



## Beyond Borders: The increasing need for global humanist community

by Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Leader

The pandemic threatening all human beings should remind us of our deep interrelationship. Despite nativist rhetoric from our president, viruses care little for political boundaries. The human race must interpersonally evolve or we will be unable to withstand future pandemics and oncoming waves of climate challenges. Reason, compassion, and cooperation must flourish if we are to flourish.

That's why I am disappointed that the **World Humanist Congress** scheduled for Miami this coming August 6-9 may be postponed. This year's theme, "Beyond Borders: Our Global Humanist Culture," is particularly relevant right now. At a time when humanists should be rallying together around this theme to demand sensible, cooperative policies, we may be forced to continue to isolate ourselves physically. Maybe a virtual conference will arise if we cannot be together in person.

Our American Ethical Union (AEU) is sponsoring this event, hosted by the American Humanist Association, because we know the importance of global cooperation. The plan was to hold our annual meeting on August 6th, just before the main program of the Congress, and then spend three days getting to know our fellow humanists from around the world. It would help the Ethical Culture movement reconnect with the global community that was a big part of our history.

There were Ethical Societies active in Europe prior to WWII - including the Vienna Ethical Society, one of the founding members of the International Ethical and Humanist Union. Ethical Culture's association with Jewish people, however, made it a prime target for Nazi harassment. That, along with the devastation of World War II, chased Ethical Culture from mainland Europe. While there were dozens of Ethical Societies in Britain at one point, for multiple reasons by 1970 there were none. Today, connecting with Humanist International is our best opportunity to understand the humanism flourishing in Europe.



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### SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

Our weekly meetings begin with lively, informative talks given by a wide range of knowledgeable, notable speakers. A question/answer and discussion period follows, giving those attending a chance to question the speaker, discuss the issues, and present their own opinions. At the end of the discussion period, there is a coffee hour which gives members, newcomers, and visitors the opportunity to socialize.

### ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

Individualized programs for preschool children and school aged students.

### PROGRAMMING NOTE

Because of the ongoing pandemic, BES has suspended in-person meetings through at least the month of April. We are currently hosting Sunday platforms and discussions online, and providing recordings via Podcast (see "Virtual Programs and Podcasts" on page 6). Many committee meetings are also taking place in an online format.

is published quarterly by  
the Baltimore Ethical Society  
2521 Saint Paul St.  
Baltimore, MD 21218

## Issue 490

Editor: Kathryn Merrill  
Proofreading & Circulation: Judy Katz  
Deadlines: March, June,  
September and December 15th

**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader**

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# Adapting to Social Distancing

by Tevis Tsai, BES president

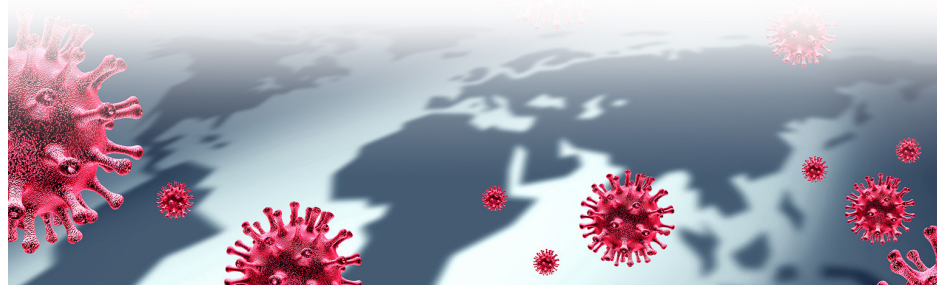
One of my key strategies for dealing with the COVID-19 crisis has been to maintain my routine. I still start my classes on time every morning, attend go club every Sunday, and meet with my mother every Friday. I do these things through a computer screen these days, but keeping my old habits has been good for my mental health.

BES, too, continues our programs and activities in the era of social distancing. The program committee has organized virtual platforms through a combination of Zoom meetings and our new podcast (see page 6). Our ethical action committee organized our recent sign-on to a letter from United Workers and has moved its book club online. I'm encouraged to find that our poetry group has begun sharing poems

over email, and that our improv group has continued meeting over Zoom.

