

THREE ESSENTIAL GROUP AGREEMENTS

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Power and Empowerment

Being “Overthrown”

Leadership and Followership

Pulling the Plug on Consensus

Power and Powerlessness in Community

The Straw Poll that Broke the Camel’s Back

Dysfunction, Community Breakdown, and Vision

Fall 2010 • Issue #148

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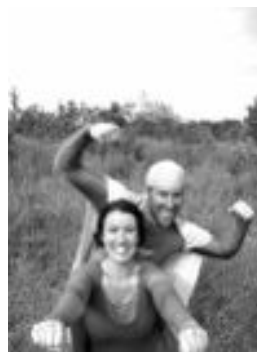
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ON THE COVER

Two Superheroes, The Zing and The Heartbeat, embody Power and Empowerment after swooping into Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, Rutledge, Missouri, July 2010. In everyday life they are Ethan Hughes, a cofounder of the Superhero bike rides and

the Possibility Alliance Sanctuary in La Plata (see issues #140, #141, #142, and #147), and Sara Gadja, a garden intern at Sandhill Farm in Rutledge.

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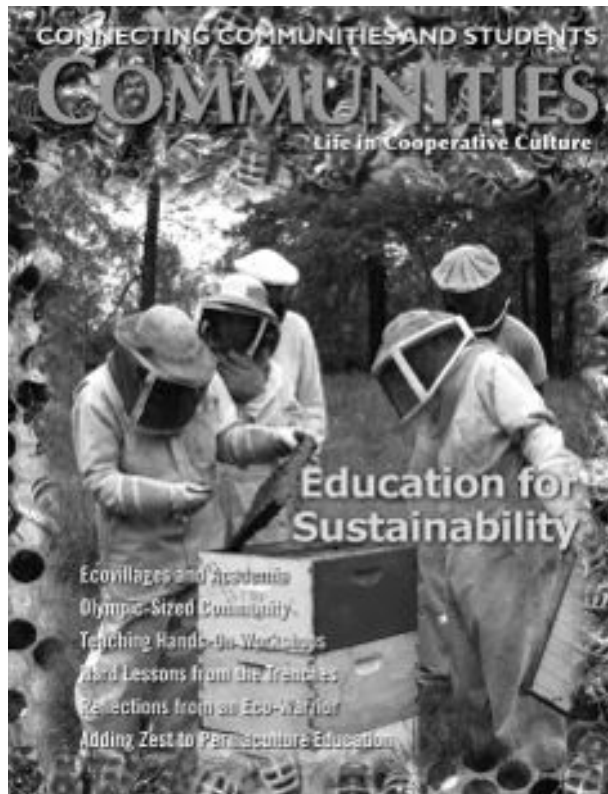
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LETTERS



A Perfectly Perfect Community

Julie Genser (Summer 2010) makes a strong, informative plea for an environmentally pure intentional community. Unfortunately, it becomes, “This community would be perfect if it/they would just change to something totally different. We environmentally intolerant people need you to give up cars, computers, cell phones, Wi-Fi, perfumes, detergent, plastics, etc. etc. etc. All dietary items must also pass screening. It sounds like circa 1840. No, scratch that, no wood stove to cook on. Presumably, stone

cold stone soup in Eden would suffice. I don't believe that she will find an existing intentional community willing and able to make such changes. I think she will have to find like-minded individuals and found her own community.

I am not making light of her situation. Life, and disabilities, happen. One of my close friends is a paraplegic. Another is an alcoholic, or as he puts it, “A temporarily sober drunk.” However, sharing their lives does not require me to wheel around in solidarity, nor does it require me to attend 12-step programs. Sharing Ms. Genser's life, in community, might well be worth it. What it wouldn't be is easy.

George Burnett
Spartanburg, South Carolina

In a follow-up email, George added:

I don't want to appear without any compassion. I do think that she will have to assemble her own intentional community. Given that you can now move to the middle of nowhere and 18 months later find a new power plant, dump, strip mine, factory, etc. moved in next door; she may need a nomadic intentional community.

Julie Genser replies:

Hi George,

Thanks for your feedback. Your response is precisely why I wrote the article. I'm sorry if it came off that I expected communities to completely transform themselves. That was not the point at all. The point was that there is a huge overlap of values and lifestyles between those communities that are aspiring towards sustainability and those that live with environmental intolerances. With some changes, it seems that many intentional communities would make perfect homes for people who have thus

LETTERS

far been excluded from community living. This is not about going backwards to live in The Stone Age, it's about looking forward—employing creative, innovative thinking. It's a challenge, not a sacrifice! The fact is, toxic habits can be easily and comfortably replaced with non-toxic ones with a small effort and perhaps an even larger attitude adjustment.

Your analogy of not having to be in a wheelchair or abstain from alcohol to share life with your disabled and alcoholic friends is not a true analogy. People with paraplegia don't usually have others putting blockades in front of or pushing them out of their wheelchairs, and it's understood that access must by law be provided to public places for them. Not so for people with chemical or electromagnetic sensitivities. People with addiction to alcohol don't usually have people pouring bourbon down their throats—people who are intoler-

ant to fragranced items and cigarette smoke have to be constantly on alert so the simple act of taking a breath doesn't harm them.

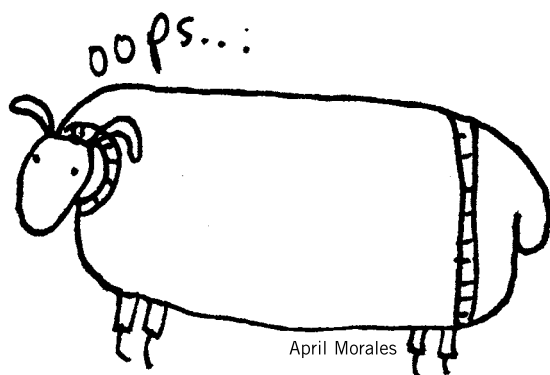
You suggest that we form our own nomadic community but it's virtually impossible to do that with the physical, mental, and financial challenges building community presents to this disabled population. Not to mention that our triggers and symptoms are unique, and that presents its own set of problems and challenges to living together, as one person may need to use a gas or propane stove because they are electrically sensitive, and another might be unable to be around gas appliances.

Fragrance and toxic chemicals are hurting everyone. I was under the impression that a majority of existing intentional communities were very focused on sustainability and health issues. Asking people who are health-minded already to

switch from toxic products that support a corporate infrastructure to non-toxic versions that support small businesses and cottage industries while helping to heal the Earth does not feel like an insurmountable request. It's important to recognize that everyone comes to a community with special needs. Mutual adaptation to these needs is what makes a community different from a neighborhood. I urge you to take a second look at potential members with environmental intolerances—discover what they bring to the community beyond what they ask of it.

If you look at the recent BP oil spill, it's clear that the world is becoming toxic for all of us, and we all need to start changing our behavior to create a cleaner, safer world even if we are not ourselves ill. If we don't start changing now, we surrender to a toxic inheritance that is slowly killing us all.

CORRECTIONS



Perished in a Sweater?

Lee Icterus' article "Busted, Almost Bludgeoned, Possibly Broke" (COMMUNITIES #147, pp. 52-55) describes a finance manager who was a "died-in-the-wool" optimist. In actual fact, however, this former finance manager is still very much alive, and has no reason to fear natural-fiber sweaters, scarves, hats, pants, ponchos, or blankets. Lee assures us that the passage should have read "dyed-in-the-wool" optimist.

Missing Captions

Understanding Israel's article "Towards a Seventh Generation" (COMMUNITIES #147) lacked its captions. On p. 45, top left, the caption should have read: "Tekoah Handorff, raised as a child in our

community, pregnant with her son Asher while little Adriel is helping mommy water their organic garden." And on p. 45, top right: "Tekoah Handorff and her son Asher examine a strawberry in an organic field near their home in Washington State."

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, RR 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, RR 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.

We handpick our advertisers, selecting only those whose products and services we believe will be helpful to our readers. That said, we are not in a position to verify the accuracy or fairness of statements made in advertisements—unless they are FIC ads—nor in REACH listings, and publication of ads should not be considered an FIC endorsement.

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 SCHAUB

Three Essential Agreements of Effective Groups

In mid-May of 2009, the FIC held a Community Building Day at Kimberton Hills (a community 30 miles west of Philadelphia) and about 56 people joined our crew of 12 presenters and support people to create a 12-hour experience devoted to the information and inspiration of community. During a general Q&A session right before dinner, one woman asked, “What are the three most critical agreements that a community should have in place in order to succeed?”

What an excellent question! Over the course of my 22 years as a process consultant I've slowly accumulated an understanding of a goodly number of key questions that healthy groups need to address, so limiting it to three was a challenge. What trio do I feel encompasses the *most* pivotal issues?

Here are my nominations:

1. Working with Emotional Input

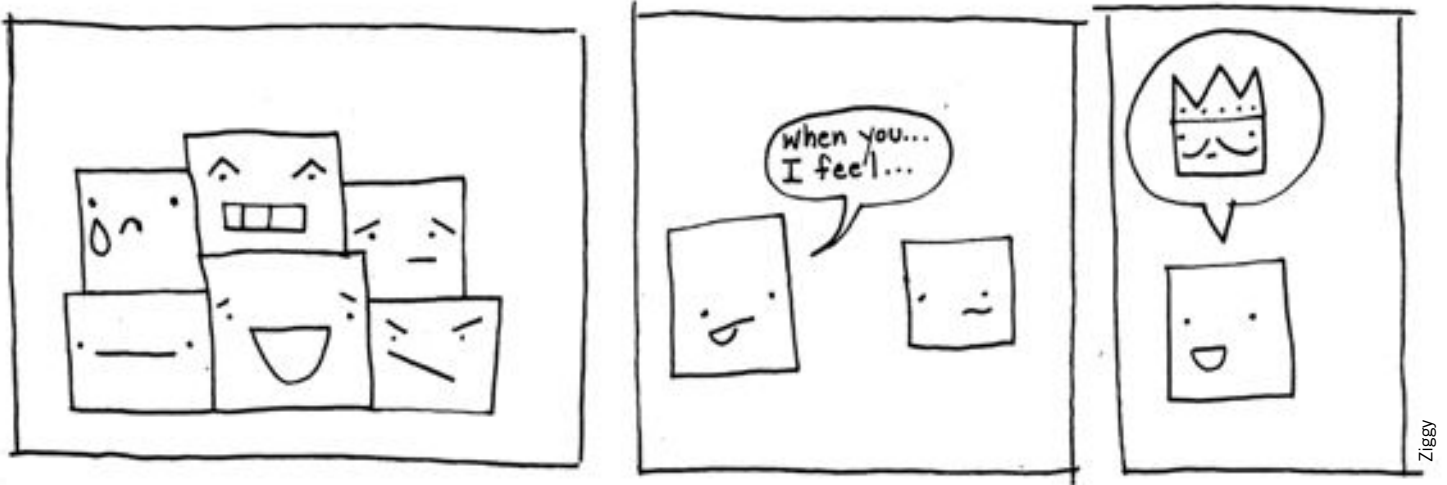
The main model for appropriate group communication in our culture is to offer one's best thinking. While rational thought is a wonderful tool, it's hardly the only one available to us, and it really doesn't make much sense to paint with only one color. As human beings we take in, process, and communicate information in an amazing variety of ways. It's my view that groups function best when they openly embrace a wider range of input than just what's available through ideation.

In addition to rational knowing, humans can access knowing that is emotional, intuitive, instinctive, spiritual, and kinesthetic. (While I don't presume that this is a complete list of the alternate channels available to us, it's enough to make my point.) Though not everyone operates with the full bandwidth, multiple channels are nonetheless available, and groups will tend to be more sophisticated and dynamic in their examination of issues to the extent that they consciously embrace more *kinds* of information (not just more data).

For the purpose of identifying a key agreement, I will narrow my focus to a single question: how does the group work with emotional input? Sadly, most groups never explicitly ask that question and have no clear answer. In consequence, they are unsure of their footing when emotions enter the equation—and the stronger the feelings, the more unsure the footing. Mostly groups discourage the expression of strong feelings, or relegate that kind of sharing to heart circles only (where they won't “infect” the business meetings).

Strong feelings can be scary for groups because their expression is often associ-

*The reality is
that power is never flat;
it's always distributed unevenly.*



ated with attacks or manipulation, and groups (understandably) want to limit both from occurring. There is fear that the expression of strong feelings may undermine safety and lead to people being afraid to share their full thinking on a topic.

Best, I think, is that groups appreciate that emotions can be distinguished from aggression, and that it's possible to welcome feelings while objecting to attacks. Emotions can be an important source of both information (people may know something more profoundly on an emotional level than on a rational level) and energy—let's bring passion into our work!

Too often groups banish feelings altogether in a baby-and-the-bath-water response to nervousness about how to handle emerging conflict. Surely we can do better.

2. Critical Feedback

In biological systems, feedback loops are crucial to survival. Think about it: if you step on a nail, it's important that it hurts, alerting you to the need to pull the damn thing out of your shoe. While you'd rather not hurt, you certainly don't want to be walking around with a nail in your foot.

I don't think it's any different in groups. If Chris and Pat are both in the same group and Chris is having trouble with something that Pat is doing as a member of the group, then there needs to be a known avenue through which Chris can

communicate concerns directly with Pat. Absent a known channel, it can be hit or miss whether Pat ever hears what's going on for Chris. Not only will this mean that Pat doesn't get the chance to work with the information (which may enhance their effectiveness in the world), but it will likely lead to a degradation in trust and an erosion of relationship between Pat and Chris. This can be very expensive.

While I'm all in favor of people having choices about the timing and setting in which feedback is delivered (some prefer to get it on the spot, others prefer advance warning; some prefer that it occur one-on-one, others prefer to receive it in the whole group), it's important that everyone offers something and that that preference be known. A mysterious feedback loop is the same as no feedback loop. And no feedback loop means the flow of life-giving information has been choked off. It's hard to thrive with a poor circulation system.

3. Talking about Power

Cooperative groups tend to have trouble talking openly about power dynamics. They typically strive to flatten hierarchies and to share power as broadly as possible. While there's nothing wrong with that goal, the reality is that power is never flat; it's *always* distributed unevenly. The key question is whether the group has a clear way to discuss the perception that someone has used power in a less cooperative

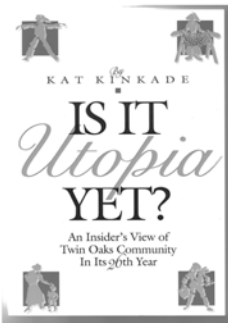
way (power *over* instead of power *with*) than that person thinks they have.

Healthy groups need people functioning as leaders. Leaders need to exercise power to be effective, and there needs to be a way to examine how power is being used. We tend to bring into our current cooperative realities damage from past abuses of power and we have to sort out how much of our current discomfort is projection from the past, how much is misuse of power in the current situation, and how much is a misunderstanding about what's actually happening (never mind what was intended). It can get messy in a hurry and we need a pathway through this morass.

• • •

In the end, if a group fails to address any one of these three issues, I guarantee that the ensuing ambiguity will be crippling. Though I'm not saying that this will necessarily be fatal, it will certainly be expensive, and seriously limit the group's capacity to realize its potential. ☹️

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm, an FEC community in Missouri, where he lives. He authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com. This column is adapted from his blog entry of May 19, 2009.



**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

prominent and successful communes. This thoughtful and entertaining 320 page book from the author of *A Walden Two Experiment* is illustrated with 16 photographs and 60 cartoons.

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Power and Empowerment on

Community Bookshelf



A Manual for Group Facilitators

by Center for Conflict Resolution,
re-published by the Fellowship for
Intentional Community

2003; 89 pages; paperback

The role of group facilitator is often pivotal to good results for groups making the transition to consensus. The *Manual* is the best introduction we've found on approaching the role of facilitator as someone who welcomes both rational and emotional input.

Blessed Unrest

How The Largest Social Movement In History Is Restoring

Grace, Justice and Beauty to the World
by Paul Hawken

2008; 342 pages; paperback

The author of this important work has a wonderful gift of pattern recognition that enables him to draw from diverse sources and sew together a patchwork of information that is compelling in its message: We must work together if life on this planet as we know it today is going to survive the threats of devaluation of individual life, depleted resources, pollution, and global warming.

Building United Judgment

A Handbook for Consensus



Decision Making

edited by Center for Conflict Resolution

re-published by the Fellowship for
Intentional Community

124 pages; paperback

Consensus decision making in groups can maximize cooperation and participation of all group members. Consensus brings together the needs, resources, and ideas of every group member by means of a supportive creative structure. This classic introduction to secular consensus was recently brought back into print by the Fellowship for Intentional Community.

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.

How To Make Collaboration Work

Powerful Ways to Build Consensus

by David Straus

2002; 250 pages; paperback

This book offers an excellent road map for individuals, groups, organizations, and communities wanting to integrate the principles and practices of collaboration into their shared work. The methods taught in this essential guide offer a chance for more productive and fulfilling outcomes for all involved.

Introduction to Consensus

by Beatrice Briggs

2000; 60 pages; spiral bound

A group that uses consensus process effectively can become a healthy community and a powerful force for social change. Many use the word "consensus," but few understand how to implement it with integrity and skill. This book is an excellent beginner's guide to the process, providing everything needed to become an active and effective participant in consensus. Highly recommended.

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.

Nonviolent Communication

A Language of Compassion

by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.

2000; 211 pages; paperback

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is founded on language and communication skills that strengthen our ability to remain human, even under trying conditions. It contains nothing new; all that has been integrated into NVC has been known for centuries. The intent is to remind us about what we already know—about how we humans were meant to relate to one another—and to assist us in living in a way that concretely manifests this knowledge.



Passion as Big as a Planet

Evolving Eco-Activism in America

by Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig

2007; 219 pages; paperback

The author of this engaging book gives those wishing to translate their core beliefs to the wider community around them excellent guidance and support. It shows how to combine personal growth and spiritual exploration with social and political activism.

Sitting in the Fire

Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity

by Arnold Mindell

1997; 267 pages; paperback



Sitting in the Fire will introduce you to inner work as a way to overcome the fear of conflict. You will gain understanding of the cultural, personal, and historical issues that underlie multicultural violence. You will acquire some of the skills necessary to work with large groups of people. The fire that burns in

the social, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of humanity can ruin the world. Or this fire can transform trouble into community. It's up to us. We can avoid contention, or we can fearlessly sit in the fire, intervene, and prevent world history's most painful errors from being repeated.

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.

The World Cafe

Shaping Our Future Through Conversations That Matter
by Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and The World Cafe
Community

2005; 242 pages; paperback

Clear, empowering, precise, and potent, The World Cafe is

store.ic.org



Call in the Experts?

Q: *Our group is very divided. We need to make major decisions regarding finances, organizational structures, and policies, at a time when interpersonal tensions have reached a boiling point. Certain individuals and factions seem to be locked in power struggles, and at this point we are almost completely paralyzed by internal conflict.*

Now we have one more source of conflict: some members want to bring in outside facilitators to help us work through our problems, and others say that we should rely on our own resources and skills, and not spend money on outside “experts” who will come and then leave (possibly stirring up more trouble in the process). Without full group agreement, we won’t be able to bring in outside help. What do you suggest?



Laird Schaub responds:

This story is a cautionary tale about how problems can compound (with interest!) when not dealt with as they occur. In my experience, the first strand to pull on in unknitting this tangled skein is the one relating to unresolved interpersonal tensions. Until and unless you can make prog-

ress there, it will infect all other conversations, and render brittle and non-resilient any agreements you can forge around finances, organizational structure, policies, and power dynamics (all of which are plenty interesting topics unto themselves).

For the purposes of getting traction on the interpersonal tensions, it may make sense to work it in the context of one of your other issues (one that showcases the damaged relationships), so that your efforts are rooted in something you need to address anyway (rather than just tackling interpersonal tension

Sadly, many times groups cannot agree to bring in help because some members have no sense of how much difference it can make, and are unwilling to take a chance to find out.

in theory). For the purposes of this response, let's say the issue you decide to work is pet policy.

Then, I'd make a commitment to the group that you will not make any binding agreements about dogs until you've first handled the interpersonal tensions to everyone's satisfaction. Then you can use the ideas and concerns that surfaced in the unpacking to springboard into a constructive dialog about rogue hamsters. Successfully dealing with the tensions first should give you an energetic bounce with which to make progress on how cats and birds can coexist in trees outside the common house.

To be fair, it's much harder to successfully tackle interpersonal tensions when they've been festering for some time and there's no clear group agreement about: a) whether members are expected to make an attempt to deal with such troubles; or b) how to go about it. The good news is that it can be done. The bad news is that few of us have the skills to guide a group through it, which brings me to the delicate issue of whether or not to bring in outside help.

As a process consultant, I am hardly neutral on this question. I always think I'll be able to make a positive contribution when working with a group in trouble, and I think there are any number of occasions where a group can get stuck in a dynamic and there is no internal member with sufficient skill or neutrality to shepherd the group through it. While it's also true that outside help is not always needed (or effective), it's important to have options. Sadly, many times groups cannot agree to bring in help because some members have no sense of how much difference it can make, and are unwilling to take a chance to find out. As bad as it gets, some people have grown so inured to poor dynamics that they have no expectations of it ever getting better (so why spend time and money on a fool's errand to raise the dead?).

For what it's worth, one of the most important and helpful decisions my 36-year-old community, Sandhill Farm, ever made was to start asking in outside help on a regular basis. Though we weren't smart enough to start doing that until we were about 20 years old—we were slow learners—it made a huge difference, and now we do it one or more times a year.

With care, you should be able to find someone who can help with both agendas: get you out of the swamp you're in right now; and teach you the skills needed to get yourselves

out the next time.

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.



Beatrice Briggs responds:

Until the members get in touch with what brought them together in the first place, it will be hard to move on.

Assuming that there is a real desire to get beyond the paralysis, I suggest an appreciative inquiry approach. The process focuses on strengths and what the group wants more of, not the current problems. For example, a typical exercise to start the work involves group members interviewing each other about a time when they were really happy to be a member of the community. What was happening? Who was there? What made that moment or period so memorable? What was their personal role? And (without being too modest), what skills from that experience do they bring to the community now? The process moves on from there, building on this foundation. (For more on this powerful approach to positive change, consult Google or Amazon for books and other resources.)

This situation cries out for skillful, external facilitation. First of all, the entire group needs to be engaged in the process—which means that no one is left to facilitate. Secondly, as Einstein said, “We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” The group got itself into this mess. I frankly doubt that it will be able to extract itself without some outside help. Perhaps those most opposed to bringing in an outsider could be asked to select a person they would trust. In any case, I would not try to address any of the operational and policy issues until there are some clear signs that the group wants to stay together and is ready to move past the current impasse.

*Beatrice Briggs is the founding director of the International Institute for Facilitation and Change (IIFAC), a Mexico-based consulting group that specializes in participatory processes. The author of the manual *Introduction to Consensus* and many articles about group dynamics, Beatrice travels around the world, giving workshops and providing facilitation services in both English and Spanish. Home is *Ecovillage Huehucocoyotl*, near *Tepoztlán*, Mexico, where she has lived since 1998. bbriggs@iifac.org; www.iifac.org.*



Tree Bressen responds:

This is a really hard situation, and i feel like i would need more context to offer useful advice. That said, here are some thoughts.

The idea that we don't need outside help was common among '70s-era communities. One might observe that most of those communities no longer exist. I'm not saying this is the sole reason of course, but it probably didn't help. Getting outside support when you need it is an investment in the well-being and future of your community. The happiest and healthiest communities i've observed have gotten lots of process training and support from **both** external and internal sources, setting a high standard for good meetings and nourishing strong friendships with each other outside the meetings too.

I lived for years at a co-op where the general process skill level was higher than most places, and we still brought in an outside facilitator about once a year either for training or to help us work through an issue. It's not just about skills, it's about being in a **role** that's neutral. I had professional-level skills, but i could only use them when: (a) i felt neutral and not charged on the issue at hand; (b) i had a decent relationship with the key people involved in the issue; and (c) other people trusted that both (a) and (b) were the case.

Part of the egalitarian culture in the secular communities movement is that outside experts typically get way more cache than a community's own members do (and the farther away they live the better, of course). As a traveling facilitator, i know this and use it to advantage in helping the communities i work with. For example, a group might be willing to try a nonverbal exercise with me that they would resist doing under the guidance of a member. I am transparent about this power and at the end of my work often encourage communities to give their own facilitators some of the support and openness to trying new things that they were willing to give me.

However, what i've said so far here is preaching to the choir, and the people you are disputing with will not necessarily be swayed by any of these points. I'm guessing you need to push harder, on one or more of the following fronts:

1. Switch the dynamic. Ask them to convince you as to why outside help is not needed. Ask for solid examples addressing questions such as:

- a. Which member(s) do they imagine facilitating this process?
- b. What form do they think it might take?
- c. What will they do to help people they disagree with feel safe?
- d. What past issues of this magnitude has the group successfully resolved without outside assistance? How was that accomplished?

