

COMMUNAL BUSINESS MODELS

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Right Livelihood

Volunteerism

Income Sharing

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Fall 2011 • Issue #152

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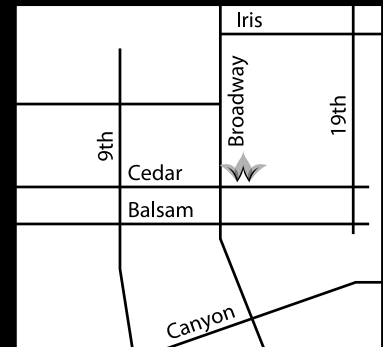
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Larry Kaplowitz and daughter Grace sell organic vegan ice cream at the Oregon Country Fair, Veneta, Oregon, July 2011. Larry and his partner Luna Marcus hatched the idea for Coconut Bliss while members of Lost Valley Educational Center in

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COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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LETTERS



Active Listening

After reading “Hand in Hand, Heart to Heart: Peer Counseling in Community” by Amara Karuna in issue #150, I felt compelled to write. I was trained in Carl Rogers’ Active Listening, and worked on a suicide prevention hotline based entirely on this method.

Active listening requires being present, following the client, not giving advice or suggestions, and trusting that the client will find her own solution in her own time. When someone is actively listening to me, I can hear myself loud and clear. That is the first step in healing. It is so powerful when another person is willing to listen deeply and just follow me, sometimes it feels like flying!

I have not been drawn to Nonviolent Communication (NVC), although it is much more popular today than Active Listening, because I think it controls and categorizes. The organizing of feelings into “needs” is a judgment. Someone rushing to put what I say into boxes feels like they are rushing me. Asking “what do you need?” over and over is annoying.

Getting advice or suggestions feels patronizing and is seldom helpful. When you have a problem, don’t you think of as many solutions as possible, right away? If I am a client and I am upset, in no way can I take control of my own session. How can you go deep into your own

feelings if you have to be both inside—talking out your feelings—and outside—monitoring the session? It is impossible and unrealistic.

The best gift a human being can give to another in distress is deep listening—without advice, without rushing, without controlling the other person. It takes time and being present, two of the things we lack the most.

Lauren Asrael
via email

Amara Karuna responds:

I completely agree with Lauren about deeply listening and not giving advice. This is the foundation of what we teach in peer counseling, and also, if NVC is done well, there is a great deal of deep listening going on in their empathy sessions.

However, being fully present and deeply listening are acquired skills; they take practice and doing your own healing work. So many beginning peer counselors and NVC practitioners are not very skilled at not interrupting or giving advice. This is why people go to professionals, who hopefully have a bit more practice being present (although not always!). But for those who are willing to go through a learning curve, and “train” the counselor in how they wish to be treated, eventually even beginners get the hang of it and become very helpful as listeners.

What we mean by “taking charge of the session” is communicating honestly and hopefully kindly with the counselor if there is something you would like them to do differently. This is a reasonable and very doable skill, which is needed in any personal relationship, and people get to practice it with peer sessions. If one really wants to be in therapy where that is needed less, then finding a trusted professional is a better option.

Mental Health

Thank you for the back issue on mental health. Excellent issue! What a marvelous group of articles you have put

LETTERS

together...very helpful!! Thanks again. I am really enjoying reading this magazine.

Denise Fletcher
via email

Mental Illness in Community

I agree with both letters in issue #151 about the Mental Health issue [#150], though the “free beer” writer might have phrased things better.

The trickiest part of most intentional communities is appropriate boundaries. It’s trendy to “honor diversity” but not all diversity is fun or easy. We judge. It’s an inherent part of being human. In general, our judgments fall into four categories:

- Celebration
- Toleration
- Avoidance
- Rejection

As an example:

I celebrate women who choose to dress in extremely modest clothing and defer to their husbands for most decisions. Not my choice, but I can celebrate theirs. Many women who make this choice are truly happy and I am joyful for them.

I tolerate the belief that this is the only proper role for women. I think this belief is incorrect, and does harm to some people. But everyone has the right to their opinion.

I oppose, but do not attempt to silence, people who seek to legally restrict women from all roles other than subservience. My belief in free speech extends to repugnant speech. So I grit my teeth and avoid these individuals, unless I’m protesting them in some political action.

I reject violence being used to “keep women in their place.”

The reality is that IC groups must create something of a monoculture in order to function well. The diversity of

the group must be limited to those types of diversity that almost everyone in the group can celebrate and everyone can tolerate. Without this unity, the inevitable conflicts tear the community apart.

Honest personal boundaries are vital when deciding to live closely with others. Personal boundaries do not define anyone as “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong.” Personal boundaries are about judging yourself. I judge myself unwilling to live with people who believe the only proper role for women is subservience. They probably wouldn’t be too thrilled to live with me either!

Does the majority of your IC group long for the day when everyone can be mentally normal and healthy? That’s fine. But this would not be a good group for someone experiencing serious and chronic mental illness. It would be unfair, even cruel, for this type of group to advertise themselves as welcoming to the mentally ill. This situation will end in resentment and rejection.

If everyone in your community can truly celebrate the neurological diversity that is part of being human, welcoming the mentally ill becomes more realistic. There are some pragmatic questions, though. Can you honor people making all kinds of decisions regarding medication? How do you distinguish between erratic behavior and unsafe behavior? Is there any point when members would be strongly encouraged to seek hospitalization? How do you design community structures with an understanding that some members may not be medically capable of being “reliable,” though their intents are good and their commitment genuine? Watch the movie “The Soloist” and consider whether your community could truly welcome a schizophrenic individual like Nathaniel Ayers.

How about someone dealing with severe depression? Manic-depression? How will your community deal with it if someone in a manic episode decides it would be a terrific idea to repaint the common house in neon colors?

Remember that even if your community welcomes people with mental illness, it does not follow that every mentally ill person is a good match for your group. For example, your community might be able to welcome a schizophrenic who sees shiny colors and fears the government is going to poison their food. Your community may not be able to welcome someone who sees all people over six feet tall as horned monsters and fears that community children are alien invaders. Also remember that mentally ill people are diverse in other ways too. People can be racist, homophobic, selfish, mean, or simply unpleasant with or without mental illnesses. Welcome people because their whole person is a good match for the group, not because their diagnosis can be tolerated by the group.

If you are clear on your boundaries and your abilities, creating community with the mentally ill can be amazing. I have dear friends, chosen family, who struggle daily with mental illness and are hospitalized regularly. I grieve for their pain. But I also feel blessed to have them in my life. They teach me so much about being human. I am honored to live and work with such amazing people, such shining souls. I am proud to have my children witness their courage. I wouldn’t trade them for a “healthy” community member in a million years. They are as perfect as any of us and more perfect than most.

Karen Crisalli Winter
Seattle, Washington

(continued on p. 73)

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue, as well as letters of more general interest. Please send your comments to editor@ic.org or COMMUNITIES, 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.

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What is an “Intentional Community”?

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

PUBLISHER'S NOTE BY LAIRD SCHAUB



Left Livelihood *Doing the Rights Thing*

As near as FIC can figure, there are roughly 100,000 people in North America currently living in some form of self-identified intentional community, and that number has been growing steadily for at least the past two decades. While the growth is encouraging, the sheer numbers are daunting. While 100,000 is a great turnout for a college football game, it's precious little to rebuild society in the face of rampant materialism. To put it into perspective, even if our numbers tripled over the next decade, it would *still* only represent about one-tenth of one percent of the population. Not much.

The political profile of that cadre is all bracketed on the left end of the spectrum (combining physics and political reality—now *there's* something you don't see every day—you might say the communities movement is Red-shifted almost beyond the visible spectrum).

Directions for a Sustainable Future

As we peer darkly into a more sustainable future, which way should we turn to find the path? For many of us in intentional communities, our efforts to create cooperative culture are geared toward building a robust society based on what we expect will be left to work with—rather than working with the views that are Left. The pursuit of right livelihood—the theme for this issue of COMMUNITIES—is not about the pursuit of what's right (is there anything quite as terrifying as the outrages people serenely visit upon each other in the name of what's right—whence the term “righteous?”),

nor is it to build on the agenda of the Right, though it is built on a sense of rights (does “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” ring a bell?). It’s liberal in that we’re experimenting with new ideas to create new culture—based on cooperation rather than competition. It’s con-

upwelling of interest in rites of passage and taking the time to more fully appreciate and celebrate holidays, anniversaries, and the transitions of life. Call it rite livelihood.

Also, there is a cornucopia of information available today about what all

Together, we are redefining what constitutes a meaningful life, one rooted in connection more than consumption.

servative in that we’re trying to test drive models of steady state economics, where the emphasis is on conserving: how long you can make a thing last, rather than how many things can you move through the system.

Why is this important? Consider these two scenarios:

—\$1 billion spent building off-shore oil rigs; coupled with \$1 billion spent cleaning up massive off-shore oil spills.

—\$2 billion dollars spent constructing wind turbines for power generation.

While they both have the exact same value in terms of Gross Domestic Product (dollars spent), they have completely different long-term impacts on society and the world around us—even though both might produce about the same amount of short-term energy and short-term jobs. How can it be conscionable that our main metric for evaluating economic well-being cannot distinguish between these two choices? We’re out of control!

Luckily, we are not alone in our efforts to find a better direction. Intentional communities represent only the tip of the cooperative culture iceberg—which is a cool thing. There are large numbers of cooperative businesses, nonprofits with cooperative values, and millions living in housing cooperatives of one stripe or another.

