

Hills and Valleys: Managing the Ups and Downs of Life

by Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Leader

Part of what I love about being in community with others is how we help each other through the ups and downs of life. Despite being a particularly “immature” 60-year-old, I had my two arthritic hips replaced just a year ago. I credit my surgeon and all the doctors, nurses and therapist for allowing me to be back hiking the hills of Quebec this summer. But it was my wife, my family, and my friends that helped me climb out of my arthritis-provoked psychological valley.

Whether we are stuck in physical or mental ruts, it is those we know and care about that best help us manage the ups and downs of life. This past year many of us were thrown into the valley of political despair. For days, even weeks, after the election, we were in shock. Many retreated from the world, not wanting to ruminate further, but unable to converse about other things. Soon, however, we helped each other up so we could figure how to start climbing out of that valley.

Without other people, we might stay in a cocoon made of a mixture of self-pity, anger, and hopelessness. We might curl up into a fetal position and stay in bed. I’ve felt that way now and then. Or, we could fall further into the depths of depression. To avoid that fate, I reminded myself of the words of one of my favorite philosophers, Bernard Williams: “Life is supposed to be a series of peaks and valleys. The secret is to keep the valleys from becoming Grand Canyons.”

We cannot control the ups and downs of our lives, but we can control our attitude toward them. We can’t control them all the time, or do it as easily as flipping a switch. It takes intention and will to shape one’s attitude. Simple techniques of affirmation, like writing three things you are grateful for each day when you wake up or before you go to sleep, can help keep the valleys in perspective. But little does better to shape our attitude than the friendship of others willing to be with us as we find the energy to climb out of the valley.

As I shared in a November platform on “Happiness,” it is not always easy to

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SUNDAY PLATFORMS 10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4–5)

DECEMBER 3

“Working with Fear as a Survivor of Sexual Abuse”

Jean Hargadon Wehner
Advocate for Sexual Abuse Survivors

DECEMBER 10

“Tell Me a Story: Nurturing our Lives through Narratives”

Hugh Taft-Morales
Ethical Leader

DECEMBER 17

“Thinking about How Lives Matter”

Michael Franch
*Ethical Culture Leader,
Former Leader of BES*

DECEMBER 24

“Colloquium: The Season’s Introspection in the Now”

Omowale Elson
BES Member

DECEMBER 31

“Annual Pancake Breakfast”

Karen Elliott / Paul Furth

ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Every Sunday, 10:30 a.m. – Noon
*Individualized programs for preschool
children and school aged students.
Separate supervision provided
for children up to age two.*

Lane Berk: A Tiny Colossus

by Wayne Laufert

There is no way to contain the multitudes of Lane Berk, the longtime Baltimore Ethical Society member who died on November 7, in a few hundred words. So I will try to leave some impressions.

A few years ago, after the first time Lane attended a Platform talk given by our Ethical Leader, Hugh Taft-Morales, she gushed. It was the most profound, fascinating presentation she'd ever heard in all her years, she told him.

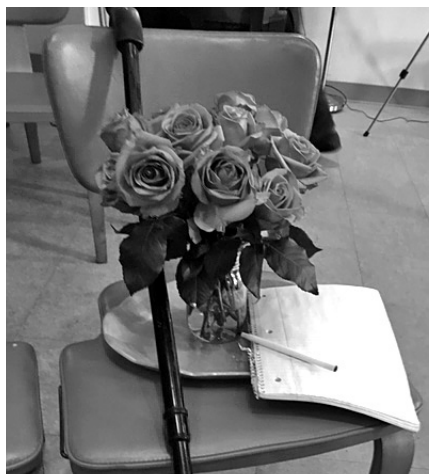
Wow, I thought, what incredibly high praise, coming from someone who had lived so long and seen and done so much.

It *was* high praise, and Lane meant it. However, since then Lane said the same thing about talks by Hugh and others many more times, about art events and community forums and social gatherings. If something touched her mind and her soul, it *was* the finest, most profound, most fascinating thing she'd ever experienced, in and of that moment.

In the innumerable moments of Lane's 89 years, she wrung meaning out of every second.

She laughed with Albert Einstein, gave refuge to Cesar Chavez, corresponded for years with Nelson Mandela, was in the room with JFK when the Peace Corps was forming, participated in the de-Nazification of post-World War II Germany, walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with Martin Luther King, Jr., and had met Pete Seeger and Felix Adler and who knows who else.

Petite in stature, Lane was a gigantic figure to those of us who valued her many decades of activism, com-



munity service, charitable support, philosophical vigor, impishness, mentorship, arts advocacy, intellectual curiosity, kindness, stubbornness, and all the rest.

This tiny colossus was the most remarkable person I ever met.

