

**Sustainable in the Cornfields: Stelle Community's Off-Grid Energy Systems**

# COMMUNITIES

Journal of Cooperative Living

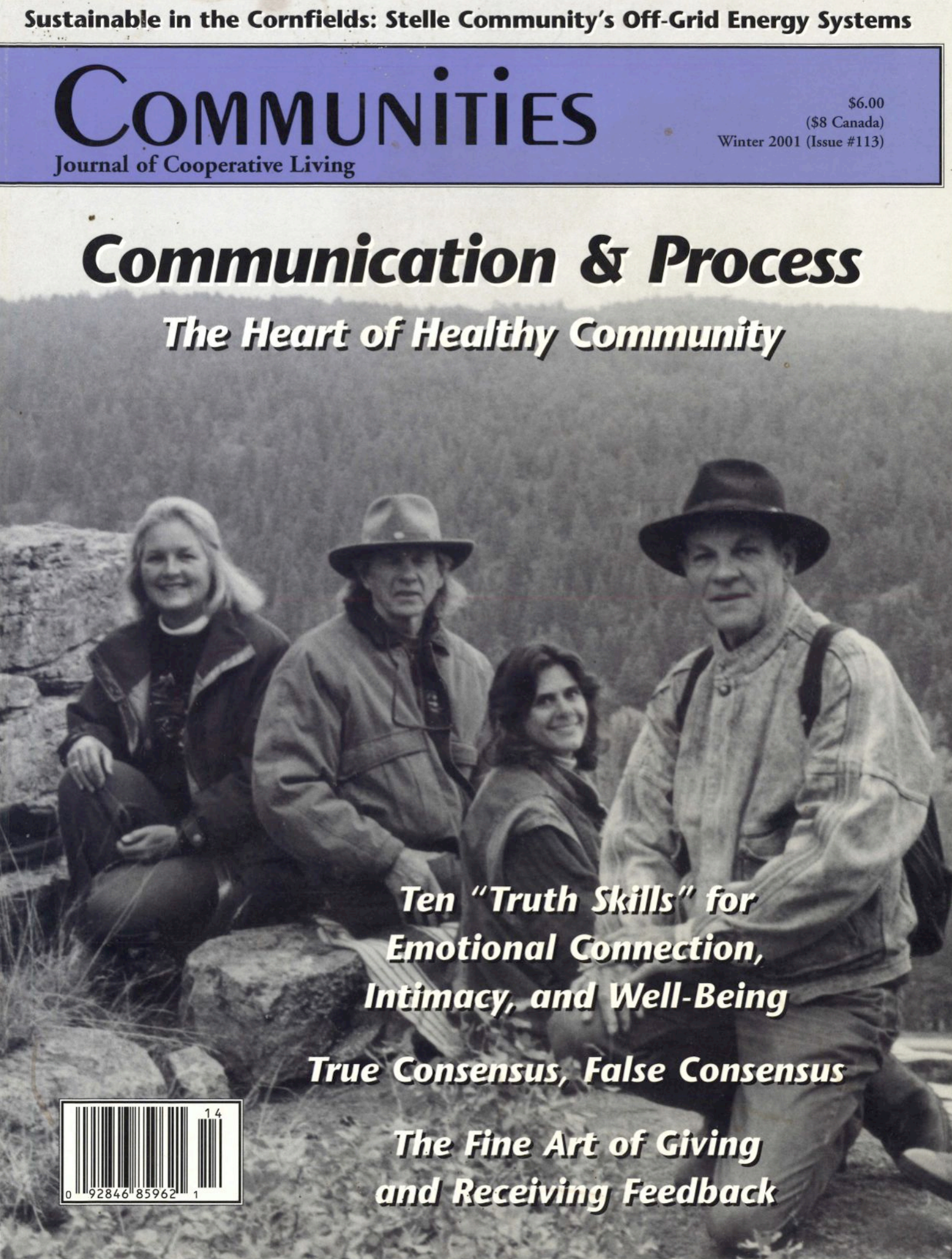
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Winter 2001 (Issue #113)

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
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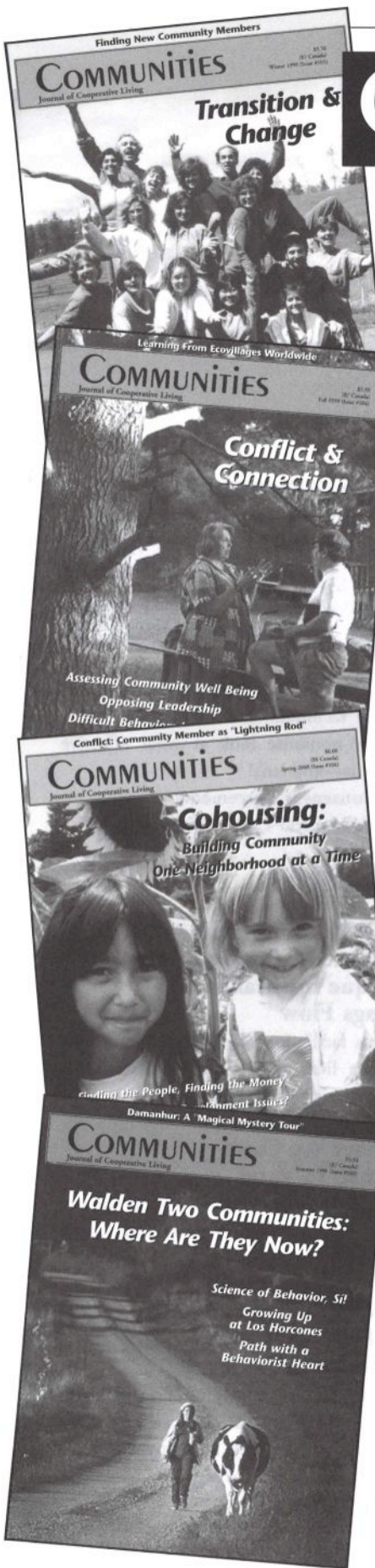
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Journal of Cooperative Living

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# COMMUNITIES

Journal of Cooperative Living

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# LETTERS



Send letters to *Communities* magazine, 52 Willow St., Marion, NC 28752, or [communities@ic.org](mailto:communities@ic.org). Your letter may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

## Communities Seeking Elders

Dear *Communities*:

You requested information from Alpha Farm for the listing, "Communities Seeking Elders" for your Fall '01 issue, Multigenerational Community, and here it is. Alpha Farm is open to people of all ages becoming members and residents on a case-by-case basis. As always we are most interested in people who can contribute productively and help cultivate harmony in the community. Our current members range in age from five months to 78 years. We feel strongly that people of all ages contribute a balance we value to our mix of emotional and spiritual resources.

Keith

Alpha Farm

Deadwood, Oregon

541-964-5102; [alpha@pioneer.net](mailto:alpha@pioneer.net)

## Yamagishi Community

Dear Editor:

I read with interest Bill Metcalf's Community Living Worldwide column on Yamagishism. (*Summer '01 issue, "Feeling Ittai at Yamagishi Toyosato"*) To my knowledge, I was the first American to participate in the movement, and know Mr. Nijjima, who is mentioned in the article. My wife and I were in the initiates' dormitory with he and his wife in the summer of '93. He was very considerate and knew a great deal about the

history of Yamagishism. I remember him very fondly.

I have a question. Mr. Metcalf writes: "They believe there is no such thing as absolute truth, only relative truth." My recollection of this issue is rather that Yamagishists hold the opposite to be the case. If I was wrong, or if Yamagishism has changed direction, I would be very interested to know.

Fred Harriman

Grass Valley, California

Author Bill Metcalf replies:

*The statement that the members of Japan's Yamagishi communities believe there is no such thing as absolute truth, only relative truth, was relayed to me by Professor Atsuyoshi Nijjima, as translated by Mr. Ikuo Kishi, both long-term members of Yamagishi Toyosato, then rendered into good English by yours truly Atsuyoshi Nijjima joined Yamagishi Toyosato in 1972, after his first training there in 1971, and I believe he is not the same person whom you know from 1993. The full text of Atsuyoshi Nijjima's statement was:*

*"In my opinion, Yamagishi members always think of problems and ideas as Ken-san material, that is, as opportunities to grow and learn through introspection. Indeed, Mr. Yamagishi (the founder of the movement) did not use the word 'truth,' but would use the expression 'something like truth' to show the relative nature of reality. Truth is not fixed but must be constantly pursued."*

*Atsuyoshi Nijjima is now very ill and is no longer able to communicate. Perhaps the Yamagishi view of truth being relative/absolute has changed but that is not my understanding. Thanks for your inquiry.*

## Are Web-Surfing Teenagers Forging a New Community?

Dear *Communities*:

The future of communal studies, indeed, of communities themselves, was the subject of a talk by Prof. Tim Miller at the 2001 conference of the Intentional Communal Studies Association held last summer at ZEGG community in

Germany. He expressed skepticism as to the continued relevancy both of studying communities and of living in them in terms of society in general. Meaning, how much impact will communities have on the world in the 21st century? His talk elicited heated comments. Some felt communities are doing just fine, thank you; others perceived the increased marginalization of utopias.

Indeed, throughout the conference, issues of changing conditions for the Israeli kibbutz movement, for agricultural collectives in the former GDR, and for the basic issue of attracting people to communities in general, were discussed time and again. As always, the very definition of community was at stake. During the question and response period following Tim Miller's talk I made the following points: (1) Community is not just a place but a state of mind. (2) Community is not just where we live but where we think. (3) The planet is the only community that matters. (4) Community is communication.

And I told the following story: Many high school students in my area of rural Pennsylvania are on the Web all the time. They are corresponding with kids all over the world; locating information all over the world. They are making friends they'll never see. They are connecting with people who live in cultures far different than our own. Now these high school kids are not progressive communitarians, but typical Americans: they consume, they buy, they like to have nice clothes, plenty of food, comfortable houses, a nice car.

Nonetheless, I suggested that they are forging and forming a community that will, in all likelihood, be far more important and have a far greater impact than any specific community you or I live in or even know about. Because these kids, unknowingly, are creating a worldwide community that encircles the planet. They are becoming planetary citizens as teenagers, simply because they can. It's available. They are encouraged to use the Web and they do.

In my opinion, those who study and write about communal studies must deal with this evolving community. I think it is the future. This is not to say that our individual plots of community ground are not important. I love mine dearly. And we don't live solely on-line. At least not yet!

In any case, this growing global community that is happening right in my neighborhood is vital to the very idea of community, though the kids themselves might not even understand what I'm talking about.

Our plots of land are essential to maintain and to provide models of sustainability for the future, as well as simply providing us with pleasure and joy. At the same time, we can expand the meaning and study of community in ways that can be exciting and rewarding.

**Johannes Zinzendorf**  
The Hermitage  
Pitman, Pennsylvania



## Art of Community Audiotapes

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*Caroline Estes*

**Finding Your Community: An Art or a Science?**  
*Geoph Kozeny*

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*Jeff Grossberg*

**Raising & Educating Children in Community**  
*Diana Christian, Elke Lerman, Martin Klaif, Judy Morris*

**Conflict: Fight, Flight, or Opportunity?**  
*Laird Sandhill*

**Consensus: Decisions That Bring People Together**  
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**Six "Ingredients" for Forming Communities (That Help Reduce Conflict Down the Road)**  
*Diana Christian*

**Building a Business While Building Community**  
*Carol Carlson, Lois Arkin, Harvey Baker, Bill Becker, Judy Morris, Ira Wallace*

**Legal Options for Communities**  
*Allen Butcher, Aiy'm Fellman, Stephen Johnson, Tony Sirna*

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*Caroline Estes & Laird Sandhill*

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### Communities Editorial Policy

*Communities* is a forum for exploring intentional communities, cooperative living, and ways our readers can bring a sense of community into their daily lives. Contributors include people who live or have lived in community, and anyone with insights relevant to cooperative living.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion we offer fresh ideas about how to live cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues.

We do not intend to promote one kind of community over another, and take no official position on a community's economic structure, political agenda, spiritual beliefs, environmental issues, or decision-making style. As long as submitted articles are related to the theme of community living, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interferes with its members' right to leave.

Our aim is to be as balanced in our reporting as possible, and whenever we print an article critical of a particular community, we invite that community to respond with its own perspective.

### Submissions Policy

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### What is an "Intentional Community"?

An "intentional community" is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based, and others are both. For all their variety though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE



## But Seriously Folks ...

### *When to Take a Joke and When to Give One*

**J**UST LIKE COPS, THERE'S GOOD HUMOR AND BAD HUMOR. Learning how to encourage the former and limit the latter can go a long way toward improving group dynamics. Everyone's been at meetings where a well-timed joke cleared the energy and lifted the mood productively. (There isn't, after all, any requirement that meetings have to be grim.) Levity leavens, and who wants a steady diet of low-calorie, flat meetings?

Humor works to the group's advantage when it's gentle, widely accessible, and doesn't interrupt a delicate moment. Laughter can be a terrific antidote for tension or boredom ... but it can also be alienating and infuriating. Let's go over some of the warning signs.

It can be awkward when someone is not in on the joke, or worse—someone in the room is the joke. Even if the speaker didn't mean it that way, you've got a problem whenever someone feels they are being made fun of. The key here is watching the reactions of the people who spoke just prior to the joke. Do they look amused? Or like they have gas? Good humor brings everyone along casually; problematic humor leaves casualties.

If someone looks injured, I think the best thing is to ask them how they're doing. For one thing, you may have misread their reaction. However, assuming you're right about their upset, a follow-up dialog with the comic wannabe can accomplish a lot. First, you can make sure that the humorist understands what was difficult about their joke. Second, the humorist can explain their intent. Perhaps an apology is in order. (Trap: don't get hung up on deciding what was intended. If one says green and the other red, believe them both—explaining to green that red was intended; and explaining to red that it looked like green, which hurts.)

Once, in the course of a weekend workshop, I facilitated a community meeting on the topic of work priorities. All was proceeding smoothly until tension entered the side door with a seemingly innocuous comment about the unattractive look of a screen that had been built to hide the compost pile.

Aesthetics were known to matter greatly to the speaker, and there was a backlog of resentment that surfaced about the perception that this person held a sense of aesthetic superiority. Indeed, the speaker went on passionately about the enjoyment derived from being in the presence of a well-arrayed room, claiming, "It's better than sex." In the silence that followed that proclamation, I thought to myself, "I'd like to see your living room," But I didn't say that. Instead, after a pause, I deadpanned, "That's a different workshop."

While I felt the first line was funnier, my alternate still got laughs and gave the group a



break in the tension. My first response was dangerous: it could have been heard as mocking the speaker's aesthetic discernment, or a jab at the quality of their love life. Instead, I played my joke off the predictably titillating topic of sex, and proceeded smoothly onto my main task: making sure that the speaker understood the difference between stating their aesthetic preference (the group readily agreed that taste was a legitimate criterion for judging design) and implying that their aesthetic judgment should be deferred to (which some in the group were unwilling to do).

At their most devious, jokes are sometimes launched with indirect barbs of negativity. Left unexamined, this kind of comment can poison the atmosphere faster than a stink bomb. If such zingers are allowed, people will learn to be cautious in their comments, lest they become the next target. If, however, the joker is asked if they intended a criticism, either it will be disavowed ("I was only joking"), or it will be brought into the open where it can be dealt with cleanly. Either way, the group will be better positioned to maintain a trusting and productive atmosphere.

Guidelines: stay away from sarcasm and put-down humor (unless you're making fun of yourself)—especially if you're the facilitator. During a recent workshop, a volunteer was facilitating a roleplay about pet policy when someone whined (per their role) that their concerns about pets' feelings had been ignored in the summary. Though the facilitator had done a credible job of capturing most input, they had in fact missed the piece named. Because the whiner had been assigned that personality and given a position known to be difficult for others to embrace, they were not easy to hold energetically. The facilitator let some of their frustration leak through in a sarcastic reply: "I'm sorry you feel that we left out your *important* comments about doggie feelings." This was met by roars of laughter from all who agreed that this was taking canine sensitivity too far. However, the whiner did not laugh. They had been made the mutt of the joke.

Speaking of which, word play—alliteration, puns, comic juxtaposition—is generally safe, though even here you can misstep. Making a light comment (regardless of how clever) right after someone's heartfelt statement is typically a poor choice. The speaker may feel their tender words were upstaged by the joke. Even if the group is eager for a mood shift, it's unwise to offer it until you're confident that the prior comments have found a safe place to land.

Finally, as a facilitator, it's important to know your capacity with humor. If you aren't funny, *please* don't use your moments in front of the group for attempts at stand-up comedy. Save it for a mirror, where you can reflect on the facilitator's prime directive—only doing things that help the group's work go more easily. Sometimes your best line is the joke you didn't tell.

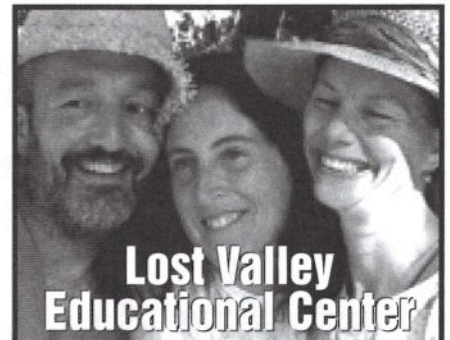
*David Schaus*

## COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES

**"What Do Children Learn in Community."** Spring '02. Are intentional communities holistic "schools of life" for community children? Does growing up in community make for richer, stronger, more balanced human beings? What about community schools, or homeschooling co-ops organized by parents? What unique opportunities does community living offer children for learning social, practical, and intellectual skills?

**"Sustainable Community."** Summer '02. Natural, Earth-friendly construction, off-grid energy, and appropriate technology in communities.

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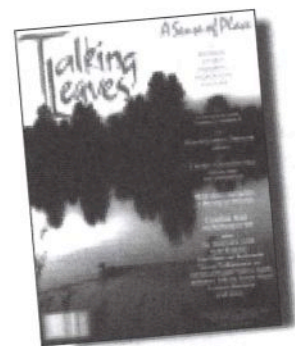


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**COMMUNITY  
GRAPEVINE**



On the morning of September 11th a group of community activists were in New York for committee meetings of **Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA)** and a United Nations conference on NGOs and volunteerism. They included Liora Adler, co-director of **La Caravana Traveling Ecovillage** and cofounder of **Huehucocoyotl Ecovillage** in Mexico; *Linda Joseph* of **Earth Arts Institute** in Colorado—all ENA activists—as well as *Corrine McLaughlin* and *Gordon Davidson*, formerly of **Sirius Community** in Massachusetts, and several current and former members of **Findhorn Foundation** in Scotland, including May East, John Clausen, Frances Edwards, and Michael Shaw.

That morning three more ENA activists—*Lois Arkin* of **Los Angeles Ecovillage**, *Giovanni Ciarlo*, a cofounder of **Huehucocoyotl**, and *Albert Bates* of **The Farm** and **Ecovillage Training Center** in Tennessee—were in lower Manhattan, considering having breakfast a block away at the World Trade Center.

“Let’s eat breakfast close to the UN so we’ll be there by the time the conference starts,” suggested Lois. So they boarded a bus and headed uptown. Soon afterwards they learned what had just happened to the World Trade Center. The UN conference was canceled and its building evacuated. They had missed being at ground zero by a half-hour or so.



The international offices of **Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)** in Copenhagen were closed in May to save costs. GEN functions previously handled there were divided among **GEN-Europe** at **Torii Superiori** in Italy (GEN communications); **GEN-Ocea-**

**nia/Asia** at **Crystal Waters** in Australia (GEN program management, and **Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA)**, at **Ecovillage Training Center** at **The Farm**, in Tennessee (GEN structural and financial planning). After winning approval of consultative status at the United Nations, GEN has now joined **CONGO**, the **Committee of Non-Governmental UN Organizations**, and has regular representation at the UN. The GEN board also approved a strong connection to the **Living Routes Educational Consortium**, headquartered at **Sirius Community** in Massachusetts, for offering semester-long university courses at ecovillages in Europe, India, and the United States.



**GEN-Europe** is about to create regional centers in the Middle East and Africa, which could send a delegate to the GEN board in the future. Three pilot Living and Learning Centers have now been established in Sri Lanka, Brazil, and Senegal. GEN-Europe is organizing tours and travel packages (for students or non-students) to ecovillages in Europe and expects to compile a **Ecovillage Travels Catalog**. [www.gen-europe.org](http://www.gen-europe.org)



**Northwest Intentional Communities Association (NICA)** and Antioch University hosted “Co-Opportunities Northwest: Sustainable Communities Conference” in Seattle Center on October 19-21. With a mission to bring together diverse people to identify and promote sustainable communities in region, the free conference attracted a crowd of 350 and high praise. *Fred* and *Nancy Lamphear* of **Songaia Cohousing** note that the whole conference was filled with a tremendous spirit of cooperation and connection, beginning with plenary speaker Vicki Robin, co-author of *Your Money or Your Life*, who offered a moving message about keeping heart in these challenging times. Workshops and panels included Consensus; Housing Options, Trends, & Sustainability; Envisioning a Living Economy; Sustainable Food and Farming Systems; and Creating Community Through Social Justice Theater. Highlights for Fred Lamphear included a panel on overcoming

racism; organic food activist and chef Tom French; and presenter Michael Cohen, who urged participants to connect more deeply with nature in order to connect more deeply with others. "The conference was successful before it even started," reported NICA president and **Bright Morning Star** member *Jonathan Betz-Zall*, "because bringing together such diverse people and resources revealed what we all had in common. We're looking forward to other people replicating this kind of grassroots networking for community and sustainability." For information on plugging into the regional network: [www.coopnw.org](http://www.coopnw.org)



On September 25, in an interview on local public radio station, WUOM in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Executive Secretary of the **Communal Studies Association (CSA)** *Don Jansen* spoke with talk show host Todd Munt. They discussed historical communities such as the Shakers, and Amana, and modern communities such as **The Farm** in Tennessee, and the **Emissaries of Divine Light**. Don told the radio audience that many communities no longer have charismatic leaders, many use consensus decision-making, and cohousing communities are one of the most rapidly growing segments of the communities movement.



The **Center for Communal Studies** at the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville is seeking materials from intentional communities to update and expand its archives on communities and historic communal sites, according to Director Donald Pitzer. Since 1976 the Center has been a clearinghouse for information on historic and contemporary communal groups worldwide, with materials on more than 100 historic communes and several hundred communities founded since 1965. The Center seeks information on communities' purpose, functions, facilities, and research resources, from brochures, tapes, videos, publications, bibliographies, and archives. contact Donald Pitzer at *Center for Communal Studies, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, Indiana 47712; 812-464-1960; dpitzer@usi.edu. Website: www.usi.edu/libarts/communal.*



On October 1st **Jackson Place Cohousing** in downtown Seattle held its official ribbon-cutting ceremony. According to *Fred Lamphear* of **Songaia Cohousing**, several Seattle city officials were present, including the mayor who gave a speech, and representatives from various other Seattle-area cohousing communities.



In late October **Riverside Community** in Nelson, New Zealand, celebrated 60 years of communal living. Riverside was founded in 1941 as a Christian, pacifist, socialist community in response to the military call-up of World War II, however it has long since become a secular community no longer affiliated with socialism. Riverside Members support themselves from their 500-acre farm of dairy cows and apple orchards, as well as outside jobs, sharing incomes and making decisions by consensus. "Not many secular communal groups reach that age and still thrive," notes *Bill Metcalf*. *Communities'* Australia-based international correspondent



**Fellowship for Intentional Communities** member Werner Kontara is hosting a discussion group on intentional community in Orange County, California. Interested people may contact him at *PO Box 7854, Van Nuys, California 91409; 818-458-1255; kontara@compuserve.com.*

## Heard it through the grapevine ...

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*Community Grapevine, 52 Willow St, Marion, NC 28752; 828-652-8517; communities@ic.org*

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## Campesinos Go Ecovillage in Venezuela

**T**HIS PAST JULY, THE MEMBERS of the Venezuelan Ecovillage and Permaculture Center got together to give a series of workshops—Consensus Decision Making, Building with Cob, Introduction to Permaculture, Vermicomposting, and Passive Solar Technology—to more than 100 Venezuelans. Most were *campesinos* (farmers), representing 15 rural communities located in the outskirts of Güiria, a small town on Venezuela's northeastern coast, only a few nautical miles from the coasts of Trinidad and Tobago. We were there responding to an invitation from Solparia, a local non-governmental organization that has been working with these communities for several years.

Although I've worked with rural communities in Colombia, it was my first time in Venezuela and I wasn't sure whether we would be welcomed. Many of these communities have had disappointing experiences with "outsiders" in the past, and this time there was some degree of apprehension on both sides, facilitators and participants alike. The day the workshops began, I felt we were being closely evaluated by them.

The first workshop was Consensus Decision Making at Yoco community with Giomar Sarmiento facilitating. I'd

thought that a subject such as consensus would be a little difficult for them to take in, but I was wrong. Their capacity for learning was beyond anything I had seen in this type of environment. During a break, Giomar told me they were "catching the concepts in the air," meaning they understood without too much explaining.

Then came Building with Cob at Guaraguarita community. During this workshop the participants began to open up, to tell more jokes—they are people with a profoundly developed sense of humor! They constantly bombarded the theoretical part of the workshop with keen questions and sharp observations. Alejandro Ascanio, the facilitator, had to make use of all his resources to

satisfy their curiosity. We were left speechless by the fullness of their enthusiasm, which was to blossom even more during the practical part of the workshop, a project to build the bus stop for the community. They tirelessly danced the "cob dance," with human chains to pass along the cobs, and all the time there was laughter.

The apprehension I had felt at the beginning melted away; the separation between facilitators and participants had mysteriously faded and we had become



*Orlando Balbás currently lives in Venezuela, where he assists the development of Venezuelan Ecovillage & Permaculture Center (CEVEP), and serves on the Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA) Information Management committee. Orlando Balbás: [orlando@unforgettable.com](mailto:orlando@unforgettable.com). Venezuelan Ecovillage and Permaculture Center, Giomar Sarmiento and Daniel Zahalka, Coordinators: [cevep3000@cantv.net](mailto:cevep3000@cantv.net). ENA Home Page: <http://ena.ecovillage.org>, ENA Regions and Contacts: <http://ena.ecovillage.org/Region>, ENA Web Newsletter: <http://ena.ecovillage.org/newsletter>*

one group. Laughter was frequent and spontaneous, and of course the facilitators were often the center of the joke. People began to bring us presents, mainly fruits and vegetables, sometimes whole bags of them.

The third workshop was an Introduction to Permaculture at La Toma community, specifically at Don Avelino's small farm. It was my and Daniel Zahalka's turn as facilitators, and although it was the sixth consecutive day of workshops, the enthusiasm and will for learn-

***The enthusiasm and will for learning was still unfaltering, undiminished.***

ing was still unfaltering, undiminished. After a short introduction and an overview of the principles, we took a tour around the farm as an exercise in "reading the landscape." In the three days of this course we addressed soils, biological pest control, and appropriate technologies, and ended with a farm design exercise.

One morning, while traveling from Güiria to La Toma on the back of a small bus that served as our daily transport, I looked at all those people sitting in front of me and suddenly great love for them washed over me. Those kind, joyful, intelligent, and easy-to-love people had opened up their hearts to us and were allowing our message in.

Then came Juan Ferreira's workshop on Vermicomposting at Guaramita community, and the last workshop, also facilitated by Juan, about Passive Solar Technology at Las Malvinas community at the beach. Even on the 10th consecutive day, the participants' attention was total. They were entranced by Juan's words and drawings of solar stoves, ovens, and water heaters and distillers.

On the last day of the workshops, we all participated in a general feedback circle. The words of gratitude and affection towards us were among the most beautiful I have ever received and surpassed any expectation I may have had. All in all I truly believe we didn't teach them anything new, we just helped them remember what they had forgotten. Ω



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Beatrice Briggs has been doing consensus facilitation in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South America and Europe since 1992. She currently lives in the ecovillage Huehucoyotl near Tepoztlan, Mexico.

*To order send \$15 check or money order to Beatrice Briggs, POB 25, Black Earth, WI 53515 USA. For more information or to request facilitation services and/or training contact <briggsbea@aol.com>.*

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# Conflict, Terrorism & Humility

## *The Cooperator's Response*

**L**EARNING HOW TO WORK through conflict constructively is probably the communities movement's most valuable product. In a world fractured by angry people intentionally flying passenger jets into crowded buildings, the need for these skills is paramount.

For all of my enthusiasm about what I've been able to glean about conflict from my 27 years of community life, I am also aware that we don't have all the answers, and no approach works every time. I was humbled last August sitting in a lawyer's conference room, participating in binding arbitration to settle a dispute over compensation for a canceled contract for an event promoting community. The plaintiff was not just a conference center (which I'll call the "Center")—they were a well established intentional community, and an FIC member.

How did this happen?

For about three weeks in March 2000, the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) held a contract to use the Center's facilities the coming Labor Day

weekend. They could handle 400 participants and we were hopeful of a strong turnout. We paid a \$2000 deposit at the time we signed the contract. Almost immediately after signing however, our coordinator had second thoughts about

the commitment he had from his support team and decided he could no longer continue with the project. We called the Center and canceled the contract, about five and a half months before the date.

Given the attractiveness of the dates and the ample lead time, Center personnel were optimistic that replacement business would surface and they told us not to worry. They

were wrong. No new client came forward and their staff held no event the first weekend in September. There was a cancellation clause in the contract, and its interpretation was key in this dispute. It read:

The guaranteed minimum [two-thirds of the maximum number of people contracted for times the number of days times the dormitory rate; a total of \$30,000 and change] ... applies unless



*The Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) publishes this magazine and the Communities Directory, hosts the Intentional Communities Web Site (www.ic.org), and produces biannual regional community gatherings. FIC, PO Box 156, Rutledge, MO 65363; 800-995-8342. See FIC's new online store, store.ic.org.*

the renter cancels the rental giving sufficient notice that the Center can and does arrange for another rental of comparable size for the time specified in this contract, in which case the deposit less \$100 will be returned to the renter.

Having canceled so quickly and so far in advance of the dates, it never occurred to us that we would be held responsible for any compensation beyond the loss of the deposit. We felt that a common sense interpretation of the clause was to protect the Center against a client canceling at the last minute. And if it didn't enter into the equation at all, what was a deposit for? In any event, they did not agree with our thinking, and had every intention of holding us to the commitment of damages. When I met with their program director in the week following Labor Day, he offered to cut the amount in half and settle for \$15,000. While demonstrably generous when compared with \$30,000, it was still a great deal more than the deposit.