Together, we are redefining what constitutes a meaningful life, one rooted in connection more than consumption. One where we’re more focused on relationship with our neighbors than relationship to our bank accounts. One of the hopeful signs in this regard is the

these cooperative folks are doing with their experiments in cooperative culture. There is an incredible richness of alternative literature available in the form of books, magazines, blogs, listservs, wikis, chatrooms, Facebook postings, and tweets. While only a fraction of these offerings are remunerative, they’re soulful, lively, and express a culture that is far more inquisitive than acquisitive. Call it write livelihood.

The fundamental challenge of right livelihood is how to conduct your life in a such a way that it’s both pleasurable and satisfying for the doer, while simultaneously enhancing the choices and quality of life of others (including non-humans), or at least does them no harm. This is not a simple calculus, yet it can be done. And what choice do we have but to try? Humans have been striving since the Industrial Revolution to subdue the Earth (and each other) through unfettered trade (backed by unfettered armies), and how is that working for us?

Somebody needs to be thinking about how sustainability and never-ending growth are mutually incompatible. It’s the rights thing to do. ☹️

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and cofounder of Sandhill Farm, an egalitarian community in Missouri, where he lives. He is also a facilitation trainer and process consultant, and he authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

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Art of Community: An Experience Centered Around the Values of Right Livelihood in Community

In a world where people are seemingly defined by their occupations, too few of us are fortunate enough to be able to do work that we love and that benefits humanity. Although some living in community make their homes in rural areas that are geographically isolated, most participants we have encountered in this movement seem to be engaged fully with a wide world. Intentional communities can offer engaging work that frequently centers around a shared commitment to peace, cooperation, social justice, environmental protection, and sustainable living, where there is little separation between work and life—that is part of the ethos of “living with intention.”

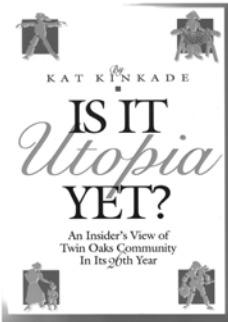
Art of Community: Creating Sustainable Culture Through Cooperation will be held this September 23-25 in Occidental, California. This event is a unique opportunity for people and organizations to educate and network for sustainability based on the values and practices of living in cooperative culture. Art of Community is a gathering space for friends, a space to cultivate new interests and gain knowledge, and most importantly, an opportunity to build bridges between the powerful projects being produced by folks who value community and right livelihood.

Some of the amazing folks we have invited to share their valuable work that demonstrates inspired commitment to right livelihood include Janelle Orsi from the Sustainable Economies Law Center, www.theselec.org, Kevin Danaher from Global Exchange, www.globalexchange.org, and the National Green Festivals, www.greenfestivals.org, Diana Leafe Christian, www.dianaleafechristian.org, author of *Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities* and

Finding Community: How to Join an Ecovillage or Intentional Community, and Ryan Mlynarczyk and Mandy Creighton, who will be presenting their full-length documentary *Within Reach*, www.withinreachmovie.com, the story of their 6,500 mile bike-packing journey around the United States using solar-powered electronics and leg-powered bicycles to visit 100 sustainable communities and find a lifestyle more in line with their rapidly changing values. These folks and the dozens of other presenters at Art of Community really walk their talk; they have dedicated their lives to promoting what they value and feel passionate about, erasing the lines between the personal and the professional, and living in congruence with what they believe.

*Art of Community
is a space to gather with friends,
learn, cultivate new interests,
and build bridges between
powerful projects.*

A thread that will run through this event is the Tree of Knowledge (TOK), a concept developed by David Ferrera, as a metaphor for our collective experience. Like any healthy ecosystem, the Tree of Knowledge serves multiple functions: It will be the event’s contextual metaphor reminding us that we are engaged in an organic, collective process of establishing roots, growing a strong core, and witnessing new fruit blossoming. It will be an interactive and evolving artwork, much like the process of creating community—an expression of our collective experience, the fruits of which we both leave behind and take with us. It will be an essential gathering place for the culminating networking/knowledge-building exercises. The last step is particularly crucial, and we are dedicating the end of our program to a space for connection around and proliferation of new ideas. It is a simple idea: anyone with a theme they want to continue dialogue around beyond the event, or a project that they either



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

Is it Utopia Yet? is a lively, first-hand account of the unique struggles and triumphs of the first 25 years of Twin Oaks Community, one of America's most prominent and successful communes. This thoughtful and entertaining 320 page book from the author of *A Walden Two Experiment* is illustrated with 16 photographs and 60 cartoons.

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FELLOWSHIP EVENTS BY MOLLY REED AND SUSAN FRANK

already have in motion or want to put forward to find partners and build collaborative momentum, will be invited to begin a conversation. We will help facilitate the ongoing conversation after the event, and will try to help collaborations grow and blossom and thrive. This is practical work, meant to achieve change within, but also change without, changes that will help humanity and help others find the path to right livelihood within themselves and their communities.

The Tree also serves as a symbol for how we integrate right livelihood into our daily lives, by moving beyond a conception of ourselves as isolated individuals to a fuller understanding of the self as an interdependent organism embedded in an ecosystem that is alive and rich with diversity. The tree as part of a natural system functions like a community—extending outward and impacting the whole system.

Right livelihood is a key part of recognizing that we are a part of an integrated system. The care we give to our personal life and professional paths has implications far beyond the self, the individual tree, branch, or leaf. Finding our place within community and recognizing our interconnectedness is key to understanding how we might best serve ourselves and each other through living a passionate life dedicated to the values we hold most dear in our hearts and minds. ☺

*Molly Reed and Susan Frank are the co-organizers of the FIC's Art of Community conference happening September 23-25 in Occidental, California. See www.artofcmtty.com; contact events@ic.org or 313-444-CMTY (2689). David Ferrera, *The Meeting Guy*, is a meeting facilitation and team building specialist who plans strategic events and lives in Graton, California (www.themeetingguy.com).*

Sacred Fire

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Right Lively 'Hood

A Pacific wren and a couple dozen other bird species have been filling the air with their songs and calls all around me today in my community in western Oregon. That was the case (though with a different species mix) in March too, four months ago, when I wrote last issue's Editor's Note—but that may be where the similarity ends between that time and this, or that Note and this one.

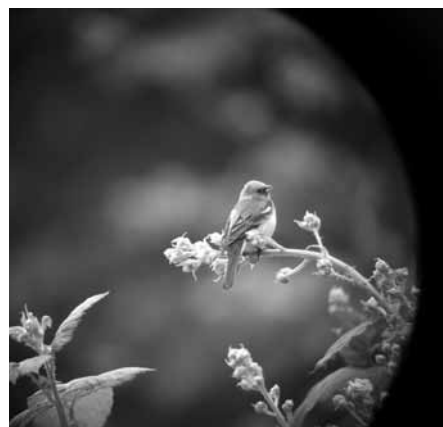
I'm in the same place physically (after a brief time away to pack up and move back here), but the community itself has evolved in ways I could only have hoped for then. Whereas last issue's Note may have given the impression that I was visiting a ghost town—surrounded by my memories of people who used to live here, sometimes daunted by the relative emptiness of buildings and places that used to be filled with people and activities—now this place is anything but that. I don't have reason or time to feel nostalgic for the past here now, because the present has once again become alive enough to replace it (as it has done many times before, after smaller transitions). The promise and potential that motivated me to return in the first place, but was still waiting to be realized when I last wrote, has been manifesting into reality. It's not happening all at once, and much remains unknown about how it will unfold, but it seems as fully engaging as my past experiences here—which is saying a lot.

In short, this has become a Right Lively 'Hood.

The connection between right livelihood and Right Lively 'Hoods seems more than linguistic. Put another way, finding meaningful, socially and ecologically responsible work with positive rather than destructive effects on our human and non-human neighbors on earth cannot be done in a vacuum. Right livelihood depends on community—on the networks of relationship that give our lives and our work context. Activities and life choices undertaken without reference to others cannot be “right livelihood,” no matter how “green” or “virtuous” they may appear. By the same token, a healthy community depends upon—cannot exist without—its members engaging in work that supports and is responsive to the whole, nurtures both the individual/family and the larger group, and interacts in a sustainable, regenerative way with the rest of the local and global webs of life.

Finding paths to right livelihood is not easy in the modern world. Just as the deck often seems stacked against the development of genuine community of all types (see Tim Miller's “A Communitarian Conundrum: Why a World That Wants and Needs Community Doesn't Get It” in our Summer 2011 issue), it also seems stacked against right livelihood. Most available jobs within modern economies exist because they will allow someone(s) to make money, not because they are socially or ecologically responsible or because they need to be done to create a better world. Most modern education is geared to prepare students to participate in this system, and is itself a part of it. In the face of a paradigm which elevates self-interest over service to the larger whole, individual accumulation over community—when the *only* way of meeting our own needs seems to be to engage in activities which come at the expense of others or of the earth—what are we to do?

As separate individuals, we are indeed powerless to change anything except our own personal choices, which are themselves constrained by the collectively-created world. To forge opportunities for right livelihood, we need to act together, and support one



Photos by Chris Roth

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR BY CHRIS ROTH



another in our efforts. This is actually more easily done than said (or than conceived of by someone trapped in the dominant paradigm). This is because, while we've been taught to think of ourselves as independent economic units, interconnection and relationship form the basis of all life on earth. The social and economic worlds we create together are the ones we'll live in, and when they reflect interrelationship they'll be much more resilient, as proven by indigenous and traditional societies that lasted for thousands of years based on much more community-focused models of livelihood. Although it is easy to forget this, because we are immersed in them, the modern economies we live in are a flash in the pan—as are many of the assumptions upon which they rest. Ultimately, if we are to survive as a species, right livelihoods will be the only livelihoods available.

