



Monthly Meetings

August 16—We'd like to hear from the greater FOSC community, so please share your vision for the Sausal Creek watershed with us at this meeting.

September 20—Long time FOSC member and Landscape Architect/Contractor Michael Thilgen will present an overview of StopWaste.org's Bay Friendly Landscape program, an educational package of sustainable landscaping techniques. Michael will introduce principles and techniques for water conservation, waste reduction, habitat enhancement, water quality, soil health, and stormwater management. He will discuss their application to projects ranging in scale from the home garden to larger public projects.

September 16: Creek to Bay Day 2006

Creek to Bay Day will be held on September 16—please join us, work begins at 9am. To volunteer in Dimond Park, Dimond Canyon, and Barry Place, sign-in at the Dimond Park Scout Hut, behind the Recreation Center at 5860 Hanly Road. To volunteer at the Joaquin Miller Native Plant Nursery, sign-in at 5594 Sanborn Road, behind the Woodminster Amphitheater. Please contact us with questions at 587-9744 or e-mail field@sausalcreek.org. If you'd like to take on a leadership role, please attend our General Meeting at the Dimond Library on August 16. This event is sponsored by the City of Oakland.



**Elliott Varner Smith
1940-2006**

*A Haiku For My Friend
by Sue Morgan.*

Enthused Elliott

Exhilarated by life

Excited too soon.

You often hear people say "live life to the fullest, you never know how much time you'll be here." If there was someone who did just that, it was Elliott Smith, one of FOSC's most loved and loyal members. Elliott passed away on May 16 due to complications from a severe ski accident. We're dedicating this newsletter to him by remembering how he touched our lives. Thank you for living your life to the fullest, Elliott. We miss you.

Three oaks down in Sausal this winter, the last fallen oak was named Elliott, fallen oaks three. Elder Oaksman Sir Elliott took an accidental fall and never got up. He is up there with the swifts and the swallows, forever rooted in the sandy loam of the Sausal banks. Only coincidence he was the oldest FOSC member to fall, and like the fallen oaks, left rich loam for others to grow with.

—Mark J. Rauzon

My best memory of Elliott was a couple of years ago in the spring when the lady bugs were swarming along the Sunset Trail near Palo Seco Creek. We had found them a few days before and let Elliott know so he could photograph them. He set up his camera gear and started taking pictures while the rest of us continued on our seed hike. An hour or so later, we came back and he was still happily photographing. Because he and the camera were so still, however, the lady bugs were gathering all over him and his camera too. So part of his packing up was to gently remove the ladybugs from his gear. I doubt a single bug was squished. I remember how happy he was that day, how delighted with that awesome swarm.

—Nancy Jones

Our relationship with Elliott was mainly from our back decks, which are almost on top of each other. Richard and Elliott felt they had traveled the world leading adventurous lives and now were safe in their beloved bungalows. Diana enjoyed sharing recipes and ingredients over the fence. We both learned so much about birds, wildlife and life itself, living next door to Elliott. We miss him every day. —Diana Surber and Richard Smith

Elliott was a fabulous dancer! I am so grateful that FOSC organized the Eli's event and that I got to dance with Elliot. He was fast, sexy, stylish, and fun. He had several ladies

dazzled, and lined up for their turns. And I thought he was just the sweet guy next to me pulling weeds. —Sheelab Weaver

I remember Elliott as friendly, positive, and helpful. Elliott's enthusiasm for Sausal Creek was infectious, and his willingness to help out admirable. I enjoyed our conversations, and miss his sweet presence. —Kathy Kramer

Elliott and I had a long discussion one day about one of the stumps at the nursery site. Both of us had noticed that it served as a home for a blue-bellied lizard. The stump was filled with holes and cracks, and the lizard could disappear into one and hop out another in a few minutes. We often would watch the lizard sunning in the morning to get moving for the day. One day we noticed that the city had cut about 1½ feet off the top of the stump. The lizard was gone, and Elliott and I wondered if he had hitched a ride in the top of the stump that disappeared, or had fled his home in horror as the saw arrived. Both of us preferred to believe that the lizard was off on some adventure in the world. Elliott was a very special man who touched a lot of souls. I feel sad when I think of the loss and also feel grateful for the time I was able to spend with him. —Eleanor Dunn

I think we were all blown away by Elliott's spirit. It was contagious. If he was excited about something, so were you. I think that is why so many of his neighbors got involved with FOSC. I was nine months pregnant when I heard that Elliott passed away so I was struck by how closely these two lives would pass each other without meeting. I had always felt they were supposed to meet at least once, for some reason. Don't you just have that feeling about people sometimes? Well, we were still without a middle name for our daughter. With this in mind, I again looked through lists of baby names. This time I started with "E", especially "El" and I found it, Ela. While I didn't name her Elliott, her middle name will remind me of him and remind me to tell her to be generous, kind and loving to all around her, just like Elliott was.