We wanted to talk about the spirit of the agreement; they wanted to talk about the letter of the agreement. We offered compensation in kind; they wanted cash. We wanted to talk directly; after the initial meeting, they wanted to work only through lawyers. We wanted to negotiate; they wanted to arbitrate. It was frustrating.

But it was more than that. Each letter from the Center—first from their program director and then from their lawyer—impugned our integrity, and I didn't understand why we were being treated like that. With the support of the Fellowship's Executive Committee, I would discuss each contact at length before responding, to process the hurt and anger among ourselves, and to keep any bile out of our responses. We made a commitment to not respond in kind and it took considerable effort to keep to that path.

***As a long-term observer of group dynamics, I know it takes two to tango.***

After months of back and forth, there was no progress and we agreed to arbitration, which took place just days before the one-year anniversary of the canceled Labor Day event. Sitting in the arbitrator's law office, I reflected on how hard we tried to find a constructive path and the diligence we exercised in crafting our communications. I was proud of our efforts, yet here I was—with our lawyer and their lawyer talking to a third lawyer. The case was going to be decided on the arbitrator's best sense of how to apply contract law to the particulars of our situation. I realized it was not going to be the arbitrator's best sense of what was fair. Nor was the arbitrator going to rule on the decency or good faith with which the Center conducted negotiations. In short, the arbitration process was not going to address the things I cared about most.

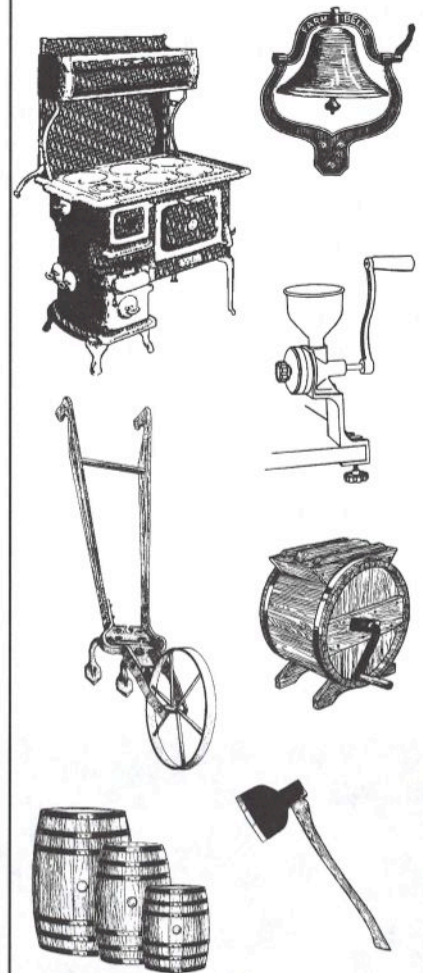
Under the rules of arbitration (at least this one) I was not allowed to speak unless asked a question. As it developed I was never asked one. I sat there for three hours, never spoke, and then went home. On the plane ride back I began the work of coming to terms with not getting resolution on the issues that mattered most to me. It would be work that the Fellowship would have to do alone.

As a long-term observer of group dynamics, I know it takes two to tango, and the Fellowship played an important role in how things unfolded. Even though I cannot think what we could have done differently, there must have been something. And we didn't find it. The Center is not the devil.

I have no doubt that Center personnel believes in the appropriateness of their position, and that they can likely look back on their actions and are at peace with what they did. Yet collectively, we failed to find the constructive solution that works for everyone. For two groups dedicated to building a more cooperative, peaceful world, this is a sobering result.

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Lessons? Two stand out. First, whenever you're negotiating, you only control your side of the equation and there are no guarantees that any particular approach will succeed, however well intentioned. (I knew this already, yet it's good to be reminded that cooperative values are not a bullet-proof vest.)

Second, there is always more to learn about how to read the person across the table, about how to recognize their interests and cast your points more palatably. I wonder what we could have done to better protect the relationship. In conflicts that don't resolve well, it's exquisitely tempting to blame the other side. Did we do everything possible to keep our hearts open and not poison ourselves with negative thoughts?

As consuming as this issue has been for the Fellowship, its relative insignificance was horrifically exposed by the terrorism of September 11. And yet, there

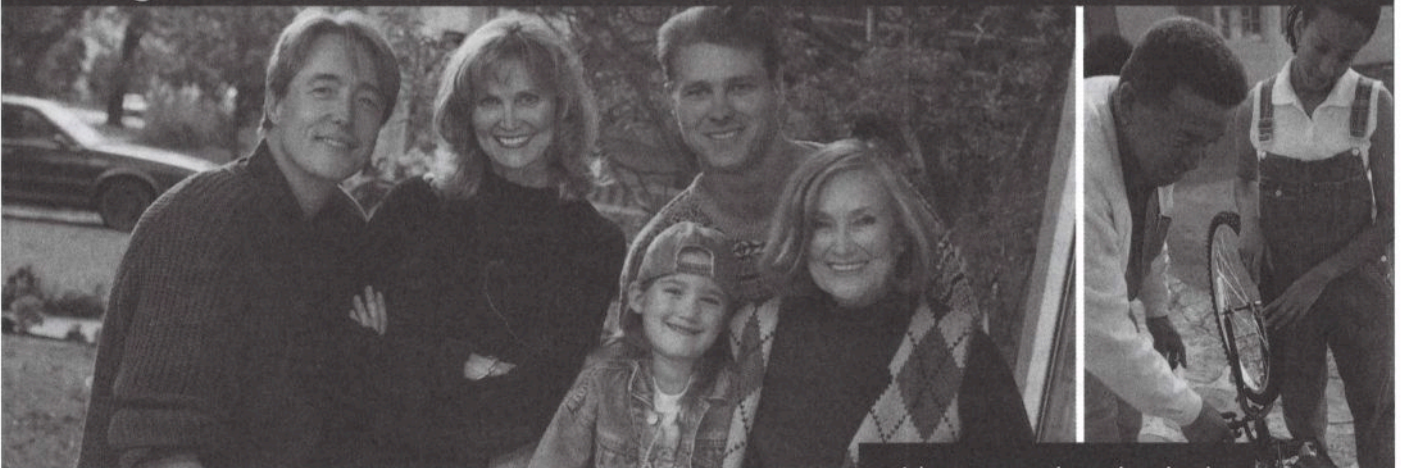
are parallels. Though the scale of impact is vastly different, both are about failed relationship and unsuccessful bridging of differences. After having spent the last year focused on our contract dispute, it is easy to see how anger, deep frustration, and a sense of gross injustice can fuel the desire to lash out and punish. I know I struggled with those feelings and I expect Center personnel went through similar sentiments.

When—in the case of the terrorist attacks—you add outrage at the sacrifice of innocent lives, it's not hard to see how responders would be ready to do violence in return. For the United States there is outrage at all the lives lost in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the four airplanes. For many living in the Middle East there is outrage at the lives lost through U.S. foreign policy, military involvements, and covert actions. You can be sure the terrorists thought they were right. Just as our leaders today think they are right to commit

violence in return. Each round of action fuels the next.

As humbling as it was for the Fellowship to have failed to resolve our contract dispute through direct negotiation, in the end it was only money. On the world stage the stakes are much higher and this is no time to stop the attempt to work cooperatively with conflict. We need approaches that are neither appeasement nor posturing, neither capitulation nor violence. We need approaches that emphasize relationship. The paramount question is not who's right—it's who will take the first step to get off the merry-go-round? Ω

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## COLORADO SPRINGS COHOUSING



# The “Stuff of Community” — *Economics, Culture, and Governance*

IT WAS THE SAME CEREMONY WE'D always done, yet it was different. We planted a tree, danced around our Maypole, sang, feasted, and celebrated into the evening. Songaia's "Festival of the Earth" event was similar to events of previous years, yet it was like we experienced it for the first time. While our Maypole stood in the same location, we were surrounded by new houses. Our dream of creating a 13-household cohousing community was finally realized.

We'd been struggling for 10 years to make this cohousing project a reality. Our challenge was to overcome the high cost of developing the physical infrastructure—roads, utilities, and buildings—while distributing these costs among only 13 housing units, the maximum number allowed by the county for our 10.7 acres. Our budget strategies included redesigning our buildings for cost-efficiency, requesting construction bids be no higher than a certain amount, changing our legal structure to a condominium association, and finding a bank and appraiser willing to use other cohousing projects as financial comparables. Finally, in December 1999, the bank and secondary loan institutions approved our construction loan. We broke ground in April, 2000.

But I'm not describing how we finally succeeded in building our project, but

rather, the “stuff of community”: the dynamics or processes that sustained us as a group throughout the journey. I believe these processes are crucial to sustain cohousing or other forms of intentional community.



The image that represents it best for me is a three-legged stool, and a community needs all three legs for stability. One leg is economic—how the community uses its resources; another is political—how it governs itself; and the third and perhaps most often overlooked is cultural—how its members interact with each other and with the entity of the community. If any one of these legs is missing, or shorter or longer than the others,

the community will be out of balance. If not corrected or re-balanced, the three-legged stool of community will be wobbly at best, and may eventually collapse of its own weight.

For us, becoming economically viable was a crucial factor, without which the physical community we'd envisioned couldn't happen. That's not to say we would have collapsed, but in order to continue we would have had to enter a re-visioning process and make adjustments in each of the three areas.

Let's consider each of these “legs,” in our community and in community in

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*Fred Lamphear, a founding member of Songaia, has lived in intentional communities for 40 years. He is an active board member of the Northwest Intentional Communities Association (NICA), and a cofounder of that organization as well.*

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general. These processes—economy, governance, and culture—are not unlike what create stability in the larger society, since, after all, a community is only a microcosm of the larger society. However, cohousing communities and other kinds of intentional communities have a unique opportunity—they can be more directly intentional about how these processes are carried out.

*Culture:* A community's culture informs everything else it does. This includes a group's common knowledge, its ways of thinking, and its methods, as well as its behavioral norms, members' roles and interactions, and finally, its common symbols—name, logo, rituals, songs, and so on, that communicate a common identity.

In 1991 I and Songaia's other founders lived as an intentional community on our land, and took several months to create a common vision and value statement. We named the community "Songaia," which stands for "Song of Gaia" or "Song of the Living Earth." The name reflected our core value of living in harmony with the Earth and all its creatures, as well as the fact that we believe in and practice community singing as a way to deeply connect and unify our energies. We were clear from day one that our mission was to create a new model of living for the 21st century—a model that supports the cohousing credo, "Building a better society one neighborhood at a time."

We established a meeting format that included singing, a check-in question, a prepared agenda, a break, and a closing exercise. In our early stages we took some meeting time to study articles and books that inspired the kind of culture we wanted to create, such as *The Dream of the Earth* (Thomas Berry), *Cohousing* (McCament and Durrett), and *A Pattern Language* (Christopher Alexander). We provided childcare as a cost to the entire community, symbolizing that caring for the next generation was not just the responsibility of the parents but one of our primary values.

We've used community celebrations,

including solstice, equinox, and other seasonal events, as opportunities to enrich our life together. We've held sharing circles for in-depth reflection and bonding. Once a year, in late summer, we've all gone camping for a weekend annual retreat, where community "business" is taboo. We've held men's retreats and

women's retreats as well as individual and family rites of passage to mark significant events in community members' lives.

We celebrate special times of the year: in spring, a May Day or Festival of the Earth celebration; in fall, a harvest celebration. On

Christmas and Valentine's Day some of us sing at a local nursing home. We've hosted a Pumpkin Patch each fall for a local Montessori school. We celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. One exercise is to reflect on the year as well as the longer journey of the community, by collectively creating a "Wall of Wonder" timeline that displays the year's significant events and accomplishments.

Over time, these events have become Songaia's traditions. Anticipated, and planned for, these traditions have become foundational to our group identity, to our community culture. The cohesion, joy, and meaning experienced through such traditions are, we believe, the primary reason people seek community, and continue to work, sometimes doggedly, to keep it. No other "leg of the stool" will sustain a community during hard times.

*Governance:* The political or governance leg has to do with how the community organizes itself, how it establishes its basic rules and enforces them, and how and who makes its decisions.

Determining Songaia's organizational form was a lengthy process. Based on our values, we chose a cooperative association as our legal form, unless and until such time it would prevent us from securing the necessary funding to do the project. Because we turned out to be on the borderline of economic feasibility, we changed our legal structure to a condo-

**Consensus symbolizes for us that we operate as a cohesive community, not just a group of people struggling to coexist as neighbors.**

minium association so our project would be considered a low enough risk by lending institutions. We preserved as many of the cooperative values as were allowed in our new legal form.

Establishing our articles of incorporation and bylaws was a creative process that included borrowing from other community documents, and inventing some unique components that would only work for us. The exercise of discussing each component until we all agreed was probably as important as the finished product. We created House Rules late in

***The cohesion, joy,  
and meaning of such  
traditions are the  
primary reason people  
seek community.***

the process, informed by the practical experience we'd gained on the journey together.

The key to our self-governing process was evolving a consensus decision-making method. This was not an easy task and continues to be a work in progress, particularly as we bring new members into the community. We explored various decision-making methods with the intent of making ours both orderly and time-effective, but ultimately discovered that the urgency to make a decision is most helpful in hastening the process. We've evolved an effective consensus process that has stood the test of time and some potentially contentious decisions. As difficult as it can be, consensus is the process which symbolizes for us, on an ongoing basis, that we've decided to operate as a cohesive community, not just a group of people struggling to coexist as neighbors.

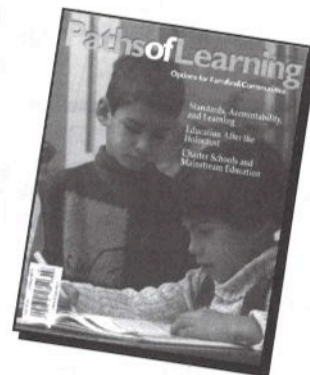
*Economics:* The economic leg has to do with how a community uses resources, transforms them into useful products or services, and distributes them.

For Songaia, on a grand scale, this has involved how we'll use our land: which parts we'll use for housing and recreation and which we'll preserve in a more natural setting.

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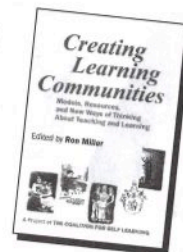
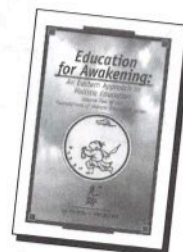
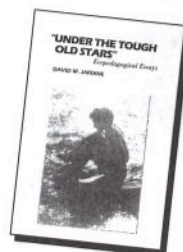
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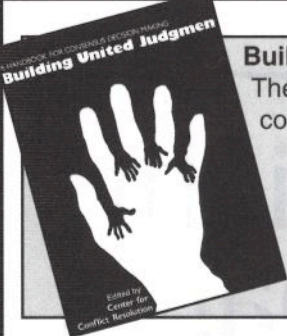
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On a lesser scale, but as potentially contentious, has been how we buy and grow food; how we prepare it, relative to the diversified needs and desires of each community member; and how we allocate its costs. We've evolved a system that includes buying bulk and growing our own organic produce, storage in a common pantry, and distribution to members for individual home use and for preparing community meals. Excluding specialty items members purchase for themselves, the monthly food cost has been \$80 per adult, and for children, \$5 per each year of age; so that the cost for a three-year-old, for example, is \$15 a month.

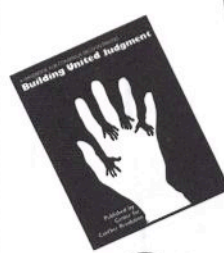

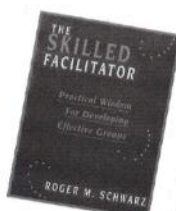

Developing the system required that we identify our values around money and budgeting, set up cost-saving strategies, and periodically evaluate and adjust how we buy and prepare food. Since food often carries an emotional charge for people, creating a food system required that we find creative ways to meet our needs for quality, economy, and the ability to collectively acquire food that's produced sustainably.

Paying attention to each of these "legs on the stool"—economy, governance, and culture—has helped us build a healthy, harmonious community. It has helped us establish a level of trust that has been crucial for sustaining our ongoing journey and our aspirations for the future. It allows us to honor each member's needs as well as our collective welfare. Building community has not been an easy task, and we don't anticipate the process will get any easier now that the project is built. In fact, community living might prove more challenging without the common goal of finishing all our buildings.

We'll still need regular meetings, sharing circles, and celebrations—and, a willingness to forgive each other when we don't meet our individual or community expectations. A community is where you have the grand opportunity to be reminded each day that your colleagues may have different perspectives and priorities than you do. It's an environment that helps you grow, become more present and conscious of the way life really is, and embrace the blessing of that reality. Ω

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# Sustainable in the Cornfields:



How Stelle is Becoming the  
“Solar Capital of North America”

BY MARK WILKERSON

What is it about intentional community that always seems to evoke so much in people? Every April at Stelle Community in rural Illinois we open our doors to the public at an Earth Day celebration, and again in October for the National Tour of Solar Homes. On these days you'll always find a congregation of people in my neighbor Steve Bell's basement listening intently to the details of his solar-wind hybrid system. Usually the conversation turns to community, and this leads to discussions of spirituality, alternative medicine, cooperative agriculture—you get the gist. A conversation might start with, “So what is this place anyway?” or “How did this community get here?” and before you know it we're down the alternative-lifestyle path. This year toward the end of our Earth Day event I went over to visit Steve. A group of visitors was just leaving. “I could listen to him talk all day,” one enthused. It's almost as though we were helping our visitors find a lost part of themselves that they didn't know was missing.

Stelle is an 28-year old intentional community of 110 residents in our own small unincorporated village about an hour and a half south of Chicago. Even though we're in a rural part of Illinois, amid thousands of acres of cornfields, and with the nearest shopping center 30 miles away, we are sometimes referred to as the “solar capital of North America.” Over a third of our homes are powered wholly or partly by photovoltaics (PV). Our water, phone, and Internet services are powered by renewable energy. In fact, over 50 percent of our homes have passive and/or active solar features.

Yet we began our renewable energy journey only six and a half years ago. Let me tell you what we've done, and how we've become a force for alternative living in the heart of the Midwest.

## Solar Phone Company and On-Site Internet Server

Back in the '70s we created our own phone system—the Stelle Telephone Company—a rural mutual corporation in which each Stelle resident owns a share. However, as in many rural locations, our local electric company's supply was susceptible to lightning strikes, ice storms, and other natural phenomena. In fact, a winter storm could cut off all power and phones for several days or over a week at a time, and this happened regularly. Each time our phone company's service shut down and we couldn't call out or receive any incoming calls.

We solved the problem in 1996 by transforming our telephone company into North America's first solar-powered phone company. We installed a two-kilowatt array of 64 solar modules

**Over a third of our homes are powered wholly or partly by photovoltaics.**

(solar panels), a large bank of sealed absorbed glass mat batteries (1,400 amp hours at 48 volts DC), and a backup propane generator. Now every phone call made from Stelle is solar-powered, and we're celebrating six-plus years of 100 percent system reliability. And while we haven't had the solar-powered phone system long enough to break even yet, we figure we can't really put a price on finally having a phone power supply we can always count on.

Another challenge to a remote community with a rural phone company is access to the Internet. Any call we make outside of Stelle is a long distance call. This posed a great challenge to many community members and home-based businesses wanting to use the Internet. So in the summer of 1998, Stelle Telephone

became the world's first off-grid solar-powered Internet service provider (ISP) with a desktop computer, a server, and sixteen 56K modems. We added an additional 900 watts of solar modules on a dual-axis tracker to our phone company's central office system to offset the additional electrical loads of our on-site ISP equipment. We're also connected to a dedicated, hard-wired, high-bandwidth telecommunications trunk (a T-1) for high speeds and high reliability.

These two solar applications have made it possible for many home-based businesses to thrive at Stelle. It also

## Wind-Powered Central Water Plant

We also created a central water plant that all of us own and manage, improving the efficiency of water delivery and reducing our average water costs to \$40-\$60 per month per household.

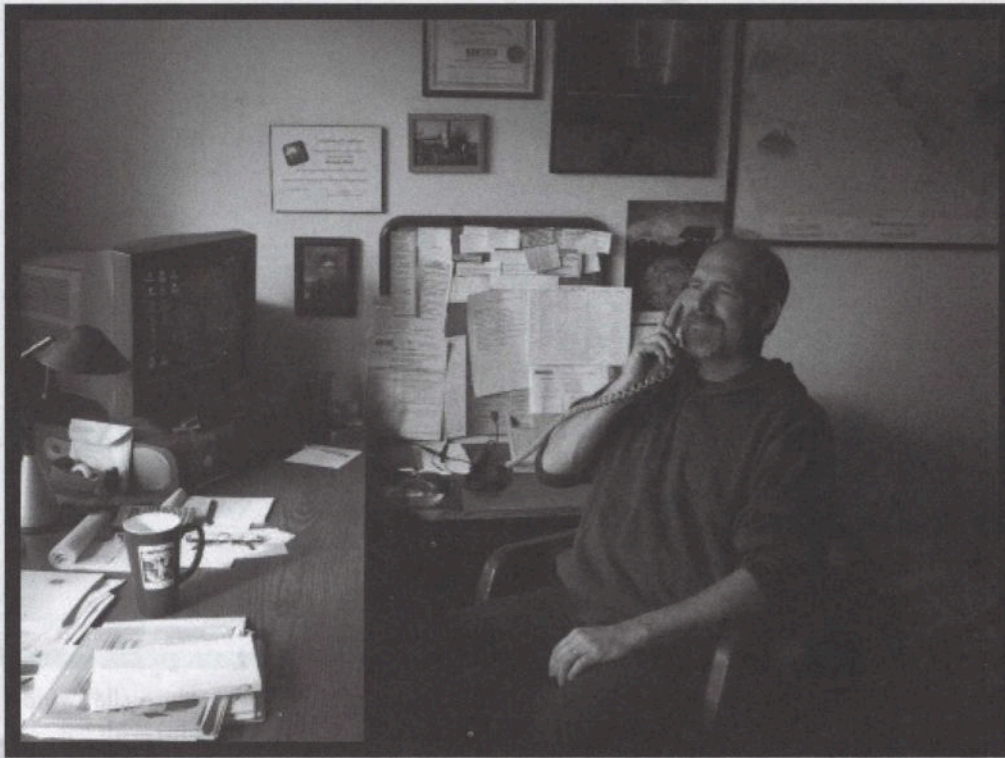
Instead of 46 households having 46 individual wells and water pumps, we provided one 300-foot well with pumps powered by a 10 kilowatt wind turbine. We originally set up our wind system to sell excess power back to the local utility company. But since Illinois has yet to enact a net metering law, the cost and has-



*Stelle Phone Company generates power from PV panels on the roof; the solar tracker adds more power for its Internet service. The wind generator helps power a home.*

opened the door for a regional office of the New York-based SunWize Technologies to use Stelle as a base of worldwide business development activities. SunWize employs three Stelle residents, including myself and Steve Bell, and supplies a Stelle-based dealer, Tim Wilhelm, with his wholesale solar needs. Tim also runs Stelle Telephone for us, and teaches electronics and other related courses at a local community college.

sle of selling back to the electric company didn't make the exercise worthwhile. But with a grid-tied system, the load goes down when the grid goes down, meaning we'd lose our ability to pump water. So we took our water plant totally off-grid by installing a battery bank, two inverters, and all the hardware in between. Now that our wind power is stored in batteries, when the grid goes down our water keeps pumping. With the new state grants and rebates for using photovoltaics in Illinois, we're considering adding a solar-electric system to increase the reliability of our power supply.



*The medium is the message—Steve Bell provides tech support to a phone customer via a solar-powered phone.*

## Home PV Systems

Fourteen of our homes are fully or partly powered by photovoltaics. The smallest residential PV systems in Stelle have arrays of 15-year-old recycled solar panels. These small systems each feature eight solar modules, an inverter, four batteries, and a charge controller with a meter. Even though they're not new, the 15-year-old modules still generate over 90 percent of their original rating.

Stelle's largest home PV set-up is Steve's solar-wind hybrid system, which includes 2,980 watts of solar modules—880 watts on a sun tracker and 2,100 watts on the roof—and a 4 kilowatt wind turbine. These supply 48 volts DC to a bank of 24 batteries (almost 100 kilowatt hours of storage at 48 volts DC), along with two inverters.

Steve's system now generates excess electricity year-round. Since currently there is no incentive to pump this excess back to the grid, he heats his basement in the winter by channeling extra wind-gen-

erated energy into a set of homemade resistant air-heating elements. When it's sunny and windy, Steve can also pre-heat his domestic hot water. Steve was also one of the first customers of Commonwealth

Edison (our local utility company) to sign up for their new net metering experiment. After a year he received a \$150 check for electric power he'd sold back to them (over and above the amount he'd used).

## Winter Space

### Heating

Six of our homes have passive solar features, which offset a good part of their winter heating needs. More than half of our households use wood as all or part of their heating fuel, and more households are planning PV and passive solar systems.

Another recent trend at Stelle is using propane as the primary fuel for loads we used to run with electricity. Having on-site propane storage gives us an extra measure of autonomy during extended

power outages. Like most people who get power from renewable energy sources, we can't afford to burn solar-generated electricity for cooking or heating hot water, so supplementing with propane helps us use expensive PV technology appropriately. For this reason I consider propane as a "solar enabler." Using propane is less harmful to the environment too: the total pollution or negative impact on the Earth of energy derived from propane is far less than an equivalent kilowatt hour of fossil fuel or nuclear generated energy. Nevertheless, as appliances become more efficient and hydrogen fuel cells and other technologies come on the market, we'll most likely phase out propane in favor of these more sustainable methods.

## Reaching Out

For several years now Stelle has hosted hybrid solar-wind workshops for the Midwest Renewable Energy Association, producers of the nationally renowned Midwest Renewable Energy Fair. But we want to do far more. In order to create a more formal and productive way to share our sustainable features and demonstrate off-grid energy, our Stelle Area Chamber of Commerce has started an organization, the Midwest Center for Sustainable Living. We've involved several universities and other key groups in the initial phase of this effort, which includes getting grants from the newly established Illinois Clean Energy Trust Fund, the Shell Foundation, and others. We've formed a nonprofit group, Sustainable Living Systems, to raise \$5.8 million to build the Center. We intend to make the Center self-supporting with corporate eco-retreats, personal growth seminars, holistic health seminars, sustainability think tanks, and, of course, wind and PV technical training. Our goal will be to demonstrate new energy technologies in a real end-of-grid support scenario, which will offer an added dimension to college-level classroom learning. Our larger vision is to reproduce this venue around the world, utilizing local geopolitical strengths and resources to help people everywhere

***We became North America's first solar-powered phone company.***

understand and enact a more sustainable way of life.

Since we tend to fuel our visitors' interests in renewable energy and sustainability, as well as intentional community, spirituality, and holistic health, we might as well make it more available and large-scale. Who knows, in a few years our small community in the cornfields might have helped fuel a trend that leads to a more sustainable way of life for everyone.

*Stelle welcomes visitors. 815-256-2224; [www.stellecommunity.com](http://www.stellecommunity.com).*

*Mark Wilkerson is Vice President of Business Development for SunWize Technologies. He and his family have lived at Stelle Community since 1993.*



Water for drinking, cleaning, gardening, and swimming is provided by Stelle's wind- and sun-powered central water plant. Author Mark Wilkerson (right) with hat.

## ABOUT STELLE COMMUNITY

Stelle was founded in 1973 by metaphysical teacher Richard Kieninger. Because he predicted coming massive earthquakes and other geological and societal disruption, he and his followers set out to create a supportive environment for spiritual development and self-sufficient living. A few years later Kieninger and many community members had grown apart philosophically, so in the early '80s he and a small group of members moved to Texas. Those who remained were more mainstream idealists who recreated the community on democratic principles, yet retained its interests in spirituality, self reliance, and sustainability.

Today, Stelle is an open, self-governing, spiritually eclectic community, with 76 adults, 26 kids, and three teenagers. About 20 or so people are "old-timers" who've been here from the beginning or close to the beginning. Others have been here almost as long, but not since the streets were literally cornfields. Then there are newcomers like my wife Rhonda and myself. The community is about to build another street and add another 14 lots, where we hope to build our own solar dream home.

Stelle is now organized as a homeowners association, the Stelle Community Association, which administers community affairs through its elected board. Residents live in single-family homes, duplexes, and fourplexes. Three households live on nearby farms and are considered part of the Stelle family. About 27 percent of our residents work at home-based businesses or telecommute, and 16 percent commute over an hour daily to downtown Chicago or its

suburbs. More than half of our working-age moms stay at home to take care of their children, and about half of these offer all or part of their children's education in homeschooling environments. Twenty percent are full-time homeschooling moms. Interests and activities in the community include gardening, herbal medicine, canning, quilting, and Tai Chi. We have a study group based on the book *Conversations with God*. We have a garden co-op; a Monday night dinner co-op; and a parent-teacher educational co-op that operates a preschool as an adjunct for our home schoolers and a resource for all parents and students.

I see Stelle as the kind of place where you feel like you can honestly call all of your neighbors friends, although certainly some are closer than others and everyone has their idiosyncrasies. As a relative newcomer to community I've noticed something else—some new people seem to come here expecting Stelle to fix all that's wrong in their lives, not understanding that their baggage comes right along with them. I've learned that unless and until you deal with your own issues, "community" won't solve it for you. And in fact, community is a place where you are forced to deal with your issues. Living at Stelle has helped me understand this fundamental tenet. Those who "push our buttons" are doing so, (1) at our request (on a higher level), and (2) for our benefit. If we choose to ignore these opportunities that, too, is our choice. Hopefully, we will choose to grow as a result of such processes.

—M.W.



# COMMUNITIES DIRECTORY

## COMMUNITY DESCRIPTIONS

Over 600 North American and 100 international communities describe themselves—their structure, beliefs, mission, and visions of the future, and provide contact information.

## 33 ARTICLES

Topics include: how to visit communities; why live in community and what it means to do so; financing and setting up the legal structures of communities; opportunities for older people in community; communities and the “cult” issue; consensus process; raising children in community; dealing with conflict; an overview of Christian community; and more.

## MAPS

Complete maps of North American communities. See at a glance what’s happening in your area.

