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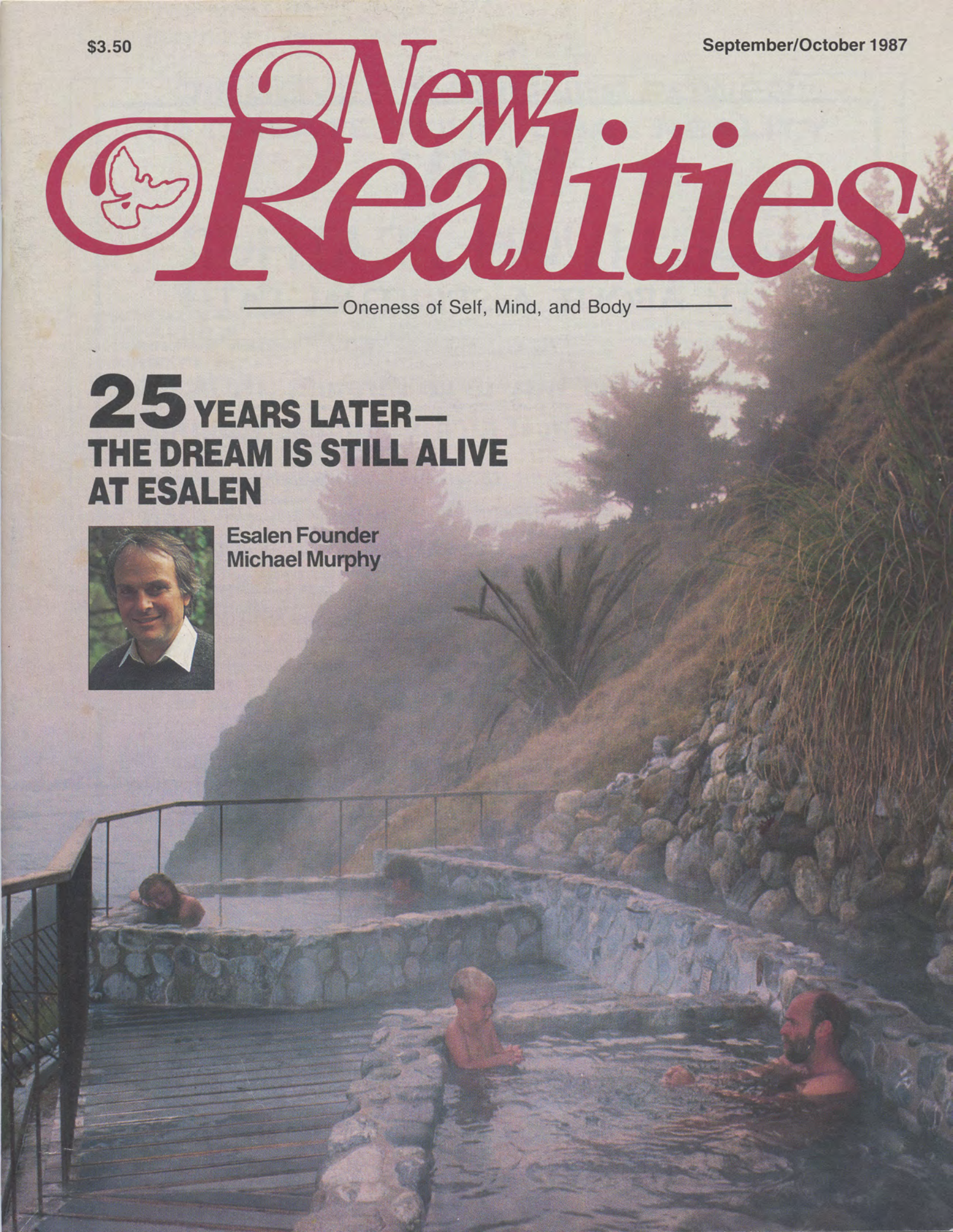
New Realities

