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COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture



Family

Beyond the Cleavers
An Abundance of Dads
Dramas and Problem Solving
Growing Family in Community
Parenting: From Fantasy to Reality

Spring 2010 • Issue #146

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COMMUNITIES

Courtesy of Julie Boerst



Katherine Pangaro



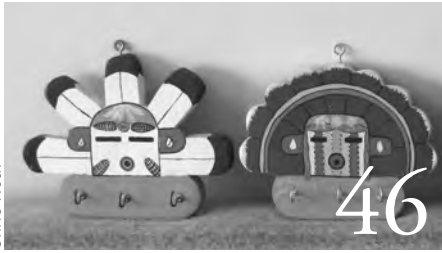
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About the artist:
Four-year-old **Anna Roth** loves her family and community of friends in Maplewood, New Jersey.

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Inspired by the Shakers, High Wind, and Fred Lanphear

Having read the last two issues of COMMUNITIES (Fall 2009 and Winter 2009) cover to cover and with great interest, I appreciate the expansion of ideas I see presented there.

In the Winter issue (#145), I especially enjoyed the “The Shakers’ Secrets of Longevity” article, which so entertainingly describes a community movement that attained, in their era and for their times, a very high degree of spiritual, mindal, and physical maturity. I became acquainted with the Shakers via the Ken Burns documentary on their history, which is fascinating. Did you know the Shakers invented clothespins? Or that they had fresh pie every morning? Now that’s my idea of a higher culture!

I also read with great interest the article by Belden Paulsen, in the Historic Communities section, titled “High Wind: A Retrospective.” At first glance I was intrigued with the article because I was a member of a community that blossomed and then ran its course in 1979 and 1980 in northern California. Basically we were a group of good friends playing music together in The Mugwort Family Band who started getting married and having babies and decided that we had better get some land and figure out how to survive

the nuclear winter we thought might be on the horizon. We were good at making great vegetarian dinners and playing music for hours but quickly discovered we had a whole lot to learn about communications, relationships, and making land payments on the 120 acres we had miraculously managed to put a down payment on. Within nine months (coincidentally after the birth of my son, Horizon) the community broke up. High Wind has a much more impressive history of success than Inspiration Sanctuary, but anyone who has lived through the “marriage and divorce” of a community experience knows how deeply rewarding and challenging it is.

As I read more of the High Wind story, my interest was captured anew by their years of successfully presenting seminars and conferences on the experience of community living. Now, after 20 years of growing and living in a community that is truly inspirational, I know the world desperately needs all of us who have experience in the “Research and Development Centers for Society” to share what we have learned about working together to create a better world for all life on the planet.

My other highlight was the beautiful article titled “Embracing a Terminal Illness” because it described so well many similar experiences we have had in our Soulistic Hospice ministry. In our community, we are constantly asking ourselves the question, “What future do we want to create for ourselves and for the entire planet?” I would say the values conveyed in that most touching article echo our continuing decision to put our collective resources towards the care of our brothers and sisters above all other pursuits.

Blue Evening Star
Global Community
Communications Alliance
Tumacácori, Arizona

Promoting Better Health

Thank you to all the contributors for



LETTERS

this outstanding issue of COMMUNITIES (#145) on Health and Well-Being. I've been a subscriber for a few years and this is my favorite issue!

Many issues in the past have had particular articles which I especially liked or were of interest, but in this issue, it seemed like every article had useful information and a different perspective. I feel sure the questions asked by the editor to potential contributors were an important factor in the excellent articles, and the "Note from the Editor" was also an appreciated addition to all the other stories.

The timing of this issue was also right on the mark, with national health care reform so much in the news! As the House and Senate try to agree on what at the very best is a "half measure" (in my opinion), your authors from communities around the world share with us what is really working and what has worked in the past. It is very hopeful to read these stories of people living in harmony with each other and the Earth, and how that promotes health and well-being. The story of how the Shakers were doing this many years ago only confirms what is being done today.

I'm a member of a fairly new group here in Columbus, Ohio which has organized to promote better health in our area of the city called Clintonville. We call the group Clintonville Health Community, and our mission is "Building better health for all in Clintonville." I plan to suggest that members of our group consider purchasing and/or reading this issue of the magazine. It not only illustrates the importance of a number of things which we have been working on, it also shows that these things are effective and lead to a better quality of life.

To me, there is no more important topic than health and well-being. Inter-

national communities are showing us that what is important for our own personal health, is also important for the health of our family, friends, and all the other living beings on this planet. May you continue to share these heartfelt stories with us.

Thanks again,
Dan Hughes
Columbus, Ohio

More on Bullying

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Issue #145 (Health and Well-Being) of COMMUNITIES. Regarding "The Bully Question": as the Founder and Executive Director of Choices Recovery Services, a Recovery Community for those with Co-Occurring Mental Health/Substance Use recovery challenges, I've witnessed and engaged many incidents of bullying within our community. For us, this issue also includes aggressive, destructive, disruptive, and manipulative behaviors.

In working as a mental health practitioner and substance use addiction clinician, I have developed a multitude of engagement strategies to address these challenges, looking to provide positive recovery outcomes for all parties. That being said, we sometimes must accept the reality that the behavior(s) may be a symptom of a condition beyond our ability to resolve. These challenges may be symptoms of a mental health condition(s)—paranoid schizophrenia, mood/personality disorders, conduct disorders, adult and youth ADHD, sociopathic and borderline personality disorders, to name just a few—which sometimes manifest themselves as bullying-related behavior, as mentioned in the article.

As a community, we do not accept exiting a person who needs/wants assis-

tance, but we also accept that some individuals require a level of professional care beyond our capacity. As such, I accept a personal responsibility as Executive Director to protect each community member from possible harm (physical as well as emotional).

Identifying this situation is sometimes difficult for non-clinicians and even for clinicians trained to identify subtle danger/warning signs. Our clear policy dictates that if a person is a harm to themselves or others, we seek immediate professional assistance outside of our community. This includes threats, intimidation, sexual acting out, mind-altering substance use, destructive behavior, and many other variations of this same theme. It is best to use your common sense if you are not a trained professional, and we source an outside appropriate party since they are not biased by being part of the ongoing issue, which has likely become emotional and potentially personal for the community.

Sean A. E. Zullo
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Remembering Stan Crow

In Fred Lanphear's article in COMMUNITIES #145, "Embracing a Terminal Illness," he stated that we had not yet experienced a death within our Songaia community. However, just a few weeks before the issue was published, a dear friend, neighbor, and community member, Stan Crow, died suddenly. The community has celebrated his life and death several times beginning in the emergency room at the hospital, here at Songaia, and at his church. Stan was one of the

(continued on p. 73)

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, Rt 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563. 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, Rt 1 Box 156 Rutledge, MO 63563-9720; 660-883-5545; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at communities.ic.org.

Advertising Policy

We accept paid advertising in COMMUNITIES because our mission is to provide our readers with helpful and inspiring information—and because advertising revenues help pay the bills.

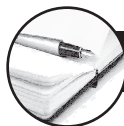
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If you experience a problem with an advertisement or listing, we invite you to call this to our attention and we'll look into it. Our first priority in such instances is to make a good-faith attempt to resolve any differences by working directly with the advertiser/listener and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

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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 SCHAUH



Problem Solving in Community How a Group Addresses Issues Says a *Lot* about Its Cohesion... and Vice Versa

As the FIC's main administrator, I do a fair number of press interviews—about two or three per month. Thus, I get a lot of practice coming up with sound bites that nuggetize the essence of community living. Up until recently, my favorite had been:

The essential challenge of cooperative living is learning how to disagree about non-trivial matters and have that be a unifying experience.

While I still like that one, lately I've been test driving a newer model:

Intentional community is about learning how to solve problems without running anyone over or leaving anyone behind—which is fundamentally different from the way problems are typically addressed in the mainstream culture.

While I reckon these two aphorisms are roughly equivalent, I like how the latter suggests culture shift (where the former has a whiff about it of mental jujitsu and sleight of hand).

As most people know, community comes in a kaleidoscope of sizes and flavors: from so big that you don't know everyone's name, to so few that there's nothing that you *don't* know about each other; from the isolation of rural Wyoming to the urban density of Manhattan; from the sacred to the secular; from celibate to no-holds-barred-among-consenting-adults sexuality. In short, the range is very wide.

A Family Affair

Because this issue of COMMUNITIES is focused on Family, I want to shine the

spotlight on one of the lesser appreciated spectra into which intentional communities sort: Degree of Engagement. To be sure, this is somewhat a matter of size. At my community, Sandhill Farm, our five adult members eat dinner together almost every evening; at nearby Dancing Rabbit there aren't more than a handful of days in the year when all 45 members are on the property at the same time, which means that daily contact among members is necessarily more diffuse. Where Sandhill is striving to be an intentional family, Dancing Rabbit is aiming to be a village, which, in turn, is comprised of many household units—some of which are families about the size of Sandhill.

While you have no choice about the family you are born into (or, depending on your views about reincarnation, maybe you *do*, but that's beyond the scope of this exploration), you have considerable latitude when it comes to a chosen (or intentional) family, and that's one of the main motivations for people seeking community: to create a feeling of family in the context of living with people with whom you're aligned in values.

In the case of smaller communities (like Sandhill), the aim is typically for the entire group to have a family quality. In the case of larger communities (like Dancing Rabbit), the idea is to create an environment that will support multiple family units—including both biological and chosen. In larger groups, individual members may feel affinity with the whole community, with one or more subgroups that identify as families, or with both. In this sense, independent of the size of the group, the family is one of the fundamental social building blocks of community.

While one's family experience growing up tends to be a hit or miss proposition when it comes to psychological health and functionality, whenever people aspire to create family as adults—whether through mating and raising children of one's own, or through joining a chosen family—people invariably hold the expectation (or at least the hope) of creating a family that functions well. Unfortunately, we don't all mean the same thing by “functioning well,” and good intentions are not nearly

Many groups don't know what to do with emotions when they enter the room, and take the ostrich approach—hoping they'll go away if the group pretends they're not there.

enough to ensure success.

Beyond intention, the degree of cohesion that a group achieves is also a matter of how much time the members regularly spend together, how aligned members are on the community's common values, how central the common values are to what each member values in life, and how the group solves problems. It's this last yardstick that I want to focus on in this essay.

Here's a set of questions I've distilled from 22 years as a group process consultant. The answers, I believe, will be highly predictive of where a group lands on the Degree of Engagement scale.

CHECKLIST FOR HOW COOPERATIVELY YOUR GROUP SOLVES PROBLEMS

1. To what extent does the group welcome emotional input on problems?

As a species, we're hard-wired to have emotional responses. I don't mean we have strong emotional responses all the time; I'm only saying that they're not rare. Yet many groups don't know what to do with emotions when they enter the room, and basically take the ostrich approach—hoping they'll go away if the group pretends they're not there. Most groups have a meeting culture that says, in effect, that expressing strong emotions is immature and inappropriate. In consequence, most groups have brittle conversations about problems, because they're ever vigilant about suppressing strong feelings. Instead of figuring out how to harness passion, they harass it.

For those with high emotional intelligence (by which I mean they know things and respond more accurately in the emotional realm than rationally), meetings are stressful because these folks are not generally allowed to use their best language. If it's bad enough (maybe they're not bilingual), they'll stop coming to meetings. Worse, the group might take

comfort in that outcome.

2. How dedicated is the group to hearing from everyone before entertaining proposed solutions?

Problem solving will be both more inclusive and more effective if the group develops the habit of making sure that everyone who wants to has had the chance to help define the problem before the group starts batting around potential solutions. When proposals are allowed to enter the conversation at any time (or worse, are encouraged at the outset as part of the introduction of the topic), those members who are slower to organize their thoughts or who struggle to get air space may give up. To them, they face a Hobson's choice of either betraying their nature by pushing into the conversation, or giving up and trusting that the quicker and more assertive will take their unvoiced considerations into account. Good luck with that.

3. To what extent has the group been successful in creating an atmosphere of curiosity in the face of disagreement?

The essence of cooperative culture is encouraging a full expression of viewpoints (under the assumption that if everything is out on the table, then it will be easier to weigh and balance factors appropriately). If, however, opposing opinions are met with resistance or hostility—rather than curiosity—then the speaker must gird their loins in preparation for an onslaught. Sometimes it won't be worth it, and alternate viewpoints will not surface.

4. How often do you hear “But...” as a person's first word in response to another's statement?

In the mainstream culture, we're used to doing battle when someone disagrees with our position (the most appalling tactics can be euphemistically labeled

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“healthy debate”), either through a vigorous defense or an aggressive counter-attack, challenging their premises or the flow of their logic. The key to inclusivity is responding to alternate opinions with openness and interest, with the possibility in view that your mind might be changed (rather than fear that you’ll be publicly humiliated as a consequence of another’s idea being found superior to yours). Does the group understand the importance of creating and fostering a culture of curiosity in those moments?

5. Does the group have facilitators capable of consistently bridging between conflicted parties?

In the heat of the moment, we tend to revert to our deepest conditioning, rather than responding from our loftiest ideals. Thus, if it appears that some matter close to the bone is not going our way, we tend to fight rather than cooperate, and it can make all the difference whether you have the capacity among your in-house facilitators to bridge between conflicted parties and help guide everyone back—with honor—from the brink of a fight that no one really wants.

6. How frequently does the community meet?

This is a loaded question. The facile answer should be, “as often as needed,” yet the question beneath this is whether the group is avoiding meetings because they have no confidence in their going well. The group may be ducking issues, or loathe to tackle them with everyone in the room. If so, this is not a good sign and will surely indicate weakness in the group’s cohesion.

7. Does the community regularly evaluate managers and committees?

While it may not be obvious why this indicator is on the list, many groups fall into a trap of allowing long-term members to remain in the same position of responsibility for years at a time without examination. While this is not inherently bad, it can be trouble if there is no way to discuss dissatisfaction with performance, or to review what the community really

wants out of that position. When people become entrenched in positions of power and create fiefdoms, it leads to demoralization and undercuts the will to engage.

8. What effort is made to integrate new members into the community’s culture?

Over time, communities inevitably create their own idiosyncratic culture. There becomes a “normal way things are done around here.” For long-term members, this become second nature and is the air they breathe. For new folks this is all very mysterious, and it can be exhausting worrying over the possibility of committing a social faux pas that was never explained ahead of time. It’s like walking through a minefield blind. If new members are obliged to walk through that field alone, it takes an exceptionally tough person to weather more than a few explosions and keep putting one foot in front of the other. Many will tend to get less venturesome. At best, this retards the integration process and prolongs the power gap between old and new. At worst, you’ll lose the new person.

•••

How did your group measure up? While it’s up to the members of each group to decide for themselves how much they want to be in each other’s lives, I’ve offered the Checklist above as an aid for groups to be able to achieve the level they want, rather than the best they can stumble into, guided only by good intentions.

Think of it as a way to solve problems about how you solve problems. ❁



Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm, an egalitarian community in northeast Missouri, where he lives. His blog that can be read at communityand-consensus.blogspot.com. An earlier version of this essay first appeared as the December 2, 2009 entry in Laird’s blog.

Family, Extended Family, and Community on Community Bookshelf



Community Building Companion

50 Ways to Make Connections and Create Change in Your Own Backyard
by Peter D. Rogers, Lisa Frankfort, and Matthew McKay

2002; 128 pages

Are you feeling lost in your town, and seeking a sense of community? Then *The Community Building Companion* is a great place to start! *The Companion* includes practical building strategies that can help anyone find neighbors with common interests, work with others to find solutions to local problems, and discover few ways to have fun. Filled with great ideas!



Difficult Conversations

How to Discuss What Matters Most
by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen

2000; 250 pages; paperback

In our lives we prepare for almost everything and this should also be true of our crucial communications with others. This book maps a path to better outcomes for those exchanges by showing how to avoid the pitfalls encountered when facing a difficult conversation. It is highly recommended for those wanting to improve their communication skills.



The Great Neighborhood Book

A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Place-Making
by Jay Walljasper and the Project for Public Places

2007; 192 pages; paperback

This is a very significant book...informative, upbeat, extremely useful, and well illustrated. It clearly shows how small things can make a big difference and jump start real change for the better.



The Mediator's Handbook

by Jennifer E. Beer with Eileen Stief
Developed by Friends Conflict Resolution Programs; revised 1997 edition; 168 pages; paperback
The original *Mediator's Handbook*—continuously in print for 15 years—

was the first conflict mediation manual available to the public. It set the standard for the methodology of conflict resolution, providing a time-tested, flexible model for effective mediation in diverse environments and situations. Completely revised and expanded, this new edition is an invaluable resource for people working in corporations, government

agencies, community organizations, schools, or any other situation where there is a need to build bridges between diverse perspectives.



Messages

The Communication Skills Book (Second Edition)
by Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning

1995; 320 pages; paperback

Messages presents the concepts of effective communication at all levels. Highly recommended for those wanting to improve their skills in this critical area.



Nonviolent Communication

A Language of Compassion
by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

2000; 211 pages; paperbound

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.



The Senior Cohousing Handbook (2nd Edition)

A Community Approach to Independent Living
by Charles Durrett

2009; 320 pages; paperback

Rich in ideas and inspiration, *The Senior Cohousing Handbook* is recommended to anyone interested in planning such a community, living in one, or who works with seniors.



Small Groups

The Process of Change
by William C. Coughlan, Jr.

2007; 167 pages; paperback

This book is a road map for organizing any type of small group. It covers the many paradigms and processes of groups in a thorough and engaging way. Highly recommended.

Superbia!

31 Ways to Create Sustainable Neighborhoods
by Dan Chiras and Dave Wann

2003; 230 pages; paperbound

The dream of creating sustainable cities is a noble and



inspiring one, but the harsh reality is that many people currently live in the suburbs. Transforming these areas to serve people better and to reduce human impact on the environment is a process that can start right away. Dozens of real-life examples from all over North America show you how.



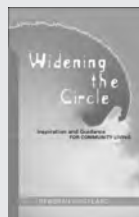
Turning to One Another

Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future

by Margaret J. Wheatley

2002; 158 pages

Margaret Wheatley believes that we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings but simple, truthful conversations. The intent of this book is to encourage and support you in beginning conversations about things that are important to you and those near you. It has no other purpose. Beautifully designed and executed, *Turning to One Another* includes multicultural experiences, poems, and quotes as it leads us through its thought-provoking sections. It is a wonderful tool to inspire and bring groups together in the best possible way—by talking and listening.



Widening the Circle

Inspiration and Guidance for Community Living

by Debora Hogeland

2000; 340 pages

This practical and inspirational book provides the context that community living requires, and explores the delights, challenges, possibilities and heartbreaks of living with others. Hogeland interweaves stories and interviews collected from over 17 years of community living.



The Zen of Listening

Mindful Communications in the Age of Distractions

by Rebecca Z. Shafir

2003; 263 pages; paperback

This thoughtful and insightful book sheds light on the art of listening, which we often take for granted. It challenges you to consider whether you are a good listener and how that affects your everyday interactions with others. Highly recommended for those wanting to acquire a deeper knowledge of this important skill.

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Family Dramas

Q: Our community, which has a largely shared economy and many shared daily activities, deals relatively well with many typically problematic, emotion-laden issues. We've managed to keep disagreements about diet, domestic animals, and money from consuming too much of our time and energy, because we've established clear policies and procedures for dealing with them, and most of us seem to be able to let go of individual attachments in these areas. But we cannot always say the same about kids and families.

No matter what we write on paper, or how we try to recruit new families, the fact remains that every new family which enters our community brings along its own unique approaches and baggage relating to child-rearing philosophy and expectations about the interface of nuclear family and community. When we have multiple families with children in similar age ranges here, we try to share childcare, but different sets of parents often don't see eye to

eye about how best to raise their kids. Some prefer more or less discipline, greater or fewer choices offered to their children, and different communication styles (ranging from open, vocal expression of every feeling in the moment, to learning to deal with things internally and quietly, especially when with adults). Clashes related to these things among children lead to conflicts among parents. To compound the matter, even within families, parents may disagree with each other about child-rearing approaches—creating tension, confusion, and mixed messages which then spill out into the community. Add in the fact that families who join often do so because the parents are dissatisfied or bored with nuclear family life, but have different approaches to dealing with that in community, and a family can bring a lot of drama to our lives.

However, we really want families here. What can we do to create more harmony and less drama?



Laird Schaub responds:

This is an excellent topic.

The bad news is that parenting choices tend to lie close to the bone, which means they're likely to be lightning rod issues—where the response is reactive, immediate, and high voltage—whenever there's a clash about the “right” way to raise kids. Things

can get tense in a hurry. The triggers can include when to discipline children, *whether* to discipline them, what are appropriate boundaries for safety, what are appropriate boundaries for use of common facilities and equipment, what's appropriate language, how do boundaries vary with age, what behaviors constitute respect for others, is spanking an acceptable disciplinary practice (or a form of abuse), when and how to introduce information about sexuality, when and how to support sexual exploration among children...even when to start potty training. Essentially, it's Pandora's Box, and once you lift the lid who knows what will pop out. A happy, collaborative moment can go south in a blink.

All communities with families must wrestle with the general question of how to determine when matters that are normally considered family business become group business—under what circumstances does private become public? To what extent is the group a stakeholder in childrearing? To what extent should the group have a voice in parenting? If you're a family living in community, this is a minefield that you cannot avoid walking through.

There can be an incredible naivete about the attraction of raising children in community. If parents are focusing solely on access to cheap babysitting and the presence of surrogate aunts and uncles in unlimited quantities, there's bound to be a fall from grace. What happens when the neighboring family allows their 10-year-old to play on the roof unsupervised, or to yell back at adults when they don't like a request? Parent A feels Parent B is permissive to the point of criminal neglect; Parent B believes Parent A is a disciplinarian Nazi who is only teaching their child to be afraid.

The good news is that if the group has a general understanding about how to constructively navigate “hot-button, emotion-laden issues” then you already possess the basic tools for handling parenting issues. I understand that you may currently be swamped by the volatility and overwhelming amplitude of the distress that can erupt in connection with parenting, and that it may be hard to find someone with the requisite skills and sufficient neutrality to facilitate the conversations, yet it's still the same general approach.

All groups that welcome families have as a common value the desire to create a safe and healthy place to raise kids. Unfortunately that general goal is typically not undergirded by any thorough discussion about what that will look like, and things

tend to get immediately sticky once actual dynamics surface (as they inevitably will) in the absence of an understanding about what's acceptable and how to negotiate differences.

While this dynamic can present in a variety of ways, the key issue typically distills down into what is expected and what is allowed (two very different questions, both of which can be challenging) when it comes to adults setting limits for children not their own.

If you accept as a given that there will be different styles of parenting in play (in other words, that the community will not attempt to screen potential members for alignment with a particular parenting style and that this matter will be seen essentially as the parents' prerogative), then it behooves the group to discuss what's wanted in the situation where an adult observes a child not their own doing something (or not doing something) that is problematic for the adult. Is that adult empowered to act in the moment? What are the expectations around notifying the parents of what was observed and what the adult did (and how the child responded)? To what extent does the equation change if the adult believes there's imminent danger to life or property? How important is it that adults respond to challenging child behaviors in a consistent way? How important is it that adults honor the parents' wishes regarding how to set limits? To what extent does it make a difference if the behavior is occurring in common space versus space owned or controlled by the child's family?

Most groups I've worked with tend to gravitate toward a set of agreements that includes the following features (there are certainly others ways to handle this; I'm just reporting the direction that most groups adopt):

- All adults are encouraged to develop direct personal relationships with all the children in the community. While this is not required, there is a general understanding that interactions between adults and children tend to be less frictional if limit setting is counterbalanced by positive, connecting experiences.

- All adults are authorized to use their best judgment about whether it's appropriate to intervene when they observe child behavior they deem inappropriate or dangerous. In doing so, authenticity tends to be valued above consistency. Further, the behavior and actions taken are expected to be reported to the child's parents at the earliest convenience.

- When intervening, adults are expected to respect children to the extent possible, and to not use physical force unless it's deemed absolutely necessary (as in separating fighting children who are unwilling to disengage upon request, or in forcibly removing a child from playing in a construction zone).

- If an adult has an issue with how another adult is interacting with children (even their own), they are encouraged to bring this up with the adult directly, preferably in a setting where the child is not present.

- Parents agree to teach their children that they should obey limits set by other adults in the moment (even if they are different limits than the parents would set), yet have the right to

bring the matter up with the parents later if they disagree (obey first; discuss later).

- Parents are encouraged to meet regularly as a group to discuss common issues in parenting and to provide guidance to the community about what opportunities for support and engagement with the children are desired.

Even if you have all these agreements in place (no small achievement), you should expect that there will be times when disagreements and upset will nonetheless occur. That means you'll need to have a protocol for handling those moments, just as you would for any other nontrivial dispute that falls within the group's sphere of influence. For the most difficult situations, you'll probably need provisions for bringing in outside facilitation.

The worst thing you can do is to allow the group to be paralyzed by the dynamic and not deal with it. Hoping it will self heal or go away on its own tends to be a spectacularly ineffective strategy. Left unattended, hurts that occur in connection with parenting choices can fester and harden into brittleness and bitterness, which is a far cry from the betterment and joy you meant to foster all along.

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.



Ina Meyer-Stoll responds:

This question is one of the key issues for a community: how open and flexible is an existing system (community) to integrate a new system (family)? And how open and adaptive is the family system entering the community? Nothing is more unpredictable, intimate, and challenging than to incorporate a new family into an existing community. As life is always new and unique, each family will bring new facets of life into the community which are probably not yet integrated in the community's daily life. The community will be reviewing its core values to see if the new family correlates with this value system. New families might reveal a lack of clarity or lack of unity in the community. However, this can turn into an opportunity for mutual development. This process will require patience, humour, and a lot of heartfelt and mindful communication between all parties involved.

