



# University of the Trees: one man's vision

## Christopher Hills: University of the Trees' enigmatic founder

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

**BOULDER CREEK** — Is Christopher Hills a humanitarian genius or just another dime-store guru?

The truth about the founder of the University of the Trees depends largely on where the observer stands.

Unfortunately, Hills himself is unable to shed much light on the topic, as he declined to be interviewed for this story.

"He does not give interviews. He's got too much to do," explained Deborah Rozman, an administrator at Microalgae International and one of Hills' students.

But no discussion of the University of the Trees or Microalgae International could be complete without discussing their enigmatic founder.

Hills and the members of the University of the Trees are suspicious of media attention because of an article printed in a San Jose newspaper in 1980 which hinted it was a cult.

For that reason, The Sentinel has had to rely on the words of others and Hills' background as outlined in several press releases distributed by the University of the Trees Press public relations office.

Hills spoke with this reporter briefly while attending the groundbreaking for the Boulder Creek Library.

He described himself as a philosopher and someone who has studied wisdom. "I am only in business to feed the world. I haven't taken a penny for myself," Hills said. "I don't know anybody who has created so much wealth and taken so little for himself."

Hills got into the business of "feeding the world" after spending several years as a spice importer in Jamaica, according to press releases.

A native of Grimsby, England, Hills reportedly made a fortune in the business and retired when he was 30 "to become a research physicist and writer of philosophical works."

Hills founded the University of the Trees here in 1973, when he began to give lectures on his views of consciousness, philosophy and religion.

He synthesizes ideas from Eastern and Western philosophies with physics and biology, sprinkled with pop culture references to explain the origins of consciousness.

He has written "more than two dozen books," according to the University of the Trees press office. Among them: "The Nuclear Evolution," a 1,000-page tome in which Hills, among other things,

categorizes personality types by their aura colors and charts the course of human consciousness; "The Golden Egg," his views on inflation, the economy and how to gain wealth; and "Creative Conflict," his system for resolving differences of opinion.

It is difficult to encapsulate the eclectic philosopher's ideas, but some themes emerge from a reading of the introduction in the latest University of the Trees Community Handbook.

Hills postulates "nuclear evolution," a process of freeing the brain from the mundane matters of survival so that it may evolve into a superintelligence. By controlling the metabolism of the brain, people will be able to eliminate hate and prejudice, Hills believes.

Nuclear evolution is defined in a 1981 community handbook as "the philosophy originated by Hills based on models in nature, particularly the example of the inner nucleus in an atom which has an energy that is very excited and alive. In human terms, it can mean the evolution of consciousness, penetrating the ego and experiencing the deep core of your being."

Writes Hills: "The whole idea of nuclear evolution is how to whip your consciousness into such an intensity that it burns away the old ideas. There's no separation between yourself and anyone else. That is what I call the experience and vision of nuclear evolution. And it is within us all. It's God's gift of Himself to Man."

When that power is realized, mankind will have the ability to communicate through telepathy, Hills believes.

One of the steps to freeing the mind from lower-level activity is to create an independent source of wealth, so that people can spend more time on this higher plain. This is the *raison d'être* for Hills' economic ventures, among them the University of the Trees Press and Light Force Spirulina.

Members of the group routinely refer to Hills by the title of "doctor." The 56-year-old Englishman received a Ph.D. from the small, state-approved University of Humanistic Studies in San Diego in 1982. He also has a doctorate from the University of the Trees.

Hills lives in Boulder Creek with his wife, Norah, a homeopathic healer who also has written books for University of the Trees Press.

Hills, alternately described as "charismatic" and "aloof" by those who have worked with him, is without a doubt the cornerstone of the University of the Trees.



Founder Christopher Hills

A core of about 40 persons has made a spiritual commitment to his teachings, agreeing to live together (although not communally) to "manifest Christopher's vision."

Students have traveled literally thousands of miles to attend classes in Boulder Creek after reading his books.

The eccentric philosopher is nothing if not industrious. Among the businesses he has formed or helped start are Microalgae International, the spirulina-distribution company of which he is president; Aquaculture Nutrition Products Co., its retail outlet; the University of the Trees Press and the Negative Ion Research Center, which manufactures a device that supposedly filters air to make it fresher and more alive.