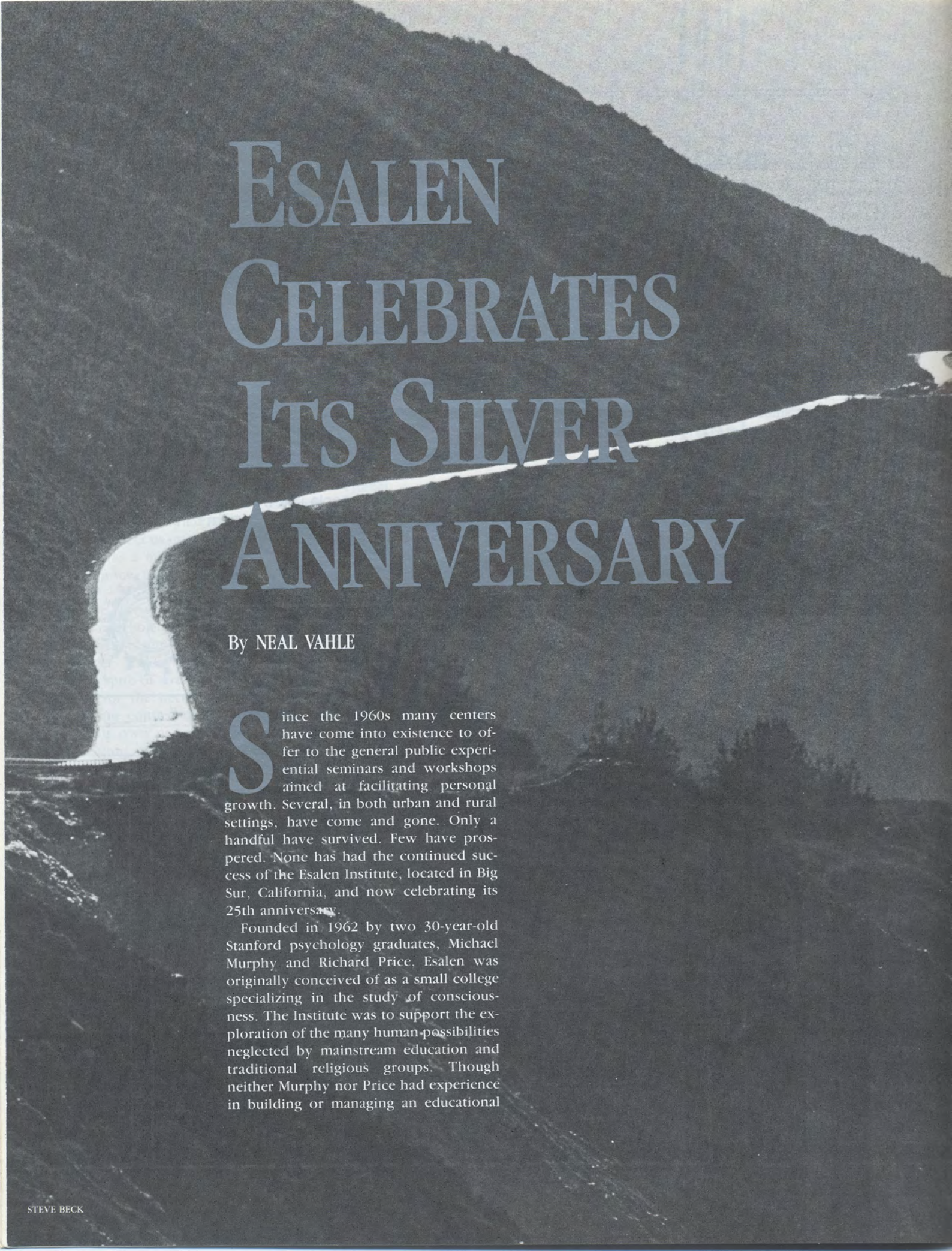
— Oneness of Self, Mind, and Body —

**25 YEARS LATER—
THE DREAM IS STILL ALIVE
AT ESALEN**



Esalen Founder
Michael Murphy



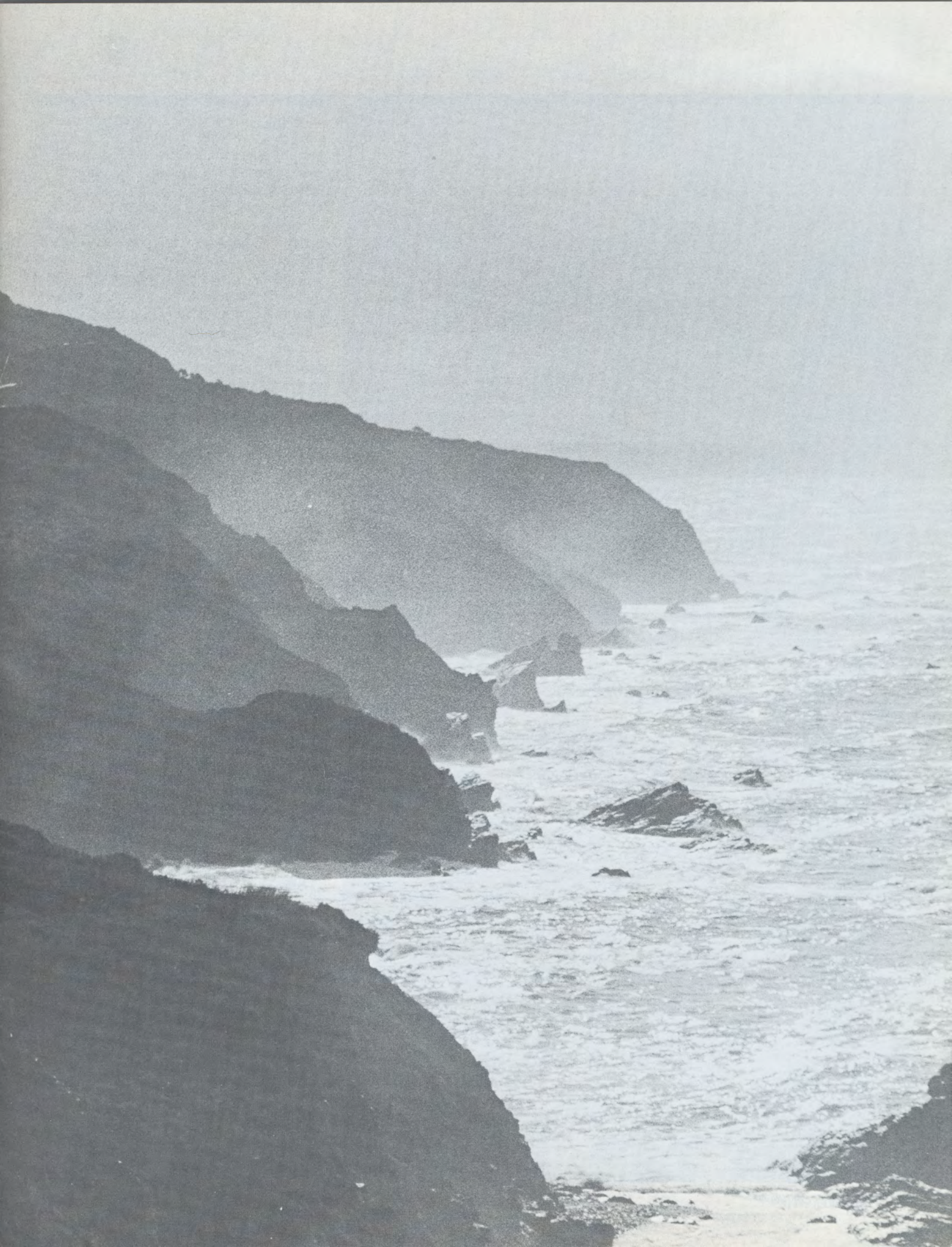


ESALEN CELEBRATES ITS SILVER ANNIVERSARY

By NEAL VAHLE

Since the 1960s many centers have come into existence to offer to the general public experiential seminars and workshops aimed at facilitating personal growth. Several, in both urban and rural settings, have come and gone. Only a handful have survived. Few have prospered. None has had the continued success of the Esalen Institute, located in Big Sur, California, and now celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Founded in 1962 by two 30-year-old Stanford psychology graduates, Michael Murphy and Richard Price, Esalen was originally conceived of as a small college specializing in the study of consciousness. The Institute was to support the exploration of the many human possibilities neglected by mainstream education and traditional religious groups. Though neither Murphy nor Price had experience in building or managing an educational





organization, they gradually turned a small hot springs resort, located on a hundred acres of land originally owned by Murphy's grandfather, into a personal-growth center that now presents annually over 500 workshops, seminars, and invitational conferences. Beginning with a human potential series that consisted primarily of discussions of great ideas, the Institute soon moved to a program that encouraged direct experiences, whether physical, emotional, cognitive, or spiritual, and reflection upon that experience. Today it offers a wide range of subjects, including Gestalt awareness training, somatic disciplines, spiritual practice, creativity, exceptional functioning, social action, and group work.

Starting with one meeting room and a handful of living spaces, the Institute has expanded so that it can now accommodate about 90 workshop attendees, 60 work scholars, and 35 staff members. Many of the full-time staff have been with the Institute for over ten years, are highly dedicated, and possess a strong sense of community, so strong that Esalen is sometimes referred to as a "secular monastery." Many of its seminar leaders are nationally known and respected, and have developed strong followings. Their workshops are often filled several months in advance.