What steps can we take along the path toward a world in which right livelihood is the rule, rather than the exception? We can start living as if we're already in that world. Here are some steps that I and others I've known have taken. Not all of these are possible for everyone, but each of them may hold the key for somebody seeking to leave a rat race in favor of an interspecies ballet:

- Do work that is not car-dependent. See what options for economic self-support are possible within walking, biking, or public-transportation distance of where you live, or in your own home. Move to a place or get a job where you can work and live in the same place.

- Rather than figuring out how to earn money that you will then need to spend, see if there are options for bartering, exchanging, becoming part of a collective effort where needs are met without the constant exchange of money. These efforts sometimes take the form of intentional communities, but less-comprehensive or formal arrangements are also common. Local currencies and time-exchanges can facilitate this kind of exchange, as can simply talking with friends and neighbors and seeking other like-minded individuals who want to barter and share more.

- Live more simply. Assess every element of your life, especially everything you spend money on, and ask whether it is necessary or even beneficial. Could either doing without it, or reducing your use of it, or sharing it with others, actually bring you more fulfillment, while reducing or eliminating your need to do stressful work, unaligned with your life path, that then entails even more expenditures to deal with the consequences (health and otherwise) of doing it? Reduce your ecological footprint and needless complexity in your life and you will probably reduce your bills as well.

- Grow your own food. Better yet, get involved in a collective food-growing project. Exchange your labor on a local organic farm for a share of the produce. Volunteer at a community food-bank garden. If you get yourself involved enough with food-growing, you will not only save on food bills, but reduce your need or desire to spend much money on consumer goods, entertainment, or travel. You'll stay too busy tending the crops to be distracted by things that require money.

- Find other ways to know your local bioregion and your neighbors. Making friends with the animals, plants, earth, water, weather, and people around you can provide sources of ongoing connection, entertainment, edification, and fulfillment that are free or almost free. The less money you need to spend to keep yourself happy, the less you need to earn.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR BY CHRIS ROTH



• Find or create a niche that no one else is filling (or, as a variation of this, that is being inadequately filled by someone who would be happy to be liberated from it)—one that aligns with your passions, abilities, values, gifts, creativity, desire to serve. *Don't* compete in the global, national, or local economy. Do something that doesn't deprive anyone else of a job or a livelihood, but instead adds to the richness of our collective human culture, that supports us in our efforts to develop more sustainable ways of living, that helps you and others be healthier, happier, wiser, more in balance. Lots of valuable work is going undone or is being done poorly, simply because either no one is available to do it or no one has chosen to focus on it. You could be that person.

• Trust that you do have a path, and become the “community member” that the modern economic system would have had you lose touch with. Build community (intentional or otherwise) by becoming yourself, bringing your self to your work, and placing “community” (how you can meaningfully contribute to the world, which at any one moment could be washing dishes, digging a ditch, writing a poem, handing someone a magazine, listening to someone in distress, harvesting a vacationing neighbor's ripe tomatoes for them, or taking care of your health so that you will be able to continue contributing to the world) at the forefront of what you choose to do.

• Volunteer with one of the idealistic projects that model alternatives to dominant economic and social paradigms—that attempt to restore equity, social and ecological integrity, community, and responsibility to our world. Efforts that, instead of perpetuating the status quo, create a new reality, depend on individuals who decide that those efforts are more important than “getting ahead” individually (and short-term) in an unsustainable or unjust system. They depend on people willing to pursue a different kind of “success”—one in which values and impact on the wider world matter more than money, status, or temporary accomplishment or gain at the expense of present and future generations. They depend on people following their hearts, believing that there is something more to life than individual materialistic struggle. They depend on our awakening to our connections with each other, with our home planet and all its inhabitants. They depend upon community, in whatever form we have the privilege to experience it.

The articles in this issue offer many inspirational stories about ways in which we can engage in right livelihood—as well as cautionary tales about challenges we may encounter. Thanks again for joining us, and for your support for our unconventional publishing venture. We appreciate whatever ways you are already supporting this magazine and this organization—and also any help you can provide in keeping this project viable economically (whether that's telling friends about the magazine, giving gift subscriptions, advertising, donating, and/or sponsoring an issue—or helping the FIC in other ways, by attending an event, buying books and videos through Community Bookshelf, becoming a supporting member). This particular form of service-oriented right livelihood, like any other, depends upon community. You're part of that community. Thank you again, and enjoy! 🐦

Chris Roth edited Talking Leaves: A Journal of Our Evolving Ecological Culture (www.lostvalley.org/talkingleaves) for eight years, and has edited COMMUNITIES since 2008. He has lived in intentional community and on organic or permaculture farms most of his adult life—most recently returning to his long-time home community at Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon. Contact him at editor@ic.org.

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Work Less, Simplify More

By Kim Scheidt

I received a phone call from my mother in the spring of 2009. A high-school teacher in her late 50s, she was overjoyed to tell me that she had just finished her last full day of work for the rest of her life. I congratulated her on her semi-retirement, and in my head a voice said, “I did that five years ago.”

Quite a while ago I realized that if I kept a modest cost of living I would not need to work a 40-50 hour a week job for the rest of my life. Instead, I could work part-time and earn enough money to cover my costs. Since then I’ve found that the more I simplify my life, the less time I need to work to earn money. By reducing my economic impact I believe that I also directly reduce my ecological footprint on the earth, which is important to me too.

This line of thought is slightly different from what mainstream society often tells us. A consumptive lifestyle is still seen as affluent. And a 40-plus hour week is standard. Many people would find it hard to believe that someone could have a happier life by giving up certain creature comforts. But in my experience and those of my community-mates around me, simpler living has led to an increased quality of life.

If you would like to simplify your lifestyle, a good first step is to reanalyze what is perceived as necessary, be it travel, good restaurant meals, movies and theater, or whatever, and put your resources toward what you care most about. Then look to see if there are any “necessities” you pay for that you personally could do without. I recommend spending some period of time living in a third-world country. Learn that everyone in the world does not necessarily have a vehicle, a refrigerator, running water, flush toilets, a washing machine, a telephone, air conditioning...the list goes on.

I spent about four months living in Costa Rica, where the sole fact that I was from the United States traveling for leisure made me seem supremely rich to the locals. The people I was traveling with gave me encouragement to go outside my comfort zone and work on simple living closer to nature using limited resources. Unfortunately,

Kim Scheidt



it seems that a great many people in third-world countries, whose ancestors have excelled at simple living, would do just about anything to live the perceived richness portrayed in Hollywood movies.

When I came back to the United States I was able to figure out for myself what is really important to me. Over time I've realized that I can do without a refrigerator, running water, a flush toilet, a shower, and a washing machine. What I do find necessary are electric lights, high-speed internet, good food, fresh air, strong social connections, and control over my own time.

I live in an intentional community that has a strong focus on permaculture and sustainable living. We aim to have a very small ecological footprint and to be self-sufficient in all the ways we can. We utilize human power for most applications and keep track of the times when we do use fossil fuels, vehicles, and heavy



Kim Scheidt

We aim to have a very small ecological footprint and to be self-sufficient in all the ways we can.



*Left photo: Nina pumping water from the cistern into the water filter.
This photo: a view of Dandelion.
Right photo: the kitchen stove.*

machinery. Our community exists within a larger network of intentional communities in the area that are exploring different approaches toward right livelihood.

Our primary dwelling that I live in is a small passive-solar house with an attached greenhouse space, and this design vastly reduces the amount of fuel we need to provide heat in the winter. We do all our cooking and heating with the sun or with wood, a renewable resource that we harvest from our land using hand tools. To be honest, we have borrowed a chainsaw a couple of times in order to fell some larger trees. But for the most part we keep to our ideals of doing it all by hand.

We are not connected to grid electricity. The power draw of the electric appliances we use is what determines how many thousands of dollars we spend on purchase and upkeep of our power system. For the time being, we have chosen to limit our power load to running very low wattage electric light bulbs, computers, and stereo. The refrigerator-freezer, ubiquitous in households across the U.S., is a power-hog appliance that we've chosen to live without.

It has been over seven years since I've had a refrigerator. In order to do without, I've learned to change the way I cook and eat. During the warmer months the cook is careful to make only so much leftovers that can be eaten up the next day at lunch. And in our climate we have refrigeration roughly half the year just by putting things outside our door. Spoiled food is fed to our animals or composted. Many items commonly kept in a refrigerator actually store just fine at room temperature, and a diet that includes little or no meat makes this easier too. We have plans to build an ice house one day in the future. At that point we will have the luxury of refrigeration, but it will be a very low-tech version.

Our drinking water comes straight from the sky. We collect rain off the metal roof of our main building into a cistern. We use a hand pump to draw water up from the cistern and it goes through a filter before consumption. It is some of the tastiest water

on the planet. For other uses such as doing dishes or washing up we use non-potable water that we haul in buckets either from our pond or from a rain catchment barrel. We do not have running water (although we joke that we have “walking water”). Our system is one that requires some physical labor but very little money or infrastructure.

And what about the flush toilet? We are fortunate to live in a part of the country with few zoning laws or building codes and thus have been able to build and use an outhouse that is a mouldering toilet. Human wastes, to which we occasionally add soil and mown grass, decompose over time giving off little odor. Eventually this compost can be spread around trees in our orchard, closing the loop in the fertility cycle.

