



ETHICAL VIEWS

February 2024 Vol. 138, No. 6 Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

SUNDAY PLATFORMS

The public is welcome to join us *

Sunday, Feb 4, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

Color Lines

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Philadelphia Ethical Society



W. E. B. Du Bois famously declared that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," which he defined as "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men." That line cut deeply into Du Bois, cleaving his body, mind, and soul and—in the process—creating a painful "double-consciousness." By contrast, Frederick

Douglass spoke of the color line as existing primarily *outside* of himself. He saw it as a boundary drawn between races, dividing the "haves" from the "have nots." Hugh Taft-Morales explores how those pursuing racial justice can address many types of color lines so as to work more effectively.

Sunday, Feb 18, 11 AM (in-person) 2 PM (zoom)

Humility and the Cave

Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader

Many consider Plato's Allegory of the Cave a foundation of western philosophy. It offers insight into human ignorance, the potential for transcendence, and the cruel fate that can befall anyone who challenges conventional thinking. Two decades ago, Hugh Taft-Morales crawled into a literal cave to produce a film about this metaphysical metaphor. There, he found the humility of unfulfilled dreams and the inspiring generosity of strangers. That experience influenced his own philosophy of life, which is animated by both limitations and gratitude.



Sunday, Feb 11, 11 AM (zoom only)

The Law is Ordered: Racial Classifications, American Law, and the Faith Traditions that Challenged Them

Timothy Welbeck,

Director of Anti-Racism Research

Temple University



Civil-rights attorney and scholar Timothy Welbeck will explore the history of racial classifications and the law in the United States. How have various faith communities challenged these legal standards and accompanying social conventions as they strive to create a more equitable society?

Welbeck is Assistant Professor of Instruction in Africology and African Studies at Temple. His forthcoming book, *No City for Young Men: Hip-Hop and the Narrative of Marginalization*, examines how hip-hop communicates the lived experience of persons—particularly Black men—who reside in urban centers across the nation.

Sunday, Feb 25, 11 AM (zoom only)

Topic: TBA

Christopher R. Rogers, Founder

We Win from Within



Christopher R. Rogers is an educator and cultural worker with more than a decade of experience supporting the arts, culture, and communities. Last year, he started We Win from Within, to provide justice-oriented artists, community groups, and not-for-profits with consulting, facilitation, and grant-writing services. Rogers also coordinates Friends of the Tanner House, which is incubating a revitalized Henry Ossawa Tanner House, whose significance combines Black heritage preservation and community cultural organizing. And he serves on the National Steering Committee for Black Lives Matter at School, spreading a racial justice curriculum and influencing policy in K-16 education.

* Where They'll Be

As a general rule, on Sundays when Hugh is the speaker, the 11 AM platform will be in-person only.

Hugh will offer the address a second time, live, on **zoom** only, at 2 PM that afternoon. (This is Hugh's personal zoom link.)

Guest speakers will appear on **zoom** only. (This is the Society's zoom link.)

LETTER FROM THE LEADER

Change

By Hugh Taft-Morales

For over a decade, it has been my honor to serve the Philadelphia Ethical Society as Leader. You, the members, have trusted me to be a teacher, counselor, organizer, and activist. I've shared meaningful relationships, moments, and projects with all of you. I feel deeply connected with so many individuals and with the Ethical Society community as a whole. That makes it challenging to share my intention to retire at the end of May 2025.

There's no single reason for my decision. No big reveal. My daily work continues to be meaningful and rewarding. Those I work with at the Society and in the greater Philadelphia area have been—and continue to be—dedicated, creative, and supportive. But things are changing in my life: in my health, my energy levels, and my family. Simply, the time is right for me.

I will step down from leadership of the Baltimore Ethical Society, as well. I don't know exactly what my next chapter will look like. After retiring, I plan to take time to figure that out. At the moment, I imagine staying somewhat involved in the National Leaders Council, our clergy group; and the American Ethical Union, our federating organization. I hope to continue to teach, write, and speak about Ethical Culture and to serve as a mentor for a new generation of Leaders.

Our world faces grave problems. We wrestle with the oppression of marginalized populations, climate change, unhinged militarism, and fascistic political extremism that feeds on hatred. I believe our particular brand of compassionate and rational humanism is crucial for our survival.

