

# BESpeak

APRIL 2014

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

## In Honor of Pete Seeger: America's Tuning Fork

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

There are many ways to honor the life, activism and music of Pete Seeger. I've mainly been prompted to sing "songs that Pete sang." I've sung them at Platforms and at a sing-along party at a neighbor's home, and next month I'll offer some up at our American Ethical Union Assembly in Chicago.

While Seeger wrote many songs that other people made famous - like "If I Had a Hammer" (Peter, Paul, and Mary) and "Turn! Turn! Turn!" (The Byrds) - he was best known for leading sing-alongs. That's why I choose to use the phrase "songs that Pete sang." Early in his career he was known for organizing what were called hootenannies. He would sing any song that was fun, easy to sing, and brought people together. As his political activism increased, Seeger sought out songs that might be useful in the struggle for social justice. He popularized "We Shall Overcome," composed by a Philadelphia Baptist clergyman, C. A. Tindley in 1903. Pete picked it up and after playing it for Martin Luther King Jr., it was said that the civil rights leader later that day commented, "That song sure sticks in your head."

I learned more about Pete last month watching the film, "Pete Seeger: The Power of Song." It featured archival photos and film of Pete "speakin', pickin' and singin' along" with commentary by family and friends, including Bruce Springsteen and the Dixie Chicks' Natalie Maines. Maines called Seeger a "living testament to the First Amendment." In case you didn't know, this is a well-earned nickname. During the McCarthy era, Seeger was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Despite potential prosecution and probably commercial loss, Pete refused to dignify the political hysteria. Not only did he refuse to speak about any of his many communist and socialist friends, as well as about his own political activities and philosophy, he even refused to "plead the fifth."

If he had cited his first amendment constitutional rights he might have avoided the "contempt of Congress" charge hurled at him. But instead his plain-spoken el-



### SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

#### APRIL 6

#### "The Truth About Our Youth"

Kara Aanenson

Director of Advocacy, Just Kids Partnership, Community Law In Action

Rashad Hawkins

Youth Organizer, Just Kids Partnership

#### APRIL 13

#### "Good Things About Capitalism"

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

#### APRIL 20

#### "An Enlightened Future for All, but When?"

Stuart Jordan

President, Institute for Science and Human Values

#### APRIL 27

#### "Let it Not Happen Again"

Morris Rosen

Public speaker and Holocaust survivor

### ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday

10:30 a.m. - Noon

Children of all ages are welcomed.

Separate supervision provided for preschoolers between the ages of one and four.

(continued on page 7)

# BESpeak

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**Fritz Williams** *Leader Emeritus*

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Karen Elliott and Kirk Mullen  
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Secretary, Poet, or Admin followed  
by @bmorethical.org. For general  
questions: ask@bmorethical.org.

**On the web at bmorethical.org**

# Demographic Change

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



“I think we’re growing too fast.” That’s what a wise and respected member of the society told me recently. They observed a certain sense of disconnection at our Sunday meetings, compared to years past, and thought this might be due to the recent gains in membership. Our demographics are indeed changing quickly. About forty percent of our members joined the society within the past two years. This strains our social fabric. Personal connections take time to form. Some members remember the years when our membership was stable (or declining). There was enough time to get to know a new member before the next one joined. The many new faces we see on Sunday mornings can bring a loss of familiarity because newer and older members do not know each other as well.

I believe the difficulty is not too much growth. Rather, we face a challenge to do more community building and membership development. We can promote interaction among members by organizing more social events and encouraging people to volunteer together on common projects. For members that can’t participate for reasons of health, we will strengthen our Caring Committee to help them stay connected. With time, we will form connections and weave new social fabric.

An organization renews itself by adding members and helping them grow to be a vital part of the community. About 85 percent of recent members (those less than two years in) have volunteered in some way. Half of the nominees for the next Board are recent members. This level of involvement results from the generous spirit of our recent members together with concerted volunteer recruitment by our Membership Committee. If we maintain this level of engagement, then we can ride out any short-term difficulties caused by rapid growth.

An organization also renews itself through demographic change that increases its racial or ethnic diversity. Because we live in a city whose population is over 60 percent African-American and because of our historical commitment to integration that goes back over 60 years, we have great opportunity to improve the diversity of our society. I’m delighted to report that in the month of March, our society hosted meetings of the African-American Humanist Society meetup and they have made plans to regularly use our space. We’ve previously held joint meetups with the AAHS at the Lewis Museum of African-American History. I look forward to further cooperation and joint events. Last year, BES had a table at the Baltimore City African-American Festival. This year, BES will have a table at the Baltimore County African-American Festival. Another opportunity for improvement is to reach out to the Hispanic population of our city. When David Tamayo, President of Hispanic-American Freethinkers, spoke to us in September, he offered to partner with us if we would get a table at the Baltimore Latino Festival. I’m looking forward to all these opportunities. If you’d like to support our outreach at these events, please look for the festival survey sent by Ken Brenneman, co-chair of our PR Committee, and sign up to volunteer!