Cleanliness is an interesting topic. I certainly do not live in a sterile environment, and that makes my life so much richer. My routine used to involve daily hot showers that would dry out my skin, and I frequently shampooed my hair. I would then slather my body in lotion to restore lost moisture and put styling goop in my hair. I was happy to find that when I changed my routine to scrubbing up with just a washcloth and warm water my skin felt pretty amazing. Another interesting discovery is that pond water does wonderful things to my hair that I can't quite get with gel or hair spray.

We wash laundry by hand using water from our pond. When I take our clothes down from the line they always smell nice and clean; however, there are often stains that just don't come out the way they would with a power washer. My solution is that I maintain a set of clothes for when I need to look “nice” and I have another set that is for everyday use. I'm fortunate to live in an environment where appearance is not so important, though I do admit I enjoy fashion. Community-mates often gift clothing that doesn't suit them, and once or twice a year I go to a thrift store to add new items to my wardrobe.

Okay, so what else do people spend money on? One particularly controversial thing that I go without is health insurance. My philosophy is that my right livelihood is my health insurance. If I live in alignment with the universe then I will be taken care of. I understand that this way of thinking does

not satisfy all people. I take full responsibility for my health. I hope to embrace death when that time comes. (And living on a low income helps me to qualify for sliding scale rates available from some health practitioners.)

I say that I only work one day a week because that is the amount of time I spend outside my home earning money. However, all my days are filled with physical and mental labor, but those are things I do for myself and for my community, so in many ways I do not consider them work. For the most part I get to choose how I spend my time and only have to do any particular task for as long as feels good to me. I find it really inspiring when there is an obvious connection between the energy I put into a project and the results I get to enjoy, be it in the garden or orchard or in the development of my child.

One of the major roles I play in my life right now is that of being a parent to a youngster. My daughter is being raised in what I consider an almost ideal environment for her. She has both her mother and her father around most of the time. Although she is an only child she is well socialized with peers and has relationships with adults other than her biological parents. She lives rurally but is not isolated. We have clean air for her to breathe, healthy food for her to eat, and pure water for

All my days are filled with physical and mental labor, but those are things I do for myself and for my community, so in many ways I do not consider them work.



Mark Mazziotti



her to drink. She gets plenty of exercise and loves to be outside.

There is a pretty good support network for being a parent around here. I certainly believe that parenting is one of the most challenging things I have taken on in my life. It is so valuable when others make an effort to be an ally to myself and to my child. I believe that in an ideal world there would always be at least three parents to any one child. I don't currently have that situation, but it certainly would be possible to do so



Kim Scheidt



Mark Mazziotti



Kim Scheidt

Left photo: Kim demonstrating bud grafting on a neighbor's fruit tree. Above: a close-up of the completed graft.

This photo: 2010 harvest of sweet potatoes and squash.

Right photo: Chad peening his scythe blade.

within a community setting.

Pioneering a community is another huge project I've taken part in. There are benefits—mainly that my personal vision is incorporated in the shape our community takes. Starting from scratch on raw land is certainly not easy and it is not something I would have ever undertaken alone. A great benefit of settling our community where we did is that members of the other established local intentional communities gave support to us in many and varied ways. So much of our time in the beginning was taken up with satisfying the most basic of our physical needs—a place to sleep, a place to cook, water to drink, etc. All this was done on a pretty tight budget using primarily human power. Phew.

There are certainly ways in which we have fallen short of our ideals. Sometimes we make the choice to spend money on an item rather than taking the extra time and energy to make do with resources we already have at our disposal. When we first moved onto the land six years ago we made choices to build structures that placed values such as speed of construction, comfort, durability, and function over aesthetic beauty and the use of completely local or sustainably harvested building materials.

We also still buy most of the food we eat. However, each year we get closer to being self-reliant in that area. Our fruit and nut orchards will begin bearing soon, and the output from our annual garden continues to increase. It is helpful to keep in mind the long-term goals and vision—the way it is today is not the way it's always going to be. I do finally feel that we are out of the pioneering stage. We have working systems in place and so now we can focus on simply improving our surroundings and quality of life.

I never thought I would be an activist, but I am. I'm proactive in that I am living the change I want to see. I'm demonstrating that there is another way. I never thought I would live in a fishbowl, but I do. Hundreds of people come by each year and we say, "here is our greenhouse, here is our garden, this is how we live." I tend to forget how extreme my life is until I go somewhere out in the mainstream world. Now that's a freaky place. 🐦

Kim Scheidt is a member of Dandelion, a sub-community of Red Earth Farms in north-east Missouri. She works—part-time—for the Fellowship for Intentional Community.

Balancing Act: How Much Are You Willing to Share?

By Janel Healy

I think it's safe to say that you are an idealistic person. As a supporter of COMMUNITIES, you've probably thought long and hard about how to live a life that's more just—and just better—and it looks like you've come to the conclusion that living communally may be the answer.

But how “communal” do you have to get before you're truly living according to the ideals of Right Livelihood?

Ask this question to someone who's living in an income-sharing community, and the answer may sound a bit extreme. At neighboring egalitarian communities Twin Oaks and Acorn, located in rural central Virginia, all the “big stuff” is cooperatively owned—from houses and cars to bank accounts and businesses. For some of these communes' members, environmental concerns are motivation enough to share almost everything. Valerie, who's been living at Twin Oaks for two decades, believes, “Anyone who wanted to be living according to Right Livelihood would share cars. It's much less of a footprint on the earth.” For others, such as Tom from Twin Oaks, it's all about the worker-owned businesses. “Income sharing *itself* is right livelihood,” he asserts. “We don't have an ownership class, so we're not working hard to make others rich. Here, workers are managers—not just tools for producing capital.”

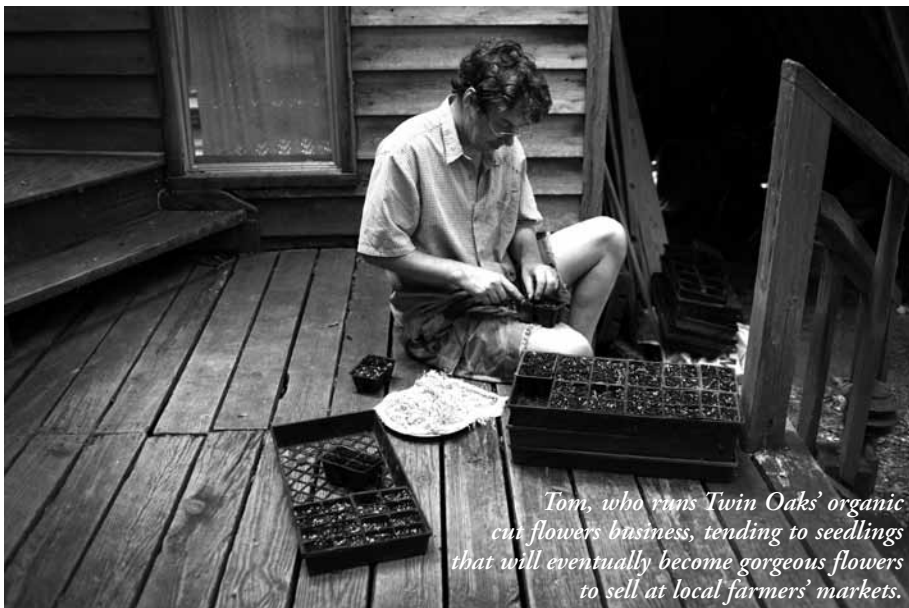
When it comes to supporting good causes, income sharing is a testament to “power in numbers.” If your economic unit is two people, your chief concern may be keeping your “unit” afloat financially. You may not have much leeway in terms of choosing a job that fits in with your values, nor time to volunteer or money to donate. But when your economic unit is say, 25 people (Acorn's current population), the group has more resources, time, and skills to put towards endeavors its members believe in. And when your economic unit is nearly 100...well, take it from Twin Oaks—you can pool your resources so efficiently as to live on about \$5,000 per person per year. Those who are sick, elderly, or otherwise unable to fully pull their weight can be supported

by the dozens of members who can, and the group has even more freedom to decide how to invest its money, time, and resources positively.

However, even though income sharing can be a successful way to band together to provide a secure and moral livelihood for a group, it's not easy. In fact, as a relatively new member, I must say that adjusting to life at Twin Oaks is still an ongoing challenge. It's been difficult getting used to having little financial autonomy. I feel frustrated that public possessions at Twin Oaks can get trashed easily—people tend to forget about the personal responsibility that comes with collective ownership. And I can't help but feel uneasy that folks who aren't working as efficiently as they could be are getting the same amount of “labor credits” as those who are.

I also sometimes find myself wondering what more I could be doing for the world. Am I living as closely to the notion of Right Livelihood at Twin Oaks as I could be? How far out does one have to reach in order to be living responsibly?

After speaking with several members of both Acorn and Twin Oaks in preparation for this article, though, I've come to realize that living in an income-sharing community as well as living by the guidelines of Right Livelihood are delicate balancing acts. There's no manual specifying how to embody Right Livelihood in every situation, nor is there a manual on how to thrive within the challenging environment of an income-sharing community (although Twin Oaks *does* have a 200-page book of community policies). I'm starting to understand that it's all about perspective, and about finding satisfaction, not guilt, in challenging yourself to do the best you can do. And living in an



Tom, who runs Twin Oaks' organic cut flowers business, tending to seedlings that will eventually become gorgeous flowers to sell at local farmers' markets.

Sarah Rice

intentional community—especially in an income-sharing community, where collectivism can allow for a greater expression of values—provides the challenge to raise the bar in terms of responsible living.