And I believe Ethical Culture will remain a vibrant home for that humanism. But the movement faces headwinds made worse by Covid's effects on congregational life. To grow this community and advance our shared values, all of you—as well as the Society's friends and allies—must remain engaged. Knowing you as I do, I am confident you always strive to honor individual worth, develop relationships, and help to build justice. I hope also that you continue to contribute the time, talent, or treasure that sustains our congregation and our movement. Our future rests—as it always has rested—in your hands.



Most of all, I hope the Ethical Society will continue to be personally meaningful and ethically invigorating to each and every one of you. That it offers you warmth, comfort, and the light to find the path forward.

For my time remaining, I will work with the Board and the entire community to help prepare for the next phase of professional Leadership. I will not be involved in decisions about how, when, or whether to seek a new Leader. But I will offer ideas about a framework in which to do this important work.

In addition, I will spend significant time documenting my work as Leader. It is important that I pass on whatever institutional wisdom I have garnered over the years. I also look forward to many more rewarding, fun times with all of you. As we have done in celebrations past, we will raise both actual and metaphorical cups to toast the future. My cup, I know, will be overflowing with gratitude.

Hugh Taft-Morales is the Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society

BEHIND THE SCENES

This 'n' That

By Cheryl Desmond

A grab-bag of notes this month.

Staffing: Late last fall, Community Life Coordinator Oliver Jane Jorgensen gave us their notice. The job was taking up too much of their time and energy, given the demands of their Masters of Social Work program, at Penn. After the break for the holidays, Hugh, Mike, and I met to review how this position fits into the overall needs of the Society. We determined that the position should continue in some fashion. We are exploring whether we can find candidates who want to focus more on pastoral-type responsibilities.

You may recall that the Community Life Coordinator position is grant-funded. We also are looking into whether any of that money can be used for a Sunday-morning tech-support person. If so, then that potentially could facilitate real-time Zoom participation on in-person Sundays.

Building tenants: Recently, Loomis-McAffee Architects downsized the space it rents at the 1906 building. So, on the fourth floor, a 270-square foot office space (17'x16'), divided into large and small sections, is now available for rent or other uses. The Building Committee is working to determine the best future for that space. Suggestions are welcome.

Our relationship with third-floor tenant *American Poetry Review (APR)* has brought in a new renter for the other half of the vacated space on the fourth floor. Joey Sweeney, principal of the branding and creative agency **Doin' Great**, has been developing the space into a podcast studio since last summer. That's where he records and produces podcasts for *APR*, Philly Built, and our own Hugh Taft-Morales. Joey has been instrumental in getting Hugh's podcast, *In Good We Trust*, off and running. Doin' Great has strong ties to Philadelphia's non-profit and start-up communities. We welcome Joey to our building "family."

Group meeting rentals: Regular weekly groups joining our schedule for 2024 are AI Anon (Saturdays and Mondays, at noon), Adult Children of Alcoholics (Sunday afternoons), and **Ragtag Empire** swing-dance classes (Wednesday nights). Organizations holding their monthly meetings newly in our space include the **Philadelphia Botanical Club**, **Philly Bike Action**, and **The Philobiblon Club**. That last one is a 130-year-old association for book collectors, book sellers, and others who love physical books.

Repairs and such: Last summer, we discovered a roof leak when the fourth-floor space was vacated. It seems the roof flashing above part of that space had failed and needed replacement. (Roof flashing is the metal strip that seals the connection between roof and wall. So, very important) Then the damaged section of ceiling was repaired with drywall and paint. Work was completed in the late summer and fall. At the same time, the contractor did a refresh of the Weston Room and the second-floor restroom.

Continuing our descent from roof to lobby, a friend of the Society donated two stylish and comfy upholstered chairs for our public space.



Finances: Every year, non-profit organizations create a Statement of Financial Position, which is analogous to a company balance sheet. The Society's statement for 2023 is now available on the Members' Page of the website. Non-members wishing to view financial information may submit a written request to the office.

That wraps up everything I have to share this month.

