

Honoring Ecovillage and Sustainability Activist and Global Ecovillage Network Pioneer Liora Adler, 1946–2024

Edited by Diana Leafe Christian

Liora Adler.



Albert Bates

On April 29 of this year beloved ecovillage activist Liora Adler passed away. She was an early member of GEN International (Global Ecovillage Network) and later honored as a “GEN Elder” by that organization. She is survived by her husband, Permaculture teacher Andrew Langford, and will be greatly missed by her many ecovillage friends and colleagues worldwide.

In 1968, Liora was part of a traveling theater troupe, the Illuminated Elephants. In 1982, the group bought and moved onto on a five-acre plot of land near the small town of Tepoztlán, about a 90-minute drive south of Mexico City. There they founded the ecovillage of Huehucoyotl and settled down to country living. That is, until one of their founders, Alberto Ruz, wanted to travel and perform again and so, with Liora, fellow Huehucoyotl cofounder Giovanni Ciarlo, and others, launched the Rainbow Caravan of Peace. This bus caravan toured Latin America for 13 years, giving educational performances and instruction on environmental education and appropriate technologies, and inspiring indigenous activism.

Liora was a longtime director of Global Village Institute, a nonprofit founded by Albert Bates of The Farm Community in Tennessee; and also of the Global Ecovillage Network; the Ecovillage Network of the Americas; and CASA (Council of Sustainable Settlements of the Americas), the GEN regional network in Latin America. With her husband Andrew, she started Gaia University in 2005, offering classes in various aspects of sustainability, ecovillage,

and permaculture topics to students worldwide. She was a board member of GEN-US, the United States regional GEN organization that publishes this magazine.

Here are highlights of her long and active life, written by some of her longtime ecovillage colleagues:

Ecovillage activist Albert Bates:

In 1996, in breakout sessions at the first International Conference on Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities in Scotland, we founders of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) created three potential GEN Regions—the Europe/Africa Regional Network, Asia/Oceania Regional Network, and the Americas Regional Network. I was appointed Secretary for the Americas and tasked with forming a regional network of ecovillages.

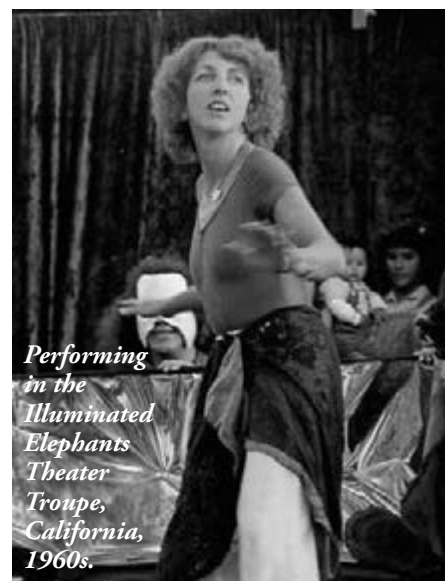
Thanks to Ross and Hildur Jackson and the generous support of Gaia Trust in Denmark, I was given enough budget to establish an office at The Farm Community in Tennessee and recruit staff for the office. I closed my law practice and embraced the work full-time. I had accountability to 1.3 billion stakeholders!

As I saw it, my first task was to collaborate with any closely aligned initiatives. That included the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC, now the Foundation for Intentional Community), the North American Bioregional Congress, ABRASCA in Brazil, the *Consejo de Visiones* in México, the Permaculture convergences, the international cohousing movement, scholarly groups like the Communal Studies and Utopian Studies associations, and various parts of the United Nations and government development agencies. The field is broad. It also includes professional groups of planners, architects, and builders; organic gardeners; alternative currencies and finance; peak oil; biophysical economics; and much more, many with annual conferences, trade journals, and research centers.

In the fall of 1996, Farm member Gayla Groom and I traveled to attend an “*Aldea Temporal por la Paz*” (Temporary Village of Peace) at the *Consejos de Visiones de Guardianes de la Tierra* (Council of Visions of Guardians of Earth) at Meztitla, a Boy Scout camp on the outskirts of Tepoztlán, Mexico. The late Alberto Ruz gave a slide show one evening that caught my eye because his third slide was a familiar picture (to me) of white school buses leaving San Francisco in 1971 to found an intentional community in Tennessee, The Farm. What Alberto proposed was to embark that week upon a similar voyage—*La Caravana Arcoíres por la Paz* (Rainbow Peace Caravan)—to travel the length and breadth of Latin America from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego and from the Sierra Madre to



*In the early days
of the Illuminated
Elephants Traveling
Theater Troupe,
California, 1960s.
Liora
is in the
back row,
far left.*



*Performing
in the
Illuminated
Elephants
Theater
Troupe,
California,
1960s.*

the mouth of the Amazon.

