

■ **You better count your rubber bands** after columnist Bill Nash comes to visit. **5D**

Guardian of the Wild



This portrait shows a young John Muir.



STARSHINE ROSHELL
ATOMIC MOM

Bullied kids: Your life will become so much more

I can't take this anymore. I can't read one more news story about a child who committed suicide after being relentlessly bullied.

Bullying is the new smoking: The bad kids do it, and always for terrible reasons. The schools are wallpapered with posters urging you not to do it. And apparently, bullying kills — far faster, in fact, than lung cancer does.

But I don't want to talk about bullies, those cowardly cretins who think they can deflect attention from their own festering failures by kicking around someone who's simply less inclined to be mean. It's obvious; no one should harass or humiliate another person. But do you know what else shouldn't happen? Children should not kill themselves. Ever. And that's what I want to talk about.

This is a message for the bullied — a missive for kids who've fallen prey to some loud-crowling schoolyard tyrant or cackling clutch of neighborhood creeps.

Dear Bullied Kid,

Yeah, you. The one wearing that mantle of shame. I'll be honest: It doesn't look great on you. It's not your color, not your size. I see you in something more colorful — something lighter.

Word has it you're being pestered by the local toughs. Do they say you're weird? Call you a freak? Insist that you don't fit in?

Joke's on them because you're in great company: Nearly a third of American students say they've been bullied this year alone. That means one in every three kids on your block, your bus, your team feels the same way you do at any given moment.

As a once-bullied kid myself, I have a secret for all of you: You're going to be just fine.

Right now you're surrounded by the voices of a few particularly loud jerks who never learned how to be comfortable in their own skin. The only way they feel safe in the tiny world you both share is to label someone else as a target. And for no rational reason, you're the flavor of the month.

When you're at the center of a pack of yipping coyotes, it's impossible to hear the friendly voices, or see the welcoming smiles, of the world just beyond that unnerving circle.

But I'm here. I live in that world just past your classroom door, your school walls, your oppressive neighborhood in your too-small town. And I promise we're all waiting to marvel at the fascinating, not-exactly-like-everyone-else package that is you. Out in the real world, we love people who fly an unexpectedly-hued flag — especially survivors: Hi, there, unique