*Cheryl Desmond is the Office Administrator
for the Philadelphia Ethical Society*

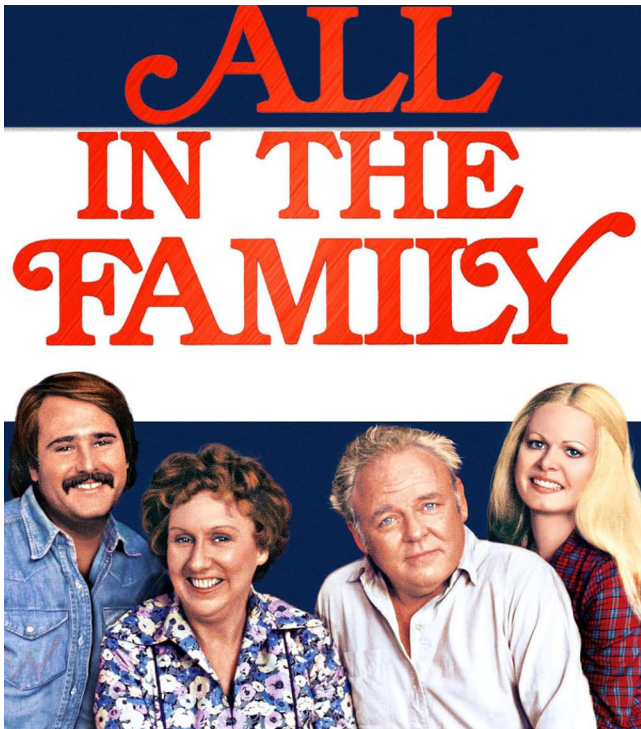
LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Ethical Lessons of Norman Lear

By Leigh Buchanan

When I was in second grade, my grandmother came to live with us for a few months. She usurped my bedroom; so, I slept in the living room, on a Castro Convertible ottoman bed. Our TV was in the living room; and my grandmother watched a lot of it. Consequently, at night I became the silent, unacknowledged audience for adult (i.e. post-9 PM) fare from which normally I was barred.

Like my parents, my grandmother was a New York City-raised Jewish Democrat, with the predictable roster of opinions. Her favorite program was *All in the Family*. She chuckled throatily whenever Archie Bunker said something moronic, which was every 30 seconds. I assume that, like many liberal viewers, she enjoyed hearing opinions antithetical to her own in the mouth of someone so clearly ridiculous.



Archie's creator, Norman Lear, died in December, at the age of 101. It is to him I owe the beginnings of my liberal education. Back then, I had little idea what my family believed, aside from war is bad. I not only didn't know the issues. I didn't know there were issues.

Peering out from beneath the covers of my fold-out bed, I listened as Archie disparaged people of color. His casual racism was eye-opening. I had always had Black friends and classmates: the daughters of professional people, including officers in two African embassies. Most had more money and lived in nicer homes than we did.

So, when Archie ranted about Black people being lazy and poor, I couldn't imagine who he was talking about. As other characters shot him down, I felt reassured. The fact that the first real racist opinions I'd heard came from someone manifestly ignorant confirmed what my nascent moral sense was telling me. Still, I asked my father how anyone could think that way. I'd like to report that, in that moment, he told me about slavery and the Civil Rights movement. Honestly, I can't remember what he said. But shortly afterward, he started driving our family through Washington D.C.'s inner-city Anacostia neighborhood, which we had previously avoided.

All in the Family is also where I learned about the existence of LGBTQ people. In a first-season episode, Archie spewed the usual epithets at a friend of Mike and Gloria, whom he assumed was gay. The friend wasn't. But later Archie learns that one of his own drinking buddies is.

That episode flummoxed me, too. Over the next few days, I asked my grandmother, my parents, my best friend's mother, my teacher, and my school librarian about the words Archie used and why everyone was so upset about them. Unlike my questions about racism, these were met by a wall of silence. I don't recall when or how I learned the facts. I do know that episode made me more aware that there are differences among people that make the world at once more interesting and more complicated.

A year after my grandmother left, I was deemed mature enough to watch TV after 9 PM. The *AITF* spinoff *Maude*, focused on Archie's stridently progressive cousin, premiered that year. When Maude unexpectedly got pregnant at age 47, I was introduced to the word "abortion." Watching it with me, my mother felt compelled to explain things. The conversation we had about sex and a women's right to make decisions about her own body was both cringe-y (it was *my mother*) and foundational.