## CHARTS

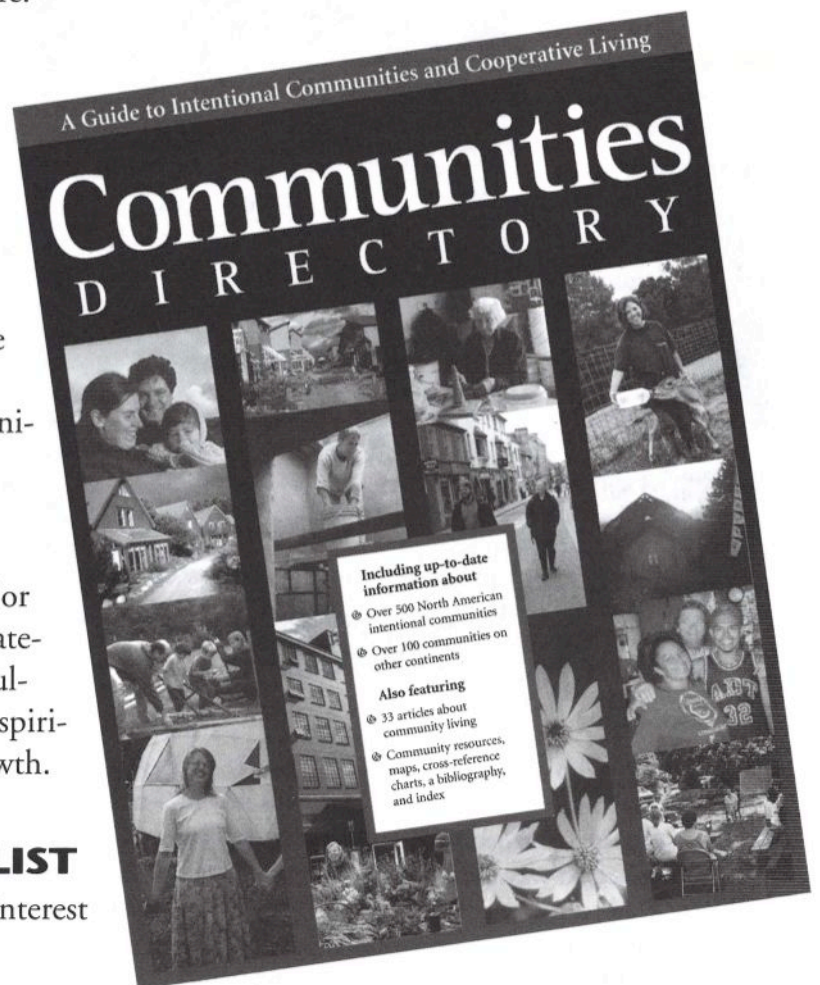
These charts allow you to quickly scan for the communities that fulfill your criteria. The charts will show you in a flash which communities match your needs and desires.

## RESOURCES

Descriptions and contact information for major organizations within specific interest areas. Categories include: community networking, agriculture, ecology, energy, economics, technology, spirituality, education, sexuality, and personal growth.

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

An annotated collection of over 300 texts of interest to community-minded people.

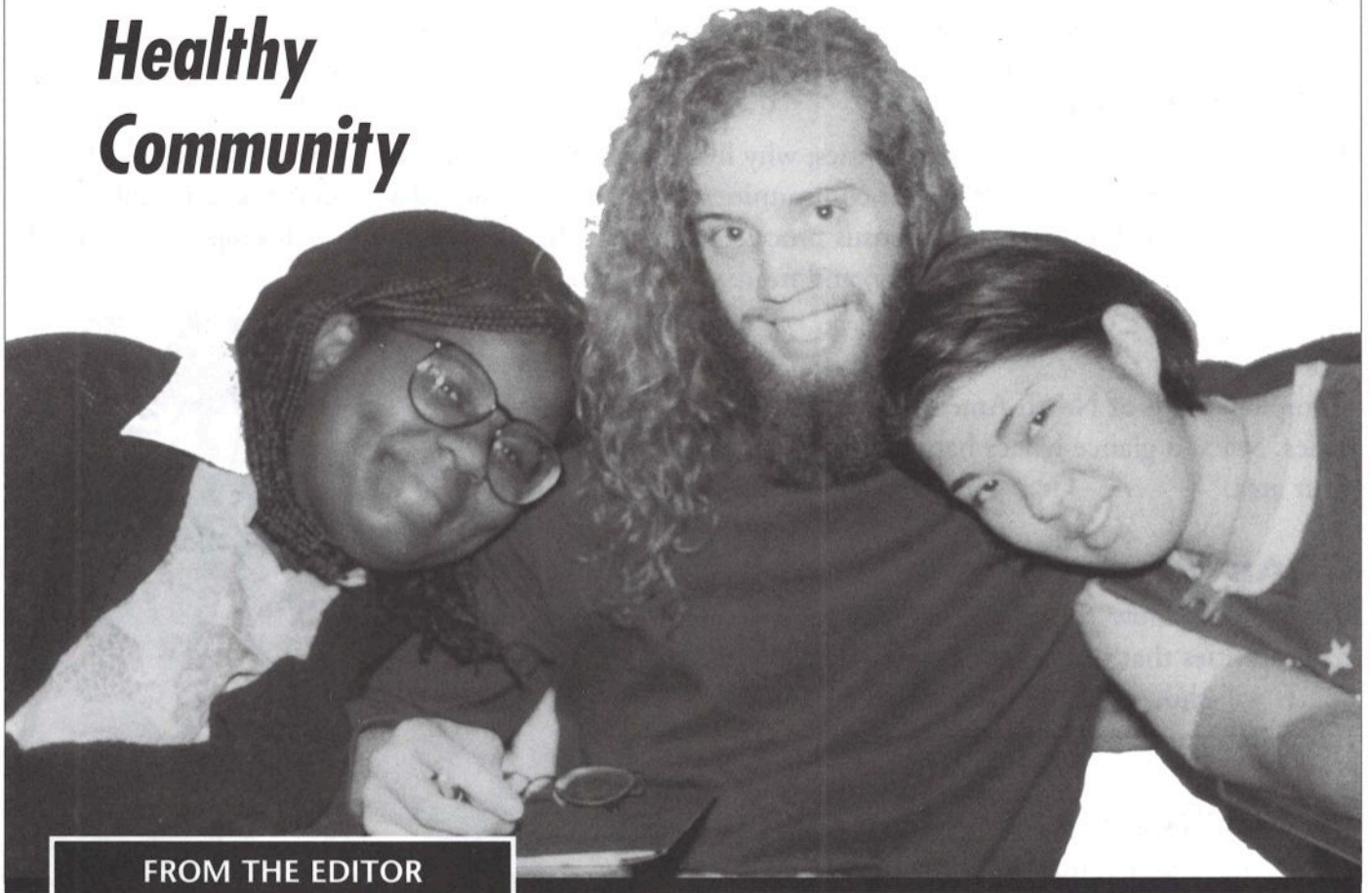


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# Communication and Process: The Heart of Healthy Community



FROM THE EDITOR  
DIANA LEAFE CHRISTIAN

NASCO

People who are drawn to live in community are usually seeking a warmer, kinder, and more connected way of life than they're used to. So if we want life to feel different in community, we've got to *do* things differently there. If we're going to create an alternative to the fragmented and alienated culture most of us have grown up with we'll need new skills for making decisions and getting along with each other.

Most of us don't realize that our

wider society is dysfunctional because it's just *us*—multiplied and magnified by millions of individuals—doing what we normally do. When we see governments or corporations using manipulative, controlling, or punishing behaviors writ large—through threats, power plays, dissembling, refusing to take responsibility for actions, terrorist attacks, or outright war—it frightens and disgusts us. But when we emit the individual microcosm version of these same behaviors ourselves, they're largely

invisible. We may revile “terrorists,” but what about our own choice of words and tone of voice with our partner or child or housemate this morning? Those of us who think we do these behaviors the least are often the ones who do them the most. The more spiritual we imagine we are, often the harder it is for us to see it.

This is where community process skills come in. I define process as those methods—from decision making to interpersonal communica-

tion—that help people feel connected and stay connected. This involves improving meeting structures, spreading power widely instead of allowing it to pool and concentrate, changing how we say things (and how we perceive things), and finding ways to openly share our true feelings, concerns, aspirations, hopes, and dreams. For community life to be better than the lives we led before community we've got to realize we may be contributing to the problem, and be willing to learn new ways of behaving, perceiving, and communicating. And we need to value and advocate good group process and communication skills in our group.

In fact, we need these skills *more* in community, as this setting tends to trigger faster-than-normal spiritual and emotional growth. The close and frequent interactions with others on major matters about how we will live and work cooperatively tends to reveal some of our worst and most destructive behaviors, and also, to heal them. I call this the “rock polisher” effect: rocks in a rock tumbler first abrade and then polish each other; in community our rough edges are often brought up and then worn smoother by frequent contact with everyone else's edges. This usually involves conflict. Process consultant Laird Schaub defines conflict as at least two people having different view-

***There's nothing like community to make us finally grow up.***

points and at least one having emotional distress about it. Such distress can manifest as any level of emotion, from anxiety, annoyance, and disappointment, to fear, anger, sadness, and grief. And, unless or until we get a bit more conscious, we usually think that *that* other community member *caused* these feelings!

But living in community, sooner or later we discover that—wonder of wonders—maybe the other person is a mirror for things we do ourselves. Whoops!

The rock-polishing effect can be so painful that it ejects some people right out of the group, or the group becomes so fraught with strife it implodes and breaks up. But through good community process we can make the rock-polishing effect more conscious and more effective. Rather than suffer helplessly during this natural process, we can use living in community as a powerful opportunity for personal growth. We can learn

to accept and welcome feedback, and do course-correction if necessary. We can purify and refine ourselves into people who are considerably more conscious and responsible about what we say and how we say it, what we do and how we do it. We can become higher and finer and more self-aware versions of ourselves in the good company of others doing the same. The process of sharing resources, living interdependently, and making decisions cooperatively—and no longer being able to get away with our usual behaviors—is like a wake-up call to the soul. There's nothing like community to make us finally grow up.

I see at least eight different, slightly overlapping kinds of processes—some procedural and organizational, others interpersonal—that can help communities experience a higher sense of well-being and individual members stay connected with one another:

**1. Fair, participatory decision-making processes that spread decision-making power throughout the group.** These include multi-winner

ACORN COMMUNITY



voting; Sociocracy; consensus; and “agreement seeking” methods such as super-majority voting and others.

**2. Processes for helping group members stay accountable to each other.** These include methods for keeping track of how and whether members meet their obligations for labor and financial contributions, or live up to the group’s behavioral norms, and how the group deals with it if they don’t.

**3. Ongoing communication skills—including skills for self-awareness—that increase affinity and reduce the amount of distancing and conflict.** These include active listening, making “I” statements, the Naka-Ima process, Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication process, and others.

**4. Getting to know each other better, creating bonding, intimacy, and a shared sense of “us.”** These include the talking stick process and other kinds of sharing circles, along with work parties, singing, dancing, rituals, and celebrations.

**5. Peer-listening processes for resolving personal issues.** These include the talking stick process and other kinds of sharing circles, active listening, empathetic listening (Nonviolent Communication), Quaker Clearness Committees, and Reevaluation Counseling, among other methods.

**6. Processes for discussing upsets and concerns, giving each other feedback, and asking for change.**

**7. Specific processes for resolving conflicts.**

**8. Processes for selecting new members to join the group, and when necessary, asking people to leave.**

We begin our special section on process with well-known consultant and psychotherapist Susan Campbell (author of *The Couple’s Journey* and *Beyond the Power Struggle*), in “Getting Real: Ten ‘Truth Skills’ to Enhance Emotional Connection, Intimacy, and Well Being,” excerpted from her new book, *Getting Real* (New World Library, 2001). *Carolyn Anderson* and *Katharine Roske* address some spiritual principles that underlie good process and how they apply them at Hummingbird Ranch in New Mexico in “Birthing Co-Creative Community.” And in “Towards

Clarity and Honesty,” ecological designer John Schinnerer shares some processes from his nonresidential therapeutic community in Seattle.

Mexico-based consensus facilitator and Huehucoyotl member Bea Briggs gives us the straight scoop in “True Consensus, False Consensus,” while Meadowdance cofounder Luc Reid offers a lighthearted look at consensus processes in “Dr. Ike’s Magical Cup O’ Facilitation.” Sometimes satire—looking at the subject backwards—best illustrates functional community process, thus we include “Ask Uncle Ralph”—tongue-in-cheek

MICHAEL MCINTYRE



advice by an experienced communitarian who, in this instance, shall remain anonymous!

Saving time and alleviating frustration in meetings are addressed by two contributors: professional facilitator Tree Bressen in "Agenda Planning: The Experienced Communitarian's Technique for Making Meetings Flow," and cohousing process consultant Shari Leach in "Who Says We Can't Consense to Vote?"

## **Maybe the other person is a mirror for things we do ourselves. Whoops!**

We end our special process section with "From Conflict to Connection: The Fine Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback," an excerpt from *Creating a Life Together* (New Society Publishers), a forthcoming book on starting new intentional communities by yours truly.

We hope you enjoy these rich and diverse invitations to good process. And, whether or not you live in community, that you find ways to apply them in your life! Ω

*Diana Leafe Christian is editor of Communities magazine.*

*Portions of this editorial excerpted with permission from Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow an Intentional Community (New Society Publishers, 2002-2003).*

## **PAST COMMUNITIES MAGAZINE ARTICLES ON PROCESS**

We can't cover all eight of these aspects of process—or all the ways available—in just one issue of the magazine, but we can point you to other articles and past issues of *Communities* dedicated to process subjects. (Back issues are readily available from our secure on-line mail-order service, [store.ic.org](http://store.ic.org).)

- **Fair, participatory decision-making processes.** *Winter '00 issue, #109, "Decision Making in Community," with articles on consensus, agreement-seeking, multi-winner voting, and sociocracy.*

*Article, "Dysfunctional Consensus—And What You Can Do About It," Spring '01, #110.*

*"Process in Community" columns: "Moderating the Vocal, Encouraging the Shy: Workable Ways to Equalize Participation in Meetings," Summer '01, #111; "False Meeting Economy: Learning When It's a Bad Bargain to Go Fast," Spring '01, #110; "Decision Making in Cohousing," Spring '00, #107; "Community Meetings: Getting Off to a Good Start," Winter '99, #105.*

- **Processes for helping members stay accountable to each other.** *Articles, "Our Community's 'Ode' of Respects and Responsibilities," Fall '96, #92; "Exploring Leadership Dynamics in Community," Winter '99, #105.*

- **Ongoing communication skills—including skills for self-awareness.** *Fall '99, #104, "Conflict & Connection," includes articles on the Naka-Ima process, Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication process, and others.*

- **Getting to know each other better, creating bonding, intimacy, and a shared sense of "us."** *Summer '00, #107, "Song, Dance, & Celebration: What Creates 'Community Spirit'?"*

- **Processes for discussing upsets and concerns, giving each other feedback, and asking for change.** *Geoph Kozeny's Peripatetic Communitarian columns: "I Don't Want to Talk About It," Fall '99, #104; "Toxic Emissions, Toxic Omissions," Spring '99, #102; "Feelings About Feelings," Winter '97, #97.*

- **Specific processes for resolving conflicts.** *Fall '99, #104, "Conflict & Connection."*

*Articles, "Community Member as 'Lightning Rod'," Spring '00, #106; "How Rumors Can Ruin Community Friendships (And What You Can Do About It), Summer '00, #107.*

- **Processes for selecting new members to join the group, and when necessary, asking people to leave.** *Article, "'Admissions Standards' for Communities," in Fall '99 issue, #96.*

All back issues are available for sale at [store.ic.org](http://store.ic.org).



# Getting Real:

**Ten “Truth Skills”** BY SUSAN CAMPBELL

**to Enhance  
Emotional  
Connection,  
Intimacy,  
and Well-being**

I grew up in a happy home with wonderful parents and three siblings who loved and supported me, and still I’m as screwed up as everybody else! My ability to be authentically myself started getting compromised just after I was born. That was when I started taking on a bunch of false beliefs about how the world works and how people are.

As I grew up I learned that it's not safe to feel and express your true feelings. I learned strategies for staying safe and in control: by not expressing wants or anger and by being judgmental when I was really afraid. I spent years perfecting these strategies. The result was that even though there was a deeply feeling, caring, loving, hurting, fearful human being in there somewhere, what I mostly showed to the world during much of my life was the competent, intelligent, helpful, over-controlled good girl. This is why I'm so passionate about the practice of Getting Real—because for so much of my life I occupied only a few of the many rooms of my emotional house.

As a psychotherapist for the past 34 years, I have, of course, observed that I am not alone in this game of limiting myself in the interest of staying safe. It is part of the human journey to start out whole, then to continually cut off parts of ourselves in response to real or imagined pain, and to spend the rest of our lives searching for what we have cut off, buried, and forgotten about. Even entire cultures seem to operate within a very narrow band of the total human experience. Thus, we project onto others what we cannot feel, experience, and own up to in ourselves. War and conflict are the result, when all the while we long for peace.

Getting Real is about reclaiming, reviving, and re-experiencing these buried parts of ourselves. In my own journey I have studied and applied many methods toward this end. After years of exploration, I have found that the quickest and best route to wholeness is honest communication with yourself and others. Of course, in attempting to follow this simple prescription, you will come up against all the ways you have cut yourself off

from the truth of your existence. So honest communication becomes your “awareness practice”—your vehicle for noticing what you avoid (your irrational fears) and how you go about avoiding it (your control patterns).

The main reason honest communication works so well as a growth path is that most of the time, when you go deeply and patiently into an experience, feeling it fully without escaping into a control pattern, it changes! I'm not kidding. The way out is to go deeply in. You will discover this truth for yourself if you engage in what I call the 10 truth skills, briefly described below. Some of these skills take quite a bit of courage. Others actually ease the way and make honesty less threatening. When you use them in combination, you will find that they support one another and make the whole process of being honest quite enlivening and less frightening than you might imagine.

The Getting Real process will go faster if you have a skilled coach or teacher to help you avoid the pitfalls of self-deception, and it absolutely requires at least one or two committed others who agree to undertake this journey with you.

From leading Getting Real workshops, I have learned how free people feel when they notice, feel, and express

***You speak the truth of what you think, feel, and notice as a way of making emotional contact.***

their own inner experience, agreeing for a day or two to set aside their normal conditions of politeness and appropriateness. Most people are amazed to discover that they feel okay just as they are—warts and all.

Have you ever

- been bored listening to someone but acted interested?
- pretended to like someone more than you really did?
- pretended to like someone less than you really did?
- had trouble admitting you didn't know something you're supposed to know?
- had trouble admitting you were wrong?
- had difficulty asking for what you wanted?
- acted happy when you felt sad?
- had difficulty admitting you were attracted to someone until you found out how they felt about you?
- had a problem saying no or marking your boundaries?
- had trouble telling your sexual partner that you're not satisfied?
- reacted defensively when you thought you were being criticized?
- had difficulty expressing your anger, jealousy, or hurt?
- had trouble expressing your love, caring, or vulnerability?
- avoided telling someone something that you feared might be hurtful?

I ask hundreds of people these questions during speeches and seminars, and nearly everyone answers yes to most of them. The most common reasons people give are:

- to avoid hurting people's feelings
- to avoid looking
- to avoid conflict, disagreement, or feeling anger
- to ensure that things turn out right
- to avoid feeling out of control

We lie to avoid whatever we perceive as dangerous—to our ego, to our comfort, to our safety. Most of all we lie because our sense of safety and self-esteem depends on our feeling in control, in control of how other people react to us, of whether we appear smart or foolish, of whether we'll get what we want.

In the mid-1990s I conducted a three-year research study that demonstrated that about 80 percent of the average person's communications are geared toward controlling things that are actually beyond the person's control.

More often than not the truth of a situation doesn't conform to our ideas about how things should be. The truth is often more confusing, paradoxical, uncomfortable, or messy than we might wish it to be. It cannot be controlled. The people in my study who experienced the greatest number of painful unexpected surprises (such as job loss, divorce, and alienation from their grown children) were those who demonstrated the highest need for control. It seems that the more you try to get reality to fit within your comfort zone, the more unprepared you are to deal with a world full of surprise, complexity, and change. Likewise, if we persist in trying to get our relationships to conform to our expectations instead of letting them be how they actually are, we may miss important opportunities to know ourselves and others more deeply.

In conducting my study, I talked to many people who have begun to recognize the price they have paid for trying to control things that really are not within their control. Because of the evolutionary forces of information overload and rapid, unpredictable change, we now need to become less attached to how things should turn out and communicate more about what is actually going on—even if doing so is uncomfortable or threatening. Doing so requires that we take our prejudices, preconceptions, and shoulds lightly so that we can accurately perceive the feedback we get rather

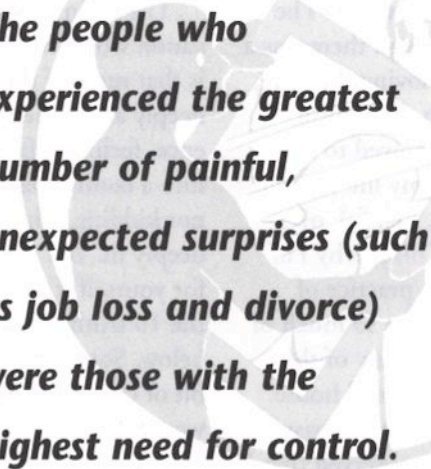
than having our perceptions clouded by what we expect, what we fear, or what we think should be happening. I call this new orientation toward communication *relating*. Relating is how you get real.

Control-oriented communication is geared toward ensuring a predictable result. It is the ego-mind's way of protecting us from feeling anxious or uncomfortable when facing an unexpected or unknown outcome. The ego-mind is that part of us that likes to feel in control. Most of us don't trust that if we don't get the result we were hoping for, we'll be resourceful enough to come up with a "plan B."

When we relate we value *what is* over what should or could be. When you relate, as opposed to when you control, you speak the truth of what you think, feel, and notice as a way of sharing information and making emotional contact—and not as a way of getting a particular outcome. You speak your truth without knowing how this truth will be received.

This is about the practice of conscious, deeply contacting communication—the type of communication that pushes you closer to that edge of aliveness where you trust yourself enough to speak your truth even without being sure of how you will be received, where you are relating instead of controlling.

To really experience true contact with another person, you must enter a realm of uncertainty together. To help you gain the courage and confidence to live this way, here is a brief outline of 10 essential life skills, which I call truth skills.



**The people who experienced the greatest number of painful, unexpected surprises (such as job loss and divorce) were those with the highest need for control.**

### **1. Experiencing what is.**

When I use the words *what is*, I am referring to whatever is actually going on in the present moment—in your body, in your mind, and in your environment. By noticing and feeling *what is* you learn to distinguish between what you actually experience in your body and emotions from what your mind thinks, judges, expects, or believes should be happening. This practice will help you communicate about your current reality more accurately and honestly. It will keep you connected to the energy of being alive, thereby training you not to depend so much on external results, such as what others think of you, for your sense of well-being.

### **2. Being transparent.**

Self-disclosure, or what I am calling being transparent, is the ability to reveal to another person what you have done or what you are sensing, feeling, thinking, or saying to yourself at the moment. When you share your thoughts, sensations, feelings, even your judgments "in the interest of transparency," you are less apt to get caught up in the illusion of control. The motive behind your self-expression is just that—self-expression. It is



not about trying to get people to change. As a result, your expression is less likely to trigger a defensive reaction in them. Letting yourself be seen by others is also an important aid to seeing yourself more honestly. It is harder to fool yourself when you are going public about who you are.

### 3. Noticing your intent.

Communicating with the intent to *control* the outcome of a situation represents the ego-mind's efforts to protect you. The intent to control, or to self-protect, does have its place, especially if you are in physical danger. However, most people communicate with the intent to control rather than to *relate* far more than they need to. If you really want to see the reality of a situation or to connect with someone emotionally, you need to allow yourself to be open to the possibilities of each moment—spontaneous and unrehearsed. You need to *relate* more and *control* less.

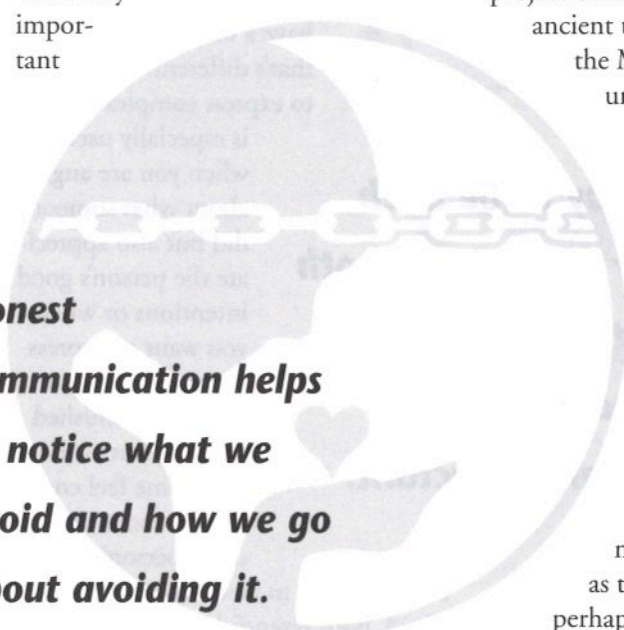
### 4. Welcoming feedback.

Welcoming feedback is another way to be present to *what is*. It means being attuned to what is happening around you each moment. When you welcome feedback, you are actively curious about how others are affected by your actions. You ask, "How are you with what I just did?" or "What is your response to what I'm saying?" Asking for feedback keeps the two-way flow of conversation going, an essential ingredient of relating. The ability to notice others' verbal and nonverbal feedback is how you learn from experience. You do or say something, then you notice what happens. In this way you can see whether your behavior serves your needs, aims, and values.

### 5. Asserting what you want and don't want.

Asserting what you want affirms your right to want what you want—even if you imagine it's an unreasonable demand or that there's little chance of getting it. This skill also helps you

become less attached to getting everything you ask for, since each request won't carry such a heavy load. When you are free and fluent with your requests, you don't expect to get everything you ask for. But when you save up your requests for "the really important



**Honest  
communication helps  
us notice what we  
avoid and how we go  
about avoiding it.**

things," each request carries more significance than is realistic. Asking freely, instead of inhibiting yourself, keeps your energy flowing. You are saying yes to yourself, no matter how another person responds to your wants.

It is also very important to let people know about what you don't want. You need to be able to refuse to do, receive, tolerate, or speak about something, if that is your honest response. This kind of asserting may result in the other person being disappointed, frustrated, or angry; but if a relationship is to be authentic, there needs to be space for people to experience their full range of feelings and to have those feelings be okay.

### 6. Taking back projections.

Often what you "see" in another person is actually a mirror of something in yourself that you're uncomfortable with. When a timid person is

put off by someone aggressive, perhaps she is disowning her own "aggressiveness," that is, her ability to stand up for herself. When a dominating person is bothered by a timid, fearful person, perhaps he is not acknowledging his own fearfulness. The phenomenon of projection has been recognized since ancient times. In the Sermon on the Mount in the Bible, Christ urged his followers to be mindful of noticing the speck in their neighbor's eye while failing to notice the log in their own. Becoming aware of projections helps you to season your judgments with some humility. It can also help you to remember that other people's judgments about you are as much (or more) about them as they are about you. And perhaps most important, this kind of awareness can show you where your life energy is blocked or stuck in a pattern so that you can get it flowing again.

### 7. Revising an earlier statement.

We can learn to be flexible enough to change our minds and to let someone know that our feelings have changed. You may at times notice that you no longer feel something after you have expressed it; you may realize hours or days after you have shared something that it was a lie; or you may discover a deeper level of your feelings. In such situations, it's important to give yourself permission to come back to the person with whom you've communicated to clear things up. Also known as "going out and coming in again," this truth skill can help you deal with changing your mind, clearing up a misunderstanding, or making up after an argument. It gives you a way to continually forgive (or seek forgiveness) and begin again.

### 9. Sharing mixed emotions.

When you are ambivalent, confused, or “of two minds,” go ahead and express this fact. You may be pulled equally in two or more directions. Or you may feel primarily one way (in your “foreground”) but have a background feeling that’s different. The ability to express complex feelings is especially useful when you are angry about what someone did but also appreciate the person’s good intentions or when you want to express a strong feeling to clear up unfinished business but at the same time feel concerned about the other person’s reaction.

It’s okay to be both angry and afraid, both resentful and appreciative, both eager and reluctant. This skill teaches you to let go of your ideas and shoulds about being consistent so that you can experience whatever shows up in your awareness.

### 10. Embracing the silence.

Whenever you step fully into the present moment, you let go of the need to know how things will turn out. Your attention is on the only thing you can know—what is happening now. The most authentic response to a situation arises from a place of now. The most authentic response to a situation arises from a place of spaciousness, of silence, of not knowing. You can’t plan everything in advance. You can’t know what another person will do until she does it. If you can’t tolerate not knowing and the feeling of helplessness that sometimes accompanies it, you will miss much of what is happening in the moment. Silence is your connection to the Source, the place from which new creation springs forth.

### An Awareness Practice

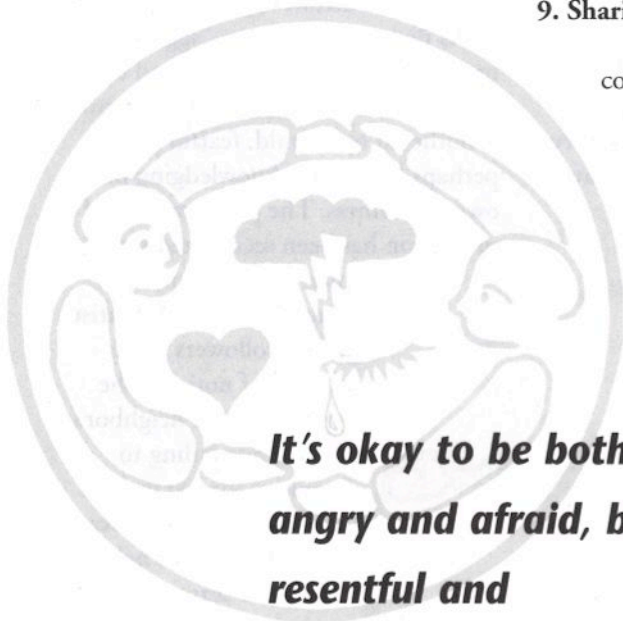
These 10 truth skills constitute an awareness practice—a way of speaking and listening that helps you to see, accept, and deal creatively with *whatever is*. As you work with the 10 skills, your ability to be present to *what is* will grow.

What is often stands in sharp contrast to what you wish were happening or think should be happening. For example, let’s say friend doesn’t call when he says he will. That’s what is—he said he’d call and he didn’t. Do you notice what you feel? Will you listen to what he says later in explanation? Or do you interrupt your capacity to feel and listen to your friend by immediately judging his behavior or imagining why he didn’t call?