If they have good answers to these, then maybe it's time to reevaluate your stance that outside support is required.

2. Include people who are distrustful of outside facilitation on the team interviewing potential candidates. Invite them to explicitly raise their concerns during interviews with both facilitators and references (past clients).

3. Give them a chance to have it their way, within limits. Set reasonable criteria for how and when the issues will be resolved internally, and agree in advance that if those benchmarks are not met then outside help will be hired. For example the group could agree to have three meetings on the big, tough issues, and at that point if half or more of the members want outside facilitation then it goes ahead.

4. Address their concerns as directly as possible. What are they scared of? What does "stirring up more trouble" really mean? (Does it mean they want certain issues or conflicts to be off-limits, and if so, does the rest of the community agree?) Is there a way to ameliorate whatever the specific concern is? Would requesting that an outside consultant include an emphasis on internal empowerment for future situations address part of it? Is barter an option to help reduce fees? If not, which budget item are they worried might get cut in order to pay for a facilitator, and if that item is a priority for others too then can the group agree to avoid that cut? What does using an outside facilitator signify to them (does it make them feel like the community has somehow failed)?

5. Tell them your legitimate concerns and request a response. "I've noticed in past meetings that this set of people often doesn't listen to each other well. I don't trust that we can handle this on our own." "I'm worried this might be an attempt to keep on avoiding the interpersonal conflict between Dakota and Cary, which i think we need to deal with to move forward." "I'm scared that a few people will blow up, others will shut down, and then we'll be even worse off than we are now." "I'm concerned that this might be an effort to hold power and avoid accountability." Name the core of your concern, whether it is personal or on behalf of the community's well-being or both, as kindly and as directly as you can. Stand up for yourself. This is particularly effective if done by multiple people who normally don't make waves.

6. Consider whether there are any middle-ground solutions. For example, inviting in a circle of friends to witness the meeting. Knowing you are being watched tends to put people on better behavior, which may address some of the need for outside facilitation, and doing this is free. What are other creative ideas? 🐾

Tree Bressen is a group process consultant based in Eugene, Oregon, who works with intentional communities and other organizations on how to have meetings that are lively, productive, and connecting. See her website, www.treegroup.info. (Tree uses a lower-case "i" in her writing as an expression of egalitarian values.)

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

COMMUNITIES

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#147 Education for Sustainability

Ecovillages and Academia; Teaching Hands-On Workshops in Community; Connecting Communities and Students; Leadership for Social Change; Hard Lessons; Olympic-Sized Community; How to Add Zest to Your Sustainability Education Program; Building for Health; Car-Reduced and Car-Free Communities. (Summer '10)



#146 Family

An Abundance of Dads; Second Family; When an Ecovillage is Raising Your Child; Parenting in Community; Exploring Family; Being Almost Two Years Old - Again; A Community Newcomer Finds Her Rhythm; Nudging at Boundaries; G8; Asperger's; Together and Apart; Family Dramas; Problem Solving in Community. (Spring '10)



#145 Health and Well-Being

Earthen Culture; Health and Community; Embracing a Terminal Illness; Garden as Therapist and Community Organizer; Cell Phones, Education, Farming, and Mental Health; Gut Health; Shakers; Artabana; Healing Biotope; Asthma and Allergies; Senior Cohousing; High Wind; Health and Quiet; PEACH Health Care Plan; Bullies. (Winter '09)



#144 Community in Hard Times

Emergency Community; Hard Times at Orinda; Shared Living; Birthing a New Order; Building Community in Hard Times; Throwing in the Founder's Towel; Somerville Ecovillage; The Transition Initiative Comes to Cohousing; Food Security; Gardens of Gratitude; Svanholm Goes, Carbon-Neutral; How Collaboration Falls Short. (Fall '09)

#143 Ecology and Community

Sharing and Climate Change; Revolutionary Communitarianism; Cars and Rabbits; Ecovillages, How Ecological Are You?; Findhorn's Incredible Shrinking Footprint; How Ecology Led Me to Community; Reindeer Herders of Northern Mongolia; Water is Life; Environmental Activism. (Summer '09)

#142 Festivals and Gatherings

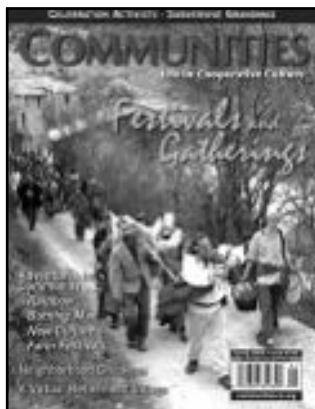
Festivals at The Farm; FIC Events; Adventures in Temporary Community; Burning Man; Comin' Home to the Rainbow; Network for a New Culture Camps; Sandhill Sorghum Festival; Celebration as a Way of Life; Festival of the Babas; Currents Community; Relocalization; Poetry in Community. (Spring '09)

#141 Scarcity and Abundance

All We Have Is All We Need; Ecobarrios; As Is: Secrets to Having Enough; Free to Serve: Notes from a Needs-Based Economy; From Car and House, To Bicycle and Tent; The Richness of Giving; Potlucks; When Community Land Is Privately Owned; Nashira Ecovillage. (Winter '08)

#140 Politics in Community

We Refuse to Be Enemies; Every Politician Should Live in a Commune; Email, Politics, & Permaculture; Searching for Elephants in the Community Living Room; Ecological Citizenship; Politics on Open Land; A World of Possibility; Communities and Global Transformation. (Fall '08)



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#148



Chris Roth

Thoughts on Power

I'm writing this in the midst of an epic midwestern thunderstorm—spectacular lightning flashes and bolts followed quickly by booms, rips, and rolling thunderclaps. It is easy to imagine that giant sky gods are bowling, and sometimes rending the floorboards of the bowling alley itself, with a superhuman press corps eagerly snapping high-illumination photos. As a deluge of rain falls from the sky, “power” as we conceive of it comes into perspective for me. Thunderstorms, floods, and oceans always remind me that the “power” we as humans have is puny compared to that of the natural world—and that our power also derives directly from that world. I feel simultaneously tiny, humbled in the presence of such great natural forces; and expansive, exhilarated by the power that flows from this watery world through me and through all of us.

It is not only in times of dramatic natural events, or on the edge of a continent, that I feel this kind of power. For me, personal empowerment means a feeling of connection, of being myself, of being a participating force in the world. Ironically, it means *not* necessarily being “in control”—it means being part of a larger, organic whole. I often find that feeling while working in the garden, exploring the woods and fields, swimming

in a pond—or when playing ultimate frisbee, making music, having a conversation, sharing a meal, even taking part in a group meeting. It is not the kind of power that comes at the expense of others, nor that forces anyone or anything to behave contrary to their own natures. This is the kind of power that, whenever any of us embodies it, empowers others as well. It is the kind of power that permeates the natural world, and it flows through all of us.

If “power” as we experience it in our times were as straightforward as I’ve just described, we’d have no need for this issue on “Power and Empowerment.” Most of us struggle, however, to feel consistently empowered and aligned with nature’s power. While diverse, often apparently opposing forces create every natural phenomenon, including human beings, they can succeed in that only if they’re cooperating, involved in a “dance” rather than attempts at mutual annihilation. The whole is not only greater than the sum of its parts, but depends on all its parts, and has no interest in extinguishing them. However, our relationships with others, with the natural world, and even with our own selves often seem like battlegrounds rather than celebrations of life’s wholeness.

Perhaps we've misunderstood power—or, having lost it (through no fault of our own), have tried to gain it back in all the wrong ways. People born into a world in which they feel alienated and disempowered will naturally look to reclaim it—but “power” as our society conceives of it seems a recipe for continued alienation and disempowerment. Ascending within human power hierarchies does not seem to make us feel better—if anything, wealth and “power over” seem to compound inner distress and the apparent need for even more “power.” The modern world is full of people for whom no amount of what our society considers “power” has actually helped them feel connected, centered, and part of a larger, inclusive whole. And the world is full of other people suffering because their own power has been taken away within these same power hierarchies.

Cooperative culture presents an alternative—a way to engage with and embody the first form of power I described, rather than the second. This is not always easy, because most of us come from a world in which power often means dominance rather than alignment. Intentional communities and other cooperative groups struggle with the same power dynamics that can affect every human group—yet they also provide opportunities for doing things differently, trying on different understandings of power. They act as laboratories in which humanity's evolving understanding of true power can receive essential research assistance. They can be places in which to test and refine paradigms that are already spreading throughout the larger culture—including the idea that exercising “power with” rather than “power over” is the only way for us to survive not only as individuals and as groups, but as a species.

* * *

We chose “Power and Empowerment” as this issue's theme because it seemed to us to be one of the richest topics we could explore in these pages. Yet we actually received fewer article proposals and submissions than for any other issue I've edited over the past two years, with the exception of the first one, “Politics in Community” (which seemed potentially equally rich). While we could blame “spring/summer busy-ness” or a host of other factors for this lowered response, those same factors didn't seem to dampen submissions last year at this time. My guess is that the field is *too* rich, with several factors simultaneously at play:

1) For many communitarians, an experience of empowerment within cooperative culture is so familiar that they don't consider it notable enough to write about. In fact, they may be so busy with activities in which they feel connected to the real world of their actual communities, the ongoing daily exploration of “power with” (both humans and nature, in meetings and gardens, cottage industries and child care), the hands-on work of creating new culture, that they have no time for writing (an activity which, by comparison, may seem relatively dry and divorced from real life). For them, the empowering potentials

of community living are so obvious as to not need mentioning.

2) For some communitarians, our theme may bring up too many difficult issues. Perhaps they are struggling to feel empowered, even within their supposedly “power with” group. Perhaps their group has “elephants in the living room,” dysfunctional power dynamics that they don't talk about. Perhaps group members are afraid to stir up the pot, either internally or externally—to put their own focus on power dynamics of which they would rather be in denial, or to expose themselves and their group to outside scrutiny.

3) Some communitarians may be quite comfortable thinking and talking about these topics, but they simply don't want to write about them. I encountered many such cases while assembling this issue. Power dynamics within groups can be sensitive topics, and, as in #2 above, potential authors don't want to make waves, cause pain, cast people or groups in a bad light, or face the consequences of describing less-than-ideal group dynamics. Even when offered the chance of making the group anonymous, several potential authors declined to contribute for these reasons. Fortunately, some others accepted the invitation.

I fully believe that life in cooperative culture has many more tales of empowerment than of disempowerment to tell us—lessons through which we can learn to tap back into true (rather than constructed) power, to live more fully in the “flow” of which we're all a part, to contribute to ways of being that are more sustainable than what has recently been the dominant paradigm. The challenges of dealing with power within groups are rich fields for learning, even when that learning comes through missteps, mistakes, fallings-out, and sometimes tragicomic failures. Misunderstood “power” in the larger world has led us nowhere we want to go—has torn the fabric of human community and the natural world almost as convincingly as an epic thunderstorm can tear the sky. Seeking to tap into more sustaining, inner power that can help us all live more cooperatively is a quest worth making.

Finally, we thank all those authors who did come through with material. Because we received fewer submissions, we had more space for longer articles (some of them written at our request). In fact, four of our articles in this issue either teeter on or handily exceed our normal maximum word count. We welcome your feedback on whether you like occasional longer articles, especially if the extra length allows them to cover more territory or tell a more in-depth story—or whether you think we should stick mostly with shorter pieces. We aim for a mix that offers material for a variety of “reading moods” and preferences—please let us know if we've succeeded.

We hope you'll find this issue full, varied, and valuable—and that it encourages you to think about power in your own life, group, and world. 🐦

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES and has been enjoying life in the community-rich culture of northeast Missouri this year after many years in Oregon.

Being “Overthrown” —A Celebration *Coming to Shared Power*

By Jim Schenk

I’m celebrating “being overthrown.” OK, it actually isn’t that dramatic.

In 1998 Imago (www.imagoearth.org), an ecological education organization established 20 years earlier, began a process of developing an ecovillage in Price Hill, an inner ring neighborhood of 40,000 people in Cincinnati, Ohio. Some years earlier it had begun looking at walking its talk, and focused on developing Price Hill as a green neighborhood. The opportunity to develop an ecovillage in Price Hill seemed like a logical move in this direction.

Imago was already located in a community that was, in many ways, ideal for an ecovillage. The area surrounds Imago’s 16 acre nature preserve. About 20 percent of the residents on Imago’s street (including my wife and I) were living there specifically because of Imago and the desire to live sustainably, the neighborhood was a good size (80 buildings and 90 households), and it was stable.

One of the issues we deal with is the fact that the street is reportedly the longest no-outlet street in Cincinnati, about three-quarters of a mile long. It sometimes makes communication a challenge.

We began the Enright Ridge Urban Ecovillage (www.enright-ecovillage.org) in 2004. Imago assigned me to be the coordinator of this project. Our goal was to develop an urban ecovillage in an existing community. (You can read more about our ecovillage in *COMMUNITIES* issues #129 and #141.)

As we began, I was very influential in the creation of the ecovillage. We decided to become a nonprofit organization because it was the structure that I understood the best. We set up a board of directors composed of all the residents of the community who chose to be members of the organization. (Membership required the contribution of \$10 or more.) This was a framework for a board that I had found very successful in the past. We began purchasing and rehabbing foreclosed properties in the ecovillage—something that I had both the resources and experience to do.

The group proceeded to develop the board, select officers, and set up committees. The board and committees did an incredible amount of work in the areas of housing, beautification, marketing, conservation, and the recruiting of new members. I was also assigned the title of ecovillage coordinator by the board and given a salary of \$100 per week. This wasn’t a lot, based on the 35 to 40 hours of work I was doing per week, but it did designate me as paid staff, which helped in relating to other organizations and funders.

While residents of the ecovillage carried out much of the work, I had a great deal of influence because of my position and because of the amount of time I was willing to spend on ecovillage projects. I did a significant amount of work. As mentioned, I had a central role in the planning for rehabbing houses. I helped in developing a budget for the ecovillage. I found ways of funding additional staff, and was a major influence in hiring. I did a good number of presentations about the ecovillage, and was responsible for bringing in many new members and volunteer assistance. And the list goes on. This is not to say I was the only person working for the ecovillage; each of the committees was doing major work. However, they had to deal with the challenge of the long street, which made it difficult to easily coordinate and bring people together. Because of time spent, years of experience in community organizing and administration, commitment to developing an ecovillage, and my position, I did have the most influence.

In the fall of 2008 we began talking about developing stronger committees that would take on more of the power. It was an acknowledged fact that the organization needed to delegate more leadership. Toward this end we planned the board meeting in January 2009 using a system called “Storyboard.” At this meeting we told the story of each committee, putting the information on cards and placing them on a pegboard with stickpins. This gave the ecovillage board a chance to see what each committee was doing. The meeting was a great success. For the next meeting we planned to look at the storyboard to find over-

laps and areas not being covered. Using the storyboard we could move the items around from committee to committee, add new ones, and in this way decide who would be responsible for each item and assign new items that were not being covered. The board was so excited that when the coordinator of the process asked each committee to write in detail what they saw as the goal and purpose of their committee for 2009, along with its projects and actions for the year, all the committees came through with their document. It seemed like a transition was on its way. The February meeting was set to continue this process.

At the February meeting the process came to an unceremonious end. An irascible member, almost from nowhere, began the meeting by accusing the housing committee of doing shoddy work and not handling the funds for the houses well. This was followed by another member demanding that we hand out a list of all income and expenses for all the houses at each board meeting. A third member, who had a dislike for me, chimed in her support. The treasurer of the ecovillage expressed her confidence in the bookkeeping, which did little to squelch the demands.

I knew this was a smoke screen. I had directed nonprofit organizations for 30 years with budgets in the quarter- to half-million dollar range. I had been involved in successfully rehabbing over 20 houses. The Enright Ridge Urban Ecovillage had an annual budget of \$20,000, along with the funds for rehabbing two houses.

I also knew that giving people a list of income and expenses was not the way to help them make sense of finances. I said, with the small salary I received, I was basically as much a volunteer as everyone else and was not willing to spend a lot of time running off meaningless financial reports. However, I would be willing to sit down with anyone and go over our books. When we had completed that, then I would be willing to run off any information that the people who went over the books with me wanted.

Greenspace around the ecovillage.

Not one person accepted the offer, and the demands to run off the numerous pages of financial information continued from these two people. I committed to doing this if they would sit down with me and understand the bookkeeping system first. They refused. I refused. The meeting ended in turmoil.

The demands of these two people, in my estimation, were so irrational that I believed the issue would blow over. However, it didn't. I could feel the beginning of sides forming. Accusations continued. Several months passed without any resolution.

It was suggested that we hire a mediator to help with the problem. The group agreed, interviewed three possible mediators, and hired one. Finances were tight, so he was to be paid by splitting the cost among those who attended the mediation session.

The mediation session was scheduled for July. Two days before the session I received word that my brother in Venezuela had died. My priority became to attend his funeral. However, the group decided to still hold the mediation session.

When I returned I was told that the mediation session had happened and that the mediator was summarizing what had happened. That this mediation session happened without me seemed a little strange, as did the fact that the mediator was writing up a summary—not what I would consider the role of a mediator. It had been decided that we should have another session with the mediator, this time with me present. We were handed his report at the session. Much of it was negatively directed at me, most of it around finances, with some general statements of appreciation for starting the ecovillage. During this meeting a couple people were critical of the report in that a lot more positive was said about me than was recorded, but the majority of the 15 people at the meeting were basically silent in this regard. Not having had time to really digest the material, I had little to say except to ask some clarifying questions,

but was personally hurt by the silence.

I mulled over this report for several days. Finally, at the end of July, I wrote a somewhat scathing response. Among other things, since finances continued to be the main issue, I offered to set up a time to sit down with four people or more to go over the books with them, and to provide them with printed information of anything they wanted at that time. I offered to hand over the books to anyone who wanted to take them on. I also told them that since they were paying me \$100 per week, and since the going rate of someone with my experience would be a minimum of \$50 per hour, I was willing to do whatever they wanted me to do for two hours per week. The rest of my time I would volunteer, doing what I felt appropriate, like everyone else. However, if they wanted me to continue as coordinator I needed three things:

1. *Have this document rewritten so that it reflects the positive contributions I have made to the ecovillage, at least equaling the length of the negative statements,*
2. *Include the strengths and weaknesses of those attending the mediation sessions and the changes they need to make.*
3. *Reflect the incredible accomplishments we have made together in only six years.*

Two people responded by writing up what they saw as my positive contributions, but were told that the mediator's report was a final document and could not be altered. This made it pretty clear to me that the beautiful opportunity for shared

*The beautiful opportunity for
shared power that opened up in January
was now dead in the water.*

*Apartment building
entrance to
ecovillage, green
rehab by
Jerry Ropp.*





Charles Griffin, head farmer, working on CSA behind greenhouse.

power that opened up in January was now dead in the water.

Despite my “threats” I continued doing most of the work that I had been doing before. In fact, 2009 was a very successful year for the ecovillage. The Urban CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) was a huge success. Proposals were written and approved for Americorps volunteers and staff hired and supervised. We wrote a grant and received money to pay off the greenhouse for the CSA. The two houses being rehabbed were completed. A number of new people moved into the ecovillage.

However, no one else stepped forward

to take over any of my responsibilities. And no one stepped forward to go over the finances, until, after some cajoling, four people finally agreed to go over the books with me, one being the treasurer. This was done just before the September board meeting, held on the last Sunday. (No August board meeting was held.) Their report, in effect, stated that the books were in good shape.

In my response to the mediation document I had also recommended that the board:

1. Figure out how it is going to pay me or someone else for this position, and if it wants me to volunteer my time as coordi-

nator that it figure out a way to recompense me, possibly a combination of monetary and non-monetary compensation.

2. If you don't want to do these things, figure out a way to get another volunteer coordinator or decide to run without a coordinator.

By the first of October only my request to have four people look at the books had been met and none of my recommendations were followed. At this time I felt that it was necessary, both for my own sanity and for the ecovillage, that I resign as coordinator. This I did in a letter to the president of the board on October 11, 2009. I offered to stay

Deborah Jordan and Bill Cabalan.



*I understand power and leadership and transitioning.
But understanding didn't totally take away the feeling of
rejection and the lack of appreciation.*

on as long as the board wanted me, but no longer than December 31, 2009. Within four days I had a letter from the president saying that my resignation was accepted. It was clear to me that I had made the right decision. It said that my *date of termination would be December 31 as I requested*. (I had not requested to stay on until then, but had simply offered to stay on that long if they wanted.)

The next three months were somewhat unnerving in that there was not a lot of movement around taking over my roles. I was approached about meeting around my roles early on. I typed out a three-page list of things that I was doing and offered them to the five people who met with me, explained each of the items as best I could, and offered to consult with them in the transition. The board instead concentrated on developing a new mission statement and bylaws, which felt mostly like busy work, as the mission statement was reworded, but basically the same concepts, with few significant changes made in the bylaws beyond the change in the board structure.

One of the problems that I was aware of was that the new board would be elected at the end of November. The bylaws were changed so that all members would no longer make up the board, but instead the elected officers and chairs of the committees would make up the board. This new board would not take over until January. All new officers but one were elected, while many of the chairs of the committees remained the same. At the end of December, the new president told me that the board was ready to take on the responsibilities.

January 1 came, and little transition had actually taken place. The board was not scheduled to hold their first meeting until the end of January. I had offered to do a few things like supervise staff, since I was authorized to do this by Americorps. This offer was rejected; however, a new structure was not set up for supervising them.

I refused to allow myself to become vindictive. I understand power and leadership and transitioning. I won't say that it didn't hurt. Understanding didn't totally take

away the feeling of rejection and the lack of appreciation. Despite these feelings I was determined to be available to help in the transition. The ecovillage is really important to me.

Finally, with the end of January, the transition began. The books were finally taken over. I worked with the new bookkeeper to help him understand the process, and handed it on. The supervision of staff was designated, but was slow in the transition. The responsibility for the houses was taken over. I am now simply a member of the CSA and of the ecovillage, available for consultation if anyone is interested in my input. There have not been a lot of requests.

One of my strengths is being able to give up power. This I have done a number of times. However, I do catch myself reverting at times. We had 12 inches of snow and the houses we rehabbed were snowed in. One of my fears is having the houses look vacant, which make them a mark for being broken into. I began shoveling the snow at one of our rehabbed, vacant properties. My wife pointed out that I was no longer on the housing committee and so this is neither my responsibility nor my right any more. With great effort I quit.

I need to keep my distance for a while, work within the structure of the ecovillage where others and I feel comfortable with my involvement, and learn a new relationship with the ecovillage. Hopefully, over the next year, those who have taken power will come to feel comfortable with my presence, and I will feel comfortable around them.

My fears are that they will:

- Blame any perceived failures on those who have been involved in the ecovillage since its inception, including me. That they will view the past as negative and as a result feel they need to totally recreate the ecovillage from what they feel are the ashes. In trying to create everything new I fear they will burn themselves out because of their refusal to learn from and build on the past, and leave the ecovillage in shambles.

- Focus on developing a bureaucracy rather than community. I believe we are tribal animals, but in the huge cultural push toward individualism, we have forgotten how to live in community. For this reason we feel more comfortable in a bureaucracy we can control than in community, where we need to learn to relate.

My hope for the new group in charge is that they will:

- Come to understand, respect, and learn from the history of the ecovillage.
- Focus on creating community and relationships.
- Involve a lot of people in the exciting next step in the development of the ecovillage.

My hope for the community is that we will:

- Learn the lost art of living in community.
- Continue to expand our notion of community to include other species that interweave in and around Enright Ave.
- Develop a method of conflict resolution and mediation that works.
- Evolve a style of leadership that will be supported and respected.
- Become a positive example of developing an urban ecovillage.

We are at the cusp. We are in crisis—at the point of danger or opportunity. These are truly exciting times in Enright Ridge

Urban Ecovillage! I personally feel immense relief, no longer having the responsibility of the ecovillage on my back. As an eternal optimist, I believe that a healthy shared power will evolve, that the people sharing this power will feel energized by it rather than burn out, and a deep sense of community will develop. The next year will tell.

And while it unfolds, I do have my own plans for the coming year. I believe the difficulty we have in developing community is the biggest challenge that we face. My focus will be looking at how we might develop it in the ecovillage. 🐦



Jim Schenk founded Imago with his wife Eileen in 1978 (www.imagoearth.org). He is passionately involved in creating Enright Ridge Urban Ecovillage as a local and national model for sustainable living in our urban areas. He edited the

book What Does God Look Like in an Expanding Universe?, an anthology with articles from such authors as Thomas Berry, Miriam Therese MacGillis, Brian Swimme, and Brooke Medicine Eagle, containing their reflections on “Where We Come From,” “Why Are We Here,” and “What Happens After Death.” He is also involved in planning a Bioneers Conference in Cincinnati, October 15-17, 2010, emphasizing Green Urbanism.

