

f r i e n d s o f

Esalen

n e w s l e t t e r



Esalen Grounds Flourish Today

by K Mello

For many of us, an integral part of our Esalen experience is just being on the very earth that supports Esalen and the variety of life that thrives here. For the past 20 years, the stewardship of these beloved grounds has been entrusted to Sydney Ocean, the Grounds Supervisor. Sydney is married to Steve Beck, head of the Esalen Farm and Garden, whom she met at Esalen. The two of them confer frequently on long and short term plans for the land.

Sydney came to Esalen in 1981 as a Work Scholar, was then an Extended Student and has never left. In meeting Sydney, it is soon apparent that her love of the land and the creatures who live here runs deeply throughout her life and work. "I don't distinguish between work and play," says Sydney, "It's all fun. I have an attitude of enjoyment." Her staff has nothing but the highest praise for Sydney, personally and professionally. "She really knows the plants," says Ronnie Haire, who has been the Grounds Assistant for over two years. "She's a great storyteller, very funny, and wise, oh my, she's a wise woman. I love working for her." In talking with Sydney, it's obvious the feeling is mutual.

One can see from the picture of Esalen taken in 1967 that the grounds didn't just happen this way. In Esalen's early years Selig Morganrath planted many trees, built rock walls, and set out an initial plan. Over time, the plan has



Above, the Esalen lodge and oval (then a parking lot) in about 1967. Below, the Esalen lodge and oval today.



Daniel Bianchetto

continually been adjusted for Esalen's changing needs and nature's changing moods. At any given time, Sydney is

planning for today, next spring, next winter, five years from now, and even 100 years from now. "Some of the

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cypresses at the Big House have been there for 100 years, and we're planting now for 100 years from now," says Sydney. "Some winters we'll lose 25 trees, from wind, age, soil that's too wet, and sometimes from diseases, like the pitch canker that's coming down from Monterey and affecting the pines. In one of the worst winters, we lost 50 trees in one year."

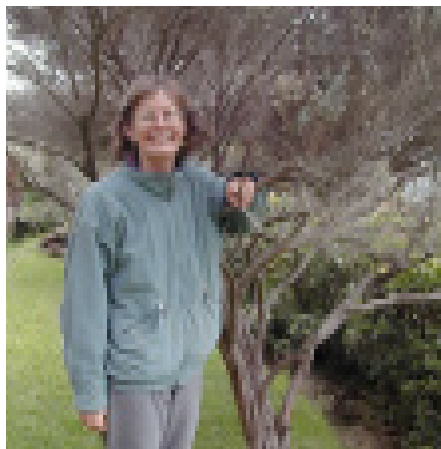
There are some long term challenges in maintaining these grounds, such as trying to eliminate pampas grass, genestia, and castor beans, which are non-native, invasive plants and whose seeds remain viable for decades. The neighboring lands are saturated with pampas grass plumes, and wind carries the seeds, longing for a home, to our land, despite the lack of invitation.

While there are some difficult aspects of the grounds maintenance, Sydney keeps coming back to the positive and all the different ways in which we are fortunate because of this location. If you are standing on the front lawn cliff on a windy day, you may be surprised to know that our location is actually less windy than most on the coast. This wind protection, along with our rich soil, the lack of frost or freezing temperatures, and an abundance of water, allows for a great diversity of plants. Esalen looks lush even in drought years.

Sydney tends to plant native and drought resistant plants because they fit with the local system and are more adapted to the area, but she speaks of the importance of plant diversity for a healthier system. It allows Esalen to be home for more "critters," and makes plant populations less prone to being wiped out by one environmental threat. "We have a huge range of plants for color, smell, and ecological diversity."

Sydney does a lot of planning for the butterflies that make Esalen their winter home. She works to create the "magic circles" that attract the Monarchs. A vegetative circle of protection at a certain height with a source of nectar and water allows visitors and residents of Esalen to enjoy our flut-

Daniel Bianchetti



Sydney Ocean

tery friends year after year. Sydney observes, "They move around to different parts of the property. This year they're hanging out in the redwood tree on the staff unit lawn. It's the first time I've seen them there."