When your attention is on your mind chatter (thoughts, inferences, judgments, and interpretations), you are not present to what is happening here and now, so you can’t be real. You become more present, and therefore more real, as you peel away the layers of automatic patterns (such as judging or explaining others’ behavior) and conditioned beliefs (about how safe it is to speak honestly). As you shed these layers, you will reveal your authentic self. Honest communication is the vehicle for this process. If you’re being real, or relating, you might say something like, “I notice my jaw is tense. I feel angry at you for saying you’d call and then not calling.” Real communication focuses on your sensations, feelings, and observations, bringing you into the present moment. This kind of communication allows for something real, unplanned, and potentially surprising and creative to occur between you and another person.

Being honest is a vital part of any awareness practice. When you express what you are honestly thinking, feeling, and wanting with the intention of relating (rather than of bolstering your position), you come to see that who you are is not defined by your

*(continued on p. 59 Getting Real)*

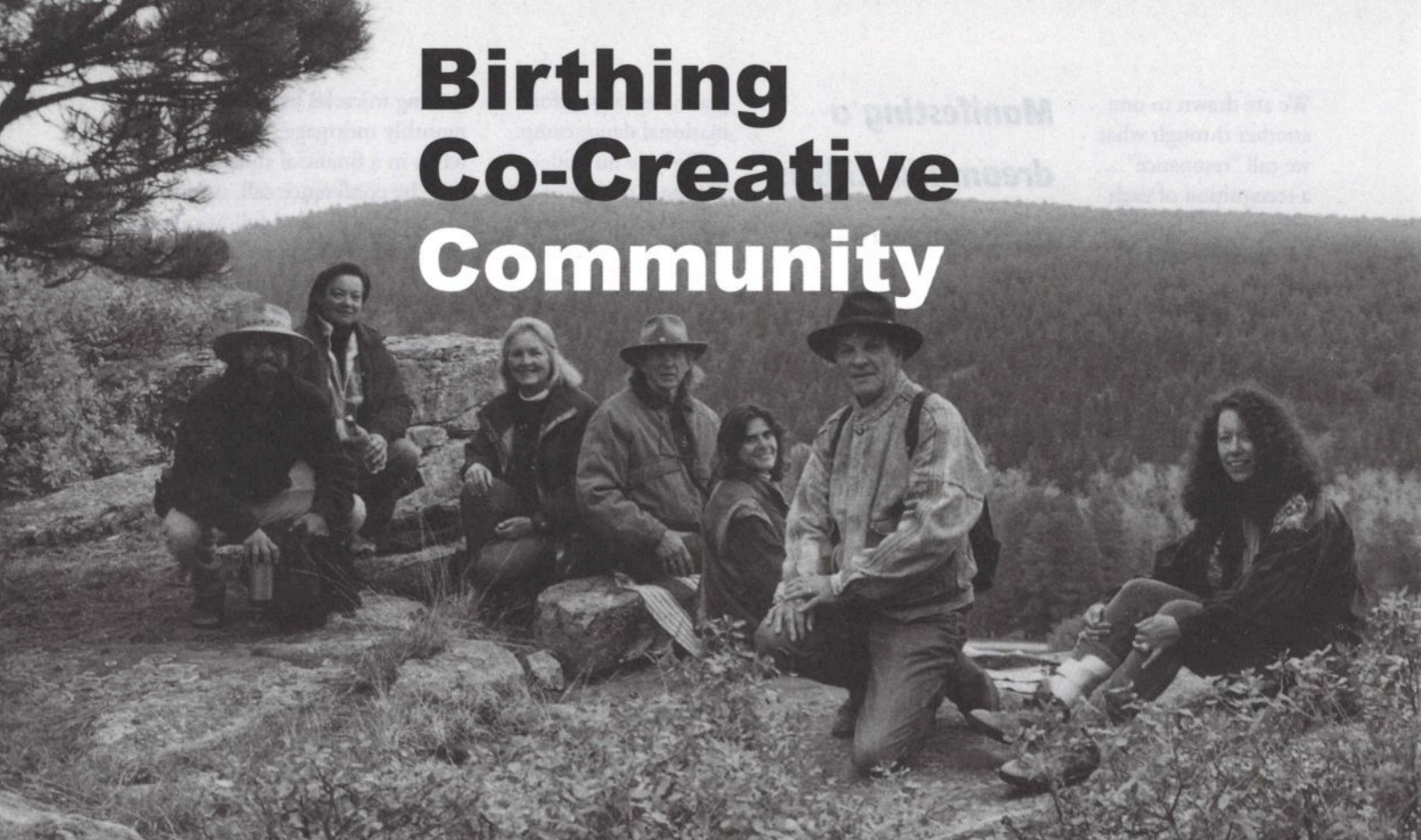


***It's okay to be both  
angry and afraid, both  
resentful and  
appreciative, both  
eager and reluctant.***

### 8. Holding differences.

Holding differences refers to your ability to have your own viewpoint while at the same time being open to hearing and considering differing views. Openly listening to opposing views need not interfere with your ability to know what you feel or think about the matter. Holding differences helps you handle more complexity. You think in terms of both/and, not either/or. This practice helps you see the relationships between things that may *appear* separate or mutually exclusive. As a result, you become much more effective in situations involving conflict, negotiation, group decision making, and problem solving. It enables you to experience the principle of mutual benefit in your relationships—the fact that any action that harms a part harms the whole and that any action that heals the collective heals the individual. I’m not going too far out on a limb to say that world peace might actually be possible if everyone on Earth mastered this truth skill.

# Birthing Co-Creative Community



BY CAROLYN ANDERSON AND  
KATHARINE ROSKE

*Community founders (left to right) David Fischer, Marcia Wallen, Carolyn Anderson, Makasha Roske, Katharine Roske, John Swerver, and Sara Senet.*

**D**riving through the forested hills of northern New Mexico one hot August afternoon, we came around another bend and crossed the cattle guard onto the property. To our left a winding stream passed through a grove of aspen and pine to an extensive family of oak trees and the marshlands that edge the property. A lush meadow lay on our right; the Sangre de Cristo Mountains rose ahead in the distance. As the kids piled out of the car they voiced our collective enthusiasm: “Wow, this place is awesome!”

We spent hours exploring the diverse terrain—moving from ridge to ridge, taking in the emerald vistas, marveling at the wildflowers and amazing variety of ecosystems and vegetation of this land. Finally, quieted by the flowing waters of Rio Casa and held in the lap of nature, we gathered in a circle and began the process of “inspired insights” that we had practiced together for so many years. Opening to our inner guidance and the spirit of the land, we closed our eyes and spoke into the circle what we heard in our hearts. When we opened our eyes, we were greeted by an iridescent burst of beauty: a hummingbird had come to bless and confirm that we were indeed to become stewards of this beautiful land. The dream we had held for so many years was about to become a reality ... and with it, of course, the struggles and challenges that accompany all intimate relationships and any pioneering endeavor.

We wanted a “co-creative community”—reflecting the integration of feminine and masculine virtues and whole-centered consciousness. We wanted, as individuals and as a group, to align the values of sharing and nurturing with the traits of focused purpose and action in the world. We wanted to replace dominance with partnership and empower each individual to express his or her unique gifts. This alignment of Self to Self, horizontally and vertically, is what we mean by “co-creation.”

Our community began on that hot August day with a handful of people who were active in Global Family, an international peace-education organization that was founded in 1986 and aspires to shift consciousness and reunite our human family. The strength of our community has emerged from the depth of our friendships, the values, vision, and commitment that we share, and the co-creative principles that form the foundation of our service together.

We are drawn to one another through what we call “resonance” ... a recognition of each other as soul family. We have experienced the importance of good communication skills, clear boundaries, emotional and psychological maturity, and financial integrity. We value individuality and diversity and recognize that sustainable relationships are built on honesty and integrity.

Hummingbird Ranch has grown slowly and organically over the past five years. We’re now a community of 16 resident partners and two children, with four more people now going through the year-long courtship process. We’ve established an initial infrastructure for our summer programs with a community dome, strawbale bathhouse, and camp kitchen. We’ve hosted four Global Family gatherings; two permaculture design certification courses; a communities workshop; and “Convivium,” a Sacred Passage pro-

## **Manifesting a dream like this is an awesome commitment.**

of the moment We operate by a set of principles described in our Co-Creator’s Agreements and govern ourselves by council and whole-systems decision making. (See “Co-Creator’s Agreements,” p.36, and “Whole Systems Decision Making,” p. 37.)

We own our land collectively, and each of us maintains our personal financial resources. Financial contributions to the community vary radically as each of us gives according to our inner guidance and our ability to contribute at any given time. As is the case in many communities, dealing with financial responsibility serves to “flush up the shadow” and bring into clarity our conditioning around money issues. One of the con-

gram; and a transformational dance camp.

We have no leader. We see ourselves as a group of empowered individuals who encourage one another to step forward with leadership gifts in response to the needs

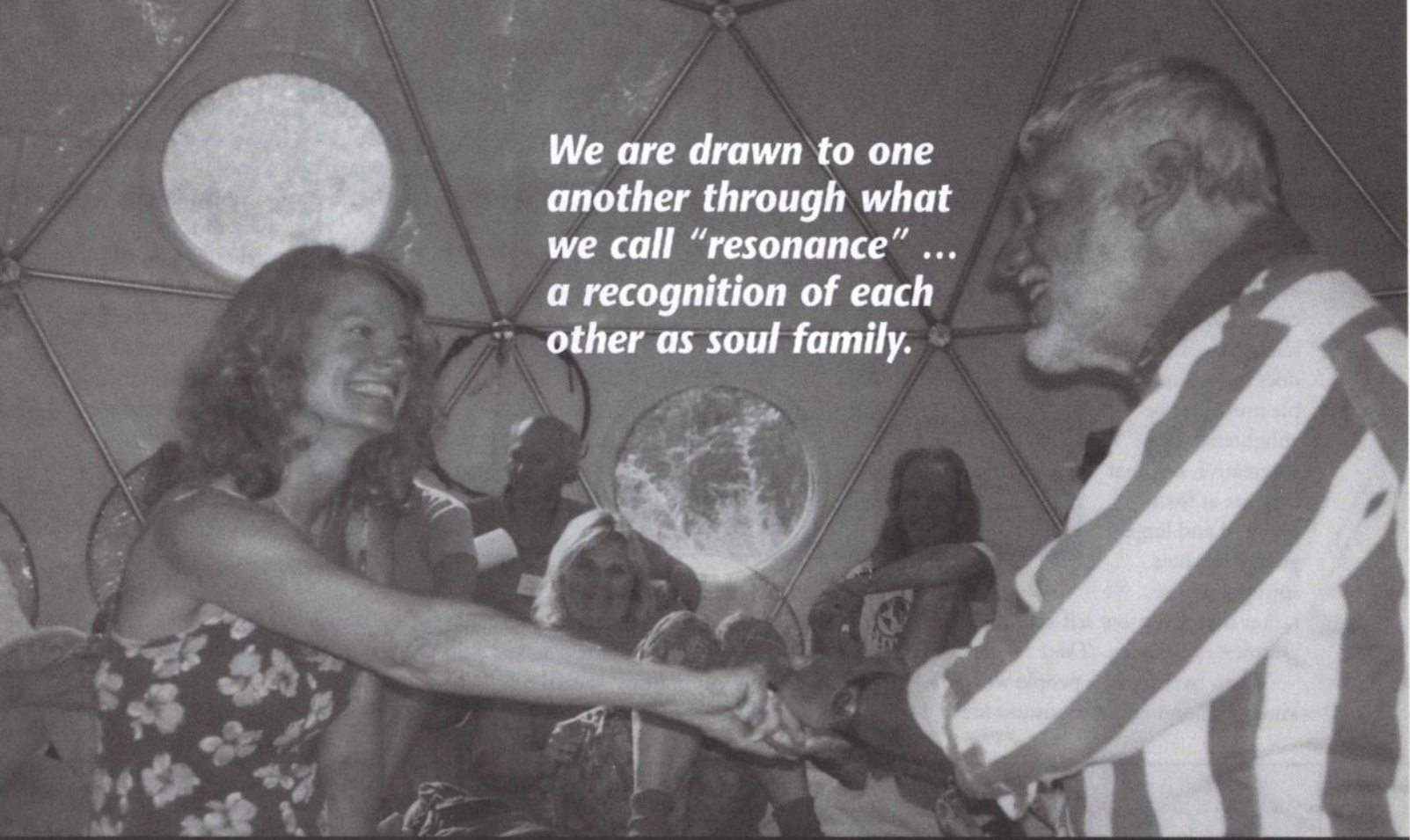
continuing miracles has been paying our monthly mortgage. When we find ourselves in a financial shortfall, we convene by conference call, use an inspired insight process, and follow our guidance. Each time, in a matter of minutes, we find a way to cover our shortfall and move on to other business.

Recently we established our Financial Co-Creator Agreements. This process has helped make more conscious our fears and thoughts of scarcity—which is beneficial, as it helps us continue to heal old wounds of our personal and collective conditioning. It is our intention to leave these patterns behind and deepen in trust.

Over these past five years we’ve learned that our desire to maintain harmony and resonance at all times has sometimes caused us problems. For example, once a couple began the year long courtship process to become new members. While several of us intuitively felt that we weren’t aligned in our philosophy and values, we were so into being loving and accepting everyone that we didn’t listen to our inner

*At a high elevation in New Mexico, Hummingbird Ranch has plenty of snow in the winter. David Fischer and friends.*





***We are drawn to one another through what we call "resonance" ... a recognition of each other as soul family.***

*Community members acknowledge one another as members of the same soul family.*

promptings or voice our concerns. After several months we discovered that there wasn't a deep level of alignment and they didn't share a commitment to the birthing of a co-creative culture. Although we still felt them to be friends, it did not feel accurate for them to be at the core of the community. This resulted in a painful experience of separation for them, as well as for us.

We learned through this experience that there are several components that are necessary for right relationship in the community. First is the feeling of being soul family, a deep connection of the heart. Next, it is important that we are aligned in our values. The third component is an experience that we have a shared purpose, that it is our destiny to model new possibilities in all areas of life that express the principles of co-creation.

We also recognize the importance of allowing relationships to mature. Now we are committed to really getting to know individuals who feel drawn to

Hummingbird before we take the step into courtship and eventual partnership.

As we've journeyed through the past five years we've deepened in our understanding that manifesting a dream like this is an awesome commitment. We must simultaneously design and build the community's physical infrastructure, host public programs, attract and integrate new individuals as resident partners, and discover and give birth to an evolving co-creative culture as we explore truth and create meaning together. We experience our community as a living laboratory serving the evolution of our consciousness.

The co-creative processes that underlie the culture of Hummingbird Ranch have been at the heart of Global

Family's work for the past 15 years. We have shared these principles with groups all over the world and have lived them as daily practices in our desire to shift consciousness from separation and fear to unity and love. Rather than our

figuring out these principles, they "came to us," just as similar consciousness principles were revealed to the Quakers as well as native peoples centuries ago.

The model, which we call the

Circles of Co-Creation or the Core Group Process, emerged from Global Family cofounder Barbara Marx Hubbard's understanding of the ways in which many people are now joining in deep resonance for personal and social change. Although the process is nonlinear it does involve ten aspects, and begins with the awakening of what we

***Dealing with financial responsibility serves to "flush up the shadow" around money issues.***

call the “Essential Self”—sometimes called the indwelling divine presence—as the individual moves beyond a strictly ego-based consciousness. This does not mean people must first be enlightened to be co-creative, but that they are at least aware of and largely guided by their spiritual nature,

rather than the more self-centered and grasping ego-nature. *(One)*

When two or more people with this kind of emerging consciousness are



*Planting a peace pole at a Global Family gathering at the ranch.*

drawn to each other, connecting heart to heart, they form an invisible magnetic field of love—what we call resonance. In a co-creative community, shared resonance reveals those who may be a part

Essence than ego. *(Three)*

Once they are united in resonance, they are able to access their collective wisdom by opening to higher guidance.

of that particular tribe or soul family. *(Two)*

In this caring field of trust, people feel safe to be vulnerable and authentic, to reveal their growing edges and move beyond the illusion of separation. Members of such a group learn a set of communication skills that help them express themselves more as

## THE CO-CREATOR'S AGREEMENTS

### Be Mindful

My intent is to be myself, to be authentic, and to be fully present.

### Realize Our Potential

My commitment is to realize my full potential and support others in doing the same.

### Follow My Guidance

I agree to attune with Spirit and follow the calling of my soul on behalf of the well-being of the whole.

### Communicate with Integrity

I agree to tell my truth with compassion for myself and others and to honor confidentiality whenever appropriate.

### Act with Integrity

I agree to keep my agreements and will do my best to follow my heart in making commitments.

### Deep Listening

I agree to listen respectfully to the communication of others and tune into their deepest meaning.

### Honor One Another

I agree to honor each person's process, acknowledging that everyone, including myself, is making the best possible choice or decision we are capable of in that moment.

### Appreciate Our Contributions

I agree to take responsibility for asking for and receiving acknowledgments and for acknowledging others.

### Honor Our Differences

I agree to come from a sense of cooperation and caring in my interactions with others, and from an understanding that objectives are often the same even though methods for achieving them may differ. I honor the diversity of all life.

### Take Responsibility

I agree to take responsibility for my creations, my reactions, my experience, and my relationships.

### Maintain Resonance

I agree to take the time to establish rapport and then to reconnect with anyone with whom I feel out of harmony as soon as it may be appropriate.

### Resolve Problems Constructively

I agree to take problems, complaints and upsets to the person(s) with whom I can resolve them, at the earliest opportunity. I agree not to criticize or complain to someone who cannot do something about my complaint, and I will redirect others to do the same.

### Go for Excellence

I agree to support others and to be supported in participating at the highest level of excellence.

### Learn from Experience

I agree to do my best to learn from my experiences.

### Be a Leader

I agree to foster an environment of genuine collaboration in which all people, including myself, feel empowered to express our individual and collective potential.

### Service to Others

I am willing to open my heart, still my mind and be in compassionate service to all life.

### Re-evaluate My Commitment

I agree to choose and re-choose to participate in this community. It is my choice.

### Lighten Up!

I agree to create joy in my relationships, my work, and my life.

*These Agreements have been adapted from the Geneva Group Agreements, Boulder, Colorado, 1985.*

Ideally, they can move beyond consensus in decision making and align with a higher will, or with the designing intelligence of the universe. *(Four)*

People in such a group develop ceremonies and rituals to help anchor and actualize the state of resonance and oneness and consciously make their relationships sacred—to each other, to the Earth, and to Spirit. They take time to celebrate with one another and to give thanks for having discovered a loving community of friends. *(Five)*

An essential step in this Core Group Process is discovering and expressing one's soul's purpose. In this step people discover their true place by following the wisdom of the heart and going within for guidance and direction. At Hummingbird Ranch, we do our best to select those tasks that allow us each to express our unique gifts so that our daily work can be meaningful and fulfilling. *(Six)*

Once people are aware of their unique soul's purpose, they are drawn to others who are aligned with their values, vision, and mission in order to fulfill their shared destiny. They look for right relationship as they enter into a state comparable to marriage, deepening their intimacy and committing themselves to be faithful to their partners and their agreed-upon actions. Spirit is configuring us into groups and teams so that we can play our parts in creating a new culture! *(Seven)*

As people gain access to their collective wisdom, discover their shared destiny, and experience group synergy, a new form of self-governance emerges. Attuning to the design of creation, they allow for decisions and right action to be revealed. Led by the self-organizing laws of nature, they observe "what wants to happen." As Essential Selves, people naturally desire to make optimum choices that honor their interconnectedness with all life. *(Eight)*

As people's lives are fulfilled, they are naturally inclined to serve, bringing the experience of resonance, love, and inspired insights to their group or community. *(Nine)*

*(continued on p. 58 Birthing Community)*

## WHOLE SYSTEMS DECISION MAKING

As you have probably experienced, in a group setting we seem to gain access not only to our own inner voice, but to the collective intelligence of the entire circle. This collective intelligence can access a "template" or pattern of action for a community to discover its function within the larger social body. In a resonant field of love, the synergy of group energy magnetizes higher consciousness and wisdom for all. Each of us is often encouraged by the inspired group insights that can catalyze our own deeper knowing. This practice is particularly useful when dealing with challenging issues and difficult decisions.

- First get all the facts out on the table and discuss them with as much mental clarity as possible. Honor the rational mind and value the contribution it makes.
- Ask each individual to check in and clear any emotional issues or hidden agendas that may stand in the way of clarity.
- Before beginning the meditative process we call Inspired Insights, frame the question as a group. Speaking the issue or question with clarity will draw forth clearer insights.
- Decide who will facilitate the process and lead an initial relaxation exercise. It's beneficial to have one member of the circle take notes or record the session.
- Go within, relax, listen, surrender, and allow your awareness to expand. Release the thinking mind and prepare to receive guidance from the Essential Self.
- When the group has entered a meditative state, the facilitator may begin with an attunement that describes the desired qualities of the outcome.
- The question is then offered, with the understanding that the answers already exist.
- Each individual shares what he or she receives as it naturally arises. Often insights will come through a few members of the group as the others hold the resonant field. It is important to speak when inspired, rather than feeling obligated. If everyone is attuned with one another, usually what is shared will ring true to each member of the circle. If insights come which seem conflicting, it is important to hold the resonant field and allow the process to continue.
- When it appears that all input has been shared, the facilitator gently brings the process to completion. Affirm areas of agreement and synthesize what was shared.
- Take a moment to check in with your body and experience how the agreements feel.
- If alignment has not occurred, re-attune and spend some quiet time alone. It is often beneficial to take a break, walk in nature and be still.
- It is also important that all voices are heard and honored. There can be a tendency to override an inner prompting or bodily feeling if there is a momentum building. It can be challenging to say "this doesn't feel good to me." Have you ever had the experience of denying an intuitive feeling because the rest of the group had excitement and seemed to be aligned? Often clarity comes after the fact when we look back on a situation and say, "Why didn't I listen to my intuition?"
- When all feel that clarity has been achieved, make appropriate choices that will move the decisions into action. Remember that this is not a vote, but an attunement.
- Always aim at coming into a deep level of alignment. Seek to arrive at a collective "aha" that everyone can stand solidly behind.

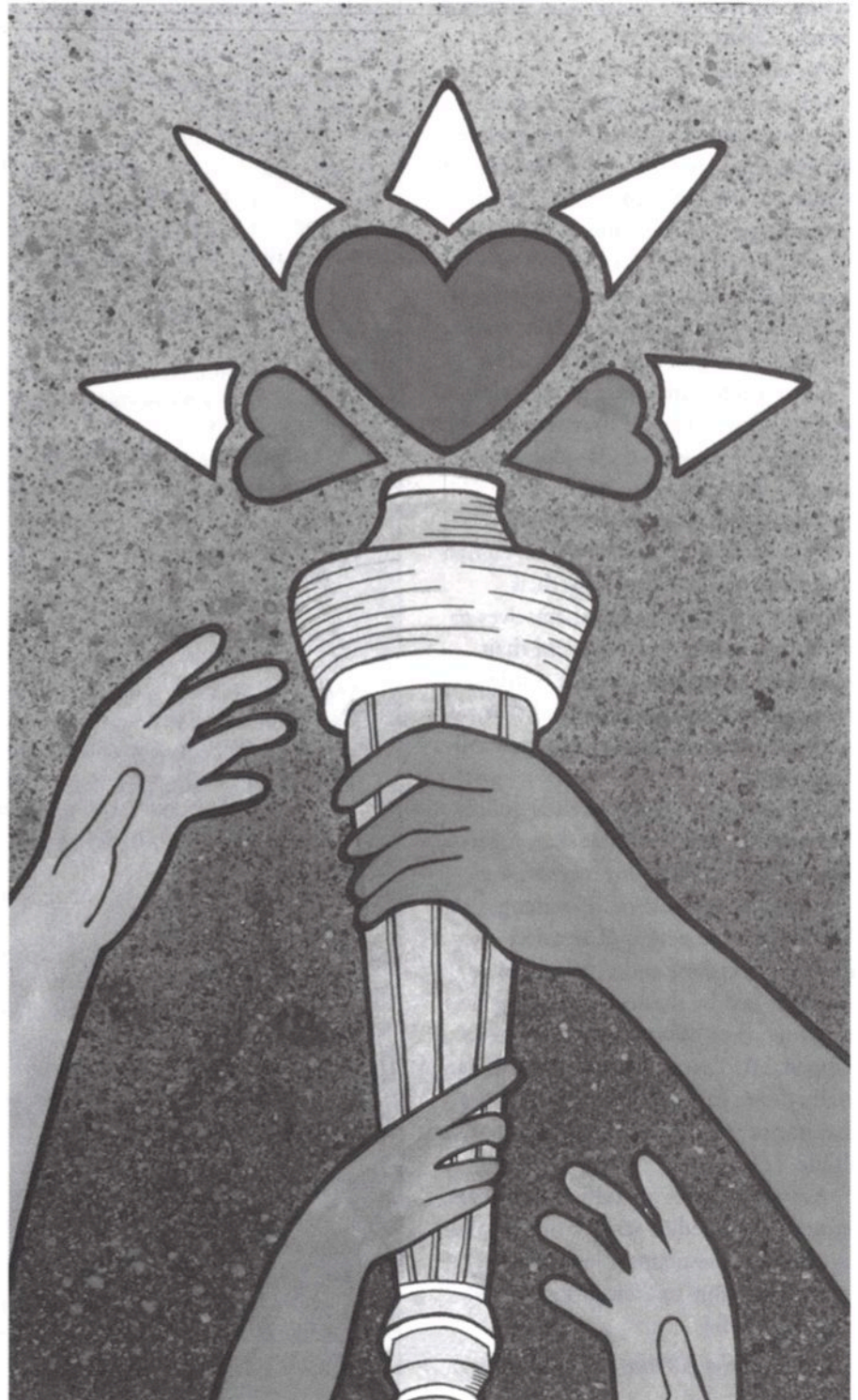
# Towards Clarity and Honesty Part I

DARREN MCMANUS

## What We Can Learn from a Nonresidential Therapeutic Community

BY JOHN SCHINNERER

It was lunchtime, and Bill was feeling uncomfortable around his best friend Andy. Usually the most punctual person in the group, Bill had been late to that morning's weekly community meeting and it seemed to him that Andy had been giving him the cold shoulder all morning. Bill noticed that he didn't like his assumptions about what Andy might be thinking, so he sat down next to him at the table.





"Andy, can I check out a fantasy with you?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"My fantasy is that you think I'm a bad person because I was late to the meeting this morning. Do you think I'm a bad person?"

"No, I don't think that. I think you're great. I consider you one of my best friends."

"Thanks.... How are you doing, anyway?"

"Not so great, actually. My mother called this morning to tell me my sister has cancer. It's still a bit of a shock. You're the first person I've told."

"Checking out a fantasy" is one of several processes we use in an experiential therapy group—a nonresidential community—that I've been involved in for several years. It seems that while intentional communities can be very different from one another, they nonetheless include certain similar elements. They all involve a group of people with at least some common intentions. These intentions are formalized in various ways through some minimum set of structures and processes which all community members agree to. Members then act, through the agreed-upon community structures and processes, to mutually support each other and their community in living their intentions. That's the theory, anyhow!

In this light our experiential therapy group is, to me, clearly an intentional community. We support each other and the group in applying processes and structures such as those I'll present here, with the intent to become more fully human.

Now back to our players.

### Checking Out a Fantasy

The "checking out a fantasy" process that Bill used with Andy is very simple. At the same time, using it well often requires moving through our deepest fears.

In essence, this process helps us find out if what we are imagining to be true

in our own minds about someone else's thoughts actually is true. Are they really thinking that? It cuts through fantasies—and the interpersonal tangles such fantasies can create—by addressing them directly. As with all the processes we use in our group, we assume that each of us is being as clear and honest with each other in the moment as we can.

In the above example, Bill first notices that he has some thoughts about what Andy might be thinking. At an earlier time in his life, Bill might have imagined he could actually *know* what Andy was thinking. "Hmm, Andy must be giving me the cold shoulder because I was late to the meeting this morning. And I thought he was my friend! Well, I'll just ignore him too. That'll teach him to be so petty!" In this scenario Bill reacts to his fantasy as though it were real.

Nowadays Bill knows that the only way to find out what anyone is really thinking is ... to ask them! This is the easiest—and also sometimes the most difficult—way for Bill to clear away the fantasy that disturbs him. By checking out his fantasy with his friend as soon as he can, Bill finds out that it was just that—a fantasy. No longer focusing on his own anxiety, he learns that there is a reason why Andy has been behaving differently that morning.

Not all fantasies are "false" in this simple sense—some "fantasies" are true for both parties. If he were unable to separate a person's actions from the person himself, Andy might indeed have thought Bill was a bad person because he was late to the meeting. By checking out his fantasy, Bill will almost always learn something useful, even if it's something he might rather avoid dealing with. Both parties constantly refine their practice of honesty and nonattachment to expected outcomes.

Here's the same scene with a slightly different context and outcome.

Bill had been late, as usual, to that morning's weekly community meeting, and it seemed to him that Andy was giving him the cold shoulder.

"Andy, can I check out a fantasy with you?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"My fantasy is that you think I'm a bad person because I was late to the meeting this morning. Do you think I'm a bad person?"

"No, I don't think you're a bad person at all. I do notice that you're usually late to our meetings, though. I would appreciate it if you would work on changing that. You know we all

have an agreement that our weekly community meeting is priority number one for that morning and that we will all be on time."

In this scenario Bill has again cleared up his fantasy—Andy doesn't think he's a bad person. He also gets some additional information about his behavior from Andy's perspective. At an earlier time in his life Bill

might have reacted with anger, excuses, denial, avoidance, or any combination of these. However by now Bill has learned (as has Andy) to separate what he *does* from who he *is*.

Bill and Andy are both familiar with the simple checking out a fantasy process. For example, they understand that it is always consensual. In either of the above examples, Andy might have said a simple "No" to Bill's request to check out a fantasy. Bill would respect this, recognizing that if Andy isn't open to the process at any given moment, Bill can't force it on him. If he tries to he probably won't clear anything up anyhow and he might even generate new fantasies.

A fantasy is always "about" the person who's asking to check something out. A generic version is, "I have a

**A genuine  
clearing cannot  
be forced,  
coerced, or  
manipulated  
into happening.**

story in my mind about what you are thinking about me. Is my story true in your mind?" The above example illustrates this. A counter-example might be something like:

Bill: "... my fantasy is that you don't want to admit you don't like me."