■ Muir fought to save unspoiled wildernesses

By John Yewell
Special to The Star

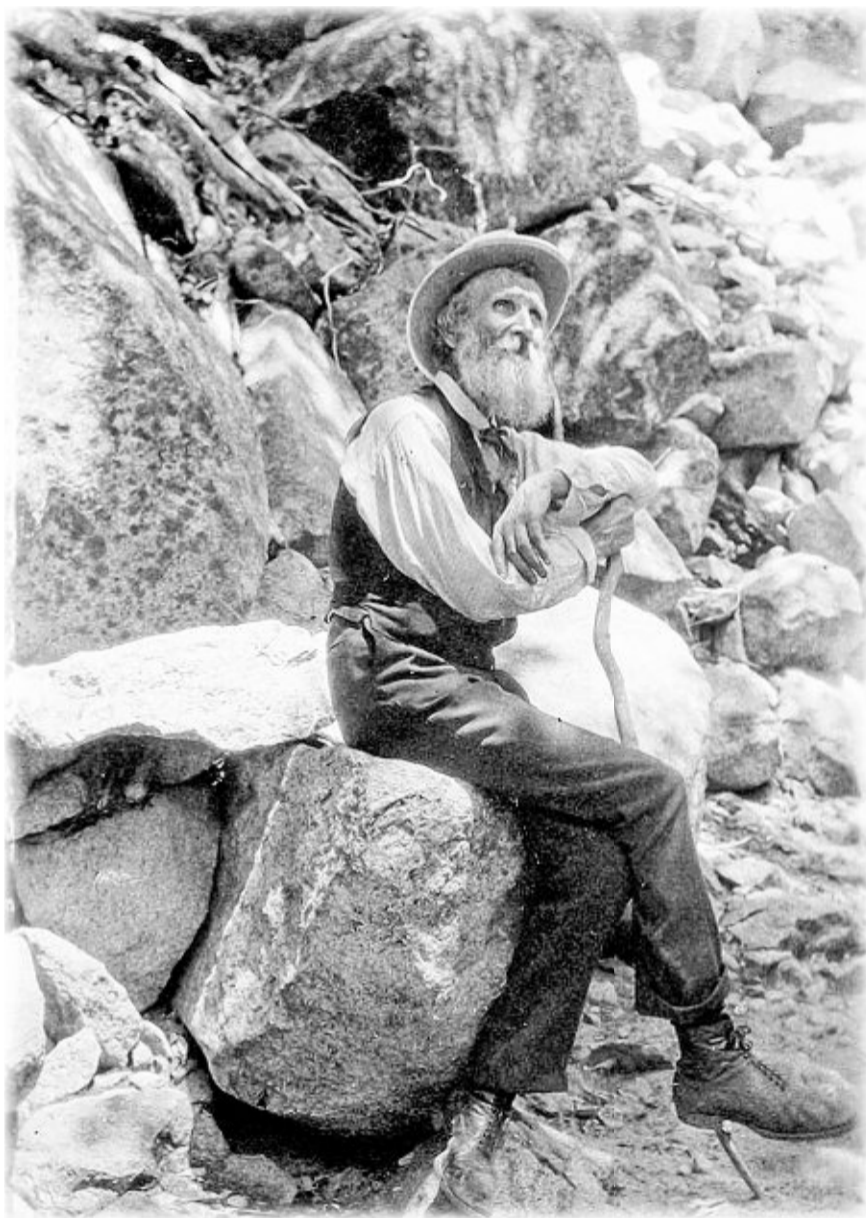
A hundred years ago this Christmas Eve, the great naturalist John Muir lay alone in a Los Angeles hospital bed. The mighty lungs that for decades had propelled him like a gazelle through mile after mile of wilderness had at last betrayed him, as the gripe that had plagued his last years became pneumonia.

Around 10 a.m. he took a sudden turn for the worse, and 20 minutes later he died. He was 76.

It was not the death Muir likely would have chosen. During his first summer in the Sierra 45 years earlier, Muir had a recurring dream in which he surfed an avalanche of water and rock to the floor of Yosemite Valley. As he later described it: "Where could a mountaineer find a more glorious death!"

Muir's unbridled enthusiasm for wilderness, revealed through a poetic gift unmatched among his contemporaries, made him a living legend in the conservation movement. He was a wilderness patriot who embodied our highest aspirations as a people, a mystic whose vision of nature seemed to arc like an electric charge through the medium of his prose: "We are now in the mountains and they are in us," he once wrote, "kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us."

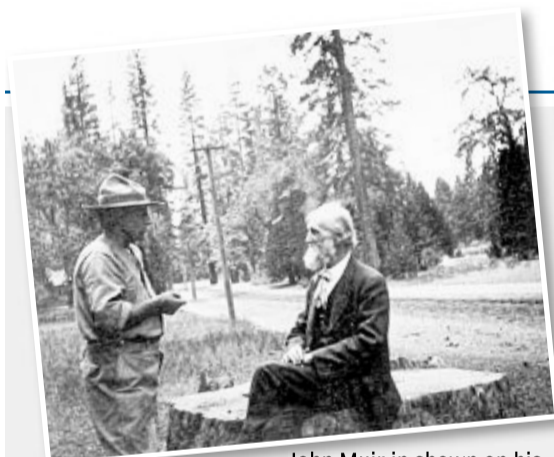
Muir manned the ramparts to defend nature at a pivotal moment in American history. After more than two centuries of our efforts as a people to subdue the wilderness, the very idea of its survival was at stake. That



John Muir is shown in a 1907 photo by Professor Francis M. Fritz.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

See **MUIR, 8D**



John Muir is shown on his last trip to Yosemite in a 1912 photo by L.P. Bagnard.