Sesame Street and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* both started within a year or two of *All in the Family*, influencing millions of children to treat others—all others—with generosity, respect, and compassion. A slightly older audience, introduced to the existence of bigotry and injustice through Norman Lear's shows, took away a similar message. Norman Lear is gone. But his influence remains.

Leigh Buchanan is the editor of Ethical Views

FROM THE ENDING RACISM TASK FORCE

The Luxury of Going Numb

By Henry Pashkow

Quite a while ago, a young Black man came to the door of the house I lived in with my then-wife.

He was selling magazine subscriptions. I found none that I wanted to buy. He stalked off, cursing white people. That I could be the object of such resentment for refusing to buy what was being offered set me back a step.

About three years ago, while I was completing paperwork to renew my driver's license, a Black employee behind the service window asked me to hand him the forms I had placed on the counter in front of him. I had not realized I was being disrespectful. I obliged.

There have been other incidents in my life like this. Examples of white privilege. The color of my skin means I enjoy benefits and opportunities not available to many people of color. And that privilege often comes at the expense of others. "One of the privileges of being white," explained the author Eula Biss on the radio show *On Being*, "is that you can coast through your experience, your life, without having to think about what your race means to other people, and what your existence in a community means to the people around you."

"Coasting" is a good word. White people float above any meaningful consideration of what Black lived life is really like. But I think there is another, less discussed characteristic of white privilege. That is the luxury of going numb.

Recently, I was rereading accounts of the 2015 massacre of nine Black people during a bible study at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston, South Carolina. Then I started searching online for commentary written afterwards.

I found an essay by the author Claudia Rankine that appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* a week after the killings. Rankine recalled talking to a friend about what it's like to be the mother of a Black son. "The condition of Black life is mourning, mourning lived in real time inside her and her son's reality," Rankine wrote. No empathy on the part of a white person can approach the strain of knowing that, as a Black person, you or the people you love most can be killed just for being Black.

Rankine is right. I can't understand that. The terror and desperation of a Black mother living with the daily fear of losing a son or daughter is beyond me. And that is just one example of the horrors visited on people of color every day that they can never, for a moment, forget. They aren't allowed to. They cannot afford to. Vigilance is critical.

I don't forget either, because I choose not to forget. But I can afford not to feel. Over the years, it seems to me, in the face of never-ending atrocities perpetrated against people of color, I have allowed myself to be lulled into lassitude. Or maybe I have been crushed into it. The sheer weight of suffering (not just racist violence, but also other forms of cruelty and discrimination, including those produced by the current situation in the Middle East) has made me numb. The advantage of numbness is that it protects people from pain.

But numbness is a terrible thing. It makes people less compassionate. It crushes their spirits. It can drain their motivation to act. Because of my white privilege, I can choose to remain numb, if it makes life—including racial-justice work—easier for me.

Numbness is dangerous. I'm not sure I can stop feeling numb. But I can listen. I have to listen. And try to understand, even though I know I never can.

Henry Pashkow is a member of the Ending Racism Task Force

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February is Black History Month. In Philadelphia, educational and cultural events and exhibitions will take place at The African American Museum, The Franklin Institute, The Rosenbach, the National Liberty Museum, the Academy of Music, the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Betsy Ross House, and World Café Live, among other sites. There are also walking tours, a children's book fair, and opportunities to support Black-owned businesses. Visit Philadelphia has [the rundown](#).

NEW MEMBER PROFILE

Welcome John Horkel!

Tell us about your early life.

I've always been interested in wildlife. Growing up in the middle of Houston, I had all kinds of pets. Ducks, chickens, snakes, rabbits, geese. My aunt even brought me a goat from Mexico. At Texas A&M, I studied wildlife biology. My doctoral dissertation was about the Attwater prairie chicken: specifically, the impact of oil-drilling on their habitat and numbers. I spent two years on a ranch studying them. I thought I would have a career in academic research.

But you didn't?

No. As I was leaving the ranch, I was invited to become co-curator of the Texas Zoo. Among other projects, we introduced a docent program and a discovery room, where visitors could examine things like animal pelts and skeletons. While I was there, I met my wife, Jane, who was a reference librarian at the public library. The zoo and the library held a pet parade. She and I were both judges. We agreed on the winner: a cat in a baby carriage.

Where did you go after the zoo?

