



f r i e n d s o f  
**Esalen**<sup>®</sup>  
n e w s l e t t e r

# The Compassionate Kitchen

*An Extended Student's Perspective on Life Inside the Esalen Kitchen*

By James Elsen

I have come to expect the unexpected during my visits to Esalen over the past 10 years. So it was with both excitement and trepidation that I entered into the Work Scholar Program and then the Extended Student Program, choosing to live at Esalen for a period of several months and work in the kitchen. I had no idea of the richness and growth that awaited me behind those lodge doors that open into the heart and soul of food at Esalen.

My first day of training included a meeting with Charlie Cascio, Esalen's Head Chef, who is retiring in April after 6 years of managing the Esalen kitchen. Actually referring to Charlie as a manager is like calling Miles Davis a trumpet player. Charlie's many gifts include a natural leadership style, born out of his warm heart and hard-earned wisdom. During his tenure he worked hard to make sure the kitchen wasn't just a mere place where food was prepared, but a home with values, emotion and friends who at times feel more like family coming together to prepare a holiday feast, three times every day.

"Over my career I've seen how *not* to treat kitchen staff and managers, and I promised myself that if I ever had the opportunity to create a kitchen where people cared about one another, I would do that," Charlie told me. Each



*Charlie Cascio, 2nd from left, helped create a kitchen where people care about each other.*

day I watched as Charlie instilled his high principles into the fabric of the kitchen, setting an example of dedication and caring.

As I met and worked with the kitchen management, staff, and fellow students, I learned more about the incredible effort and care that goes into every meal prepared for our community. Before a single vegetable is sliced in preparation for a meal, there has already been a tremendous amount of thought, energy, and care put into creating a clean, safe, healthy, and

nutritious environment for us all. Stainless-steel pots and pans are used in place of aluminum, as there is concern that the aluminum would inevitably pit and enter the food we eat. Bleach is eschewed in favor of white distilled vinegar for cleaning kitchen surfaces. Harsh chemicals are replaced with superheated steam to sanitize our cutlery, dishes, and glasses. A high percentage of our daily vegetables comes from Esalen's sustainable garden, and every effort is made to supplement those vegetables with organic fruits and vegetables purchased from local sources.

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Meats are often organic, without hormones or antibiotics, and, in some cases, free range. We use cinnamon instead of pesticides for keeping the ants away, and even the floor-cleaning solution is eco-friendly. And that's just the beginning.

The management lessons I've discovered in the kitchen could be rich content for a *New York Times* bestseller book on management practices. I used to travel the country working with management teams and corporation boards that were striving to better their organizations. They spent millions of dollars annually in an effort to inspire creativity and leadership, and to build high morale and effective teams. These highly prized and



*Baker and cook, Angela Karegeannes sought-after*

components of successful organizations are evident in Esalen's own kitchen, and most of it seems to come about organically through the people that fuel the processes.

I was immediately welcomed into the kitchen and treated like an equal, despite being a novice in a commercial kitchen. Constant efforts are made to

facilitate clear communications and to celebrate each individual's uniqueness. Time is taken to listen to each other's feelings, issues, and thoughts regularly. The very nature of the 28-day cycles of entering and leaving work scholars and extended students creates a culture that has learned to embrace change. Our daily work activities are necessarily interdependent, and build compassion and understanding for each other. It's a recipe for long-term organizational success.

As I reflect on my experience working with management teams, I believe that Esalen's kitchen has much to teach other organizations. The tangible manifestation of the culture in the kitchen results in high productivity, good morale, healthy employees, flowing creativity, great food, and fun. We know that we are all part of a great and important experience that feeds 200+ guests and staff 3 times a day, 365 days a year. We care deeply about doing our best. And it is indeed *the people* that are Esalen kitchen's special ingredient.

Charlie notes that "taking risks and believing in people as a pathway to growth is the same philosophy that Esalen co-founder Dick Price practiced during his life at Esalen. As many regular Esalen

visitors can attest, growth here can be difficult and profound work at times. In the end, it is why I have returned time and again to Esalen – to challenge myself and extend my boundaries.

So what's next for the Esalen kitchen? An "externship" relationship has been formed with the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) to bring in newly trained chefs to work in the high volume, practical environment of Esalen's kitchen. Esalen hopes this will bring

innovative ideas and creativity into the kitchen and offer the new chefs an alternate and humane view on kitchen management and process. They, in turn, will become the messengers that bring Esalen kitchen's enlightened style of management and process to kitchens around the world.