Andy: "That's a fantasy about me, not about you. What's your fantasy about yourself?"

Bill (digging deeper): "Ummm ... that you don't like me. Is that true?"

Andy: "Not at all."

In this example, Bill first offers Andy a double-bind, like "heads I win, tails you lose," or "Do you tell anyone you beat your dog?" Andy recognizes the game and doesn't play. Instead he reminds Bill how the process is used. Bill gets it, and brings the process back on track by returning the question to his own fantasy about himself, which is that he is not liked by Andy.

If Andy actually does think Bill is a bad person because he was late to the meeting, he will say so when Bill asks to check out the fantasy. This is the best thing Andy can do for both of them. Bill gets to move through his fear of asking the question, hear a truthful answer, and practice nonattachment to other people's opinions of him (he will probably find that any answer Andy gives is much less stressful than his own fantasies about it). Andy gets to verbalize his thoughts and consider anew whether they are really true for him.

## Clearing

All the attributes of this simplest process apply to a more thorough process our group calls the clearing model. It goes something like this:

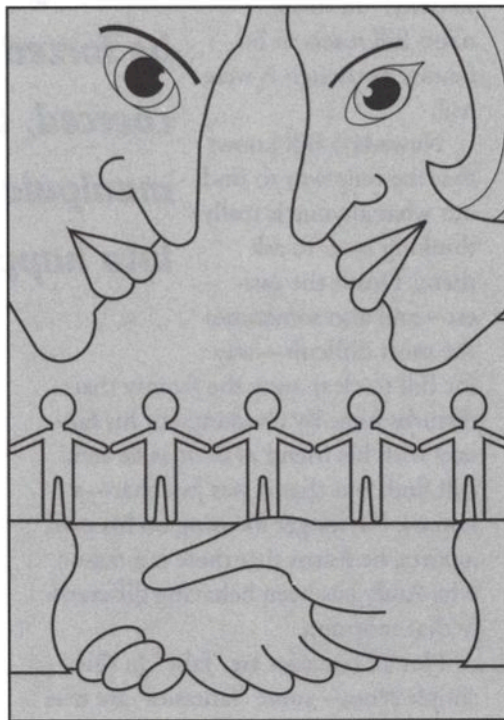
Helen offered to carry and stack the firewood if Sue would split it. Helen had never used wood heat before and wasn't yet handy with an ax. Sue took a break after a while and came over to see how Helen was doing.

"Oh," Sue said, inspecting Helen's work, "here, let me show you how to

do this. See, you have to put the pieces in layers like this, so the air can circulate through and the wood stays dry. Let's redo this part before I split any more."

"Oh great," fumed Helen to herself, "now she tells me! All this work for nothing!" Angrily she began re-stacking the wood, feeling upset with Sue. She didn't like being upset with Sue, but she couldn't help it. Or could she?

**Feelings are best expressed with short and concise words such as "mad," "glad," "sad," and "scared."**



DARREN MCMANUS

"Sue," she said, "will you hear a clearing?"

Sue agreed.

"OK. I felt mad ... and scared ... when you said we had to re-stack the wood, ... because I think it means about me ... that I'm stupid. What I need from you is to know, do you think I'm stupid?"

"No, Helen, I don't think you're stupid."

"OK. And what I need from myself is ... to acknowledge to myself that I'm smart, and capable. And what already exists between us is ... that we're cooperating, helping each other get an important job done. Ummm ... OK, I'm clear. Let's get the rest of this wood re-stacked the way you just taught me."

Notice how the process of checking out a fantasy is nested in this more comprehensive format. Helen suddenly feels upset with Sue. Then she notices she is angry, and scared, and is holding a mistaken belief about herself. She realizes she might actually be upset with herself rather than with Sue. In this clearing process Helen starts by acknowledging the feelings she had and the events that triggered those feelings. Then she looks for her mistaken beliefs about herself that were involved in those feelings and/or in her fantasy. Next she checks out her fantasy with Sue. She also considers what she can give herself in this situation, and acknowledges something she is grateful for in her relating with Sue.

As with fantasy check-out, the process is consensual. Sue could equally well have said "No" when Helen asked if she'd hear a clearing. If someone says no to such a request in our therapeutic community, there are other ways for the person asking for the clearing to work with what's come up for them. A genuine clearing (or anything else) cannot be forced, coerced, or manipulated into happening.

Here's a slightly different take on the same scenario

"Sue, will you hear a clearing?"

Sue agrees.

"OK. I felt ... mad ... and scared ... when you said we had to re-stack the wood I stacked. What I think it means about me is—I think it means I'm stupid. What I need from you is ... to know, do you think I'm stupid?"

"No, Helen, I don't think you're stupid."

"And, what I need from myself is ... to acknowledge to myself that I'm smart, and can learn new things easily. And what already exists between us is ... that we're cooperating, and helping each other. OK, I'm clear!"

"Would you hear an observation, Helen?"

"Yes, I would."

"I notice that you don't question your own intelligence and competence when you're doing things you already know how to do well—but when it's something new, you often seem to give yourself a hard time over learning it."

"OK ... thanks, I hear you. I will work out a new contract for myself around that. Let's get back to work!"

Andy offered Bill his observation without asking if he'd hear it; Sue asked if Helen wanted more information (and you guessed it—Helen could also have said "No"). The process can be used either way—it's up to the participants.

Helen and Sue already know a few more guidelines about the clearing model. For example:

"*I felt ...*" is where Helen says what feelings came up for her in the event she wants to clear up. Feelings are best expressed with short and concise words such as "mad," "glad," "sad," and "scared." (Or simple synonyms such as "frightened," "happy," "angry," etc.) Thoughts disguised as feelings do not belong here: for example, "I felt stupid" or "I felt used" or "I felt abandoned," are all expressions of thoughts, not feelings. The point of this first part is to dig down to the raw, unedited feelings that precede the thoughts. When Helen identifies the feelings that underlie her negative thoughts about herself, she has gained useful information towards changing those thoughts. Otherwise

**Bill knows that the only way to find out what anyone is really thinking is ... to ask them!**

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- *Scripts People Live*, Claude Steiner, Grove Press, 1990. Read it at least twice.
- "The Work" of Byron Katie. Experiential self-healing process towards clarity, understanding, and peace. *website: thework.com; P.O. Box 667, Manhattan Beach, CA 90267; 310-760-9000.*
- Crazy Tiger Institute. Experiential, transformative courses in becoming more fully and humanly alive. *website: crazytigerinstitute.com; 2404 35th Avenue W., Seattle, WA 98199; 206-284-6790.*

—J.S.

she has most likely used the thoughts to mask, hide, or deny her feelings.

"*When you ...*" starts a statement of the action and/or behavior that triggered Helen's mistaken belief about herself. This must be a simple, non-judgmental description of the words and/or deeds of the other person, free of projection. If Helen had said something like "When you made me feel stupid about stacking the wood wrong," or "When you attacked me for not stacking the wood right," Sue would ask her to rethink and try this

part again before continuing the process.

"*What I think it means about me is ...*" is where Helen states her mistaken belief about herself ("I'm stupid"). As with the fantasy check-out, this must be about the person requesting the clearing. It would not work for Helen to say "... that you don't appreciate me" or "... I'm not good enough to suit you" or anything else that is a fantasy about Sue instead of about Helen herself.

"*What I need from you is ...*" gives Helen the opportunity to check out her fantasy with Sue. Helen asks Sue if she shares her mistaken belief about herself: "... do you think I'm stupid?" Helen

does not ask Sue for something she cannot do, or something that is self-negating. "To know that you think I'm not stupid" won't work, because Sue has no power to make Helen "know" anything. "To know that you don't mind that I'm stupid" and similar double-bind (lose-lose) statements are also not appropriate here or anywhere else in these processes.

"*What I need from myself is ...*" gives Helen an opening to reflect on and state something she can do to help herself "unlearn" her mistaken belief about herself. This may be a simple statement of self-affirmation, but the more practical and tangible it is, the better! Helen might have dug deeper and come up with something like "... to try something new each month and write down how I feel and how I support myself in learning it." This might be the kernel of the new contract she mentions. (We'll describe contracts in Part Two of this article.)

"*What already exists between us is ...*" creates an opening for Helen to reflect on what she's grateful for in her ongoing interactions with Sue, and then express that to Sue as a sort of closure.

Helen's final act is to look back at the whole process she has just worked through and how she feels after doing it and see if she is indeed clear. Being "clear" is noticing whether or not she has understood to her own satisfaction what feelings and mistaken beliefs were triggered, and how, and whether or not

any fantasy she had with Sue has been cleared up. It may well take more than one pass for her to be clear, especially if she and/or Sue are new to this process. It is also worth noting that one may have a clearing to do with oneself rather than with another person!

When to use a fantasy check-out and when to use a full clearing model depends on circumstances and context. A full clearing format typically reveals more facets of one's feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, giving more information to work with towards wholeness. A fantasy check-out is quick and (relatively) easy to do and may be all that's needed, especially if done early and often.

### Process Work and Community Living

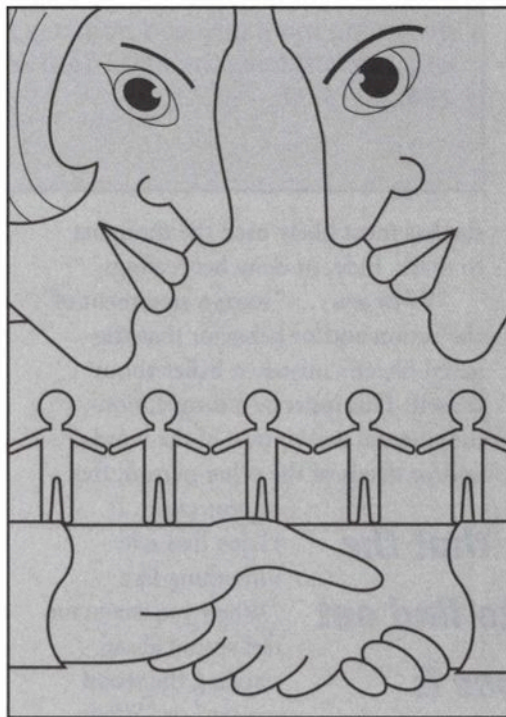
Bill, Andy, Helen, and Sue have also illustrated a few more common features of these processes:

Excuses, apologies, rationalizations, and justifications are generally not appropriate when saying "No," or for that matter, "Yes," to all or part of a process, from any role in the process. When I feel uncomfortable with a simple Yes or No, or feel the need to rationalize, justify, etc., I ask myself why—and usually find some mistaken belief to work on.

Explanations, when requested, may help clarify some aspects of checking out fantasies, clearings, or our other processes. Pay close attention to any explaining that is done: explanations can easily turn into excuses, apologies, rationalizations, and justifications.

This work is subject to the vagaries of human behavior just as much as all of human experience. I have found these to be some of the simplest and clearest—and therefore most powerful—processes for relating with others that I have experienced thus far. However, they will only work as well as we each want them to. If I'd rather keep my fantasies than check them out, I will; if I don't want to get clear on my mistaken beliefs, I won't. In the case of our group, the larger container of our

therapist-facilitated context has provisions that enforce accountability at higher levels. If I won't at least keep our common contracts, by either omission or commission, I will not be allowed to participate in our group. Others can lead me to this work, but only I can choose to drink of it.



### **Bill has learned to separate what he does from who he is.**

The processes described above, those I'll cover in the next issue, and numerous others, support community decision making because they invite community in a deeper and larger sense. Whatever methods you use to make group decisions: consensus, majority rule or super-majority voting, council circle, delegated representation, and so on, this level of interpersonal and intrapersonal work supports it. This is the work that lubricates the human interaction within those decision-making processes, those daily tasks, that everyday living. This is, to me, the most

fundamental work to be done in any community that claims to promote understanding and mutual respect amongst human beings.

Used proactively, these processes can make any decision-making method more likely to flow and function well; when such a process falters, this is the sort of work that gets it growing (and I do mean growing) smoothly again. In daily life, play, and labor, this work does the same.

In our group we practice being responsible for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions, and supporting others in doing the same, as a basis for all else that we do in our lives. I invite you and your community to try these processes and those I'll describe in Part Two, which aid us greatly in being who we are, clarifying our interactions with ourselves and others, and enhancing our experience of living. Perhaps they can serve you as well. Ω

*Part Two, in the Spring '02 issue, will present two other related processes, "accountability work" and "contracts," and how they help John's community function well.*

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# True Consensus, False Consensus

BY BEA BRIGGS

The consensus process is a decision-making method based on values such as cooperation, trust, honesty, creativity, equality, and respect. These days many people use the word "consensus," but very few understand how to implement the process with integrity and skill. Consensus goes beyond majority rule. It replaces traditional styles of top-down leadership with a model of shared power and responsibility. A group which uses consensus effectively can become a healthy community and a powerful force of social change.

The consensus process rests on the fundamental belief that each person has a piece of the truth. Each member of the group must be listened to with respect. On the other hand, individuals cannot

be permitted to dominate the group. In consensus, as in ecosystems, each individual rules and is ruled by the larger community. In this web of reciprocal relationships, the beauty and strength of the whole is created.

This is not to suggest, however, that consensus process presupposes, or automatically confers, complete peace and harmony within a group. Given the depth of our current social pathology and the complexity of the decisions we face, conflict is inevitable. In fact, in groups that are truly diverse, differences are both a sign of health and an invitation to creativity. Nonviolent resolution of conflict and the collaborative development of decisions that everyone in the group can support are the principle goals

of the consensus process. (See "From Conflict to Connection: The Fine Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback," p. 53.)

## Five Essential Elements

Consensus is not a panacea. It will not work in every situation. In order to invoke the power and magic of consensus, five main elements must be in place:

- (1) Willingness to share power
- (2) Informed commitment to the consensus process
- (3) Common purpose
- (4) Strong agendas
- (5) Effective facilitation.

Let us briefly examine each of these essential ingredients.

## Willingness to Share Power

Participants in a consensus group must be willing to give up their hierarchical roles and privileges and to function as equals. The contribution of experts, professionals, and elders are, of course, welcome, but they must not be allowed to silence the voices of other members of the group. People accustomed to being in charge often have difficulty in letting others share in the decision-making. They ask for ideas, input, and assistance, and pay lip service to the egalitarian, participatory ideals of consensus. But as long as they retain the decision-making power, they are violating the integrity of the process.

## Informed Commitment to Consensus Process

Because consensus is radically different from the way most of us have been conditioned to function, the process needs to be carefully explained, and the

fundamental principles reviewed from time to time. The more people in the group who understand the process, the better it will work. Often the first consensus decision that a group makes is the choice to use consensus, or at least to try it for a certain period of time. Ongoing evaluation of the group's process not only acknowledges its successes, but also identifies areas in which improvement is needed. This information is critical to the group's self-education and growth.

## Common Purpose

Without an overarching purpose to unify and focus its efforts, a group will spin its wheels endlessly, trapped in confusion, frustration, and ego battles. At the times when the group's process deteriorates into a shouting match, or its motivation is weakened by apathy or despair, it is important to be able to say: "Remember why we are all here." A

group's purpose may change over time and its mission statement may need to be revised, but at least everyone will know what is being changed and why.

## Strong Agendas

The lack of an agenda, an agenda controlled exclusively by one or two leaders, and poorly prepared agendas all undermine the consensus process. They waste people's time, erode their trust, and diminish a group's effectiveness. In contrast, a group which designates a few people to plan the agenda, and which then collectively reviews the proposed agenda, revises it as necessary, and formally adopts it by consensus, and then honors this agenda contract, is a group committed to its own success. (*See "Agenda Planning," p. 48*)

## Effective Facilitation

A facilitator is the custodian of the consensus process, a "servant-leader" whose purpose is to help the group make the best decisions possible. A facilitator is not a guide, not a participant in the discussion. He or she must be assiduously neutral about the topics being discussed and fair in the treatment of all the members in the group, showing no favoritism. A facilitator does not give answers, but continually asks questions intended to equalize participation ("Are we hearing from everyone?"), elicit wisdom ("Are there any other ideas?"), and clarify the group's situation ("Are we ready to move on?") To practice the art of facilitation, one needs patience, stamina, the ability to remain calm in the face of conflict, a good memory, a sense of humor, and genuine love for the group which he or she is serving.

## Procedure for Reaching Consensus

In the consensus process, no votes are taken. Ideas or proposals are introduced, discussed, and eventually arrive at the point of decision. In making a decision, a participant in a consensus group has three options.

- *To block.* This step prevents the decision from going forward, at least for the time being. Blocking is a serious

## BASIC CONSENSUS AGREEMENTS

To reach consensus and avoid chaos in meetings, the group needs to adopt some ground rules. The facilitator must present the basic agreements as a proposal at the beginning of the group's first meeting—or at the first meeting in which they are to be used. Once they have been accepted by the group, it is the job of the facilitator to see that the group respects its own norms. Some possible ground rules appear below. Each group must choose the norms which best meet its need and values.

### • *The Bare Minimum:*

- \* Use a facilitator
- \* Everyone participates
- \* Speak only for yourself
- \* No interrupting
- \* Seek a solution

### • *Also Useful:*

- \* Begin and end on time
- \* Have an agenda and stick to it
- \* One speaker at a time
- \* Listen with respect
- \* No personal attacks or blaming
- \* Confidentially (when appropriate)
- \* Silence equals assent. (If you do not say anything, it means you agree.)

—Bea Briggs

# DOCTOR IKE'S MAGICAL CUP O' FACILITATION

BY LUC REID

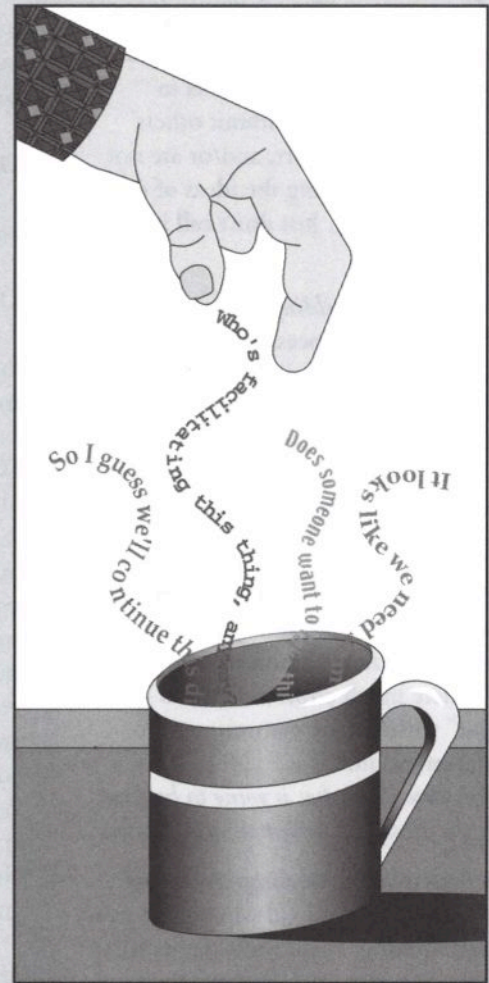
Is your group in the process of learning how to do consensus and you need a break from all that seriousness? Perhaps you need a little humor. Consider "Dr. Ike's Magical Cup O' Facilitation." It's just like a "Cup O' Soup" but not as tasty.

To use the Magical Cup, cut out the following phrases and fold each one, then place them in an ordinary cup. Carefully tape a label to the cup, "Doctor Ike's Magical Cup O' Facilitation." Now the Cup is ready to use.

When facilitating consensus meetings, whenever a difficult or awkward moment arises, turn to the cup for the ideal response. Stick your hand in, mix the slips of paper around, withdraw one, and read it aloud. Your consensus meeting will be instantly and expertly brought into line and you can relax. It's all in Doctor Ike's capable hands. Here are the magical phrases.

- Isn't time just about up on this topic?
- Pipe down, you!
- I think we're getting a little off-topic.
- Didn't we decide to send this to committee?
- So I guess we'll continue this discussion next time.
- It sounds like we don't have agreement yet.
- Let's do a go-round.
- Who's facilitating this thing, anyway?
- Do we still have the notes from last week?
- We haven't heard from George yet.
- It looks like we need someone to take this on. Will someone, *please*?
- It looks like we need more time for this topic.
- Does anyone know what this topic was supposed to be about?

*Luc Reid, a frequent contributor to Communities magazine, is cofounder of Meadowdance Community in Vermont.*



DARREN MCMANUS

matter, to be done only when one truly believes that the pending proposal, if adopted, would violate the morals, ethics, or safety of the whole group. One probably has a lifetime limit of three to four blocks, so this right should be exercised with great care. If you frequently find yourself wanting to block, you may be in the wrong group.

• **To stand aside.** An individual stands aside when he or she cannot personally support a proposal, but feels it would be all right for the rest of the group to adopt it. Standing aside is a stance of principled non-participation, which

absolves the individual from any responsibility for implementing the decision in question. Stand asides are recorded in the minutes of the meeting. If there are more than a few stand-asides on an issue, consensus has not been reached.

• **To give consent.** When everyone in the group (except those standing aside), say "Yes" to a proposal, consensus is achieved. To give one's consent does not necessarily mean that one loves every aspect of the proposal, but it does mean that one is willing to support the decision and stand in solidarity with the group, despite one's disagreements.

Consensus decisions can only be changed by reaching another consensus.

## False Consensus

Like the words "green" and "natural," "consensus" is becoming a buzz word, which means it is being co-opted by those who want to appear inclusive, but who have no real intention of giving up decision-making power. Sometimes "consensus" is used as a synonym for "large majority." In other cases, consensus abuse is committed by well-meaning people who lack the training to use the process effectively. Look for these warn-

ing signs and take the steps recommended below to avoid wasted time and heartbreak.

**Special note to policy makers, corporate top brass, artistic geniuses, and lone wolves:** If you know exactly what you want to do, have the means to implement your plan without others' involvement or support, and/or are not interested in including the ideas of others, then go ahead. Just don't call it consensus.

- **Consensus building.** This perversion of the consensus process occurs when policy makers and their allies hold meetings designed to sell people on a plan that has already been decided.

*Antidote: Ask if the organizers are willing to put away their charts and graphs and listen.*

- **Participation without implementation.** Beware of community-wide meetings, staff retreats, volunteer meetings, etc., where much effort is made to get "input" without any commitment to implementation.

*Antidote: Ask what is going to be done with the ideas and information generated.*

- **Inconvenient meetings times and locations.** Meetings held when most people are working, or on week nights when parents cannot attend, and meetings called at the last minute automatically shut people out of the process.

*Antidote: Ask whether those most affected by the decisions to be made realistically can attend the meetings.*

- **Winning at any cost.** When one or more of the participants view consensus as a game to be won, rather than a process to be entered into, meetings will be the same old decision-making hardball.

*Antidote: Ask whether any proposals other than those of the "leaders" will receive fair consideration.*

- **Passive-aggressive leadership.** When community leaders (e.g. founders, presidents, executive directors, chairpersons, etc.) fail to provide information, clear direction, or good process, whether out of fear of appearing too controlling or

## EXPLOITING COMMUNITY FOR PERSONAL GAIN

*Sometimes satire best illustrates a point, as Jonathan Swift and George Carlin can tell you. Here's tongue-in-cheek advice from an experienced communitarian who likes to make points about functioning community—backwards.*

**Dear Uncle Ralph:**

What do you advise about community decision making?

**Uncle Ralph replies:**

Since consensus is an egalitarian decision-making method, you'd think I'd push for some kind of voting, right? Wrong! Don't be fooled: although real consensus is egalitarian, there are wonderful variations that keep the "spirit" of consensus (that is, nothing can happen if you choose to stand in the way), but "simplify" it by removing barriers to your personal control, such as facilitators, meeting agendas, and time limits. Facilitators are all too likely to try to take away your ability to monopolize the meeting. Time limits prevent you from dragging meetings out so long that everyone else is sick of the subject and willing to agree to anything if the meeting will just stop.

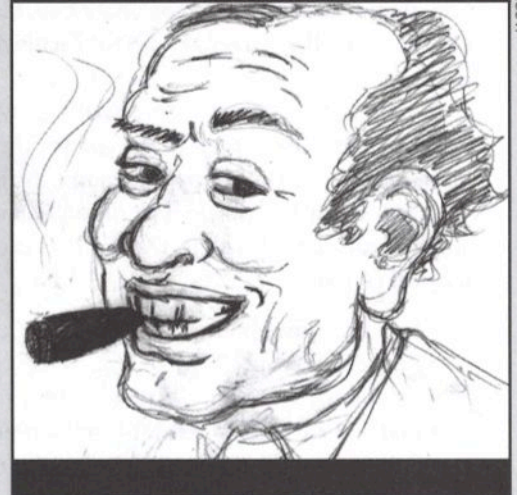
The key to successfully manipulating the consensus process is to not care about the outcome. If you don't care, it won't matter to you that nothing ever gets done, and you can abuse the process with abandon. Have fun with it! Use consensus meetings as a sort of personal venting exercise by turning community issues into personal affronts. If everyone else is opposed to you, remind them that consensus depends on everyone's participating and describe yourself as being "railroaded." Use pseudo-authentic self-revealing language like, "I feel like you're just trying to force your opinion on me." Even though this is a wildly biased and manipulative accusation, it sounds like real personal expression. Try it! Consensus meetings can be a real feast for mind-game aficionados, too. Try arguing one point of view until everyone is swayed, then change your mind, saying, "I just had an epiphany" or, "But despite all that, I really think . . ."

If you are effective in making consensus meetings tedious and non-productive, eventually many people will stop going to them, and at that point you can start shoving your agenda through with minimal resistance. People will be so happy to be making decisions at all that they won't care what they just agreed to.

Again, using "pseudo-consensus" instead of a letting your group get good training in real consensus is essential for you to maintain your stranglehold on the group. Keep 'em down!

*More questions about community for Uncle Ralph? Send them in. He'll do his best to answer them backwards.*

### Ask Uncle Ralph



JACOB STEVENS



sheer incompetence, they sabotage consensus.

*Antidote: Ask those "in the know" to share their wisdom and experience—and then get out of the way so that others might participate.*

• **Everyone decides everything.** This unworkable and unnecessary strategy is a set-up for failure.

*Antidote: Ask that decision-making power be delegated to smaller working groups comprising those who will be most affected by the decisions. Ask that organization-wide and strategic decisions be open to review and challenge by all members.*

• **Anything goes.** Groups that try to function without any structure, focus, or clear process guidelines are doomed to fail. The opposite of hierarchical control is not undisciplined chaos.

*Antidote: Ask that the group adopt some guidelines. (See "Basic Agreements" p. 44.)*

• **Compromise.** When opponents in a discussion settle for an agreement which everyone can support but which no one really likes, it is not a consensus decision—it is a cop-out which will ultimately fail for lack of real commitment.

*Antidote: Keep talking until you find a solution which satisfies the interests of all parties and generates enthusiasm, joy, and a sense of solidarity. Ω*

*Excerpted with permission from Introduction to Consensus by Bea Briggs. Available for \$15 postpaid from John F. Bird Accounting, 1039 Mills St., Box 416, Black Earth, WI 53515; jbird7467@aol.com. Also available for \$15 postpaid from Community Bookshelf, store@ic.org/bookshelf.*

*Besides writing and publishing Introduction to Consensus, Bea Briggs is a consensus facilitator and teacher who has facilitated meetings and led workshops throughout the Americas. She lives at Huehuecoyotl Ecovillage near Tepoztlan, Mexico.*

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# Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage

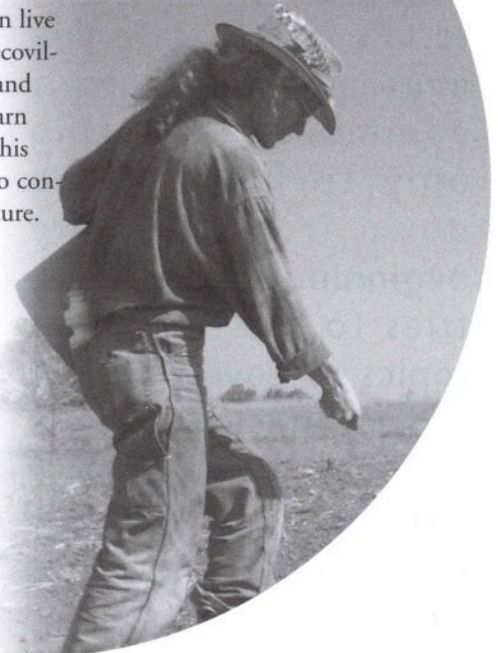
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Contact us to find out about how you can live more sustainably. We're building a rural ecovillage with room for individuals, families, and other communities, where we strive to learn and educate about sustainable living. In this early pioneering stage, we're committed to consensus, feminism and building for the future. Come help us create a new way of life!



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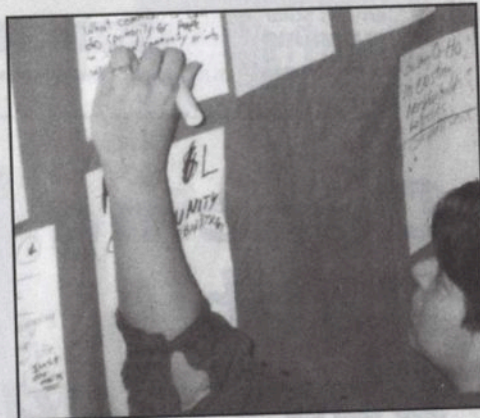
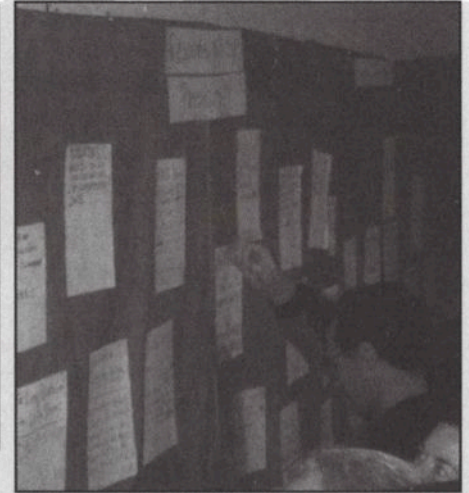
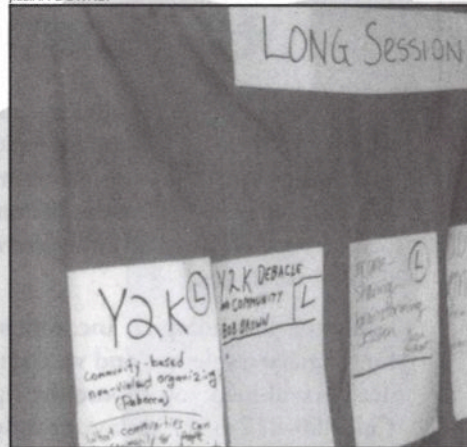
- Live where we work
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- Grow our own food
- Use solar and wind power
- Share a car co-op
- Host internships and workshops
- Barter goods and services



# Agenda Planning

The Experienced  
Communitarian's  
Technique for  
Making  
Meetings Flow

JILLIAN DOWNEY



BY TREE BRESSEN

Few things frustrate a group more than spending meeting time talking about what to talk about. Have you ever shown up to a community meeting only to have it bog down from the very beginning as the group tries to sort out what topics to cover in what order? Effective agenda planning ahead of time can help community meetings run a lot more smoothly.