My next job was director of the Houston Arboretum. We started a project where visitors could walk along a platform and observe, across the seasons, the animals, plants, birds and insects that inhabited a meadow and a pond. There was an island there, too. It didn't take long for some visitors to realize you could grow certain plants on the island that were not exactly legal.

You ended up on the east coast.

In 1985, I accepted the position of executive director at Earthplace, an environmental studies center in Westport, Connecticut. It was wonderful. While I was there, we started a nursery school and got accreditation for a summer camp. I expected to leave after five years but stayed for 27. Everything I've done has been related to education about human beings' impact on the environment. How we affect wildlife and—in the long run—how that affects us as well.

Did you move to Philly after you retired?

Next, I went to New Haven, where I got involved with a literacy organization called New Haven Reads. I tutored for nine years, watching some of those kids grow up. Two years ago, I moved to Philadelphia to be near my son's family. (My daughter lives in Connecticut.) I joined the IHM Center for Literacy, which serves adult immigrants. For a year, I tutored a woman from Haiti in English.

Any other volunteer activities?

I work with the West Philadelphia Alliance for Children, which manages libraries in public schools. On Wednesdays, I visit the Morton McMichael School, where I read aloud, recommend books, and check books in and out. Once, UPenn brought in working scientists from their faculty. It was the first time these kids had seen scientists of color. There was so much excitement when they realized this was something they could do, too. My mission will always be embedded in libraries or classrooms.



Why the Ethical Society?

My wife was Jewish. I was raised Catholic; but it didn't stick. In Westport, our family joined the Congregation of Humanistic Judaism, which focused on the cultural rather than theistic side of religious tradition. When I moved here, I was looking for a comparable group of like-minded people.

What do you do for fun?

I walk all over the place. I do yoga and lift weights. I am still interested in urban wildlife. It is fascinating how all these plants and animals and birds have adapted to life in the city. I walk through the Penn campus where there are owls and hawks. Even in these little pocket parks, there is so much diversity. And I'm thinking, how do we manage all this, in the midst of this dense city? How do we keep it going?

UPCOMING EVENTS



Sunday, Feb 4, 7 PM (in-person)

An Introduction to Ethical Humanism

Hugh offers an informal overview of the history, philosophy, and community of Ethical Culture. While this is intended primarily for people wanting to know more about our unique brand of humanism, all are welcome!



Tuesday, Feb 6, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM (in-person)
Lunch with Hugh

Come to the Leader's office for an informal conversation about whatever is on your mind. Bring your lunch.

Wednesday, Feb 14, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM (zoom)

Make Room for Love

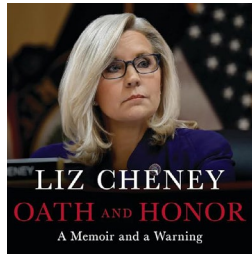
In honor of Valentine's Day, members of the Philly and Baltimore Ethical Societies will meet on Zoom to discuss love in its myriad forms. Love between friends. Love within families. Love for a pet. Universal love. And, yes, even love between romantic partners! Share a memory, a quote, or a favorite poem, if you choose to do so. Bring your lunch.



Saturday, Feb 17, 10:30 AM - 12 PM (zoom)

Book Discussion Series: *Oath and Honor*

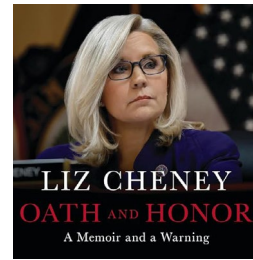
If you worry about the future of democracy, this important new book by Liz Cheney won't set your mind at ease. But it will make you better informed. "The warning Cheney issues is clear and persuasive," writes Carlos Lozada, in *The New York Times*. "A second presidential term for Donald Trump would pose great risks to the nation's democratic practices and identity. A retribution-minded, Constitution-terminating leader buttressed by unscrupulous advisers and ethically impaired lawyers could... 'dismantle our republic.'" This first of two meetings, led by Hugh, will cover Parts I, II, and III. (A Zoom conversation about Parts IV and V will take place on Saturday, March 2, from 10:30 AM-12 PM.)



Tuesday, Feb 20, 5 PM - 6:30 PM (in-person)

Book Discussion Series: *Oath and Honor*

If you worry about the future of democracy, this important new book by Liz Cheney won't set your mind at ease. But it will make you better informed.