This April will mark Charlie's retirement from running Esalen's kitchen. He will remain in charge of the "externship program" and will be spending more time at his sustainable mountainside ranch with his lovely wife Marion (also an incredible chef who brings delicious European cooking influences into Esalen's kitchen). Charlie will be missed. His legacy of love and caring will live on in the fiber of the kitchen and in those of us fortunate to have worked with him.

And for me, that has always been one of the ultimate beauties of Esalen: a mother who loves and teaches her children to go out into the world, apply the lessons learned, and share the love received. In the process, we all receive the opportunity to expand our own capacities and potential to do good, feel better, and create and support the process of positive transformation for ourselves and our world.

*James Elsen was a work scholar and extended student at Esalen until February 2004. He now lives in the Big Sur mountains with his*

### Welcome John and Tracy

*As this newsletter goes to press, we are thrilled to announce that John Blunt and Tracy Sparks have been chosen as the new co-managers of the Esalen kitchen. John has been a dedicated and talented chef at Esalen since 1993 (think Monday A.M. pancakes, aka "sponges of love") and has been in the field for 26 years. Tracy comes from a long line of restaurateurs and has been a catering and purchasing manager as well as a financial advisor. At Esalen she has experienced every job in the kitchen.*

*Both John and Tracy speak of "service" as their true passion. They are interested in allowing their staff to blossom in their own ways while providing fresh, whole-some, delicious food for all. We are fortunate to have them with us!*

# Rachel Fann's Many Talents

by Bill Schrier

Imagine that it's an hour before dinner and a well-meaning work scholar has just mistaken your vegetarian entree for compost and dumped it into a barrel. Panic time? Not if you're Rachel Fann, 57, Esalen's multi-talented, down-home, unflappable chef. "Everything I cook is soul food," says Rachel of her culinary endeavors, and, as anyone who's ever had some of her meatloaf can attest, her soul shines through her



*Rachel Fann with John*  
cooking.

Many first meet Rachel on Wednesday morning when she opens the kitchen for omelets cooked-to-order. Non-kitchen types may not appreciate the energy and time it requires for Rachel to do so, but suffice it to say it's a significant gift.

Rachel's contributions don't stop at the Esalen kitchen; she's a member of the massage crew (perhaps the only "two department" Esalen staff member), a talented painter whose work has been exhibited in the Esalen lodge and at local galleries, an entrepreneur (she and John Blunt have a catering business called Labor of Love), the mother of Jayson (Esalen's Art Center director), Robin (an Esalen massage crew member and yoga teacher), and Sharon

(a real estate agent and professional poker player in Las Vegas), and a grandmother of four.

Rachel first graced Esalen's land in 1989 and attended Laura Day's intuition workshop. At the time, she and Jayson were recent Bay Area transplants from Omaha. "I moved to Oakland with Jayson because I wanted to enroll him in an alternative high school, and there was a school which encouraged alternative views and had an emphasis on music, art, and drumming."

Less than two years later, Rachel's house burned down in the Oakland firestorm of 1991. At the time, Rachel had been working as an account executive in radio and television, writing commercials, doing voice-overs and selling helicopter traffic reports and commercial time. "After

my house burned, my throat closed up, and I couldn't work. A friend suggested that I go to Esalen, and I enrolled in the workscholar program. I hadn't been without a job since the age of 14, and I couldn't imagine quitting."

So what tipped the scales? "Robin handed me a pair of purple Birkenstocks and told me to get a life. I'm happy at Esalen. I have an amazing balance of being able to access creativity on a lot of different levels. I manage people; I have free reign in the kitchen; and I have quiet time in my art studio. And when I'm massaging, I can drop into a one-on-one relationship with a person without talking. I also feel very connected to the women who have come before me on this land."

What's one thing you'd change? "I appreciate people. I appreciate the people who work for me, and I appreciate my managers. I'd like to see people appreciated more often."

## July Arts Festival Week

Last year the 4th of July Celebration at Esalen marked the end of an era by celebrating the life, music, and teaching of the late Babatunde Olatunji. This year the sound of drums will christen the beginning of a new tradition at Esalen – The July Arts Festival.

