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Life in Cooperative Culture

Intimacy

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Summer 2011 • Issue #151

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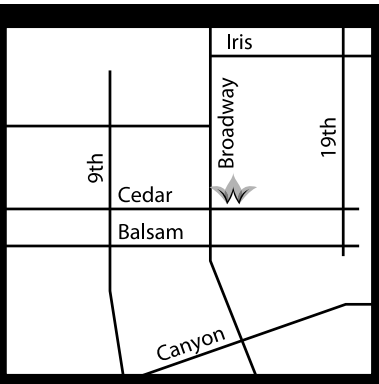

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Issue #151 • Summer 2011

Yulia Z.

Intimacy

VOICES

ON THE COVER

Two squirrels watch, listen to, and sniff the world from their home at Sandhill Farm, Rutledge, Missouri. Photo by Chris Roth.

COMMUNITIES
Life in Cooperative Culture

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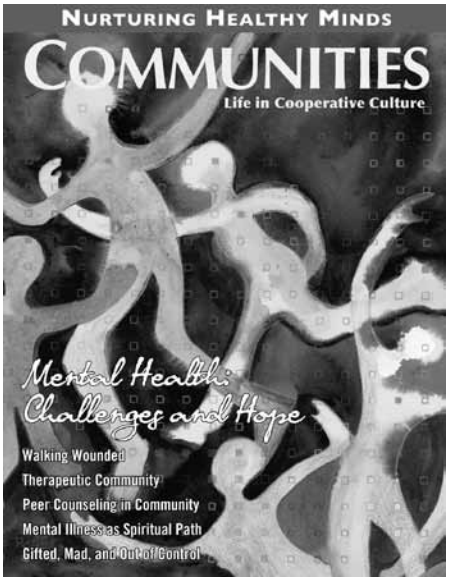
LETTERS



Rethinking Mental Health

I read the latest issue of COMMUNITIES (#150, Spring 2011, Mental Health) with great interest. There is a great deal of wisdom in the various articles and I am glad to see this subject getting attention. However, I was also dismayed by some of the themes expressed.

I lived at Lost Valley Educational Center for seven years. Over the years there, I saw a polarizing way of thinking in the intentional communities movement about mental health. That way of thinking is basically: "The entire mental health professions is bad because it is just a corrupt society enforcing conformity through stigmatizing and drugging people to fit in. Intentional Communities are good for mental health because they provide social support and a healthier lifestyle." While I used to hold this view to an extent, I now find this way of looking at the issues to be a very partial oversimplification, frankly outdated, and potentially dangerous for both individuals and communities.

What I saw in my experience living in intentional community was that the community experience was helpful for many people with mild and medium type personal issues, but was not very helpful for the more intense and recurrent mental health issues some people had. In those cases, community often just exacerbated the issues and the process burned everyone out. Communities that have a mission focused on mental health, and are set up to provide high level mental health support, can probably handle serious mental health issues in a fantastic way. However, most ICs do not have this capacity and the individual with challenges is actually put in a worse position when they are expected to receive relief simply from living in community. Articles that extol the mental health benefits of living in community, without recognizing the limitations, are like advertisements attracting the John Wachters of the world [see John's article, "A Mental Health Patient Seeks (But Does Not Find) Religious Community," issue #150, p. 44]. It is unfair to people with those levels of challenges to promise them healing that you probably can not provide, unless you are one of the few communities specifically set up to provide that.

Many of the authors nicely highlight various external circumstances that contribute to people's challenges. However, after some point, continually focusing on the external influences on mental health can become another form of procrastination and denial. For many people in serious need, the last thing they need is to be assured that they are fine, and it is just a messed-up society that is trying to label them. They are suffering, not from a label or judgment or lack of community events, but from serious mental anguish, which might be preventable with holistic professional treatment, and the first step towards that is admitting there is a problem. Ironically, avoiding treatment because there might be a stigma to a diagnosis, as some of the authors seem to suggest, only gives power to and reinforces the idea that a diagnosis is bad and something to stigmatize, and we'd somehow be better off not talking honestly about these types of issues.

A few of the authors seemed to characterize professional mental health treatment as something out of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. There are a lot more healthy options these days. Sure, with no effort, one might end up with an old-school therapist with the negative traits described in some of the articles, but with a little

bit of searching one can also find many professionals who are integrating conventional psychotherapy with more holistic methods. There are multiple colleges, like Naropa University, and JFK, CIIS, etc., that are pumping out professionals who learn both about allopathic and holistic approaches. There are some amazing modalities out there, such as mindfulness-based therapy, somatic therapy, Hakomi, emotional freedom technique, etc. Sure, community living can be healthier than mainstream living, but when that isn't magically solving things, and someone's issues are troubling them and/or the community for years, we should encourage them to seek complementary professional and holistic mental health treatment outside of the IC. That would make our communities much healthier, and is more truly communitarian than thinking that any one IC alone can or should try to handle every mental health difficulty with only their own internal people and resources.

In addition to my experience in community changing my view from the oversimplified approach of "professional treatment bad and community good," I also saw someone close to me go through serious mental health challenges. My friend, I'll call her "Nancy," had gone through serious bouts of depression since her teenage years, and most recently had left her partner of many years, moved across the country and married another man, and when that didn't work out, she became suicidally depressed. At the time I thought that maybe all she needed was to hang out with groovy people like I had been doing, have more potlucks, and do more community stuff, etc. I figured that what made me happy should make her happy, but I did not understand that what cheers me up isn't going to be comprehensive treatment for someone with suicidal depression. I was worried that her seeking professional treatment would just label and medicate her. In retrospect, I think that if she had tried to join an intentional community as an attempt at treatment, it would have turned out badly, as John Wachter describes of his experience in his article.

She did seek treatment, and fairly easily found therapists who were using a more holistic approach. She was diagnosed by independent therapists as bipolar. Accepting a label that has a stigma was humbling and embarrassing for her for a few weeks, and saved her life. I think the tradeoff was worth it. Eventually, the label became relieving because it gave her understanding and tools—she could read books on her condition and find community in the experiences of others with the same challenges. (Her study of her own condition actually eventually led her to pursue a satisfying career in holistic mental health.) She was prescribed medication, not as a sole cure, but in minimum doses to be a stabilization force that allowed her to pursue a comprehensive mind/body approach of various practices—yoga, meditation, talk therapy, etc. I don't think she would have made it out of bed to engage in these other approaches without the medication in the beginning. I also don't think that my friends in community, with good intentions but no real understanding of clinical depression, could have helped her much, and I think that if she had tried to live in community at the time without getting outside care, it would have been dangerously tumultuous for the community and her.

She did not have a traumatic childhood, and I don't think that mainstream society traumatized her into this condition. She and I both came to believe that some people are simply wired a bit differently, and some things in nature don't come out quite right, like being nearsighted. It is not a cause for shame any more than being nearsighted and needing glasses. However, valuing the nearsighted person equally as a human does not mean we should pretend that their vision is just as good as 20/20 and tell them not to try glasses. It is more compassionate to notice that they seem to squint a lot and bump into things, and encourage them to get their eyes checked, than to try to convince them of some relativist logic that society has no right to say whose vision is better or worse. Nancy would probably be dead or greatly suffering if she hadn't admitted she had a problem that needed professional treatment. Because she did get holistic skilled help, outside of what her immediate community, friends, and family could do for her, she is doing extremely well right now. While she doesn't live in an IC, she is now stable enough in her own self and mental health practices to be a positive source for greater health in her broader community.

Marc Tobin
Eugene, Oregon

Free Beer

I have just finished the Spring 2011 "Crazy in Community" issue *(sic.)*. People are attracted to the idea of community for various reasons. My reasons tend to be practical: #1. Frugality via shared tools, skills, and space. #2. Sustainability due to lower material and energy requirements. #3. Companionship around shared meals, projects, and the occasional chess or foosball game. However, I do prefer neighbors that can at least fake being normal. I would be more comfortable alone on Crusoe's island than dealing with mentally ill or substance-abusing neighbors day in and day out. However, that's just me. I do see the value of groups such as the Camphill communities. Presumably, they are also knowledgeable and skilled as well as compassionate. My only advice to a community would be eyes wide open guys. A known commitment to being "Nonjudgmental," "Open," "Accepting," "Valuing," "Diverse," etc. is the

(continued on p. 75)

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

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues. We also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about "creating community where you are."

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

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

Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, 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/lister and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

Tanya Carwyn, Advertising Manager, 7 Hut Terrace, Black Mountain NC 28711; 828-669-0997; ads@ic.org.

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

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

COMMUNITIES Continues to Make Friends... and Lose Money

Last year, this magazine sustained an operating loss of $23,000. Raise your hand if you think that's sustain*able*. (I'll give you a hint: keep your hand down.)

While the FIC, publishers of COMMUNITIES, loves this quarterly and is willing to support a modest deficit in order to keep this publication going, there's nothing remotely modest about losing this much money, and something has to change. Ordinarily when facing a serious financial challenge, you employ a two-sided strategy: reduce expenses, and boost revenues. In this case though, almost all of our hope is pinned on the latter.

Expenses were essentially flat in 2010—even down slightly—excepting $1400 spent to bring everyone together for a Production Team summit in April, which has been the only time that the Editor, Art Director, and Business Manager have all been in the same room together. The money to cover that one-time expense came from an earmarked donation, and basically we've done quite well holding the line on outflows.

While it's always possible to trim a bit of fat here or there, and we keep our eyes peeled for such opportunities (who makes up these metaphors?), the only way we're going to make *significant* inroads on our deficit is through turbo-charging our revenues. Let's look more closely at this magazine's four major income streams:

Newsstand Sales

This is what we earn from distributors who place copies of each issue on the magazine racks of stores around North America. Once you factor in the costs of labor and shipping however, our goal in this category is mainly to not lose money. Magazine copies that don't sell are destroyed and the best we can hope for is to generate enough income to cover expenses. Even so, we have to diligently manage our distributor accounts. Because there is no cost to distributors of unsold copies, they want to maintain a high draw (the number of copies they order of each issue), to maximize sales. Counterbalancing this, our Business Manager has to stay on top of these figures, to minimize the number of copies that are destroyed without losing sales.

While strong distributor income necessarily means increased expenses (because we have to print more magazines, pay more for shipping, and spend more time managing accounts) and typically doesn't help the bottom line directly, it is nonetheless important for the coattails it affords the next two income streams: subscriptions and advertising.

Distributor income was off a whopping 45 percent last year, and it's not easy to figure out why. We believe the product has never looked better (good cover images, timely themes, and insightful articles). Though sales are down for magazines in general, and there's no stopping the growing trend to go first to the Web when you want to learn about something, nobody covers community living like Communities; nobody else offers the same in-depth mix of information and inspiration.

Subscriptions

We have only about 1200 paid subscribers (total subscriptions less the complimentary copies given to FIC personnel and magazine contributors). On the one hand, it's a miracle that we've been able to stay in print with such a low subscriber base. On the other, it points out our tremendous potential for dramatic improvement.

Having been in the community information business for 24 years, the FIC has gradually developed a database of more than 40,000 people who have approached us over the years looking for information about cooperative living. If just 10 percent of those became subscribers, our deficit would evaporate.

We're convinced that there are at least another 1200 people out there who would *love* to get our magazine in their mailbox four times a year. If we doubled our subscriber income, the additional $24,000 in revenue would essentially eradicate our red ink (yes, we'd have increased printing and mailing costs to accommodate those new folks, so the gross bump in income would not be the same as the net, but it would get us very close to solving our financial woes, and it's our strategic goal).

Of course, this is not a new idea. Every publication dreams of increasing its subscriber base. The challenge is how to do it. We know that our subscribers typically frequent natural food stores and independent bookstores. We know that they're politically liberal and often well educated. They belong to the quarter of the population that futurist Paul Ray labels "Cultural Creatives"—people who want to have their oar in the water when it comes to making a world that works better.

We also think we have a valuable and under-utilized asset in our existing subscribers: people who already know that our magazine is a good deal and well worth the money, and who know that changing the world is something we need to do *together*. Newsstand sales give us a chance to continually get our publication in front of new folks. Even though this is issue #151 and Communities has been in print since 1972, the vast majority of our target audience doesn't know that we exist. Ouch!

Even though this is issue #151 and Communities has been in print since 1972, the vast majority of our target audience doesn't know that we exist. Ouch!

If you figure that there are about 240 million adults living in the US and Canada today and one quarter of them are Cultural Creatives, that means that there are roughly 60 million potential subscribers and we've converted only .0002 per cent of them. Now *that's* potential! We just have to figure out better ways of getting our cooperative light to shine out from under the bushel of our obscurity.

In 2010 subscription income slipped by 11 percent. While that means this segment held up better than the other areas, it's still the wrong direction. We need dramatic increases here. I bet everyone who's reading this knows a few people who would greatly benefit from receiving a gift subscription.

Advertising

While we try to be highly selective in whom we accept as advertisers in Communities, there is still a wealth of groups and companies that are an excellent fit with our readership. Some of our advertisers are communities looking for members; some are cooperatives looking for customers; some are busi-

Upcoming Communities Themes:

Fall 2011:
Right Livelihood

Winter 2011:
Permaculture

If you'd like to write for **Communities**, please visit
communities.ic.org/submit.php

PUBLISHER'S NOTE BY LAIRD SCHAUB

nesses with green products. All are trying to market to Cultural Creatives.

Ad revenue dropped a precipitous 34 percent last year, and that's unacceptably weak. On the plus side, we hired Tanya Carwyn as our Business Manager last year and she's steadily been turning this around. In the first month of 2011 alone, ad revenues equaled 41 percent of what we'd collected for all of 2010, and we're hoping to keep that momentum going.

If you have interest in placing an ad or an idea about who to approach as a possible advertiser, drop Tanya an email and let her know: ads@ic.org.

Donations

While our number of subscribers is low, we are fortunate that they are highly dedicated. Among them is a select group of folks who have generously supported magazine operations with tax-deductible donations. While it is difficult to know how much we can budget for contributions earmarked in support of Communities, we have been able to average close to $10,000 in recent years and this has been crucial to keeping our finances within range of being manageable.

Now we have to do better. This can take a variety of forms. Sometimes people underwrite the costs of a particular issue, because they are excited about the theme that will be highlighted. (Take a peek at the bottom of the magazine's homepage to see if any of the themes queued up get your heart racing: communities.ic.org.)

Sometimes, people (or groups) will pre-purchase a batch of a given issue. Even at a deep discount (we offer 40 per cent off if you buy 10 or more copies) we still make money. Last year, one person was excited enough about this possibility to buy 100 copies of our issue on Education for Sustainability.

Sometimes people want to support a particular magazine initiative, such as the Production Team summit mentioned earlier, or are simply happy to write a check to support the magazine in general. Alternately, you could become a lifetime subscriber for $500. It all counts.

A year from now, I'm hoping to write about all the success we've had in turning things around. However, don't wait to hear it from me—help make it happen! If you're half as inspired by Communities as we are, we invite you to join our collaborative effort to reverse this magazine's fortunes right now! In the process, we'll be making a better world just that much more accessible for everyone.

Communities Magazine 2010 Financial Statement

Expenses	
Printing	$20,767
Office overhead	6,628
Production labor	30,477
Fulfillment	10,687
Office expenses (postage, phone, copying)	33
Travel	1,400
Marketing	763
Total Expenses	**70,755**

Income	
Subscriptions	$24,481
Single issues	924
Back issues	2,064
Distributor sales	8,603
Advertising	6,065
Royalties	322
Donations	9,085
Total Income	**47,672**
Net Profit (Loss)	**($23,083)**

Richard Iriga Wanyiri

The Tyranny of Structurelessness?

Q: *I'm part of a forming community. I'd like to establish operating agreements for the group, but am encountering resistance from others, including the two people who hold title to the property (until the group can get fully established and buy it from them). So far our leaders and many members tend to default into the "we-don't-need-no-stinking-agreements" point of view when I push for them, though we are creating a few. Some folks are wanting more clarity, but are not sure how to get it, and others go into hopelessness that they have no power or means to address the situation as they see it. I feel as if I am "holding the space" of possibility and optimism, as well as a sketchy vision of how to get from where we are to where we need to be, all by myself, as I am really the only one with an experience of good facilitation and good process. But frankly, it is pretty exhausting. People seem to think good process, clarity around expectations, etc. equates to a loss of personal freedom, the creation of arbitrary or onerous rules or bureaucracy, a recreation of the corporate world which we are trying to escape, etc. They get triggered into their feelings about the latter without even knowing that it's possible to have processes that are actually freeing, and that can emerge from the group, rather than be imposed from above. When I push for more "social infrastructure," I think I look like some kind of control freak to them. And the frustrating part is that as I start to freak out about the lack of clear agreements, I tend to get triggered into my own stuff, which does include a wish to control the situation. It's a vicious cycle. Any reflections or suggestions?*

Tree Bressen responds:

Here are my suggestions:

1. Provide your group with as many fabulous process occasions as you can, so they will know from personal experience that such a thing is possible.

2. Hear them out one-on-one, the ones you disagree with. How can you sympathize with their fears? What do you have in common with them? Can you engage people in a larger conversation about the archetypes of group well-being vs. individual freedom? And own it when you get triggered yourself (either in the moment, or soon afterward)?

3. Arrange for group visits to other neighboring communities, where, in front of others over a meal or consultation, you can engage established groups in conversation about clear agreements as well as other topics.

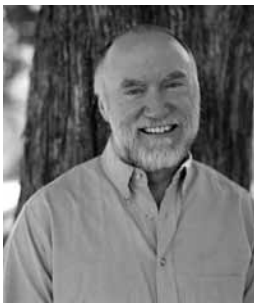
4. Get members to read Diana Leafe Christian's book *Creating a Life Together,* so they'll know it's not just you or other individuals who advocate for further clarity. You might consider actually buying every family their own copy, because frankly if the book has a positive impact regarding this issue on even one or two people, that is worth a lot.

5. Get yourself some good support personally, allies and friends outside this group—people you can lean on when things get tough.

6. Can your group do a roleplay or something to play with this issue and unlock polarization? Perhaps something including swapping roles back and forth? See #1.

At some point if the group is not prepared to undertake the basic work of creating some clarity and agreements, you may have to cut your losses and withdraw, but hopefully it won't turn out that way. Good luck.

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



Laird Schaub responds:

As often occurs with interesting questions, this one breaks down into parts. So let's tackle them one at a time.

First, there's a subtle dynamic at play here about power that may or may not be something the group is aware of—I'm wondering especially about the two land owners. Ambiguity slants things toward the status quo and reinforces power gradients. If the owners take the position that no agreements are needed until and unless there's a problem ("good will will see us through"), there will be resistance to engaging in the work of clarifying that must be overcome every time. To be clear, I'm not talking about anyone having a bad heart or being purposefully manipulative; it's just the way ambiguity plays out, and people with power tend to be oblivious to it.

Ambiguity slants things toward the status quo and reinforces power gradients, but people with power tend to be oblivious to this dynamic.

Second, this is a classic manifestation of the dynamic tension between structure/no structure. Anarchy has a decent chance of working so long as everyone sits on one end of that spectrum. In a typical group though (which this one has every indication of being) the lens that the no-structure folks look through needs to be counterbalanced by the lens preferred by those who find structure clarifying and liberating (because they know where they stand and there's anxiety living in the miasma of uncertainty).

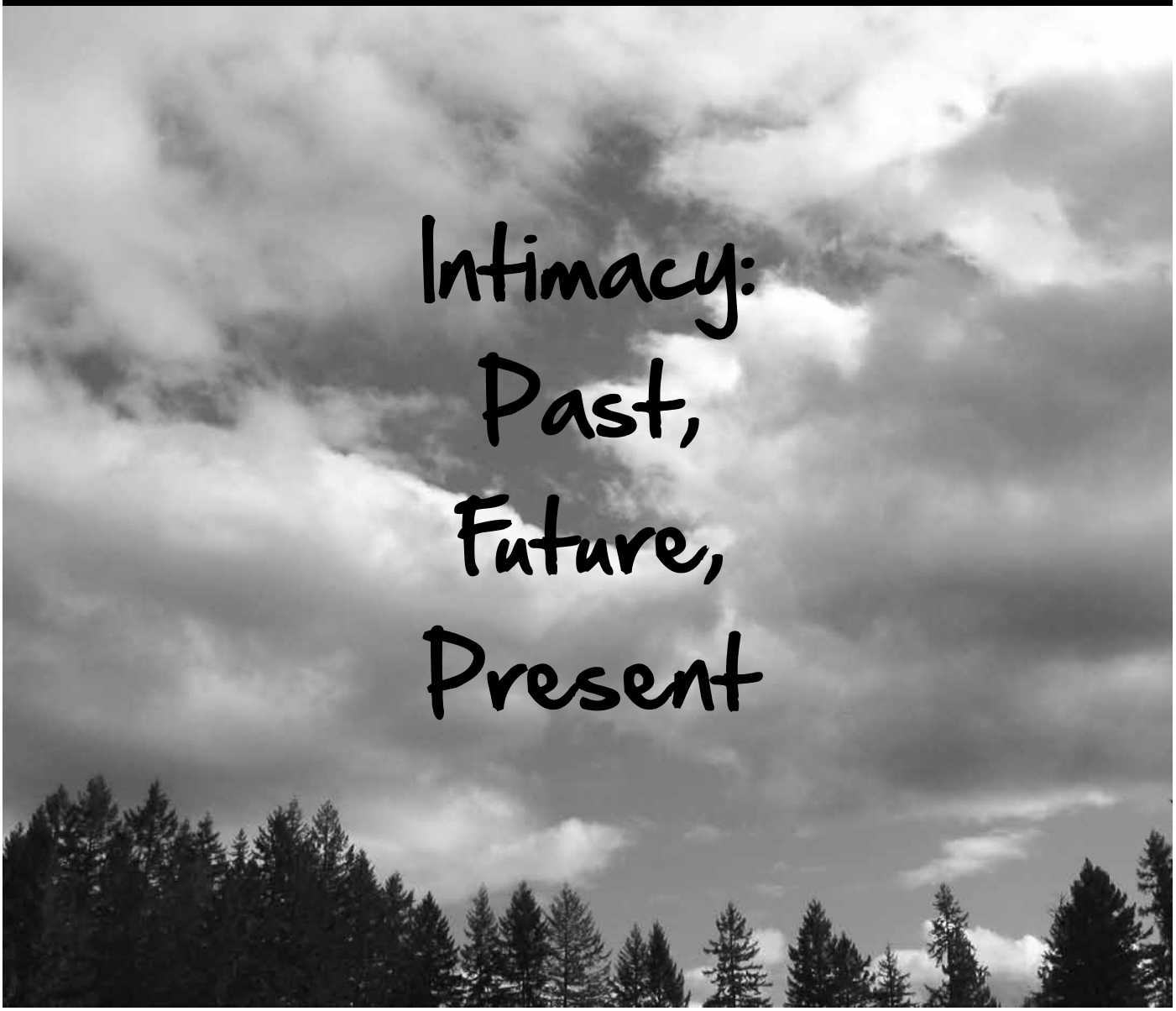
The key, in my experience, is trying to sell any structure as our structure, rather than as something imposed by others. It is not a question about right and wrong; it is a question of finding the right balance.

Third, I caution you to be patient with those who are suspicious of the benefits ascribed to spending a gob of time talking about good process. For the most part, the baseline of meeting dynamics is so poor in our culture that it's hard to fault people whose basic attitude is that group conversations are a gauntlet to survive (trial by meeting)—rather than an opportunity to build connection and solve problems. If someone has no personal experience of a thing being good, it makes a lot of sense that they learned to avoid it.

As a strategy, I suggest asking for permission to experiment with some structure and see what happens. If you can deliver productivity and connection during the experiment (rather than a sense of being hamstrung by rules and red tape), it won't be nearly as difficult to get people to make tentative agreements permanent, or to expand the experiment to additional areas. ❧

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.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR BY CHRIS ROTH



Intimacy: Past, Future, Present

Once again, the wide-ranging articles in this issue cover much more ground than an Editor's Note could—and many of their authors are more qualified than I am to comment on certain aspects of our theme. Instead, this Note is a personal reflection on what "intimacy" meant to me on one late-March morning, at a community in Oregon...

"Trees, trees, beautiful trees." It's a birdsong with which I'm intimately familiar, but it took me a day to remember who was singing it, after more than a year away from here. It's a brown creeper, accurately describing a habitat with which I'm also intimately familiar, the forests of western Oregon. I've called this region home for most of my adult life. I've recently spent a year in Missouri, but I'm back visiting again this March, exploring the possibility of returning to my former community (where I spent 12 years) or at least to this area (whose people and places I first started getting to know 25 years ago). I hear that song again now, and I'm also hearing ruby-crowned kinglets, winter wrens, black-capped chickadees, American robins, American crows, Steller's jays, spotted towhees—and that's just at this moment. I've also heard osprey, common ravens, red-breasted nuthatches, and varied thrushes this morning. When I take time to listen, to let the chatter of my mind and the turmoil of my emotions fade away, I feel intimately connected to this place, to the earth, to the community of life. I also feel able to be intimately connected to the people I share my life and this planet with. I feel at home, and open to experience. In this moment, life seems like a blessing.

But I know this is not the only kind of intimacy I've felt today. Some of those other kinds, I've welcomed a lot less. I'm visiting a place facing major financial hurdles if it is to survive into the future. A small group of people has come together to attempt to give it new life—but the odds can seem steep. I'm

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR BY CHRIS ROTH

intimately familiar with the kinds of struggles and tensions that can happen in intentional communities and in nonprofit organizations when "scarcity" rather than "abundance" seems to be the dominant experience, and when threats to individual and collective survival loom large.

I'm also intimately familiar with much of this community's history, and my personal history in it. I've had some transformative, healing times here—shared meaningful experiences with many wonderful people, seen dreams of community and earth-connection come true, at least for periods—and I've also had painful times here, when struggle and disappointment seemed to reign. I've felt held by the wider natural and human community, and I've also felt isolated, lonely, out of sync with the earth as well as with people. I've felt very open, and boxed in; I've felt that life is magical and wondrous, and that life is pointless and cruel. I've felt appreciative of and connected to the natural beauty here at times, and unworthy of and alienated from it at others. I've felt hopeful, and despairing. I've felt satisfied with, and even satiated by, the intimacy of connection through shared lives and friendship, and despairing at my seeming inability to find intimate romantic connections. I've felt excited about upcoming or ongoing work, new projects, and possibilities, and I've felt as if all the good days were behind me, and they led me to...*this*.