Lane was committed to Ethical Culture but took bits and pieces from many faiths and philosophies, including a belief in some kind of afterlife because "nothing goes to nothing." She did not fear death. The word she used was *transiting*.

"I don't know what's on the other side," she said, "but I can't wait to find out."

By now, she knows.

And, no doubt, is fascinated.

The family informs us that in lieu of flowers, contributions may be sent In Memory of (IMO) Lane to the Baltimore Ethical Society, 306 W. Franklin St., #102, Baltimore, MD 21201 and Kol Halev, 6200 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21212, two of the many causes she held near and dear.

NOTE: A longer version of this article is available at bmoreethical.org.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

Sunday, December 3, 9:30 a.m.

Caring Committee Meeting

Sunday, December 3, 12:30 p.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, December 10, 9:30 a.m.

Second Sunday Family Meet-Up

Sunday, December 10, 12:30 p.m.

Board Meeting

Sunday, December 10, 12:30 p.m.

Fun with Fictionary, Drinks and Appetizers

Sunday, December 10, 4:00 p.m.

Lunch at Joe Squared

Wednesday, December 13,
12:00 p.m.

Relocation Exploratory Committee Meeting

Sunday, December 17, 12:15 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, December 17, 12:30 p.m.

HumanLight Celebration

Saturday, December 23, 6:30 p.m.

Program Committee Meeting

Sunday, December 24, 12:30 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, December 31, 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	December 3
G to L	December 10
M to R	December 17
S to Z	December 24



SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

DECEMBER 3

“Working with Fear as a Survivor of Sexual Abuse”

Jean Hargadon Wehner

Advocate for Sexual Abuse Survivors

Jean Hargadon Wehner will talk about the way she has used her own fear as the springboard for coping with the memories of the horrific abuse she suffered 45 years ago. She will share how leaning into fear is itself the source of the courage survivors need to carry on and grow. Jean's experience was the primary focus of the Emmy-nominated documentary, *The Keepers*. *The Keepers* describes in detail the experience of the sexual abuse Jean and others suffered at Archbishop High School, along with the murder of a nun who was about to expose that abuse. The documentary also describes the Archdiocese of Baltimore's cover-up of the history of the primary perpetrator of the abuse, Joseph Maskell.

Jean Hargadon Wehner is an advocate for sexual abuse survivors, their families and the people who work with them. She herself is a clergy sexual abuse survivor and contributor to the Emmy-nominated Netflix documentary series *The Keepers*. Jean originally trained as a Spiritual Director and now works as a Life Coach, inspiring others through her private practice Light the Path. She was born, raised her family and currently resides in Maryland, enjoying time with her grandchildren.

Jean shares her inner health walk with integrity, giving others a glimpse into the psychological, spiritual, emotional and physical effects sexual predators had on her as a young child. She also shares how she instinctively found coping tools to help her survive these horrific experiences. She is discovering how her experience resonates with people who have lived

**CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE SOCIETY
ON SUNDAY MORNINGS?**

**INTERESTED IN A PAST PLATFORM
THAT YOU MISSED?**

Watch them on our Vimeo page! Simply go to vimeo.com/user4409178 to see video recordings of many of our platforms from the last several years.

with trauma. Jean has published a collection of poems called *Conversations with My Self*. Its focus is on the recovery of repressed memories through journal writing, conversations with the child within, and reflecting on past abuse, violence, love, loss and transformation. It is not just about recovering memories, but more importantly, it's about the journey – through time and perseverance – to find one's true Self.

DECEMBER 10

“Tell Me a Story: Nurturing our Lives through Narratives”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Ethical Leader

Storytelling has been a hallmark of human civilization since our species learned to communicate. For children in particular, stories help make sense of an often-chaotic present, the fading past, and the indeterminate future. Ethical messages are often best translated through story. What children's stories helped shape your life, your sense of self, and your conception of right and wrong?

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.

DECEMBER 17

“Thinking about How Lives Matter”

Michael Franch

Ethical Culture Leader, Former Leader of BES

We claim universality in our faith community. We talk about the worth and dignity of every person. It doesn't matter whether one is black or white, gay or straight. That's true but it's also not true. If we ignore an identity that is important to a person, we ignore part of them. We know that “Black Lives Matter” and that “All Lives Matter,” but if we can't say the former, we don't mean the latter. We need to recognize both specificity and universality, that “all” contains multitudes.

SUNDAY PLATFORM PROGRAMS

Michael S. Franch is an Ethical Culture Leader and an active member of the National Leaders Council of the American Ethical Union. He served as Leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society from 1975-1984 and is currently affiliate minister at the First Unitarian Church, Baltimore. Mike is a historian by training but spent most of his career working in health policy at the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. He enjoys English country dance, folk music, playing his concertina, and riding his bike around town. He's on the board of the Baltimore City Historical Society and the Green Burial Association of Maryland.