The majority of workshop participants are white, middle-class, well educated and affluent, and have attended previous workshops at Esalen. The mailing list of workshop participants is now over 20,000. The growing number of returning regulars coupled with the continuing influx of newcomers, particularly foreigners (over 25 percent now come from abroad), allow Esalen to run at almost full capacity year-round. Frequently in debt in the early years, Esalen now generates about \$4 million in annual income and operates comfortably in the black.

What are the major factors responsible for Esalen's success? Why has Esalen succeeded where others have failed? Let's start with the physical setting. It's dramatic. Michael Murphy recently told me, "We could do anything here. The property makes anything possible." Words fail to do justice to its breathtaking beauty. The best description I've read was written by author and

*"Big House" at Esalen. Photo by Mary Payne,
© The Esalen Institute.*

former *Look* magazine editor George Leonard:

"Stand at the edge of the cliff. Nearly a hundred feet beneath you the ocean heaves and pounds against the land; foaming streaks of blue-green water rising and falling lazily, as if in slow motion. But then an incoming swell reaches one of the jagged offshore rocks, and a ton of seawater explodes 15 feet into the air. . . . Turn to the left and look down the coast, where dark-green promontories thrust into the sea like prows of enormous ships. Keep turning and you'll see that this shelf of land atop the ocean cliffs extends for only a few hundred acres. Be-

yond that mountains loom up to 4,000 feet. . . . Bring your eyes down from the peaks and spend a few moments admiring the lawns of springy grass, the profusion of flowers, the windswept cypresses, redwoods and pines, the large organic garden bursting with lettuce and cabbage, broccoli and beets, practically every kind of vegetable and herb you can think of. There is even something organic about the man-made structures that nestle into the contours of the land, the stone retaining wall and steps, the wrought-iron railings, the redwood lodge, and living quarters. No overhead wires or antennas mar your view of the sky. High above

some, soothing for almost everyone, a place where you can restore yourself after the sometimes strenuous interactions in the meeting rooms up above."

The impact of the physical setting is further testified to by Walter Truett Anderson, author of a recent book on Esalen titled *Upstart Spring*. Anderson observes that people who live and work in that "fragrant and magical site," or just visit occasionally, often come to see the place as "in itself a source of growth and wisdom, no less life-giving than the therapies and psychologies and religions and philosophies" that are taught there.

The success of Esalen is also due to the extraordinary capabilities of its co-founders. Let's start with Michael Murphy. It was he who, as Esalen's first program director—youthful, intelligent, engaging, but untried—persuaded luminaries in a variety of fields to give seminars.

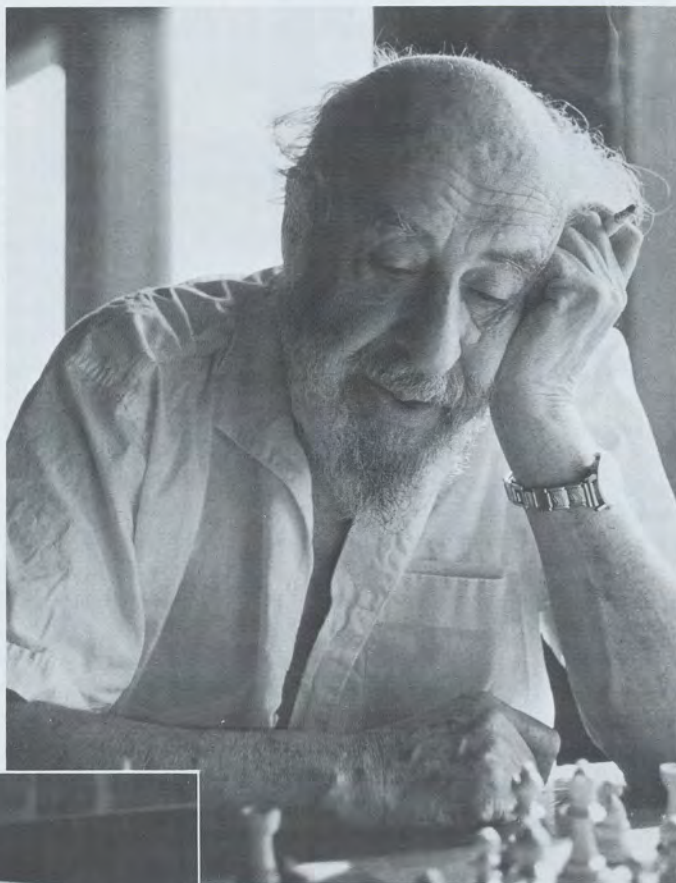
During the first five years you might have spent a weekend in close personal contact with any one of the following: psychologists Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, B. F. Skinner, Rollo May, and Fritz Perls; theologians Paul Tillich and Harvey Cox; writers Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, and Carlos Castaneda; bishops James A. Pike and John Robinson; historian Arnold Toynbee; chemist Linus Pauling and futurist Buckminster Fuller. Over the years, Esalen has sponsored the work of a variety of therapeutic innovators, including Ida Rolf, Moshe Feldenkreis, Robert Assagioli, Charlotte Slever, Will Shutz, George Leonard, Alexander Lowen, and Stan and Christina Grof (see *New Realities*, March/April 1987).

Murphy presided over the program in the early, turbulent years when Esalen made its name. It was during this period that Gestalt practice, encounter, and somatic disciplines became the program's primary components. While most of the encounter work was dropped in the early 1970s, in the public mind Esalen became identified with all three approaches.

While Murphy was primarily responsible for the program, Price managed the facility. He was Esalen's first general manager, concerned with the development of the buildings and grounds, the operation of the kitchen (the food has always been considered excellent), the hot baths, the cabins, and the business-management function. "My focus," he once said, "was on the question of how you operate the type of counseling and psychological work that goes on here."

Below: A seminar taught by Buckminster Fuller. Photo by Paul Herbert, © The Esalen Institute.

Right: Fritz Perls, an Esalen "pioneer." Photo by Paul Herbert, © The Esalen Institute.

