

Journey To and Through Communities

By Riana Good

It was July of 2016, a damp, cool day in the foothills of the White Mountains. I poured a steaming mug of tea and nestled into a pale, overstuffed chair with fraying arms in the library above the main gathering space at World Fellowship Center¹ in Albany, New Hampshire, where I was spending the summer bartering work trade in the kitchen and garden. The small stack of books I wedged beside me featured *Finding Community*, and it was the first I had heard of author Diana Leafe Christian and of most of the communities profiled therein. I read the book cover to cover, almost in one extended breath, feeling exhilarated, confused, and overwhelmed. I could taste the anticipatory sweetness of living in a singing, liberation-minded, land-based community, though I couldn't envision myself methodically researching and visiting to find such a fit.

I have been non-methodically, mysteriously, and magically following the path of community-living ever since.

Growing up in a relatively isolated upper-middle-class home in the suburbs outside of Boston, Massachusetts, my first exposure to community was living at West House Vegetarian Food Co-op in college, and thereafter I lived in semi-communal homes for the rest of my adult life. Teaching in the Boston Public Schools provided summers off to do work exchange in various settings, living and learning near woods and freshwater. Over the years I worked on the land at WabiSabi on Shelter Island off of Juneau, Alaska, at the now-closed Kushi Institute for Natural Healing in Becket, Massachusetts, at World Fellowship Center, and elsewhere. Still, passing through for a couple of months at a time was just teasing my palate, and while there was an element of community at many of the places that I worked, they functioned primarily as retreat centers.

When I applied for a year sabbatical after 11 years of teaching, I started to put out more feelers. I was accepted for work exchange at Earthdance², though in the thick of administering final exams, just days before packing up my classroom and bedroom, I severely injured my left meniscus and couldn't walk. Uf! Well, though Earthdance no longer seemed to be in the cards, within a few days two friends independently invited me to a month-long "Living Laboratory" at Starseed Sanctuary³ in the northern Berkshires of Massachusetts. On one of my visits to Isabella Freedman Center⁴ (usually in a work exchange capacity), a friend encouraged me to head west and visit the Bay Area. After three rough months staying in Berkeley, California with a friend I had met on OKCupid, I was done. Feeling the call to the Southwest, with help from a friend from a 2007 Bread and Puppet⁵ internship, I researched options ranging from supporting immigrants on the border to volunteering at Zen monasteries, and after a phone call interview, I made arrangements to work exchange at a vast Buddhist retreat center in Arizona. Where to stay for a few nights before they could pick me up? I posted on Facebook to ask for help and a friend from Earthdance put me in touch with Bruce at TerraSante Village Permaculture Laboratory⁶. In his ever-generous style, he swung by the Tucson airport to pick me up in his blue pickup truck after one of his 3x/weekly 12-hour nursing shifts. That night I slept on the couch in the common space, and three months later I was still living at TerraSante, though I had moved my sleep spot to a patch of sand surrounded by mesquite trees and cholla cacti, sleeping under the stars.

My days at TerraSante were glorious beyond compare! What a dream of intergen-

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erational, class-diverse, beautiful though not-too-intentional community! Cold nights under the stars, cool mornings walking and meditating or working on the land, warm afternoons visiting and cooking and networking, evenings by a fire circle or reading COMMUNITIES. What a magazine! I read just about every issue I could get my hands on, and noticed a plethora of articles written by members of Lost Valley/Meadow Song Ecovillage⁷. *What is that community all about?*, I wondered. I applied for a work exchange and was accepted for June and July. As the desert began to heat up in April and emerging scorpions, tarantulas, and rattlesnakes made sleeping out under the stars unwise, a friend from Massachusetts dance community came to visit and recommended that I get in touch with Rex at I-FLY Co-op near Yosemite National Park. So, I hitchhiked up there, which is a story for another time, and after a glorious month, I found myself connecting with others who were driving up

to Meadow Farm⁸ in Mendocino County of California, where for another month I worked and fell in love with the people and land. From there a traveling nurse drove me up to Lost Valley in Dexter, Oregon and after two months of deep satisfaction in community and an introduction to New Culture Summer Camp West, I returned to Massachusetts and to my connections at Sirius Community and Camp Timber Trails⁹. Sleeping out under the stars, working the land, and celebrating life with others, I was giddy with the delight of finding community in this non-methodical method.