For an unprecedented 7 days beginning July 2<sup>nd</sup> there will be no Gestalt-ing, pillow punching, soul regressing, or relationship coaching. These common Esalen activities will be replaced with creative endeavors of all shapes, shades, colors, and orientations including art, writing, music, poetry, dancing, film, storytelling, spinning, flipping, flapping, giggling, juggling, and lots more for people of all ages. Key presenters include Brazilian percussionist Airtó and dancer, choreographer Tandy Beal. Check out the current catalog or our website ([www.esalen.org](http://www.esalen.org)) for workshop descriptions and more information.

Preparations have already begun with community art projects springing up on the front oval. Pictured right is one community project. Can you guess what it is? Is it a circus contraption, a giant cocoon, or part of the community show? What community show you ask? Well, the Esalen actors, actresses, musicians, and dancers have created an interactive performance piece that will engage participants in a transformational journey that seeks to integrate and celebrate both light and shadow. The Esalen community members look forward to sharing their gifts



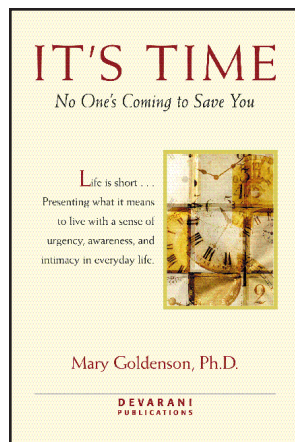
# New and Recent Books from the Esalen Community

by Gordon Wheeler

## *IT'S TIME — No One's Coming to Save You* by Mary Goldenson, PhD

Devarani Publications, 2004. \$15.95

Mary Goldenson is an institution at Esalen. For thirty years now she has been weaving her special brand of magic, touching hundreds of lives here — and through them, thousands more beyond. Her particular alchemy involves



what you might call “tough self-love” — a unique and inspiring amalgam of “you’re already perfect as you are” and “so get off your butt and get busy living, not avoiding, your life!” (My words, not hers). No shame, no blame — but that doesn’t mean anybody else is going to fix the past, guarantee the future, or otherwise do it for you. Or as she puts it, considerably more trenchantly, “No one’s coming to save you.” Mary tells us in the book that writing does not come easily or naturally to her, but

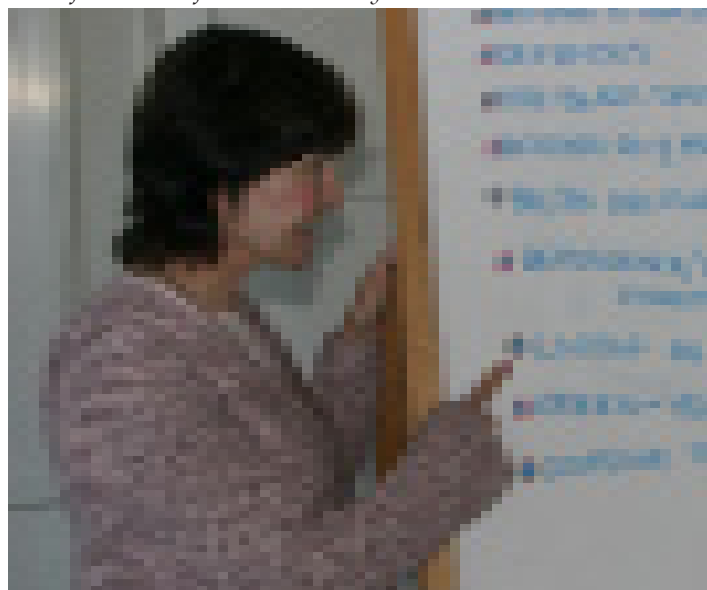
you wouldn’t know it from these sprightly pages, which sparkle with clarity, humility, self-humor, simplicity, and, yes, eloquence.

Here’s what this reader took away from this accessible, readable guide: *All the magic is in the things in ourselves that we usually don’t want to face.* Our core wounds, our deepest regrets, the wrenching griefs we have avoided or only mourned incompletely; vulnerability, loss, aging, death itself; the *finitude* of life, which gives the shimmer to the beauty of living — this is not one of those quick-fix, Pollyanna, everything’s-dandy formulas you find so often in the bookstore. Are you filled with anger? Fine, start with some screaming and pounding — but don’t stop there. Go on deeper, to the wound itself, the grief, and the ongoing vulnerability beneath. That’s where the new freedom and empowerment lie, and the new connections with others.

