

Photographs by Christina House Los Angeles Times

**HEIDI HEFFINGTON** says farewell to her mother, Wilma, at Return Home in Auburn, Wash., with husband Joe at her side.

# The quest to alter our last 'toxic' act

It was nearly dark outside when Blaire Van Valkenburgh strode through the woods, lanterns dangling from both hands, to visit the soil that was once her husband.

She walked easily through a tangle of roots and rocks to a small bowl-shaped glade just visible from her kitchen window on Orcas Island, Wash. She and her husband of 40 years, Robert Wayne, had planned to retire here. Then he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Towering Pacific madrone trees and Douglas fir appeared like ghostly shapes around the area where, months earlier, friends and family had emptied seven burlap bags that held Wayne's mulch-like remains and raked them into a dry sprawling puddle under the trees.

This was the "burial" Wayne wanted, chosen just a few weeks before he died on Dec. 26, 2022, at their Calabasas home. The genetics pioneer loved hiking in the woods and was always first in line to try something new, "especially things that made sense from an

Life-giving compost is made from things that die and decompose. People can now add their bodies to the mix.

By Jeanette Marantos



IN SEATTLE, Larry Kreisman holds soil from his husband, Wayne Dodge, who died in 2021. Other compost has been spread in the gardens of friends and family, he said.

environmental, Earth-friendly point of view," said Van Valkenburgh, a paleobiologist at UCLA.

But this kind of burial — natural organic reduction — won't be legal in California until 2027, so Van Valkenburgh paid to fly her husband's body to Washington, the first state to legalize human composting in 2020. Three months later, two women in a Subaru drove to Orcas Island and unloaded the bags of Wayne's soil from the back seat — about 250 pounds of what looked like a fine, odorless wood-chip mulch.

The area looks bare now, Van Valkenburgh said apologetically, but someday she'll plant bulbs. "This is what he sees," she said softly, gazing into a purple-black sky slowly freckling with stars.

The American approach death and burials has changed dramatically over the last century — from families putting loved ones in a simple box in the ground to expensive, elaborate funerals involving poisonous embalming chemicals, concrete or lead grave liners and land that's [See Burial, A7]

## Ex-Metro security chief speaks out

Transit agency pays \$195 million a year for law enforcement. It isn't well spent, Gina Osborn says.

By RACHEL URANGA

A dead man was slumped over on a bench at Metro's San Pedro Street station in February. For nearly six hours, nobody checked his condition, including five Los Angeles Police Department officers who had been patrolling the platform. It took a transit ambassador doing a welfare check to see the man had died, said former Metro security chief Gina Osborn.

'They weren't even paying attention," she said. "They weren't engaged enough to see that there was a human hunched over."

Osborn, a former FBI agent, said she knows because she and her staff had access to cameras set up around the system, and over her two years at the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority increasingly used them to oversee law enforcement patrols. Her conclusion: They aren't doing enough.

The security issues surrounding Metro have only grown over the last month after a string of stabbings and two killings on the sys-[See Metro, A8]

### Mystery surrounds dead baby sea lions

# Can she kick out the tenant from hell?

For two years, a homeowner watched helplessly as her Mid-Wilshire property was operated as a lucrative Airbnb without her consent



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

NIKEETA SRIRAM, with boyfriend Peter Banachowski, rented her two-unit property to a man named Nicholas Jarzabek, who immediately listed it on Airbnb.

By Jack Flemming

Nikeeta Sriram would love to live in her Mid-Wilshire home.

But she can't, because for two years, a steady stream of guests have been able to live there. They just had to click

Caught in an Airbnb ordeal, Sriram has seen property damage rack up while she fights to win back her home, she alleges in a law-

The man accused of taking over the rental, Nicholas Jarzabek, lives 5,000 miles away in England, his social media accounts show.

Fans know him as Nick Diver, a touring musician who recently released the album "Black Liquorice." Sriram knows him as the tenant who turned his twoyear rental into a moneymaking Airbnb operation.

seemed like the [See Airbnb, A9]

### Early start for summer **COVID** rise

California doctors see uptick as FLiRT subvariants make huge gains nationally. CALIFORNIA, B1

#### Rise in voter suppression laws

Race plays an important role in the GOP's restrictive tactics, Robin Abcarian

writes. OPINION, A15

#### Clark showcases ice in her veins

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Weather Clouds, then sun.

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An unusual number of them are showing up along California coastal islands.

By Susanne Rust

On May 7, Patrick Robinson took a boat out to Año Nuevo Island to survey the sea lions that come to birth on this rocky outcropping north of Monterey Bay.

The shore was littered with dead pups — babies that looked as though they'd been delivered too early and therefore were too weak and small to nurse, or had been dead at birth.

Similar observations were being made farther down the coast on San Miguel Island in the Channel Islands — where massive colonies of sea lions gather every year — and as far south as Mexico.

Robinson, director of UC Santa Cruz's Año Nuevo Reserve, said it's not unusual to see some dead pups this time of year. He said sick or malnourished females occasionally stop on their way south to abort. But the numbers he was seeing were alarming. And with the peak of birthing season still several weeks away, it augurs a [See Pups, A11]



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