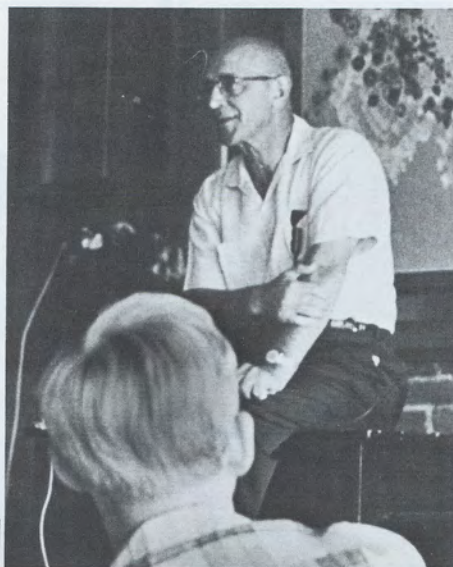


swallows dart and wheel and then dive down to skim inches above the surface of the swimming pool. This is Esalen Institute, named for a tribe of Indians that once lived on the land."

Then there are the baths—hot sulfur water flowing out of the mountain at the ocean's edge. Again, George Leonard:

"The baths at Big Sur simply provide one of the most relaxing sanctuaries you can find anywhere. Whatever the weather, even in the pouring rain, the baths retain their appeal, curative for

When Murphy moved to San Francisco in the early 1970s, it was Price who remained at Big Sur. For 15 years it was his gentle presence that held things together. Price also played an important role in making Esalen a major center for Gestalt group work in the United States. Associating in the late 1960s with the principal creator of Gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls, who lived at Esalen, Price not only became a skilled practitioner but was able to transmit the techniques to others. One of his most gifted students is Christine Stewart Price, his wife for 13 years, who, since Price's premature death in 1985, heads the Gestalt practitioners' group at Esalen.

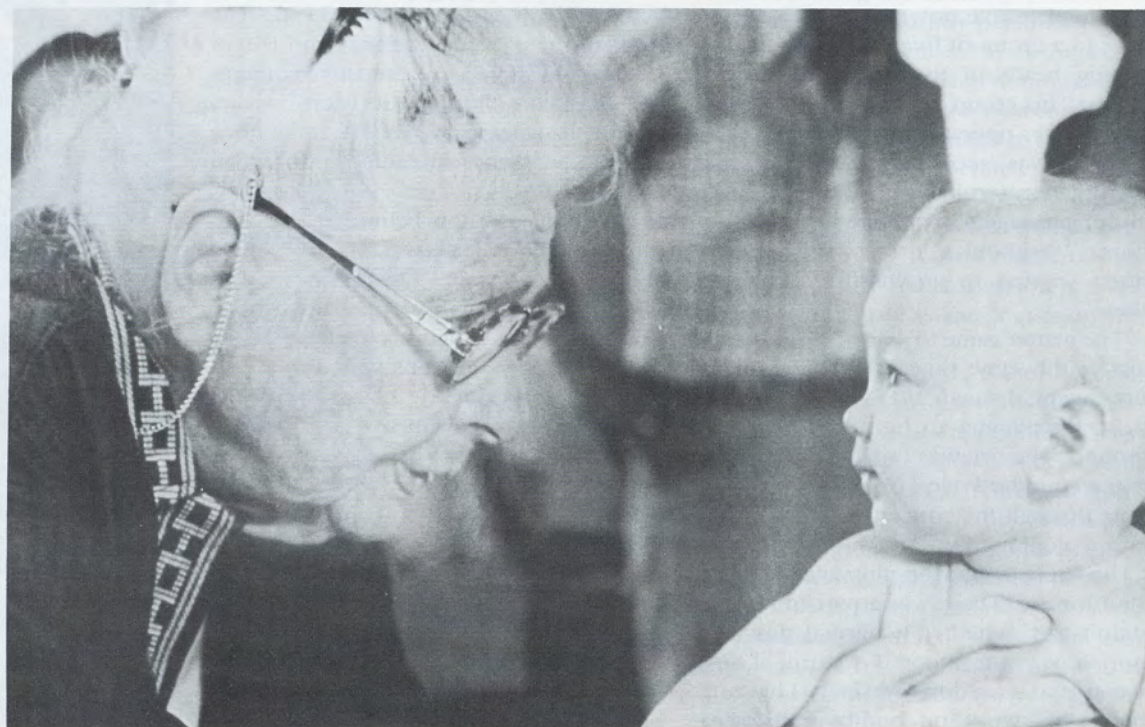


Above: Carl Rogers addresses workshop participants in the late '60s. Photo by Paul Herbert, © The Esalen Institute.



Above: Alexander Lowen leading a workshop in the late '60s. Photo by Paul Herbert, © The Esalen Institute.

Right: Ida Rolf in 1987. Photo © The Esalen Institute.



Esalen's openness to a diversity of disciplines and approaches has also contributed to its success. Throughout the early years there were concerted efforts on the part of charismatic and popular practitioners to make Esalen into an organization which promoted a single point of view, but Price and Murphy resisted what they called "Capture the Flag." Murphy states that Esalen "never had a package, no dogma, no set thing." He and Price viewed it as a testing ground for new ideas and techniques without being a proponent of any one. As a result, people coming to Esalen knew that the Institute had no interest in serving as a proselytizer for any one of them. This openness undoubtedly attracted people who were wary of personal-growth organizations that employed more direct methods of enrolling people into their programs.

An important factor in Esalen's success was the ability of Price and Murphy to resolve differences that arose between them. In the late summer of 1985, just two months before Price's death in November of that year, Murphy and Price resolved a managerial conflict that had nearly caused the two of them to dissolve their partnership and dispose of the property. The problem lay in the crisis of leadership caused by the unwillingness of either of them to serve as operating head of the Institute, or to find a satisfactory substitute.

Mimi Farina, Mama Cass, Judy Collins, Joan Baez, and Arlo Guthrie in concert at a Big Sur Folk Festival two decades ago. Photo by Paul Herbert, © The Esalen Institute.



Murphy had lived in the San Francisco Bay area for over a decade, and had not exerted hands-on management since the early 1970s. His major interests revolved around what Price called "his three R's: Running, writing, and Russians." Price, who continued to live on the property, had taken himself, five years before, out of the direct line of managerial responsibility and had focused his interests on Gestalt practice and hiking.

Administrative power had been turned over to a group of five managers, the operating heads of the individual departments. This group met in council to make the major operational decisions. The problem was, according to Murphy, that the organization had no head. The council of managers was like a "team of horses" without a driver. Its members often wanted to go in different directions.

The matter came to a head in July 1985, just at the same time that a large forest fire swept through the Ventana wilderness, threatening to burn Esalen to the ground. The fire was finally stopped, just a few hundred feet from the property line, through the concerted efforts of the entire community. As Murphy puts it, "The fire came at the most alienated period for me. There was a part of me that didn't care whether it burned down or not. It was the mood I was in; if God wants it to burn down, so be it. I have my book (his work on bodily transforma-

tion), I have my work. Sell the property, get a few million bucks. It was not a pretty thought, but it was a temptation."