I recommend looking at all family members individually. In

our three decades as a community we have a few basic experiences: If the parents don't feel content, this will have a deep impact on the kids. And if the parents are inspired by the new situation, kids are much more likely to thrive. New children will be experiencing some deep changes, including new school and friends. For things to go well, both parents need to have the feeling that the new step (entering a community) really improves their life situation. If only one part of the family stands fully behind the decision to move into a community, this can be a constant source of troubles.

Life also becomes much easier if all parents living in a community become friends. This is a big one, I know.

Here at ZEGG, all parents meet once a week to share and to exchange experiences in our ZEGG Forum. They tell each other how they are feeling with their own kids (and each others', if there's anything to say), and what the challenges and the joys are at the moment. They talk about their styles of education and welcome input from others. Greater transparency amongst the different parents allows better understanding of different styles of education and makes it easier to accept different ways of family life. For example, not all parents have the same agreements with their kids concerning watching television or the use of computers. But shared acceptance of the different agreements and the values behind them is of crucial importance.

And why should all members of a family need to share one household? Here at ZEGG we look at each family individually. Of course, family members live together in one household if they want to. Sometimes, however, a family will benefit if not all members share the same household. For example, a mother may live with one child in one living group, while the father may find a different group to stay in, maybe with another child. There are no "rules" about how a family should live. We are open to any possibilities that will create more understanding and love. One living group consisted of all teenagers (supported by the parents). One boy, then eight years old, decided to not live with his mother, but rather with some adult friends in a bigger living group. The mother supported this step and maintains a very close connection with her son.

There is no "one solution" when incorporating new families into a community. To create more harmony during this process, it is necessary to agree to some core values for parents and to find nourishing ways to communicate with each other. ❀

Ina Meyer-Stoll has lived in community for 25 years. She was one of the founding members of the ecovillage ZEGG, where she has been active in various ways since 1991 (www.zegg.de)—including focalizing the children's house for seven years and working in the ZEGG kindergarten for two years. She has also been a communications trainer and supervisor for almost 20 years, specializing in building community and creating transparency and trust in group processes, and offers ZEGG Forum training in the US.

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

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#146



Family

Among hot-button topics in intentional community, issues related to “Family” must certainly rank near the top. If “Kids, Pets, Food, and Finances” have the most proven potential to turn a tidy five-minute agenda item into a series of two-hour meetings, then “Family” is inextricably implicated in all of them. While the likely runners-up in the hot-topics category, “Relationships, Power, Participation, and Personal Challenges,” may often get less attention in group discussion, they are equally tied into “Family.” If “Family” causes so much trouble, why even bother trying to combine it with “Community”?

One might as well ask: Whoever had the idea of combining “Humans” (with all their idiosyncracies) and “Society” (which we’d like to run smoothly), or “Bodies” (which age and fall apart) with “People” (who want to stay young and healthy forever)? In other words, except in those communities which deliberately exclude them, families, in their multiple forms, are unavoidable parts of the equation, both for better and for worse. And even in childless communities and in those groups with agreements that preclude coupling between individuals, some element of “Family” (with both its attendant challenges and its rewards) still exerts an influence.

The articles in this issue shed light on the multiple ways in which Family can manifest in community, and offer ideas and many real-life examples of how that association can help, rather than hinder, the growth, health, and happiness of all involved. We asked potential contributors a wide range of questions and received an equally diverse array of responses. A quick review of the Table of Contents is enough to show that no two people experience this topic exactly alike.

We invite your own reflections on these articles and on this topic. We always welcome letters to the editor (editor@ic.org); you may also visit our newly redesigned website (communities.ic.org) to leave your comments.

Our Summer 2010 theme is “Education for Sustainability,” to be followed in Fall by “Power and Empowerment” and in Winter by “Elders.” We invite your submissions to these issues as well (visit communities.ic.org/submit.php). We also encourage you to browse the back issue excerpts newly posted at communities.ic.org, sign up for the weekly FIC newsletter at www.ic.org, and, if you belong to Facebook, become a fan of COMMUNITIES (www.facebook.com/CommunitiesMagazine) and join the Intentional Communities Cause ([apps.facebook.com/causes/413476](https://www.facebook.com/causes/413476)).

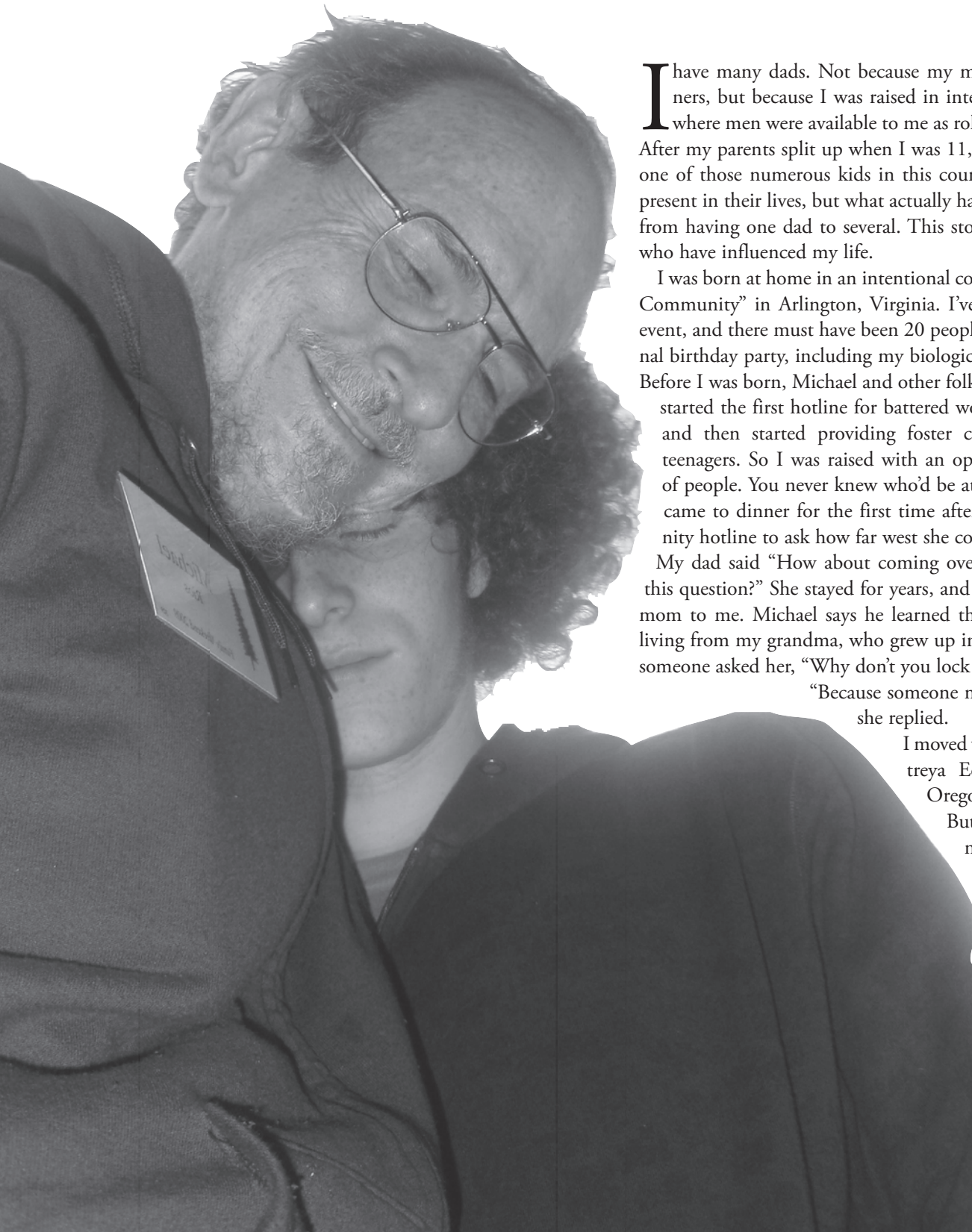
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Thank you again for joining us in COMMUNITIES. ❁

Chris Roth (editor@ic.org) edits COMMUNITIES.

AN ABUNDANCE OF DADS

By Skye Rios (with Melanie Rios)



I have many dads. Not because my mom had lots of partners, but because I was raised in intentional communities where men were available to me as role models and friends. After my parents split up when I was 11, I could have become one of those numerous kids in this country without any dad present in their lives, but what actually happened is that I went from having one dad to several. This story is about four men who have influenced my life.

I was born at home in an intentional community called “The Community” in Arlington, Virginia. I’ve seen a video of this event, and there must have been 20 people present at my original birthday party, including my biological dad, Michael Rios. Before I was born, Michael and other folks at The Community started the first hotline for battered women in this country, and then started providing foster care to court-referred teenagers. So I was raised with an open door for all kinds of people. You never knew who’d be at dinner. One woman came to dinner for the first time after calling the community hotline to ask how far west she could get on 50 dollars. My dad said “How about coming over and we can discuss this question?” She stayed for years, and became like a second mom to me. Michael says he learned this welcoming way of living from my grandma, who grew up in Puerto Rico. “Tere,” someone asked her, “Why don’t you lock your doors at night?” “Because someone might want to get in,” she replied.

I moved with my mom to Maitreya Ecovillage in Eugene, Oregon when I was 11.

But I still stayed connected with my first dad, often calling him every day, even now that I’m 18. He’s like a walking encyclopedia, faster than the internet for answering my random questions about the world.

When I moved to Eugene, I made friends with some of the homeless people who live downtown, and

Dean had a ragged exterior and a heart of gold, and he became one of my inspirations and significant influences.

wanted to sleep overnight with them on the streets. My mom wasn't thrilled with this idea, so we compromised by inviting one of them, Dean Clark, to live at our ecovillage. Dean had a ragged exterior and a heart of gold, and he became one of my inspirations and significant influences.

When Dean and I met, he was a 55-year-old recovering heroin addict who wore dirty clothes, smelled like alcohol, and carried the stature of a bum. He first strayed onto Maitreya Ecovillage property in search of a place to reside, and someone pointed him to the local mission. But he insisted that our village was his future home, even if it meant sleeping under a tree. I found him interesting to talk to, and so I invited him to stay, and joined him as he worked in the garden and did other tasks around the ecovillage.

Dean was a good worker, accomplishing a myriad of tasks from blackberry trimming at the ecovillage to household chores for a community member in her 70s. He worked steadily despite chronic pain, addictions, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a thin, mangled body. Our house was full, so Dean camped out initially with the young folk who were visiting the ecovillage. When winter came, someone found him an RV to stay in on our street. When the city towed the RV because it was illegally parked, Rob Bolman, whom I will describe next, built him a small bedroom to live in.

Dean's small stature probably led to his struggles with addiction, though they might also have had something to do with his mother being a Native American prostitute and his stepfather a violent abuser. In Vietnam, the Viet Cong created underground tunnels for safe travel. Because of his small size, Dean was chosen to crawl into these cramped tunnels and face the Viet Cong who awaited him there with firearms. Unlike after WW II, when veterans were met with heroic praise, Dean met only hostility and scorn upon his return.

Within a couple of years of living with us, Dean had managed to significantly reduce his dependencies on drugs and alcohol, but he was still hooked on prescription methadone. He checked himself into a clinic to get off this drug as well, and he was almost through the two-week ordeal when the hospital staff allowed him to walk outside for some fresh air. He lost his balance, hit his head on the sidewalk, fell into a coma, and died a few days later.

Dean taught me that a person's social status and the way they are perceived often do not correlate with their integrity, intentions, and positive effect in the world. I saw how a person's life situation can create huge struggles, and how they deserve and need support. Watching Dean's determination to become free of addictions influenced me to not become addicted to substances in the first place. After Dean died, I became a resource for youth centers that are over-capacity, and hosted and supported children who had been neglected or abandoned by their families. I also worked on a video documentary project to convey the voices of homeless teens in Eugene by interviewing them on street corners during the day, and in warmer places such as the aisles of Wal-Mart at night. Our film aired on a local TV station, and we used it during a day-long workshop on homeless youth in Eugene.

Rob Bolman became my step-dad when my mom moved in with him. I call him "pops," and we get together for a meal or two when I come home for vacations, even though he and my mom are no longer together. In addition to building Dean's small house, Rob built or renovated almost all the other buildings at Maitreya Ecovillage. I worked as his apprentice rebuilding a house foundation, renovating a garage into a living space, and making wooden

(continued on p. 75)



Photos courtesy of Skye and Melanie Rios



*Left page: Michael Rios and Skye.
This page top: Robert Bolman and Skye.
Middle: Dean Clark.
Bottom: Finn Po.*

Nudging at Boundaries

By Julie Boerst



White Hawk Ecovillage

The author lives at White Hawk Ecovillage, a growing intentional community on 120 acres near Ithaca, New York, with 30 home sites and three households in residence. Members value the kind of sustainable living, interaction, and sharing that emerges spontaneously in community.

The sun brushes the treetops and I hear Buster crowing. I go to the chickens, open up the coop, clean it up like it's a big kitty litter box, and listen to the soft clucking as the birds begin their foray into the acreage that surrounds our homes. I take the eggs left behind and put them in Steve and Laura's fridge. Why am I taking care of these chickens not my own? Because it comes to me to do it. Because the chickens eat the bugs out of my yard. Because I'm fond of watching them pecking in the clover and love to throw some corn in their direction.

This is how family is taking shape here at White Hawk Ecovillage—a sort of soft, friendly give and take that nudges at the boundaries that exist in traditional neighborhoods. If you're going to nudge at boundaries, you've got to be sensitive—to the stiffness in a posture, the downcast eye, when someone's tone leaps into nervousness or agitation, when my own tone does that. You need to know

when to come and when to go if you're living in a community where you're in and out of each other's houses, yards, and chicken coops.

Food that I did not make shows up at my house—popcorn, spring rolls, muffins, pie. Food shows up at my neighbors' houses—cookies, cakes, squash. Some of my family's food is cached in Greg's root cellar, which he has opened to all of us. We are getting the hang of effortless sharing. It's interesting to see how a *quick! quick! reciprocate!* alarm went off inside me when I first received, obscuring the gift someone offered. Now I know to just do my job—to give when it occurs to me and to receive when it comes to me, to say no when that comes to me, too.

Sometimes what occurs to me is funny. Bring nettle tea to Greg! Bring nettle tea to Greg! Why? He's probably busy working. I don't want to interrupt. Bring nettle tea to Greg! So I give in and just do it. There. It's not so hard.

There are fun little uproars. Someone has taken all the shovels! Where have they gone? I need a shovel! I should have a shovel! We learn to rub the rough edges off each other, communicate honestly and directly, hear when that querulous and utterly nonproductive note creeps into our voices. We are seeing the little stories about ourselves that emerge, settling down into more plain and simple fact. It's exactly the same as learning how to get along with a partner, a daughter, a mother.

Kids are allowed to be who they are. No one remarks about my child in his extended hermit phase, preferring to spend the bulk of his time inside with trains rather than roaming our 120 acres. Children may play naked or half-naked.

Parents don't have to worry about the stigma of having kids outside without coats in cold weather. All of us know when and how to indicate a need for more warmth, for more or less of anything, and we are all free to do that.

As people come and go, come and go from our home, I am fortunate that I am unable to maintain a standard of cleanliness that would say something nice and orderly about me. I am grateful for that. I drop another layer of identity and obligation and just let myself clean the house exactly when I do. I notice I don't apologize anymore for the way my house looks. It seems preposterous to me now, almost like telling the clerk at the grocery store, "I'm so sorry I'm probably not pretty enough to please you!" Entirely unnecessary.

The day I sweep Laura's floor, I have a breakthrough. Her girls have been playing with salt and her hands are full. It occurs to me to grab a broom, simultaneously terrified that I may be saying something about the house or her ability to handle things. But really, I'm just sweeping the floor—the floor gritty underfoot, the floor she's sighing over. She comes to my house and helps herself to juice. Good! So this is how it is—boundaries easing, no need to play hostess or capable mother. It feels nice.

I'm writing this article before dawn with all my shades up, exposing me entirely. We installed shades before we got here because we value our privacy and love having the option of enclosing ourselves. I notice that I don't care as much about being enclosed, though. Before, I put the shades down to smother an uncomfortable sense of being on display, on stage. Now that occurs to me less, maybe because I act a little less like I'm on display in my day-to-day life. Being in community brings me face-to-face with the image that I make of myself more often, and it invites me to let the image crumble. At the same time, hooray for shades. I love them.

I like to drink Coke. I used to prefer to do so with the shades down. How could I let them see my terrible weakness? Terrible weakness or not, I do it with shades up or down now, with a still-perceptible



Photos courtesy of Julie Boerst

I notice I don't apologize anymore for the way my house looks.

degree of self-consciousness. So is this the definition of family? The people who are allowed to see you drink Coke? The people who are allowed to see you greedy, sheepish, ashamed, and happy about it?

My day-to-day experience is family, as the stay-at-home mother to a one-year-old and four-year-old. Two-year-old twins live two houses down. No, they're not all best buddies. No, they don't spend all their time together. There's no need to create a cheery and idealistic picture of that. They come and go when they do, sometimes sharing smiles and moments. Laura (the twins' mother) and I bounce back and forth between our homes, adding variety to our days. My daughter is currently fascinated by her daughters, staring at them in awe, reaching up to stroke their hair. Sometimes two whole days go by and I think how odd that I haven't seen them. Sometimes I'm over there five times a day. Today it was three times by 7 a.m.—once to tiptoe in and put eggs in the fridge, once to add one more, once to put a plate of cookies on the table.

I wonder what it will be like when there are more homes, more bouncing, more exchange. I wonder if a certain stiffness will arise, an image of community to uphold, an identity grasped with white knuckles or a sense of self-impor-



Opposite page top: Arvelle, Laura, and Sylvanna Woinoski visit Julie. Middle: White Hawk Lane. Bottom: Buster the rooster. This page top: Community playground construction: Steve Woinoski and Greg Nelson working with visiting family helping out. Above: Danby Fun Day Parade (Alana Peterson; Beauty Peterson; Joe Italiano; Sylvanna, Laura, and Arvelle Woinoski; Dmitri Italiano).

tance. I realize that's up to me. What will I uphold in any particular moment? What will I allow to unfold?

A couple from Long Island is coming to visit today, and I have forgotten entirely. I am pleased that I have done this, that I have not spent the entire preceding day attempting to make my home appear like a suitable image of White Hawk, one that will entice and convince. Today this home will be what it is. Maybe it will invite new members into our extended family. ❀



Julie Boerst lives at White Hawk Ecovillage with her husband and two children. She enjoys baking, reading, and walking (www.whitehawk.org).

When an Ecovillage Is Raising Your Child

By Kim Scheidt

The saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” When a family lives intentionally with the members of their village, this saying takes on a whole spectrum of meaning. No longer a completely autonomous unit unto themselves, parents and children will find that their decisions and actions have noticeable effects on the community around them, much more so than with a traditional family unit in the mainstream culture.

Jennifer and Meadow live at Dancing Rabbit, an ecovillage and intentional community of about 45 people set amidst the hills and prairies of rural northeast Missouri. Both are mothers of three, and their children range in age from six to 14. Jennifer and her family moved to Dancing Rabbit in the spring of 2005, and Meadow has been living there with her family since the summer of 2007. In this article they share some of their thoughts and experiences of what moving to and living in an intentional community has meant for their families.

The members of Dancing Rabbit hold some of their infrastructure and most of their land in common, and individual dwellings are typically quite modest in size. Today’s media will tell you that downsizing is the opposite of what makes for a happy existence. But Meadow feels that, for her family, this has not proven to be true. “There was a sense of loss in that each boy used to have his own big bedroom, and then all three went into the same very small bedroom when we moved here. But, very soon after, they almost like it. They may complain occasionally about it, but I think they like being more pared down in some ways. They seem to find a real comfort in sharing sleeping space. They used to have a lot of fears at night, and would creep into our room, but now they have each other. The upside is that they have each other, and then the downside is that they have each other so closely—which is kind of like the

conundrum of community.”

Meadow’s sons also enjoy having a much larger, more interesting place to explore. “In the suburbs we had a yard, and everybody else had a yard, and then there was a street, and then there was another street with houses with yards. But you couldn’t ever go onto someone else’s yard, and we didn’t know anybody, so it was really isolating.”

In their new home, Meadow finds,



Photo

Photos courtesy of Kim Scheidt



Jennifer Martin



Cynder Johnson



Opposite page: Nicole, Alyson, Sara, Thomas, and Jeffrey, working together to mulch the paths. This page top right: Ewan, Toren, Aurelia, Angela, and Sierra, harvesting community peaches. This page top left: Cynder and Rachel, best friends forever. This photo: Viro (of "30 Days" TV fame) with Rowan, Toren, and Cynder, popping the big packing poppers at the entrance to the village.

“we all have the sense that we’re a better family because we’re more in touch with each other. Downsizing has helped me to feel more connected: they’re not up in their bedrooms while I’m down in the kitchen working and feeling isolated. Now we can carry on a conversation or I can hear what the conflict is and help out. Whoever is working in the kitchen can be part of the conversation in the living room. So the actual structure of our house has been fabulous. I’ve enjoyed the change, surprisingly. It could be a little bit bigger, a little bit more elbow room, but not much.”

Jennifer touches on another aspect of living in close quarters: the fact that her children are witness to the realities of interpersonal relations. “We live in a small house, 450 sq. ft., with no walls. So if I have a thought or a feeling and I express it, even if I’m talking with a friend on the phone, even if I go outside, I have no privacy. And I’m one of those people who thinks out loud. My kids have a really strong idea of how I think, how I relate to others.”

Jennifer sees a distinct difference between life in and out of community. “In the outside world, kids, unless they’re extremely exceptional, are pretty much

doomed to a childhood separate from adults. They are not allowed to work or relate or play with the adults. They are children. They do children things. They are on their own planet until the day they turn 18 and they prove themselves as worthy adults. It's not that way here. They see interpersonal relations. They see dynamic tensions. They see people being attracted to each other. They see the interplay that goes on between individuals in any relationship, whether it's romantic or adversarial or friendship or companionship. They love the meat of that. And as I'm here longer, and especially as they get older, I'm less and less interested in editing that out of their experience, because I think there's such wonderful knowledge to gain."

Jennifer also finds that some of her community mates have developed strong relationships with her children without needing to have a particularly strong relationship with her. "I feel comfortable with my kids going into any of the other houses, and I don't have to be there to supervise. I don't even have to be there to interact with the other adult. They have their own independent relationships, and that's really cool."

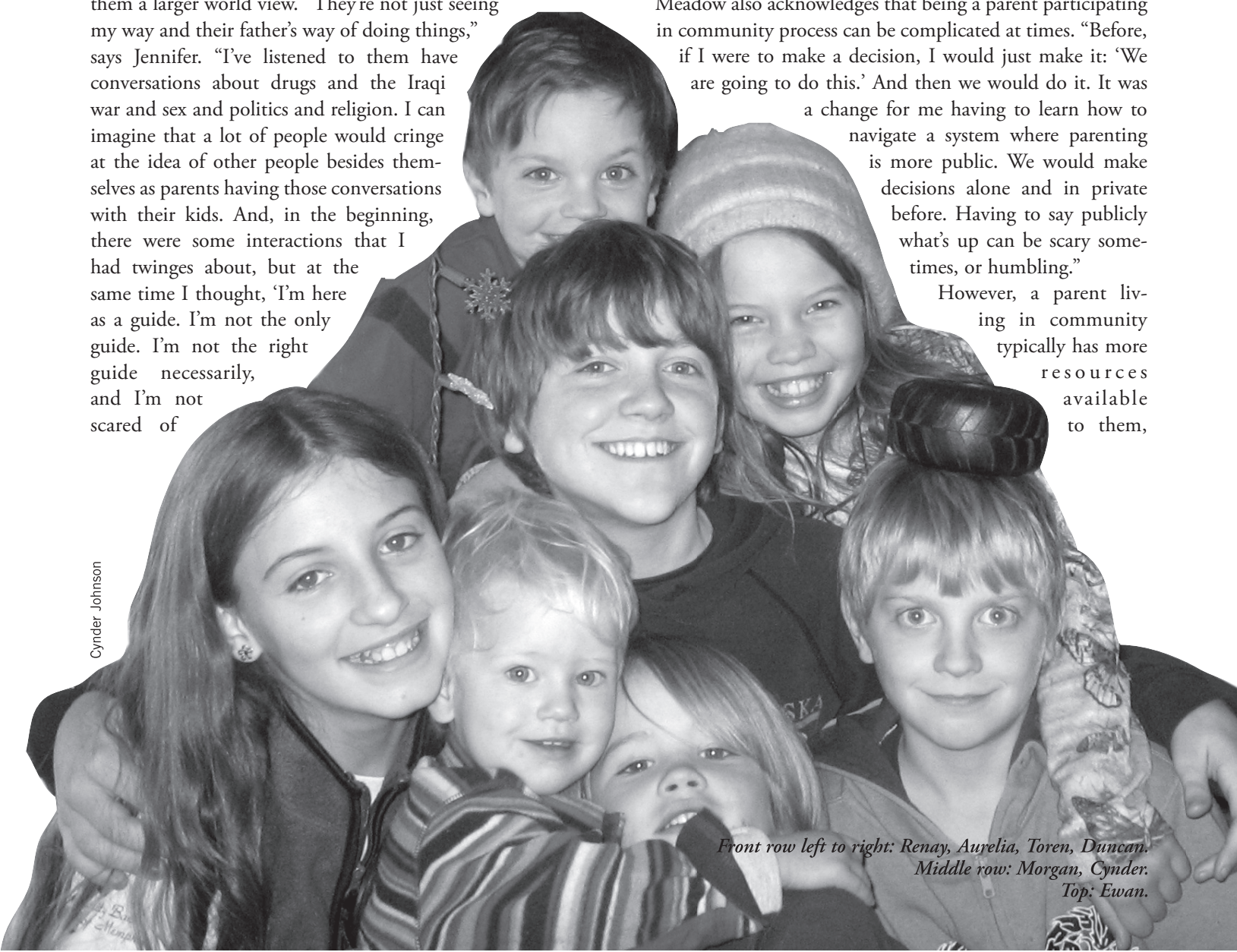
Encouraging children to develop relationships with adults outside of their immediate families can benefit them by giving them a larger world view. "They're not just seeing my way and their father's way of doing things," says Jennifer. "I've listened to them have conversations about drugs and the Iraqi war and sex and politics and religion. I can imagine that a lot of people would cringe at the idea of other people besides themselves as parents having those conversations with their kids. And, in the beginning, there were some interactions that I had twinges about, but at the same time I thought, 'I'm here as a guide. I'm not the only guide. I'm not the right guide necessarily, and I'm not scared of

information.' So, when I can see it from that perspective I say, 'OK.' They're going to hear things, and it might not be the way I would relate to them or the way I would think of them. But I want my kids to have enough information, or a plethora of information, and then they can make their own decisions. For every time they hear a perspective in one way, they then can hear a different perspective. And a conversation with another person can spark a conversation between the two of us."

