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Vigorous Communities

The current COMMUNITIES (“Ecology and Community,” #143) brought back many pleasant memories. I taught briefly at Findhorn in the 1980s, where I learned about gardening, so it was good to catch up with them in your pages. It also was good to see something written from Lawrence, Kansas, by Kelly Barth, where I was an undergraduate at KU in the early 1960s. I also liked Beatrice Briggs’ encouragement to “generate hot debate.” (p. 11) This is what I hope that my writing about cell phones and texting might do. [Editor’s note: *Shepherd’s article about cell phones and texting will appear in our next issue.*]

I am fortunate to now live outside small town Sebastopol of around 8000 souls. We have three cohousing communities within the city limits, one of which has 150 residents in affordable rental homes. We also have a number of long-term living communities in the nearby countryside, including Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, Ocean Song, La Tierra, Green Valley Farm, and Laguna Farm. In addition to benefiting their many residents, they frequently host Transition Town meetings, seed exchanges, clothes swaps, holiday gatherings, community emergency response training, plant sales, etc. It is impossible to imagine our good life without these vigorous communities.

Shepherd Bliss

Sebastopol, California

Visions of a Better World

As soon as we received Part Two of the video *Visions of Utopia*, Lisa and I put aside everything to look at it. It brought back vividly the life of Geoph Kozeny, who spent years visiting communities and creating this documentary. Our hats

go off to Laird and others for taking responsibility to complete the production after Geoph’s untimely death. A work of love for all involved! Then I dug out Part One of *Visions*, received years earlier, to refresh my memory of how Geoph used his unparalleled knowledge of communities to frame the whole project. He had visited our High Wind community in Wisconsin a couple of times, and when we talked to him briefly at an FIC meeting in Madison, I mentioned that I was working on my memoir (*Odyssey of a Practical Visionary*, published this summer) and had written a lot about intentional communities. He said, “let’s sit down and talk, in depth.” I knew he was interested in how I, as an academic, could become so involved with alternative values and cofound an intentional community. He said in all his wanderings he had not encountered a university like mine, actually immersed in the educational work of an intentional community. He was curious about my straddling the two worlds of academia and New Age.

Although that conversation never happened, I recently had the idea to write an article for COMMUNITIES to summarize the conversation we didn’t have. Before writing the piece, I reviewed some past COMMUNITIES issues. I especially liked, among others, the excellent Spring 2009 edition, “Festivals and Gatherings.” I found personal interest in Laird’s comments on technology; his community-mate Stan’s piece about their Sandhill sorghum festival; my fellow Oberlinian Harvey Baker’s piece; Geoph’s astute writing; the notes on The Farm (Lisa and I talked with Stephen Gaskin at Findhorn on our last visit); the Burning Man item (an event our granddaughter loves); Easter in Eourres in the French Alps, where our Three Community seminar stayed regularly. I was fascinated with the report on cigarettes and alcohol—we’d experienced a cultural conflict when certain people of our group argued for openness with drugs (they left). I found the item on temporary communities relevant to our



own experience—some shorter-term residents sensed that High Wind offered far more valuable learning than a university semester. The piece on a virtual retirement village suggested new horizons for community futures and for older folks. And as I'm familiar with other efforts to create a new local currency (e.g., the E.F. Schumacher Society in Massachusetts), the commentary on local trading was an affirmation. All of this quality reporting suggested to me that this magazine is in good hands and ready for expanded circulation.

Belden Paulson

Plymouth, Wisconsin

Belden Paulson, University of Wisconsin professor for 35 years, cofounded High Wind with his wife Lisa. They are Findhorn Fellows. His writing will appear in our winter issue, and his memoir Odyssey of a Practical Visionary has just been published by Thistlefield Books.

Diversity in Community

I currently live in an intentional community in New York City, and one of the issues of deep concern to me is diversity—or rather, the lack of it. I'm doing some research about it to see if there are solutions to this problem. I came across Zev Paiss' "The Desire for Diversity: A Cohousing Perspective" [at www.ic.org], and I'd like to offer a few of my own insights and suggestions as a woman of color living in a predominantly white post-collegiate intentional community.

In a nutshell: the problem of ethnic diversity within intentional communities is less about how many ethnic minorities live in those communities and more about who holds real power. Although it'd be nice to believe that every member of an intentional community has equal power, pragmatically speaking it's often not true. Information, resources, and political clout usually rest in the hands of

a few. Unfortunately, those few are overwhelmingly White and affluent. Furthermore, there is typically an unwillingness to acknowledge and reform the insidious attitudes and practices that create and perpetuate the problematic power dynamics these individuals inherit from the society that created them. As a result, as an ethnic minority and member of an intentional community, interacting with these individuals is unfortunately more of the same thing I experience in mainstream society: disempowerment and dehumanization.

It'd take volumes to discuss the best strategies for reversing this trend, but I can summarize them as follows: ruthless self-examination and incorporating ethnic diversity within the power structure. Who has access to information and resources? Who makes the real decisions? Who frames the context for decision-making? Whose voice is usually heard? Who bears the most authority? These and other questions need to be asked and answered with utmost honesty, free from rationalization, before any real change for the better can occur.

This is certainly not easy to do. Mainstream society does not encourage introspection, particularly if that leads to discomfort. It's far easier to live under the illusion of equality than to strive for its reality.

But I cling to the hope—perhaps foolishly—that enough people are truly willing to try.

Shawn C. Harris

Brooklyn, New York

Editor's note: Thanks, Shawn, for your reflections. We invite reader responses on this topic.

The State of Marriage

I've read a couple of articles recently about the abysmal state of marriage in this country (tinyurl.com/lrn6dx and

<http://tinyurl.com/kl42xn>) and they both suggested that the endless chores and fatigue of domestic partnership and all the other demands of modern life are in large part responsible for its demise. And then I found myself wondering if partnerships/marriages in community are faring any better. What's the divorce rate in community? And then I wondered if there is an online community for intentional community where these things could be discussed. Also it would make an interesting article for the magazine.

Mary Henn-Lecordier

Silver Spring, Maryland

Editor's note: Thanks, Mary, for the suggestions and question. We appreciate readers' ideas, and they definitely influence the content of future issues. Readers, please feel free to send us writing related to Mary's query, and stay tuned for future theme announcements.

Families as Communities

My family subscribes to your magazine, and have enjoyed many of the submissions by your writers. I was struck this last issue ("Ecology and Community," #143), by the summary by Laird Schaub of your financial situation. It stimulated an urge in me to offer some ideas on how you might steer COMMUNITIES to increase its usefulness and meaning.

First a little about me: Our family does not currently reside in an "intentional" community, other than the reality of our family. We generally subscribe to many of the values your magazine encourages, i.e., honest communication, simple living, etc. Both my wife and I are in our 40s, and have had experiences living in intentional communities. We chose the course we are on as the optimal expression of our values.

Like us, nearly all of my friends have had some brush with intentional communities

(continued on p. 76)

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue, as well as letters of more general interest. Please send your comments to editor@ic.org or COMMUNITIES, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

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 or shared projects.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work 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 also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about “creating community where you are.”

We do not intend to promote one kind of group 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 thematically to community living and/or cooperation, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interfere 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

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431; 541-937-2567 x116; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at communities.ic.org.

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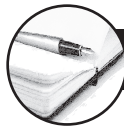
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What is an “Intentional Community”?

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; 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 BY LAIRD SCHAUB

How Collaboration Falls Short With Hints About How to Help It Go Long

The theme of this issue is Community in Hard Times. Could there ever be a moment when information about how to collaborate is more critically needed? If income is down, what are our options for keeping quality of life up? Sharing—of all stripes—provides terrific leverage on this issue. If you have access to a thing, do you really need to own it? To be sure, sharing means you have to work out with others who gets to use a thing when, how it will get stored and maintained, and how to sort out hurt feelings when any of these arrangements go awry.

These pitfalls notwithstanding (think of them as opportunities to get to better know your friends and neighbors), collaboration offers tremendous potential for achieving or maintaining a standard of living with fewer dollars. What's more, if you're not so busy chasing dollars, you'll have more time to pursue less remunerative passions, and isn't that what you really meant to be doing with your life anyway?

If you have less money, will you be less secure? Not necessarily. It's been my experience that a life built more explicitly around stable relationships (paying at least as much attention to who you're doing things with as what you're doing) pays off in the long run as well as the short. While conventional wisdom equates security with net financial assets, after 35 years of community living I've come to understand that one's ultimate security is in relationships—the people who will be there for you in time of need. And stable relationships go hand-in-glove with successful collaboration.

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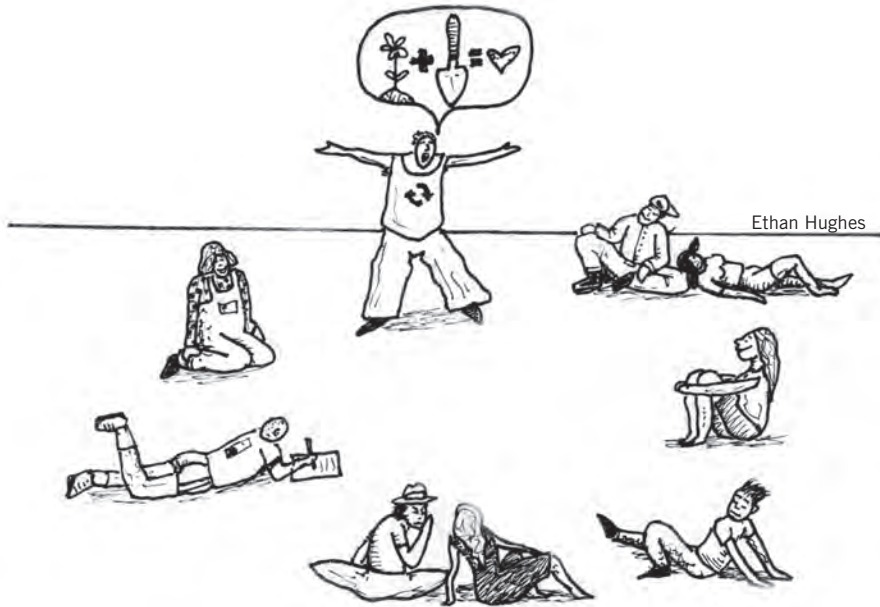
Collaboration was on my mind when I

attended Green Business Camp in South San Francisco at the beginning of May. I was curious what interest existed among self-identified green entrepreneurs for enhancing workplace social skills. I figured that “green” implied sustainable, and sustainable has a social component. Were my fellow campers thinking along those same lines?

In a keynote talk, Paul Hawken (who characterized himself as a “change slut”) emphasized how much our future will be impacted by jumps in energy costs that are outside our frame of reference. He called it “civilizational” change, to distinguish it from the cyclical change that most economists think in terms of. To my delight, he also emphasized the increasing need for collaborative savvy.

So when I attended the first breakout session—on the topic of teamwork, partnering, and cooperation—I was curious to see what the pressing needs were. Though I had my chance to pitch the relevance of what's being learned about cooperative dynamics in intentional communities, there wasn't much grab in the room. Instead, there was a lot of attention given to why collaboration—for all its sex appeal—wasn't easy to pull off. (There was also frustration expressed about how there was much more talk about collaboration than there was actual collaborating—which phenomenon we then promptly recapitulated by spending the bulk of our 45 minutes cataloging shortcomings, and marveling at how similar our stories were.)

To be fair, it probably wasn't realistic to expect this audience to be able to see the immediate application of the intentional community experience to their desire for collaboration. (For many folks—espe-



cially political activists and social change advocates—intentional communities are a middle class indulgence, not a serious choice for those who are ready to roll up their sleeves and get into the trenches to battle hierarchy, oppression, and social injustice.) Rather than criticizing others for a lack of sophistication about how 0.03 percent of North Americans live, I think it's more productive to look at how we communitarians are failing to tell our story of what we're learning about how to make collaboration work—in the crucible and complexities of community living—that is readily applicable to the wider culture.

In any event, I listened to the laments and figured it would be instructive to round them up in a single list. While 45 minutes wasn't long enough for us campers to start turning our attention to solutions, I have tried to lay out the issues in such a way that pathways to solutions are implied, figuring that if you've properly described an issue, then you're most of the way toward knowing what to do about it.

1. Shallow agreement

This is where people feel good about reaching an agreement to collaborate, but the basis for it hasn't been fully explored and the buy-in is weak. Typically people are "making nice" and avoiding the hard questions. The fragile seedling withers

from neglect.

2. Unclear implementation

The collaborators didn't go far enough to create a solid plan for who would do what, when, and with what resources. At worst, there may be no implementation plan at all. However, a vague or incomplete plan may be enough to strangle an initiative.

3. No accountability

When different entities are attempting to collaborate, it can often be tricky navigating who will monitor progress and handle task follow-up. This tends to be viewed as a position of authority and coalitions may inappropriately shy away from that assignment for fear of establishing a hierarchy among "equals." Lacking clarity about who's moving things along, it tends to be that no one does and momentum dies.

4. Poor leadership models

This is a continuation of the previous point, broadened beyond task monitoring. We need leaders to motivate, organize, and think strategically. Yet we've not done a good job of coming up with good models for working in a healthy way with power and leadership in cooperative situations. Mostly we look at current situations through the lens of prior damage and are far more critical of leaders than

Your financial partner.

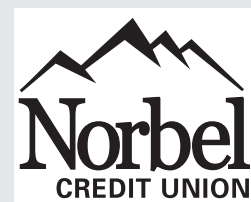
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supportive. Leader bashing in cooperative groups is an art form, yet we have to learn to stop eating our own if we're going to create viable alternatives to traditional business models.

5. Wrong people at the table

For coalitions to be effective, it's important that all the key stakeholders are at the table. You can run into problems with this in two ways: either by leaving out one or more key stakeholders, or by the right groups sending the wrong people—those who either don't grasp the issues and/or don't have the authority to commit their group to agreements and actions. This gets to be a chicken-and-egg dilemma in that key people tend to be busy people who don't have time to attend meetings that aren't going to get things done. However, if they don't attend a meeting and send an underling with no authority, it may guarantee that the outcome will be weak.

6. Not carefully vetting implementors

One of the keys to effectiveness is having the right people doing the right jobs. Thus, even if there's solid agreement and a good implementation plan, coalitions can shoot themselves in the foot by being sloppy about who's assigned tasks. Often, groups do little more than ask for volunteers and happily accept whoever puts their hand in the air. I think of this as Implementation Roulette, and it's a poor way to run a railroad. If the task is important and takes certain skills, take the time to identify the qualities needed and evaluate candidates deliberately.

7. Process too slow

Meetings need to produce results. If it takes too long to reach agreement, or there's no identifiable product from each investment of time, people lose heart and put their attention elsewhere. There are subtleties that underlay this, such as not having too many people in the room (the flip side of point 5 above), having good facilitation (to make sure that meetings stay on task and don't duck the tough topics), and having good minutes that are

promptly posted.

8. Culture clash

When two or more entities attempt collaboration, they may not have similar cultures, or ways of doing business. When that happens and is not addressed, it's a sure path to misunderstanding and an erosion of trust.

9. Constricted information flow

Often collaborations result in a mushrooming expectation of who should receive updates on what's happening, and it's relatively easy to drop a ball or two. When people are left out of the loop, even inadvertently, this also will erode trust and undercut the good will needed for a collaboration to remain robust.

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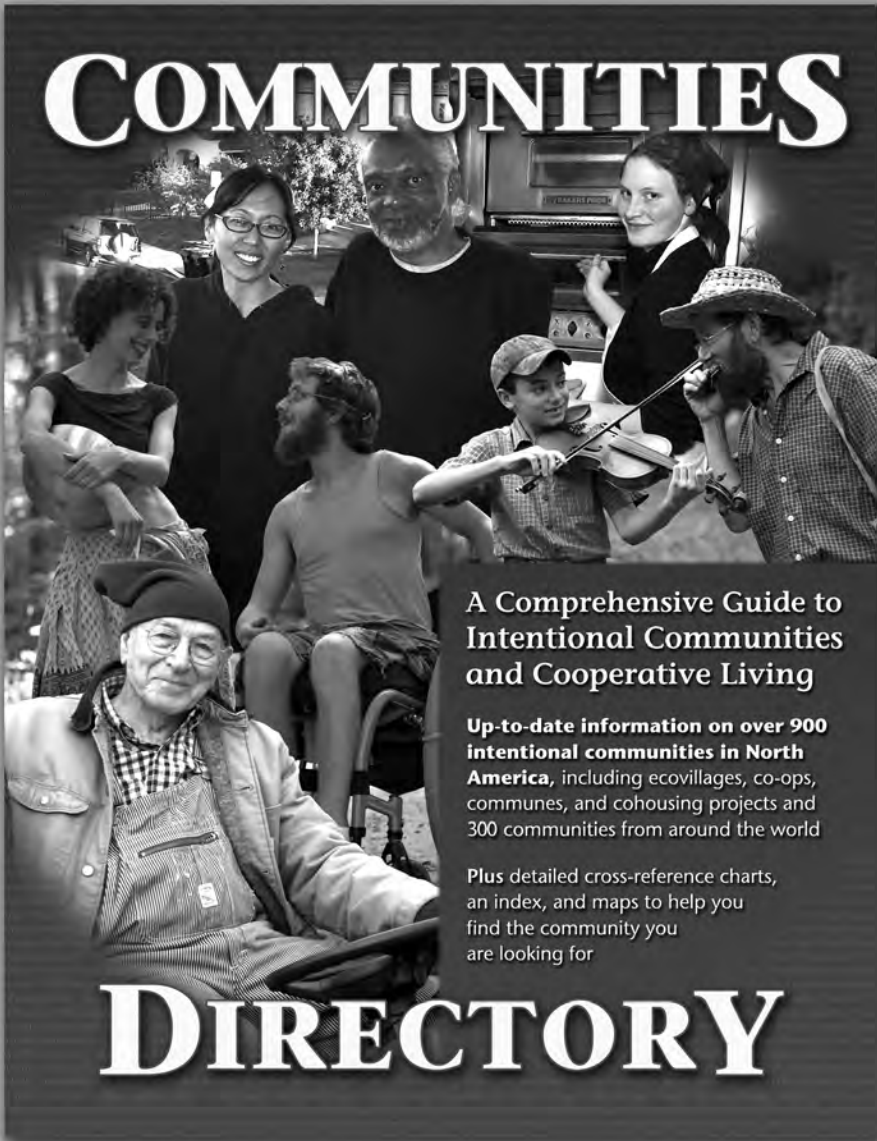
OK, so collaboration isn't easy. The good news is that it's *possible*, and that intentional communities have learned a lot about it. The Fellowship wants people to have a realistic picture of the challenges ahead, yet we also want readers to be optimistic.

Though this short article can't do more than point you in the right direction, this magazine is devoted to cooperative living, and you'll find on our pages a wealth of practical advice about how to make collaboration work. The FIC believes it's the responsibility of the Communities Movement to help the wider culture learn how to better navigate the pitfalls outlined above, and we're dedicated to spreading the word about successes wherever they occur—especially now, when the need is so great. ❁



Laird Schaub is executive secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm community in Missouri, where he lives. He authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com; this article is adapted from his blog post of May 2, 2009.

LATEST EDITION



COMMUNITIES

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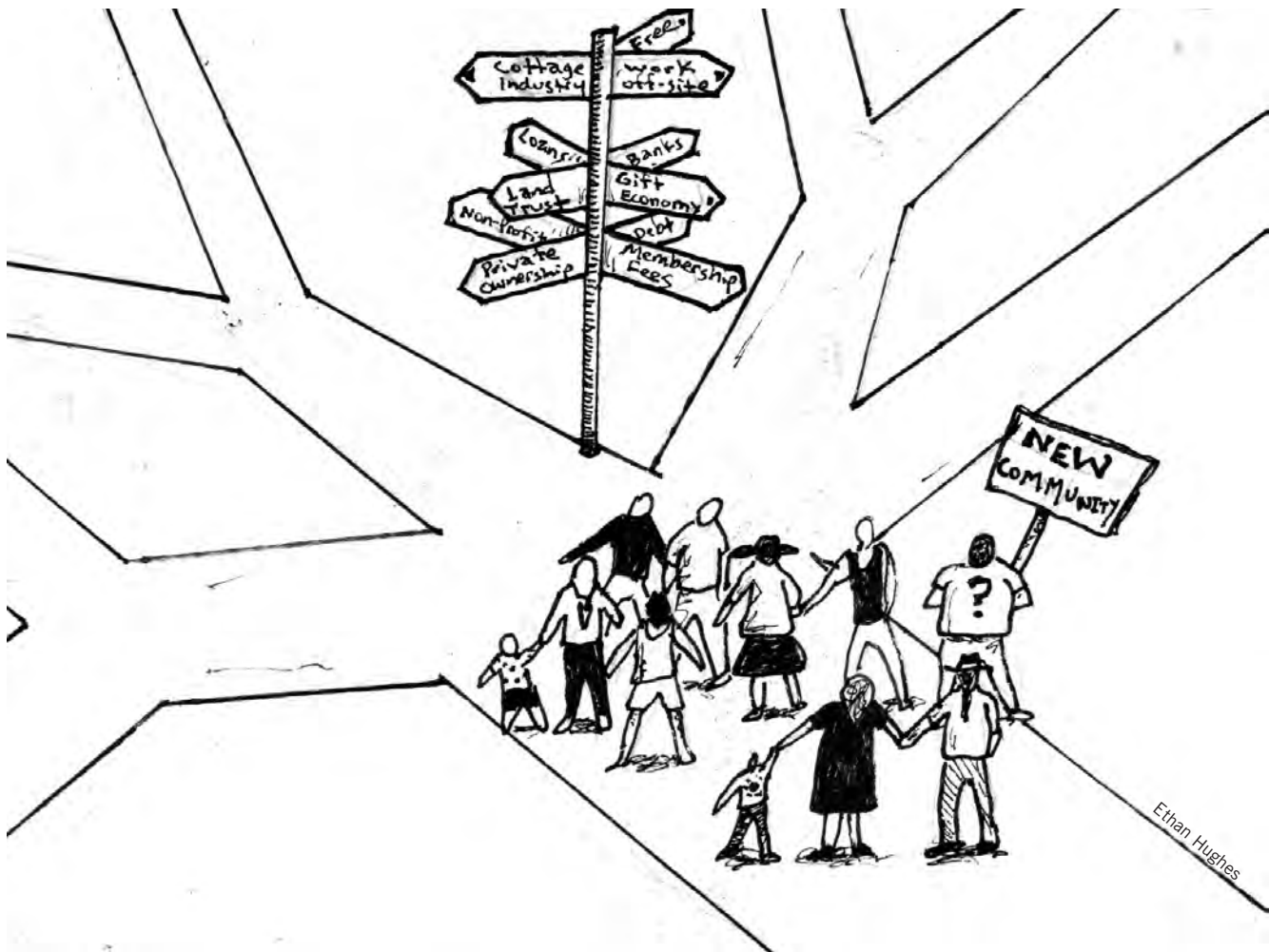
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Avoiding Abundance's Traps

Q: Our community is quite used to functioning with relatively little money—it seems we've always been finding ways to stretch dollars. We run several businesses collectively and share housing and infrastructure. Our activities bring in enough money (barely) to support themselves and us, but we've never had enough income for major infrastructure improvements, construction projects, expansions of our businesses, or raises in pay. We have fantasized about what we'd do if we had a large influx of money, but so far have accepted that “doing more with less” has been our path.

In recent years we had several opportunities to apply for grants, and also courted a potential large donor who wanted to be a member. None of these opportunities has worked out, but each has led us in directions we're not sure we want to go. We considered changing our vision of the kind of housing we wanted in response to

a particular funding opportunity, found ourselves “fast-tracking” issues that we normally would have considered more deliberately, and almost altered our mission statement to please a wealthy potential new member—resulting in considerable community conflict. In each case, fortunately, either the opportunity dried up or the unsavory reality of what we might be getting into became clear. While we'd like to bring in more financial resources to make needed infrastructure and program improvements, we want to maintain our identity, integrity, and healthy community relationships while doing so.

In your experience, what problems do groups encounter when pursuing and/or receiving financial abundance? If we receive it, how can we be sure that it helps us and our mission, rather than hurts us? What compromises can a group safely make in the interests of money? What mistakes should we be sure to avoid?



Laird Schaub responds:

My sense is that you've already discovered the most important edge: being able to distinguish between when the money is helping you follow your dream, and when you're following the money. Every minute you put off leading the life you mean to be living (because you're trying to make enough money to afford the life you mean to live), is a minute in hell; a minute of prostitution. Of course, in order to profit from this advice you need to have a clear idea what your dream is (when a boundary is fuzzy, it can be hard to tell when you've accidentally drifted across it).

Caution: my previous comment notwithstanding, keep in mind that dreams change, and someone's questioning the group's core values or mission is not necessarily a warning sign of "selling out." It's perfectly normal—even good—that a group periodically dusts off its vision statement and rethinks what it's doing.

Let's suppose though that you're solid about your values and know how to assess proposals for alignment with your mission. There are still traps. I'll enumerate three.

