

## A spiritual journey from Sunol to Oregon, Berkeley, the Midwest and Hawaii

Submitted by Geraldine Baldassarre

I love the sweet smell of Kilkare Woods. It signals my re-entry to Sunol. Twenty-three years ago, I pried myself away from here and my position as editor of the Sunolian. I now live in a yurt in the Hawaiian rain forest.

I left Sunol in 1986 for Ashland, Oregon where I bought a house, edited a newsletter, and met my husband, Steve Bohlert. Our initial attraction was writing. He wanted input on his autobiography. But it was his deep spirituality I found most compelling. He shared romantic tales of Radha and Krishna's "love sports" along India's Yamuna River. His wasn't book knowledge...he had lived it.

Steve became a Radha-Krishna devotee at twenty years of age. It was the sixties. He chanted at the Avalon Ballroom and Hippie Hill. Steve started eight temples. He preached in London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Bombay. His guru encouraged him to raise funds, recruit disciples, and build temples. Steve yearned for less mundane work and a deeper spiritual connection.

He lived in India for three years as an itinerant monk and gained firsthand experience of Radha-Krishna devotion. Steve lived in the holy city of Vrindaban. He was befriended by O.B.L. Kapoor PhD, a prominent devotee, professor, and author. Kapoor confirmed his realization of a higher level of devotional practice than taught by Steve's guru, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. Kapoor directed him to Lalita Prasad Thakur, the son and disciple of nineteenth century reformer and Westernizer of Chaitanyaism, Bhaktivinode Thakur.

In 1974, Steve was initiated into the esoteric practices of natural devotion. Steve left India for Honolulu. He acquired an estate for the Krishna Movement from the Ford Foundation. After being sent to Fiji to "build a temple," he resigned because of his dissatisfaction with the direction of the movement. He left the renounced life and reentered American society on Maui.

When I met Steve he was a family man, and a printer. He was a leader in the progressive Ashland United Church of Christ (UCC) and con-

tinued to worship Radha-Krishna. A Methodist pastor remarked, "If Christ equals love and Krishna equals love then Christ equals Krishna."

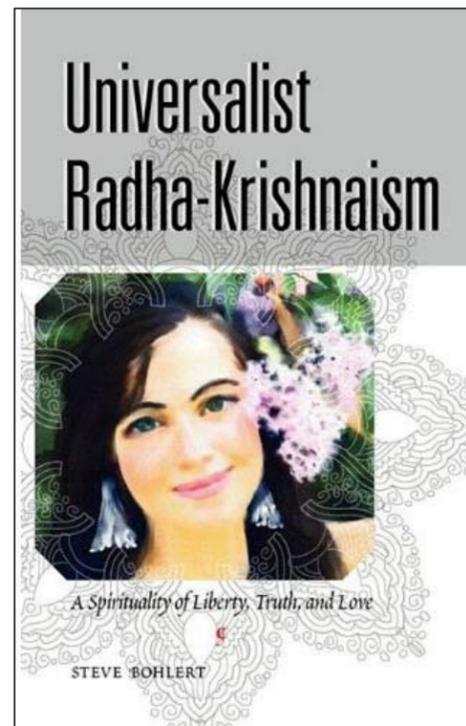
We progressed from co-workers, friends and business associates, and after the split with his wife, to romance. One day I remarked, "Wouldn't it be great to be a minister?" By association, I had become increasingly attracted to spiritual life. Steve returned with a file folder of seminary applications. With renewed vigor, he applied to seminary and was accepted. We married and moved to Berkeley.

In 1991, he graduated with a Master of Divinity and was ordained in the UCC. We moved to Iowa and learned the reality of being a Midwestern pastor. We addressed local justice issues, such as gay rights, homelessness, and de-stigmatizing the mentally ill. The church split, and we were asked to leave. Next came North Dakota with a less receptive congregation. After three years in suburban Grand Rapids, my husband lost his high paying job to find himself.

Steve started an independent ministry with an emphasis on Radha-Krishnaism. With Michigan's declining economy, we moved to Hawaii, the Big Island's rainy side to live in "voluntary simplicity." Steve read "Hindu Encounter with Modernity," a biography of his grand guru, Bhaktivinode Thakur, and discovered Thakur and he were on the same wave length. British educated, Thakur applied critical thought to the religion, as Steve was doing, with his seminary training. He blogged, refined his autobiography and developed his own theology. About a year ago I suggested he begin his reformed Radha-Krishna theology book.

He agreed and the result is the just released "Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: A Spirituality of Liberty, Truth, and Love." In it, he redefines Radha-Krishna devotion enabling contemporary Western seekers to establish an eternal loving relationship with the Divine Couple. He presents esoteric Indian spiritual wisdom in plain English from a postmodern, Western perspective.

Philosophy of religion instruc-



Cover of Steve Bohlert's book 'Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: A Spirituality of Liberty, Truth and Love'. In the book, he redefines Radha-Krishna devotion enabling contemporary Western seekers to establish an eternal loving relationship with the Devine Couple.

tor Dr. M. Valle, of Scottsdale Community College (AZ) says:

"Bohlert's approach to spirituality merges Western and Eastern thought by de-emphasizing cultural trappings and literalism, while maintaining a passionate emotional bond with the Supreme Being."