In general, Jennifer has appreciated the additional interactions her children have had—but it hasn't always been easy. "It's one thing when things are going really smoothly and people are telling me, 'Your kids are great. They're smart. They're intelligent.' But when things aren't going smoothly, and the kids are having a hard time, suddenly you have 30 different potential parents, 28 of whom have never actually been a parent, all giving you ideas about how it is to parent and what's the right way to parent. And navigating that within community process is not always easy. But by being open to that process, and even just hearing it, if nothing else you can at least say, 'Yes, my thinking on this is where I want it to be,' or you can tweak your thinking."

Meadow also acknowledges that being a parent participating in community process can be complicated at times. "Before, if I were to make a decision, I would just make it: 'We are going to do this.' And then we would do it. It was a change for me having to learn how to navigate a system where parenting is more public. We would make decisions alone and in private before. Having to say publicly what's up can be scary sometimes, or humbling."

However, a parent living in community typically has more resources available to them,



Cynder Johnson

Front row left to right: Renay, Aurelia, Toren, Duncan.
Middle row: Morgan, Cynder.
Top: Ewan.

which can be very helpful. “If there’s conflict in our family that we can’t handle, we’ve been able to go to certain people and say, ‘We need your help.’ The support we’ve received has been really appreciated. And whereas before we felt like we were kind of in a bubble all ourselves, we now have a lot of resources in conflict resolution.”

Meadow says she’s learned a lot from other people about interacting with her children. “There have been many positive aspects to that. For instance, if a friend sees that I’m at my wit’s end, they might jump in. They check with me—‘Is it OK if I say something?’—and then try some different path. That gives me a break and it gives me different ideas.”

Another benefit of living in community for Meadow has been learning a different style of communication—Nonviolent Communication (NVC). “It has been really beneficial for our family and for other people in the community. Particu-

“I’ve listened to them have conversations about drugs and the Iraqi war and sex and politics and religion. I can imagine that a lot of people would cringe at the idea of other people besides themselves as parents having those conversations with their kids.”

larly with a group of kids and adults that play after school, there’s been a real effort to deal with conflict in a way that’s NVC—not necessarily fixing the conflict, but supporting someone and recognizing what their feelings are and having compassion. That’s been fabulous; it feels very helpful. For them to recognize what they’re feeling and be able to express it, particularly for boys, I think, is huge.”

According to Meadow, Dancing Rabbit children have experienced “a beautiful blooming of getting along” since the introduction of NVC in their after-school games. “They’re working through things in a really different way. Before, if they couldn’t agree on a game, they would storm off and be really angry and show their anger in a way that wasn’t conducive to figuring out a game to play together. Now they just accept that there’s going to be some conversation. They might not always get what they want, but if there’s some way of meeting everybody’s needs they’re more able to work on that and also show compassion to one another.”

Jennifer also tells of a difference in the approach her children take to conflict resolution due to their life in community. “If you have a conflict with someone or someone isn’t acting in the way that you want them to, in the wider culture (at least the way that I and a lot of people I know were raised), you either deal with that conflict or you disassociate from that person. And likely as not you disassociate. I’ve watched my children do this, when they try to decide what course to take. And the times they decide to disassociate from that person, they have

Jennifer Martin



Rowan and Toren get in the center of the maypole at Sandhill's May Day Festival.

to inevitably come back to the fact that—guess what? They still have to live with them. They still have to interact with them in some way, and so they’ve got to come up with a way to interact with them that’s going to feel OK. Time and time again I’ve seen the kids give somebody the second and third and fourth and fifth chance that I don’t think they would have been as inclined to give if they had the larger social circle to choose from. That’s fascinating to me. I love watching that.”

Life in community has many effects on children, and the children also have a great impact on the life of the community. Spaces filled with kids can be noisy and boisterous in a way that is not always appreciated by adults. Jennifer’s family moved to Dancing Rabbit at a time when there were no other children at the community. She emphasizes how it was important that the community was truly ready for children and the impact they would have before her family came to live there. “There was a lot of enthusiasm for families,” she says. “We came at a time when the community had already made the decision that it wanted families and wanted to encourage families. We weren’t trying to fit into something where people weren’t ready. And those who weren’t enthusiastic weren’t really verbal in that, or else they were clear. They said, ‘I’m glad you’re here. This is right. This is good for the community. But I’m not really into kids, so don’t expect a lot from me personally—but know that I’m supportive of your being here.’”

Exposure to a non-consumptive, nonviolent culture that values human relationships is uncommon in this day and age. Life in an ecovillage gives children the chance to interact with numerous positive role models on a daily basis, and living in community with others helps to develop a sense of how they as individuals fit into the larger society. The slightly out-of-the-ordinary upbringing that life in an intentional community provides its children encourages their growth into independent-minded, well-adjusted young adults. ❁



Kim Scheidt is a founding member of Red Earth Farms, an intentional community located in northeast Missouri. She earns money doing accounting work for the Fellowship for Intentional Community in addition to her full-time job as mommy to a two-year-old.

One Thousand Loaves of Bread: Reflections on Life Lessons in an Intentional Community

By Understanding Israel, M.A. Education

Marco Ricca Studio of New York, New York

The casting director for children on a William Shatner made-for-television movie looked at me and the 10 children in my family that day, “Well,” he said, “you have more of an entourage than the star.” He was right, because we had community. That day I was working as part of our home schooling education with our community’s children on a set in Hollywood. I gained from that experience an insight into the value of community.

For almost three decades I lived in an intentional community. Originally we were focused on the “back to the earth” movement that occurred in the late ’60s and early ’70s. One million turnips and a thousand loaves of bread later we were focused on the dynamics of sustaining our community and educating our children. I since have come to value the incalculable lessons only a community imbues.

Now as a result of that unique experience I am engaged in pursuing my Doctorate of Educational Leadership. What I learned there, both the triumphs and failures, are infusing my research today. I developed a deep belief in the value of experiential learning and community building as genuine aspects of a real education.

I was crafted and honed as an educator in the traditional style of educational theory at Pacific Lutheran University. Later, through the crucible of community, I became an advocate for experiential learning as a valuable part of education. This form of learning favors children’s hands-on experiences with materials and concepts. It focuses on taking the education out of the confines of a classroom and moving it into real-world experiences. As an example, children in a biology experiential learning setting would feel real pollywog masses of gelatin at a pond site, rather than view them in a third-hand video and classroom handout work sheets.

Our form of education within the community focused on this experiential learning. For Native Americans, like myself, this style of education is actually an ancient form of learning that combines children’s natural interest with community elders and guides. Our intentional community was nestled in the misty rain clouds of the Cascade Mountains’ foothills. Some of us developed a program that allowed children at least half of the day to experience the wonders of community and nature. Children worked alongside adults in the gardens and participated in community-building activities. My natural-



born children learned to build, wire, and plumb a cabin from their father, alongside memorizing their multiplication tables. They also participated in negotiating disputes among themselves in a children's council, and spent weeks camping in the mountains, to name just a few of the curriculum components.

My sons Strong and Magic raised sheep, chickens, and ducks. Yes, the raccoons got the recalcitrant ducks that would not come in from the pond while the chickens escaped the attack in their home-built pen. My son Magic and I cried when our treasured pet sheep Lambie Pie died of worms. We learned the tragic consequences of putting our pet amongst the community's untreated flock. Today my son has purchased almost 50 acres with his "community siblings" and eventually will be starting another flock, all the wiser.

Before joining the community, I taught in the ghettos of Harlem, Washington DC, and Appalachia. This was at the behest of my Native American grandmother who was orphaned in a Texas massacre and advocated for the poor and disadvantaged. When through a circuitous route I stumbled upon the alternative community, the children were being watched by uninterested guardians. One of the wonders of community I experienced is what I call *natural community bonding*. This is the phenomenon that occurs when one person in a community (myself in this case) starts a passionate project (the education of the children in this example) and others with the same natu-

My natural-born children learned to build, wire, and plumb a cabin from their father, alongside memorizing their multiplication tables and negotiating disputes in a children's council.



ral instincts and passions arrive to help. This phenomenon acts somewhat like the body's systems for maintaining health. In our community, artists naturally bonded over artistic endeavors and farmers bonded over organic gardening, among just a few of the examples of this phenomenon.

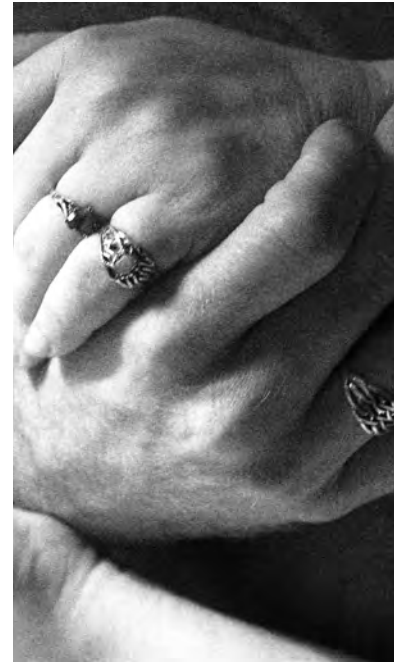
Even Eden had its apple, and our community was no exception. We went through an upheaval and were torn apart in the mid '80s. I have maintained close ties and bonds to some of the former members and the loyal devotees because the children and the culture of community tie me to both groups.

Suffice it to say that the experience in building an educational system based on experiential learning in an intentional community has greatly influenced my work today as a researcher. One thousand loaves of bread later, I have learned a valuable lesson: community is the bedrock foundation of a real education.

I close with the reflections of a young adult who was raised there: "The education I experienced in the community showed me that adults cared for me in particular, and paid attention to my mistakes. They made me excited about learning because they allowed me to experience my world first-hand." ❁



Understanding Israel lived for over 26 years in an alternative community in Washington State. Along with others there she helped to eventually form and establish a community school. Prior to joining the community in 1972, she received her Bachelor of Arts in Education from Pacific Lutheran University. In 2008, as a descendant of Native American roots, she received her Masters of Education from the Muckleshoot Tribal College First Peoples Program at Antioch University in Seattle, Washington. She is presently pursuing a Dr. of Educational Leadership through Argosy University in Seattle. Her memoirs are kept in a collection at the Washington State History Museum's Women's Consortium.



Parenting in Community: The Voyage from Fantasy to Reality

By Jesika Feather

I stood in the bathroom; a sake cup filled with urine in one hand and a positive pregnancy test in the other. My first thought was, “Wow. This is kind of exciting.” My second thought was, “Oh no! I didn’t ask permission!” (to have a baby, or to pee in Valise’s sake cup).

My community makes decisions by consensus and, at the last house meeting, “baby having” was not an item on the agenda. In fact, “baby having” has never been on the agenda.

This was happening at an awkward time. After renting together for a year, we’d finally managed to buy a house. We’d moved in a few weeks prior—hadn’t even used up all the toilet paper the old owners left in the bathroom. All of a sudden I would have to introduce this addendum involving creamed peas and footie pajamas. This was NOT what everyone had signed up for, and backing out, at this point, would be a very difficult procedure. After all, we’d just signed official paperwork in offices called “suites,” witnessed by men in suits and women

with frosted hair.

In our community founding meetings we tried really hard to predict every imaginable hardship: the roof caving in, economic crisis, and unfavorable personality transformations. We deliberated all this and more, yet the pregnancy scenario never made it to the table.

Why *didn’t* I ever bring it up? Benjah and I had been married for almost 10 years. We didn’t imagine this happening so soon, but we knew there’d be a baby at some point. Would it have been *so terribly difficult* to say, “How do y’all feel about living with a baby?”

Clearly, I was scared. Our community had never been what anyone would describe as... “family focused.” The majority of our time together was spent doing disaster relief in the Gulf Coast, after Hurricane Katrina. In that flurry of passion and social service, there was a general over-indulgence in many facets of life: hard work, miracles, ruckus, PTSD, and sewage...



Opposite page: Benjah, Jesika, and Ash: Ash's first minutes of life. Holding hands during birth. This page: Sean, Katherine with Ash, Stirling, and Goat: a rough night with the baby.

but *never* any babies.

Our list of communal strengths veered toward charisma, resourcefulness, and work ethic. Stability and structure? Not so much. I knew that my new community *liked* children, but I wasn't at all sure how they felt about *having* one. Not only do babies add work and mess, but they carry a certain stigma. The toy farm strewn across the floor does not exactly set the tone for a night of lively debauchery.

When I finally broke the news (the next day), reactions ranged from ambivalence to a jig of joy. Mercifully, there was no bashing of fists upon tables or rending of paperwork. In my state of relief, I settled sweetly into a nine-month reverie, indulging all my fantasies of communal-child-rearing cloud nine.

Twelve years before, when Benjah and I first fell in love, we strolled the grounds of our college campus, hand-in-hand, philosophizing our 18-year-old brains out, mostly about communities and how "it takes a village." These shared values have been the consistent unifying factor throughout our relationship.

By the time we got pregnant we'd lived in six very diverse communities and, over these 10 years, effectively eroded our youthful romanticized notions. We were proud of the fact that, in spite of the naysayers, we hadn't become bitter or jaded. And, most importantly, we'd kept our marriage intact.

But once Ash was born, it became clear that despite those 10 humbling years of "teachable moments," I'd sustained an unrelenting grip on some absurd expectations of communal families. My fantasies involved dozens of fat-legged toddlers scampering through acres of basil and butternut squash, wearing clover necklaces, harassing chickens, mimicking goats, and being nurtured by *many* mothers and fathers.

That vision was a far cry from our seven-bedroom home in Eugene, Oregon, where our predominant garden space is on the

roof and I was *definitely* the only mama. It didn't matter that the facts didn't match my fantasy. My faith was not swayed.

During my eighth month of pregnancy one of my co-workers asked me what I planned to do for childcare.

"I live in a community," I told her, as though that explained it all.

"So, they're gonna watch your baby while you're at work?" she asked me.

"Of course!" I replied, self-assuredly. "That's *why* I live in a community."

"Don't they have jobs?" she asked.

"There's always *somebody* at home," I answered flippantly.

"How much are you going to pay them?"

I shrugged. Admittedly, I hadn't considered this. Were my housemates going to charge me for childcare? "I don't think I'll have to pay that much," I said.

"You're lucky," she said. "Childcare breaks me every month."

I left work that day feeling very superior to all those non-communal folks, passing off their babies to daycares, emptying their bank accounts each month. Community, I thought, is a kind of insurance...so many people around to help you out.

With one month left of my maternity leave, the dismal truth began to emerge. Yes, I live with a bunch of people—a bunch of *busy* people who already work more than one full-time job. Simply planning a monthly house meeting takes about 30 minutes of compromise and usually results in someone stomping out for a consolatory cigarette.

Did I think that once Ash was born they were all going to white out their day planners and sit expectantly at my feet, waiting for their child-care assignments? "And don't worry about paying us, Jes. It's on the house."

"Oh, by the way, does anyone know where all those goats and

chickens came from? The ones wearing clover necklaces in the front yard?”

The truth is, they *did* help me out. They re-arranged their work schedules to help me keep Ash home for the first year-and-a-half of his life. They even took pay cuts, working fewer hours at their higher paying jobs to babysit Ash at a rate that was (temporarily) affordable to me. It was exceptionally generous of them and energetically draining for us all. Jimmy-rigging the communal schedule started to feel like a daily project. Eventually, in the name of household sanity, I had to suck it up and take Ash to a daycare.

These early, fantasy-shattering days were not particularly graceful ones. Far from emanating any sort of “maternal glow,” my new-mommy aura was composed of

paranoia and self-consciousness. Something like a resurgence of adolescence.

I couldn't figure out what “being a mother” meant in terms of my identity as an individual or as a member of this community. I realized that I felt a responsibility, as the only mother in my community, to embody my new maternal role in a graceful, goddess-like manner. I had ulterior motives. I *wanted* others in my community to have children. Therefore, this process needed to look fun and personally fulfilling. I was determined to participate actively in my community, maintain my love life, excel at my job, *and* present an air of solid unaffectedness: “It’s cool. I’ve got a baby now. So what?”

I know what you’re thinking: “Get real woman. *Child* and *graceful* don’t even belong in the same sentence!” Needless to say, I haven’t been particularly successful at my goal.

In our community founding meetings we tried hard to predict every imaginable hardship: the roof caving in, economic crisis, and unfavorable personality transformations... yet the pregnancy scenario never made it to the table.

During the first month of Ash’s life, we experienced nursing problems. The birth center issued me an industrial breast pump which I was told to use every three hours around the clock. In between pumping I nursed Ash and sanitized the equipment. This generally left me a two-hour slot in which to sleep and eat before beginning the process over again. This lasted an entire month.

Breast feeding in public has never bothered me. However, sitting bare chested with both tits plugged into milking funnels is *not sexy*. Nor does it depict the graceful poise of a nurturing mother. It calls to mind a cow in a milking factory. I was exhausted. I had a huge post-natal belly. I felt totally incompetent as a friend, a wife, a community member, and a mother. For two days I attempted to cloister this undignified ritual to the bedroom but, because it represented one-third of my life, I eventually gave up. I held council with my housemates, random guests, and coworkers, while my boobs stretched back and forth like a good ol’ fashioned toffee pull.

The whole ordeal made for interesting conversation, which was good, because the events of my daily life did not.

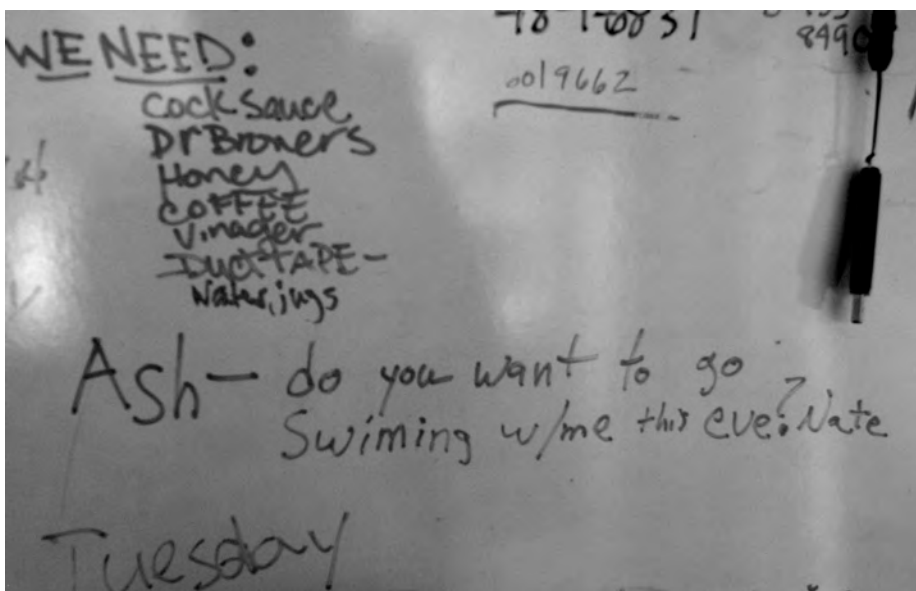
My housemates bustled through the periphery of my life with news of their Frisbee tournaments, their wildcrafting expeditions, and their fashion shows. My greatest fear was being asked the question, “What did *you* do today?”

My gig was off. I was most definitely *not* proving that “babies don’t change anything.”

All I wanted in the whole entire world was to live *alone*. I wanted to focus on Ash without enduring the self-imposed guilt of not pulling my weight in this community and the humiliation of my new, monotonous life. Also, I felt sad for Ash. This time was supposed to be about *him*. Never in my life had I been *this* obsessed about other people’s judgments, not even in middle school. Why on earth was this happening *now*?

Thankfully, things got better. Sleeping helped. Speaking honestly about my insecurities helped also. Now that Ash is

Valisa



a-year-and-a-half old, I've gained some helpful perspective. Asking myself to give my entire life to a child I met yesterday, and to *enjoy* it, was unrealistic. Asking myself to endure that gracefully in front of seven other people was insanely idealistic.

I'm also learning that to maintain a strong nuclear family within a communal family, it is vital to wield a healthy sense of prioritization. This is not a trait that comes naturally to me.

My husband and I each have more than one job. It was hard to find quality time *before* Ash was born. Now that our parallel home-hours are spent convincing Ash to eat "one more bite of oatmeal" or to break-dance for the visitors, we get about five "alone" hours a week. These hours are stolen between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. and, since Ash doesn't sleep through the night, they are destined for interruption.

We delicately distribute these scant hours between house cleaning, my writing, Benjah's lesson planning, love making, bills, and—oh yeah—sleep.

Wouldn't it be nice if our priorities aligned? They don't. Let's add another time-consuming activity to the list: argument.

The following is a common 11 p.m. interaction:

Benjah is reading on his side of the bed. We both cringe at the abrupt smack of released suction as I try, for the fourth time, to withdraw my nipple from Ash's pursed lips. Benjah and I freeze in silent prayer as Ash (eyes still closed) tosses from one side to the other. He murmurs and then lets out a high-pitched cry. Benjah and I lock eyes. Mine is an expression of resigned defeat; Benjah mouths, "Sorry."

But wait... Ash quiets. He stops moving. Relief washes over me. Oh glory be, blessed church of autonomy, you are my new religion. I can move. I can take a shower. I can drink a cup of tea. My two-foot, cute-as-all-git-out, sucker-demon is *finally* unconscious. My head is reeling with opportunity...for about 30 seconds. Then I remember it's my night to do the dishes.

ARRRRRGGGGG! I have to do it. In the last house meeting we made a com-



Emilie Beath

These early, fantasy-shattering days were not particularly graceful ones. Far from emanating any sort of "maternal glow," my new-mommy aura was composed of paranoia and self-consciousness.

mitment: we would not go to bed with a dirty kitchen. I lie still, contemplating my options (or lack thereof). I glance over at Benjah. He's looking at me with... yes...unmistakably *hungry* eyes.

How will I break this terrible news? Now he's leaning over to kiss me and all I can think about is the horrible, crusty lasagna dish on the counter. Has it even started soaking?

I summon the memory of every interaction I've had with Benjah over the last 14 years and try to perfect my tone, word choice, and energetic vibration so that he will acquiesce with my insufferable request.

I return his kiss and say, "So, do you wanna hang out in the kitchen while we finish those dishes real quick?"

He's not stupid. He knows about the lasagna pan. He also knows that the dishwasher is full of *clean* dishes which will have to be unloaded and that I could



Valisa

Opposite page top: Ash after carving his first jack-o-lantern.

Bottom: Ash's first message on the White Board.

This page top: Most recent family photo:

Back row: Jesika, Lali, Ja.

Middle row: Valisa with Malia P., Benjah with Ash, Devon and Brian.

Front row: Kiki, Renee with Alyssa, and Cassie the dog.

(Not pictured: Discordia and Paul.)

Above: Nate, Lali, and Ash at Holiday Market.

get detail-oriented with the counters. I watch him wilt.

Can you blame him? He's being prioritized under *dishes* (something that he doesn't fail to bring to my attention).

But it's not *really* about the dishes. I could never be classified as a clean freak.

(continued on p. 76)

Growing Family in Community

By Ma'ikwe Ludwig

During one of my son's brief forays into something resembling regular "school," I picked him up one day and was greeted by a quiet and somewhat perplexed version of my usually gregarious child. When I asked him what was on his mind, he reported that the class had been assigned a genealogy project, and he was to bring to school the next day a family tree.

"Let me guess," I said, feeling a wave of both amusement and compassion. "You're having trouble figuring out who to include?"

Jibran was raised in a scene where the lines between community and family were a bit fuzzy, to put it mildly. Even if he'd been asked to simply represent his siblings, parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles, he'd be sketching something closer to "bush" than "tree." His dad, Marqis, for instance, can legitimately be referred to as either an only child, one of four, or one of 10, depending on whom you count. And do you count your parents' current partners? Or just legally sanctioned relationships? And if the latter, do you then take the opportunity to share the story with your second-grade classmates about the time your dad made you look up every swear word he'd ever heard you utter in the dictionary, only to discover that the word "bastard" was actually an accurate label for yourself?

The timing of the assignment made for even more intense soul-searching on Jibran's part: I was eight months pregnant with his half-sister, Ananda. And while halves- and steps- could hardly have been that strange in his alternative school, the circumstances around this child surely were.

Let me back up.

Jibran has spent his whole life living in some version of community. When we were pregnant with Jibran, we made our first

family move to living communally, and he's been raised with a healthy mix of strong parental ties and having lots of kids and adults in his life that mattered a lot, but aren't related. He is highly independent, has influences from dozens of adults who have been in his life, and is amazingly socially savvy for a 12-year-old. And he has, in many ways, never truly been "mine."

Jibran's name was inspired by Kahlil Gibran's poem, "On Children":

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you, but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you...*

We loved this poem, both Marqis and I, and when he suggested that the child in my belly might be named Jibran, we both had an immediate sense of rightness, and never re-opened the boy's name conversation again. And after all our years in community, Jibran embodies the poem beautifully.