Trap #1: Not Knowing When to Stop

I've known groups that failed because they didn't have enough money, and others that failed because they didn't know how to handle financial abundance. One potential awkwardness with a surplus is ambiguity about how much is "enough." At what point would you rather sleep in, go for longer walks, or take up underwater basket weaving? At what point is there enough money in the bank, and you can taper off how much income-producing work you do? If not attended to, you can become addicted to making money (a time-honored measure of success which most cultures are happy to encourage), and you'll be at risk for becoming a hoarder, or never getting off the Madison Avenue merry-go-round.

Trap #2: Pride of Poverty

This is where money—especially in the form of donations—is axiomatically associated with evil. In this dynamic there's a sense that nothing truly good is created unless the implementers are subjected to a suitable amount of struggle and privation. Really it's a form of guilt by association: money is linked with power, and power is linked with corruption; therefore money is linked with corruption. While it isn't hard to think of examples of money being misused, it doesn't have to be.

If you're open to receiving donations (or the largess of well-off prospective members), my advice is simple: make sure that the offerings support the group's purpose, and don't come with strings that may be inadvertently used to tie your hands or pull you off course.

An interesting nuance is the situation where a financial backer is willing to fund a portion of your mission, but not necessarily the whole program. Are you willing to prioritize the donor's pet

interest? Maybe you are and maybe you aren't. Maybe it's a case of the tail wagging the dog, and you'd be better off asking if the donor can wait until that project otherwise reaches the top of your To Do List.

Done right, a donation is a collaboration, where the supporter's money is paired with the group's labor and expertise to develop a product or service that both parties agree is a good thing. Done cleanly, everyone feels good about it, and the world's a better place for the partnership's joint efforts. It's the group's responsibility to make sure that the match is good enough before accepting the money.

Trap #3: Living Beyond Your Means

I've known groups that became accustomed to operating on money from a large one-time donation and then failed, because they didn't develop a viable strategy for replenishing their income before the donation was used up. Sometimes, "winning the lottery" can undermine fiscal discipline to such an extent that the group can never recover.

At FIC this siren song emerges whenever we we have an exceptionally good year financially, and we entertain proposals for using some of that bounty to boost wages for our underpaid staff. While there's no question that compensation bumps are deserved, the strategic challenge we have to wrestle with is whether we're strong enough financially to be able to continue to meet those increased obligations in the future, when the bottom line won't always be so black.

Laird Schaub, a member of Sandhill Farm community in Missouri, has been doing consulting work on group process since 1987. A longtime activist in community networking, he has lived in community since 1974 and been involved with the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) since 1986; he is currently its Executive Secretary. laird@ic.org; 660-883-5545. Laird authors a blog which can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.



Tree Bressen responds:

I don't feel knowledgeable in dealing with this dilemma, as it's not one i have much facilitation practice with. Thus my response arises from personal experiences in my own life and as a member of groups, rather than from the facilitator perspective. Basically, what i have found works very well

both personally and for groups i have participated in is to get very clear internally on what the vision is, then communicate that vision outward with natural enthusiasm. That seems to draw in resources that are a good match.

If your group has perennial issues with money, can you together figure out what that's about, get to the core of the problem? One way to do that might be to ask past members who left what their perceptions were about this. Their responses may

point to “shadow” information that, if faced well, can be integrated successfully to result in lasting changes in this area of your community life. Some intentional communities struggle with a basic sense that it’s wrong to have money or power, because these forces have also caused great suffering throughout society. Others try to avoid dealing with financial realities; for example, regular reports on cash flow and balance sheet are lacking, standard procedures for oversight of accounting may be resisted, or members don’t show up for budget meetings. I can’t know for your group what’s at the heart of the matter; however, I’m suggesting that whatever it may be, a commitment to honesty and transparency is a good way to start dealing with it.

Groups’ missions do sometimes legitimately grow and change. There should be space for this. But as it sounds like your group realized, if the change is coming directly in response to a resource opportunity, that is a warning signal: Don’t let the tail wag the dog.

Most of the time, problems that seem to be about money aren’t really about money. When you have a clear vision, there are countless possible paths to making it real, many of which don’t rely on money, so don’t get hung up on the finances—instead, focus on living out the vision.

Tree Bressen is a group process consultant based in Eugene, Oregon, who works with intentional communities and other organizations on how to have meetings that are lively, productive, and connecting. Her website, www.treegroup.info, offers extensive free resources on consensus, facilitation, and more. (Tree uses a lowercase “i” in her writing as an expression of egalitarian values.)



Diana Leafe Christian responds:

In my work as a consultant to communities, I’ve learned that having extra money to spend is not in itself a source of conflict—whether the funds are gained through new members’ joining fees, annual community dues, or unexpected sources such as gifts or donations (assuming there are no strings attached to the latter). Rather, the source of conflict seems to be when various community members interpret the group’s values and mission in completely different ways—which means they will most likely not agree on how to spend the money. And this is the source of conflict.

If, for example, some community members think the community is or should be primarily a demonstration model of ecological sustainability which hosts regular classes and workshops, these members would most likely support a proposal to build a new visitor education center with the funds. If others, however, believe the community is or should be primarily a friendly neighborhood in which to raise children, perhaps with the occasional tour but no real educational programs to speak of, they

*For a community to function well,
its members need to be on the same page
regarding values and mission.*

will probably not support the visitor center proposal, but might advocate upgrading the playground instead.

For a community to function well, its members need to be on the same page regarding values and mission, because this will prevent one source of conflict later—particularly when they must decide how they’ll spend shared resources such as community labor, time, and/or money, and must return to the touchstone of their reason for being there. For this, the community founders must make sure their mission statement and list of values is crystal clear and unambiguous from the start, and create an orientation process for potential new members that ensures they share the group’s values and thoroughly understand and support the community’s mission before they join.

Let’s say a gift or donation does have strings attached, however. For example, a donor could expect that he or she will of course be accepted as a new community member (perhaps without going through the usual new-member screening process), or that, once becoming a member, he or she will have more influence on the outcome of proposals than other members. This can often be a recipe for resentment and conflict, since most community members will probably not want one member to have more power than everyone else.

However, if someone, including an existing community member, requires that a gift or donation be earmarked for a specific project, this is not necessarily a problem—if the group can treat the offer as a proposal and discuss it thoroughly ahead of time. They might approve the proposal, or modify it and thus present it to the potential donor as a counter-proposal, or not approve it at all, in which case they can simply say “No thank you.” If some members want to accept the proposal and other do not, well, that’s OK. That’s simply more grist for the mill of daily community life. The group discusses the proposal and hopefully uses their multiple perspectives on strategy for the proposed donation (while sharing the same perspective on their community values and mission) to come up with a creative solution, as they would with any other proposal.

Diana Leafe Christian is author of Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities and Finding Community: How to Join an Ecovillage or Intentional Community. Editor of COMMUNITIES magazine for 14 years, she publishes Ecovillages, a free online publication: www.EcovillageNews.org. Diana leads workshops, offers consultations on process and communication issues, and speaks at conferences internationally. She lives at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina. Diana@ic.org; www.DianaLeafeChristian.org. ❁

Do you have a question for our Cooperative Group Solutions panelists? Please send it to editor@ic.org.

Community in Hard Times on Community Bookshelf



Blessed Unrest
How The Largest Social Movement In History Is Restoring Grace, Justice and Beauty to the World
by Paul Hawken
2008; 342 pages; paperback
The author of this important work has a wonderful gift of pattern recognition that enables him to draw from diverse sources and sew together a patchwork of information that is compelling in its message: We must work together if life on this planet as we know it today is going to survive the threats of devaluation of individual life, depleted resources, pollution and global warming.



Circles of Strength
Community Alternatives to Alienation
edited by Helen Forsey
1993; 144 pages; paperback
A collection of experiences and reflections of over 20 members of communities, *Circles of Strength* helps turn the desire for a home base of family and friends into reality. The voices are diverse - urban neighborhoods, First Nations, religious orders, rural communes and activist camps are represented. Contains practical advice and inspiring visions about ways to reconstruct circles of mutual caring and support.



Creating a Life Together
Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities
Diana Leafe Christian
2003; 272 pages; paperback
Creating a Life Together is a unique guide to launching and sustaining successful communities providing step-by-step, practical advice on everything from the role of founders to vision documents, decision-making, agreements, legal options, buying and financing land, sustainable site design, and communication, group process, and dealing well with conflict, as well as community profiles, cautionary tales, and ample resources for learning more. There is no better book on how to start an intentional community.



Creating Community Anywhere
Finding Support and Connection in a Fragmented World
by Carolyn R. Shaffer and Kristin Anundsen
2006; 334 pages; paperback
Whether you live in an urban or rural area, are single or married, reside near or far from your family, you will find the many oppor-

tunities explored here to be sources of community. Covers support groups, workplace teams, new forms of residence sharing, social clubs, neighborhood associations, discussions groups, spiritual communities. Profiles successful communities in the United States, offering modes of what works and solutions to overcome difficulties.



Culture Change
Civil Liberty, Peak Oil and the End of Empire
by Alexis Zeigler
2007; 136 pages; paperback
Culture Change challenges us to think outside the box about the issues that face our society. The book provides inspiration to seek solutions by taking a quantum leap in thought and action.



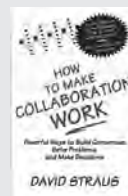
Depletion and Abundance
Life on the New Home Front
by Sharon Astyk
2008; 288 pages; paperback
Depletion and Abundance is a much needed and well-written book. While some of the other books that have been written about climate change and peak oil have seemed strident, Sharon Astyk sticks to the facts, suggests realistic scenarios for what all of us can do about these problems, and offers her opinions in a way that invites the reader into the dialogue.



Finding Community
How to Join an Ecovillage or Intentional Community
by Diana Leafe Christian
2007; 256 pages; paperback
Finding Community is a well-written handbook that will help those reading it research, visit and evaluate potential community homes in terms of what is best for their own well being. Case studies, anecdotes and other resources make this a must-read for serious community-seekers.



Getting a Grip
Clarity, Creativity and Courage in a World Gone Mad.
by Frances Moore Lappe
2007; 208 pages; paperback
Getting a Grip is a beacon of hope that serves to remind us that we can all make choices everyday that positively impact the communities we live in, both local and global.



How To Make Collaboration Work
Powerful Ways to Build Consensus
by David Straus
2002; 250 pages; paperback
This book offers an excellent road map for individuals, groups, organizations and communities wanting to integrate the principles and practices of collaboration into their shared work. The methods taught in this essential guide offer a chance for more productive and fulfilling outcomes for all involved.



Nonviolent Communication
A Language of Compassion
by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.
2000; 211 pages; paperback
Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is founded on language and communication skills that strengthen our ability to remain human, even under trying conditions. It contains nothing new; all that has been integrated into NVC has been known for centuries. The intent is to remind us about what we already know - about how we humans were meant to relate to one another - and to assist us in living in a way that concretely manifests this knowledge.



Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook
The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook: Recipes for Changing Times
by Albert Bates
2006; 286 pages; paperback
The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook is a blueprint for moving into a changing energy future. It distills the essentials for small-footprint living, leavened with deep wisdom, a wide variety of wonderful recipes, juicy quotes and reminders to enjoy life as we power down.



Sitting in the Fire
Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity
by Arnold Mindell
1997; 267 pages; paperback
Sitting in the Fire will introduce you to inner work as a way to overcome the fear of conflict. You will gain understanding of the cultural, personal and historical issues that underlie dissension and strife. You will acquire some of the skills necessary to work with large groups of people. The fire that burns in the social, psychological and spiritual dimensions of humanity can ruin the world. Or this fire can transform trouble into community. It's up to us. We can avoid contention, or we can fearlessly sit in the fire, intervene and prevent world history's most painful errors from being repeated.

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Community in Hard Times

Hard Times (*hård tîmz*) *n.*: 1. A season of difficulties.
2. An opportunity for change.

When we announced our fall theme to potential contributors, we intended the “Hard Times” in the title to be open to interpretation and deliberately multi-layered. (Whose “hard times” were we talking about, anyway? Society’s? An individual’s? A community’s? We meant any or all of the above.)

For some, “hard times” started with the financial meltdown last fall. Economic adversity stimulated a burst of interest in intentional communities, as people searched for more viable alternatives to a status quo in which survival had become a challenge. The Fellowship for Intentional Community’s oversight committee soon identified coping with hard times as a potent theme around which the organization could help people discover the benefits of sharing and collaboration. Laird Schaub, FIC’s executive secretary, wrote a six-part blog series in February on achieving “Economic Leverage in Hard Times” through cooperation and community-minded living skills. And knowing that each COMMUNITIES issue requires six months from conception to “birth,” we figured (correctly) back in March that the theme would still be relevant, from an economist’s standpoint, come fall 2009.

We also aimed to find out how community helps individuals deal with their own hard times, and how groups handle internal tribulations. The articles we received cover a broad spectrum of readings of the “hard times” theme, and reveal, more than anything else, how these different spheres interconnect. Large-scale economic troubles inevitably pose challenges not only to individuals but to intentional communities—but they also offer perfect opportunities to make needed changes.

Of course, “hard times” did not begin just a year ago. Each of us can probably identify a unique point in time as our “aha!” moment: the moment in which we realized that “all is really not well in this world, and serious change is required.” World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, and many other events provided opportunities for such moments in the 20th century. While for some people, an impression of “good times” may have returned after these events, for others these historical moments revealed more fundamental problems in our society and stimulated life-

long commitments to making positive change. Even what are thought of as the “good times” have exacted major collateral damage: the loss of family farms, destruction of the environment, increased pace of life, concentration of wealth, and other unsavory side-effects that impact at least a portion of the population directly, and ultimately touch all of us.

In retrospect, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident roughly demarcates the point in my own life after which I no longer believed that we as a civilization could experience true “good times” without major transformation. For the last three decades, my impression has been that both the human race and the earth are experiencing “hard times” on very fundamental levels. It took me three years to figure out a meaningful response to this new awareness, beyond relatively superficial personal lifestyle adjustments; and in the interim period, I was often not a happy camper. But when I got involved more seriously in the active quest for alternatives to our civilization’s apparently suicidal course, I found that I was far from alone in this. (In fact, discovering that others shared my perspective, and were already pursuing alternatives, made my involvement possible.) In various forms, collective efforts and community have been what has given me hope, for the past 27 years, about the prospects for a better world—because I have experienced the power of people to change the world when they come together.

For me, the current “hard times” are actually hopeful, because they have torn the veil from the appearance of unmitigated “good times”—an illusion that had been essentially smoke and mirrors (inducing, regrettably but aptly enough, both global climate change and cultural self-absorption). The good news is that, because that veil was torn for many of us decades ago, we do not have to start from scratch in creating alternatives. Better ways of living are already in place—ones that can turn “hard times” into “good times,” and that have lasting power. Please read on... ❁



Whether editing COMMUNITIES (at editor@ic.org), coordinating organic vegetable gardening at Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon (www.lostvalley.org), or watching birds, Chris Roth likes to take the long view.



Hard Times at Orinda

By Kristina Janzen

Today I told Jenna that I don't like my job anymore. "All I do nowadays is call people collecting money, or tell them no, sorry, that's not in our budget." "It really is no fun," she commiserated. We both laughed weakly. And then she asked me to call Dr. Carlton and tell him we couldn't afford to pay what he billed for this new year, and see if he would agree to reduce his rates at least to last year's level. I sighed, said sure, and went on to my day in the office—I administrate our community's central office, organize people, handle logistics and communications for our members, and sometimes have a hand in the hard decisions that need to be made about what we can or cannot do based on our community's finances. I also get to communicate those decisions.

Lately that's been more challenging than in the past, since lately I've had to say no more often than yes; or OK, but only this much; or alright, but please shop for food at this store and not that one... These are all communications that go against my easy-going, free-flowing nature. I don't like saying no or telling people what they can or cannot do, but this is what I've signed up for in my job in the central office. Jenna is my friend and boss, and the force behind our community's purse strings. Her nature is conservative, constrained, and all about precision. She has taken on the burden of balancing our budgets and she is good at it. But that doesn't make it fun for her either.

I live in a place I have called "Orinda" in past writings. We are a community of around 100 people. Roughly a quarter of these are children, roughly another 10 percent are retired in one form or another, and another 10 or 15 percent are fully employed by the community as child-care workers, teachers, crew on our

boats, or just in the business of making things work around here. This leaves about half of us to try to earn enough to keep our economy going, and the burden rests mostly on the shoulders of 15 individuals who have accumulated the means to support most of the rest of us in comfort—at least for a while.

In the recent past, we have enjoyed an amazing amount of prosperity: our business ventures flourished, our investments paid off, we had one windfall, and then another, and working hard brought the benefit of capital accumulation and material gains, which were happily shared among our friends and families. Personal wealth was redistributed among our membership, and our collective standard of living rose, each year just a little easier and more flush than the last.

Then in 2007 and 2008 things started to get harder. Business was down, salaries and commissions were not as generous as they had been, investments were not returning at the rates that we'd gotten used to. We were worried about what the near future might bring. We started cutting back. We formed a budget committee, and met regularly about how to take practical steps to reduce our spending, how to inspire more income, how to deal with the potential losses we were forecasting. We cut our salaries by 10 percent, we started shopping at cheaper stores, we stopped buying cookies.

In September of 2008, when the bottom dropped out of the stock market, and investment banks and insurance brokerages started going bankrupt, we watched our collective fortunes decline as well. Our forecasts of loss were now coming true, and we had to look even harder at what was most important to us. We had to face the fact that where for the past 15 years, our collective



Chris Roth

For the past 15 years, our collective balance sheet had continuously gone up; we were now in a period of rapid contraction.

balance sheet had continuously gone up, we were now in a period of rapid contraction. Along with the rest of the country, along with the rest of the world, we had to stop spending so much.

We met and agreed we had to cut back even more—both in our community spending and in our personal spending. We sold a boat that we loved and had enjoyed thoroughly for the past seven years. We took another 10 percent pay cut across the board, and decided to streamline the kids' program, freeing up a few individuals to go out into the workforce and start earning outside money. We started a vegetable garden and bought chickens to raise for eggs. We stopped going out to eat as much, or buying each other presents, and we have had to cut back on the assistance we give to outside friends who have fallen on hard times. We've started saying no instead of yes, giving a little instead of all. Over the past year, this has continued to be an active discussion and we have kept a conscious goal of working together to spend as little as possible as a community and as individuals.

While aspects of my job are not as much fun as they used to be, I actually love the new attitude of frugality I see in my friends towards both our community finances and their own personal pocket books. The conversations we have had about what is essential to our lives, what we must continue to do, and what we can let go of, have strengthened our community and enhanced our commitment to living the best life we can together.

For example, we could have decided to close down our school and kids' program, send the children to public school, have our teachers return to the workforce as regular income earners, and trust our kids' education and personal development to the state system. This was not something we were willing to do; our chil-

dren's care and education is too important to trust to outsiders if we can do it ourselves.

But we did let go of an extra apartment in town, and moved closer together in smaller spaces. We did put some of our energy into growing food instead of shopping for it. We are moving towards sustainable living practices—lessening our energy requirements, and using our land more efficiently. We are doing repairs ourselves we might have hired out for in the past. We are finding ways to use our things, share our space, spend our time more wisely, and in the process getting closer and living better.

Driving home, I pass evidence of a recent forest fire. Where a month ago the hills were lush and verdant, they are barren and scarred now. The spring palette of sage, clover, and olive has been replaced by charcoal, ash, and sepia, and the few trees left are crackled shadows of their untouched cousins a few miles up the road. The fire is finally out after weeks of valiant firefighters working around the clock. It was one of the biggest, hottest fires we've had in decades, and it came closer to us than any in recent memory. If the winds had turned just a little, it would have threatened our ranch. But coming as it did while I was working on this essay, it made me think about what lessons catastrophe can bring—how in the face of natural disaster, people step up and join together to do whatever they can to help. Given the evacuation notice, what is really important becomes crystal clear—we grab our memories, our pets, and our people. Everything else is left to burn if it comes to that, and in the eye of the fire, it is easy to let go of things that moments before seemed so valuable.

It seems to me the crucible of hard times has had a similar clarifying effect: material riches matter little as long as we have our friends and families around us. True wealth is found in these relationships. Sometimes we just need a little reminder. And despite the loss of green for a while, removing the gnarly old growth allows new life to come up in its place. ❁



garden, raises kids, writes essays, travels the globe, and spends as much time as she can with her friends.

Kristina Janzen grew up in the community she writes about here, and has dubbed "Orinda" for publication purposes. She left for a while to explore the wider world, and then returned as an adult to have her own children and live among close friends. She works in the community's central office—managing projects, people, and activities, or doing whatever needs to be done.

Building Community in Hard Times

By Randa Johnson

New Brighton Cohousing came into being just as the housing market began its precipitous slide in the fall of 2007. Unlike most cohousing communities, we bought an existing apartment complex fortuitously set around a common courtyard. The more typical built-from-the-ground-up cohousing development model had resulted in only one built community in Santa Cruz County (California) despite the earnest efforts of dozens of forming groups over 20 years. Coming upon a 12-unit property with a main house to use as a common house and a “cohousing” feel seemed like a miracle after years of looking at bare land that cost as much as we paid for our finished if not exactly “green” or elegant community.

A nightmare three-month escrow extension turned out to be an early warning of the national tightening credit and home loan market and economic slump to come. The bank gave us no clear reason for the delay, just kept asking for more documentation. Grateful to be moving in to cohousing after six years of meeting, hoping, and planning, we packed up our respective houses and moved in, starting in August of 2007. There is one other cohousing community in our area, founded by a group of friends in the medical profession, with beautiful, spacious homes. We make jokes about being the “teachers and social workers” cohousing with smaller, modest homes.

There were a few hang-ups. One of the first two households to move in eventually had to give up on selling their old house, and decided to rent it instead. My partner and I sold our old house a few short weeks before the bottom dropped out of the housing market. Another household pulled out all the stops to stage their beautiful custom-built home and sell it before the market dropped any lower. Two of the units turn out to need much more repairs than anticipated. The whole community participates by holding a couple of work parties—pulling carpet, painting, doing minor repairs.

In 2008, three of our members moved from well-paid full-time work with benefits to temporary work, and much lower

pay. Over a year later, none have been able to find a comparable job, and one household is looking to sell, worn down by worry over paying the mortgage and keeping food on the table with temp work wages. We have had to raise our tenants-in-common fees to cover losses on an unsold unit. Many interested people come to check us out, but are waiting to sell the house, still scraping together down payment, or postponing big decisions until the economy improves. A few prospective buyers, unclear on the concept of retrofitting, berate us for our lack of high-profile green items such as solar panels. Others, veterans of Santa Cruz’s many unsuccessful cohousing groups, are more appreciative of our ready-made community, ’70s-style brown shingles and all.

Bitter arguments start over money issues. One member blocks all expenses in a fit of panic over money, then reluctantly stands aside as the group agrees to hire a consultant to help us talk about money issues—for \$1000 for a one-day workshop. Many community members quietly donate key items to the community when we don’t have the money or we cannot agree to pay for them together. We hold a cash call to make some urgently needed repairs. One household temporarily borrows from another to meet their obligation. We have many discussions about fairness. Some community members see fairness as strict equality of contribution. Others do not want to be tied to this minimal standard, as it means that we will struggle to meet bare minimum for years, and probably never have money for less essential improvements.

In order to fund another round of urgent projects, we have a sliding-scale cash call, with a minimum required contribution. A few households contribute substantially more, a couple are unable to make the minimum. The group decides to go ahead with the cash call, having faith that the households involved in collaboration with a few others will come up with an equitable way that we can all contribute. Both the community and the individual household benefit from an agreement that households unable to come up with the full amount can work off half the



hours, at the local sustainable wage rate. The list of long-postponed chores involving more time and focus than we had been able to muster dwindles, as one industrious member works off her cash call debt.

Our common meal program is in full swing, with all the chaos that comes from trying to accommodate many different sets of dietary restrictions and palates. Members with tight finances voice concern that they are expected to provide extras like dessert or wine, or meat and fake meat. We reemphasize our initial agreement that the expectation is a meal that we can all eat, and that anything else is gravy.

A few generous souls often take it upon themselves to prepare dessert on a night they are not cooking if no other dessert is planned. Another member begins a “Beans and Rice around the World” cooking cycle, finding many interesting and exotic bean and rice variations to feed us, including a Nicaraguan meal, and a meatless version of Brazil’s national dish, feijoada. Now a year and a half into living together, our meals range from the gourmet to the deliciously low-cost and simple. We did call a few months’ moratorium on lentil soup, a too popular choice in the first few months when we were all getting used to feeding 12-25 people, including two vegans, two vegetarians, an assortment of dairy avoiders, one soy-intolerant person, and a diabetic. We now have a hot trade in lentil soup recipes, as people liven up their home cooking with a neighbor’s recipe—one has tomatoes, another curry, another cinnamon and apricots. Mercifully, lentil soup now shows up only every month or two.

In 2009, the economy worsens. My partner, the most recent hire in a county job, has been bumped to a succession of less desirable jobs by senior employees whose jobs were eliminated. Every six months, we wait to find out if she will be out of a job. At my work, we are temporarily on a four-day work week. Another neighbor, with a job at a small retail chain, works overtime knowing that the company is in bankruptcy proceedings and will soon close its doors after 105 years in business.