As I wandered the grounds of the festival I happened upon one of the organizers, not only of the *Consejo*, but of *La Caravana* as well. She was dressed all in white and part of the original performing troupe Alberto had assembled years earlier, the Illuminated Elephants. She was a cofounder of the troupe's ecovillage, Huehucoyotl (which means "the old, old coyote") in the hills above Tepoztlán. She took us to her home and introduced us to her fellow ecovillagers and the *Caravanistas*. This was how I met Liora.

In the years that followed I would entrust more than half our Global Village Institute's annual budget to Liora and *La Caravana*, with no strings attached. She, Alberto, and their merry band of *Caravanistas* toured 17 countries in 13 years, hosting hundreds of events for nature and social justice, linking arms with social, environmental, and indigenous movements throughout Latin America. The *Caravanistas* created peace villages at the World Social Forums in Porto Alegre and Belem de Pará, Brazil; Caracas, Venezuela; Santiago, Chile; and Mexico City.

In 2001, we received a grant from the US Department of State's Bureau of Cultural Affairs to convene all the women's development and rights groups in Ecuador into a Women's Peace Village. This included 140 women leaders of women's NGOs and 40 indigenous representatives. Over the course of a month, we held trainings on using email and cell phones, grantwriting, facilitation and consensus, child development, crafts and fair trade, and more. An hour-long Spanish-language video helped to replicate the program in other Latin American countries.

Over several years *La Caravana's* work was also generously funded by the government of Brazil. While the ecovillage network expanded ever so slowly in the US and Canada, it burgeoned in the global South, eventually becoming the Council of Sustainable Settlements of Latin America (CASA) and founding more than twice as many new ecovillages and conservation communities each year in Latin America as compared to ecovillage start-ups in the North.

La Caravana cofounder Alberto Ruz wrote in 2020: "The model of these meetings has been adopted by a large number of groups, not only in the Americas but in the rest of the world, and today they are replicating, each with its own characteristics, but main-

taining principles of inclusion, ecumenism, and plurality. This is the pulsating heart of our ecovillages, giving room by sharing all the visions that point to the creation of a new planetary paradigm."

When the Global Ecovillage Network—GEN—founded its Council with two delegates from each region, it was Liora and myself whom the Americas chose to represent the Americas. In 2003 it was again the Americas' turn to host the GEN Council meeting, and Liora organized the *Llamada de Condor* (Call of the Condor) in the Sacred Valley of Peru—more than 700 people from 36 countries gathering near Machu Picchu on the Summer Solstice.

In 2002, the Chinese government, inspired by a visit to Liaoning Province by architect William McDonough, announced it would promote the formation of 8,000 ecovillages by creating official standards and placing top-down design and development into its national five-year plan, to be guided by the National Academy of Architecture. While top-down design of ecovillages is not usual, the lead for the initiative was taken by Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping. Madame Peng convened the "First Global Forum on Standards and Goals for Eco-Villages and Eco-Regions in Beijing" in 2004. The Farm's Ecovillage Training Center sent Liora Adler, her husband Andrew Langford, and Farm members Paul Gaskin and Valerie Seitz to participate. Many local leaders vied to get their villages and regions approved by meeting the new goals. The forum produced a National Ecovillage Construction Standard, National Demonstration Ecovillage Construction Indicators, a Guide for Construction of Beautiful Countryside, and an Evaluation for the Construction of Beautiful Villages. From that process, 107 top-down ecovillages in China were certified by the government and some 100 more grew from the bottom-up to form the Sunshine Ecovillage Network in China.

After more than a decade of this work, Liora and I retired from the GEN Council and went on to the next stage of our work. The first classes of Gaia University, founded by Liora and her husband Andrew Langford, were held at our Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm in Tennessee. Also with Andrew, Liora founded Cambia, an innovative permaculture-based system to reform the almond-growing paradigm in California's Central Valley, a method using half the water usually needed for almonds in that water-scarce area, while multiplying carbon drawdown by 500 percent.

Liora and Andy soon joined the Ecosystem Restoration Communities now spreading around the world as volunteer efforts to reverse climate change with natural solutions. They became the Knowledge Exchange Coordinators of the Ecosystem Restoration Camps Foundation.