DECEMBER 24

“Colloquium: The Season’s Introspection in the Now”

Omowale Elson
BES Member

This event is meant to be an expression of free flow of the inner experience a member brings or develops as a result of listening to others. It reflects the themes of the season – generosity, peaceful coexistence, compassion, humanity... One might speak impromptu, read a poem, or a quotation.

In reflecting these brief thoughts it is hopeful that the collective consciousness of the members will ripple into the wider ethical and unethical communities in Baltimore, in the counties and in the state.

The reflection is expected to be spontaneous, but measured between moments of silence so that the members can acknowledge the reflection of others. One might be moved to stand behind or at the side of a member whose reflection they will built upon.

The program will end with a collective cheer.

DECEMBER 31

“Annual Pancake Breakfast”

Karen Elliott / Paul Furth

As 2017 draws to a close, we celebrate with a hearty breakfast and time to connect. Pancakes are on flap, with a variety of expert chefs turning out to turn things over. If you would like to volunteer to help, to bring a side dish to go with pancakes, or another breakfast/brunch-type food item, please contact Greg Corbitt. Everyone is invited to bring a warm ar-

ticle of clothing such as gloves, scarves, hats, socks to adorn our mitten tree. Coffee, tea, and juice beverages will be provided. The Pancake Breakfast is free and open to all.

Besides having a pancake-focused potluck brunch, we will again enjoy sharing with others less fortunate by providing warm decorations for a mitten tree (mittens, gloves, scarves, hats) and by bringing sun gifts for an exchange – bring a wrapped gift with a value between \$2 and \$10. This year warm items provided as mitten tree decorations will be donated to TurnAround, which provides support services to victims of domestic violence.

SOMEONE GETTING MARRIED?

The Baltimore Ethical Society has a Leader and a team of officiants who are trained and licensed to conduct weddings, memorials, and other life passage ceremonies. Contact weddings@bmoreethical.org.

FAMILY

Bolded single words (and one final phrase from a rule-breaker) were provided by members of our BES family and combined together by Karen Elliott as a community poem at our Fall Festival in November.

Families are

togetherness – with **fun**, or without,
laughter or tears, and most of the time
acceptance of who we really are.

Diverse individuals

across many **generations**.

Often **supportive**, we

snuggle in each other's **warmth**,
share **activities**, holidays – even work.

Dysfunctional? Maybe, but **caring grandpas**
can overcome all of that.

Good **company** – sometimes **complicated** –
a family is **what you make it!**

HUMANLIGHT CELEBRATION AND POTLUCK DINNER

**Saturday, December 23,
6:30–10:00 p.m.**

Please join us to celebrate HumanLight with the Baltimore Coalition of Reason on Saturday, December 23. HumanLight is a celebration of the winter season conceived by the New Jersey Humanist Network as a humanist or secular alternative to traditional religious celebrations. HumanLight features music and the lighting of three candles celebrating Reason, Compassion, and Hope. HumanLight was first celebrated in 2001 in New Jersey and has since spread throughout the country. This year is the eighth celebration of HumanLight by the Baltimore Coalition of Reason. To learn more, visit the HumanLight website (www.HumanLight.org).

This year we are celebrating HumanLight at BES. We will have a potluck dinner and desserts, music, and the candle lighting. This is a family-friendly event, and children are welcome.

Please tell us you're coming (RSVP) and tell us what food you'd like to bring. Sign up for the potluck dinner here (<https://goo.gl/7CGLGD>). If you can't access the Google Doc, then email BmoreCoR@gmail.com or call 443-267-8585.

Ethical Education and Love

December's ethical education theme is love, and what a perfect one for December. As the joy and fervor of the holidays descend upon us, many of us with young children struggle to balance the expectations and materialism with the love and joy that we ultimately want to be central to all of our celebration.

Being grounded in a multi-generational and dynamic community like BES is an ideal way to teach our children love and show it to them. As we celebrate birthdays of young ones – like Leo Sissoko (Ms. Jill's son) on Dec.

3rd – and mourn the passing of our own Lane Berk (but celebrate her beautiful life!), we teach our children the power of love in a community and city as dynamic and diverse as our own.

Gradually and intentionally building relationships – whether between kids in Sunday school, with neighbors

and friends, or among family – is at the core of teaching our children love. Above all, demonstrating love directly to them and in the way we interact with others around us is the most honest way of teaching this theme. When I'm driving with two little ones in the back seat and a reckless driver cuts me off, I try to think more carefully

about my response and show compassion as a way to model love. I may not always succeed, but it's certainly my goal.