I'm intimately familiar with all of these feelings, and this place brings them forth powerfully for me. Recently, I've felt overwhelmed at times by the less-happy aspects of this intimacy, and wanted to run from them. But by running from one kind of intimacy, I am also running from the other. When "escape" is the impulse determining my actions, I don't end up sitting down, being still, letting *life* wash over me. To be honest, when I started writing this Editor's Note, I was wanting to escape. I did not expect the process to actually create the space where I would experience this issue's theme, rather than simply write about it. I did not consciously anticipate the flood of birdsong. And for whatever reason, by simply expressing the above, I have also lost my perceived need to escape.

Our circle of volunteers had a similarly open, intimate gathering this morning, in which we each talked about our own challenges in finding the energy to carry forward in a situation seeming fraught with obstacles. How can we possibly close the budget gap here? How can we rebuild a community in a place with rapidly-deteriorating infrastructure? How can each individual afford to live here and put their life's energies into the place, with little real assurance that the efforts will be successful or lead to any kind of future security? How can we each deal with both personal and collective pain—physical, emotional, social, planetary—in ways that leave us feeling sufficiently empowered to make a difference in the world? When one acknowledges that life is, in some fundamental way, about suffering, what's next? Even becoming a community of Buddhists won't pay the bills.

A song sparrow just let its song pour forth—now punctuated by the call of a spotted towhee in the woods, as well as a rooster's crow and several ducks quacking over by the chicken/duck yard. All of them seem to lighten my spirit. I'm sitting on the deck outside a yurt once inhabited by a family that I thought would never leave this community; we'd be community-mates for life, and I was happy about that. Since them, many others have come and gone, and it sits empty today. We don't know its, or the land's, future. "Letting go" seems imperative. I don't know, at this moment, whether I'll come back here after this visit—or whether it will even be possible to be here a year from now.

A winter wren sings again, advertising its territory and possibly its eligibility as a mate. The sun filters through clouds. The oldest human resident here, in her 80s, just passed with her dog—she seeming to exude the wisdom and gratitude borne of a life well-lived, the dog obviously also happy to be in this beautiful place.

When one acknowledges that life is, in some fundamental way, about suffering, what's next? Even becoming a community of Buddhists won't pay the bills.

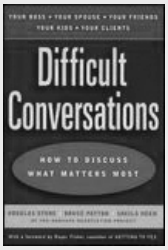
I think about other communal experiments, and even this magazine, many of which, even if they appear to be very successful, also exist, in another sense, on a wing and a prayer. As recent events in Japan remind us, nothing and no one is absolutely secure in this life—we're all just an earthquake or a heartbeat away from being "recycled," our current forms becoming a memory. If that happens to any of us, or any of our projects, it is not the end of the world, though it may seem that way—and it is ultimately inevitable. Even your voting for this magazine with your subscription dollars does not actually guarantee that it, or I, or you, will live, or share this experience, past tomorrow, or next year, or the earth's next encounter with a giant comet. If it seems important and worthwhile now, that may be enough. And we can also hope that life as we know it and love it will go on, and do our best to make it so. (In the case of the magazine, be reassured that we have no intentions of reneging on subscriptions—though we do need your help to keep this forum alive.)

A chorus of tree frogs is telling me to wrap this up. For now, in this moment, that's the security and intimacy I need. ❧

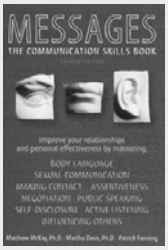
Chris Roth (editor@ic.org) edits Communities.

Featured Titles

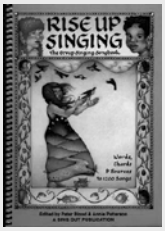
Community Bookshelf



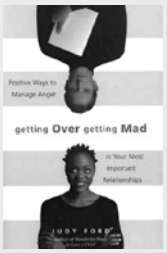
Difficult Conversations
250 pp, softcover, 2000. Lays out a structure for understanding challenging conversations, pitfalls and how to avoid them for better relationships.



Messages
320 pp, softcover, 1995. Multilayered book about communication, including with groups and individuals, verbal and nonverbal messages, and even a chapter about working with kids.



Rise up Singing!
288 pp, 2004. Song is a timeless way to connect with others and this is the classic book for bringing people together around song. Easy to use, with a wide range of songs from many traditions.



Getting Over Getting Mad
176 pp, softcover, 2001. Rather than avoid anger, this book lays out how to deal with it productively and find a good role for this trickiest of emotions in your life.

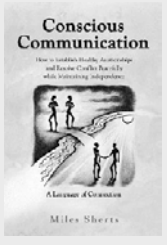
Passion as Big as a Planet
219 pp, softcover, 2007. We only work on behalf of what we love. Learn to bring connection, faith and forgiveness into your activism work, and help turn the ecological crisis around.

Communities Directory
512 pp, softcover, 2010. New edition of the FIC's guide to finding and connecting with communities, with over 1,000 listings.

Sitting in the Fire 267 pp, softcover, 1997. Looks at conflict and high emotions in large groups and offers ways to engage not only productively, but dynamically.

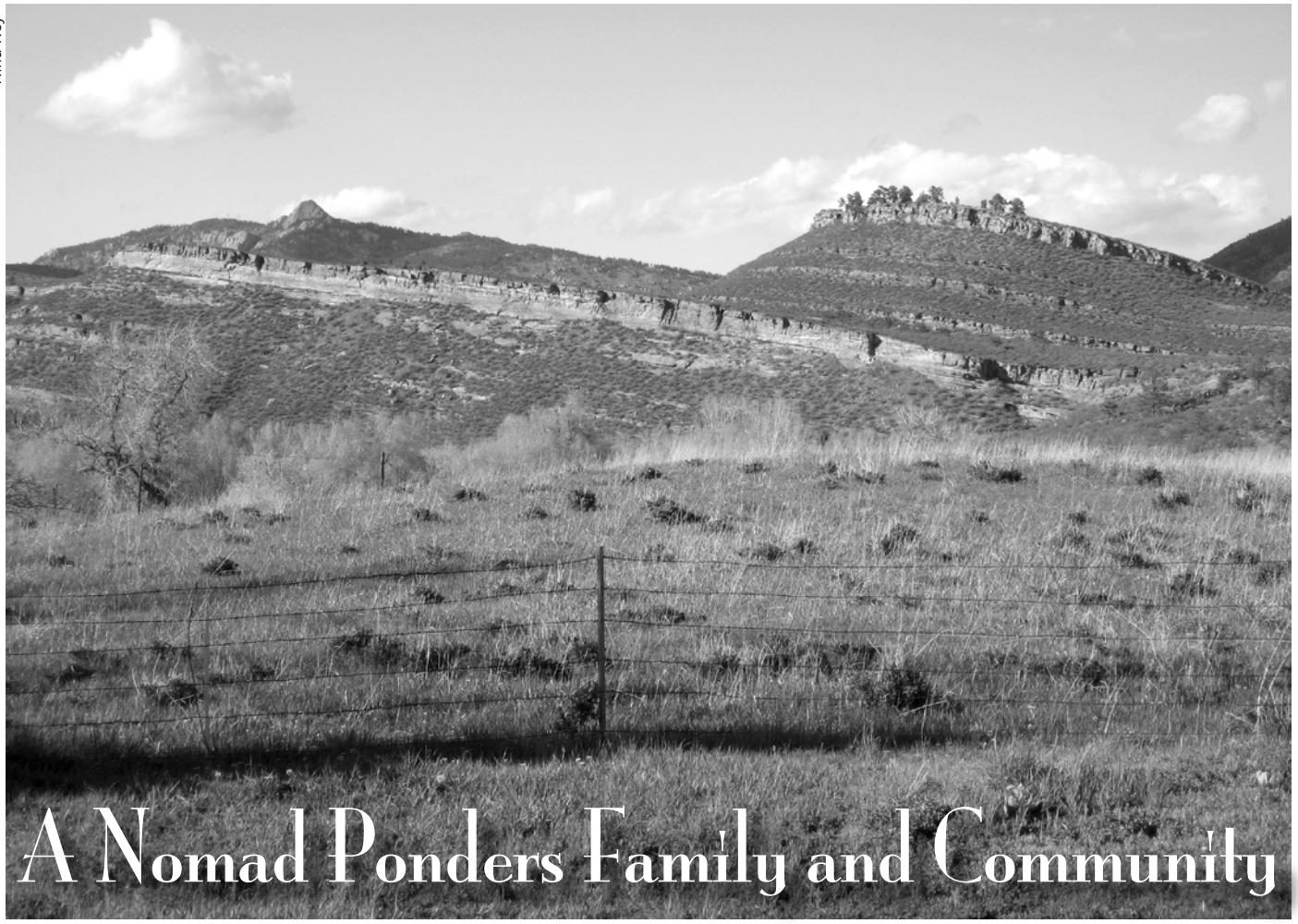
Turning to One Another
158 pp, softcover, 2002. Looks at the simple art of communication for creating connection and social change. Get closer to those around you through the simple, ever-present tool of talk!

A New We
(new: DVD)
120 minutes, 2010. Profiles of sustainability-focused communities in Europe. Great addition to your community video collection.



Conscious Communication
334 pp, softcover, 2009. Like NVC? You'll love this! Does a great job of explaining why things work, and offers a long list of tools to get at better communication from all sorts of perspectives and styles.

store.ic.org



Nina Rey

A Nomad Ponders Family and Community

By Molly Hollenbach

My friend Nancy goes to family reunions a thousand miles away with at least 50 people, and I marvel. I'm an only child from a small family, not married, no kids. We moved around a lot, and my parents didn't actually live together much, even when they were married. I'm not sure why. They moved to change jobs, to be near her brothers and sisters in Detroit or his in Los Angeles, or maybe to split up, to get back together. We had relatives but didn't live near them; I had friends but frequently had to say goodbye.

My mother was the only constant in my life, and we had an edgy relationship. She came of age on a Missouri farm in the Depression, I grew up in a California town in the '60s. She worked two jobs as a medical secretary to put me through high school, and I, of course, lounging around reading the Existentialists, had no appreciation for what she must have given up to raise a child alone. We blamed each other for our differences.

I have, like my mother, itchy feet, the travel bug, the nomad's belief that there really is greener grass in the next valley over. Being able to move along when things aren't going well is a very American form of freedom, and it produces a very American kind of person: a lonely one. Although I've kept up the family pattern, with variations, I've also yearned for closer relationships. This story is about my personal quest for intimacy in family, friendship, and community, and what I learned along the way.

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The common element of intimacy is some kind of openness. You meet each other's eyes without dissembling—it's an open-eyed, mutual regard. It could be called a loving regard; but not all intimacy is loving. There's the quiet comfort of knowing and being known, such as one feels in a family, a long marriage, or a small town. There's also the intimacy of extreme moments—in crisis or celebration—the stuff movies are made of. You're standing together on the deck of the sinking Titanic. You're in bed. You're halfway up the glacier. Or someone has a gun to your head, and you look into his eyes. You are fully, mutually present.

And there's what Romain Rolland, an early 20th century French philosopher, and then Sigmund Freud called the "oceanic feeling," *"le fait simple et direct de la sensation de l'éternel (qui peut très bien n'être pas éternel, mais simplement sans bornes perceptibles, et comme océanique)."* [literally: The simple and direct fact of the sensation of eternity (which might not be

eternity, but simply without perceptible boundaries, oceanic).] Freud rephrased this as "a feeling of an indissoluble bond of being one with the external world as a whole."

I think of it as a moment of grace, an ecstatic, mystical oneness—the far end of the range of feelings of intimacy. It happens; it's not something one can consciously direct. My first experience of this sort came at a lonely moment in my life, when I was 11. My mother filed for divorce and took a secretarial job in La Jolla; my father went to work for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. They put me in a small boarding school for girls on a ranch in the live oak hills of Fallbrook, California. On the second day of class, the teacher in the one-room schoolhouse skipped me two grades—from fourth to seventh—and thus I became both the youngest and oddest member of this small community.

Each girl was assigned a horse to ride and take care of. Mine, a swaybacked brown pony named Prince, became my best friend. Because of the swayback he couldn't wear a saddle much, so I learned to ride him bareback. One afternoon I was out in the back pasture with Prince, stretched out on his warm, dusty back, with my toes in his mane and my head on his rump, watching the clouds. Something happened that I called afterwards "merging with the sky." The air became luminous. I had a deep sense of absolute belonging in the world. I couldn't tell whether it lasted for a moment or for a while. Since then, whenever that perception comes, it fills me with gratitude. It infuses my life with meaning. It is what I stand on, my bottom line.

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When I was younger I think I expected that feeling of ecstatic, mystical oneness to happen in human company, as well. I believe I've seen it in Sufi dancing or the ecstatic devotional dance of followers of Rajneesh, though I haven't experienced it that way myself. It is an extraordinary kind of intimacy in a crowd, closely related to the bliss of sex, the feeling of union with god. It is one of the elements of charisma. It is a human universal, although many people have never felt it, might not even want to feel it. This feeling can be manipulated, controlled, and directed by those who know how to use their personal power over others.

As a graduate student in cultural anthropology, I read about the wide varieties in human experience and social forms, and thought there were probably better arrangements in some societies than ours. For example, I found gypsies fascinating because they, like my family, never settled down, yet they seemed to have a closeness and emotional freedom so different from ours.

Carol Miller, a cultural anthropologist who lived among modern-day, Serbian-American gypsies in the 1960s and '70s, writes about the gypsies' love of a blissful feeling of togetherness in extended family groups. Although they moved around a lot, they maintained close ties through phone calls and parties and religious events throughout the year. Miller explains, in her book, *Lola's Luck: My Life Among the California Gypsies*, that gypsy ceremonies held on occasions such as births and deaths were intended to be more than just a good time, to create more than good feeling: the goal was euphoria, unforgettable moments, heroic moments—what I'm calling ecstatic, mystical oneness. All the elements of community were there: close relatives, food, music, dance, and formal elements invoking spiritual beliefs. But it wasn't considered a successful event if that shared good feeling didn't arise and sustain itself among everyone present. A mean-spirited remark could ruin the whole ceremony.

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The Be-Ins, Love-Ins, rock concerts, political demonstrations, group therapy, and communes of the '60s were experiments in intimacy—intensely shared experience, openness, honesty—in new social forms that flew in the face of the cautious, conventional '50s. Toward the end of that era, after hugging strangers at Love-Ins and standing shoulder-to-shoulder in protests, I dropped out of graduate school in anthropology and joined a commune.

At the height of the hippie Revolution, a group called The Family coalesced in Haight-Ashbury and left the city, eventually settling in northern New Mexico with high hopes of creating a new and better society. In early 1970 I met two representatives of The Family at the World Affairs Conference, a semi-academic, radical thinkers' conference at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where The Family was invited to talk about their communal way of life. They gave a demonstration of Gestalt therapy to a large audience, which I found thrilling. At the end of the week, I quit my waitress job, said goodbye to my roommate, and left for Taos. The calm self-possession of these two folks, both bright dropouts from higher education, impressed me. I

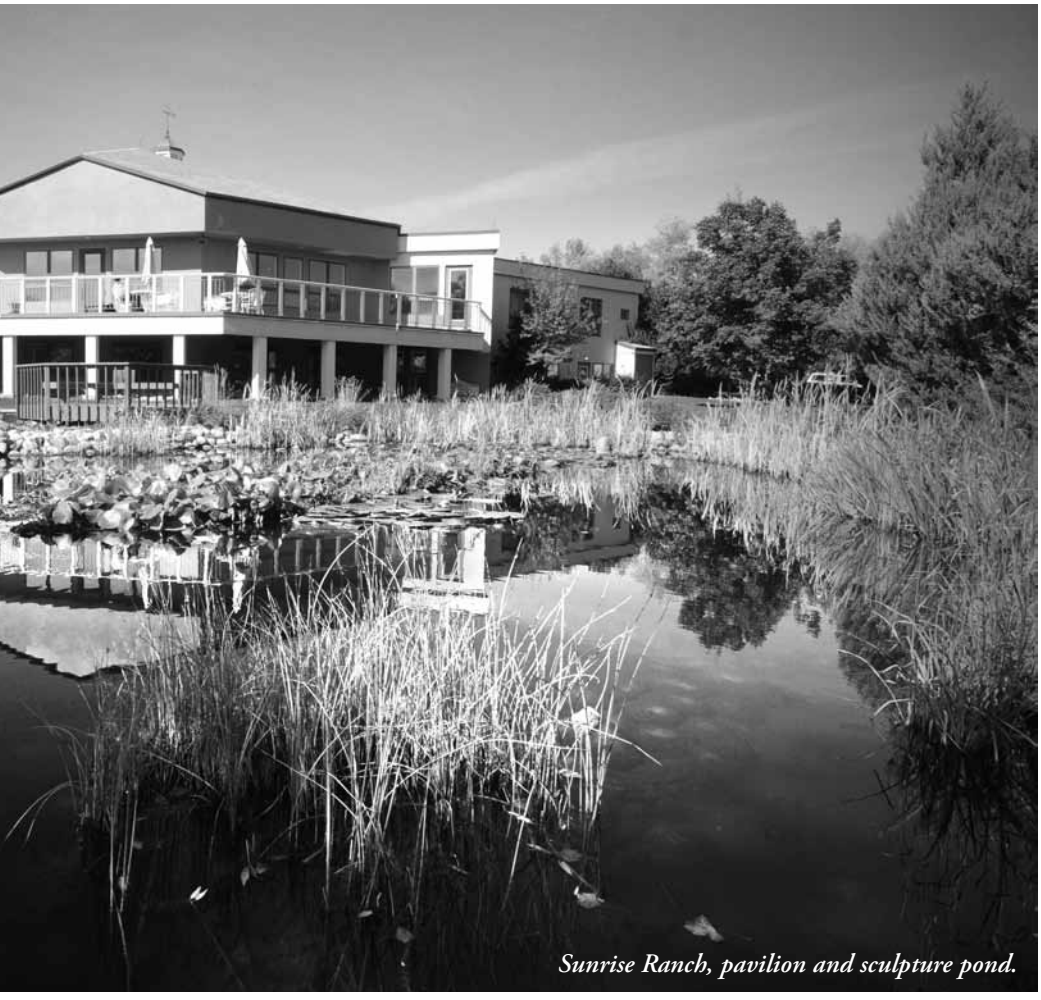
Bligh Gillies

hoped they could help me get what they had: "the self you've always wanted." And I was hoping to find a real family.

At that time, The Family had about 55 members and lived in a small adobe house about 10 miles outside of Taos. They considered themselves a group marriage and practiced their own form of group encounter and Gestalt therapy as a means of breaking down psychological barriers. They had a rule of "24-hour encounter." Every member was supposed to be emotionally available to the others at all times. If someone wanted to interact with you, you had to give the encounter your full and honest response, including showing anger or irritation if that was how you felt. All conflicts were supposed to be resolved by face-to-face confrontation, which they called "hassling"; no passive avoidance, no forming alliances to gang up on someone. Everyone had an equal voice, they said. This vision appealed to me. I hated hypocrisy and believed that people are essentially good. I believed that if I could get in touch with my "real" self, I would be OK; I would know what was going on, know what to do, know how to be a good person. And I would be loved.

Sunrise Ranch, little chapel.

Nina Rey



Sunrise Ranch, pavilion and sculpture pond.

As it turned out, there was no politeness encountering each other, and no privacy either; even toothbrushes were shared. But more significantly, there was no psychological privacy. I was horrified to hear things I had said to a lover thrown in my face by someone else. Intimacy in The Family proved painful, as it was based on psychologically invasive techniques without corresponding safeguards. The Gestalt sessions often turned accusatory and bullying—all in the name of love. In The Family's version of Gestalt therapy (probably not recognizable to its founder, Fritz Perls), the person on the "hot seat" in the middle of the circle faced a crowd of interrogators who gave no quarter. For me, the message was: "You don't know where you're at!," "You don't know what you really feel" (the implication: We do.), "You're so fucked up." When I was on the hot seat, I usually ended up humiliated, sobbing apologies for not being whatever

I thought I was supposed to be according to the group.

Nothing in The Family's rules said anything about nonviolence or compassion. The leader was called "the strongest among us"—not the kindest or wisest, though some considered him wise, but the strongest. The rule of hassling, which was presented as a means of giving everyone an equal voice, in fact created a hierarchy in which the strongest and most aggressive members got their way and directed the life of the community.

Yet there were moments—many moments—of peaceful being together in the little adobe house on a field outside of Taos, or crowded together on the floor of the white van on the way into town, or working side by side in the kitchen, that touched some part of me seldom touched. It was like having lots of brothers and sisters—the larger family I had yearned for as a child. Though I left The Family after only a few intense months, I held onto the possibility that somewhere, somehow, there could be that open sharing of selves without the invasiveness, whether in the intimacy of one-to-one relationships, or in therapy, or in a community of a different kind.

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Now, in my 60s, I have finally realized that relationships deepen when you stay put. I live in a high mountain town where I've lived several years, gone away, visited, and moved back, to be with the same friends. The post office and grocery store are a short walk away, and I see faces I recognize even if I've been gone for a while. I cherish this community that others have built and take comfort from their sense of permanence. My own small circle of friends is teaching me what it means to know one another over a long time and to see one another grow and change. Simply choosing to stay in this town, in a landscape I love, with these particular friends, has taught me a lot about intimacy. I'm not looking to move—at least not for a while. Not unless I have a really good reason.

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An article in the "Elders" issue of Communities magazine by Victoria Albright moved me to think again about my own family. She is about my age and is writing about a mother-daughter relationship transformed by a group process in community. My mother died 12 years ago, before I ever found a way to let go of my anger and blame. My clumsy efforts at encounter-style honesty with her after I left The Family didn't work well for either of us. She looked back bitterly on "that terrible time when you got involved with the hippies and hated your mother."

Albright described an experience of intimacy within a group that sounded so different, and so much kinder, than what I had seen in The Family. It sounded secular; not mystical oneness but a way of building close relationships while keeping ego boundaries respectfully intact. She and her daughter had a very positive outcome from a group process that seemed intrusive to her at the beginning.

Albright had come for a visit to Lost Valley Educational Center, an intentional community near Eugene, Oregon, where her daughter was living. When she was invited to share disagreements with her daughter with a third person—a mediator—present, she almost turned around and left. But she stayed, at her daughter's urging, and found it was possible to be herself, communicate fully, and honor the generational differences. Albright visited Lost Valley many times and grew to love her role there as an elder, able to help other parents and children understand each other better.

I decided to call Albright and ask her to consider in more detail what made this potentially painful or even harmful "processing" of differences in values and worldview both positive and growth-inducing instead of widening the conflict between herself and her daughter. If my mother and I could have had something like that, I thought, it would have changed our lives. Albright said the ground rules made the group process positive—the rules for peaceful, nonjudgmental communication, and the dedication of all the members to following those rules. There were several practices that made deep sharing at Lost Valley safer than it was in The Family or in my family of origin.

Sunrise Ranch, dome.

The Lost Valley community's rules were based on the principles of Compassionate Listening, developed initially to help Israelis and Palestinians talk to each other in the quest for a lasting peace, and Nonviolent Communication, developed by a psychologist, Marshall Rosenberg, for similar purposes. The idea is that conflicts can be resolved if the parties agree to listen to each other with empathy and speak honestly without judgment, blame, shaming, guilt, or


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"Would you be willing to wait until later in the day to use the vacuum cleaner?" It wasn't about oneness; it was about allowing, differentiating, and working together.

other kinds of manipulation that increase the conflict. Nonviolent communication is a four-part process: first, making observations based on perception, e.g. "I hear you vacuuming the living room at 8 in the morning"; then a feeling statement, "I feel irritated"; then an expression of a simple human need, such as "I need to be able to sleep in after working late"; and finally a clear, concrete, feasible request, such as "Would you be willing to wait until later in the day to use the vacuum cleaner?"

Surrounding all this at Lost Valley were hours and hours of just listening and allowing each other to say what they meant. It sounded delicious to me, but it wasn't about oneness; it was about allowing, differentiating, and working together.

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Because, after The Family, I remain suspicious of hierarchy and distrustful of charisma, I was intrigued to hear from a former member of another communal group who considered her patriarchal leaders benevolent, even though she eventually left. I asked for more information from Taylor Goforth, a bright-faced, slender woman now in her 50s. Goforth spent nearly 20 years with the international spiritual group, Emissaries of Divine Light (EDL), living for six years at an EDL community in Oregon, and another 12 years at Sunrise Ranch, in the foothills of Rocky Mountain National Park.

The beautiful land at Sunrise played a large part in her experience of community.

"The land spoke to me so deeply," she said. She loved to climb the hill of huge granite boulders to the west and look out over the valley and north to the mountains. The 345-acre ranch provided the group a solid economic base, with a dairy herd, a five-acre organic garden, and enough land to raise alfalfa and hay. Some 125 members worked hard together, growing and processing much of their own food. They found joy in the work, Goforth said.

EDL had a hierarchical structure, but in this case there were many leaders, not just one, and according to her they were mostly benign.

"The spiritual focus was represented by the community and the leaders. We considered the hierarchical structure the design of heaven on earth; the heavenly design could be made manifest," Goforth said. "The community was a vehicle to experience oneness with God and with the creative process and the Whole [of existence].

"When we were together there was a hugely moving experience that happened, with the group resonating around ideals and high feelings of ecstasy, compassion, serenity, illumination."

In the best of times, Goforth said, "I felt like everything I did had significance; I had a purpose, a direction; I was surrounded by others with the same purpose, having the same experience. It was mind, heart, and body together. Life was suffused with meaning."

What could possibly have been missing? For Goforth, it was critical thinking and a strong connection with the big world outside the community. She felt subtly set apart as an intellectual. She saw the patriarchal leadership growing rigid and resistant to change. The teachings emphasized the positive to the extent that the negative couldn't accept-

Despite their struggles, those who left these communities took something with them, as I did from The Family—new knowledge of themselves, questions, a determination to build something more.

ably be spoken.