Reflections from a Fellow Community Member

My first response to Jim’s article is that I wish we all would write up our versions and share them. Maybe we could understand each other better and take responsibility for our part in the conflict. Conflict is, after all, natural and a way to grow. I say that as a mediator and peace educator who is supposed to know how to deal with conflict. I have also lived on Enright for 24 years and was the Ecovillage president for the first two years. I feel hurt and a mixture of other feelings about this conflict, including relief (as Jim mentioned) not to be working so hard. My consolation is that having worked in visionary nonprofits for 20 years, I know expectations can be high without the necessary skills to totally fulfill them.

Jim (and Eileen) have initiated some amazing projects and organizations where I have tried to be a worker bee. Some people used the term “founder’s syndrome” to describe the conflict; they didn’t want Jim leading the way anymore. In “founder’s syndrome,” the organizational structure can take on the strengths and weaknesses of the founder; to overcome it, he/she needs to know when it’s time to move on, if it’s a community organization. Since the founder lives on the street, he was involved with the transition of power. Why then did the ecovillage temporarily turn into a soap opera?

Key dilemmas I heard voiced: Are we building a nonprofit or

a community or an eco-community? Are we doing everything right? Do I know everything going on? I was content with what we were doing, but some others weren’t. People moved to Enright for what they perceived was happening, but there was no application or discernment process for membership and no orientation. We had dual roles as neighbors, ecovillage members, and some as employees. We also had the lives we were leading off of Enright. We were “creating the road (to an ecovillage) as we walked.” Instead of dealing with key dilemmas, too often we had parking-lot conversations without whole group conversations. Several members were so frustrated that they used email and a meeting or two to blame and attack, which fueled people’s moving into camps. We had no clear conflict resolution processes. My attempted mediation in one of the conflicts failed. Some of us didn’t know each other enough to have the trust or commitment necessary to continue to take the increased time to work things out.

With all that, we continue to be an imperfect model of creating an urban ecovillage in an existing transitional neighborhood. Some people are trying to be bridge builders. I’m trying to learn my boundaries and take on what I enjoy. We are urban pioneers. Amazing projects abound. May we all learn and grow together in service to the planet and each other.

—Deborah Jordan

MONEY, POWER, AND PROCESS: How We Pulled the Plug on Consensus

By Kees Kolff

After six intense years, Helen and I did what we thought we never would: exercised our power as owners of the property and temporarily suspended our cherished consensus process. We announced that we would make all the decisions for a while, that we were going to become a homeowners' association with private lots, and that we were developing a list of required conditions if the EcoVillage were to continue. How did we get to that point?

We had searched for alternative structures and funding for six years. How could we possibly go back to a traditional homeowners' model after having tried so hard to be more innovative? Didn't our core values suggest that we don't own but rather borrow the land from future generations? That housing ownership has increased economic disparity in our society? That financial institutions are part of the problem? That intentional communities are ideal for correcting some of society's economic power imbalances? All true, but we had to face economic reality: We were out of money and needed to complete our infrastructure improvements and make mortgages available

The cutest contestant at the annual zucchini festival.



Photos courtesy of Kees Kolff



The fact that my wife Helen and I owned all 7.5 acres of the Port Townsend EcoVillage created a tremendous power imbalance with other members. We agreed to use Formal Consensus and danced with the imbalance quite successfully using Compassionate Communication and a lot of trust. But the power imbalance was always there, especially since we also had the greatest economic wealth in the group.

Terri takes the extra CSA produce to the food bank in our electric car, a ZAP.



to potential new members.

The fact that my wife Helen and I owned all 7.5 acres of the Port Townsend EcoVillage and weren't planning to move afforded us the luxury of time to explore different legal structures and different sources of funding. It also created a tremendous power imbalance with other members, since we could unilaterally pull the plug at any time. We agreed to use Formal Consensus (*à la* C.T. Butler) and danced with the imbalance quite successfully using Compassionate Communication (*à la* Marshal Rosenberg) and a lot of trust. But the power imbalance was always there, especially since we also had the greatest economic wealth in the group.

Initially we had formed a Limited Liability Company so we could share ownership, and we looked for private lenders since the banks wouldn't touch us. Then the economy crashed. We considered a limited-equity cooperative so we could still share ownership and limit profits to keep housing as affordable as possible. Then the banks crashed. National Coop Bank told us they were not offering new loans, especially to those with limited-equity constraints. We asked if a local community land trust would take the land, but they were too new and declined, and ultimately we felt it would constrain our plans for economic diversity. We considered sharing ownership as a tenancy in common, but the perceived level of liability was unacceptable. We needed more people to buy in so we could install the city-required infrastructure, and our potential new members needed loans to build their homes. We felt stuck and burned out, and that's when we pulled the plug on consensus.

It felt strange exercising our power over fellow EcoVillage members who had put in just as much time and energy and a considerable amount of cash to get us where we were. Although our consensus process might well have yielded the same decision eventually, I think we were just burned out by the almost weekly meetings and couldn't

This photo: Shae and Orion with the homeschool group that warms up in the new greenhouse, attached to the shop building. The first new cottage, with an earthen floor, is in the background.
Bottom photo: Jim and some of his professional garlic harvest.
Opposite page: A zucchini car goes for distance at the annual zucchini festival. The honey extraction house is in the background.



handle the idea of more group process. The next several meetings were very uncomfortable and then Ruth said, “So basically you and Helen are now the developers and you’re just asking us for some input.” Though we didn’t like the title, she was right, and it did help to state the obvious. With ideas from all the members, we modified our conditions over several months and then moved back into the consensus process, but only with a smaller core group of six members who paid for lots. This left other long-term members, who either weren’t ready or could not yet afford to buy in, out of the consensus process, and created a whole new power imbalance. We’re still exploring different ways to include them in the discussions and in the social fabric of the EcoVillage.

With our home ownership model we hope that:

1. Options for institutional financing will be greater (and in fact we immediately had some families qualify for one-percent loans through the US Department of Agriculture),



2. We can sell or donate lots to Habitat for Humanity or a community land trust,
3. Low-income senior members can more easily get reduced city utility rates,
4. Tax credits and deductions will be available for homeowner energy-efficiency upgrades and renewable energy systems,
5. Mortgage interest payments will be tax deductible,
6. Members who need to relocate in the future may find it easier to sell their homes, and
7. Potential members may feel that their investment is safer.

We currently have eight adults, two children, four hens, and thousands of honey bees living on site. Can we inspire new members, even if we are all homeowners, to embrace our vision, including permaculture principles, living more sustainably in smaller homes, and sharing amenities like an electric car, shop, common house, and gardens? We believe we can! We published our dilemma over the LLC vs. Co-op decision back in the Winter 2006 COMMUNITIES. Bucking elements of our dominant economic system had been more difficult than anticipated, yet we are still optimistic about our future as a thriving ecovillage. 🐝

Kees Kolff is cofounder of Port Townsend EcoVillage in Port Townsend, Washington.

EcoVillage Resident Reflections:

Marc Weinblatt:

Pulled the plug on consensus? I always knew that Kees and Helen could “pull the plug” at any time. When I joined six years ago I told them that the first thing I wished the group could do was to buy them out, to level the power “playing field.” When they exercised their power, I mostly was grateful that they waited as long as they did and I did not mind letting two drivers take the wheel for a while.

We actually had a remarkably healthy “faux” consensus process. The Kolffs were as responsive as anyone could be under the circumstances. Members were heard and respected, and we all had a huge impact on the shaping of this community. That said, I feel great that we are on the road to *true* consensus. It takes an uncommon degree of generosity and humility, but genuine and sustainable group agreements are truly possible.

Ruth Baldwin:

Trust is what enabled me to feel secure during our recent ownership turmoil. Some might call me impetuous or even foolish since I built the first new dwelling here with no clear idea of how or when I might secure my investment. With an amendment to their wills, Kees and Helen directed their heirs to ensure I would be entitled to use and own my home should the EcoVillage fail to materialize. I definitely had my moments of fear and even a few memorable meltdowns during the non-consensus phase. I also experienced relief that our struggles over how to fit into the “dominant financial system” were coming to a close. Our community came through the power imbalance with our values and love for one another intact. Why? Because we spent so much of our time over the years building trust.

Bekka Bloom:

When Kees and Helen announced they had made some decisions about our direction and were suspending the consensus process for a while, I felt both relieved and disappointed. I didn’t realize they felt so burned out by our reluctance to let go of our cherished alternative legal structure. I wish our group could have used consensus to accomplish our financial goals. At least membership now is more affordable for those like me, sharing a lot with two other adults. I had always felt awkward about operating by consensus when we hadn’t purchased the existing assets from the Kolffs. By their action they clarified this—and that was a relief. Consistently Kees and Helen have proved to have only the best interests of the EcoVillage and its members in mind.



Power, Dysfunction, Community Breakdown, and Vision at EcoInstitute

A Document from the Struggle

By Troy Bell

Editor's note: Several decades ago, Troy Bell (a pen name of one of our readers) was drawn into a major internal power struggle at a small sustainability-oriented nonprofit. Pseudonymously dubbed "EcoInstitute" for the purposes of its article, the group ran a rural "EcoCenter" staffed by members of its resident intentional community. Following is an internal communication, which the author typed, photocopied, and circulated to the small group of staff, Board members, and organizational supporters involved in the group's fall nonprofit membership meeting. While not composed with a magazine audience in mind, it seems to epitomize some classic power dynamics common to groups expe-

Some Unsolicited Thoughts on EcoInstitute and Its Future

...coming from someone who's lived and worked at the EcoCenter for almost half of the past five years, and has just returned after five months away to consider further involvement. These thoughts are not meant to be threatening to anyone; I am trying to be thoughtful about some ongoing problems (as well as opportunities) that I see, and hope that those who read this can be thoughtful (not defensive, nor opportunistic) as they consider what I say. I hope people can remove themselves, for a moment, from their interpersonal struggles, and look at the situation with the fresh eyes that I hope I am bringing to it at this time.

My main concerns are:

- 1) How can EcoInstitute be relevant? How can EcoInstitute be effective? How can it have an impact on a very messed-up world?
- 2) How can the EcoCenter be stewarded in a sustainable manner?
- 3) How can those involved with EcoInstitute make best use of their individual strengths? What situations will bring out the best (rather than the worst) in us?

Though I admire and appreciate the effort that has gone into the current restructuring proposals, I'm not sure they effectively address the basic issues. It seems to me that a very basic power and territorial struggle is going on here, that no amount of legislation can address. Numerous times in the past, both prior to and during my involvement with EcoInstitute, legislation has failed to solve problems when individuals involved were unwilling to cooperate or to address those problems. The only successful solution to the current situation, I believe, will come about through individuals' voluntary acceptance of new roles that make best use of their talents. I'd ask that people (on either side of the fence) stop clinging to something if it is not working, and open themselves up to new experiences. I'd ask that the overriding concern of everyone involved be the future of our planet—how we can make our own lives and work relevant, and how we can make EcoInstitute and its EcoCenter best serve this purpose.

1) Coming fresh from the "outside world," I'm concerned that, right now, EcoInstitute is not relevant, outside of the relatively small circle of people who are involved with it. I believe that this is because it does not generally present its best face to the world. It is beleaguered by internal difficulties—as it has been, as far as I can tell, since its founding, and certainly during all the time I've been involved in it. It is constantly in a state of "transition," "restructuring," etc. The current state of affairs is nothing new; the organization very rarely has its "act together."

I am not meaning to be critical or condescending in this analysis; it is very difficult indeed to be relevant in a society overwhelmingly founded on irrelevance. However, I believe that our society is beginning to become self-aware. I think that people are now asking questions that they used not to ask. I think it is possible to build bridges to that society, to make EcoInstitute's work really relevant. However, I think that to become relevant we need to make best use of our talents as individuals, and not get mired in roles to which we are not suited or which we've outgrown. As someone's who's been out in both the mainstream and alternative worlds since becoming involved here, I can say that a) the great majority of people have never heard of EcoInstitute and b) a disturbingly large number of those who have, know mainly not that it is a visionary organization of people doing valuable work, but that it's a "dysfunctional community." This brings me to concern #2.

2) It's probably obvious to most of us that the continued existence of the EcoCenter is important to EcoInstitute, and that the land trust contributes, in a small but nevertheless significant way, to the preservation of a livable planet. I'd like to ask how we

riencing "Founder's Syndrome." Needless to say, it presents just one perspective on a quite complex situation, and, according to Troy, a lively rejoinder to it could have been (but was not) made, pointing out the flaws and hypocrisies in this document (present in any document that takes the place of actual, person-to-person conversation—conversation which unfortunately seemed impossible to him at the time). We present it here in almost-original form, with just a few potentially identifying details changed, and will let it speak for itself, in hopes that other groups can learn from (and avoid or preempt) this type of conflict.

can best steward this piece of land, and maintain the EcoCenter as a place that can promote EcoInstitute's goals.

The technical achievements of the past 10 years have been impressive. The land is certainly more productive, more permacultural, more suitable for the purposes of the EcoCenter, and even (from what I have heard) less cluttered than it was when EcoInstitute arrived a decade ago. A land trust document is in place, protecting most of the land from major negative human impact.

At this time it seems appropriate to reconsider the concept of stewardship and how we can promote it...reconsider some of the assumptions EcoInstitute has been operating on, reshuffle our priorities.

With the land trust document and its well-established guidelines in place, and with the land healing itself, I think it is easier than it has been in the past to protect the EcoCenter land. In fact, I'd even suggest that the major danger to the land at this point may be not neglect but busy-body-ness...workaholism (what's destroyed much of the rest of the continent)...too much development...overabundance, disorganization, waste. Again, I don't mean to appear critical—what's been accomplished is certainly impressive—but I do think it's important to remember that "hands-off" is a much more important element of land stewardship than "hands-on," at least from my meager understanding of it (once essential human needs are met).

So, assuming Board-supervised adherence to the land-trust document, I'd say that the single most important element in sustainable land stewardship at the EcoCenter is sustainable human community or a sustainable human environment. And this single most important element is EcoInstitute's greatest weakness. I've heard enough and been part of enough of EcoInstitute's history to know that the current lack of sustainability in human relationships here is no quirk—it's been an almost perpetual state since a "community of stewards" first tried to settle here. Certainly healthy, sustainable human relationships and human environments exist elsewhere in our society, even in the most adverse of conditions; these are almost necessary for any real, effective work to be done. They are a basic foundation for relevance, when we try to build bridges to the rest of society. Without a sustainable human environment, all the organic vegetables the EcoCenter can grow are not going to change the world. Far more likely, they'll be composted as another group of would-be residents leaves, finding the human environment too unsettling. Residences will sit empty, mail will go unanswered, the rest of society will continue its sprint toward oblivion, unaware of EcoInstitute's existence or, more likely than not, only aware of its in-fighting, its dysfunctionality, and the fact that almost everyone, no matter how committed, competent, and idealistic he/she initially is, eventually leaves, disillusioned with the human environment. Even those in the outside world who never have this close involvement will tend to ignore what's said by people who, too often, put their worst rather than their best faces forward.

So, I'd like to take the bull by the horns and talk about concern #3:

3) It seems obvious to me that those in EcoInstitute mean well; otherwise they would not work so hard nor undergo so much unhappiness for the "cause." I'd just like to suggest other ways of serving the cause, so that the three concerns I've mentioned—relevance/effectiveness, sustainable land stewardship, best use of our individual strengths—can be successfully addressed.

And, it seems time to mention names, since beating around the bush and eschewing obfuscation are mutually exclusive. I hope that my observations and thoughts will be taken thoughtfully...not, as I said before, either defensively or opportunistically by those involved. Let's pretend none of us is involved in the situation, and step back and look at it. Let's look at ourselves objectively.

I think we'd all agree that David is not only a powerful personality but a very gifted human being. I'd like to suggest that his greatest strengths are his vision and his skill as an educator. I think we should all do as much as possible to see that this vision is not lost to the world; that this educational ability is not wasted. I think that, finally, the world is waking up to its suicidal course. What has brought me back in thought to EcoInstitute again and again, and what has brought me back in person several times, has been, more than anything else, the vision, the critique of society, and the search for something better, which all of us hopefully share but which David can



crystallize often better than anyone else. Yet David's gift as a visionary, educator, and public speaker still reaches very few people, and is underutilized.

David is also a skilled gardener, and experienced land steward, but I believe these are not his greatest gifts. With due respect to David and all the effort he has put into the EcoCenter, I think that that effort is (relatively) replaceable, and that the gift of his vision transcends this little 35 acres back in the woods. I see a power struggle happening in which he and Beth are battling for their turf, retreating toward their cabin, then advancing to try to regain more power within the organization, then retreating again. They should not be having to do that, and the rest of EcoInstitute should not be having to do that. It's as if the cabin is the ultimate destination or refuge, in which they will hole up or to which they will be banished. It's also as if the EcoCenter and EcoInstitute are the worlds which need to be conquered, the ultimate goal on the other end of the spectrum in this struggle.

I'm merely suggesting that this scenario is all wrong. David is a visionary and a genius, with gifts to offer to the whole world. When we struggle to banish him to his cabin, we miss the

Perhaps this domestic power struggle is more comfortable and familiar, but I'm not sure it's getting anyone anywhere.

point. When he struggles to reassert his influence and dominance in this small organization and in this small community on this small piece of land, he misses the point.

David's greatest weakness, of which he himself is aware, is his ability (or lack thereof) to maintain healthy, supportive, sustainable human relationships, at least in a community setting. The people living with him, attracted in part by his vision, end up forgetting his genius and not even wanting to listen to him because he is so difficult to live with. He puts more and more of his energy into struggling in a situation which in many ways brings out the worst in him, and less and less of his energy into a) being happier himself and b) reaching the larger world that is aching for his vision and insights (in my humble assessment). Perhaps this domestic power struggle is more comfortable and familiar—undoubtedly a lot of negative energy, difficult past experiences, and very understandable frustration at the state of the world are being discharged (or rather, expressed)—but I'm not sure it's getting him or anyone else anywhere. David is less effective as a person, and EcoInstitute and its EcoCenter are unsustainable and imbalanced entities (even if they continue to exist in name and physical form) because of this unfortunate yet apparently addictive dynamic. David's response to his frustration here, unfortunately, appears to be simply to work harder (too hard), become more frustrated, put more energy into defending his personal and physical turf, rather than finding environments in which his gifts will be really appreciated, in which his strengths have much more time and opportunity to surface than his weaknesses.

I believe that, with the groundwork done over the past 10-15 years, the EcoCenter as a place and EcoInstitute as an organization will survive, with the vision that has formed them reasonably intact, no matter who stays or who leaves...but only if the human environment is sustainable, only if EcoInstitute puts on a friendly rather than hostile face to those who are looking to it for guidance, inspiration, opportunity for involvement.

If I were to start from square one, I would say:

David (or David and Beth)—your talents are best suited to life as a prophet, on the road—the road of public speaking, slide shows, workshops and courses all over the country (or anywhere in the world). Our country and our world are looking for visionaries...and I think, hopefully, they'll be less eager to crucify them once they've found them than they have been in the past.

I am willing to contribute to a fund to start up this project, if others would contribute as well. I think some of EcoInstitute's money, either in a lump sum or in regular installments, could and should go to start up this new life as well. EcoInstitute could provide back-up and even help coordinate this project; in fact, it could be one of EcoInstitute's main projects. Or the project might eventually find a home elsewhere, or might have a number of them (including possibly the EcoCenter).

But the EcoCenter can stand on its own. EcoInstitute can stand on its own. They need independence. David

(continued on p. 74)





Balancing Powers: Leadership and Followership in Community

By Elizabeth Barrette

Power in community can work differently than in the mainstream. We acknowledge more types of power and value a wider set of skills. We move more fluidly through roles so that instead of “leaders” and “followers” we often have the same people playing both those roles in different contexts.

Leadership

On a spring afternoon, the turnspit assembly team finally admits defeat: no spit-roasting today. The whole lamb carcass won't fit in the oven. People stare dolefully at each other. “Okay, we need to cut this nice lamb into pieces,” I say. “I know some anatomy and I've helped butcher chickens. Raise your hand if you've ever done home butchering, or field-dressed game, or have any other relevant experience.” Several people volunteer. With much tugging and laughing and sharing of ideas, we divide the meat into small pieces.

In considering leadership, look at what a leader needs to be and do. Most concisely, a leader provides guidance and direction. Community leaders direct a particular settlement; task supervisors see that jobs get done; workshop facilitators teach numerous people new skills. So “leader” covers all the people who make things happen in intentional communities and lend their vision to get us where we're going. Overall, people want leaders to create

a sense of community, organize activities, provide services, and help in times of need. Leadership expectations break down into practical and personal roles, among others.

The practical sphere encompasses most group functions. *Founders* define a vision and create new communities. *Event organizers* dream up festivals and workshops, then make sure the activities run smoothly. *Entertainers* include our musicians, dancers, theatre troupes, and so forth. They add spice to the work we do—but they also transmit our culture. *Networkers* connect the dots into a vast web of human resources spanning the world. They make it possible to pull together people needed for a community, a publication, or a special project.

The personal sphere encompasses things that usually happen behind the scenes, but can intrude into group space. *Greeters* welcome new people and help them mesh. They make communities grow. *Crash crew* leaders are the people you turn to when disaster strikes. They clean up after messy divorces, personality meltdowns, and storm damage. *Cheerleaders* urge people to grow and try, providing encouragement after failures and applause for successes.

Qualities of a Good Leader

Each leader has a unique combination of leadership quali-

ties. Skills may come from education or experience—ideally both, but don't overlook someone who can do the job just because they only have one or the other. Different roles also call for different traits and skills. However, some things are essential for most or all leaders in community.

Determination—A leader provides the energy and focus to get people moving and keep them on track.

Competence—This includes not just the ability to do things correctly but the self-confidence to do so smoothly, in a way that reassures other people they're in good hands.

Patience—Effective leaders allow for calm handling of delays and difficulties, as well as teaching people.

Honor—People can look up to a leader who is worthy of their respect and who behaves with integrity.

Vision—A leader illuminates a path from where we are to where we want to be, and inspires people to follow it even through the rough spots.

A sense of humor—This eases tensions, fosters connection, and discourages harmful forms of pride.

Communication—Necessary for most community functions, this is a fundamental ability to gather information, guide meetings, talk people into doing things, and mend misunderstandings.

Problem-solving—A good leader can recognize signs of trouble, identify the source, and take steps to fix it.

Resource management—This entails fundraising, gathering tools and supplies, finding volunteers, and using them efficiently to meet established goals.

A well-calibrated bullshit detector—A leader must be alert when people are trying to deceive her...or themselves.

Leadership Techniques

Leadership is not one skill but many. People sometimes learn the obvious ones but overlook more subtle aspects. Here are some useful techniques for community leadership:

- Learn what your neighbors do well. When assembling a team for a project, connect each task with a person who has relevant expertise.
- Find the work that needs to be done and take care of it. You know how people are always saying, "Somebody should do something about that"? Be "Somebody."
- Always pad your budget and your timeframe. Things *will* go wrong; it's your job to make sure the problems get buffered, so they don't make matters worse.
- Watch for members whose skills are growing. Cheer for their progress. Offer them more responsibility.

- Watch for burnout. Be prepared to reduce or change someone's tasks (including yours) to avoid this.

- Observe body language. If folks are leaning forward and nodding, you're on the right track. If they're fidgeting, it may be time to stop talking and switch to something else, like physical activities.

The intentional community movement offers numerous models of leadership. Some communities have one leader, or a small group of leaders. Some try to avoid the temptation of putting anyone in charge, instead sharing responsibility equally. How does your community assign (or withdraw) authority? Who organizes things, and why? What do members expect of the person(s) in charge? What do the leaders get, and what do they give? How well does your system work for you? Discussing these and related topics can help a community fine-tune their leadership structure so that it works for everyone.

Followship

Several friends gather to disassemble a fallen tree. A chainsaw growls in the background as we work on breaking up the smaller twigs and branches for kindling. Sometimes I help hold the bigger branches to be cut by handsaw or chainsaw. Upon request I fetch and carry gloves, earplugs, and water bottles. Later, I retire early to the house and start supper for the team.

People often discuss leadership without ever touching on followship. Followers are as essential as leaders, because leaders can't lead if nobody follows. Similarly, if the leaders outnumber the followers, nothing gets done because of too many arguments over who's in charge. Ideally, people have both leadership and followship skills so that they can switch roles.

Good followers enable leaders to accomplish great things. The leader supplies the direction, and the followers provide the motile power. Bad followers don't provide enough power, or pull in different directions, or support wretched ideas as well

as good ideas. So a leader really depends on having good followers. Many communities teach and reward that kind of teamwork, which helps expand our skills.

