

Bizarre farewell

Oberlin grad tells how to contact him in death — then takes his own life

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — It was no ordinary suicide.

On April 1, Edward Nylander sent 10 friends a photograph of himself. Ten days later, his charred body was found in a cave next to a can of gasoline, in a yoga position with a skull in his lap — just as he had posed for the photo.

HE HAD ALSO sent the friends a meticulously printed letter, detailing how they could contact him after his death.

Nylander was 29, the son of a retired Air Force sergeant. He was a graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio, an Optimist International Youth Award winner, a factory worker, a pinball freak, a student of Eastern philosophies and a self-styled guru.

He was also a suicide, the county coroner said.

He had revealed an intention to kill himself to a close friend.

“WHEN I asked what form he was coming back in, he just smiled,” the friend said. He had also hinted at it in a letter to his parents.

“I felt strange after reading the letter, but I hoped my feelings weren’t based on anything,” said his father, George Nylander.

Perhaps the best clue to Nylander’s suicide, and to how he felt about it, was in the letter he sent to the 10 friends.

“Herein are contained the essential life and teachings of your friend Edward Nylander,” he wrote. “The first basic recognition about the cycle of birth and death, indeed the nature of all worlds, is their illusory, dream essence.”

BUT THE SUICIDE is still a mystery.

When Edward Nylander came to Boulder in the summer of 1974, he brought a wife and a mission — to continue his spiritual pursuits, to teach his own method of self-realization.

He had graduated from Oberlin in 1971, a six-month journey in Europe with an ascetic sage already behind him. After graduation he stayed at Oberlin, teaching yoga for the college’s physical education department.

He was, said friends, something of a guru in Ohio. His wife had been one of his students.

THINGS WERE different in Boulder, a university town, home of the University of Colorado. Boulder is a bastion of the do-your-own-thing, let-the-other-guy-do-his mentality.

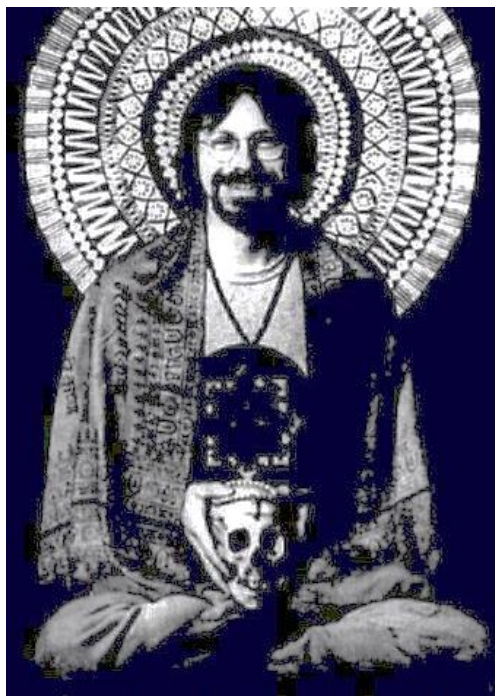
“There were already too many religious leaders in Boulder, so it didn’t work out,” said Art Hoffman, a drug counselor in Denver who was close to Nylander during the last weeks of his life.

Hoffman said Nylander used the hallucinatory drug LSD to perpetuate his spiritual highs, but the extent of his drug use is not known.

IN AUGUST 1976, Nylander and his wife separated. The divorce, filed under Colorado’s no-fault statute, became final in November.

According to the letter he sent his friends, Edward Nylander would be reincarnated. By meditating on his picture, starting at three minutes and working up to 20 minutes, his friends would be able to reach him, he wrote.

A hiker found the body in the foothills west of Boulder.



EDWARD NYLANDER poses in life in the same manner in which his charred body was found within two weeks after this photo was taken. Authorities ruled it a suicide. (AP)

Parents had premonition

By **GARY CLARK**
and **GLEN MILLER**

OBERLIN — Edward Nylander, who became involved with yoga while an Oberlin College student, believed his spirit could travel while leaving his body behind.

But his father believes a manuscript sent by Edward to his parents and 10 friends was really an elaborate suicide note rather than simply a letter detailing a planned trip.

Edward's charred body was found in a cave near Boulder, Colo., on April 10. He was sitting in a yoga position with a skull on his lap.

EDWARD, an art student, was graduated from Oberlin in 1971. He was also a yoga teacher in Oberlin's physical education department from 1973 to 1975. He was hired by former Oberlin athletic director Jack Scott.

He left the teaching position at the end of the 1974 academic year.

He married a former student of his, Lyn Heiman, who attended Oberlin from 1971 to 1973 but did not graduate.

Nylander's father, George, a retired Air Force sergeant, said in a telephone interview from his Portland, Ore., home this morning that Edward became interested in yoga and Eastern religions at Oberlin, although the father was unaware from whom Edward received instruction.

NYLANDER SAID his son had been divorced last November and "was pretty upset about the whole thing."

However, the father visited Edward in January and "he seemed in pretty good spirits, but he wasn't too communicative."

In early March, Nylander talked briefly with his son by telephone and received a package containing Edward's high school and college diplomas and a photo album. Edward's older brother received a package containing a stamp collection and other items.

"He just kind of indicated he was leaving" on a trip, Nylander said. "He wanted to travel with just a knapsack and be light and free to travel."

WHEN THE PARENTS received Edward's second letter in early April with the accompanying photo, Nylander said he and his wife felt "something bad is going to happen, and something did.

"We both had the feeling he was prepared to leave on more than just a trip.

"The total result (of the letter and photo) of the whole thing," Nylander added, "would give the idea of suicide.

"It was definitely an elaborate suicide note," he said.

Nylander said his son, because of his yoga instruction and belief in Eastern religions, believed "he could transport his spiritual being to another world while leaving his body here.

"I DON'T know if he ever got into reincarnation," the elder Nylander said.

But Edward's letter that accompanied the photo was "sort of a manuscript" attempting to explain the photo, Nylander said.

"It was supposed to explain his pose and the significance of his costume," Nylander said. "For instance, I think the skull (held in Edward's hands) was supposed to signify 'life into death.'"

Associate professor of biology Richard Levin recalled Nylander as a "very nice and soft-spoken person." Nylander and his wife occasionally babysat for Levin and his wife.

Joseph Gurtis, director of men's athletics, recalls having Nylander in one or two of his classes. "He wasn't any different than any other student, except that he very much liked yoga."