Sydney talks of Esalen's unique opportunity to utilize the creative influence of all the different Work Scholars, volunteers, Extended Students, and staff who have contributed ideas and handiwork. Many people have passed through and added something: a rock wall, a rock path, a pond, the bench by the Big House pond, trellises, railings, and more. These are all expressions of individuals passing through. "We've had some amazing people over time; some of them stay a day, some for years. Antonio Nunez, who does all our tree work, has stayed more than ten years. I think it's vital to encourage people to use their skills and interests and find a way to bring them into the place." The result is the multi-faceted peacock's tail which is the Esalen grounds. The crew is a bit like Esalen elves, quietly working at making this place beautiful.

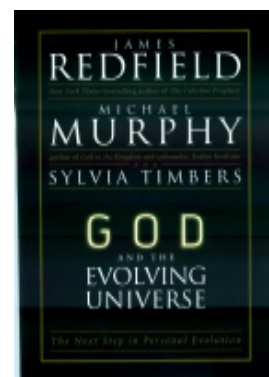
"It's funny that I took this job for the plants, but I've ended up getting at least as much enjoyment out of people," muses Sydney. "What a thrill to take someone who's never gotten their hands mucky playing in the dirt, never worked in the rain, run a weedwacker, worn rubber boots to clean out rain gutters...the lawyer, the accountant, a 17-year-old." It's undeniable that Sydney takes great pleasure in introducing people to such enriching experiences. "It's hard to work outside with plants

and not get something positive. It's like giving them a stage to learn more about themselves."

It's important to Sydney that the Esalen grounds express the wildness of the Big Sur coast; that they look like there's been little human intervention. "Although it does take a lot of work, my goal is to have it look like it just happened that way. The landscape is intended to gently invite pleasure." As is Sydney Ocean. Thank you to Sydney and the Grounds crew from all of us who deeply appreciate the magnificent results of your efforts.

New Work by Michael Murphy and Friends

Author and Esalen co-founder Michael Murphy has written a new book entitled *God and the Evolving Universe* (Tarcher / Putnam, \$25.95) with James Redfield (*The Celestine*



Prophecy) and documentary filmmaker Sylvia Timbers, which tells the story of the long and intimate association between spiritual/philosophical traditions and evolutionary thinking. Not only are we heirs and (as far as we know) the most complexly organized products of billions of years of evolution, but we stand poised, the authors argue, on the threshold of a new evolutionary leap in the universe, and a giant new step in human capacities and human self-understanding.

This book will be reviewed in the next issue of the Friends of Esalen newsletter. It can be purchased through the Esalen bookstore by

Volunteer Team Helps Esalen Plan for Future

In the planning process to create a long term development plan Esalen has been blessed with the expertise and friendship of an extremely talented, multi-disciplinary team of planners, designers, architects, and engineers who have donated days of their time in service to Esalen.

When asked why he donates his time to Esalen, Amory Lovins, CEO/ Research at the Rocky Mountain Institute in Snowmass Colorado says, "Love. I felt the place could be a wonderful example of how to tread more lightly on the earth. My dream is to see Esalen as a place so in balance that it creates delight on arrival, joy when you stay, and regret when you depart." He also remarks, "I'm looking forward to seeing Esalen self-sufficient in energy in this decade combining photovoltaics and geothermal."