For instance, because Acorn is a consensus-based community with biweekly meetings, its culture of discussing all group decisions face to face encourages members to think deeply about the choices they make. According to River, who's been a Virginia communitard for the past 25 years, this is especially true with purchases. "Modern society is based on impulse buying," he explains. "If I were living on my own, I might go to the grocery store and pick up ramen noodles for dinner without thinking much about it." But when you're sharing your meals with a group, he says, you have to talk to each other about what kind of food to purchase and eat. "It forces you to question these things. There's a discussion about, 'What's the best way to do this, not just for personal health but also for the earth?'"

At Twin Oaks, you don't have to think very hard at all about using less fuel or electricity to have a lighter impact on the land. It's just a part of everyday life because of the community's culture of home and car sharing. "The way we live and share everything is more ecological, but it's easy for us to make those choices," Valerie says. "Mainstream society is not set up to make those choices. Often there are other priorities."

But does Twin Oaks adequately challenge its members to do service outside of the intentional communities movement? In a classic case of poor perspective, I've recently felt discouraged at the thought that Twin Oaks doesn't. I thought that the community's lack of emphasis on serving those in need was keeping me from emphasizing it in my own life. However, in talking to Ira, who moved to Twin Oaks in 1985 and then became a founding member of Acorn in 1993, I realized it's my own fault that I haven't been contributing to good causes outside of the communities movement since I've lived at Twin Oaks.



Ira and Andros of Acorn Community watering and working with the community's roselle plants (to be used eventually for tea leaves).

Janel Healy

A culture of discussing all group decisions face to face encourages members to think deeply about the choices they make.

All I have to do is go out and do it.

"When I lived at Twin Oaks, I'd take different crews of people to local farms to harvest peaches and other stuff the community didn't grow," Ira told me. "I didn't do it for labor credits, at least at first. I'm just into supporting local farmers, so that they can support their families. This makes it more likely that they will continue farming using organic principles."

Because Ira has energy and people organizational skills, she was able to tap the vast pool of skills and labor available to her at Twin Oaks when she wanted to start a project or embark on a service mission. If she had been living outside of community, it could have been much harder for her to rally people together to volunteer their time and money to support a cause. "It's all about having enough energy to work on projects because it's the right thing to do and not necessarily because it'll make money or fulfill your labor quota," Ira imparts. "Anywhere you live, living according to the ideals of Right Livelihood takes a lot of energy. It might take even more energy outside of community."

Now, Ira is constantly able to tap into her enthusiasm for changing the world through local agriculture thanks to Acorn's heirloom seed business, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (SESE). Acorn, with sheer good luck on its side, had the option of purchasing SESE at a time when the community was looking for an ethical, organic agriculture-related business to sustain itself. "We realized that good seed is the foundation of sustainable agriculture," says Ira, "and so SESE was like putting on a pair of shoes that was just right."

Down the road at Twin Oaks, the major community businesses are Twin Oaks Tofu and Twin Oaks Hammocks. For some Oakers, producing hammocks—leisure products made with synthetic rope—doesn't quite match up with their idea of Right Livelihood. However, as Acorn's Andros observes, "Hammocks sustained Twin Oaks long enough for the community to be able to survive. Twin Oaks has since reinvested that money into ventures that are arguably more righteous."



Author hauling clean laundry from Twin Oaks' main laundry facility back to her building: "Even the way we do laundry here at the Twin Oaks Community is an example of Right Livelihood (in an ecological sense). We have only three washing machines for almost 100 people, and whenever it's sunny, a lot of us hang clothes out to dry instead of using a power-intensive dryer."

Income-sharing communities can be challenging places to live, but they provide an immense array of opportunities for doing good.

Andros, who's been living at Acorn for the past three and a half years, has a point. The hammock business, although not necessarily "sustainability"-focused, allowed Twin Oaks to simply exist. As Twin Oaks' first business, it gave a community of resource sharing and egalitarianism a chance to put down roots. Now, Twin Oaks has a variety of businesses that focus on sustainability through supporting local and/or organic agriculture—the community grows organic seeds for SESE and other seed companies; buys local, organic, and non-GMO soybeans for its tofu; and grows and sells organic cut flowers at nearby farmers' markets.

Plus, as Ira pointed out, it's important for an income-sharing community to have many different jobs that are suited to various people and skills. "The hammock business is useful for Twin Oaks because almost anyone can learn [hammock-making] quickly and can use it to contribute to the group," she explains. "Making healthy vegan tofu seems more ethical to a lot of Oakers, but the work isn't suited to as many people. It's important to have a culture where a large amount of people can contribute through a wide range of jobs."

Talk about a lesson in perspective.

Another Right Livelihood issue with which my fellow communards grapple is how much to allow our community businesses to grow. To Ira, the ability to have enough money to purchase local and/or organic food to supplement what Acorn can grow is extremely important. She remembers that she thought she'd "died and gone to heaven" the day Acorn, thanks to SESE, could finally afford to purchase organic coffee. "Right livelihood entails living a life that isn't all fancy but does allow you to buy the things you think are right," says Ira. "We grow some of our own things, but we also want to buy food from organic and sustainable sources." Twin Oaks' Tom might agree. "Right livelihood is not just what you do to make money—it's what you do with the money," he told me.

On the other hand, Pam, manager of the prolific Twin Oaks garden for the past 15 years, is dubious of the idea of using money to vote for change. She'd rather her community simply be the change by becoming even more self-sufficient. "Do we want to focus on how much to earn and what to spend it on, or do we want to reduce our

dependence on the cash economy?," she ponders. "The latter is my preference."

From Pam's perspective, how can anyone—or any community—really know that what they're buying is coming from an ethical source? A business could sell a product that it claims to be organic, but if the business has, say, a hierarchical power structure and poor working conditions, there isn't an intention of Right Livelihood behind the product. In this global economy, as Andros put it, there could be "an element of exploitation and unsustainability" in every financial transaction.

But should our communities stop buying things altogether? It doesn't seem realistic (nor good for morale)—not when so many people deeply enjoy or have even come to feel they need some of the comforts of modern life. The answer must therefore lie somewhere between dependence and complete independence when it comes to the cash economy. It's just another balancing act.

Although diverse opinions and perspectives of members can be stressful to those living in community—especially to those living in tightly knit income-sharing communities—it may actually be that this diversity keeps a community centered. Personally, I'm learning to take in many perspectives in order to have a balanced diet of food for thought. As River recommends, "Holding conflicting ideas in your head at once seems to be the best way to be flexible." I'm learning to embrace both the frustrating and the positive—income-sharing communities can be challenging places to live, but they provide an immense array of opportunities for doing good. Acknowledging how my community could do better in terms of Right Livelihood is necessary for "raising the bar" for the group and for myself, but it's also important to appreciate the ways in which my community does allow me to live according to my values.

Living in an income-sharing community is not the only way to lead a life according to the ideals of Right Livelihood, of course. Worker-owned cooperatives often share the ideals of Right Livelihood that Twin Oaks and Acorn

hold so dear, as do other intentional communities that don't pool their earnings. "A lot of different communities and co-ops are part of the solution to a more equitable world," Ira explains. "It's not just one size fits all!" But for some people, income sharing is the perfect values match. "Most communities choose to do certain things together, but the more you do as a group, the more powerful it is," says River. "The ability to share resources creates something bigger than myself. I think that's a common human desire—to come together with other people to create something bigger."

When I think about the long term, I'm not yet sure where my life will fall along the spectrum of Right Livelihood lifestyles. I want to challenge myself to live as morally as possible, and although income-sharing communities are one great way to do that, I know there are other options. But for now, I'm appreciating the wonderfully just nature of sharing. I'm grateful to be living in a place where egalitarianism discourages the greed that seems to be plaguing much of the world. Tom puts it best: "For the few to have much, the many must have little. But at Twin Oaks, everyone *has*." If that's not Right Livelihood, I don't know what is.

For more information about secular income-sharing communities, visit the Federation of Egalitarian Communities online at www.thefec.org. 🐦

*Janel Healy, a California native, has been living at the Twin Oaks Community in Louisa, Virginia for the past year. An avid sculptor of words, Janel has most recently written for *Survive and Thrive TV*, *Positive Impact Magazine*, and the previous issue of *COMMUNITIES*. Janel also spends her time making tofu, caring for chickens, and marketing for the 2011 Twin Oaks Communities Conference. One of her goals is to spread knowledge about the intentional communities movement to people across the country.*

More Perspectives from Acorn

I have lived at Acorn for only seven months, but it feels right to me to live communally. I feel good about sharing cars and farming equipment. If we were living separately in mainstream society, we would be using 25 cars, 25 washing machines, 25 toasters, 25 blenders; the list goes on and on. Now we share five cars, two washing machines, one toaster, one blender, etc. In my old apartment building in New Jersey, there was no recycling program. Acorn has a compost pile and recycles everything that can possibly be recycled. Surplus clothes go to Goodwill and surplus vegetables go to a local food bank. It makes me feel good to hang the laundry outside to dry, that our main residence only has one air conditioner (to store the seeds for our business), and that I haven't driven a car in seven months. I love growing and eating our own fruit and vegetables, knowing that they were not touched by pesticides and that they were handpicked by myself or people I know.

I don't miss my \$60,000 a year job. Ultimately, it is not about money. To me, it's about living right.

I finally found a place to live where I feel good about myself and the impact I have on the earth. Before I started living at Acorn, I felt lonely, angry, scared, and unappreciated. Now I feel support, friendship, love, and appreciation. Life is not perfect, but it sure feels a hell of a lot better.

