



FRIENDS OF ESALEN

n e w s l e t t e r

Transcending Categories of Difference

Esalen has long stood for the coming together of the disparate.

Here is where mountains meet ocean, where East meets West, where Body meets Mind, where I encounters Thou, where oppositions come into contact and dynamically combine into a generative whole.

We take this alchemy almost for granted here at Esalen.

Oppositional Gestalts seem naturally to form here and move towards synthesis: topdog befriends underdog, the (then) Soviet Union makes first US contact, science says hello to soul.

This newsletter is about those moments at Esalen when constructed categories of difference are transcended — when a deeper order emerges out of dialogic counterpoise.

Esalen is a touchstone for this kind of originaive evolution.

Even though the events that are described here take place largely within our geographic confines, the impact of our work does not remain only within our small sphere.

What happens here ripples outwards into the world, as our core curriculum slowly becomes the mainstream's cutting edge.

It is an exciting place to be.

Albert Wong, Friends of Esalen

— When Art Meets Life —

LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

During the week of October 13, 1996 Esalen hosted its Second Annual Arts Festival.

A team of sixteen artists, headed by **Margot McLean**, Esalen's artist-in-residence during the storms of 1995, presented a broad range of workshop offerings, thematically devoted to art.

Michael Meade, the author of *Men and the Water of Life*, invoked the artistic spirit into the week by playing the drums, telling the most riveting of mythic stories, and leading the participants in soulful African song. **James Hillman**, the father of Archetypal Psychology, brought deep intellectual presence to the oftentimes heated moments of artistic debate. **Joan Baez** sang and gave the week a feeling of timeless elegance.

The participants, too, during the week each showed themselves to be artists in their own right. The last night was lit by a fine display of their art in Huxley, followed by an impassioned collective poetry reading and a ceremonial fire on the Big House shore.

"There was one night when I came home after being down here [at the ArtsFest] all day long," says **Cynthia**

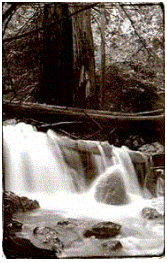


Margot McLean helps a student in her Painting and Perceiving work

Johnson-Bianchetta, one of Esalen's senior movement teachers and a local professional photographer. "It was late at night and I was taking a bath at home and Danny [my husband] jumped into the tub with me and I told him: *I don't think I've ever been happier than this week.*" Cynthia was one of the community members at Esalen who was most directly involved in and deeply touched by the Arts Festival.

"I felt personally inspired and I also felt inspired for the community.... I started imagining what our community meetings would be like if people expressed themselves in poetry, and how we might get to know an even deeper sense of each other ... by taking our process and bringing it into creative expression," says Cynthia. "That's the Esalen that I've always wanted to live in." *ART COMES TO LIFE*

Where Science Brushes with the Sacred



Anyone who has been around Esalen for a while knows bodily what group field feels like. “Group field,” says **Seymour Carter**, a long time Esalen group leader, “is the combined emotional atmosphere of a room.” We take this understanding of *field* almost for granted here; it is part of our every day language.

Roger Nelson, the director of the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Group, believes that he has found a device that can measure *field*.

We are in the Fritz building on a rainy Thursday in December, 1996. It is the last full day of the fifth Direct Mental and Healing Interactions (DMHI) Workgroup Conference at the Esalen Institute, Big Sur. An assemblage of leading scientists of “psi” consciousness interactions are convened around the fireplace.

And then, there is me [Albert], who has been let in as a kind of odd-ball guest

observer to the conference.

Roger, whom I met first almost a decade ago during my days at Princeton, sits across from me in his trademark cross-legged pose. It is good to see him here.

Roger distributes a graph of the behavior of his hand-held Random Event Generator (REG) on the occasion of his first contact with certain sacred sites in Egypt — Karnak temple, the great pyramids of Khofu or Cheops. At exactly those moments when he first enters into these sites, the graph swings markedly off of the norm.

That is, his machine essentially goes tilt.

The correlation is intriguing, and the international group of scientists headed by **Marilyn Schlitz**, Director of Research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, begins to discuss what, if anything, might be going on here.