Roger Courtenay, a prominent landscape architect and master planner with EDAW of Alexandria, Virginia, sees Esalen as a potential steward not only for itself but for the whole Big Sur/Central Coast region. He likes seeing his work become visible as an example to a wider audience and Esalen has that. He enjoys the "unfolding" nature of the project at Esalen which he describes as "humane and personal, like no other client, with respect being shown for



Margaret Grathme

Jason Hainline, Greg Franta, Andy Nusbaum, Amory Lovins, Barbara Harwood, Don Aitken and Roger Courtenay enjoying one of the perks of working with Esalen.

each other and each other's views. I've learned a lot from this project because it is unfolding at its own rate rather than on a fixed schedule, letting the path determine itself. Decisions are allowed to evolve."

"Esalen has always been one of my favorite spots on the planet," says Greg Franta, an environmental architect with ENSAR Group in Boulder, Colorado. "I travel the world a lot, and this is one of the few places I like to be. I was excited when Amory asked me to be involved. Esalen has an incredibly beautiful environment and great programs, but the built environment doesn't reflect the beauty of the rest of the place, especially in terms of ecological aspects." Greg has a great passion to help transform the

building industry and make it more sustainable. Esalen can be a great model for the rest of the world as so many people come through here and can witness the success of sustainable building.

Don Aitken, Secretary of the International Solar Energy Society and senior consulting scientist for the Energy Department of the Union of Concerned Scientists, says that "Esalen has become a part of my personal work. My heart is responding. My head is responding. It's a marvelous challenge." Don not only donates his time to Esalen but also donated part of the photovoltaic solar system that powers the Dance Dome and Art Barn on the north side of the property.

Bath Construction Enters the Home Stretch



Daniel Bianchi

Construction is full steam ahead on the baths after a short slowdown at the end of last year. The roofs on the second-story massage room and bathroom are being finished. Alaskan cedar beams have been formed to create a ceiling which will have natural light filtering through translucent panels. Final lighting details are being resolved which will assure safety and be unobtrusive. A lovely tiled fountain has been installed in the entry way. Weather cooperating, a summer opening is likely.

It has been a long and involved process but with spectacular results. Thanks to all of you who have given generously to make this project happen. Donations continue to be welcomed and appreciated.

A Clearing in the Woods: Reflections of an ES

by Abe "Brammy" Bernstein

Extended students (ES) typically live, work and study at Esalen for a period of a year after completing several months as a work scholar. They constitute nearly a third of Esalen's work force and help to supervise and train the monthly work scholars. They represent a variety of chronological ages, ranging from the late teens and early 20's to the 50's, 60's, and 70's.

They come from a wide range of backgrounds, life styles, professions, and countries, and a broad array of past experiences, points of view, and future goals. This article attempts to give the reader a sense of the common experience that many ES share, regardless of those differences.

He had heard for years of a place where people came who were seeking they knew not what, a place where they found, if not what they were seeking, at least others not unlike themselves. He decided to check it out for himself. He arrived shortly before sunset on a summer day.

It was no more than a clearing in the woods. There was a spring there, and the water was good, so people on many different journeys stopped there to rest and recoup their energies before moving on. Initially they stopped for a day or two; they sat together over meals, shared stories in the bath house by the spring and around the fire circle after the sun went down, and ventured short distances into the woods beyond the stream or up the hills to the highland meadows. Many moved on after a short stay. Others lingered.

Some who lingered went on side journeys into the surrounding country, journeys that ranged from a few hours to a few weeks, and then returned to the community. A few of the people who ventured into the countryside and became familiar with the terrain there began offering their services as guides to people who were newly arrived. A body of folklore about the vicinity grew and was passed on to those who had not yet

experienced it first hand.

Others stayed close to the spring and the fire circle; these took on the tasks of tending the garden, preparing and serving meals, and keeping the buildings in shape. They organized song fests and dances and storytellings, and taught the skills of gardening, cooking, and building repair to those who wished to learn.