In the fall of 1985, after talking with friends and relatives and coming to the conclusion that he would not sell, Murphy proposed a solution to Price that would require both of them to take an active role in the Institute's management. The plan also contemplated bringing in Steve Donovan, a close friend of Murphy's, to be president and operating head. The three of them (Murphy, Price, and Donovan) would serve as an executive committee, and make all major decisions involving the management of the Institute. Price agreed and Donovan came on board on October 1, 1985.

With this decision behind them, Murphy reported that he was "really excited about Esalen again." Just two months after the new system was put into operation, Price was killed accidentally while hiking in the mountains above the Institute. He was evidently pleased with the new working arrangements; as he told his wife Chris a few days before his death, he was more satisfied than ever with the operation of the place and felt that he and Michael were in a better relationship than ever before. Price's death was, according to Murphy, "a shock." But, he said, "We kept going."

Brian Lyke, the general manager of the Institute, was appointed to fill Price's spot on the executive committee. It is

now about two years since Price died and all three agree that the new system works well. Murphy was effusive. "It's marvelous now," he said. "Esalen is in the best shape it's ever been in." The Institute is not only out of debt but has several hundred thousand dollars in the bank. Enrollments in the seminars are up, and Donovan, who has a business management background, is in full charge.

Murphy is now involved in several institute projects that deeply interest him. Improving communication among the superpowers in the field of human-potential research has been a project of Esalen since 1980. At that time Murphy was invited to the USSR to speak on the subject of sports and modern society. Wherever he traveled in the Soviet Union he found people engaged in a variety of activities related to personal and spiritual growth. In Georgia he met a group of young people involved in meditation. In Moscow he found Russians engaged in a variety of spiritual pursuits—meditation groups, healers, psychics, followers of Gurdjieff, as well as scientists studying psychic phenomena and sports researchers interested in maximizing human performance. At Moscow State University,



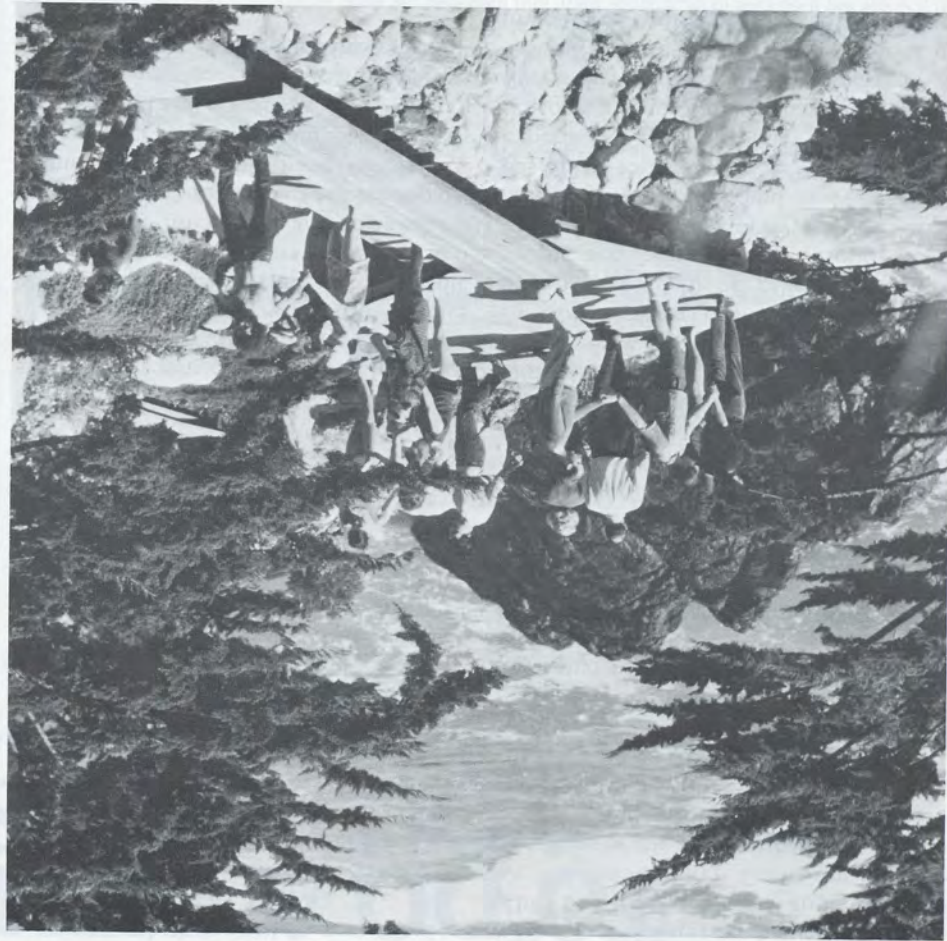
he discovered that the social psychology department had worked with encounter

It was at that time he decided to make a link between the Russian and American human-potential movements a major thrust of the Esalen program. The first secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, Valentin Berezhkov, accepted an invitation to come to Esalen to discuss the outlines of an official Soviet-American exchange program.

