Staff Spotlight: Cynthia Greenleaf

Name: Cynthia Greenleaf

Office Location: home office

Department/Division: Literacy, Division 1

Former Program (prior to the new Division structure): Strategic Literacy Initiative, TPD

Position/Role: Co-Founder of SLI, currently Senior Research Scientist

Number of Years at WestEd: 25?

What do you like to do in your free time outside of work?

I like to camp, hike, watch birds and nature, spend time with my granddaughters, and ... big surprise ... read! I read world literature – classic and new – historical fiction and mystery series set in other regions of the world and other time periods. I am a member of
a book club – all women – that has been meeting for more than 22 years. I am a member of Indivisible Berkeley and work with Reclaim Our Vote and other social justice organizations to encourage civic engagement and especially, voting. I write a lot of postcards to voters these days.

If money and travel logistics were not an issue, which country/place in the world would you most want to visit?

Almost anywhere, but especially Spain, Portugal, Italy, and the Mediterranean. Also South and Central America. I have spent quite a bit of time in New Zealand and love it. I imagine some of South and Central America would be similar terrain. I love learning about other places, other ways of life, other terrain.

Name one interesting thing not many people know about you.

I’m not sure that it’s particularly interesting, but I’m an introvert. I have fostered and modeled an intensely social and collaborative pedagogy and workspace – indeed this is at the heart of Reading Apprenticeship professional learning and the instructional framework – but secretly, it takes a lot out of me to teach and facilitate and collaborate in the intensely social and self-disclosing ways I insist on. And here’s something else: reading beautiful or powerful ideas aloud makes me cry. In public. Every time. Sheesh! One more thing – as a girl, I wanted to be a Park Ranger and do environmental education. I almost majored in systems biology instead of linguistics.

Describe what a perfect day would look like for you.

Walking or paddling in nature and catching sight of wildlife with my husband and granddaughters.

What is one hidden talent that most of your colleagues are unaware of?

I play guitar and Appalachian style autoharp. Not sure it’s a talent though! I haven’t had time to really play in years and years – maybe in retirement?

If you were to win a big lottery prize, what would you do with the money?

Fund potential solutions to offset global warming.

What can you claim to be your superpower?
I seem to have a particular knack for spotting wildlife. I often intuit where critters will appear – probably hypersensitivity and hypervigilance related to introversion.

**Tell us about one of your favorite teachers.**

Mr. Snow was my 5th grade science teacher and he lived pretty close to my neighborhood. He had a shock of white hair and a garage with lots of interesting projects always underway. He was tolerant of me dropping by and probably was the one responsible for my rock collecting habit. I know he coached me through developing a highly systematic method of rock collection – field samples displayed in drawers of a plastic hardware storage cabinet, carefully labeled. I can close my eyes and see the white numbered circle on the underside of each rock referencing my handwritten legend and notes. I still have my field guide!