It's hard to sustain utopia. As Shakespeare put it in *The Taming of the Shrew:* "My tongue will tell the anger of mine heart, Or else my heart, concealing it, will break." Jealousy, aggression, a carping, bitter anxiety—there will be a stain on the white tablecloth, and eventually it will have to be washed. The Taos Family ran up huge debts, lost members, and left town in the middle of the night. The communities described by Albright and Goforth did not last, at least not in the same idyllic form. For Lost Valley, the gradual changing of the generations, as well as economic and other factors, both internal and external, brought in new goals and approaches that also changed the social dynamics (part of an evolution, perhaps a spiral one, that continues today). In the EDL community, Goforth said, "people felt their idea of or commitment to what Martin Exeter (and Uranda before him) had taught in terms of spiritual truths was being betrayed, left behind, changed. The group's trust of each other was deeply shaken." Many, including Goforth, left. (Sunrise is, however, still a working farm community, still part of EDL, and, according to Goforth, again manifesting important elements of its initial spirit.)

But despite their struggles, those who left those communities took something with them, as I did from The Family—new knowledge of themselves, and some questions, and perhaps a determination to build something more.

"After I left I felt very fragmented," Goforth said. "No one around me had anything in common. I wondered what brought people together [in mainstream society]."

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After my brief but often painful experience in The Family, I had no interest in living in a commune, ever again. But while I was still with The Family, I had the opportunity to visit another kind of place that also left a lasting impression, this one positive. The Family had made a film about itself and the other Taos communes of the time, and had a grand plan for distributing it and becoming rich and famous. The leader sent four of us off in a car with a copy of the film and instructions to arrange showings at university campuses throughout the west. Our first stop was the University of Arizona, and someone had arranged for us to stay at a community of artists north of Tucson called Rancho Linda Vista. Rancho Linda Vista was a cohousing community before the term was adopted. A group of artists and art professors from the University of Arizona had bought a piece of land that was formerly the home base of a working ranch; houses were scattered out among the desert landscape and there was a central building for meetings and shared meals. But there was privacy; there were separate houses; there were psychological and social boundaries and breathing spaces in which to make art.

When I visited Rancho Linda Vista in the spring of 2003, more than 30 years after its founding, it was still there, still beautiful, and they were still doing art. Some of the original members had passed on, but the community continued. I chatted with Joy Fox McGrew, one of the cofounders, sitting on her porch in a cool desert breeze. I asked if there had ever been a time when someone tried to take over and run the place their way. Joy mulled it over and said that someone once did get into writing up the rules and making them into a book and telling everybody what to do, but that effort didn't get very far. There was no way to get a leg up on that particular horse. It seemed that when conflicts arose and meetings got long, someone would likely say, "Aaahh, let's go get drunk and make art."

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I'm happy in my *un*intentional community with good friends, but here's what I would look for if I wanted something more consciously designed: First, a secular mission statement. I'm no longer looking for ecstatic, mystical oneness in a group. That's religion. I believe in the separation of church and state, on the micro as well as the macro level. Second, a means, whether formal or informal, part of the rules or part of the group's culture, to acknowledge and prevent the ascension of those who want power over others. Exercising limited personal authority based on character, experience, and/or skill is different from control, manipulation, coercion. Let that distinction be maintained.

I would look for a place where there are separate quarters for partners and families and others who choose to live alone. I'd look for a community with permeable boundaries and lots of involvement with the wider world. And I'd want to find people who know about Compassionate Listening and Nonviolent Communication and are committed to living by those rules of engagement, because I think such practices allow intimacy to develop where it will—like grace—like belonging in the world. ❧

Molly Hollenbach is a freelance writer. She is working on a revised edition of her book, Lost and Found, *a memoir about The Family commune in Taos, New Mexico, 1970 (University of New Mexico Press, 2004).*

Honesty and Intimacy

By Damien Friedlund

Intimacy is like a drug. If you're brave enough to take a taste, you'll get high. By intimacy, I mean honesty. To practice honesty, we expose ourselves, make ourselves vulnerable. If my friend knows that I look at internet porn, once aspired to become a billionaire, and am attracted to his partner, and he still loves me, then I have overcome one of humankind's worst fears. If he loves me more because he knows me that much better, then we have reversed a basic human dynamic much of society takes for granted: that we will tell the truth and lose love directly because we did so. When my secrets are no longer secret, and I am loved in spite of them, or even because I have shared deeply, intimately, I am free. It's my experience that the most powerful social and emotional bonds are created by this process.

When I was 30, I joined a rather extreme community (some might call it a "cult," though FIC discourages use of this ill-defined, usually pejorative label) because I could see, upon visiting them, that the 40-odd members had some kind of powerful family-like love between them. They so casually expressed affection with playful, light touch. Because of loneliness and isolation in my life, I readily gave up my unappreciated autonomy and what few worldly goods I possessed

Illustrations by Yulia Z.

to gain a chance to experience this other-worldly kind of connection. I was not disappointed, though the path towards intimacy was not a clear one. After a couple months of pleasant warm social interactions while performing simple rural labors such as harvesting potatoes and milking goats, two of my closest new companions took me aside in the hay room of the goat barn to let me know, to my horror, that I wasn't working out in the community. After years of solitary, ambitious toil in large cities, I was thoroughly enjoying my new, rich social life among 40 seeking souls in rural America. The problem they told me was that I was hiding myself behind the mask of my personality.

I had no idea what they were talking about. What did they mean that I was lying from deep within my personality? I had thought I had been so congenial, so willing to work hard, so open to what this new strange but powerful communal life had to offer. I was distraught at the prospect of my return to the mean streets of mainstream America. They told me that they could tell that I was hiding and lying, that they did not feel close to me in the way that I imagined I was close to them. The only way to stay was to come clean and honest, tell them about my real feelings about the pain they said they could feel right beneath the surface of my persona. I dug into my memory trying to excavate some childhood (their suggestion) wrong that could possibly redeem me in their, and apparently the whole community's, eyes. The best thread I could pick at from the garment of my life was pain I had experienced in high school, heavy ostracism, that led to me retreating emotionally, becoming much more guarded in the way that I expressed myself. I was 32; high school seemed so long ago. I had thought that pain was safely discarded in the past. Perhaps, I wept, the pain of those experiences, a cruel taunting that went on for several years while I was marooned at a chilly New England boarding school, was what they were looking for. I had never voluntarily told anyone about those years. Bingo! My friends yanked at the thread of my story until the whole garment of that old pain lay in a pile of thread at my feet. I had never told my family or any of my friends outside of prep school about this painful part of my life. I had just tried to bury it and forget about it.

Later that day, I related my sad tale to an audience of the entire community. Crying, expressing my emotions, in front of everyone led directly to my acceptance and success in this community. Reflecting on the experience, I know I was, consciously or unconsciously, being recruited into what some call a "cult," but the social transaction that was taking place was one of the most important events that has occurred in my life. By revisiting the painful chapter from my past, which I had long relegated to a mental dustbin, I regained a measure of my youthful enthusiasm, the innocence and naivete that had been crushed at prep school. Now I profited socially by undoing the layers of defense

and protection I had built up over the years. A fundamental human dynamic of fear and truth was reversed. The truth—that I was treated as, had been, a loser in high school—did not lead to people continuing to reject me. On the contrary, the revelation led to profound empathy and my acceptance into a community and a way of life I craved.

The important lesson I learned was that revealing the truth led to love and intimacy because sharing it was a form of love and intimacy. With intimacy as the payoff, honesty, both emotional and intellectual, became my new religion. Though the community was not sustainable over the long term for myself and for almost everyone else—how could it be sustainable, when the religion of honesty came up against the practically inevitable desire for autonomy?—the lesson imparted, that honesty rather than strategy would lead to love and intimacy, has, for me, never diminished. I learned how to breathe a healthier, more powerful atmosphere, and I would continue to seek that air, choosing to live where it flourished.

But can we always be honest, and expect to receive the love and intimacy we crave? Unfortunately, no. I'm writing this article anonymously. For professional reasons, I do not want my colleagues to be able to Google my name and read about my past experiences or know details about my personal life. My professional life, for better or worse, is not the appropriate context for expressing myself honestly or seeking intimacy, except in individual doses that I control. There is some truth to the common perception that if we are truly honest we will be crushed. We cannot expect those who hardly know us, and who did not choose to work in the world with us, to respond favorably to unusual and uncommon expressions of honesty. Most people in impersonal situations just want our social interactions to go smoothly. Practicing an unusually high degree of honesty will not make one's interactions go more smoothly. Quite the contrary, it will point out the hard work that building intimacy requires, and is likely to make them very uncomfortable. The joke phrase we hear so often, "Too much information!," will assume a new air of seriousness. If, for any of the parties, the goal of the social transaction is other than intimacy, then honesty has a limited role to play.

Attraction tends to work much more mysteriously, or at least eccentrically, than matching values and lifestyles.

So, what contexts are the best for seeking intimacy? Not surprisingly, in family and community, we have the best chances for building deep intimacy. Despite the faults of the community at which I took my crash course in honesty, the degree of intimacy practiced there was exceptional. That's what attracted me in the first place. When I left, I knew I would seek that intimacy in a more sustainable context.

I researched intentional communities and I ended up living in another rural one where 30 people, in addition to gardening, building, practicing permaculture, and running a conference center, met weekly for several hours specifically to cultivate connection and build intimacy. On paper, the situation seemed the perfect place to continue my quest for communal intimacy. And I did make strong connections. Many of the members of this intentional community practiced a high level of honesty and experienced a deep intimacy with each other. But this community of intention, over time, was hardly more sustainable than the group I had left. Over the years I have seen every member I knew leave to meet some need they could not meet there. Most often members left to pursue a professional ambition or to seek and cultivate personal relationships. Although intentional communities often have built the social structures to encourage honesty and to promote intimacy, like meetings and rituals devoted specifically to this purpose, they are usually, nevertheless, challenged to hold on to members.

Most communities are not big enough to foster enough loving partnerships. People usually want to find someone with whom they can fall in love. A population of 30 people, many already partnered, is rarely enough to provide a suitable variety of potential partners. Fifty unattached people is closer to what I imagine would be the lowest possible number of members of an intentional community that would be likely to be able to hold on to members for social reasons alone. Though communal intimacy is a powerful draw, loving partnership, along with meaningful vocation, is the fuel that powers most peoples' lives. Unfortunately, most people are drawn to intentional communities because they believe in the values of the community, the mission statement, and they are attracted to the lifestyle the members live. But we don't really choose our friends, lovers, and partners by such criteria. Attraction tends to work much more mysteriously, or at least eccentrically, than matching values and lifestyles, though these factors certainly come into play. Though the process of deepening honesty and building intimacy with any willing like-minded person is thrilling, at least for extroverts, most seekers of communal intimacy long to do so with their best friends, those to whom they are most attracted. Ultimately, I believe, profound intimacy springs from "affection," not "intention." The good old-fashioned chemistry of attraction and affection is more likely to create the incentives that will galvanize individuals to overcome the inevitable challenges that come with relationship building, community building, intimacy building.

I left that community to pursue a professional goal, and eventually I ended up drawn to another communal experiment, this one smaller and urban. I moved in with a partner and her extended family consisting of an ex-husband/co-parent and

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their two children and another long term member of the community. With room for 10 members, I hoped we could foster a community of affection that would provide the foundation for life in a beautiful and stable community of intention. I believe that goal may be possible, but we were not successful. My partnership was not as solid as I had hoped, and when it broke up, and when we both fell in love with new partners, though we were still friends, our new social lives did not lend themselves to building the degree of intimacy I believe is necessary to create a "community of affection." My energy flowed across town to where my new partner lived and where many of my best friends ended up living. The point of offering these details is to show to how much fluidity our lives are subject, and the difficulties this condition places on the building of a community. And we were middle-aged, slowing considerably down. Try to build a solid anything with a group of young people. It might be that a community most likely to thrive would be comprised of retirees approaching senior citizenship. You think I'm joking, but the older age demographic has the best qualifications for creating stable community.

I'm presently involved in an extended family of sorts, non-residential, but quite intimate. Our average age is 54, including those in our 40s and our 60s. We're financially stable, more geographically stable than most younger people, and we have the time to connect and do things with each other, when we want to. What, exactly, it is that we want to do with each other has emerged as our biggest challenge. When we first realized that we were a "community of affection," we didn't exactly intend it, and we were all so thrilled. At last a community, no larger than a big nuclear family, in which we all really liked each other. We shared and shared. We helped each other through all sorts of knotty personal issues with each other and within our various partnerships and friendships. But the first blush of love wears thin in a group, even a small group, just as it tends to in a partnership of two. Differences clarify.

At the beginning of this essay, I put forward a definition of intimacy based on honesty, or shared emotional experiences. But honesty is a game in which the ante is continually being raised. It's not easy, or necessarily sustainable, to put the brakes on honesty, to say, "only this honest, and not any more so." Don't all relationships, whether comprised of two or 20, tend to chafe against their limitations? I don't know whether those with whom I feel most intimate, by my own definition, those with whom I must express myself as honestly as I am able, will agree to meet me in a place in which we are both vulnerable, in which we both show each other our naked and imperfect souls. There is no guarantee that honesty will be reciprocated, that others, even those closest to me, will share my notions of intimacy. I don't need everybody I love to believe in the religion of honesty, but relationships among people who believe in different degrees of emotional sharing come under a pervasive strain. Relationships are almost like sharks: they don't have to keep moving to survive, but if they're not moving forward there is a high likelihood that they'll move backwards. And receding relationships, even if the recession turns out to be merely seasonal, are particularly awkward creatures with which to play.

Though our family of old fogies is relatively stable, we may not blaze new trails towards greater intimacy. What we already have, which I hope will continue to be extraordinary, may be as much we get. If our collective age is the key to our success as a "community of affection," it may also be our limitation. Old dogs may not be capable of learning new tricks, new ways of being with each other. It's often quite difficult to tell whether we're creating a new way of being intimate, or whether we're just holding each others' hands on the long, inevitable walk towards death. But I suppose that is a rather intimate stroll.

Over the past six months, my partner has been more honest with me about my dysfunctional behaviors, themselves manifestations of my selfishness or self-centeredness. She calls me out on things I say or ways that I act of which she says she would not have made an issue in years past. She realizes she must be honest with me or the foundation of our relationship will be corrupted. In actuality, we will have no relationship, even if we are living together and are sharing the logistics of our lives. In turn, I really must hear, must receive, what she is sharing, if I value our relationship. To resist her emotional truth would likewise nullify our relationship. Whether I can change my behaviors, heal my dysfunction, is another question, but I must, at least, deeply respect what has been bravely offered if we are to move forward, to continue to build intimacy. Each of these decisions to hear each other's truth is individual. We do not know if it will be heard, reciprocated, or if its sharing will change our dynamic.

Despite my quest for intimacy in partnership and community, I realize the most important decisions about intimacy—in my opinion, how to pursue honesty—will have to be made alone and stand alone, whether reciprocated or not. Just as the essential decisions affecting my partnership, I believe, are individual, decided by each of us, the future of our communal family will come down to individual decisions about what each of us wants and is able to express. Ultimately it is quite ironic that intimacy—honest, deep sharing between people—is expressed, both in partnerships and communities, by individual actions. ❧

Damien Friedlund writes pseudonymously.

Love Is the Answer

By Satyama Lasby

I love the topic of love. Being "in love," falling in love, finding one's true love. It depends on where you are in your life, of course, for as we know, everything changes. One year you may find yourself with a beautiful partner, and in another moment you are going through a breakup or a unique healing process that has occurred through relating with another.

It was after a breakup with my partner of four years that I made the New Year's resolution to discover unconditional love, and I have been on this journey ever since. The breakup occurred because I had slept with another man during a vacation and held this event close to myself for several months. It was not a happy or free time in my life. In fact, I lost a lot of sleep, worked too much, and lived with stress. I decided to take a group I had heard of called the enlightenment intensive, otherwise known as "Who Is In." I returned to my partner to share the truth of being with another man, which resulted in the end of the relationship on his part. Emotionally I journeyed from the bliss of the truth and emotional emptiness I had found in the group to being devastated and rejected as he ended the relationship.

Photo courtesy of Satyama Lasby

Tantra for Greater Understanding

Here is an idea for a group of men and women inspired by Karam and Raji, the tantra teachers of Pachamama in San Juanillo, Costa Rica.

The men and women meet in separate groups to begin. In each circle, each person says something aloud on what they would like the opposite gender to know about their gender, for greater understanding, sharing, and intimacy among the sexes. Each person also shares what they appreciate about the opposite sex.

For example, I have shared:

"I would like men to know that they are free to be who they are, and that women are not trying to keep them down or get something from them."

and

"I would like men to know that we appreciate it when they communicate honestly and openly with us, and listen to us even when we are trying to explain something that may be emotionally difficult."

After the same-sex groups share amongst themselves, they come together to share what was discussed. People have the option to pass if they do not feel comfortable. Each person lets the next person know when they have completed their sharing.

I have found this exercise to be deeply intimate, beautiful, and heart-opening.

—S.L.

It was a turning point in my life, however, as I launched into the quest for truth. Living and speaking this way brought a feeling of incomparable bliss. I quit my career two years later and decided to finally live my dreams by traveling the spiritual path and living in community. I wanted to live in community, with people who felt that the truth was as important as I did. I also wanted to be among people who could share love freely, even be in relationships that were open enough to sustain and accept other lovers. It was at the Osho International Meditation Resort in India that I began a way of relating that would change and expand relationships for me.

As Osho attests, love is freedom, and freedom is truth. The meditation centre in India is a juicy and ethical place. People have multiple lovers, open relationships, exclusive partners, with little marriage or children in the Osho sanyassin world. Sanyassins are spiritual seekers and followers of the master Osho Rajneesh. I decided to take sanyass after several experiences with men that taught me two very important lessons...one being to share the truth upfront when relating, and the other being the principle of detachment.

When it came to intimate relating, I had one partner who told me he was sleeping with several people yet still invited me to join him. While at first I was taken aback by the conversation and proposal, I spent several weeks processing, doing emotional cleansing through groups, and came to a place where I decided to accept his offer. The decision was one based on my respect for the truth given outright. The next lesson that came very quickly for me after accepting his proposal was one of detachment, especially detachment from people. Many women experience this in the commune and in our lives because our ingrained and conditioned nature is to find a man to keep for raising of children in order to keep our species alive. I experienced feelings of anger, jealousy, and rejection, because of my conditioned expectation for this man to continue to want me, yet when he pulled away, or went with another woman, I was hurt, despite having the cards laid on the table for me.

I have since had several experiences like this, and in the reverse. Men come to me energetically with desire, and I do not want them because of this pull. I am always grateful for experiences in relating, as it is such a mirror for me. It is a journey of course in finding love, but as we know, love can only come when we love ourselves, which I truly do.

My spiritual journey has led me to the place of observation, letting things go, and learning the art of non-doing, as the universe works to provide us with what we need. It was after an experience of moving to a new city and meeting a fellow sanyassin in Ontario that I learned the lesson of detachment, once again. I thought this might be the "one," as it is quite rare to meet someone having Osho as their master in this part of the world. I fell for him of course, as the pattern went; I wanted him too much and he went with someone else, backed away and eventually told me he wanted only friendship. While all this was happening, along with the feelings of rejection that came with it, I was naturally becoming friends with another man, going to spirit conferences, festivals, and the Rainbow Gathering in Pennsylvania. What started with absolutely no attraction to this other man ended up in a very deep love, for I truly wanted nothing from him. I had no expectation on the relationship. I was simply having beautiful experiences with this man, as a friend and as a lover. I could be in my full power, express my full truth, and be intimate with other people if I wanted.

The Path of Love is one that runs quite deeply for us all. I feel that in the work I have done on myself, doing exactly as I want to do is key, every time. True love came when I wasn't trying to make anything happen, and it continues to work this way. My relating with my lover is open and free; I can travel the world and live in community. He is raising two children and teaching spiritual living to ESL students while I am following my dream of being in the community of Pachamama for the winter, and teaching yoga workshops and writing in Canada for the summer.

It is also possible for us to have other lovers, and be open about it. Love, intimacy, and the truth are interconnected, and all come when we are truly free and in love with ourselves. ❧

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Dreaming It Up: Our 20-Year Experiment with Open Marriage in Community

By Jake and Bell

Bell: I remember when it all started. We had been married a year, together for four. And I still hadn't answered the question, "Can I really be in love if I am attracted to other people?" I had this belief that in serious relationships you put your blinders on and never look at other men. But after a while, I realized this restriction was sapping my zest for life. Then we moved into this big intentional community and, in our first week, I met Rain.

Jake: I remember that long walk we took when you said you were attracted to Rain and didn't know what to do about it. I didn't know either so I gave you a yellow light and said we should "Proceed with caution…" I think I also made some silly rule I didn't want you to touch each other where you would wear underwear. I remember the fateful night a few weeks later when I came back early from making tofu (coincidentally, with your next lover!). And there the two of you were, in our bed, and you clearly had broken my rule!

I was devastated. I felt like you had pulled the rug out from under me and I lost all trust in you. We slept apart for the first time that night and I remember having one of the most profound dreams of my life. I was driving a beautiful red car and all our photo albums were in the back seat. We stopped at an amusement park and when we came back, we found the car was broken into and all our photos were stolen. And I knew this happened because you left your door unlocked!

Suddenly it all made sense! I think the car represented our relationship, which is interesting because, like a car, we can both be "in it," but also have our own doors—our own ways of relating to the outside world. In my relationships, I always "lock my door." I can roll down my window—and relate with my head, even my heart—but I always keep my seatbelt on.

My fear was that you would be "careless" and let someone else into our car, and this person would steal that which made us special, made us unique... And that's exactly how I felt. Around that time, you would say you loved me and I would think, "So what?! You love me… You love him… You love the dog… What's special about that?"

It was a difficult time for us! You kept wanting to open up the marriage and I was angry and scared. This went on for around five months, but slowly I started asking new questions about

that dream, like "Why am I driving?" Why am I the one responsible for keeping us on straight and narrow road? And perhaps even more important, "Is there even a road out there?" Over 50 percent of marriages end in divorce. Maybe we'd do better heading off in our own direction.

I also started to recognize some of the cultural stories we were trapped in. Continuing with the car metaphor, it occurred to me that the cars we drive were designed before we were born. We don't build our own cars, we go to a lot and say things like "I'll take the red sedan with the good safety record." In a similar way, we don't create our relationships and they have rules and norms that were created millennia ago! "I'd like a heterosexual, serial monogamous relationship please. Ah, come right this way…"

So, I started to wonder, if I could really *design* our relationship, using the metaphor of a car, what would it look like? And it quickly came to me that I'd want a solar powered car! Solar energy is abundant! Today, most cars run on fossil fuels—a limited and zero-sum resource. The more one person has, the less another has. And I think many of us have a similar story that love is a finite resource we have to hoard. "I can't let you love someone else because that would be like putting a hole in our gas tank. All our love would leak out and there would be nothing left." I dreamt up a new *story* for us in which our "car" is powered by a source of energy so abundant we couldn't imagine even beginning to use it up. Love is the fabric of the universe! It's limitless!

This new story helped me feel more connected to you and also brought back a sense of specialness to our relationship. I realized what made us unique was not only the "photos" or experiences we shared, but who we are in the world together. As a couple, we take this omnipresent love and manifest it in the world in a unique way. Who "Jake and Bell" are *together* is unique. And that uniqueness is not lessened by your sharing love with someone else. In fact, in a way, it actually increases it!

I also came to realize that most of us have very different interpretations of what the word "monogamy" means and that this disparity is often what gets couples in trouble. In almost every relationship, one partner wants more intimacy, more love, outside the relationship, and this partner always "wins." They either get what they want or are seen as "noble" for sacrificing and coming back to the relationship. Meanwhile, the other partner either feels awful for restricting their partner or like a doormat if they let the other go. I realized the only way to make this work was to make it a two-way street.

Now, instead of our own struggles, it was our friends in the community that were challenging us. It was always, "Poor Jake. Bell is such a slut. Brandon is a homewrecker."

Bell: And that's what we did! We worked out a 10-rule agreement for ethical non-monogamy. 1. Alerting each other to "upcoming attractions"; 2. Getting permission before acting; 3. Getting permission from love interest's partner, if there is one; 4. Confirming that a love-interest is aligned to spiritual principles...and a slew of sexual health and safety protocols. Finally! Liberation Day! Just knowing this was possible made me fall in love with you all over again.

And others… Soon after, I also fell in love with Brandon, a builder in the community. He was the strong silent type, but spiritual too. Just what I wanted off the menu. But now, instead of our own struggles, it was our friends in the community that were challenging us. And here, *you* always came out the winner. It was always, "Poor Jake. He deserves better." or "Bell is such a slut. How dare she have her cake and eat it too!" or "Brandon is a homewrecker, breaking up their marriage!"

The irony is that, while we were trying our best to be transparent and honest with each other and those around us, there were several secret affairs that came to light around this time. The resulting chaos rocked the community and none of those rela-

tionships recovered.

The lying and dishonesty were so powerful, they could never explore anything deeper. It was all about "How could you have done this to me!" and "I was the *last* to know!" The pain of the deceit was so overwhelming, they couldn't ask "What did this mean?" or "Can you still love me and him/her at the same time?" What broke them up was not so much the fact that their partners made love to someone else, but the breaking of trust between committed best friends.

Jake: Yes. I remember deciding early on that if we were going to open our relationship we had to do it with the utmost integrity and honesty. I didn't want to repeat these old, painful stories, but rather to create something new. I found it amazing that, even in this new-age community, members were still clinging to traditional stories. It's like we were floating in this river of culture yet somehow swam to shore and could see these cultural stories for the first time.

Bell: It was quite a year! In the end, we left the community, to move closer to our

What broke them up was not so much that their partners made love to someone else, but the breaking of trust between committed best friends.

families. I had dreams of the three of us living together happily ever after. But then I went to Costa Rica and blew it big time. I met another guy and got your permission to sleep with him, but totally forgot to ask Brandon. He didn't like that at all. And that was that. Later, you started having other lovers as well.

Jake: It took me a few years though. I thought I "locked my door" because I was a "sensitive new-age guy," but really, when I was honest with myself, I was just scared of rejection. Opening our relationship took away my excuse and my hiding place, which was challenging, but also wonderful! I had a number of short-term lovers and one relationship that lasted four years and recently ended when she chose to enter into a monogamous relationship with another friend. These all were incredible opportunities to share love and intimacy. They were also opportunities to "unlearn" many of our cultural stories. For example, I learned that I'm not a very jealous person. I didn't know that about myself! And I learned that love for one person doesn't preclude love for another. In fact, it often increases it! I don't remember learning that in any Disney movie!

Bell: And that brings us almost to today. My most recent relationship happened when the kids were three and eight. I was in my early 40s and having a mid-life crisis of sorts. I fell in love with someone much younger while traveling and later supported him to come and live with us. You were very generous around this, for which I will always be grateful.