In 2007, Liora helped The Farm win a \$50,000 rural development grant to organize our county seat into Tennessee's first Transition Town. City fathers of Hohenwald, Tennessee passed municipal resolutions to make it happen. An Elephant Sanctuary welcome center popped up on Main Street. A large biochar production plant was planned for an industrial park to handle municipal waste. Community gardens sprang up. An annual Sunshine Festival closed the city's streets. An alternative currency—ChamberBucks—was issued by the local Chamber of Commerce.

Liora's creative spirit knew no bounds. Born in New York City in 1946 and spending part of her childhood in Israeli kibbutz before graduating college, she lived for many years in Colombia and Mexico and raised a family. She started Millennio, a village women's sewing cooperative and a men's campesino collaborative, and in 1968 cofounded the Illuminated Elephants Traveling Theater Company, Huehucoyotl Ecovillage in 1982, and *La Caravana* in 1996.

Over the past several years, she and Andrew put their attention into developing iCAAFS—the International Cooperation for the Accreditation of Ancient Future Skills—as well as a regenerative agriculture project in collaboration with UNDP and the Department of Organics of the Agriculture Ministry of Syria, training more than 100 field and extension agents in permaculture, biodynamic, and syntropic techniques, with those trainers eventually training thousands of others in the region.

Dancer, educator, administrator, artist, lover of life, entrepreneur, academic, performer, and woman for all the ages—that was the Liora Adler I knew and loved. Her last words to me were to remind me of *buen vivir*—good living.

Maybe we are climate pessimists who've despaired at accomplishing lasting change. Maybe we've given up on politics. But as Liora demonstrated, we can do what we can for the Earth and still live a good life. And in that, like Liora, we can become the change we want to see.

Ecovillage activist Giovanni Ciarlo:

I first met Liora in 1978 when she showed up at the Round Mountain Ranch community in Ukiah, California with her then-husband, Baru Adler, and their small child. They had left the east coast to search communities across the US and somehow found the radical psychology group from Berkeley that came to form an intentional community. I was living there with a gypsy band of young artists and activists. We were guests in the newly forming community and Liora immediately felt a kinship with our group and didn't hesitate to join in our street theatre productions and social activism. One of the first things I remember Liora and her young family doing was to purchase a small house across town, slated for demolition, and then moving it to the ranch on the outskirts of town so they could join the rest of us on the land.

She was there in the early days of what became The Illuminated Elephants Traveling Theatre Company, our "tribe." Later they bought a used school bus and converted it to a living and traveling home, adding it to our growing caravan, now numbering five converted buses and a horse trailer. She named her bus Hikayana.

Liora loved to dance, sing, and perform on stage, so it was natural for her to gravitate towards our theatrical performances and contribute with her dance, songs, and organizational skills. We soon incorporated Hebrew dances and songs that she brought into our productions as we exchanged cultural showpieces from our varied backgrounds with audiences throughout California and Mexico. In 1980 our caravan crossed into Mexico and toured the country, bringing our performances to traditional and indigenous Mexican villages and cities with a message of cultural understanding, peace, and environmental awareness.

Liora was still with the group in 1982 when we decided to settle down, purchase land, and develop our own ecovillage, Huehucoyotl, in the central mountains of Mexico. At that time Liora was not quite ready to stay in one place, so she continued to pursue her passions in social activism in other ways, including becoming a voice for GEN. She later moved to Colombia, returning to Huehucoyotl for short stays until 2006 when she and her new partner/husband, Andrew Langford, started to consider Huehucoyotl

Liora teaching a class in Gaia University, the educational organization she founded with her husband Andrew Langford.



Albert Bates

Teachers, students, and administrators of Gaia University.



Jennifer English

their home and moved there permanently shortly after. There they continued to develop Gaia University and a number of ecosystem restoration projects until her passing in April 2024. Before that, Liora spent several years traveling and performing with The Caravana Arcoiris por la Paz, which left Huehucoyotl in 1996 to discover and network with intentional communities throughout Latin America. Her accomplishments were too many to name here. Others will surely address those.

Her health took a turn in the last few years, but that did not stop her from continuing to work, organize, mentor young people, and live her life to the fullest. She will be remembered fondly and missed by all who got to know and work with her, and most especially by her family and friends, her son, her grandchildren, and her loving husband.