What I didn't understand, until I found myself unexpectedly pregnant eight years after naming our first child, is how profoundly having a community kid has affected my development as a parent (and, more importantly, as a person). I decided fairly early on that I didn't need that second child I'd dreamed of as a teenager; if we were going to live in community, Jibran had access to lots of playmates and I could cuddle all kinds of cute babies without needing to make more myself. And so when I was told by a medical practitioner that I probably couldn't have any more, that news didn't land hard for me; I was at peace with no more kids.

Suddenly, though, at the age of 34, I found myself staring at a positive pee test.

Community Kids

One of the major gifts of community for me is that, when I hit crisis moments, I've learned to open up and get bigger, rather than shrinking in on myself. My first urge is to lean into social relationships, because years of living with people has taught me that I am most creative and alive in connection with others. And years with Jibran have taught me that even the most primal of bonds, between parent and child, can be enriched by (and not, as fear might suggest, threatened by) letting that child find their right niche in the community.

Because Jibran blossomed with this freedom to connect, I slowly became a less attached parent—not less in love with or responsible for my kid, but less territorial about his time and mind. That, combined with my own sense that raising a second child was not right for me, allowed me to ask, “What else is going on in this situation?” I had taken on the sense from the Kahlil Gibran poem that this child may be coming through me but was not really mine.

In this case, the turning outward was both bigger than anything else I'd ever encountered and an easy call. Turns out that the day I got pregnant, two of my closest friends, Zaida and Denis, were at a personal growth course doing consciousness work around adopting a child. Zaida in particular wanted a child so much it hurt, and she was never going to have one of her own. After all that time in community, and in the face of her need, my having an abortion would have felt like a real betrayal of her; and raising another child when I intuitively knew it wasn't the right thing for my own life would have been a betrayal of me. The bottom line: you simply don't ignore a real human need that you can fill with your own “surplus” when you are in close, connected community.

There was also another way Jibran influenced the outcome. I made the mistake of leaving the pregnancy test sitting on my bed in my room. Jibran walked in to ask me something, picked it up and said, “What's

this?” It was one of those parental choice moments: I'd never lied to him...was I willing to not lie now? I closed my eyes for a minute, briefly considered the options, let out my breath and said, “It's a pregnancy test.” After a moment of staring at me, he asked, “Well, are you pregnant?” And when I said yes, he asked me what I was going to do.

Ever tried talking about abortion with your seven-year-old? Once he understood what I meant, he was adamant: no way was I aborting his sibling. He'd been raised in this heavily relational environment and had heard me talk about how cutting people out was the last resort after trying everything you needed to in order to have a clear conscience. In this case, he'd internalized that value and for him, this child was already in the circle. It was both touching and a bit unnerving that he felt free to wade into the decision, and yet I couldn't deny that it was largely my influence that led us to that moment.

And so sprouted another branch in my son's family bush. Starting from the beginning of my pregnancy, the four parents set out to co-create a family around the child in my womb. Incidentally, Jibran liked our solution: he gets to have a sister, but doesn't have to share mom. How good is that? Both of us felt—and still feel—that we didn't “give Ananda up” so much as turn Zaida and Denis into family. Whatever the definition of family used to be in my life, it has long

since been subsumed under years of sharing, reinvention, and expansion. Community—and Jibran—have gifted me with an ability to fold more humanity into my most intimate, cared-for circle and experience it as a gift.

The funny thing is, Ananda has



Ananda, Ma'ikwe, and Jibran.



This photo: Zaida, Ananda, and Denis. Right: Alberto (Zaida's dad), Ananda, and Ma'ikwe. Below: Ananda and Denis.



also created more links in our blood families. Both of my parents and my brother were initially appalled by what we were planning. But with some time and a lot of reassurance from all of us, they've come around to having relationships with Ananda. My mom was there when she was born, sends birthday presents and demands pictures; my dad set up a college fund for her, just like the one Jibran has. When Laird and I got married, they all made the trip. During

that night's dinner, when Ananda had climbed up onto my lap, I turned my head to catch my dad gazing at us and got a smile from him as genuine and pleased as any I can remember.

Zaida's parents (who, coming from Brazil, where open adoptions don't even exist, had further to go than my folks to feel at peace with this) made a trip to the US in part to meet the "other parents" and had a similar experience of relaxing into it once they saw us all together. In short, at our invitation, they've all gotten on board with the idea that our families have gotten larger and richer. And if it is still a little weird, they are also proud when they talk about it.

Influence

What I've come to see is that community changes us. Because I came to live in community as an adult, it has been a tremendous influence on how I put my world together, and—in spite of being blessed with a basic values match with my blood family—that world looks notably different from the world of the rest of my blood family. It feels like my brain has been rewired over time by a different cultural context that is being created in the communities movement. Because Jibran was raised in community, all this



stuff that seems radical and strange to us adults is just normal for him.

Still, I'm surprised when I find life presenting me with a new stretch to make, and am convinced that I am nowhere close to a finished community product in the relational department.

Mixing It Up

When Laird and I wed (adding a step-dad and two step-siblings to Jibran's expanding bush) we had a four-day celebration that included special dinners with various subsets of people we love. Our family dinner included all the predictable people, plus Zaida, Denis, and Ananda, and the other parents of all four of our kids. We had both gotten into occasional trouble with past partners for insisting that the exes with whom we'd made babies were, obviously, *family* even if we weren't still partners. It was a relief when we got together that we shared an understanding in our bones of something so basic to both of our worldviews. We've both been trained by years of consensus that the key to happiness is greater inclusion, not less, and we are blessed with amicable and enjoyable relationships with a variety of ex-partners, including our co-parents.

What we didn't have in common at the outset was our respective takes on monogamy. For all of the radical family stuff I'd done, I was pretty firm that monogamy was simpler and more my

We've both been trained by years of consensus that the key to happiness is greater inclusion, not less, and are blessed with enjoyable relationships with a variety of ex-partners.

speed. Laird, on the other hand, just doesn't seem wired that way. However, he also places a high value on our relationship, and so was willing to content himself with monogamy in order to be with me. And that was the basic arrangement of our relationship for the first three-and-a-half years.

My previous experiments into polyamory had been brief and, while neither had gone badly, I didn't find myself having a strong need for more. One thing I did figure out, though, was that the best formula for me if I am going to re-open my relational field is having a very strong relationship with the other woman with whom I'm sharing a lover (in other words, what I'm not wired for at this point is love in isolation). Even early in Laird's and my relationship, I could see that I might be open to polyamory under that same circumstance. It seemed highly unlikely, though, given our relatively small dating pool in northeastern Missouri (and even smaller "open to poly" pool...and, even smaller than that, people who'd be willing to put up with Laird and me pool...). So we had basically shelved that possibility and were busy creating a great marriage.

Things started to shift for me over the winter of 2008-2009. Laird and I both get crushes with some regularity, but they usually either fade out or stay at a level that is sweet and interesting but not very compelling. I realized at some point that the crush I'd developed on Ted shortly after coming to Dancing Rabbit hadn't faded. My intuition (which seems to be getting both more insistent and more accurate as I head into my menopausal years) kept nudging me in Ted's direction and I was starting to think I ought to pay attention to it, in spite of a strong self-image as monogamous.

And then the thoroughly mundane

kicked in: we had a new crop of smart, sexy young interns show up in the spring. I realized one day that if Ted fell in love with one of them, I'd have a suddenly irrational personality change unbecoming of a woman almost 40. It felt like it was time to speak.

So after talking to Laird about it, I finally told Ted. (Do you have any idea how hard it is to find a really private space in a bustling ecovillage to have that conversation without half the world overhearing? I felt like a teenager again, sneaking around and shyly asking, "Uh, Ted...I have, uh, something, uh...I have a confession to make..." yikes!) Ted was interested, and Sara (his lovely long-term partner) was actually enthusiastic. Perhaps she, too, had noticed all the interesting young women? Or maybe she understands the same thing I do—that having great communication between the various loves is a really good way to go.

Jibrán, when asked for his take on the possibility, simply said, "So long as this

doesn't mean Laird is going away, I'm cool with Ted." He is ever my north star in understanding what family means, ever the community kid. Having gotten the blessing from the most important man in my life, I found myself giddy with new love and deeply grateful for having a husband who loves me as much as Laird does.

Although Ted's and my experiment ended after about six months (with friendship intact and new perspective for both of us), Laird and I have been through an intense period of growth in our marriage. Somehow, Ted's presence in my life pushed Laird and me to



*This photo: Ananda and Zaida.
Above: Ananda and Ma'ikwe, at
Dancing Rabbit in summer 2009.*



become more honest, hold our time together as more precious, and dropped us into a level of vulnerability that we had rarely gotten to before. I have jokingly said that if I knew our marriage would get this much stronger, I would have done this years ago... but the truth is, we'd gotten strong enough to be able to handle polyamory only recently, and strength of connection seems to me to be another requirement for making this work.

The Essence of Strength

Strength is the key theme when I look back at this ever-expanding and deepening thing in my life called "family." I have come to believe that real strength is some combination of flexibility to explore what is really there and embrace it, plus creativity and vulnerability. It is more resilience than rigidity: more bamboo than oak.

And community is the essence of strength for me. We are all in this for some creative urge, some wanting life to be different than it is in the mainstream cookie-cutter reality that most of us come out of. Living with others means that we are constantly presented with both the hard and the interesting, constantly pushed to get more honest about what is true

for us. When you lean into whatever presents itself, life gets more rich. Family for me seems to be a thing defined by how much of the cookie-cutter reality I am willing to let go of, and I haven't hit the limits of that yet.

Permaculture tells us that the strength of a system is largely determined by the number of relationships between elements. If this is true, then my family is strong indeed! When I think of family, I find myself easily willing to include more and more people, and get a deep thrill when one branch of my family meets another and creates their own connections. And while I think this expansion runs the risk of having something sacred get watered down to the point of meaninglessness, the opposite feels true for me: this expanding definition of family feels like it sanctifies my life by seeing more people as being that important to me. I'm closer to Buddha now because "beloved" applies to so many different people in my life. I haven't stopped loving my blood connections, but I have stopped thinking of them

as trumping all when it comes to importance in my life. Like all definitions and boundaries (from nationalism to religious categories to race and any other way we define some as "us" and others as "them"), the implications of letting go the old meaning of family have been profound for me...and absolutely a product of community living.

The Next Generation

A while back, we were trying to figure out our family schedule for November, and it wasn't coming together easily. Laird and I had one of our annual conference trips, and Jibran preferred to stay home at Dancing Rabbit where he has school and a vibrant batch of friends of his own. His dad was also having trouble getting his work schedule to line up easily in order to

be at home with him the whole time. So Jibran went to work one evening at community dinner, arranging for alternate "parents" for a few days among his chosen clan. He has no problem with the expanding circle of family, and I already see him claiming his own group. The fun part is watching them claim him, too, accepting both the joy and



Ma'ikwe, Ananda, and Alberto.

responsibility for him for a few days. I think he's learned the community lesson well.

Almost five years after his initial genealogy assignment, I'd like to see what that "family bush" of Jibran's would look like today, with him starting to add his own twigs to the bush. ❀

Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig lives at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in northern Missouri, and teaches consensus, facilitation, ecovillage design, and spiritual activism courses. She is the author of Passion as Big as a Planet, which explores the importance of personal growth work and spiritual connection to effective environmental activism. Her latest antics include building her own eco-groovy home, a return to creative writing inspired by her 12-year-old son's interest in science fiction writing, and providing fodder for her husband Laird's blog.

Morehouse— Choosing Your Family

By Judy St. John, Ilana Firestone, and Marilyn Moohr
with Arlene Goens and Ben Oliver

Lafayette Morehouse is a community that has been living as an extended family in San Francisco East Bay for over 40 years, while actively researching pleasurable group living. In addition to unrelated community members, the group includes brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, grandparents and grandchildren, in all the traditional meanings of those terms.

Lafayette Morehouse supports its ongoing research on pleasurable group living by presenting its findings in courses for the public. Members of the Lafayette Morehouse community tell their experience of family within the group.



Judy St. John, 52 **Finding my** **extended family**

I have often heard it said that you can pick your friends but you can't pick your family. That never sat right with me. From a young age I knew I could feel a sense of family with a lot of people under the right circumstances.

I discovered this at summer camp. Raised in New York

City with working parents, each summer starting at age five my sister and I were sent off to the same camp in the Catskills. Since I saw the same people each year, the other campers felt like siblings to me. The counselors and adults running the place were like parents, aunts, and uncles. In my experience, all those people became my extended family, at least for the summer. I didn't know it then, but basically what I was experiencing each year was communal living. The variety of personalities to bounce off of allowed me to express all the sides of myself. It was a rich, full, joyful existence that was what I thought family was meant to be: all these people behind my goals, interested in my life as I was in theirs. Returning home at the end of the summer to our nuclear family unit, as wonderful as my parents were, my sister and I felt like we were going back to a kind of

fabricated social construct. We would wait patiently until summer came around again.

Later in life I looked for a way to recreate that environment. Living at college had some of the elements but it was transient. After graduating and getting a job and my own place, I longed for that feeling of being surrounded by people I care about and who care about me. But how was I going to create it? I considered the Peace Corps, the Navy, working on a fishing boat—something that would entail living closely with other people—but I didn't want to go to a foreign country and, being a poor swimmer, was deathly afraid of floating around in water.

It looked like I could possibly find a reason to live with people if I would just subscribe to a philosophy or religion or take up some kind of a cause, like organic farming. Unfortunately I didn't have any of those callings. What I did have was the desire to have a big family and I didn't want to have to give birth to most of the members.

In fact, even marriage was not something I aspired to, which set me apart from my girlfriends growing up. I knew that, even if I were to find the guy of my dreams and fall in love, going off into the sunset and setting up a home with just him would likely turn into a nightmare. It just seemed unreasonable to expect one person to fulfill all of my interests and yearning for social interaction. From my experience of summer camp, it was clear to me that it would take a composite of several different people to keep me fully entertained.

Arlene Goens.



Ben, Marilyn, and Sylvia.



Arlene Goens, 79 **Moving into community as a senior**

I was 67 when I moved into Lafayette Morehouse. I'm 79 now. My daughter Diana had lived there for over 35 years, and my granddaughter Sugar, 9 at the time, had been born there. My original goal in moving from Indiana where I owned my own home was to find a low-cost apartment and live near the children. Because low-cost housing is basically non-existent in the area, as a last resort I asked if I could join the Morehouse community. I had visited my daughter here for short periods over the years, but no one really knew me, nor I them.

The life I left behind in Indiana could not have been more different. I was a leader in a close-knit ultraconservative Christian church where I was involved in all activities and I had close relationships with many people as friend and counselor. I was often asked for advice in church and interpersonal relationships. I had lived alone in my own house for over 20 years.

I was shocked to observe what by my standards was parenting that was beyond permissive. What Sugar wanted, Sugar got. No argument, no exceptions. Example: Sugar's grandfather came to visit, and the four of us went out to eat. After Sugar (then 10) decided that none of the five places we chose were where she wanted to go, we ended up going home and she and Diana fixed their own meal. I was sure she would grow up to become the most selfish, self-centered person ever. I eventually was able to come to terms with the fact that this method was Diana's choice.

Diana and Sugar enjoyed (and still do) an extraordinarily close relationship of which I was not a part. My initial response was to feel sorry for myself while at the same time acknowledging that realistically this was bound to be so for whatever period of time.

Gradually, Diana and Sugar and I began to communicate some of our feelings. I expressed my sense of isolation, and we began to do more things together.

Today, Sugar, now 21, has become a thoughtful, caring, charming young lady, responsible and willing to take responsibility in every way. She has chosen this way of life as an adult and plans to stay in the group for now. The three of us (affectionately dubbed "the Goens Girls" by the community) have fun going out together or sharing whatever we choose to do, enjoying a mutually loving, caring, delightful relationship. For the first time in my life, I am truly happy.

Arlene Goens has lived at Lafayette Morehouse for the past 12 years.

So there I was, a group dweller in search of a group, knowing I would not be satisfied with the conventional model of a marriage and family. I wanted to be part of a pack where I could carve out my own lifestyle and live as I wanted in the middle of a bunch of people.

Fortunately my sister was looking for this too. Thanks to her, I found Morehouse. She had been living there for six months and knew I would love it too, just like we both had loved summer camp. I visited and liked what I saw. The central goal of the group was to live closely and overtly study the dynamics of pleasurable group living. Through deliberate living, could everyone have everything they wanted while getting along? This was clearly an active exploration that included a lot of communicating and examining of goals and interactions and discussing all proposed actions before they happened.

I also liked the diversity of the group and their acceptance of people with all different lifestyles. There were single people with and without romantic partners, married monogamous couples, couples with outside romances, divorced people who still lived together in the community but kept their friendships and raised their kids. It seemed like you could create the life and relationships you wanted as long as it didn't make anyone else's life uncomfortable. It was the Burger King of communal living. I could have it my way.

So at the age of 23, as a relatively shy, single person, I moved into Morehouse. I delved into the group social experiment investigating what it takes to have my life and the lives of those around me be pleasurable. I quickly befriended a nice guy in the group who was also single at the time. He did not seem like the man of my dreams so I felt free to enjoy myself around him and felt no pressure to have our friendship be anything other than it was. As the months passed he became the best friend I had ever had and a wonderful roommate. Because I had made friends with the other people living so closely with me, there was no pressure for him to be my dance partner, my tennis partner, my shopping buddy, or even like to eat the food I liked, read the books I liked, or watch all the shows I liked. I had the rest of the group from which to pick people to share my various interests.



I was happy. I had found my lifetime summer camp and a relationship that was thriving largely due to the interest and support of the other people in the group. After living here for a year it dawned on me that I could be married without making my husband be my sole companion. We got married and became parents.

Twenty-seven years later we are still together. Our son was born and raised in the community and had the kind of childhood I had dreamt of. I have an unconventional relationship within a large unconventional extended family and it suits me perfectly. Of course having this large, extended family brings with it exponential problems. There are more people to disagree with, be betrayed by, leave messes behind, and to see through difficult times. It doesn't get easier with more people in your "family," but it's never dull and there's always someone to relate to over something crucial. One thing I am certain about is that my relationship with my husband would not have started and certainly not have endured or increased in intimacy over all these years without the group around us for support, an extended family beyond what blood relationships could provide.



Ilana Firestone, 56 **Keeping a** **marriage together**

Like many Boomers, I grew up with women's lib. I had seen how my mom, a spirited free thinker, nevertheless became a housewife whose freedom turned out to be doing everything at home and also working a full-time job. I was certain I was never going to get married, have kids, and

get into that trap, and I thought I had the new freedom to help me along.

But after fending off my cute husband-to-be for a couple of years, he prevailed in his insistence on giving me everything I wanted, even those things I protested about. He convinced me

Marilyn Moohr **Living with elderly family**

Sylvia is my 93-year-old mother. She and I have always been close, even though we lived thousands of miles apart ever since I graduated from college. My mother and father came from very traditional backgrounds and they and my older brothers were initially somewhat challenged by my decision to live in a group. However, over the years they all visited our community many times and fell in love with the people. My undeniable happiness and the way my son was thriving thoroughly won them over.

When my dad died eight years ago, after being married to my mom for 65 years, she was bereft. She still had a wide circle of friends, yet I knew she faced spending most of her days alone in her apartment. With the support of my community, I encouraged her to come live with us. It took quite a bit of reassurance before she said yes. It was a brave move for her. Many of us have invited our parents to live with us but over the years only a few have accepted.

We, as a group, had to make some adjustments to accommodate having Sylvia here. Drawing on our experience of having had a few elderly people live with us and knowing how devastating isolation and boredom can be for old folks, we gave her a room in the center of our busiest house, making contact easily available. We refurbished her bathroom to include safety rails and also added rails to the hallways she uses. As time has gone on and Sylvia has transitioned from cane to walker, we have had to alter access to the house she lives in so she can more comfortably move about. The old-age-friendly changes we have made and continue to make will be needed by us eventually (we hope to be 93 someday too), so it's been great to have a reason to begin them now.

Sylvia's life here at Morehouse is rich, filled with relating with people of all ages and interests. Each morning, she and I begin our day together having coffee in the group dining room with the "girls," catching up on all the gossip, planning the day's activities, and greeting other friends as they arrive or pass by. The excitement and social drama inherent in close group living sometimes reduces Sylvia to shaking her head, mystified, saying, "This place is not to be believed!"—but she loves being where things are happening. If there is a meeting, party, or event, Sylvia is usually the first one there. Some days she can be found at the hairdresser and out to lunch with other women from the community or attending the Greek Orthodox cathedral in Oakland. Her daily exercise includes doing laps around the large dining room and long hallways, laughing and chatting with people along the way. On a typical day at least a dozen community members stop by her room to say hi, show off a new outfit, bring her a treat, or to confide in her and ask her advice. We tease her about being a party animal. She often says with a laugh, "I'm spoiled—and I love it!"

For me, having my mother's life be so rich and full is an indescribable blessing. My brothers, who live on the East Coast, are grateful for the good time my mom is having living with us and they enjoy visiting us as often as they can. While I am my mother's primary caregiver, I am not burdened by that responsibility in the way that I would inevitably be if we didn't live in this group. Since we are on a 24-hour clock around here, there is always somebody up in case Sylvia needs anything. Within the community various people help with her physical care and her daily needs. It's enjoyable and rewarding for them and fun for Sylvia. With so many others actively involved in my mother's life, I am free to spend time with her in ways that pleasure us both. I get to cherish her with love, rather than obligation. My Morehouse "family" has helped me take the best care I could possibly imagine of my mother and provide her with an enviable, vibrant, and rewarding old age.

Ben Oliver, 35 When your parents divorce

The only way for me to talk about being raised by divorced parents is to start by saying, “Really? I didn’t notice.” I couldn’t say how old I was when my parents divorced, because as a child, it was never anything I had to think about. Either I was very naïve and/or my parents did an outstanding job of making sure that I never knew what it could feel like being raised in a “broken” home. Not a day goes by that I don’t appreciate my parents and the way they raised me; however, I know things would have gone a much different direction if it wasn’t for Morehouse.

Growing up in Morehouse, whether you were a child of a “single parent,” from a “broken home,” or any other variation from the societal norm, everyone looked after you, loved you, and treated you like their own. I saw my parents when I wanted to see them and they saw me when they wanted to see me. My dad might make me breakfast or take me to school, while someone else might pick me up and make me dinner. My mom might help me with English class or help me clean my room while my “other” parents might help me with math or tuck me in at night. The reality is, I always had a community of people looking after me and making sure I was taken care of.

What is divorce? What our society has come to define it as is not the same as when you live in Morehouse. Compared to a societal norm, I don’t consider my parents divorced. Fighting? Lawyers? Custody? Abuse? Distrust? Separation? These words do not reflect the childhood I experienced—it was quite the opposite.

I consider my upbringing as extremely blessed. I had the best of everything and never considered life would be better under a traditional roof. My parents were happy. Did they sleep in the same bed with one another? No, but what did I care? I was a kid. Did my parents ever fight or show signs of what a traditional divorce might look like? Surprisingly, no. To this day I have no memory of them ever fighting or showing dislike towards one another. As a child, I would selfishly only consider how something would affect me, and I have only positive memories. My family loved me and I was happy.

To me, Morehouse has always been more about the extended family than the traditional family. As an only child with divorced parents, I had brothers and sisters and dozens of parents. I never had to go without, choose one parent over the next, witness fighting parents, or feel like my happy home was being torn apart.

As an adult looking back on my life and thinking about my childhood, the truth is, I couldn’t have asked for better. My parents are still in each other’s life and love one another. I can come home and see both of them at the same time, all the while knowing there isn’t animosity in the room. Yes, my parents are divorced, but they are happy and that is all I could ever ask for. While society would define my childhood as one from a “broken” home, thanks to Morehouse, mine was “fixed” and I never knew there was anything wrong.

Today, I’m married with a family of my own. My wife and I are more in love and happier than ever. We live in a traditional family environment and I get great gratification from the life I’ve provided for my wife and children. I learned so much living at Morehouse that I use today in my family, my group. Life is good.

Ben Oliver, son of Marilyn Moohr and Bill Oliver, grew up in Lafayette Morehouse.

Before I could say “I will never be June Cleaver,” some friends introduced us to Morehouse.

that I could be married and be my own person.

Still, two-in-a-box was not going to be for us.

Communal living seemed to be my destiny. Even though my parents immigrated to the US, I was raised to eventually go live on a kibbutz, my mother’s unfulfilled legacy.

I went off and lived on a kibbutz for a few years after college and found a lot of good ideas there—you were friends with your neighbors, worked for a common goal, there were parties and holidays at home with the extended family, and the kids lived in their own house with nannies 24/7. You could be with them as much or as little as you wanted to be.

But when all was said and done it was hard to shake the freedom and multi-cultured society available in America. I found the mores and values of kibbutz life to be just too restrictive. I came back to the US but the communal living paradigm stuck with me. In fact, my husband and I lived in an apartment alone together only for the first few months of our relationship. We quickly moved people in with us including my sister, Judy (*see article*), who was also looking for that group feeling.

But he wanted kids; we were getting close to buying a house, having a mortgage, and growing our business. I was headed for being a vegetarian, Californian version of my mother...and without her tremendous patience!

Before I could say “I will never be June Cleaver,” some friends introduced us to Morehouse, which was everything I had been looking for! It was structured in many ways like a kibbutz, including having a house where the kids are raised together. But Morehouse had much more, including an emphasis on pleasurable group living, an interesting and dynamic philosophy of the perfection of life, members of varying backgrounds, and the idea that fun is the goal, love is the way.

The best part was that shortly after we made the move, my sister came too—she and I fulfilled our childhood dream of being able to live together our whole lives while having our own families and careers.

Of course, like everyone, we hit relationship snags along the way. I remember first moving in, a fairly starry-eyed newlywed, mesmerized by all these fun people with whom I was now living, all of whom seemed to have so much more experience in ways to enjoy life. I wondered if I had made the right choice (in having picked my husband) and considered perhaps jumping ship and starting a relationship with someone else. It was Marilyn (*see article*) who talked to me, so many years ago. Seeing my husband through her eyes reminded me what I loved about him and why he was then and still is the right one for me.