CONSERVATION ANNIVERSARIES

The anniversary of Muir's death caps a year of notable conservation anniversaries:

- June 30 marked 150 years since Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant legislation into law in 1864, protecting a national treasure and setting the precedent that would lead to the first national park eight years later.
- Six days later, on July 6, 1864, Clarence King and Richard Cotter, members of the Whitney Survey, made the first crossing of the rugged Kings/Kern river divide. It was the first foray into the High Sierra by a survey team, and led to the creation 15 years later of the U.S. Geological Survey, headed by King. From the summit of Mt. Tyndall, King identified Mt. Whitney in the distance, declaring it "probably the highest land within the United States."
- Sept. 3 marked 50 years since President Lyndon Johnson signed The Wilderness Act, which stands as the hallmark law preserving America's wild lands. In his 1964 signing statement, Johnson described wilderness as "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Muir could not have said it better himself. Written into the Act was the establishment of the John Muir Wilderness, along the eastern escarpment of the Sierra.

Pen-palship started 50 years ago

■ Two on far sides of world have seen technology change

By Brett Johnson
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Over a half-century, from opposite sides of the globe, Cathy Pallitto and Yvonne Hocken have forged an unshakable bond along a lifeline that now stretches from Newbury Park to New Zealand.

They've been pen pals for so long that snail mail is now a fossil; they exchange emails steadily and once a week hook up via Skype.

"Now, we're awaiting..." Hocken began, and without a hitch she and Pallitto finished in unison, "...teleporting!"

Their friendship just might last until that type of space travel materializes. So might their second-nature, easy humor and



KAREN QUINCY LOBERG/THE STAR

Yvonne Hocken (left), of New Zealand, and Cathy Pallitto, of Newbury Park, celebrate their 50th year as pen pals at the Pallitto home earlier this month. The two signed up for a pen pal program via the 1964 World's Fair and have been friends ever since.

lively spirit that once again were on display as the two decorated the Christmas tree and hearth in

Pallitto's Newbury Park residence on a recent weeknight.

Hocken was in town again, up

from the underside of the equator in part to celebrate their 50th anniversary as long-distance pen pals. They've been together through all kinds of social weather — births of kids and grandkids, as well as the tragic early deaths of their husbands, both from cancer.

It all began when Pallitto walked into a Parker Pen pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair in New York City and watched a computer spit out a name and address at her. She still remembers the design layout and the way the computer lights lit up, noting, "I don't remember much these days, but I can certainly picture that."

A couple weeks later, a letter arrived at Hocken's New Zealand sheep farm. "My husband Barry said, 'You've got a letter from America,' and I said, 'I don't know anyone from America.'"

She'd forgotten she signed up to be a pen pal. They were matched up by interests on the forms they'd

See **PEN PALS, 8D**

See **ROSELL, 5D**



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PEN PALS

from 1D

filled out, and the computer hit the bull's-eye.

BEING THERE

Both were 21-year-old brides at the time (Pallitto then lived in New Jersey). Both would go on to have three kids — two sons and a daughter. Hocken has six grandchildren, Pallitto five and a great-grandchild. Both lost their husbands to the same disease, Pallitto's Greg in 1983, and Hocken's Barry in 1992.

"Even though it was long distance, the emotional support was good," Pallitto noted.

They've cried and laughed together, mostly the latter.

When told that the passage of time made both 71 years old now, Hocken replied in mock indignation, "Hush your mouth!"

Chimed in Pallitto, "That's 71 with a 3 and a 9."

Hocken pulled a popular New Zealand holiday dessert called Pavlova out of the oven, which consists of meringue topped with whipped cream and fruit, in this case blueberries. (Kiwifruit also is a frequent choice.)

Soon, Hocken was hanging a deep-red homeland ornament depicting a pohutukawa tree, also called "the Christmas tree of New Zealand." The coastal evergreen flowers brilliantly this time of year (their summer) in a blazing crimson; the tree is revered by the country's Maoris.

They both know a good zinger and a better comeback, the same kind of natural banter they had in a 2004 Star story when Hocken ventured up to share their 40th year as pen pals. (She also visited in 1995 and 2009).



Cathy Pallitto (left), of Newbury Park and Yvonne Hocken, of New Zealand, celebrate their 50th year as pen pals at the Pallitto home earlier this month. The two were both 21-year-old brides when they became pen pals.