Qualities of a Good Follower

Leaders and followers share some of the same virtues, while others differ. A follower's qualities should complement those of a leader. Not all followers necessarily show all of these qualities, and there are other qualities, but these can help identify people with followship potential.

Humility—A humble follower helps leaders relax, because they don't have to worry about that person trying to take over their position. The modern mainstream culture pushes success to excess, often pressuring people to "get ahead" and "be a star" even if they hate being the center of attention or being in charge. Humility means deriving contentment from who you are and what you do without feeling compelled to reach for the pinnacle. Not everyone is, can be, or should be a leader. If people's personality, skills, and desires suit them to be followers, they should take satisfaction in that. Explore until they find a level and area of responsibility that feels comfortable.

Loyalty—Loyal followers support a chosen cause or leader through good times and bad times. They stick around when others leave, and won't switch sides as long as the cause is just or the leader honorable. This helps minimize turnover, which can strain communities.

Honesty—The best followers display excellent communication skills. They speak the truth gently if possible, firmly if necessary. They give an honest opinion of ideas and people.

Integrity—Good followers can be trusted to carry large sums of money or use equipment responsibly. They will keep an embarrassing secret, but not one that could harm innocents. They carry out honorable instructions in honorable ways; they won't lie, steal, or cheat to accomplish goals.

Disagree constructively. Don't let a bad plan or improper request pass unremarked. In problem-solving sessions, open, vigorous discussion promotes effective solutions.

Reliability—This means getting things done right, on time. Be organized. Only promise what can be delivered, and always deliver it. If necessary, find a substitute to cover responsibilities.

Utility—The most useful followers are competent, confident, and good at diverse skills. They avoid false modesty and their community knows what they do well.

Flexibility—An effective follower finds ways to make things work. Be willing to implement whatever is assigned. Be prepared; expect the unexpected. Adapt to changing circumstances.

Synergy—This precious ability enables a follower to combine the available people and resources to best effect, creating a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. The synergist may be an expert teambuilder or ceremony coordinator, unifying what the leader provides.

Followship Techniques

Like leadership, followship spans a variety of skills and methods. By learning and teaching these, we can expand the pool of good followers in community. Here are some things you can do as a follower.

- Support your leader's ideas. Voice agreement; also use body language by nodding or leaning forward. Speak well of your leader to others.
- Accept direction from your leader. When asked to do something reasonable, do it without hesitation. This helps avoid the awkward scenario caused by everyone waiting for someone else to move first.
- When volunteers are requested and your skills match, step forward. Volunteering strengthens community bonds.
- Ask the right questions. If you don't understand what is needed, seek to clarify the needs and processes. If a proposal is under discussion, ask questions to reveal its strengths and weaknesses.
- Disagree constructively. Don't let a bad plan or improper request pass unremarked. In problem-solving sessions, open, vigorous discussion promotes effective solutions—even if people argue a lot before reaching conclusions. Otherwise, it's usually best to deliver criticism in private, and praise in public. Avoid saying things publicly that could discredit your leader or their plans, unless the situation poses a danger. Save face as much as practical without allowing real harm, because when people feel threatened they tend to switch from problem-solving to defensiveness.
- Build consensus. Bolster teamwork. Seek suitable people and encourage them to get involved.
- When following instructions, pay attention to the *spirit* as well as the *letter* of

What gets in the way of learning, community, productivity, or just plain fun? How can you avoid making the same mistakes that you've seen other people make?

the instructions. Deliver what your leader wants and needs, not just what they said.

- Pay attention to everything around you. Be observant. Report interesting details, task progress, potential problems, and possible solutions.
- Listen actively. Serve as a sounding board or a shoulder to cry on. Good listeners are valuable.
- Take care of your leader. Many leaders are “big picture” people who easily forget small details while focused on wider issues. If necessary, pick up cell phones, ensure notes are in order, or remind your leader to eat and sleep regularly. Divert unnecessary distractions; encourage people to handle things within their own responsibility.
- Remember that your leader is only human. Allow for some mistakes and flaws; accept apologies with grace. Do what you can to compensate for weaknesses and encourage improvement. Be patient with growth processes.

As you did with leadership, now think about followship in your community. Who are the followers? How are they chosen? Are the followers good at what they do? Are they always the same people? Do they want more responsibility, or do they prefer following to leading? What does your community do to thank people who take this role? By discussing these and similar topics, you can help make sure that people feel satisfied with their role in community and that they have opportunities to shift around so they don't get bored.

Developing Skills

The drums make pleasant thunder as we strive to stay in rhythm, one eye on our neighbors, one eye on the workshop leader. He guides us only by hand signals, not words—we respond by intuition, speeding or slowing. Afterward he explains how this type of drum workshop builds teamwork skills.

Intentional communities depend on the membership having a good balance of leadership and followship skills. Because our values may differ from those of the mainstream, people haven't always had a chance to learn the interpersonal and organizational skills needed in community. In order to meet our needs, we need to teach those skills so that residents and guests can get along and accomplish their goals. Conferences, festivals, and workshops provide formal opportunities to learn both leadership and followship skills. However, a lot of education in community happens on a casual, everyday basis.

Understand that there are better and poorer ways of teaching, and that not all methods work equally well for all teachers, students, or topics. One mistake is to let people volunteer to lead a project without providing any guidance, which can lead to fumbling and failure. A better approach is to pair a new volunteer with an experienced member who can teach what they wish to learn. As people gain experience, they may take on new responsibilities so that they remain challenged and invested in their work. Also remember that leaders may get tired and want to let someone else take charge for a while. That's

a good time for them to focus on a followship skill they want to improve.

For best results, learn from both good and bad examples. Which classes or workshops have you enjoyed the most? Which ones did you hate? What techniques do you find most effective? What gets in the way of learning, community, productivity, or just plain fun? How can you avoid making the same mistakes that you've seen other people make? How can you make skill development enjoyable and effective? Do your members know how to lead and how to follow? Do they know how to get things done in an egalitarian group? When planning educational activities or pairing teachers and students in your community, discuss these points together.

As a general rule, treat other people with respect, whether they serve as leaders or followers or both. Consider how they wish to be treated; for instance, some people like attention while others don't. Also think about how you prefer to be treated; it may not always be the same as other people's preferences, but it's a good starting point. Avoid doing things to others that annoy you when someone does them to you.

Look for ways to strengthen community ties. If you admire an experienced person, ask them to teach you something. If you're organizing a project, invite skilled people to help with it. Get together and discuss your community's skill set. What's missing? Where could your members gain those skills? Reach out to your friends in other communities—whatever it is, somebody knows how to do it! 🐾

Elizabeth Barrette writes nonfiction, fiction, and poetry in the fields of gender studies, speculative fiction, and alternative spirituality. Her article “Householding” appeared in COMMUNITIES #144. She supports the growth of community in diverse forms and is active in local organizations. Her favorite activities include gardening for wildlife and public speaking at Pagan events and science fiction conventions. Visit her blog at ysabetwordsmith.livejournal.com.



More Perspectives on Leadership and Followership

A Response to Elizabeth Barrette

By Maïkwe Schaub Ludwig

I love it when someone takes the time to break a complicated topic down into component parts that are easier to understand, and I like a lot of what Elizabeth has offered in her lists of leadership and followership traits. I teach about leadership, and so have spent a lot of time thinking about that side of the equation. Elizabeth's done an excellent job of getting me to think about both sides, and I'm grateful. If I could sit down at my kitchen table with her, here are some things I'd love to chat about.

Leadership Qualities

I found myself wanting to add some aspects to the leadership list. Mostly, it seemed odd to me that there was more focus on communication, integrity, and honesty for the followers than for the leaders. Being a teacher-type and a life-long seeker of great role models, I wondered from whom the "followers" would be learning all these great skills (as our mainstream culture is hardly great at them)? So here are my additions:

Self-honesty and the ability to recognize alignment. Effective leaders are ones whose passion matches the passion of the group. People turn into martyrs when their personal life's work doesn't match the group's life work. "Know thyself" is a credo for everyone; for leaders, it is also an imperative.

Ability to hold to the group purpose and set aside one's own agendas when needed. This is two-fold: being able to keep one's self on track and not introduce extraneous agendas to the group's work; and being able to hold the group to their focus, gently reminding people when they are starting to get too complicated

or when they are adding aspects into the project that aren't the group's work.

The ability to nurture others. The best leaders are on the lookout for the next generation of leaders, and actively nurture the spark of enthusiasm and self-development in others. I've spent hours with interns and students over the last couple years talking about their lives and what inspires them, acting as elder and mentor. I'm starting to see this as a more matured version of my own leadership.

A willingness to model humility and the fine art of apology. When it comes down to it, some of the most important skills we can model are those that involve humanizing ourselves in the eyes of others (which makes leadership look accessible) and being able to admit when we've been (or done) wrong. Both of these are rooted in a philosophy that says that we are all human and we are also all capable of some form of leadership, despite our flaws and shortcomings. (Paired with Elizabeth's *sense of humor* element, this is the cornerstone of authentic leadership.)

A strong sense of fairness. Sometimes leaders have to arbitrate tough moments where the people in their group seem to have contradictory needs. Leaders need to be even-handed in their rewards, chastisements, and division of resources. If you aren't fair, you (rightfully) lose the trust of the group as a whole, and create an environment where your perceived "favorites" have to struggle to be seen as part of the gang. Responsible leaders don't set up their group for the fissure lines caused by favoritism.

The ability to think ahead several steps. While I don't buy into the "idle hands are the devil's workshop" philosophy, I do think

that when folks show up enthusiastic to work on a project and there is nothing to do, this experience can be pretty frustrating. A good leader has to serve the function of thinking things through in terms of timing, order of steps, and having materials and personnel available so that the work can continue and flow well.

Responsible Followship

While I like a lot of the advice that is offered in this article, I want to note a pitfall of adopting this whole package. The way Elizabeth talks about followship makes me nervous: while I don't think this was her intention, the way she has things framed could be read as too much passive and potentially blind support of leaders for my tastes (particularly without a strong focus on integrity in leaders). On the other hand, groups sometimes want to switch in midstream, handing over power and then attacking their own leaders for wielding it.

Here's my bottom line: if a group has abdicated power to a leader, then you damn well better back the person up. It is deeply unfair to hand over responsibility to one person and then hang them out to dry when you disagree with what they do or say. However, I prefer the model where you don't abdicate and you therefore have the right and responsibility to call your leaders on bad behavior. While I don't think this article is entirely one-sided in this area, I prefer to lean more on the active end of engagement between leaders and followers.

In fact, when it comes right down to it, I found myself wondering as I was reading this why the list of traits of leaders and followers didn't overlap more. Strongly defined categories of "leader and follower" feel a little too dichotomous for my

tastes—not what I'd like to see in an alternative culture. I'd like to see us all working on developing flexibility as a bottom line: be able to lead when it is needed and follow when it is needed, and do both with grace and a cooperative attitude. I like the philosophy that says that there aren't "leaders" and "followers" but rather that these are roles that everyone plays at one time or another. "Leaders" are really the servants of the moment and role models for how to be a good human. Presumably, they once learned those skills from others and are now passing them along.

One of the places where I see us strongly agreeing is in this idea that leaders are human: they mess up, don't think clearly all the time, and sometimes forget who and what they are serving and have to be reminded. Fear of messing up (and either feeling humiliated or being punished for it) is a huge factor in people being unwilling to step up to the plate and lead. Creating a kinder, gentler culture where power and leadership are shared, and where giving and receiving feedback are regular (and non-traumatic) events, can go a long way to making leadership accessible to everyone. Ideally, leaders are people you can look up to because they are genuine about their struggles and flaws as well as their passions, and unapologetic about caring and wielding power in service to your shared goals. Leaders are best when vulnerable; this is possible when the culture makes that safe. Everyone in the group has responsibility for creating that culture.

Power in Cooperative Groups

Finally, I'd like to touch (briefly) on a largely missing topic, which is power in cooperative groups. Traditionally, power is seen as residing in leadership. While this is certainly true, it
(continued on p. 75)

Photo courtesy of Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig



Students in Laird and Ma'ikwe's Integrative Facilitation training learn about facilitation, cooperative leadership, and themselves. (2009)

Power and Powerlessness in Community

By Markus Euler

In university I was already keenly interested in issues of power and authority, but my studies of these topics have become much more real since I started living in community. Now, rather than focusing on academic questions such as how power comes into existence and what legitimizes authority, I care more about coming to terms with power differences in specific structures and clarifying existing problems on this basis.

Strangely, sometimes I feel just as powerless in my community as in normal society. At these moments, I think I am just a lonely voice crying in the desert with no power to change anything. Since the population in my community is much smaller than in the society as a whole, my voice should have more weight here.

And probably it does. One out of 60 (in ZEGG) is certainly more than one out of 80 million (in Germany). But that does not mean that I actually feel this way. What I say to myself is important in relation to how powerful I feel.

I noticed this when we had a small kitchen crisis in our community. We are organized so that every community member belongs to a cooking group which is in charge of the kitchen once a week. Each group has about 10 people who distribute among themselves whatever tasks have to be done. When new members arrive, or old members leave the community, we always try to ensure that the number of people in cooking groups remains the same. However, because of a big fluctuation, once only five members remained in one of the cooking groups and could therefore no longer handle the workload efficiently. They were still somehow able to keep things running through heroic self-sacrifice, but it was pretty unfair since people in well-staffed cooking groups had to work significantly less.

Though it was obvious to all that this group needed more people, attempts to lure members from other groups failed. This happened partly because people did not want to leave their familiar group and partly because the other groups feared that they would become too small. It became clear to us that we could come to a solution only with the entire community. Thus, we called for a Plenum in order to try to resolve this problem. In our community, a Plenum is a meeting to which

It was actually by not expressing my needs that I had inhibited the problem-solving process.



Markus Euler

all community members are invited and where all those who attend are entitled to make a decision.

Not everybody was present at the Plenum. This happens often in our community, since our members are usually very busy. We decided to set up our cooking groups in the room. Thus, all those who belonged to a cooking group stood together and the names of the missing people were written on slips of paper and placed at the appropriate groups. It became immediately obvious that one group was much smaller than the others. The attempts to shift people back and forth so that all groups could have the same number of members failed once more, for the same reasons as before.

I kept myself out of the whole process. I thought I could not contribute anything to the solution. My cooking group was still big enough. Although I was not really happy in this group, there was nothing that particularly bothered me. Above all, I did not want to move to a smaller group. When the situation started looking really hopeless, I felt powerless to do anything. At some point, however, following a spontaneous impulse, I

said: "I would really like to cook with people I like." The statement was well received, but still no one had any idea how it could bring us closer to a solution. The whole process had come to a standstill.

We were all aware of the problem, but there was no one who had the power to solve it by decree—for example, by compelling some members to change groups. Since it was clear that nothing had helped, and also that things could not continue as they were, we decided to start considering crazy solutions as well.

Then a community member said: "I think Markus' idea is really interesting." I was intrigued that she described my statement as an idea, as I myself would have never perceived it as such. I had simply expressed my own needs, but did not wish to stand in the way of the overall process. But all at once it occurred to me that it was actually by *not* expressing my needs and by *not* going fully for what I wanted that I had stood in the way and inhibited the problem-solving process.

I would call this an example of empowerment at the right time, and what happened next showed that she was right to support me as she did.

I looked around the room. Unfortunately, none of the people that I would have liked to have in my group were present. However, their names were written on slips of paper. So I plucked up all my courage, authority, and power and I simply took the papers I wanted and put them around me. Immediately, a new cooking group was formed and I was inevitably its manager. The remaining people, including the papers with names that were left over, quickly found their way to other cooking groups without any major difficulties.

For me, this experience proved several truisms that one hears again and again in communities.

First: If everyone takes care of oneself, then everyone is taken care of.

Second: Everybody has something to contribute to a solution, even if she or he does not think so.

Third: Sometimes it takes a nudge from the outside, so that you do what you wanted to do anyway.

The process I just described took place about two years ago and our cooking groups still work perfectly. For me, this process symbolizes that when someone in our community wants something and the time is ripe for it, then things can change completely.

We are open and free enough to implement even crazy solutions. ☺



Markus Euler lives in the ZEGG Community near Berlin (www.zegg.de). He works there as an accountant and a workshop leader. As a writer he publishes articles about several issues, including community, money systems, love, and relationship.

Dancing with Discomfort: Thoughts on Empowerment from a Reluctantly Powerful Person

By Kristina Jansen

In an essay I read recently about advocacy and citizen participation in Zimbabwe, I came across this statement about the difficulty of empowering women in Africa:

Institutional change is often easier than at the personal level... most people resist changes to their personal space even when it involves extending their horizons. It is not easy for people to reach critical consciousness in their personal lives due to an intrinsic need to belong.

—Hope Chigudu, Chair, Global Fund for Women,
personal correspondence, 2001

What struck me about this quote was how much I identified with it, and it resonated with what I was writing about for this issue of COMMUNITIES. I was trying to describe how I felt as a child growing up in the midst of a vibrant intentional community in southern California, which I call Orinda in my writings. The basic tenets at Orinda were all about self-discovery, psychological empowerment, and personal integrity, but when I was a child growing up here, I experienced it differently.

My parents were among the early members of Orinda, moving here in the mid 1970s, and I was brought along. I was five or six years old when we moved into a cooperatively owned apartment building and I stopped living under their direct care. They weren't particularly good at being parents, and even before we moved, our family was rapidly falling apart. Need-

less to say, I was a deeply insecure child. Somehow I got it in my head that I had to be a "right" sort of person to be cared about, and this made me feel constantly on edge. While there were many ways that living in Orinda allowed me to develop and flourish as a person, I always felt oppressed by this need to be good, to say the "right" thing, to think and feel in a way I believed was in line with how the majority of everyone else was thinking, feeling, acting. Living with this belief meant there wasn't much room for me to figure out what I actually thought or felt, and I was not happy—which was a problem, since I thought "happy" was what I was really supposed to be. The pressure I felt is perhaps not so different from what a small-town girl with aspirations to go to the big city for college might experience, and even the guilt I felt at having different opinions and different wants was perhaps not unusual. It's part of that impulse in many of us to go out into the world and find our place in it, to leave our parents behind and make our own life. But at the time I didn't know this was a part of human nature. I thought I was a freak.

When I was 19, I left Orinda to go to college and live independently. Since there was no precedent for a young person in the community to go off to college (before me most of the younger people involved had dropped out of mainstream education, and were focused on working in one or another of the community's business enterprises), I did not know how to do this and keep close to my family, which was how I thought



about the community by now. Because I had never trusted my community friends and family enough to really talk about what I wanted and why I felt I needed to move away, many were surprised and felt hurt when I left for school. They assumed I would be estranged and antagonistic to Orinda. Other people who had left in the past were quite sour by the time they said goodbye, and bitterly rejected their whole experience here. I did not feel this way, and in fact I deeply believed in the goodness of living more communally. I believe humans are social animals, and our social experiment felt right to me. I loved the adults who had acted as parents, role models, mentors, guides, and I cherished those relationships even as I planned to leave. I loved my age-mates like siblings, and there were many people of all ages in the community that I considered dear friends. Leaving was not an easy choice on many levels, but it was something I felt I needed to do if I was going to find my own path.

At 28, I found myself back home for a

spell. The intervening years had changed me, and being back I found myself in a different relationship to my former “parents.” Life in Orinda turned out not to be as oppressive as I had once thought. Over the years I had lived on my own, I had gotten to know that I have an innate tendency to look for definition outside of myself. I learned that I could not blame the community for my own reluctance to have and express a dissenting opinion. I discovered I have an almost neurotic desire to blend in, while always holding myself slightly apart as an observer. In graduate school I studied anthropology, putting my natural tendencies for “participant observation” to professional use. Living in India during this time made me know that no matter how exotic the society was within which I found myself, I would find ways to disappear into the woodwork. If I was the only fair-headed woman in the village, I’d be sure to cover my hair, duck my face, and keep my mouth shut as long as possible—without creating waves, that is. So, when my time

in India came to a natural end, and other life issues brought me home, I had the chance to revisit some of my old ideas about the society I grew up in with a fresh perspective.

I found that I was more than welcomed back into the community as an adult. Instead of being regarded with suspicion over my prodigal adventures, I was treated with respect, especially because I had a different point of view. I had been expecting to be shouted down, or otherwise silenced if I voiced an off-beat preference, like for yoga over tennis for example. I loved yoga, but when I came back only two or three others were quiet practitioners. When I started to go to classes in town, and then chose to practice regularly in the open, these few others joined me. Then more people got interested. Then more. Now even the most die-hard anti-yogis among my friends take the occasional class.

It was not easy for me to live as boldly or with the equality my friends and family members at Orinda were eager to

allow. I've been home again now for more than a decade, but it is still hard for me to say what I think, to act as I see fit, or to express dissenting opinions. I fell into a job within the community's central office, and turned out to be good at communicating with people and organizing things around here. And in fact, I now find myself being called on to make decisions that affect lots of others with surprising regularity. Usually I make sure to take a reading from a handful of other people, and then communicate the results to the masses. In a funny way, I think my reluctant style might actually be more effective than if I was a more overtly controlling sort of person. Many of my friends now come to me for advice or to be a sounding board for some community event. I still get the occasional "Who are you to tell me what to do?"

thrown back at me, to which I usually just reply, "Hey, I'm not telling you what to do, I'm just letting you know you are welcome to participate if you like."

Since I personally don't have a stake in anyone actually listening to me, even the most defensive reaction can just slide off my back.

As I've gotten older here and more established as a person others turn to, I have had to face that I'm intrinsically uncomfortable with being in charge of anything. Hell, half the time I don't really want to be in charge of myself. And here is the secret problem with living in a large and vibrant community: there are always a number of people who are not fully able or willing to take care of themselves on a practical level. Instead of someone or some small group of people trying to run everything, seeking power wherever they can, it seems there are a lot of people here who'd be perfectly happy just being told what to do. A lot of times, I am one of those people. On the other hand, there are always decisions that need to be made, and in the end someone needs to take action. Sometimes now, I am one of those people.

What is power at Orinda? It's not money, though being generous financially does get respect, and being self-supporting means a person has the security of financial independence. It's not force, though being able to express one's anger or opinions forcefully and effectively does get respect. It is not manipulation, though there are times when a person's weakness seems to have the whole community focused on him or her; it's just not usually a positive focus. I guess the people who have the most power here are those that have the most respect, and the way you get respect at Orinda is to live a generous, open, forthright life, in accordance with your individual nature, while being responsible for yourself and respectful to others. Being a powerful person here requires saying what you think, feel, and believe, without trying to ram it down anyone else's throat. It requires asking for what you want, knowing full well you may

not get it. It requires showing up and sharing life. It's pretty simple, but surprisingly difficult.

But the main path to power here at Orinda is the willingness to give back, and to be of service. This past weekend marked the start of the summer season, when a large contingent of our friends and family members are off traveling until September. This is always a challenging transition for those of us left behind, who need to work and keep things at home going. My friend Alice called me on Friday to ask what was happening over the weekend. I made it up. "We should get together for dinner Saturday and maybe talk after." She was happy with this idea. I sent a message to everyone still in town that I was putting a meal together: "Show up if you like, I'll be home around 5 to

start cooking, and would love your help if you have time. We'll serve around 6:30, talk after. I would love to see everyone."