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR SUMMER SUNDAYS

During the summer months, BES Sunday morning meetings feature talks that are less formal than platform addresses. These talks run 10-30 minutes in length and are commonly offered by BES members or friends. The speaker usually invites discussion following their talk. The Program Committee encourages BES members and friends to suggest topics for talks they'd like to give and invites you to contact Joe Adams, Ronit Klemens, Angad Singh, Jayme Smith, Hugh Taft-Morales, or Emil Volcheck with your ideas and suggestions.

## Celebrate Another Year of BES!

*Annual Membership Meeting - April 27, 12:30 p.m.*

Please stay after the platform address on April 27 for our Annual Membership Meeting. At this meeting, we celebrate a year of success by reporting on our growth and achievements over the past year. We welcome the new leadership team when we announce election results. We renew our commitment to the society and to each other when we review and approve the society's budget and pledge campaign goal for the next fiscal year. We encourage questions, comments, suggestions, and volunteering. We hope you can join us!

## Electing a New Leadership Team

Each year, the membership elects the team that will lead the society in the coming year. Election ballots will be sent out by April 13, and election results will be announced at the annual membership meeting on April 27. The Nominating Committee has nominated the following candidates.

### *BES Officers:*

President: Emil Volcheck  
Vice President: Paul Furth  
Secretary: Amy Trauth-Nare  
Treasurer: Stephen Meskin

### *Members-at-large of the Executive Board:*

Frederick Compton (2-yr term)  
Heather (Mav) Vaughan (2-yr term)  
Argentine Craig (2-yr term)  
Angad Singh (1-yr term, replacement for Paul Furth)

The members of the Nominating Committee were Ben Busby, Ken Brenneman, Argentine Craig, Stephen Meskin, Janey Solwold, and Mav Vaughan. We thank them for their service!



## OTHER ACTIVITIES

**Young Adult Book Club**  
Sunday, April 4, 7:00 p.m.

**Poetry Group**  
Sunday, April 6, 9:30 a.m.

**BES Eatery Social (B.E.S.)**  
Sunday, April 6, 1:00 p.m.

**Baking Night  
at Moveable Feast**  
Thursday, April 10, 5:45 p.m.

**Mindfulness Meditation**  
Sunday, April 13, 9:30 a.m.

**Board Meeting**  
Sunday, April 13, 12:30 p.m.

**Ethical Action Meeting**  
Sunday, April 20, 9:15 a.m.

**Family Board and  
Card Games Party**  
Sunday, April 20, 3:00 p.m.

**Passover Seder  
with the Chavurah**  
Sunday, April 20, 5:30 p.m.

**Roy Zimmerman Concert**  
Sunday, April 20, 8:00 p.m.

**BES Ironweed Film Club**  
Wednesday, April 23, 7:30 p.m.

**Annual Membership Meeting**  
Sunday, April 27, 12:30 p.m.

**Newcomers Meeting**  
Postponed to May 18, 12:30 p.m.

## SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

All are invited to bring snacks for our coffee hour following platform. Snacks are especially welcome from those whose last names start with:

A to F	April 6
G to L	April 13
M to R	April 20
S to Z	April 27

**APRIL 6**

**“The Truth About Our Youth”**

**Kara Aanenson**

*Director of Advocacy, Just Kids Partnership,  
Community Law In Action*

**Rashad Hawkins**

*Youth Organizer, Just Kids Partnership*

In Maryland, kids as young as 14 can be charged as adults, meaning they are sent to the adult criminal justice system and wait in adult jails pre-trial. When the Just Kids Partnership looked at what happens to youth in the adult system, it found that 70% are sent back to the juvenile justice system or have their case dismissed, nolle prossed, or stetted – after waiting an average of four months (a school semester) in an adult jail. Just Kids recently released a film that examines this practice through the stories of four individuals charged as adults while still teenagers. Just Kids Youth Leaders share their personal stories to bring statistics to life and dispel misconceptions about youth who are charged as adults.