Four trips here, Hocken remarked, "and I still haven't got used to being on the wrong side of the road. It frightens me." By the time she leaves, she continued, "I'll have figured out the light switches — we go down for on and up for off."

Pallitto scoffed and said, "That's wrong," to which Hocken replied, "It's as natural as the nose on your face." Shot back Pallitto, "That's because she's from Down Under."

This led to another hilarious lightning-fast exchange, the topic being toilet water and how it

circles the bowl clockwise here and counterclockwise in New Zealand.

They have similar lifestyles — neither is rich, neither is poor — and similar experiences.

"We're ordinary people ... but I just love her," Hocken said, turning to Pallitto.

TREE CHATTER

They tease each other a lot — "because we can," noted Pallitto.

Pallitto calls Hocken "Kiwi," after the bird that is New Zealand's national symbol. Hocken calls Pallitto "SAL," the AL

always standing for "American Lady" and the "S" for silly or stupid or special or as Pallitto put it, "S for whatever I've done lately."

This time around, they went to Tucson, Arizona (where Pallitto worked for years in a hospital emergency room before retiring) and visited the Gene Autry museum in Los Angeles as well as the Museum of Tolerance, the latter last Sunday on Hocken's final day of her three-week stay.

Hocken came this time in part to take in an American

Thanksgiving. She loved how everyone went around the table and said what they were thankful for; she and Pallitto are thankful for each other and "for Parker Pens," — again, that unison thing.

They lamented that neither saved the original 1964 letters, though Pallitto said she once wrote the Parker Pen company and told them their story. She never got a reply.

As the Christmas tree got stuffed with ornaments, the talk drifted to Hocken's stint on the volunteer community police patrol in Feilding, the small town on New Zealand's North Island where she now lives.

Cracked Pallitto: "That's New Zealand's answer to Barney Fife."

Fife, played by Don Knotts, was a character on "The Andy Griffith Show." Like Sheriff Andy Taylor on that show, Hocken doesn't carry a gun.

Once, she and a partner noticed a car at a ball field parking lot late at night and decided to follow it. It parked; they watched for a while. When they flashed lights on it, two furtive heads popped up in the now-steamy windows. "I guess that's international," Pallitto joked.

She and Hocken are quite the pair.

"If we'd have been married..." started Hocken, cut off in a nanosecond as Pallitto answered "... we'd have got divorced." The place again was awash in gales of laughter.

After they recovered, Pallitto smiled and said, "I think if we were more serious people, we wouldn't still be together."

Plenty of warmth wafted through this living room, none of it coming from the hearth.

“The battle we have fought and are still fighting for the forests is a part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong. We cannot expect to see the end of it.”

John Muir

MUIR

from 1D

Muir and his compatriots were able to slow the momentum of that national imperative bears witness in large part to his unshakable vision. And he had no illusions about the magnitude of the struggle:

"The battle we have fought and are still fighting for the forests is a part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong," he told his followers. "We cannot expect to see the end of it."

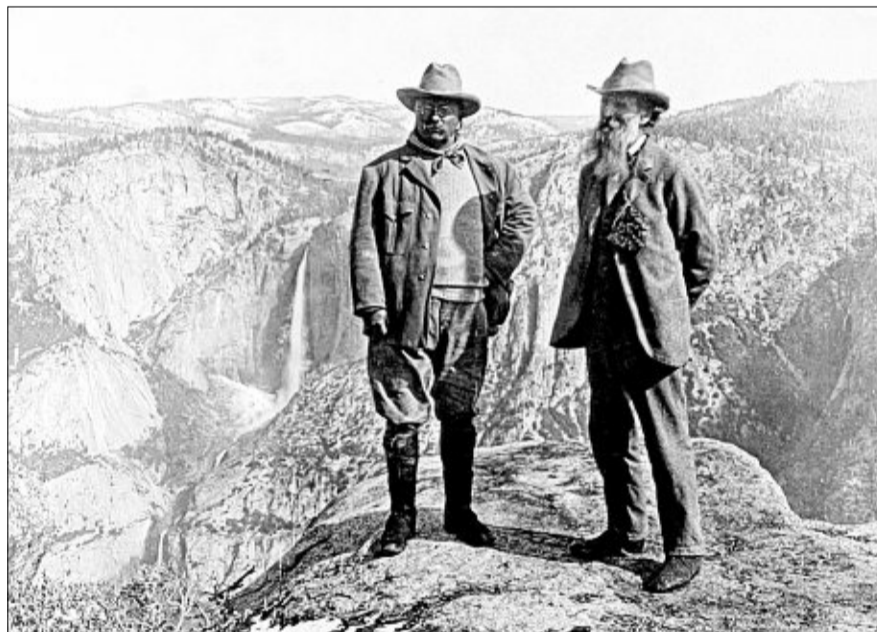
Today, we take for granted thousands of square miles of national parks and pristine wilderness, but a century ago preservation was hardly a foregone conclusion. In his day, the "Father of the National Parks" was as maligned as any idealist with a righteous cause.