While we've limited face-to-face contact, other communication has grown in new ways. BES has put together a task force to call and check in with our members. We've also seen a growth of communication between societies, as ethical culture groups across the country pool ideas and resources like some of the platform recordings BES has featured in recent weeks.

These are difficult times, and it's normal to feel lonely or anxious as we shelter in place. I look forward to the day when I see you all at BES again, but in the meantime, BES will adapt and endure. Social distancing keeps us physically separated, but our community stands together.



## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

**Sunday, April 26, 12:30 p.m.**

Please attend our Annual Membership Meeting from home this year via Zoom conference. At this meeting, we will welcome the new leadership team when we announce our election results and we will 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 July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021.

Details for logging on will be sent to the membership the week prior to the meeting. We hope you can join us!



# BES Members Lobby for Stronger Schools

by Emil Volcheck, BES member

**O**n March 9, BES members went to Annapolis to lobby legislators to pass a law to improve education in Maryland called “The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future” (HB1300/SB1000).

The Blueprint implements recommendations of the Kirwan Commission to increase funding and accountability for education. BES partnered with Strong Schools Maryland (SSM) and joined an Abell/Charles Village team of volunteers led by Prof. Jo Ann Robinson. At this time, the Blueprint had passed the House of Delegates and was to be considered by the Senate later that week. The evening of lobbying had three parts. First, our group visited all three District 43 delegates, Curt Anderson, Regina Boyce, and Maggie McIntosh, to thank them for their support of the Blueprint. Second, we stood in front of the State House right before a meeting of the Senate. Because there was construction on Bladen Street, all the senators had to walk through our receiving line, where we cheered for support of the Blueprint.



Photo with SSM staff member Linsey Malig-Mayhew



Lobbying in front of the State House

Finally, we visited Senator Mary Washington in her office. We thanked her for her support and listened to her

discuss some amendments she was proposing to address problems with the draft legislation. The lobbying was successful! The Senate passed the Blueprint with a bipartisan vote strong enough to override a veto. We hope that Governor Hogan will let the bill become law. Watch the Strong Schools Maryland 2020 Thank-you video here <https://youtu.be/fcTVNvtj9PQw> and look for BES members at timepoints 1:39 and 2:09. We thank the BES members who participated: Argentine Craig, Jeanne Sears, Alan Shapiro, Emil Volcheck, and Ethical Action Committee Chair Charlie Shafer, along with his wife Miriam Arenberg.



Visiting Senator Mary Washington

# A Tribute to Gordon Stills

by Karen Elliott, BES member

At the time of his death on March 4, 2020, Gordon Stills had been a member of the Baltimore Ethical Society for over 50 years. His memorial service was held on Saturday, March 14, 2020, and as is common at Ethical memorial services each person attending goes in with certain memories and ideas about the person whose life is being celebrated and comes out with an expanded understanding and appreciation of them. The service for Gordon, with Baltimore clergy Leader Hugh Taft-Morales presiding, was an excellent example of this.

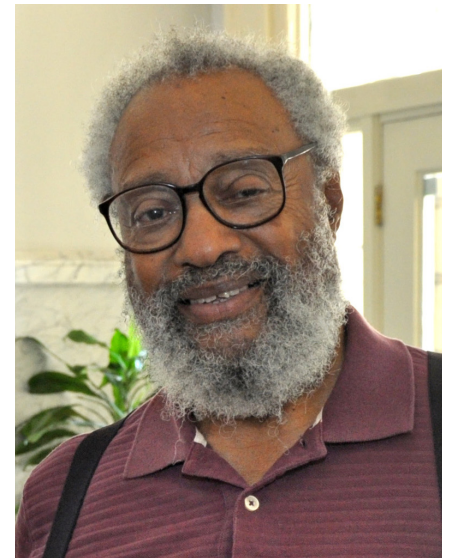
I went to the service knowing that Gordon was from Baltimore and was a proud alumnus of Dunbar High School and learned that he had graduated from Morgan State University – first with a BA in English and later with an MS in Education. I knew that he had been a delegate to the model United Nations (at Cornell) but learned that he was Editor-in-Chief of Morgan's student newspaper. I also learned that after receiving his BA, he served in the Army.