Ecovillage activist Jennifer Morgan:

In 2004, I was working as the Program Director at the Ecovillage Training Center (ETC) at The Farm in Tennessee. That August, Liora Adler and Andrew Langford visited Liora's dear friend and colleague, Albert Bates, to participate in board meetings for Global Village Institute. Within moments of the visit, my head began buzzing with stories of their birthing of Gaia University. After eight years of fantasizing about developing a study-abroad program, when I heard the radiant, dazzling light that was Liora speak of change-making her vision beckoned me nearer. Within days, Liora and I were scheming about turning the ETC into Gaia U's first regional center. Her passion and energy were truly remarkable. Liora was not only charismatic and persuasive, but she exuded an infectious enthusiasm that ignited a fire within me, as it did with so many others she inspired. As Liora and Andy left Tennessee, I eagerly agreed to help host a Gaia University design charette for that fall and another for the following spring. We also began spearheading conversations with an organizing group on The Farm. I later co-hosted 14 Gaia U orientations worldwide and represented Gaia U at multiple international convergences and gatherings, often at Liora's side. Both founders of Gaia U supported me in organizing the first Financial Permaculture Summit, our local Transition Initiative, the Summit for Sustainable Tennessee, and the 10th Continental Bioregional Congress. Their groundbreaking work at Gaia U revolutionized educational designs through eco-social-based hands-on learning. Liora's transmissible impact was felt by everyone she collaborated with, taught, and touched with her generous shimmer as she lit up any room.

Throughout the next 15 years, Liora remained a consistent mentor and co-creator. She was a visionary elder and master motivator, a designer with unparalleled creativity, and an unwavering advocate for collaborative world change work. Her legacy of contributions to Gaia University International, Huehucoyotl Ecovillage, Council of Visions, the Rainbow Caravan of Peace, Global Ecovillage Network, El Llamado del Condor, the International Cooperation for the Accreditation of Ancient Future Skills, and Cambria, positioned her at the forefront of the ecovillage, Permaculture, bioregional, and facilitation movements. She empowered and inspired countless individuals to take action. I was fortunate to visit with Liora in Tennessee in April and received another spark of motivation just before her transition. Let us all dedicate ourselves to carrying forward the torch of collaborative agency.

Ecovillage activist Daniel Greenberg:

I first met Liora in the early 2000s when we were part of the group that cofounded Gaia Education (and out of which emerged Gaia University). We reconnected at many community gatherings over the years and I'll always remember her as a grounded visionary who was fully committed to co-creating a better world. Whenever Liora was around, I knew we were going to get a lot done and have fun doing it! She easily spoke truth to power while also being tender and vulnerable. I am sad to lose her as a friend and colleague, and I trust her life and her love will continue to ripple out and continue changing the world. 🌱

Albert Bates has been Director of the Global Village Institute for Appropriate Technology since 1984; Director of the Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm in Tennessee since 1994; and Farm resident since 1972. A former attorney, he has argued environmental and civil rights cases before the US Supreme Court, drafted a number of legislative Acts during a 26-year legal career, and served on the steering committee of The Farm's Plenty International nonprofit for 18 years, focusing on relief and development work with indigenous peoples, human rights, and the environment.

Jennifer Morgan (previously Jennifer English) played a pivotal role in the creation of Gaia University and the first regional centers. At the University, Jennifer was an advisor, designer, and teacher for 18 years and the Director of Advisory and Mentor Services for eight years. Jennifer is also the founding president of the Center for Holistic Ecology. She cofounded the Financial Permaculture Institute and chaired the first Transition Town in the Southeast US. Jennifer built and continues to live at Solar Springs, a naturally constructed off-grid lodge and Regenerative Permaculture Farm and community in Tennessee.

Giovanni Ciarlo is a cofounder of Huehucoyotl Ecovillage in Mexico, former Board President of GEN-International, Faculty Advisor for Goddard College in Vermont, Education Director and CEO at Gaia Education, and longtime board member of ENA (Ecovillage Network of the Americas), GENNA (Global Ecovillage Network North America), and GEN-US.

Daniel Greenberg is Co-Director of the Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC); former Education Director, Findhorn Ecovillage; former Board President of GEN International; Founder/Director of Earth Deeds nonprofit and the former educational nonprofit Living Routes Educational Consortium. Daniel has lived at Findhorn Community in Scotland, Auroville in India, and Sirius Community in Massachusetts, where he is still affiliated. He served with Liora as Board Member of GEN-US.

Diana Leafé Christian, Board Member of COMMUNITIES' publisher GEN-US, is author of Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities, and our eight-part article series, "Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors," COMMUNITIES #193, #194, #196, #197, #198, #200, #201, #203. She lives at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina.