

# Finding Peace in the City of Angels:

*"You, whose day it is,  
get out your rainbow colors  
and make it beautiful."*

Traditional Nootka Song

**A**s I sit down to write this piece, a birthday card from my daughter that has been sitting on my desk for months catches my eye. "You, whose day it is, get out your rainbow colors and make it beautiful," reads the inspirational quote on the front cover. It brings tears to my eyes. What a perfect synchronistic message to inspire my writing this morning. I am grateful that my daughter knows me so well – picking such a perfect card – but it's a bittersweet reminder that she's currently navigating her freshman year at college and no longer living at home with me. It's a reminder, both liberating and poignant, that I am now officially in my "empty nest."

Then the gardeners arrive with their gas-engine lawn mowers and deafening leaf

blowers and my dog won't stop barking at them. A large truck rumbles down the street. I utter my grievances out loud. Fortunately my little dog, Lizzie, is the only one in earshot. "Don't you guys know I just sat down for some peace and quiet? This is not a good time!" What happened to that sacred space I was trying to carve out for myself this morning to allow my creative impulses to flow, to help me become more attuned to that voice of inner wisdom and inspiration within? Gone in an urban instant!

I chide my dog – not very peaceful or sacred of me – and select a beautiful, if New Age-y track on my iPod, called "Serenity," to help me return to some semblance of peace and focus. Slowly, my heart rate begins to slow, my breathing deepens. "Serenity" is doing its job. I pet my dog and apologize to her I know she's just doing her job as my protector – and I begin again.

"You, whose day it is..." Yes, it is my choice what I will make of it. These days feel so new and unfamiliar as I navigate my way through the huge transition that

the completion of day-to-day parenting entails. I've been raising my two daughters for 23 years, and have been a single mom for the past 16. Despite our closeness and deep love for one another, we find ourselves in different places on the planet and I am re-discovering what it means to be a woman on my own. I'm feeling into my new rhythms: figuring out what it is that I want to do every day now that I don't have to get up to make breakfast and drive anyone to school, to show up at an office or be home in the evenings to make dinner, help with homework or just share some girl talk. What do I feel like doing? What would bring me pleasure or joy? What would give my life meaning now that the little people who have been the greatest source of meaning and joy for me for two decades are now bigger people and out the door, off on their adventures, creating lives of their own. These are questions I haven't had time to ask myself in years, but to be asking them now feels like standing under a cool, refreshing waterfall in the midst of a lush, tropical paradise.

What is my life about now? What's

# Exploring Sacred Places in Los Angeles

next for me? I don't really have a clear sense yet. I've spent much of the last year drifting aimlessly. It feels like so many things that have been the focus of my life, that I've identified myself as, and that have kept me in Los Angeles – mother, a career in public health, the small business that I created as life coach, my marriage and other romantic relationships – have fallen away over the past several years. Things that inspired me before in terms of work or career no longer feel juicy. It's as though I'm pulling up anchor, but I don't yet know where my ship is going. I turned fifty a couple of years ago and right on cue, for the first time I feel in my bones a profound sense of the finiteness of my physical being. Even though my energy is good and I'm hopeful more delightful adventures are on their way, the end seems more real. So it all feels very precious and like now is the time to really live the life I was meant to. But what is that? The way is still being revealed.

Oprah said recently that 40 is when you give yourself permission to do what you want, (you no longer care what others think); 50 is when you get to be all you've

been meaning to be (you're no longer willing to put it off). Having passed the 50 mark, I find myself deepening on my spiritual path. This feels like an excellent time to cultivate a greater sense of faith and trust in the process of Life. I'm realizing more and more how little of it really is in my control and how our job as humans is to continually let go, even of those things we most cherish, including our children, our formerly youthful bodies, perhaps where we live, in order to make room for a fuller expression of who we really are.

So as I've been contemplating this time of transformation (both personal and global) and trying to find peace and acceptance of where I am here in the midst of my urban environs, I've found myself drawn to places of serenity and beauty in my (rather large) backyard of Los Angeles. In these sacred spaces, I hope to tap into my own inner sanctuary, to begin to find answers to some of my questions, to help guide me forward.

I grew up in Los Angeles and have lived here most of my life. Over the years, I have discovered some really lovely and peaceful places right here in the midst of the hustle and bustle and urban sprawl that is LA. Our city is not necessarily known for being one of the more sacred places on earth, quite the contrary; but as I began to delve into it, I uncovered a surprisingly rich and varied spiritual history here in the City of Angels and I am discovering that I do find solace, inspiration and healing as I spend time in these special places. Here are a few of my favorites.



*Point Dume  
Natural Preserve  
and State Beach*

Driving up the coast to Malibu, especially on a clear, sunny day, always fills me with a

sense of freedom and adventure. As the expansive blue sky, sparkling ocean and winding highway open up before me, I feel myself opening up, decompressing from life in the city and becoming more

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By Carol Sutherland, PhD, MA

Photography by Carol Sutherland  
and David Sand (Peace Labyrinth, MSIA)

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available to the beauty all around me. One of my favorite destinations for a day trip is the Point Dume Natural Preserve and State Beach about a 40-minute drive from Santa Monica, just south of Zuma Beach.

