



# ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 27 NUMBER 8

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APRIL 2008

## Leader's Message

### "An Officer of Distinction, Col. Morris D. Davis"

Col. Morris D. Davis was previously the chief prosecutor at Guantanamo Bay and "the most colorful champion of the Bush Administration's military commission system" as reported by the NY Times. The article described the degree of his prosecutorial zeal by referring to a prior statement of his when he claimed that showing "sympathy for detainees was nauseating and compared putting them on trial to dragging "Dracula out into the sunlight."

However, after some very unsettling experiences, Col. Morris has come to the conclusion that the military trial process is in serious moral and legal jeopardy. He has claimed that Pentagon officials have "interfered with prosecutors, exerted political pressure and approved the use of evidence obtained by torture." Having resigned as Chief Prosecutor, he still remains a legal official of the U.S. Air Force. He has now become a major critic of the Guantanamo judicial process. Col. Morris has also taken the dramatic step of volunteering to testify at Guantanamo on behalf of detainee, Salim Ahmed Hamdan, who was allegedly Osama Bin Laden's driver. While he is not claiming that Hamdan is innocent, he is maintaining that there "is a potential for rigged outcomes." He will testify at the trial in April.

Col. Morris told one newspaper that prominent defense officials told him of the "strategic political value" of placing prominent detainees on trial before

the 2008 elections. The Times reported that "He (Davis) had told *The Nation* that the general counsel of the Pentagon, William J. Haynes II, informed him "we can't have acquittals" at Guantanamo."

Hamlet complained that "something was rotten in the state of Denmark." We have reason to share his sentiments about our beloved but morally misled nation. — *Boe Meyerson*

## President's Message

I am sorry to report that a long-time stalwart of our Essex Ethical Society, Vita Lee, died in February, losing her five time battle with cancer. She served in the 60s and 70s as an extraordinary president and in other leadership roles, while raising four children, Larry, Adrienne, Melissa and Libby, all graduates of our Sunday School.



Vita was strong, kind, sensitive to our many needs. A plaque on the wall of our meeting room which read "Notes from the President's Kitchen Counter", highlighted the constancy of her caring leadership. Over 200 friends and family attended her memorial service at Arbor Glen in Bridgewater, NJ, the senior home where she lived the past seven years with her husband, Dr. Edward Lee. Among the mourners were her children with their respective spouses and nine grandchildren.

Vita's death also brought together several core members of our Essex Ethical Society — Suzanne Gluck-Sosis (who drove down from Massachusetts), Bessie Hodes, Alberta and Marvin Lane and Andrew Permisson (a Sunday School graduate who remained on to serve as

a teacher). Several of these members served on the staff of the Educational Center, our school featuring the creative arts and humanistic studies that flourished during Vita's tenure. Vita returned to our Essex Ethical Society from time to time to celebrate special occasions. The commitment and devotion of Vita and other past members has set a foundation upon which we can flourish. — *Betty Levin*

## Tribute

We congratulate Mira and Jerry Stillman on the birth of their grandson, Abraham Ariel, to son Joshua and his wife Inna. Mira and Jerry are also grandparents to Sarah, 17, Emma, 14, and Jonah, 9, children of son Ezra and his wife Laura of Brookline, Mass. We wish them all joy and good health.

## Board's Fun-(d) Raiser

We hope to see all our members come out for our FUN- raiser dinner on Friday May 2. We will serve a free dinner and hopefully have us all laughing, singing and dancing! But there is a catch — we are trying to raise extra money in a hard economic situation — the Society needs a little help from all our members and this evening you can help by pledging some more! All members will get an invitation in the mail the first week of April. As always when we do something, it would be great with help: there is plenty to do and if you can sing, play an instrument, dance or tell a good story, let



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# Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



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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 (gilman.howard@gmail.com). 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.

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Our web site: [www.essexethical.org](http://www.essexethical.org)

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

Attention members! Please submit your email addresses to [ethicalessex@netscape.com](mailto:ethicalessex@netscape.com) to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

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us have you on the program! It is a challenge: Can we have fun together? If you want to help or get more information, please contact me (my e-mail is [moenanja@hotmail.com](mailto:moenanja@hotmail.com)) or any board member.

Hope to hear from you, — *Anja Moen*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Stirling Duo and The Ethical Society — Together Again

Once again, seasoned performers Mary Babiarz and Joe Gluck, our own society members, better known as the Stirling Duo, will perform for an Ethical Culture Society Fund Raiser to be held on Sunday, April 13,



2008 at 2 p.m. at the society building. Joe, who recently retired as violinist with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and Mary, violinist with the Paper Mill Playhouse Regional Theatre in Millburn, NJ, are renowned in the metropolitan area, performing for many functions and organizations. Mary adds her piano skills to Joe's violin as they become the Stirling Duo. In 2005, both Mary and Joe were instrumental in bringing the "Two Towns in Harmony" Concert to Maplewood/South Orange.

