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Confessions of a Bone Woman:
Portola Valley's Cindie White

reveals the skeletons in her barn

Story by Kate Bradshaw | Photos by Natalia Nazarova

Through the blue barn doors at the historic Jelich Ranch lies Portola Valley resident Cindie White's inner sanctum: a cathedral of naturalistic artifacts, every inch of the walls festooned with bones and pelts and taxidermied critters. An elegant oversize table holds stones and crystals arranged in formations that White says carry astrological significance.

The setting evokes the layout of one of those I-Spy kids' books, but one's eye is instantly drawn to the coyote skeleton dangling from the ceiling. White calls it her little wolf.

Cindie White, who was sporting a T-shirt and a friendly smile when *The Almanac* went out for a visit, has lived her life in extremes, intimate with both the opulence of Silicon Valley's elite and the gritty realism of the natural world.

White recently published a memoir called "Confessions of a Bone Woman: Realizing authentic wildness in a civilized world," which details the process she underwent while searching for deeper fulfillment in what, by external appearances, seemed to be a charmed life. It's a journey that took her from having a personal stylist at the Stanford Shopping Center Neiman Marcus to digging for bones in Montana, with a lot of territory in between.

Rise of the bone woman

In her book, White begins her story with her idyllic childhood visits to her grandparents' Garr Ranch. As a teen, her mother remarried, and she moved to Portola Valley. She talks about struggling to adjust to her new life and grappling with body image issues.

She went on to UCLA, pursued an MBA and worked at IBM for a few years before coming home to Portola Valley at age 27 in a deep depression.

"I was living 'the dream' with three girls in a condo near the beach in Santa Monica, and I commuted to IBM in my Porsche. I was suntanned, blonde, and pretty, not to mention social, kind, and smart too. ... [T]he promise was that if I did as (my father and the surrounding culture) said, I'd be happy, loved, and adored. Therefore it made no sense that I was miserable," she writes.

She began to do some soul-searching then, with the help of a psychologist.

She wanted to know how to become "enlivened," she says.

Back in Silicon Valley, she found a job in marketing at Orgdata Inc. A couple of years in, the company brought in a new CEO, Rhys (Phillip) White, and they soon became a couple. In January 1992 they became engaged.

White said partygoing in high society became a big part of her life at that point. "Adorning myself with fabulous apparel was a thrilling and creative outlet for me, but it was also an important job, which I regarded as necessary to maintain my identity."

After having two kids within three years of marriage, she became less entranced by the expectations of high society. A reading by an astrologer piqued a budding interest for her in the metaphysical — she claims the astrologer's reading was more resonant with her than her mental health care provider.

For better or worse, White's story was tied to the trajectory of her high-flying CEO husband, and in 1997, the family upgraded to a larger home in Atherton.

Three months later, Orgdata (Informix) announced a \$140 million loss for first quarter. Months later, Phillip White was pressured to resign as CEO. But it didn't faze him, she recalls. "Ironically, he made far more money after being ousted from Orgdata than while he was there," she wrote.



Cindie White, who lives in Portola Valley, keeps a barnful of artifacts from the natural world, artfully displayed.

On the Cover: White, who recently published a memoir, called "Confessions of a Bone Woman: Realizing authentic wildness in a civilized world," surrounded by artifacts she has collected.

