



Krotona Institute of Theosophy, Ojai, California

Krotona is an international center inspired by a vision of the oneness of all life and dedicated to the spiritual awakening of the human family.

Farewell House 50 Ananya Sri Ram

As one enters the Krotona campus, on the lefthand side sat an old house on a hill. Shaded by the eucalyptus trees and hidden from the road, it was the original (and only house) on the land which became known as the Krotona Institute of Theosophy. It held a special place for many of us here at Krotona as it connected us with a history that has long since passed. It was first known as the Kerfoot house, because it was the home of the Kerfoot family who owned the land. There is not much known about Mr. Kerfoot except that he was an orchardist, found his wife through a mail order catalogue (common in those days), and added rooms on to the house as his family grew. When Krotona moved from Hollywood to Ojai, the house served as a temporary home for Eugene and Mattie Munson who were basically the first residents of Krotona. Mr. Munson was instrumental in moving the Krotona community to Ojai and oversaw the development of the first buildings while living in the house. As time passed, and houses needed addresses for postal purposes, the Kerfoot house became known as House 50.

The driveway to House 50 is unassuming due to it being near the entrance of the campus. In one's comings and goings by car, it is easy to miss. Several visitors to the campus, while meditatively walking along, have found themselves ambling up the driveway and greeted by a very powerful presence that made them feel expansive and warm. It was not uncommon to find strangers sitting on a boulder at the top of the driveway enjoying the experience.

For those who are sensitive, the unseen Presence at Krotona is remarked upon quite often. It has been mentioned in some circles how the whole Ojai Valley itself is protected and that many areas in the valley have a special presence or force field. This seems likely considering the Chumash have lived here and have honored the valley for



thousands of years. The long held common teaching held by Theosophists and the Native American community is that all existence, whether seen or unseen, is one.

It did not surprise any of us when a member from the community mentioned the presence at House 50. She shared that the deva (angel) needed some attention, and that it was important for Krotona that something be done about the condition of House 50. While we all agreed, the difficulty was that House 50 needed more work than Krotona could afford. Things would have to wait. In the meantime, another visitor to the campus made it clear that the deva had nothing to do

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

with House 50. The deva would remain for as long as it needed to whether the house was there or not. This gave comfort to many of us who felt there was something special about the area.

House 50 was finally taken down at the end of April of this year. It was not an easy decision and many at Krotona felt sad. The costs outweighed the benefits and the issue became one of safety when children from the surrounding neighborhood repeatedly vandalized the house even after attempts were made to close it up and avoid further damage. This only underscored the need to raze it.

About a week after the demolition, a walker

went to visit the land. Strolling up the driveway, she was greeted by the familiar presence. She stated that the energy was a little weaker than before as the land had been disturbed, but it was made clear as things settled, the vibrancy would come back. Like anything that is healing, time and care was needed. Krotona would like to recognize the Kerfoot house and the protection and comfort it provided to those who occupied it. Despite the change in setting, visitors regularly mention the feeling of peace that pervades them as they enter the campus. For some, it is without question that this is our dear deva expressing its Presence as it provides solace to all who visit and live at Krotona. What a blessing! For this, we are eternally grateful. 🙏

Martin Leiderman Retires From the Krotona Board

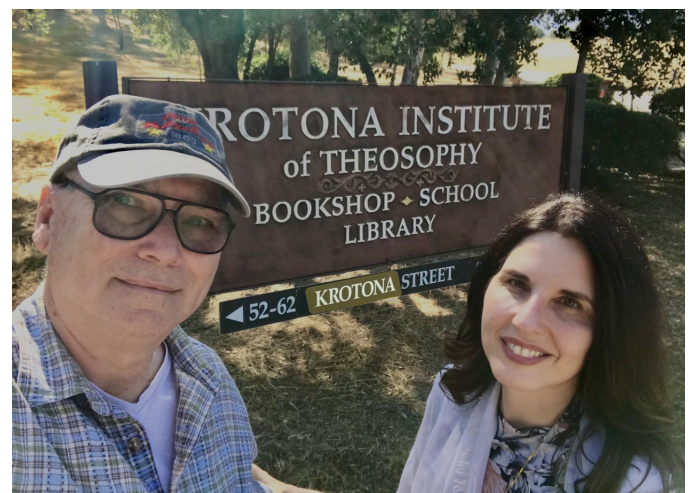
After serving for 18 years on Krotona's Board of Trustees, Martin Leiderman retired in September 2024. A much-loved and highly respected student of Theosophy, Martin has lectured extensively around the world in both English and Spanish for the Adyar TS as well as various other Theosophical groups. His warm, playful, and animated style lightens his deep knowledge of difficult theosophical concepts. Bringing such ideas to life, Martin creates understanding and enthusiasm for many who attend his lectures.