Our plans to green the complex have slowed to a crawl. Unable to refinance, we have put plans to upgrade the common house on hold, as well as plans for a large-scale water-saving rainwater catchment system. Instead we compost, recycle, and haunt a local soap maker for free barrels to convert into rain barrels. We

may recycle parts of an old fence into a shorter version in another location. Enthusiasm for growing our own fruits and vegetables increases as the economy worsens. Since expanding the vegetable garden is not in the group budget this year, we scavenge for chicken

wire to keep the gophers away, and take up a collection for seeds and starts. We look into bulk buying as a way to save money and gas by consolidating some of our food purchases. For many of us, short on disposable income, going to a movie turns into going across the courtyard to a neighbor’s to borrow a video. We

are all more likely to pass up dinner out, a concert, or a movie, for the free concert at the beach, an evening in the common house at a game night, or a walk down to the beach.

Bitter arguments start over money issues. One member blocks all expenses in a fit of panic over money, then reluctantly stands aside.

Despite the occasional skirmish over how to spend money, our community flourishes. Several of us discuss the security provided by living in community during hard times. Struggling together is vastly preferable to struggling alone. Minimizing purchases and living on less are much simpler and easier when you have a ready pool of neighbors from whom to borrow tools, dress-up clothes, bikes, or cars. If you need an item and can’t afford it, chances are someone will have an extra, or know someone who wants to get rid of just the item you need. If you need a small short-term loan to tide you over for a month or two, chances are a neighbor will provide it. If your car breaks down, or you break your ankle and can’t drive for six weeks, someone will give you a ride or lend you a car. While not exactly the back-to-the-land fairy tale of complete self-sufficiency that many of us have in the back of our minds, living in community strengthens and sustains us in ways none of us can doubt. ❁

Randa Johnson is a founding member of New Brighton Cohousing. Her next round of impossible dreams includes installing solar panels and a dance floor in the common house and creating a new wave of retrofit cohousing communities in the Santa Cruz area.



Photos courtesy of Randa Johnson

Opposite page: Spring Fling festivities. This page: Work party at the community.

Hard Times, Good Life, Community

By Joan Valles



To me, community is another word for relationship, and the most important thing I'm continuing to learn in community is that relationship, a circle of friends, is the capital resource that survives and contributes the greatest satisfaction over a lifetime.

As a 74-year-old woman and now retired, I've been spending more time world-watching, following the news about the "new hard times" we are in. Although I've lived through several economic and political cycles, these times feel particularly unsettling. I sense things are going to be different, and I see it happening (for example, I once made my living in print journalism and now newspapers and jobs are fast disappearing); yet, I can't really predict an outcome. So as a community member, I am comforted and growing in my appreciation for the guidance and support that is here for me during a difficult time, and perhaps rediscovering the importance of community to society. Government programs, however much good they do, cannot accomplish what friendship and mutual caring can. To me, community is another word for relationship, and the most important thing I'm continuing to learn in community is that relationship, a circle of friends, is the capital resource that survives and contributes the greatest satisfaction over a lifetime.

I came to community late in life in search of companionship and an environment in which to grow myself and serve others. For me, relationship wasn't automatic; it was something I needed to learn. Once I was committed to the importance of human development (an interest I had had since college), I began to look for help. I found the Goodenough Community—a community whose focus is relationship and human develop-

ment—in my hometown, Seattle, and have been a member for 17 years. I love the mutuality of community life. Let me share some examples:

Community has a focus

Community has priorities that tone up everybody's behavior, activities that draw us together, and ways of doing things that are agreed upon. It contributes to and stabilizes my life as I contribute to it. One way I contribute is by working with myself. It's generally true that we lose our interest in self-development as we get old, and I haven't. I've modeled something different. I've leaned into my elder role in our women's cultural group as its first initiated crone and as a co-contributor in making our women's culture vital. Serving on a women's team has taught me how to be a more effective leader and a better team player. Community makes it possible for anyone who wants responsibility to take on something and do it. The capacity of the group is there to take you seriously.

Community offers mutual support and caring

Within the core of our community we have been sharing the financial facts of our lives with a cluster of others for years, making agreements to work with each other towards making wise financial decisions. We have found there are some real benefits in being open with others about our financial situations, even though we live in households that are discrete financially. We bring various perspectives and talents to each other's financial affairs, which at least reduces anxiety and at best leads to creative solutions. I really can't think of anybody who hasn't felt good about it. So when some members of our community began expressing their concern about the direction our national economy was headed, our leadership responded with a series of gatherings last fall that has made it easier for everybody to talk about the economic downturn and their worries. The series entitled *HMT*³ or "Help Me Think Through This" helped us orient ourselves to our



Photos by Rodney Herold

Top left: Phil Stark carrying a just-baked cake to our summer campers, helpers, and staff. Top right: Some members join in a work party to spruce up the "in-town" (Seattle) Community Center. Above: Liz Zebold and Phil Buchmeier enjoy a moment of reflective conversation. Opposite page: Joan Valles with one of her house mates at Sahale Retreat Center.

responsibilities as individuals and organizational partners in a shared community. Joining with friends, sharing my concerns, and taking positive action helped alleviate my worry. The series was a "consciousness raiser" for me and I continue to be more aware and caring of what is happening to the people in all the circles of my life.

Community inspires compassion

Influenced by the Dalai Lama ("Compassion is the activism of our time") and other spiritual leaders, we challenged ourselves almost two years ago to join in a "Compassion Project," an "action/reflection" research project in which participants committed to doing one compassionate act per week and reporting on it. Some 40 people signed up, and stories from the project have appeared weekly in our online newsletter. Although I admit to forgetting much of the time (and I'm not the only one), I notice myself making an effort to be kinder and more empathetic and to practice patience as I remember the loss and stress that so many folks are likely to be experiencing these days.

Community offers practical help

In addition to the economy, our community is concerned with the potential hard times precipitated by global climate change and natural disaster. We live in an earthquake zone, and our state is experiencing more frequent and severe floods. Left to my own devices, I would make an effort to "green up" my life, and pretty much ignore the potential for emergencies, trusting to luck. Fortunately, the men of our community



Top: Group leaders Leslie Norman and Richard Kenagy prepare a list of activities offered by participants to share with others at the community's annual human relations lab. Above: Sophie Hoff and her Aunt Amie decorate a special dessert for a member's 60th birthday celebration at Sabale Retreat Center.

have stepped in with a concerted effort to prepare us as individuals and households for emergencies. Utilizing some of the best information available for our region, the Emergency Preparedness Initiative is a stepped, week-by-week plan that many of us are engaging together as households, as a community, and as neighbors. Taking action with the help of others helps reduce my anxiety. What we call “watch care” is another example of practical help in community. It is the organized way

This kind of organized social response is my “money in the bank” in these uncertain times.

that we look out for each other, marshal our resources, and help when it's needed. For instance, I could count on watch care to provide help at home when recuperating from hip replacement surgery last year. Reciprocally, the watch care team knows that our house is a place where others can convalesce because it's handicap accessible and we retirees have time to take care of others.

Community is a creative endeavor

In 2001 some members of our community invested in a country retreat property and have been developing it ever since. We are all contributing to it, with money, labor, and varying degrees of skill and artistry. The transformation of the property and of our lives has been amazing. Sabale Retreat Center has become a magnet for like-minded groups and has expanded our circle of friendships and service. We are converting the retreat center to an ecovillage. We have joined with the permaculture movement, and several of our members are being trained in permaculture practices. Our garden is growing as we anticipate greater sufficiency from the land.

This shared resource benefits my life in so many ways as an escape from the stresses of city life, as a second home, a gathering place, and a restorative for the soul.

This kind of organized social response to authentic human life—community—is my “money in the bank” in these uncertain times. As an elderly single woman it would be much more difficult going through this in my lonely way and is much less so when others are sharing it and I see hard things being dealt with well. I'm not the only one...

Another elder community member, my friend Phil, remembers his childhood in a large extended family in semi-rural Missouri, doing chores, working on family farms, playing with his cousins, as a “golden” time. He grew up with communitarian values that sustain him in facing “the new hard times.” “I feel more resourceful knowing I won't be surprised by hardship,” he says. “It will be easier to be grateful for what we have. It will remind us of our interdependence—bailing out your neighbor will be commonplace, knowing next month you're apt to need help. Common sense will become more important, and we'll teach it to our children: not wasting food on your plate, not leaving the lights on, not using a gallon of water to brush your teeth; saving and reusing string, nails, lumber, jars. Relationships will be more important not just because we need someone's help but because they provide a larger part of our entertainment.” As Phil talked, he reminded me of a way of life at Sabale Retreat Center, where, after chores and a shared supper, we gather to play games, dance, sing, or talk around the fire pit.

Leslie, a friend almost 30 years younger, is a founder of the “Turtle Clan,” a community cultural group of younger adults that has been meeting biweekly for 14 years. It is part of the Turtle Clan's culture to help each other set goals, establish practices, and be accountable to each other. “Community is the place to talk about how best to use your money at this time,” Leslie says. [In the Turtle Clan] “we talk about our perceptions and monitor and debrief what's happening. We help each other understand what is real

and what is exaggeration—I feel blessed to know people who can read the media in a reasonable way.” Leslie is grateful for a stable group of friends she can count on to help her over personal and national hard times. “I could find a place to stay, borrow a car, and they would honestly let me know if they could help.” An archaeologist and experienced certified school teacher, Leslie is about to change jobs, and some people outside the community are telling her that she shouldn’t do this now. “It may not be the best time, but I know my community will support me,” she says. Meanwhile, with the encouragement of her friends, she is working to get her debt load down. “Maybe being in the hard times will draw people to community,” Leslie says.

“There are many nonprofits collapsing now with the economic troubles. We can persevere by trusting relationship and mutual goodwill,” observes Kirsten Rohde, president of The American Association for the Furtherance of Community, parent organization of the Goodenough Community. “I can no longer imagine what it would be like to deal with life and money and everything that comes up nowadays without having the companionship and support of our community.” ❀



Joan Valles was introduced to the Goodenough Community in 1992 through its women’s program and has been involved with that group and with the community ever since.

She shares a house in West Seattle with two other community members (and visiting friends). She retired in 2005 from the University of Washington where she was a research coordinator in the physics department; prior to that she was an editor and reporter for suburban daily newspapers. As an elder in community she has learned that any service, no matter how small, is welcome and needed. Since most of her family—children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—live on the East Coast, she is especially grateful for her surrogate community family.

The New Hard Times: “Help Me Think Through This”

The following is excerpted and distilled from a lecture by Dr. John L. Hoff for the Goodenough Community’s series on the new hard times, “Help Me Think Through This”:

We believe that as communitarians we must allow ourselves to come together in a concern for each other’s welfare. As adults who have decided to be good and kindly, we are entering into a period where our aspirations must become operational because our maturity will be needed in the world around us, our inner peace needed as comfort, our desire to learn the truth calming to others who have not seen much unselfish service in leadership.

As an individual:

- Assess your situation, your sense of health and strength, remembering what it takes to take care of yourself. Then through meditation and reflection, allow your mind to take care of you by setting aside a few minutes to meditate on what you’ve learned about larger social concerns. Then purposefully turn your mind to your immediate life, routines, relationships, and observe what is satisfying and fulfilling. Reflect on your good fortune. Practice this ability to acknowledge social problems and then return to your own peace and joy.

- Live within your means financially and talk with others to learn better ways to handle money and be prepared for eventualities.

- Engage a formal plan of emergency preparation. It is practical to do something, rather than worry.

- Firm up relationships with family, friends, neighbors. Exchange information such as phone numbers and email addresses. Talk with others about how these troubled times are impacting them and offer support and practical assistance.

As a relational partner:

- Begin by assessing your relationships and help your partner talk out his/her thoughts and feelings about changing times.

- Ask for some regular time in the week for making changes you choose, such as

shifts in your financial priorities, preparing for emergencies, improving household environmental practices.

- Practice working together as partners so that you both are informed about all areas of your life. The goal is more order in your life and practicing better communication. The relationship we have with each other while we are working makes work more enjoyable.

- With your group of friends, contact specific friends for guidance or support. Talk about finances, emergency support, and health care needs.

As a community:

- As community citizens, review and re-select leaders if need be. Leaders can only lead, especially in difficult times, when they’ve been chosen, supported, and held accountable by their friends. Leaders, work to form effective teams, utilizing the skills of each in a harmonious way. The organizational process is first a relational process that relies on friendly feeling and mutual support of decisions.

- As community members, seek actively to know and support each other.

- Actively create a rich culture. Song, dance, rituals help focus energy and express more fully. Eating and drinking together is more than partaking of food and beverage. Seek to communicate more deeply and fully with each other—words, spoken and written, can comfort.

- Collaborate. Share wisdom, empower leadership, and create local knowledge to respond to the world more wisely. Local knowledge comes from sharing more intimately what experience has taught us. Evidence suggests that good people talking openly and honestly with each other are capable of making unusually wise decisions.

- Demonstrate. In times of confusion and rapid change, an open-minded, open-hearted community that is gathering information, discerning what is of practical benefit, and applying truth to their own lives will pass forward a demonstration of how any group of people can learn to work together effectively.



Katherine Pangaro

Sunset over our home in the parking lot.

Emergency Community

By Jesika Feather



Liz McCartney

Aerial view of the Made With Love Cafe.



Katherine Pangaro

There is still beauty amid the destruction.

Our community fell together in Waveland, Mississippi, post-Katrina. We all found our separate ways to the New Waveland Café, a relief kitchen started by the Rainbow Family days after the Hurricane ravaged the Gulf Coast. When Rainbow gathering meets disaster zone, over-stimulation is an understatement. The hum of the refrigerator trucks eternally cloud the background. Oddly costumed kitchen volunteers stride here and there with boxes of zucchini, chicken legs, mayonnaise, and tomato sauce.

The parking lot where our kitchen was stationed was shared with a distribution center staffed by a church group. Their counters carried everything from evaporated milk and Vienna sausages to fall-themed centerpieces at Thanksgiving. A bird's eye view would show dreadlocks, mini-skirts, and baggy overalls amiably mingled with gray crew cuts and lime green t-shirts reading, "The Church Has Left the Building."

We washed dishes, chopped cantaloupe, smoked meat, and sanitized surfaces until the city of Waveland could stand on its own, at least as far as pancakes and pulled pork were concerned.

From there we moved on to St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, where we started a non-profit, Emergency Communities. Our new relief kitchen, The Made with Love Café and Grill, served an average of 1000 meals a day from December 2005 until June 2006.

We came to know one another over the span of months. Our facility housed thousands of volunteers. Each day was a blur of names and faces. Most volunteers were available for short periods of time (one week to one month). Those of us who couldn't bring ourselves to leave, developed a ragtag family.

The parking lot of a destroyed horse betting establishment, Off Track Betting, became our home. A geodesic dome, borrowed from a Burning Man camp, became our dining room. Two long rows of port-a-potties actually started to feel normal. Our pantry consisted of a series of refrigerator and freezer trucks along with a large army tent we named Hot Lips. All this was connected by paths made of pallets—to keep our feet from touching the Katrina-poisoned earth.

For the first time in our lives, cement was clean. Grass was dirty. In the disaster zone, all laws are changed. At least cement can be bleached. It's a quick fix, but it will take years for the earth to heal herself.

None of us are from Louisiana. Like all good hippies, we've eaten our fair share of beans and rice, but apparently we were naïve to the subtle intricacies of Red Beans and Rice, the way "mama" makes it. For one thing, it's supposed to be served on Mondays. The locals pushed their way into the kitchen, determined to teach us about Gumbo, Jambalaya, Bread Pudding, and even fried alligator. We swallowed our pride, handed over

our spatulas, and took notes.

Though the action at Made with Love centered around the kitchen, many of my current housemates fell into responsibilities that had little to do with food.

Valisa and Benjah took on the job of reigning in the ruckus that occurs when hundreds of homeless locals, rebellious volunteers, and passionate eccentrics reside in tight quarters. Their work was complicated by the ubiquitous presence of "flood liquor." In essence, Katrina gathered up every liquor bottle in New Orleans and tossed her bounty to the masses. Unopened bottles could be found in trees, streets, and abandoned buildings. Ben-

jah, Valisa, and the other volunteers on security never suffered a boring moment.

Lali, aside from facilitating at least two meals a day,

initiated the ritual of "singing the menu." As the residents of St. Bernard Parish waited for the serving line to open, Lali, followed by a convoy of volunteers, wound her way around the dining room. The dancing procession improvised a rhythmic rendition of the menu. The dome echoed with jubilant calls about ham, potato salad, rolls, and peas.

Brian was our rock. As the months wore us down, our already zany idiosyncrasies became increasingly pronounced. Brian stayed solid through it all. He was generally indispensable in every area. Primarily he headed up the First Aid tent but he also washed dishes, provided technical support, worked security and, most importantly, made sure we all wore sunscreen.

I specialized in breakfast. And, because I have an internal alarm clock, I was also the self-appointed wake-up fairy. I crawled from my tent at 5:30 in the morning, still in my pajamas. I pulled on my muck boots and traipsed from tent to tent, rousing volunteers to begin cracking eggs, lighting the griddle, mixing pancake batter, and chopping apples. I picked out a CD—the soundtrack that would define our morning.

By 6 a.m., the kitchen was a hodgepodge of personalities. No one ever had to wake up, but somebody always did. The volunteers were different every day. Sometimes they were hung-over, sometimes they hadn't gone to bed yet. Sometimes they were grandmas who effortlessly threw down pancake batter for the masses like it was your average Sunday brunch. Sometimes they were 19-year-old college girls who, when confronted with the prospect of fruit salad for 400, displayed such performance anxiety you'd think they'd never peeled an orange in their lives. Frequently it was gutter punks, conspiring over corned beef hash in a wok—demanding an uncustomary array of spices, swearing "this is how the locals like it!"

Now, when I try to remember us three-and-a-half years ago, it's as if I'm remembering a dream. Those people—pretending they know how to cook green bean casserole with onion crisp-

When we arrived in Eugene, we were a crew of traveling volunteers. Now we have a mortgage payment, a baby, full-time jobs, a Subaru wagon, and bags of shorn dreadlocks in the garage.

Valisa Higman



Valisa Higman

with a notary and a realtor, signing piles of home ownership papers with a Turkey feather quill.

The year that transpired between starting the ignition on our caravan, and hanging Mardi Gras beads in the window of our new home, was a huge transition for all of us. Whether it was conscious or not, that year led to drastic changes for both our communal and individual identities.

Co-owning a house is a huge financial and social commitment. All decisions affecting our home are made by consensus. This ties us to a considerable financial obligation and a lengthy amount of time invested in communication and conflict resolution with our co-owners.

These choices were not made carelessly. We spent eight months meeting weekly to create the legal document that bound us. During this time, several people realized that this was not a decision they were ready to make. Some backed out entirely, others lowered their level of commitment by choosing to be renters rather than owners. By the time we were ready for signatures, there were five of us still committed to owning.

The eight months we spent creating our legal documents could never be defined as a honeymoon. As far as understanding the personality types we were venturing to work with, we bore no false pretenses. However, there is a certain “reality” surrounding our financial commitment that could only set in over time.

When we arrived in Eugene, we were a crew of traveling volunteers. Now we have a mortgage payment, a baby, full-time jobs, a Subaru wagon, and bags of shorn dreadlocks in the garage. You could say our glamor has been a little...tarnished. Truthfully, if something akin to Katrina struck our country now, we'd be

Bret Olson



Katherine Pangaro



Valisa Higman



ies, and then serving it to 700 mouths... those people rushing around at 2 a.m., their tents crushed by the weight of the rain, tarping 300 bags of ginger snaps, wondering if the ovens would work in time to cook the frittata. Those people, with filmy June-in-Louisiana skin. Was that really us?

At the end of June, The Made with Love Café and Grill closed down and Emergency Communities founded three new relief kitchens. Our haphazard group of 10 tired, financially pressed disaster relief volunteers crawled into a VW van, a Toyota truck, a Mercedes with no reverse, and pointed ourselves west.

I still can't define what held that tentative caravan intact over the year and a month it took before we sat in an office

Top left: Benjah takes a moment during the St. Bernard Mardi Gras parade to pose in front of the flood-damaged oil refinery. Top right: Inside Hot Lips. Middle left: Alice and Valisa in front of the domes. Middle right: Hamburgers for dinner at The Made With Love Cafe. Above: Lali, Uncle Van, Heather, Eric, Arjay, Cynthia, Danmo, and Kiki enjoy Thanksgiving dinner in the new house. Opposite page: Members of the Heart and Spoon Community after a house meeting. Back row left to right: Evan, Lali, Brian, Valisa, Johnny, Jesika, Lisa, Nathan. Front: Ash and Benjah.

hard pressed to donate our time so freely.

We all have different ways of reconciling with our new identities. I beg someone to play with my son so that I can sit in a coffee shop, eat huevos rancheros, and organize my life into paragraphs. Lali bought a second-hand clothing store and assuages her fears of “normalcy” by wearing and designing the most conspicuously striking outfits in Eugene. Benjah smokes cigarettes with homeless men and swaps theories of impending disaster. Valisa slides recklessly after Frisbees and takes lengthy excursions to other countries. Brian...well, to be honest, I'm not really sure if anything ever fazes Brian. But he, as always, nurtures plants and people.

Our financial commitments have had both positive and negative effects on our community. On one hand, we have a contract that gently nudges us back together when we feel inclined to stray. If there were any glaring issues, we could ultimately end it all, but the added complications keep us from making spontaneous or flighty decisions.

It is imperative that we work through any conflicts that arise. We can't push anything under the rug. We plod our way through agitation about too much dog poop in the yard. We acknowledge fears that some folks get more respect than others, and we hold discussions about whether or not a gun is allowed in the house.

After three years of bi-monthly house meetings and spontaneous breakdowns over sinks full of dishes, confrontation is not nearly the graceless, self-conscious scene it used to be. Now we have a common vocabulary and experiences to draw from. The communication skills we've honed while living together have also pulled us through difficult scenarios in our jobs and personal relationships outside this community.

Our financial commitments have also worked *against* our communal bond. Most of us make the majority of our money by working social services while holding side jobs that involve our other passions. In this way, we manage to serve our larger community while keeping our creative spirits alive. This also means that we work more than 40 hours a week. Af-



Sean Peterson

I know we can maintain this community through a disaster, but I still wonder if we can stick together through the mundane.

ter prioritizing the nine-to-five job, the art work, the management of art sales, and miscellaneous personal situations, it can be hard to make it home for dinner, much less to attend a house meeting.

It is realistic that after dedicating one year to disaster relief and another year to founding this community, people have to nurture their personal ambitions. If individuals aren't fulfilled, the community cannot thrive.

It is also clear to me that working through intense experiences to achieve common goals is what gave this community its sticking power. Maybe that's why, after we'd signed our names, haggled over rooms, and hefted in the piano, I started to get nervous. What would we do with nothing left to work towards? In my mind, the sweet feeling of success was muted by the fear that we'd reached a dead end. I know we can maintain this

community through a disaster, but I still wonder if we can stick together through the mundane.

Within days of signing our homeownership contract, we discovered that I was pregnant. Mostly, I would call this a coincidence. However, I can't deny that with the end of our home-search in sight, I was zealous for a new community project. The idea of a baby, at least temporarily, absolved those fears. As we all know, it takes a village to raise a child...right? Nine months later, reality set in.

Ash, our baby boy, is currently 13 months old, and we are 13 months wiser. My husband and I learned that the ol' "it takes a village" routine doesn't actually apply to the first year of life. Unless the village is so hell-bent on child rearing that they invest in an industrial breast pump and start inducing lactation, the first year

(continued on p. 77)

Shared Living— When Home Is a Community

By Carol Pimentel



All photos courtesy of Carol Pimentel

Why would anyone voluntarily give up having a place of her own? “I could never do it,” say my more traditional friends, shaking their heads in wonder. “I could never handle other people in my home. I can’t even take house guests for more than three days! I need to have my own space.”

Having one’s own house (and washer, dryer, garden, lawn mower, stuff) may be the American Dream, but some of us have a different dream: a dream of learning to live more cooperatively with others and sharing resources rather than each needing to have our own. And as it happens, the skills it takes to live closely with others and low on the food chain are extremely useful when the economic systems of the larger culture hit the skids.

I’ve lived in shared households all my adult life. Shared living has always been my chosen lifestyle, both for the companionship and the sharing of resources. When other young women were dreaming of becoming brides, my dream was to find my tribe. I was part of several start-up groups exploring intentional community, but none of them got off the ground. However, at age 35, I joined with three other women to buy a large house on an acre of land in San Luis Obispo, California as an experiment in community living on a small scale.

None of us could have afforded to buy property alone, and none of us wanted to dedicate our lives to earning enough to do so. We reasoned that if we shared living expenses we could all be free from the rat race. We called the place Caballeros House, and buying it jointly was a splendid decision. There was lots of turnover in the household as people’s lives changed, but for 20 years there was always a houseful of folks living and growing together.