And our kids were so used to "alternative" families in our progressive neighborhood (as we're writing this, they are both at play dates with friends who have two mommies) they just rolled with it. When our eldest asked about my lover, I explained that people can love more than one person and we were different in our beliefs about love and that mommy could love daddy *and* a boyfriend. That relationship ended over two years ago and I've been a bit more "quiet" about my sexuality since then.

I now look at non-monogamy in terms of its usefulness developmentally. At this stage in my life, my spiritual practice and career development require a lot of focus and these kinds of relationships absorb a lot of energy and attention. I'm also questioning if non-monogamy at this point in my spiritual development is an inhibitor given our present cultural context and understanding of how to do love. I think in 50 years, spiritual practice and non-monogamy will fit together more easily because the cultural waters are getting clearer.

So, here we are. Twenty years later! And, many thought, surely one of us would find someone else and leave the marriage. I was always clear that was (and still is) possible, but chose to take the risk because I really wanted to learn something about myself, us, love, and our world.

Jake: Ironically, I think we wouldn't be together now if we *didn't* open our relationship then. And to be clear, we have never advocated that others do as we did. We had four years of relationship, including a year of marriage under our belt, before we even considered these questions.

Bell: These are changing times and individuals need to stay true to their own hearts for guidance as we evolve into a more compassionate and awake world. ❧

"Jake" and "Bell" live in community with their children and can be contacted through editor@ic.org. While they are open to sharing on these topics, they understand these are controversial issues and thus names and locations have been changed to provide "plausible deniability."

The Relationship of Relationships to the Group

By Laird Schaub

Recently I was asked to facilitate a sharing circle for a group where there had been a shift in an intimate relationship among members. The change—an old partner out and a new partner in—naturally spurred a complex set of reactions among the other members and the group was undecided about whether to talk about it as a group, and if so, how. That's where I was asked to help.

On the one hand, the precipitating events were intimate decisions that the group clearly recognized as outside the group's purview. That is, no one was trying to make the case that the individuals needed any kind of group sanction to proceed. At the same time, it was equally clear that the shift was demonstrably affecting the group. In addition to the two people who were starting a relationship, there was a break-up of a longstanding relationship that resulted in a long-term member exiting the community. So joy and grief were commingled in a volatile emotional stew and it was anything but simple figuring out how to proceed with caring and authenticity.

To what extent is the group a stakeholder in this dynamic? To what extent is it helpful to create a forum at the group level to explore this tender territory? This is a great topic. Shifts in intimate relationships are not rare and groups often stumble over this dynamic, in part because groups seldom address how they want to handle it ahead of being in the situation that exposes the ambiguity—and it's hard to have an even-handed conversation about the *theory* of discussing the impact of relationships on the group, when everyone knows that what they're itching to talk about is how unresolved tensions in one *particular* couple regularly manifest in the form of sarcastic comments that poison the ambience of community potlucks.

In the particular situation I was working with, the pathway was further clouded by one member of the emerging couple wanting the chance to talk in the whole group, while the other partner dreaded it. The latter had never been comfortable sharing in groups, yet was willing to talk with anyone individually. Why, this person wondered, couldn't that be enough?

While much sharing might have been accomplished through one-on-one sharing, not everyone feels comfortable doing that when they're upset, and there is considerable power in everyone hearing from everyone else all at once. Not only does this cut down on speculation and gossip about what's happening and how people are responding, it gives depth to each person's knowledge of other members, and enhances the trust that you can build as a consequence of weathering a complex dynamic together.

By creating an intentional community, the group had made an explicit choice that members would be more in each other's lives than is the case in typical neighborhoods. That is, they purposefully chose to be closer with one another. That said, there was still substantial ambiguity about how close they wanted that to be, and the request to have a group conversation about how the group was impacted by intimate events begged that question. While some members definitely wanted this opportunity, others thought it was inappropriate and was inserting the community too far into members' private lives. Nonetheless, the

group proceeded, and most members, to their credit, were willing to give it a try, with even some of the skeptical attending (for which I was thankful and impressed).

The sharing circle was an explicit attempt to help the new couple in their continuing relationships with others in the community—which everyone wanted to proceed in a healthy, authentic way—yet we established at the outset that no one was intending this session to encourage people to take sides between the new couple and the exiting member. In fact, one of the clearest benefits of the session was our ability to successfully establish that no one was asking anyone to choose between them, so that support extended to any of the principals should not be construed as an implied withdrawal of support for any other principal. Whew!

In this instance, the group did a terrific job of speaking from their hearts and listening closely to each other. This was all the more impressive in that a number of people had hard things to say.

Here is some of what came out:

—Anger that one member would make themselves available for a new relationship before the old one was dissolved. Some thought this violated a standard of morality, even though it was recognized that was a personal position and not something that the group took a stand on (though some groups do, this one did not).

—Lament that the group was not able to find a way to better help the struggling couple work through their issues, with the hope that either they'd come through it with their relationship intact, or that it was possible for the old couple to separate without the group losing a valued member.

—Fear in the new couple that others were holding them in judgment and that they might be shunned.

—Anger that people might have been used by the new couple to create opportunities for them to get together—that the third party was asked to hang out not because the couple wanted to spend time with them, but so that their presence could make it "safer" for the new couple to spend time together without arousing suspicion.

Note the power of the whole group hearing about all of this in one go, rather than trying to piece it together from a series of one-on-one conversations.

—Upset that people were hearing "dirty laundry" about the old couple that no one was comfortable with, or knew how to respond to.

—Confusion about whether it was appropriate to express happiness for the new couple without coming across as callous and uncaring for the person losing their partner.

—Upset that the group was intruding on private matters, and that the conversation might lead to traumatization and polarization that would preclude or at least delay healing.

—Fear among single people in the group that their spending time with married members might be misconstrued as an attempt to seduce other people's partners.

—Relief that the group cared enough about each other—and the whole—to make this attempt to discuss what was going on, without judging one another for their individual reactions.

—Thankfulness that there was finally an opportunity to say openly how difficult it had been to try to befriend all parties and have no one to share that with because of an overriding commitment to confidentiality (the underlying relationship struggles had been going on for more than a year).

One of the most powerful things that emerged in the sharing was people witnessing difficult things from their past that strongly influenced how they saw this development, which included their personal stories around intimacy and the boundaries they have developed about what is private and what is suitable to be shared with others. When revealed, it made it much easier for others to understand their perspective. In the absence of such knowledge, we tend to assume that others have similar life experiences to ours, and this can considerably muddy the waters when trying to make sense of why someone reacts as they do. Often, these things don't emerge until such tender moments occur and people are given an unexpected safe forum to share their histories.

Note the power of the whole group hearing about all of this in one go, rather than trying to piece it together from a series of one-on-one conversations. None of what I've written here is meant to criticize one-on-one sharing—I'm all for it. I'm only trying to make the case why sharing in the group offers unique benefits. Done well (which is not a slam dunk, yet is demonstrably possible), it undercuts hearsay, establishes a common basis for moving forward, enhances trust, and accelerates healing.

While no one wants people to suffer and go through deep hurt, such things inevitably occur. I'm excited when groups are willing to make the attempt to trust their ability to help each other through hard times by being real and vulnerable with one another, trusting in our basic humanity and desire to piece together our myriad and confused responses into a tapestry of authenticity and support when coping with crisis.

Relationships don't exist in a vacuum, and I think it works better when groups don't just look the other way and hope for the best. It gives me hope when communities are willing to extend themselves and recognize they can have a role in helping to create a healthy container in which relationships can manage struggle, and the individuals whose lives are affected can get support in finding their way to a constructive response. I'm proud to be a midwife of such moments.

As a group process consultant, this is as good as it gets. ❧

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 is also a facilitation trainer and process consultant. This piece originally appeared September 30, 2010 on his blog at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

Three Perspectives on Intimacy in Community

Three members of Lafayette Morehouse (in the San Francisco Bay area) reflect on various forms of intimacy and how community fosters and supports it.

The Cavalry is Just Around the Corner

By Kiva Lindsey

I had a tumultuous relationship with my first husband, although we loved each other deeply. I really believe that we split because I kept the details of our relationship so private. We loved each other, but anger and resentment built up over time.

Somewhere along the way I became quiet about how I was feeling, not wanting to rock the boat or disturb the façade of "we have it all together." It was just the two of us, living on our own, and I felt more separate from him than ever. I am a "put on a happy face" kind of gal, but behind the big smile I was an unhappy woman, afraid to tell anyone what I was feeling. I was lonely and estranged from everyone, especially the one I loved the most.

I am grateful for my "starter marriage." It was a true learning experience and luckily we have stayed great friends. I learned what not to do, which for me was trying to make a marriage succeed without getting much support from other people. It is still my instinct to hide any troubles with my relationship but now, living a communal life closely with others, hiding out is no longer an option and I have found unexpected benefits in including friends, both in good times and bad.

For example, recently I had a blowup with my second husband, Michael. It had been one of those days; I could tell I was getting sick and was just annoyed by everything. I got very upset when Michael came home 20 minutes late without bothering to call. I know, I know...20 minutes seems really petty, but like I said, it'd been one of those days. So we argued and ended up sleeping in separate rooms.

The next day there was no denying that I had a massive head cold. Michael walked into the room and I immediately started barking orders at him. I was distressed about getting sick and felt it was my right that he drop everything, especially his grudge, and take care of me. "I am the one who is sick!" I screamed. (Attractive, right?)

He was still upset from the night before and frankly, I was still angry with him for coming home late. In no time our fighting escalated and was on the verge of violence. Michael stormed out of the room; I buried my head in the pillows.

He went directly to see Alec and Marilyn, friends of ours who have lived in our community for many years and have had a lot of experience successfully navigating intimate relationships. They've helped us many times before, quickly and gracefully getting us to a place where we could talk calmly about what was going on in our relationship.

It was a brave and loving move Michael made, calling in the Cavalry. I, of course, was not in the room to hear their wise words. I was home feeling sorry for myself for being sick and chasing off my best ally. But amazingly, 15 short minutes after he stormed out of the room, he was back, he was calm, he was happy, and he was offering to run me a bath and make me tea. When he walked *in* the room, feeling sane and full of love again, I immediately let my guard down and felt like I could surrender to him and the bathtub and the cold. We both knew that we were teammates again, with the common goal of getting me well.

Michael and I often say that we wouldn't have stayed together without our group. Including other people and their viewpoints has been one of the most important ingredients in the success of our intimate partnership.

I am 38 years old and I have spent the

last 16 years in two different intimate relationships. I am just starting to really understand that having true intimacy with my partner doesn't mean not arguing. Arguing can be incredibly intimate; and we all know that making up can be very sweet.

Having a good marriage is what I wanted all my life. I was blessed with the ability to pick great men, but keeping them was a different story—I had no idea how to have an intimate partnership. By the time I graduated from high school, my parents had been through three divorces. What I knew of relationships was that when the going gets rough, you walk away.

But I am sticking this one out, with some help from my friends! The best part is I am not only more intimate with my husband but with everyone I share my life with. ❧

Kiva Lindsey Goldstein, a Colorado native, took her first Morehouse course 16 years ago, and has been living in the community the past seven years. It was at Morehouse where she met and married her husband, Michael. Kiva studied at Naropa University in Boulder and was staff member of The World School of Massage in San Francisco, where she was certified in Holistic Health Education and massage therapy. She is currently training to teach Morehouse courses, which includes participating in ongoing research in sensuality and pleasurable living.

When You Feel All Alone

By Jane Hillis

The intimacy in my life was unexpectedly increased recently when my 77-year-old husband broke his elbow in three places. He was completely immobilized in a position where he could not even lift a glass of water. At first he depended on me 24 hours a day for everything.

There were many moments of extreme appreciation for each other during this time. I realized Joe would not always be there for me; he appreciated how willing I was to take care of him. The simplest acts of everyday life, like giving him a drink of water, were opportunities to love.

There were also times when I was stressed out and overwhelmed to the point of snapping angrily or crying. Couldn't I have my morning coffee before tending to him?

Our struggles were opportunities for us to get to know each other better and others also, as we talk frequently to people in the group about our lives. My husband was vulnerable, struggling with issues of mortality and physical inability to take care of himself or be productive. At 62, I was now facing taking care of a rapidly aging husband. Wasn't life supposed to get easier now? Who would take care of me?

As time went on, I realized I could not do everything myself. We reached out to the group for help and found we developed a much more intimate relationship with many people. Although people had offered to help from the beginning, it was not easy for me to accept. As for asking, what if they said no? A good friend finally said "You're so busy rejecting yourself you won't give us a chance!" So I began to ask.

People were happy to contribute different things. Some brought Joe snacks or drinks. Some spent time with him. One person was even willing to empty the bedpan!

I was now able to go out and have time to do other things. Joe and I got to experience the love people had for us. There were still stressful times during Joe's recuperation period, but the intimacy and love had increased dramatically—not just between us but with lots of people in our group with whom we wouldn't otherwise have shared so much. ❧

Jane Hillis has been a resident of Morehouse since 1992 and involved since 1974 in group living. She has a Ph.D. in Sensuality from More University and is a faculty

member of the Lafayette Morehouse Sensuality Department. Jane studied psychology at UCLA and later completed her liberal arts degree at Antioch University in Venice, California. Jane and her husband Joe enjoy living communally and finding ways to have life improve as they age.

Little Intimacies

By Lynne Goodman

I grew up in a solid New England family. We had dinner together every night, the beds were always made, and clean clothes magically appeared in my closet every week. It was a good way to grow up; at the same time, it wasn't heavy on drama. Since I wasn't privy to any households that did have drama, I always wanted to know what was really going on with other people. Kind of like when people crowd around the friends of celebrities and ask, "What are they REALLY like?" I wanted to know, "What is everyone REALLY like?"

Living in a community, in my case specifically Morehouse is, for my money, the best way to know. You get to see your housemates fighting, being romantic, going through crises—all the really juicy stuff. In fact, the moment I truly wanted to live in a Morehouse was when I went to visit one. As I walked in, a resident I knew was coming down the stairs—and as he rushed out, he yelled bloody murder at another resident who was at the top of the stairs. "Wow!" I thought. "Cool! People aren't pulling punches—they're just saying what they feel. They really get into it here!" I wanted in.

Once in, I discovered that it's not just the dramatic moments that create intimacy; it's also the raft of all the little ways you get to know other people. In our communal environment, we like to take time to do things for each other and thus we find out what each other's preferences are. Like exactly how someone likes each of the seven pillows on her bed positioned. That one housemate likes his coffee the almondy color of another housemate's skin. One woman, who only ever seems to eat healthy food, always has a can of Pringles and a Lindt chocolate bar on her bedside table. When you ask Deborah to help out with something, she'll always say "No." But we're not bothered by that because we know you just have to wait a little while, ask again, and she'll likely say yes.

We've seen each other at our best and worst and funniest moments. Like the time one couple had a fight and he threw all her clothes out the window. Another couple would sometimes ask me to wake them in the morning. I discovered how they looked entwined and asleep, their skin beautiful against their dark purple sheets. Once someone slipped into the kitchen and spiced up the soup Millie was making for the house. (You should have seen when Millie found out…). When a friend's little girls would visit, one housemate painted their fingernails and showed them scary movies like *Jurassic Park*; they loved that. Once I had a boyfriend over and after we'd gone to bed a housemate came into our room with a video camera. We laughed. (No, he didn't get any footage!)

It always feels great when someone from outside the house comes to me for advice on what to do to please or impress one of my housemates. "Do you think she'd like lemon bars?" they might ask. And I can answer, "Oh, gosh, I'm afraid not, she's got a sensitivity to citrus. But you know what she does love?... " And then I feel good, like I myself am "A Celebrity's Friend," because I am the one being asked, "What is she REALLY like?" And I know. ❧

Lynne Goodman lived in the New York Morehouse for 18 years, the last seven of which she and her husband took the leadership position of being the "housemothers." They have led many Mark Groups, introductory social evenings held around the country. Last year they moved to the Bay Area to live at the Oakland Morehouse. Lynne graduated from Oberlin College with a degree in English. She is now a graphic designer.

Intimacy in the Village Setting

By Ted Sterling

Since first I met Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage cofounder Tony Sirna at the Communities Conference in Willits, California in 1998, I have understood that the "village" part of ecovillage here was meant as more than a euphemism. Dancing Rabbit was intended to be more or less like the village of popular conception—small, rural, surrounded and supported by agriculture and practical arts, and made up of villagers whose lives would doubtless be intertwined in many ways.

When I subsequently arrived at Dancing Rabbit (located on 280 acres outside Rutledge, Missouri) for an internship in July 2001, I found a small group of people (at that time, members numbered perhaps 10, and the village hosted upwards of 20 interns over the warm season) with a lot of commitment to a beautiful vision. It was not a village yet. It did feel intimate, in the ways that we all worked together and relied on each other to feed ourselves, survive in our tents, and share the very small amount of sheltered space while trying to build some of the first structures. We were pioneering. Intimacy was born out of necessity, though aided by common purpose.

I met my future partner Sara, another intern at the time, that first morning as I reconnoitered the budding village. I had been deeply missing the intimacy of a close relationship prior to my arrival, and felt deep gratitude to the world and to circumstance when I quickly found that intimacy. Within a few weeks we were sharing a tiny tent in a field of tall grass. Within a couple months, I was beginning to think seriously that I might like to spend the rest of my life with her. This July we'll celebrate 10 years together alongside our five-year-old daughter Aurelia.

In our village I sooner or later see my community mates in nearly every shade of their existence.

At the time of that 1998 conference, I had already lived five years in the student co-ops in Berkeley, California, mostly in the co-op known as Lothlorien. The intimacy of that setting was like a drug to me; we cooked beautiful vegetarian food for each other, cleaned for each other, created and took part in elaborately prepared social events, sometimes fell in love with our house mates, and even studied together occasionally. It was the parallel education to my academic pursuits, and turned out to be the more important for me. I was hooked on the intimacy with my community mates that came from living in such close proximity and sharing so many events both routine and unusual in one of the most formative moments of our collective lives.

Sadly I began to see that I was facing an end to that particular intimacy; transience is built into the BSC (Berkeley Student Co-ops) experience, since you must be a student to live in them and are allowed only one grace semester. Lothlorien (my then home) possesses amazing cultural coherence under the circumstances, but at that time I agonized over the loss of important house members every year as they graduated (or moved into private housing, the wisdom of which I thought dubious at best). The pain of it was visceral. The idea of starting my own community, based on good land that I'd never have to leave, offered salvation for my particular torment, and grew deeply rooted in my dreams.

I worked on organic farms, homesteaded for a year, traveled around the world and across the US in search of community in its many forms as my desire for a more permanent home increased. At first that five-month stay in northeast Missouri seemed just another stepping stone to me. I still pictured mountains and forest and perhaps the ocean or a big river looming not far off in the distance when I dreamed about my own community. Sara was more sanguine than I about Dancing Rabbit, but indulged my fantasies so far as to begin looking for land with me in the Appalachians.

Then one day, home alone at our temporary abode in some quiet (and lonely) woods on the Maine coast while Sara was off visiting friends and family for a few weeks (including at Dancing Rabbit), it hit me: I could spend the next 10 years trying to start my own community, hoping I had enough charisma to attract others and instill dreams of community similar to mine in them; or I could give it a go in an existing community where I knew it was possible to do all or most of what I dreamed of, and spend the next 10 years doing instead of trying. Sara already thought Dancing Rabbit was the way to go, and I realized that if I really wanted community to succeed, I ought to support existing communities instead of splintering the energy still further.

We wrote a fateful letter to Dancing Rabbit, and arrived as members in April 2003. In the intervening years I have learned a great deal of intimacy. To be sure, my understanding and experience of closeness in a partnership with one person dwells in a different realm now than it did then. Alongside Sara I have stretched and molded the rudimentary sense of fulfillment in love I began with into a glittering, jeweled orb of deepest intimacy. We have changed each other, grown individually and together, built a house, birthed a child, and much else.

Without the supporting web of context, however, I cannot imagine having traveled so far or with such meaning. Dancing Rabbit and our neighboring communities Sandhill Farm and Red Earth Farms provide that context, and I will likely spend the rest of my life trying to fully appreciate the fathomless depths of intimacy inherent in building a village in all its lurid detail from scratch with 30-1000 friends and acquaintances. Whether by upbringing or predilection, I did not begin with a deep appreciation of intimacy beyond that of family or lover. I always thought of myself as having friends, but in retrospect I hardly understood what friendship really meant.

In our village I sooner or later see my community mates in nearly every shade of their existence. I do not have to share a bed or income with most of them to see it. We are building a pedestrian-based village whose human zone is "thickly settled," to borrow a New England term. Between one dwelling and the next a frog often requires no more than a few leaps. In hot summer weather when the barriers between inside and out fade to nothing, I can hear my neighbors snoring, having sex, arguing, cooking, and just about everything else related to the act of living. It is both startling to my staid American sense of propriety and independence, and at the same time deeply humanizing.

These observations are perhaps nothing remarkable to a city dweller, but there is a certain anonymity to city life; the individual typically leaves those unintentional intimacies of home for work, play, commerce, and so on, losing his or her self in the multitude.

Here at Dancing Rabbit, I share limited space in often-cooperative facilities with my neighbors, and beyond the village are farm fields and forests. I may dine in an eating coop with them, share shower facilities, build compost piles with buckets of their mixed excrement, dive naked into the pond to cool off alongside them, grow, sell, trade, and eat produce with them, share a ride to town with a handful of them, sit through and participate in every conceivable form of meeting with them, find myself in conflict and its resolution with them, quietly lust after them, build a house with them, cry, laugh, run, scream, or die with them. I will also just watch them do many of these things. I share myself and so do they. Some more than others, but you cannot really hide from anyone here.

This is not the first time I've felt like I was re-learning and experiencing a life that was commonplace to the vast majority of my ancestors in the not-too-distant past. Yet for all that, I never experienced a tenth of it before deciding to embroil myself in the exquisitely mundane daily realities of this particular place and collection of people.

Before living in community, I found it very easy to play the mental game of comparing myself favorably to the blind, benighted masses of the world who didn't care or didn't know better about whatever it was I was concerned with (and whom I didn't know). Since rooting myself in this intimate setting, I have found that game far harder to play, because I daily observe a much broader range of human behavior and foibles than just my own or my partner's or child's examples. I can plainly see, and cannot readily ignore, that my way is only one among many, and that I have a great deal still to learn.

Each time I see and learn, gratitude grows in me for this shared humanity, the vulnerability we each show each other, the gifts of love, time, and energy we daily give and receive, the example we show to every new person that sets foot here, which subsequently seeps out to help change our collective culture.

Despite this undeniable intimacy, we still struggle sometimes with elements of it, particularly in the more intentional forms like friendship. Without the situational closeness I share with all here, I fear I would rarely grow true friendship. I would be far lonelier. But I'm not. I do have this.

My friend Thomas wrote a poem of sorts to each person in the village one year for Validation Day (our version of Valentine's Day). Most were typical, brilliant Thomas, with deep meaning likely hidden in apparent nonsense if only I was sharp enough to find it. I read mine many times, and have carried it since as encouragement to pursue as many more opportunities as I can to know him more:

two ants
wished to treat
bones here & there
with pond elixir.
welcome spirit
nurtured being
becoming bee.
friends not far?
true joy ❧

Ted Sterling lives at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage. See also his article about Lothlorien in our "Student Housing Co-ops" issue, Communities *#110, Spring 2001.*

Photo courtesy of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage

The Solace of Friends in Community

By Alline Anderson

It all started with Amy. She, like many of the women here at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, felt dissatisfied with the quality and depth of her relationships. Looking for a format that encouraged and developed closeness among women, she found the Woman Within Journey (womenincircle.org). She went for a weekend, learned about Women's Empowerment Circles (e-circles), and was profoundly moved. One by one she approached women in our community who she hoped would be interested in participating in a circle of discovery and sharing, and with whom she felt a level of comfort. I was fortunate to be among these women. Oh, how I count my lucky stars!

In the beginning there were seven of us. It was scary, uncomfortable, and often painful. We had a lot to work out. For all of the closeness of our lives here, we seemed to have developed a culture filled with emotional barriers. This makes sense if you think about it. In "normal" (non-intentional community) life one resides with a partner, or room mates. You go to work, where you interact with an entirely different set of people. After work you might get together with friends, or volunteer somewhere, or belong to a gym—all with an expansive group of individuals. I found I missed the safe anonymity found in a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. For example, if I were having a conflict with a room mate I could run it by my co-workers, or friends in my book group, who might have ideas on resolutions, or help me with perspective. But when all of these people are the same it can become problematic.

Here at Dancing Rabbit, we (members, residents, and work exchangers) eat, work, and play together. There are occasional shorter-term visitors and guests, but basically it's just us. And therein lies the difficulty. If everyone knows everything about everybody (or thinks they do), where are the boundaries? Where is the safety?

So with Amy gamely leading us into unknown territory, we began. At first, we used the Woman Within text. We were reluctant, unsure that we would reap any benefits, nervous, and not entirely trusting. Many of us, each week, said the same thing "I didn't really want to come, I don't know if I'll keep with this, two hours is a lot of time..."

After a few months we ditched the text. We took turns leading. And amazing things happened. We found many more commonalities than differences. The differences we discovered provided insight and understanding rather than being divisive. We realized that prior to e-circle we were comparing our insides (filled with flaws) with other women's (seemingly perfect) outsides—not accurate, and certainly not helpful. We found that we shared many of the same insecurities and fears. Even better, we found that we really liked and admired each other, even when we knew that each of us was less than perfect. It was eye-opening and yes, empowering. Oddly enough, as the weeks and months went on, we found that we really looked forward to going. Or that at least after our e-circle session was over, we were grateful for having attended.

Our gatherings look like this: Every other week, we get together in a place where we'll have no interruptions. After lighting a candle, we sit in a circle and have personal check-ins—each woman can take up to half an hour. Daunting at first ("Am I boring you? Oh, this sounds so stupid...") we came to revel in our sharing time. I mean really, when is the last time you had half an hour of anyone's undivided attention? We speak of what is happening in our lives, what we're feeling, what we're struggling with. There is no back and forth—this is each woman's opportunity to share without interruptions. The rest of us listen in supportive silence. If, at the end, she asks for feedback, or help, we share what we're feeling and thinking. We don't gossip, and do not talk about others in any way other than how they intersect with our lives. We work hard at being constructive. Everything is entirely confidential,

even from spouses/partners. This creates an incredible sense of trust. We are creating a force of support, a silent yet fierce network of women who believe in each other. We have created a space where we can be vulnerable safely.