In this milieu, knowing that I had the backing of my blood



More fun at Lafayette Morehouse.

relations and of the whole group, I decided to have kids—yes, two, much to my own surprise. I was fortunate enough that at the time there were many other kids being born and the whole “herd” of them lived in their own house, where they could enjoy each other’s company, color on the walls, and do what kids like to do, with constant adult supervision by people who loved them just about as much as we did.

A couple of other times Jack and I got very close to splitting up. We even separated once for a few weeks. But the good part was that we still lived in the same community, just a building apart on common grounds, and were able to share our friends, spend time with our kids, and be together when we wanted to. Our friends were a close enough part of our lives that they could help us sort out our differences and eventually to reconcile. With the support of the group, my relationship with my husband has flourished, rather than diminished as it often does with couples left to their own devices.

I attribute the great relationship we have had with our sons as they grew up, and continue to have with them now as adults, to having raised them in this group. Throughout their childhood we spent exactly as much time together as we wanted to and my husband and I did not have to sacrifice our relationship or private time together. As far as I can tell, happy parents make for happy children.



Marilyn Moohr, 65
A Morehouse divorce

Bill and I met in Morehouse, fell in love, got married, and had a son. We had a lot of very happy times, but we had rough ones too. With the help of our friends we navigated the shoals pretty well whenever things got rocky between us, but after 10 years, we realized that being married to each other really didn’t suit us. When people in our community realized that our relationship was in trouble, they came to our support. For example, one couple whom we loved and respected met with us for an hour or two every day for about six weeks to help

facilitate our communication. Their goal was not to persuade us to either divorce or to stick together, but rather to make sure we made decisions about our future not out of anger but rather with love and compassion for ourselves and each other. We had seen other couples in our community divorce and continue to care for one another, and that really helped us to see that we could end our union yet still keep all the parts of our relationship that we enjoyed and valued. Bill and I both felt strongly that we wanted to remain friends, continue to live in the community, and raise our son in a loving environment. Together we looked to how to make this situation as good as possible for us and for our young son, Ben.

With this level of support we got from our friends, Bill and I were able to end the marriage without bitterness and acrimony, but rather with keeping the best parts of our friendship. There were adjustments we had to make and they weren’t always easy or comfortable, but neither of us had to leave “home” to have things be the way we wanted. Our friends were able to go on being friends with us both, and didn’t have to join my camp or Bill’s camp. There were no camps to join! There was no custody battle, no attempt to make Ben choose between us. He was able to grow up with total access to both of us without ever having to doubt our love of him or each other. We talked with Ben about how we were sad about divorcing, but that the fundamental relationship between the three of us had been and would continue always to be love. Bill and I continued our partnership parenting together. Now, almost 30 years later, Bill and I both continue to live in the community with other partners that we are deeply committed to. Ben is grown and has a family of his own and Bill and I both get to freely enjoy our grandchildren together and separately. So although Bill and I divorced many years ago, our “family” flourishes. ❀

Judy St. John, Ilana Firestone, and Marilyn Moohr are long-time members and on the faculty of Lafayette Morehouse. For more information, visit www.lafayettemorehouse.com.

Second Family

By Arizona Nashoba

The dreaded day in every mother's life finally arrived for me. All my children were out on their own, scattered around the world. It quickly became apparent that living in the family home, quietly waiting for the kids to have time to come visit me, was not a lifestyle I could adjust to. So, I sold my house and started moving around the country trying to find a place that would feel like home. Inevitably, everywhere I went included four empty walls that were devoid of the laughter, conversations, and shared work that I had become accustomed to while raising my children. Working, cleaning, and cooking for myself alone was just not worth the effort. I was stuck and I was going crazy. Empty-nest syndrome left me feeling lonely and without a purpose.

Four years later, in total desperation, I took my search to the internet looking for unique community living experiences. I thought that I could find a neighborhood that shared occasional potluck meals and truly interacted with each other. What I found instead was the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. The more I read about these intentional communities, the more excited I became. Could I have found my answer?

After days of carefully reading about each community, I decided to write a request to visit Twin Oaks. That single decision has led to a series of life-changing events.

The three-week visitor period provided me with ample opportunity to see how the community functioned. I worked alongside community members, ate with them, socialized with them, and quickly fell in love with the community lifestyle. My

decision was made. I was applying for membership. The 10-day wait for 100 people to decide the fate of my choice was one of the longest periods in my life, but finally the wait was over—I had been accepted for provisional membership.

The move and subsequent adjustments to life at Twin Oaks

were not quite as easy as my visitor's period had led me to think they would be. The labor scene was difficult to balance. Most days ended with me feeling totally exhausted and just wanting to climb into my bed and escape into dreamland. The social scene was also not as I had anticipated after my visitor's period. Now that I was a member and not a visitor, it was up to me

to make the effort to reach out to other community members. They had their lives and routines and I had to attempt to become a part of that.

The days passed by quickly and each day I wondered if I had made the right decision. Perhaps I had made the choice too quickly. I wondered if lack of former community experience meant that I was not going to adjust or be accepted. And still I plodded through each day, reaching out to people when I had the opportunity, fulfilling my responsibilities, and trying to grow.

Around my three-month mark, halfway through my provisional period, I was walking to the writing group that I co-facilitate. One of the topics I had chosen for the group to write on—"Home"—was leading me to serious contemplation about my life here at Twin Oaks. It certainly isn't a perfect utopia.

Personal and community dramas are on display for everyone

(continued on p. 77)



Author's housemates and second family, "The Nashobites." From left to right: Mr. Tom, Shakaya, Steve, Gwyn (a regular primary child of Madge), Madge, Jayel, Eve, Diane, Arizona, Marione, and Piper.



Being Almost Two-Years- Old—Again

By *Shepherd Bliss*

“Are you his grandpa?” more than one person has inquired as we play together. I just smile in response, thinking to myself, “I wish.” Our olive skins, dark eyes, and long eyelashes connect us. I’m River’s 65-year-old neighbor here in the countryside of small town Sebastopol.

This nearly two-year-old boy is re-parenting me away from my rigid military childhood. I follow him around, with either or both his freedom-loving French father Laurent Alfieri or his artistic Filipina mother Carolina Cruz Santiago, preferring his leadership to that which controlled my own early years. River’s childhood differs so much from the regimentation of mine. As he grows, so do I, having this opportunity to de-construct and re-construct my own militarized, problematic childhood. I begin to internalize some of his more flexible ways of moving and being—not as stiff.

He points, and I follow. He opens up his arms, and I pick him up. He lifts one hand, and I take it to guide him through the other giants. It is really River leading this twosome, sometimes threesome with Laurent or Carolina on the other side, providing direction and security, but not dominating. Sometimes we just sit, idle. Other times I just watch him. Or he draws in my little notebook. At times he gives me small gifts, which help connect us. He’s constantly changing. As he learns, I learn, recapitulating and transforming my own beginning.

River has a mind of his own, a strong will, a body of his own, a robust voice of his own. If he does not want to do something, he simply shakes his head. I do not remember such things as permissible when I was almost two years old. I felt owned, domi-



All photos by Laurent Alfieri

I must admit that I still have some rigid patterns. River helps me dissolve them, even in my body, as I bend down to join him closer to the ground.

nated, controlled. As my father used to say, “This is my house and while you live here you will do as I say.” No wonder I ran away as soon as I could. There are better ways than military ways to raise children.

I must admit—and my friends would be likely to concur—that I still have some rigid patterns. River helps me dissolve them, even in my body (which has what one doctor calls a “military neck”), as I bend down to join him closer to the ground. He opens me up to receive.

I took River to taiko drumming at the Japanese Buddhist temple in our town. Now when he sees me his arms make wild drumming motions. I like being associated with drumming and dancing, rather than with shouts of “YES SIR!” and standing at attention, which prevailed on the military bases where I was raised—angry and threatening sounds ruling, rather than danceable rhythms.

River recently went to France for the first time, which stimulated this reflection.

They were gone for a month. I missed him. From my young friend I learn a lot. I looked forward to playing with him again, lifting him up, dancing with him, feeding him. I wondered how River would be different upon his return and how that might change our relationship. Since becoming an adult, I cannot remember having an intimate friend this young.

I cherish this neighborhood in which I have lived for most of the last two decades. River and his biological family are newer here; the community has expanded to include them. Laurent, Carolina, and their young son bring a unique multi-cultural family to our rural community. We recently went together to the 60th birthday party of Mr. Music (Jim Corbett) at the Sebastopol Community Center and had a great time. River quickly drew a group of children to play with—putting balloons and balls to the good use of connecting people—as the Love Choir sang to more than 100 people gathered to honor one of our

beloved citizens.

As a military family we moved every three years, a disruptive mobile pattern that I retain, in other forms. Separating seems more familiar to me than staying connected. The literature on “military brats” reveals that many of us have trouble staying within a family, unless it is cemented by the military.

But I do not want to leave this relationship with River. Though I want this connection to last, I accept that it may not, for various reasons. So I must remain unattached, while doing my best to stay connected. Radiant children can assemble a family around them who are more than their biological parents.

Though biologically childless, by choice, I somehow now feel with child, cared for by this little one. I feel protective of him. He evokes such strong feelings from me.

One reason I refused to make a child with my former wife, an Asian, was my fear of being unable to endure the sounds that a child would need to make. The sound trauma that I have written about is part of the post-traumatic stress that I have from being raised in a military family and having served in the Army. River, who is partly a Pacific Islander, sometimes yells full throttle. So far, I persist. I wonder if the biggest mistake in my life was not to father a child with my former wife, such a wonderful woman? I reflect on my family of origin, which gave our name to Ft. Bliss, Texas, and this fairly new family, which has welcomed me into its arms.

Another reason I decided against fathering is that I did not want to send another child to war, as the Bliss family did during every American war up to Vietnam. My family’s warriors were often on the wrong side, such as during the Civil War. I broke that deadly war-making legacy, though at a personal cost.

I’ve only surrendered myself this much to one other human being. She was also dark. That was more than half a lifetime ago. I lost her. I’m more than 30 times as old as River, yet he is such an old soul, teaching me as he does.

I am one of the few outside his biological family whom River lets hold him. He's very loving, full of vigor, able to ask for what he wants, set boundaries. Since one "no" is not always sufficient, sometimes he chants "No, no, no!" His steady gaze can linger a long time and open up one's heart. I fear losing him.

River loves picking berries on my small farm, his tiny hands reaching upward, a purple ring forming around his lips. Feeding River is fun. He drops things. He makes choices. He spits things out. Liquids flow freely down his clothes. He poops, pees, and sometimes stinks, but it's no big deal.

The Spanish word "Rio" sometimes rises when I think about River. It evokes "tio," Spanish for uncle. My Hawaiian students called me Uncle, instead of professor. They melted my heart. Learning is best done in a context of trust, and even intimacy. In Hawai'i a large percentage of children are raised by family members and "Aunties" other than their parents. On only my second trip to the Big Island, while in my late 50s, a woman only slightly older than me adopted me, invited me to move in, and became my Auntie. She offered me—a guest and newcomer—what in Hawaiian is called 'ohana, which can be described as family, relatives, and a kin group. A second definition is "to gather for family prayers."

The avuncular role, especially in a village, is important. My mother's brother—the farmer Uncle Dale—was the one who stabilized my adolescence. During my 40s I realized that the happiest years of my life were as a teenager on his Iowa farm. So I left teaching to farm.

Rio helps me review my childhood and my adolescence and step into this old age that I now experience. He has become a spiritual guide, a gift from beyond.

"Buddha" is one of his few words. We once faced a statue, which I identified for him. Sometimes I just say "Buddha" for the fun of it, to which his nearly two-year-old mouth responds with "Buddha" and smiles. It's an easy word to say. "Mama" and "Papa" are so far his only other English words. His dad often speaks to him

in French, so I say a few things to him in Spanish. River does say other words and frequently joins adult conversations with considerable animation. I look forward to his further acquisition of consensual language. His non-verbal communication is already so deep and evocative.

When I started writing this, a hawk circled over and screeched at a regular meeting of our Veterans' Writing Group, led by Maxine Hong Kingston, with which I have been for 15 years; we're a kind of family also. We were at the receptive Redwood Empire home of Marg and Bill, both now in their 80s; he is a World War II veteran. River, too, knows how to soar, and sometimes lifts me with him into the heavens, into which he brings his healing waters. River opens my heart

and makes me a new person. ❀

Shepherd Bliss has lived for most of the last two decades in what is known as "West County," which nestles in the Redwood Empire on the Pacific Coast in Sonoma County, northern California. He operates the organic Kokopelli Farm in the Sebastopol countryside and teaches part-time at Sonoma State University. He comes from the military family that gave its name to Ft. Bliss, Texas, served in the Army during the Vietnam era, and has spent over 40 years working to de-militarize himself. He has contributed to over two dozen books, including eight on war and peace issues since 9/11. He can be reached at sbliss@hawaii.edu and is a member of the Veterans Writing Group (www.vowvop.org).



GS

By Lawrence Siskind

Two and half years ago, P and M, a couple close to me, put out a call to a few friends. They asked if we would be willing to meet regularly, one night a week, to support them in their partnership by helping them communicate and process thoughts and feelings with which they had been struggling. Six of the invited responded, and we quickly decided to make the Thursday evening gatherings about all of us, rather than just the one couple who had inspired us to meet. The rest is history, at least for eight of us, plus D, who joined us earlier this year. We continue to meet every Thursday night, and our connections to each other, already deep and growing at the beginning of the experimental meetings, have grown to such a degree that we unabashedly use the f-word, “family,” to describe what we are doing.

It certainly is difficult to use any other word since each of the nine of us would describe differently what we might be up to. Though we are all, to varying degrees, polyamorous and intimate with each other, we have no particular intention when we meet other than to honestly connect and to support each other in whatever ways to which we are moved. We gather in one of our living rooms—we live, three couples and three individuals, spread out over six houses, in compact Eugene, Oregon—and we usually begin with short check-ins during which each of us shares (holding our red, polished heart-shaped stone) what’s been going on for us that day or that week. After we hear from each person, we decide who wants more time and attention, or occasionally, we decide to

experiment with some process or activity that one of us wants to offer, a meditation or an energy work modality. For example, recently, we went around the circle telling stories from our lives that the others were not likely to know with the intention of revealing more about ourselves, and another week we expressed gratitude for each other in a completely darkened living room. At the end of two hours, or thereabouts, we indulge in desert (homemade cobbler and ice cream are our favorites), and often repair to the hot tub. Though several of us are lovers, in varying degrees of intimacy, sex is not a part of Thursday nights (except there was this one time...).

Although Thursday nights made us the family we are, we are much more than some “poly” folks who meet on Thursday nights to process their relationship baggage. We suffer the weight of many other varieties of baggage which can often make

We are much more than some “poly” folks who meet to process their relationship baggage. We struggle with how honest we want to be with each other, how much we want to share and receive.

for some heavy lifting. We struggle with how honest we want to be with each other, how much we want to share, how much we want to receive, and whether

expanding the size of the group to others in our lives will raise our collective energy or dilute our intimacy. Since we have no particular goals for our meetings, no personal growth agenda, we have to face whether we really want to consistently show up and be with each other, because each other is all we can agree to. Early on, we floated the idea of learning Nonviolent Communication (NVC) together, but a few of us were less than enthused. Nothing, other than being present with each other to the best of our abilities, has inspired us to get serious

about something, and I doubt anything will. We simply love each other as a family. But in this family, we strive to uncover our secrets, to expose our deep behavioral patterns in order to prevent the building up of petty resentments that undermines connection.

Although we socialize in many ways other days of the week, and with a wider circle of people, we have trouble doing much together as a group, other than meet on Thursday nights. Seven of us went to Burning Man together a couple years ago, and it was a strain to do much, other than the arduous set-up of our camp. Four of us, my partner S and I and another couple, L and M, spent some time together in New York during the holidays, and we had trouble getting along. For example, S and I like to walk a lot, even in the cold, but L and M wanted to jump on a bus, subway, or in a cab whenever possible. We like abstract expressionistic paintings, L and M, figurative works, so even museum visits led to separation rather than connection. Because we are a group of people with such varied interests and needs, it is particularly important and challenging to communicate clearly.

I do think it's unlikely that we all will live together any time soon. We're far too eccentric and set in our ways, and we're a bit old to start building residential community; I'm the youngest at 45. I imagine us, in our old age, living more closely and sharing more resources. At the present moment, we remain very independent souls. We came together in an attempt to try to

help a single couple stay together. (They're still together, despite ups and downs, both economic and emotional, and we're still working at it.) That said, I truly believe that our group is stronger than the individuals and couples it contains.

At the Network for a New Culture Summer Camp, at which we all met (at different camps over the years), we're an exciting item to other Campers. Questions are asked: What are you G8 folks up to? Can we join you? How can we create a group like

yours? And isn't it all about sex? The answers to the questions, I believe, are actually quite simple: We connect in whatever way is true in the moment. To join us, you would have to fall in love with each of us, then we would demand (actually we're too lazy to demand, but we would be unable to resist) your presence. You can create a group like ours by assembling those individuals who you think love you, and seeing who keeps showing up. And no, it isn't much about sex... but we can still dream. ❁



Courtesy of Lawrence Siskind

The G8...or is it G9...or 10?

Lawrence Siskind, despite having lived his entire adult life on the West Coast, considers himself a New Yorker in exile. He currently lives in Eugene, Oregon, where there is more opportunity for loving connection than there is for teaching high school English. He and his partner are involved in a "committed," "open," "codependent" "experiment" that they call a "relationship." They reside at the Du•má community, where he loves to empty the dish rack and hone his backgammon skills. He spends much of his time and energy processing and funning with the G8, and participating in the planning of the Network for a New Culture Summer Camp.

Smoker and Mirrors?

"Well, I could probably see it the way you do if I were an a••hole!" P remarked to me. I had been curious as to why P was so much more attached, felt so much more betrayed, by his partner M's admission that she'd been secretly smoking cigarettes away from home for months. P read in my objective-sounding curiosity a lack of concern for his partner M's health, and he was angry because I wasn't more understanding about his disappointment in the dishonesty of her behavior. My reaction to getting called "an a••hole," when my intention had been to try to help shed light on the emotions we all were feeling about M's coming clean, was to shut down emotionally. When the discussion about P's feelings continued on with others in a pretty heated manner for our group of lovey-dovey "family," I requested that we simply stop trying to talk further at this time about the issues. For me, the heated emo-

tions were too painful to witness. I was that upset, and I am the one of us who almost always wants to push and push in the group, to get us to share more deeply. The intensity of the emotions showed us all how difficult it can be, among partners, lovers, and deep friends, to even try to disentangle loving concern from emotional codependency. Do we care so much about our loved ones' behaviors because we are concerned for them, or because we believe their behaviors are a part of ours? If M risks her health by smoking and fails to be honest about it, is my health at risk? If I were her partner, would I be able to remain civil while others wondered why I was so upset? These complex issues of intimacy are the kind with which our group is dealing on Thursday nights, and beyond.

—Lawrence Siskind



Exploring Family

By Chris Roth

Questions from the Hopi
“Where’s your family?” This was the most common question I was asked as a white person living and working on a pueblo reservation in northern Arizona, 2,250 miles from the New York suburb where I’d grown up. The Hopi have occupied their traditional villages for nearly a millennium, with familial and inter-familial ties spanning generations. Each Hopi family is known and connected in some way to every other Hopi family; each clan has a memory going back as far as memory will reach, explaining each individual’s place in the intricately woven fabric of the family, clan, village, and tribe. The question might as well have been “Where is your community?” because, for Hopis, family, extended family, and community are so intertwined as to be virtually inseparable.

My nuclear family of birth—meaning my father, mother, and brother—lived back in New York at the time, although my brother spent much of the year at college in Ohio (where my parents were to move years later, although by that time my brother was back in our home town, later to move into the city). My only surviving grandparent lived in upstate New York. My uncles, aunts, and cousins lived in various locations up and down the East Coast and Midwest (later to extend to

the West Coast). Except for those still living with their parents, I believe no two siblings within this family (at least what I knew of it) lived in the same state, let alone the same town.

I actually experienced more rootedness and family in my life than many of my peers did. I had grown up in the same home town until I left for college. Our family spent lots of time together as a unit, including on every school vacation. My parents usually worked within a half-mile of our house (my father even bicycled home daily for lunch, weather permitting), and were present every day for their two children. My maternal grandmother lived in the same town until my teenage years; she was our most frequent babysitter and a major presence in all of our lives. We stayed in touch with immediate relatives (including far-flung ones) and were part of a relatively close-knit church community as well. Although some of my friends left my home town part way through my childhood (their parents’ careers taking them elsewhere), others stayed until high school graduation (almost all then dispersed). Unlike many of my peers’ parents, mine stayed married (for 50 years as of 2009, and counting).

And yet here I was, more than 2000 miles from where I’d grown up—something that would have been unthinkable to



any Hopi—seeking a new way of life and new “community” for myself—which would have been unnecessary for any Hopi. For a person from my background, however, the *unusual* thing would have been to stay with my family, even if I could find more than one or two of them in a single location. Coming from a dominant culture based not on inherited traditions and principles of ecological and social sustainability, but instead on a process of nearly constant change, progress, and reinvention, I was naturally seeking to figure out how to reinvent my own life as made best sense to me—how to choose among the seemingly endless choices of how to be. (In my case, “progress” meant moving back closer to the earth rather than into ever-more-advanced technological civilization.)

That this path led me there might have been somewhat comical and counterintuitive to the Hopi, as many of them had learned to aspire to elements of the life

I’d left behind. However, despite encroaching modernization and western culture, family and community still held central places in their lives, and were not fading away any time soon. As examples of people who have found ways to live together and “stay together” in place, the Hopis have few rivals.

“Do you think you might meet some nice Hopi girl?” I was also asked occasionally. (I was not only the sole white person in my workplace, but one of the few male employees there, and an eligible bachelor in my early 20s.) Inevitably, I was embarrassed and didn’t answer. I was not looking for a Hopi bride, or any bride (although, in retrospect, I sometimes have to ask

myself, “*What was I thinking?*,” before I remember). I wanted to find harmony within myself, with the earth, and with people who knew how to live on the earth. A “relationship” would be a distraction. My “family” was everyone.

But why wasn’t I married?

On Marriage and John Keats

I’ve never been married. I’ve never even really been close to it, nor to starting a family. In my approach to and history of romantic relationships, I seem to have much more in common with Romantic poet John Keats (moviegoers, see “Bright Star”) than with Casanova or others who, for better or worse, seem to have had no problem living in the moment sexually with whoever was in front of them.

However, I’m also different from Keats: I failed to die of tuberculosis at the age of 25, and therefore have

had the opportunity to be inspired by several muses (not just one) over my lifetime, virtually all of them (like Keats’) solely platonic friendships, never “consummated” in the conventional sense. As a result of my greater comfort with platonic rather than sexual relationships, and the generally deeper, more long-lasting connections I’ve felt in friendship in general, uncomplicated by sex, I have never been part of a biological family except my family of birth—and may never be.

To be fair, Keats was planning to marry Fanny Brawne when he was inconveniently written out of life’s script—and they might well have started a family (albeit probably a tubercu-

*I was not looking for a Hopi bride, or any bride.
A “relationship” would be a distraction.
My “family” was everyone.*

lar one). Furthermore, I've deliberately steered my romantic impulses away from the kind of sexual tension that made Keats' unconsummated relationship so cinema-worthy—and, after a brief, frustrating, imagined career as a tormented writer, I also stopped attempting to write poetry that is “half in love with easeful Death.” I know through experience that I am fully capable of feeling tortured by longing for a person who embodies life's beauty and mystery for me (and simultaneously thwarted by—well, I'm not sure what), but I've generally tried to redirect my energies in ways that eluded or were simply not available to Keats—who also left no offspring, although he left some terrific poetry.

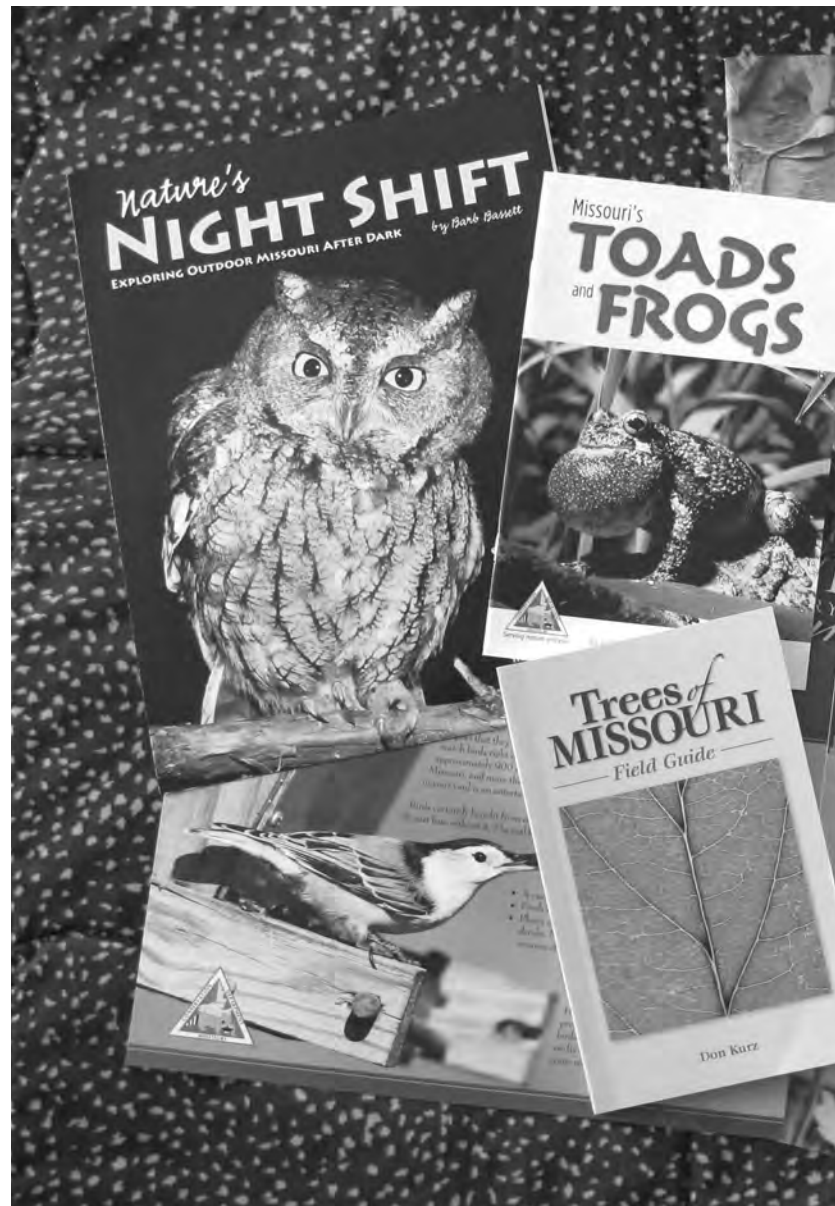
In my closest brush with a Keatsian relationship, near the end of high school, I finally overcame my shyness enough to establish a real friendship with the person in question (or allow it to be established by not running the other way). (The previous time I'd fallen hopelessly in love, in first grade, had caused me to become mute in the presence of the object of my devotion for the next eight years, so our imagined engagement and wedding never happened.) But this time, for one poetry-filled summer, and for much of the next year, I felt that someone else could perhaps supply everything that was missing from my life, a feeling that had some basis in my own experience.