—Charlotte Bell Acharya

My primary memory of Elliot was that when I ran into him on many volunteer days, he seemed to have a way to make you feel that the best place you could be at that point in time was right where you were, volunteering your time to help out the Friends of Sausal Creek.

—Mark Lane

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Friends of Sausal Creek

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I knew Elliott as a regular. He and his camera were such a regular during the days of the big Sausal Creek improvement projects. I always appreciated his generous, brave spirit and his artistic eye. It's sad not to have him around documenting FOSC's efforts with his camera. And it's just plain old sad to not be touched by his kindness any longer. I expect he's hovering somewhere above Dimond Canyon with a smile on his face. Best wishes always, Elliott.

—Stephanie Reed

The first time I ever went down to Sausal Creek to help with the native plant restoration project, I wore my thirty-year old red vest. I must admit to a perverse pride at keeping items of clothing way past their intended lifespan. "Nnnnice vest!" said a man behind me. Although it was considered quite stylish back in the 70's, who would EVER admire my vest today? You can imagine my surprise when I turned around, and there stood a man wearing a nearly identical ancient red vest! That is how I first met Elliott Smith. It turned out that we had many other things in common besides just our vests, and I spent many happy hours working beside him, hours more fun for me when Elliott showed up.

I learned from Elliott's sister Judy that he was wearing his red vest at the time of the terrible skiing accident. I felt some comfort knowing that on that day, he was having fun with his family in a place that he loved, and that he was wearing his old favorite red vest.



And I realized that to me, the vest was a symbol for the man himself. After all, most people don't keep the same clothes for thirty years. They also don't keep the same friends, the same youthful enthusiasm for life, or the same

idealistic commitment to their values. But Elliott Smith was not "most people." My life was enriched for having known him, and I shall miss him greatly.

—Laurie Kunit

When I found out that Elliott had left us I sat down and wrote, "Sir Elliott of Sausalshire, You can't leave us now. We'll miss you too much." Some time has passed now, and it is still true that I miss him too much. The Friends of Sausal Creek have suffered a great loss. Elliott was our guardian angel, always monitoring the talk on our email lists, giving feedback and encouragement and then when a project struck his fancy—he'd jump in two feet firmly planted on the ground and ready for action.

As we all know, Elliott had a boundless love for our planet and all of its fascinating life. I loved to talk about plants with him. His fresh eye would always have me seeing some

new and wondrous things that I previously took for granted. Last winter when we realized we needed to stabilize a section of creek bank, I showed Elliott how to do willow staking. A month later, when we came back and saw that they were successfully leafing out, Elliott was elated. So profound was this new mystery of creekside plant life that he talked about it for the next month and showed it to anyone who would come look.



Elliott would also get really jazzed by the success of a work day. Last Earth Day, he was so ecstatic at the progress he and his crew had made removing broom and acacia in Dimond Canyon that when he was done he jumped in his car and zoomed up to the nursery where a different work event was still in progress. He bounded through the gate and plunked himself down in the midst of the chaos—like a puppy ready to play—to tell us the good news.

Elliott particularly loved to work by the creek with high school students. And whenever I needed a crew leader to do some very arduous task, he would come at the job with an infectious enthusiasm. The kids loved to work with him because he was so positive—all the time in the face of everything—about the restoration work. He got kids involved and happily working. And he had a secret method for engaging people that I've only too late come to truly understand and appreciate.

Truth is, I used to give Elliott a hard time about leaning on his shovel and shooting the breeze. I'd kid him about doing a great job propping up the shovel and he'd kid me about being a slave driver. Now I realize that what Elliott was really doing was making all of the volunteers comfortable and happy to be there, working, on a hot sweaty day.

Elliott Varner Smith was the quintessential Friend. He was part of the reason why folks liked to come out and work along the creek. He loved to alternately work up a good sweat and then stop to prop up the shovel and tell a good yarn. I was lucky to have known and worked with him. I will hold that unique mixture of playful malice and genuine joy for life close and think of it as Elliott's gift to all who knew him.

—Kristen Hopper

To support the good work of FOSC through a donation or for details about ongoing meetings and projects, please visit our website at www.sausalcreek.org.