When I asked the women in my group why they like e-circle, one told me, "It's not just what is happening in my life. It's bigger stuff, the growth edges. We can receive support with what we're working on, get and share empathy and compassion. We are able to expose the raw spots where we're trying to grow—no one holds back when sharing." Another replied, "E-circle has enabled me to share more openly with more people, especially women in this group. It encourages a depth in relationships and trust. I am able to expose more of myself. I am learning to be more accepting and empathetic." Another said, "I so desperately want to feel understood. In e-circle I feel I am, and I feel safe" and "best of all, the relationships carry beyond e-circle. There is not a lot of space in our community for 'what's really happening for you' conversations. But now there are five people I actually know well, who know me well, and who have my back."

We have created a space where we can be vulnerable safely.

For me, the beauty of e-circle comes from the support we receive from each other. For example, one of our members has a lot of fear and anxiety speaking in groups. So when she musters up the courage to speak in the community's Sunday meeting, we are there cheering her on. No one else knows what's going on behind the scenes, but we do, as does she. We have found that we each have a deep sense of appreciation and pride when we have a full vision of another person, in this case the members of our circle. We're on the same ride together. It's not always fun, and sometimes involves screaming, but what the heck!

In the year and a half since we started, much has changed. One of our members passed away last September, and Amy is taking a sabbatical away from Dancing Rabbit. Those of us who are left continue to meet regularly.

We now look forward to our meeting every other week, and joke about how we'd like to have a daily e-circle, if only our busy lives would allow it. We truly appreciate the gift we've inadvertently given ourselves and each other—the solace of friendship, and the balm of caring women. I feel incredibly humbled to be the recipient of the trust of these amazing women.

One of our goals is to establish a number of e-circles here at Dancing Rabbit. We hope to add more women to our circle, and empower several other circles to begin and flourish. More women supporting women, and therefore making our community stronger and healthier. What could be better? ❧

Alline Anderson wishes to thank the women of her e-circle for their continued support and anonymous quotes for use in this article. *Alline has been a member of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage since 1999. She and her husband Kurt run the Milkweed Mercantile, a strawbale, solar- and wind-powered Inn and Seminar Program. Contact her at alline@milkweedmercantile.com—she'd love to hear from you.*

Fascinating Selfhood

By Kim Scheidt

I recently reread a book that I originally purchased five years ago when I was trying to "fix" my failing marriage. The book, *Fascinating Womanhood* by Helen B. Andelin, purports to teach the reader what characteristics define the ideal woman. It explains the laws which she must obey if she is to be admired, loved, and appreciated, and gives instructions on how to go about becoming more feminine.

Originally published in 1963, this book is written from a patriarchal, Christian viewpoint. Virtually every page provides material that would cause any good feminist to scream out in indignation, or perhaps go searching for a match with which to send it all up in smoke. My now-partner picked up the book from where I had left it lying on a table and when I came back to the room asked, "why in the world are you reading this crap?" So, I want to make it clear that I'm not actually suggesting that anyone go out and buy this book...

But I guess even the murkiest of literary works can sometimes provide nuggets of wisdom, and *Fascinating Womanhood* has its share. Much of the advice the author provides is specific to a married woman's relationship with her husband following traditional gender roles. However, a lot of the focus is on self-improvement of one form or another, and there are quite a few ideas that could be adopted to help any person in any number of their relationships.

Acceptance

Complete acceptance of others is one quality that is often touted but seldom followed. How many times have we heard the adage that you can't go into a relationship with the idea of changing the other person? But so many people still try, usually with frustrating results. If we cultivate the attitude of complete acceptance of others it can be very freeing. Recognize that we are all human beings who are part virtue and part fault. Honestly accept the total person, including all imperfections, and don't try to change them. Being less concerned with the other's faults allows you to concentrate on all the good qualities they exhibit. And probably the best way to help someone else's self-growth is by recognition and belief in their better side.

Admiration

Every person has qualities or characteristics that deserve appreciation, be they intellectual gifts, physical prowess, or other skills or special abilities. When you become interested in another person and listen to them talk, find traits they exhibit that deserve recognition and admiration. Then express your admiration in a way that is heartfelt and sincere, and also be specific.

The desire to be admired, which we all possess, can go hand-in-hand with a fear of humiliation. If someone has been ridiculed or belittled in the past, or treated with contempt or indifference, they will very likely suffer from injured pride. In addition to expressing admiration of others, it is best to eliminate remarks that have the effect of crushing another's ego. Be sure not to ridicule or belittle others, even in humor.

Sympathetic Understanding

There are bound to be times when people around you become discouraged, and it is a great relief to find someone to confide in. When you develop the attitude of complete acceptance, then those around you feel able to trust their precious thoughts and emotions with you. When a disheartened person comes to you, it is usually not practical help that they need. The most valuable help that you can provide is to build the person up with approval and hope. Do your best to remove self-doubt and reestablish self-esteem in the other. Picture the person as a success, even if they aren't one right now. And don't let their gloom rub off on you.

Inner Happiness/Worthy Character

It is uplifting to be around those who are genuinely happy. Deep inner happiness is something you can cultivate to carry you through the ups and downs of life with tranquility. It comes from a development of the personal spirit and is not to be confused with seeking temporary pleasure. Two essential ingredients to this happiness are the complete acceptance of yourself and the appreciation of the simple joys of life.

Inner happiness evolves from development of the entire character, and this is an ongoing process. Important qualities of a worthy character are traits such as self-mastery, unselfishness, patience, gentleness, honesty, and self-dignity. Be accepting of your weaknesses and mistakes, but continue to strive toward greater character development.

•••

I realize that these pieces of advice are not always easily followed. But I recommend trying to incorporate them into your own life, and then witness the positive reaction in yourself and those around you.

Kim Scheidt is a founding member of Red Earth Farms community in northeast Missouri. She works at the national headquarters of the Fellowship for Intentional Community. She initially intended to write an additional sidebar outlining "advice from the book that didn't make the cut"—for example, "women shouldn't wear herringbone prints, make financial decisions, or be educated for a career"—but decided against it.

What To Do When You're Angry??

The author of *Fascinating Womanhood* uses the analogy of steam gathering in a teapot to depict the inner turmoil one feels when angry. Anger is a real emotion that we all experience, and at times it can be intense. But how to properly express yourself without causing the situation to escalate? There are different techniques for dealing with anger:

Suppressing anger, like turning the flame off under the teapot, is a mistake. Suppressed emotions can be seriously damaging and can lead to a self-induced numbness, an inability to feel both pain and pleasure.

Releasing anger with harsh words or violent actions is like turning up the heat and blowing the top off the teapot. This is obviously not ideal.

Self-control, tightening the lid on the teapot, causes steam to build up pressure inside. Presenting a calm exterior while holding emotions within will lead to inner turmoil and resentment towards others.

Talking things over with the person you're angry with is an attempt to turn down the heat. However, in the author's experience, doing so will probably lead that person to feel defensive and result in an argument.

According to *Fascinating Womanhood*, none of the above methods of dealing with anger truly solve your frustrations without causing further damage to yourself or your relationship. Thus the successful way of dealing with anger is with a

Spunky display of emotions. This causes the teapot lid to gently bobble up and down, releasing steam. It is important that this fiery show of anger be mostly on the surface, that underneath you aim for an inner calm. Acquire a list of adjectives that are fitting for the occasion, and make use of exaggeration in your speech. The idea is that you give vent to your emotions in a way that is not harmful. It is a way to communicate your thoughts when you have been offended or mistreated, and a manner of preserving your self-dignity. Releasing steam in this way will allow for a tranquility of spirit to emerge. Even if the situation that provoked your anger does not change, your reaction to it can. Anger can become just another fleeting emotion that you embrace and then let go.

—K.S.

Photo by Chad Knepp

Internal Intimacy

By Karbyn Eilde

I wonder about different kinds of intimacy. If intimacy is defined only as something that is shared or expressed physically, then I'm out of luck for sure! I wonder, also, if intimacy must be understood as always including someone else, even if not physical? I don't think so, after all. If intimacy lives in the heart or is a mental construct, then it's freely available to everyone, even those who are alone. And getting to know yourself well is its own type of intimacy. I think that when hearts or minds are connected, whether to ourselves or to others, this is what we name as Intimacy.

Precious and Protected

I picked a great pile of lettuce from the backyard garden and using bits of leftover corn on the cob, a droopy looking carrot from the back of the fridge, and a boiled egg, I put together a quick salad. When I served it, my friend seemed disappointed, and said, "What? No pickled beets? But I love pickled beets in a salad!" Amazingly, I had no idea about that, despite us having known each other well for most of 15 years, so I was excited to find out this little detail that can so easily help someone else have a great day in the future. I'll be sure to include that in the next salad I make! More interestingly, I noticed that my immediate instinct was to text everyone (or at least my Mom) and let them know I had discovered this "secret" about someone we all care for. A little voice in my heart held me back, though. Knowing something special about someone special feels intimate, even if it as casual as salad.

Shared Challenges

I certainly don't think of myself as official Elder quite yet, but I am now older enough than most people around me that I have some distance to see situations through a different lens than I did when I myself was that age. I wonder if the 80- and 90-year-olds look at those of us in our 40s and 50s and think, "oh, aren't they so sweet, how they're trying to get through... (whatever)..." or, "I remember so well when I was dealing with...that..." I find that I feel more connected, and more deeply, with people I've known only a minute or two, if they are facing situations that are similar to my own past, than I do with some people I've known many years. Likewise, I find myself feeling closer to Mom as time goes on, now that I've been parenting long enough to better understand the stories she shares that I've never heard before of challenges that I was oblivious to at the time, even while living in the same house! Physical proximity, closeness in age, or even a personal meeting all seem entirely unnecessary to create a sense of intimacy in most of my relationships during this time in my life.

Dancing with My Dark

Last week it came again, the spiraling downward feeling that I've come to recognize and know well, if not exactly make friends with quite yet. This Dark and I have traveled together throughout my life, and the more often I approach it with interest and curiosity and awareness, the less often it comes around, and the shorter the visits. For years and years, I tried avoidance, denial, alcohol, online games, and excessive busy-ness, and none of those have worked to make depression, anxiety, or mood swings any easier to manage. The only way I've found that works for me is to boldly greet that other aspect of myself and go together, and through, to the other side. Sometimes now, I can make it through a short bad spell on my own and other people around me seem to not even be aware—a huge change from the past (and a good one, I think). Through getting to know myself better, I am more able to get to know others, because developing the skill of acceptance (of myself) leads to an improved ability to accept others as they are, too.

Intimacy as Awareness

Perhaps intimacy is simply a special word for awareness and being present, either with ourselves or with others? That mindfulness can be expressed during physical closeness, of course, but needn't always be, as there are many other ways to feel connected. ❧

Karbyn lived in a rural commune for four years and actually enjoyed taking notes at meetings. She now writes for various places online; visit her at www.karbyn.com.

Bee Intimacy

By Dona Willoughby

Amara Karuna

My body glides through the water with each strong, firm stroke; the rhythm seems in sync with the universe. I am one with the cool water, the blue sky, and the palm fronds sparkling in the setting sun. Suddenly my bliss is interrupted by my left brain. Thoughts flood in. They create a hollow sensation in my chest, and a clenching in my gut. My strokes become sharp and mechanical. My goggles fill with tears. How can it be that I continue swimming, that my heart continues beating, and my life goes on, even though I feel torn apart? My intimate partners are dead!

I am amazed that everyone else is carrying on as though nothing has happened. People are driving, laughing, buying as usual. It feels surreal. I want everyone and everything to stop. I want to scream, "Pay attention! Care! Be distraught! Do SOMETHING!" I burst into tears at the least provocation.

What am I distraught and grieving about? The loss of an intimate connection to my/our partners, the bees. The bees were a constant presence in my life on our land here in Hawaii. Where we live, fruit trees, forest trees, grasses, and garden plants are always flowering, so the land was always vibrant and alive with my lovers, the bees. Now they are gone. We humans caused their demise; we imported bees to Hawaii. The imported bees brought *Varroa destructor* (a mite which weakens the overall immune system of the hive and makes them susceptible to diseases and viruses), small hive beetle, and unicellular fungi called *Nosema apis* and *Nosema ceranae*. These parasites were unknown to the islands prior to the importation. They stressed our bees and I believe caused the death of our nine previously thriving bee hives.

I feel a deep bond with the small piece of Gaia we steward here at La'akea, the intentional community where I live. As I write, a soft evening breeze caresses me, wiggles the hairs on my head and legs, giving me a gentle tickle. The night sounds of coqui frogs resonate through me. I recall the sweet succulent taste of three abiu fruit in my mouth, picked earlier today from one of our trees.

I cannot say exactly when my love affair with the bees began because it started accidentally. Although I was aware of a deep yearning to be closer to them earlier in my life, it was a serendipitous trade

(continued on p. 78)

Diverse Forms of Intimacies

By Shepherd Bliss

Intimacy has many different forms and rhythms. It can pause, then resume. It can have cycles, seasons, and even be circular, rather than linear. Grief can open the heart and deepen intimacy, rather than cancel it. Longing, loss, and desire can stimulate intimacy. Mended mistakes can strengthen the ties that bind people together, rather than forever sever them, especially when forgiveness is involved. Yet like everything that lives, intimacy can fade and die, especially when not tended carefully.

Spaniard Antonio Machado starts a poem with "The wind, one brilliant day…" and ends it as follows: "What have you done with the garden entrusted to you?" Intimacy in fast-moving, machine-driven 21st century America can be like a strong wind on a brilliant day that passes by quickly. But deeper intimacy is a garden that needs to be carefully tended, from the ground up, so that it can flourish, rather than perish. Tears can water intimacy and help it grow. The right food is necessary.

I began writing this during the longest nights of the year around Winter Solstice. It will be published during the longest days of the year. I wrote with the benefits of sweet darkness, as well as chill. Light and dark are an intimate, long-term couple. They feed each other, though many modern people give the dark a bum rap. But where would we be without night, sleep, dreams, and chocolate?

It's time to praise benevolent darkness, even when it shadows the light, or at least to accept it. The sweet berries on my small farm need a winter break away from too much light, which helps kill pests and diseases. We hunger for intimacy, yet we fear it, knowing that it can fade and leave sad memories and a gaping hole in the heart. Why love again, if it is only going to die? The fear of death is a primary thing that keeps us from intimacy and love.

Yet out of the deepest darkness, intimacy can rise. Most of us were conceived in the darkness and spent months in the womb. Intimacy can be the spark that brings life. Intimacy can ignite dreams and fire us up. Intimacy can harvest gifts from dark corners.

I am certainly no expert on intimacy. Ask my friends. It can be easier to write about intimacy than to practice it, though writing can help. What do I know about intimacy? Not enough. I guard my solitude carefully, but then it can become isolation. So I reach out, then get overwhelmed. For me, finding the balance between solitude (intimacy with the self) and intimacy with others is an ongoing process. When to stay, when to take space, and when to leave? What to hold on to and what to let go of? I have more questions about intimacy than answers.

Many forms of intimacy exist. Since


Frank Vincentz

others are likely to focus on romantic intimacy in this Communities issue, I will focus mainly on other forms, including cross-generational intimacy. For example, I appreciate the professional boundaries of the academic community, which makes me feel safe as a teacher and enables me to take risks. Necessary limitations can enhance student-teacher intimacy of appropriate kinds where the teacher attends to and even cares for the student and his or her learning and well-being, without crossing necessary boundaries that can preserve intimacy. It is important that teachers acknowledge the power they have over students, the unequal relationship, and not abuse their power.

I live in one extended community and work nearby in a more compact community, both of slightly under 10,000 humans. Though of a similar numerical size, these two are quite different. Sebastopol is the small town in northern California near where I live in the countryside, and I teach 20 minutes away at Sonoma State University (SSU). The vast majority of people there are 18 to 22 years old, which is one-third my age. "Village" is a word that various people use to describe both places.

Sebastopol has three active cohousing neighborhoods, with perhaps the most per capita cohousing residents in the United States, nearly 250, at Two Acre Wood, Sequoia Village, and Petaluma Avenue. Some SSU faculty live near campus at Frog Song Cohousing. Frequent Transition Movement and other meetings, potlucks, and celebrations happen in the community rooms of these four quite different places, which help facilitate intimacy.

Face-to-Face, Side-by-Side, and Back-to-Back Intimacies

Gender and generational conflicts continue, and even rage at times. Sometimes I think that there are three quite distinct worlds: that of men, which I understand, that of women, which I do not understand, and the world of men and women together, which can be comic and joyous at times, as well as painful.

My own experiences range from mainly male groups, such as sports and the military, to being the only senior male administrator at a women's college. I learned a lot from being that only male at meetings of a couple dozen females. I mainly observed. "Male willing to listen" was the role I assigned myself for that decade. Over the years I have also been in groups with names such as "Soul, Mystery, and Gender," where we talk about such matters.

The intimacies between and among men and women vary, as they do between and among generations. I'm in my mid-60s and my favorite forms of intimacy can be described in physical terms—face-to-face, side-by-side, and back-to-back. My college students tend to spend much more time with machines mediating their intimacies, including cell phones, computers, iPods, and other gadgets. They meet people and date online, sometimes more frequently than in person. I see students walking on campus together and communicating to each other by texting rather than talking. Most of them spend many hours a day in front of screens. Machine-mediated communication and intimacies tend to lack context and texture and move faster. So I am what studies call a "digital immigrant" and they are "digital natives." Our forms of intimacy differ.

An example of face-to-face intimacy would be talking in person. Forms of side-by-side intimacy would include doing things together, like gardening, where you spend more time looking at what you are doing than at each other. Back-to-back intimacy would include soldiers who cover for each other and friends who back you up.

Women tend to be more verbal than men, according to studies and to what I have noticed. I find it sometimes hard to keep up verbally with my women friends. Some would conclude that men are therefore less intimate than women. But it might be that our preferred forms of intimacy tend to differ. Male intimacy and female intimacy can take different forms. However, I do not like the term "opposite sex," preferring the description "other gender." When we define gender relations in oppositional terms, that tends to set up a contrary connection. The term "other" is more neutral.

Reducing unnecessary gender conflict, for which appropriate naming and language can help, is worth doing. Some conflict, on the other hand, can be beneficial, even fun or erotic. *The Magic of Conflict*, a book by aikido instructor Thomas Crumm, has guided me to accept the inevitability of some conflict, which needs to be dealt with. When I ask my students how many of them are conflict avoidant, the majority tend to raise their hands, especially the females. So I set up some gentle conflicts, seeking more than merely conflict resolution, trying to get to conflict transformation. Conflict can engage and connect people, depending on how one deals with conflict when it comes his or her way.

I like the shoulder-to-shoulder contact of gardening with someone, where we do not need to talk a lot, but can still communicate deeply.

I like the shoulder-to-shoulder contact of gardening with someone, where we do not need to talk a lot, but where we can still communicate deeply with each other, as well as with the abundant Earth itself. Many dogs and other animals do not like to be looked at directly as much as some people do. They have other ways of being intimate with humans, including loyalty. Some people are able to be more intimate with their pets than with people. Pet therapy for military veterans, such as myself, and others who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress, is growing.

Same-sex intimacy seems to have a gender difference, at least here in the United States. Women tend to relate more intimately to each other than men do. They seem less competitive and aggressive, two energies that can impede the growth of intimacy, since surrender can enhance intimacy. Women also seem to have less homophobia and fear of each other. They are more likely to do things such as sleep in the same bed when necessary, like while hiking, whereas heterosexual men seldom do such things. I've been in men's groups for decades and the men drawn to such groups seem to welcome various forms of intimacy, though what I hear from women's groups is that they are even more intimate.

College Students and Cross-Generational Intimacy

I remember walking around campus at the University of Kansas in Lawrence when I was an undergraduate over 40 years ago. I derived pleasure from seeing people, plants, clouds, and the sky. The majority of students at SSU today are looking down texting or speaking into their mobile phones as they walk, often quite unaware of their immediate physical surroundings. This saddens me. SSU has a beautiful campus with redwoods and other tress, as well as a creek, ponds, ducks, and a few stray chickens. The eyes of the students seldom meet other life forms as they walk about. They do not seem to listen to the tall trees when their dance partner, the wind, arrives to take them for a spin or birds fly over in intimate formations. Traditional peoples tend to be more part of nature, whereas moderns tend to be more connected to machines. Though these machines promise a lot, we lose something by our intimate attachments to them, rather than to living beings.

We recently experienced a tragic crash when one of our SSU students was texting while driving and killed a two-year-old who was walking hand-in-hand with her mother in a crosswalk. The student's distraction was fatal and is likely to forever haunt her and both families. It has been hard to get that crash out of my mind and nightmares, especially since I have many vibrant two-year-old friends, so I have been speaking to my students about it. Most of them are addicted to their cell phones and the convenience of disembodied texting.

Though I do have a cell phone, I am a landline kind of person. Why? Because it feels more grounded and in most places the voice quality is better and more consistent, with fewer machine hang-ups. I find more intimacy on landlines than cell phones. I also notice differences between those who prefer cell phones and those who prefer landlines. With exceptions, cell phone users tend to move faster and be busier, often in a hurry. Intimacies can benefit from going slow and observing details, nuances, and that which is subtle and noticed in a tone of voice.

I talk with my classes about the dangers of high technology; they already know the benefits. If students would be more moderate and restrained in their uses of these fast-moving objects, they could expand their forms of intimacy and recover some of what has been unfortunately lost. Many of my college students probably do not realize how important they are to me.

Cross-generational intimacy can take various forms, even outside the family. The most surprising intimacies that I am experiencing in my life at this time are with unrelated children around two years old. It started when my friend Randi had Ruby, whose second birthday we recently celebrated. I have been accepted as part of the extended family with Randi and her partner Claudia.

Then River showed up in my life, when he was around 18 months old. We

both recognized the connection right away. Then Opal and more recently Asher. I have never had so many toddlers in my life. I attribute this partly to the biological and psychological grandfather instinct and archetype within me. There is a way in which this gang of four teach me and re-parent me. My intimacies with them are sweet and tender and involve mutual curiosity and a certain protectiveness on my part. We have fun playing together.

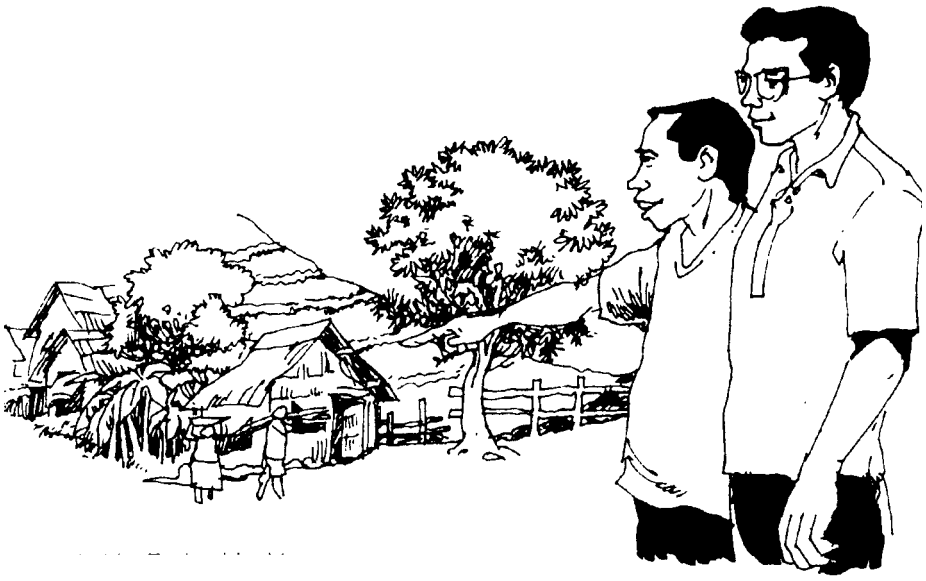
Being Military, Introverted, and Melancholic

Perhaps I should shift to even more personal and intimate comments. I'm a "dinosaur." Electricity had not even arrived to our family farm in Iowa until the late-l940s. So I have not been all screened-up by television, computers, and other screens. In fact, I still do not have a television. I do have a monitor and enjoy videos, though not as much as live stories, especially around a fire. We've had storytelling for adults here in a local barn.

Whereas many people fear speaking to large groups, such opportunities energize me. When I have talked about gender on programs such as Oprah, Phil Donahue, and Bill Moyers, it was more exciting than scary. However, being the "military brat" that I am, having been raised in a military family that moves every three years or so, staying with the same person or geographical location has not been easy. Other than my family of origin, I do not know people from my childhood.

I have recently been studying and giving presentations about the radical otherness of people raised in military and civilian families. I was militarized for the first two dozen years of my life and have been de-militarizing myself for over 40 years. But as the old saying goes, "You can take the boy out of the military, but not the military out of the boy."

Being with other military brats and veterans provides a certain intimacy and safety of shared experiences. For example, I have sound trauma, so I am easily triggered by certain sounds, which makes living in community difficult. This has been hard for my friends raised in civilian communities to understand. Post Traumatic Stress re-wires one's nervous system, so some responses are not voluntary. Children need to make noise, but I benefit from silence, which feeds intimacy with myself and with those willing to enter the silence carefully.



Illustartions are courtesy of www.developmentart.com

My writing requires being able to pull away from people, even those I care for, to find private places from which to write.

Though I am a public person, I always score as an introvert on tests. I have a persona within me that can function in the roles of a public speaker and teacher. I prefer the professional boundaries of such roles and an academic community; they make me feel safer. My teaching is partly based on emotional intelligence and I use tools from the co-counseling (reevaluation) community, which affirms the values of discharge through laughing, crying, shaking, and other natural forms of catharsis.

In my speech classes it is not unusual for students to talk about things close to their hearts, such as suicide, death, and abuse. In such classes we accept that crying is a legitimate form of communication that can enhance connection and intimacy. The academic frame can provide a safety that helps to both facilitate and contain such expressions.

I am also what could be described as melancholic. I am fed by deep valleys and sweet darkness. My writing requires being able to pull away from people, even those I care for, to find private places from which to write. Rain and the diffuse light of the moon at night enhance this melancholic's writing, which some friends do not understand.

I prefer soulful intimacy to loud, flamboyant intimacy. I enjoy spending quality time with certain special people, but this does not necessarily have to involve lots of talking.