When he isn't involved in one of his many business enterprises, he is writing (in longhand) books, visiting spirulina farms in Israel, Japan and Desert Hot Springs (near Palm Springs), offering lectures or conferring with University of the Trees students in one of their several daily meetings.

University community members describe Hills as loving, gentle and kind.

Rozman, a University of the Trees graduate, said she experiences "a lot of wisdom, a lot of caring, a lot of insight" from Hills.

"I've never met anyone who can work so tirelessly for the welfare of other people," she said.

The University Community Handbook refers to Hills this way:

*"In Christopher you can see the vision of selflessness taken to its ultimate human conclusion, where love knows naught but itself, is never exhausted and never fails."*

*"Christopher's one difficulty in life is how to get through a massive workload and remain unburdened by the burdens you may bring him."*

Another section of the book tells group members about making appointments to see Hills: *"If you see him working in the garden you may be able to talk to him and help him at the same time. Be sensitive to his world and if you are unsure if he is interruptable, check with Norah before you approach him. If you see him meditating or writing, be quiet and walk down a path from where he is concentrating."*

Others who have worked with Hills, however, say he is anything but kind and gentle. If you want to get along, whether you are a member of the group or an employee at one of the businesses, you'd better not disagree with him, they say.

Santa Cruz resident Mitchell Goldstein, who considered joining the group in 1981, said Hills "never smiled. I would see him every day but for someone who was such an evolved being, he didn't seem to have much warmth."

"The people in the community talk about him as though he were Jesus Christ incarnate," Goldstein recalled. "They quote him all the time."

"I have problems with people who hold one man up as having all the answers," he added.

A woman who preferred to remain anonymous said Hills is "kind of a grouch."

"He's very upfront about who he is. He says, 'I am ruthless. I am a negative teacher.' It's the other people who are there who say, 'Oh no, Christopher, you're love.'"

While Hills wrote in books that the environment is a mirror, that principle did not apply to him, the woman said.

"To everyone else, the environment is a mirror. But when anybody works against him, he says it's The Dark Force."

While Hills ostensibly wants people to think for themselves, his words carry such great weight he may as well be giving orders, say former employees and members of the group.

"People are always trying to do things for him," Goldstein related.

On the other hand, even people who disapprove of Hills' methods credit his talent and energy.

"He was a very astute businessman, devoted to his ideals, very good at getting people to do things," said Goldstein, terming Hills "brilliant."

Said a Boulder Creek businessman, who didn't want to be identified, "Christopher is into all the energy tax laws and loopholes. His operation is far more sophisticated than you'd expect for a small town."

A Santa Cruz businessman, who also asked not to be named and who sells spirulina, said, "Christopher Hills is a man who is very dedicated to his ideals, which this world needs more of."

Hills makes one of his few public appearances Friday evenings at meditation sessions at the Forest Pool complex here.

A tall, imposing figure with a salt-and-pepper mane of hair that trails down his back, Hills enters the room after everyone else is seated with their eyes closed. He sits, elevated, in an overstuffed chair surrounded by microphones while students and acolytes sit on round pillows on the floor.

The Friday night this reporter attended, the first student inquired, "I am sorry for my selfishness ... I love you and I feel I've been a burden to you ... how can I act so that I always keep the other in mind?"

Members of the University of the Trees spiritual community write questions for Hills to answer every Friday afternoon, according to a handbook prepared for prospective members.

Hills answered three questions that evening, talking for about 45 minutes. Then he left, not pausing to talk (or look) at the people gathered in the room.

Interviewed at the Boulder Creek Library groundbreaking, Hills emphasized that people in the community choose disciplines of their own volition.

"They respect and admire me. My staff is trained to think for themselves," he said.

Looking natty in a three-piece gray suit, his long hair bundled up inside a Cossack hat, Hills described himself as "a man who has studied wisdom."

Asked about the reverence with which members treat him, Hills said, "Don't you think well of your mother and father?"

The reporter said yes, but she does not deify her parents.

"I don't think they deify me," he said.