The makeup of the community continually changed, but its identity as a community stayed the same. Some of the people who stopped there sought simply to rest and catch their breath before continuing on their journeys. Others sought to heal some earlier damage to body, mind, or spirit. Still others were on a quest, whether or not they knew what they were questing after. They exchanged stories with each other, discussed deep and important matters, and played, sang, and danced together. No two of them had the same story, and few had any answers, but all had something to share and something to learn. A handful stayed and settled there, but most stayed only for a brief

time, then headed off elsewhere. Some would later return. Some would not. It was a place where people on many different journeys could linger briefly, share what they had in common, celebrate their differences, and move on. He had never seen anything like it.

This is what a year of being an extended student at Esalen has been for me. It has been a time when I could be open with others about who I am and what I feel, and through doing so, become more open to be myself with less self-judgment, inner criticism, and shame than I have known before. It has been a time when I could learn more genuinely than ever before what others are like, for in this community it is difficult—perhaps even impossible—to maintain, for any length of time, a false facade to hide behind.

It has been a time when I could expose myself to new learning, new behaviors, and new attitudes of body, mind, and spirit; it would have been hard not to do that,



Extended Students Abe "Brammy" Bernstein from the front office and Katrina Dunbar from the Farm and Garden.

Nancy Worcester

because the energy generated by workshop leaders and visiting teachers is difficult to resist. It has been a time when I could delve deeply into my own personal healing, for the environment here provides an almost magical sort of personal emotional alchemy. It has been a time when I could open up enough to let a new “me” begin to emerge, to begin to discover who I really might be, for everyone here supports everyone else in doing whatever they need to do for their own growth and self-realization.

Esalen is not a Utopia, not a place of perfection. All the characteristics of humanity, save only violence, can be found here—love, joy, pride, shame, jealousy, kindness, courage, fear, timidity, anger, envy, loneliness, withdrawal, bitterness. Miracles occur here, grudges are held here, politics happen here; people speak their truth and people lie; things are done in openness and things are done in secrecy. But more than anywhere else I have lived or worked, Esalen offers the possibility of being myself, being authentic, being unguarded, being free of pretense.

I wonder what it will be like, once having experienced this, to return to the outside world. I will find out; most of us who are here as ES will find out, because only rarely does one stay on.

Esalen is the clearing in the woods, the place to drink deeply of the magical spring and to experience the wonder of our own souls before returning, forever changed,

“While the workshop was outstanding, as I had expected, I was not prepared for Esalen’s beauty. The combination of the quality of the workshop and the beauty of Esalen came together as a powerful experience.

Thank you.”

Esalen Seminarian

Campaign Update by Serena D’Arcy-Fisher

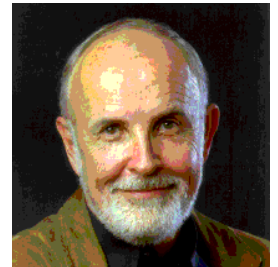
The Esalen *Campaign for the Future* enjoyed a special weekend at Esalen on November 2 – 4 with trustees, workshop leaders, campaign cabinet members, members of Esalen’s Group 2000, volunteers and staff for briefings on Esalen’s vision for the future, the Long Term Development Plan (LTDP), and the Capital Campaign. Hosted by John Cleese and Board Members Marilyn Schlitz and Keith Thompson, this special event attracted over 120 Esalen supporters.



Campaign staff noted with pleasure the strong response of the participants to the call for volunteers in Esalen’s major fundraising campaign. Esalen is delighted to announce that Ms. Ann Knoll-Downing has joined the Campaign Cabinet as Chair of the Major Gifts Network. Ann is a planning and resource development professional in both the public and private sector. For many years she raised funds for the Sierra Club. She has served as a consultant for several national non-profit foundations in the arts, community development, health care, and environment; she comes out of retirement to lend her considerable expertise to our efforts. We deeply appreciate Ann’s commitment to the success of this campaign.

Thanks to Corinne Bourdeau and the Los Angeles volunteer team, there are some exciting campaign events scheduled. For more information please contact Serena D’Arcy-Fisher at (415) 884-4307. Esalen Chairman Mike Murphy is presenting at Yoga House in February, an event hosted by Peter and Tara Guber. Mike will be making public appearances at various bookstores to talk about his new book, *God and the Evolving Universe* — a joint project with James Redfield and Sylvia Timbers.