With an industrial engineering background, Martin worked for 37 years in avionics, retiring in 2019 as a Quality Control Manager. His theosophical background combined with his managerial experience made him a valuable contributor to important decisions regarding Krotona's future direction and operations. He often looked at a problem from various angles.

One vision that Martin believes is highly important to Krotona is that it always remain

an international center for deep theosophical study where students can come to connect with nature. As the world becomes more chaotic, this seems even more crucial.

Martin's insights, wisdom, and guidance on the Board will be greatly missed. We thank him deeply for his many years of selfless service. 🙏



Martin and his wife Susan take a selfie at the entrance to Krotona.

Wildlife in My Backyard

Susan Johnson

Krotona's quiet parklike setting is ideal for contemplation and reflection. But unless one lives or stays at Krotona, it is easy not to realize that much of Krotona's charm is derived from the wildlife that also shares the grounds. I have been fortunate to be a witness to the various creatures who bless our land as many of them come to rest, feed, or drink in my yard.



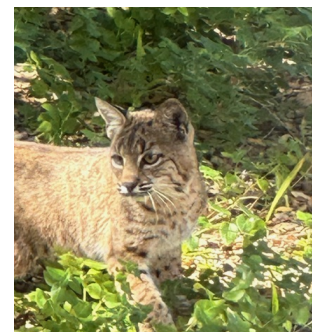
I was quite surprised one day as a roadrunner jumped up to eat bugs from my living room window sill while looking me straight in the eye from just a few feet away. A typically elusive bird, he returned the following day for a proper photograph with a lovely display of his royal crown and long shimmering tail.

The handsome buck featured in the photo spent several months in and around my yard. Settled in and sleeping right outside my dining room window, we would often startle each other when I went into the backyard early in the morning. One night, I ran over to the window to see what had tripped the outside motion sensor, only to find myself literally face to face with him staring right into the house. The tiny 4x2 pond in my front yard brings all kinds of feathered and furry guests for water. The antlers of this buck

regularly drag the water plants everywhere, but of course, each morning I return them to their preferred place. Coyotes, lynx, rabbits, and frogs have all been observed using this little watering hole.

We have several families of red lynx here at Krotona. The North American red lynx is a larger type of bobcat characterized by the bright white and black triangles and tufts on the back of their ears. They tend to hang out in my yard at any time of the day. Once I snapped an amazing photo of a curious baby lynx and my equally curious house cat, Tucker, looking at one another nose-to-nose through the glass of the front door. Mama lynx was just a few feet away in the yard. Lynxes can often be seen near the road in front of the library and behind the Krotona School.

Two-legged, four-legged, or winged, all are welcome here at Krotona. It is what adds to its beauty, but more importantly, its harmony due to Krotona's practice of ahimsa and its relationship with the natural world around it. For those looking to retreat into a slower and more gentle way of life, you are welcome to come and experience it for yourself. 🐾



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Krotona Remembers the Ellwoods

As we were preparing to go to press, we received word of Robert Ellwood's passing. Just a week prior, his beloved wife, Gracia Fay, had also passed. We offer this remembrance as a token of gratitude to a couple who brought light and wisdom to Krotona.

--Eds

Robert and Gracia Fay Ellwood moved to Krotona in February 2001, accompanied by their three cats—Isaac the Syrian, Angelique, and Lancelot. For a time, Gracia Fay served in the library and Robert in the bookshop. Both were members of *The Krotonian* editorial board, and Robert served on the Krotona Institute board for over 15 years. They were prolific writers and frequent lecturers, and their presence infused the campus with vitality and warmth. After nearly 20 years at Krotona, they moved, due to health concerns, to live with their daughter, Fay Ellen, and her family. Their departure was keenly felt by the community.