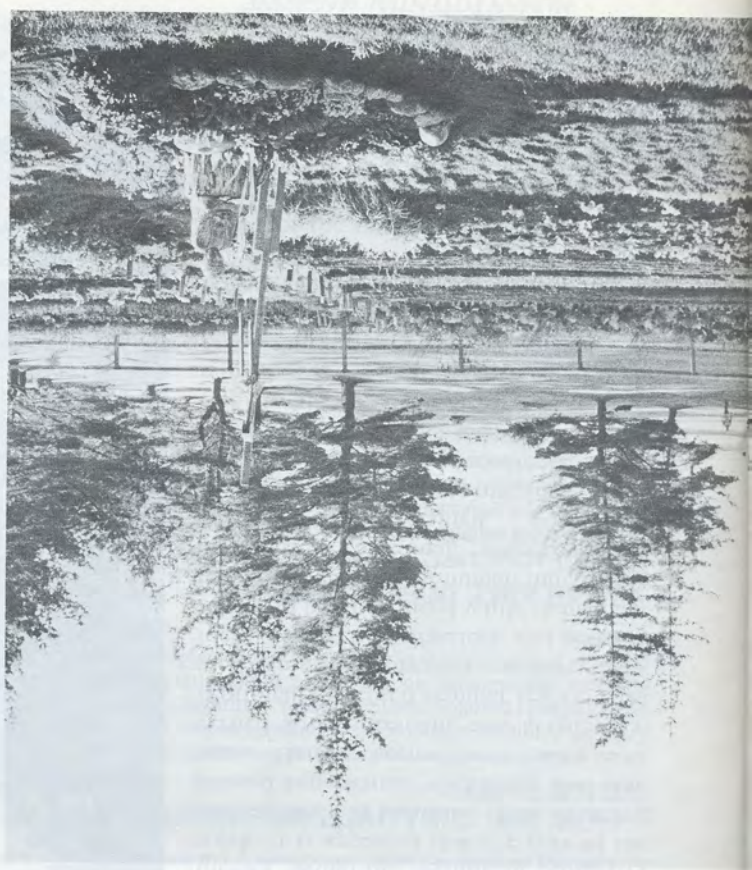
Since 1980 a variety of activities has been underway. Under the leadership of its first director, James Hickman, the Institute's exchange program was instrumental in setting up the first face-to-face meetings between astronauts and cosmonauts; it arranged a live, two-way television satellite hook-up, a "space-bridge" between a rock concert in southern California and a group of Soviet rock musicians and young people in Moscow. Murphy's wife Dulce has organized a health promotion project that has resulted in a series of conferences, including one on exceptional functioning and addiction, and another, to be held in 1988, on research connecting mind and body. There have been dialogues between Soviets and Americans on social and economic transformation, and in 1986 a long-term cooperative agreement was negotiated between Esalen and the USSR Union of Writers. Writers' exchanges are occurring this year, with a delegation of American writers touring the USSR.

A project that Murphy personally gives a great deal of attention to is the Esalen Study of Exceptional Functioning, which is exploring the human power to radically alter the body through physical and disciplines and liberated powers of the mind. It is based on the supposition that the body is fundamental in the liberation of the soul. It proceeds from the view that bodily transformation is just as important to man as the transformation of consciousness.

To support this view, the project will provide a comparative systems analysis of exceptional physical functioning. Scientific and anecdotal evidence is being gathered from a variety of activities, including sports, the martial arts, biofeedback hypothesis, psychotherapy, religious practice, spiritual healing, and shamanism. An archive of over 10,000 studies of extraordinary human functioning has been gathered, and the results of the work will be disseminated through books, monographs, and seminars.



Above: "On the edge" in a 1960s workshop below Big House. Photo by Paul Herbert, © The Esalen Institute.
Left: The garden at Esalen. Photo by Joyce Lyke, © The Esalen Institute.



Almost everyone who attends an Esalen workshop takes time out for a massage. Having had many wonderful massages there myself, and having heard the ecstatic comments of others, I knew that Esalen had a highly capable massage crew. Until I spoke with Don Johnson, somatic educator, author, and faculty member at Antioch University of San Francisco, I knew nothing about the unique abilities of these practitioners.

Johnson reports that the thirty-person Esalen group, many of whom live in Big Sur and have been working at Esalen for over 20 years, have studied with many of the world's leading body-workers and have had excellent training. As a result, these practitioners rank with the most sophisticated body-workers not only in the United States but in the world. Johnson believes that the Esalen body-work is equally as powerful as Swedish massage.

Unlike other kinds of body-work, the therapeutic value of Esalen-work has gone unrecognized. Swedish massage, for example, has been integrated into hospitals and clinics, while Esalen-work has been directed, through week-long and month-long workshops, toward the training of masseurs and has been valued primarily as a relaxation technique. John-

son, at Murphy's invitation, was asked to rectify this situation.

Johnson has recently developed a cooperative program between Esalen and Antioch University of San Francisco that will enable the Esalen practitioners to draw health practitioners (nurses, social workers, physicians, psychotherapists, body-workers, chiropractors, and others) into a new training program given at Esalen and accredited by Antioch. The goal is to refine and articulate the full scope of the Esalen massage-work so that a significant part of the efforts will be directed toward the development of the nation's health professionals.

Another major project that Murphy recently initiated is entitled "Revisioning Philosophy" and is intended to help restore philosophy to the mainstream of American culture. This project grew out of the view, prevailing in many circles both inside and outside the academic world, that philosophers have forfeited their unique integrative and imaginative function. The major academic departments of philosophy have constricted their subject so that its principal concerns are technical and scientific. Philosophers no longer address the great questions such as "What is the meaning of life?"

"What is the difference between a worthwhile and a wasted life?" and "What do we tell our children about the ultimate questions of life and death?"

Jay Ogilvy, of the Stanford Research Institute, a philosopher and former professor at Yale, is directing the project. A three-year "Consultation in Philosophy" is underway involving people who believe that philosophy can be revitalized. Some of the most creative philosophers in the U.S., Europe, and the Far East will be brought together for conversations and for participation in conferences at Esalen.

Ogilvy points out that the project will explore the subject from much more than a merely speculative dimension, and will include experiential aspects of the discipline. "Borrowing from East and West," he states, "we wish to restore the *experiential* dimensions of philosophy, and explore what might be called 'the philosophic sensibility' or 'philosophy as a way of life.'" Philosophy, he notes, has ignored the passions and emotions, and has failed to acknowledge that there are experiences, whether they be mystical, sensory, or emotional, that need attention from a philosophical perspective.

While Murphy takes special interest in invitational conferences organized around themes requiring significant cognitive work, it is apparent that the core of the curriculum will continue to be centered around experiential workshops and seminars. Murphy seems much more concerned about attracting and keeping exceptionally talented seminar leaders than in shifting the Institute's emphasis. New ideas, discoveries, practices, and perspectives will be introduced while elementary courses in all areas of human functioning—physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual—will be retained.

Will Esalen expand its offerings? Given the high levels of attendance, it seems clear that, in any other location, the Institute could expand in size to offer more workshops. While there are plans to upgrade the current facilities, Esalen managers agree, however, that because of the limited amount of usable land at its Big Sur site and its fragility, large-scale expansion is out of the question. Long-time Esalen devotees will be glad to know that the Institute is likely to remain, as it has been from the beginning, "a small college engaged in consciousness."

Neal Vable is publisher and editor of *New Realities*.



JOYCE LYKE

Michael Murphy: "Eastern Contemplative/ Western Entrepreneur"

By Neal Vahle

Looking back on the 25 years of Esalen's existence, Michael Murphy experiences a continuing excitement about its work. There is not only "a tremendous sense of work in progress," but also a recognition that "the whole movement is profoundly valid." He envisions a continuing commitment on his part to the institution and its various endeavors. He considers himself as "in it all the way."