Muir was dismissed by rapacious resource-grabbers as a sentimentalist. He was derided as a "faker," "radical amateur" and "nature lover" — a smear roughly equivalent to today's "tree-hugger." Yet nothing deterred him. In his last great cause, the fight against the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in Yosemite, he thundered like an Old Testament prophet: "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man."

The loss of Hetch Hetchy broke Muir's heart. He even lamented that perhaps, if a railroad had been built into Hetch Hetchy, exposing the valley to tourism, it might have been saved. He died a year later.

EARLY YEARS

Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland, on April 21, 1838, the third of eight children. The Muirs emigrated when John was 11 and settled on a Wisconsin farm. John displayed an early, lively intelligence that somehow survived the beatings his father administered in forcing his son to memorize the Bible.



John Muir is pictured with President Theodore Roosevelt.

Muir attended the University of Wisconsin for a time, excelling in botany and geology.

Contrary to his later reputation as a starry-eyed opponent of progress, Muir was no Luddite. As a young man he designed many useful contraptions, including a machine that fed horses, a barometer, and his famous "early rising machine" — an alarm clock that put the sleeper out of bed in the morning. He did not believe in "blind opposition to progress," he later wrote, but rather "opposition to blind progress."

"Blind" progress was almost his fate. Some years after leaving the farm, an industrial accident temporarily robbed him of his sight. When he regained it six weeks later, he committed his life to studying nature, and set off to see the world. He arrived in San Francisco Bay at age 30 and left immediately, on foot, for Yosemite, where his eyes were opened to his life's purpose. "This is true freedom," he wrote of

the mountains that would become his spiritual home, "a good, practical sort of immortality."

He explored relentlessly, traveling alone and carrying "only a tin cup, a handful of tea, a loaf of bread, and a copy of Emerson." He became so well known that visitors to Yosemite Valley were soon asking to meet the eccentric Mr. Muir. His storytelling, familiarity with the terrain, and knowledge of natural history drew tourists and scientists alike. "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people," he later wrote, "are beginning to find out going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity."

Not long after his idol Ralph Waldo Emerson visited him, he began to take writing more seriously, penning accounts of perilous ascents of Sierra peaks, the joyous scamper up a tree during a storm to feel the fullness of nature's power, the terrifying yet exhilarating crossing of a glacier in

Alaska — not to mention treatises that argued for the glacial origins of the valley that first met with derision.

By 1892, the year he helped found the Sierra Club, he had become a celebrity. In May, 1903, at age 65, Muir spent several days virtually alone in the back country with President Theodore Roosevelt, a stay that resulted in the consolidation of Yosemite National Park under federal control.