—**Jacqueline Langeveld**
Acorn Community

I've been in community for most of the past eight years, and I've been at Acorn for most of the past two years. Since coming to community, I've been grateful for the chance to live close to the earth and in relative harmony with it, tending gardens, drying herbs, etc., and for the chance to live with people who understand my desire to do these things. I don't feel I make sacrifices for sustainability; I feel I've escaped the mainstream pressure to consume. I've never wanted my own car, my own house, my own computer, or the most fashionable clothes. In community, that doesn't make me weird. However, some people at Acorn might miss those things, the same way I sometimes wish I could build up more of a fund for travel or for something like retirement.

At Acorn, and in large part thanks to SESE, we don't just try to reduce our own ecological footprint; we also contribute to the sustainability endeavors of many others. We sell seed to gardeners and small farmers. We answer customers' questions about gardening, host seed swaps, and give workshops. We cooperate with other similar seed companies. Together, we help keep heirloom varieties alive. I send out donations of seeds to school gardens, community gardens, and the like. When we plant too much of something for ourselves, I pack up the extra for the local food bank. The same goes for when we plant, say, melons according to how much seed we need, but can't eat all the fruit. When students at nearby colleges move out and throw away huge amounts of perfectly good stuff, I ask myself how we can organize better salvage operations, responding to authorities' concerns, and perhaps giving what we can't use to charity. All in all, I am so glad I don't have to sell my time to earn a salary. The work I do here is not for money, but for the benefit of the community, society, the earth, and my own growth.

Though Acorn and Twin Oaks are egalitarian communities, we couldn't claim to be perfectly fair, or to be perfectly sustainable, or to have worked out all our differences. One of the difficulties with adjusting to life in an income-sharing community can be the level of trust our fellow communards expect of us. I sometimes get frustrated trying to reduce the amounts of food, electricity, and work time that we waste. Yet in the larger scheme of things, I trust that Acorners will continue to do the work that ensures that our basic needs will be met. I trust that if one of us gets very ill, that person will be taken care of. I trust that we will continue to listen to one another when making hard decisions.

—**Irena Hollowell**
Acorn Community

Active Communities:

Why working towards improving our world should be a defining part of any intentional community

By Michael Kenny

Living justly and in harmony with the planet has been a key component of many intentional communities. Many who are attracted to the intentional community lifestyle have themselves been social, community, or environmental activists. Yet we often fail to define intentional communities as vehicles for social change outside of the context of the personal lifestyle changes of members living in our communities. Intentional communities themselves possess great potential in providing the resources needed for an individual or group to give back to the wider community, be it through social enterprise, activism, or volunteerism. An intentional community can facilitate greater social and environmental change by providing space for meetings, offices, and storage for local nonprofits and activist organizations, acting as a local hub for environmentalists and social justice activists, and having on-site residents and visitors available as activists and volunteers. Intentional communities can even act as green business incubators, housing social enterprises or worker cooperatives.

When a group of us formed the Toronto Ecovillage Project back in 2004, having a strong social justice aspect for our group and our future community was essential to us, though it was never defined or explicit. When our group re-formed in 2009, I and the other activists involved decided that we needed to be explicit about the kind of community we were trying to create. We sought to define our vision through the creation of a new term, in order to avoid confusion with other established concepts of intentional communities. The term we came up with was **Active Community**.

An active community can be defined as the following:

1. Sustainability. An active community is designed to be environmentally, financially, and socially sustainable.

2. Active. Members of the community are active within the community, and the greater neighbourhood, municipality, and region where the community resides. They are active in making the world a better place, be it through activism, volunteerism, advocacy, politics, social enterprise, or through environmentally and socially sustainable living. Such communities also provide resources or assist those engaged in being active, whether it is activism, social enterprise, or the like. Such communities are active at making a better world.

3. Community. The community is designed to maximize a sense of community and encourage socialization. Community members should have a proven history or desire for involvement, and continued involvement is either encouraged or required. Opportunities for socialization are maximized through on-site facilities and community planning of events.

4. An active community is **not limited by its size**. An active community can be as small as a house, or as large as a neighbourhood, town, or city. The work of Jane Jacobs, who believed that you require higher population density to provide a vibrant community life, has inspired our vision. Many proponents of ecovillages and cohousing argue a case for smaller-scale communities. We, however, believe community can occur at any scale.

5. Encourage healthy living. Food, fitness, and safety are required for healthy living. Urban agriculture, community supported agriculture, and farmers' markets can provide affordable, healthy, and locally grown food options. A communal kitchen with optional meal plans should be an option offered. All food should be organic

if feasible, with vegetarian and vegan meal options. Physical fitness should be encouraged through the creation of on-site fitness facilities and proximity to parks and recreation trails. Sites chosen should be free or cleaned of any potential contamination, and all building materials and cleaners used in the building should be free of chemicals. The community should adopt a chemical-free living policy based on the precautionary principle, restricting the use of chemicals and smoking within the community.

Many existing intentional communities could fit this description, whether or not they describe their community as having an activist focus. The growth of the intentional communities movement in the past two decades has created numerous new communities. For an activist such as myself, it is important to make the distinction that the community I am to be a part of actively commit to making the world outside the immediate community a better place. As new communities are formed in the future, I hope more communities will commit to activism, social enterprise, and similar endeavours, and that those communities will be distinct by defining themselves as active communities. ☘



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Ecovillage Project and Toronto Social Justice Centre.

Apple Trees in Winter

By Russ Purvis

“There are strange things done in the midnight sun...” begins the famous poem “The Cremation of Sam McGee” by Robert W. Service. Yes, it’s true that winter in rural Canada and for many northern locations is a time of unrestrained creativity. Why? Well, we have time. I look forward to the quiet, peaceful days of winter after the non-stop social of the ecovillage season here, April-October. At its peak during that busy season we have 17 hours between sunrise and sunset. Then of course there is the hour before dawn, and then twilight after sunset. It is perhaps hard to imagine. We might experience only five hours of darkness on the Summer Solstice! All that light creates abundant outdoor energy and activity. So winter is a time for rebalancing.

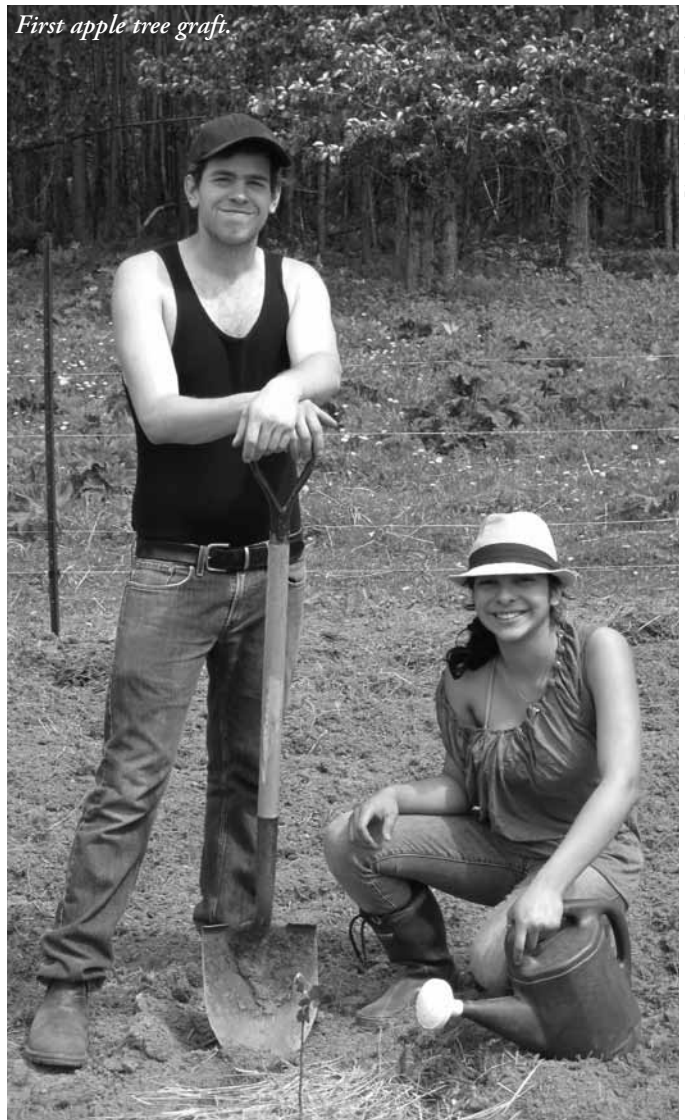
Matching intellectual stimulation and social needs during the long Canadian winter with ecovillage values is an interesting challenge. After I become bored with “self-improvement” my focus has been to look for avenues to serve the greater community. The winter of 2010/11 I contacted a friend who is also a member of the Board of Directors for a local primary school. My inquiry was to see if they would be open to having their own school-based orchard. The answer was “Yes.” Fortunately, as the local community owns and controls the school, there were not many obstacles to overcome at the administrative level.

British Columbia has always been a progressive place. An element of their Provincial Health Care management team has determined that if people are active and eat more balanced diets they will be less of a burden on the public healthcare system. Grants to encourage experiential learning in the schools are part of this programme. And a primary-school-based orchard was seen as a multi-faceted tool.

There is some amazing information available on the Web for growing apples in northern climates, especially from St. Lawrence Nurseries in Potsdam, New York (www.sln.potsdam.ny.us/apples.html). In addition, a local orchardist was able to advise on hardy root stocks available for our region.