Communication

Conflict was inevitable, and we had to learn how to manage it. One day a few months after we had moved in, Maxine came home to find a new piece of wall art mounted at the end of the hall. “Who put that there?” she demanded. “I did,” replied Elizabeth mildly, “I think the colorful herb and flowers in the poster look nice there.” “Well I don’t like it,” grumbled Maxine, slamming her door. Elizabeth’s feelings were hurt, and we all tiptoed around on eggshells for a day or two. Finally we called a house meeting to discuss what had happened and how we would handle such things in the future. The real issue was not the poster, of course, but territoriality. Max was sensitive to changes being made without consulting her, and Liz wanted the freedom to experiment without new additions being shot down. We came up with a simple policy that we called “Try it for a week.” Anyone could bring anything into the house on a trial basis and the others would wait a week to pass final judgment. As it turned out, we discovered that an immediate negative reaction frequently dissipated after living with the change for a while. “Try it for a week” saved us innumerable arguments and much unpleasantness, and we often laughed remembering the stir caused by that inoffensive poster.

Living with others presents challenges. Relationship dynamics can get prickly and fantasies that the household will meet extended family needs or that everyone will pitch in equally may not pan out. Mutual adjustment is necessary. It takes a couple of months for a new resident to get into the flow of the household, and there’s a lingering emptiness when a much-loved person

departs. It's all part of the ebb and flow.

Communication is the key to making it work. Every new resident at Casa Caballeros had a long interview, in which we shared our values of recycling, composting, and conserving energy and resources, to determine whether s/he would be a good match for the household. We talked about mutual respect and the importance of communicating with one another about needs and irritations so that we could mutually adjust to prevent chronic complaints or resentments. There was no structure or expectation of how much we would interact; that was allowed to develop organically. Sometimes we shared meals, late night schmoozing, or celebrations. Always we respected one another's privacy.

Alternative economy

Eventually I married one of my housemates. When two of the original owners chose to move on, Don and I purchased their interests and Casa Caballeros entered a new phase as a shared home. Don was a remarkable artist/builder who transformed the yard with small outbuildings and tree plantings. Living in the outbuildings allowed us to include more people in the main house. The rental income covered most of our expenses, so we rode out the financial downturn of the '80s without blinking an eye.

Valuing frugality, we all lived well on the cast-off treasures of others. We seldom paid retail price for anything, since with patience anything could be found at swap meets or garage sales, everything from boots to vacuum cleaners to table saws to glittering sequined gowns.

Every Sunday at 6 a.m.—no kidding, every Sunday—Don was up and off, flashlight in hand, to what we called the “Church of the Holy Swap,” the weekly swap meet, to inspect the offerings of the day, coming home a few hours later to display his bounty. He had a great eye and the skills to repair and upgrade virtually anything. I remember when he brought home a plastic grocery bag of dirty looking sticks of wood and some rusty springs, which he assembled into a lovely Mission style rocker. Friends would



An outbuilding at Casa Caballeros.

Valuing frugality, we all lived well on the cast-off treasures of others. We seldom paid retail price for anything, since with patience anything could be found at swap meets or garage sales.

place orders with Don, and sure enough, within a few weeks he could usually come up with the item.

Don was not alone in his dedication to reuse and recycling; we all held these values, and others in the household learned to be “bottom feeders” too. Sometimes we'd toodle around construction sites scavenging building materials. Those materials went into tidy resource piles to be used as needed for building projects on the property.

When the local university let out for the summer, we invited friends to join us with their trucks for the annual dumpster dive day. Armed with rubber gloves and

dressed in garbage clothes and throwaway shoes, we went from dorm to dorm and behind student apartment buildings on a mission to rescue usable items students had predictably tossed into the trash. We loaded up on enough unopened sundries like dish soap, shampoo, and cleaning supplies to last for months. We scored so much—clothing, appliances, office supplies, furniture, and even jewelry—that we couldn't use it all. Some items we sold second-hand for cash, but we'd donate much of it at the end of the day. Sometimes we'd take a few kids with us. It was a fun adventure for them to be allowed to get dirty and find so many cool things

for free. We'd talk about the extravagant waste they'd seen and how they felt about donating to the homeless shelter. It was a great learning experience.

When a household is made up of people with a variety of skills, everyone is enriched. Physical skills, interpersonal skills, and creativity are all valuable contributions. Don was indisputably the swap meet king, our procurer of goods for very little cost. Allen was the consummate host and chef extraordinaire, often spontaneously firing up the grill and inviting anyone who was home to participate. I was the nurturer, communicator, and mediator, attending to relationships and dynamics in the group and willing to confront problems when they arose. Terry brought music. Kari was a gardener. Elizabeth, our elder, was the "ground." While the rest of us were busy with work, activities, and multi-tasking, her days were filled with reading, caring for the chickens, and deadheading the flowers. Her deep centeredness and quiet spirit permeated the atmosphere and brought peace to us all, while our activity enlivened her. Everyone pitching in with chores meant less burden on any one individual.

Beyond ourselves

In anticipation of Y2K, several friends joined us to expand our gardens so we could all share the organic produce, fruits, and nuts. We developed the yard into a food forest, with a flock of chickens for fresh eggs. The security of knowing we were in it together prevented many a sleepless night, and though the crisis never happened, we all loved gardening together and sharing the bounty. And with so many of us involved, whatever tool we needed someone was bound to have.

Taking community and resource sharing beyond our own household, we formed an informal group with several couples and singles that we called The Barn Raisers. Anyone who had a big project could put out a call and those who were free would descend *en masse* and work miracles. Together we cleaned and painted houses, installed cabinets, cleared yards (lots of this!), and once we even installed a huge metal bridge over a creek. Our workdays always



included wonderful meals and socializing together, sometimes into the wee hours. I wonder how much money we collectively saved over the years by helping each other in these ways?

We made the house and property available for any number of community events and groups. There were weddings, ceremonies, Cub Scout campouts, bonfires, meditation groups, workshop retreats, and big potlucks. A Mardi Gras float was built in the yard one year.

All good things come to an end

The community at Caballeros house lasted from 1985 through 2006, when sea changes in our lives dictated that Don and I sell the house and go our separate ways. We invited anyone who felt connected to the place to a huge "house closing" party to honor the many years of community sharing. About 150 people came to share stories, look at the photo wall, write in a memory book, hug, laugh, wipe away tears, and say farewell to an era. Three young people who had spent time with us as children were part of the celebration. One drove up with her daughter from Los Angeles, one drove down from college in Davis, and one flew in from Brussels, Belgium. All of them said they wouldn't think of missing the event, Caballeros had been such an important part of their early lives, showing them an al-

ternative way to live.

Not everyone has the temperament to share a house with other non-related adults, with all the comings and goings and the juggling of personalities and emotions involved. But for those who choose this lifestyle there is great wealth to be found in the realms of personal growth, shared resources, spontaneous celebration, and financial freedom even in economic downturns. Now, that's MY kind of "social security!" ❁



Carol Pimentel was Mistress of Caballeros House in San Luis Obispo, California for over 20 years. She now resides with a housemate in Asheville, North Carolina, where she has a relaxed private practice as a counselor and organizing consultant. She is also Facilitator of Community Life at the Jubilee! Community. Wherever she finds herself, building community is Carol's form of activism and her art in the world. She loves to share her experience and offers consulting, problem solving, and coaching to others living in or contemplating shared housing. Carol may be contacted at carolpim14@gmail.com.

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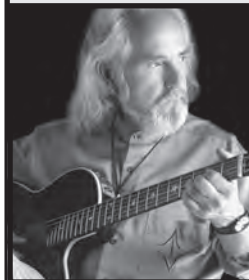
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Householding: Communal Living on a Small Scale

By Elizabeth Barrette



Householding involves the practice of intentional community in a single house with a group of people not all related to each other. Similar terms include “sharehousing,” “shared house,” “sharehouse,” and “group house.” Householding offers most of the same advantages of companionship and economy as other forms of intentional community, but on a smaller scale that some people find more accessible. For many people, a shared house is their first experience with communal living—and in times of economic hardship, the frugality may cause people to try it who might not otherwise consider it.



Shared Houses

Householding is related to other types of intentional community. It is most closely connected to urban housing cooperatives, student co-ops, and cohousing. These models tend to feature concise living arrangements, often under a single roof.

A key feature of householding is the house itself. Shared houses typically evolve from large buildings such as farmhouses or Victorian mansions. They have multiple bathrooms and bedrooms, and generous common rooms and kitchens. It's possible, though more challenging, to share a smaller building. The number of bathrooms may prove more of a limiting factor than bedrooms in household population. Our house, Fieldhaven, is a large farmhouse with three current residents; it also hosts many events for our local like-minded community. Ravan Asteris, who also contributed input to this article, lives in a household of four adults over 40 (plus the landlord downstairs), five cats, and one dog in an 1890s Victorian house.

Shared houses may be short-term or long-term establishments. Those started by college students rarely last more than a year or few. During my college days I was a frequent guest, sometimes overnight, at one called Illinois Street House. Shared houses started by more settled adults can last for decades. Some even become famous in certain subcultures. For a while, I had friends at Lytheria in Milwaukee, Wisconsin: a modest mansion with individual bedrooms and large common rooms, and a waiting list for would-be residents. The Bhigg House in Winnipeg, Canada houses an assortment of musicians and other creative people; this household has collectively been invited to science fiction conventions as Guest of Honor.¹



Forming a Household

A household forms when several people decide to live together. This can come about in various ways. All benefit from careful planning and communication beforehand. Economic hardships, however, may force unplanned moves or leave friends in need of emergency housing. Don't overlook these opportunities—it may be awkward, but helping each other through hard

times is what community is all about.

The first approach to householding involves inviting people to move in with you.² This works well for a single person or couple with a large house, or at least a spare room; if your budget is tight, renters can help. It also benefits seniors, who often own a house but wish for more company. Pass the word among friends and family that you seek housemates. Check newspapers and bulletin boards in your area to find people who need living space. One trick for attracting housemates is to undercut the going rate for housing; another is to let people pay rent with barter instead of cash, especially if you aren't desperately broke. Ideally, seek people whose needs and interests mesh well with yours.

Stay alert for housing emergencies, a common dilemma in times of foreclosure and layoffs. Among the best ways to create a strong household is to provide living space for a friend who needs it on short notice. Start by offering temporary lodging, such as two to four weeks; use that time to test your compatibility. If you make a good fit, formalize a longer-term arrangement. If it doesn't work out, at least the emergency is taken care of and your friend has time to search for another place.

Economic hardships may force unplanned moves. Don't overlook these opportunities—helping each other through hard times is what community is all about.

The second approach to householding involves moving into someone else's place. This is easiest for a single person with minimal baggage, but may work for more people or possessions. First, use social networking (in person and/or online) to find opportunities. Perhaps some of your friends have a spare room they would like to rent out. Maybe someone has moved out early from a shared house and you could take over their lease.

If you can't find space with anyone you know, broaden your search. Local newspapers and bulletin boards may mention communal living opportunities. Check nearby colleges, because students frequently band together for housing and sometimes leave early. Finally, browse intentional community directories for shared houses or co-ops open to new members.³

The third approach to householding involves gathering a group of people who then rent or buy a place together. College students often do this, as one year's friends become next year's housemates. Experienced householders do it too. This way you can choose a building that meets your needs; you know how many bedrooms and bathrooms you need, and what other facilities or parameters are important. You also enter the household as equals; nobody has to move into somebody else's space or let someone into theirs.

On the downside, it can prove difficult to find a place that

everyone likes. You may have to prioritize needs over desires, and that requires careful negotiation and honesty. Some towns have laws against unrelated people living together; even where it's legal, some landlords disapprove. These complications come up less often in college towns where students commonly rent houses together, or in cities or neighborhoods with old-fashioned "walkable" construction where duplex or triplex houses are common and amenities nearby.



Money Matters

In order to succeed, shared living requires a careful discussion of money, preferably at the beginning. Members must be absolutely clear about who contributes what, and when, and how. Ideally, one or more "anchor" members should have reliable income and credit, allowing the household the option of including others with different contributions.

Many groups choose to establish a household account, filled by rent or other arrangements, for paying common expenses such as utility bills and grocery shopping. This makes the bookkeeping easier; the household account can be managed by the person with the most financial or mathematical skill, and available for anyone to review upon request. Ravan Asteris adds, "In general, it is a good idea to start out with everyone making deposits, and then paying bills and buying common supplies out of the central account. This helps figure out what your real household expenses are. It's also good to overestimate the amount needed. Anything that isn't used in one month can be shunted to the savings, for months when the utilities spike or there are unexpected expenses (what do you mean, the neighbor kids broke a window?)." ⁴

Some expenses tend to increase substantially as more people join a household. These include water, electricity, and phone bills. Your budget needs to account for this. The house phone may not increase much if everyone has their own cell phone, though.

Some expenses tend to stay the same, or increase only a little, as the household grows. These include heating/cooling, garbage, internet connection, and cable/satellite TV. Unless you choose to add more services, or add a lot of people, standard family packages usually cover these.

You can find many ways to save money by living together.⁵ It is more economical to eat together than for everyone to buy their own food; budget more for communal groceries and take advantage of bulk pricing. Gather for activities, and you only have to light one or two rooms, not the whole house. Recycling, composting, and vermiculture reduce the need for garbage service. Share newspaper, magazine, and other subscriptions. Walking and biking save wear on the household car(s). Finally,

brainstorm money-saving ideas with your housemates.



Talking Points

Like other types of intentional community, a shared house benefits from fluent communication skills. Talk with your potential housemates before moving in together and discuss important points. It helps to have at least one person with facilitation and/or mediation experience.⁶ Some households set formal meetings; others communicate more casually. Figure out what

works for your group.

Practice verbal self-defense and avoid hostile language.⁷ If you're new to householding, your job includes learning from more experienced members. If you've shared living space before, your job includes teaching communal skills to newcomers. Remember that under a single roof, you can't just walk away from conflicts—they come back to bite you later. Therefore, don't let disputes simmer until they boil over. Deal with them at once, gently if possible and firmly if necessary.

Explore the parameters for potential housemates. Do you want a like-minded group or a diverse group? Does it include employed, unemployed, self-employed, or part-time workers? Is the household open to children, college students, middle-aged adults, and/or seniors? Can you have pets and livestock, owned individually or collectively? What are people's dietary and other needs? What is the policy regarding tobacco, alcohol, and other substances? There are many ways to assemble a community, so read about some previous examples.⁸

Agree on a decision-making process for the household. Most groups prefer participatory options such as democratic, egalitarian, or consensus methods.

*Remember that under a single roof,
you can't just walk away from
conflicts—they come back to bite you later.*

If one person owns the house, however, that can lead to a more autocratic situation, which may or may not work for you.

Define what constitutes personal vs. public space. Which rooms are common rooms? What equipment is shared and what is private? What are the rules for using common space and equipment? How do housemates give each other necessary privacy? What balance between companionship and privacy do people want?

Discuss the distribution of chores and other responsibilities. Who does the cooking, cleaning, repairs, and other upkeep? Who has special skills or limitations? Express thanks for tasks completed; everyone enjoys being appreciated. Also compare "mess quotient," one of the commonest reasons for domestic friction that people rarely consider. How messy or tidy should public spaces be? What about individual bedrooms or other private places? Generally, divide chores based on ability and interest, so that nobody has to do things that they hate, that they do poorly, or that aggravate their health issues. Two types of task

should be shared by all: those that everyone dislikes, and those that everyone enjoys.

Compare people's wake/sleep schedules and work/home schedules. Discuss your tastes in music, conversation, and other aspects of noise level. Do you want to establish specific quiet times or revel times? Could you use the physical layout of the house to separate noisy activities from peaceful ones? Here at Fieldhaven, we've found that having people on different sleep schedules poses no serious problems—as long as the day sleeper is upstairs, not downstairs near the door that makes a racket every time it opens or closes.

Explore your thoughts regarding guests. Can housemates bring home anyone they want, at any time? Do guests need to be known to other housemates? Are visits to be planned or spontaneous? May guests spend the night in a housemate's room, or in common space such as a couch? Households that frequently host overnight guests may want to invest in a futon or hide-a-bed sofa. Fieldhaven has two, a full-size couch and a loveseat, because we have several out-of-state friends who need crash space when visiting.

Finally, consider the issue of trust. Ravan Asteris explains, "If A hands B \$20 to go to the store and get XXX, will they actually get it or return the money? If C falls off a ladder, will D call 911, and not just leave the house? You can be friends with people, but not trust them enough to live with them. Everyone has their faults and foibles, but if those faults are in the trustworthiness area, and are outside the bounds of what can be coped with by the rest of the household, the household will break down very quickly and/or expel the person that they can't trust. This doesn't mean that they have to be always honest, always perfect accountants, always 'clean,' or whatever, but they have to keep the trust of the household."⁹



Homemaking

Although economic and other practical reasons may cause people to share a dwelling, it takes more to create a thriving and cohesive household. For that you need homemaking skills, the knowledge and practices that merge individuals into a group. Pay attention to the group dynamics, nurture the collective identity, and generally encourage housemates to cooperate on projects. Create customs and traditions that define your household as a social unit.

Food provides comfort as well as nourishment. If possible, prepare meals collectively and eat together.¹⁰ Team up for canning or freezing fruits and vegetables for later use. Take advantage of crock pots and other methods that fill the house with delicious smells for hours before a meal. Share recipes by creat-

ing a cookbook of household favorites. Exchange the news from each other's successes and challenges of the day over supper.

Spend leisure time together. Find out who enjoys the same crafts or hobbies, and who would like to learn new ones from someone else. Encourage "lapwork" activities such as sewing, knitting, or woodcarving that people can do while conversing. Share board, card, roleplaying, or physical games once or twice a month.¹¹ Movie nights are popular. Also consider music nights if your housemates sing or play instruments.

Finally, name your household. While not obligatory, a name helps make it real and memorable. It also gives you an easy way to talk about your shared house and your collective housemates. You might choose a name inspired by the house or yard, location, favorite literature, mythology, or other characteristics. It should sound interesting and welcoming. Above all, it should capture the spirit of the place and the people who call it home.

This is your dream. Give it roots—and then give it wings. ❁

Elizabeth Barrette writes nonfiction, fiction, and poetry in the fields of alternative spirituality, speculative fiction, and gender studies. She supports the growth of community in diverse forms and is active in local organizations. Her favorite activities include gardening for wildlife and public speaking at Pagan events and science fiction conventions. Visit her blog at gaiatribe.geekuniversalis.com.

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Four-year-old Aaitien, born in GCCA.

Birthing a New Order in a Chaotic World

By Niánn Emerson Chase



For all the diversity of its members, one of the things we at Global Community Communications Alliance all have in common is a whole-hearted desire to make the world a better place for the generations to come. Since 1989 we have been engaged in the collective adventure of coming out of the “old order” of things and moving progressively, as a community and extended family, into a cooperative society. We are all in agreement that functional communities made up of healthy families are the solution to the hard times we are in. As co-founder of our group, based in Arizona, I am convinced that the process of true community building is a spiritual birthing process, a conscious and committed one for each individual as well as for the group as a whole.

Perhaps the hardest aspect of our years of community building has arisen from our work to recognize and admit the flaws in our own characters as well as in fellow family and community members, students, and others—limitations and erroneous ways of thinking, feeling, and doing that we and many others do not want to deal with. “Pardon me friend, but do you realize you are running at top speed towards a cliff and are about to go over the edge?” Suddenly pride and defensiveness take over as we humans respond with aggressive defiance rather than the humility it takes to really see the things about ourselves that we need to change in order to cause no harm to ourselves or to others. But we have found that in order to heal our relationships with all members of our family, this is exactly what we need to do. Our commitment to this has gotten us through many hard times.

We have learned that being “civil” and being “polite” are two different things. Being civil is being appropriately respectful of another’s perspective and attempting to understand someone else’s viewpoint in a nonviolent manner. Being polite is more on the surface and skirts any issues that may create any kind of conflict or heated discussion. People can be transparent and openly honest in their differences in a civil manner, but they tend not to be as genuine and open when just being polite.

Relationships go deeper when our masks of composure, pride, and denial fall away, and we begin to recognize certain cosmic connections with each other. In order to foster the communications and alliance building necessary to live as a cooperative society, we have found that it is a process of learning to express oneself honestly, with wisdom and discernment, understanding what is appropriate when, with whom, and how to do it. We are striving to create a “fourth dimensional” community where communication involves application of spiritual principles in relationships and encouragement of each other’s spiritual rehabilitation, growth, and healing.

We have had the opportunity to deal with many challenges in this way and find that, as long as everyone is willing to cooperate with the process, any situation can be reconciled to everyone’s satisfaction. Not only that, the darkest situation can become a blessing on many levels. As long as we are honest and respectful, we find this way of living fosters health and wellness for



*Top: A pond at the Avalon Organic Gardens, Farm and Ranch.
Above: Members of Global Community Communications Alliance celebrate a maypole dance during a wedding at Avalon Organic Gardens.*

individual members, couples, families, housemates, co-workers, band members, classmates, and all in our collective society.

We have dealt with issues from every aspect of the life cycles of human beings, including: teaching parents not to spoil their children; correcting disrespectful children and adults; dealing with sexual boundaries in adolescents and immature adults; creating sacred homes with people from diverse cultures; and addressing power trips, issues with authority, complaining, gossiping, theft, deceit, dysfunctional/co-dependent relationships, laziness, workaholics, and denial of all of the above.

Whenever possible, we deal with those outside our community in the same manner. We have experienced hostile, aggressive attacks by various outlets of the corporate-driven media and responded by writing and sharing our views using our own community-driven media—the *Alternative Voice* quarterly pe-

We have dealt with issues including power trips, issues with authority, complaining, gossiping, theft, deceit, and denial of all of the above.

riodical and a worldwide web cast called “Media Misrepresentation.” The 1999 Spring issue of *COMMUNITIES* featured an article by Celinas Ruth about this titled “Seeking the Truth in Media: What Happens When Your Community is Criticized on National TV?”

When we first began to consider moving our entire community from Sedona, Arizona to Tumacácori, Arizona, we had a few very negative and vocal potential new neighbors expressing their fears about our being an undesirable cult. We suggested a meeting where we could meet and discuss the situation. A local restaurant owner in Tumacácori generously offered “Wisdom’s Café” for the meeting. The day of the meeting the place was packed. Five of our members attended. The two prominently vocal and aggressive neighbors who disliked and feared us (but had not really met us yet) verbally attacked the five members of our community and disrespectfully overshadowed the entire meeting. Our members managed to remain calm and respectful “under fire” and tried to bring the discussion up to a more spiritually mature level.

Afterwards, many who had sat quietly through the meeting came up to talk and privately state that the views of the two who had monopolized the evening did not speak for everyone, and that they were amazed that we had handled it so well. It was decided that another meeting would be held so that questions could be asked and answered in a more cordial manner in a neighbor’s private home.

In our experience, it is always better to give more time and energy to those who are willing to build towards a positive future. That is how we are building alliances for a future cooperative society that we hope will expand beyond our wildest dreams.

Some of our hardest times have been the result of losing friends and family when they choose to return to the stampede for the cliffs, deciding that the work and effort required to spiritually grow and heal—in order to thrive in a cooperative society—is no longer desirable. It seems obvious that everyone on the planet has to face making many changes in lifestyle so that we may learn to collectively live in balance with the many gifts that Mother Earth gives us to sustain our lives. Few people choose to make these kinds of changes unless forced into it by circumstantial reality.

Our “turning away from the stampeding herd” has led us to do many things that have been misunderstood by others in the past, but are increasingly applauded in the present. We have built organic gardens, starting out by cultivating three acres in Sedona and then, 20 years later, moving the entire community of 100 members and many ministry programs and affiliated

services to a wonderful 165-acre ranch in Tumacácori, called Avalon Organic Gardens, Farm & Ranch.

In our new home we are busy expanding the organic gardening and animal husbandry projects, goat cheese production, making soap from goat milk, and building small herds of horses and cattle. We also have rabbits and chickens. We started a Community Supported Agriculture Program that is expanding rapidly and supported by new friends and neighbors for miles around. The community kitchen serves tasty and nutritious food for the entire community (and many guests) on a daily basis.

As a cooperative society we are able to manifest so much more than is possible for the same number of individuals in a more mainstream setting. We have established Soulistic Hospice which provides holistic healthcare to people in our region. Our Out of the Way Galleria in Tubac, Arizona provides an outlet to sell the work of our artisans, as well as for the many donations of fine arts and crafts we receive in support of our services, which includes the Personality Integration Rehabilitation Program for Teens and Adults.

After showcasing quality music from all around the world at our performance venue called Future Studios in Sedona for eight years, we are now doing the same by producing a free concert series called Tubac Plaza World Music Days in Tubac, Arizona. We are inviting people from around the planet to make a pilgrimage to attend one of our Tubac/Tumacácori Music Festival Weekends, and to participate in concerts, films, presentations, organic gardening lectures, camping at Avalon Gardens. We are advertising internationally and putting it out there that it is free admission to these events and that reciprocation by contribution is appreciated. Dates of bi-yearly festivals can be found at www.globalchangemusic.org/events#183.

The Global Community Communications Schools for Children and Adults are flourishing. We are able to contribute to local activist groups, helping to preserve the local environment, which has been called "The Palm of God's Hand" for thousands of years.

Earth Harmony Builders are working with other alternative shelter entrepreneurs to create beautiful alternative shelters including a variety of domes, papercrete structures, homes with state-of-the-art, eco-friendly and alternative energy features, yurts, tipis, and more.