A rule of thumb in agenda planning is that meeting time can be used most efficiently by being in sync with people's natural inclinations. If you practice thinking about the group's energy, you can learn to predict it instead of working in resistance to it. Having a few people sit down to think ahead step-by-step might seem like too much trouble, but in my experience the rewards are well worth it.

The first set of decisions you'll need to make are which items to include and which to save for another meeting or send to committee. Try asking these questions in order to figure that out. The list is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive; you may come up with other questions for your group.

## *Who will be present?*

- Who will sponsor or present an item?
- Who will participate in making the decision?
- Who will facilitate the meeting?

## *Timing:*

- How long has an item been waiting?
- Are there deadlines for action?
- Where are people at with this issue, are they ready for it?
- What else is going on for individuals and the group?
- Find a balanced mixture of "light" and "heavy" items.
- Consider the length meeting length.

## *Consider the Whole Group:*

- What are the priority issues for the

group right now?

Does this really need everyone's time?

Should it be handled by a smaller group or a manager either before or instead of going to meeting?

Would it be addressed better by posting something in writing?

*Preparation:*

Should any research be done ahead of time?

Do any documents need to be posted ahead of time?

Is the sponsor ready to present the item?

I recommend that groups maintain an ongoing agenda collection list that anyone can add potential items to. Then when the agenda planners sit down to work things out, they have a good base to start from. If a new topic surfaces during a meeting, you can add it to the list for a future meeting.

Part of the job of agenda planners can be to assist people who may be unfamiliar with community process. For example, perhaps a new member doesn't realize that their proposal needs to go through a committee first. You can be available as a resource person to help guide members through the appropriate steps to address their needs.

As an agenda planner you are also a gate-keeper. The community is trusting you not to let things enter into

group time if they shouldn't be there. Is an item really a committee-level issue?

Don't give it full group meeting time. Is an item actually arising out of a conflict between two individuals? Perhaps they should have mediation before that proposal comes to the whole group.

You also need to make judgment calls about how much to flesh something out before bringing it to the meeting. If a committee works out a proposal in every detail without asking the community first, the community might not respond favorably. On the other hand, if a topic is brought to meeting without much forethought, the whole group is likely to spend time covering territory that could have been handled more efficiently by a small group. Try to find the right balance between these extremes to keep everyone happy. The whole group will likely need more opportunities for input on the development of big, important proposals that need everyone's support in order to succeed.

Once the agenda planners figure out what items to have on the agenda, the next step is

timing. People's energy tends to move in certain rhythms. For example, most groups can't handle going more than 90 minutes without a break. So for a two-hour meeting, take a short pause in the middle. I recommend putting your most controversial or complex item earlier in the meeting, when people are fresh.

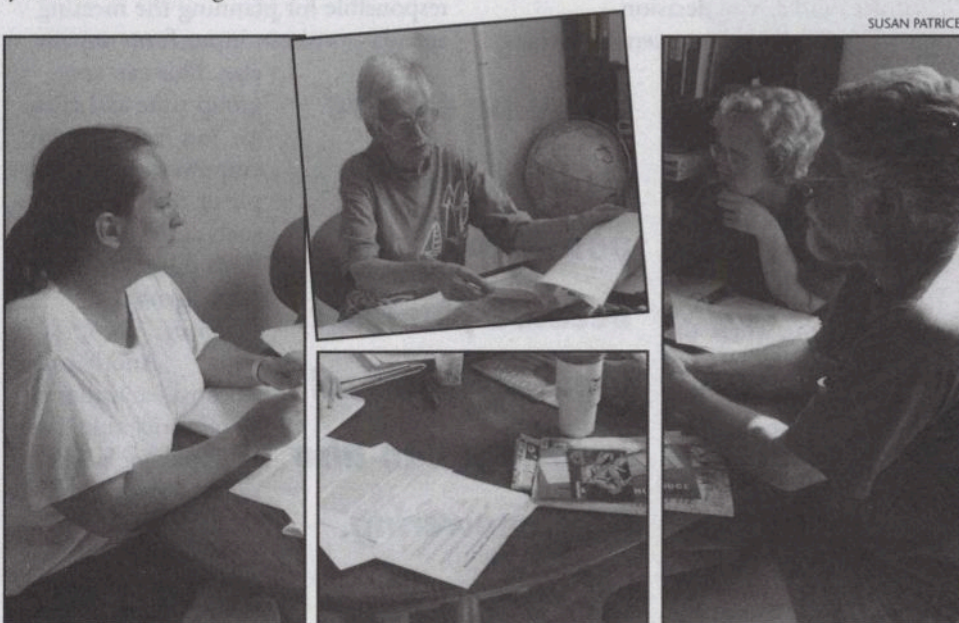
In addition to laying out the order for agenda items, the agenda planners should assign time limits for each item. This step forces you to get ruthlessly realistic. It's not uncommon to cut a proposed agenda by half once you rigorously review how much time it will really take to talk about things. Prioritization is an essential skill.

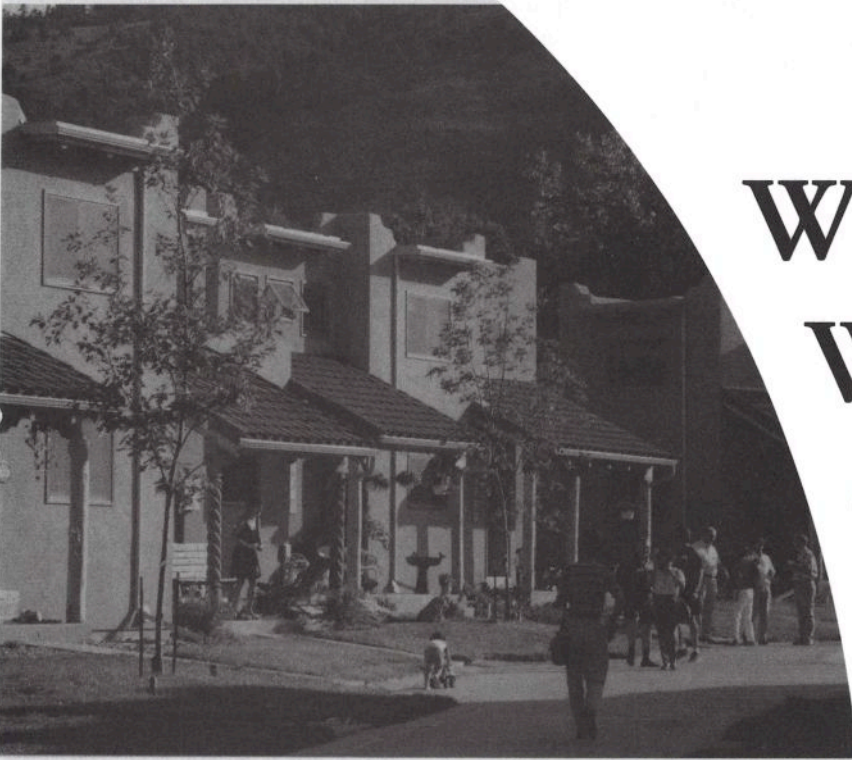
A few final points about agenda planning. First, it's good to give people more information rather than less. Be specific. If you post "Gardens" on the agenda, will members know what you mean? I recommend posting more about the item, such as "Whether or not to give full work credit for time spent helping in the gardens." Second, don't lose track of items that appear less urgent—it's easy to put off revising the bylaws month after month, but

**Few things frustrate a group more than spending meeting time talking about what to talk about.**

if all meeting time during those months are spent addressing short-term crises, the community may suffer later, when something about the bylaws really matters. And lastly, remember to rotate the roles of agenda planners—the more people in your community who get experience planning effective meetings, the better your meetings will run. Ω

*An experienced communitarian, Tree Bressen has worked with groups ranging from her local food co-op to the national Green Party. For information on facilitation and workshops, contact Tree at 1680 Walnut St., Eugene, OR 97403; 541-484-1156; tree@ic.org.*





Harmony Village Cohousing, Golden, Colorado

# Who Says We Can't Consensus To Vote?

BY SHARI LEACH

**C**an a consensus-based group use voting without undermining its principles and values? In my opinion the answer is definitely Yes. However, choosing to use a vote instead of consensus needs to be done correctly so the results stick and members feel empowered and valued. Sometimes it's appropriate to decide in advance to use a decision-making method other than consensus. Alternate styles of decision-making that can be used include authority, minority rules, majority rules, or super-majority rules voting.

Giving up your right to consensus on any issue can feel dicey, even frightening. It is essentially giving away a piece of your power. However, choosing to give some of your power to others because you trust their wisdom and judgment can also be an empowering choice, and a wise decision.

Let's look at some scenarios where a group might choose a decision-making method other than consensus.

## **Deciding to Let Authority Rule**

Have you ever been in a meeting where the group takes 10 minutes to decide whether or not to take the scheduled 10 minute break now, or 15 minutes later, after they have finished discussing the next item? Arghhh! It would have

been more effective and more efficient, probably resulting in as much or more group satisfaction with the decision, if the facilitator had simply made a judgment call. In the forming group Wild Sage Cohousing in Boulder, Colorado, each month a different person is responsible for planning the meeting agenda—without input from anyone

else. This can save group time and energy. You may wish to empower certain people or roles to make such authority decisions during meetings. (See "Agenda Planning," p.48.)

Another time to consider authority or minority rules decision-making is when the knowledge needed to make the decision is not easily accessible to everyone in the

**Choosing to give some of your power to others because you trust their wisdom and judgment can also be empowering.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF WONDERLAND HILLS

Hearthstone Cohousing's groundbreaking ceremony, Denver. Members used a combination of decision-making methods to choose their community name.

group. Sometimes one or more individuals may know a whole lot more about an issue and it may be appropriate to assign the decision to those individuals or a team. An example would be allowing the finance team to make some decisions independently of the community (i.e. related to taxes, or Homeowners Association dues, etc.). Process teams could make decisions on agenda items.

Social committees decide on celebration events and dates. Not every committee decision requires group input, or merits the whole group's time. (See "True Consensus, False Consensus," p.43.)

Although the members of one of these teams may choose to use consensus to make their decisions, the community is effectively empowering a minority group to make the decision for itself, and letting go of its opportunity to decide.

For start-up communities in the process of designing or building physical structures—in cohousing as well as

other kinds of communities—this form of decision-making may also be appropriate when a professional is involved, such as an architect, civil engineer, or building inspector. Some decisions may be inappropriate for the whole group to make, in which case it's better to consciously empower the person who has the most knowledge. Using authority or minority rules

decision-making does not undermine the consensus process, in my opinion, because the group has consciously chosen in advance to have the decision made in this manner—by the person or persons with a particular area of knowledge.

### When The Heat Is On

Casa Verde Commons (formerly Colorado Springs Cohousing) generally allows three meetings for final approval of a decision: the first meeting to discuss the idea; the second to decide; and the third to reaffirm the decision. However, if they need an

exceptionally fast decision, or in an emergency, Casa Verde has already authorized its Steering Committee to make the decision without waiting for approval from the general community.

One of the fundamental elements required for reaching consensus is having enough meeting time. However, some decisions arise very quickly and may not allow the group sufficient time to reach consensus. If your community has to make a decision *now* or face significant consequences (such as a huge financial setback, or potential demolition of a portion of your property) the group might choose in advance to have an emergency back-up voting system in place in the event that consensus cannot be reached. Defining an emergency in the heat of the moment can be tricky, so it's a good idea to do this in advance. An emergency is defined by some groups as "a situation which could cause significant negative consequences (financial or time delay) on the community if action was not taken rapidly."

### It's a Matter of Taste

If the issue is one of personal preference, it is often wiser to rely on a vote to help your group reach a deci-

**Not every committee decision requires group input, or merits the whole group's time.**

sion. For example, what color do you want to paint the exterior of the new building? Personal taste decisions are not explicitly based on the vision or values of your community, so these tools cannot be used to guide you, or to help members differentiate between personal preference and group needs. Examples of personal taste decisions include choosing paint colors for buildings, deciding where paintings are hung, or deciding where the clothesline will be located.

Consensus and voting can be combined for an efficient and effective decision-making process. (See "When You don't Want to Use Full Consensus," #109, Winter '00 issue.) You may want to use consensus to determine your intention as a group, and then use a vote to decide the details. For example, when choosing their community name, the former North Denver Cohousing used consensus to decide that its name should represent one of the following criteria:

- The historical background of their site, or

- The geographical location of their site, or
- An aspect of their vision statement.

They then brainstormed to create a list of possible names. Using their consensed upon criteria, the group was able to limit the list to only about 10-15 names. They then used a series of dot votes (each member has multiple votes, indicated with colored sticky dots placed next to their favorite choices) to narrow the field. After a final vote, they let the name sit for two meetings, and finally consensed upon it—and Hearthstone Cohousing was born. Having valued the process, and believing that the name represented one of the key criteria (an aspect of their vision statement), all members felt comfortable with the final decision.

Finally, it may be ridiculous to use consensus when the decision does not matter to all members of the group. For example, you may wish to use consensus to decide the intent to celebrate the anniversary of your community, but the exact details (guacamole or

marshmallows; brunch or barbecue) can be left to the dedicated few who have a passionate interest in this area.

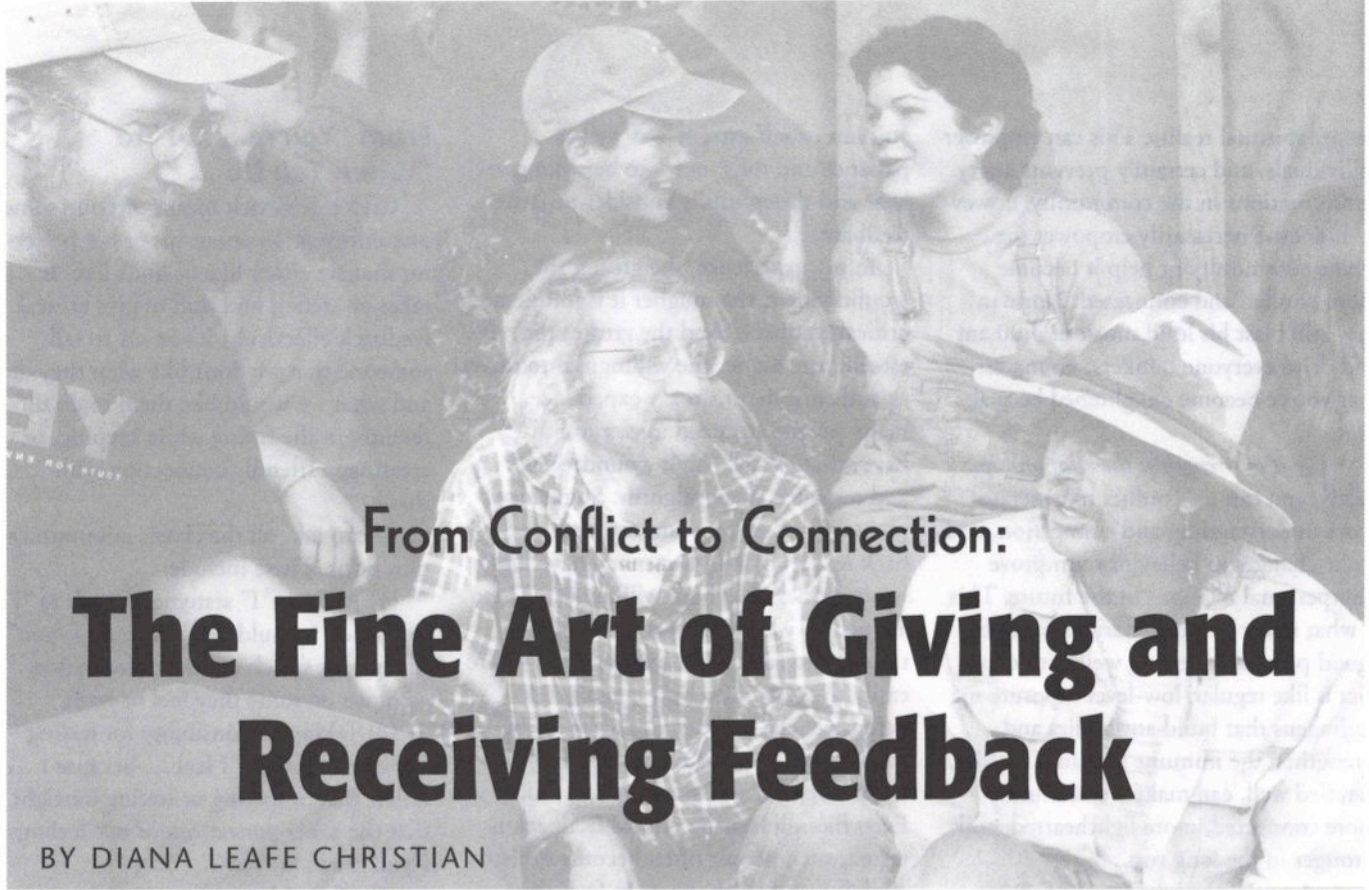
If your group was planning to use consensus, but you encounter a block, you should not use a vote *unless* you previously agreed to use a voting system as a back-up or for special conditions. Not doing so can result in members feeling disempowered, and reduce participation in the long run. A consensus-based group can use voting without undermining its principles and values, if it decides this in advance and has sufficient group trust. So, try deciding to let someone else decide, then sit back and enjoy letting the power of community do its work for you! Ω

*Shari Leach is a group facilitator and process consultant for Wonderland Hill Development Company in Boulder, Colorado. A member of Wild Sage, a forming cohousing community in Boulder, she teaches outdoor skills in summers and volunteers as a youth mentor in winters.*

Many cohousing communities use a back-up decision-making method for when they need to move fast, such as securing a sought-after parcel of land. Community children, like those at Grayrock Commons, are affected by their parents' decisions.

PHOTO: MARK IVINS





## From Conflict to Connection: The Fine Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback

BY DIANA LEAFE CHRISTIAN

**M**ANY OF US BELIEVE THAT FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER, OR the right intentional community, means, on some level, that we'll "live happily ever after."

However, we tend to make the same kinds of mistakes choosing community mates as we do choosing lovers: leaping before we look; projecting idealized archetypes onto ordinary folk; refusing to pay attention to telltale signs.

The same kinds of conflicts that erupt between lovers erupt among community members, and for the same reasons: poor communication skills; differences in values; triggering each other's long-buried wounds and traumas; projecting onto and attacking others for denied aspects of ourselves; mutually reinforcing rounds of accusation, defensiveness, and counter-accusation.

And the same kinds of communication and process skills that resolve differences in love relationships do the same in community—sharing from the heart, speaking in ways that maintain mutual good will, listening to each other deeply. This includes being willing to give constructive feedback and ask for what we want, as well as being willing to hear critical feedback about ourselves. It means speaking to and perceiving others in ways that allow us to stay in beneficial relationship with them while discussing even the most sensitive subjects.

### Typical Responses to Conflict

We can respond to conflict in at least five ways.

- *Ignore and suppress it.* Rarely a conscious choice, but rather a lifelong avoidance pattern, this response erodes the quality of well-being in a group. Community members might not notice the buried resentments accumulating over time, but visitors certainly will. "Why does this group feel so heavy?" And like trying to flatten beach balls by sitting on them, ignored conflict always pops up somewhere.

- *Leave it.* Leave the subject, leave the room, leave the community. Another popular, usually unconscious, choice, this is usually a lose/lose, for the person leaving, and for the group.

- *Leap into it aggressively.* Some people thrive on conflict, and enjoy how emotional-

ly alive they feel when sparring with others. They may crave emotional intensity; or believe that aggressive criticism is equivalent to "being honest." They may unconsciously want to recreate a negative, but familiar, experience from early childhood. Some may not experience their feelings consciously so yelling at others gets them in touch with suppressed anger, and it feels great to let it out. Others can only feel connected to or intimate with others once they've had a fight—as if they're testing someone's solidity or strength before they can trust them. By leaping into conflict people may meet their needs for aliveness, authenticity, healing, connection, or trust, but their *strategies* for meeting these needs can drive others right out of the room and right out of the community.

- *Change how you feel about it.* In this response, practiced by some spiritual aspirants, emotional upsets are considered opportunities for emotional growth and spiritual awareness. (See "We Don't Use 'Good Process,'" p.60 .) You don't address behaviors that trigger distress, but rather go more deeply into the anger, fear, or sadness in order to release these feelings at the core and touch into a

deeper spiritual reality. This can empower individuals, and certainly prevents angry confrontations in the community, however, it doesn't necessarily empower the whole community or help it become more bonded and connected. Norman may still blast his loud music at 3:00 am and drive everyone bonkers, no matter that you've become enlightened because of it.

- *Use it to strengthen the relationship.*

Lastly, you can *use* conflict to generate more understanding and connection, and make changes in behavior to improve interpersonal relations in the future. This is what many communitarians mean by "good process." Dealing well with conflict is like regular, low-level exposure to pathogens that build antibodies and strengthen the immune system. Conflict, handled well, can make a community more connected, more lighthearted, and stronger in the long run.

And one of the best forms of good process, in my opinion, is learning how to give and receive feedback well.

### High Woundedness, High Willingness

Giving and receiving feedback can be difficult, at least at first. I believe that when people don't get certain key emotional needs met in early developmental stages, they tend to have a charge on those needs throughout their lives. These can include needs for nurturing, affection, love, acceptance, empathy, connection, being valued, and being respected—qualities which many associate with family, and nowadays, with community. It's not surprising then, that many people with a charge on these kinds of needs (whether they know it consciously or not) are attracted to community. Having such a charge can make it difficult to hear critical feedback well. And the more wounded the person is, the greater the likelihood he or she will attract conflict and resist hearing feedback from their community mates about their annoying or disruptive behaviors.

Yet, many people attracted to community are also especially savvy about the many avenues to emotional healing and resolution, and have developed increased self-esteem as a result of their self-awareness and healing work. It takes a certain

amount of self-esteem—as well as patience and tolerance—to be willing to hear and thoughtfully consider negative feedback.

In my experience, the greater the woundedness, the tougher it is to tolerate critical feedback. And the greater the self-esteem, the higher the willingness to listen to and consider it. In my experience, many people attracted to community have what I'd call "high woundedness" and resist feedback mightily. Some have plenty of self-esteem and can hear feedback relatively well. But many have high woundedness *and* high willingness. These are people who didn't get certain emotional needs met at an early age and so are easily triggered into hurt, anger, and defensiveness, even while they're in the process of mastering emotional healing, self-awareness, and good process skills. Even though hearing critical feedback is tough, such people often become skilled at giving and receiving it. In fact, they often become the community's best facilitators, counselors, and mediators.

### ***If you ask me to "be more mature," how do I know what that means, exactly?***



### From "You're a ... !" to "When You Do ... "

Giving feedback means offering someone information about his or her behavior that we either like or don't like. It takes awareness and skill to give critical feedback effectively. It's an art to tell someone that we don't like what they did and what we would like them to do differently in the future while keeping, or creating, a friendly connection with them.

It can take all the classic communication skills. These include:

(1) Making "I" statements such as "I feel" and "I would like" instead of "you" statements which tell the other person what we presume they feel or want.

(2) Taking responsibility for feeling our own feelings ("I feel ... because I ..."), rather than implying or stating outright that the other person *caused* our feelings ("you made me feel ...").

(3) Describing our emotional state with words for actual feelings ("angry," "sad," or "worried"), instead of words that aren't feelings at all ("I feel blamed," "cheated," "manipulated"), but assessments of what we believe the other person is doing to us. Equally disruptive are the common phrases "I feel that you are..." and "I feel like you are ..." which also are merely presumptions about the other person.

(4) Describing what the other person does that we don't like in clean, neutral terms, rather than using words that imply that he or she is bad or wrong for doing it (even if we think so.) This is particularly difficult for most people, as it's all too easy to label, blame, judge, analyze, or diagnose someone with our choice of words ("When you got defensive today and projected your father onto me again"), instead of merely describing what the person literally *physically* did ("When you raised your voice today and said that you thought I was picking on you").

Nowadays these communication skills are widely recommended and increasingly familiar to people seeking greater self-awareness and interpersonal harmony. (See "Getting Real," p. 28, and "Towards Clarity and Honesty," p. 38.)

To give feedback well, it helps enormously to shift our perception from thinking there's something wrong with



the other person—their state of being—to observing that we don't like something they're *doing*. (I'm indebted to Marshall Rosenberg for clearly articulating this concept in his *Nonviolent Communication* process. See "Nonviolent Communication: Transforming Conflict and Enhancing Connection," in the Fall '99 issue, #104.)

When we perceive someone as having something wrong with them, it disempowers us, disempowers them, and triggers further frustration in both of us. In contrast, we're empowered when we perceive the person as doing actions we don't like or don't want. With such a perceptual shift the person no longer appears as a steady state that cannot change—"irresponsible," "immature," or "neurotic"—but as an ongoing *process*, doing different behaviors at different times, some of which we like, some of which we don't. With such a perceptual shift we can take heart that the person may change that particular action, if we request it in a way *that* doesn't make them wrong.

This is because giving someone feedback about what we think they "are"—a state of being like "irresponsible," "immature," or "neurotic," for example, usually triggers anger, defensiveness, and a desire to retaliate. Giving feedback about what they actually *do*—using neutral, nonjudgmental language—tends to trigger far less defensiveness, and more willingness to consider our request for change. It's much easier to respond to and cooperate with a request for changed behavior than a request to "be" some different way. If you ask me to "be more mature," how do I know what that means, exactly? How will I know when I meet your standard? Such "be different" requests are not only judgmental and off-putting, they're far too vague.

Process skills like these, particularly perceiving people as *doing* things instead of *being* a particular way, and using neutral, nonjudgmental language, takes time, patience, and practice, ideally with others seeking to master the same skills. Fortunately there are plenty of books, audio and videotapes, and workshops on communication and process. My own favorite is the Nonviolent Communication process and its many teaching aids

and workshops ([www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)), but there are many others.

## Listening for Kernels of Truth

There is no guarantee that your community mates will reciprocate as skillfully. Much of the time feedback offered to you will probably be relayed in a graceless, unskilled manner. Even in communities



where most people are committed to good process, they can still regress to their lifelong patterns and speak awkwardly or harshly. You could receive a message that implies or outright states that you're wrong, bad, or defective in some way. You can hear guesses and presumptions about your motives stated as facts. Your actions can be exaggerated and your character "horriblized." You can be told you "always" do such-and-such or "never" do such-and-such. You can be armchair-psychoanalyzed as to what childhood factors cause your malfeasance. You can be outright attacked verbally and called names. This can be so painful it completely obscures the actual piece of information the person is trying to convey.

And ... keep in mind that it can be extremely difficult to hear critical feedback calmly, even when it is delivered with all the right "I" messages and real feeling words. It can be painful for two reasons. The critical statements or harshness of the delivery can hurt. And, you can wonder whether, and to what extent, it's *true*. It helps to keep the following in mind:

1. *Just because feedback is delivered in a critical, exaggerated, or hostile manner doesn't mean it doesn't contain a kernel of truth—or maybe a lot of truth.*

2. *Conversely, it could be pure projection—a message only about the person delivering it, with nothing to do with you.*

3. *And even when delivered skillfully, it*

*might still be exaggerated, or partially or wholly invalid.*

I believe hearing feedback requires at least two skills. First, responding to the person in a way that doesn't make things worse, for you, for them, and for the whole community. And second, "listening for the amount of truth" and finding ways to check it out objectively.

Suppose Jason says: "I'm annoyed with you and feel frustrated by the messes you leave in the community building. You don't seem to clean things up after you use it."

What's a good response? In my opinion constructive responses could include (depending on how accurate you think his observation is):

"Thanks for telling me," or "Thanks, I'll consider that," or "Thanks, I'll do something about it," or just "Thanks."

But what if he had said: "You're a slob who leaves a mess every time you use the community building. We always end up cleaning up after you!" With a message like this, it can take a great deal of patience and tolerance not to retaliate in kind. If you do, you, Jason, and the whole community will probably feel worse. If you refrain, and respond more neutrally as suggested above, you've helped the community's well-being just that little bit, by not adding to the burden of ill will Jason has just dumped into it.

How do you know when feedback is true? There's introspection, self-observation, and any manner of self-awareness techniques (including asking for guidance on inner levels). And you can ask other community members directly. I recommend doing this in an open-ended way. For example:

"Excuse me, Sally, I want to know something about myself. Do I sometimes leave a mess in the community building?"

Sally could say, "Yes, you sure do. I've been meaning to talk with you about it. Would you be willing to take more time before you leave the building and put things back where they were? And clean up after yourself in the kitchen?"

Or she could say, "Hmmm, let me see. Well, maybe once or twice, but not all the time."

If you ask various people and get either kind of response consistently, you can judge the accuracy of Jason's feedback.

Because you've asked it an open-ended way you haven't set Sally up to respond to the unskilled way Jason may have said it, which gives you the best chance of getting neutral, accurate information from her.

But if you felt so hurt or angry by how Jason criticized you that you repeated what he said—or worse, exaggerated it—you defeat your chances of getting accurate feedback. For example, don't say:

"Excuse me, Sally, but Jason says I'm a horrible slob who leaves a mess everywhere I go, and everyone always has to clean up after me! Is that true?"

Because you'll likely get:

"Of *course* not! You don't leave messes everywhere!" And you'll have missed the piece of truth that you do, in fact, *sometimes* leave a mess.

Here's what I think it boils down to. I'm suggesting that you offer skillful feedback unilaterally, without expecting or demanding that people who offer feedback in return are any good at it. And that you sift through any graceless or harsh feedback for whatever helpful truths about yourself you can glean. I realize this is a lot to ask. Yet, most of us are seeking a better way of life in community. Many of us want to model a more sustainable, cooperative way of life, to "change the world." So we need to master new, better ways of communicating than those we've unconsciously absorbed from our non-cooperative, unsustainable culture.