The Campaign would like to acknowledge the generous gift of long-time Esalen supporter and contributor to the Center for Theory and Research, Jay Ogilvy. Jay is a co-founder of Global Business Network (GBN), a research and consulting company that serves Fortune 500 companies and government agencies. Jay’s background includes 12 years as a professor of philosophy at Yale and Williams universities. Over the past 20 years he has been a regular contributor to invitational seminars and workshops at Esalen.



As part of his contribution to the Capital Campaign, Jay is leading a scenario-planning project for Esalen. Jay describes the process as follows: “Every organization that wants to stay around for a while needs a long-range strategic plan, even those whose past successes seem to provide a momentum into the future. Precisely because it has built such a strong reputation, Esalen needs to think carefully about the range of futures that are available to it, given its strengths and its wide repute. Scenario planning is a strategic tool that’s been designed to explore such alternative futures.

“As a longtime participant in programs at Esalen, and as one who respects the interests of many in the Esalen community, I’m very aware of the passionate commitments that many people have to Esalen’s future. I would be the last to imagine that I alone could come up with a strategy for Esalen, or that this process alone will guarantee Esalen’s future success. But the scenario-planning process does provide an excellent platform for those who know Esalen best to engage in a strategic conversation about Esalen’s future. And that is what I hope to facilitate by putting GBN’s well-honed tools in the service of the Esalen community.”

Book Review

Reviewed by Gordon Wheeler

Searching for Hassan: An American Family's Journey Home to Iran by Terence Ward

Long ago and far away, a small boy named Terry grew up with his parents and three brothers in a land of contradictions. Within their garden walls lay a magic world of tales and traditions, presided over by a beloved cook/housekeeper, Hassan, who was their guardian angel and enthralling guide to an ancient culture. Outside lay the Teheran of the Shah, at once oil-rich and desperately poor, where a privileged elite got ever more Westernized, while the masses were forgotten. Propped up by the all-too-familiar triad of foreign oil companies, secret police, and the CIA, the regime of Reza Pahlevi spawned a new bourgeoisie, but withheld the freedom and democracy that might have broadened opportunity and anchored socioeconomic change in the deepest traditional values of Islam. Instead, religious reactionaries united with the dispossessed, the Shah fell, replaced by a new dictatorship arguably more equitable than the old, and America, perhaps unsurprisingly, became the Great Satan. A horrendous six-year war ensued with Iraq, armed and backed up by America; soon the new dictatorship was as feared and hated as the old — while beneath the surface of oil and Islam alike, an ancient tradition of poetry and mysticism went underground, and was lost from view.

Two decades passed, but the Ward brothers, cut off from their childhood memories by revolution and war, never forgot their beloved Hassan. In 1997 a moderate democrat was elected President of Iran, with a platform of reform and an insistence that the God of Islam stood for love, not hate. For the first time in almost a generation, through a circuitous

routing, visas to Iran became possible for Americans; the entire Ward family, minus four daughters-in-law and several grandchildren, set out in search of Hassan, and of the culture and connections that were the legacy of their lost childhood.

One result of that odyssey was a re-union as unlikely as it is moving, testimonial to the power of love and human attachment over the insane forces of jingoism and war, themselves staged and fueled by all the worst sides of imperialist capitalism and fanatic religion. A second was the rediscovery of a magical and timeless culture, private but not forgotten, where the book on the bedside table may as likely be the poetry of Hafiz or Rumi as the *Koran*, and the deepest values of human connection are manifest in *taarof*, the ancient ritual of hospitality.