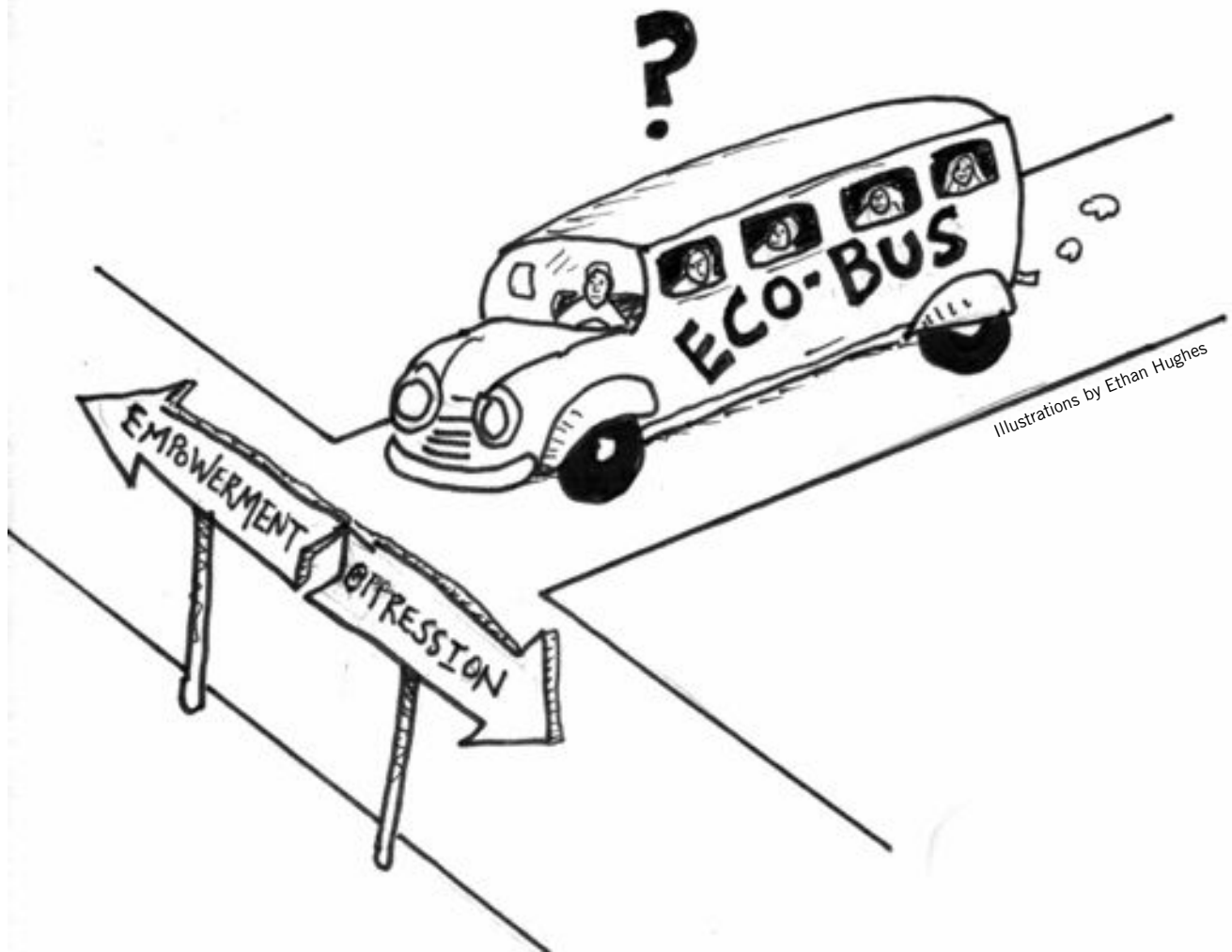
Donny offered to

shop, so I sent him the grocery list. Alice wanted to take care of dessert, so I suggested she bring pies. "What kind? How many?" she asked. "Apple, cherry, and one more," I told her. Miguel said he'd help, so I asked him to make the main course. Lonnie sent me a note that she had already harvested lettuce that morning. It was washed and ready in the main fridge. At 5, when I got home to start preparing the meal, Annika, Dee, and Dennis arrived and wanted to help. It felt like a stone soup sort of meal, and in the end, my efforts were mostly directorial. Twenty-five friends showed up, helped cook our meal, clean up, and then we sat down to talk about our week, and share where each of us was at. As I looked around at the many friendly faces, I realized I had made this happen just by saying let's do it. I felt amazed by what a little initiative and a willingness to stick my neck out could create. It might not have been the most comfortable position for me to be in, but that night I certainly felt like I was creating my own life, and there was not an ounce of inequality in the room. 🐦

As I've gotten older here and more established as a person others turn to, I have had to face that I'm intrinsically uncomfortable with being in charge of anything.



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



Power and Disempowerment on the Ecobus

By Chris Roth

I arrived for my first day on the Conservation Society Ecobus (not its actual name) wearing my Conservation Society t-shirt. I was happy and proud to finally be part of a tribe—to join something larger than myself that I could actually believe in. To me, the t-shirt symbolized this new beginning in my life, and the larger movement to which I was now dedicating myself.

Imagine my surprise when I was told to turn my t-shirt inside out.

The guides explained that by wearing t-shirts with writing on them, I and other students were serving as advertising placards, presenting images to other people in an effort to create impressions-by-association, rather than presenting our true, unbranded selves. T-shirts with writing showed inner insecurity, and furthermore, they were offensive and tiresome to look

at during hikes. By turning our t-shirts inside out, we would be reclaiming our power and our integrity, instead of giving them away to societal forces by buying into something that wasn't really us.

Not everyone agreed. While many of us had never considered this issue before, some had already sworn off corporate t-shirts but felt good about wearing environmental ones. A few people said they liked to wear t-shirts representing groups and causes they cared about, because it helped promote those causes and also was an excellent conversation-starter with others who had similar interests. But the guides and second-year students immediately became more emphatic, and the dissenting voices soon piped down. We apparently needed to agree on this. No one wanted to get off on the wrong foot. We all agreed to

reverse our t-shirts, or wear plain ones.

Thus began a two-year journey during which I simultaneously gave away power and empowered myself with an expanded perspective on the world—lost my voice and aspects of my self while also discovering both. I've heard similar tales from others who've joined intensely focused, insular groups (what some label "cults," though that is not a term that the Fellowship for Intentional Community considers useful or fair, as it's an oversimplified, judgmental term in every case).

The questions that arise are similar among many of us, whether our experiences were in separatist Christian communities, ideologically-driven social experiments, radical environmentalist enclaves, groups guided by charismatic leaders (a category that can overlap with others), or any similarly focused community endeavors:

Were we being controlled, or had we found a new freedom in our adopted tribe? Had we lost our individuality, or gained a new sense of self? Were we simply conforming to new standards, or were we gaining the courage to resist conformity to the larger society's norms? Were these the best times of our lives, or the worst?

The answer was often: both. But I'm getting ahead of myself. So far, I'd only flipped my t-shirt inside out.

* * *

At 20, feeling isolated, alienated, and out of harmony with the world around me, I had left my traditional liberal arts college and set off on an entirely different course. The Ecobus' parent organization, the Conservation Society, had been a cornerstone of American environmentalism for decades, and had taken this traveling, consensus-run experiential education school, and its nine-month-long experiments in community living and outdoor learning, under its wing.

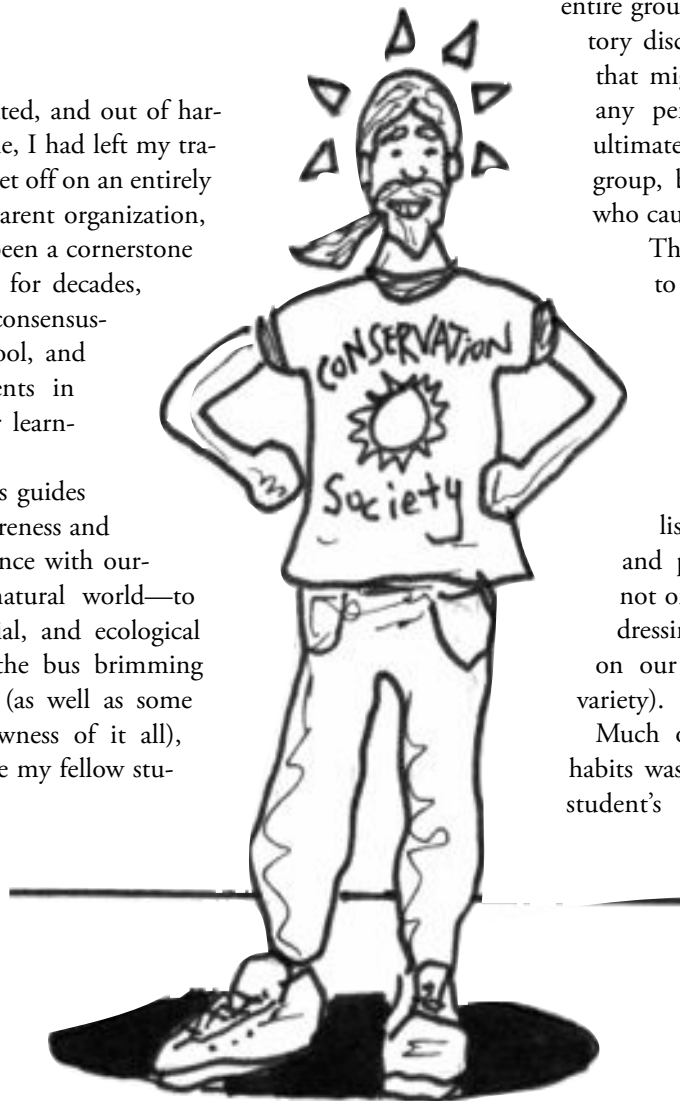
The Ecobus aimed to help its guides and students rediscover the awareness and practices needed to live in balance with ourselves, each other, and the natural world—to restore healthy individual, social, and ecological relationships. I stepped onto the bus brimming with idealism and enthusiasm (as well as some understandable fear at the newness of it all), and met the 22 people who'd be my fellow students and community-mates for most of the next year. The first lesson, about t-shirts, while unexpected, felt strangely liberating. The nuances of the issue seemed less important

than the opportunity to be "in this together." Something about the black-and-white framing of it, the radical shake-up of the default mode of being in the modern world (in which advertising was so pervasive that few questioned putting it on their bodies), comforted, even exhilarated me. The t-shirt decision solidified us as a tribe. Many more such decisions followed.

When applying to join the bus program, all of us had already consented to certain norms. We'd agreed to eat whatever was served, rather than following different diets. (Catering to individual dietary needs, we were told, would be too complicated and would also divide the group.) Dedicated meat-eaters, the guides made it clear that meat would be a regular element in the group diet. Although I'd been vegetarian for three years, I had agreed to this change in diet because I'd felt desperate for an actual group experience that would bring me back into harmony with the world and myself. There would be no alcohol, drugs, or tobacco, restrictions which were fine by me. Quite significant for many students, we had also agreed to refrain from "exclusive relationships" while on the bus—meaning not only sexual relationships, but "best friend" and confidant-type relationships. Our primary relationship was to be to the group as a whole—nothing could be said to any individual that was not OK to share with the entire group. (As those who tested this territory discovered, anything said to anyone that might raise any "issues" or indicate any personal or interpersonal tension ultimately would be aired in the whole group, by that person or by the person who caught wind of it.)

The men on the bus had also agreed to cut their hair so that the tops of the ears were visible, and to remove facial hair, because we didn't want to offend some of the "resource people" we'd meet on our travels by appearing to be hippies. We'd received a list of suggested clothing to bring, and partly as a result, we ended up not only cutting our hair similarly, but dressing similarly (though the patterns on our flannel shirts showed a bit of variety).

Much of the uniformity in our living habits was dictated by our situation. Each student's belongings needed to fit in a small cubby on the bus and a backpack on the roof. Living outdoors and camping, essential parts of the educational experience, were the only options





available to us. Some of us tended to sleep in tents, others under tarps, others under the stars, but we all slept outside except in the direst weather emergencies (which occurred on perhaps two nights during my two years with the program).

* * *

I found the new experience of sleeping outside deeply satisfying. I'd grown up in a suburb of New York City, and had been camping only a few times in my life. The Ecobus took us to beautiful natural places all over the country, exposed us to environments more varied and awe-inspiring than I could ever have imagined, and put us in direct, tactile contact with the earth every night. Not every camping experience occurred in the wilderness—in fact, wilderness hikes comprised just a fraction of our time together—but whether camping in a town, on a Native American reservation, in a developed state park, at a KOA campground, or in the backcountry, we were opening ourselves up to the outdoors, becoming comfortable with the earth (rather than a building) as our home. Given the previous trajectory of my life, I probably never would have done this on my own.

Camping felt quite empowering. Not only was I less dependent on "civilization," and able to take care of my own (minimal) shelter needs (with a little help from modern tent and tarp materials), but I shared my bedroom with the natural world, which I realized held more beauty and endurance than anything we humans can construct.

Sleeping outside together in a group of 23 people every night also offered a unique experience of community. Even when we spread out (as we often did), I felt a sense of solidarity with others that I have rarely felt in my life. For years afterward I would periodically miss that feeling—especially when I was

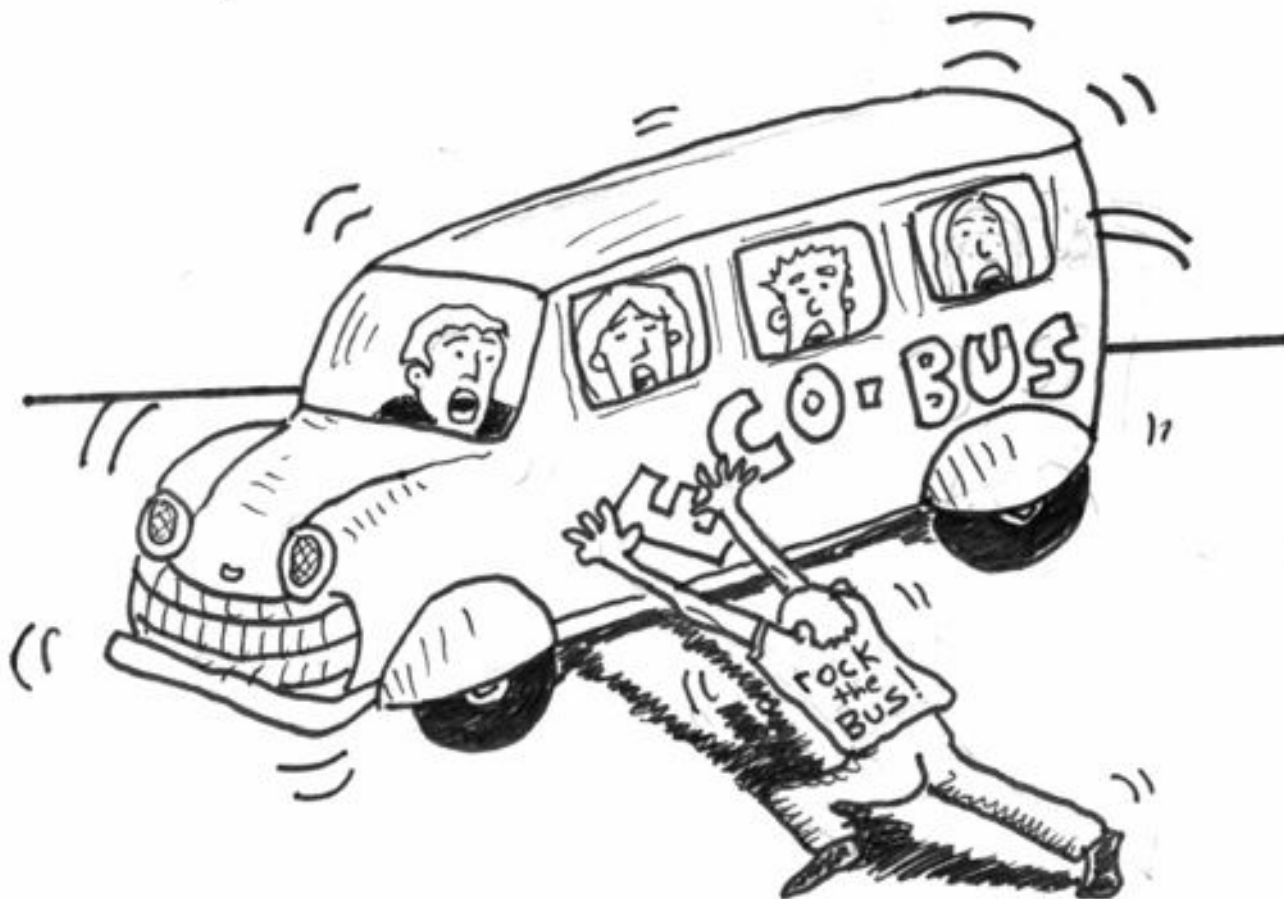
continuing to sleep outside, as all good Ecobus students did, but no one around me was. Where were my Ecobus mates? At those times, I would miss the tribal togetherness that had us all sleeping out together, whether the weather was balmy or extreme (as it sometimes was).

Dedicating ourselves to this practice, especially when it wasn't easy, challenged us and brought us together. If any of us had slept inside (in those rare situations where that might have been possible), it would have felt like a betrayal. In fact, sleeping outside was not only a practical matter—it was a moral statement and essential sign of our alignment. It embodied our commitment and loyalty to the group and to the earth. It was a nonnegotiable part of being an Ecobus participant. It was part of the same reassuring, black-and-white package of lifestyle choices that had us flipping our t-shirts inside out, eating whatever the group as a whole ate, refraining from couple relationships, and grooming and dressing ourselves nearly identically. It unified us as Ecobus students. It brought power to the group.

* * *

And at least once, it brought unexpected discord. On a night fairly early during my first year on the bus, we had set up camp in a state park, and many of us had chosen to sleep without tent or tarp, under the clear, star-filled sky. Part way through the night, an unanticipated rainstorm wakened us. Those without weather protection faced a choice: take their tent or tarp down from the roof of the bus and set it up in the pouring rain, or crawl under the large, roofed picnic shelter that was next to our campground. Most of the unprotected campers chose the latter course, and woke up in the morning relatively dry, grateful for the fortuitous location of that shelter.

But not everyone was so happy at this good fortune. At our



morning meeting (we met, always as a whole group, for several hours on most days), one of the guides uttered the “magic words” (words that were repeated, by various people, quite frequently—and that almost always resulted in a stoppage of all other activity and a devotion of the entire group’s attention to the issue, for as long as it took to deal with it): “I have something to bring up.”

He described what had happened the previous night, and asked if the people who’d chosen to sleep under the pre-constructed shelter had anything to say for themselves: What had they been thinking? How did their choice reflect our desire to be self-reliant, to set up our own shelters? Hadn’t it been an example of taking the easy way out? Didn’t it contradict what we stood for as a group? Wasn’t this the first step on a slippery slope that would have us sleeping inside shelters built by others elsewhere as well? Had they honestly believed that this was the best choice to make? How serious were they about this program, anyway?

The students offered some explanations and apologies, but by this time most people knew that genuine debate was not wanted, that acquiescence was the only safe route, the course of least damage. They promised never to do it again. Had someone felt empowered enough to challenge the guide’s assertions, they might have said:

That park shelter was built much more sustainably, using more local and durable materials, than our nylon tents and tarps made in China. The more we set up and take down those tarps and tents, especially in inclement conditions, the sooner they will wear out. The environmentally responsible choice is

to make use of an existing resource rather than, for arbitrary ideological reasons, using an alternative with larger negative impacts.

The guide might well have responded that sometimes the best choices *do* exact environmental costs, and that in this case the purity of our camping experience, our direct contact with the earth, held more importance than the negligible wear and tear on our equipment. But that conversation never happened, and none of us actually got to make that choice. Or rather we *did* make it—we ran by “consensus,” after all (in unfacilitated meetings dominated by the loudest voices and without any training or formal consensus process)—but we made it under great duress. We had already given our power of choice away to those who ran the Ecobus. We already understood that we were there not to learn by making choices and seeing the results of those choices—we were there to learn by following the leaders’ choices and adopting their worldview, or at least trying to.

* * *

In the first week or two, actual multi-sided conversations, exchanges of ideas held independently by individuals on the bus, had still attempted to occur. But the pattern established by our initial t-shirt discussion asserted itself quickly: if given a chance, people might start to share their own perspectives, but the guides and second-year students quickly moved in with the “Ecobus” interpretation of whatever we were discussing. Most problems were the result of “Prejudice Against Nature.” “White-smockers” (soulless reductionist scientists, obsessed

with measurements and logical arguments and cut off from the living, breathing earth) shared the blame for the plight of the planet with greedy corporations and clueless consumers. Most educational institutions (except the Ecobus) deliberately separated us from the earth in order to mold us into cogs in the machine of western civilization, which was destroying the planet and the native peoples who once lived in harmony with it. Our feelings were the voice of nature speaking through us, and they connected us with the rest of the living earth. By returning to actual, experiential connections with “Culture, Nature, and Self”—by recreating our understandings of and relationships to those, as we formed a subculture more attuned to them—we could help heal the damage the dominant culture had done.

The worldview was compelling in many ways, and I still believe that much of it has validity. I also now see other aspects of it as oversimplified, black-and-white interpretations of a nuanced, “gray” world. But during the Reagan years, that world seemed to have gone mad, as ecological concerns had been pushed to the margins (and often off the edge) of the national discourse. Corporations had seized power in Washington. The agencies responsible for our parks and wildlands had been deprived of enforcement power and taken over by corporate lackeys, and even most environmental groups had been forced to compromise until there was nothing left to give away. Our Secretary of Interior believed that the end of the world was near, and that if humans failed to use up all additional natural “resources” by that time, we would have sinned by failing to utilize the gifts that God had given us. He gleefully urged mining, drilling, and resource extraction everywhere—the more the better. In this atmosphere, the radical, often antagonistic response exemplified by the Ecobus seemed not only understandable, but justified.

Conversations would not end until all seemed to have “agreed” or at least acquiesced to the guides’ point of view—until all dissenting voices were silent. The processes of forming consensus in our day-to-day decisions and of figuring out the meanings and reasons behind the issues we discussed relied on attrition, on wearing down the will of those who may have seen things a bit differently but got tired of arguing. Ultimately, resistance to the dominant view seemed futile—an ironic twist, in that our group prided itself on resisting the worldview of the dominant culture. Perhaps, in holding strong to that resistance,

we needed an unusual degree of unity—one that, if it didn’t come naturally, had to be forced or constructed.

By a month into the program each year, most students wouldn’t even bother stating an obviously alternative viewpoint—in fact, they seemed in competition with one another to articulate the “Ecobus” viewpoint first. How did we feel about the stripmine? As student after student reiterated (reinforced by the guides’ approval), it was a rape of the earth. I had also noticed how colorful and awe-inspiring the rock exposed by the mining was—I had actually enjoyed seeing it—but I didn’t dare say so. I kept quiet.

* * *

I noticed that I kept quiet a lot. Long discussions would go by and I wouldn’t say a word. Some other students wouldn’t either. Near the end of each discussion, a guide or one of the more voluble students, usually a second-year, would say, “I wonder why so-and-so [often ‘Chris’ during the first year, until I learned to prevent it by saying at least *something* before being called out] hasn’t said anything? What is s/he thinking? Where is s/he at with this?”

In a group that discouraged alternative or more complex viewpoints, that pressured its participants into ideological conformity, it seems little wonder that some of us clammed up rather than giving our power away by saying things we didn’t wholeheartedly believe, or that didn’t express the full picture as we saw it. Instead, we chose to give our power away by *not* talking. I remember a period when I had difficulty articulating anything, even in normal conversation. I felt almost as if I’d lost my voice entirely; when I did manage to squeeze something out of my voicebox, it seemed to me strained, feeble, full of tension. People often asked me to repeat it, to speak up so they could hear me. I would, but I didn’t really feel like talking. In retrospect, I’m sure my physical voice faded away because I didn’t feel safe speaking about what was really going on inside, of which I was often in denial.

And yet, in a sense, I did also find my voice during those two years. I had been trained to be polite, socialized to not “rock the boat.” I had often censored myself rather than raising difficult questions or offering potentially critical perspectives. The Ecobus turned this formula on its head. The guides encour-





aged us to criticize ourselves and each other, to “bring things up” whenever we saw a hypocrisy or inconsistency, to hold each other accountable to our group covenants and ecological principles. Experienced Ecobusers made it a habit of *not* saying “good morning” or “hi” or even, it seemed, smiling—those would distract, apparently, from the weighty business of focusing on how we each were failing to live up to our ideals. Displays of affection, casual touch, and hugging were absent from our culture, and actively discouraged by the guides; in fact, predictably, one of them blocked a proposed group hug at the beginning of my second year on the bus (such a thing had never even been proposed the first year), ensuring that the suggestion would never be repeated. A community we certainly were—but one committed to mutual challenge and confrontation rather than mutual support. The guides saw this as excellent training for challenging and confronting the people in agencies and companies who were ruining the planet—and we even got some practice with that, as we visited government offices and power plants and asked questions that made our hosts squirm.

Interestingly, the higher-ups seemed relatively immune to confrontation and challenge. Having figured out the “Ecobus way,” they were responsible for embodying and articulating it. When our bus got together with the two sister buses in the program, I noticed that the guides and students on those buses seemed to act in the same ways, have the same discussions, hold the same worldviews and opinions as our bus. In fact, all the guides seemed to hold the same philosophy and even use the same jargon as the original founder of the Ecobus program, who guided one of the buses. It turns out that all five of the non-founder guides had been proteges of the founder on the original Ecobus, and were now doing their best to spread his understandings, which had become their own.

And during the course of those two years, many of those understandings became my own as well. I found that a lot of them did make sense to me; they helped me understand and

interpret the world in ways I hadn’t before. Especially in my second year, I became more outspoken on the bus. I felt that I agreed with most of the philosophy but didn’t always agree with how we were attempting to embody it.