Nori Muster, author of "Betrayal of the Spirit" says, "As a life long seeker myself, open to both Eastern and Western religious ideas, I consider this book a portal to enlightenment. Bohlert leads the reader up a spiral staircase to the light, winding through the Christian and Hindu faiths as we ascend."

'Universalist Radha-Krishnaism: A Spirituality of Liberty, Truth, and Love' by Steve Bohlert is available now at Amazon.com and bookstores everywhere. Or check out [www.radha-krishnaism.org](http://www.radha-krishnaism.org). Also, [www.stevebohlert.com](http://www.stevebohlert.com).

## 'Meander through meadows' along Sinbad Creek

Sinbad Creek, **SIMPLY SUNOL**  
Sour little seasonal stream, lies

at the heart of Sunol. Now that the East Bay Regional Park District has opened the Northern Extension of Pleasanton Ridge to the public, it's possible to walk the stream's entire length.

Only about eight miles long, and flowing only half the year at best, Sinbad Creek nevertheless is a major topic of conversation, particularly for those of us who live near Kilkare Road. Residents speculate on when the stream will begin running, and if that event happens during daylight, will call their friends to accompany the head of the stream as it flows at a walking pace to Arroyo de la Laguna. Heavy rains can turn the usually gentle waterway into a dangerous, foaming torrent. It is occasionally visited by mallard ducks, nourishes tadpoles in the spring, and at one time supported a population of steelhead trout.

I explored the portion of the creek that lies within park boundaries on Tuesday, Nov. 3, a warm, sunny day -- perfect for a hike. First I took a brisk walk up Kilkare Road from my house, and then followed Sinbad Creek Trail about four miles to its end, at post 47. Then I turned around and strolled downhill, quickly reaching the point at which the creek will begin to flow once enough rain has fallen. A breeze whispering through the cattails emphasized the quiet, broken only by bird calls. The creek bed contained occasional puddles, thanks to October's storm. Downstream from the Northern Extension, Sinbad Creek meanders through meadows, mostly exposed to the sun. After its intersection with the Mariposa Trail, however, the stream is largely shaded by oaks, laurels, and sycamores. Their tangled roots are often exposed by the force of the water which also allowed them to grow so large.

At the water trough about a mile and a half from the gate at the end of Kilkare Road, I met up with Sunol artist and author Hans Peeters and his wife, Pam; their guest, artist Randy Dutra; and my husband, Gary Chambers, acting as photographer. With Hans (who is also a retired college biology teacher) and Pam along, the familiar forest along the creek suddenly became a source of insights and mysteries. I learned that the lacy gray stuff hanging from the trees is a true lichen (sometimes called lace lichen), a composite structure of algae and fungus, and no relation whatever to the Spanish moss of the South (a bromeliad). Hans said old-timers have told him that lace lichen used to festoon trees along Kilkare Road but now grows only in the park. Why? Is wood smoke or auto exhaust killing it? I learned that the roots of the coyote bush that is beginning to bloom are the favored food of the larvae of a large beetle that leaves its underground home at night after the first soaking rain -- which explains why I've never seen one. I learned that all the thistles, plus the poison hemlock, are exotic invaders. On



PHOTOS BY  
Gary Chambers

Once enough rain falls, Sinbad Creek will again flow through Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park and along Kilkare Road through Sunol (above). At right, Sunol artist, author and ornithologist Hans Peter describes the fauna and flora along Sinbad Creek during a November stroll.



the other hand, the honeysuckle with its fragrant flowers in spring and red berries in autumn is a native, as are the ocean spray with its white flowers and the snowberry with its white berries. Few showy flowers bloom this late in the year, but we found one that does: the California fuchsia, with its scarlet trumpets. Hans pointed out the tiny yerba buena, with its refreshing smell, and Pam showed me a pack rat nest right along the trail which I had never noticed before. All of our talking probably insured that we wouldn't see any of the brush rabbits that live in the tangled thickets near the park entrance. But we did see a dead tarantula. It was almost certainly a male which, having reached maturity and performed its duty to find and mate with a female, had wandered away and quickly died.

When Sinbad Creek leaves the park boundary, it also leaves behind its quiet sylvan setting for one characterized by dams and culverts. In December, I'll describe the creek's course along Kilkare Road. •

Barbara Egbert is editor-at-large for The Sunolian and the author of "Zero Days." Her monthly column also appears online at [www.simplysunol.net](http://www.simplysunol.net).

### ATTENTION SUNOLIANS:

Keep your doors and windows locked, there have been a number of thefts lately...tools, bikes, etc.

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The view from these hills, where my great aunt Grace Elliott farmed olives in the early 1900s, is calming and opening to the heart. Now, when olive oil is enjoying a renaissance in healthful living, it is for my health and yours that I am able to harvest and press Aunt Grace's olives for our enjoyment. This olive oil business is for the love of her and for the magnificent 130-year-old olive trees that she tended.