Because of our successes in learning to live as an ecovillage, people are now asking us how they can do what we are doing—how they can move from hard times to the good times they see us (with much effort) living in. We believe in unity without uniformity and encourage everyone to strive for harmony

As a cooperative society we are able to manifest so much more than is possible for the same number of individuals in a more mainstream setting.



Top: Members of Global Community Communications Alliance (GCCA) plant peppers in Avalon Organic Gardens, Farm and Ranch. Above: Community members build a sand bag earth dome at Avalon Organic Gardens

with their neighbors and learning to live sustainably on our Mother Earth. ❁

Niánn Emerson Chase is an educator, spiritual teacher, counselor, writer, and cofounder of Global Community Communications Alliance, located in Arizona. She grew up on four different Native American reservations in the southwest and, after earning her bachelor's degree, returned to the San Carlos Apache reservation where she lived and taught for 15 years. Niánn Emerson Chase's articles have been published in various periodicals including New Thought Journal, Connecting Link, COMMUNITIES, Quantum Thoughts, Inner Word, and the Alternative Voice, of which she is the co-Executive Director. www.niannemersonchase.org, www.GlobalCommunityCommunicationsAlliance.org, info@GlobalCommunityCommunicationsAlliance.org.



Throwing in the Founder's Towel

By Maïkwe Schaub Ludwig

The following article is adapted from a blog entry originally written in mid-2008; because it encapsulates so well the challenges and “hard times” often involved in starting a new community, we reprint it here.

I've just thrown in the towel. It's not like me, and I'm a bit embarrassed to admit it. But the truth is that I've spent the past seven years working on the rather intimidating goal of starting a residential intentional community, and I've finally admitted that I might not be up to the task. Conventional wisdom says that every new community needs a burning soul, and I've burned brightly, burned joyfully, and finally, burned out.

The first year and a half, I lived with my mother, stepfather, and son, and the three of us adults worked diligently on visioning a community that we could be happy with. But it turned out that our visions were too different, and my relationship with my stepfather deteriorated to the point that it wasn't worth the effort anymore. I had one of my worst-ever human behavior moments about a month before we called it quits, and actually threw a

plate during a meeting. (You can't tell me that people can't behave badly and intend well in the same breath!) Garden-variety conflict, combined with a lack of a basic values match, killed the first project.

I spent that next summer at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri. It was a great summer: inspirational, reinvigorating, and just plain fun. But there weren't other kids for my incredibly social son, and I couldn't figure out how to make a living in rural Missouri. I left with some real regret, but the confidence and hope that I, too, could make something like this project happen in the world. So I moved to Albuquerque with a promise from my son's father that we'd start a community together.

The next year and a half was a time of concentrated growth and learning. We rented two houses next to each other in a residential neighborhood, painted the porches a wild turquoise and lavender combination that just screamed “cultural creatives here!,” hosted weekly neighborhood dinners until all hours, and supported each other in following our dreams. In a classic example of too-clunky process

without much training, it took months to arrive at a name: Sol Space was christened months after we moved in. (Sing it to the tune of “Soul Train,” bob your head a little, and you can capture a little of the giddiness when we finally arrived at that one!)

This was the group that supported me in writing a book, having a baby for close friends, and learning about just how important good facilitation is. We shared expenses (and therefore all of our various neuroses around money) and tight quarters (which meant sharing lost its charm fairly quickly and became instead a platform for growth and clarifying what was really important to each of us). Sol Space was a truly amazing social scene...a little wild at times, but characterized by a lot of care and grounding.

Things came apart for two main reasons. The bad news was that we weren't savvy enough about our conflicts, in spite of being creative and dedicated to our friendships with each other. On the good side of the ledger, half of us were chasing bigger dreams: we combined efforts with another cooperative group and began



Photos courtesy of Marikwe Schaub Ludwig

From the left: Welcoming sign to the Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage. Road to the Ecovillage. The old swimming pond is a place of tranquility. The courtyard as you come in: Skyhouse and the Common House. As in traditional villages, courtyards are a big feature for design here, literally holding space for social interaction.

work on a full-fledged ecovillage, wanting to be a model project for urban revitalization. Sol Space was a limited success, short-term but with high impact on a lot of lives, and the initial testing ground for a lot of our ideas and relationships.

So Sol Space morphed into a project that eventually became known as Zialua Ecovillage (or ZEV) and had a much wider draw than the dozen or so folks who lived together in our small co-op. For four years, a typically urban mix of dreamers, teachers, activists, artists, and business people shared a dream of cooperative living. We did our best to correct for past weak points: we committed to consensus training, spent a lot of time working on our vision, and made efforts to get real about money, diversity, and space issues early in the process. It felt, most days, like we were just keeping our heads above the water, but ZEV was powered by inspiration and honesty, and most days that was enough.

I made some huge mistakes as a leader. I confess to pushing the group too fast, being unable to separate my personal needs from the group's agenda, and doing my share of simple whining when things didn't go my way. I also did a lot of things right: got that facilitation training I had been missing, insisted that we learn consensus, connected individually with everyone who showed the slightest interest, and preserved all the friendships I ever made in the process. And yes, I got good at confession, and slightly better at humility.

Things almost fell apart in mid-2006.

It was the first period where we started to understand that the three women who had been most central in the leadership of the group had different enough priorities that things were not moving easily ahead. I think, in retrospect, that we loved each other too much and just couldn't bring ourselves to let go of the particular individuals in order to get to the point of having an ecovillage. The wisest of the three of us stepped back into a support role. The other two of us apparently couldn't

ly, has huge advantages financially, and also keeps open space for a spontaneity that fed a lot of my companions, it left me feeling flat and unmet in my heart's deeper needs.

I wanted people in my life who were excited to commit to showing up for a shared adventure, not just sharing our tales of the individual ones we were each pursuing. I wanted meals together and a shared vision that we could each contribute to in a meaningful way. I wanted to know that

The wisest of the three of us stepped back into a support role. The other two of us apparently couldn't take a hint: we barreled ahead.

take a hint: we barreled ahead, convinced we could hold everyone's dreams in one container, if we just tried hard enough.

In the fall of 2006, the group landed on a city block with a vibrant, member-owned business, and a development model similar to N-Street Cohousing. This move was an interesting one, and for me, a compromise. We lost people, some of whom were really close friends of mine, and the people who shared the more communal and radical parts of the social vision. I think we lost me, too, though that wasn't immediately clear.

Somehow, I had missed the sweet spot between flexibility and sticking with a vision that inspires me. While the less structured model of community building, in which you let it unfold organical-

ly, has huge advantages financially, and also keeps open space for a spontaneity that fed a lot of my companions, it left me feeling flat and unmet in my heart's deeper needs.

the people I see every day have made a commitment to something bigger than ourselves and that we can lean into each other when we need it. At the bottom of it all, my ecologist's daughter's roots were too strong to ignore, and the chance to really experiment with sustainability outweighed the stubbornness that had kept me at it in New Mexico for five years.

In the fall of 2007, just a year after my group migrated to a city block in Albuquerque, I found myself at the 10-year reunion for Dancing Rabbit. I looked around and realized that the village dream I had found so compelling (and really, had been trying to re-create in the five interim years) was progressing along quite nicely while I was off somewhere

(continued on p. 78)



Establishing Community in Hard Times: A Swedish Case

By Robert Hall

Looking across the half-excavated fields of our ecovillage site in late spring, I wonder what we got ourselves into some nine months ago, just before the financial crisis hit Wall Street. Our attempt to build up an intentional community in Sweden could not have been more closely timed with the global financial crisis, which quickly spread through the banking system from the US to the Baltic states and into Sweden.

We launched our embryonic community in September 2008, just as the global economy was beginning to falter. In some ways this situation has both helped and hurt our community-building process, but we have not allowed it to shake us from our admittedly ambitious intentions. Luckily those of us who pay monthly rent to the cooperative—crucial for making loan repayments—have more stable incomes not affected by the growing number of layoffs especially in the auto industry. The global economic slowdown, on top of the broader environmental and climate crises, has perhaps been helpful in convincing people of

the need to find other, more sustainable ways of living.

That my wife Ingrid and I wanted to live in a community was obvious, but just three years ago it was not even clear in which country we should make it happen. Having stayed more than four years in Albania, we knew it was high time to move on, and finally to start living more in line with “the talk” and the books on the coffee table. In fact, we were in a relatively good position to make the transition to a sustainable lifestyle, but just like most people we have attachments to “modern decadence” that take a considerable amount of self-discipline to control or if possible rid oneself of. After various considerations, we chose to return to my wife’s native Sweden, where we were best able to utilize the advantages of a progressive, well-functioning welfare state to create the ecovillage intentional community we had been seeking elusively for two decades.

So how does one go about establishing an ecovillage community? Thanks to the progressive state, many visibly similar, often



Gabe and Robert on barn roof, September 2008.

The seller of the 80-acre forest six miles from town wanted double what we could pay—so our hopes were again crushed and we had to look elsewhere.

top-down substitutes for community living are already on offer, quelling the demand for grassroots-initiated alternative communities. Squeaky clean cohousing associations, modern housing cooperative estates, agricultural cooperatives, often initiated by government-supported national federations, are commonplace, and the critical mass to create alternative communities that one finds in the US, Germany, or the UK just never is sufficient in Sweden. And creating a community anywhere is often a lengthy ordeal that we really wanted to short-circuit.

I managed to get a job in Stockholm while the rest of the family decided they wanted to live on our home island of

Gotland, a picturesque historic and insular province in the middle of the Baltic Sea. Immediately on moving to the island—from which I started weekly five-hour commutes by ferry—we decided to found the Gotland Ecovillage Association, based solely on a membership of my own nuclear family. However, we realized that this step was perhaps not the right way to build community, so we shelved the unregistered association and started to network with others in the local community who might be interested in the same goal of an ecovillage community. The municipality helped with names of other people who had asked about ecovillages. The local health food shop became a key contact point in finding others. While all my energy was being used to commute to Stockholm, and later to Kyiv, Ukraine, my wife was able to network with other associations and people on the island. After six months, we had a core of four families and another five-ten families and individuals on the periphery. We decided then to establish Gotland Eco-village Network. One of the core individuals, Peter, worked with Markus to establish a web portal for ecologic living, www.ekobogotland.se, documenting examples that already existed on the island financed by European Union rural development LEADER funds. Ingrid and Liselotte worked to organize excursions to these existing examples. However, the main work was to find land for a village and at the same time get to know each other more to see if we really had the same vision. We felt that it was entirely OK if we should realize in the process that we were in fact striving after different community visions and separate into two or more sub-groups, established at different sites—for we would still then have the network of ecovillages I hoped for. We

all agreed upon a list of criteria, and then searched, asked around, got land maps, and called owners from the phone book. The network grew to 30 interested, even if only about nine people paid membership dues.

After a year and a half, I was able to get a job transfer to the island, and soon afterwards, Ingrid got a good job locally. This enabled us to intensify the search for land, and I felt urgency in finding a place to live out all the ideas we had always talked about. At the same time, others in the network had new problems with employment or personal life that caused them to pull back from the main search effort of what my biologist son labeled the “alpha group.” When “alpha group” finally found a perfect property, we were down to just two families. But the seller of the 80-acre forest six miles from town wanted double what we could pay—so our hopes were again crushed and we had to look elsewhere. Then a small farm without the desired forest but just four miles from town, much closer to the coast, came up on the internet, to be auctioned off by the estate of the deceased owner. We finally had a fair chance! With our vision of a community we should be able to compete with others interested in the dilapidated farm. Then the other family left “alpha group” on the eve of the internet auction, leaving just our family. After nearly two years of networking, in the end we were alone when we had to make the critical decisions. We did not know that some businesses would be bidding against us, and the price soon surpassed what we thought we were willing to pay. Should we drop out or dare raise our bid? We did continue, but each bid was a crisis decision. Finally the real estate agent called and said the owners had stopped the bidding and wished to



While we wanted to roll up our sleeves and jump into the practical work, we knew that communication and networking were actually more crucial.

offer the property to us. They knew their mother would have wanted it kept as a family farm rather than become a golf course or tire warehouse.

Within a few hours of receiving the offer to buy, we founded Suderbyn Cooperative Society, consisting of just our family, on May 8, 2008. Our friends in the network offered their names so we could have enough adults to legally register the society. This was not the way we wanted

it to develop, but the cooperative society would facilitate taking in new members that we felt would come once the dust settled and they could calmly decide on buying into the cooperative-owned ecovillage property. Our first event inviting in the network to the property brought only one couple that wished us the best of luck.

We had plenty to do registering the cooperative, finding eco- and ethical financ-

ing, and organizing all the due diligence work to take over the beautiful property with its very run-down buildings. While we wanted to roll up our sleeves and jump into the practical work, we knew that communication and networking were actually more crucial in getting a community going than laboring alone. We had bought a similar farm on the island 12 years previously and in the end sold it due to the social isolation it created.

Utilizing the network's web portal, we were able to create invaluable web pages for the new ecovillage project to be seen. This was complemented by getting listed with ic.org, GEN, Eurotopia, and the Swedish site www.alternativ.nu. Just weeks after my family and one university student, Disa, moved in at the beginning of September 2008, we received an international work camp of 10 volunteers from Service Civil International for a two-week work-stay. The work camp not only gave us practical help, but created the atmosphere of the international intentional community I had longed for. While it lasted only the two weeks, news of our ecovillage project had been advertised around the world in several dozen languages. The work camp also gave us good local press, which led to growing curiosity by the islanders. The municipality asked if we could receive a twin city energy-interested group from the Netherlands. We had somehow become recognized by the local authorities as a grassroots project worth visiting, even if it all was still mostly on paper.

In November we organized a permaculture introductory course for local and mainland Swedes interested in the ecovillage project. We brought in qualified trainers from Denmark and southern Sweden. We succeeded in gathering 20 participants. While we had hoped the course would be an injection of new members and project activists, it gave us one new member and a few activists. This was the second major effort to build up a broader group behind the initiative, and it seemed to not really succeed. A third of the participants requested to pay in our alternative currency, Kufic grivna, which we created on-the-spot to accommodate

all those interested but who could not pay in national currency. Several of these interested had become or were becoming unemployed during autumn 2008, but saw ecovillage living as a possible way out of looming private financial hard times. Financially and physically, the course took resources from other investments, but we felt it was a necessary statement about what type of community we were trying to establish and thus which type of individuals we were seeking. All the sweat and long hours spent creating the training room in the dilapidated barn also resulted in a permanent exhibition to show visitors what we were trying to do.

A month later we held an Open House in the training room for the neighbors and got a good response. Almost all of our neighbors came, as well as many from the nearest town that had seen the TV report which came as a follow-up to the course. Despite the Scandinavian winter, we tried to keep the development process going with monthly “working weekends” and at the same time continue the communication efforts though Powerpoint® presentations and guided tours whenever asked. And, impressively, people came and helped out digging ditches despite darkness and falling snow.

As spring 2009 approached, it was time for more serious investment, even if we have little money. We planned the development of a huge forest food garden and the vegetable garden. The first-mentioned had to be significant: our wind-whipped land had been flattened after centuries of plowing; the Alaskan latitude demanded tailoring the land to deal with the cold; and the noise and lack of privacy caused by the highway that tangents our western property line had to be mitigated. The solution was constructing seven large sun traps consisting of earthen embankments 6 ft. tall, 16 ft. wide, and installed as 150 ft.-diameter horseshoes forming a chain diagonally across the property. Thanks to the slowdown in the construction industry, we got a good price on the excavation work. The excavations, the large solar cooker reflector from Switzerland, and the velomobile from Germany gave us a swell of media coverage which resulted in

a rise in requests for study visits.

So while the community has still not developed as hoped, we continue to develop the site with the funds and labor available. We keep a high profile to attract the right types of members; it also serves to scare away those who do not really share our vision. And a number of candidates are in touch with us. We have seen that subdividing the property and selling off lots would allow us to develop the land quickly. But would it give us the community we were seeking? We don't think so. So we continue the slow

route of not adapting to the mainstream demand, and accept that our community will develop in due time. For us, creating a clearer profile of what we are about is the most prioritized investment, so that those who share our ideas will be able to find us. ❁

Robert Hall is a native Californian gone Swedish, father of three, and currently working for the Swedish development aid agency, Sida. His free-time activities include permaculture, solar cooking, and the Swedish cycling movement.



Joel Gson Hall



William Hederman

*Top: Erik and Fabian carry out seedlings for planting, May 2009.
Above: Work camp meal, September 2008.*

SOMERVILLE ECOVILLAGE: Culture and Creating Spaces

By Vida Carlino

In a changing world full of unclear challenges and conflicting viewpoints, people are choosing to re-investigate the ideas of community living. People are looking at their quality of life and asking, “Is this what I really want?”

In my experience a community is a diverse group sharing a common understanding, and the more they share and contribute, the richer the community becomes. After all, community is not something we try to get to or be, it is how we live. People are drawn to community living for individual reasons—social, economic, political, environmental, or any number of others—but once engaged they have the opportunity to share these differences and influence the collective. It is through this kind of sharing that the culture of Somerville Ecovillage emerged.



This page and next: Somerville's wine-making event, February 2006.

Somerville Ecovillage started with people first. In fact, the physical environment is not yet built, yet we have a vibrant community scattered throughout Perth and surrounding areas. After the perfect site for Somerville Ecovillage was located (in 2002), the problem of financing the acquisition seemed daunting. But then the perfect solution manifested, where parties interested in living the vision were asked to loan funds to purchase the land: \$1.1 million in total. Not only are community members involved and dedicated, they also have a strong sense of ownership.

In a culture that embraces the wisdom of the crowd, along with a good dose of professionalism, the community gathered to review all commitments and intentions expressed in our documents and publications, to draw out the collective vision and the value statements.

Somerville Ecovillage Vision:

A vibrant village where community flourishes, in which every person is supported and contributes in balance with a sustainable ecological ethic.

This vision and the associated values are the foundation for how we relate to each other, the natural environment, and the world. They are by no means rules. Instead they are set guidelines on how we would like to live. They are a beacon on how to Walk our Talk.

We always believed the topic of cats and dogs at Somerville would be difficult to address. That is why we left it until June 2005. The day arrived, and gathered in a large circle sat 73 members. The question was asked: “Do cats and dogs belong at Somerville?” It was a difficult and emotional gathering as individuals voted “No,” knowing that they were saying goodbye to their beloved pets. This selfless decision was based on what is best for Somerville and the natural environment and not what is best for the individual. This moving experience was a living example of common understanding at its best.

As a community we have experienced many challenges. In the early stages of the project, financial constraints could have crippled Somerville, but instead, many individuals with the required expertise restructured their work commitments so they could work diligently on the project. For some, this entailed moving to Chidlow, the nearest town. This was a major commitment and lifestyle change given that success was not assured.

As we worked together in creating our dream, unseen opportunities emerged, individual skills and expertise increased, and new career paths opened.

It took up to five years for these people to be remunerated for their time and effort.

During this period the community collectively developed the village design, building guidelines, bylaws, and governance model. Our community is blessed with members with diverse skills and expertise and willingness to contribute. As we worked together in creating our dream, unseen opportunities emerged, individual skills and expertise increased, and new career paths opened. Some people who had never previously worked in the areas of sustainability, community development, administration, marketing, and finance were now employed in such positions. It is our strong belief that every person has capabilities and talents, and having a good life depends on whether we have the opportunity to use them. This opportunity has been enhanced for many community members of Somerville.

It is one thing to talk community, but without the opportunity to engage and participate, it is just words. At Somerville we have focused on creating spaces for the community to experience each other. This may be as simple as a place to loiter with intent, or as specific as the “Nemeton,” a place for quiet contemplation and meditation.

Our famous yellow shed is the focal point for much celebration and the home of Somerville Sundays, which are held each month and are our main vehicle for project updates, visioning, and dealing with the many issues related to creating a world-class ecovillage. In fact, many events have transformed into rituals and customs, like our February water fight or making Somerville Red Wine. We inevitably have formal committees and a management board consisting of delegated representatives, and all meetings are open to any community member. Somerville operates within an open and transparent philosophy. It is through creating spaces for participation that the community has opportunity to contribute and evolve.

It is through all this “doing” that we have created “The Somerville Way,” the living culture of our community. We have walked beside and stood on the shoulders of many, including each other. We have been empowered by the collective wisdom of all those who participate. We have dreamed, shared, experienced, pooled resources, struggled, and celebrated. The Somerville Way (as expressed in our documents) reminds us of where we came from, informs us of where we are and what we are doing, and guides us into the future. In this diverse community, the common understanding provides a platform for dialogue and communication, where doing more of what works is the key.

In this time of continual project delays, employment insecurity, and a tightening financial system, people are being forced



All photos courtesy of Vida Carlino



to re-evaluate. Is this what I really want? I strongly believe that community strength is directly proportional to the number of people who contribute their abilities to the well-being of the community, and as this well-being expands, so does the well-being of the individuals. These attributes then integrate into all aspects of life.

It is through community that we have the greatest opportunity and influence to live in a culture that we truly value and respect. ❁

Vida Carlino's experience of 25 years in business and her passion for creating low-impact and inclusive communities are key drivers in the concept and establishment of Somerville Ecovillage. With several years of community research and training both in Australia and overseas, she has used her business, health, and social science skills to contribute to the development of the community enterprise model and the social and governance structure for Somerville.

Somerville Ecovillage: Statutory Approvals and Finance

By Karen Moore

The idea of an ecovillage just outside of Perth, Western Australia, was first conceived in 2000. As we are now in 2009 and still waiting to commence infrastructure works, the gestation can be likened to that of an elephant! We are assuming that the numerous challenges we have experienced mean that we are giving birth to a beautiful, magnificent, and long-lived creation.

The first challenge was finding a suitable piece of land. After an extensive search and whilst lamenting that the search was not proving fruitful, one of our members told us of a farm at Chidlow that was on the market. This had not shown up during the search process as the land comprised seven separate titles and individually the lots were not large enough. However, the combined lots gave us just what we were looking for, a gently sloping north-facing 162 hectares (399 acres), with water on site, predominantly bush, and walking distance to an existing town. Members completed scoring sheets assessing the suitability of the land with respect to solar orientation, water availability, trees, landscape, and other factors, confirming that this was the right site for us. This process was also a good demonstration of the advantages of “tapping into the wisdom of the crowd.”

Now we had found the land (April 2002), the next challenge was to raise the \$1.1 million to buy it. This is where our small, existing community rallied. We had numerous information sessions at different locations throughout the metropolitan area, and Open Days out on the land (the then owner was very understanding and sympathetic to the cause). All of this was done with volunteer labour, low cost advertising, homemade goodies, members’ talents, and great enthusiasm. I can vividly remember one Open Day where we had to extend the parking area as we were overwhelmed with the number of visitors (over 400 attended); and an information session where, after an interesting method of entry (we had to break the window to get in, then call someone to come and replace the window), we had an incredible day with about 100 people attending. Suffice to say, we (65 families) did it, and with no external funding. People felt inspired,

and with a sense of trust in the project and project team, community members loaned money to purchase the land. This was an amazing experience of common purpose and community building.

Now the real journey begins... In April 2003 not only was the first baby born at Somerville Ecovillage but it was the first time the Shire Councillors met to discuss the project, the outcome being that a motion was passed to support the Somerville Ecovillage. September 2003 saw the For-



Review of lots, east of future Village Center.



mal Rezoning Submission lodged with the Shire of Mundaring. Rezoning approval was finally gazetted on 14 August 2007 after the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure at the time, Alannah MacTiernan, overturned the Planning Commission recommendations on two occasions, indicating her support of the project. Mind you, a number of us did “stalk” the Minister at a number of public functions so she became very aware of the project—one way of raising your profile!

Whilst we were waiting for the rezoning approval, and in between “stalking” the Minister, work continued on the Local Subdivision and Infrastructure Plan (LSIP). The LSIP was submitted on 19 May 2006 and was approved at the full Mundaring Shire council meeting on 28 August 2007. The LSIP was subsequently sent to the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) for its final endorsement on 18 September 2007; this endorsement was gained as part of the mediation process through the State Administrative Tribunal (see below).



An opening circle celebrating The Lorax by Dr Seuss. Above: Children at tree planting ceremony in community veggie patch. Top right corner: Open Day, tour of the land, overlooking the dam.



All photos by Neil Robertson

In April 2008 we initiated action at the State Administrative Tribunal as we had been advised that the subdivision application that was submitted on 27 June 2007 had stalled at the Shire of Mundaring. At the hearing in May, the mediator/judge ordered all the necessary government agencies to be a part of the mediation process and indicated that a resolution should be easy to achieve. I found it encouraging that once all the relevant parties were together and gained an understanding of what we are trying to achieve, there was a willingness to assist the process. The result of the mediation was that conditional subdivision approval was granted on 3 June 2008. On 7 October 2008 the Shire of Mundaring issued the approval for commencement of infrastructure works.

Throughout the journey we have celebrated the milestones, big and small, with community events involving food, wine, and music. Events such as the Home-stretch Celebration (in an old shed on the land before we even owned it), Black Tie Dinners, and Bush Dances are fondly remembered and have helped cement the community spirit.