Here I find much resonance with the work with shame issues I’ve been exploring over the past decade, with groups and in writing, and in my own life. The goal is not to *get rid of* all our old feelings of shame, but rather to live them more lightly, more *openly* — and, thereby, to *use* them, as a golden door to deeper connections with other people, as well as with ourselves. In the wound lie our strength and our creativity — an idea that comes out of this book.

Bottom line: If you’ve never had the chance to take a workshop with Mary Goldenson, buy this book — it’s only \$15.95! (I have the feeling all those who have had that luck will be buying it anyway). Better yet, buy two — one for you, and one for a friend who can use it.

Mary says: “A human being is part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.”



So what is it time for in Mary Goldenson’s life, now that her book is done and she’s marking her 30th anniversary as a teacher at Esalen? What has she learned, and where is her remarkable passion going now?

“Sufficiency,” is the surprising answer she gives me. “This is a lesson I had to learn to finish the book. It follows from consciousness about time,” she goes on. “When is enough enough? It’s a spiritual question. Spirituality, to me, is being conscious and taking responsibility. Be conscious of time, go for it, play it big, be grateful — and then know when to let go, and move on. We talk about living from abundance, but there can be a trap in ‘abundance.’ Where does it come to rest? When are we satisfied, and grateful? When do we find peace? Take money, for example: People are trapped — more, more more. Money, sex, houses, stuff, even ‘enlightenment.’ When is it enough?”

So where does this lead her next, I ask (but I can’t help wondering if the question itself — next, next, next — isn’t an example of what she’s talking about. In other words, she’s already got me thinking...) “Spirituality and money,” she shoots right back. Stay tuned —

# Language, Experience and Philanthropy

By Ann Knoll-Downing, Director of Development

Growing a new fundraising program is hard work. Like growing good crops, *cultivation* must be done largely by hand. The quality, nutritional and curative properties that are missing in so many relationships must be raised through established “good practice” that encourages charitable giving. After 40 years of working alone to support its work, Esalen has taken steps to join with its alumni and other constituents, to raise money to protect it as a haven for independent and integrative programs and thought.

The codes of communication through which Esalen speaks about its work in human behavior and perception are reflective of its concern for the basic expression of human life: consciousness, survival, ritual, relationship, life transition/transformation, and spirituality – focusing on what’s alive in us – our needs, the universal needs, the ones all living beings have. We in the Department of Development strive to reflect Esalen’s values by building communications that mirror Esalen’s mission and needs, and reflect our donors’ interests.

The practice of using language and information to shape attitudes and opinions is an established American practice; some consider it an *art*. In the field of philanthropy nationally, communication practices are taking new forms with language that speaks about one’s *inner relationship to money, the sacred circulation of money, giving from the heart, and transformational giving*. We at Esalen are contributing to the evolution and construction of this new vocabulary while diligently working to compose our fundraising communications to honestly reflect the work that goes on every day at Esalen. In 2004 and 2005, we plan to develop a number of new communication tools that will assist us, such as communicating to our Friends electronically.

It seems that sometimes there is an intention to make language perform its own little supernatural act, which is to turn marks on a page into emotions, an effect of something that is not there. Our intention is to have our fundraising communications reflect what is there. The complexity of the machinery used to produce this in the language of philanthropy that can be hidden beneath the surface. In composing our fundraising communications we want you to “connect” to the Esalen experiences you have had or plan to have; making you aware of what we do, hoping that your attention to our work is never far from the experience of it, and encouraging your involvement in all that we do!

We are grateful for your involvement in this amazing jour-

*“The earth is a better place with Esalen on it.”*  
Esalen Seminarian



Photo: Margot Duane/toronto.planetmargot.com

David Kipen and John Cleese share a laugh

## Thank you John Cleese!

In February, internationally acclaimed actor, humanitarian, comedic pioneer, author, and entrepreneur John Cleese performed three Bay Area benefit events for Esalen, entitled “*John Cleese’s Life and Times*.” We are extremely grateful to John for his wonderful donation of time and talent on behalf of Esalen.

Python and Esalen supporters alike filled theaters in San Rafael, San Francisco, and Palo Alto to hear about John’s life and enjoy film clips of his most memorable TV and film projects, including *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, *Fawlty Towers*, *A Fish Called Wanda*, and *The Life of Brian*.

