



ETHICAL CULTURE

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APRIL 2006

LEADER'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends,

I am haunted by these words from Pete Seeger's classic folk song:
*In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia,
 Down in the dark of the Cumberland Mine,
 There's blood on the coal, and the miners lie
 In roads that never saw sun nor sky,
 In roads that never saw sun nor sky.
 Eight long days and some were rescued,
 Leaving the dead to lie alone.
 Thru all their lives they dug their graves.
 Two miles of earth for a marking stone
 Two miles of earth for a marking stone.*



I am moved by the sheer stubborn courage of these men who risk their lives daily. I am moved by hardship in their work. I am moved by the images of risk to life and limb that so relentlessly accompanied them to work each day. I am moved by the hardness of their work and the sacrifices they make for their families. I am moved by the pathos of their death.

I am not angry when I read these lines. The song does not explicitly blame anyone for their death. It shows us the life of those who chose a dangerous type of work—like soldiering or fire fighting or building skyscrapers.

I know that the history of mining is also filled with gross injustices, with needlessly hazardous conditions imposed on miners in order to squeeze out a greater profit. I know that many lost their lives not so that you could light your lamp but so that the owners of the mine and their stockholders could light their cigars with dollar bills. I had for a while believed that these unnecessary dangers—those that were born of greed by owners valuing profit above human life—were largely elimi-

nated by the growth of unions and government regulation.

However, within the past several months, as more disasters hit the papers, it is becoming abundantly clear that government exercises little meaningful control over the most flagrant abuses of mining companies and that unions are unable to intervene effectively. Government oversight is crucial in this area since union contracts can not anticipate every type of hazard. One cannot but wonder how this is happening? A recent article in the NY Times 3/2/05 makes it abundantly clear. First of all, the penalties levied at mining companies generally are insufficient to deter them, given the profitability of ignoring them. In the January Sago Mine disaster where 12 men died, the operator had been cited 273 times since 2004. Yet none of the fines exceeded \$460. That constitutes less than "one thousandth of 1 percent net profit reported over the last year by the current owner of the mine, the International Coal Group." Second is the fact that when dramatically higher fines are levied, there is no meaningful payment

enforcement by the federal government. There was a dramatic case in South Carolina in 2002 when a mining roof caved in because the miners were illegally directed to scrape coal from the pillars supporting the roof. One miner lost his life and the other his legs. Regulators had seen the practice before the accident took place. The company was fined \$165,000. It has yet to pay the fine.

We have looked at how it happens but now, (in case you are not angry enough) consider why. It is not routine inefficient bureaucracy but rather quite deliberate policy set by our executive government. As one former regulatory agency official said, "[the] administration ushered in the desire to develop cooperative ties between the agency and the mining industry." Such a statement gives the word 'cooperation' a truly diabolical meaning. This is compounded by the thought that such policy is born of the choice to increase one of the highest polluting fuels available. There is a time to mourn and a time to rise up and protest injustice. You decide. — *Boe*

FUND RAISER NEWS

April 8 Concert at the Society • As you receive this newsletter, there may still be time to join us at a soiree on Saturday, April 8 at 7:30, when soprano Marjorie Berg and pianist John Pivarnik will present a program of French music at the Ethical Society. Marjorie will sing the wild and spirited *Songs of the Auvergne*, folk songs from the French countryside collected and harmonized by composer Joseph Canteloube in the 1920s. Mr. Pivarnik will play *Sonatine* by Maurice Ravel, and the program will conclude with dra-

matic arias from three French operas: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Manon* and *Faust*. Wine and cheese will be served before the program, and dessert and coffee will follow. Suggested donation is \$20.

Later this Spring – Marshall's Ribs This new event is planned for spring weather, when we can sit outside, savor the scents of the smoker, and the season. Date to be released shortly.

White Elephant Sale • Save the day, Saturday, May 20, for our big sale of the season. Our most profitable fund raiser, this event needs your full support. Please bring (*continued on page 2*)

Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



Boe Meyerson, Leader
Jim White, Leader Emeritus

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Editor's note

The newsletter invites you to submit articles, announcements, commentary, etc. for publication. ITEMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY THE FIRST OF THE MONTH FOR INCLUSION IN THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S EDITION. Items should be no more than 150 words, preferably submitted via email to the editor (howardgilman@netscape.net). Items can also be delivered to: Editor, Ethical Society Newsletter, 516 Prospect St., Maplewood, NJ 07040. Please call the office, 973-763-1905, and leave word especially if your item is time-sensitive.

Editor reserves right to edit for length, clarity and content. Opinions offered in this publication are those of the authors.

For those interested in receiving their copy of Ethical Culture Monthly by First Class Mail for a charge of \$10/year or \$5/half year (beginning in January), call the office, 973-763-1905, and request our First Class Mail Special.