One requirement of the LSIP was to have a lot layout. Ian McHarg’s Overlay process was used to exclude areas for development, and assuming that all residents would want motor vehicle access to their homes, a fairly linear lot design was created. The community members were not happy with this design, so another survey followed. It transpired that not all residents required vehicle access, which enabled us to alter the design to the clus-



*Left: Olive tree in the orchard.
Above: Tallulah at herb spiral in
community veggie patch.*

*Finally we got all our statutory approvals in place,
civil works contract agreed, contractors waiting to start
on site—and the worldwide credit crisis hit!
Our existing financier withdrew support.*

ter format we have today—another example of the advantages of “tapping into the wisdom of the crowd” and the importance of community consultation.

During the process of amalgamating the original seven titles into one lot required for subdivision, we discovered that there were potentially unexploded ordnances (UXO) on one of the lots. Chidlow had been an army training camp for new recruits during World War II. Experts were called in from Queensland, the property was given the “all clear,” and the community soldiered on.

It has been an extremely long process to get rezoning and subdivision approvals, largely due to our development being unique and other parties needing to gain an understanding of exactly what we are doing. Our requirements haven’t always been the right shape to get the ticks in the right boxes as easily as wished for. We have engaged in a lot of negotiation to ensure the integrity of our vision is not compromised. Our perseverance has been rewarded with Somerville Ecovillage being awarded a Special Commendation from the Planning Institute of Australia in the category of Environmental Planning and Conservation in November 2008.

As evidence of the commitment of members to something greater than themselves, not only have many members have been involved for seven years, but also from 2002 to 2004 members worked on a volunteer and “conditional fee” basis. This has certainly helped the cashflow. We are blessed to have a deep talent pool of high calibre, skilled professionals including engineers, accountants, and health care professionals on whose expertise we can draw. One community member dubbed 2005 as the year

of “death by Powerpoint®”!

Finally we got all our statutory approvals in place, civil works contract agreed, contractors waiting to start on site—and the worldwide credit crisis hit! This resulted in our existing financier withdrawing support for our second round of funding for the infrastructure works. The community has rallied yet again and provided further short-term funding. I found the experience of sitting in circle in February with members, exchanging different ideas on how we may be able to obtain the finance we need, moving and very humbling. Knowing that there is such a tremendous support base to tap into is food for the soul.

One outcome of the February meeting was to start a veggie patch. So, despite the finance challenge, work commenced and we have a blossoming garden with a Chook Castle (rather than a hen house!). Doing physical work alongside fellow community members and working things out in a team environment has confirmed for me the reasons I joined this wonderful community, Somerville Ecovillage.

We are yet to secure the finance for the infrastructure works, but as the riddle says: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. ❁

Karen Moore has used her 16 years’ experience in senior finance roles to assist the Somerville Ecovillage project as Finance Co-ordinator and Company Secretary. Involved with the Somerville Ecovillage development since December 2001, she has a reputation for “getting things done.”

The Transition Initiative Comes to Cohousing

By Sonja Eriksson

How will the rapid depletion of fossil fuels, especially oil, affect our society, and how can we plan for the inevitable change in lifestyle? The Transition Initiative attempts to find solutions to both climate change and peak oil (defined in Wikipedia as the point in time, likely soon or already passed, when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline). A Transition Town, which can also mean a village, an island, or even a county, develops methods for a local community to become sustainable through reduced carbon emissions and diminished reliance on fossil fuels.

A group from our cohousing community, Oak Creek Commons in Paso Robles, California, has become active in the Transition Town movement. Even before our cohousing project of

36 households was completed in 2004, we agreed on our strong intention to respect the environment by being sensitive to the interconnections among all things. As a cohousing community, we are already committed to using less energy and to sharing resources, but we have also taken specific steps that lead to a more sustainable future.

Almost three years ago our community sponsored a workshop on climate change. We invited members of the public, including two progressive candidates for City Council. Neither of them thought they would win votes on a platform that included climate change. They told us that change has to come from the bottom up and encouraged us to influence the local government by showing that the public had a genuine desire for the city to consider climate change in its policies and decisions.



Orchard workshop No. 1: "The Rock Brigade."

Photos courtesy of Sonja Eriksson



Our lives will inevitably undergo radical change, but if we plan for this change we can make it smoother. While we recognize the challenges, we also need to envision how attractive living in a sustainable society would be.

These comments inspired community member Jim Cole to establish a nonprofit corporation called The Institute for Sustainable Living. Its purpose is to plan conferences and other events locally to promote sustainable living and business practices in cooperation with business and government leaders. An engineer who has worked in the area of energy efficiency for several decades, Jim is also currently a consultant with the California Energy Commission, where his team works to identify new ways to integrate renewable energy into the California electric system.

As one of its first activities, the Institute brought together members of Oak Creek Commons and of the larger community to form a book discussion group to study sustainability. Jim Cole and his wife, Norma, learned about the Transi-

tion Town initiative at an energy conference at the Findhorn community in Scotland, where they met Rob Hopkins, author of *The Transition Handbook: From oil dependency to local resilience*, and other members of communities involved in the Transition Initiative. The Transition Town movement, which started in England and has spread to other countries, emphasizes building a local economy, re-creating lost skills, producing food locally, and even creating local currencies.

Prompted by Jim's enthusiasm about the Transition Initiative, the book discussion group members read *The Transition Handbook* and became active in the Transition Town movement. Carolyn Fergoda, a member of the group from the beginning, describes the Transition Initiative as an exciting opportunity "to plan for major change on all levels—personal,

social, economic, political." I joined the group after reading *The Transition Handbook* on my own. Becoming involved in the challenges of climate change and peak oil on a local level seems manageable when you work with a group. *The Handbook* lays out a sequence of steps to follow for groups that want to promote the Transition Initiative concept in their communities.

The Institute sponsored a Transition Town workshop in January, held at Dancing Deer Ranch, a nearby intentional community. Over 40 people attended, including nine people from our cohousing community and one person from another cohousing community. To prepare for the workshop, we were encouraged to watch videos and read books on related topics.

The workshop and the required reading and videos made it clear that suburbs, big box stores, and industrial agriculture are not sustainable. We will not be able to continue to transport food and other necessities over long distances, but will have to rely more on our local economy and relearn skills that have been lost. I participated in a small-group discussion about using food produced within 100 miles of where you live, except, for now, you are allowed three "cheat foods"—foods that are produced outside of that range. A couple of women in the group, both married with families, said they want to try it.

I used to think that "they" will come up with a replacement when we run out of cheap fossil fuels, but experts say that this is magical thinking and a form of denial. The alternative fuels we have developed so far are not sufficient to replace fossil fuels at current levels of use.

The transition from reliance on fossil fuels may provoke conflicts and even wars to compete for scarce resources. Our lives will inevitably undergo radical change, but if we plan for this change we can make it smoother. While we recognize the challenges, we also need to envision how attractive living in a sustainable society would be. Much of the farm work and other tasks will need to be done cooperatively—fostering social relations, ceremo-

nies, and rituals. James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Long Emergency*, believes that small towns surrounded by agriculture have the best chance of survival. Paso Robles is such a town, although the wine industry will have to change to include other crops.

Our transition town trainers recommended that, in attempting to engage the community, we first contact people who are already moving in the same direction, including other environmental groups. Reaching out to cohousing communities also seems natural to me, because we already do many of the things that make a community sustainable. Sharing resources and working as teams will become the norms in a transition town.

Our cohousing community incorporates many features of a transition town: energy-efficient buildings and appliances, recycling, an organic garden, an orchard, and a workshop we call the Creativity Center.

We planned our buildings at Oak Creek Commons with efficient heating and cooling systems. The temperature in Paso Robles often exceeds 100 degrees F in the summer, but the house I live in is so well insulated that my husband and I did not install air conditioning until last year, and could have been fairly comfortable without it.

We converted three parking spaces in our underground garage into the Creativity Center, used for woodworking and other crafts, which could become even more important in the future when we may need to make our own furniture and other household items.

Our organic garden provides vegetables and herbs all year. Our common meals often include produce from the garden, and we grow enough herbs for everyone to use. On Saturday mornings, we sometimes have our own farmers' market with produce like lettuce, carrots, radishes, and chard laid out on a table in the Common House. People can take what they want and pay what they think is fair. Nancy Scott organizes work parties for the garden and hopes that the money contributions eventually will pay for seeds and other garden supplies.

This past winter, after a year of planning, we planted an organic orchard with 15 fruit trees and a food forest. We published information about three Saturday workshops by word of mouth and through the media. Surprisingly, a dozen or more people who don't live here and who had never visited showed up to help and to learn how to create an orchard—an example of what can happen in a transition town when people get involved in each other's projects.

Whether or not one is convinced that we must "power down" for a new type of economy and lifestyle, I see no downside to being prepared. We have already witnessed a severe downturn in the economy,

which could be a signal that our society is not sustainable and that growth on the scale we have been used to can't continue. Cohousing and other intentional communities seem to be ideal partners for the Transition Initiative. We already have a community in place with shared resources and skills to help each other economically as well as emotionally to deal with the challenges that come with climate change and peak oil. ❁



Sonja Eriksson has been a member of Oak Creek Commons Cohousing in Paso Robles, California, since 2000.

For more information about Transition Towns, the following sources are helpful: www.transitiontowns.org; *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the 21st Century* by James Howard Kunstler; *Peak Everything: Waking Up to the Century of Declines* by Richard Heinberg; *A Crude Awakening: the Oil Crash* (video).

Our cohousing community incorporates many features of a transition town: energy-efficient buildings and appliances, recycling, an organic garden, an orchard, and a workshop we call the Creativity Center.



Above: Orchard workshop No. 1: Joe Brenner and Kayla Wisdom team up. Opposite page: Orchard workshop No. 1: Cohousers and volunteers work together.



FOOD SECURITY IN COMMUNITY

By Blake Cothron

The theme of this issue is “Hard Times in Community” and there’s not much that’s harder than going hungry. Not that I’ve ever known real hunger or food scarcity, having grown up in the privileged US, with grocery-store aisles perennially overflowing with food (albeit food of questionable quality, but rarely was there any shortage). Now things are changing and we need to change too.

In the US and many other countries, the systems we’ve relied on for over a century, including agriculture, energy, and transportation, are in serious question. Many complex challenges confront agriculture. We face the real dangers of genetically engineered food, terminator seed technology, irradiation, pesticides, and vast soil degradation turning once fertile land into deserts. Regular outbreaks of food poisoning due to contaminated industrial produce reinforce the need for solutions to our current food systems. We have relied on petroleum to transport our food great distances and to produce the fertilizer and pesticides necessary to industrial agriculture. With petroleum a source of constant warfare, vast pollution, and dwindling in supply, big questions loom. How can intentional communities respond to issues of food security? What are the options available and what routes can your community take to becoming more food secure and sustainable?

Throughout my community explorations in the US and much online research, I’ve noticed that almost every intentional community shares one strong desire the world over: the desire to grow food. When humans start forming groups and settling into communities, they seem naturally to gravitate towards agriculture. Nearly every community I come across expresses food production as a goal.

Being an organic gardener myself, I love growing food. I believe that growing your own food is the safest and most assured form of food security available. It’s also the most affordable. Some intentional communities are richly agricultural, abundant places. In my explorations I’ve seen it done extremely well and I’ve also seen it done poorly or completely abandoned. What were the communities that were actively growing much of their own food doing right? What were some of the problems faced?

Growing your own food is the safest and most assured form of food security available. In my explorations I’ve seen it done extremely well and I’ve also seen it done poorly or completely abandoned.

I believe that in these uncertain and increasingly difficult times, every intentional community and in fact every community everywhere needs to start growing food. Homegrown food makes sense from every angle: better nutrition, better taste, greater connection to nature, exercise and fresh air, safer and more secure food supply, less land plowed under by mega-farms, more money for other things, less reliance on industry and petroleum...the list goes on. If looked at in this way, com-

munity food production positively impacts nearly every major issue facing humans today.

Growing food is an art and an intricate science. To grow good food you must LOVE what you are doing. It doesn't take machinery, lots of tools, expensive seeds, ideal conditions, or back-breaking labor. I've noticed that the communities actively growing food have several things in common, and it's not ideal climate, perfect soil, or big tractors. What were the successful gardening communities doing?

First of all they had the INTENTION to grow food. They got together and decided they shared an interest in growing food—that it was important to them and something they valued. They did not conclude that their soil was too poor, the growing season too short, or that it was too much work. They believed they could do it and they had a strong interest.

Second, they PLANNED. They researched what species would grow well in their area. They identified leaders in the community who would take on responsibility and oversee things. They perhaps hired teachers and permaculture designers to give insight and direction. They planned things carefully in advance. Planning and site selection are crucial and are mapped out well by most of the successful gardeners. Permaculture design principles are highly recommended and popular in communities.

Third, they STARTED. They did whatever was necessary; they cleared land, mowed fields, acquired seeds, built greenhouses, plowed the soil, and built beds. Once you start, food starts rolling in quickly. There must be initiation and subsequent dedication to obtain production.

Here are some key elements to incorporate and questions to ask to assure that the planning and execution stages succeed:

Identifying *what your community will eat* is a very important and often overlooked aspect of growing food in community. I've heard of people planting communal gardens with 50-foot rows of arugula. Who can eat 50 feet of arugula? Not these folks, as I heard most of it went to waste, along with all the work and resources to grow it. Is anyone going to eat all those beets, or all those brussel sprouts? What veggies will the cooks utilize? What would the kids like to eat? What can be preserved if there is an excess? Will anyone do it?

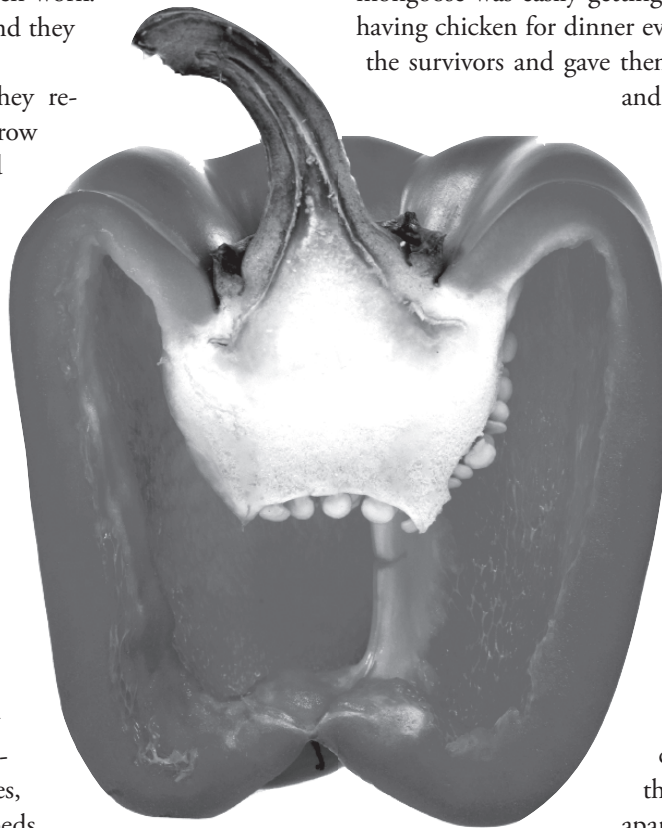
Animals often play important roles in food production systems. Animals generally take much more care than plants, so

be very realistic and plan for animals far in advance. Goats and cows can destroy entire gardens and orchards overnight, so make sure secure fencing is in place, or design pens for them. Do not rush introducing animals to your community. I once lived in a community with a woman who, out of her compassion, obtained several chickens, rescuing them from the frying pan when an industrial egg farm closed down. I tried to warn her about hastily getting these animals, but it went unheard and within a few days the chickens were here. She housed them in a dilapidated old shack that was hastily converted to a basic chicken coop. In a few days, she was horrified to find a bloody mess in the coop, and feathers everywhere. One of the chickens was dead. The next day: another. The day after that: another. A wily mongoose was easily getting into the inadequate structure and having chicken for dinner every night. She quickly rounded up the survivors and gave them all away, disappointed in herself

and feeling a bit foolish. Proper planning beforehand and knowledge about the realities of raising animals could have prevented this, and grown productive happy animals. Planning can predict and reduce conflicts, possible problems, and incompatibilities (such as a loose goat in a young orchard).

Communities are utilizing tree crops more and more as crucial elements in their food systems. What tree crops grow well in your climate? What do people desire? Will people be around to prune the apple trees every single year? Will anyone collect all the walnuts and pecans before the squirrels do? Are the trees planted the correct distance apart and far enough away from any houses or power lines? Will they be watered correctly as they establish? Carefully consider these things before a major planting is done.

I always urge people to *start small!* Successful community farms and gardens were generally small at first (or shrunk later), and are equivalent to the stable work force. By small, I mean start with a modest but meaningful goal of around 10-20 percent of the community's diet, unless the community has very experienced and hard working gardeners. Many times I've heard people in community say, "We would just love to have a garden!"—without being realistic that a garden takes *gardeners*. Gardens and orchards are not static elements to be installed, like a new building or a road. They are dynamic, living systems that take much care and skill to flourish. Before a garden or orchard is built, realistically consider how many stable and dedicated people will be there to take care of it. Start small enough so



that taking care of the garden and orchard is a fun, life-enhancing, and productive event, and not an overwhelming burden or overgrown mess. If the work force is small or inexperienced, focus on perennial vegetables and easy-to-care-for fruit and nut trees, such as (depending on your location and climate zone) mulberry, figs, citrus, avocado, persimmon, and berry bushes. Plenty of wonderful perennial vegetables require little care and live for many years. Native edibles are always a fine choice, and very easy.

Many communities once had abundant beautiful gardens but then lost the crucial element: the gardeners. I believe it is not sustainable for a community to have one or two gardeners. These people will eventually not be around, and then what will happen to the gardens and community food supply? Relying on purely outside labor, such as WWOOF volunteers to work the garden, is equally unsustainable. There is also the very common occurrence that someone plants something or makes a garden and then leaves the community, and it disappears. Oftentimes as well, some great garden or planting someone did in the past is destroyed or damaged by a (hopefully) well-meaning newcomer. I've heard of abundant asparagus patches yielding 100 pounds a year being dug up and discarded by the new gardener, and of raspberry patches being leveled when all someone with a mower saw was a mess of thorny bushes. This is why it is crucial to have stable gardeners or at least detailed garden maps and community-wide knowledge about community food production.

All the work involved can seem intimidating, so start with what feels comfortable. There is no big rush (as of yet), and moving with haste is a big mistake I've seen many make. However, the time to start (small) is definitely now! Having the attitude "We'll start when we need to" is like saying you'll learn CPR when someone is choking or learn to swim when you're drowning.

Careful planning and in-depth knowledge about your land is necessary, and only truly gleaned from staying in one place for years of observation. Start small and fun. Permaculture design describes planting gardens close by the kitchen for easy access, as well as combining vegetables, herbs, and fruits together to make beautiful, fun, and easy-to-care-for mixed plantings. The "lasagna bed" method of gardening describes ways to make fertile gardens with no tilling or digging whatsoever.

The best way to make food production sustainable is to get everyone involved. If you're trying to get community gardens going, talk with everyone and see what people would like to grow. Have work parties to build garden beds and plant trees. Let everyone know what is ripening, and when a homegrown

ingredient is featured in a meal. Get the children involved too; they can be picking berries and playing with worms while the adults dig and transplant. Make flower gardens that are inviting and places of peace. Put benches all around to invite people to sit and be with the gardens. Have everyone in the community plant a fruit tree.

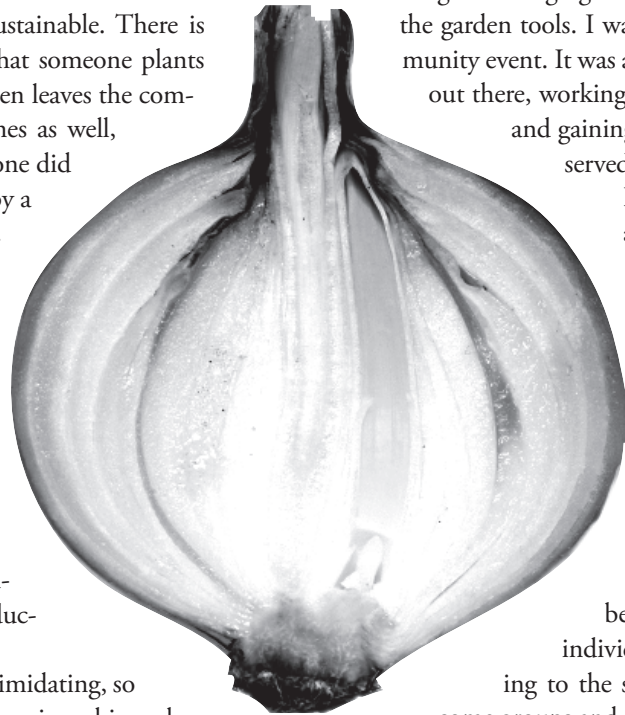
A shining example of this happens weekly in a Zen Buddhist community in which I lived in California. Every single Wednesday morning, after the 4:45 a.m. meditation, *every single person in the community* would simultaneously walk out into their large organic farm together, hoes and rakes in hand. There we would all silently cultivate the rows of bright colorful lettuce, Swiss chard, broccoli, cabbage, and carrots. It was wonderful; the early morning fog rolling around the pines and redwoods, the only sounds being birds singing and the gentle clicking and clanging of the garden tools. I was so impressed by this weekly community event. It was a great way to get every single person out there, working together, watching the plants grow, and gaining a deeper connection with the food served to them straight from their fields.

I believe the only long-term sustainable form of food security in community is to get nearly everyone involved in some aspect. This includes people growing the food, cooking community meals, watering gardens, pulling weeds, discussing strategies, picking fruit; there's something that everyone can do. Some communities have shared gardens where each person gets a personal growing bed or two and the garden is tended individually, with most of the produce going to the shared kitchen. This works well for some groups and can be fun. Trees can also be planted as memorials for big events, such as births and deaths, community breakthroughs, and celebrations. This gives connection and meaning to the planting and gets people involved.

An intentional community can help the greater community through food production in many ways. Some communities give away excess production to local food banks and shelters. Through seed exchanges, which are free seed giveaways, communities can distribute regionally-adapted non-GMO seed to local people (and also obtain it). (We should utilize seed exchanges while we still can; I've heard that they are actually illegal in parts of Europe and that the Monsanto corporation is working hard to make it that way in the US.) Groups can offer classes and workshops on permaculture design, seed-saving, aquaculture systems, beekeeping, and raising animals, as outreach to the local communities and as a right-livelihood income source.

Buying locally also increases food security. Purchasing local organic food helps reweave the local food systems and support

(continued on p. 79)





Svanholm in Denmark Goes Carbon-Neutral

*By Christina Adler Jensen,
translated by Pauline Kreiken and Nicholas Mickelsen*

Svanholm, Denmark's largest intentional community and ecovillage, is a collective with a multi-functional agriculture operation, including dairy cows and sheep, and home to about 140 people. We began in 1978 when our founders bought 400 hectares (998 acres) on the island of Zealand, 55 kilometers (34 miles) from Copenhagen. Pioneers of organic farming in Denmark, we were instrumental in introducing organic dairy and other organic foods to Danish stores and supermarkets. About half of us work on site, in maintenance, administration, farming, cooking, teaching in our kindergarten, and the like, and half have jobs in the local area. As we are an income-sharing community, 80 percent of each person's income goes to Svanholm for taxes and common living expenses such as maintenance, food, electricity, and childcare; 20 percent is kept for personal use. We're also asset-sharing; new people contribute their assets to the community when they join, and get them back if they leave. We make decisions by consensus.

We have off-grid energy and other ecologically sustainable systems. We currently produce 68 percent of our own electrical and heating energy needs through two wind generators and a slightly archaic wood-chip furnace (fueled mainly by wood chips from our own trees). Unfortunately, because we're in a relatively isolated rural location, we're largely dependent on gasoline-fueled cars for work and leisure activities, which burdens our conscience. In fact, 14 percent of Svanholm's annual energy use is from driving cars! But this is about to change.

In the future, electric cars will be available in Denmark at a relatively decent price. Electrical recharging stations will be built along the entire Danish road system, ensuring a smooth transition from gasoline-powered vehicles to electric ones.

To power our electric cars in the winter, we installed a Stirling engine from the Stirling DK company in Denmark (www.sd.econtent.dk). This is a type of electric generator first developed by Scottish inventors Robert and James Stirling in 1816. The Stirling engine converts heat energy into mechanical power by alternately compressing and expanding a fixed quantity of air or other gas at different temperatures. (We use helium.) This pushes a flywheel around in a circle, which passes a copper coil back and forth through a magnetic field, which generates electricity. See animated graphics of different kinds of Stirling engines on Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stirling_Engine).

Unlike internal combustion engines, Stirling engines are quieter, more reliable, and have lower maintenance requirements. A Stirling engine costs more initially and is usually larger and heavier than a comparable internal combustion engine which produces the same amount of electricity, but a Stirling engine's lower maintenance costs make up for it.

We plan to burn woodchips from our forest to power the Stirling engine. Roughly 20 percent of the energy produced by the woodchips will be converted into electric power; the rest will be used for heating hot water. (We plan to install huge water tanks next to the engine.) The amount of woodchips required for this new project will be, on average, the same as that required by our current wood furnace. In the summer we'll get hot water from solar hot water panels, and electricity from our wind generators.

