



# ETHICAL CULTURE

M O N T H L Y

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 4

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DECEMBER 2010

## DECEMBER PLATFORMS

**Dec. 5 Sam Krause** *“Hey Waiter — There’s God in My Soup!”* · An exploration of Kabbalah through humor.

Although Kabbalah has made a dramatic entrance into pop culture over the past decade, authentic Kabbalah is an ancient discipline dating back over 3,300 years. This esoteric, mystical branch of Judaism has been handed down by word of mouth through generations and came to written form in the second century by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Learning Kabbalah will give profound inner meaning to written Scripture and attempt to describe the transcendent nature of a formless, infinite God as He relates to His finite creations.

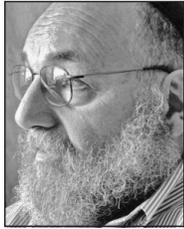


Photo by Nick Levitin

According to Kabbalah, the entire world as we know it comes from a Divine Source called “The Never-ending Light,” and everything we experience through our five senses is God-given so we can appreciate creation.

If everything has a Divine Source, so too does humor. I have chosen humor as the medium through which to deliver the Divine messages emanating from the teachings of Kabbalah.

Sam lives in New Jersey with his wife and the youngest four of his six irrepressible children.

**Dec. 12 George Brandon** *“Where Does Music Come From?”* · Concerning the sources of musical creativity, the roles music has played in world culture

that include but also transcend entertainment — from the point of view of a composer and anthropologist.

George Brandon, PhD, is a musician and anthropologist whose musical roots began with lessons from his father. By high school he was playing professionally in local swing bands, rhythm and blues, gospel and classical ensembles. Brandon has studied with great teachers and has performed with a wide array of ensembles.

He holds a bachelor’s degree in literature and anthropology from Reed College; a master’s degree and a doctorate in anthropology from Rutgers University; and a certificate of African Studies from the University of Ghana at Legon. In 1977, he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to study theory and composition with George Russell in the Afro-American music department of the New England Conservatory.

Brandon is currently director of sociomedical sciences at the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education, City University of New York.

**Dec. 19 Martha Gallahue** *“Connecting Ethics and the Solstice”* · Martha Gallahue will connect some solstice traditions with traditional ethical culture thought. She will link the season of “long nights” with the present and how we might access ethical culture wisdom to avoid sinking into a “winter of our discontent.”



**Dec. 26 “Festive Season Colloquy”** · **Boe Meyerson** will lead our post-Christmas/pre-New Year exploration of the year drawing to an end, and our hopes and plans for the year ahead.



## DECEMBER EVENTS

**Sat., Dec. 4, 7 to 9 p.m. · The 3rd Saturday Arts Night:** Author Meredith Sue Willis will be signing her latest books, *Out of the Mountains* — a 2nd collection of Appalachian short stories — and *Ten Strategies to Write Your Novel* — a book about writing novels — at a book-signing party in her honor at Ethical Culture Society of Essex County where she is a long-term member and chair of the Social Action Committee. Both casual and formal dress is appropriate.



Photo by Dory Adams

Meredith Sue Willis was raised in Shinnston, West Virginia. Her father’s family came to West Virginia following jobs with Consolidation Coal, and her mother’s father witnessed the Monongah, West Virginia, mine disaster of 1907. She now lives in South Orange, New Jersey and teaches novel writing at New York University’s School of Continuing and Professional studies as well as visiting schools and giving workshops around New Jersey.

Her novels and short fiction have been published by Scribners’, HarperCollins, West Virginia University Press, Ohio University Press, Mercury House and others. Her first book of lit-

# Ethical Culture Society of Essex County



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Boe Meyerson, *Leader Emeritus*  
James White, *Leader Emeritus*

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*EC Monthly newsletter writers/contributors:*  
Elaine Durbach, *platforms*; Anja Moen.  
Howard Gilman, *editor/graphics*

#### Editor's note

The newsletter invites you to submit articles, announcements, commentary, etc. for publication. ITEMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY THE EIGHTH 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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of Essex County,  
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as to elicit  
the best  
in others  
and in  
ourselves**

Attention members! Please submit your email addresses to NEW! — info@essexethical.org to receive newsletter and other special event notices.

erary short stories, *In the Mountains of America*, was praised in the New York Times Book Review as providing “a[n]...important lesson on the nature and function of literature itself.” [www.3rdSatArts.org. Ethical Culture Society of Essex County at 516 Prospect St., Maplewood. [www.essexethical.org](http://www.essexethical.org), (973) 763-1905] — *Hilding “Gus” Lindquist*

## A Little Bit of Summer Past

July 24 to 31 I was lucky enough to attend the 8th AEU Lay Leadership Summer School on “The Mountain” in Highlands, North Carolina — a retreat owned by the Unitarians. At 4200 feet it overlooks the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. Spectacular views — a magical place.