Increasingly, I felt able to “rock the boat” when I thought it needed rocking. I challenged the meat-eating dictum on environmental grounds, and almost succeeded in converting my bus to vegetarianism on a trial basis (stopped only by a couple holdouts who were unwilling to even attempt it). I remember questioning how much time we spent driving around instead of staying in one place. I found myself able to express my perceptions of other people and their personal challenges (as well as my own), and I rediscovered my ability to write. I was no scientist, just a beginning student of ecology, and a very poor naturalist at that point in my life, but in the areas of “psychology” and “English” I got high marks from fellow Ecobusers (both figuratively, and literally, in our very awkward mutual-grading ritual at the end of each semester). I also discovered a passion for Native American culture, which led me, upon graduation, to move to a reservation I’d first visited with the Ecobus. For the next four years, I continued to follow the “Ecobus code” by sleeping outside in all but the very most inclement weather, including all through the winter. And to this day, I have continued to be influenced by the ecological and cultural perspectives I gained on the bus, although I see that they were infected by varying degrees of fundamentalism, intolerance, decidedly *uncompassionate* communication, pseudo-consensus, dysfunctional power dynamics, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and naivete.

* * *

When I tell people about my times on the bus, they have one of two reactions: “That sounds *amazing!*” “That sounds *awful!*” Often the same person says both things during the course of the conversation; the order of the statements depends only on

which parts of the story I happen to tell first.

Our group had experiences in natural ecosystems, on Native American reservations, in other land-based subcultures (from communities of Mennonite farmers to Appalachian mountain dwellers to remote Sierra Nevada homesteaders) that affected many of us profoundly, and permanently expanded our ideas about the world and its possibilities. We also witnessed power plants, mines, chicken factories, and environmental devastation; we spent time with policy makers and wild food foragers, folklorists and archaeologists, activists and conservationists. We all picked up musical instruments, sang together (learning songs particular to each region of the country we visited), and held our own contra-dances. We eschewed consumerism, mass media, and electronic entertainment of all sorts (although laptop computers and cell phones didn't yet exist, we would likely have boycotted those too). In their absence, we created, however awkwardly, our own culture and lives together during those years.

We talked and formed community. Were we always speaking our full truth, and was it a community of equals? No, and no. We each gained some inner power, and lost some inner power, by joining this tribe. Fortunately, most of us still had many decades ahead of us to continue to figure out how best to speak about our feelings (which we'd been told were the most important things, nature's way of expressing itself through us); how to relate most effectively with others (by being more compassionate, and less judgmental, than we'd been on the bus); how to connect most fully with the earth (for me, it wasn't riding around in a bus and camping, but rather gardening and immersing myself in local ecosystems in place-based intentional communities); how to distinguish between choices that were truly ours and choices that we made under pressure; and how to integrate everything we'd experienced on the bus in ways that empowered rather than disempowered us.

* * *

An intense, 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week world unto itself, the Ecobus asked for total commitment from its participants. Was it a "cult"? In the sense that most people mean it, maybe it was. But the ease with which that label can apply to many aspects of it proves to me the uselessness of that label. I learned and grew through my time on the Ecobus in ways that I value to this day. My experience on the bus made unique contributions to my life, both through its "positive" and "negative" lessons, influencing everything I've done since. And it left

me with many memories (most more comical than troubling in retrospect, and many of them beautiful) that continue to inspire me, or at least provide good fodder for conversation. You haven't heard the half of them.

But here are a few more: there was the night we were drenched by the municipal sprinklers set on "automatic" in the town park; the frigid winter evenings sitting in a circle around a non-campfire talking about how cold we were, but how the act of enduring extreme low temperatures was more aligned with nature than building a fire; the hike along Baxter State Park's narrow Knife Edge, during which several of us had uncontrollable bowel ailments...and the welcome we felt at southwestern pueblo dances; the quiet of a backcountry canoe trip; the transcendent beauty of the song of the canyon wren; the glimpses we offered each other into our own complex, tender inner worlds, in which the answers were seldom quite as easy as those offered by any single worldview, no matter how compre-

hensive. And there were the many times when we got past the words and I felt, on a much deeper, more tactile level, that we were indeed part of the earth, living in community with

one another in ways that were *not* forced, finding our power from sources more fundamental and enduring than the relatively insignificant human power dynamics of the day.

About the t-shirts: I now wear them right-side out...except when I choose not to. ☹️

Postscript: In the decades following my two years on the Ecobus, the program evolved considerably. A new generation of leaders replaced the original guides, introducing new ideas, a much greater emphasis on diversity (in everything from thought to diet), increased bioregional focus, and more compassionate communication. Yet there were also tradeoffs; latter-year students, who could enroll on a single bus for only a semester at a time (a shortened and more-expensive one at that), by most reports experienced less

intensity, less unity, less commitment, fewer contra-dances danced, and fewer folk songs learned. Regrettably, financial and organizational challenges eventually forced the cessation of the Ecobus program. It is sorely missed and still mourned by many of its alumni, from every era.



Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES and currently calls Rutledge, Missouri's tri-communities area home.

The Awesome Power of the Non-Consenting Voice

By Arjuna da Silva

I feel wonderful being admitted into a circle of consensus decision makers and participating in an egalitarian, democratic process. Here in our group, in our own small way, we can still fulfill some of the promise of empowerment that may not be achievable in our public or political lives. Consensus is so seductive, so utopian-sounding, it's hard not to feel eager for the chance to finally cast our judicious perspectives on the issues of the day.

At its core, consensus harkens from a deep spiritual understanding that there is intelligence in the mindful collective, that no one person has all the facts or has access to all pertinent information, and that contributions of genius and serendipitous solutions can come from any direction. If consensus processes are baffling and frustrating for many of us, it may be because we haven't completely given in to this spiritual underpinning.

At the same time that it is awesome to work with a group seeking a true consensus of its members, it can be hazardous if one's passion for participating becomes a hindrance to the group's ongoing smooth functioning. Most of us come to consensus decision making with no background in it—nor in conflict resolution—at all. Whereas the structural steps in the process are usually fairly easy to master, skill in staying on track *toward fulfillment* of others' needs or desires takes time—and sincere intention—to develop.

Dr. Dan Siegel, author of the book *Mindsight*, says research shows that children who get a lot of “no” in their upbringing have a very different kind of brain development from those who get plenty of “yes.” If you think of the kinds of feelings you have when someone turns you down, how whatever you were enthusiastic about a moment ago can feel all shot to hell now, and multiply that energy into a day-in, day-out pattern,

it begins to make sense that so many people in our society are so bummed out, so uninspired, so unable to be creative and encouraging to others.

Some of us were impacted by a lot of “no” energy growing up at home; some of us got it at school; and some of us got it socially from our peers. One or more of these “contributions” to our development, according to research in the *Mindsight* movement, affects not only our self-esteem and confidence, but our health, our intelligence, and our maturity.

If you think of your decision-making group as its members' child, at least in the sense that it's probably a tender, wobbly work-in-progress, and then think about how the atmosphere of the group shifts and changes as conversations go from ideas and proposals to opinions and approvals (or not), it's easy to

see how the way a group functions—its morale, optimism, clear thinking, and cohesion—is affected by a lack of “yes.” (To experiment

There's a nice glow in the room until someone clears their throat and says, “I hate to tell you this, y'all, but I am opposed to this project.”

with the power of “no” in our language, try knocking the “no's” out of your vocabulary for a while; this includes not, never, don't, can't, won't, and any other derivative of “no.”)

Given the power of “no,” and the way the freedom to say it can be abused, we might begin to wonder if there's a more conscious way to use our authority to dissent than we already do, both in our decision-making meetings and in the conversations that lead up to them.

There are also several ways the power of the consenting voice can be used to the group's detriment, including *hogging the mike* (power through coercion), *doubting everything* (power through stalling), *objecting without suggesting* (power through authority), and *scaring folks* (power through traumatics). Each of these produces an energetic or atmospheric disturbance in the group field. People begin to fidget, their minds wander, they



Chris Roth

lose focus—for the most part. Occasionally, groups will have at least one member who is a skilled vibeswatcher and can call the group back to focus by mentioning the shift and suggesting a conscious return to presence. If the disturbance was mild, this may be possible. If its affect was more troubling, perhaps time out to address the fractured energetics can be spent using a tool from the group's toolbox for clearing the air.*

For me, however, the most awful thing that happens to us at proposal time is the immediate response of self-protection. If, like me, you have energy you're not always aware of that's on guard about what might deter, hinder, or otherwise prevent you from realizing a dream, that might be the first filter you apply to any proposal potentially affecting you. Have you noticed yourself whether your first response is "How can this work for Jane or Harvey?" or more like "Hmm...what does this mean for me?"

One would hope, one would think, that in a consensus community, we can safely believe that others will want our needs and desires to be satisfied if possible. And yet....

There's more than one way at Earthaven to stall things. Say someone (or a small group or committee) shows up at a Council meeting with a well-prepared proposal, maybe one they've been working on a while. Then a round of comments

are made, peaceably and thoughtfully, and those in the circle who find the proposal reasonable, maybe given a tweak or two, are feeling that nice feeling that comes with working together toward a useful or creative goal. There's a nice glow in the room until someone clears their throat and says, "I hate to tell you this, y'all, but I am opposed to this project. It's taking us in the wrong direction, etc., etc., etc."

Typically, if I support the proposal (or the person proposing it), I may feel defensive and on guard. Or if I also don't like it, I may feel relieved that I'm not alone in my concerns, that I may have a posse to support my objection, if it comes to that. But if I'm serious about pursuing the long-term benefits of a pure consensus, if my group is willing to struggle with differences and paradoxes and to make hard decisions about specific issues (even risking being inconsistent and "led by Spirit"), what might ensue is a marked uplift in the group's good energy.

When members of a consensus decision-making group, who are feeling well-connected and even light-hearted, can't hold on to their good vibes because someone expresses opposition during a proposal's discussion, clouds gather in the consensus sky. Without remarkable facilitation, those funky vibes can spread through the group and take its energy down. I call it The Great

(continued on p. 76)

*At Earthaven, where I live, we're collecting tools. When things get hot, either right in a meeting or when it's clear something's really up, we may use ZEGG Forum technique, or remind each other that Compassionate Communication methods for expressing (and listening to) feelings and needs work miraculously well in many, many circumstances.

The Power of Process: How WindSong Created its Community Contribution System

By Andrea Welling

Whether you live in a small community with a few homes or a large community such as WindSong Cohousing with 34 homes and close to 100 residents, community maintenance is non-negotiable. The community needs to be cleaned and maintained, the records kept, the meetings run, minutes kept, the garden tended, and garbage removed.

WindSong (located in Langley, British Columbia) started with a voluntary community contribution system that worked well for a number of years. Over time, though, as concerns were raised and the issues became more complex, our simple discussion process didn't seem to work. We would talk in circles about a large array of topics related to contribution and then attempt to make some small changes to help the situation. While some of these changes would help, ongoing issues about fairness and burnout continued to come up again and again with increasing frustration.

Finding the way forward wasn't about jumping in and doing something quickly. Instead, it was finding a *process* that would allow honest dialogue through focused and efficient discussion to allow the group consensus to emerge. This paper explains how WindSong created its Community Contribution System (CCS) using the ***Consensus Process for Complex Topics***; a process that could be used in any community to work through a difficult and/or complex issue.

The WindSong Cohousing Community is a 34-unit strata-titled complex. Although the community opened in 1996, a group of original residents worked from 1992-1996 to design, develop, and create WindSong. I arrived at WindSong in January 1998, a year and a half after the official ribbon-cutting.

When we arrived at WindSong, the community was all abuzz with projects everywhere to complete: kitchens to be finished, dining room chairs to purchase, painting the kids room, building the community gardens...and everyone was keen and new to WindSong and the projects kept coming and getting done. Everyone was learning about consensus decision-making and discovering new things every day about their interesting neighbours.

Cleaning and maintenance and social activities happened voluntarily and almost all community members were involved. Getting WindSong completed, livable, and lovely was high on everyone's priority list because it was so obvious the projects that needed to be completed.

A couple of years later, sometime after 2000, the community changed somewhat. Residents created their own businesses, some of the couples started having children, residents were branching out into the local community to pursue their passions for



dance, music, sports, and spiritual interests. Also, for various reasons, some original members moved. Jobs moved to other cities, families needed to live elsewhere, and a few residents decided for various reasons that cohousing wasn't the right mix for them.

New residents moved in. Some residents were feeling that they barely had time to clean their own houses, let alone spend afternoons cleaning WindSong.

Initially, the voices concerned about fairness were a handful of residents. Over time, as certain issues continued to resurface, the handful turned into a third or more of the community, and one community member, out of frustration, was approaching individual members to ask them about whether they were participating or not. This questioning wasn't well received by the members and the issue of their participation remained a concern.

The Building and Maintenance coordinator at the time was feeling burnt-out and concerns were being raised about getting

work done, jobs falling through the cracks, and worry about properly maintaining our community investment.

For the next three to four years, various concerns about participation would come to the community meetings. During these discussions, we created an effective team system that is part of the current CCS. Nonetheless, issues about fairness, getting work done, who is included, how many hours should residents work each month, how to address gaps, etc. kept coming up, but given the complexity of the topic, it seemed almost impossible to create consensus. There was also a strong polarity between community members who wanted a more formal system and those who wanted to keep the status quo.

Rather than focus on the issues or the solutions, a small team was formed to create an effective process to lead us through the complexity to reach full consensus.

In addition to the six steps of the *Consensus Process for Complex Topics* (see below), we included these important ele-



Photos courtesy of Andrea Welling

Howard and Alan C.: endurance and teamwork.

Painting mural.



Nyjal, Myra, and wood chips.



Attempts to repress or not allow certain concerns to be raised is a pitfall, because they will almost inevitably resurface later.

ments: preparedness, focused facilitation, openness, acknowledgment, allowing for authentic sharing, sticking to time and agenda agreements, and not rushing.

Consensus Process for Complex Topics

1. Scope of the topic.

- What is the scope of the topic to be addressed?
- The facilitator keeps the group focused on the scope of the topic only.
- As people wander into discussion and debate around parts of the topic, reassure

them that they will have an opportunity later to get into the details.

2. Brainstorm areas of concern related to the topic.

- What are the specific areas of concern related to the topic?
- Allow the brainstorm to happen in whatever order it happens.
- The facilitator lists every concern and creates safety for people to express the breadth and depth of concerns.
- If the full range of concerns is not reached, more can be added later.

- Attempts to repress or not allow certain concerns to be raised is a pitfall, because they will almost inevitably resurface later and potentially hijack/derail or slow the process down even further.
- As people wander into discussion and debate around the specifics of the concerns, reassure them that they will have an opportunity later to get into the details.

3. Categorize the areas of concern into many small and manageable topics.

- This categorization can be done by one person or a team of persons.
- The final list should be shown to the group to ensure that nothing has been missed.

4. Discuss each area of concern on its own.

- The facilitator needs to keep the discussion focused on the area of concern only.

5. Allow consensus to emerge from the discussion of concerns.

- Resist the urge to discuss or create consensus about solutions.
- Create consensus about **concerns** first.
- A variety of techniques and formats can be used to facilitate the discussion of concerns, and are best tailored to the size and type of group and the topic.
- Some concerns will need more research or more time to allow the group to contemplate and consider the various options.
- If this step is not pushed through by an agenda, a group consensus will emerge.
- When consensus is hard to reach, consider asking specific individuals if they are willing to step aside, determine how personal preferences are shaping their concerns, and remind everyone to find the consensus that is the best for

the group.

6. Once consensus is reached on the concerns, appropriate solutions will follow.

Since the creation of WindSong's Community Contribution System, concerns and issues about participation have dropped dramatically and allowed us to pay for work when needed. Those individuals who wanted to keep the status quo were willing to step aside. Those individuals carrying resentment about fairness were able to let it go. Those individuals who felt guilty about not participating enough had more options to include themselves that were easy to understand and applied consistently to everyone.

In order to keep CCS working, some administrative work was needed initially to collect deposits and orient members. Ongoing CCS administration takes one to two hours per month and involves collecting reports and following up with individuals as well as creating a seasonal gap list. Once standard forms were created, this administration work was simple.

After three years, all members are in good standing and it has not yet been necessary to bring any CCS participation issues to the community. If that is ever necessary, we now have a Community Agreements Team in place to follow-up.

In conclusion, we managed to create our Community Contribution System through a strong process. This process can be used for any complex topic that your community is struggling to address. And if participation is the issue in your community, don't reinvent the wheel; try our process and watch what emerges. 🐣

Andrea Welling, B.A., M.A. is an active facilitator at WindSong Cohousing (www.windsong.bc.ca) and has been working with consensus decision making and using innovative group processes for over 10 years. Her specialty is to help groups take a "stuck" issue and create an effective process to allow the group consensus to emerge. Her diverse background includes co-owner of Ladybug Organics, Green Party candidate, personal trainer, and MomCoach.

WindSong's Community Contribution System Agreement

The following are excerpts from Windsong's CCS agreement; for the full text, email Andrea Welling at andrea@momcoach.ca.

Intention

The spirit and intent of this CCS proposal is "Not about who is watching *whom*, but about who is watching *what*."

WindSong's cleaning and maintenance is simply too big for two or three people to look out for. We need to borrow everybody's eyes to really know what needs doing to maintain the fullness of WindSong's well-being, including social connections and social events.

Some of us see "things" better than others. We see when things are "out of whack" or broken, or needs fixing. Some of us see "energy" better than others. We notice when the energy in WindSong needs tending. And some of us see social connections and disconnections better than others and can tell what needs doing. We can use everybody's different way of seeing things. All of these ways of contributing one's eyes and hands matter.

Accountability

Each household must do an amount of work based on a minimum amount of three hours/month for each adult above the age of 19, or the equivalent of \$30/month (e.g., a household consisting of three adults over 19 will need to account for its minimum quota of nine hours/month total, or \$90/month). If a household's CCS account is in arrears at the end of a CCS quarter, the situation will be brought to a community meeting. .

Each CCS quarter, a community-wide list of all areas and jobs getting done and not getting done will be posted for the community to view. Names of WindSongers responsible for individual areas, team coordinators responsible for larger areas, and overall administrative CCS coordinators, will also be posted, so that members will know with whom to communicate concerns about gaps noticed and/or appreciations for the tasks getting accomplished in these areas.

Coordination and Tracking System:

Level 1: Individuals

All WindSong adults are responsible for the ownership of a particular job and/or area that they have signed up for. That individual keeps track of how consistently the job gets done, how long it takes to do the job, and his/her own CCS hours that become a part of his/her household's total monthly CCS quota. Since the definition of CCS is broad, individuals are encouraged to find some kind of job that fits their ability. At a minimum, it is the individual's responsibility to communicate any gaps that he/she notices to the team coordinator, including if their job is not getting done.

Level 2: Team Coordinators

Each team coordinator is responsible for tracking a particular area of the current CCS job sign-up sheet. Team coordinators are also responsible for tracking their overall area with respect to minimum standards, and to communicate such standards, and can request support from the CCS coordinators. Team coordinators are also responsible for organizing blitzes periodically.

Level 3: CCS Administrative Coordinators

CCS coordinators will create and track the overall accountability system, create the communication systems that will help individual coordinators and team coordinators track gaps, support the team coordinators to help fill job gaps, orient new people to the system, and keep track of and balance the quarterly CCS household accounts. Any community member can approach the CCS administrative team with any questions regarding the status of any particular area or job concern in the overall maintenance, sustenance, and well-being of WindSong.

THE STRAW POLL THAT BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK

As a process consultant I get the chance to observe firsthand which methods consensus groups tend to use to work their way through issues. One of the most common is the straw poll, employed to determine which way and how strongly the wind is blowing part way through a discussion. As a consensus trainer I cordially detest straw polls, and I want to make the case for why this is not a good practice.

[Years ago J.R.R. Tolkien wrote that he “cordially detested” allegory when responding to a suggestion that *Lord of the Rings* was written with Hitler as the prototype for Sauron, and I’ve been nurturing that turn of phrase ever since, hoping that I’d eventually be able to dust it off and put it back into play. This, I think, is finally the right occasion.]

Think of me as the Big Bad Process Lupine who is going to huff and puff and attempt to blow down the house of straw... (OK, so I get carried away with metaphors.)

Consensus is a process that is altogether different from Voting. While Consensus is based on the concept that the best decisions will emerge from the full group being in alignment about how to proceed, Voting is based on the idea that the best proposal will emerge from a healthy competition.

In Consensus a proposal does not advance to acceptance if there are any principled objections—even one; in Voting it only takes a majority of votes for a proposal to succeed. Living in the US, nearly everyone has experience with parliamentary proce-

sure and democratic decision-making that relies on majority rule. While there are a number of possible variations, in the main, Voting works like this: proposals are put forward, their merits are debated, and eventually there’s a vote. If one proposal garners a majority, it passes and the matter is settled.

One of the reasons I’m uncomfortable with consensus groups using straw polls is that it’s a form of voting (albeit a non-binding one), and one of the more common difficulties that groups have in fully realizing the potential of Consensus is that they struggle to create a culture of collaboration (perhaps because

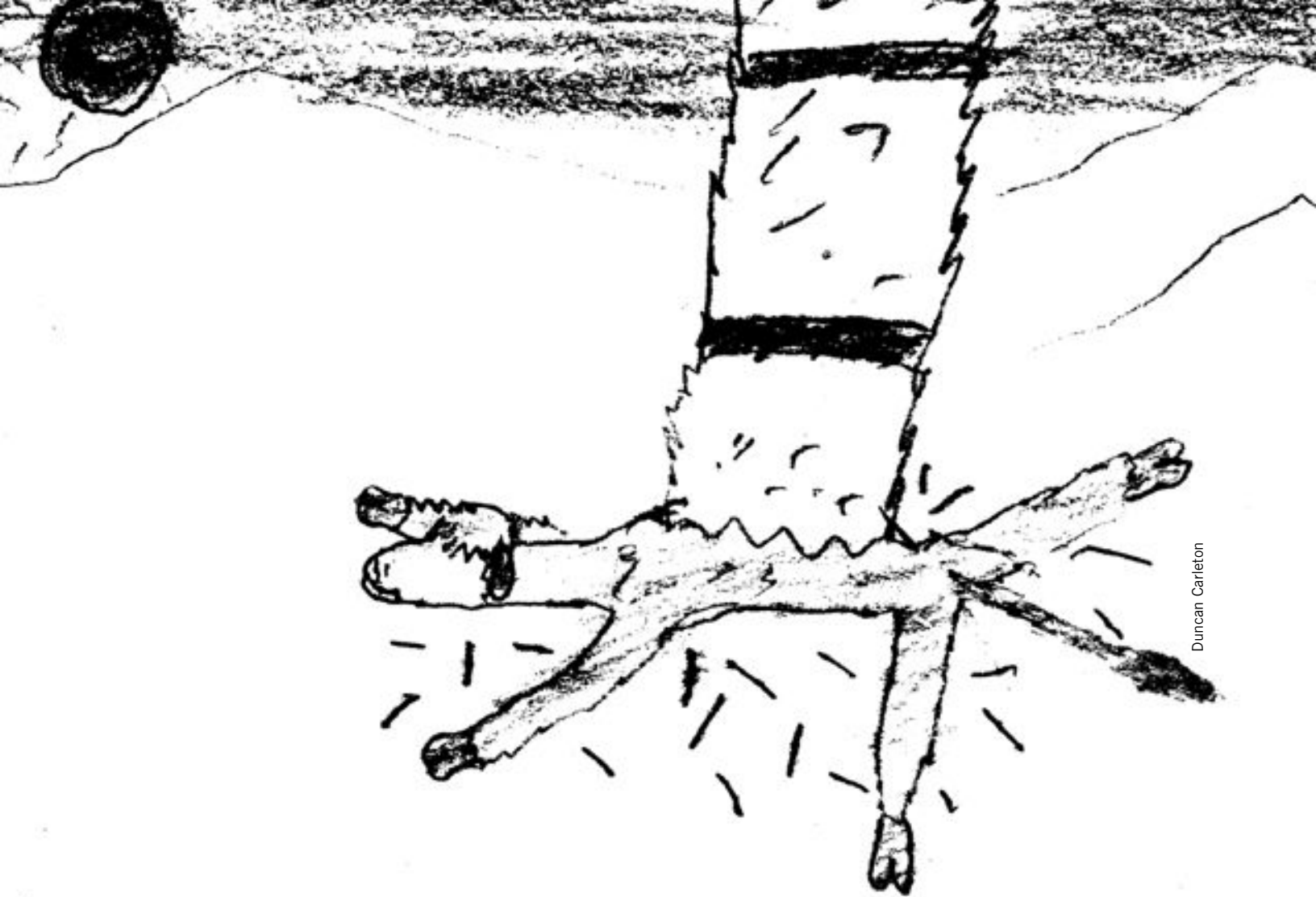
they don’t even perceive the need for it). If a group attempts to superimpose Consensus on a culture of Voting, then you’re just talking about unanimous voting, and it’s no wonder that many groups

report frustration and weak results (as the only proposals that can jump that high bar are typically so watered down as to have little potency for addressing issues).

Thus, I’m highly concerned that if a consensus group uses straw polls, they’ll be keeping alive a competitive dynamic that undercuts the attempt to build and maintain the requisite collaborative culture.