This way in the winter we'll provide our community with both hot water and electricity through a CO₂-neutral source, since trees yield only the amount of CO₂ which they absorb through their lifetime. (Trees would emit an equal amount of CO₂ through the process of breaking down if they were left to decompose on the forest floor.)

With a Stirling engine we'll burn 10 to 15 percent of our woodchips, and save an additional 15 to 20 percent on energy resources by replacing our hot water pipes with new, better-insulated pipes. The result should be a diminished use of woodchips and a more sustainable supply of electricity. In the near future we will also replace our out-of-date wind generators.

In December 2009 Denmark will be the site of the United Nations' Conference on Climate Change, hosted by the Danish government. The 1997 Kyoto conference on climate change attracted international notice; perhaps journalists from around the world will visit Svanholm during this one and finally put "ecovillages" on the map! ❁

Christina Adler Jensen is a journalist who has lived at Svanholm for three years. Pauline Kreiken and Nicholas Mickelsen also live at Svanholm. For more information about Svanholm: www.svanholm.dk, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svanholm.

A version of this article appeared in the July 2009 issue of Diane Leafé Christian's Ecovillages newsletter (www.EcovillageNews.org).



Making Home

Home Is Not Just a Place

I had always considered Foxboro, Massachusetts my home. After all, Foxboro brought me up. I attended elementary school there, edited *The Fox* at Foxboro High, received my college acceptance letter, watched the New England Patriots practice behind the old mental health hospital, and fell asleep every night to the factory hum of the Foxboro Company.

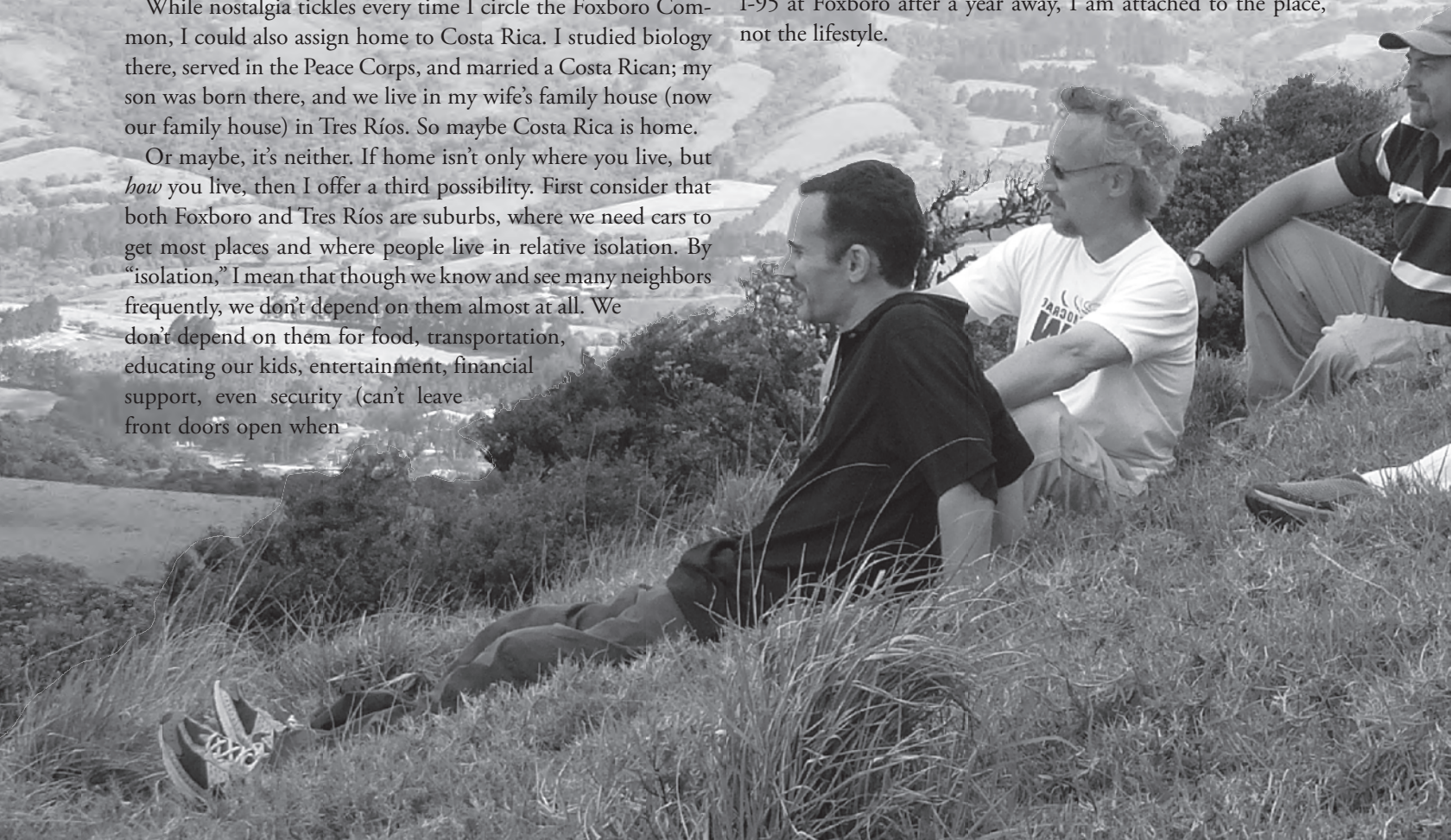
Once at college, I studied biology in Costa Rica and contracted the international bug. It drove me to live in Honduras, Guatemala, and now Costa Rica and to work as far away as Indonesia, Africa, and Argentina. Despite these sojourns, though, Foxboro should still be home: my mom still lives there, my driver's license still declares Baker Street, and I am a Patriots fan come bitter and sweet.

While nostalgia tickles every time I circle the Foxboro Common, I could also assign home to Costa Rica. I studied biology there, served in the Peace Corps, and married a Costa Rican; my son was born there, and we live in my wife's family house (now our family house) in Tres Ríos. So maybe Costa Rica is home.

Or maybe, it's neither. If home isn't only where you live, but *how* you live, then I offer a third possibility. First consider that both Foxboro and Tres Ríos are suburbs, where we need cars to get most places and where people live in relative isolation. By "isolation," I mean that though we know and see many neighbors frequently, we don't depend on them almost at all. We don't depend on them for food, transportation, educating our kids, entertainment, financial support, even security (can't leave front doors open when

we're not home anymore). We can't depend on them when we're sick, to attend our funerals or weddings. They usually can't fix our shoes, mend our clothes, or clean our oil furnaces. We depend on the Town Hall far more than on people who live within a shout. By this definition, the nearby supermarket is a better neighbor; definitely the Verizon internet connection; and even the stores around Gillette Stadium.

Many people have studied the collapse of the American community, especially in the suburbs (for example, Robert Putman's classic *Bowling Alone*), where suburban life often exceeds urban life in environmental damage, depression, loneliness, obesity, and well, bowling alone. This lifestyle grew from modern seeds of autonomy, mobility (hence the "auto-mobile"), and individualism. Thus while I feel happy butterflies when getting off I-95 at Foxboro after a year away, I am attached to the place, not the lifestyle.



In fact, the only lifestyle to which I do feel attachment doesn't even exist. One that my and several other families here in Costa Rica labor to create. This lifestyle, which has no associated physical place, not yet, is embodied in an ecovillage we hunger to create. This is my third possibility for home.

Intentional Communities Movement Explodes

A common vision, set of values, and goals lend communities their "intention." Their founders together envision, design, plan, build, and co-manage these communities. We might say communities without intention arise from a salsa of individual interests of for-profit developers, office-bound city planners, government-run housing projects, or random congregations of homeowners, each of whom builds a house in the same vicinity according to personal goals; few if any involve extending their family to include surrounding neighbors or living a style more ecological and socially responsible.

Our ecovillage envisions a Costa Rican community (but also including foreigners) that models the best low-impact green technologies such as alternative energy, green architecture, and recycling, combined with the best social construction methods such as intentionally designed culture, conflict resolution, con-

sensus-based governance, and equitable distribution of power. It uses the best communication, outreach, and training techniques in Latin America, so that Costa Rican communities, both urban and rural, can find relevance, inspiration, and guidance in improving their own capacity to learn and adapt in a rapidly changing world. There's more to it than that, of course, so please visit www.querencia.co.cr.

Citizens Create Community They Truly Desire

But you can't just carve an ecovillage out of our standard societal base material. Whether Foxboro or Tres Ríos, neighbors expect too often that others will do for them. We depend on government to supply our basic needs (water, electricity, security), Hollywood to package our entertainment, non-profits to fight our causes, and supermarkets to prepare our food even before we've decided what to buy. We have become nations of consumers where producers lay out options, bombard us with marketing messages, and we usually consume that which tingles our tastes at the time. This applies as much to buying cereals as it does to electing presidents. When our tastes change, we vote for a different cereal.

To create an in-



Photos courtesy of Jon Kohn

Some of our community on a property reconnaissance trip in Costa Rica.

tentional community, as I'm now dawning to discover, requires that its members *create* community, not consume it.

Founders must envision a future they really want to create, organize people, and seek a way to survive reality's obstacle course to get there. Not yet do ecovillage companies direct-mail us, stylize different ecovillages to meet ever smaller market niches, from whose shelves we choose. And with my seminal experience at creating an ecovillage, I've discovered the sweat of true citizens.

As Peter Block, organizational consultant, says, being a citizen has little to do with voting, a consumer act of choosing among competing products

Creating community with others requires energy, patience, inspiration, open-mindedness, creativity, and especially persistence.

(campaigns) in a political marketplace (though we must vote). Being a citizen isn't about banding together only when we're pissed off or threatened by a "Not-In-My-Back-Yard!" development (though often we have to do this). Being a citizen certainly isn't about just following laws (we certainly must do this). Being a citizen is about creating the society we truly want to live in. Sometimes that comes through resistance, most of the time through inspired and painstaking creation. Alexis de Tocqueville, the great French observer of American democracy in the 1820s–30s, noted that "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens."

He also noted that "The English often perform great things singly, whereas the Americans form associations for the smallest undertakings." This may be why the intentional communities movement thrives in the US.

Home We Must Create

Certainly many people in Foxboro and Tres Ríos do participate in associations that have yielded admirable and citizen-worthy gains for their towns far in excess of anything I can inscribe on my tombstone. I still don't see a citizen when I look into the mirror, only when I look into my dreams. Yet I do realize now that, compared with being part of a consuming community, creating community with others requires far more energy, patience, inspiration, open-mindedness, creativity, and especially persistence.

Seen this way, then, home isn't a place that we inherit—home is a place that we create. ❁

Jon Kohl is a writer on sustainability and natural resource issues as well as a founding member of Querencia Costa Rica, in formation. He currently lives with his family in Costa Rica. To contact him or learn more about his writings and experiences, visit www.jonkohl.com.



Cohousing for Non-Cohousers

It's been my hope to be able to live in a cohousing community since the early '90s, when I first heard about the concept while living in a three bedroom colonial on half an acre in small-town western Pennsylvania. After many relocations, life changes, and meetings, I finally moved into my one bedroom condo in Camelot Cohousing in a small town not far from Boston two months ago. There are also over 20 other households now living in our brand new community, many of whom participated in the arduous development process, which took about six years from first formal meeting to move-in. While it's clear to me that most members of Camelot put in extensive time and energy to make our community a reality, I have also been aware that some of the same neighbors were dubious about the merits of making a life in cohousing versus living in a more typical

single-family home or condo. I took the opportunity to interview three neighbors about how they came to their decision and how they are finding the experience so far.

A Practical Choice

John, 38, is the father of two young children, and, like many in Camelot, works in the high tech industry in eastern Massachusetts. He grew up in different places, with significant time in South Carolina and in suburban communities. As his wife Kim reports, he retains that southern friendliness, and I felt immediately comfortable settling into the kitchen table as he set the baby monitor and dug into a bowl of bean soup. He and Kim were acquainted with several people in the founding group, from whom they first heard about the project.

"Given a brief description of the idea of cohousing, I wouldn't have said, oh, that's for me," John related. Years before, he'd known a friend who had lived in a cooperative household in Cambridge. Although in many ways, including financially, it seemed like a great situation, he was aware of a tension in the atmosphere, and the housemates' frequent attempts to get away from it. "There was not a lot of personal space, and it seemed like people had to subscribe to a set of beliefs," he explained.

Some members were initially dubious about the merits of making a life in cohousing versus living in a more typical single-family home or condo.



Juli and Chris coming to say "Hi"



Kids look on while games are played in the common house.



Chris and Nolan drawing on the walkway.

The memory of that air of constant discord or discomfort led John and Kim to approach the Camelot group with caution as well as interest. Knowing several people a bit to begin with and having some common interests was a plus for John, as was the design emphasis on distinct public and private spaces. “I don’t think Kim and I would consider ourselves extroverts. That could be a common misconception that you have to be.” Reading one of the key cohousing books was also helpful for him: “I’m not a big financial risk taker. Being able to see examples of what others had done was important for me to understand it. Things seemed to work very well.”

While some of the group was interested in the “green” angle of cohousing, John was more attracted by the pragmatic personal benefits of sharing lawnmowers and common facilities. “Using less stuff is a practical and logical conclusion, not political, for me,” he says, alluding to the savings of buying a moderately sized three-bedroom instead of the ubiquitous minimansion on two acres, and using the almost 6000 square foot Common House for bigger parties, energetic children’s play, accommodating overnight guests, and exercise, among other activities.

The Big Test

Once John and Kim understood the basic nuts and bolts of

the concept and this project, they agreed on a strategy for when to make their commitment, financially and emotionally. “We wanted to see the group have a serious disagreement and how they got through it.”

The conflict they’d been waiting for came just before the papers to buy land were signed. It was a process-oriented disagreement about when to use a blocking red card in consensus decision making. “There were really impassioned arguments on both sides,” he recalled, yet the group worked through it. He observed that the people who most cared about the issue got together outside of meetings and resolved it. Camelot as a community passed their “test” by being able to come to an agreement about rule creation, something John felt was particularly difficult because it brings out individuals’ personal values and beliefs about what is right and wrong. He thought it perhaps even more challenging than committing to signing on the dotted line with the group’s LLC for a multi-million dollar loan. “When emotions are high, that’s the real test of consensus,” he concluded. He and Kim also agreed that how people treated each other post-conflict was very important.

Twenty-Somethings in Cohousing

I next spoke to a neighbor and good friend (via member-



Lula plays it safe while riding dad's shoulders; Maggie tags along.

ship on the same committee for years) who lives a few houses away from me on the pedestrian path. Karen, 29, and her new husband Sean have been involved with the group almost since the beginning, in 2003. In fact, they had started dating in college, and were not yet engaged when Karen was in grad school earning a degree in research chemistry in another state and Sean started attending Camelot meetings.

While many members have described cohousing as “the fun of college without the papers or bad food,” I wondered how a person in her twenties would come to consider the idea of committing time and significant money to cohousing. She pointed out, “I was already spending time with these particular people on shared hobbies.” The original idea for Camelot came out of the group of friends wanting to live near each other so they could spend less time driving and more time having fun. “So I thought, if following other people’s cohousing blueprint makes it easier, that’s great.” She added, “I liked the idea of cohousing but I can’t imagine if this hadn’t worked out, joining another cohousing group. It’s the sort of thing I’d have done when I was older.”

The Common House was a major carrot motivating her as well. “If the Common House we designed wasn’t part of the deal I don’t think I would have been so keen on it. That’s what got me excited enough to work on it. I wouldn’t go to all the trouble just to build houses next to each other.” Among the various amenities Karen has started to take advantage of, the sewing room rates highly, and is where she’d have been if I hadn’t knocked on her door to corral her for this interview.

For the Kids (and even very private adults)

Jeff is the neighbor I know the least in this group. Their household has three generations: he and his wife are in their thirties, with Ginny very visible as the head of the Maintenance and Pool Committees; I am frequently greeted by their two children, Chris and Julianna, as they scooter, bike, or race past; and Ginny’s mom Jan is a nurse and has given me advice and support for my 91-year-old father’s health problems. Camelot

“A number of us had talked about making our own neighborhood. The main driving force for me was a safe environment for the kids.”

did a lot of its organizing via email and Google calendars, and these continue to be major communication channels in the community, but Jeff is one of the infrequent posters and was less often at meetings. I do remember discovering his sense of humor when we went through the uniquely difficult process of selecting a name for our street. I was partial to his “We-named-this-road-by-consensus Road” suggestion, but alas, the sign to accommodate it would probably fall outside any town’s size regulation.

He offered to be interviewed as he watered the newly seeded garden area across which our two houses face each other. True to my sense of him when he’s spoken or written to the group, Jeff is very family-oriented in his response to my question, “why did you choose to live in cohousing?” “Ginny and I went back and forth. First she was gung ho and I was hesitant, and then we’d switch. A number of us had talked about making our own neighborhood. The main driving force for me was a safe environment for the kids.”

He noted that in 2003 they were living in “a great little town” in western Massachusetts, close to where he grew up, but it wasn’t near friends and family. However, he got laid off from his university job, and both the job and rental markets (they had rental properties) were drying up. Given those changes, they decided it was time to move on. However, they weren’t sure if this was where they wanted to be or the people they wanted to be with. They were the first household to go through a formal process of joining as Observers, then graduating to Associate status with some input into decisions, before finally putting down five percent of the estimated cost of what became their three-bedroom home to become full Equity members. This process was designed for the pre-built phase, to help the new members get information about the group and the project and give everyone time to get acquainted and see if there’s a match, before serious money becomes involved on the new household’s part.

Jeff seemed pretty satisfied with how Camelot is working for his kids. Chris broke his elbow badly while playing a few weeks ago, and had to have surgery. “I was touched by all the neighbors who offered to help in various ways, like taking care of my daughter while we were staying at the hospital.”

The other big concern for Jeff was that the group might “force him to participate.” He’d read about communities where people wore red hats when they wanted to signal that they were not interested in socializing—a prospect that didn’t interest him at all. But people seem to have gotten the message without the need for special headgear (so far), and he reported having sufficient privacy in his home. And Jeff is also clear that when he’s outside on the path or elsewhere in the community, he can expect to



Outside the common house.

be interrupted (which our group calls “being cohoused,” when someone stops you on your way to somewhere and suddenly it’s an hour later and you can’t remember what you were going out for to begin with).

He does, however, like to cook, including for common meals, and is good at it, I can objectively report. He even emailed the group to announce that he was making and jarring up salsa in three flavors, if anyone wanted some.

Welcome to the Honeymoon!

All the neighbors I interviewed seemed happy with how things are going at the two- to five-month point. John, whose household was one of the first three to take up residency, considered significant the point in February when they started having people over as more folks moved in. The second milestone was passed when, as more households with children arrived, son Joe, five, could just go outside and play with other kids. The two parents realized they didn’t have to think twice about Joe grabbing his scooter and shooting out the door, because the houses are away from the roads and they already knew all the people living a short walk (or scoot) away.

Karen reported that the first several months have been good, but the first week was miserable. She’d been so busy working on marketing the project to prospective neighbors that she hadn’t prepared for the “we’re finally moving in!” She had also worried she and Sean wouldn’t have enough room in their two-bedroom plus townhouse for all their belongings. Happily, she found that “all this stuff about being able to live in a smaller house in cohousing works out—at least it did for us, having gotten a house with a basement!”

Jeff said sometimes it’s still a shock to realize he’s actually living in Camelot. He was pleasantly surprised at how much time

“Don’t join cohousing if you need to win arguments.”

he’s been spending out and about in the community. “I’ve been to almost every meal,” he realized, which in our community means eating in the Great Room with other neighbors two to three times a week.

Advice for Non-Cohousers Considering Cohousing

Collective wisdom is something I believe in more and more as I accumulate experiences with different groups, including my new neighbors. I asked each of them for their advice for similarly reluctant or unsure potential cohousers. Here are some pearls I was thrown by my three—dare I say “former non-cohousers, now happily cohoused”—neighbors:

“Knowing the people in community is as important if not more important than the physical structures. The idea is to have some sort of connection with your neighbors.” (*John*)

“It’s not that different from living in a condo complex, but you *do* know everyone by name, and we make sure you will.” (*Karen*)

“Don’t judge a book by its cover. No matter what you’ve heard or read, you can best tell by experiencing it to see if it could work for you. Once I was able to start walking into my house as it was being built, and participate in setting up structures for post-move-in, it definitely made it more real for me.” (*Jeff*)

“We’re not around very much. Even when you’re not here, it’s here for you. I don’t feel like I need to be here for things like common meals all the time. It’s worth it for the moments you get.” (*Karen*)

“I think each cohousing group probably has its own feel. [Judge each group on its own merits.]” (*John*)

“Don’t join cohousing if you need to win arguments.” (*Karen*)

And this is after only five months, at most, of cohousing life—think how smart we’ll be after five years or five decades! ❀



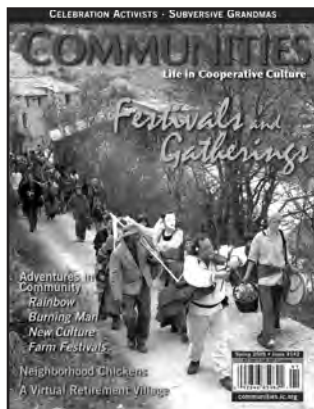
Charlene DiCalogero lives in Camelot Cohousing in Berlin, Massachusetts, where she is the Chair of the Membership, Marketing, and Fun Team when she’s not at her grants administration job in Cambridge or performing as a singer-songwriter. If you’re interested in living in Camelot or the “super green” Mosaic Commons Cohousing community right next door, please contact her at charlene@camelotcohousing.com.

COMMUNITIES

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#144



Financial Benefits of Communal Living

Can living in community help us financially while lowering our ecological footprint? To help answer this question, I decided to interview five people who inspire me. Following are their stories:

Tyrone LaFay lives at the Regenerative Cooperative of Pomona, California. He is the director/founder of Earthcare Design Solutions, an organization focused on community capacity and resilience building through services in permaculture, sustainable settlement, and ecological design and consultation.

Rin lives in a communal house with six other people in Vancouver, British Columbia. She is the founder of the Farmhouse Farm (farmhousefarm.wordpress.com), an urban micro-CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and permaculture and urban agriculture education center.

Mike Thayer: At the time of our interview, Mike was living in a communal house with three other people in Portland, Oregon. He the founder of Ammonite Design (www.ammonitedesign.net), a bike-powered ecological design company.

Jessi Ortiz spoke of her experiences living and working at Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon, and at The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee. She currently resides at a yoga retreat center in the hills of Tennessee.

Greg Landua lives and works at The Farm's Ecovillage Training Center. He is the Director and a resident eco-social entrepreneur.

How has living in community affected your life financially?

Greg: Positively, because it allows me to have a lifeboat. I don't have to get into debt or pay expensive rent because I have chosen to live in communities that have at least some part of their internal economy geared towards the services that I can provide. I feel good about exchanging time and energy for healthy food and a healthy place to live, instead of paying a lot of money in the outside world for a similar quality of life. It makes me rich in lifestyle and not so rich in terms of US dollars.

Rin: I would not be able to run my business if I were by myself because I could not afford to rent a whole house by myself. It has created a situation where I can have access to the space to run my business. *[Rin gardens the front and back yards of her shared rented house and sells the produce through her micro-CSA, delivering weekly boxes to Vancouver families by bike.]*

Jessi: Community living has offered me so many experiences that have helped me to develop a positive relationship with money. I used to spend frivolously, but with the support of others I learned how to live a rich and rewarding life with very little money.

Tyrone: Living in community gives me the opportunity to share resources, further lowering my energy and ecological footprints, so I am able to save money.

Mike: It makes it a lot easier financially. The cost of living is a lot cheaper, especially by changing how many people live here. There used to be six of us, and we converted the front common room to a bedroom, which lowered all our rents. We also share things such as tools, kitchenware, etc., so we don't all need to buy our own set, and save money by buying much of our food in bulk.

What relationship do you think finances have with your ecological impact?

Tyrone: Because of the design of our built environment and how our finances and debts are set up, most people in our society have to go out and make money to pay bills. Fulfilling our needs in this way can make a large ecological impact. If we meet our financial needs in community and on site, without needing to commute and drive, we can have a much smaller impact.

Rin: For me it's a bit of a chicken or egg thing. I live on so much less money than other people in the city. People rent apartments that cost, just in rent, twice what I live on comfortably. Part of that is because I live with people and we share, part of it is because I eat from my garden, and part of it is because I just don't need stuff—I barter with my friends and I trade. One

“The way you spend your money can make you totally ecologically irresponsible, or it can reflect the values of earth care, people care, and equitable distribution of resources. When we are mindful and creative, we create a culture that is an expression of our own values.”

of the people that I delivered vegetables to had a fig tree, so I traded vegetables for figs that I canned, so I get to eat figs all year; in a store they cost \$7 a pound. We don't need as much money, and we can lower our impact, and it's hard to tell which came first.