But although the “myth of romantic love” (as a substitute for everything else) dies hard, it almost inevitably dies, and it did for me. My soulmate ended up in and out of mental institutions, and I myself barely escaped what I realize in retrospect was a loony bin itself, my college, after what I self-diagnosed as a very quiet mental breakdown. Although I was better at recognizing my mental patterns in the “illnesses” section of a psychology textbook than I was at identifying my actual feelings, I see now that underneath it all, I was feeling depressed, adrift, and unconnected to others or to my life source. This was not the stuff of which happily-ever-after dreams—nor families—are made.

Nor, in truth, is tuberculosis. Keats was obviously not one to emulate too closely.

Missing: Family

I wanted a way back into the feeling of connection I'd had as a child. Although I'd grown up in a tight nuclear family, and with some sense of extended family (both related and unrelated to me biologically), I seemed to have grown apart from them through my process of education. Seen from one perspective, my high school had taken in a human being and spit out an over-intellectualized super-student with a gnawing feeling of emptiness and almost no time (or even skills) to cultivate relationships with others. (High school also taught me to edit, so depending on your opinion of this magazine it may not have been a total disaster.) I'd grown apart from most of my peers, who tended to be into all the teenage things that I was not. Henry David Thoreau spoke my mind more than anyone I knew personally or witnessed in popular culture. While others



*...good times, hard times, dreams,
disappointments, “tempests in teapots,”
transformative moments, and everything
in between...*

drove, drank, and dated and dumped one another, I got my fulfillment through long-distance running, bicycling, taking a very full course load, and holing myself up with books and a typewriter. This seemed to work at least tolerably well as long as I was surrounded by family and the larger community in which I'd grown up (even if I was ignoring them, preoccupied with schoolwork and running).

But gaining and then “losing” a soulmate, being separated for the first time from my family and home town, and having



my self-story crumble midway through college, left me seeking the connection to others that was now so obviously missing. This process helped launch my involvement in community (described in more detail in “How Ecology Led Me to Community,” issue #143—I won’t repeat the entire story here).

Nuclear family did not seem like the answer to me, and was not what I aspired to. For better or worse, owing to reasons I understand and reasons I don’t (including my previous experiences, my sense of broader connection, my upbringing by parents who modeled concern for others over self-interest, and my particular mix of personal strengths and insecurities), my interpersonal energy usually goes towards a number of people—both close and casual friends—rather than just one, and toward the non-human world too, not strictly the human.

Family in Community

I’ve lived in community for most of my adult life—when

not in a formal intentional community, then on a farm or at an educational center in which people live and work together. My sense of family has broadened to encompass many hundreds of people by now—people with whom I’ve lived and worked closely, shared meals, good times, hard times, honest conversations, music-making, gardening, dreams, disappointments, joys, traumatic events, humor, “tempests in teapots,” transformative moments, and everything in between. I can’t imagine not having these things in my life, nor people to share them with.

That sense of extended family endures even with people who are no longer my community-mates. In fact, most people who feel like family to me fit into that category now, owing to high rates of residential, membership, and staff turnover in the places I’ve resided. In my most recent community, I’ve stayed about twice as long (a dozen years) as anyone else who lives here now, and the second-longest of anyone who’s ever lived here. After all that time, and all the change that’s occurred during it, I’m recognizing that my need for family is still just as strong as it was early in my life, and that I want to explore some other ways of meeting it. By the time you read this, I will have started that exploration.

One advantage of finding “family” in community is the ability to be part of many families. I’ve spent more than a decade in a usually child-friendly community in which I’ve been able to enjoy the presence of children, be one of many adults in their



lives, provide whatever guidance, modeling, cultural enrichment, or at least child-friendly verbal banter I feel capable of, play catch, read books, and make sure they don't fall off stone walls.

At the same time, none of these children were mine, and all of them (except the most recent arrivals) have left. A disadvantage of finding extended family in a high-turnover community is that the people in your life can be here one day, gone the next—gone forever, because busy lives mean you may not stay in touch. That doesn't happen with biological family—even with physical separation, that kind of family seems (at least to me) as if it's for life. I expect to stay in touch with some of my ex-community-mates for life as well, but probably not with many of the children (for whom we were once surrogate aunts and uncles), especially if they were very young when in community. I know that blood ties would add a different dimension to our ongoing commitments and connection.

I wonder: Who *is* family for each of us?

Leaving

I am walking away from a place I love—from people, animals, land, and weather I love. I am leaving home. The first time this happened was the most difficult moment of my life. I was leaving behind family to join people unknown to me (who, that first time, never ended up seeming like family). The second time was easier. Eventually I came to see that even when I stay in one place—as I have for more than a decade—people, animals, weather, landscapes change. My adopted, extended family changes, leaves, lives in flux—sometimes almost as much as if I myself were the one who'd left and arrived somewhere new.

When I move on, I am no longer just leaving family—I am going towards family. I am reuniting with family from whom I've been separated by distance, and I am discovering new family. I am sorry to leave behind all the non-human family, especially plants and birds, who, in many ways, have been more

steady companions than the ever-changing human population here. They are as big a part of my ongoing daily experience, and in some ways as connected to my heart and my being, as all but the closest human friends. But I know that wherever I go, I will find their relatives. And while my sense of tribe is quite different from that of the Hopis, less rooted in bloodline and tradition, I do experience it, and it is not limited geographically. My contribution to it seems not necessarily to be as one who's adding to the gene pool or helping the population rise—but I do feel I have a role to play.

What motivated John Keats moves me as well: No matter how many well-reasoned lists I might make balancing pros and cons of various life choices, ultimately it is my heart that draws anywhere. It is a sense of connection and strange familiarity, even when this family I've discovered is new to me. It is the beauty and mystery of life reasserting themselves, pushing aside distractions and fears. When I am in touch with these truths, separation from "family" no longer provokes anxiety, and the world becomes again a place of wonder, existing in the moment, ever-new yet more familiar than my own experience of time would seem to account for. Whether involving individuals, groups, or places, these feelings of family never fail to remind me of the value of gratitude and the cyclical, ancient-feeling newness of every day...as if I had discovered an unknown, long-lost sister; a bunch of siblings, elders, nieces, and nephews that inadvertently got erased from my family tree; a piece of ground I know from a dream; a sacred spot on the earth. Few statements are indisputable, but I think this one may be: we are all more related than we can comprehend. ❁



Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES and spends much more of his time in practical action (especially growing organic food and combing through articles for typos) than the above reveries might indicate.

From *Visions of Utopia* to “The Many Faces of Community”

By Maril Crabtree



Hearthaven in the hot tub.

Community Past: Hearthaven

Tears came as I watched Volume II of Geoph Kozeny’s insightful documentary, *Visions of Utopia: Experiments in Sustainable Culture*. Geoph devoted the last years of his life to filming and then editing hundreds of hours of footage from 17 intentional communities. He died of pancreatic cancer before he could complete the editing of Volume II, which features 10 of those communities (the other seven were showcased in Volume I, released in 2002). Friends of Geoph from all around the world contributed more than \$20,000 to see that the project was completed.

More tears flowed as I watched younger versions of myself and my former housemates discuss community living, what our original intentions had been, and how we evolved as we worked through the challenges and joys of sharing the same household.

For 16 years four of us, along with others for varying lengths of time, had lived together as a community-based household known as Hearthaven, one of the communities featured in the DVD. By the time the film was released, however, Hearthaven was no longer an intentional community.

Although the four of us remain loving friends and actually still spend every February together in Mexico, we had to let go of the dream known as Hearthaven. Changing life situations and goals created an ending we didn’t envision when we first began.

Yet, when I saw us speak of our hopes and dreams and intentions on film, I realized how deeply ingrained our vision had become, and how many ways it had flowered in the world at large, even though we parted ways as housemates.

Geoph’s spirit permeates the film—that spirit of loving curiosity that motivated him to crisscross the country as the “peripatetic communitarian,” sharing at each place lessons learned. Sometimes those lessons were pragmatic. He taught us how to make a concrete pad for our hot tub and made the best tofu stir-fry in the land. Other times the lessons were more subtle, such as when he offered a different perspective on the conflicts of the day.

Seeing Geoph’s video made me realize that the years spent developing com-

munity values as an intentional community resulted in an even greater sense that the whole world is our community.

Community Present: Shadowcliff, Core Star, Writing Classes, and Visions Discussion Group

Bob Mann and Judith Christy now create community five months of the year in a nonprofit eco-lodge known as Shadowcliff, where they gently guide guests to consider making simple yet permanent environmental changes. They live the rest of the year (except for February, when we share a condo in Mexico) at River Rock Cohousing in Ft. Collins, Colorado.

My husband Jim created Core Star, a three-year school of energy healing which became a spiritual community, bringing together people from all walks of life who yearned to make a contribution to the healing and well-being of others.

I have been guided to create community by leading informal writing classes for older adults, where we encourage each other to explore our creativity.

Thanks to Geoph and his work, we saw in *Visions of Utopia* many other examples besides our own of intentional community living. His video inspired Jim and me to offer it to our local spiritual group as a springboard for discussion on how to bring more community into our lives.

We titled the evening “The Many Faces of Community.” In addition to Hearthaven, we chose three other featured groups, all with a different history, different living configurations, and different goals. I was especially interested in the story of Goodenough, a Seattle group which does not live together, yet nevertheless offers a model for community-oriented living.

After viewing the video segments, we

Geoph Kozeny.



Photos courtesy of Maril Crabtree

Where do you find community? How does community enrich your life? How can you create more community?

and we offered suggestions. From stories in the morning newspaper to what happened at work or at school, people offered comments on how conversation about “community” could change their “same old same old” routines and expectations.

At the end of the evening, we had a sense that this discussion honored Geoph’s original intent: to use his work as a learning tool, an inspiring yet honest portrayal of people coming together to deepen their commitment to options for living in ways other than what mainstream culture offers.

Community Future: An Intentional Family Venture

Not long after that, Jim and I entered into conversations with our son, daughter-in-law, and teenage grandkids about living together as a three-generation intentional living community. Although the two of us had lived in community with friends, we had never before considered living with our own family members. Now, it seemed natural to entertain the notion, due to health changes and

a variety of other reasons—and in part due to the powerful reminder of the advantages of community living that Geoph’s video gave us. Synchronistically, or perhaps miraculously, the first house we looked at fit all our “must haves.” By the time you read this, we will have embarked on our next grand intentional community living venture.

I’m looking forward to finding other opportunities to share Geoph’s work and pose those fascinating questions: Where do you find community? How does community enrich your life? How can you create more community?

I have a feeling that Geoph’s playful spirit will pave the way. ❁

Maril Crabtree, a poet and essayist, grew up in the South, but adopted the Midwest as her homeland in the early '60s and has lived in Kansas City (on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri state line) ever since. She has lived in intentional community nearly 25 years and looks forward to sharing a household again. You can reach her via her website, www.marilcrabtree.com.

asked those present to reflect on what they had seen and heard, and to answer the questions: Where do you currently find community in your life? How does community enrich your life? How can we as individuals or our spiritual group as a whole create more community?

Feedback was thoughtful and enthusiastic. “I can see how I could do more to help create community in my workplace,” said Jeannine. Paula, who lives in a subdivision of attached homes, wondered how to create a more cooperative spirit among neighboring homeowners,

How to Encourage Intentional Community

The economy has produced even more reasons for families, friends, and strangers with compatible values to explore living in community. Here are some helpful steps to take if you want to help “spread the word” about intentional community:

1. Purchase a copy of Volumes I and II of *Visions of Utopia* (visit fic.ic.org/video).
2. As you review the videos, jot down questions and comments that occur to you, and make special note of which segments capture your interest most.
3. Plan to show no more than 45 minutes of video and encourage people to take notes, as you did, on what struck them, but especially focusing on those three questions: Where do you find community? How does community enrich your life? How can you create more community? Furnish paper and pens. (Popcorn is optional, but nice!)
4. Guide the discussion so that everyone has a chance to express themselves. Make sure people understand that, as Geoph says, there is no one

“right” way to create community, but many ways.

5. Other FIC resources:

- COMMUNITIES magazine (after all, you’re reading it): this 80-page quarterly features the latest ideas and inspiration about cooperative living. communities.ic.org.
- Communities Directory: *the* source for who’s doing what and where, focusing mainly on North America, yet with listings all over the world. directory.ic.org.
- Community Bookshelf: your one-stop shop for titles on cooperative living, group dynamics, sustainability, and right livelihood. store.ic.org.
- Art of Community events: FIC periodically hosts events or partners with sister organizations to put on events where participants can get both information about community and a taste of it at the same time. fic.ic.org/aofc.
- ReachBook: online listings about community ventures all over the place, specializing in people looking for groups and communities looking for members. reach.ic.org/postings.

A Community Newcomer Finds Her Rhythm

by Melanie Ravensong Martin

As the full moon balances on the cusp of the horizon, at the merging of heaven and earth, I see shades of gray transforming into subtly glowing shapes radiating with auras of ethereal light. This world and the dream time reveal themselves as one. In this land, we revere and revel in the moon cycles, and the changes happening throughout nature at every moment—the coming of the bluebirds, the ripening of blackberries, the sudden appearance of mushrooms. With each swift or gradual change we become renewed, taking on new hues and intensities as surely as the forests, the deer, and the meadows.

When I arrived in Eugene, Oregon after a long nature retreat in the rainy forests of British Columbia, I felt my anticipation turn to terror. There I was, in a new town nearly a continent away from my former home in western Pennsylvania, guided by nothing more than the belief that I would find community here. I'd grown up in a neighborhood where no one really knew each other, in a town where I didn't seem to fit in. In college, things were somewhat better, but I still hadn't experienced a strong spiritual network of family and friends. My own spirituality was very different from that of many of the people I lived amongst, and though I believe in accepting one another despite those differences, I yearned for what I hadn't yet experienced.

Wandering the streets of this new town, I felt daunted by the idea of searching for housemates. I wanted to find a cave somewhere and hide from all these strange people and this town filled with new parks, new coffee shops, new libraries, new streets. I hadn't expected that everything would feel quite so foreign. I decided to look for a small cabin where I could begin to ground myself.

I found an ad for a one-bedroom cabin at a community house, but though the cabin sounded great to me, I wondered

how I would adapt to living communally. As much as I wanted to find a new circle of friends, finding a secluded little cave was sounding more and more appealing.

I dialed. The voice on the other end said they were on their way home from the Saturday Market, and I could meet them at their home now. Ten minutes later, I was pulling up to a

beautiful house surrounded by a lush evergreen forest, a house that looked like a cross between a castle and a spaceship. "Welcome to the Mothership," the owners greeted me warmly.

They were David and Omni, a middle-aged couple with a playful spirit that made them seem almost like kids at times. They had just acquired a sizable quantity of strawberries at the market, and as I helped them wash and slice some

for freezing, they began reliving their own story of how they had found this place, still clearly feeling amazed that they lived in such a palace. Omni swept me through the house, telling stories of how they had made it into their own space, watching the land and their little community evolve. Along the way, I took in the vibrant beauty of her many feltings and weavings that decked the walls, turning the house into a colorful art gallery. The main communal space consisted of a large round room with a kitchen, music area, and cozy places to sit, with



The Mothership.

Yona Appletree

Sunheart's main band members, Omni, David, and Eostar.



Pamela Wibbe

Do they think I'm weird for just showing up and expecting everything to work out for the best?

glass doors leading out to a spacious deck overlooking a breathtaking view of Spencer Butte and the surrounding forest. Above, a huge skylight flooded the space with sunshine. Seven or eight people usually lived in this house, a large double yurt (triple on one side). I would have my own little cabin just a short walk from the main house, in its own little clearing. When they said I could move in that day, I was thrilled.

I had never lived communally before, though, and I usually needed a lot of time to myself. The same spaces that looked cozy and inviting at first glance seemed intimidating when I realized I'd been ingratiated into a house of musicians, who tend to attract other musicians, filling the house with people and sound. Could I get used to this? I wondered. And do they think I'm weird for just showing up and expecting everything to work out for the best?

Many of them, I learned, had been through similar experiences. Omni told how David had shown up at her door in the rain 25 years ago, saying he'd come to Eugene to find his family. And they did their best to make me feel welcome—in my first week there, as their band, Sunheart, practiced for an upcoming gig, they invited me to join them, and I happily played tambourine, a buffalo drum, and maracas. That weekend, I joined them for their performance at the Essene Garden of Peace in nearby Triangle Lake.

Something about music can transform people from a bunch of individuals to a cohesive group. Feeding off the ecstatic energy of the crowd, I felt pure joy at being part of a creative force larger than myself. The energy of the music transported us all to a higher realm, where we remembered that we are one soul with all other beings: with all the people dancing, with the animals, forests, and stars of that

August night.

Soon I began playing keyboards with the band, and performed with them at a house party held at the Mothership. Guests brought a plethora of organic vegan food, and I almost couldn't believe that as a vegetarian of 10 years, I was finally in the majority.

Later, I would begin playing harmonium during kirtans with Fearless Love, led by the amazingly talented singer and songwriter Eostar Kamala. At these kirtans and at their concerts, the soul-stirring music and lyrics built a vibration so high that people could sense it in the air and left revitalized. Through music, I felt my sense of connection to others deepening profoundly. I still needed plenty of solitude, but an attitude of *carpe diem* had helped me to find my new community, and it was helping me to feel more at home in it as well. Finding a balance was difficult at times, and I had to step back often to replenish my energy. But through music, I felt the spirit that flows through all uniting me with others, reminding me that we are all sacred beings filled with the same divine essence that pervades the forests and meadows where I'd usually seek tranquility.

Within our circle of friends, most of us seemed to take this holistic approach, connecting with other living beings and the place where we lived on a spiritual level. By eating healthful foods produced humanely and locally, we celebrated our interdependence with nature, as well as the health of our community. We celebrated seasonal changes with the understanding that they reflect changes in our own selves. Days like the equinox or Beltane, which had been just another day where I'd grown up, became a chance to join together in celebration of the divine within all creation. On the spring equinox, I found myself torn between going to a poetry reading at a local nature preserve, a celebration at a spiritual center in town, and a party at a friend's in the country. I opted for all three. After a quiet, relaxed reading session with other poets, I found myself joining hands with a multitude of new and old friends,

singing to Gaia as we spiraled around with hands joined. Then, I went to the party, where everyone sat deep in meditation while Eostar played the sonorous undertones of her didgeridoo. I quietly stepped in and joined the group, feeling surrounded by joy and awareness of the rhythm of life, reinforced by the steady vibration of the music that united us all.

At the same time, though, I sometimes felt myself falling out of alignment with my own inner rhythms. It was all too easy to forget my own needs for solitude until I started to feel drained. There's a fine line, I realized, between embracing community and expecting too much of myself. I wasn't going to develop into a bubbly, extroverted person, and I didn't really want to, even though many people seem to perceive that as the epitome of happiness and inner alignment. I liked my meditative, reflective tendencies; they form a large part of my identity. I still have to remind myself every day that my own feelings are valid and healthy, after growing up in a world that says they are not.

Living in community, with so much going on around me, I have to continually check in with myself to learn whether I should spend more time alone, or take a break during a gathering. Sometimes a part of me craves being involved in whatever happens to be going on at the moment, but I feel a stronger need to step aside. When people congregate together in the evening, I'm often starting to feel tired and in need of space, though I'd like to catch up with them about their day. It's a difficult balancing act, compounded by the fact that I'm a writer who needs plenty of quiet time to pursue projects. Because the dynamics of community continually shift, with some months (and members) quieter and some busier, my own balancing act continually shifts. I'm still adapting, and to some extent I probably always will be, but it keeps life interesting and dynamic.

In May, when the full moon came around, rumors began spreading about a musical gathering on top of Spencer Butte. Several bands and other musicians would be up there playing bluegrass

music all day long, in this jamboree honoring the full moon. When I hiked up the butte with friends, we found dozens of people dancing and picnicking high above the busy town and countryside. As the sun set over the reservoir in the distance, everyone cheered and gave it a standing ovation. When the sky darkened and the moon rose over a distant mountaintop like a great orange pumpkin, people howled ecstatically.

I stepped back, closed my eyes, and listened. I allowed myself to simply watch, reminding myself that was all right. I sat on the side of the hilltop and looked out over the lights of the town, then over the darkened countryside stretching toward the horizon. In stillness I listened to the lively music and chatter, as if in meditation. After a long while, I stepped back into the circle, feeling more grounded.

I thought of how, to a distant observer, it might have seemed like just a party, but as locals well knew, these parties were a form of ceremony, a way of celebrating spirit. And as long as I nurtured my needs for solitude and tranquility, I could allow my own energy to merge with that of others to create something that transforms us all.

Going to the hot springs in the nearby

mountains was, and continues to be, another very sacred type of ceremony—a ritual done with small groups of friends under the cover of dark. In the crisp chill of night, we hike down the woodland path and then step into the healing waters, their steam rising toward the spires of Douglas firs. We sometimes sing, or just sit in silence. The land nourishes us here as it did the indigenous people for thousands of years, and we radiate thankfulness in the blissful stillness of a starry night.

In these ways, we baptize one another in earth and water, love and light. And in these ways, we become family, for in remembering our rootedness in the cycles of nature, we remember who we are. ✨



Melanie Ravensong Martin is a freelance writer and editor with a master of arts degree in English who especially enjoys writing about nature and human cultures.

She is also a storyteller who especially loves stories that emphasize our place in the larger community of nature. Find her blog at storygrove.blogspot.com.



From left to right, it's lead singer and guitarist David Sunheart, singer and guitarist Don St. Clair, drummer Glenn Falkenberg, drummer Nanda Dulal Das, lead singer Omni Mountainskyrainbow, and keyboardist Melanie Ravensong Martin. Barely visible behind David is bass player Troy Keys.

Rukmini Russell



We're All in the Family

By Karbyn Eilde

It is almost certain that you will have an opportunity to meet, work with, and even love someone with ASD (an Autism Spectrum Disorder), whether they are born/adopted into your blood family or move in to your chosen community family. This broad definition includes everything from the classic autism that most people associate with the condition, at one end of the spectrum, to high functioning autism (HFA) or Asperger's Syndrome, at the other end. The explosive growth in numbers of ASD children being born has been called both a sad epidemic and the next positive step in human evolution, as the brain structure of people with ASD is different in very basic ways. Though no one is quite sure why so many more of these people are coming into the world, they are certainly here. The more that "typical" people understand how ASD people experience the world, the better our entire human family can learn to live well together.

I have been reflecting on my own life, and realizing how well I fit the pattern that is now called Asperger's Syndrome. Frankly, it's a relief to have a name for it, and myself. Screaming tantrums in childhood? You bet. Weird style of walking? Yes, and I still remember clearly the day a classmate said, "Why do you walk so funny?" Terrible handwriting—oh yes! And, finally, social misfit? Social failure would be more accurate,

and that has remained true throughout my adult life. When I recently got back in touch with a good friend from middle school, I asked, "How do you remember me, from school?" and his reply was sadly affirming of my new understanding. "Well, we all thought you were kind of strange and you didn't really have any friends, but you were smart, so we let you hang around with us." I was grateful then for the tolerance, and grateful now for the validation that I was not the only person who thought I was different.

Seeking relief or definition, I've tried to lay claim to many other conditions, naming myself as alcoholic and bipolar and various other things in life. But if they were true, then presumably others would recognize it and the interventions that work for those would be helpful to me. Instead, trained professionals tell me I'm "okay" and nothing I do helps with the core issue—not really understanding how people work. I'm the constant tourist, the cultural anthropologist trying to blend in with the natives through careful observation and mimicry. And despite a lifetime of practice, my real understanding never gets better, although I do think I'm getting better at the copying. In a course of events that I now know is common, during my efforts to help my child manage the world better, I've become more informed about autism and Asperger's, and realize I've



Community life (especially rural) suits many Aspies very well, and they are likely to find their way to you eventually.

time I don't even mind, though it does sometimes feel lonely). But online, I get positive comments about what a fantastic communicator I am! How strange, that both sides of the same thing could be true. In any event, I'm glad to be getting more involved in a place where it seems like I'll be able to do well.

But I have found at least one "real life" place that welcomes pretty much everyone, and that was "on the farm" in a rural commune (not The Farm). It has been the only place I've lived that felt like Home to me in my adult life, has been the only place I've made friends I've stayed in touch with at all, and is the only kind of place I'd move to again. But as great as it was for me, I know there were things about me that were hard for other people there...to them, I apologize, but I just didn't know who I was then. Now that I do, things are much better in my life, and would be for all of us, if we lived together again. I'm grateful for your compassion and patience during our time together, especially since you didn't know the right things you needed to understand about me, either! We were all making it up together and did the best we could.