**Kara Aanenson** is the Director of Advocacy for the Just Kids Partnership in Baltimore, a statewide campaign to end the automatic prosecution of youth as adults. As the leader of Maryland’s campaign, Kara was responsible for building the Just Kids membership base that includes parents, youth, and families directly impacted by the issue. Ms. Aanenson is also responsible for creating the Just Kids communications strategy, to effectively engage strategic partners. She leads the Partnership’s state legislative strategy, which achieved passage of policy reforms.

**Rashad Hawkins** is the youth organizer for the Just Kids Partnership. Rashad organizes grassroots support and builds public awareness about issues and stories of real youth who are charged as adults. Rashad created the award-winning

**PLEDGE CAMPAIGN  
REMINDER**

Please submit your pledge cards (both yellow and green) if you have not already done so. Your pledges tell the Board how much resources we can commit to next year’s budget that will be voted on at the Annual Membership Meeting on April 27th.

youth advocacy group for the Just Kids Partnership, named the Core Alliance of Youth Leaders (CAYL). He was also the chairman and one of the main organizers of the alliance of 30 organizations that worked to stop the construction of the proposed youth jail that would have held youth charged as adults.

**APRIL 13**

**“Good Things About Capitalism”**

**Hugh Taft-Morales**

*Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society*

While socialists and anarchists might think the admission that “capitalism is not perfect” is the understatement of century, this is where Leader Hugh Taft-Morales begins his defense of some good things about capitalism. What aspects of capitalism are easiest for an Ethical Humanist to embrace: competition, incentives, merit pay, the freedom that still exists in the free market? Can some moderate restraints and regulations bring out the best from a system that centuries ago overthrew feudal dictatorships, built the middle class, and set the stage for the ideals of democracy to flourish? What truth is there in free-market advocate Paul L. Poirot’s claim that “He gains most who serves best?”

**Hugh Taft-Morales** joined the Baltimore Ethical Society as its professional leader in 2010, the same year he was certified by the American Ethical Union as an Ethical Culture Leader. He also serves as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia. His presence in Ethical Culture has been termed “invigorating.” Taft-Morales lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, with his wife Maureen, a Latin American Analyst with the Congressional Research Service, with whom he has three beloved children, Sean, Maya, and Justin.

**APRIL 20**

**“An Enlightened Future  
for All, but When?”**

**Stuart Jordan**

*President, Institute for Science and Human Values*

America was born at the height of the Enlightenment, yet outside of educated circles we seldom hear of this great humanistic movement today. The central idea of the Enlightenment was progress, especially toward a better world for people everywhere. Dr. Jordan will discuss how well we have progressed and where we have stumbled, concluding that

societal progress will continue, but only if universal education in critical thinking and civic mindedness are significantly improved.

**Stuart Jordan** is a retired NASA Senior Staff Scientist and holds a Ph.D. in physics and astrophysics. He has held leadership positions in three humanist organizations, most recently as president of the Institute for Science and Human Values (ISHV). He is author of the recently published book *The Enlightenment Vision—Science, Reason, and the Promise of a Better Future* (Prometheus Books) and is also a Rhodes Scholar. Read more at <http://ishv.net>.

**APRIL 27**

## “Let it Not Happen Again”

**Morris Rosen**

*Public speaker and Holocaust survivor*

Polish born 94 years old Morris (Moniek) Rosen is a survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp, living to tell about his horrific experiences during World War II. Morris made it his mission to describe his experience as a matter of respect and remembrance of the people who did not survive Nazi atrocities. Morris is a volunteer speaker at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and it is a rare opportunity and honor to listen to his firsthand testimony at BES.

**Morris Rosen** (Moniek Rozen) was born in 1922 and grew up in Dabrowa Gornicza, an industrial town in western Poland. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Rosen attempted to flee but was forced to return and work for the German construction office. In 1942, Rosen's parents were deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Rosen was sent to several camps, including Buchenwald, and in 1945 was liberated from Theresienstadt by Soviet forces. His parents and five of his siblings perished in the Holocaust. In 1949, after spending several years in displaced persons camps in Austria and Germany, Rosen immigrated to the United States. Read more about Morris Rosen and hear him describe his forced march to Buchenwald at: <http://ur1.ca/gvdef>.

## YOUNG ADULT BOOK DISCUSSION CLUB

**Friday, April 4, 7:00 p.m.**

Join our new Young Adult (YA) book club for kids and adults as we begin reading Cory Doctorow's novel *For The Win*. Download the PDF for free at <http://craphound.com/ftw>. This book is engaging for both youth and adults and deals with thought-provoking themes of labor struggles in a global Internet economy. Kathleen Wilsbach will introduce the book, and Andy Brokaw will facilitate discussion. Refreshments will be provided by the Ethical Education Committee.