Greg: Finance has a huge impact on our ecological footprint. It is important to patronize companies and individuals that are doing good things for the planet, especially local businesses involved in the local community. I'm willing to pay more money for products and services that come from organizations that are walking the talk and integrating into their local ecology and culture in a positive way. In the long run, paying more money to a local business that spends their money locally will benefit us all financially.

Jessi: Every time we spend money it's a choice. With our choices we make our world. We have a choice in what we support and do not support. The way you spend your money can make you totally ecologically irresponsible, or it can reflect the values of earth care, people care, and equitable distribution of resources. When we are mindful and creative, we create a culture that is an expression of our own values.

Any other thoughts on this topic?

Tyrone: Living in community can create great opportunities for creative collaboration in developing cottage industries and working together. When living in community rather than in just a nuclear family, you have a huge diversity of people from different backgrounds and cultures sharing a multitude of related and beneficial skill sets.

Jessi: Living in community, you sometimes provide services to your commu-

nity that you normally wouldn't do. For example, I was paid to learn and do web design because someone trusted me. So, rather than giving the money to someone they didn't know, they paid me to learn and do it. I wouldn't have learned web design if I wasn't in that environment, so it diversified my skill set.

Greg: One of the benefits is having this really healthy lifestyle, which is exchanged without currency. So all of the money that I get for my work I get to keep, and I've chosen to reinvest that to help create microenterprises within the on-site community and within the community at large. This has enabled me to have a really firm foundation to create another business structure that fits into our overall shared financial system. *[Greg is the founder of Booyacacao (www.booyacacao.com), an organic fair trade chocolate business that invests in regenerative trade networks.]*

Rin: Living with other people who share my values has made it a lot easier to trust those values and do something about them. If I lived by myself and all of my friends did not believe in these values, then I probably would never have believed that I could start this business and be successful. It's community support that allows something like this to work. ❁



Ali Rosenblatt is currently living at EarthArt Village, where she is helping set up a local currency for Saguache County, Colorado. She is the NextGEN (the Next Generation of the Global Ecovillage Network) representative to the Global Ecovillage Network board, as well as the co-secretary of the Ecovillage Network of the Americas (alison@ecovillage.org).



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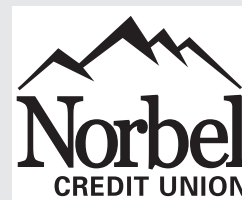
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natural builders and people with leadership skills into our community. Help make our ecovillage grow! 660-883-5511; dancingrabbit@ic.org; www.dancingrabbit.org.

EARTHAVEN ECOVILLAGE, Black Mountain, North Carolina. Earthaven is an aspiring ecovillage founded in 1994 on 320-forested acres in Western North Carolina, 50 minutes from Asheville. Our 53 members are spiritually diverse, and value sustainable ecological systems, permaculture design, and healthy social relations. We make decisions by consensus and have independent incomes. We lease homesites from the community and pay annual dues. We have a few small businesses and members who offer internships and workshops in permaculture design, natural building, consensus, creating ecovillages, herbal medicine, and healing. We are seeking hardworking people with organic-growing, construction, or fundraising skills; healers. www.earthaven.org, 828-669-3937, or information@earthaven.org.

ECO-FARM, near Plant City, Florida. We are an agricultural-based intentional community focused on sustainable living, farming, alternative energies (with an emphasis on solar), music, environmental issues and social justice. Community products: organic vegetables and eggs, ornamental trees, cane syrup, Tilapia and native plants. We also have mechanic and wood-working shops. Community outreach activities include a sustainable living program (www.wmnf.org), farmers' markets and support of global community efforts. Carpentry, mechanical or agricultural experience a plus. Check out our web site at www.ecofarmfl.org; 813-754-7374; or email ecofarmfl@yahoo.com.

ELDER FAMILY, near Cherokee, North Carolina and Smokey Mountain Park and an easy drive to Asheville. Your best investment—shared ownership in a loving “family of choice” sanctuary. For active elders with lots of free time to enjoy group activities, such as gardening, hiking, shared meals, spiritual gatherings, fire circles and lots more. Non-smokers, healthy and financially secure. Two new shared homes on eight acres in private cove with private bedroom/office/bathroom and large common kitchen. We are part of a larger community with community building, swimming pool, organic garden, trails and 46-acre spiritual retreat land. See unionacres.org for information on the area and community and click on Elder Family Shared Housing for our web page. 828-497-7102; or email: annariel@dnet.net.

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 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; rsffoffice@fellowshipcommunity.org.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE, Tubac, Arizona. Founded by Gabriel of Urantia and Niánn Emerson Chase in 1989. Currently 110 adults and children. International members. EcoVillage, green building, sustainable living. God-centered community based on teachings of The URANTIA Book and Continuing Fifth Epochal Revelation (The Cosmic Family volumes). Organic gardens, farm, & ranch. Children's school, landscaping, Soulistic Medical Institute. Spiritual commitment required. Non-spiritual internship program also. PO Box 4910, Tubac, AZ 85646 (520) 603-9932. info@GlobalCommunityCommunicationsAlliance.org; www.GlobalCommunityCommunicationsAlliance.org; www.GlobalChangeMusic.org; www.GlobalChangeMultiMedia.org.

HEARTWOOD COHOUSING, Bayfield, Colorado. Located in southwest Colorado, with easy access to the high peaks of the San Juan

Mountains and the red rock canyons of Utah, we are a cohousing neighborhood with a deep sense of community. Built in 2000, we support a population of approximately 40 adults and 20 children in a cozy cluster of 24 homes nestled within 250 acres of pine forest and pastureland. We make decisions by consensus and value open and honest communication to accommodate the diverse needs, backgrounds and perspectives of our members. Find out more about Heartwood and available property: www.heartwoodcohousing.com; mail@heartwoodcohousing.com; 970-884-4055.

LIBERTY VILLAGE COHOUSING, Frederick, Maryland. A beautiful rural cohousing community of 18 homes, ready to build 10 more this year. Homes are located on eight acres with pedestrian-only walkways, leaving 15 acres of meadow, woods, and wetlands to explore. We are the county's first community where all residents have been educated on practices to save the Chesapeake Bay. Homes are energy efficient with geothermal heating and low energy bills. We are multi-generational from age one to 80. Community decisions are made by consensus, usually smoothly and amiably and with spirited discussion if needed. We put a high priority on listening to each other's point of view and working things out. Located 10 miles from Frederick and convenient to the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. Check out our website www.libertyvillage.com.

SANDHILL FARM, Rutledge, Missouri. We are a small family of friends living together on an income-sharing organic farm. We value cooperation, initiative, living simply, caring for our land, growing most of our own food, working through our differences, making good ecological choices, and having fun with our friends. We've been at this for 35 years and continue to grow in our visions and our capability to realize them. Sound like home? POB 155, Rutledge, MO 63563; visitorscm@sandhillfarm.org; 660-883-5543; www.sandhillfarm.org.

SANTA ROSA CREEK COMMONS, Santa Rosa, California. We are an intergenerational, limited equity, housing cooperative 60 miles north of San Francisco. Although centrally located near public transportation, we are in a secluded wooded area beside a creek on two acres of land. We share ownership of the entire property and pay monthly charges that cover the usual expenses of home ownership. We have kept our costs reasonable by sharing all of the responsibilities of our cooperative and much of its labor. All members serve on the Board of Directors and two committees oversee the welfare of the community. We enjoy a rich social life and a mutual concern for the natural environment. Contact: Membership 707-575-8946.

TWIN OAKS, Louisa, Virginia. “Not the revolution, but you can see it from here.” We are an income-sharing, non-violent, egalitarian community that's been living this lifestyle for 39 years. We would love to have you visit right now. We can offer you: work in our community businesses, an abundance of homegrown organic food, a thriving social scene, and an established culture of non-violence, feminism and egalitarianism. You can offer us: your talents and skills (or your unskilled enthusiasm) and your desire to live an ecological and income-sharing lifestyle. For information: Twin Oaks, 138-R Twin Oaks Rd., Louisa, VA 23093; 540-894-5126; twinoaks@ic.org; www.twinoaks.org.

ZEPHYR VALLEY COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE, Rushford, Minnesota. Zephyr Valley Community Cooperative (www.zephyrcoop.org) is a rural cohousing community with 11 members and 10 kids on 500 acres of stunningly beautiful land in the hills of southeast Minnesota. We have four ponds, a creek; wetlands; pastures; bluff & forest lands and 80 acres of land in crops farmed organically. We strive to live lightly on the land. There are seven individual homes; and sites for six more, a common house; two barns and several outbuildings. We have a community center and a spring fed swimming pond, a rec field, trails and barns for animals and storage. Decisions about the land and community are made by consensus, all others are individual. If you're interested in small-scale, organic farming or just in living in a rural cohousing community, contact us at zephyrcoop@yahoo.com.

COMMUNITIES FORMING

LAYTONVILLE ECOVILLAGE, Northern California. Seeks founding members to buy in and co-create sustainable community. Three 2-acre parcels for sale. \$155K for the two raw land parcels, \$299K for 2 acres w/2unit farmhouse. Each parcel includes access to four acres of community land, perfect for cooperative solar grid, gardens, common house, etc. Land is walking distance to local schools. Founded on permaculture ethics and principles with a fertile blend of structure and flexibility. Laytonville EcoVillage is an affordable way to live your vision and values. Contact Cassandra for more details. 707-228-8400 www.regenerativerealestate.com

SEEKING PIONEERS. Ecovillage forming. 35-acre wooded sanctuary one hour to and from KC. Have old farmhouse and 100-year-old refurbished barn that serves as lodging and meeting space. Retreat and workshop center under Unity Churches for 14 years. Welcome diversity. Seeking homesteaders, those with energy and skills to create, learn,

and ultimately model sustainability in a living community. Visit www.lightcenter.info, email info@lightcenter.info.

TERRASANTE DESERT COMMUNITY, Tucson, Arizona. Looking for resourceful people who want to build community on 160 acres of vegetated Sonoran desert surrounded by State land trust. Explorations in alternative building, solar energy, permaculture, natural healing, quiet living, artistic endeavors. Abundant well water, good neighbors, mountain vistas, awesome sunsets. Contact Bruce at 520-403-8430 or email: scher@terrasante.org.

TRUE NORTH, Canton, New York. Can't afford \$250,000 cohousing units or \$50,000 ecovillage buy-ins? Looking for small, rural community with goal of economic affordability as well as ecological sustainability? Into less sweat gardening and more fun cross-country skiing, and being in on the creative beginning? In spring we will be three full time and one part time person in 50s/60s. About 45 years of community living experience between us. Farmhouse, new barn, 35 acres with stream, fire circle, fenced fields, organic gardens and orchard, artesian spring, back road but only 6 miles from town. Four universities nearby, plus Adirondack Park, St. Lawrence River, Ottawa, and three other intentional communities. We have lots of skills and will be building a cabin in the spring. Looking for a few healthy, spiritual, emotionally mature, peak oil aware people, especially those with green building, farming, permaculture, self-sufficiency, group process skills. Well-behaved dogs and pagans welcome. peagreen@earthlink.net 315-386-2609.

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Go to join.dancingrabbit.org to arrange a visit.

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PEOPLE LOOKING

NEW JERSEY WOMAN, 55 years old, interested in connecting with folks who are interested in learning more about Intentional Communities. Also seeking one or two roommates who have common values, (I am an active Unitarian Universalist), to share the expenses of a private home in Toms River, NJ Animal friendly, near parkway and bus station. 732-330-4054 or louiselle@yahoo.com

SEEKING NONURBAN COMMUNITY in warm climate with artistic, spiritually inclined, mature, responsible, open-hearted, open-minded, self-aware people. I'm female, 60+, healthy, active, classical singer; retired language teacher: anazafiro07@gmail.com.

SEEKS COUNTERPART, Hawaii. Single male, 40, at small 13-year-old egalitarian community in Hawaii seeks female counterpart. Parenting. Music. Children's theater. Homestead-based elementary school. Permaculture. Write dkern@coconut-wireless.net.

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEB SITES

BUY, SELL OR TRADE GREEN. Buy, sell or trade your Green goods and services on BigGreenCart.com! FIC members can use the code FIC50 and pay just 50 cents to list an item on BGC, and Green Businesses are welcome to contact angela@biggreencart.com for special FIC Member advertising discounts on BGC! If you're in the San Francisco area, feel free to stop by our booth at the Green Festival November 13-15. Visit us today at www.biggreencart.com, or call us at 877-BGC-2425.

COHOUSING.ORG, the Cohousing Website, is filled with core resources for cohousing community – a thriving segment of the intentional communities movement. The site includes the Cohousing Directory, info on National Cohousing Conferences, Classified Ads, and FREE publications including Cohousing Articles, online Cohousing Books, In-

the-News, Just-for-Fun, and much more. Its presented by Coho/US, the Cohousing Association of the United States - please visit us at cohousing.org.

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RESOURCES

FEDERATION OF EGALITARIAN COMMUNITIES (FEC). LIVE YOUR VALUES, LEARN NEW SKILLS. For 25 years, the FEC has welcomed new members to our groups based on cooperation, ecology, fairness, and nonviolence. No joining fees required, just a willingness to join in the work. We share income from a variety of cottage industries. For more information: www.thefec.org; fec@ic.org; 417-679-4682; or send \$3 to FEC, HC-3, Box 3370-CM00, Tecumseh, MO 65760.

GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES available at Tree Bressen's website. Topics include consensus, facilitation, peace-making, blocks and dissent, community-building exercises, alternative formats to general discussion, the list goes on. Dozens or helpful articles, handouts and more—all free. Contact: Tree Bressen, 541-343-3855; tree@ic.org; www.treegroup.info.

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LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)

during their lifetimes. None of them want to live in that format at the current time. This fact needs addressing by your magazine, and by the communities movement in general. It's not ignorance that has so many people steering clear of communal living, it's life experiences. I urge you to tackle this issue honestly.

One target group that is under-served by your magazine is families. Families are often the nexus of communal life, whether it be in towns, cities, or intentional communities. Sustainability means nothing if it does not include raising and providing for future generations. I encourage you to open up your definition of "intentional communities" to include families, and begin to include articles about how families shape a mission statement, discover their values, and put it all into action in the world with their purchases, their diet, their transportation choices, etc. If you could pull this off, your potential base of readers who would benefit from your magazine would grow tremendously. As you made inroads into this demographic, your attractiveness to advertisers would grow as well.

However it shakes out, I wish you folks the best with your endeavor.

Ben Piper

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Editor's note: This letter is edited down from a longer letter. We aspire to address both of Ben's main points on an ongoing basis. Several articles in this "Community in Hard Times" issue focus specifically on some of the challenges of founding and/or living in an intentional community or cooperative group; see, for example, "How Collaboration Falls Short," p. 6. Our goal is to aid readers in the admittedly difficult, but also rewarding and necessary work of creating cooperative culture that both includes and extends beyond the bounds of the nuclear family. At the same time, we aim to make the magazine relevant to all societal groupings intentionally seeking to create better, more sustainable ways of living. We expect "family" to be the theme of an upcoming issue.

EMERGENCY COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 27)



Sunset over our home in the parking lot.

is going to belong to the mama. The infant dwells in a very small neighborhood consisting of the left boob and the right boob. He'll broaden his horizons later.

Only in the last few months has Ash begun to belong to our village as a whole. While every member of this household is undoubtedly invested in his upbringing, a community mission statement this child is not. In fact, for my husband and me, he has been another individual project, diverting our attention from the community.

However, when he pushed his five pound, four ounce body into this world, every member of this community was present to cheer him on, and he knew, from his very first breath, that his support system extends far beyond his father and myself.

Now there are days when my life consists of nothing more world-changing than five loads of laundry folded in increments between playing with my son and baking a pie. Each member of our household wakes up to an individual alarm clock, gazes into a day planner blotchy with appointments, and rushes off to nurture the world, individually. I can't help but wonder if we aren't wasting our group potential. While I clean a sink full of eight people's dishes before making myself a bowl of oatmeal, I can't help but wonder...what exactly is the point?

On other days I rush to my job, secure in the knowledge that my son is giggling at home with Valisa. Someone else scours my egg pan, and I glide expertly through quibbles with co-workers. Maybe I am

getting something out of this.

I have to remind myself that learning to live together does make the world a better place. That raising my child in a household that faces conflict, but hugs afterwards, is a form of disaster relief. That cooking 10 different dishes, simultaneously, in a very small kitchen, and enjoying it, is a community bonding ritual.

In answer to the question, "what does your community do?" I would have to say, we are growing up together. We are inspiring one another to live to our full potential, and we are squeezing every ounce of passion from the mundane. At least, while I fold the 489th diaper, I can giggle at Lali, in the background, clomping her cowboy boots and singing "Hey, mama rock me."

As I look into the changing faces of my housemates, I remind myself that this is only one of many cycles on our life path. The rich history that binds us is truly a blessing. I should be equally grateful that we've been given this time to focus on our individual needs. Hopefully, in the near future, we'll find a way to combine our service skills to create a new phenomenon of beauty. Let's pray that it won't be prompted by disaster. ❁

For information about current rebuilding projects in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish: www.stbernardproject.org/v158, lowernine.org.

Jesika Feather is a teacher, mother, and writer. Currently she is a member of the Heart and Spoon community in Eugene, Oregon.

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THROWING IN THE FOUNDER'S TOWEL

(continued from p. 41)

else. And suddenly, being “somewhere else” was untenable. After years of being the “starter,” I found myself wanting to join in. And my practical side could finally see it too: enough kids to satisfy even my rambunctious 11-year-old, while the progressed finances of both my life and Dancing Rabbit's suddenly opened a door I had shut, with regrets, five years earlier.

Something else got triggered that weekend, too: in a way I never anticipated, I found myself longing to return to the country. Urban living had worn me thin, and I wanted to wake up to the sound of crickets instead of jet engines, look out at gardens instead of streets.

And so now, almost a year later, I am happily settling back in as the latest resident at Dancing Rabbit, humbled and a bit battered by the lessons and hurts and stretches of the past seven years. I find myself both relieved and inspired to serve a vision that someone else crafted, with a group that happens to hit that sweet spot for me between flexibility and a strong vision. Now when someone wants to know

what the hell the founders were thinking, or why we do things like that, people's eyes train on my friend Tony and not me. I feel a little guilty that I am finding it far easier to support him than to be him.

But only a little. I feel like I did my time in that particular hot seat, and am enjoying a well-deserved break and a chance to develop other parts of myself that were put on hold while trying to hold it all together.

What I left in Albuquerque was another qualified success. While the ecovillage never fully manifested, our work over those years spawned a dozen or so meaningful projects that are a legacy of sorts for the Southwest. We still love each other, but now, it isn't “too much” because we aren't trying to make each other fit into a box that doesn't work. The block we claimed is a vibrant neighborhood, in part because we claimed it, and may yet be an exemplary example of what the Fellowship for Intentional Community calls “creating community where you are.” In the sense that community means having

people who see each other, care about each other, and are genuinely interested in each other's lives, ZEV was (and is) spectacularly successful.

And I've walked away with a profound respect for founders and their unique struggles: feeling responsible for everything, the exhaustion of constantly re-explaining why we are here, and the flashes of joy and pardonable pride when your dream suddenly manifests as a real, meaningful thing (flashes that no one else seems to really grok). Your work has made it possible for me to take the next steps in my own life and, perhaps, finally find my best way to serve and create community. Thank you. ❁

Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig lives at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in northeastern Missouri, just down the road from Sandhill Farm where her husband, Laird, resides. She teaches workshops on starting communities, consensus-inspired facilitation, and various ecovillage-related topics. She is the author of Passion as Big as a Planet: Evolving Eco-activism in America. Ma'ikwe is currently involved in something more mundane than starting a new group: building a strawbale house.

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FOOD SECURITY IN COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 56)

organic food helps reweave the local food systems and support local farmers, while receiving much better quality produce and relying less on vast transportation systems and polluting petroleum-based agrichemicals. Even better, talk with local organic farms about obtaining CSA (community supported agriculture) shares. In fact, try to buy everything possible local, including honey, spices, wine, beer, meat, seafood, dairy, and any other items, including non-food items. Deeply question reliance on staple foods that are imported vast distances, such as bananas, coffee, chocolate, and tea. Most bananas are distributed by very unethical and polluting businesses operating in “banana republics” that destroy indigenous communities.

Making connections with other people and farms is another way to reweave the local food web and make friends. Inquire what items are available from your neighbors, and offer something valuable in exchange, including labor. Maybe they are beekeepers, grow mushrooms, or raise goats that produce milk. You could offer them veggies, fruits, or a helping hand for trade. Keep these connections going. Investigate what local options are available, and ask around. Keep in mind also that the wild rural places where many communities are located often abound with wild greens, nuts, and fruits. Urban locations often are surprising cornucopias of forgotten fruit trees, herbs, and edible landscaping. Many people in urban areas will gladly let you harvest their fruit trees—just ask.

The time is now to become more food secure. I wish for abundance and fertility in your community and every community in the world. ❁

Blake Cothron is an avid permaculturist, gardener, orchardist, and community visionary. He has been exploring intentional community life throughout the US for nearly 4 years. He is from Louisville, Kentucky and is 24 years old.

RELATED BACK ISSUES

Community in Hard Times



The following COMMUNITIES back issues speak to various aspects of our current “Community in Hard Times” theme, as do some others not listed here. See communities.ic.org/back_issues for a complete list of back issues and ordering information. You may also order back issues (\$5 apiece plus shipping) using the form on page 65.

- | | |
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Gardens of Gratitude:

A TWO-DAY GARDEN PARTY BLITZ IN L.A.

By Ginny LeRossignol Blades

Seeds of community, sustainability, and change were sown in a very large and fertile field when the Westside Permaculture Group of Los Angeles launched a two-day gardening blitz last May called **Gardens of Gratitude: Growing Food and Community**.

This grassroots collective, calling themselves The Westside Permies, offered free advice, resources, and labor to anyone willing to plant edibles who signed up on their Gardens of Gratitude website (www.GardensOfGratitude.org). The garden party was a congenial yet subversive celebration of goodwill, inspiring individual gardening confidence and self-reliance while mobilizing neighborhoods toward growing food and sharing their bounty with each other. In all, 96 new gardens sprouted up over the weekend.

No project was too small—or too large—for the Gardens of Gratitude campaign: from tomatoes potted for apartment balconies to full-scale operations where entire front yards or empty lots were converted into bountiful “Victory Gardens.”

Each site participant teamed up with a certified master gardener or permaculture consultant “mentor” who donated his or her time for the event. Free or low-cost compost or mulch was available by the truckload, in some cases even delivered on-site by a friendly stranger. Roving teams of volunteer work crews of every skill level helped make it all happen in “barn-raising” party style.

Part of the inspiration of Gardens of Gratitude came from the Victory Gardens of WWII, when in response to food rationing, shortages, and government encouragement, nearly 20 million Americans planted gardens in backyards, empty lots, and even city rooftops. Neighbors pooled their resources, grew different kinds of foods, and formed cooperatives.

Sean Jennings, a spokesperson for the Westside Permies, says the key to pulling off a huge undertaking like Gardens of Gratitude was in having a small, cohesive community of like-minded people assembled around a clear purpose. They hope their example will inspire other groups around the country and world to create similar events to catalyze community and local food sustainability. ❁

Ginny LeRossignol Blades, former COMMUNITIES Art Director, lives in L.A.

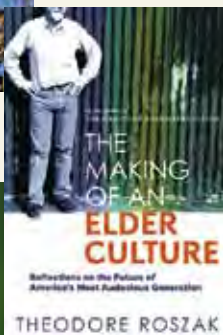
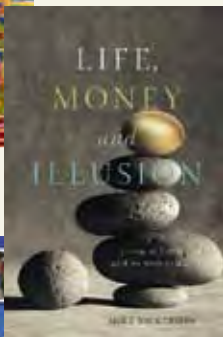
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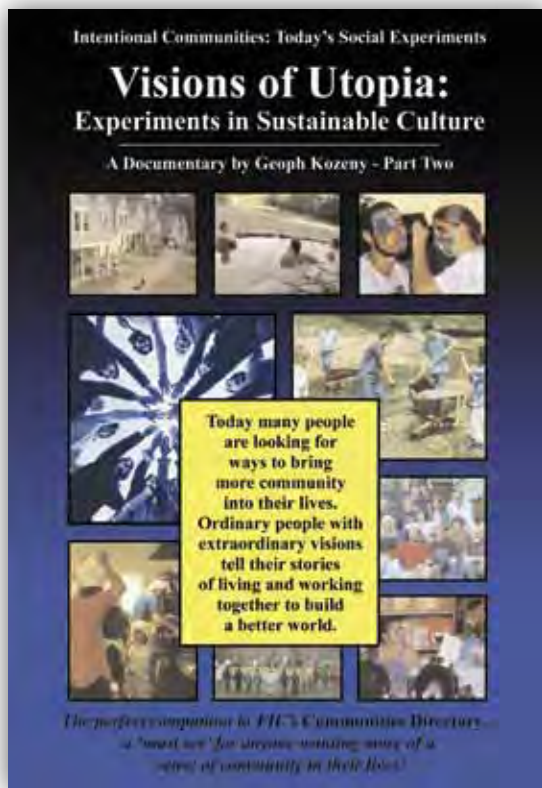
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