In the end, the group decides that this line of work is promising, but that more studies need to be done before anything conclusive can be stated. What seems most revolutionary to me

however, is that these questions are now, and ever-increasingly, being taken seriously — by scientists of the first caliber.

Besides Roger’s work on measuring *field*, the group shared experimental results on a variety of ongoing scientific projects, ranging from presentiment to intentionality and distant healing. The week also allowed the group to formulate collective plans and collaborative possibilities for guiding this still young *field* into full maturity.

This week was the last meeting of this working group at Esalen, at least for a while. The timing on this seems to be about right. The *field* seems safe enough, now, and there is a sufficient critical mass established among these trailblazers to keep it going. The group has lived through the “Great Turn” — the grand movement towards the growing respectability of Mind-Body — and though their ideas remain fringe, one senses now that their entrée into the scientific mainstream has become, albeit distantly, only a matter of time.

SCIENCE BRUSHES WITH THE SACRED.

Where Mountains Drop Straight into Ocean

If heaven and earth did not mingle, whence would everything receive life?

— Cheng Zhu

“The Big Sur coast is the steepest meeting of land and ocean in the continental United States,” says **Eric Erickson**, matter-of-factly. Eric, the manager of the Esalen Gate and my old boss, used to be a forest ranger just down the coast.

“And from an energetic point of view mountains are the element that is the most *yang*,” he continues. “And *ocean* is the element that is the most *yin*.”

He raises his eyebrows and looks at me with his classic “you get it, right?” gaze. I, of course, am an idiot, so I try to get him to say a bit more.

“Well, in the Chinese Taoist system,

yin — or water — draws and receives energy. *Yang* — or mountains — generate and expel energy.... Now, look at where Esalen is. It’s smack in the middle.”

Yes, I am beginning to understand.

He pauses, and then throws in the kicker. “And right at the interface, you have a hot springs.”

He gives me another one of those “you get it, right?” looks (I nod), and then he continues, almost with deliberate understatement: “That is very unusual.”

No wonder this place is such a catalyst for change.

Strangely, it all begins to make perfect sense. Carl Jung said: “The greater the contrast, the greater is the



potential. Great energy only comes from correspondingly great tensions between opposites.”

Esalen lives on this thin strip of land between the two archetypal, monumental opposites of nature: mountains and ocean — in one of the clearest examples of nature’s oppositions in balance.

I’m surprised, just thinking about it now, that the place doesn’t burst.

MOUNTAINS MEET OCEAN.

When a Legacy of Old Gives Way to the New

Since its beginning in 1975, **Bette Dingman** has shepherded the Work Scholar program through thick and thin. For over twenty years, to be a Work Scholar at Esalen was, at least in some way, to pass through the hands of Bette.

This summer Bette is retiring.

Thousands of people have had their lives deeply changed by the program that Bette ran.

You can count me as one.

Certainly, things will not be the same at Esalen without her.

The growth of students at Esalen once they “graduate” from Bette’s



Work Scholar program has been faithfully handled for the past year by **Steve Harper**. Late in 1996, however, Steve indicated his own desire to move on from stewardship of this Extended Student program.

The (near) simultaneous departure of both Bette and Steve created a double vacuum out of which has crystallized a structural reorganization of the jobs governing Work Scholar and Extended Student life.

Now there will be a single *In-House Education Coordinator* charged with creating a coherent and enriching educational curriculum to serve all



resident members of the Esalen community, whether Work Scholar, Extended Student, or other; there will also be a single *Work Scholar and Extended Student Administrator*, on the other hand, to oversee the details of day-to-day living for both Work Scholars and Extended Students alike — a kind of full-time mother hen, if you will.

We offer our deepest gratitude and thanks to Steve and especially Bette for their service through the years. What has been given, measured in love, can scarce be repaid.

Two very beautiful people were chosen to follow in the Esalen Work Scholar legacy. We are delighted to introduce them to you below.