Here's an enjoyable group experience that can help.

### The Gifting Circle—A Feedback Process That Feels Good

This process, which I first learned from consensus facilitator Paul DeLapa, is based on the idea that feedback of any kind is a gift, and it's all good. It's an opportunity for people to not only give thanks and appreciation, but also to share concerns they've been withholding, or address situations that they want to clear up. Doing so ritually, like this, with everyone doing it at the same time, seems to make giving and receiving feedback easier. And obviously, the more skilled the actual language used—telling real feelings, using "I" messages, using neutral language in describing each other's behavior—the bet-

ter the process will go.

Everyone sits in a large circle in a big room, but with some space between the chairs for sound privacy. Soft music plays in the background to help set the mood of respect and sacredness, and to give more sound privacy. Candles and any of the group's ritual objects are placed in the center, with the intention of creating an honored, safe, and friendly atmosphere. A large poster displays the following four statements.



1. "Something I appreciate about you is \_\_\_\_\_."

2. (Optional) "Something that is (or has been) challenging for me with you is \_\_\_\_\_."

3. "Something I know about myself is \_\_\_\_\_."

4. "Thank you for listening."

The facilitator explains the guidelines and how much time there'll be for the process. (For a group of 20 or so I recommend 60 to 90 minutes.) At the end the facilitator asks if people would like more time. It takes some people time to give enough minor feedback messages to get up the courage to give more significant or emotionally charged messages.

Each person chooses a small object to place in front of them on the floor. It can be a special stone, a small ritual object, or just their wallet or keys. It serves as the signal, "I'm available to listen."

The Gifting Circle involves Givers (speakers), Receivers (listeners), and Gifts (the feedback). When it begins, each person willing to hear feedback at that point places their object in front of them on the

floor. Anyone who wants to give feedback crosses to someone who has their object on the floor, and sits, kneels, or crouches before them. This is a simultaneous process, so many people will be going to and from other people in the circle.

The Giver picks up the seated Receiver's object and hands it to them as a symbol of the Gift they're about to give. Some facilitators suggest that the object be handed to the Receiver with both hands, and the Receiver take the object with both cupped hands, as a physical reminder that

the feedback is a gift. The Giver whispers or in a low voice makes the four statements to the Receiver. The statement about what may be challenging for the Giver about the Receiver is optional. The Giver may not want to talk about such challenges at that moment, or there may be no challenging situations—the Giver may simply want to give the Receiver appreciation and acknowledgement. (Note: This process is as much for sharing appreciation as it is giving critical feedback.) The "something I

know about myself" statement invites the kind of intimacy that arises when people freely reveal something about themselves to another. The four statements are meant to be heard only by the Receiver, and not audible to anyone else.

The Receiver just listens. When the Giver is finished, the Receiver doesn't respond but simply says, "Thank you." The Giver returns to his or her seat. The Giver can put their object on the floor and become a potential Receiver, or go to a different person with another feedback Gift.

The Receiver may put their object on the floor again, meaning "I'm open for receiving more feedback." Or they may continue holding the object and just sit there for awhile, feeling what they feel and considering the feedback. This gives the Receiver control over how much, and how often they receive feedback, which seems to increase willingness and tolerance for hearing it. Or the Receiver can put the object on their chair and become a Giver, giving feedback to someone else in the circle. Anyone who wants to respond to whatever the Giver said can do so later, if they wish, as a Giver.

It's suggested that people pause a bit for silence and contemplation between the

actions of giving or receiving. People will be constantly changing roles, crossing back and forth across the circle as they decide to give feedback, or to remain where they are and receive it (or not). The facilitator is available to explain the process again, or clarify any misunderstandings. The facilitator rings a chime five minutes before the end of the session, and again at the end. (Once the group

***It takes a certain amount of self-esteem to be willing to hear negative feedback.***

knows the process well, the facilitator's role can be eliminated and someone can serve as timekeeper.)

The group can, if it wishes, evaluate the process at the end, but only the process, not anyone's content. The Gifting Circle seems to generate as many loving expressions of appreciation as it does expression of concern and requests for change. There is usually a hushed atmosphere during the process, and often, smiles, tears, and long hugs.

Giving and receiving feedback well and seeking the truth in it can make a big difference in how well we function as individuals, and whether our community treads water or thrives. Like rocks polishing one other in a rock tumbler, our mutual feedback and requests for change can lead to our each becoming kinder, more aware, more considerate versions of ourselves. It's part of how we *can* change the world—personal interaction by personal interaction. Ω

*Excerpted with permission from Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow an Intentional Community (New Society Publishers, 2002-2003).*

*Diana Leafe Christian is editor of Communities magazine.*

## NEW COHOUSING IN MICHIGAN



For more information about Honey Creek or Great Oak, call Nick at 734-663-5516.

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(continued from p. 37 *Birthing Community*)

In the final step of this process, Core Groups naturally converge with one another, giving birth to a co-creative society. The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), for example, is one example of converging core groups that, individually and collectively, are making a difference in the world. (*Ten*)

Co-creative communities, whether rural or urban, intentional, neighborhood, or online, are sprouting throughout the world in the fertile soil of awakening consciousness. Guided from within, such groups and communities are joining with others in endeavors that embody the values and virtues of trust, respect, equality, cooperation, equanimity, generosity, integrity, and compassion.

There are no clear road maps as we are called to pioneer a new way of being, where our collective wisdom and inner guidance lead the way. At Global Family we believe that our culture stands at the threshold of a global renaissance that has only been dimly dreamed of by the

## **Our desire to maintain harmony and resonance has sometimes caused us problems.**

visionaries of the human race. Collectively in intimate spiritual circles and community configurations, we are modeling new possibilities in manifesting a sustainable, planetary co-creative culture. As Thich Nhat Hanh said, "the next Buddha may not be an individual, but an enlightened community." At Global Family and Hummingbird Ranch, we rejoice in being a part of this unfolding dance. Ω

*Carolyn Anderson and Katharine Roske are founding members of Hummingbird Ranch in northern New Mexico and co-authors of The Co-Creator's*

*Handbook: An Experiential Guide for Discovering Your Life's Purpose and Building a Co-Creative Society (Global Family, 2001). Carolyn is a cofounder and codirector of Global Family. Katharine is an educator, workshop facilitator, and youth advocate. Carolyn resides in Northern California and Katharine lives most of the year in Boulder, Colorado. Both spend several months each year at Hummingbird Ranch.*

*For additional information about Hummingbird Ranch, Global Family, or The Co-Creators Handbook: 530-265-3180; [www.globalfamily.net](http://www.globalfamily.net). Hummingbird Ranch programs for summer 2002 include a communities workshop, a permaculture certification course, a youth program, and a Global Family gathering.*

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(continued from p. 32 *Getting Real*)

thoughts, your feelings, your story, or your position. You come to experience yourself as a human being whose experience of life is constantly changing and who is okay regardless of what you feel. This profound shift in your identity is the reward for practicing *Getting Real*. You learn to participate in life instead of trying to control it.

*Excerpted from the book Getting Real (2001) by Susan M. Campbell, with permission of H.J. Kramer/New World Library, Novato, California; www.newworldlibrary.com; 800-972-6657.*

*The 10 truth skills are described in greater detail in this book. The author suggests that mastering these skills requires a support group of at least one or two other people also committed to learning them.*

*Susan Campbell is an internationally known author, speaker, seminar leader, and consultant to Fortune 500 companies. Her five previous books include The Couple's Journey: Intimacy as a Path to Wholeness (Impact, 1980), and Beyond the Power Struggle: Dealing with Conflict in Love and Work (Impact, 1984). She lives in Sebastopol, California, and offers one-day Getting Real seminars in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her Getting Real Card Game is also available to help people learn the 10 truth skills. Contact: drsusan@susancampbell.com; www.susancampbell.com; www.thegettingrealgame.com*

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## We Don't Use “Good Process” *Going Within to Find Perfect Community*

Anger seethed through my body like a crucible of hot lead. “How can you be so inconsiderate as to wake me up at three in the morning?” Not only had they rudely disturbed my sleep, but they were poking fun, actually laughing at my distress. I was angry!

My roommates had decided to have a little party in the middle of the night. I was not amused. After letting them know exactly what I thought of them, I went to get someone to act as a referee. Imagine my surprise when he pointed out that I was the one making myself upset!

“Sure,” he said. “We create our world around us at every moment. Our choices in every instant govern our universe. Of course, it’s essential to express exactly how we feel. So what you did was good. You let your roommates know exactly how you feel. Great!”

“But now do you want to hold on to

those feelings and wallow in your anger, or would you rather just let them go, focus on the Ascension attitudes and see what happens next? Otherwise, you stuff your feelings down, where they stay stuck, perhaps forever.

“What other choice do you have? You can’t control what happens outside of you. You can’t make your roommates be something different than they are. So by expressing feelings without holding back and then letting them go, you can find out what you really are, beneath all that feeling. You are love. You find you can love everyone, no matter how they behave. That’s unconditional love.

“That’s reality, and you can choose for it, whenever you want. So what do you prefer: holding onto your anger, or letting it go, and knowing the love that you are?”

To hear this was such an astounding



*Vidya Ishaya is a teacher of the Ishayas' Ascension process who lives at the Society for Ascension Academy (SEA) in North Carolina. The Ishayas welcome visitors. For more information: [www.ishaya.com/offerings/invite.htm](http://www.ishaya.com/offerings/invite.htm).*

difference from the way I had lived most of my life. I had lived in community for a long time. For 20 years, I had the opportunity to visit a number of intentional communities in the eastern United States. All faced a major challenge—how do you live together in a harmonious and loving way in the face of being human?

Full human consciousness means expressing all your emotions—love, joy, and peace *as well as* anger and sorrow. How do you relate to someone who really angers you or is driving you crazy? And how do you remain close while bound in a community with all that going on?

In the communities I visited, I saw two ways of handling this. Both were

**By always focusing on  
the inside, we learn  
we're not broken, not  
screwed up, not crazy.**

dysfunctional, in my opinion. Either the residents agreed to accept whatever a powerful leader said, or they tried to agree on everything amongst themselves through interminable meetings. In the first case, people learned to accept someone else's knowledge of what was best for them. And in the second case, people learned to dominate others. That way, they could control their world.

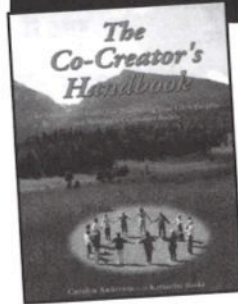
Either "solution" didn't work for very long. In my experience of community living (and life, in general), I was never fully satisfied with the mistaken understanding that solutions could be found by looking outside of me. All I ended up doing was trying one fix after another, until I was totally frustrated. Then I left everything to wander on my own, for awhile. And that wasn't very satisfying, either.

But being really dissatisfied wasn't a bad thing. It meant I was not about to put up with things as they had been, anymore. I was ripe for a change. And

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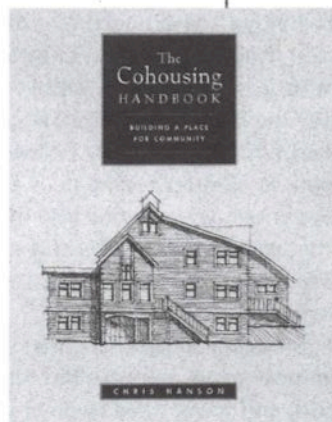
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the change that I was seeking (whether I knew it or not on the conscious level) was to stop living life on the outside, and go within and live from there.

For many years, I had enjoyed books, videos and workshops that suggested all the answers I sought were within. I had chanted and meditated for long years, but had never come to that inner peace that they all claimed was just there, for the taking. And one thing that was really lacking was the reality of someone who had achieved

**Almost 200 people  
live together in the  
most harmonious  
and joyful community  
I've ever experienced.**

*closed and practicing what the Ishayas call Ascension Attitudes, in order to connect with spiritual essence. —Ed.)* From that moment on, my life changed. I didn't really know what Ascension was, but I somehow knew inside that this

the inner life, and was a shining example of that. Until one day.

I picked up a copy of an article about the life of MSI, the first teacher—the guiding light—of the Ishayas' Ascension. (*The Ishayas are teachers of Ascension, a process involving sitting or lying quietly with eyes*

## ABOUT THE ISHAYAS AND SFA

The Ishayas are a community (although they don't use that term themselves) of almost 200 Ascension teachers, called Ishayas, who live together on 40 acres near Asheville, North Carolina. Their now-deceased teacher, MSI, founded the SFA in 1995 as a place where people could learn, practice, and teach the Ascension process. Ishayas range in age from 18 to people in their seventies, and live in six large houses and a dorm, with a kitchen-dining room building and a large hall where they do the Ascension process together. They derive income from teaching Ascension to others, and by welcoming visitors who come to practice the process.

I asked Vidya Ishaya how they make decisions. "We all get together and hash things out, but there sure isn't any leader or supervisory position. Believe it or not, we've learned to listen 'within' and act from there. When one is aligned with the One (which is all there is), then everything works out."

I asked him whether they believe they have conflict. "It depends on your viewpoint. Shakespeare said life is a play and everyone is an actor. If an actor expresses anger, you can buy into that anger and see it as stressful. Or, you can know that someone is just having emotions, and not have to get sucked into it yourself. Unless that's your role at the moment. Then, you surrender to that. But afterwards, it's time to let go.

"We're having some challenges at the moment. We've got a bigger place than we now need, because the teachers have spread from here throughout the world, and so we need to downsize. Some people see that as a crisis, some see it as a great move, some don't care. So, Yes, there are emotions that come up around that. But we all know it's OK to share these emotions. They're not 'real.' (Only that which is eternal is real anyway.) So we know it'll all work out. It always does."

—Diana Leafe Christian



was for me. So I moved to the Society for Ascension Academy near Waynesville, North Carolina.

I am now among almost 200 people who live together in the most harmonious and joyful community I've ever experienced or even imagined. But we don't focus at all on community living. We don't design meeting structures or talk about conflict resolution or decision making by unanimous agreement, or any of the things that people come up with so that they can control their outside world. Instead, our one-pointed and constant focus is on the inside. We are solely dedicated to knowing ourselves in truth, 100 percent. "Be still and know that I am God." That is the essence.

By reminding ourselves to always focus on the inside, we learn we're not broken, not screwed up, not crazy. I've seen people who were full of sorrow or who had a poor sense of self-worth just give up that judgment of themselves, and practically overnight become the rich, loving people they always were, on the inside.

So, for me, the best community life I've ever experienced is in a place where people don't care about community. They care about the inner person. They care about finding out who they are. They care.

And that automatically takes care of everything else. Once the inner world changes, the outer world follows along. To create heaven on earth, we go inside to find the heaven that has eternally been there, and will always be there. To find the perfect community, I go within. Ω



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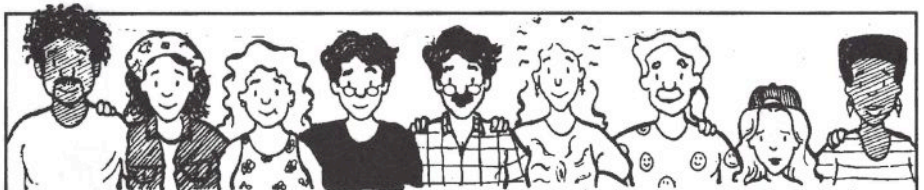
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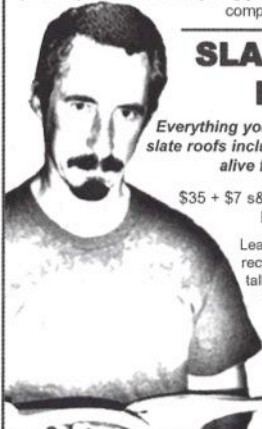
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# 25 Years of Community Building

The Federation of Egalitarian Communities has been a fixture in the North American intentional communities movement for a quarter of a century now, and their impressive list of accomplishments and network support is cause for celebration.

Established in 1976, the network came together around shared values of income sharing, egalitarianism, nonviolence, and cooperation. To that end, each FEC community holds all its land, labor, and other resources in common and is committed to equality, ecology, and participatory government.

Originally an association of five intentional communities, the network has grown to include seven member communities (Twin Oaks, East Wind, Sandhill Farm, Skyhouse, Acorn, Jolly Ranchers, and Beacon Hill House) and seven groups in dialogue (Tekiah, Terra Nova, Krutsio, Ganas, Blackberry Farm, Aspenwood, and Dandelion).

From the start FEC delegates saw the need to finance their common projects, so they developed a self-taxation system in which each community contributes two

percent of its net revenues into a common fund to do joint advertising, pay support staff, bankroll assorted projects, subsidize travel of member community

delegates, and provide financial support to outside projects that are compatible with their organizational goals. The joint advertising budget alone is worth the cost of membership, since the cost for an individual community to duplicate this effort would typically exceed the cost of their dues. Everything else is gravy.

A second innovation was the creation of their Labor Exchange program, which builds friendships,

fosters inter-community communication, encourages skills sharing, and helps meet seasonal labor requirements such as providing extra hands to bring in a large harvest. The basic concept is that a member of community "A" can get full credit at home for work performed at member community "B," and then later a member of the "B" community can visit community "A" and plug into their work system to even out the labor balance. And since working away from home often seems like play instead of work, it's actually a



*Geoph Koseny, a longtime community networker and activist, has visited more than 360 intentional communities, is a frequent participant in networking gatherings, and is a regular columnist for Communities magazine.*

great way for individual members to take a paid vacation.

Another aspect of the shared labor system is that the FEC has been able to free up individuals from work at their home communities in order to channel that energy into network issues and larger social causes. Examples include providing labor hours to create promotional literature and maintain a web presence, sending delegates to talk up community living at various conferences, and in providing thousands of hours of organizational staff work during the formative years of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC, the publisher of this magazine).

Additionally, the FEC's PEACH fund is a creative alternative to commercial health insurance which also serves as an alternative bank. Member communities can opt to pay money each month into an emergency disaster fund (a glorified cooperative savings account) to cover specific individual members—so if that person runs up medical expenses in excess of \$5,000, the community can access those combined savings. In the meantime, that savings pool has grown into a half-million-dollar revolving loan fund that finances community businesses and other socially responsible causes.

The FEC played a crucial role in helping the FIC get started, and over the years the FEC has supported various Fellowship initiatives that advanced causes important to both organizations. This help has taken many forms. In FIC's early years FEC provided an unrestricted grant of \$1000/year—when this was significant portion of the FIC's budget. FEC has provided travel subsidies to FIC meetings for people who live in FEC communities, and for FIC's first nine years FEC subsidized the work of the FIC's Executive Secretary by providing a minimum wage—back when all FIC work was done by volunteers. FEC financed the first two *Communities Directories*, and in recent

years has purchased numerous cases of *Directories* for placement in public and academic libraries—even paying for the calls to find out which libraries didn't have this reference work and wanted it. FEC communities have hosted people working on FIC projects (especially research and production marathons for the *Directory*), and they have both subsidized member labor and organized visitor labor to help with bulk mailings and *Directory* research. Several years ago Twin Oaks' Indexing business donated the indexing of FIC's minutes, using it as a training exercise for their new members. And always supportive of networking events, East Wind, Ganas, and Twin Oaks have hosted FIC organizational meetings for little or no cost, with the latter also hosting FIC's Art of Community weekend at a very modest cost, making

it affordable both to the FIC and participants. Another of the FIC's valuable resources, its mail order Community Bookshelf business, was started by FEC communities, and a few years ago was transferred to FIC, at cost, when it became clear that the latter organization had the interest and energy to add it to their constellation of services.

The bottom line: over the years the FEC and the FIC have developed a symbiotic relationship, pioneering ways that network organizations can cooperate in pursuit of mutual goals. In addition to providing early staffing and funds, FEC also provided encouragement and helped brainstorm possibilities—two forms of support that are valuable beyond measure. With that support, FIC has developed numerous programs that promote, augment, and sustain community—goals that also further the FEC's mission. And that's something to celebrate. Ω

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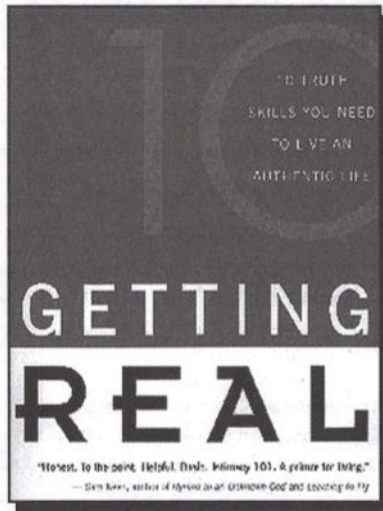
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# REVIEWS



## *Getting Real*

by Susan Campbell

New World Library, 2001  
Pb., 232 pp. \$14.95

Reviewed by Diana Leafé Christian

One night I settled down under the covers to take a brief look at *Getting Real* by psychotherapist and consultant Susan Campbell. I'd assigned it to myself as a 10-minute bedtime glance-over, to consider for possible review in *Communities* magazine. I assumed it would be good, as years before I'd read her book, *The Couple's Journey: Intimacy as a Path to Wholeness*. Besides, this book's forward was by *Radical Honesty's* Brad Blanton, who had nothing but good things to say. But I planned to only glance at it.

Three hours later I was deep into concepts and exercises about honesty, clarity, telling the truth, being transparent—and letting go of grasping after certainty and control in order to just plain *relate* to people without knowing how things will turn

out. I was also sending thought-messages to the author. "Susan, you 're writing straight to me!"

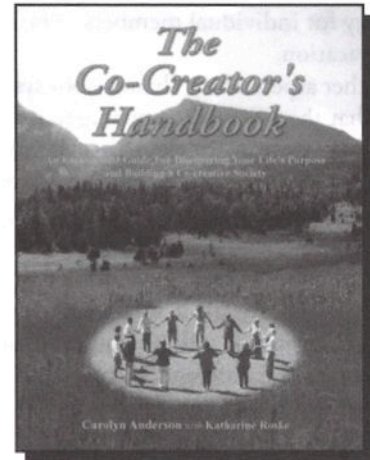
The next day I got permission to excerpt a portion (See "*Getting Real*," p28.), and typed up portions of the first two chapters. On a whim I emailed it to a friend. He liked it so much he'd emailed the excerpt on to most of his friends, and had even called a friend in a distant city and read it to her over the phone. Then he bought the book. If the message in *Getting Real* is a meme, then it's one that replicates rapidly.

What's the message? That telling the honest truth about what we're feeling and wanting leads directly to happiness, well-being, and greater intimacy with others. That doing so generates a freedom that comes from relating more and controlling less. (People who control people and things in their lives, says research evidence, have a significantly greater incidence than non-controllers of painful, unexpected events in their lives, such as divorce, job loss, and estrangement from their grown children.) That it's not so scary to tell the truth and not worry that people aren't going to like us for it. (And by the way, this is not about dumping on someone else and calling it "telling the truth." It's about revealing what's going on in ourselves.)

While many people believe that telling the honest, transparent truth is a good idea, they don't know how. So Susan Campbell outlines ten "truth skills" to aid in this work. Each skill, from the first, "experiencing *what is*," to the second, "being transparent," through the tenth, "experiencing the silence of not knowing," are built upon each other sequentially. Ten chapters explore each of these skills, with anecdotes from her and others' lives, and individual and group exercises to learn each skill. Appendices offer book and tape resources, a "Getting Real" on-line community, where to get a "Getting Real" card game, and a set of communication guidelines for people who've read the book and played the game.

*Getting Real* is written well. It's clear, it's straightforward, it hits home. It is the book I want my fellow community members to read.

Don't just go out and buy this book. Buy several. You're going to want to share it.



## *The Co-Creator's Handbook* *An Experiential Guide for* *Discovering Your Life's* *Purpose and Building a* *Co-Creative Society*

by Carolyn Anderson,  
with Katharine Roseke

Global Family, 2001  
Pb., 274 pp. \$22.00

Reviewed by Diana Leafé Christian

Every two weeks I meet with five others in a small canvas yurt. By candlelight we burn incense, hold hands, affirm our intention, and begin the satisfying task of organizing rituals, celebrations, process experiences, and other events for our intentional community—a task we *love*. We fill the yurt with insights, "ahas!," and yips of delight when we especially like something. We end with a song, a shared hug, and expressions of fondness and gratitude.

For me this equals self-actualization, pure and simple. But I haven't thought much about self-actualization—what it is, how to get it—and I surely never thought about consciously creating it with like-minded others while I was actually trying to do something else.

But lo! *The Co-Creator's Handbook* addresses exactly this—enjoying yourself immensely in a group with a shared service purpose, whose members operate from a deep sense of affection, connection, and alignment to something higher. Small "co-creative" groups like this can change the world, say authors Anderson and Roske. ("And indeed, are the only thing that ever

has,” whispers the shade of Margaret Meade.)

The authors' premise, based on Barbara Marx Hubbard's *Rings of Empowerment*, is that social change groups—or any group with a purpose—are more effective, inspired, and creative when their members are consciously aligned with each other in love and connection, and inspired and guided by Spirit. “Co-creation,” they say, is conscious alignment with others and “the laws or patterns of the Creator.” A Co-Creative Core Group is a group formed around a shared purpose of social activism that actualizes the gifts of all members. This works because the members are in Resonance—the frequency that aligns people heart to heart, which calls forth the best and highest from each person. (See “Birthing Co-Creative Community,” p. 33.)

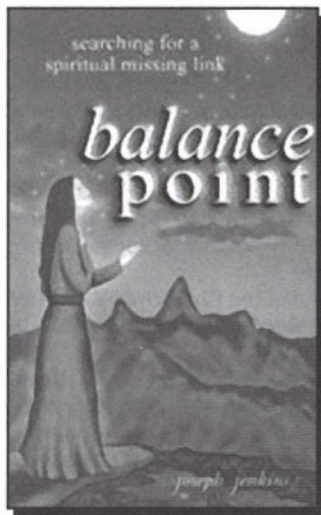
*The Co-Creator's Handbook* was written for people who believe that a new way of life is trying to be born in the midst of our societal breakdown, and feel a strong urgency to play a part in it. Co-Creative groups differ from those that focus solely on personal and spiritual growth but not activist work, or social action groups that don't cultivate harmony and resonance among their members. In co-creative groups, the members use their shared work and relationships with each other as the way they do their service or activist work. Ah, I get it. The process is the product. The medium is the message. (Sounds like communarians to me!)

The authors present the model of the ten Circles of Creation (and how they build upon one another sequentially) with a descriptive overview and a clear set of diagrams. They offer detailed information on how to set up and run a core group, including the number of people (at least five to start), timing, formats, facilitation, and roles. The real gold of the book—how to manifest each Circle—is a wealth of experiential exercises and processes, guided visualizations, rituals, celebrations, songs, poems, prayers, and cooperative games, which I found especially inspiring and sound. When it comes to good group process, the authors obviously know what they're talking about.

I occasionally felt impatient with passive-voice construction and yearned for more down-to-earth terms. (“Talk normal!” I'd sometimes want to shout.) But

this criticism is minor. *The Co-Creator's Handbook* is not only valuable as a rich and juicy resource for group exercises and processes, but as an intriguing theoretical framework for people who want to effect change in the world in a more conscious, aligned, and powerful way.

*Diana Leaf Christian is editor of Communities magazine.*



***Balance Point:  
Searching for a  
Spiritual Missing Link***

by Joseph Jenkins

Chelsea Green Publishing, 2000  
Pb., 298 pp. \$14 in bookstores  
Or \$19.25 postpaid from  
[www.jenkinspublishing.com](http://www.jenkinspublishing.com)

*Reviewed by Marni Rachmiel*

*Balance Point* tells the story of a self-described average American, Joseph Jenkins, who is thrown into a journey of spiritual and ecological awareness by the death of his Great Aunt Lucy (whom he had met only once, 20 years earlier) and the demanding legacy she bequeaths to him. The battle between the “Ego” and the “Eco,” she writes in her instructions, is at a crucial juncture and he must step in to finish the work she began in this struggle. In short order Joe is out of the routine of his normal life (including such activities as homeschooling, home brewing, and organic gardening) and prying up the floorboards of Lucy's isolated cabin in Montana

to find the first of many clues to what lies ahead.

The book presents a striking and effective overview of the harmful effects of our cultural acceptance of and participation in environmental damage. Jenkins covers Gaia theory, global warming, overpopulation, depletion of ancient resources, the war on drugs as big business (“they're not drugs, they're plants.”), and repeatedly, how big corporations own and manipulate the government and mainstream media for the sake of profits. “Maybe our government doesn't want us to be able to hear what the Earth mother has to say. Maybe our government wants to control our minds, control what we think. No doubt we're much better consumers that way.”

I don't have a problem with most of the author's opinions, and I imagine they will not be radical ideas for many *Communities* readers. My main difficulty with the book is what I see as the often contrived way the ideas are presented. Then there's the unlikelihood of main characters who homeschool and grow their own food not having heard of global warming before. Their naiveté was too implausible for me. *Balance Point* reminded me of *The Celestine Prophecy* in that way.

Along the way to discovering his personal balance point between selfishness and ecological awareness, Joe finds out his great aunt was a nuclear physicist, a Wiccan, the student of a Peruvian shaman, and possibly the victim of foul play (we never find out, but the characters are mostly convinced). Her theories include sociopathic bees and microbial pathology, which serve as models for how the human race has been like a disease organism infecting our host, the Earth. Joe emerges from his experiences with raised consciousness, and a new understanding, and dedication to doing what he can to live sustainably and help save the planet. Despite what I consider literary flaws, *Balance Point* does offer much thought-provoking information for the uninitiated, and possibly fresh inspiration for those already on a path of ecological awareness.

*Marni Rachmiel is a musician, psychotherapist, and editor. She lives in Boulder, Colorado.*

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- personal ads.

Please note that the **CLASSIFIED DEADLINE FOR THE SPRING 2002 ISSUE (OUT IN APRIL) IS JANUARY 15.**

The classified rate is \$.50 per word. We now have a discounted rate of \$.40/wd. for a four time insertion and if you are an FIC member, you may take off an additional five percent. We appreciate your payment on ordering. Make check or money order out to Communities and send it, your typed or clearly printed copy with specified word count, how many times you wish the ad to appear and under which category (you may suggest a new category) to: Patricia Greene, 13 West Branch Rd., Charlemont, MA 01339. Phone or fax: 413-337-4037; email: [patricia@ic.org](mailto:patricia@ic.org) If you are emailing me an ad, please be sure to send your mailing address, phone and put the check in the mail at the same time.

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NOTE: new picture listings with Land For Sale ads. See section for details. All other listings can be found in the Reach and Calendar columns.