Ethical Culture Society
of Essex County,
516 Prospect St.,
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Visit our web site: www.essexethical.org

...act so
as to elicit
the best
in others
and in
ourselves

FUND RAISER NEWS (*continued from page 1*) your clean usable items to the society — dig them out now, say your goodbyes and bring them to the sale. One person's throwaways are another person's treasures. The dollars add up quickly. Ask your neighbors for some good items, stuff them into your trunk, and bring them here. People always need furniture, so if you are in doubt, don't throw it out, give it to us. Bring it all to the society now, place them in the sun room off of the parlor and mark them "White Elephant Sale". We're accepting everything including clothes and linens at this time. If you have large items, call us. We'll try to arrange for a pick-up. When in doubt, call the office. We're depending on you! We also need help to set up and dismantle — please volunteer.

Luncheon at the Lake • The ever-popular gourmet lunch at Boe's place is scheduled for June 24. Mark your calendars now! A "must be there" event — the view, the food and the company are spectacular. —*Jeanine Rosh*

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

April 7 — First Fridays Potluck Dinner

The Society will be hosting Potluck Dinners from 7 to 9 p.m. on the first Friday of each month during the spring: March, April, May and June. All Ethical Culture Society members, friends and others from our wider communities are welcome. Bring a main dish or salad that will serve six and the society will provide beverages and dessert. Enjoy meeting and greeting others. Possible board games, singing and book discussions may follow. Mark your calendars. Potlucks are set for April 7 (note correction), May 5, and June 2. Hope to see you there! —*Terri Suess*

April 14 — Second Fridays Folk Singing

7:30 p.m. second Friday of the month with Lisa Novemsky.

April 21 — Third Fridays Film Society

7:30 p.m. [*Please call office to check*]

BUILDING NEWS

The South Orange Maplewood Community Coalition on Race has just moved its office to the tower room of the Ethical Culture Society. The Coalition is the local

integration organization dedicated to making sure that Maplewood and South Orange continue to be communities of choice for all people. The Coalition has programs ranging



Robin Burns Saunders, left, and Sue Willis

from free tours for potential in-movers to working to overcome the academic achievement gap to special low interest second mortgages for people moving into areas where their race is under-represented. Drop by and meet Executive Director Robin Burns Saunders, Program Director Audrey Rowe, and Office Manager Arlene Klein as well as some of the several hundred volunteers who participate in the work of the Coalition.

For more information, see their web site at <http://www.twotowns.org>. — *Sue Willis*

TRIBUTES

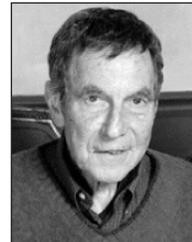
In honor of Betty Levin. — *Warm regards, Bob and Patty Bender*

In commemoration of Al Levin's passing. — *Bob and Patty Bender*

Obituary for Al Levin, who was a member of the Essex Ethical Culture Society, is from a message written by Paul Surovell:

Al Levin, Fighter for Peace and Justice

Al Levin died in his sleep in Maplewood on February 13, 2006.



Al was an active member of South Mountain Peace Action for many years. He was always willing to contribute his time and energy to whatever was needed,

whether it was standing in front of the Post Office or Starbucks with petitions or flyers in single-digit cold, going house-to-house with candidate surveys, sharing his ideas and wisdom at planning meetings, traveling to New York for a demonstration or speaking before the Maplewood Township Committee for a resolution against war in Iraq — Al was always there for all of us.

The *Times* and the *Star-Ledger* have documented Al's celebrated career as newsman and documentary producer. Al Levin's brilliant in-

sights, his commitment and energy and his generous and loving spirit will be deeply missed by everyone. South Mountain Peace Action extends its deepest condolences to the Levin family. — Paul Surovell, chair, South Mountain Peace Action

A HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BETTY LEVIN

The Society celebrated Betty Levin's 80th birthday with a luncheon on Feb. 25. Honored guests were welcomed; a toast was offered to Betty; songs and music were performed by Jeanine Rosh and Betty's grandson Spencer Rudolph; Boe Meyerson, Terri Suess and many friends offered tributes and gifts; and Betty gave a heart-felt speech.



“I feel a tremendous sense of gratitude, to have been so extravagantly feted for my 80th birthday, also marking my 45 years with Essex Ethical Culture Society. Together with my affiliation with 3 other ethical societies in my early married years, I have been a member for almost all of my adult life. I am so fortunate to have been shaped and influenced by the humanistic tenets of the ethical movement from my early years, including teen years at the Chicago Ethical Society. If I have exhibited some unusual qualities, I recognize that as the potential of the ethical movement, bringing out the best in others, bringing out the best in oneself.

My deep thanks to our leader Boe Meyerson and president Terri Suess for organizing this celebration and bringing so many of our members and friends together (and to gather my family into New Jersey)! My delightful granddaughter Stephanie Rudolph drove in from Haverford College for the day and offered her caring words. Thank you to all who attended; you all helped me become who I am. And appreciation for all the other gifts. My plea — who gave me the majestically carved “Spirituality” sign? And the Bill Moyers essay “Restoring the Public Trust”? Please call me so that I can personally express my thanks.

And as many of you have heard, responding to Boe's inspiring suggestion, my gift to the Society will be an oral history of my years with Essex, and my years in the Movement. I hope I can do it justice. Thanks to everyone for contributing to my growth in this incredibly unique Movement. Ethical Culture is a religion that often accomplishes what religion is supposed to do.