The point of straw polls is to test for the presence of momentum favoring one response to an issue over another. The idea is that this will clear the fog and help the group move productively through the forest (or at least the thicket) of ideas. While there is undoubtedly a need for groups to know where they are

I’m highly concerned that if a consensus group uses straw polls, they’ll be keeping alive a competitive dynamic that undercuts the attempt to build and maintain the requisite collaborative culture.



Duncan Carleton

in a conversation and what aspects hold the most promise for being a path through the woods, I think there are better ways to meet that need than with straw polls.

When a group votes, the intention is that the group will be influenced to move in the direction of the majority. (I know that's not always what happens, but that's what the people who propose straw polls are hoping will happen.) No matter how many times you insist that the straw poll is not binding and is informational only, whenever you vote you are invoking the culture of Voting, and the group can hardly help but be influenced by that dynamic. Those in the majority start to relax (after all, they're winning); those in the minority start to feel the pressure (c'mon, you're holding up progress). Some people who suspect they are in the minority may even alter their voting so as not to be singled out for this kind of attention. To the extent that the group slides back into the culture of Voting, it moves out of the collaborative environment where everyone is working purposefully and trustingly toward a we're-all-on-the-same-team solution that everyone can support.

Better, I think, is for the group (led by the facilitator) to learn to follow the energy of a discussion, diligently identifying and working all relevant ends of the discussion (not just trying to

find the road where most of the traffic is). Instead of asking the group which views seem to be dominant (the point of a straw poll), you can ask instead, "What ideas do people have that will bridge the disparate concerns expressed?" In a Voting culture the conversation pivots around advocacy (of one's own position) and challenges (of differing viewpoints). In a Consensus culture, the conversation should revolve around how to develop agreements that balance and connect all the factors. You are looking for how to draw an elegant circle around all the input—not just most of it.

Take some advice from the Big Bad Wolf: if want to built an enduring collection of consensus agreements, go light on the straw. It may come at a price that's too heavy. 🐺



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. An earlier version of this essay first appeared as the January 9, 2010 entry in Laird's blog; find it at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

Bursting the Bubble:

The Challenges of Progressive Com-

Many who live in progressive communities liken themselves to living in a bubble. Nearly everyone has an organic garden, enjoys natural foods and cooperative living, hates war, loves peace, and votes Democratic or Green Party. Except for the occasional pick-up truck to haul compost or firewood, gas guzzlers are nowhere to be seen, and there are a higher number of bicycles per capita.

In most progressive communities, there is little serious crime. Marijuana use is often tolerated, cigarette smoke is frowned upon, and what theft or vandalism occurs is usually from bored teens. But the bubble is often shaken or it bursts when the larger society presses in with its more serious afflictions, often stemming from oil and consumer addictions—a proposed new Wal-Mart, a dirty power plant, or a large-scale development. This often galvanizes a progressive community into unified action, and sometimes the culprit is defeated. This is easier done when the progressive community encapsulates most of a particular town, such as Brattleboro, Vermont, and entire regions of the Pacific Northwest. But small progressive communities often have it tough. In these enclaves, the dominant culture presses in on all sides, both in large and small ways.

Take the place where I live. It's a neighborhood community called Spiral Garden, tucked away in the piney woods south of Tallahassee, Florida in a largely low-income region. About 20 families and individuals intentionally purchased land adjacent to each other to form the community's nucleus. We have footpaths extending throughout the community, thick forested areas, sinkholes for swimming, berry patches, and numerous gardens. Community potlucks occur almost weekly at different homes and there are volleyball games, work parties, and times when people pitch in to help neighbors in need. Small town utopia!

Our challenges often stem from the folks who border our small community in all directions. Many are good people, but with different values. NASCAR and country music are popular.



Paul and Kristy Force's three-story yurt in Spiral Garden.



Author's home in Spiral Garden.

The popping of firecrackers at New Year's and Fourth of July can stretch across several days. Occasional guns are fired at all times of year. The aromas of roasting meat on grills, and of burning garbage, are commonplace. Litter and dumping is a chronic problem. We are constantly picking up beer containers, fast food wrappers, non-winning lottery tickets, and empty cigarette packs from our roads and yards. If a distant siren goes off, the "surround sound" howl of dogs resembles a Yellowstone wolf pack.

Sometimes, petty theft occurs. At my family's self-built rustic house, situated on five wooded acres out of sight of other homes or the public road, we rarely locked our vehicles at night. Then, one night, a desperate young man wandered into our remote driveway and rummaged through our cars, taking CDs, loose change, and my daughter's checkbook. He was caught the next morning trying to cash checks made out to him, seeking his next crack cocaine fix.

Registered sex offenders settled in along our community's periphery. We learned about them through a public website. One friend inadvertently rented a house to one who had served five years in prison for repeatedly having sex with his 11-year-old stepdaughter. That caused consternation among

community members. The disturbing part about viewing the website was that these offenders lived throughout the region, in rich and poor neighborhoods. It was a sickness that crossed boundaries, and permeated bubbles.

What really shook our sense of security, however, occurred

on Tuesday, June 10th, 2008. That's when my road was closed off by police because my neighbor, Bo, had been murdered in his living room. He was

found face down in a pool of blood amid signs of a struggle, and his 1988 Cadillac was missing. Forensics workers in protective suits searched his house and yard for evidence.

Bo was an elderly African American on disability who had cancer and a heart condition. He loved people—few people he met remained strangers for long—and his greatest vice was drinking beer or whiskey and playing cards with his peers. He rarely entertained guests inside his small wood-framed house. His front yard was his living room. On the grass beside a mountain of aluminum cans around a small fire, Bo would sit with friends or relatives. His lively voice would often drift through the pines. I liked to stop and talk to him as part of my daily walk. He was Old Florida. "I was out fishing the other day at the Wakulla River bridge," he told me one day,

Everyone needs a bubble, whether it's the bubble of light created around one's self through meditation or the sense of security felt in one's home or community. But it can also be too rigid and confining.



Spiral Garden residents Paul Force and Lee Rigby (foreground) and Norma Skaggs and Pam Lightner (back row) share a laugh on Pam and Lee's porch.

“And I was catching ‘em—some big ole’ bream—and then this naked woman walked into the water at the landing and the fish stopped biting.” Naked women change the mojo of fishing; everyone knows that.

My dog, Bear, liked Bo, too. He would visit him almost daily, and I suspected that Bo would give him meat scraps and bones that couldn't be found at our home. Sometimes, after a visit, Bear wouldn't be hungry for several hours. If Bear somehow missed his daily visit—usually on hot days when he didn't like to move much—Bo would ask me about him almost accusingly, as if I had mercilessly chained him up. He loved that dog.

Like generations of pets before him, Bear had come to us voluntarily. Bo said he had seen some people drop him off at the end of the road. He wandered to our driveway and wouldn't leave. While Bear was extremely gentle, we quickly learned that he would not tolerate confinement or being on a leash under any circumstance. He was an escape artist. So, we let him wander freely, and he mostly limited his rounds to Bo's house and ours.

After the police wrapped Bo's body in black plastic and transported him to the county morgue for an autopsy, the yellow tape was removed from across our road. The white tent that had been erected to protect workers from a violent thunderstorm that had erupted that afternoon was taken down, and all of the police and other vehicles eventually left. Bo's small house and

yard was eerily quiet, suddenly empty of life. I sensed that Bo's spirit was unsettled. Given his health problems, I'm sure Bo knew his days were numbered, but he wouldn't want to go out like that. I said a prayer.

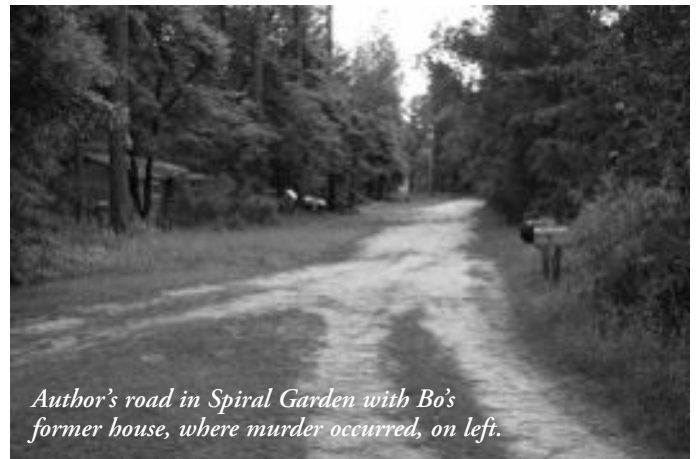
Three of the four people involved in Bo's murder were caught the next day. The perpetrators were a man and three women. Calvin Hills told police that when Bo answered the door, he hit him twice in the face and one of the women hit him repeatedly with a stick. After taking his wallet and car keys, they left Bo unconscious, not knowing if he was alive or dead. The four had previously done yard work for Bo, but they waited until nighttime to return and kill him. Hills said that he “knew what he was doing was wrong,” but he was “just caught up in the moment and was just thinking about getting money so he could purchase more crack cocaine.” Hills had a long record of previous arrests.

In reading about our area's history, I knew that roving bands of Civil War deserters were often the most desperate and dangerous men of their day. Now, it seemed to be drug addicts.

The day after Bo's body was removed, I heard voices and the sound of children's laughter at his house. I walked over. His daughter and grandkids had driven up from Tampa to clean out his place and prepare for the funeral. Bo's daughter was understandably hurt and angry. She appreciated my condolences, but she looked at me with pained eyes. “You didn't hear nothing



Some Spiral Garden community members in 2009. Author is in t-shirt in front row.



Author's road in Spiral Garden with Bo's former house, where murder occurred, on left.



Travel trailer home in Spiral Garden.



Paul and Kristy Force's sinkhole is often used for cooling off by community members.

that night?"

"No," I stammered. "I live a good ways up that driveway in the woods." Five acres separated our houses.

She nodded, understanding. "I think they surprised him," she said. "I think it was over real quick." She felt a need to give me the grisly details that the newspaper account had left out. I felt even worse.

I knew then that I couldn't help to protect my neighbor because of the bubble I had placed around my home in the form of acreage and natural beauty. I didn't hear the struggle, didn't hear the cries or gasps that may have occurred or the cranking of Bo's car as the perpetrators sped away into the darkness. Bo died alone. My dog slept through the whole thing, too, on our front porch.

A couple of days later, for the first time ever, my wife Cyndi said we should buy a gun. The bubble might need defending.

Interestingly, as timing goes, our annual neighborhood association meeting was the next Saturday. This was the best opportunity for neighbors inside and outside Spiral Garden to interact with each other. The main job of the neighborhood association was to maintain our unpaved roads so holes wouldn't grow into gaping pits that could swallow a front end. As expected, after the mandatory road discussion, Bo's murder was the main topic of discussion. The result? We agreed to work with local law enforcement to set up a neighborhood crime

watch system of neighbors watching out for other neighbors and reporting anything suspicious. It was a start. Our community bubble was becoming more elastic, and as part of the ensuing dialogue, we began to talk about other issues, such as the carcinogens released when burning plastic garbage. Communication can lead to education and a change in behavior. Maybe the path will lead to a discussion about global warming and what we as a broader community can do about it.

Everyone needs a bubble, whether it's the bubble of light created around one's self through meditation or the sense of security felt in one's home or community. It helps us function without paranoia, a launching pad towards self-actualization. But it can also be too rigid and confining. The boundaries have to be carefully explored and allowed to expand if the need arises. There are no easy answers, only the opportunities each day presents. 🐦



A recipient of three national writing awards, Doug Alderson is the author of seven books, including The Vision Keepers: Walking for Native Americans and the Earth (Quest Books). Additionally, his articles and photographs have been featured in magazines such as Sea Kayaker, Wildlife Conservation, American Forests, Sierra, Mother Earth News, and Shaman's Drum. For more information, log onto www.dougalderson.net.

Ad Astra per Aspera: Through Adversity to the Stars — A Community Member's Passage to India and Back

How must a student cooperative member readjust her sense of community and mindfulness in order to live in an ecovillage in India? Perhaps a better question is how she must deal with reentry into the United States and her original living situation once her stint in India has ended. These are two questions I faced this winter as I embarked on a journey to the state of Tamil Nadu to work on a reforestation project connected to the Auroville Community, just miles from the town of Pondicherry.

Although the Auroville community was founded in 1968 by the Mother, protégé of the philosopher and spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo, the community in which I lived and worked, called Sadhana Forest, was founded only six years ago in December of 2003 by an Israeli couple and their daughter. Founders Yorit and Aviram invested their life savings into the land on which the community now sits, and in doing so they began a bold reforestation project with the help of volunteers from around the world. In exchange for work in the now-lively dry evergreen forest, as well as work around the community of self-made thatched huts, volunteers receive free room and board for a stay of one month or more. The main goal of Sadhana Forest is to reforest a plot of land made arid by the Indian government in times past. However, further goals include an experimental lifestyle seeking a vastly reduced carbon footprint combined with community oneness among a large group of volunteers.

Upon joining the Living Routes study abroad program founded by the University of Massachusetts, I agreed to a host of guidelines including mandatory sobriety, a vegan diet, and forest work each weekday. However, it was not until I entered the forest that the reality of these criteria hit me. Forest work began just after dawn, once the community members were awakened by the music of one or another volunteer with a drum or a guitar, whose job it was to enter each of the huts and gently rouse the volunteers from sleep. Sleep itself was an issue for me at times. It took longer than I would have liked to adjust to both my jetlag and the hot, humid climate, not to mention the beds which were woven from local, indigenous fibers and which seemed

to bow in the middle after a few nights of tossing and turning. Furthermore, we were lucky enough to be in Tamil Nadu during the New Year, a time during which temples open at four in the morning, blasting music to prepare Hindus for the auspicious change from the darker phase of the year into the lighter season.

But I was determined to make the adjustment, and adjust I did. I began paying attention to the more minute details of this very intriguing community. The community hosts anywhere from 50 to 200 volunteers, depending on the season. During our stay this winter, there were upwards of 150 volunteers, winter being the most popular time to visit southern India to avoid the stifling heat of the summer months. Of the community's population, about 15 were members of families, including Aviram, Yorit, and their two young daughters. There were also families from Russia and South America.

I discussed the dynamics of raising a family in this setting with the other students in my group. The children were brought up using a method called

Photos by Chelsea Cooley



“unschooling,” in which they weren’t prompted to learn any specific skills or information, but were rather taught only those things which they first discovered themselves. Only when asked by the child did a parent shed light on any particular topic or skill. This method of childrearing was certainly hotly debated, not only among the group of students but also among other members of the community. It wasn’t rare for an “unschooled” child to pee on someone’s yoga mat during a workshop or wipe his rear-end with a spoon before passing it out for a group meal. Honestly, I sometimes felt envious of these children, who rarely wore clothes and seemed so uninhibited and free, but I was also often aggravated by them. Oftentimes children would play too roughly with the small puppies in the community, and younger children would scream and shout throughout every group meeting or event, even while others were talking. “Should I not tell these children to be quiet?” I thought, frustrated. “Shouldn’t 11-year-old so-and-so know how to read by now?” I asked myself when I noticed one child was still illiterate.

Nonetheless, the level of unity among this hodge-podge of volunteers from around the world, some (like us) staying no more than a month, was remarkable. I believe that we were able to bond so quickly because we shared a common goal that was higher than each of us as individuals. We were each there as a steward of the earth and indeed of all living creatures. Through our commitment to sustainability and non-harming, we naturally adopted a gentle attitude toward one another—nothing else would make sense in such a community. The practices of veganism and environmentalism combined with the prohibition of competitive games made peacefulness the obvious mode of behavior.

In this community focused on saving the land and appreciating life, a multitude of sustainable living practices flourish. Sadhana permits the use of only biodegradable soaps and detergents, and since there is no running water but rather the use of a hand-pump, water is much more readily conserved than might otherwise be the case. Various composting methods were also in the works—including a vermiculture system introduced by a couple of students in my group—and dishes are cleaned with potash and vinegar.

I was both impressed and concerned by Sadhana’s cashless economy. Unlike my community in the US, where there is no hierarchy and no singular leader or landlord, Sadhana has definite leaders in Aviram and Yorit. At each meeting, the volunteers are told to be thankful to them and their children for letting us stay at their home. It follows that Sadhana Forest is their investment, and since Sadhana engages in no cash enterprise, they depend on donations to make necessary purchases. They don’t require rent, only charging a small amount to cover expenses for food and biodegradable toiletries (an amount made even smaller, when compared to US dollars, by the

small value of an Indian rupee).

Given this situation, I found myself scrutinizing the financial situation in my own student co-op household, in which we each pay rent that goes into a general fund used for maintenance, bulk food, supplies, etc. After living in Sadhana, I feel lucky, time and again, to have luxuries like running water and electricity. With Sadhana as a comparison, rather than wish my household didn’t waste these things, I more often find myself thanking my lucky stars that I have them at all. As a student in Sadhana, a place that *maybe* has electricity for an hour a day, obtained through solar panels or human-powered stationary bikes if at all, I found it difficult to complete any school-related assignments or even to contact my parents back home. This was not made easier by the fact that there is very little privacy in the community, unless one ventures into the forest alone. Each room in the dorm-style huts is separated from the next by only a sheet or a mosquito net.

After so much new input and experience, one of the greatest questions in my mind as I flew home from India was how in the world I would reintegrate into my old lifestyle. How could I employ such drastic lifestyle changes in my own life in the US and my laid-back student cooperative? I spoke with my roommates at the Ad Astra House in Lawrence, Kansas about Sadhana in our first house meeting after my return, but I felt I was

(continued on p. 77)

Opposite page left: The huts in Sadhana and nearby Auroville are thatched by hand from indigenous fibers. Opposite page middle: Student Amanda Staton sits in front of the Main Hut in Sadhana Forest. Opposite page right: An organic rice farmer in Auroville tells students about the sustainable use of water.

This page starting left: Ad Astra House in winter. Sign out front. Roomies in the kitchen. Laundry line.



Moon Valley: A Community on the Horizon?

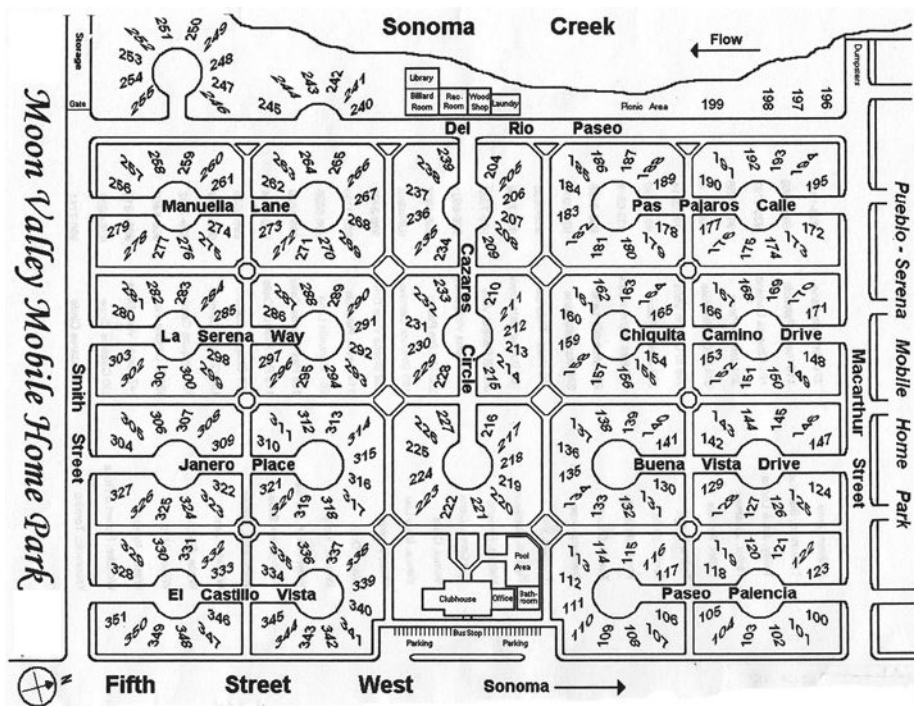


Can a circumstantial neighborhood, one that has no formal entering process for new residents, become a community? I'm thinking of community as a place where there is a strong consciousness of collective as well as individual rights and where a majority of residents participate in neighborhood issues and programs. There are some examples in both small and large municipalities (with support from these towns), but most neighborhoods in America are not real communities, even when a place with its geography and resources desires it.

An example of the latter is the neighborhood we live in called Moon Valley, a large mobile home park in Sonoma, California. We came here in 2005, soon after moving away from our half-acre farm in rural Glen Ellen, just eight miles up the valley from Sonoma. Now that we were in our 80s, it was a time in our lives for something more urban, but having been community activists in several neighborhoods since the two of us came together in 1987, we were still looking for another community possibility. Moon Valley as a place seemed to have all the attributes of a real community, and it

was attractive to us. The 250-home development built in the 1960s is bounded on three sides by thoroughfares and on the fourth by a well-defined Sonoma Creek. Walking paths connect neighbors so that residents don't have to go across busy streets to meet. The landscaped private and public areas are well taken care of and have a variety of fruit trees; we have a persimmon tree. At the ends of the neighborhood are two clubhouses, each with a kitchen and library, one with a lounge living room and card room. There is a wood shop, laundry, poolroom, an all-year swimming pool and Jacuzzi, two saunas, and some outside common areas where people can sit and talk. You'd think that a strong community feeling would come from these resources, but we found that not to be the case.

Since we've been here, we've made some good friends, and we really enjoy living here even with its community deficiencies. I became the editor of *Whisperings*, the neighborhood newsletter, for two years; Gena volunteered to be a librarian for the numerous books that had been collected. We worked closely with the Residents' Club, a social organization, seeing ourselves as committees that were part of the whole. What we saw happening was a few people were doing most of the community work, and a majority of the people in the park did not involve themselves, being more or less



We won't be able to point a finger at a distant owner when conflict occurs; we'll have to learn how to mediate conflict that's certain to occur among us.

isolates in their living situations. A number of people on the Residents' Club Board had been in their positions for a long time, and with declining interest of residents in social programs, the club board decided to disband in 2007.

Shortly thereafter, a homeowners' association formed to act as a protector of resident interests, to make sure a rent control ordinance stayed in place and to oppose any attempts to subdivide the entire parcel. This process of subdivision is often referred to as condolization. Homes are situated on land owned by a corporation headquartered over 500 miles away in southern California; homeowners pay space rent for use of the land. There has been a trend towards park owners selling properties for subdivision, which would require residents to either buy the land their units sit on or move away. So the homeowners' association came together to defend residents' interests and prevent things like that from happening.

But a new wrinkle came into the equation. Periodically the owners of the park have revised their rules and regulations for resident and management compliance, and most recently this occurred at the beginning of 2010. The residents had minimal input in affecting changes that were made. The most controversial issue was changing the neighborhood into an all-ages park, eliminating the 55-plus age requirement for living here. When the owner made a presentation of the changes in the fall, there was a large turnout of residents and many voiced their opposition to the age change, but the owner representative was not swayed by the dissent.

The homeowners' association has become more proactive lately, and with resident approval by majority vote, is presently going through a process to buy the park from the owners and make it into a cooperative owned by the residents. The park was not for sale, but the owner said that the corporation would entertain an offer from the

park residents. A consultant has been hired to work with the homeowners' association and the owner in developing a fair market value for the park. There has been strong support from the residents for this action and this has brought more homeowners into communication with each other, a necessary step for any community building.

As a cooperative, the homeowners collectively will have ownership of the land, and that raises the question whether we, the residents, will make ourselves knowledgeable about cooperative living in taking the responsibility to oversee the management of a co-op? And, how will we handle the conflict that goes along with making up rules for us all to live by? We won't be able to point a finger at a distant owner when conflict occurs; we'll have to learn how to mediate conflict that's certain to occur among us, now being the owners of the park.

First, a purchase price has to be arrived at and then loans and grants have to be obtained to complete a sale. Forming a cooperative is an exciting prospect for us. It seems to be a good route for us in becoming a real community. Can an action like this by itself help to raise a community consciousness for residents of Moon Valley? It's questionable! It seems appropriate to be working on some conflict resolution program while the sale is being negotiated; Gena and I have some ideas about how to go about that and are inviting our neighbors to participate. We'll have to see how the process goes. ☺



Bob Glotzbach and Gena Van Camp are community activists, both of whom have

had some community and "forming community" experiences, as well as being active neighborhood volunteers. They have co-written an unpublished manuscript, "Place, Consciousness, and Participation: the Elements of Real Community."