Shepherd Bliss teaches at Sonoma State University and has operated a small fruit farm since the early 1990s. He has contributed to over two dozen books and can be reached at 3sb@comcast.net.

Illustration by Yulia Z.

My Search for Community and Intimacy: Is Cohousing the Answer?

By Robin A. Alexander

I was born yearning for community and connection. Well, if not born so, I was soon aware of an emptiness, loneliness, and sadness that of course as a young child I had no name for but it was as palpable as a stomach ache. I was lonely and isolated as a child but as I grew older and my family settled down to a relatively stable life in Princeton, New Jersey, I began to acquire some good friends and by the end of high school was much improved over my early years. Yet the sense of something lacking was always lurking in the background.

The Path toward "True" Community

Then I "left the nest" and headed off to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Homesick, yes, but new experiences, freedom, friends, and youthful romances (as well as intellectual stimulation) made this a very exciting time with lots of ups and downs.

During my years in undergraduate and then graduate school I lived in student rooming houses and was lucky in having good apartment mates and friends. Yet there was a limit to the sharing and still

something missing.

Then came the crisis that led me to find what I'd been looking for my whole life. I was discouraged at the progress (or lack thereof) on my Ph.D. dissertation in Math, and this led to a full-scale depression accompanied by a few other symptoms thrown in free of extra charge such as agoraphobia. This was definitely the low point of my life and I had no idea what I was going to do.

Salvation came through an amazingly improbable set of coincidences. I had gone to UW Health about some symptoms and was seen by a Dr. Chosey who practiced psychosomatic medicine. He did not mince words: "You look terrible," he said. I told him a bit about my situation. His response: "Why don't you do something about it?" He meant therapy and I expressed my negative opinion about that. Then he did something that transformed my life. He handed me a set of pamphlets written by Dr. Maxie Maultsby, who had been a psychiatric resident there before moving to the University of Kentucky. Dr. Maultsby had developed a therapy based on Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy that could also be used as a self-help method or in peer groups. Dr. Maultsby called his version Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and the handouts Dr. Chosey gave me explained the foundations and practice of REBT.

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy

In order to understand how this led to community, I have to explain briefly how REBT works. If you want to learn more, see www.transthought.org/rsc/rsc.html or pick up a copy of any of Dr. Maultsby's books.

REBT relies on the assertion that it's not people, things, or situations that upset us. Rather it's our thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes we have about those things. If you think and believe depressive thoughts about a situation and you have a healthy functioning brain, you will feel appropriately depressed. The second key insight is that not all thinking is equally "rational" and for now we can think of rational as realistic, though there's much more to it than that. To apply REBT the "client" (as we'll refer to the person with the problem) identifies and analyzes his/her thinking that caused the upset. By then substituting more rational thinking, the client usually feels better and deals with the situation more effectively. Over time, with practice, assistance, and support from the group, the unnecessary upset may disappear or be greatly diminished.

I read the handouts with growing excitement. The idea that not only was I causing my problems with my thinking but that there was a systematic way to examine and change that troublesome thinking was very encouraging. Immediately I felt about 50 percent better and my agoraphobia essentially vanished. I even attended a crowded Joan Baez concert with my girlfriend that evening with no phobic symptoms.

Group Work

Then began my journey into community. The peer groups that Dr. Maultsby had started continued meeting after he left. The group met for two hours once a week and periodically Dr. Maultsby returned to conduct a weekend-long workshop. My timing was excellent; soon after I joined, a weekend workshop was scheduled featuring not only Dr. Maultsby but also Dr. Ellis—a double dose of high power REBT. Though I was not used to identifying, yet alone admitting my irrational thinking, I persevered.

And that is the key to community/intimacy-building in the REBT groups. In order to get help, one had to take the risk of exposing one's real, unvarnished, possibly irrational thinking to this group of people. Maintaining one's usual facade would get one nowhere. The group was supportive, critical perhaps of the thought but not the thinker, and the members were encouraged to relate their own similar issues once the client was finished. Unsolicited advice was discouraged. Not only did I get assistance but I learned that others had problems similar to mine, which countered my sense of being uniquely flawed. Through this process I got to know the group members at an entirely new level and a degree of intimacy built up in the group.

Some of the group members started a commune near campus. Sensing that this was the kind of group I had always wanted to be a part of, and though they were full, I got in by being willing to inhabit a small room in the basement. It felt like coming home for the first time. I was so happy to be there I didn't even mind the various illnesses that swept our tight quarters during the first winter I was there. Almost everyone attended REBT groups, providing some immediate cohesiveness to our community. We ate together nightly and I remember lots of laughter and a great sense of belonging and camaraderie. Eventually a couple moved out and I graduated from the basement to the first floor front room and life was complete! I remember sitting in my room one afternoon and thinking to myself, "I'll never be depressed again!" That was how good it was, though unfortunately after I left Madison I did manage to re-experience depression.

Community Lost

Doing REBT groups did not pay the bills. Unfortunately my solution to this problem was to leave Madison for a Ph.D. in Accounting at Northwestern University—with the intention of returning to Madison, but that didn't happen. I somehow thought I had the secret now and could generate a similar community elsewhere, but I was wrong about that. The Madison community had been very special, and recreating it was not going to be easy or even possible.

Scott Peck and the Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE)

So, no more community for me until some years later when someone introduced me to Scott Peck's best selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*. That led to *The Different Drum*, with the subtitle: *Community Making and Peace*. By then I had some idea that

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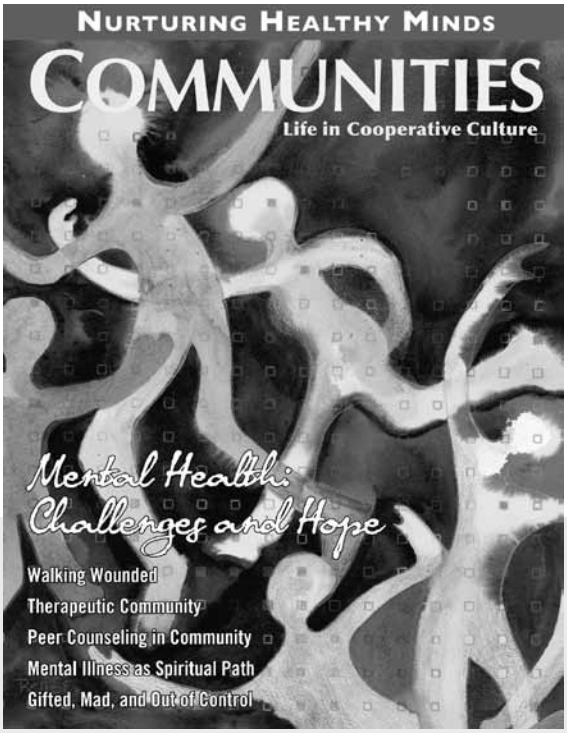

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my experience in Madison had something to do with community, so I read how Dr. Peck had inadvertently stumbled on a model for community-building. One day he showed up unprepared for a workshop he was giving. Not knowing what else to do, he had the participants form small groups and encouraged them to talk about what was on their minds. Expecting little from this, he was surprised when people began to share deeply. The experience was so powerful that he used it to design a workshop process with the purpose of giving people a taste of community.

In order to spread the word on community more efficiently, Dr. Peck and some associates created The Foundation for Community Encouragement (FCE) with the mission of bringing the experience of community to as many people as possible, mostly through his workshop model. FCE sounded exciting to me so I took the first opportunity to fly to FCE headquarters in Knoxville, Tennessee for a weekend workshop.

The FCE Workshop Process

It may be helpful to describe briefly the workshop process. A group of from 20 to 50 people gather in a comfortable space arranged in a circle. Two facilitators give a brief introduction and state that the goal is for the group to *lead itself* into community. The facilitators will assist by making occasional observations about group process, but their job is not to lead the group. One of the facilitators then reads the story of the Rabbi's Gift (see *The Different Drum* or search for this moving parable online). There is a short period of silence and then the process begins. The idea is for the group to experience and work through the four stages of community formation that Dr. Peck identified: pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness, and true community. I found that groups differed considerably in all respects including the degree of community attained.

As the weeks went by, participants felt safer and began to speak their minds.

The workshop experience was sufficiently encouraging that I returned to Knoxville in August of 1988 for FCE's annual three-day Community Continuity Conference. I visited FCE headquarters in Knoxville's west side and even attended a search committee meeting with Dr. Peck as they searched for a new Director. I was most impressed with the openness of the organization and how they were trying to use their community-building principles in the search process.

I wanted more contact with the organization and a fortuitously timed sabbatical the following year allowed me to spend the fall semester at FCE as a consultant. I was treated like any staff person and attended meetings and retreats, which allowed me to observe and participate fully in their community-building process.

Admirably, the FCE staff was determined to walk the talk and attempt to work "in community." Compared to a weekend workshop this was a much more challenging process. Early in my stay we held a one-day staff retreat using the Peck community-building model. The fear and discomfort in the room were palpable. But as autumn progressed and the staff got used to working together and we continued our community-building efforts, the improvement was obvious and by the time I left at the end of December, the staff was much more at ease talking about important personal and business matters.

Two key factors in the staff's success were 1) their willingness to back their commitment with process time and 2) their method of incorporating community-building into their weekly staff meetings. Following Dr. Peck's lead, every group activity at FCE began with a period of community-building, which consisted of making time for people who were "moved to speak" to do so. Each staff meeting began with a couple of minutes of silence after which anyone who was "moved to speak" could do so. At first nobody seemed so moved, but as the weeks went by, gradually they began to feel safer and began to speak their minds.

Working at FCE became more fun as the community process improved, and by the time I left in December, we had made good progress towards working in community. But I was to re-experience an almost Madison-quality depth of community the following summer when I returned as a paid consultant to work on their budgeting system. When I arrived in June I was amazed at the progress they had made as a community. It felt like coming home and that summer was one of the best experiences I have ever had. They still had their weekly staff meetings with the community-building component at the beginning, but now working smoothly with little fear of sharing. They had become a smooth and effective team.

I was ready to quit my job at the University and work at FCE when I learned again that all good things come to an end. The Knoxville office was closed in 1991 due to financial problems stemming from the recession. So, disappointed, I returned to my University job but kept looking for opportunities for community.

Cohousing—the Last Hope?

In 2002 I quit my job at the University, planning to go into nonprofit work to do something more "meaningful." But so hungry was I to re-experience community that when my wife and I became aware of a cohousing group in North Carolina that had an opening, I went down to visit and look it over. I was there on a "good week." They had an excellent business meeting, a nice common meal, and a social outing to see the town's minor league baseball team play. So we jumped in, though it meant a long

difficult move and not ideal climate for me and my border collie (arctic version).

We liked the house, the layout of houses along a central pedway, the area for dogs and kids to romp in, and the helpfulness of some of the members in showing us the ropes. A few people went far out of their way to help when my wife had emergency surgery a few months after we arrived. People enjoyed the common meals and other social events and meetings usually went quite well. But after a few weeks I became increasingly aware that something was missing. It was so different from what I had expected. Most people were helpful and friendly but somewhat distant. For me the difference between community and pseudo community (using Scott Peck's term for a group that has not taken the risky step into intimacy) is its feel or spirit. In the REBT and FCE communities I felt a sense of aliveness, energy, creativity, connection, family, and excitement. At the cohousing community most of those feelings were either absent or only weakly present.

Then a highly involved member of the group shocked me, but also confirmed what I'd been feeling, when she said that if I wanted community I'd better look elsewhere. I already knew that on a feeling level but it was still discouraging to have it so strongly confirmed. There was enough good that we probably would have stayed, but a change in the Wisconsin State health system made living out of state unaffordable and we returned to Wisconsin.

Reflections and Lessons from These Three Experiences

It seems important to try to understand the problem this and perhaps other cohousing groups have with community, because I am convinced that community is a very desirable condition. The popularity of cohousing indicates that many people hunger for greater community and intimacy, and the cohousing experience shows that it is not always easy to achieve.

What characteristics might have encouraged the almost automatic creation of community in the first two experiences?

1. There was a shared purpose that was both internally and externally focused and considered valuable by the members of the groups. That shared purpose also was intentionally or unintentionally supportive of community.

2. Being vulnerable and sharing deeply important aspects of self (including feelings, concerns, strengths, and weaknesses) was encouraged and supported in a safe environment.

3. Community-encouraging participation was ongoing, consistent, and involved a reasonably stable set of people.

4. Both groups benefited from unusually skillful facilitators/teachers.

In contrast, what might some of the barriers be to community in cohousing?

1. Most people don't know what community is (as I'm using the term) and have not experienced it. When I returned from FCE I gave a number of talks on community. My assertion that most have not experienced community comes from direct statements by the participants to that effect. Without having experienced deep community, some cohousing members might think that having common meals, reasonably civil meetings, and other group events means they have community. They do, but they may not be aware of how much better it can get.

2. People join a cohousing group for a wide variety of reasons. Not all want deeper intimacy. There would need to be a critical mass that does.

3. The critical mass would need to both know that vulnerability and risk-taking are required and be willing to begin to take those risks. Since this process can be uncomfortable at first, they have to have some idea that it's worth it, which they might not have because of not having experienced it, and so on—a vicious circle.

Many cohousers hunger for greater community and intimacy, but it is not always easy to achieve.

4. Practices that inadvertently inhibit community may be used. For instance, I've seen many group facilitators begin meetings with a directed exercise. This can have the opposite effect of the "moved to speak" model and stifle a member's vulnerable sharing.

How might community come to cohousing?

1. If the group hangs together long enough, community can gradually develop "by accident," though there are many ways in which it can get derailed if it is not done with intention.

2. There are facilitators skilled at community-building that the group could hire to speed the process.

3. Enough participants need to be both aware that greater community is possible and willing to do what it takes to get there.

Having experienced deeply satisfying and enjoyable instances of community, I will probably keep searching, but it is unfortunate that it is so rare. Perhaps cohousing will eventually provide a more consistent path to community. ❧

Born in Berkamstead, England, Robin A. Alexander moved with his family in 1950 to the US, where he's lived in New Jersey, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Carolina. He now lives in Madison, Wisconsin with his therapy dog Teddy, doing writing and learning web design.

COMMON HOUSES: WHERE ARE ALL THE PEOPLE? A Study into Common House Vitality and Some Recommendations for Increasing its Use

By Rebecca Disbrow

This afternoon I was working at Bryant Park in New York City, at a free outdoor performance by the New York City Ballet. At some point between three and two hours before the event start time, the concern among my colleagues switched from, "Will we have enough of a turn-out?" to "What measures can we take for crowd control?" I reflected on my previous year of research—for which I spent countless hours trying to approximate that formula of how many people will use a space—and realized just how widespread and important this estimation can be.

Cohousing communities across the country tend to grumble more along the lines of "under-use" when talking about their common houses. These shared spaces, often expensive and laboriously designed, are not meeting residents' basic expectations of use. I spent six months visiting 14 cohousing communities in Arizona, Massachusetts, Michigan, Colorado, and California. From these visits, extensive interviews, and 168 survey respondents, I tried to extract the things most important to maintaining bustling common houses—the things successful communities seemed to have in common.

Of the 168 residents participating in

the study, 63 percent indicated they felt their common house was used too little. The goal of this research project was to create a guide, useful to current and forming communities, which helps residents create and maintain socially vital common houses. In this comprehensive study, I probed into every topic relevant to common house life, from resident relations to meal times to common house floor plan.

Many of the things I looked at were important, as expected: Common houses need to be comfortable and pleasant; they should feel like an extension of residents' homes. They should be well-lit and have a steady schedule of both meals and events. The common house should be situated so that it acts as a gateway to the community; a space overrun with pedestrians rather than cars. Aside from these basics, which can be found in most cohousing guidebooks, a few less-discussed factors surfaced having particular importance to common house vitality. These topics will be the subject of this article, but for more detail request the full paper (Rebecca.disbrow@gmail.com).

First, there are some philosophical ideas that guide the design and management of

common houses in order to maximize their use:

1. **Make the common house incredibly easy to use.**
   Keep the distance from houses to common house short, keep the common house doors unlocked whenever possible, etc. People are lazier than most would think.
2. **Make the common house a necessity in as many ways as possible.**
   Mail, newspapers, community news, etc. located inside.
3. **Make being in the common house a better alternative to private homes.**
   Complete with, for example (depending on your lifestyle choices), a better TV, AC, kitchen, space to entertain, etc.
4. **Give residents a multitude of excuses to use the space.**
   Puzzles, retrieving mail, food, a library, tea/coffee machines—the more the merrier.

Getting more specific, the data pointed to three less expected areas that appear to weigh heavily on the amount of use a common house receives. These include the amount of personal input residents have into the design and decoration of their CH, how informal the space feels as well as how informally it is used, and the tensions among residents in the community.

Personal Input

The first area of apparently high importance, personal input, makes a strong case for the use of cohousing-specific professionals in the design and development of communities. Architects and developers who work primarily with cohousing communities have developed methods to include future residents in the decision and design process far more than conventional development methods. Further, architectural theorists and social/psychological researchers have long touted the importance of personal connection to one's environment.

Christopher Alexander, in his book *A Pattern Language,* titled one of his 272 patterns of design "Things From Your Life." In the modernist era in which his book was written, he stressed the forgotten importance of keeping personal items in your physical spaces. "It is far more fascinating to come into a room which is the living expression of a person, or a group of people, so that you can see their lives, their histories, their inclinations, displayed in manifest form around the walls, in the furniture, on the shelves."[1] Alexander is far from the first to espouse the importance of personal items in design and decoration; for example, Winifred Gallagher in *House Thinking* talks not only about the aesthetic appeal but also the health benefits of being surrounded by items that hold personal meaning and memories.[2]

How can communities increase this personal investment, particularly after the common house is already built? Here are some examples of the ways I came across in the communities visited:

- Children's height markings on the wall (Pioneer Valley)
- Community photo walls
- Resident art displays (Great Oak, Sonora)
- Resident-painted tiles in the kitchen counter and backsplash (Tierra Nueva)
- Donated furniture (Stone Curves)
- Resident repainting of common house rooms
- Children-painted fence mural (Great Oak)
- Hanging recent/fun projects, like tie-dyed tee shirts, in the CH (Great Oak)
- "Pinecones" board—appreciation board or wall acknowledging communal/positive acts by specific residents
- Community history timeline on a wall with resident-made index-card-histories of important events (Pioneer Valley)
- Resident photo board with a favorite quote/food/CH room/activity under it
- Larger personal "cubbies" for storing items such as slippers (Mosaic)

Of course, one of the proven most effective methods to increase feelings of personal sentiment or investment other than tangible items is to incorporate members extensively in the community design. This is one of the guiding principles of cohousing and most residents reflect its importance. According to this research, having participated in the design or decorating process is highly correlated to both satisfaction with the CH and its social vitality. As noted above, the use of a cohousing-specific architect becomes extremely important in this regard. These specialized individuals not only understand the goals of cohousing, but further they know and expect to incorporate residents in the designing process. Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant from The Cohousing Company have a well-developed and resident-based design process. One of these steps, for example, includes writing the name of each desired room on an index card and then systematically comparing one-by-one until the group creates a hierarchy of importance. According to budget, they use this to decide which rooms to include in their common house.

If you want to design a shared space which attracts residents and in which they feel comfortable, make it a space over which they feel a sense of ownership. When residents can point to furniture/art/photographs/wall colors and say, "That's mine" or "I picked that," they are more likely to sit and stay a while.

Informal Use

Of the 183 residents included in my study, the average number of hours

1. Alexander, Christopher. *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977. 1156-1166.
2. Gallagher, Winifred. *House Thinking: A Room-By-Room Look At How We Live.* New York, NY: Harper Collins. 2006.

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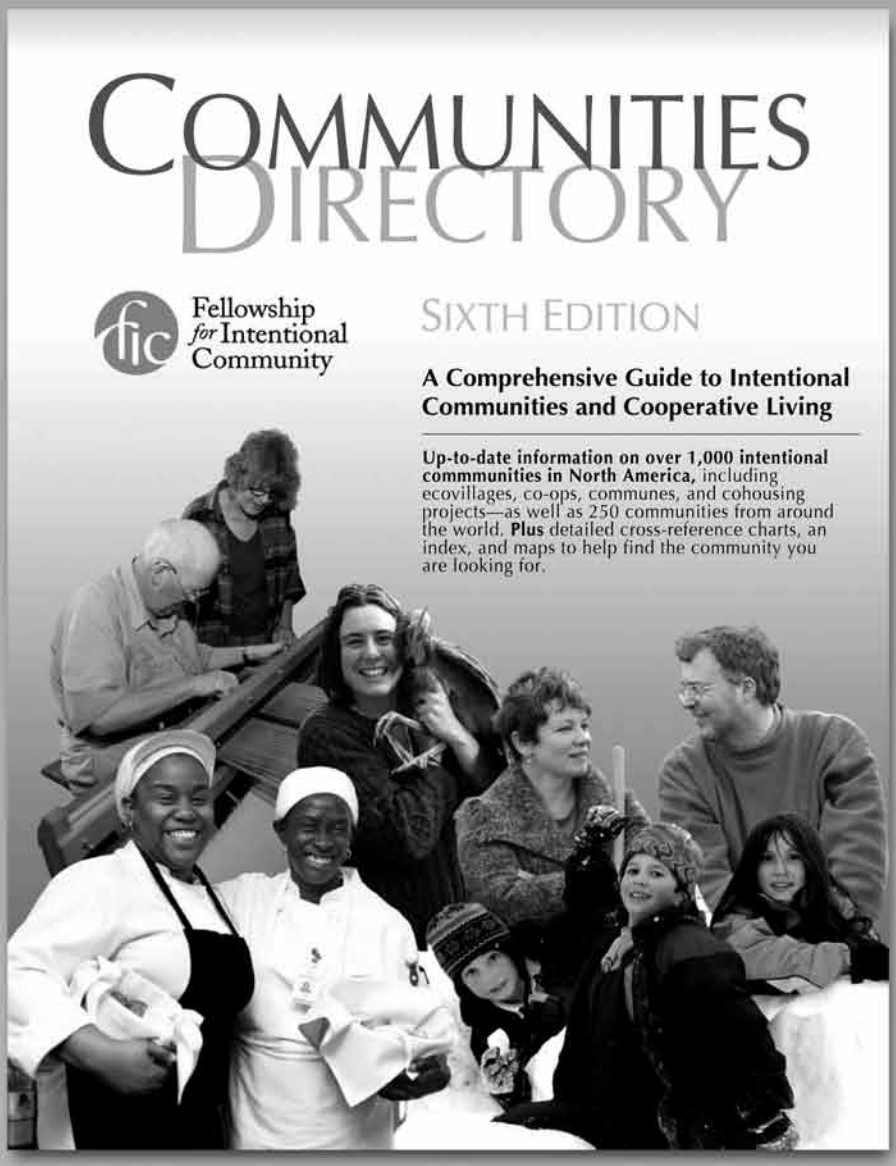

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per week spent informally (defined as not for a scheduled event, work hours, etc.—just "hanging out") was less than two. The single largest complaint from residents—more so than overall wishing for a busier common house—was the desire for a common house that was used in a more informal, spontaneous way. The best way to encourage people regularly coming through and bumping into each other is to build the CH into their daily routines. A community can do this in several ways: by placing this common house on the throughway into the community, by building the mailroom and laundry facilities into the common house, and by leaving things that need to be regularly done or checked in the CH. Examples of the latter include food left out, regularly changing news and message boards, and common house daily chores.

Many communities tried making some sort of food/drink available in the common house, but I would suggest they take the idea further than a box of tea on a counter. People simply love food. As William Whyte, renowned urban and social theorist said, "food attracts people, who attract more people." Relating Whyte's ideas, which were intended for public parks, back to common houses, there is an abundance of ways to incorporate food in a similar way. Leftovers are excellent and easy to ensure; ask cooks to prepare meals for five-10 extra people per evening and leave them in the fridge. Breakfast also has the power to bring in many people. Some communities have tried automatic coffee machines (with great success) as well as occasional bagels or pastries. These need to be routine, however, to truly work. A constantly supplied basket of pastries and an automatic coffee machine could be all the impetus residents need to stop into the common house on their way into work rather than going to a coffee shop or grabbing something from their own kitchen. Throw in a newspaper delivered daily, wireless internet, and/or the news on a television (again, depending on your lifestyle choices), and the place could take on a new life every morning.

Just as tensions in a family can disrupt the way the living room is used, tensions in a community can disrupt the way a common house is used.

If a community were large enough and wanted to get more elaborate, they could have a few items, such as bagels, pastries, and fruit laid out, plus coffee and tea, with a resident preparing it in the mornings and collecting small amounts of money to support it.

In addition, preliminary findings suggest that, in communities where televisions are already part of the culture, residents use the common house two or more extra hours per week on average when the common house has a television rated as superior to residents' own. Something that provides background noise and a common, pressure-free, reason to be in the CH can act as a drawing force—or the attraction that allows residents to linger that one or two seconds longer, under the real or fake guise of watching a couple minutes of the news.

Tensions

Just as tensions in a family can disrupt the way the living room is used, tensions in a community can disrupt the way a common house is used. The vast majority of communities I spoke with expressed problems with community relations, and further expressed and demonstrated how greatly such problems can interrupt CH use. One community had "East Side vs. West Side" rivalries. Another had an interpersonal dispute become so heated it effectively ended weekly CH events as these two residents—and the allies of each—refused to come into the CH.

Less dramatically, many community residents I spoke with expressed feelings of helplessness or giving in to prevailing social powers during group process. How skillfully a group handles governance, community-building, and conflict resolution can have a major impact on feelings about meetings and about the common house in which they commonly occur. Whether a group uses consensus, voting, a combination, or some other method, it is important that members feel safe expressing their opinions, which may involve allowing for anonymous feedback. In this way the group can create and maintain a community atmosphere that gives to rather than detracts from common house life.

When designing common houses, residents rarely are concerned with "will this get enough use?" Most future residents envision using it constantly. This is simply not always the practical reality of daily life—even in a neighborhood built for community. Being aware of the possibility of future under-use—and further aware of some of the most effective ways to combat it—can save residents time, money, and heartache later.