The strip of coastline that makes up the Preserve is a relatively unknown gem of exquisite natural beauty and abundance that was considered sacred to the indigenous Chumash people who lived sustainably on this land for thousands of years. It is the largest piece of undeveloped property along the Malibu coast (although the adjoining residential area is fully developed right up to its borders!) This rugged bluff-top Preserve feels very alive, fresh and bountiful. Walking along the cliff-side trail brings a sense of exhilaration as the waves crash forcefully on the rocks below. Looking out across the expansive, azure ocean, one is likely to see a flock of pelicans gracefully skimming the ocean surface in perfect formation or a pod of dolphins swimming just offshore or surfing the breaking waves. Between November and April, it's a great place to view humpback whales on their migration route between Alaska and Mexico.

The cool ocean air feels fresh and pure. Every sense feels alive with the briny scent of salt air, the sounds of the seals barking offshore, the sight of seagulls overhead, lizards scurrying under bushes along the trail and the colorful yellow wildflowers that blanket the sandy hillside in the spring. Every time I visit, I feel energized, more expansive and less concerned about things that seemed so pressing only a few hours before. I feel the wild places within myself, the part of me that loves being in nature and feels so at peace and so free here, begin to awaken and feel nurtured and grateful that I have given myself this time and space to remember what truly brings me joy; what makes me feel alive and content exactly where I am without needing to fix, change or do anything other than what I'm doing right now!

*Whatever we are waiting for – peace of mind, contentment, grace, the inner awareness of simple abundance – it will surely come to us, but only when we are ready to receive it with an open and grateful heart.*

Sarah Ban Breathnach

For more information and directions: <http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/623/files/PointDume-Brochure.pdf>.



*"How you walk the labyrinth may illuminate how you live your life ... Do you walk it fast? Slow? ... Do you find walking the labyrinth annoying? ... If you encounter another person on your path, are you impatient? ... Do you wonder if you are doing it right? ... You may find key awarenesses there."*

Peace Awareness Labyrinth & Gardens brochure



### Peace Awareness Labyrinth and Gardens

Peace Awareness Labyrinth & Gardens is located in the West Adams

Historic District, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Los Angeles, southwest of downtown. This now economically-depressed section of town might seem like an unlikely setting for a sacred place, but the Labyrinth & Gardens offer a surprisingly beautiful retreat in the midst of the urban heart of Los Angeles. They are situated behind the Guasti Villa, a restored Italian Renaissance Beaux-Arts mansion built between 1910 and 1913 and once owned by famed movie producer-director Busby Berkeley. The Villa is considered one of the "jewels in the crown" of the West Adams District and is now home to the Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness (MSIA), founded by John-Roger, an international teacher and best-selling author.

Behind the villa, a two-level flagstone courtyard incorporates reflecting pools, fountains, flowering plants, a rose-covered pergola and an outdoor labyrinth, hand-carved in stone. The labyrinth is designed after the one at Chartres Cathedral in France, which was built around 1220 A.D. The archetypal design of the labyrinth has been in existence for thousands of years and is used throughout the world by mystical and religious traditions as an instrument of prayer, meditation and self-reflection. Made of hand-cut and hand-laid travertine marble, the Peace Awareness Labyrinth is about 40 feet across; the winding path totals about a third of a mile.

At the southern end of the garden, down marble steps, the Bali-inspired Meditation Garden offers another peaceful refuge. Here you'll find shaded places to sit and observe the beauty and colors of nature and enjoy the sound of flowing water in the many fountains throughout the garden. The lily pond, water features, fruit-bearing trees and flowers that fill this lush and sacred space create an inspiring atmosphere for contemplation and meditation on life and all the beautiful gifts of nature.

For more information and directions: [www.peacelabyrinth.org](http://www.peacelabyrinth.org).



### Self-Realization Fellowship Mother Center, Mount Washington

Another unexpected diamond in the rough is the headquarters of Self-Realization Fellowship, known as The Mother Center, located at the very top of Mount Washington, a residential neighborhood about five miles north of downtown. Accessed through narrow, winding roads ascending the mountain, the journey itself feels like a pilgrimage. This beautifully – landscaped, tranquil oasis overlooking the sprawling city below – feels remarkably remote and instantly calming.

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952), founder of Self-Realization Fellowship and the first Hindu teacher of yoga to make his permanent home in the United States, established The Mother Center here in 1925 as the international headquarters for his new spiritual society, integrating the spiritual traditions of Yoga and mystical Christianity. He lived and worked here for nearly thirty years until his death in 1952.

Yogananda called Mt. Washington "a mecca for all the spiritually hungry people of the world to come and commune with the Divine." Today, the beautifully maintained meditation gardens are open to visitors seeking a peaceful, personal retreat. Yogananda encouraged meditation in nature to more readily access the Divine. In addition to the gardens, the chapel where Yogananda conducted services is open daily for prayer and meditation and the library in the main building houses a small exhibit of Yogananda's books and personal effects.

There is a very special quality of tranquility at the Mother Center, an extraordinary, palpable presence of peace. On my visit, I could almost feel every cell in my body relax as I spent time at this sacred place on the mountaintop. Returning home, I felt more relaxed, more patient and in the "flow." Even though I still don't have all the answers I'm seeking, when I spend time in these sacred places, I feel less concerned about not having it all figured out and I feel a greater sense of trust that the answers will come in their own time, when I'm ready for them. In the meantime, I'll do my best to "get out my rainbow colors" and make my life from here forward as beautiful as I can.

*"There is great value in visiting places where saints have lived ... Such places are forever permeated with the vibrations left there by the divine souls who walked those grounds ... Often such pilgrimages completely change one's life for the better."*

Paramahansa Yogananda

For more information and directions: [www.yoganandasf.org/mothercenter/mothercenter.html](http://www.yoganandasf.org/mothercenter/mothercenter.html).

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