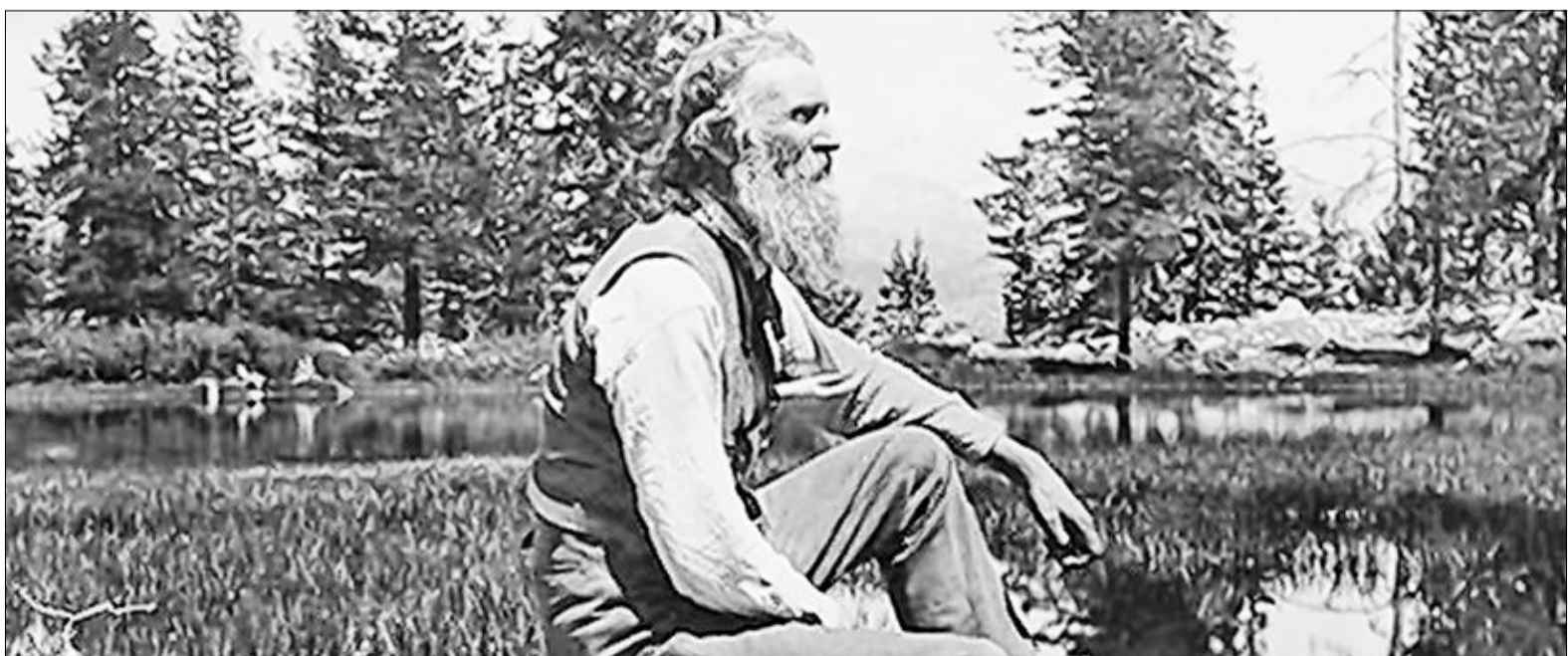
Over the course of his life, Muir's spiritual growth eventually led him away from his father's harsh Calvinism to a kind of trickle-up theology, wherein the divine was derived from nature instead of the other way around, with Yosemite Valley as its grand cathedral. "In God's wildness," he wrote, "lies the hope of the world."

Biographer Donald Worster bestowed a kind of secular sainthood on Muir, writing that the Scotsman tried to save "the American soul from total surrender to materialism" at a time when materialism was every bit as alive as it is today.

The problem with saints is that they are also human beings. Muir was a Civil War draft dodger. He left a mixed legacy in his dealings with Native Americans. And he had entirely too cozy a relationship, by some lights, with E.H. Harriman, head of the Union and Southern Pacific railroads.

Saint or not, John Muir was first and foremost a mountaineer. He once wrote to his sister that "the mountains are calling and I must go" — which sounds today like an epitaph. But perhaps the Los Angeles Daily Times got it right, in the headline of its Christmas Day obituary: "Earth He Loved Reclaims Him. John Muir, Apostle of the Wild is Dead"

John Yewell is a writer based in Ventura. Like many young people, he was introduced to the life and work of John Muir as a boy, on a family trip to Yosemite. He is a lifelong Sierra back-packer and supporter of conservation causes. Contact him at johnyewell@gmail.com



John Muir is shown in the back country.