The first meeting with the parents committed to assisting with the project implementation was everything that I could have hoped for. The orchard site within the school grounds was chosen by consensus on the fly. Some outlying pods were identified as secondary choices assuming extra trees were available. Bodies to operate shovels and a backhoe were committed. A fortuitous beginning...

Ordering and pickup of the trees required some newly acquired expertise and a truck. Or at least so we thought.



First apple tree graft.

Photo by Russ Purvis

However, late arrival of the grant monies meant the bare root “orchard whips” were all gone. Larger trees five-six feet tall required a horse trailer or something similar to prevent wind damage on the long drive from the nursery. And so it goes... picture next year with apples in full bloom and kids dreaming of apple snacks! Adding food diversity to a community for 20 or even 100 years is a goal most communitarians would heartily endorse. Of course it’s a lot of work. But worth it! ☺

Russ Purvis is a founding member of Kakwa Ecovillage Coop, British Columbia, Canada: www.kakwaecovillage.com. Currently he is President of the Ecovillage Network of Canada.

Remade in Edinburgh: The Story of a Community Vision for a Reuse and Repair Centre in Scotland

By Sophie Unwin

The Vision

In a community centre in Edinburgh a man is bent over a model railway set. Look closely and the trains are all made with pieces of salvaged wood and chipboard, cut by hand and carefully painted. David, who looks very eccentric, wearing olive green clothes that are all patched together, tied by string, and hitched up by braces, is 59 and is highly intelligent. He also has Asperger's syndrome. Speak to him and you will have something which does not really resemble a conversation. "Remind me your name," he asks me, and when I say Sophie he says, "Ah, yes, Princess Sofia from Austria...as you will remember," before launching into a long historical monologue. When I stop him to point out that I am not, in fact, a princess, he is movingly self-aware. "It's Asperger's, you know."

Like the rest of us in the room David does not come to the centre to be "helped"—he comes to volunteer to repair things and share his skills. Our main activities are sewing and mending clothes and patchwork quilt-making with leftover scraps of material, and basic computer repair, to help people clean out the viruses from their laptops and stop them throwing them out and buying new—but we are open to all ideas. David has expressed enthusiasm about the idea of running workshops for adults to make model railways with scrap wood and plastic. In the first weeks that he came, I was concerned that he needed quite so much attention, with our energy and time very limited. But I knew that the project could succeed only if it kept to its conviction that everyone is welcome and everyone has something to offer. And with the support and encouragement of the whole group, David has relaxed visibly and is a wonderful addition to the project. He is now happy spending much of the two hours that we meet on his own in purposeful activities, often with an audience attentive to his unparalleled command of historical and geographical facts. "Listening to David," says Benny, our lovely German computer repair volunteer, "is like turning on the radio."

Edgar Cahn, the founder of an idea called "Time Banking," in which people swap skills with everyone's time being counted as having equal value, has coined the phrase "no more throw-away people." We hold this idea close to our hearts in our project "Remade in Edinburgh," which is about trying to change

the culture of "throwaway" in its widest sense. After all, where is this "away" where things, or people, can be thrown?

The economics of it brings the issue into focus: figures vary but for every tonne of waste, there is one job in disposing of it at landfill, but ten jobs for recycling it. With reuse and repair, the amount of jobs increases further—so while the burden on



the planet is decreasing, people's opportunities are growing.

Remade in Edinburgh is inspired by a similar project in Brixton, South London, called Remade in Brixton. I used to live in London and had been involved in setting up the project there. The idea was quite simple—to create a community centre where things could be reused and repaired rather than throwing them away. When things aren't made to last, or in fact are made deliberately not to last, it's often both cheaper and easier to throw things away rather than repair them. This "built-in obsolescence" is the norm of most electrical consumer goods, and is explained simply in a series of engaging films found at North American campaigner Annie Dillard's website The Story of Stuff (www.thestoryofstuff.com).

In our centre, we said, we would not need to pay other people to fix things for us; we would learn how to fix them ourselves, and learn the kind of skills we would find useful when the oil runs out. Our philosophy was not just common-sense, it was underpinned by a strong tradition of social activism around community equality and

Our philosophy was underpinned by a strong tradition of social activism around community equality and empowerment.



empowerment as reflected in the writings of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire. For Freire, education is a radical journey towards social justice:

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

II. Learning from Brixton

The Brixton project started up as part of the Transition Town group, a global grassroots movement motivated by the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change. We started the Remade project as a waste group. Hannah, who had trained in product design, was already using the name “Remade” for her work, and we decided to merge the two groups to try to work together to promote a culture of zero waste in Brixton. After all, when things aren't thrown into holes in the ground, we have to start thinking about other uses for them—and the possibilities are almost endless. One thing that happens a lot in an urban centre with a fairly transient population and a lot of gentrification like Brixton is a huge pace of house-building and renovation. Because of a lack of storage space, things are thrown into skips (big containers outside houses) and rapidly disposed of. Often this means that good quality timber and other construction materials go to the dump.

Brixton is also known for its poverty, its strong racial mix, and has a huge amount of energy and life. Go to the market and you'll find Chinese, Portuguese, Jamaican, Ethiopian stalls all side by side: rows of chicken feet, huge scaley pink fish with bulging eyes, okra, aubergine and plantain, make-up and wigs and accessories for Afro-Caribbean hair nestled next to outlets selling cheap mobile phones, watches, and clothes.

We started the project in October

2008. The recession was just starting to bite and people were losing their jobs and waking up to the holes in the financial system. A senior official in the Council was backing the transition vision and we held an open meeting in the town hall called “The Great Unleashing.” We launched a local currency, “The Brixton Pound”—where money stays in Brixton. The hall was full to capacity, with several hundred people there; some had to be turned away. People from the different projects—the Brixton pound, a food growing project called “Abundance” where people grow food on the waste land of urban estates and help pick fruit from trees that is going to waste, an affordable home insulation programme—all presented, and I also stood up for a few minutes to outline the Remade vision. “Imagine,” I said, “if elderly refugees could teach unemployed bankers useful skills like cooking or sewing or repairing furniture.” We got a round of laughter, and applause.

After this meeting, many more people got involved. An email group called “Project Dirt” started up a discussion about all the pumpkins that get thrown away during Hallowe’en. They sent out recipe cards for stews and pies and distributed them and persuaded supermarkets to distribute them so people would cook the food instead of throwing it away after carving out faces. Another group of people started to meet with the local council, asking them what its plans were to move beyond recycling to reuse and repair. From this grew a practical project to map and create a directory of all the local businesses offering repair services, to be uploaded onto the transition website.

Eventually, the collective “honeymoon” ended, and a new phase set in. Difficulties arose, and it sometimes seemed like two steps forward and one step back, as organizers faced the realities of a project run almost entirely on the spare time of enthusiastic volunteers, energized by the potential of the idea but confronting not only the obstructions of local bureaucracy and commercial realities but their own limitations.

At one point I remember a meeting in a local pub. The group was open to all, decisions made by consensus, and there was no agenda or time-keeping. Each time a new person came to join the discussion the conversation started at square one, rehashing old ground. “Why don’t we ban plastic bags in Brixton,” said one woman, an idea that many had previously voiced, but that was not going to materially progress our centre. We left over three hours later, having agreed nothing.

But then—a breakthrough. Hannah, who had built up an excellent network of good relationships with local makers and politicians, heard of an opportunity to take on a shop front in a little arcade at the heart of the market, rent-free for a year. It was a tiny space, but would be a visible site for the project, a place people could drop in and chat and share ideas. Outside the shop was a blackboard chalked up with “wants” and “offers,” and inside Hannah found an array of recycled crafts to display for sale, from belts made with old bicycle inner tubes to bags made from old jeans. Hannah also started organizing workshops and courses in making things to attract people to the shop. One day I helped out for the day and did a simple survey to find out what people wanted to learn. The overwhelming response was a demand for sewing classes, and this came from women and men, workers, students, and unemployed people, of all ages and different ethnicities.

Having the shop opened for six months helped get people involved; the relationships in the community were also strengthened. One woman, Sue Sheehan, was

“Why don’t we ban plastic bags in Brixton,” said one woman, an idea that many had previously voiced. We left over three hours later.





Sometimes I would idly imagine the idea of starting up a Remade project in Edinburgh, but it seemed like far too difficult an undertaking on my own.

employed as a community champion officer in the local council and through this and other connections the project came to a point where it was offered a set of disused garage spaces by the council. Each one could house a different reuse and repair social enterprise.

III. Remade in Edinburgh

By this time I had moved up to Edinburgh in Scotland—a long-held dream—for a new job. I was keeping in touch with the project through phone calls and emails. It was more and more difficult.

Edinburgh had been a city that had always beguiled me. It's a city whose edges—unlike those of London—are visible, giving way to the green hinterland of the arable farmland surrounding it. In the long spring days I go walking, a coconut-like scent in the air from the gorse bushes, bright yellow against the purple of the heather, through woods of silver birch and rowan and pine, and the sound of a cuckoo, and later a nightingale. The bus journey from town is only an hour; in London it would have taken me that time just to get to the bus station.

And Edinburgh is also a city whose seven hills, including an extinct volcano, mean that the countryside never feels far away. It is easier to have a connection with your environment if you can see more clearly where things come from and where they go. And, because we are our own environment, it follows that it is easier to have a connection with yourself.

My love of this place has kept me here; though two jobs and one relationship have

come and gone, through all this change I have kept being able to find new ground.