I was our representative in the AEU group of 27 students from local Societies around the country. We had full, intensive days of learning, searching, self-development, fun, and excitement. Our topics covered history of religion and philosophy, placing Ethical Culture in its historical context. We had read papers by Felix Adler as assigned pre-reading for the summer school, and we learned more about our founding leader and our movement through some of the sessions.

Other topics were interpersonal ethics and ethics of action, the balance between relationships and tasks in groups, the life-cycle of groups, and nonviolent communication techniques, which can be used as an effective way to communicate in general, but also in resolving conflicts.

Evenings we had “Day’s End,” where a different group of us presented a program to give us a meaningful end to the day. This ad hoc group had 24 hours to prepare. While I prayed not to be selected to do the program, it was fun when my turn came.

Throughout the day we also had yoga, meditation, singing and other volunteer events organized on the spot.

As you all will understand, we were at our very best behavior. After all, we were at the AEU Summer School! (You wouldn’t even have recognized me.) Even so I was very im-

pressed by our teachers and our staff member, Billy Dechand. He could and would do anything to help with your stay. And he could sing. And he could write songs. And he could play the guitar. And he was funny. And he could buy you a diet coke—or beer—in the village during the day and deliver it that night.

All our teachers were impressive. What was special about them was their ability to work together as a team while showing their unique selves in the sessions they led individually. Of course I laughed most from Curt Collier’s lectures, and I was most impressed by Kate Lovelady’s leadership abilities. I found them all knowledgeable and inspiring.

Matthew Hile was my group observer and group leader in two different groups, so I got to know him beyond his lectures as a role model for leadership.

The experience showed me that we belong to a national organization with interesting and exciting leaders and members.

I made several lasting friendships with other students. I am grateful for the scholarship from our Society that allowed me to attend. I hope I use everything I learned as much as possible. — *Anja Moen*

## You too can be a peacebuilder

At the Oct. 22–24 annual retreat of the ANJ Mental Health Counselors Association, I was invited to conduct our “Imagine Peace” workshop on understanding the peace bill (presently in Congress) and the “Youth Promise Act.”

Besides international concerns, the bills have in common addressing the ugly violence that plagues American communities on a daily basis: domestic abuse, gangs and bullying. Just as hundreds of individuals are learning peacebuilding (some at the newly-instituted Peace Academy), we can all learn that conflict does not have to end in violence.

You too can be a peacebuilder by asking friend, family and neighbors to attend a similar workshop. You only need 4 to 5 participants. I have car and will travel. Just call to



set a date: 973-763-1033. Additionally, join the National Conversation about the bills — the next phone call is Tuesday, December 7 at 9 p.m. (and all the following 1st Tuesdays of each month: Jan. 4, 2011, Feb. 1, March 1, April 5, etc. Make a new year's resolution, CALL!) You'll hear folks all across the country talk about their peace activities. Merely dial 712-432-1601; at signal, dial access code 470321. I'll join you there and hopefully others from New Jersey! — *E. Betty Levin*

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## **Social Action Committee**

### **Next meeting will be**

**Sunday, Dec. 5 after platform.**

Chair Sue Willis reported on her conversations with people at First Friends/IRATE (see website at <http://www.irate-firstfriends.org/>), who work to support detainees in the Elizabeth Detention Center. They are willing to speak at Ethical and Sue is working with Elaine on a date.

Certain supplies needed immediately for the detainees are: blank 2 pocket folders, first class "Forever" stamps, \$0.98 stamps for international postage, and money to purchase phone service for the 326 detainees.

If you want to help out in another way, they are having a "packing party" and want volunteers on Sunday, Dec. 12 at 1 p.m., St. Joseph's, 118 Division St., Elizabeth. If you're interested, call them at 908-965-0455.

At Boe's suggestion, donations were collected immediately which will be used to buy stamps for the detainees.

Anja reported about the AEU Presidents' luncheon and AEU social action. The presidents are considering taking on an AEU-wide issue, which our committee thought worth considering as long as it is optional for the local societies. We have the opportunity to give our input as to what such an issue should be. By the next meeting (or e-mail sooner) give your suggestions for what the entire AEU might take on

in the realm of Social Action.

Betty Levin had a number of items (see her article, "*You too can be a peace-builder*," in this newsletter), also expressing interest in the *Pennies for Peace* project, which Zia will look into.

