



## 5 questions with ...

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*Frances Dinkelspiel  
Gary Wayne*

... [Frances Dinkelspiel](#), a journalist, author and co-founder of [Cityside](#), a nonprofit news organization.

**Q: What is one place everyone should visit in California?**

**A:** Considering the Caldor fire almost destroyed it, I would say everyone should visit Echo Lake, a gorgeous area on the edge of Desolation Wilderness not far from South Lake Tahoe. It is an area of both natural beauty — with its clear, cold waters surrounded by

granite mountains — and interesting California history. UC Berkeley professors started to build rustic cabins on Forest Service lands there in the 1920s. Their Stanford rivals were not to be outdone and constructed cabins at the nearby Fallen Leaf Lake, thereby continuing the schools' rivalry — but in the mountains. You have to hike or boat into most of Echo so it feels like a place from the past.

### **What's the best book you've read or podcast you've listened to recently?**

I highly recommend "[After the Last Border](#): Two Families and the Story of Refuge in America," by Jessica Goudeau. Her reporting and storytelling on two women — one from Myanmar and one from Syria — who emigrate to Austin, Texas, 10 years apart is superb. The book is filled with details about the women's lives in their home countries, their struggles to remake themselves, and the erratic history of U.S. immigration policy. It's a gripping and heart-rending tale, narrative nonfiction at its best.

### **What's a hidden food gem in your area?**

[Rockridge Market Hall](#) on College Avenue in Oakland is a European-style market with different stores for fish, meat, produce, baked goods, wine, coffee, flowers, and prepared foods. The stores open to the sidewalk and to one another so you can stroll through and get inspired about what to cook for dinner, or what to grab if you can't wait that long.

### **You're organizing a dinner party. Which three California figures, dead or alive, do you invite, and why? How would you get the conversation started?**

I would have to invite Isaias Hellman, my great-great-grandfather, a Jewish immigrant who came to Los Angeles from Germany in 1859 and became one of the state's leading financiers. He eventually owned Wells Fargo Bank. I wrote a book about him, "Towers of Gold," but I have so many unanswered questions to ask him! What were his business partners, Levi Strauss, Gov. John Downey, and Henry Huntington, really like?

I could ask the same of the architect Julia Morgan, who redid the charred hulk of the Fairmont Hotel after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and designed Hearst Castle overlooking San Simeon for William Randolph Hearst.

Dorothea Lange, the photographer, led such an interesting life, and I would ask her about the time during the Great Depression she had a studio in the "Monkey Black" building on Montgomery Street in San Francisco. Some of the other artists in her crowd who also had studios there were Maynard Dixon (her then-husband), Benny Bufano, Ralph Stackpole, Diego Rivera, and Frida Kahlo.

**Wildfires, rising Covid cases, drought, a recall election — there's no shortage of long-term news stories in California at the moment. But what's an issue you think is just as important that isn't getting as much attention?**

I believe the decline of local news is an urgent issue that affects our democracy and is not talked about nearly enough. There are too many locales in California that don't get written about at all. How do those residents know what their city councils, school boards, or police departments are doing? How do they know for whom to vote? I bet most people aren't aware that one hedge firm, Alden Capital, known for buying up papers, cutting staff, and stripping

resources from media properties, owns about 24 of the state's newspapers. Margaret Sullivan, who writes about media for the Washington Post, said Alden is "one of the most ruthless of the corporate strip-miners seemingly intent on destroying local journalism." That's why my partners and I co-founded Cityside, a nonprofit news organization that runs [Berkeleyside](#) and [The Oaklandside](#). We want to help stop the hollowing out of local news.

*"5 questions with ..." is a weekly feature by Finn Cohen, who edits the California Sun. Conversations are sometimes edited for brevity.*

*Someone you'd like to see interviewed? Let him know:*

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*Thanks for reading!*

*The California Sun is written by Mike McPhate, a former California correspondent for the New York Times.*

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