A third is Terence Ward's beautiful book, *Searching for Hassan* (Houghton Mifflin, \$25.00), weaving both the other two themes into a magic tale worthy of Hassan himself — with the dauntless Ward family in more or less the role of Mullah Nasrudin, innocent anti-hero of many a Sufi fable, guided on their journey as much by "Irish luck and Allah's blessing" as by any really coherent plan. And all around them, in place of the cultural monolith depicted for so long in Western media, they found an Iran of new complexities, where strong new stirrings of democracy and tolerance vie with the remaining forces of repression, while the spirit of poetry and mysticism still animates much of the land. "Today Iran is the only democracy in the Islamic Middle East," says Ward, commenting on four successive elections in which the reformists have prevailed. "It is no accident either," he continues, "that the most pro-American of those countries today is the one where we have *not* sided with a repressive government against its own people."

Ironically, religious tolerance was born in Persia two and a half thousand years ago, under Cyrus the Great, whose declaration of human rights is inscribed today at the General

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Assembly of the United Nations. Two millennia later that same spirit was to say, in the voice of the Sufi poet, "I have learned so much from God, that I no longer call myself Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jew.... a man, a woman, an angel, or even pure soul. Love has befriended Hafiz so completely..."

Today, the American government, in terms as simplistic as those of its real enemies, has officially declared Iran to be part of a "triangle of evil." Rather, Ward insists, our common enemy is "the prohibition against knowing the Other" — that crippling wall that unites fanatics everywhere. In this inspiring book, by contrast, we read of an Iran where "far more people follow the words of Hafiz and Rumi than listen to the bull horns of the mullahs." Ward was at Esalen March 8-10, where he co-led the workshop "The Time-less Soul of Iran: The Other Face of Islam." Meanwhile, you can join him on the enchanted journey that is *Searching for Hassan*.

Esalen trustee and workshop leader Gordon Wheeler is author of over a dozen books on relationship, development, the Gestalt model, and the Western tradition of individualism.

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We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the many wonderful Friends of Esalen who generously support our operations and special projects. The following is a list of friends who have given over \$500 from 1/1/2001-12/31/2001. We couldn't be here without you!

Italics below indicate a lifetime donation giving commitment and/or a donation pledge of \$100,000 or more

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Giving Back to Esalen

by Bill Herr

Paul Herbert came to Big Sur over a half-century ago and has been associated with Esalen since its founding. Early on he became Esalen's unofficial historian, photographing and recording the luminaries who visited and collecting the stories and images of those whose lives here shaped Esalen over the years.

Paul is the founder and proprietor of Dolphin Tapes, the audio service which has compiled a library of thousands of hours of recordings of speakers at Esalen, and at places as far-flung as Bombay. Recently Paul donated this remarkable collection of audio tapes to Esalen. It includes recordings by Gregory Bateson, Joseph Campbell, Moshe Feldenkrais,

Richard Feynman, Buckminster Fuller, Jean Houston, Aldous Huxley, R.D. Laing, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Terence McKenna, Carl Rogers, Ida Rolf, Virginia Satir, Alan Watts, and the list goes on - truly a name-dropper's litany of the great minds whose discourses have enlightened thousands.

He also donated the personal memorabilia he had amassed in his 50-plus years in Big Sur, including such items as autographed limited editions of books by Henry Miller, original copies of the Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix obituary editions of *Rolling Stone*, and photographs of the Beatles on the Esalen lawn.

I have recently had the pleasure of helping Paul with the preservation of these unique treasures. This has given me the opportunity to hear many of these remarkable speakers. The thing that has struck me repeatedly is not only the originality and creativity of their ideas, but how current, how timely their words are still.



Daniel Bianchetta

Paul Herbert

The next step is to convert them to a digital format both for their long-term preservation and to make them available on the internet. These ideas, like Paul, are treasures and to make them more accessible is to make them truly live again.

Thanks, Paul, for all you have given to Esalen over the years and all that you continue to be.

A listing of Dolphin Tapes available for purchase appears in every Esalen Catalog. Tapes are also available through the Esalen Bookstore.

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