Growing out of an idea from Martha Gallahue's talk on Oct. 24, the group agreed to do a carding on general support for the UN. — *Meredith Sue Willis*

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## **UN: World Food Day Oct. 16**

Almost a billion people are suffering from chronic hunger because they are too poor to purchase sufficient food. Over-population is often cited as a reason for this humanitarian disaster. Tragically, world hunger exists in a world of plenty. Food has never existed in such abundance. There is enough food available to feed the entire global population of almost 7 billion people. In fact, despite a 70 percent population increase over the past 30 years, agriculture globally is producing 17 per cent more calories per person today than it was then. Hunger also exists in rich countries like the US where millions of families go hungry. Surely, this is not due to there being insufficient food around. Basically, the problem is poverty and the volatility of food prices.

Food is like any other product in a market economy, a commodity. Farming is a business. Accordingly, large tracts of the best agricultural land is often devoted to cultivation of coffee, tobacco, cotton and so forth, responding to market demand, rather than feeding poor people. For example, over half the grain produced in the US is used for livestock feed despite the fact that it would provide food for more people than the livestock to which it is fed. This process is aggravated by the fact that some developing countries like China, with an increasing middle class, wish to purchase meat. Furthermore, many farmers produce crops for export as well as for biofuel. There

is now more corn grown than staple foods (such as wheat and rice) for bio fuel. This had led to shortages in staple foods leading to higher market prices.

The problem becomes more difficult due to US farm subsidies, which topped 15 billion dollars last year. The surpluses of the US and other countries are often dumped in underdeveloped countries undermining the abilities of local farmers to compete.

What about technology? In the early 80's Dr. Borlaugh introduced the Green Revolution with new miracle seeds, thanks to which more grain was harvested and many more people were fed. However, the crops are more vulnerable to disease and need a number of expensive inputs such as irrigation, petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides. The Green Revolution modernized farmers already better off to the detriment of the poor who could not afford the expensive inputs. Another technology with controversial possibility is genetically altered food. No study, so far, has found problems but without long run studies it is still an open question.

The volatility of food prices can be devastating to poor people. A notorious example is the bubble created in 2008 by the financial institution Goldman Sachs. They devised a complicated financial instrument called a Commodity Index of many food products. Many banks pumped money into buying futures in food products. In the frenzy of futures trading, prices quickly escalated and multiplied 10 fold in 3 years. In 2008, the major food conglomerate Cargill announced an 86 percent increase in profits due to commodity trading. Many investors made a bushel of money without ever seeing an actual bushel of wheat. The end result was an increase in starvation in the world.

In the first eight months of 2010, US agricultural exports increased, corn prices are up and the price of wheat almost doubled. Recently, Cargill stated

*(continued next page)*

# ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY

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## ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF ESSEX COUNTY NEWSLETTER · DECEMBER 2010

**UN**, *continued from page 3*

that thanks to price volatility, their profits rose significantly.

Since the 1980's the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have championed deregulation of the world's food markets. The effect could be devastating.

What about the UN? There are two UN agencies involved with food and agriculture. One is the Food and Agricultural Organization which offers development assistance and expert advice. For example, in 2006 it had 1600 field projects. Another UN agency is the World Food Program which is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger world wide. They save lives by getting food to the hungry fast. In 2010 it brought food assistance to 90 million people in 73 countries.

Periodically, the UN holds a world summit on food security. One very explosive issue between developed and developing countries is farm subsi-

dies and dumping. The current serious situation is also the result of 20 years of under-investment in agriculture in developing countries. Agriculture provides the living for 70 per cent of the world's poor. Support for small farmers in poor countries is essential. The UN is promoting negotiations on regulations to moderate food price fluctuations, limits on dumping and more support for small farmers in poor countries. ■

*Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld, representative to the UN of IHEU and National Service of the AEU and Temma Ehrenfeld freelance writer based in NYC*

### Member Notes

On Oct. 16 we gathered for a memorial for our life-long member, Doris Rados. Her daughter, Martha Rados, with her brothers Andy and Henry (see photo) presented a beautiful program in memory of their mother. Many people spoke about their memories of Doris and we ended the program singing together, *Blowing in the Wind*. We



want to thank Doris's family for the privilege and opportunity to hold her memorial at our Society.

### Seymour Armstrong injury

Seymour Armstrong had a serious injury when he fell Oct. 21, which resulted in a brain hemorrhage. He is still dealing with effects from the fall, but being well cared for at the Kessler Institute where is undergoing therapy. At present, he is not having visitors, but he would appreciate hearing from his friends. Write to: Seymour Armstrong, Room 330 c/o Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, 1199 Pleasant Valley Way, West Orange, NJ 07052.