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of Leo Buscaglia of Leo Buscaglia of Leo Buscaglia

Change Magazine, June 2006
Sue Mayfield Geiger and excerpts
from Buscaglia.com

June 11 is National Hug Day Saluting Leo Buscaglia (1924-1998)

Leo Buscaglia was a cheerleader for life. "Life is a banquet," he would say, quoting from the movie *Auntie Mame*, "and most poor fools are starving to death." He was most closely associated with the topic of love and human relationships, emphasizing the value of positive human touch, especially hugs.

This association with hugging became his trademark at lectures, where thousands of people would stand patiently waiting to hug him after a presentation. It was not uncommon for him to give a talk of about an hour, then stay afterwards signing books and hugging for at least twice that long. This came about when someone spontaneously offered him a congratulatory hug following an early speech. A line formed, and it became an anticipated part of future events. Time restraints on occasion would dictate that those towards the end of the line would have to choose between a hug and an autograph. Nearly all chose the physical connection with this inspiring speaker. And he almost never left until he met everyone in line. Should someone be left out because they hadn't pushed to the front? Those would have been people he would have missed experiencing, he said, and that would have left him a lesser person.

Buscaglia was teaching in the Department of Special Education at the University of Southern California in the late 1960s when one of his students committed suicide. She had been one of the sets of "kind eyeballs" he always looked for in the large auditorium, because her responses showed him that at least one student was hearing what he said, so the news that she killed herself had a great impact on him. "What are we doing stuffing facts into people," he said, "and forgetting that they are human beings?" This incident led him to form a non-credit class titled Love 1A. There were no grades. (How could you potentially fail someone in this class? That wouldn't be very loving!) The class led to lectures and a manuscript loosely based on what was shared in those weekly classes. The book found a publisher and an author surprised to find that the simple title LOVE had never previously been claimed, allowing him to say "I have the copyright on

LOVE!" Buscaglia said he never taught this class, only facilitated it, adding that he learned as much as anyone.

Known as the "granddaddy of motivational speakers," his simple message delivered in a dynamic style made him a popular speaker not only on the lecture circuit, but as a guest on television talk shows as well. His warm presentations touched viewers' hearts nearly as effectively as they did in person. Someone from a PBS affiliate heard one of his talks and arranged to tape a later presentation, eventually showing it during a pledge drive. The response was so strong that it was presented to the national office for consideration, and his heartfelt talks became

the largest single money generator for PBS through much of the 1980s.

At one time five of his books were on *The New York Times* Best Sellers List simultaneously. Over eleven million copies of his books had been purchased in the U.S. by the time of his death by heart attack in 1998. Approximately 24 editions are available throughout the world.

Recommended reading: *Born for Love*; *Loving Each Other*; and *Living, Loving & Learning*

Born in Los Angeles, Leo Buscaglia was the youngest of four children of Italian immigrants. He was raised Roman Catholic, and was influenced by Buddhism in his adult life. The combination of physically demonstrative love of life learned from his Mediterranean parents combined with the inner reflection learned from travels and studies in Asia served him well. He served in the U.S. Navy in World War II.