"The warning Cheney issues is clear and persuasive," writes Carlos Lozada, in *The New York Times*. "A second presidential term for Donald Trump would pose great risks to the nation's democratic practices and identity. A retribution-minded, Constitution-

terminating leader buttressed by unscrupulous advisers and ethically impaired lawyers could... 'dismantle our republic.'" This first of two meetings, led by Hugh, will cover Parts I, II, and III. Meet in the Leader's Office. (An in-person conversation about Parts IV and V will take place on Tuesday, March 5, from 5 PM-6:30 PM.)

Wider Community Events

The following cultural events, presented by others, will be held in the Ethical Society Auditorium.

Wednesday, Feb 14, 7 PM

Songs for Valentine's Day: L-O-V-E

Presented by Lyric Fest, this themed concert includes seldom heard art songs and transcriptions of music by Nina Simone, Duke Ellington, and Nat King Cole. More information and tickets are available on the [Lyric Fest](#) web site. Tickets also may be purchased at the door.

Sunday, Feb 25, 4 PM

Andrew's Cabaret Evening, with Andrew Monath

Monath is a choral music teaching artist and division lead with Play on Philly and performs with the Philadelphia Gay Men's Chorus, Philadelphia Voices of Pride, and the Philadelphia Symphonic Choir. For more information, visit the [Andrew Monath Music Academy](#). Tickets may be purchased at the door.

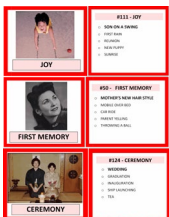


Festivity, food, and fundraising: The annual party at Carol Love's home drew 76 guests and raised almost \$1000 for Camp Linden.

Tuesday, Feb 20, 1 PM - 2:30 PM (in-person)

Peeling the Onion

Get to know other Ethical Society members and some of our Philadelphia neighbors through this fun activity. Peeling the Onion lets participants share stories from their lives, creating opportunities for conversations and new friendships. Meet in the Leader's Office. Space is limited, so RSVP to [Woody](#).





SUNDAY SERVICES

11 am

Ethical Views is published monthly
except July and August.

Executive Editor: Leigh Buchanan
Proofreaders: Betsy Lightbourn,
Henry Pashkow, Nick Sanders,
Hugh Taft-Morales

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PHILADELPHIA ETHICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEES

Our Society is sustained by all of its volunteers who serve on the many committees that fulfill our purpose and guide our decisions. The following generous members serve as chairs of the committees, which meet at the times shown. Members and interested others are welcome to attend. Email us to learn more at office@phillyethics.org.

Board of Trustees
Michael Black-Smith
Sunday, Feb 18, 6 PM

Building Committee
Michael Black-Smith
Wednesday, Feb 21, 7 PM

Camp Linden Committee
Jeffrey Dubb
Wednesday, Feb 28, 5 PM

Education Committee
Betsy Lightbourn
Wednesday, Feb 7, 5:30 PM

Ending Racism Task Force
Sylvia Metzler, Erik Younge
Saturday, Feb 10, 11 AM

Ethical Action Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

Finance Committee
Nick Sanders
Wednesday, Feb 14, 5 PM

Media Committee
Drew Snyder
no meeting this month

Social Committee
open chair
next meeting TBA

**For suggestions regarding this
newsletter, contact**
leighebuchanan@gmail.com.

What's on Your Mind?

A few times every month, Hugh invites people to bring their curiosity, their opinions, and their brown-bag lunches to his office for some free-wheeling conversation. (He hosts similar gatherings on Zoom.) At the December 19 luncheon, weighty topics included the existence of evil and how to face it. Participating were (left to right) Juanda Myles, Erik Younge, John Horkel, Irene Putzer, and Peter Jam.



Who's on Your Mind?

At the Memorial Sunday platform, on January 7, Society members took turns at the podium remembering those people—relatives, friends, and inspirational figures—who have died but left their marks on hearts and lives. Among those sharing stories (left to right): Stan Horwitz, Robert Edwin Steinfort, Christian Hayden, Drew Snyder, Hugh Taft-Morales, Henry Pashkow, John Marshall, Garry O'Rourke, Betsy Lightbourn, Kate Esposito and Carol Love.

