

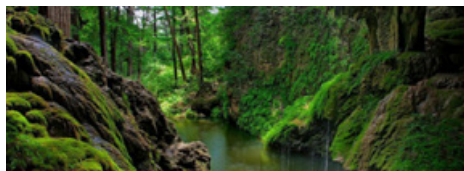
Journey into Westcave

by Betty Sharp



Last spring I thought I was on Ferenginar not Earth. The home planet of my favorite Ferengi, Quark, has rivers thick with mud. Rain shoes are a fashion statement. Texans call them muck boots. Thankfully, I didn't grow ear moss from the damp like the Grand Nagus, Ferenginar's economic leader, who falls in love with Ishka, Quark's mother. Although making profit is the most admirable life goal for male Ferengi like Quark, Ishka being female wasn't allowed to make profit. That is, until she caught the Negus' moldy ear -yuck- and convinced him that females were not only smart enough to make profit, but also should be allowed to leave the house and wear rain shoes, not to mention clothing. Oppressed Ferengi females weren't allowed to wear clothes, a reverse of female clothing laws in Earth's arid regions. Nothing got covered on Ferenginar.

Now that I have your attention—and yes Ishka got rid of that law—I thank the Star Trek: Deep Space Nine creators. DVD binge watching helped me survive this past spring when Texans relearned the hard lesson that too much water is as dangerous as too little. We already knew Texas was hell on women and horses. And we've heard the old joke a thousand times: "If you don't like Texas weather, just wait a minute." But the minute turned into endless weeks. We were blindsided by torrential rain, relentless mud, hay fields too wet to bale. If we were fortunate to experience nothing worse personally, we felt for the people in flooded communities, the disrupted lives and businesses. Wimberley got much the worse of it.



photos by Mike Murphy

But not far from Wimberley there's a place where the force of water has created something so beautiful you'll forget water's treachery, and its safeguarded by Westcave

Outdoor Discovery Center (westcave.org). Limited guided tours lead from "an arid savanna through a limestone crevice into a sheltered canyon of lush plant life," and at the canyon head is Westcave and a breathtaking 40-foot waterfall tumbling to a pool below. Preserve Ranger Traci Ibarra says this natural treasure was often described as "loved to death" before it was restored from the abused condition to which humans reduced it in the 1970's. Now it's been loved back to life. I asked Ms. Ibarra how much damage there was from the spring rains. Fortunately not too much, although the Center closed for a week. Trails were flooded, bridges washed away, trees were water gashed, vegetation suffered but has recovered.



Westcave is spectacular, much more so than I can describe here. Tour details are on line, as well as classes and special events information, not to mention stalactites. Then there's Westcave's Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center, a sustainable building with exhibits about harvesting rainwater—yes, drought will return—solar panels, ground source heating, and a marvelous solar calendar created by the sun's rays coming through a roof hole.

I am fascinated by the idea of an exhibit illustrating the Fibonacci Series, which explains the relationship between mathematics and nature. At first I thought I needed a Ferengi who can add up profit faster than a lightning strike to explain it, but then I began to catch on. Let's just say it's great fun to contemplate pairs in nature—1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21---see it yet? You'll get it--or your child will. Go. Enjoy.

Contemplate the beauty of nature. There's more to life on Earth than profit. Sometimes nature leaves a gift in its wake.