



Ethical Action Report

A publication of the American Ethical Union (AEU)

Number 15-02

February 2015

Welcome to the Ethical Action Report 2.0

In this Report:

Future of Ethical Societies Working Hard in the Big Easy

Paulo Ribeiro, Leader-in-Training

A Tribute to Dalton Baker

by Friends of Dalton: Ann Mandelstamm, Sharon Pederson, Joe Corrigan, Alan Ranford, Brian Hall, Ed Schmidt, and David Brown, President, Ethical Society of St. Louis

Continuing the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Kate Esposito, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

Future of Ethical Societies Working Hard in the Big Easy

Paulo Ribeiro, Leader-in-Training

This winter break marked the very first service trip for Future of Ethical Societies (FES), the national organization of young adult Ethical Culturists. The group went to New Orleans to work with an urban farm called *Our School at Blair Grocery* (OSBG) run by a former Brooklyn high school teacher named Nat Turner. In addition to growing food sold at the farm's weekly farmer's market, the organization also works with around ten at-risk youth helping them with GED tutoring and teaching them about self-reliance and community organizing through farm work. The financial needs of the farm are met by selling produce such as arugula to upscale New Orleans restaurants, the harvesting of which was the main task for our volunteers.

The defining feature of the operation is how grassroots it is. There is nothing of the typical rigid policies and procedures that one would see volunteering with a major non-profit. New Orleans' character as a city of questionable infrastructure, lax ethics in public administration, and rampant crime also means that OSBG is navigating through a murky legal system and dangerous local environment. Taken together, the dirty nature of the work, the seat-of-your-pants administration, and the dangerous setting of the Lower Ninth Ward really put the "adventure" in adventure learning.

This trip had a distinctly Ethical Culture philosophy because we were



not content simply to provide service. Forming community with the people in the neighborhood where we were serving was a part of our task. We held a type of colloquy called “Hip Hop Sanctuary” with Turner and some of the youth from the community.

OSBG is also providing a form of education to the young people of the Lower Ninth Ward that is deeply experiential, which is something that Ethical Culture founder, Felix Adler, strongly supported. The Workingman's School the New York Society

founded used industrial education as a means to instruct students in academic content and moral education. In an age when factory workers only ever saw one tiny part of a long assembly line, Adler saw something deeply spiritual about workers understanding how a product was created from start to finish. In an age when children think tomatoes come from the grocery store, urban farms are operating under much the same philosophy.

A Tribute to Dalton Baker

by Friends of Dalton: Ann Mandelstamm, Sharon Pederson, Joe Corrigan, Alan Ranford, Brian Hall, Ed Schmidt, and David Brown, President, Ethical Society of St. Louis

Editor's note: I want to thank David Brown for sharing this tribute about someone who combined issue-oriented activism with caring interpersonal relationships. It is clear from these words how much Dalton Baker will be missed.

The Ethical Society of St. Louis has lost one of its most ardent social justice volunteers. Dalton Baker died on January 11, 2015, at the age of 77. He apparently died of a fall suffered in his home. He chose not to have a funeral or memorial service. We will honor his memory and miss him. He was a very, very good man.

Dalton was the founder of the St. Louis Hemlock Society years ago. Dalton not only was very active in the Hemlock Society as head of training and as a Senior Guide, but also, when the Hemlock Society folded and morphed into Final Exit Network, Dalton carried on the work. He became active in the right-to-die movement after close relatives died very unpleasant deaths. Several years ago he also was trained as a hospice volunteer who went to patients' homes to provide companionship, a chess partner, whatever would add meaning to the patients' lives. He was dismissed from volunteering at a local hospice care group when they learned of his right-to-die activities.

The St. Louis Final Exit Network affiliate, which meets at our Society, would not be in existence today if Dalton hadn't offered help and encouragement. On a national level, he served as Treasurer of the organization when the Georgia Bureau of Investigation raided the homes of many FEN officers and seized their computers. Although Dalton was less active in FEN in recent years, he retained a strong interest in the organization and never wavered in his belief that each person has the right to choose to end their life when they judge the quality of that life, due to illness, pain or disability, has become unacceptable.

Dalton was one of the most caring and unassuming people we know. For many years he was the primary caretaker for his brother who suffered from Alzheimer's. He volunteered to walk dogs for the Humane Society as a way to be of service and to provide exercise for his brother. He tutored underprivileged kids in elementary schools and also in a high school where he helped a teacher and his students build robots and other scientific projects after school. Dalton was a retired Air Force pilot.

As a member of our Committee of generosity and willingness to do members who were unable to get care and took people to doctor's trained to advocate in court for a watchful adult where one was badly

For those of us who rode bicycles surprise as he was a very strong valuable volunteer because he was someone had a flat or mechanical problems of that sort. A few years the state of Missouri with a blind

Dalton Baker was a good man -- an values and helped his neighbor. We he was in our world.



Concern, Dalton demonstrated his volunteer activities visiting out. He tended to people on hospice appointments. Dalton was also child assigned to him and to be a needed.

with him, Dalton's death was a real rider. Even on bike rides he was a the first to stop and help when problems, and he knew how to fix ago he rode a tandem bicycle across friend in the second seat.

ordinary, decent man who lived his give thanks for his life and are glad

Continuing the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Kate Esposito, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

For the fourth consecutive year, our Society has participated in the MLK Day of Service here in Philadelphia. Thousands of people turn out to paint schools and rec centers, clean up neighborhoods and feed the hungry. This year seven Ethical Society members helped paint the cafeteria at Spring Garden public elementary school. And as the latest cuts in the school budget affected maintenance and janitorial services, the timing was right. Teachers, students, parents, and members of a synagogue that shares our building, Leyv Ha-Ir, joined us for painting and pizza. And most of the paint even got on the wall!