This does not mean that he believes it necessary that he live at Esalen, nor involve himself in the day-to-day operation of the Big Sur facility. Now 56, he lives in San Rafael with Dulce, his wife of 13 years, and a two-year-old son, Makenzie. Since returning from Esalen to the Bay area in the early 1970s, he has occupied himself primarily as a writer of novels and non-fiction books on consciousness-related topics. He writes every day but Sunday, three or four hours in the morning and two or three in the afternoon.

During the past three years he has devoted a large amount of time to a forthcoming work which will be titled *The Future of the Body*. It is already assuming voluminous proportions and will require two more years of work to complete. He focuses in part on the subject of "transformative practice," a topic that has been at the center of his interest not only while he was developing the curriculum at Esalen, but since he was a student at Stanford and a resident in the 1950s in the Aurobindo ashram in India.

In the book he reviews a broad group of "transformative practices," discussing those that promote growth, healing, and many-sided awareness and functioning. The practices or disciplines that Murphy believes can facilitate the development of physical and spiritual faculties (high-level human development) include Gestalt awareness training, Assagioli's psychosynthesis, three different types of yoga (such as Aurobindo's yoga, Samkhya yoga, and the yoga of Pantanjali), Zen Buddhist training, Theravada Buddhism, Gurdjieff work, and some forms of shamanism.

In choosing a practice he points out that there is no one "right kind" for everyone. The practice must be suited to the individual's make-up. "A multi-dimensional growth of mind, body, and soul requires a curriculum that can be adapted to each one of its practitioner's particular strengths, shortcomings, and levels of development." Secondly, the practice should promote simultaneously the development of spiritual,



BARBARA DEMARCO

cognitive, emotional, and physical faculties. Finally, we ourselves should assume full responsibility for the choice, and not rely on a group or a guru to choose for us. Choosing requires discrimination, creativity, and willingness to improvise.

A sense of balance is important in achieving success—a balance between either deficient or excessive effort. Essential attributes are patience (a steady willingness to stay on the long plateau of the learning curve), concentration, adaptability, and a willingness to seek help from others when appropriate. Murphy asserts that integral practice, leading to higher levels of human development, manifests itself in a variety of ways — through enriched emotions,

illuminating mental processes, a body that has new power and beauty, a developing identity that sees unity everywhere, moments of joy and elevation, and a new confidence or self-mastery.

Murphy grew up in Salinas, California, an agricultural town about 100 miles south of San Francisco. He came from an old California professional family—his father was a lawyer and his grandfather a medical doctor. School work was important and he was a bright student, graduating as valedictorian of his high school class. So were athletics. He was good at most games and excelled at golf, playing in junior tournaments around the state. Attending Episcopal church services as a teenager, he once considered entering the ministry.

As an undergraduate at Stanford he majored in psychology and developed an interest in Eastern philosophy, particularly the work of the religious mystic, social activist, and Cambridge-educated Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo, the head of the great Indian ashram at Pondicherry, had written several philosophical works, including *The Life Divine*, which urged a synthesis of East and West, revolutionary social change, and spiritual transformation. Aurobindo's views on the evolution of consciousness struck a responsive chord in Murphy. "There was a tremendous feeling of everything falling into place."

Murphy began meditating while still in college, something unusual for American college undergraduates in the 1950s. Drafted into the army upon graduation and given a desk job in Puerto Rico, he found plenty of free time to play baseball, read, meditate, and continue the spiritual journey begun in

(continued on page 30)

MURPHY (continued from page 13)

college. Returning to Stanford after completing his two-year military obligation, he enrolled as a graduate student in philosophy. Anticipating a program that addressed the broader issues, including mysticism, Murphy found himself in a department that emphasized scientism, measurement of behavior, quantification, and analytical thought.

After two years he left Stanford and went to India, intending to apply for admission to Aurobindo's ashram. "I just presented myself and they let me stay." He remained for a year and a half, spending as much as eight hours each day meditating. He liked the emphasis that was placed there on the body and physical well-being, and participated in several sports.

Upon returning to the United States he took up residence in a meditation center and urban ashram in San Francisco established by Haridas Chaudhuri, an Aurobindo follower. It was here that he for the first time met Richard Price, a man who had not only been a classmate at Stanford, but a fellow psychology major. Four months later, during a stay at the Murphy family property at Slate's Hot Springs in Big Sur, they decided to start a center there to explore their interests in philosophy, psychology, and the more esoteric disciplines. "We didn't have a blue print," recalls Murphy. "The whole idea was exploration into consciousness in general—and the notion to support a diversity of approaches." The idea fit in with Murphy's desire to do something with his life. "I'd had something like the same idea when I was in India, but nothing came of it. Now, though, there was a great deal of pressure building up inside me to do *something*—here I was 30 and still meditating."

Though Murphy and Price operated as partners and equals, Murphy tended to take the lead. He was gregarious, open, engaging, even bold, and this helped in the search for seminar leaders. During the decade that Murphy lived and worked at Esalen, he was, according to the principal chronicler of Esalen's history, Walter Truett Anderson, not only the institution's primary creator, but "its major product." He learned as he went along. Anderson reports that Murphy attended every seminar that was held at Big Sur in the early years (over 200 of them), including many Gestalt therapy and Encounter groups. He extracted ideas from the movements that were shaking the foundations of American society and came to believe that the world was on the verge of a great "evolutionary leap"—that a major transition or shift was about to take place in how people experienced themselves and the world. He was constantly in search of expressions of this same vision and for other seekers of it. He attended many psychology conventions, not only to scout out seminar leaders but to hear new ideas.

Anderson also describes Murphy during this period as "outgoing, earnest, respectful toward older people, full of enthusiasm, and among those he knew well, able to break into wild, mischievous playfulness." Anderson credits Murphy with the ability to "synthesize the best in East and West," being simultaneously the "Eastern contemplative and the Western entrepreneur." While Murphy remained a "mystic," he was at the same time "devoid of heavy-handed spirituality." At a time when the old values were being

challenged, he personally eased the transition, becoming a spokesman for things of a new era—Eastern religion and group therapy.

As the 1960s progressed, Murphy spent more and more time away from Big Sur, traveling and involving himself with the world of people and ideas. Having grown restless at Big Sur, even during summer vacations as a child, he was always finding reasons to go elsewhere. Finally, in 1970 he moved to an apartment on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco, and began embarking on what has turned out to be a second career, that of a fiction writer and an author of books on consciousness. He viewed writing as both a vehicle for discovery as well as a way to share what he'd learned.