Illustration courtesy of Merry Hall



Affording a New Community: a Story of Persistence

We have a dream for AMMA Community. The name, meaning “our Mother who dwells in Earth,” honors Mother Nature. The seed of this dream is well planted, fertilized by many hopes, shined upon with great vision, and watered by many tears. For over a year we planned big under the misconception that a multi-million dollar grant was going to become available to somebody willing to seed ecovillages throughout the nation. With high hopes, we submitted a provisional offer for a 650-acre riverfront farm in Turner, Maine. We envisioned an ecovillage of 100 families sharing the land, creating 2.5-acre homesteads and supporting itself and its members with a shared farm, green cottage industries, and an educational facility. We generated impressive documents on a founding vision, bylaws, incorporation, membership policy, sustainability, and conflict resolution.

Disappointments could have miscarried our dream. First came a big split over governance styles. Then red tape delayed the funding. Next the land went to another buyer. Then it became painfully clear that outside funding would never materialize.

What were four dirt poor remnant families to do? Give up? NO! Our commitment to our shared vision and the community bonds we had forged were too strong. The seed within us had taken root too deeply. Our plans had become too real to us. Here are the principles that nourish our dream:

AMMA is a community committed to:

- *Sustainability, regeneration, and resilience*
- *Exploration of humanity and nature’s potential for co-creation*
- *Homesteads nurturing each member family*
- *Permaculture principles*
- *A resilient, self-sustaining community economy*

- *Community that balances belonging and autonomy*
- *Inclusive governance that honors both self and others*
- *Educational and informational outreach to the larger community*
- *Providing a public demonstration of sustainable lifestyles*

There was no way we could let such a vision wither. It had quickened within us. It became apparent that it would not be born a king, but we are prepared to welcome a peasant.

So we downsized our plans drastically, investigating first a couple of farms on the market in the \$200,000 to \$300,000 range. These proved unsatisfactory either because of size, soil fertility, or inappropriate location. We also came pretty quickly to realize that we were still reaching beyond our economic means. To be viable, our dreams must be practical as well as visionary.

So we persisted, finding 90 acres in Starks, Maine that spoke to our hearts with good woodlands, fields, brooks, orientation, and a mobile home that would serve as temporary dwelling for each family in turn as we collectively built our affordable green homesteads. The four families that had hung in there through the hardships envisioned a community of up to 18 families, each contributing \$15,000 toward the community land and personally financing the materials for permacultural, off-the-grid homesteads we would help one another to build. This plan would necessitate liquidating our current assets. We would have to empty our wallets in order to fulfill our dreams. We became ready to put our shoulders to the plow.

One member said she was willing and able to put down the \$65,000 50 percent down payment which the rest of us would pay back to her with our \$15,000 shares as we became able. Two other families would immediately put their current homes

(continued on p. 78)



REACH

REACH is our column for all your Classified needs. In addition to ads intended to help match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, Reach has ads for workshops, goods, services, books, conferences, products, and personals of interest to people interested in communities.

You may use the form on the last page of Reach to place an ad. **THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #149/WINTER 2010** (out in December) is Friday, October 22, 2010.

The special Reach rate is only \$.25 per word (up to 100 words, \$.50 per word thereafter for all ads) so why not use this opportunity to network with others interested in community? We offer discounts for multiple insertions as well: \$.23 per word for two

times and \$.20 per word for four times. If you are an FIC member, take off an additional five percent.

Please make check or money order payable to COMMUNITIES, and send it, plus your ad copy, word count, number of insertions, and category to: Tanya Carwyn, Business Manager, COMMUNITIES Magazine, 7 Hut Terrace, Black Mountain, NC 28711; email: ads@ic.org. (If you email an ad, please include your mailing address, phone number and be sure to send off the check at the same time.)

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALENDAR

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

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.

A FORUM FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSIDERING OR HAVE HELPED FOUND AND FUND COMMUNITY ENDEAVORS. People with land and/or more money than most, have a unique situation and opportunity to help foster the efforts we are involved in with others. These resources come with blessings and challenges for all. If you are experiencing the varied issues of sharing, letting go and/or gifting property, money, or funds to help build/create something with others, and you'd like to share thoughts, ideas, challenges, opportunities, etc within a confidential and supportive setting, please contact me for details about a conference call later this fall. The call will be a discussion of several of the most pertinent issues that come from the participants. More conversations, a blog, perhaps an article for this publication, even a workshop/conference are all possible in the future if we feel inspired to continue this kind of forum. Please email cschend@gmail.com for more info.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

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.

INNISFREE VILLAGE: Seeking full-time residential caregivers to live and work side by side with adults with intellectual disabilities in organic gardens, woodshop, weavery, bakery, and kitchen. Located on 550 acres in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Health insurance, paid vacation and monthly stipend provided. www.innisfreevillage.org (434) 823-5400.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY MEMORIAL UNREST HOME WOMYN'S LAND TRUST, ATHENS OHIO. Beautiful, 150-acre feminist intentional community. We have three goals — feminist education, inexpensive leaseholds for residents and safe recreation space for womyn. We are currently 4 womyn living in 3 houses. We are seeking more members. Visitors Welcome. More information at www.subamuh.com or 740-448-6424.

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 Leisure 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 50 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.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS ALLIANCE, TUBAC, ARIZONA. Founders Gabriel of Urantia, Niann Emerson Chase 1989. 110 adults/children. International members. EcoVillage, green building, sustainable living. God-centered, based on The URANTIA Book and Continuing Fifth Epochal Revelation (The Cosmic Family volumes) teachings. Organic gardens, farm, & ranch. Children's school, landscaping, Soulistic Medical Institute. Spiritual commitment required. Agricultural internships. PO Box 4910, Tubac, AZ 85646 (520) 603-9932. info@GCCAlliance.org; www.GCCAlliance.org; www.GlobalChangeMusic.org; www.GlobalChangeMultiMedia.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; twinosaks@ic.org; www.twinosaks.org.

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

Communal Studies Association

Encouraging the study of Intentional Communities

Founded in 1975, the Communal Studies Association publishes *Communal Societies*, a journal covering many aspects of historical and contemporary communal societies with articles and book reviews written by academics, communitarians and preservationists.

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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.

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 415-608-2594.

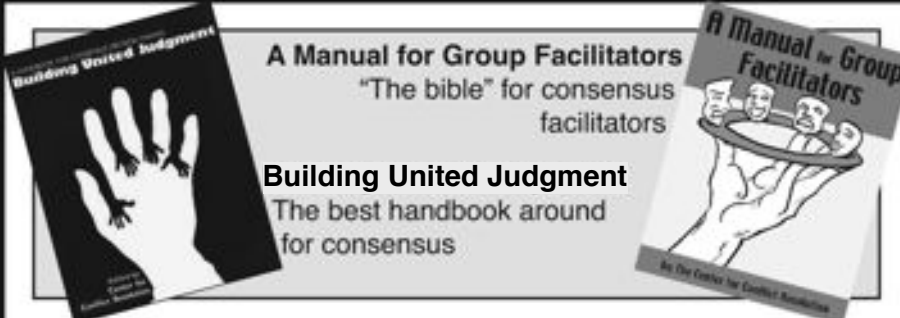
HONOLULU INTENTIONAL OHANA PROJECT, HAWAII. We are currently meeting to explore possibilities for developing some form of co-operative living arrangement in or near the urban Honolulu area. All aspects of the project are still open for discussion. (Go to www.hiopi.info for more information.) We are actively recruiting new members at this time. If you are able to attend our meetings on Oahu, please send your contact information to hiopi@lava.net.

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PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEB SITES

COHOUSING.ORG, the Cohousing Website, is filled with core resources for cohousing community – a thriving segment of the intentional communities movement. The site includes the Cohousing Directory, info on National Cohousing Conferences, Classified Ads, and FREE publications including Cohousing Articles, online Cohousing Books, In-the-News, Just-for-Fun, and much more. Its presented by Coho/US, the Cohousing Association of the United States - please visit us at cohousing.org.

FINANCING COHOUSING CD ROM WITH KATHRYN MCCAMANT. This 90 minute recorded webinar is packed with how-to information on financing the creation of your Cohousing or Intentional Community. Learn more at www.cohousing.org/financed.

WANT TO BUY/SELL YOUR COHOUSING HOME? The Cohousing Website Classified Ads provide many choices in different price ranges all across the United States. Check out these and more cohousing-related classified sections at www.cohousing.org/marketplace.

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

GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES available at Tree Bressen's website. Topics include consensus, facilitation, blocks and dissent, community-building exercises, alternative formats to general discussion, the list goes on. Dozens of helpful articles, handouts, and more--all free. www.treegroup.info

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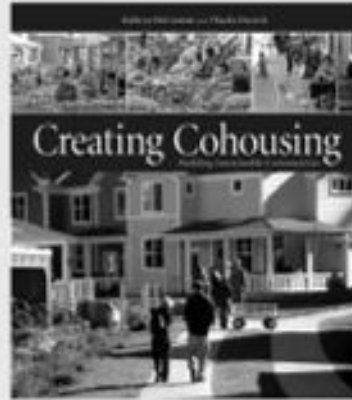


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• **GROWING A CULTURE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT EARTHAVEN ECOVILLAGE**
Arjuna da Silva
At a permaculture-based ecovillage in North Carolina, care for the earth, care for people, and care for inner health all benefit from a dynamic culture based on local self-reliance, holism, and community. (From Issue # 145 - Health and Well-Being)

• **REVIEW: HEALTH AND QUIET**
Noise and quiet can both affect well-being profoundly. Gordon Hempton's *One Square Inch of Silence* offers ear-opening stories and

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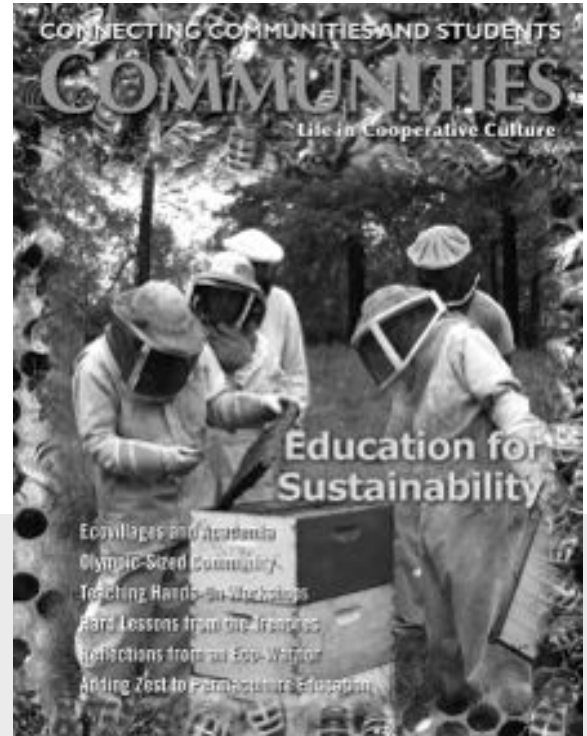
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POWER, DYSFUNCTION, COMMUNITY BREAKDOWN, AND VISION AT ECOINSTITUTE

(continued from p. 29)



needs independence too. There is not a deficit of competence, vision, and energy here...there's an overabundance. The world needs some of it. Those who find it easiest to create a sustainable human environment, while stewarding the land, should do that...but I'd encourage those whose greatest gifts are their insights and their vision neither to hole up in a cabin nor to attach so much importance to what one small group of people on one small piece of land do or think—but to pay full respect to these gifts and share them with the rest of the world.

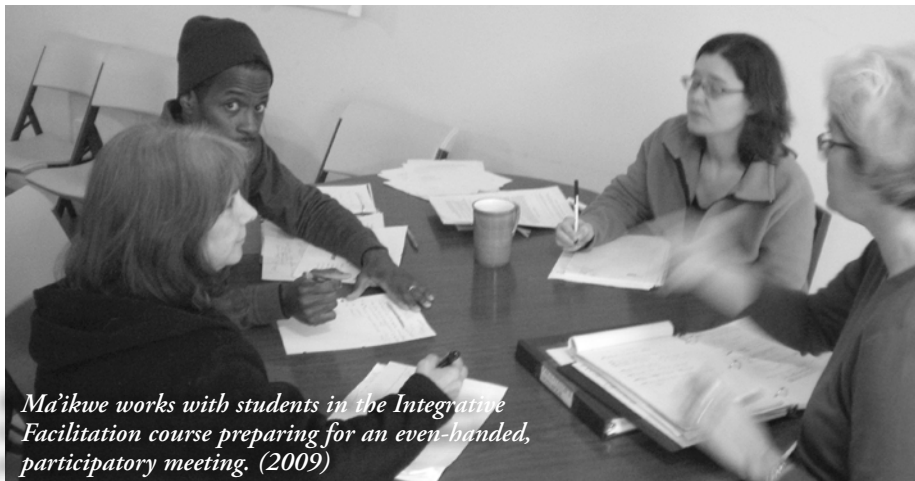
I and I'm sure others are willing to help in any way we can. I am, anyway. Globally, the hour is getting late, and we don't have a lot of time to mess around. Hope this has provided some food for thought.

And if you've made it this far, thanks for reading it. 🐦

A historical note from Troy: My attempt to move the group toward unity and greater clarity (or misguided, presumptuous manifesto) failed to achieve its goals, at least in the short term. After reading this document, David boycotted the meeting, internal divisions increased, power struggles intensified, and the matter finally ended up in court—after which David (and his partner Beth) did indeed move on, but not in the hoped-for climate of mutual respect and appreciation about which I had fantasized. Eventually, though, both David and EcoInstitute achieved substantially greater levels of success in their work as separate entities than they had when together, thriving in ways that had seemed impossible in 1981. In the years following the "divorce," each also experienced significant challenges and new power struggles, involving different individuals, but found more appropriate structures and forms to deal with them, finally achieving a hard-won maturity that made the era described above mostly a distant memory.

MORE PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP AND FOLLOWSHIP

(continued from p. 35)



Ma'ikwe works with students in the Integrative Facilitation course preparing for an even-handed, participatory meeting. (2009)

isn't the whole truth. My theory is that there are many different types of power, some blatant (like who is leading the project, who has a lot of social capital because of past good deeds, and who has expertise) and most more subtle. This subtle list includes a lot of territory: Who neglects to read the notes ahead of time, and then gets the whole group to tell them everything they should already know, wasting 15 minutes of everyone's time and getting a lot of attention? Who is really good at getting folks to pick up their slack? Who is really good at honesty? Who isn't? Who is really good at fun? Who is internally strong and has power because they don't need to be coddled? Who does need to be coddled, and takes energy from the group to get their personal needs met? Who rarely speaks, saving up their input for times when it is likely to be more influential?

Instead of asking, "Who has power?" I'm more interested in the question of how each person within the group gets and wields their power. The list of things above that are examples of types of power are (mostly) things that can be used for either good or ill in a group. Power itself is necessary to get things done, and neither good nor bad. And I believe that everyone has some power in a cooperative group (and that claims to complete powerlessness are themselves a form of wielding power, because no cooperative group wants to be accused of that depth of power imbalance and will generally bend over backwards to not have that impression persist).

Here's the kicker, though, and the one addition I'll make to Elizabeth's basically sound list of follower traits. Because leaders generally can't effectively lead a discussion about their own power in the group, good followers will occasionally bring this topic up. (This could just be an addition to the list of other important topics Elizabeth suggests groups grapple with.) The purpose of this conversation is not to drag down the leaders, but to encourage an even-handed consideration of how the group wants to relate to power in general, and how well everyone is doing with taking on their share of both power and responsibility. If a "follower" can successfully serve the group in this way, they'll be well on their way to blurring the lines between leadership and followship, and that is all to the good. ☺

Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig has lived in intentional community for 14 years, and is currently a member of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage. She is the author of Passion as Big as a Planet, which looks at the relationship between self-awareness and effective earth activism. Ma'ikwe teaches facilitation and consensus with her husband, Laird Schaub, and offers workshops on starting communities, leadership, and spiritual activism.

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THE AWESOME POWER OF THE NON-CONSENTING VOICE

(continued from p. 49)

Consensus Fumble.

Although the real beauty of consensus is in its commitment to synthesize input from the many for the benefit of the whole, staying alert to the group's energy field becomes a real challenge because it takes time away from essential business at hand or, perhaps worse, spotlights our vulnerabilities. These central features of consensus can potentially be at cross purposes if our inexperience with successful resolution presses us to cut processes short and go for the quicker solution. After a while, through moral exhaustion, a group's vision of consensus decision making can begin to feel like another day at City Hall.

The question is, what can be done differently than at City Hall? I believe the answer lies in skill-building, training, and practice. If we are given the privilege of impacting our group's development single-handedly, we need to be shown how to use that power with the highest motives. Instead of relying on familiar dysfunctional patterns, we can decide to incorporate steps and processes for working things through that leave individual integrity and confidence intact or even enhance it.

What if objectors knew that in order to stall a proposal, they had to do the following?

1. recognize feeling a sense of objection and commit to promptly;
2. examine personal emotional issues that might be feeding the objection,
3. seek to understand the value of the proposal for the proposer(s), and
4. think about ways their own concerns might be met without blocking the proposal.

How would the atmosphere of a group change under this regimen, should someone state an objection? What would it take for a group to be willing to take this process on? Try it for a year or two and see? Instead of recoiling or pouncing when objections appear, become curious, responsible, unselfish?

After 15 years of working with consensus at Earthaven, the essential question for all of us in our Council seems to be, "How can we balance the urge to express ourselves and hone our democratic skills with appreciation and respect for the history and current time investments of an ongoing group?" 🐦

Arjuna da Silva is a founder and has been an officer many times of Earthaven Council. She is current president of Culture's Edge, which presents classes and trainings in permaculture, natural building, communications skills, and the healing arts. She is a consensus facilitator and trainer, as well as a counselor and hypnotherapist. She has a passion for natural building and is about to move into her earth-and-straw temple, called Leela House, at Earthaven. She can be reached at arjuna@earthaven.org.

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AD ASTRA PER ASPERA: THROUGH ADVERSITY TO THE STARS

(continued from p. 61)



only rambling, only scratching the surface of what this vastly multidimensional experience taught me.

So I decided to be, as Gandhi said, the change I wished to see in the world. Although I was vegan before going to Sadhana, I began paying closer attention to all the food I buy and ingest. I started buying more local, organic food, as is the practice in the forest. I'm also more shamelessly vegan now than I was before, when I acted almost apologetic for my dietary choices, not realizing the scope of environmental and physical degradation caused by the meat and dairy industry. I started using only biodegradable soaps and detergents and encouraged my roommates to do the same—a practice which has had positive effects on my skin and hair as well as my community's ground water.

Luckily, as the "buyer" for my house, the person who purchases supplies and bulk food, I was able to put these ideas into practice on a grander scale that affects my whole household rather than just me alone. Most importantly, I was able to incorporate the maturity and philosophy of humility I learned at Sadhana, as well as the necessary work ethic, into my life at home. The world no longer revolves around me as it did before. Rather, I am only one aspect of a unified whole. I am responsible for a certain amount of waste and suffering in this world,

and I can make the conscious decision to minimize them both.

My only continued concern after reentering my household is our lack of group unity as compared to the community at Sadhana. As a student, each member of my household has a different, busy schedule. We eat group meals only once every couple of weeks rather than three times a day, and chores often go undone, perhaps because we don't have group work sessions as they do in Sadhana. I'm concerned by this lack of unity, but I also feel as though different circumstances call for different measures. Since we each do work outside the community, less energy is focused on the house itself. I wonder, for a busy college student, could life be any different?

And of course, I'm concerned that my house is in no way capable of matching Sadhana in its ability to practice the three R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle. This is true despite the fact that my house consumes much less and recycles much more than the average household. Sadhana represents a studied and conscious approach to sustainability, where conservation is itself the main goal of the community. At my cooperative, sustainability is *a* goal, but not the main one. I am the only vegan, and there is still a trashcan full of waste at the end of each week—to which I contribute my fair share. I wonder, is there time or desire for sustainability to be the main focus of my community? Given the state of the world and the environment, *should* sustainability be the main goal?

I believe successfully forming a community like Sadhana in the US requires taking into account certain material considerations, and I wasn't the only visitor to think so. In all practicality, in order for a society accustomed to capitalism, consumerism, and creature comforts to accept sustainable living practices, those practices must be made attractive somehow. I doubt the majority of Americans will adopt hand-powered water pumps over running water or open-air thatched huts over enclosed living spaces—even if a small group of people might enjoy such things for a time. Water conservation must become a way of life instilled in American children from the youngest age, and permaculture must be both attractive and comfortable to take root on a vast scale. I believe these things are possible, and I appreciate Sadhana for employing them in their extreme, raw forms. It's now up to students like us to bring such ideas back to the US and shape them in such a way that they are applicable to our society at home. 🐦



Chelsea Cooley is a radio DJ and student at the University of Kansas, where she studies world religions and history. She lives in the Ad Astra student cooperative in Lawrence.

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The following COMMUNITIES back issues speak to various aspects of our current “Power and Empowerment” theme, as do some others not listed here. See communities.ic.org/back_issues for a complete list of back issues and ordering information. You may also order back issues \$5 apiece plus shipping using the form on page 13.

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AFFORDING A NEW COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 64)

on the market. The fourth family was willing to remain in and mortgage its current home until the remaining 50 percent would be paid off. Only as new families joined us would we be able to afford the barn, greenhouse, and gathering hall we envisioned. Our dream would evolve organically. Great! AMMA Community was regenerated, until...

...the member with the down payment readily available got cold feet and backed out. Now what? We could not allow our dream to be so arbitrarily aborted.

We continue our commitment to our vision. So we are embarking on a membership drive to raise the necessary \$65,000 down payment ASAP. We are beginning our educational outreach, even while still unlanded, with a six-session workshop on “Monitoring and Increasing Sustainability.” Sessions one to four will focus on sustainability in the areas of ecology, economy, health, and social networks. Sessions five and six will be six-month and one-year follow-ups to monitor progress and plan the next steps. We believe personal and community sustainability is a dream whose time has come. We more than believe it; we are actively pregnant with the idea and now seek competent midwives to help us give birth to it. ☺

Merry Hall, retired teacher and current sustainability activist, is author of the book, Bringing Food Home: The Maine Example, secretary of AMMA Community, and a member of the Food for Maine's Future Board of Directors. If you are interested in joining, donating, or investing to make the dream of a Maine eco-community manifest at AMMA, please contact her at mainely-organic@yahoo.com, 207-522-2606, or 41 Katherine's Way, Sabattus ME 04280.

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The Community that Dines Together, Aligns Together

Ah yes, the community meal table. Communal dining can be a glorious bonding experience, as members recreate the feeling of an earlier era when the tribe gathered at the end of the day to share their bounty. On the other hand, it can also bring out certain aspects of the cook's personality, as sure as Myers-Briggs. Here is a sampling of the "Cook du Jour":

"Le Chef"—Before joining community, this member ran their own French restaurant. They know that presentation makes the meal, and people ooh and aah over their concoctions. Their cooking is generally well-appreciated, with the exception of people who like their green beans other than dripping with butter.

"The Ethnic Specialist"—Thai, Indian, Chinese, Ethiopian—it's a geographical whirlwind as each week we're whisked off to another exotic food locale. The underlying theme: more spice is twice as nice. Bland is banned, so it's peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich night for those with sensitive palates.

"Food as Art"—This member doesn't see any reason why their creative, whimsical side needs to be left at the kitchen door. Tofu sculpted to resemble a recent guest or a Thanksgiving turkey, a rainbow salad including beets, carrots, peppers, kale, blueberries, and grapes, or a cake in the shape of a body part—their creativity knows no bounds on the serving table. (Results may vary, depending on actual cooking skill.)

"Agit-Prop Cuisine"—When politics and food collide (think Chairman Mao with a measuring cup). All-vegan-all-the-time, no refined anything, no profit-mongering corporate ingredients to be found in any dish. The heart and mind can enjoy this meal, but the stomach may stage its own protest.

"Locavoracious"—A lighter-hearted version of the above, this cook sources their food from within 100 miles, or better yet, 100 yards of the communal kitchen. No flora or fauna are exempt, and dinner may include what you previously thought were weeds growing beside the porch or the groundhog that was last seen invading the garden.

"The Mess Hall"—Prior military, cafeteria, or summer camp experience informs this cook's style. Mass-produced and designed to appeal to the masses, these meals are heavy on the mac-and-cheese, gravy-laden entrees, and all things carbohydrate.

Regardless of style, as we sit down to a meal together in accordance with our own community traditions—be that thanking the cook, saying a prayer, or simply digging in—we can appreciate that the simple act of sharing food is an important part of the "community glue" that holds us all together. *Bon Appetit!* 🍴

Valerie Renwick-Porter has eaten more than 13,000 communal meals over the course of her 18-year membership at Twin Oaks Community in Virginia.

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Kathy Goss, *Journalist*

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Gabriel of Urantia & Niann Emerson Chase are the founders of Global Community Communications Alliance, an EcoVillage of over one hundred international students practicing sustainable living & building and offering agricultural internships in Tumacácori, Arizona.



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