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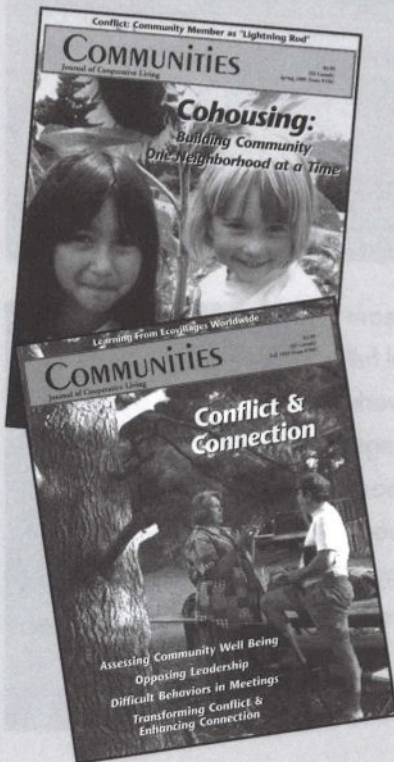
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*You may use the form on the last page of Reach to place an ad.*

**Note: THE REACH DEADLINE FOR THE SPRING 2002 ISSUE (OUT IN APRIL) IS JANUARY 15.**

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*Suggestion: get a larger response by not excluding anyone. Include not just email, but address and phone. Caveat to readers: never, but never, drop in on any community unannounced!*

*NOTE: new picture listings with Community House For Sale ads. See section for details. Listings for workshops, land, books, products, etc. including personals, belong in the Classified Dept. and are charged at a .50/wd. rate. Please see that column for instructions.*

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POB 433, Floyd, VA 24091; [abundant-dawn@ic.org](mailto:abundant-dawn@ic.org); [www.abundantdawn.org](http://www.abundantdawn.org)

**ACORN, Mineral, Virginia.** We are a young, consensus community creating an egalitarian culture that values fun, children, relationships and varied, fulfilling work. We share income from selling crafts, organic farming and occasional outside jobs, and work together to build and maintain our home on 72 acres. *Acorn, 1259-CM12 Indian Creek Rd., Mineral, VA 23117; 540-894-0595; [acorn@ic.org](mailto:acorn@ic.org)*

**AQUARIAN CONCEPTS, Sedona, Arizona.** Founded by Gabriel of Sedona and Niann Emerson Chase in 1989. Currently 100 members full-time. We love children. International flavor. Global change work for Destiny Reservists in Divine Administration. God-centered community based on teachings of The URANTIA Book and Continuing Fifth Epochal Revelation-The Cosmic Family Volumes as received by Gabriel of Sedona. Clean air, pure water, organic gardens. Starseed Schools of Melchizedek (all ages) and healing environment which includes morontian counseling and other alternative practices. Global Change Music with Gabriel of Sedona and the Bright and Morning Star Band with the vocal CDs "Holy City" and "CosmoPop 2000," and Future Studios with CosmoArt, CosmoTheater and video productions. Planetary Family Services, including light construction, stone masonry, landscaping, cleaning and maintenance, teepees and yurts, computer services, elder home care. Serious spiritual commitment required. Student commitment also available. POB 3946, Sedona, AZ 86340; 928-204-1206; [info@aquarianconcepts.org](mailto:info@aquarianconcepts.org); <http://www.aquarianconcepts.org/>; [www.glob-alchangemusic.org](http://www.glob-alchangemusic.org)

**BREITENBUSH HOT SPRINGS, Detroit, Oregon.** We are a wilderness retreat and conference center owned and operated by an intentional community, organized as a worker-owned cooperative. Breitenbush is surrounded by old growth temperate rain forest, one of the last of its kind on Earth, and possesses the highest concentration of thermal springs in the Oregon Cascades. We have a variety of hot tubs, natural hot spring pools, a steam sauna and all buildings are heated geothermally. The work and business ethic is one of stewardship; caring for the land while insuring accessibility of the heal-



ing waters to all who respect them. Breitenbush hosts events involving human potential: meditation, yoga, theater, dance. Breitenbush provides housing and a variety of benefits for its staff of 40 to 60 people. We are looking for talented, dedicated people in the areas of housekeeping, cooking, office (reservations, registration and administration), maintenance, construction and massage therapy (Oregon LMT required). Our mission is to provide a safe and potent environment for social and personal growth. *Breitenbush Hot Springs, Personnel, POB 578, Detroit, OR 97342; 503-854-3320.*

**CAMPBILL VILLAGE MINNESOTA, Sauk Centre, Minnesota.** Part of the International Camphill movement. Located in rural central Minnesota. Life-sharing community of 60 people, 25 of whom are adults with special needs. We are on 400 acres—woods, fields, river, ponds. We have a dairy farm, beef farm, weavery (rugs and scarves), woodshop (toys and household items), bakery (bread, cookies, cereals), dollmaking shop, food processing kitchen and large vegetable gardens. We provide our own bread and biodynamic/organic meat, milk and vegetables. We live and work together with respect for each person's abilities. Although we work out of a non-denominational Christian philosophy, we accept people of all spiritual paths. Fostering a mood of reverence and gratitude is an essential part of Camphill life. We celebrate the seasonal and Christian festivals of the year with songs, stories, plays and other activities that are prepared together in the community. We seek people to join us—families, couples, single people. We need people who can be House parents (usually with four special needs people and one or two other "co-workers"), a dairy farmer, gardeners and people willing to lend a hand wherever needed. We are looking for long term, committed people generally starting with a six month get-acquainted period. We provide health insurance, three weeks vacation and meet each person's needs as possible. For information: *15136 Celtic Drive, Sauk Centre, MN 56378; 320-732-6365; Fax: 320-732-3204; CVMN@rea-alp.com; www.camphillvillage-minnesota.org*

**CHILDREN FOR THE FUTURE, Champaign, Illinois.** Join our child-friendly, peace-oriented, income-sharing community of students and grads. We are currently five adult non-smokers and three children. Our houses are just two blocks from the University of Illinois. We are academically oriented, non-sectarian and home school. Student members are subsidized and pay just \$110/mo room/board. Members get back 25% of earning for personal expenses. Student loans and moving expenses are paid by the community. We hope to have and raise many intelligent and well-rounded children who will contribute positively to society. *800-498-7781; C4TF@cs.com; www.childrenforthefuture.org*

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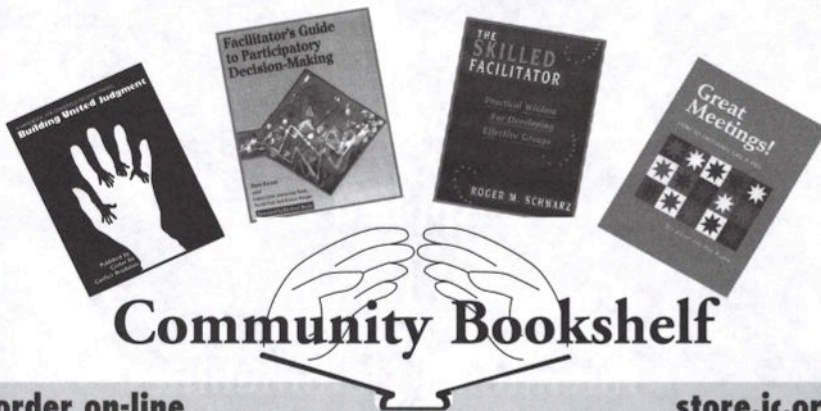
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**DANCING RABBIT, Rutledge, Missouri.** We are actively seeking new members to join us in creating our vibrant home and sustainability demonstration project. We are building our homes with earth-friendly materials on our 280 beautiful, rolling acres in northeast Missouri. We live, work and play together; with cooperation and feminism as basic principles. We grow much of our food and share delicious organic meals together every day. We make our decisions by consensus. If you’re looking for a nurturing home where you can live more sustainably and make a difference in the world, come visit us. Help make our ecovillage grow! *One Dancing Rabbit Lane, Rutledge, MO 63563; 660-883-5511; [dancingrabbit@ic.org](mailto:dancingrabbit@ic.org); [www.dancingrabbit.org](http://www.dancingrabbit.org)*

**EARTHAVEN, Black Mountain, North Carolina.** Community in the Blue Ridge invites motivated cultural evolutionaries to live in dynamic harmony with nature (and each other) on 325 acres. Three streams, permaculture land plan (70+ house sites in 11 neighborhoods, 25 leases sold), natural building methods, simple off-grid living. Hydro-powered village center with strawbale community hall and kitchen, store and café. Gardens, lumber mill, building coop, workshops and trainings. Growing every day! Accessible to Asheville. Membership and visiting information: [info@earthaven.org](mailto:info@earthaven.org); “Infopak” and four newsletters available for \$15 from *Earthaven Association, 1025 Camp Elliott Road, Black Mountain, NC 28711*. Visit our website at [www.earthaven.org](http://www.earthaven.org) or leave phone number at 828-669-3937.

**EAST WIND, Tecumseh, Missouri.** A 75-member Federation of Egalitarian (FEC) community, est. 1973. Located on 1,045 acres of land in the Ozark foothills of southern Missouri. The topography is heavily forested and scenic. Like other FEC communities, East Wind members value ecological awareness, equality, cooperation, and nonviolence. Personal freedom is important to us. We enjoy flexible work schedules, incorporating choices from our successful businesses and domestic labors. Write or call and please contact us before visiting. *East Wind Community, Box CM-R, Tecumseh, MO 65760; 417-679-4682; [visit@eastwind.org](mailto:visit@eastwind.org)*

**ECOVILLAGE COHOUSING, Ithaca, New York.** A great place to live! We are creating an environmental village that will be composed of several cohousing communities integrated with a working farm and education center. As an experiment in sustainable living, we already inspire visitors from around the world. EVI actively seeks new members for its expanding community. Come see our beautiful 176 acre site near a vibrant college town. Stay overnight in our first neighborhood, a lively community of 30 families, share a meal in the Common House and visit our 9.5 acre organic farm. Stop by the construction site of our second neighborhood group (SoNG).

EcoVillage welcomes you! Check out our web site at: [www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us](http://www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us) and contact: Liz Walker, 607-255-8276; [ecovillage@cornell.edu](mailto:ecovillage@cornell.edu); EcoVillage, Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, NY 14853.

**FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY, Spring Valley, New York.** We seek co-workers. Located 30 minutes north of NYC, we are an intergenerational community founded in 1966, centered around the care of the elderly. Now numbering about 150 elderly, co-workers and children, we grow our own fruit and vegetables bio-dynamically. All ages work together in our practical work activities. They include a candle shop, metal shop, wood shop, weavery/handwork group, greenhouse, publishing press, bakery, outlet store and medical practice. The spiritual science (anthroposophy) of Rudolf Steiner is the basis for our work. There is a Waldorf School and several other anthroposophical initiatives nearby. Our lifestyle is an intense social/cultural commitment to the future of mankind. Check out our web site at [www.FellowshipCommunity.org](http://www.FellowshipCommunity.org) If you are interested in co-working or need additional info, please contact our office at 845-356-8494; or write to: Ann Scharff, c/o The Executive Circle at 241 Hungry Hollow Rd., Spring Valley, NY 10977; [fellowship@attglobal.net](mailto:fellowship@attglobal.net)

**GANAS, Staten Island, New York.** We are an intentional community in NYC with about 90 adults of many ages, ethnicities and life views. We are looking for people with managerial skills to work in our residences or retail businesses. We could also use people who can do auto repair or grounds maintenance. We live in ten well-maintained buildings with lovely gardens, good living space and excellent food. Our four stores repair and resell furniture, clothing, artwork and much more. People who qualify to work full-time receive expenses, plus up to \$300 a month and a share of our profits. Others pay expenses with \$500-650 per month. Every day about half of us talk together about work, community and personal issues. Our purpose is to learn to exchange truth with love, intelligence and pleasure. Some live here and choose not to participate in Ganas process, work or goals, but almost everyone has become part of a caring extended family. *Ganas, 135 Corson Ave., Staten Island, NY 10301-2933; 718 720-5378; fac 718 448-842; [www.ganas.org](http://www.ganas.org)*

**SANDHILL FARM, Rutledge, Missouri.** Family-style, income-sharing, egalitarian community looking for new members to help build a caring, sustainable lifestyle, respectful of the earth and each other. We support ourselves growing and selling organic food (sorghum, honey, mustard, tempeh, garlic, horserad-

ish), helping build the communities movement (we do administrative work for FIC), and by having fun! We grow most of our own food and value the energy put into that process. We operate by consensus and hold group meetings twice weekly. We are looking for people who value simple living, are self-motivated, conscientious, and willing to follow through with conflict resolution. We have experience homeschooling. Single parents or families with a child of four to ten years old are particularly encouraged to visit. We are looking to expand our membership from the current five adults and one child. Having a sense of humor and a joy for living are big pluses. We have recently joined energies with Dancing Rabbit (a community two miles away aiming to build a sustainable ecovillage.) Interns welcome April-November (see ad below). *Sandhill Farm, Rt. 1, Box 155-C, Rutledge, MO 63563; 660-883-5543; [sandhill@ic.org](mailto:sandhill@ic.org)*

**STARSEED, Savoy, Massachusetts.** We seek a team of kindred spirits to co-create sacred space for personal and planetary transformation. We are a healing sanctuary seeking partners and community members who are clearly on their spiritual path and interested in being part of a developing interfaith sanctuary and holistic retreat center. Located in the hills of western Massachusetts, we have been transforming our six buildings and 130

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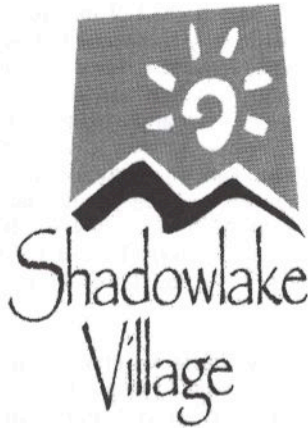


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### THREE SPRINGS, North Fork, California.

Our 160 acres, including annual creek, pond, rolling hills and CSA-organic garden, is held in a nonprofit land trust. After 5+ years, we have grown to 10 adults and five children. We are now seeking new members who share our values of consensus decision making, simple living, and interpersonal growth. Send letter of intent. 59820 Italian Bar Rd., North Fork, CA 93643; [farm@sierratel.com](mailto:farm@sierratel.com)

### TWIN OAKS, Louisa, Virginia.

Twin Oaks has been a model of sustainable community living for over 30 years. We are currently looking for new members, and would love to have you visit. We can offer you: a flexible work schedule in our community businesses, an abundance of homegrown organic food, a thriving social scene, and an established culture of non-violence and egalitarianism. You can offer us: your talents and skills (or your unskilled enthusiasm) and your desire to live lightly on the land and share income. Twin Oaks offers a number of internships, including tofu-making, outreach, bikes, marketing and more. For information: *Twin Oaks*, 138-R Twin Oaks Rd., Louisa, VA 23093; 540-894-5126; [twinoaks@ic.org](mailto:twinoaks@ic.org); [www.twinoaks.org](http://www.twinoaks.org)

### UNAHWI RIDGE, Western North Carolina.

Our community offers home sites, amenities, gardens and miles of trails on 600 acre eco-development in North Carolina mountains. Prices from \$38,000, with owner financing. [www.unahwiridge.com](http://www.unahwiridge.com)

### UNION ACRES COMMUNITY, Whittier, North Carolina.

Established community seeks responsible and fun-loving people to purchase lots and join us on 80 acres in the Smokey Mountains. Children welcome. Contact: *Union Acres*, 654 Heartwood Way, Whittier, NC 28789; [swasapp@earthlink.net](mailto:swasapp@earthlink.net); [www.home.earthlink.net/~lchristie](http://www.home.earthlink.net/~lchristie)

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**CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, White Mountains of Arizona.** Starting Biblical-based community Acts 2:42-47. 43 acres. Northeast Arizona. Must be able and willing to live and work together in primitive area. Provide own housing, transportation and income. Members serving one another. 1Cor.12 No kings, one is our king. No lords, there is one lord and savior of us all, Yashua! Contact: *Dames and Knights of the Lord's Table, POB 1078, Snowflake, AZ 85937.*

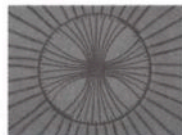
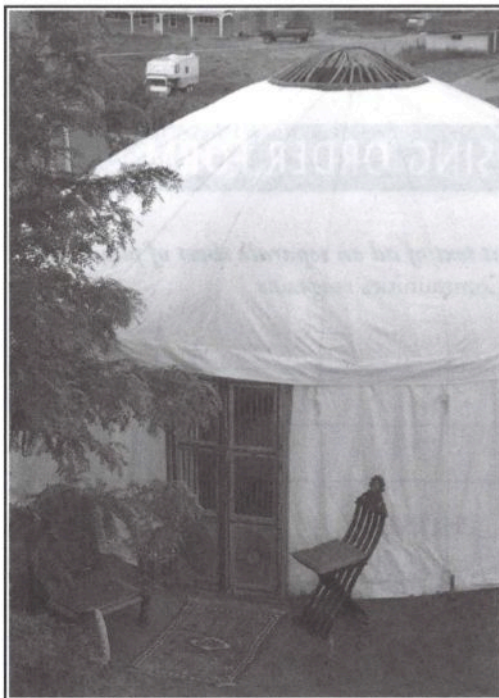
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**MOSAIC COMMONS, Framingham/Concord, Massachusetts.** We are looking for members and searching for land for a cohousing community in the Framingham/Concord area. 508-869-2567; [info@mosaic-commons.org](mailto:info@mosaic-commons.org)

**NAMASTE GREENFIRE COHOUSING, Center Barnstead, New Hampshire.** Active ecology (permaculture), nature sanctuary on 49 diverse, secluded acres, seek investor co-participant cohousing residents. NGC, POB 31, Center Barnstead, NH 03225; 603-776-7776; [nhamaste@yahoo.com](mailto:nhamaste@yahoo.com)

**NOAH'S ARK 2, Texas.** Eleven rural acres one hour east of Austin, two hours northwest of Houston. Open-hearted, job-sharing, progressive sufi/yoga/unitarian folks co-creating short-

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**OAKLAND HANOVER ECOVILLAGE, Oakland, California.** Three year+ neighborhood-as-community. Monthly calendar of free daily events: garden projects, art/music, video discussions, potlucks. Meeting places: member houses, local restaurants. Drop in for events. Stephen Kelly, 468A Hanover Ave., Oakland, CA 94606; 510-663-2594; [www.javamentor.com/eco](http://www.javamentor.com/eco)

**RETREAT CENTER, Oregon Coast.** Community opportunity for qualified individuals or groups of vision to invest in beautiful existing retreat center, 11,000 sq. ft. house on four view acres. And/or purchase contiguous two acre parcels. 503-241-2414; [millhouseranch@earthlink.net](mailto:millhouseranch@earthlink.net); [home.earthlink.net/~imagineinstitute](http://home.earthlink.net/~imagineinstitute)

**SEEKING PARTNERS:** about a dozen adults committed that integrity is the source of workability in the matter, to forward the communal experiment "ethical science theatre." Alexis 631-736-3085.

**SEVEN GENERATIONS LAND COOPERATIVE, Minnesota/Western Wisconsin.** Core group evolving into dual focus cooperative program. We want BOTH an urban center (well-located house) for classes, retail and living quarters, AND a rural center (western Wisconsin?) for CSA (Community Sponsored Agriculture) project, goats and chickens, and our ecovillage. Our business plan calls for these two centers to work together synergistically to enhance the financial, emotional and spiritual well-being of the whole community. We welcome a diversity of ages, ethnicities, gender orientations, spiritual paths and species. Full and associate memberships available. For more information contact: Trisha McKenney 952-443-3340; [ancienteyes@att.net](mailto:ancienteyes@att.net)

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY, Northern California.** Starting gender balanced cooperative household working toward visionary ecovillage community. Mostly artists, musicians, unencumbered singles 25-35. \$300/month plus utilities. [www.SustainableCommunity.homestead.com](http://www.SustainableCommunity.homestead.com); [Temeluch@yahoo.com](mailto:Temeluch@yahoo.com)

## PEOPLE LOOKING

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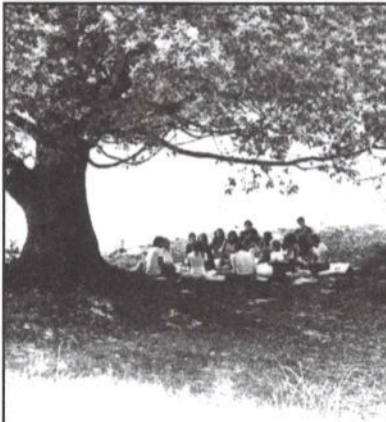
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## PERIPATETIC COMMUNITARIAN

(continued from p. 80)

Germany in the fall of 2003, an international gathering of communities, networks, and networkers. (My biggest chuckle was hearing that one of the regional sub-networks, GEN-Italia, has changed its name due to the considerable number of jokes made at its expense.)

We left the GEN-Europe gathering right after the closing circle, though it was tempting to stay for at least the first day of Wolimierz Station's annual festival which features three days and nights of free, nearly non-stop music, theater, food, workshops, partying, and all-night drumming. However ZEGG's annual summer camp was starting the next day, and I didn't want to miss the starting bell.

ZEGG's Annual "Sommercamp." There were another 200 visitors converging on ZEGG for the two-week "Sommercamp." A few participants stayed in the ZEGG Hotel, though most of us were on tight budgets and opted to sleep in tent villages or the dorms. We were divided into about a half dozen dorfgroups (village groups) of about 25-30 participants who met regularly for check-ins, discussions, and forums—the process at the heart of ZEGG's cultural experiment. My dorfgroup was comprised of English-speakers, so I got to regularly hang out with the more international crowd, and I greatly appreciated being able to share and socialize in my native tongue.

ZEGG's forum is a ritualized form of communication, done in a circle, where individuals go into the center to share, ask, emote, or speculate about whatever is moving her or him in the moment. Experienced community members facilitate the process, aspiring to help the participants explore their feelings and thoughts, and enabling them to be seen and heard by everyone present. Sharing one's deepest self in this way is called "transparency," and they use it as a foundation for building trust, clarifying communication, and gathering information that will later be used to help guide the community's decision-making process. It's a very

creative and entertaining process, and what you can get out of it ranges dramatically with how much you're willing to put into it. I did some constructive, encouraging work on a few of my own lifelong personal issues.

The daily topics of conversation tended to branch off from whatever speech was given in the morning plenary, most of

which were delivered in German with simultaneous English translation through a network of earphones. Planers included such topics as "Social Culture and Spirituality in Matriarchal Societies," "Political and Spiritual Conditions for a Culture of Peace," "Sustainable Regional Development," "From

Inner Peace to World Peace," and "Sexual Vitality and Spiritual Connectedness." And to round out the experience there were guided tours, nature walks, women's groups, men's groups, children and youth camps, music and dancing, choir performances, "dancelust" classes, meditation and yoga groups, kitchen shifts, slide shows, star walks, volleyball, a talent show, a swimming pool scene, and late-night hanging out at the dorfkneipe (village pub).

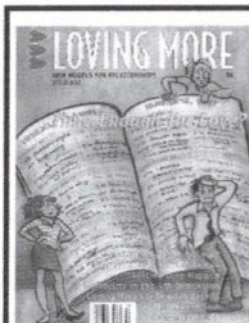
Of course, no report about ZEGG would be complete without at least a glimpse of the community's sexual attitudes. In the early days they advocated "Free Love," but over time that has transformed into a philosophy of "Liberated Love," which means their sexual adventures used to be more widespread and spontaneous, whereas today they aspire to be in "relationships free from fear." How this

translates into daily life is that there are a few monogamous couples, a number of singles who date around but tend to have a few favorite partners, and a bunch of open couples who have a primary partner and a number of other occasional lovers. There are probably also a few who are having little luck attracting sexual partners, but I heard little mention of that, and one woman I spoke with had decided to be celibate during a time of personal evaluation and relationship transition. At this stage of the experiment, I noticed a widespread preference for having a primary partnership base from which to operate. My impression is that most people living at or visiting ZEGG can have a romantic adventure if they want one, but folks who are awkward, hesitant, or "too shy to ask" still end up being left out, feeling inadequate, and wondering what they're doing wrong—just like in the mainstream, only not as common—and here people regularly ask you how you're feeling about it and what you want to do about it.

All in all, my time at ZEGG was stimulating, thought-provoking, and inspiring. The fact that they have the facilities and energy to host three back-to-back networking events speaks volumes about their vision and dedication. And the experience, insights, and enthusiasm of the many participants at these events promises great hope for the role of intentional communities in creating a positive future for the planet. Ω

*Geoph Kozeny has lived in various kinds of communities for 28 years, and has been on the road for 14 years visiting communities—asking about their visions and realities, taking photos, and giving slide shows about the diversity and vitality of the communities movement. Presently, he is producing a full-length video documentary on intentional communities.*

**Sharing one's deepest self in this way is called "transparency," and they use it as a foundation for building trust.**



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# How I Spent My Summer Vacation: Intentional Communities Abroad

I finally got to visit ZEGG, a community of about 80 residents 50 miles southwest of Berlin, when they hosted an impressive series of networking events last summer. Because I've been hearing about ZEGG for years, and since their name comes from a German acronym meaning "Center for Experimental Culture Design," I was eagerly looking forward to the experience.

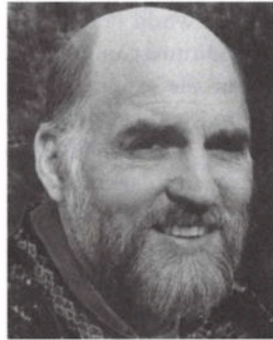
Annual Conference, International Communal Studies Association. On the last Monday in June, I arrived at the front gate of ZEGG's 43-acre site, ready for the seventh international conference of the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA, pronounced "ICK-suh") which brought together about 200 scholars, networkers, members of intentional communities, and seekers of community for three days of talks, workshops, networking, and socializing. The program featured 66 interesting and informative presentations on a wide variety of topics including "Communal Living: An Alternative to the Crisis of Contemporary Civilization," "Women and Intentional Community," "The Challenge of Inter-generational Change," "Communal Education: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice," "Changing Our Vision of Nature," and "Close Human Relationships: Are They Impaired by Communal Life?" However, the most-mentioned conference highlight was the unplanned bonding and healing that happened between the Israeli Kibbutzniks and the various German participants, especially ZEGG members. The magic that catalyzed this healing stemmed from the ZEGG choir's long-standing tradition of singing folk songs from around the world. Their repertoire includes a number of Hebrew songs about peace, and by the time they'd sung a couple of those, the barriers seemed to melt. Additionally, this was the first time ICSA's triennial conference had been hosted at a real live contemporary community, and the experience was so inspiring to most participants that there's now widespread enthusiasm for finding other intentional communities to host future ICSA gatherings.

ICSA Post-Conference Tour. At the end of the week there was a 3-day post-conference tour. A double-decker tour bus

took more than 50 of us to visit three other communities in central Germany: UFA-Fabrik in Berlin (a live/work urban commune focused on social, cultural, and ecological innovations); Kommune Niederkaufungen (located in the middle of a small town, it's the largest secular income-sharing community in Germany); and Èkodorff Sieben Linden (a new ecovillage being built outside a small village that's long seen itself as the center of the world). It was a great tour, and many strong connections were created with members of the host communities, and especially between participants as a result of our sharing considerable one-on-one time on the bus, at meals, and in the dormitory-style accommodations.

International Communities Meeting. We returned to ZEGG just in time for the opening of the week-long fourth annual International Communities Meeting (ICM), an informal gathering of communities from all over the world. Representatives from about 40 communities were present, as well as a dozen networkers from various corners of the global communities movement. The sessions featured a good mix of sharing, brainstorming, organizing, and socializing.

Annual Meeting, Global Ecovillage Network/Europe. After the ICM, I enjoyed a few days of rest and recreation at ZEGG before heading southeast with three ZEGGites and one Kibbutznik who decided to stick around for post-ICSA networking. The five of us carpoled about six hours to Wolimierz, a formerly abandoned railroad-station-turned-community-culture/art center in southwest Poland, about two miles north of the Czech border. There we were greeted by a ragtag collective of artists and their friends who were hosting the annual meeting of the Global Ecovillage Network/Europe. One of the meeting's official highlights was witnessing the signing of the paperwork to accept a \$70,000 grant given by the EU (European Union) to support ecovillage education and development in the coming year. A second highlight was their decision to convene, probably in



BY GEOPH KOZENY

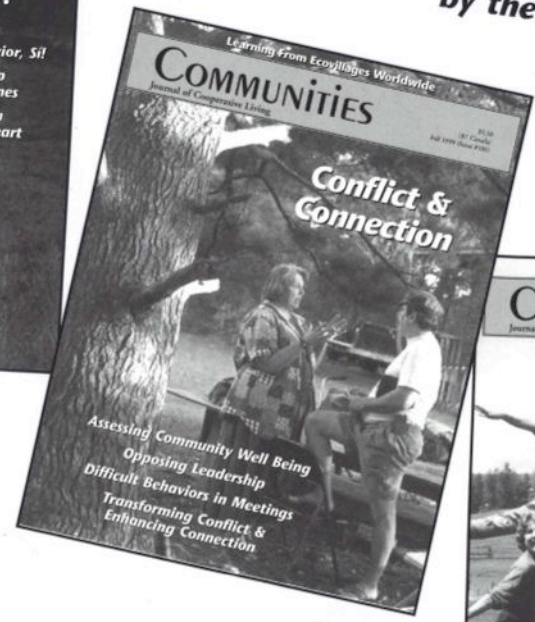
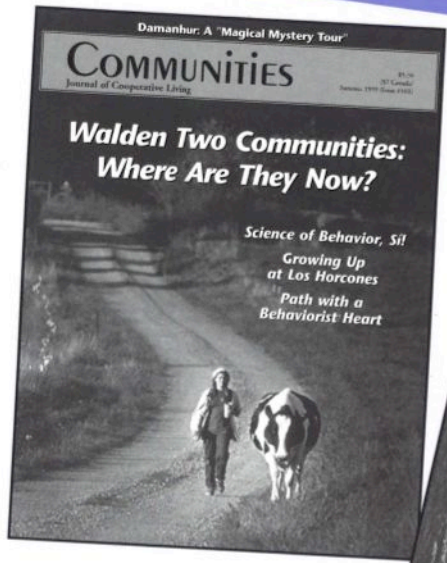
***Unlearning the old ways and creating a new culture was going to be a lifelong endeavor.***

*(continued on p. 79)*

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