TORREY WAAG

In-House Education Coordinator

After a career in financial analysis with a Wall Street firm, **Torrey Waag** journeyed physically West and spiritually East in 1974, when he participated in an intense 40 day Arica Training on Pfeiffer Ridge in Big Sur. This mixture of Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Enneagram work, and contemporary psychology opened the door for the Wall Street maven to begin a “highly eclectic spiritual search” which continues for him to this day.

He met a number of Esalen people during the Arica training and was soon working in the Esalen kitchen. After eighteen months, he left Esalen to continue his spiritual search studying Sufism, Zen, Feng Shui, and the Enneagram, but returned to the area in 1986, when he fell in love with his now wife **Brita Ostrom**, an Esalen community member since 1967.

Over the years, Torrey has been involved with many Esalen projects ranging from contracting the 1987



Pictures, clockwise from upper left: Bette with child, Steve with child, Dorothy Thomas, and Torrey Waag

Lodge remodel to sharing his Enneagram expertise with departmental work groups. Despite certification in Neuro-linguistics and training in several psychological methods, he never applied for any Esalen management job until this educational position became available.

“This is an incredible opportunity,” says Torrey. “I envision long-term programs that use all the resources available here blending conscious work with in-house and catalogue programs. Esalen is a school for educating the heart, mind, and body — a school for conscious living — with potential for impacting both the individual and society.”

“A revolution is happening now in the fields of consciousness research and whole-person education,” he continues with enthusiasm. “And the Esalen programs for long-term students can benefit from and effect this revolution.”



DOROTHY THOMAS

Work Scholar and Extended Student Administrator

Dorothy Thomas seems to share Torrey’s enthusiasm, and she’s proving it by uprooting herself from a life and home in Florida to return to Big Sur. Dorothy came to Esalen as a Work Scholar in 1985, working in the kitchen as a Lodgekeeper. She was invited to stay for a year as an Extended Student (then called Work Scholar II), but wanted to honor her commitment to remain working with suicidal teens in Florida.

A year later she returned to Esalen without an invitation for a specific job, but when several cooks departed unexpectedly, the woman with a Master’s in Counseling Psychology suddenly became a chef.

After a year of living and cooking at Esalen, Dorothy returned to Florida and within three months had opened The Keys Institute (TKI), a small human

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DOROTHY THOMAS

Work Scholar and Extended Student Administrator

Continued from page 3

potential center which offered workshops taught by names familiar to Esalen: **Chris Price, John Soper, John Heider** and more. She ran the Institute for eight years, but its overhead was always too high for Dorothy to draw a salary. She is now putting TKI on hiatus, expecting that it will still sponsor an occasional workshop.

Dorothy was drawn to her new position because “almost everyone [who lives] at Esalen starts as a Work Scholar — the community grows out of the Work Scholar program. For the Work Scholars to have one person to go to, to help them have their time at Esalen be fruitful, is exciting to me,” she explained.

“I love the freshness of new people,” she continued. “I also love the idea of holding entrance and exit interviews with the Extended Students, to learn what they want when they come here and to see how the program

has then met those needs.”

Dorothy has run process groups and is Esalen-massage certified, and so her background and orientation, like Torrey’s, is broad-based: heart, mind, body, spirit. With Dorothy and Torrey signed on, Esalen seems ready to begin a new chapter in the exploration of human potential.

[Ed. note: Andy Glazer, a once Sports Editor of the Michigan Daily, wrote the second half of this special article and provided substantial research assistance also for its first half. Andy is now a chef in the Esalen kitchen.]

Our Grateful Appreciation of Recent Gifts:

sustaining members

Nancy Bourgeois
Bill and Freda Marvin
John Andrew McQuown
Lyle S. Poncher
Janet Ryan
Robert Woertz

benefactors

David and Jerilyn Brownstein
Kay Brunner
Michael Hoffman

group 2000

Harriet Crosby
Richard M. Fenker
Bruce and Lueza Gelb
John T. Gelb
Diane M. Marks
Maureen McKenna
Michael Murphy

founders circle

Tana and Richard Gelb

ESALEN INSTITUTE is a center to encourage work in the humanities and sciences that promotes human values and potentials. Its activities consist of public seminars, residential work-study programs, research, and invitational conferences.



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