Gordon was a man of many talents and also of several careers. His primary career was as an educator in Baltimore City School system, where he began as a classroom teacher in 1954 and finished as principal first at Baltimore City College and then at the brand-new Northern Parkway Junior High, leaving the school system in 1983. Once when Gordon was volunteering for BES at the Baltimore Book Festival (more about that later) the actor Andre DeShields was looking at the brochures at BES' booth when he heard Gordon's voice, walked rapidly over

to him, and began talking with him animatedly. When Mr. DeShields returned to the booth, he told me what a great mentor Gordon had been for him at City. At Gordon's memorial service, another of his students from City, who now teaches there, talked about how Gordon guided the members of his graduating class (the last all-male class at City) and took a personal interest in each one – especially those, like him, who needed a bit more personal guidance. Gordon let them know in no uncertain terms how they needed to behave and followed up with them to make sure they didn't lose track of what they needed to do and how well they should be doing it. At that time City was losing its reputation for academic excellence and Gordon brought it back to being one of the top schools in Baltimore.

Gordon was also an entrepreneur. I learned that he'd had a photo shop and others before opening the Thank You Shoppe, where I sometimes visited him as for many years it was only a few blocks from my house. Members from the early days when BES was at Franklin St. may recall the engraved paperweights we gave to visiting speakers, contributed by Gordon, along with the trophies he sometimes gave to our volunteers. Gordon also provided, courtesy of The Thank You Shoppe, the bookmarks we handed out in the early years at the Book Festival and in the 90's he was our first source for BES t-shirts.

I learned that Gordon was a sports enthusiast, having held season tickets to the Colts and often going to see the Orioles. He also published his writing



over the years, including having several op-ed page essays published by the Baltimore Evening Sun (in the days when the Sun published twice a day). I'm sure all of those who worked with Gordon at the Baltimore Book festival remember as vividly as I do the way he encouraged people, especially young ones, to write a poem for the "Po-etTree" and to read it aloud. If young people did not want to read their own poem, he would read it to the crowd and the young writer would look proud (or once in a while a bit embarrassed by the attention) because their poem sounded so wonderful as Gordon read it. He had the gift of speaking in a compelling way, which was enhanced by his warm, deep voice.

He also encouraged young people to learn how to speak well, both as an educator and later when he developed and ran the annual BESpeak-Off oratory contest for middle school students. The final contest was held at BES, where the winners from the participating middle schools would come and speak to their families and teachers as well as BES members. The crowds were so large that we had to rent chairs each year, and it was wonderful to hear so many young voices



speaking so well. Everyone went home with a trophy, with the winning student and school receiving large ones that were later engraved with the details of their victory.

Several members of Gordon's family spoke at the memorial service, including one of his granddaughters, Ava Stills, the daughter of Quinn who attended BES multiple times with Gordon in the last year. Ava noted that her grandfather sometimes "bragged on" his family. I told her that she was wrong - he "bragged on" them a lot, and for good reason. Gordon achieved so much, and so many of his descendants have excelled academically and in their careers. Quinn spoke of how his father would make sure he was well-prepared for school, whether he wanted to be or not, and how later he found himself doing the same thing with his daughters.

At the service, I talked about what Gordon contributed to the Society in greater detail than I have here. You may know of things he did that I'm not aware of and so didn't mention - that's the beauty of attending an Ethical memorial service, where all are given the chance to speak. I encourage you to watch the video recording of the memorial service for Gordon and learn some more about him that you didn't know. I'd like to end with some of the words Hugh used to close that day, as I can't think of a better way to remember Gordon in the end - a tribute to his persistence and strength, and to the trust he had for the Society and our members.

"Gordon was a master storyteller. Fritz Williams, one of the other great story tellers I have known in my life, attested to Gordon's skill at weaving a tale. Fritz, who was Leader of the Bal-

timore Ethical Society years ago, wrote of Gordon that he was 'impressed by his wonderful voice, his ability to hold an audience in suspense, his sense of timing.' Fritz even said he was a bit jealous of Gordon's style. Even the way Gordon would gather himself before sharing a story was a part of the act. He would shift his feet, sit up a bit straighter, pause, take a breath, and begin, 'Well... I remember one time when I was a boy....'