Born In or Moved In

Autism spectrum differences tend to run in families and are more commonly diagnosed in boys than in girls. The prevalence is up to 1 in 166 births, and some say as high as 1 in 150 births. Perhaps you know a family who says "All our boys are like that," or "His dad was the same way," or other phrases that imply there may be a genetic cause. In my own family, this is certainly the case, and was the main reason it took us so long to actively seek services that could be helpful to Ethan. All our guys have shown at least some of the classic signs of Asperger's Syndrome, so in our minds, that's just how boys are. Fortunately, Ethan's experience of school and life is better than it was for my brothers, because we are helping him get the support and interventions that he needs. You may have a brother or dad who could meet diagnostic criteria for Asperger's...or perhaps you even recognize yourself!

In your chosen family, community life (especially rural) suits many Aspies very well, and they are likely to find their way to you eventually. It is usually easy to find work that is hands-on and does not require writing or paperwork in general—both of these areas are excruciatingly difficult for many people with Asperger's. Flexible work times and varied schedules provide the time they need to decompress and be alone, without seeming anti-social. If your group wants a website or other online presence, then your Aspie may be a great choice for that role, too, since the online world feels very comfortable and understandable. Long hours of unsociable alone time, while still engaged in productive work, is a win/win combination! Many

already been down the road he's on. His life feels so familiar to me, especially as compared to my older "typical" child, who has many friends and skips joyfully along through the intricacies of high school relationships and general drama. She seems like the different species, to us!

Most recently, I have been making drastic changes in my own life, based on my new awareness and understanding of myself. I've quit my teaching job, which required long hours of sociable behavior with many people and left me an emotional wreck at the end of each day. I decided to try something completely different that I thought might be a better fit and now I am getting paid to chat online, and it really does suit me much better! I have quit several groups I was in, and am spending more time at home, doing less for fewer people, while I instead use my time to develop my online life and world.

I've found that online is a place that feels very right for me, and the observer side of me breathes a sigh of relief as I feel comfortable and relaxed for the first time in many years. I'm 20 years behind, I know, so there is a lot to learn from scratch. The most fascinating part is about communication. For my whole life, I've been told that I'm bad at communicating and I readily admit it has been true—my lack of skill in talking to people has resulted in a very solitary existence (which most of the

How to Get Along with Your Asperger's Neighbor

What To Do

- Plan for change. Even just a few minutes' advance notice about a change in plan can be very important to help your Aspie neighbor cope better.
- Allow for think time. Expect them to need time to think about something first, before they are ready to respond.
- Encourage healthy eating. (This is good for you, too!)
- Go outside. Invite your neighbor on a walk or include them in any kind of community project that encourages working together.
- Be honest. No, they won't "get the hint" if you are trying to be polite, so just go ahead and say what needs to be said. You can bet they will, too!
- Include them. Small group situations are best. Small groups with structure, or based on a common interest or activity, are even better.

What To Avoid

- Avoid surprises, especially if they create a disruption in the routine. Think of the routine as your neighbor's medication.
- Avoid rushing into any conversation, especially if it might be sensitive for any reason. Being rushed feels like being trapped, and your neighbor is likely to respond defensively.
- Avoid foods that are known allergens for ASD people, such as wheat, dairy, sugar, and preservatives/dyes. There are many ways to express an allergy, not just a runny nose. Emotional outbursts can be greatly reduced by avoiding these foods.
- Avoid or reduce isolation, lethargy, and apathy by actively reminding your neighbor to get up and get out.
- Avoid your own fear of expressing emotions. The Aspies are overly expressive, perhaps, but at least you'll know what's going on, plainly.
- Avoid exclusion. They won't learn how to be sociable unless they practice, and "typicals" won't learn how to be accepting unless they practice, too.

communities highly value structured and clear communication, and actively provide lessons and practice sessions in these skills. This gives the socially inept a fighting chance at figuring out the mysteries of communication. These positive aspects of community life are only some of the reasons why you will probably find Aspies in your chosen family, too.

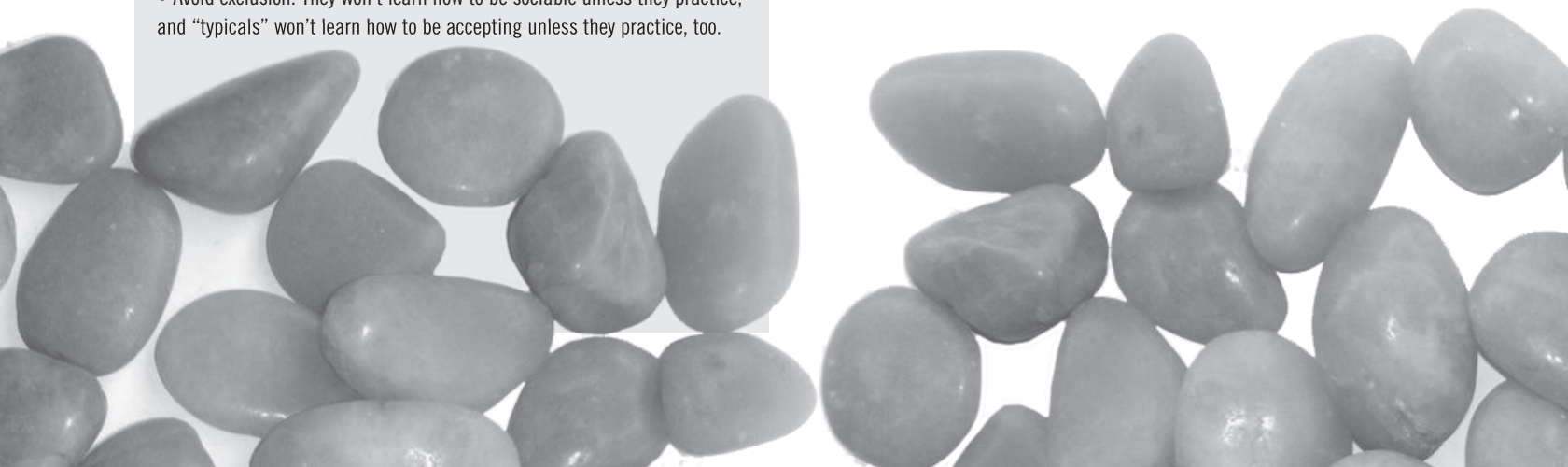
The Good, the Bad, and the Different

The Good

People with Asperger's Syndrome have good qualities and can be well-liked contributing members of your community. They are generally very smart and enjoy using an extensive vocabulary, which makes them fun to talk to (though they'll do best chatting in a small group). If they are linguistically inclined, they'll prefer written communication...as long as it is not handwritten! Email or typed notes would be ideal and they might do well working in your office, handling correspondence, or taking notes on a laptop during committee meetings. Many with Asperger's have superior visual-spatial skills and become excellent mechanics, builders, or artists. Others are more math oriented and may excel in accounting or inventory control. Most do have a tendency towards attention to details and this hyper-focus can be channeled to productive use in all work areas, leading to great performance and exciting new innovations (Einstein? Da Vinci?). With a bit of help in setting up a schedule and discussing work expectations, they'll find comfort in following the routine, and you can count on them to work hard when needed, as long as they also get the quiet alone time they need, before and after.

The Bad

On the other hand, there will be some challenges, too, especially in the area of emotions, which are largely a mystery to people on the autism spectrum. A "typical" person can notice a frustration and then say, "I feel frustrated." The ASD person is more likely to become visibly and physically agitated, perhaps jumping up to pace or cry or yell, even though the same situation seems mild to others. With practice and support, they can get much better at interpreting emotional content and expressing themselves, but it is a learned skill that never quite feels easy. Before they can be effective in a conversation, they will need time to mentally prepare, and may use their stock phrase



almost like a mantra: “I’ll be glad to talk about that with you, but I need to think about it first and get back to you.” This is a socially appropriate way they have learned to buy themselves the “think time” that they need. Rushing them into a conversation usually ends badly for everyone.

Some ASD people may also have a “stimming” behavior that takes some getting used to, perhaps tapping a pencil constantly, fiddling with their hair, flapping their hands, like clapping fingers with one hand, or playing with a piece of string or a squishy ball. These self-soothing behaviors should be accepted calmly, unless they are so odd that they cause problems. In that event, some mentoring by a good friend can help guide the person towards a better time, place, or way to relax, and/or help solve whatever underlying problem may be causing anxiety. Others may have an odd “special interest” such as trains or ceiling fans, that they find relaxing to constantly learn more about, after their community work is completed for the day.

The comfort they find in routines, schedules, and rules is balanced by the discomfort they may express during times of change—especially change that is abrupt or unexpected. The advance planning and good communication that the ASD person requires benefits the whole group, by developing the community’s culture to include those habits.

The Different

The rainbow, with its spectrum of colors, is the symbol of hope for people with ASD, and the catchphrase “different is the new normal” sums up this new way of being in the world. Each person you meet will have slightly different strengths to offer and slightly different needs that must be met to let those strengths be expressed to their full potential. Each one will have had different experiences (often negative) in their previous home, school, and work environments, that will affect their ability to trust you and the new environment in your community. But with compassionate communication and a common goal, the Aspies can be important members of the new world we are creating together. ❁

Karbyn Eilde lived in a rural commune for four years and found her niche in the garden and in helping the group run smoothly by taking good notes during meetings. She can now be found online at www.aspienwoods.com, www.eHow.com, and various other places.

To the Doctor...or Not?

An undiagnosed life can be very frustrating; you may spend many years of life feeling different, but never quite understanding why. You may end up with medications that you don’t really need, or find yourself in jobs or social environments that will never go well despite your constant best efforts. You and the “typical” world just seem to grate on each other’s nerves, for no really clear reason.

Self-Diagnosis

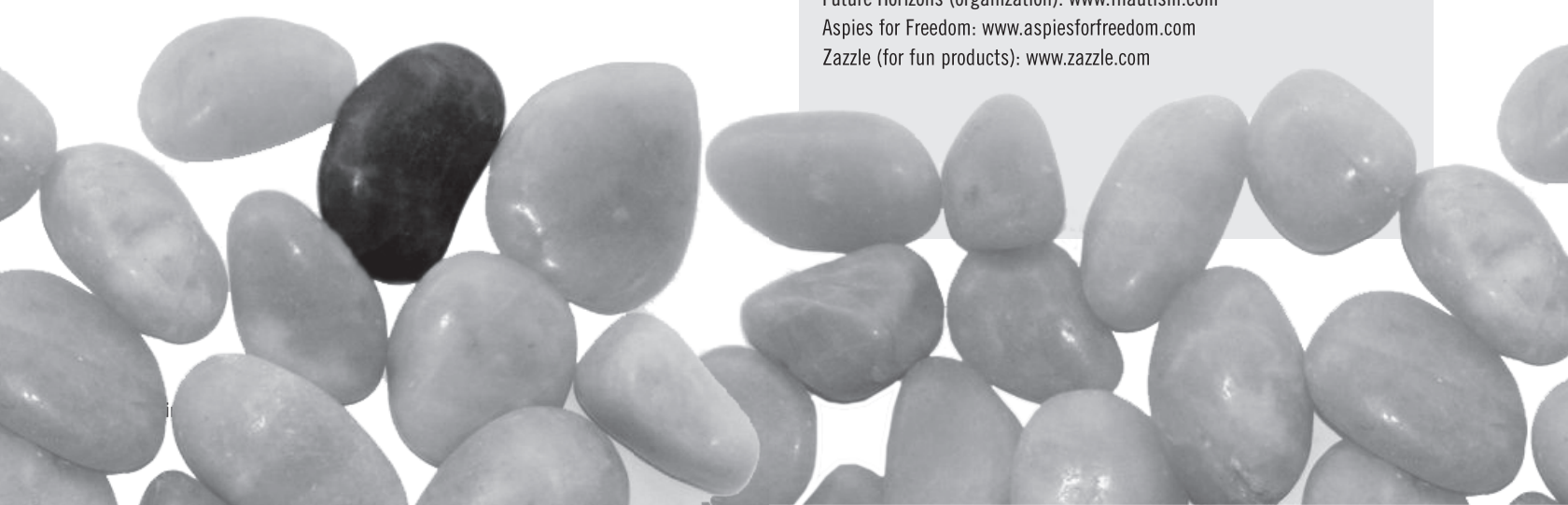
Read books by reputable authors, visit their websites, pay attention during school meetings if your child is being evaluated, explore self-assessments in books or on the internet. If you realize that you, too, would probably qualify for a diagnosis, this can be an exciting moment, even if you don’t actually get a medical diagnosis for yourself. With the new term, you know where to look for the support you need. You can learn new coping skills, realize the importance of choosing your career appropriately, set up your daily life in a way that is good for you, and in general start to feel better about yourself.

Medical Diagnosis by a Doctor

This can be extremely helpful, especially if the person is a child in public school. Without this, the special education department is closed to you, even if all the teachers working with your child know that he or she needs those services. The doctor’s signature can be necessary to get school services, medications for co-existing conditions, government assistance, free medical care at high quality hospitals, tutoring arrangements, aides in the classroom, and many other kinds of help. Sadly, children who are able to get by during the early years of school may not get the services that everyone knows they need, until they do eventually begin to fail classes or get in fights or have other serious problems.

Suggested Authors and Websites

Tony Attwood: www.tonyattwood.com.au
Temple Grandin: www.templegrandin.com
Jed Baker: www.jedbaker.com
Liane Holliday Willey: www.aspie.com
Carol Stock Kranowitz: www.out-of-sync-child.com/default.htm
Future Horizons (organization): www.fhautism.com
Aspies for Freedom: www.aspiesforfreedom.com
Zazzle (for fun products): www.zazzle.com



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For more information on this and other New Culture events and activities, contact us at:

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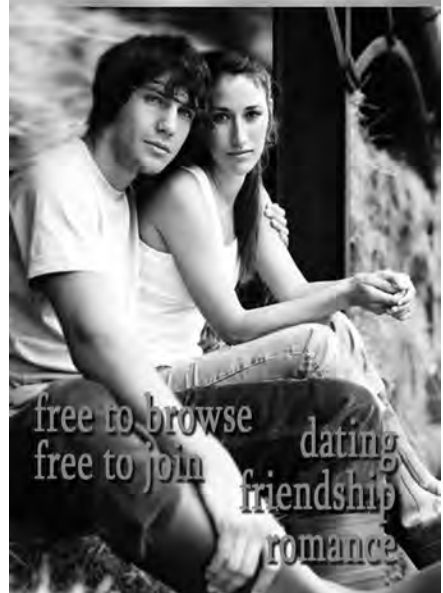
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You may use the form on the last page of Reach to place an ad. THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #147/SUMMER 2009 (out in June) is Friday, April 23.

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Intentional communities listing in the Reach section are invited to also visit our online Communities Directory at <http://directory.ic.org>. Listing on our web site is free and data from the site is used to produce our print version of the Communities Directory. Contact: directory@ic.org for more information on being listed in the upcoming Communities Directory.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALENDAR

2010 COHOUSING CONFERENCE in beautiful Boulder, CO. June 18-20. Engage in empowering workshops, educational tours, and productive conversations in this 3 day event. Join us early and take a course at Cohousing University (five 2-day intensives on June 16-17). Learn more at www.cohousing.org/conference.

ECOVILLAGE NETWORK of Canada 2010 AGM Weekend. June 25- June 27, 2010, Yarrow Ecovillage, Chilliwack, British Columbia. For more information: <http://ecovillagenetworkcanada.ning.com/group/2010encannualgeneralmeeting>.

ENTROPY PAWSED. Entropy Pawsed is a nature-linked low energy living demonstration site in rural West Virginia. Visit: www.entropypawsed.org.

INTENSIVE ZEGG-FORUM TRAINING 2010 - unique opportunity! Integral community design—a deep personal process in a social context. Sharing, transparency and awareness, heart to heart communication; experience Forum, train inner listening and presence. Heal relationships, learn direct feedback and clarify unsolved situations. Find greater understanding and cohesion in groups. Dates: California: 2-6 June; 18-24 October; New York: 9-13 June; 26 Oct. - 1 Nov.; www.zegg-forum.org. Ina Meyer-Stoll, Achim Ecker, world-leading experts on "The Forum" from the ZEGG Ecovillage, Germany, have been deeply involved in its development. Application: ina@zegg.de.

NEW CULTURE SUMMER CAMP: discover "a life that works" based on love, freedom, and community! Explore transformation, honesty, safe and sacred touch, world-changing and more; co-create loving, clothing-optional community in a beautiful natural setting. Kids welcome! Summer Camp East: July 9-18, West Virginia, \$495 – \$895, <http://www.cfnc.us>, sc10e@cfnc.us, 800-763-8136. Summer Camp West: August 6-15, Oregon, \$575 – \$1000, <http://www.nfnc.org/sc>, sc10w@nfnc.org, 800-624-8445. Scholarships available. See also our display ad, p. 60.

TAKE AN INSPIRING COHOUSING TOUR! 2010 Coho/US Bus Tours let you visit multiple communities in a single day. Learn from experienced guides as you tour in the areas around San Francisco Bay, Seattle, Portland, Denver, or Boston. Learn more at www.cohousing.org/tours.

TWIN OAKS COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE, Aug. 13 to Aug. 15, 2010. Visit www.communitiesconference.org for more information.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

COMMON GROUND, Virginia. Intentional Community of 30 years, with cooperative focus on large organic gardens, has openings. Located in picturesque area near college town of Lexington. Live close to nature in the wooded mountains of Jefferson National Forest. Seeking young families of a homesteading mindset/ spirit to add to our small but growing group. Kids welcome. 80

acre land trust, community freshwater spring, trout pond, warm swimming pond, pavilion, schoolhouse/ visitor's center. Sustainability key, not the maddening grind. Transitional housing available with partial work-exchange possible. Interested visitor's contact Glen Leasure 540-463-4493 or through web contact at our page on IC.org.

DANCING RABBIT, Rutledge, Missouri. We are a growing ecovillage of more than 30 individuals and are actively seeking new members to join us in creating a vibrant community on our 280 beautiful acres in rural Missouri. Our goals are to live ecologically sustainable and socially rewarding lives, and to share the skills and ideas behind this lifestyle. We use solar and wind energy, earth-friendly building materials and biofuels. We are especially interested in welcoming 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 inspiring ecovillage founded in 1994 on 320-for-ested 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 organ-

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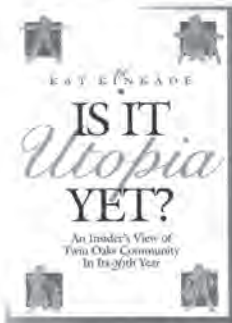
California: June 2–6, 2010

New York: June 9–13; Oct. 26 – Nov. 1, 2010

Greece: „Being free to love!“, Aug. 27–Sept. 3, 2010

Information: www.zegg-forum.org

Ina Meyer-Stoll and **Achim Ecker**, world-leading experts on “The Forum” from the ZEGG Ecovillage in Germany. They live in a committed and polyamorous partnership and offer to share their knowledge about spirituality, communication, love and 25 intense years of living in community.



An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community in its 26th Year by Kat Kinkade

Is it Utopia Yet? is a lively, first-hand account of the unique struggles and triumphs of the first 25 years of Twin Oaks Community, one of America's most

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ECO-FARM, nr. 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 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/hand-work 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@fellowship-community.org.

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

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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

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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.

THREE SPRINGS COMMUNITY, North Fork, CA. Since 1996, we have been living on 160 acres with a year-round creek, waterfalls, swimming holes and an extensive trail system, in the Sierra Foothills, near Yosemite National Park. We are 7 adults and 5 children; sharing a communal kitchen, bathrooms and common spaces, while residing in private dwellings. Having recently expanded our infrastructure with accommodations for new members, we invite you to come experience and share community living and learning with us. We practice open communication, consensus decision making, sharing financial responsibilities, creativity, spirituality and loving more. We eat organic, home grown and locally bought food. Our garden also supports an organic flower business and apprenticeship program. Come visit us soon! Tour our website for more information www.3springs.org

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 and right now, we're especially looking for more women members, as well as people in their 30s, 40s and 50s. 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@jc.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

SEEKING PIONEERS. Ecovillage forming. 35-acre wooded sanctuary one hour 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 and investors, 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.

TRAILS AT NEWCASTLE, Newcastle, Washington. Trails at Newcastle, currently in development, is an intentional sustainable community based on best practices of cohousing, low impact development, and smart growth. Home design is simple, natural, and elegant. Nestled in foothills, the tree canopy outside your front door connects to 4,500-acre Cougar Mountain Wildlife Park and the Cascade Mountain crest. Downtown Newcastle with many shops and services is a quick walk; bus routes and bike paths are at our entrance. Plans include a multi-purpose member-designed community center, organic garden, and native landscaping along paths connecting to regional trail systems. If you are interested in becoming an early member and want an active and intentional community lifestyle, please visit our website www.trailsatnewcastle.com or contact: Brenda Nunes at (425) 785-6286 or brenda@trailsatnewcastle.com.

WEST MARIN, California. Coho Canyon is offering two shares with dwellings starting as low as \$100K each. Visit <http://www.marincohousing.org> or call Alex 415-342-5215.

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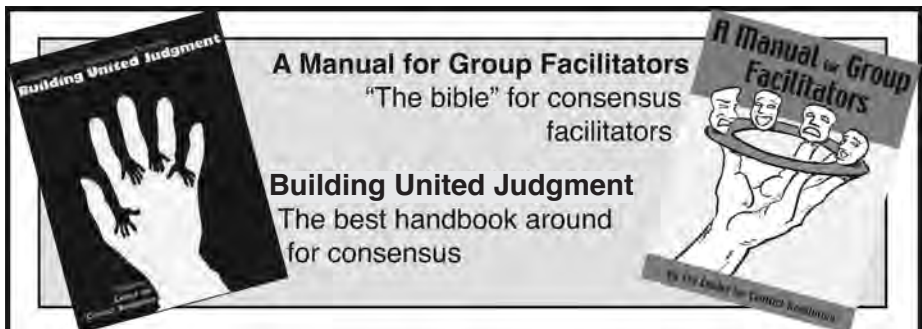
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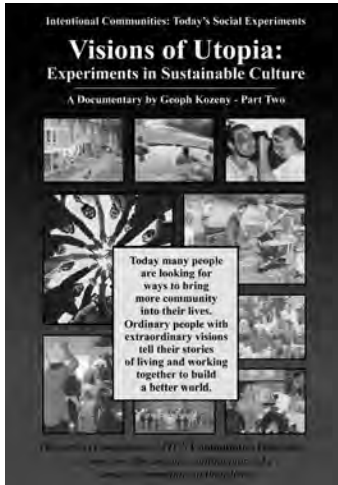
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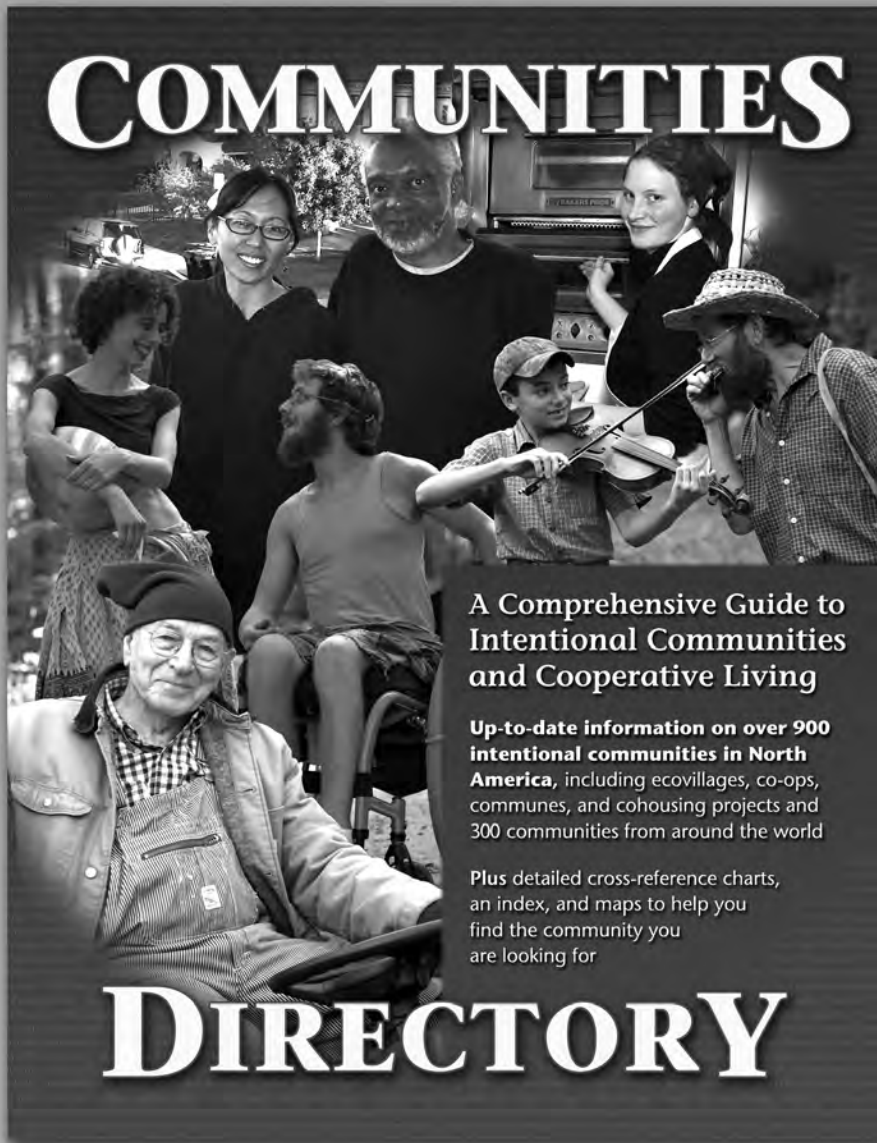
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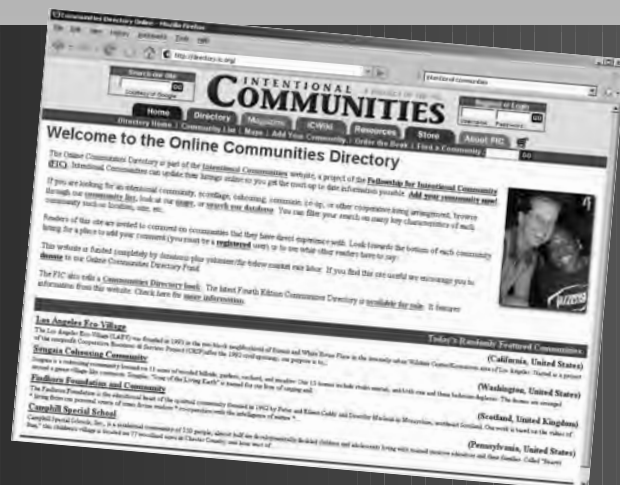
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Arjuna da Silva
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Since the site is new we are still working out the kinks and adding new features. If you find problems or have suggestions please let us know and we'll see what we can do to improve the site. Thanks for your help.