The Ellwoods met while studying at the University of Chicago Divinity School and married in 1965. Their shared love of literature and philosophy enriched their life together. They were active members of the Jane Austen Society of North America, often hosting candlelight discussions of Austen's work, and were also admirers of Tolkien. Their academic lives were deeply rooted in world religions and philosophical inquiry. Their compassion for animals and care for the Earth were consistent threads in their lives. Remarkably, they even shared the same birthday—July 17—and for sixty years, they embodied a true partnership, always supporting one another's work.

Gracia Fay was a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and was known for her gentle greeting: "Hello, Friend." Like Robert, who published many theosophical



books, she was a writer, and served as editor of *The Peaceable Table*, "a vegetarian journal for Quakers and people of other faiths," with Robert's support. She is especially well known in Theosophical Order of Service (TOS) circles for her booklet *Are Animals Our Neighbors?* that advocates for a cruelty-free diet from a humanitarian perspective.

The couple were deeply involved in the TOS Healing Circle, hosting weekly rituals in their home. Their love for animals extended to these healing practices, inspiring the idea of an animal healing network within the TOS. In the quiet evenings at Krotona, it was not uncommon to see Robert and Gracia Fay walking peacefully around the hill, their cats close behind.

Krotona is deeply grateful for the many years of their steady, joyful presence. We wish them peace and love as they journey onward

Krotona's New Board Member

In October of 2024, Carol Nicholson was invited to join the Krotona board. No stranger to Krotona, Carol lived on campus for eight years. She volunteered at the library and bookshop for two years before taking over as the bookshop manager in 2013.

Carol has served on various theosophical boards. She was president of the Stil-Light Theosophical Center, was president and board member of the Pumpkin Hollow Retreat Center in Craryville, NY, and served as a board member for the national TS center in Wheaton, Illinois. She most recently served two terms on the national Theosophical Order of Service US (TOSUS) board.

The daughter of Bill and Shirley Nicholson, Carol's parents met at Krotona seventy years ago, both having found Theosophy while in college. The couple

served at Olcott for ten years. After her husband's death, Shirley moved to Krotona in 1991 and served as Resident Head and School Director.

"Mom and Dad were both very committed to Theosophy and supporting theosophical centers. It is an honor to serve Krotona as a board member and to follow in their footsteps." 🐾



New Resident Danelys Valcarcel

Danelys became a member of the Theosophical Society in Cuba in her youth and maintains a life membership in the US. While at Olcott, she was the assistant librarian and worked at the information desk. With a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts, she has trained as a Waldorf, Montessori, and a Krishnamurti school teacher. She worked as an Early Childhood teacher at a Waldorf School for many years and continues to serve as the coordinator for the Early Childhood Program of the Waldorf Training Institute of Chicago.

Having visited Krotona for many years,



whether on retreat or taking part in the Partner's program, Danelys eventually moved to Krotona in September of 2024. She now volunteers in the Sanctuary of Connections garden. Besides gardening, Danelys maintains the water treatment and algae control for the pond in the Sanctuary as well as in the Cascade garden by the library. She can occasionally be found at the library helping with book mending and cataloguing. As an artist and lover of the natural world, Danelys feels incredibly grateful to be a resident of Krotona and part of such a loving and caring community of dedicated spiritual seekers. 🐾

All Our Relations: Field Notes

Maria Parisen

Wildfire prevention began a month earlier this spring. Regulations require more clearing along roads, homes, and fence lines. Extensive clearing, while essential for Krotona and our neighbors' safety, takes its toll on trees, gardens, meadows, and the wild animals who share our land. The adjustment and eventual adaptation takes time.



An arborist advised the removal of two elder pines and one eucalyptus tree. Due to physical instability or ill health, each was in danger of falling with great damage to others or nearby structures. As the trees were sensitive to subtle impressions, the need for removal was conveyed to each and to the surrounding grove. We shared gratitude for their special presence and help through the years, and affirmed support for their overall well-being.