Just remember, make the common house **easy** (to use), **necessary** (to daily life), and **better** (than private homes)—and give people an excuse to use it! ❧

Rebecca Disbrow is a researcher and writer studying the social effects of architecture. She has a degree in Environmental Psychology from the University of Michigan and wrote an honors thesis on common house vitality. She was a resident of student cooperative housing and sat on the Board of Directors for the Inter-Cooperative Council in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She currently works full time for Bryant Park/34th Street Partnership in New York City as an Operations Analyst, and part-time for Cohousing Collaborative, LLC out of Washington DC. In the fall Rebecca will be starting a Masters program in City Planning and Architectural Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

A COMMUNITARIAN CONUNDRUM: Why a World That Wants and Needs Community Doesn't Get It

By Timothy Miller

The following is an edited version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Communal Studies Association, New Harmony, Indiana, October 2, 2010.

I believe that people the world over long for community. While that assertion is just about impossible to test, a number of indicators point in that direction. Social alienation seems to me widespread, with large numbers of people dissatisfied with the prevailing way the world is organized. They may have radically different visions of an ideal world, but a fair number, it is reasonable to guess, see lack of community as a cause of much of the restlessness and anomie we see all around us. The kinds of community that can bring meaning into life are many, but it is another fair guess that more than a few of those longing for community see intentional community as something that could put meaning and fulfillment into their lives.

Communal Aspirations

One bit of evidence for the desire for community can be seen in the classified advertising section, called "Reach," in Communities magazine. In every issue there are ads seeking members for established communities, but also quite a few ads for new communities, typically ones that have not yet been actually launched, but concrete visions of community, at least, in the minds of would-be founders and members. In the Fall 2010 issue of the magazine, for example, people were invited to help start an ecovillage and retreat center in Kansas, a desert community in Arizona, a cohousing community in California, an urban cooperative in Hawai'i, and a shared household in New Jersey.

Another bit of evidence for community-mindedness is the traffic on the Fellowship for Intentional Community website. As of October 2010, that site attracted about 66,500 hits per month, or about 2,200 a day, with 6.5 page views per visit, and the numbers for 2010 were up 11 percent over 2009. While not everyone visiting the site is in the market for community, surely the numbers reflect to some degree interest in intentional communities—if not living in one, at least wishing.

Video sales also indicate increased interest in community. The FIC reports that it sold over 1000 total copies of the two volumes of Geoph Kozeny's video "Visions of Utopia" last year, and that included more sales of volume 1 than had been reached in any of the seven years it has been available.

Communities also attract attention from the broader public. There is a steady stream of media coverage of communities, as in the case of a photo feature on East Wind community in *National Geographic* in 2005. And there is a steady stream of visitors to communities—not just sightseers, but in many cases persons looking for a place to live in community.

The Hard Numbers

For all of the interest there seems to be in intentional communities, however, the number of persons actually living in intentional communities is tiny—a very small fraction of 1 percent of the population. Counting the number of active com-

Labyrinth at New Harmony.

Amana church.

Photos courtesy of Timothy Miller

munitarians is a daunting task, to say the least, but the numbers are not large.

I decided I would count up the population of the hundreds of American communities in the 2007 edition of the *Communities Directory* (the new 2010 directory was not yet out when I did my counting, but I don't think the results there would be very different) and in round numbers that would come to something like 10,000 adults living in communities of five or more members each in the United States. But there are so many problems with the numbers that getting within even a couple of orders of magnitude is dubious. For example, the Adidam community lists its population at 1060. But that apparently includes many locations, the majority of them outside the United States. On the other hand, the Bruderhof communities don't provide any numbers at all, and that group of communities, with a membership thought to be in the low thousands, has enough members that its numbers alone would have quite an impact on any total figure. And the most important skewing factor of all is that huge numbers of communities choose not to be listed in the directory.

So I took another path toward trying to make an estimate. The Catholic religious communities keep pretty careful track of their numbers; in 2007 they reported 13,428 priests, 60,715 sisters, and 4,904 brothers, for a total communal population of 79,048.1 There are two other groups of communities with five-figure populations, the Mormon fundamentalists, who are thought to have perhaps 30,000 communal members, and the Hutterites, who have around 15,000 in the United States. So that puts us at around 125,000 communitarians. Now, here is the wildest guess of all: I'm going to conjecture that there are 5,000 other intentional communities averaging 10 members apiece, which would be another 50,000. Add that to the 125,000 we already have, and, just to be cautious, let's report the total as a range: 150,000 to 200,000.

The point of all this guesswork is to say that not a lot of people live communally. Given an American population of over 300 million, 150,000 is fewer than 1 in 2,000, less than 1/20 of 1 percent of the population; 200,000 is fewer than 1 in 1,500, less

than 1/15 of 1 percent of the population. And take out the Catholic communities, which are linked to a larger tradition that provides a support system, and focus only on independent, freestanding communities, and the numbers are even more drastic. We probably have fewer than 100,000 such communitarians, which comes to fewer than 1 in 3,000 Americans, less than 1/30 of 1 percent of the population. No matter how you slice it, communal living is not a mass movement.

So why not, if so many people long for community in their lives?

Some Reasons for the Gap

One answer is that community in the broad sense doesn't necessarily involve a residential situation that meets even a simple definition of intentional community. So the communitarian desires of many can be met through various nonresidential forms of close relationships—churches, social organizations, political organizations, fraternal organizations, and many other such institutions. But the gap remains. Why do so few people live in community?

Many who have considered the disconnect between a widespread desire for community and the difficulty of starting actual communities and getting them to function well have focused on what might be called internal issues—things such as interpersonal relations, decision-making processes, leadership, and financial strength. Many accounts of communal life, especially of short-lived communities, talk about internal bickering, conflicts between leaders and the rank and file, and inadequate work skills on the part of members, especially when a community is trying to make a living through agriculture. Take just about any issue of Communities magazine over the last several years and you will find those things—especially personal relations and group process—discussed at length.

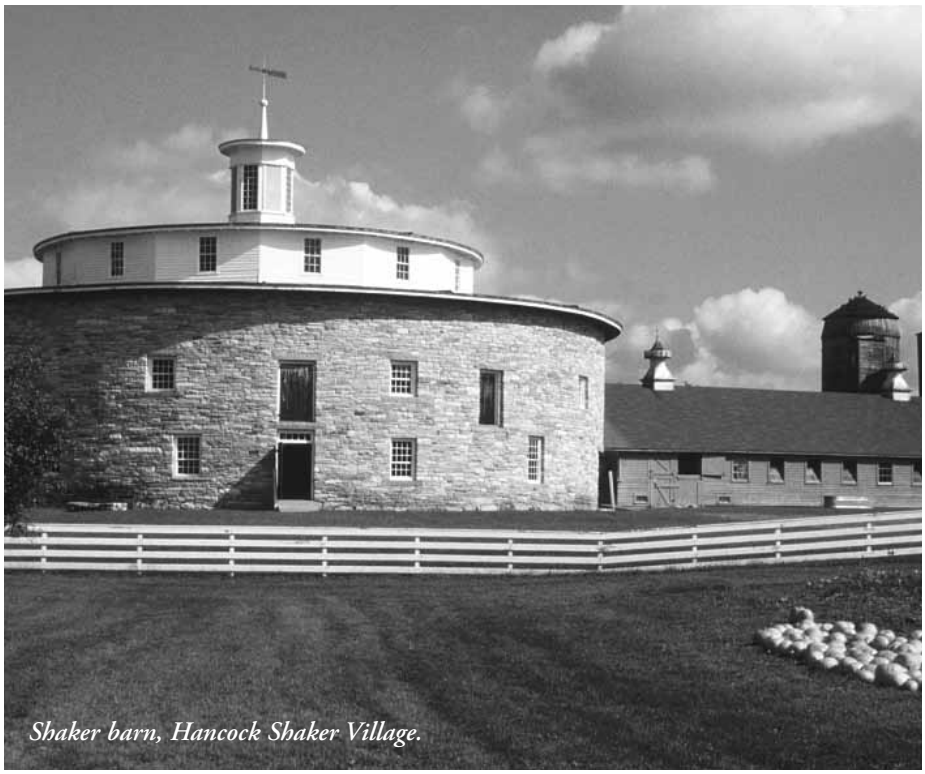
However, issues that could be called external may be more important than the internal ones. American society, in particular, has structures and attitudes that discourage communal ventures. I would like to look at some of the ways in which our contemporary American lifestyle impedes the development of communal living.

One fundamental problem is what I will call, for lack of a better term, basic American selfishness. Our whole national ethos seems to be predicated on a me-first approach to life, something that is about as contrary to communitarianism as anything could be. Little acts of me-first rudeness are all around us, as in the case of my neighbors who needlessly park half blocking the alley and make it hard for the rest of us to get through, whose free-range cats methodically kill the songbirds we try to attract, and whose dog is left outside to bark all night.

The "Reach" pages of Communities magazine bring this all-American tendency into focus quite clearly: while in every issue several communities advertise that they are looking for new members, just as many ads ask for new members to join a community founder's new or prospective venture. One way to interpret this: I don't want to work within someone else's vision; I want people to help me work out my own plan. That kind of attitude, if it's there, really negates any possibility of community, since the diminution of the will and the ego are essential to any communal venture. American individualism is deeply ingrained in us, and I think that is one fundamental reason why most people don't join communities, despite their manifold attractions.

Another basic problem, one that could be solved legislatively but may never be, is zoning. Zoning laws have existed in this country for less than a century, so when the Shakers and Harmonists and Amana colonists set up shop, for example, zoning was one problem they didn't have to worry about. When they bought land, they could use it as they liked. If they mixed commercial and industrial and residential uses in some unconventional way, no problem. But since the early 20th century zoning has been implemented in much of the country.

The desire for zoning is certainly understandable; I don't want my neighbor to sell her house to make way for a 24-hour fast-food restaurant with a drive-up window and bright lights and lots of litter. However, perhaps inadvertently, zoning laws have seriously impeded intentional communities. In many parts of my city if more than three people occupy a house, they must all be related. That means that my lesbian



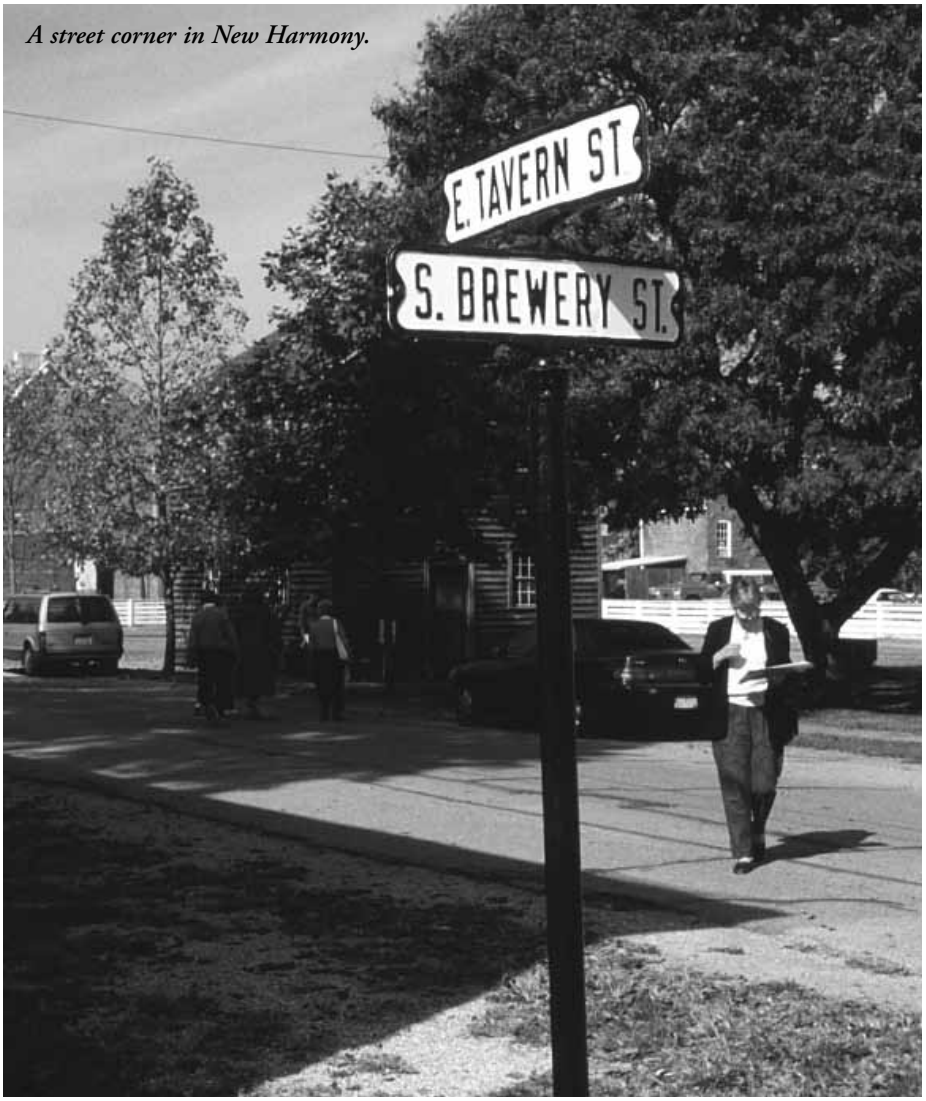
Shaker barn, Hancock Shaker Village.

neighbors, a couple with children who are forbidden by law to marry and who are the best neighbors you could ever want, could be run out of their home if a moral crusader were to go after them. If such innocuous people are threatened by zoning laws, how much more are communitarians unable to pursue their dreams? I know of a large intentional community that has around 60 resident members and tries to keep an utterly low profile in order to avoid attracting attention to itself. The community is located in a county where officials have bulldozed two intentional communities they deemed illegal, so the remaining community's fears are not exactly unfounded. How unfair is that?

Technology vs. Community

Another broad category of modern anti-communitarian forces at work in our society consists of technological devices, including many that we almost all use. Perhaps the biggest offender here is the automobile, which, despite its enormous convenience, seems to bring out the worst in many people who use it. Where I live people are fairly courteous with each other face to face; we open doors for others, we say please and thank you, we wait our turn in line rather than cutting in.

Yet large numbers act aggressively and rudely and irresponsibly all too often when they are behind the wheel of a car, running red lights and cutting people off and speeding at just about all times. Although someone who did a controlled study of motoring behavior might come up with some other answer, my own conclusion is that the automobile is an inherently isolating device, one that enables relative anonymity, and that it seems to give the anonymous driver a chance to behave in an unfriendly way without really being seen. I've wondered, sometimes, if we would have more courteous driving if the name of each principal driver were painted onto the car in large graphics.



A street corner in New Harmony.

If the automobile is anti-communal, so is television, and as television technology progresses, it seems to draw ever more people away from social interaction. Entertainment was once largely communal; people would mingle with others at dances, concerts, movies, and other such events held in public spaces. Television, which the average American watches for several hours a day, draws people away from such activities and reinforces the value of being alone.

Even worse than television, at least potentially, is the near-universal spread of the cell phone. People once walked down the street looking at the people around them, looking at the surrounding environment, and occasionally greeting those they encountered, but today hordes of people walk everywhere with cell phones held firmly to the sides of their heads. That primary focus on cell conversation tends to lead them to avoid eye contact and to withdraw from other interaction. We know, of course, how vital the typical cell phone conversation is. On campus the ones I overhear usually go something like this: "Oh, not much. What're you doing? Maybe I'll go find something to eat. Want to talk later? Give me a call." I have instructed my students not to use their cell phones in class, but then I go to faculty gatherings and watch people there texting rather than paying attention to the work at hand, or jumping up and running out of the room to take calls at will. Many of us worry about the danger of cell phone use by drivers; research has shown that using a cell phone creates a distraction that is on average the equivalent of a blood-alcohol level of 0.12 percent, or one and a half times the legal limit for alcohol in most states. Texting, of course, is much worse than that.

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We've rolled out a whole new Communities magazine website where you can read a selection of articles from our quarterly magazine online. We will post a handful of articles from each issue so you can get a taste of what Communities offers.

You can browse our online articles by category, author, or you can search the article text. You can even receive notification of newly posted articles via RSS or ATOM as well as updates on reader comments for any or all articles. We encourage you and all our readers to comment on our online articles and help us create a vibrant forum on the subject of community.

Help us promote intentional community and our magazine by sharing articles with friends.

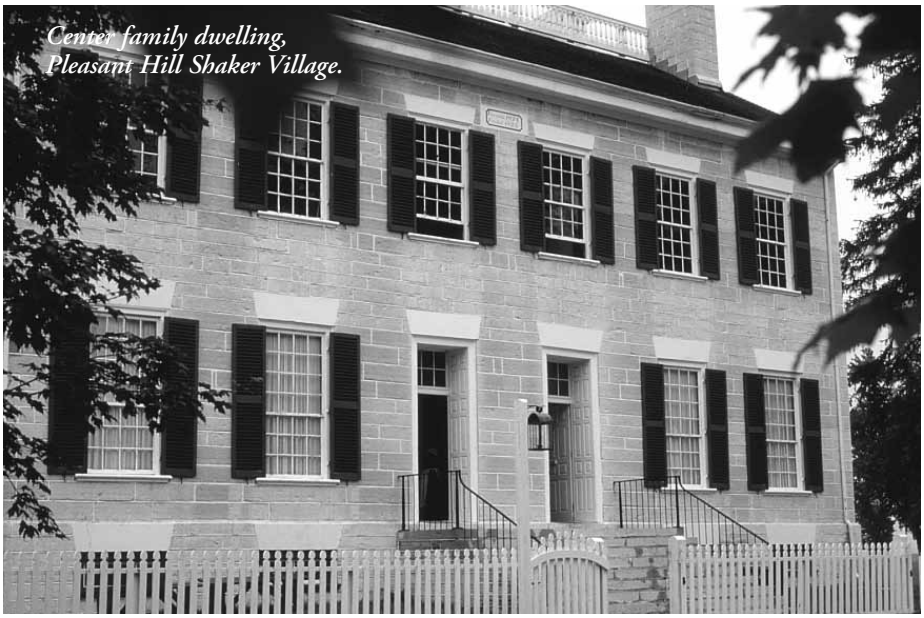
On our new site you can email articles and share links to them via Facebook, Twitter, or a whole array of social networking sites. Please share links to our articles widely and consider adding a link to our site to your webpage or blog. Help the world know how critical community is in our lives.

As always, you can purchase a subscription or renew your subscription online and receive our quarterly print magazine for one year at $24 (higher outside US). You can also purchase copies of our current issue or back issues online. In addition, the new site provides a look at the complete table of contents for each of our recent issues.

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

We will also post announcements of new articles on our Communities Magazine Page on Facebook. You can also join the Intentional Community Cause on Facebook and help support the FIC.

communities.ic.org



Center family dwelling, Pleasant Hill Shaker Village.

But I digress. Bad driving is hardly the only product of cell-phone use; decline of human community is just as serious. Incidentally, one byproduct of cell phones is also unfortunate: we are experiencing a serious decline and soon, probably, the extinction of phone books, with which we can locate each other easily—another anticommunal effect, in other words.

Computers have brought a lot of convenience into our lives, but they too can be seriously anticommunal. Initially the computer was a great means of social contact for far-flung intentional communities, but its net effect has moved strongly over to the dark side. Probably the biggest culprit is social networking, which, although it does promote personal interaction, puts people in front of monitors or on their cell phones rather than in personal contact with others. Once again prospects for human interaction are hindered when they should be helped.

Even air conditioning takes its toll on community. When the weather is hot, most of us like to stay inside where it's cool. That's not a very good way to interact with one's neighbors, and it certainly has nothing but negative environmental impacts.

Alternatives to all of these isolating technologies exist. We can do much of our moving about with public transit and walking; we can find entertainment live instead of on television; we can, at least for the moment, still find public telephones in public places if we do need to communicate while away from home or office, and therefore not really need a cell phone. Front porches and public swimming pools can help minimize the need for air conditioning. We can gather, at least occasionally, face-to-face instead of on Facebook. But that's not the way things are headed in these last declining days of Western civilization.

The "C" Words

Now, I don't want to end by saying that technology is the sole culprit in the decline of American communal values, or the sole impediment to the growth of intentional communities. There is one other social presence that might be even worse than isolating technology, and that is a suspicion of cooperation that is both wide and deep.

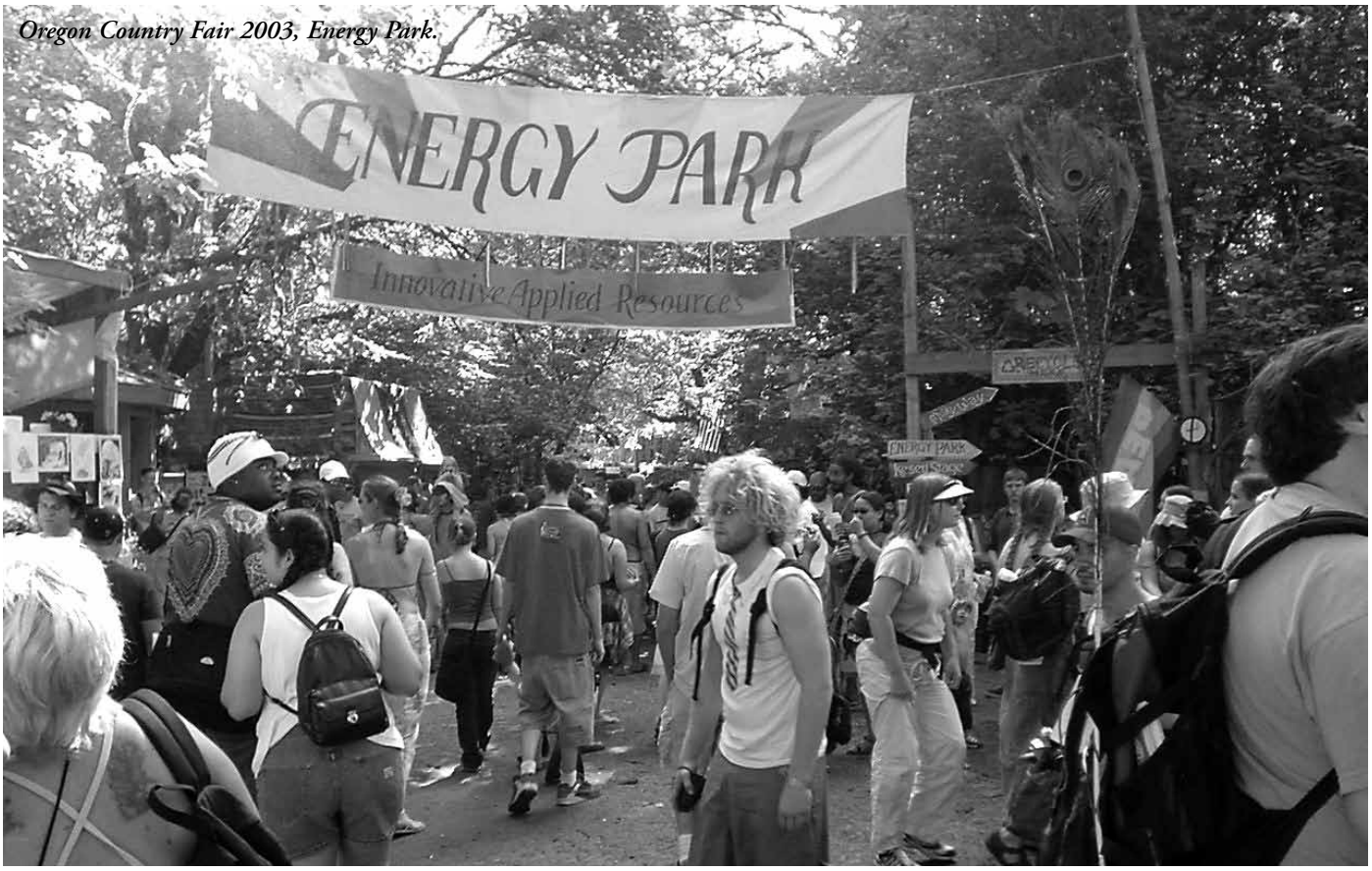
That suspicion would seem to be a product of modern history. Charles Nordhoff, writing in 1875, could call his book *The Communistic Societies of the United States* without undue controversy, and others in the communities movement of the 19th century used the word in a positive and uncontroversial way. The 20th century, however, was the era of evil communism, or Marxism. Until the fall of the Soviet Union and its related states 20 years ago there was no more horrifying word in the English language than "communism," and although today its definitive horrifics have been replaced by terms such as Al Qaida and terrorism, its demonizing power remains strong. Socialism too remains a term of enormous opprobrium, as we have seen when universal health care is labeled socialist and therefore condemned.

The effect of anticommunist and antisocialist fervor on intentional communities is not just hypothetical. In the 1930s communitarians were acutely aware of the persecution they faced when their way of life became known, and tended to keep their profiles low. In the 1940s the New Deal communities of the Resettlement Administration and other agencies, which helped thousands of families up from abject poverty through cooperative rural projects, were summarily shut down by Congress precisely because of their collective nature. A few years earlier public officials in the state of Arkansas became determined to purge the nest of radicals at the communal Commonwealth College—note that name, *Commonwealth*—from their midst, and in 1940 state action did effectively put the college out of business.

Confronting the Challenges

All of these things add up to a powerful anticommunitarian bias in American life. Intentional communities, especially in their modern forms as ecovillages and cohousing, have a great deal to offer a world with pressing social and environmental problems. But the forces running in the other direction are formidable, and if the communities movement is to rise to its full potential, those forces must be identified and dealt with. That is a project of enormous dimensions. ❧

Timothy Miller, professor of religious studies at the University of Kansas, presented a version of this paper at the annual meeting of the Communal Studies Association, New Harmony, Indiana, October 2, 2010.



Oregon Country Fair 2003, Energy Park.

On the Road with Communities

Rutledge, MO, May 2011—After a year based in what some have dubbed Intentional Communities Central, USA (Rutledge and environs, northeast Missouri), the Communities editor is returning home to western Oregon and its own cooperative experiments. I'm leaving with great appreciation for the communities and people I've gotten to know—at Sandhill Farm, where I spent the 2010 growing season (and where the Fellowship for Intentional Community, Community Bookshelf, and this magazine have their home offices); at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, where I moved in November; at Red Earth Farms, Dancing Rabbit's homesteading neighbor; and at the Possibility Alliance Sanctuary, where old Oregon friends and their new community-mates are leading a service-oriented, land-based life outside La Plata.

Coming months will see several major community-related events. July 8-10, 2011, I'll be co-staffing the Intentional Communities booth in Community Village at the Oregon Country Fair, one of the premier annual "cultural renaissance" gatherings in the world. If you've never been, and are anywhere near the area, you ought to go. Prepare to be overwhelmed by the sights, sounds, arts, crafts, music, and people, as well as by the beauty of this organically-constructed, pedestrian-only village embedded in the woods and meadows of the OCF land.