They offer an intimate style, highlighted by anecdotal explanations of the works they play. Always, there is the unique connection of piece to composer, and performers to audience. This year the duo's presentation is "Women Composers and the Male Composers in their Lives". The program includes compositions by Clara Schumann and Robert Schumann, Amy Beach and Brahms, and Mozart and a woman named Maria Theresa Paradis. What an intriguing topic!

After the performance, hors d'oeuvres, beverages and conversation will top the afternoon. Donation is \$20 per person. If you have never heard the duo, ask anyone what a treat we have in store. This event is open

to the public, and we encourage all members to commit to the cause, as well as to bring a friend to this marvelous afternoon of music. Please keep the date open, and plan to attend. For more information or reservations call the society office at 973-763-1905 or Jeanine Rosh at 973-258-9395.

### Other Upcoming Fund Raising Events

**Dinner Call** — On Saturday, **March 29**, Sue Willis will host an Appalachian Miner's Dinner at her home. There is room for 10 guests at \$25. Come enjoy the fine home cookin' and good company. Call or sign up at the society.

**Concert news** — The Sterling Duo Event will be held on Sunday **April 13** at 2 p.m. at the society. Joe and Mary are tuning up for Ethical and promise an enjoyable afternoon. Donation is \$20. Call or sign up at the society.

Sylvia Kramer's **Poetry Evening** is set for Saturday, **April 26**, at 7 p.m. If you believe you could never write anything, you are a perfect candidate. Sylvia weaves her magic in a most delightful way — and voila! — a poem appears. Or it's great fun to come and just listen. Treat yourself to this experience.

Note the date change for **Wine and Cheese at The Shore** — May 2 — Barbara Lipton has graciously offered her new "digs" overlooking the ocean at the Jersey shore for a wine and cheese event. \$15 per person.

**More Concert News** — Marjorie Berg and pianist John Pivarnik, along with Margaret Walker, flautist, return on **May 31**, in a concert of romance and passion. Please keep the date open — this will be a lovely evening of music and meeting old friends and new. Updates and details to follow soon.

**June 7** — Gloria Torrice's daughter will graciously host another event this year. Details to follow.

**June 21** is our annual afternoon at Boe's



## Fund Raising Events *(continued from page 2)*

Place — **A Day in the Country** — (And yes, the lake is still there, too). Eat, drink, swim, paddle, chat. Always great food and camaraderie. \$25 per person.

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### Mini Market

We are continuing with Nancy Bohn's idea for raising funds after the Sunday Platform — offering good, useful items for

re-sale. If you would like to participate, bring your clean, saleable items on Sunday, we will sort and ticket those that are marketable. You take them back home if not sold — or just peruse the goods, and maybe you'll find something you've been looking for. Items are on a table on Sunday, then on the mantle during the week.

— *Jeanine M Rosh*

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## From the UN

### HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER FIRE

The 60 year old Declaration of Human Rights has inspired and emboldened many human rights defenders, The many human rights watchdog organizations, an ever growing global consciousness of human rights, and the international criminal court are a testimony to its successes.

Yet the current status of human rights is under challenge from many sources—civil wars, failed states, the over reaction of governments to terrorism threats, and particularly now, a renewed attack on the very concept of the universality of human rights. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, human rights are being grossly violated. In Darfur, murder and violence continue unchecked. In Zimbabwe, human rights defenders and political dissidents are being attacked, tortured and thrown in jail without a fair trial. In Myanmar (Burma) and Pakistan, public protests are brutally crushed by the military junta.

In 2007 Amnesty International reported that 102 countries had cases of torture and ill treatment by security forces, police and other state authorities. Violence against women is widespread and shockingly causes more casualties than armed conflict.

At the UN the newly reorganized Human Rights Council has so far been disappointing. It has mostly ignored major large scale human rights violations in Sudan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, and other places while concentrating primarily on Israel.

A global policy of counterterror-

ism has undermined the fundamental principle of human rights. Witness the bizarre discussion in the United States about legitimizing torture. Article 3 of the Declaration states that everyone has a right to security of person. Governments have the responsibility to protect the community without grossly overreacting as they so often do. This balance between security and human rights is a major challenge today.

The most recent attack on the universality of human rights comes from resurgent Islam. In December 2007, the Organization of Islamic Conference representing the 56 Islamic states renewed the opposition to the universality of human rights, focusing on the status of women, including article 16, relating to free marriage choice and article 18, relating to freedom of religion. They have also tried to introduce a resolution on a vague prohibition about defamation of religion.