Understandably, responses to tree removal, heavy pruning and meadow mowing have varied. Along with appreciation and acceptance have come resistance and sadness. One morning near a long, high row of cut branches, an angry visitor berated workmen for what she saw was an uncaring assault on nature. The next day along the same pathway with another view, an artist set her easel. She quietly painted a brightly colored landscape, cloudless skies, hazy distant mountains, a rounded wooden gate as portal. She spoke of Krotona's beauty, of resonance with nature.

We learn and grow through all our relations. Cooperation for water conservation is another challenge. Much rainwater, precious during a lingering drought, has been lost down roadways. Between the library parking lot and main road, a narrow island is being restructured for catchment. A swale consisting of a heart-shaped, shallow depression now receives water from the hillside and road above. During recent spring storms, the swale caught nearly two feet of rainwater, becoming a pond which released rainwater deeply into its dry bed over the next week. Bounded by rocks and surrounded by native and wildlife-friendly plantings, the swale's rainwater also nourishes nearby oaks and a sturdy carob tree.



Gardener extraordinaire Liz Cantemir and daughter Juniper.

Many thanks to resident volunteer Liz Cantemir who accompanied both the arborist and tree service specialist on their evaluation rounds and is following up on recommendations. She and husband, Chris Lawson also removed all native plantings in the pine removal site for protection and are now restoring the cascade garden enjoyed by many visitors. They have also planted much of the new swale. Arturo Sanchez and John Ruth helped with rockwork and mulching. Resident Head Elena Dovalsantos provided hardy young plants and is overseeing the island's design and development. 🌱

Dear Friends,

Following our centennial year, we entered 2025 with a renewed focus on three areas:

- Hosting programs that deepen understanding of theosophical principles and their application in daily life.*
- Offering a peaceful, beautiful retreat environment with welcoming accommodation for seekers; and*
- Preparing members for future roles as theosophical speakers.*

This year, we were honored to receive a generous gift from the George and Kathleen Anderson Charitable Trust to start a Certificate in Theosophical Studies (CTS) project. This program is designed to help fill gaps in theosophical knowledge and, more importantly, to prepare members to become effective Theosophical speakers. We look forward to sharing more details as the project develops.

In January, the Partners in Theosophy program, led by Pablo Sender, welcomed young Theosophists to their second year of leadership training. Participants enjoyed a week of fun and learning, practicing public speaking and facilitation in a supportive environment. We are grateful to the Kern Foundation for their continued support of this vital initiative.

The Krotona School, under the new direction of Ananya Sri Ram, offered a rich array of programs, including:

- A class on The Voice of the Silence led by President Linda Oliveira and her husband Pedro,*
- A Sufi retreat with Imam Jamal Rachman, and*
- An in-person screening of Teach Me to Be Wild: A Story of Hurt Children and Their Animal Healers.*

This fall, we're excited to introduce a new 7-week online course, "Unveiling Theosophy", which includes a live discussion forum online, and concludes with an on-site experiential weekend at Krotona. Details are available at krotonainstitute.org.

Thanks to your generous donations, we've renovated three rooms in the Guesthouse, with further interior improvements planned for the school units. Krotona Hall received a new audio-visual system following last year's installation of acoustic panels.

We are also developing the island near the library parking lot into a demonstration garden for environmental sustainability. It will provide a serene seating area where visitors can enjoy a view of the hills and the famed "pink moment." John Ruth, through his non-profit "Viewpoints," is collaborating with Maria Parisen on this and other landscaping projects across the campus.

None of this would be possible without your heartfelt and generous support. We hope your visits to Krotona continue to nourish and inspire. Please consider visiting and see firsthand the impact of your contributions.

With deep gratitude,

Elena Dovalsantos

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees,
books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in
everything. I would not change it.*

--- William Shakespeare

As a Theosophical community, Krotona:

1. Nurtures living in harmony and compassion with self, others, and nature.
2. Inspires spiritual transformation through an earnest quest for Truth and living the ageless wisdom, Theosophy.
3. Offers a peaceful, welcoming environment to encourage a life of self-inquiry, study, meditation, and selfless service.