August 19-27, I'll be attending the biannual Continental Bioregional Congress, held at Birch Creek Arts and Ecology Center, nestled in the old-growth-rich wilderness of southern Oregon. For nine days participants will share notes, ideas, information, and inspiration with others cultivating local community all over the world—learning about diverse projects and talking about how we can support one another's work. Just as the Fellowship for Intentional Community serves as a hub for cooperative efforts near and far, the Continental Bioregional Congress serves as a networking and gathering place for bioregionalists worldwide—and a great learning opportunity and experience of community for anyone who sees the importance of building local and bioregional awareness and connections in response to changing times.

I'll also be traveling to Occidental, California, for FIC's September 23-25 event, "Art of Community: Creating Sustainable Culture through Cooperation." Like the OCF and the CBC, this gathering promises to bring together many people sharing visions of a more cooperative, ecologically viable future—including both those new to these fields and those with years or decades of experience "on the ground." As with the other events, I hope to see some of you (but please, not all of you—the place can't hold you all) there!

—Chris Roth

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 #152/Fall 2011 (out in September) is July 1, 2011.

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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALENDAR

MURRAY GROVE RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER is a peaceful, private nonprofit organization with historic Unitarian Universalist roots; where the Pine Barrens meet Barnegat Bay. We are open to the public year-round to book group retreats, family reunions, youth groups and work/social gatherings. Located on 20 peaceful acres in Ocean County, NJ, minutes from the Garden State Parkway Exit 74, and 90 minutes from Philadelphia and New York City. We are purposely simple, comfortable and affordable. Overnight accommodations are available for as many as 50 people. We offer meeting space, a large fully-equipped kitchen, dining room, living room with fireplace, labyrinth, outside fire pit, playground and pool. Visit murraygrove.org or call 609-693-5558 for more information.

DAMANHUR (ITALY) "HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY" 8 Day Workshop ~ October 3-10, 2011. Learn how to build a sustainable Community ~ Experience community living ~ See Italy! Damanhur, one of the world's most renowned and successful intentional communities, will share with you over 30 years of expertise in building community! Be Inspired by the passion of the Damanhurians! Be amazed at what a community of people have accomplished! See their website at: www.Damanhur.org. Join us for an unforgettable experience! See our ad. Approx. cost: $1900-$2200 (Airfare NOT included). Contact: Dan & Mariana Watson (828) 698-1448 or (828) 273-7373 danandmariana1@gmail.com

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

PARTNERS WANTED: WE BUILD THE ROAD AS WE TRAVEL! Established woodworkers(s) and other artisans to invest and contribute to our community-based cooperative cottage industry. Long-term vision includes teaching in a school that features woodworking. Fully outfitted wood shop already exists on site, ready to be expanded. Adjacent assembly room currently under construction. YOU are the missing element! Contact Paul Caron, The Natural Building School at Earthaven Ecovillage, 7 Consensus Circle, Black Mountain, NC 28711, or call (828) 669-4625. You can also email us at culturesedge@earthaven.org.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

QUAKER INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY SEEKS NEW RESIDENT MEMBERS. We are six families, ages infant to 60's, in green homes on 135 acres in gorgeous upstate New York (near Albany; 2.5 hours from NYC/Boston). Oppertunities include sojourning on-site, renting/buying a modest 3-bedroom home, or renting member-owned homes nearby. Visit HYPERLINK "http://www.qivc.org/"www.qivc.org or e-mail info@qivc.org Land trust in Rural Tennessee. Large house with several outbuildings on 7.5 acres. Quiet location, good neighbors. We have spring water system, electricity, DSL. Several dozen apple trees, plus some cherry, peach, plum, pear, muscadine, kiwi and more. Currently one full-time resident, would like several more. Our community is informal and friendly. Interest in social activism a plus. Write HYPERLINK "mailto:AbundantLandtrust@yahoo.com"AbundantLandtrust@yahoo.com or Nova Land, 292 Haydenburg, Whitleyville TN 38588

BIRCH CREEK ARTS AND ECOLOGY CENTER, SISKIYOU MOUNTAINS, OREGON. Nestled in the Little Applegate River canyon, we invite you to join us creating intentional community in a wild and rustic setting. Our focus is living in a neighborhood of wilderness cabins, south facing solar exposure, growing food, celebrating the abundance of nature, serving the greater good. Our spiritual work helps us to provide a sanctuary for educational retreats including the 11th Continental Bioregional Congress in August 2011. www.cbc-11.org Located at historic Trillium Community Farm, BCAEC offers various opportunities for learning about and living in community; internships, residencies, members/partners. trillium@deepwild.org www.deepwild.org

THE MIDDLE ROAD COMMUNITY, NELSON BC. This magnificent five bedroom log home is one of eleven homes in The Middle Road Community, a thriving cohousing strata-development with a strong sense of neighbourhood living. Located on a sunny elevated bench on Nelson's North Shore of Kootenay Lake, this strata consists of 52 acres of forest, wetland, fields and meadows. Half is developed as 11 privately-owned lots with the rest remaining commonly shared property, which includes 2.5 acres of organic garden and orchard, horse pasture, community hall and play grounds. This particular lot is quiet, private, and secluded. The warm

and inviting home was built with a strong environmental consciousness using primarily natural, renewable materials. The unique qualities of this home's many comfortable spaces evoke an experience of connection with the surrounding beauty. Features include radiant floor heating, sound proofing organic insulation, central vacuum, Japanese water-room and tub, custom-built high-end birch cabinetry, energy-saving fridge, marble shelf cold cupboard, front-load washer and dryer, double-coated wiring, and four decks: southern exposed large deck, covered cozy seating deck, game-enticing open deck, and outdoor sleeping porch. Enjoy the spectacular views from this bright and enchanting home overlooking Kootenay Lake. For photos and more information: Canadian Co-Housing: http://cohousing.ca/openrealty/open-realty208b/index.php?action=listingview&listingID=67 BC Homes for Sale: http://www.bchomesforsale.com/view/nelson/lilli/Default.htm. Lilli Ruth Rosenberg. (250) 825-0023. Lilli23@shaw.ca

PERMACULTURE SYNERGIES. Permaculture Synergies is about people connecting or self organization in a time of separation. PS believes we can go beyond lifestyles of dependence on faltering institutions and the demise of the high tech visions of the "good life." Dependence has usually meant being beholden to impersonal, corporate entities and its results of a few winners and many losers. Now production and jobs have moved to Asia and we are left to government, the Tea Party, crying in our beer, or more violent reactions. PS offers a PLACE FOR SELF AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, where self and community serve for mutual and reciprocal development. We offer a small, sustainable living community with private and common land for more independent and cooperative living. This will be a modest lifestyle to enhance self-reliance and shared work in the basics of food, shelter, and energy production that can be used to built relationships and, importantly, reveal interests that can lead to the pursuit of a wide range of additional cooperative activity. We believe this kind of self-organization can naturally come about if the conditions are available, namely if affordability, time, space, access to each other, and a commitment to communication over the longer term are inherent parts of the new environment. Offering such a facilitative environment in the scenic hills of SE Ohio with good access to towns and colleges is Permaculture Synergies' goal. We invite interested people to complete and return our Skills and Interests Questionaire. Once 3 or 4 people with shared work interests have been identifies, we will schedule weekends for discussions at a SE Ohio country inn and conference center. We eagerly await your response. It is only for us to start talking about SERIOUS things that

true change and improvement can happen. The folks at Permaculture Synergies. www.permaculturesynergies.com

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.

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, Niánn 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. Agricultural internships. Spiritual commitment required. 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. We can offer you: work in our community businesses, an abundance of homegrown

organic food, a thriving social scene, and an established culture of nonviolence, feminism, and egalitarianism. You can offer us: your talents and skills (or your unskilled enthusiasm) and your desire to live an ecological and income-sharing lifestyle. For information: Twin Oaks, 138-R Twin Oaks Rd., Louisa, VA 23093; 540-894-5126; twinoaks@ic.org; www.twinoaks.org.

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.

COMMUNITIES FORMING

NEW SOUTHEAST OHIO LAND-BASED COMMUNITY. Www.permaculturesynergies.com Proposed Cooperative Retirement Community. 4185 Yates, Denver, CO 80212 Intentional Community Forming - The Justice Trust - Calhoun Co. WV. Lease homesites for 99 years, transferable & renewable. Current rate at $5 per acre per month, which will pay local Land tax. A nonprofit trust, land will never be sold. All buildings subject to local property tax. Write for information. Carl F. Shaw, 1019 Kerby Ridge Road, Mt. Zion, WV 26151 (304)354-6598 cfshaw@frontiernet.net

HONOLULU INTENTIONAL OHANA PROJECT, HAWAII. We are currently meeting to explore possibilities for developing some form of cooperative living arrangement in or near the urban Honolulu area. All aspects of the project are still open for discussion. (Go to www.hiop.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 hiop@lava.net.

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COMMUNITIES

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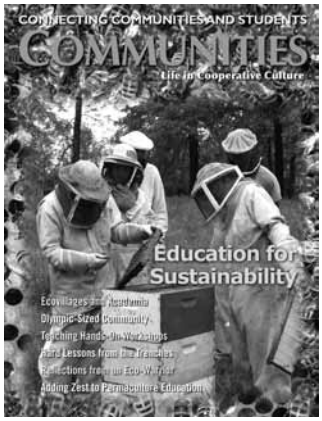

#150 Mental Health: Challenges and Hope
Gifted, Mad, and Out of Control; Walking Wounded; Nurtuing Healthy Minds; Rx for "Mental Illness"; Mental Illness as Spiritual Path; Crazy About Community; Peer Counseling in Community; Shadow Sides of NVC and Co-Counseling; Prescription Facebook; Gould Farm; Camphill Villages
(Spring '11)

#149 Elders
It Takes a Community to Grow an Elder; Elderhood, In and Out of Community; Becoming Elders; A Legacy of Beauty; Remembering Jane Owen; Snapshots of Elders; Aging in Community; Green Houses; Perspectives from Sao Paolo; The Making of Senior Cohousing; Reinventing Retirement; And I Listen
(Winter '10)

#148 Power and Empowerment
Being "Overthrown"; Balancing Powers; Leadership and Followship; Power and Disempowerment on the Ecobus; Pulling the Plug on Consensus; Dysfunction, Breakdown, and Vision; The Power of Process; Moon Valley; The Straw Poll that Broke the Camel's Back; Call in the Experts?
(Fall '10)

#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
Earthaven 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)

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PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES

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.

WANT TO LIVE RENT FREE - anywhere in the world? There are empty homes in every state and country, and property owners are looking for trustworthy people to live in them as caretakers and house-sitters! The Caretaker Gazette contains these property caretaking/house-sitting openings in all 50 states and foreign countries. Published since 1983, subscribers receive 1,000+ property caretaking opportunities each year, worldwide. Some of these openings also offer compensation in addition to free housing. Short, medium and long-term assignments in every issue. Subscriptions: $29.95/yr. The Caretaker Gazette, 3 Estancia Lane, Boerne, TX 78006; 830-755-2300; www.caretaker.org caretaker@caretaker.org.

RESOURCES

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

LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)

communal equivalent of the FREE BEER sign. Be prepared for a crowd.

George Burnett
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Editor's Note: We value diverse viewpoints (though we offer no free beer), and welcome responses not just to articles, but to the letters we publish.

Thought-Provoking

Well done for pulling together such an interesting, inspiring, and thought-provoking issue! (#150, Mental Health) I'm awed by what people go through—both the caregivers and the wayfarers. Thanks to all of you for COMMUNITIES magazine—good work!

Anthea Guinness
via email

Followers and Leaders

I thoroughly enjoyed COMMUNITIES' Fall 2010 issue (#148) on Power and Empowerment. Its contents were so rich that I had to consume it slowly so as to better digest it. I especially appreciated Elizabeth Barrette's "Balancing Powers" and Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig's response to that article, "More Perspectives on Leadership and Followship." Like Ma'ikwe, I noticed that Elizabeth devoted more time to describing the qualities and techniques of Followship rather than those of Leadership. I reconciled that disparity with these thoughts: spending more time on Followship makes sense—there should be more followers than leaders at any given moment...and Followship traits are core attributes for a good leader to have.

Ma'ikwe asked "from whom the 'followers' would be learning all these great skills." I believe that much can be learned from experienced followers. Though those experienced people may not want to claim the title or responsibility of a leader, their abilities allow them to demonstrate what it takes to be effective in that essential role.

I believe that mature people change "hats"—move from Followship role to Leadership role and back again—as their skills, comfort level, and the necessities of the situation dictate.

Elizabeth and Ma'ikwe's articles, taken together, make up a basic "must know" course on the dynamics of power sharing. If these women ever sit at the same table to discuss these issues, I'd love to sit in—I know I'd learn much.

Denzial Tittle
Texarkana, Texas

BEE INTIMACY

(continued from p. 43)

that brought the bees to me. A participant in our annual seed exchange wanted the refrigerator we were selling and we wanted bees, and so it began. Since no other community member stepped forward, I became the default beekeeper.

Our relationship developed slowly. Over the years, I understood more of the bees' beauty, and of their mysterious ability to sense my feelings, either calmness or anxiety. Many mistakes and stings later, I learned to flow with the bees' nuances as opposed to my desires. I learned to recognize their love sounds and their angry sounds, and began to know how to calm them. I became aware of the immeasurable benefits they gave the whole community by making their rounds to every blossoming flower, collecting nectar and doing the crucial job of pollinating. On our farm, we produce up to 90 percent of our food, and the bees played a huge role in this part of our sustainable lifestyle. I feel frightened as I walk past the Brazilian Cherry tree by our porch. The tree is in full blossom. I have never seen it so covered with flowers nor smelled such fragrance, but the sounds of my lovers are not there, not one bee present to make their important pollinating journey.

Three months ago, I harvested 15 gallons of honey from our hives. This was our usual bounty. We would harvest about this much honey every three months. Beekeeper friends tell me one could ignore a beehive for years here on the Big Island, then come back and collect honey from healthy hives. Our honey is so delicious: in fact, we recently won an award for the best-tasting honey in Hawaii. But at this point I do not care about the loss of the honey; what I grieve is the intimacy and presence of the bees. I feel especially sad when I realize how much I took my beautiful lovers for granted. I am determined to create new hives, to learn more, pay closer attention, and take any precautions required to keep them healthy. I refuse to say goodbye to the bees. I will love again.

What are my deepest desires? What do I want? What exactly do we all want? I am aware that I want to slow down, to be more conscious, to pay more attention, and to value and care in a loving way for all the creatures that work together as part of the web of life, including my human lover, community family, and especially the bees. ❧

Dona Willoughby is a La'akea cofounder, communitarian, joy sharer, love giver and receiver, carer, and grandmother. She's currently working on a higher level of consciousness. Before her community life, she spent 21 years in the US Navy and allopathic medicine.

SINGING FOR THE CAMERAS: REALITY TV = COMMUNITY EXPOSURE?

(continued from p. 80)

Photo courtesy of Janel Healy

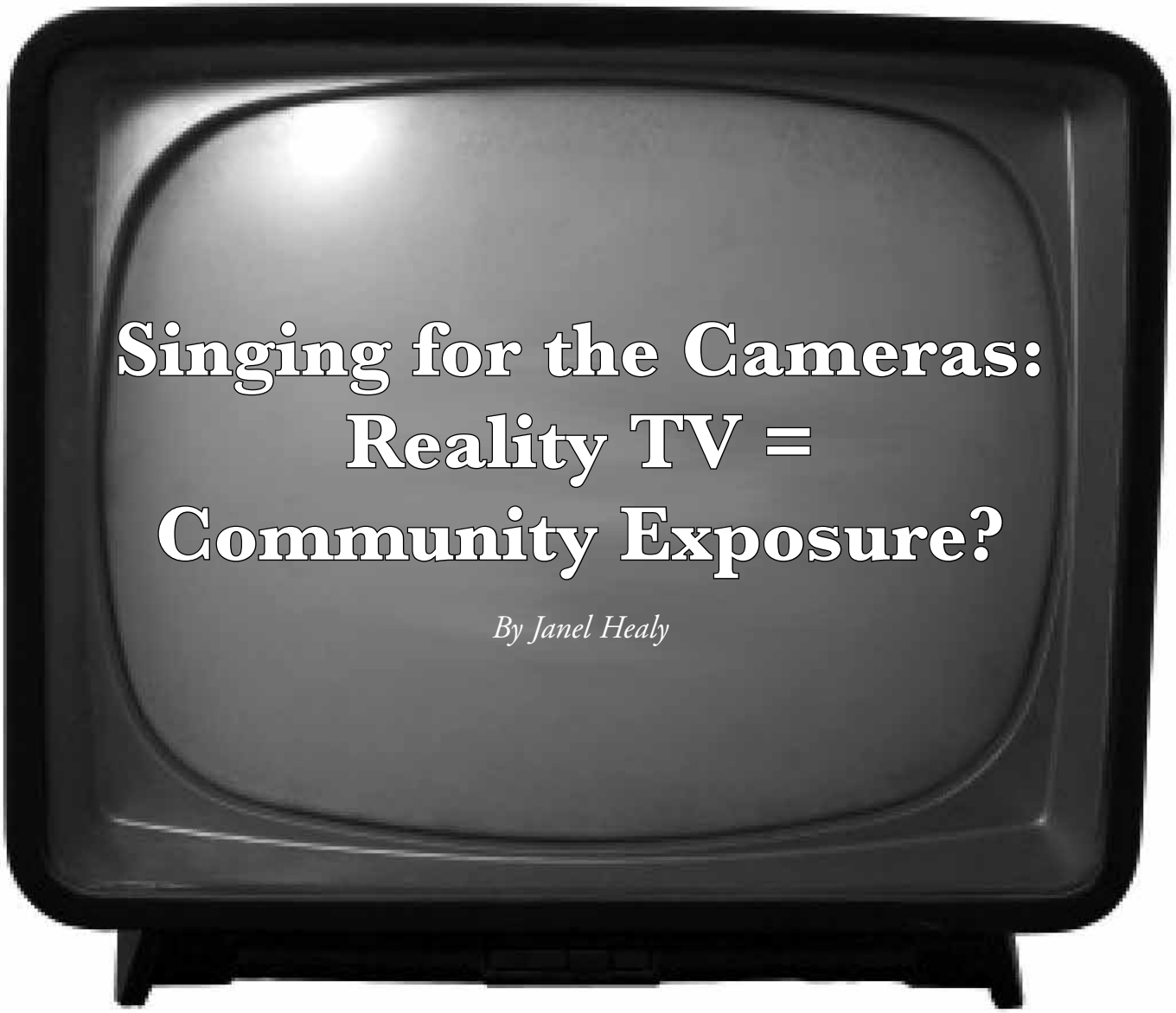
minion of the producers approached me. "So. What's the most interesting thing about you?" I knew he was looking for filming material, and I was ready. "I live on a commune," I answered confidently. His eyes widened. "Do you think they would let us film there?" "Well, I'll bet at least one of the intentional communities I've spent time at this year would be up for that," I said, trying to sound casual despite the excited pounding of my heart.

Two days later, I was standing in front of the show's producers. They asked me a slew of questions about communes, and before I had even sung for 10 seconds, I got a "yes." Thrilled that my angle was working, I then walked into the executive producer callback—lights, cameras, and microphones following my every movement—and again explained that I live on an intentional community. After fielding questions about slaughtering animals by hand and installing wind turbines (neither of which I know anything about, but hey, I tried), I sang my heart out. But the executive producers dismissively told me that my voice "wasn't special enough." "Sorry, it's a 'no.'"

Perhaps they thought I needed a more "folk-y" sound to go with my "hippie" persona. Or perhaps they thought I was the kind of person who, upon being rejected, would deliver a dramatic show of emotion for the camera. But I didn't feel sadness at their response. In fact, I felt relieved that I would now get to enjoy my Twin Oaks experience with no strings attached. I cheerfully said, "OK, thanks!" and walked out of the room. When I burst into the waiting room, a camera crew descended upon me. "How do you feel right now?" A man behind a camera asked me. I knew he was hoping I would dissolve into a fit of tears, or start swearing profusely. But I just shrugged. "I know I'm going to do incredible things with my life," I said with a smile, "but not this, I guess!" I began to gather up my things, but the crew was still glued to my side. Finally, as I was walking out the door, the cameraman called out to me. "Won't you flash a peace sign for the camera?"

I did, knowing that a sound bite about "the girl that lives on a commune" might therefore appear on prime time TV a few months later. I was eager to clue more Americans in on the fact that there are alternative ways to live one's life in this country. But I also knew that if it didn't happen, it would be all right—I'd find some other way to spread the good news. ❧

Janel Healy lives—and sings—at Twin Oaks. Besides belting her heart out, she loves writing, and hopes to use this medium to spread word of the intentional communities movement.



Singing for the Cameras: Reality TV = Community Exposure?

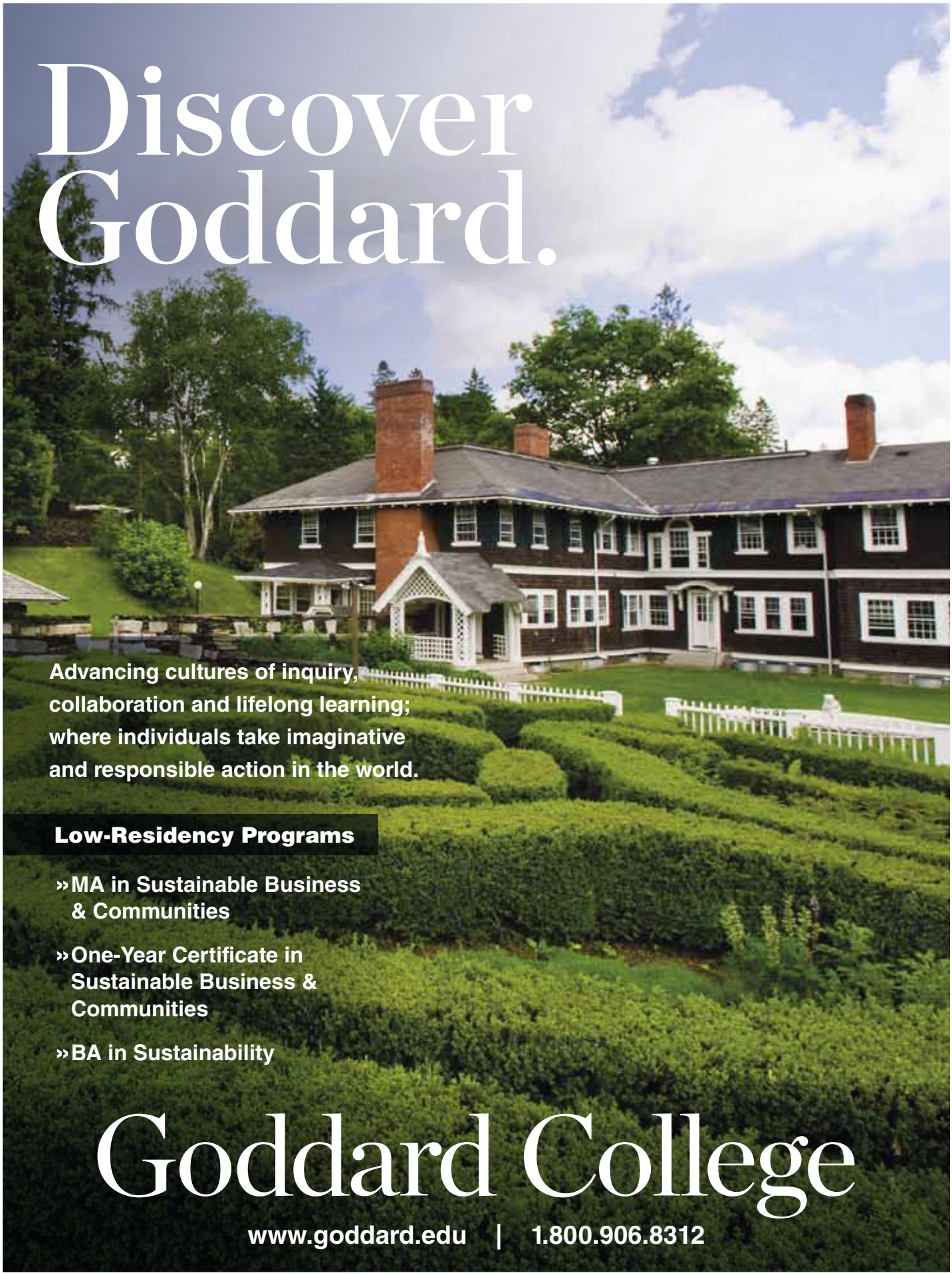
By Janel Healy

Just days before moving to the Twin Oaks Community in Louisa, Virginia, I auditioned for a musical reality TV show. My brief foray into the world of reality TV actually began on a trip to East Wind, Twin Oaks' sister egalitarian community in Missouri. A bunch of folks were sitting around a campfire one night when someone asked me to serenade the group, and I obliged. When I'd finished, the person said to me, "Janel, have you ever thought about auditioning for [popular show that aims to find the next singing superstar]? Because you have heart, and that's what they're looking for!" "I don't know," I replied tentatively. "They're looking for someone with a story..." The person laughed. "Look around you!" With a sweep of her arm, she motioned toward the group, the fire, and the dark mountains around us. "Look where you are. I'd say you have a story to tell!" That night, a thought was planted in my mind: *if I auditioned for the show and actually got airtime, I could expose the idea of intentional community to 30 million viewers...*

So, on August 19th, after 11 hours of waiting outside a San Francisco stadium with 10,000 fellow hopefuls, I finally found myself standing before the two producers' assistants who would decide my fate. "Hi." I said. "My name's Janel, and I live on a commune." I then sang my song, and waited for a reaction. The two assistants just stared at me. Finally, the man asked, "You really live on a commune?" I nodded enthusiastically. "For the past six months, I've been visiting intentional communities throughout the country, and now I'm about to move to one." "How did you find out about these communities in the first place?" "I typed in 'commune' on Google!" After a few more hilarious questions (e.g., "How do you listen to music on these communes? Are there radios?!"), the assistants motioned me forward. "You're in," the woman said to me with a wink.

I was escorted to a room where the handfuls of other people deemed worthy were signing paperwork. As I begrudgingly signed a slew of forms giving the show permission to publicly ridicule and/or invent fictitious information about me, another

(continued on p. 79)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