But, in terms of the significance of Dr. King's legacy, the Day of Service falls short. A progressive, congregation-based interfaith social justice group that we joined last year called POWER (*Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower and Rebuild*) and other labor and grassroots organizations decided to "reclaim" and "recast" this important national holiday. It created the MLK Day of Action, Remembrance, and Empowerment Coalition (MLK/DARE).

In only 35 days, the coalition turned out 7,000 (approx.) people who marched from the Board of Education to Independence Mall. The event demanded six concrete reforms: a \$15 minimum wage; the right to form unions; democratic control of the schools; and a full, fair funding formula; an end to "Stop and Frisk;" and, a Police Review Board that would demand police department accountability.



Left to right: EHSOP members Linda Benowitz, Nick Sanders, Steve Bremner, David McDevitt, Ken Greiff, John Marshall, Betsy Lightbourn, Sharon Wallace, Leonard Weeks, John McCormick, and Lauren Strong, with Leader Hugh Taft-Morales and visiting Leader-in-Training Paulo Ribeiro.

Eighteen members and three friends of EHSOP marched and rallied. Having worked the most with POWER in our first year of membership, I joined its Coalition Demands Committee. In light of what’s happened over the past months in Ferguson, Long Island, and Cleveland, this type of organizing and action feels much more congruent with Dr. King’s legacy than a service day alone. He lived and died for justice and demanded the system bend towards it on the arc of history. The time is now for systemic change. People stayed in the streets in Ferguson and that got our attention. I’m tired of clicking on internet petitions, thinking that’s really going to change much. Painting a cafeteria is good, but leveling the playing field in the workplace, public schools and the criminal justice system is how to *live* Dr. King.

EHSOP member, Sylvia Metzler, started a campaign of asking people to shave their heads to protest over recent police shootings of young men, as well as to condemn recent U. S. torture revelations. As a result, the rally concluded with a public “shearing” of three people’s heads including her own head. This got the attention of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and other press outlets.

Our Leader Hugh Taft Morales, a member of the POWER clergy caucus, marched with us. The day before he concluded his platform address by pointing out a less quoted part of King’s “I have a dream” speech: “We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.”

Hugh concluded by challenging us all, especially those lucky enough to be able to avoid racial targeting, to take a stand: “I’ve had the privilege of participating in protests and simply walking down our streets without worrying about being targeted due to my race. But that privilege comes with an obligation – an ethical obligation to demand that everyone be treated with inherent worth; an obligation to replace power relationships marked by guns and handcuffs with ethical relationships of mutuality and respect; an ethical obligation to build social justice even when it is inconvenient or makes some people anxious. If we want a peaceful world, we may need to go through some tense times. As King explained, ‘*true peace is not the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.*’”

Ethical Action Spotlight

With many thanks to Paulo Ribeiro, David Brown, and Kate Esposito for contributing text and ideas to this month's EAR, and to Amanda Poppei for her editorial assistance. Let's continue the dialogue in our national movement – submit comments, articles and suggestions for future EAR editions!

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and Baltimore Ethical Society.

The Ethical Action Report 2.0

As Ethical Societies around the country have begun their 2014-2015 program season, the EAR is evolving to try to be more useful to you and to generate more constructive, engaged dialogue about “deed before creed” throughout the movement. We hope this new format offers stimulating ideas and practical hints that make ethical action more effective and rewarding at your societies and in your lives.

EAR 2.0 hopes to offer:

- More in-depth analysis of particular social justice issues.
- Stories of ethical action projects that worked well at one of our societies and might enliven your home society.
- Discussion of ways to frame Ethical Culture's commitment to Ethical Action
- Excerpts from recent Ethical Culture platform addresses or statements from around the movement about civic, social, or ethical issues.

Join the fun!

Offer your thoughts and news items -

For the April edition coming to you in “Dialogue” and titled ‘Ethical Action Features,’

And also for the March edition of the Ethical Action Report.

- Write about an issue with which you are familiar due to your professional life or private interest.
- Share news about an interesting ethical action project at your society, current or from the past.
- Write a “letter to the EAR editor” addressing any articles in this or future issues, or about other issues relating to our commitment to action.
- Do a historical reflection on an Ethical Action moment from Ethical Culture's history.

Submit your essay early and the editorial volunteers can help polish your offering. Feel free to float your idea by me at HughTM@gmail.com or send something to me by the 15th of the month. All final copy has to be sent to me no later than the 25th of March for the Dialogue's ‘Ethical Action Features’ and the 25th of February for the Ethical Action Report.

Sincerely,

Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Culture Leader and Editor, *Ethical Action Report*

American Ethical Union
2 West 64th Street, New York, NY 10023
www.aeu.org Tel: 212-873-6500 report@aeu.org Fax: 212-624-0203

To share your views on national legislation with the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) visit: www.secular.org

The *Ethical Action Report* does not represent the views of the American Ethical Union. The American Ethical Union takes ethical positions on public affairs only through resolutions adopted by its Assembly or Board.