From his lifelong interest in athletics, it is not surprising that Murphy's first work, a novel, deals with sports and consciousness. Published in 1972, *Golf in the Kingdom* views sport as a yoga or a spiritual discipline, and explored a notion that its author long held: that sport is "one of the great ways for the journey within." The central character, Shivas Irons, is a Scottish golfer, a teaching professional, whose mystical worldview was as much a source of his instruction as his knowledge of the game. The book is a philosophical novel, filled with many parallels between playing the game of golf and living the game of life.

The book attained surprising critical acclaim, considering it was a first novel and the author had not only had little formal training in fiction but had just embarked on a writing career. *Intellectual Digest* called it "the sports book of the year, which explores the mysteries in and around the game." The *New York Times* book reviewer called it a "mystical tale" that was going to "alter many visions." Alan Watts saw it as "a Western equivalent of Herrigel's famous *Zen in the Art of Archery*, but a much better book."

In his second work, *Jacob Atabet*, published in 1977, Murphy used the novel form to express his ideas on the phenomenon of bodily transformation. Set in San Francisco in the early 1970s, the story is narrated by Darwin Fall, a 30-year-old author and consciousness researcher. In Fall's journal, which occupies a significant part of the book, there are a variety of provocative statements on spiritual practice and human possibilities:

- The dominant contemplative traditions of the last 2,500 years have conceived of the goal of life as a release or liberation from the flesh, rather than an embodiment in it. The body is viewed as a source of suffering and limitation. This has been a mistake.
- The body, rather than being an impediment to the life of the spirit, is *itself* meant to be a manifestation of the glories of the spirit. Evidence that we are engaged in an adventure of embodied existence is shown in myths and legends all over the world, from hypnosis and psychical research, from the lore of spiritual healing, from the stigmatic prodigies described in religious and psychiatric literature, from sport and tantra, and from the physical phenomena of mysticism generally. There's no denying the constant witness to it, once you perceive the main pattern.

- A new vision of human nature and destiny is emerging. It is now possible to attain surprising transformations in the human form. The saint is blindly remaking his body. Stigmatics, in this respect, are signs of further evolution. From the knowledge and control that has been developed, it is possible for the body to house and express a fuller consciousness and capacity.

- It is amazing how fast the body changes. Part of the body is always dying. What is there to fear? Life and death are simultaneous. We are living flames.

This novel succeeds on several levels. It has an engrossing plot and a group of interesting, believable characters. Until Murphy's new book, *The Future of the Body*, is published in 1988, this novel remains his most complete public statement on the possibilities of the human condition.

Murphy's third novel, *An End of Ordinary History*, published in 1982, continues the story of Darwin Fall and takes him to the Soviet Union, where he is an expert in the body's super-normal abilities. He meets with Russian mystics and becomes exposed to the machinations of the Soviet bureaucracy. This novel, in my opinion, is Murphy's least successful work—a rambling, slow-moving plot with wooden characters.

The Psychic Side of Sports, written with Rhea White, a professional parapsychologist at the Duke University Parapsychology Lab, was Murphy's first work of non-fiction. The book proceeds from the assumption that there is an "underground of spiritual experience" that goes unnoticed and unacknowledged by most participants in sports, both professionals and amateurs. The authors see these experiences as having "enormous power to sweep us beyond the ordinary sense of self, to evoke capacities that have been regarded as mystical, occult, or religious."

The book describes a wide spectrum of mystical experiences reported by athletes: acute well-being, peace, calm, stillness, detachment, freedom, floating, flying, ecstasy, intuitive action and surrender, mystery and awe, out-of-body experiences, unity, and feelings of immortality.

Interspersed throughout his writings and interviews are his viewpoints on most of the major issues of consciousness and transformation. I found the following statements particularly illuminating:

On the evolution of consciousness: "What Aurobindo called yoga, what Abe Maslow called self-actualization, what Fritz Perls called organismic integrity, Assagioli called psychosynthesis. All these share basically the same idea—that there is a natural tendency toward development, toward unfoldment, that pervades the universe as well as the human sphere, and that our job is to get behind that and make it conscious."

On psychic phenomena: "Lanterns along the way of our psychophysical development, harbingers of our emerging self-mastery, but certainly not the end-all . . . We must not let them obsess us in a way that stifles our growth into the deeper and higher dimensions."

On encounter: "You can't live on encounter. Encounter is like an initiation ceremony, a way of crossing a boundary and looking at what's on the other side. I feel that in future

disciplines encounter groups as we have known them will have a very small place."

On the value of transformational disciplines: "All the disciplines that have gained a significant following have been helpful for someone, for some particular purpose. If a person's aim is simply to learn how to relax, then biofeedback or meditation or simple suggestion might help. If he wants to explore his feelings, he might try an encounter group. If his aim is the kind of release described in the Vedantic literature, then the traditional Indian yogas are a way. If his aim is more integral development, then Aurobindo's approach or Assagioli's psychosynthesis are the kinds of things he's looking for.

"I generally lean toward the non-dogmatic disciplines, such as the Gestalt awareness training that Dick Price and others practiced, and the integral yoga that Aurobindo did."

On the weakness inherent in transformational disciplines: "No human discipline is immune to excess or lack of wisdom. All programs for human betterment may be undermined by ignorance, incompetence, or psychopathology. Indeed all transformative activity is affected by many genetic and psychosocial diseases that afflict human functioning in general."

How about Murphy's own discipline? What is his spiritual practice? Meditation continues to occupy an important part of his daily routine. "I love to meditate," he told me. He does it twice daily—once in the morning and again in the late afternoon, 20-40 minutes each time.

Running is also a part of his daily regimen, and has been since the early 1970s. He's much more serious about it than the typical twice-a-week jogger. He runs every day and he does distances. He ran in his first marathon at age 43 and, since reaching age 50, has competed nationally in master's track. In 1984, at the national championships in Houston, he ran the 1,500 meter race in 4:35, finishing third in a field of 15. The competitive aspect has a spiritual dimension that he views as important. "You have to pressure yourself for excellence, and that means transcending something—and to do that is to compete."

Today, in 1987, he is running for himself, but not competitively. He still puts in five miles each day, but none of the endurance training of past years. A change in his personal life since becoming a father has resulted in a restructuring of his daily schedule. As he puts it, "having a little boy, two-years-old, takes the edge off strenuous training." Having a young child, while requiring a cut-back in his running program, has not dampened his long-term desire to compete. He looks forward in four years to competing again in master's track, this time in the age 60 bracket. "I'd like to see if I can win one national championship."

One of Murphy's unfulfilled dreams—something that makes his eyes dance and his voice rise—is a sports center that could have a training facility with room for track and field events. "I know what I want," he states. "It's a big sports facility where you'd join philosophy, sport, and mysticism." Someday, perhaps, he will find a way to make this dream come true.