"One story I heard him share was about when at the cusp of adulthood, around 1950, he was accused by a Baltimore County police officer of being involved in an incident of petty theft. He pointed out how to the officer that he was being illogical and that there was no way he could possibly have been involved. He got 'smacked down,' as Gordon put it.

"He said that this incident was traumatic, and it reinforced a message he was learning about how he had to keep some things to himself. He said

that it reminded him of the great poet Paul Dunbar's advice in his poem, "We Wear the Mask." Gordon said that, as a matter of physical and psychic survival he had to hide his true feelings from the world. Too often, as a black man, revealing his real thoughts and feelings could get himself into trouble.

"As he grew older, in a place that at times was a sanctuary for him - the Baltimore Ethical Society - he let his guard down more. He wrote to me that he was not 'wearing the mask' anymore. But he confided in me that life has taught him that there was nowhere he could really feel safe in the world, even at the Ethical Society. And yet - and this is what I will remember most about Gordon - and yet... he loved. He loved children. He loved humor. He loved gathering together to bring out the best in each other. Despite a world less idealistic than him, he kept on believing in goodness. He kept believing in goodness. To honor him, let's keep believing in goodness."

## Darwin Day Celebration



Over 80 attended our celebration of Darwin Day at the Village Learning Place (VLP) where we heard Prof. Jonathan Pevsner speak about Leonardo Da Vinci and Charles Darwin. We celebrated jointly with the Baltimore Coalition of Reason and Second Wednesdays at the VLP.

## VIRTUAL PLATFORMS AND PODCASTS

Our Program committee has organized Sunday meetings via Zoom to allow members and friends to gather virtually. Members should be receiving invitations and login instructions via email each week. Friends are welcome to request an invitation by emailing [president@bmoreethical.org](mailto:president@bmoreethical.org).

Audio from these Zoom platform gatherings is being recorded and made available on our Soundcloud account at <https://soundcloud.com/user-848057214>. You can also search Baltimore Ethical Society to find our page.

If you are interested in watching older platforms, you can do so on our Vimeo page. Simply go to <https://vimeo.com/user4409178> to see recordings of most of our platforms from the last several years.

## SOCIAL DISTANCE improv SESSIONS

Our series of improv workshops is currently meeting online via Zoom on Wednesday evenings. Information is available on the BES Meetup site.

## ETHICAL ACTION COMMITTEE NEWS

The Ethical Action Committee proposed that the membership support two letters circulated by United Workers and directed at state and city officials to take steps to protect and support those most at health and financial risk during the Health Emergency. The Committee then conducted a campaign that successfully secured membership approval. The bailout of corporations and the \$1200 checks (that may someday reach us) will be of very little help to homeless, poor, and incarcerated. We hope in the future to enlist BES members in advocating for them.

We have also been conducting a monthly Ethical Action Book Club. We have devoted 2 meetings and will devote a third in May to the *The Uninhabitable Earth* by David Wallace-Wells. We will continue meeting online for the foreseeable future.

We want to support members in social justice projects they want to engage in. To make suggestions or for more information about our activities contact [charles.shafer@gmail.com](mailto:charles.shafer@gmail.com)

## SMART RECOVERY MEETING

**Every Saturday, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., via Zoom until further notice**

SMART Recovery (Self-Management And Recovery Training) is a free peer-support group for individuals who have chosen to abstain, or are considering abstinence from any type of addictive behaviors (substances or activities), by teaching how to change self-defeating thinking, emotions, and actions; and to work towards long-term satisfactions and quality of life. SMART is not a 12-step group like Alcoholics Anonymous. For more information about SMART, visit [www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org).

## PLEDGE PAYMENTS

We realize that these are difficult and uncertain times for many of our members. While we want to remind you that pledge payments for the current fiscal year (2019-2020) are due by June 30th we also understand that some of our members circumstances may have changed.

If you have any questions or concerns about your pledge, you may contact our Treasurer, Richard Heffern, at [treasurer@bmoreethical.org](mailto:treasurer@bmoreethical.org). Thank you to those who've already completed their pledge payments!

If you haven't pledged for the current fiscal year, there's still time to do so! We want and need the support of all our members! Please contact Richard at the email above.