Growing up in the Washington Ethical Society, I have fond memories of our own winter solstice celebration on winter's darkest days. Each year we put on elaborate plays about bringing back the light with the central themes of peace, love, and joy. As we enter into the cold, dark winter months and the exciting-but-stressful holiday season, I am grateful to the BES community for helping teach our young ones about love.



SECOND SUNDAY FAMILY MEET-UPS!

Join other families with young children immediately following Sunday platform to have fun, build community, and let off steam. We will be selecting FREE family-friendly destinations (usually close to BES) for these regular monthly gatherings. The activities will be selected with 2-6 year olds in mind, but all are welcome!

If you have questions, email Maya at mayagk@gmail.com or Beth at emluginbill@gmail.com.



PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING

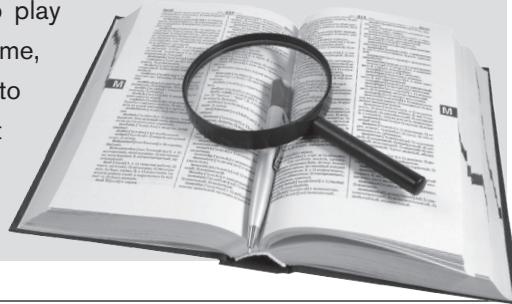
Sunday, December 24, 12:30 p.m.

Join the Program Committee and help choose speakers for our Sunday morning meetings! Visitors are also welcome to provide thoughts and speaker suggestions, or to just listen. The Program Committee meets monthly on fourth Sundays.

FUN WITH FICTIONARY, DRINKS AND APPETIZERS

Sunday, December 10, 4:00–6:00 p.m.

Hugh hosts and teaches how to play "Fictionary," his favorite parlor game, at BES! Bring a modest appetizer to share and BYOB. RSVP to Hugh at leader@bmorethical.org so that he brings enough dictionaries!



Managing the Ups and Downs of Life

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feel "happy." Sometimes the valleys are too deep for that. But, if we look at the whole journey of our lives, and see the many hills and valleys we have traversed, it reminds us that there will be hilltops in our future. We can climb the slopes of the valley, especially with others who help us from time to time.

Helen Keller's life is a testament to her remarkable strength and optimism. She said, "The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse." Despite the seductive, Taoist wisdom that in all dark there is a seed of light, light and vice versa, I am

not always willing to thank the valley for giving me the hill. But it is true that overcoming adversity can bring us joy.

The adversity I have faced in my life has been relatively modest. My valleys have been relatively small, and for that I am grateful. But no one knows what the future holds. Perhaps I need to steel myself more for times when the valleys are deep. I hope then to tap some of the toughness evident in this quote from Queen Latifah: "There are times you can't really see or even feel how sweet life can be. Hopefully its mountains will be higher that its valleys are deep. I know things that are broken can be fixed. Take the punch if you have to, hit the canvas and then get up again. Life is worth it." Life is worth it – its hills and its valleys.

YOUR PLEDGE AND YOUR TAXES

The calendar year is coming to a close and it's an apt time to think about your BES Pledge and your taxes. The Pledge Drive is over, but if you haven't pledged for the current fiscal year, you may do so by email to the Treasurer. If you have pledged, remember that you may take a charitable deduction on your 2017 taxes only for those payments that you've made by December 31st. Please contact our Treasurer, Richard Heffern, if you have questions regarding your pledge. Email: treasurer@bmorethical.org. Cell phone: 703.340.5221

LUNCH AT JOE SQUARED

Wednesday, December 13,
12:00 p.m., 33 W. North Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21201

Join members for conversation and delicious food at a family owned restaurant in Baltimore.

SAVE THE DATE

New Year's Day, 1:30 p.m., at
the Rawlings Conservatory

Join ethical society friends and family for a walk through the conservatory.



BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

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

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, December 17, 12:30 p.m.

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

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, December 31, 12:30 p.m.

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the last Sunday Platform of every month, and find out more about Ethical Culture and our Society – its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and are recommended for anyone who's curious about membership. Please attend at least one Platform before going to a Newcomers Meeting. Contact Wayne Laufert or Janey Solwold for more information.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, December 10, 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.

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Visit bmorethical.org and look for us on Facebook, Twitter, and MeetUp.com @bmorethical

Welcome to BESpeak, the newsletter of the Baltimore Ethical Society. Donations from readers like you help us keep it in production. Send checks payable to Baltimore Ethical Society to: BESpeak, 306 W. Franklin St., Ste. 102, Baltimore, MD 21201. If you would like to subscribe to the online version of this newsletter, sign up at bmorethical.org. Thank you.