For a few years I continued this seasonal rotation of living at TerraSante, I-FLY, Meadow Farm, Lost Valley, and various Massachusetts communities, and I imagined it continuing indefinitely. Then, five years after the rotation began, a friend I had met at a New Culture Summer Camp invited me to stay with him at his community of La'akea¹⁰ in Hawaii. I had resisted past recommendations to visit Hawaii because I had concerns about being a white mainland US-er on this recently colonized land, about the jet fuel consumption, and about the potential escapism of living in "paradise." I again felt resistance, though after many signs reinforced a visit, I booked a one-way ticket, he picked me up at the Hilo Airport, and I stayed at La'akea for two months.

Five years after I began cycling among communities and eight years after I first read *Finding Community*, living at La'akea helped me to identify and articulate what I love about living in community and what elements contribute to my well-being. La'akea loves included:

- Learning skills from more seasoned community members, such as Michael's wise and gentle approach to teaching how to tend to plants and trees.
- Regular shared meals as an opportunity to cook together, use food harvested from the land, nourish each other, and gather together. Eating is something that we all generally do so it fits well into a regular schedule!



Photos courtesy of Riana Good



- Commitment to open communication, especially evidenced through the facilitation and modeling of Tracy, Biko, and Amara. Superstars!

- Opportunity to delve deep into hosted events like New Culture Camp, Sufi Dances of Universal Peace, and Zegg Forum Training.

Living at La'akea also presented challenges, heightened by my arrival during event season, which is also the very, very wet season. I often felt antsy during shared time involving sitting and talking, which helped me to learn that I thrive most when community members have regular opportunities to gather in ways that are nonverbal or involve movement, such as working together on a project, singing, or dancing. Also, I felt isolated from the "outside world" and learned that I desire more cross-pollination and opportunities to connect with the ex-

tended neighborhood and community. Lastly, as much as I enjoyed participating in the camps and workshops that we hosted, I also missed the regular flow of community. The whirl of set-up and clean-up pleased the workaholic in me, but also contributed to a more splintered dynamic among community members. I am grateful to have had this opportunity for discernment, as it introduced me to the epicly* (*why is this not a word?!) wonderful folks at La'akea and also helped me to find the community where I currently live, just a few miles down the road.

Living at La'akea and in other communities helped me to know what I was seeking and how to articulate it. I am grateful to *Finding Community* for starting me on my path, though ultimately my own experience and others' invitations have been my best guide.

The unknown awaits, and much is unknown and unfathomable as this journey of community unfolds. I am grateful to weave among communities and I am glad for both the porous and the stable elements of communities, as with all ecosystems. I feel indebted to COMMUNITIES and to the dedicated communitarians, generous sleeping bag-lenders, soulful musicians, big-hearted lovers, wise facilitators, expansive visionaries, and kind hard-workers at each of the communities mentioned in this article. I celebrate you, I love you, I breathe the dream with you. Bless, bless, bless! 🌱

Riana Good has lived in communities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Oregon, and Massachusetts. Most recently she lives in a seven-year-old community in Hawaii. See her previous articles in COMMUNITIES #196, 197, and 201.

1. WFC is a secular, unaffiliated camp and conference center offering summer hospitality, educational social justice-related workshops, and lectures, outdoor recreation, and creative opportunities for all ages near the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire: worldfellowship.org/about-wfc.

2. Earthdance is an arts organization and retreat center hosting workshops, artist residencies, and community programming: earthdance.net.

3. Starseed is an interfaith healing sanctuary, holistic retreat center, and developing intentional community dedicated to personal and planetary transformation: starseedcommunity.org.

4. See adamah.org/retreat-centers/isabella-freedman.

5. See breadandpuppet.org.

6. TerraSante Village is a nonprofit community dedicated to experiments in sustainable living in the challenging environment of the Arizona Sonoran desert: terrasante.org.

7. See lostvalley.org.

8. See meadowfarm.org.

9. See camptimbertrails.org.

10. La'akea is a small, family-style, egalitarian, intentional community on the big island of Hawaii: permaculture-hawaii.com.

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—Patch Adams, M.D., author and founder of the Gesundheit Institute

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opting out of the rat race and living life on their own terms. We're pleased to share the voices we come across in COMMUNITIES with our readers because they remind us all of the virtue of cooperation and the world-changing potential of coexistence.

—Christian Williams, Editor, *Utne Reader*

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—Murphy Robinson, Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

Community has to be the future if we are to survive. COMMUNITIES plays such a critical role in moving this bit of necessary culture change along. Thank you COMMUNITIES for beating the drum and helping us see.

—Chuck Durrett, The Cohousing Company

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—Shen Pauley, reader and author, Barre, Massachusetts

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