This is not a new challenge from Islam. When the Declaration was drafted in 1947 the Saudi Arabian delegation challenged it through their interpretation of Islamic faith and patriarchal authority. On the basis of these objections the Saudi delegation refused to ratify the declaration. They claim that human rights come from Western ideas of the enlightenment and world wide imposition is a form of cultural imperialism. This claim gains halfhearted support from the Western concept of cultural relativism. "This is their culture. what right do we have to impose our values on their culture?"

But whose culture are we talking about.? Many of these supremacy ideas are most often the product of a domi-

nant group, uninterested in others' rights. Is it the culture of the women who are being oppressed? Culture is composed by a variety of groups, and the tune is usually written by those who dominate. But cultures do change in response to the demands of the dissatisfied.

In 1948 UNESCO organized a panel of leading thinkers who solicited responses from representatives of Confucianism, Hindu, Moslem, and European thinkers. The result was an amazing agreement on basic values in practice, in spite of the differences in underlying theory. Some practices were so terrible, no one would approve them; some so desirable, no one would oppose them.

These issues were revisited once again in heated debate at a major conference in Vienna in 1993. The wisdom of the carefully crafted Universal Declaration of Human Rights was reaffirmed. These rights apply to everyone and stem from our dignity and common humanity which transcends all boundaries.

Martin Niemoller, the German theologian who lived through Nazi persecution has summed it up quite simply.

"In Germany they first came for the Communists and I did not speak because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics and I did not speak because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak."

The struggle continues.

— *Phyllis Ehrenfeld, Pres. of National Service Conference of the AEU, and Rep. to the UN.; and Dr Sylvain Ehrenfeld, IHEU Rep. to the UN*

# ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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## ETHICAL CULTURE

### SUNDAY MORNING PLATFORMS

April, 2008

Platforms begin at 11 a.m. All are welcome. Platforms are subject to change without notice. For information about our Sunday School, 11 a.m.–12:15 p.m., and our Youth of Ethical Societies (YES), contact the Society office, 973-763-1905.

#### April 6 Dr. Edward Tick: *“Welcome the Warriors.”*

Dr. Edward Tick will discuss, with film, his eighth trip back to Viet Nam with veterans to help them seek reconciliation and healing from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). An afternoon session will explore how we civilians can transform our communities for successful homecomings so that



healing can happen for our veterans from Iraq and all wars.

Dr. Tick is a psychotherapist, writer, poet, mythologist, international journey

guide and transformational healer. He has been working with veterans and survivors of violence for 30 years. He is founder and director of the non-profit Soldier's Heart Foundation dedicated to creating community-based veterans' safe return initiatives across the country.

#### April 13 Norman Gershman: *“Besa — To Keep the Promise.”*

Righteous Albanians saved over 2,000 Jews during the Holocaust, hidden by Albanian Muslim families throughout the war. Albania was the only country to boast a larger number of Jewish people after WWII than prior to the Holocaust. Norman Gershman,

a long-time former member of our Essex Ethical Society, a humanist, man of conscience and prize-winning photographer, traveled to Albania and Kosovo to chronicle the tales of the righteous Albanians and their devotion to Besa, an Albanian code of honor. Featured at the United Nations and the Hebrew Union College, these photos and their stories will be presented by Mr. Gershman during this Platform. His work has been lauded in Congress and by Jimmy Carter. In Congress: “When we find common ground, our minds are safe and open to limitless possibilities for dialogue, tolerance and change”.

Mr. Gershman is a fine art photographer with his work shown in various museums throughout the world. His work is described as humanistic rather than as photojournalism and has brought people together with his work in the former Soviet Union, Cuba and Muslim Albania. He has taught his humanistic photography in many prestigious art institutes in the U.S.

#### April 20 Gladys Smith and Rebecca Perez *“An Egyptian Saga — Tracing roots in Africa”*

Gladys Smith and her friend, Re-



Gladys Smith

becca Perez, will describe their trip to Egypt last November in search of family roots and new insights into their African connections. Rebecca Perez will have just

returned from a second visit to Egypt to attend the wedding of new friends. Gladys Smith, who recently joined the Society, is a social worker, community activist, and mother. *[Rescheduled from Feb. 24]*

#### April 27 Boe Meyerson: *“The Brilliance of Amartya Sen’s ‘On Ethics and Economics’*

Amartya Sen is the Lamont University Professor at Harvard University in the Departments of Economics and Philosophy. He has broken down barriers and walls which have for so long separated classical economics from ethical considerations and the ways they interact without sacrificing the integrity of either discipline.

Boe Meyerson is the leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Essex County. She is also the Humanist Chaplain at Columbia University.

*[Please note that Boe changed her Platform date for April to enable Ed Tick to address us on April 6.]*