# Civil Rights Award for Monica Cooper!

by Emil Volcheck, BES member

Congratulations to BES Sunday School Teacher Monica Cooper who received the 2019 Jill P. Carter Civil Rights Award for Returning Citizens, presented at the Baltimore Civil Rights Week Gala Celebration in October 2019! This award honors formerly incarcerated individuals who have made an impact on the Baltimore community with their commitment to community development and advocacy. The award citation from the Baltimore City Office of Civil Rights recognized Monica's work leading the Maryland Justice Project saying it is impressive and exemplifies the positive impact a Returning Citizen can have in their communities.



## Beyond Borders: The increasing need for global humanist community

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I want to learn more about the great work Humanist International is doing to protect Humanism in Asia, Africa, and South America. Humanists in developing nations are often oppressed by fundamentalism of many forms. This year HI has supported those on the front line of humanist activism. For example, grants were made to Filipion Freethinkers, Atheist Bogota, the Prometheus Society of Slovakia, and the Peruvian Atheist Association. For many people these organizations are the only freethought alternatives for intellectual and political engagement. Come learn more about what HI does to support apostates and end blasphemy laws.

Ethical Culturists are on the speakers list, including Je Hooper, Bart Worden, Anya Overmann, and Emily Newman. Our congregational form of humanism has a lot to contribute to international humanism, especially as people in our fractured world seek deeper personal relationships. Ethical

Humanism has a lot to teach the world about reason, tolerance, and compassion. Come help connect Ethical Culture to the world again. As Mark Twain said, "Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

We'll have to wait to see if the World Humanist Congress is happening this year, perhaps in a virtual form. But if you are curious about what was planned for August, I invite you to explore the registration page (<https://humanists.international/2020/03/world-humanist-congress-2020-speakers-announced-and-more-to-come/>). In the meantime, as you hunker down to withstand the current pandemic, keep your mind on broader horizons. Explore the websites of the member organizations of Humanist International (<https://humanists.international/about/our-members/>). To continue our existence on this planet it is clear that we need to see beyond borders.

### MEMBER PROFILES

**Let's get to know each other a little better.** We post short biographies of our members in our website's Members Only section. Profiles of our newer members have been posted based on the text used in their welcoming ceremonies, but we need to hear from our longer-time members. Go to the Directory or Member Profiles page and you will see a "Tell Us About Yourself" link in the sidebar that will take you to a form submission page. Type some details and attach a portrait-type photo. If you don't have a picture of yourself, our photographer can take one after a Sunday meeting. Use the published profiles as a guide. If you have any questions, contact Wayne Laufert ([wlaufert@aol.com](mailto:wlaufert@aol.com)) or Janey Solwold ([jl-solwold@gmail.com](mailto:jl-solwold@gmail.com)).





**BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY**  
2521 Saint Paul St., Baltimore, MD 21218

**NEWSLETTER**  
Please do not delay!  
**TIME VALUE**

## HOW THE AEU IS RESPONDING TO CORONAVIRUS

Our daily lives are quite different from what we are used to, to say the least, and it is a significant challenge to connect and stay connected with others when we need to be physically apart. With that in mind, the AEU is actively developing supports to help our communities function effectively in these trying times. Our leadership has reached out personally to the Presidents Council representatives of each Society to hear what our groups need now and expect to need in the future. We will be continuing and expanding that outreach.

Here are some things we have put in motion so far:

### **Connections Web Forum and Calendar**

We have launched a new Ethical Community page on AEU.org. This page includes an interactive web forum called "Connections" where we share helpful information, ideas, and resources from inside and outside the Ethical Culture

Movement. You can access the Connections web forum from the [aeu.org](http://aeu.org) home page by clicking on the "Connections" graphic.

### **Other programs being made available:**

- Virtual Sunday Ethical Education for Kids – a collaborative effort between the AEU and interested Societies that will offer a joint program with breakout rooms for different age groups
- Support Call for Societies with Buildings – a chat on coping with the financial struggles and health concerns caused by COVID-19
- How to Conduct Virtual Platforms and Other Events via Zoom video conferencing
- Online caring and support service for Societies without a Leader

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