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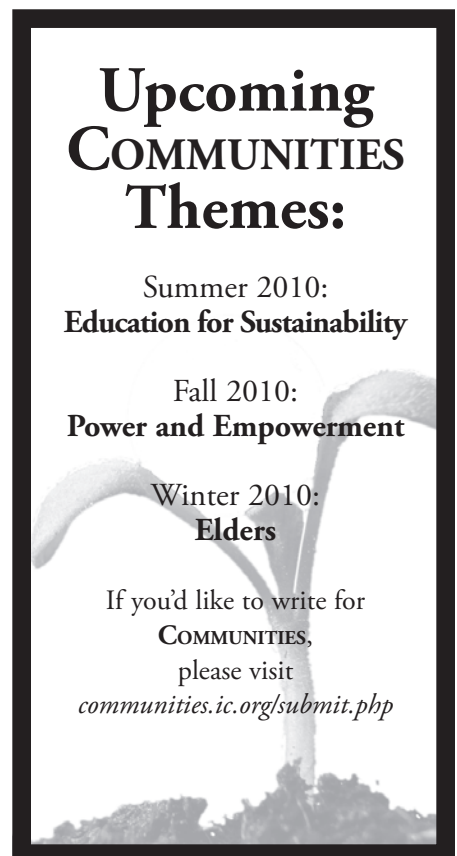
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LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)

early visionaries of Songaia and continued to be a committed, contributing member of the community for his entire life. We miss him!

Nancy Lanphear
Bothell, Washington

More on Stan Crow

One of Songaia's beloved members, Stan Crow, unexpectedly passed away on November 15, 2009 at the age of 70. Stan had a heart that was bigger than life and he shared it joyously with many through ritual, song, and collaborative work and play. Stan is the first Songaia member to die; as a result, our community is learning about losing a member to death. With only two resales since we were built, most of us have known Stan for 10-20 years. Sharing five meals per week, we see and know each other well.

Stan and his wife Carol Crow, along with Fred and Nancy Lanphear, first articulated the vision of Songaia as a cohousing community in 1990—and then tirelessly gathered the people power and resources required to make it so. All four are extraordinary community builders with good, attractive energy. They have provided critical Songaia leadership for two decades. Today, they are releasing their grip on our common torch, helping the other strong hands to carry it forward.

Songaia was just one of Stan's communities. Stan founded the Rites of Passage Journeys, a nonprofit which helps people transition between phases of their lives. Stan was also the president of Woodinville Unitarian Universalist Church Board of Directors. He was an Institute of Cultural Affairs colleague for decades. In recent years, Stan's life has been well-celebrated, so he enjoyed the appreciation and gratitude of his many friends and extended family.

The night before Stan passed, he participated in Songaia's monthly circle.

With 12 families from the 13 Songaia homes represented, this circle was well attended. We explored the past, present, and future of the Songaia Community—in particular, we were looking at our “community energy” and how it has shifted and what we see lying ahead.

Stan and I closed the circle by attempting to synthesize and summarize some ideas shared in the previous two hours. I see Stan's final living gift to Songaia as the articulation of three historic arcs:

- Inventing our community (1990-2000)
- Growing our community (2000-2010)
- Reinventing our community (2010 and beyond)

I suggested another metaphor might be Child, Adolescent, and Adult.

Stan's ideas seem to be taking hold and Songaia is actively considering its future with a renewed energy that feels akin to our early days. How might our cohousing community re-invent itself? Is the idea of a community becoming an adult useful? Might this be about taking more responsibility?

I am so grateful for what Stan has meant to me, our family, and our community. At his core, he was a truly good man and an amazing community builder who deeply embraced life and everyone he encountered.

We have been experiencing deep grief. Together, with members of his other communities and family, Songaia members gathered for many hours on the day of his death and then again the following weekend. His life and our grief were also explored during our large Thanksgiving gathering. A theme we've explored is how grief and gratitude are so deeply interconnected in our hearts.

Whether or not you were part of Stan's life, perhaps you can take a moment to think about the good people who have had such positive effect on our many communities.

In community,
Craig Ragland
Songaia member since 1992

Homeschooling in Community?

I've often wondered why education of children seems to be so low priority in communities, and why groups of homeschoolers haven't started communities. I believe there is one homeschool-based community. Also Greenbriar School in Texas is a school that evolved into a community and is still a school. We'd like to hear about any good examples of educational alternatives in intentional communities and would be happy to support any community interested in creating one.

Jerry Mintz
Alternative Education
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Creating Community

I have been interested in the problem and process of creating community for a number of years, which draws me both to your excellent magazine and the specific issues your readers face in creating an intentional community.

How to bring people together in a community, conventional or intentional, is well understood, but how to get members to interconnect both with each other and with the larger community of which we are all a part is a piece missing from the puzzle. We cannot simply lump persons together in a group or suburb and expect community to mysteriously emerge. People need a reason to connect. Economic self-interest is the key to community development. Transactions form the basic structure of all choice. Something of value has to be given to get something worth more.

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LETTERS

(continued from p. 73)

Intentionality requires volitional values to trump objectives. We need to take stock of who and what is being subsidized and why. We need to clarify why certain ends are given precedence over our inalienable right to exercise free will. Wealth taken from one person to subsidize the objectives of another is theft. The universal principle of social organization is that any action that does not result in a net increase in economic value and personal choice is intrinsically wrong.

Regardless of the aims a program seeks to achieve, if we are going to develop community the key to community development has to be observed. The right to make economically sound choices must be respected. Otherwise we will continue to see personal wealth and choice chipped away in search of ends that never materialize. The answer to all our social problems is a more efficient community. The key to community is the individual with the inalienable right to make his or her own economic decisions.

Robert Burk
Lisle, Ontario

I Have A Dream— Beyond Copenhagen

The 2009 Copenhagen climate talks amounted to another waiting game among countries eager to protect their industrial economies or—and this is also appalling—gain financial compensation for ecological crimes committed by others. Perhaps one bright spot came from a contingent of 150 peasant farmers from the “global South.” While endangered by the global economy, they came to communicate that their non-industrial model of farming could save the planet.

They might well be right, but only if that model is also applied to the global North. And yet, in the North, the movement away from industrial farming is too slow, and might remain so unless governments get involved.

Presently that hardly seems possible,

but reasons for getting involved are multiplying at a dizzying rate. In the US alone, prisoners and persons on parole or on probation number over seven million; persons in danger of losing their homes number in the millions; and the unemployment number is above 15 million. Furthermore, these numbers are growing in most developed countries.

What can a government do with millions of homeless, unemployed people while the biosphere is under assault? What can any government do while desertification and drought begin to take their toll on agriculture, while peak oil is poised to ruin the industrial agricultural model, and while ailing “developed” economies struggle to subsidize agriculture?

Will it occur to governments that in just a few months they could train millions of unemployed people to grow food in desert-like conditions using permaculture or agroforestry techniques? Will it occur to governments that soldiers might be better employed building swales, cob and adobe houses, temporary wells, and whatever else is needed to improve our environment and help create local food security?

If not, they have not considered the other likely benefits of such projects, especially if such a project is pursued in the US. Though it would be a social-ecological experiment, and the outcomes are unknowns, those outcomes could hardly be worse than the current situation. Very likely, if such a resettlement project occurred in the US, the national crime rate would plunge, wars would cease, desertification would be stopped and reversed, carbon points would be scored, and participating “farmers” could be taxed in the form of an organic food tax that would feed millions of “normal” workers.

Why not? Why shouldn't an environmental solution also be a solution to poverty, crime, and war? After all, all things are connected.

Peter Dudink
Burlington, Ontario

AN ABUNDANCE OF DADS

(continued from p. 17)

cutting boards for gifts. Rob taught me that a building is only sustainable if it is beautiful, for otherwise it will be treated poorly and fall apart with age. I use the skills he taught me on a work crew at college that does construction and repairs on campus.

In addition to being a well-known green builder, Rob is also an outspoken guy who is always eager to profess his understanding of the triple global crisis of peak oil, economic vulnerability, and global climate change. One small course of action Rob inspired me to take was to purchase bidet attachments and install them around our ecovillage to reduce toilet paper use. ABC TV became interested in this and other environmental practices of my family, and invited us to participate in a reality program called "Wife Swap." Rob's influence on my world view has affected my career goals; next year I plan to work with one of my professors to measure greenhouse gases.

Finn Po, who also lives at Maitreya Ecovillage, is another guy I've called "Dad," especially when the police brought me home for violations of curfew when I was walking home from my late night job at a restaurant. Finn was usually awake long after my mom and Rob went to sleep, and he was happy to play the role of "responsible adult" to collect the wayward kid. Finn was also my mentor in learning odd skills that might come in handy some day, such as how to turn acorns into edible flour through a process of soaking, shelling, and grinding the nuts.

Finn doesn't take himself seriously, and is often found laughing. He's one of the few people I know who is fully aware of the world's suffering, but who instead of being discouraged, is enchanted by any love, hope, or inspiration that surrounds him. To him, "everything is perfect." His

speech often contains sayings that make me think for a moment. For example, he says "If you're ready to go, you're already invited," or "What else can go right?" Spending time with Finn showed me the value in enjoying my current situation no matter what the circumstances.

Finn makes his living as a carpenter, and he has a different philosophy of sustainable building than Rob Bolman. Rob usually builds to code, even if it means getting special-use permits, and his goal is to make buildings that are functional 100 years from now. Finn's goal is to build using materials gathered from our culture's waste stream. His specialty is creating small dome-shaped huts for people to live in which range from eight to 12 feet in diameter. His own dome, made from cardboard and re-used wood, cost him 18 dollars to build 10 years ago, and it's still in good shape.

Thanks to these four men, I go through life with many sets of eyes. I have become a woodworker looking to create things of beauty and durability like Rob, using discarded materials like Finn. I have become a welcoming person like Michael who learns from folks living on the margins of society like Dean. And these are just a few of the people who influenced me. I recommend that everyone be raised with the rich set of perspectives and skills one can find in a village. ❁



Skye Rios is a chemistry major at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina. Melanie Rios, in addition to being mom to Skye and his two siblings, is a permaculture designer and teacher in Eugene, Oregon.

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PARENTING IN COMMUNITY: THE VOYAGE FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

(continued from p. 29)

Our bedroom looks like we have some kind of moral agenda against open space. There are at least 50 books on the floor, an overturned child's shopping cart, seven pairs of shoes, the directions to our new thermometer, a crossword puzzle, dirty clothes and clean clothes (intermingled), bills, unfinished sewing projects, and a grocery bag full of mismatched socks. Clearly, I'm not jeopardizing my sex-life in the name of *order*. I'm just trying to maintain our community standards.

But maybe I *don't* have my priorities straight. I consider this as I scour Pyrex, a sullen Benjah unloading the dishwasher at my side. Am I taking my husband's unconditional, time-honored love for granted? Do I incessantly place him behind the needs of this newer, shakier relationship—my community? Will I eventually do the same thing to my son? Should I bring this up in therapy?

Obviously, if we lived by ourselves, we could just forget these damn dishes—guilt-free. So why, exactly, am I still here?

Now that we've survived Ash's infancy, I can take a step back and acknowledge that this community's "family focus" should not be defined by the number of free child-care hours that

I receive. We do each other's dishes, we snuggle on the couch, and we fight over who gets a shower before the hot water runs out. What else distinguishes a family?

When I was two days into my labor and my belly-dance moves were no longer effectively soothing the contractions, they circled around me, singing my favorite songs as I gyrated my hips with tears running down my face. I knew then, even in the face of my two greatest fears—shitting all over the midwife and begging wretchedly for an epidural—that I desperately wanted every one of them in the room during Ash's birth.

My commitment to this community is obviously a marriage of love...not of convenience. Someday there might be goats, butternut squashes, and 15 other kids. Right now, I'll just appreciate what I've got. I do, however, have a brand new fantasy: when Ash goes to pre-school and they ask him to draw his family picture, I really hope it includes us all. ❁



Jesika Feather (Jesikafeather@gmail.com) is a mother, a teacher, and a writer. She lives in the Heart and Spoon Community in Eugene, Oregon.


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SECOND FAMILY

(continued from p. 40)

to see and comment on. Everyone has their own beliefs about how the community should operate, which many times cause lively discussions about community intentions, finances, and businesses. Members have different viewpoints on just about every part of life, from work ethics to what should be served at dinner. Living here has provided me with daily challenges regarding personal interactions.

I continued walking and contemplating the lifestyle I have here at Twin Oaks. Tonight I have the writers' group, tomorrow is art therapy, and Wednesday night is cards with my housemates. On other evenings I may go to a dance party or make a walking date with another Twin Oaker. Sunday mornings bring a pancake breakfast with my housemates, at which we share Steve's delicious pancakes heavily seasoned with lots of good conversation and laughter. My work scene has begun to balance out; I know every day what tasks I am going to perform. Somehow or other, I too have quietly fallen into the nice comfortable routine filled with the laughter, conversations, and shared work that I was looking for. I have a new family, friends, and a purpose for this second part of my life.

As I walked along the forest path enjoying the acceptance of my new lifestyle, I heard the voice of one of the community's children call out. "Arizona! Arizona, I love you." I took a deep breath and smiled. I was home. ❀



Before joining Twin Oaks, Arizona worked as a software engineer. The fall of WorldCom/MCI soured her perspective on the modern corporate world and led her to work completely for herself while researching the problems with businesses in today's world and our impacts on that world. Her findings left her searching for a better way of life.

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REVIEWS

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difficult thing may be a gift of love."

She gives her perspective on the supposed "holiness" of religious communities with characteristic candor: "Someone once said of the cloister that it does not automatically ensure holiness: a wall may enclose a lovely secret garden, or a stinking rubbish heap." Elsewhere, she writes, "When our order was in the early stages of self-study and renewal, our superior said in jest that she was going to write a book about the life called *The Grunge and the Glory*. Living a life that is both culturally apart and intensely together is exacting. There is a lot of grunge."

This book contains many more gems: thoughtful observations on the balance of work, relationships, and one's own inner life in community (and how different individuals' approach to that balance can itself create tensions); the importance of having well-designed, protracted processes for incorporating new members, as well as graceful, deliberate ways to deal with a member's separation or exit from the community; reflections on the challenges faced by founders and elders witnessing change within their own communities; and some simple, sage one-liners: "Some of the stress that arises in community life comes from insecurity trying to clothe itself as power." "Even the most desired outcome is much better chosen than imposed."

While describing "fair and efficient leadership, whether designated or undesignated" as the "oil" that keeps the 'machinery' of relationships and daily life moving along smoothly," Ellen sees the ideal form of that leadership as "almost invisible"—not ostentatious or concentrated, but flowing through different people in different circumstances. Ellen's houses function with no one sister in charge, but with delegated responsibilities, and with whole-group decisions made in weekly house meetings, by consensus when possible. These meetings start with a few moments of silence, then the setting of an intention, then personal "check-ins." (Does this sound familiar to anyone in community?)

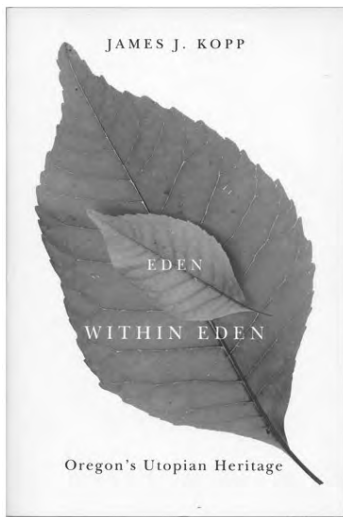
A few final notes: if you don't resonate well with the word "God" as a descriptor of ultimate reality and the source of one's guidance, you may want to substitute "Gaia," "the Universe," "our essential being," or some other term throughout this book. If you are averse to the idea that we are part of something larger than ourselves—"family members" with responsibilities as well as opportunities—or believe that everything is meaningless, disordered chaos, or think that monastics and "seekers" of every kind take things *way* too seriously, you may not like this book (or, on the other hand, you might take perverse pleasure in it). Otherwise, I can almost guarantee that this very personal story of hearing and answering the call to community living has much to teach even the most secular communitarian.

EDEN WITHIN EDEN OREGON'S UTOPIAN HERITAGE

By James J. Kopp

Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, 2009
Paperback, 370 pages

If *Together and Apart* portays community life with an intensely personal and particular focus, *Eden Within Eden* takes the opposite tack. In it, historian and librarian James Kopp assembles an encyclopedic look at the utopian history of a single



state. (While “utopian” and “communal” are not strictly equivalent terms, for the purposes of this review they are interchangeable.)

Since the middle of the 19th century, Oregon has been home to nearly 300 known communal experiments, in addition to countless others not describing or advertising themselves as such. Most of us living in community have only a limited grasp of or perspective on what preceded us.

As someone involved in several of Oregon’s recent “utopian experiments” starting in 1986, I had probably an above-average amount of knowledge on the subject—and yet most of the groups described in this book, except the contemporary ones, were unknown to me.

Like Together and Apart, Eden Within Eden describes both the “grunge” and the “glory” of community living—utopian experiments that were deeply dysfunctional, and others that were by most measurements wildly successful in improving people’s lives and achieving their cooperative goals. Almost always, it’s a mixed bag, with different folks choosing different strokes, learning, growing, giving, and receiving through the process. These groups contribute in both subtle and obvious ways to the larger society, often for good, occasionally for ill (as with the almost-forgotten Holy Rollers and the less-forgotten experiment called Rajneeshpuram, where, amidst some “good works,” members also poisoned the local food supply and had other unsavory activities planned).

After introductory looks at Oregon as Eden and the American Utopian Tradition, Kopp writes extensively about the Aurora Colony, the settlers’ first communal experiment (and also one of the most successful, long-lasting ones), founded in 1856. After a slow period, intentional community start-ups experienced a resurgence in the 1880s and 1890s, and various cooperative ventures blossomed in the early 20th century before they were overtaken by larger historical events. The most recent resurgence, the one with which we’re all most familiar, started in the late 1960s and continues, in various forms, to this day. As most readers of this magazine know, the myth that the intentional community movement “died” in the early 1970s is anything but the truth, although many of the groups from that early boom did fold. *Eden Within Eden* reflects the richness of recent and contemporary communal activity within Oregon. Nearly half of this lengthy book is devoted to a resource guide to Oregon’s utopian heritage and to additional notes. Not surprisingly, *COMMUNITIES*, which has been documenting contemporary intentional community projects since 1972, is the one source most frequently cited.

Too often communitarians may feel isolated in their attempts to create the structures and realities that will encourage more cooperative living. But both in contemporary times and historically, those engaged in similar experiments are far from alone, as you know if you are reading *COMMUNITIES*. Books like *Eden Within Eden* can provide both encouragement and valuable lessons to contemporary communitarians. Every state deserves this kind of resource; and in the meantime, you don’t have to be an Oregonian to benefit from the perspective this book provides. ❁

Chris Roth is taking a break from Oregon’s communal landscape this spring to explore another hub of communal activity: northeast Missouri.

More Books of Interest

Birthrites: Rituals and Celebrations for the Child-bearing Years by Jackie Singer, foreword by Glennie Kindred, Permanent Publications, East Meon, Hampshire, UK, distributed by Chelsea Green, White River Junction, Vermont, 2009.

Building Commons and Community by Karl Linn, New Village Press, Oakland, 2007.

Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind edited by Linda Buzzell and Craig Chalquist, foreword by David W. Orr, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 2009.

For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America by John Curl, PM Press, Oakland, 2009.

Heartland Utopias by Robert P. Sutton, Northern Illinois University Press,

DeKalb, 2009.

Held in Love: Life Stories to Inspire Us Through Times of Change edited by Molly Young Brown and Carolyn Wilbur Treadway, Psychosynthesis Press, Mt. Shasta, California, 2009.

Kitezh: A community approach to raising children in Russia by Dimitry Morozov, Eland Publishing Limited, London, Ecologia Youth Trust, Moray, Scotland, 2008.

Living Green: Communities that Sustain by Jennifer Fosket and Laura Mamo, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, Canada, 2009.

Odyssey of a Practical Visionary by Belden Paulson, Thistlefield Books, Plymouth, Wisconsin, 2009.

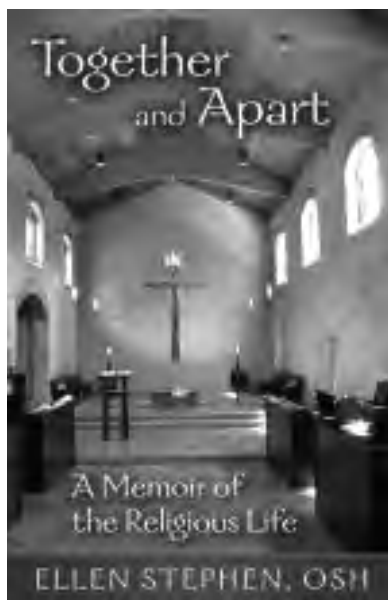
Voices from a Sacred Land: Images and Evocations by Lisa Paulson, Thistlefield Books, Plymouth, Wisconsin, 2008.



TOGETHER AND APART A MEMOIR OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

By Ellen Stephen, OSH

Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, New York, 2008
Paperback, 148 pages



If you're a secular communitarian, you may assume that a book about living in a convent will have little or nothing to do with you. *Together and Apart* will almost certainly cause you to unclutter your thought habits in this area.

Ellen Stephen writes with more wisdom, insight, and candor about residential intentional community than most authors I've read. This is partly because she herself

has spent more than four decades immersed in it; she is also a gifted writer and seasoned observer of herself and of human nature. While I have never been a member of a religious community (monastery, convent, ashram, etc.), many of her stories about her life in the Order of Saint Helena (in several different convents) resonated with what I've experienced and witnessed in secular communities. In her memoir, the life of a monastic and the life of a secular communitarian—including the issues that confront each—do not emerge appearing so different after all. In fact, they are in some respects almost identical.

While a popular conception is that religious communities tend to be hierarchical and dogmatic—and therefore perhaps different from more egalitarian secular communities—these do not appear to be the dominant themes in Ellen's life in an Episcopalian community. In Ellen's group (once nominally answerable to a monastery, but now independent of any male authority), sisters rotate through roles, share power, and actively question both theology and day-to-day guidelines they set for themselves. She describes her order's "bad old days" when she first took her vows, during which fear and subservience to the superior ruled too often, and its subsequent evolution over the decades into a far more egalitarian, mutually supportive, mutually empowering paradigm emphasizing connection. "A

call to the religious life is first and foremost an invitation to be *together*," she writes. "There is always a consciousness of the importance of human relationship, of love."

The sisters are committed not only to each other but to a path that respects the earth. Although Ellen's community is not explicitly ecological in its focus, its commitment to "poverty" (understood as simplicity and sharing) and social justice mean that it may actually be more ecological and sustainable in its practices than the majority of secular communities. The sisters wear mostly used clothing, not only because they need to operate within a very low budget but because "using what others no longer need seems like a kind of recycling, and recycling in all its forms is an important aspect of poverty today, as well as a witness against consumerism and waste." The amenities in their daily lives are simple and shared, as the sisters seek alternatives to the excess, exploitation, and economic disparity that they see in a society of individualistic materialism and ownership.

This approach is not always easy. "Sharing a kitchen or any other space with other people," she remarks wryly, "can be a real challenge to serenity and sisterly or brotherly love." In fact, even deciding on décor in a convent can pose difficulties, now that the traditionally austere guidelines have loosened up a bit: "Homey' to one sister may mean frilly white curtains and flowered throw pillows. That doesn't signify home to me."

But perhaps the biggest challenges come from simply learning to live together as individuals with differing personalities, priorities, needs, and personal issues. Ellen repeatedly disabuses readers of any rose-colored glasses through which they may wish to look at community living, while also explaining why she has found the challenges worth confronting. Her descriptions and perspectives are, if anything, on the "dark" side, but they are meant to counteract false images. If she doesn't speak for you in these passages, she likely speaks for someone with whom you have lived:

"[Sometimes] the hardest thing for me in community is respecting another sister who does not seem to me to be choosing the 'road less traveled,'" she writes. "It has taken slow-growing knowledge and acceptance of my own failings to begin to see beyond the faults of my sisters to the true self within that is to be accepted and loved." At another point, she observes pithily, "We human beings are complex creatures, and complexity is hard to live with."

The solution, she has found, is not to bottle up the difficulties, but instead to say what needs to be said to community mates, if it truly needs to be said (or to process it internally, if reflection shows that to be the best course). "Repressed feelings are like toothpaste in a tube—under enough stress a capped tube will crack open and the paste will ooze out at an inappropriate point. On the other hand, freely choosing to bear a

(continued on p. 78)



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