

# Passion for the Land



*A Collaborative Project to help rural residents share stories about preserving community heritage while protecting agricultural lands & natural resources for future generations*

## Blue Gold by Gia Martynn



Growing up in the Central Valley of California, I took for granted the water that kept my playground green, grew my food, or quenched my thirst. As a child I recall stories of how the valley once was. A giant wetland, covered by hundreds of miles of marshes and lakes filled with waterfowl and herds of Tule elk. The water that once covered this great valley hundreds of years ago comes primarily from the Sierra Nevada mountain range. As a young adult, I began my natural resources career in the southern Sierras. Memories pull me back standing atop a mountain peak overlooking the valley below. I close my eyes and imagine that massive wetland amongst the fields of cotton, alfalfa, corn, orange groves, dairies, and relic oaks that currently cover the valley floor. Open fields and suburbs are now bound and woven together by canals and irrigation ditches. The water that once fed the giant wetland, now feeds a tapestry of agricultural, industrial, and municipal developments.

Family ties and career moves pulled me north into the Sacramento Valley at the northern end of the great Central Valley, where I followed the California aqueduct to its source in the northern Sierras. Now as the Watershed Coordinator for the Feather River Coordinated Resource Management group, I have come to fully understand and appreciate the value of water. Following the Feather River down the canyon to the valley with my child's sixth grade class, I watch the students fill their thirsty minds with watershed facts and refresh their bodies with the clean water from the watershed they call their back yard. It never ceases to amaze me how few Californians know where their water comes from. Other parents on the watershed field trip comment on how they never gave a second thought about where their water came from. Afterwards I hear them boast about living in the Feather River watershed, the headwaters of the State Water Project that delivers water to over 23 million Californians.

But as I watch the water turn the hydroelectric turbines in the canyon, the kayakers race the rapids, the fisherman reel in his catch, and the boaters skimming across Lake Oroville Reservoir, I remind them that this water is essential to all living things. It is the "blue gold" of the Sierras and as residents of this watershed we should act as stewards of this precious treasure. Not just those living in the lifeblood watersheds of the state, but all California residents should know and acknowledge the true value of their water. Let's not squander this vital resource....but help protect, restore, and conserve the water of California. Because, water is the thread that binds our livelihoods.



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