## CARING COMMITTEE HELP

Do you have time to make a phone call or send a Get Well card? Then think about joining the Caring Committee. The Caring Committee helps members who experience illness or other health problems. If you'd like to help with the caring work of this committee, please speak to Kirk, Judy, or Emil.

## *Explorations in Bioethics and Medicine*

### “MONEY, MEDICINE, AND UNDERSTANDING MEDICAL CONTROVERSIES”

**Sunday, April 13, 4:00-5:30 p.m.**

Why do medical experts sometimes disagree about the effectiveness of a medical intervention? If they are all following “the scientific method,” wouldn't they agree with one another? How does money influence research, development and treatment? We will explore how experts can disagree and manage their disagreements.

## PASSOVER SEDER WITH THE CHAVURAH

**Sunday, April 20, 5:30 p.m.**

Join the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah at Prologue, Inc. for their Passover Seder, a nontheistic celebration of the Passover tradition. For details, visit [www.baltimoresecularjews.org](http://www.baltimoresecularjews.org) or email [baltimoresecularjews@gmail.com](mailto:baltimoresecularjews@gmail.com).

## IRONWEED

# film

## CLUB

Wednesday, April 23,  
7:30 p.m.

*Shadows of Liberty* reveals the extraordinary truth behind the news media: censorship, cover-ups and corporate control. Filmmaker Jean-Philippe Tremblay takes a journey through the darker corridors of the U.S. media, where global conglomerates call the shots. For decades, their overwhelming influence has distorted news journalism and compromised its values. In highly revealing stories, renowned journalists, activists and academics give insider accounts of a broken media system. Controversial news reports are suppressed, people are censored for speaking out, and lives are shattered as the arena for public expression is turned into a private profit zone. View the trailer at [shadowsofliberty.org](http://shadowsofliberty.org).

Would you like to select films or help run the club? Please ask Emil. As of February 1st, BES has obtained an umbrella license from the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (MPLC), which will allow us to screen a wider range of films. (Thanks to Richard Campbell for telling us about MPLC!)

## BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, April 10, 5:45–8:00 p.m.

Join BES members and others for this enjoyable outing at a great organization – check out their website at [www.mfeast.org](http://www.mfeast.org). Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming ([lialderson@gmail.com](mailto:lialderson@gmail.com)) and show up at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Ave., Baltimore, MD, at 5:45 p.m. Park in front of building and enter through the door closest to Ashland Street. Let Lisa know if you'd like to car-pool, and she'll try to match you up with another BES participant.

## FAMILY BOARD & CARD GAMES PARTY

Sunday, April 20, 3:00-6:45 p.m. at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic

Join members of the Baltimore Parenting Beyond Belief Meetup for a board and card games party at the home of Marjeta Cedilnic in Howard County. Feel free to bring a game or play one of the many there. Please bring a snack or drink to share (or a small monetary contribution for the host instead). Come when you can, while the party lasts. Ms. Cedilnic is the lead organizer of the Maryland Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Address and directions provided when you RSVP. For questions, please call her at 301-642-1065. Join the Meetup at <http://meetu.ps/153cvM>.

## BES EATERY SOCIAL (B.E.S.)

Sunday, April 6, 1:00 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to go out together for lunch. We'll gather in the lobby at about 12:45 p.m. following post-platform snacks to decide what restaurant to visit. Everyone is encouraged to wear their BES shirts or other items to help promote the society. BES Eatery Social is held on a different Sunday each month to better provide members with the opportunity to attend. If you have any questions, please contact Adam at [synxr0nic@yahoo.com](mailto:synxr0nic@yahoo.com).

## ROY ZIMMERMAN CONCERT: "BLUE DOT TOUR"

Sunday, April 20, 8:00 p.m.  
(doors open at 7:00 p.m.)

Join the Baltimore Coalition of Reason to hear a concert by singer/songwriter Roy Zimmerman! Cost is 5–25 USD or BNotes at the door (sliding scale, pay what you can).

Roy writes hilarious, rhyme-intensive original songs that are also incisive calls to action, smart, savvy and undeniable. "He simultaneously inspires me and makes me laugh my ass off," says comedian/author Paul Krassner.

Watch the trailer for his new DVD at <http://ur1.ca/gwe5t>.

# Pete Seeger

(continued from page 1)

quence is a lesson in courage: “I am not going to answer any questions as to my association, my philosophical or religious beliefs or my political beliefs, or how I voted in any election, or any of these private affairs. I think these are very improper questions for any American to be asked, especially under such compulsion as this.”

