

4509 ACACIA ST

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THE ACACIA STREET ZOO

by Jane Field



There is a zoo in La Mesa. Pedestrians who walk the east side of Acacia Street can enjoy it, the results of nature's and Francis Schiller's artisanship.

Schiller and his wife Mary Ann, a senior center bridge teacher, have lived in many American states and over twenty foreign countries during his career as a consultant and troubleshooter for paper mill machines. He is also a writer, having produced several books revelant to his profession and more than two hundred articles for the "trade" publications.

For the last ten or so years, the Schillers have lived at 4509 Acacia Street in one of the first La Mesa areas to be developed. Schiller still commutes all over the world to attend broken-down machines, some a city block long, but when he is home, he manages to have fun combining three of his hobbies: fishing, gardening, and decorating his house and garden.

In the process, he has established a zoo.

At the beach - he has "walked every foot from San Clemente to Punta Bunda," - Schiller plants a couple fishing poles in the sand which his dog, Coco, watches for any action. Then Schiller searches for shells and any other interesting flotsam the sea may have donated. There are two special (secret) places where the driftwood hunting is good.

At home again with his bounty, Schiller digs the inedible fish parts into the garden soil, currently (in January) producing beans, beets, onions, big ears of corn, parsley, turnips, not to mention citrus fruits.

He may add some shells to the thousands that decorate the roofs and walls of his house and garage, outline the flower beds, and carpet the outside stairs. As for the driftwood, if any piece resembles some real or fanciful creature, it is added to the wonderful collection that is his zoo.

They stand in "cages" and niches in the light green fence; the "Trojan Horse," the "camel with two legs, now extinct," the "Holstein cow," the "European stork" protecting her nestling, and the "modern dog" with its own fireplug.

Some of the pieces resemble Olympic runners. Another (kept in the house) is a womanly Eve. Just inside the front gate is a strange lizard and at its rear a fox red as Reynard.

These interesting "animals" have been twisted into shape by nature, wind, rain, and the sea. Although Schiller does admit to a judicious bit of pruning, nothing has been added.