My wish for all my friends is that upon achieving your elder years that you can realize many of your humanistic dreams.”

— Betty Levin

Platforms (continued from page 4)

the presidency of the American Ethical Union. He will answer the following four questions: what is the AEU? what does it do? why is it needed? and what is its role in humanist affairs?

April 23 Phyllis Ehrenfeld: “Ethical Women's UN Work — 100 Years Plus”.

Beginning with wide-ranging activism by AEU women's groups at the end of the 19th century, the Ethical Movement has been continually connected with the growing United Nations. Today's National Service Conference at the UN reflects the charter in its sometimes controversial choices of pragmatic involvements in the search for world peace and human rights.

Phyllis Ehrenfeld has done postgraduate work at McGill University School of Social Work, Montreal, Department of Contemporary Literature at Columbia University. She has received the Arnold Gingrich Award for The Fellowship in Prose from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Five of her plays have been presented in Bergen County. She is currently President of the Bergen County Chapter of UNA-USA which she founded.

April 30 David Weinberger:

“Is the Internet moral?”

Technology is, of course, neutral. Yet the architecture of the Internet has certain presuppositions about its use: it is designed to enable the movement of bits — and thus of information — without regard to their content or owners. The Web, which runs on top of the Internet, has its own architecture and its own presuppositions: it favors connections of a particular kind. While acknowledging the ability to use both the Internet and the Web malevolently, what can we say about the moral tendencies of these technologies?

He is the coauthor of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, the best seller that cut through the hype and told business what the Web was really about. His latest book, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined*, has been published to rave reviews. He's been a frequent commentator on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* and has written for *The New York Times*, *The Harvard Business Review*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Boston Globe* and *Wired*. He was a comedy writer for Woody Allen for seven years and a humor columnist for Oregon's major daily newspaper. He is a Fellow at Harvard's prestigious Berkman Institute for Internet & Society. Most important of all, he is Andy Weinberger's brother!



ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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ETHICAL CULTURE SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

April, 2006

Platforms begin at 11 am. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. Sunday School 11 am–12:15 pm. Youth of Ethical Societies (YES): contact Society office.

April 2 Boe Meyerson, Leader, Interviewing Shagufta Hassan: "Islam as Seen by the West"

Boe Meyerson is Leader of the Ethical Society of Essex and Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University. Shagufta Hassan, originally from Pakistan, has had the benefit of experiencing a variety of Eastern and Western cultures as the result of accompanying her husband, Ambassador Azmat Hassan, during his travels when he served as Pakistan's Ambassador to Morocco and elsewhere. She has both studied and worked in Damascus, Lahore, Islamabad, Cambridge, New York, and now New Jersey. She previously served on the Board of the American School in Rabat. Her varied cosmopolitan experiences have given her a special opportunity to see her own culture of origin both from within and without as well as to compare it with other cultures. Both Ms. Hassan and her husband currently reside in New Jersey where she also is presently enrolled in Seton Hall's Graduate Program in Marriage and Family Therapy.

There is a long tradition of learning about foreign cultures from one's well traveled compatriots. Marco Polo is a great example of this. There is also a great tradition of learning about ourselves from the point of view of an observant foreigner. De Tocqueville is a great example of that. But there is

yet another option and that is to learn about the way we see other cultures from those who both know their own and ours and therefore might help us see where our vision is clear and penetrating or clouded and distorted. Boe will interview Ms. Hassan in an attempt to learn just that when she questions her on a variety of topics: Jihad, Islam and the status of women, separation of church and the Islamic state, among others. Join us. (*Rescheduled from Feb. 12*).

April 9 Alice Robinson Gilman and Sue Willis — a member platform: "Beginning a New Decade"



Panel members discuss their feelings on approaching a new decade in their lives.

In recent years, Alice Robinson-Gilman has starting fulfilling her life-long dream to act, by working with the Strollers, Maplewood's community theater group. To date, she has worked as stage manager, producer and various other backstage jobs. As an actor she has been cast in two small roles and been

seen in several staged readings, among them the powerful play, *The Laramie Project*. She has loved every minute of it. On another note, Howard and Alice's daughter, the amazing Molly, is about to "hit the boards" upon graduating from college this May.

Meredith Sue Willis, fiction writer and native of West Virginia, teaches novel writing at New York University. She is a past president of the Essex Ethical Culture Society and immediate past chair of the South Orange Maplewood Community Coalition on Race. Her latest book is a novel for children, *Billie of Fish House Lane*, and her newsletter for readers and writers is online at <http://www.meredithsuewillis.com/booksforreaders.html>. She lives in South Orange with her husband Andy Weinberger. Their son Joel is a junior in college.

April 16 American Ethical Union (AEU) President Arnold Fishman: "Together We Can Make A Difference"

Arnold Fishman, Esq., is the President of the American Ethical Union (AEU), the federation of Ethical Societies in America. Arnold has also served as President of the Philadelphia Ethical Society.



Mr. Fishman will describe his personal journey to (*continued on page 3*)