For years Pete had paid a price for refusing to hide his leftist political leanings. He had been blacklisted from television and sales of his records plummeted due to political pressure on his agents, underwriters, and radio stations. By the 1960’s he had, however, become a counter-culture hero and was soon given the credit and public acclaim he deserved.

One song I intend to learn stirred great controversy in 1967. *Waist Deep in the Big Muddy* was a biting commentary on the mindlessness of war. It tells the story of an army captain who refused to change course while leading a WWII platoon on maneuvers in a Louisiana swamp and as a result drowned. Some claimed Seeger intended the captain to represent President Johnson’s deepening of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. CBS censors refused to air Seeger’s performance of *Waist Deep*.

Censorship couldn’t stop Pete and he became more and more active in the anti-war movement. In 1969 Seeger led 500,000 protesters in Washington, D.C., singing *Give Peace a Chance*, with his voice popping up between verses with phrases like, “Are you listening, Nixon?” Our nation’s capital might have been host to the largest sing-along in history.

Earlier in his life Pete spent substantial time in D.C. working where

my wife works today – the Library of Congress. He worked for America’s premier folklorist, Alan Lomax, researching and cataloging roots and hillbilly music. It was Lomax who got Seeger his first regular gig performing on CBS’s radio program, “Back Where I Come From” in 1940. His career took off from there. While he took a beating from the anti-communists, and refused to take advantage of the money people were willing to throw his way if he would make a few compromises, he seemed deeply content with his life. He lived close to his values. For example, he said that he resigned from the Weavers – the most popular group he was ever in – because the other members insisted on signing a contract to sing a cigarette commercial. Well ahead of his time, Pete knew the evils of tobacco.

The last phase of Seeger’s life was centered on environmental issues. Living in the Hudson Valley, Pete, like many residents, was incensed by the pollution that turned one of America’s most beautiful rivers into a cesspool. In 1966 he founded *Clearwater*, also the name of a 106-foot sloop he had built. The sloop sailed up and down the Hudson and the east coast successfully promoting clean water and industrial regulation to minimize pollution.

One of his later songs became an anthem of the environmental movement: “My Rainbow Race.” The chorus appeals to beauty and love to motivate us all to try to change our relationship with nature:

*One blue sky above us  
One ocean lapping all our shore  
One earth so green and round  
Who could ask for more  
And because I love you  
I’ll give it one more try  
To show my rainbow race  
It’s too soon to die.*

His ecological streak played a big part in his spiritual life. While he attended a Unitarian Church, he expressed his perspective in ways that remind me of Thoreau and Carl Sagan: *I feel most spiritual when I’m out in the woods. I feel part of nature. Or looking up at the stars. [I used to say] I was an atheist. Now I say, it’s all according to your definition of God. According to my definition of God, I’m not an atheist. Because I think God is everything. Whenever I open my eyes I’m looking at God. Whenever I’m listening to something I’m listening to God.*

I won’t say that when listening to Pete I’m listening to God. But I do find that his words and his life are filled with values fundamental to Ethical Culture: compassion, the worth of every person, social activism, and, more than anything, the importance of getting folks together to do the right thing. President Obama expressed this well when speaking about Pete: “...he believed in the power of community – to stand up for what’s right, speak out against what’s wrong, and move this country closer to the America he knew we could be. Over the years, Pete used his voice – and his hammer – to strike blows for worker’s rights and civil rights; world peace and environmental conservation. And he always invited us to sing along. For reminding us where we come from and showing us where we need to go, we will always be grateful to Pete Seeger.”

I am now, and will always be, grateful for one of the gentlest musician activists ever to walk on this earth. Thanks Pete!

*Seeger died on January 27, 2014, at the age of 94, just a few months after his wife of over 70 years, Tosbi-Aline Ota, died.*

# BESpeak

**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**

306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

## **NEWSLETTER**

Please do not delay!

**TIME VALUE**

## **ETHICAL ACTION MEETING**

**Sunday, April 20, 9:15–10:15 a.m.**

Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

## **NEWCOMERS MEETING**

The April newcomers meeting is postponed to May 18. Feel free to see Hugh, Judy, or Emil for any questions about membership.

## **SPRING FLOWER SALE!**

Want a beautiful garden this spring? Want to help BES? Pick up a catalogue at BES or go to [www.flower-powerfundraising.com/i/t/407705/E2f9Z545651P](http://www.flower-powerfundraising.com/i/t/407705/E2f9Z545651P) and BES will get 50% of the proceeds from every sale!

## **MINDFULNESS**

# meditation

**Sunday, April 13, 9:30 a.m.**

Mindfulness is a tool we can use in our daily lives to act in a more ethical way. We practice mindfulness meditation so that it comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.

# **bmorethical**

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