Hillcrest Ranch in Sunol is an island of 137 olive trees in the middle of 2,000 trees in Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park. The trees, of Picholine, Mission and Manzanillo varieties, are dry-land farmed using organic farming methods. The olives are hand picked, cold pressed, and bottled the same day to produce a fresh, crisp, grassy, and peppery extra virgin olive oil.

—Kathleen Elliott



For more information or to place your order, call Kathleen Elliott at 925-862-2509 or email: kdell@sonic.net

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Ten for a dollar may cost you more

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AC is a red azo dye that goes by several names including: Allura Red, Food Red 17, C.I. 16035, FD&C Red 40[1][2], 2-naphthalenesulfonic acid, 6-hydroxy-5-((2-methoxy-5-methyl-4-sulphophenyl)azo)-, disodium salt, and disodium. Several case studies have linked azo pigments with Basal Cell Carcinoma, skin cancer.

Sounds yummy, doesn't it? So your child is not eating their lunch in order to be first in line with that \$1.00 you gave them for their Tuesday and Thursday treat. And thus they got 320 calories, 10 teaspoons of sugar and a whole lot of chemicals. How do you think their afternoon of learning and behavior went? I kid you not, the other day, during lunch recess, I witnessed 1st graders racing each other to the Snack Shack line, then sit down with fist fulls of Twizzlers and Fruit Roll Ups and Corn Nuts. Are we really the parents that want our children to eat this stuff? Don't we care more for them than this? Don't get me wrong, I like a Twizzler as much as the next person, but ten at lunch time...every Tuesday and Thursday at school, every week – really?

Some Facts to consider when we feed our children:

- An average of 17% of school aged children are considered

obese with a BMI over 31%. (Ogden, JAMA. 2008;299(20):2401-2405)

- Nearly 5% of children in the US have been diagnosed with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, with many more undiagnosed. This is caused by the consumption of High Fructose Corn Syrup. (Feldstein & Kay, Department of PGN & CB, Cleveland, OH)

- If current trends continue, 1 in 3 Americans will develop diabetes sometime in their lifetime, and those with diabetes will lose, on average, 10–15 years of life. (Dept. of Health and Human Services, CDC)

- Leaky Gut, Candidas, Constipation, Diarrhea, Indigestion are complaints on the rise in the Pediatrician's office. (Fratkin, Holistic Pediatric Association July 2004)

- There has been a significant increase in the diagnosis of learning disabilities and ADD/ADHD during the same period of increase in obesity among children. (Obesity Journal, 2009; Dr. Allan Green, June, 2009)

- Nutrition can play an important role in the prevention and management of many kinds of difficulties in behavior, learning and mood. (Greene, June 2004 Archives of Diseases in Childhood.)

- Do you want to know if there is real fruit in the Fruit Roll Up? Food for thought. •

A poem of praise for Sunol

Submitted by Elaine Gliderwell (Skylark)

When I first walked around Sunol, I drew a big breath and let it out. I embraced the sense of tranquility and simplicity of my surroundings. I hugged Sunol. Why has providence allowed you to be as you are? Inch by inch, change happens to most cities, then they are swallowed up and something is lost. The sacred element of the land, which is in harmony with the soul is lost. Once what originally sprang from the earth is tampered with – something is lost forever.

I found this poem on the internet that expresses what I am trying to say and how I feel:

*Rural vs. Urban*

*Ill fares the land, to hast'ning,  
is a prey  
Where wealth accumulates, and  
men decay  
Princess and lords may flourish,  
or may fade,  
A breath can make them,  
As a breath has made;  
But a bold peasantry,  
Their country's pride,  
When once destroyed,  
Can never be supplied*

– Goldsmith

NCRY Reminder!

Submitted by Karen L. Kadaja  
Niles Canyon Railway

The Train of Lights is coming soon. The annual train ride for Sunolians will be on Saturday, Dec. 5, departing the Sunol Depot at 4:30pm with the Annual Tree Lighting to follow in the Sunol Gardens. If you are attending the Tree Lighting, please feel free to bring cookies or other pastries to share; please bring them to the Gardens prior to the train ride for the Sunol 4H organization to accept.

Space is limited, first come first served. You must reserve your tickets prior to pick up. Contact Ario at 925-862-2251 or email at calliopekaren@gmail.com.

After you reserve your tickets, pick up your four reserve train tickets on either Saturday, Nov. 28, from Ario Ysit at the Jazz Café between the hours of 9am and 12 Noon OR on Sunday, Nov. 29, from Ario at the Jazz Café between the hours of 9am and 12 Noon.

If you are unable to pick up tickets on either of those dates and/or if you have not heard from Ario by end of business on Tuesday, Dec 1, please contact him to arrange a pick up. •



SRT Auditions coming up

Are you 16 and older and have a yearning to release your inner thespian? Do you think you're a great singer but not quite American Idol material? Would you love to be a part of a fun, energetic and "interesting" group?

If so, come to the Sunol Repertory Theatre auditions on Thursday December 10th, 7pm at the Sunol Glen School Auditorium. •