John likes to talk about serious subjects with humor, so audiences got a rare view of the “other side” of the comedian in the second half of each performance, when he focused on what was really on his mind: religion, fundamentalism and the press. John stressed how important Esalen is as a place that encourages radical free-thinking. “I think it is extraordinarily important that we have places where people can get together who want to examine the paradigm and look at the evidence that it doesn’t quite fit,” John said.

John first came to Esalen in 1960 looking for a massage after the Pythons performed at the Hollywood Bowl. He and his wife, Alyce Faye, are regular visitors to Esalen.

Our special thanks to Michael Krasny of KQED radio and David Kipen of the San Francisco Chronicle, who offered their talents to interview John on stage. Our grateful thanks to our dear friends, Steve and Mary Swig, of San Francisco, and Charly and Lisa Kleissner of Los Gatos, who generously hosted two lovely events in their homes during “Cleese Week.”

# The Healing Power of Music: Sound Meditation at the Baths

by Ashley Smith

Music frees us. Not only does it let us say for ourselves what we cannot say in words, but, at its best, it reveals to us a higher reach of life, detached, yet a part of the innermost being of us all. When we truly respond to it, it sets up in us a certain harmonious vibration which tunes us in to one another, to mother earth, the everlasting sea, and to the larger world of sun, stars, and planets, of which they are all a part.

The musicians and singers of Esalen have learned that the new baths are not only a beautiful place for physical healing but for vibrational healing as well. Many thanks to the architect, whether it was Mickey Muennig or God in this case, for creating a struc-



ture with heavenly acoustics. Right now we are blessed to have Corey Costanzo as an Extended Student in the kitchen. He plays the didgeridoo, which is a traditional Aboriginal wind instrument used by the indigenous peoples for healing and communication with nature. It has been said that if the earth had a voice it would be the sound of the didgeridoo. He started playing his didgeridoo down at the baths to help heal his heart and noticed that as he played, the usually empty silent tubs would fill with people coming to enjoy the magical al-

chemy of sound and sea. And so this Spring, on Wednesday nights, from 9:30-11:00pm, the "silent" or "south" side of the baths is transformed into a music chamber for sound meditation and vibrational healing. One seminarian wrote the following about her experience, "It's like the sound of the earth meeting the sound of the sea, dancing together inside of me."

*Ashley Smith works in "special projects" and teaches movement at Esalen.*

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# Giving Back to Esalen

Every year, beginning in 1965 and continuing until his death in 1987, Joseph Campbell spent anywhere from a week to a month teaching at Esalen. To celebrate the centenary of Joseph Campbell's birth, an array of individuals who "danced" with him—creatively, intellectually, and, in some cases, physically, gathered for a special benefit/workshop March 21-26, to honor Joe and celebrate his life and work.

Special guest of honor was Jean Erdman (Mrs. Joseph Campbell). Jean was joined by a notable group of presenters: Steve Aizenstat, Rebecca Armstrong, Angeles Arrien, Michael Christie, Phil Cousineau, David Darling, Stan Grof, Maren Hansen, Paul Horn, Chungliang Al Huang, Sam Keen, Lynne Kaufman, Mickey Lemle, Gerald McDermott, Michael Murphy, Susannah Self, Brother David Steindl-Rast, Rick Tarnas, and Bob Walter.



*Christina Grof, Brother David Steindl-Rast and Angeles Arrien*

Each day was devoted to the exploration of a different theme: *Myth & the Body*, *Myth & the Soul*, *Myth & the Artist*, and *Myth & the Future*. Chungliang Al Huang led the group in impromptu Tai Ji movement sessions throughout the day accompanied by the haunting music of maestros Paul Horn and David Darling. Films related to myth and culture were screened throughout the day and night. A table was set up out-

side the Lodge with a wonderful array of arts materials; glitter and paints, so that masks and prayer flags could be made for the ongoing festivities.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all the presenters who donated their time, and to Bob Walters and The Joseph Campbell Foundation for making this once in a life-time event a benefit for Esalen. Many thanks also go to Pernod-Ricard, the US distributors of Glenlivet, Campbell's favorite scotch, for their generous donation of Scotch, so that everyone could toast Joe in a befitting manner!



*Jean Erdman Campbell and Bob Walter*

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