

Ed Lange, 1920-1995 Founder, Elysium Fields



Ed Lange was an internationally known nudist leader who created the Elysium Institute in Los Angeles.

Lange began his career as a fashion photographer for Vogue magazine, Harper's Bazaar, and Life magazine; and as studio photographer at Paramount and Conde Nast studios in Los Angeles where he captured such Hollywood greats as Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Lange was also heralded as an architectural photographer, whose work is installed in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In the late 1950's he began to publish photos and write articles in so-called adult male "nude" magazines about the American nudist movement. Such publications were considered taboo in most states and the post office often refused to deliver them to book stores or subscribers. Then on January 13, 1958, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to allow nudist magazines -- even those with full-frontal nudity -- to be mailed through the U.S. Post Office.

Though he was now free to publish what he wanted, Lange was not a "small" thinker. He would not be satisfied with operating a strictly mail-order, brown-paper wrapper, under-the-counter publishing concern that so many other nudist magazine and journal publishers had tried in the past. No, Ed wanted the WORLD to see the wholesome sensuality and beauty of nudism in a thoroughly public and legitimate context! In 1961, he broke out on his own and established Elysium Growth Press as a producer of books celebrating the beauty of the naked human body in natural settings.

Two years later, Ed Lange rented a booth at the Frankfurt International Book Fair and displayed a handful of high quality, hardcover pictorial books such as Shameless Nude, Nudist Nudes, and "N" is for Naked. The show put Ed and Elysium Growth Press onto the world map.

Over the next thirty years, Lange published several shelves-worth of trade books and a staggering number of magazines containing contributions from other famous photographers, authors and editors such as Keith & Iris Bancroft, Charles Cropsey, sci-fi author Jean Marie Stine, and publisher/hot pools enthusiast, Jason Loam (aka Stan Sohler). He and his wife June often visited other nudist clubs to compete in their local volleyball tournaments (both were avid players!)



Ed, 1952

In June 1958, Lange, Stohler, and ASA's Sol Stern jointly sponsored the first organized nude beach campout at Davenport Landing, north of Santa Cruz, California.

Now financially comfortable, in 1967 Ed decided to "practice what he was preaching" and founded the Elysium Institute in Topanga, California as a clothing-optional recreational and educational facility. A 25 year zoning battle with the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors ensued, resulting in the longest and most expensive zoning case in Los Angeles history.

Lange spent over a million dollars in legal fees to overturn local laws and prejudices against social nudity, prevailing with a Conditional Use Permit granted in 1992. His tenacity led him to challenge and to overturn in the courts the arcane 1939 Anti-nudity Ordinance in Los Angeles which stated no three people could be seen together if all were naked.

Elysium's fame grew as a unique blend of social nudity and self-help workshops. With the help of Aileen Goodson and Jackie Davidson, the Institute's calendar filled with everything from the world's first nude group therapy sessions to yoga to family counseling. Therapists, nurses, and other self-help professionals flocked to the Fields and contributed to its Golden Age of the 70's and 80's, all while the epic zoning battle was swirling around them.

Lange was elected vice-president of the American Sunbathing Association (now the American Association for Nude Recreation) and he also served a term as a vice-president of the International Naturist Federation. In 1980, helped his friend Lee Baxandall organize the first Gathering for the Naturist Society, bringing together nudist activists from around the country



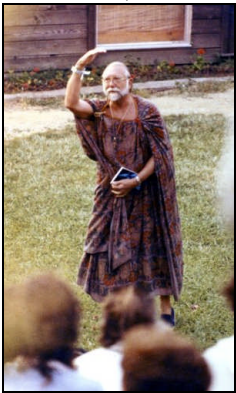
XB58 Beach, June 1958



Lee Baxandall and Ed Lange, 1980



Ed and June, 1970



Guru Ed in his familiar kaptan



1995 Topanga Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year.

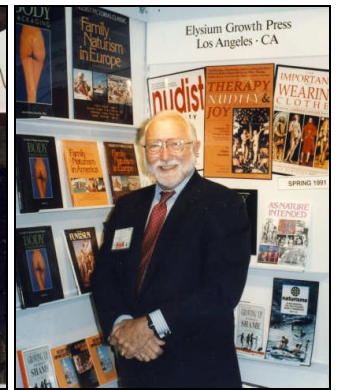
to organize for nude access to beaches and public lands.

The early years of neighbor hostility towards the Institute gradually wore away through the years as Lange made many philanthropic contributions to the local community included the Topanga Women's Club, the Topanga Community Center, the Topanga Philharmonic, and the Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum. (Although one neighbor, who lived next to the front gate never stopped fighting the "immoral goings-on" behind the high fence.) In March, 1995 Lange was awarded Citizen of The Year by the Chamber of Commerce in Topanga, California, for his twenty-five years of public service and humanitarian efforts and commended by Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky for his human rights activism.

At the time, Lange was suffering from prostate cancer, but he proudly accepted the award as vindication for his lifelong vision that social nudism deserved a place in the sun. Ed died a few months later on May 7, 1995. He was 75.

The 1995 Western Gathering of the Naturist Society, which met on Elysium Fields shortly after his death was vibrant with the sense of continuation of Ed's desires and vision, as manifest in the presence of his handiwork. A candlelight memorial around the pool was held that summer with hundreds of current and former Elysium members participating.

After Elysium closed in 2000, its members decided they could not let Ed's vision die out, and so they founded the Southern California Naturist Association (SCNA) to carry on his good work.



Ed with his beloved dog, Murphy; Ed addresses Elysium members 1994; Ed at 1992 Book Show