I have done work to earn a living, and I have also sought out work that I enjoyed. I am most happy when I am using my skills to do something useful, working with others and helping others to reach their potential. It sounds simple but is not always easy in practice. So many jobs are deadening to the soul and have no intrinsic value. Who do you know who wants to do a job they don't believe in? But I also reject the philosophy of competing for those jobs that are the most interesting—the idea that being creative is the privilege of the few. It is when people come together to do something worthwhile, all supporting each other in the process, that we start to find a right livelihood.

Sometimes I would idly imagine the idea of starting up a Remade project in Edinburgh—Remade in Edinburgh. But it seemed like far too difficult an undertaking and not sensible on my own, and I kept on putting the idea aside.

In summer 2010 I got an email from someone called Adam, put in touch with



I have had to learn to let go a bit in order to let others step forward, whilst still keeping a gentle hold of the reins.

me by Hannah in London. “My name is Adam,” he wrote, “and I want to set up a reuse centre like the project in Brixton.”

For the next few months Adam and I worked together in a tide of excitement, writing funding applications and linking up with the transition town group in South Edinburgh. But this process was also not straightforward. After his initial burst of enthusiasm, Adam decided he would go traveling with his girlfriend for up to a year. We had very different working styles and at times clashed over how to proceed—I wanted to think things through, and Adam was keen to do things more quickly. By Christmas it looked like the project might falter altogether, as we still had no funding to proceed. And then, in one quite heated exchange, we both realised that what we wanted was to get a wider group of people involved, to take things forward.

What followed was initially amazing. In January this year we put out a message about a public meeting for the project. “Interested in getting involved in our vision for a reuse and repair centre in Edinburgh?” read the invitation. Thirty-five people came. By chance, a visiting professor, Paul Connett, had been in town to talk about zero waste as part of a Scottish campaign against incineration, and at the talk he’d shown examples of successful reuse and repair centres around the world. They work best, apparently, when a small project is based in a central area of town, linking to a bigger storage facility on the outskirts, where space is cheaper. In one example, an Italian project, we saw endless vats of liquids from olive oil to household detergent, being dispensed into people’s refillable containers. I spoke at Professor Connett’s talk and some other community events and almost everyone I spoke to was interested in getting involved. Nancy Somerville, the director of a neighbouring community centre, offered us a large hall rent-free while we got the project up and running.

By March we had over 100 members, and now, in June, almost 200. Each time we talk to people about the idea for the project it gets an excellent response. One of the most popular activities we run is the computer repair and upgrades—we offer really

simple software checks and sometimes it takes as little as a virus check and clean-up to prevent someone throwing away their laptop and buying new. If you go to a commercial outlet for computer repair the cost of the two things can be almost the same. The laptop that I am currently typing at is a good example. I took it to a shop where I was quoted a minimum £100 charge to repair it, where buying a new one would be £300. We’re conditioned to think we have to upgrade our home equipment every couple of years—but it’s simply not true. In 20 minutes at our repair session, Benny has got my computer working well.

The clothes mending is also popular, and we’ve secured a supply of free secondhand clothes from a neighbouring charity shop so our team of volunteer sewers can help tailor them to size and show people how to get a sewing machine running. Meanwhile, other people sew scraps of leftover fabric into a large collective patchwork quilt.

This seems to be the time for the project, with a resurgence of interest in the skills which many people used to take for granted in mending and repairing things. We’ve moved away from this culture in an age of cheaply manufactured goods that aren’t made to last. We hope to move back to it, not by blaming people for being wasteful, but by offering them new opportunities to behave differently.

The biggest challenge, and also the biggest success, of the project, has been in converting an idea into an organization, and building a network of people who are really taking on responsibility for different roles. We are all volunteers, but volunteers need to be supported and motivated, given direction, and this has so far mainly fallen to me. And so I have had to learn to let go a bit in order to let others step forward, whilst still keeping a gentle hold of the reins and continuing to look out for new opportunities.

There have been several setbacks—we did not receive a large funding bid in April and have had to struggle on with no money. In some ways I think this has been good for us, as it’s meant

thinking about creating an organization that is self-sufficient from the very start. Now, we are looking to keep our drop-in sessions with computer repair and quilt-making free, but to add workshops on particular skill areas—from furniture restoration to upholstery—that would pay their own way. We also hope to run a house-clearance and decluttering service where we will give advice on reusing and repairing broken household objects.

IV. Right Livelihood and Community

Each time I start a conversation with someone about the project, it builds my own commitment and enthusiasm. There is so much desire for opportunities to learn the skills that too often we have lost, and that would mean we could truly move away from a disposable culture to one where we really treasure the things we own. There are many other reuse projects in Edinburgh, from a woodwork project to a tool library and a craft store—and thinking about how we can work together with them and share resources, such as rent for a centre, has been exciting and energizing. And this, above all, is not just about saving things from landfill, it is about finding new ways we can interact with each other, through cooperation and sharing.

As I was thinking about the project one day, wondering how to explain the connection between right livelihood and community that seems central to its appeal, I came across a magazine from the Edinburgh Buddhist Centre. It described right livelihood as “an ethical approach to work—viewing work in the light of the five Buddhist precepts: developing friendliness, honesty, skilful sexual ethics, truthful speech, and mindfulness.”

For too many people, I believe that daily work involves a mismatch between the values of the organizations they work for and their own personal ethics. For others, the reaction of working for large and faceless corporates is to try and reclaim control by becoming self-employed or freelance, freeing up their time for leisure activities. I have done both, and neither has satisfied me.

In contrast, working for community you can see the impact of your actions, and can be supported by the people around you. Your colleagues are your neighbours. I do think this means we are more friendly to each other but of course there are times when there are clashes and the only way to survive these is to really work together to resolve them.

With Remade in Edinburgh the community has helped shape a sound business proposition too: we have a local market in the supply of broken goods and a demand for the repaired ones amongst our members, and a local pool of participants for our courses. If we can grow this local market we will be helping reduce the need to manufacture things far away and transport them here, and we will become more self-reliant in the process.

Turning all of this into reality continues to be hard work, and often a very challenging journey, but I persevere in the deep belief that it is my own right livelihood. 🐦

Sophie Unwin coordinates Remade in Edinburgh and is researching a book about ecology and community. Find more about Remade at www.remadeinedinburgh.blogspot.com and remadeinbrixton.wordpress.com.



CROWDFUNDING: A COMMUNAL BUSINESS MODEL

By Elizabeth Barrette

You may already be involved in crowdfunding but not know it by that name. Crowdfunding is a collective financial approach that allows individuals to pool their resources in support of favorite projects that might not succeed under a more conventional model. It also lets creative people and businesses cater to niche markets willing to support them, even if the product or service seems odd to outsiders. Crowdfunding both encourages and thrives upon community, as creators and sponsors form close relationships with each other and as the audience also develops a collective culture.

These features make crowdfunding a business model that meshes well with intentional community. It goes by various names, so you may recognize some of your community's projects or your personal activities as fitting this model. If you're new to the idea of crowdfunding, perhaps you'll decide to explore it further or discuss it with your neighbors in community.

Types of Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding spans a wide range of methods. Some projects rely on subscriptions or donations. Others sell products or services at a particular rate. There are also websites that offer fundraising pages for crowdfunded projects. Amidst all the variations are some common threads.

Community Supported Agriculture may be the example most familiar to folks living in community. You won't often see this listed as crowdfunding, but it is. CSAs sell memberships, allowing people to share both the risks and the benefits of farming. Members usually influence what foods the farmers grow for the CSA; they may also volunteer their time or visit the farm on open house days. Crowdfunding CSAs let farmers use sustainable methods and members enjoy healthy food when the mainstream doesn't readily support those options.

The main crowdfunding sites such as IndieGoGo, Kickstarter, and RocketHub serve well for two types of project: small business launches and big project launches. Starting a new business takes money; that's hard to raise conventionally if your business isn't conventional. But if you can connect with your niche market, they may help you launch, and then stick around to support your business as it grows. Big projects include examples like an art gallery show, a print of a digital movie, a

professional printer for a small press, and other instances where an established project or creator needs a lump sum to accomplish something important. This is a bit easier because they can often draw support from an existing customer or fan base. The crowdfunding site just makes it simpler to lay out the business plan for the project, tell people the goal and the perks for contributing, and track progress. Both of these project types put the control in the hands of small business owners and ordinary people, not bank executives.

Cyberfunded creativity is the arts branch of this business model. It spans such things as webcomics, serial fiction, poetry events, divination, music, illustration, sculpture, and other media. Some shared-world projects involve a mix of contributions like stories, artwork, and even jewelry. Most cyberfunded creativity focuses on one creative person, though, and relies on gathering enough of an audience to support the project. This removes the bottleneck found in conventional publishing, art galleries, etc. by letting the fans fund the items they love by the people they admire. It also has the advantage of promoting uncommon viewpoints or themes that people value, which might otherwise get overlooked. Those projects that invite audience prompts also help promote people's favorite ideas; if you participate in such projects outside your community, consider suggesting communal living as a topic. Projects are most often funded with donations or subscriptions, although the details vary widely. This branch of crowdfunding is particularly prone to strong community development, and in fact supporters list that as a reason for participating.

My most successful project is a monthly Poetry Fishbowl that I host on my LiveJournal. People give me prompts about a theme, then I write poems based on whatever I get. I post at least one poem for free, and people can sponsor more. There are even series of poems about favorite settings and characters. This project has been running for over three years; it has a great sense of community among fans who live nearby and far away. The project draws us closer together. Another crowdfunding project of mine is Torn World, a science-fantasy shared-world launched by Ellen Million. I actually joined that one partly to practice my people skills, because it is highly collaborative.

Rewards of Crowdfunding

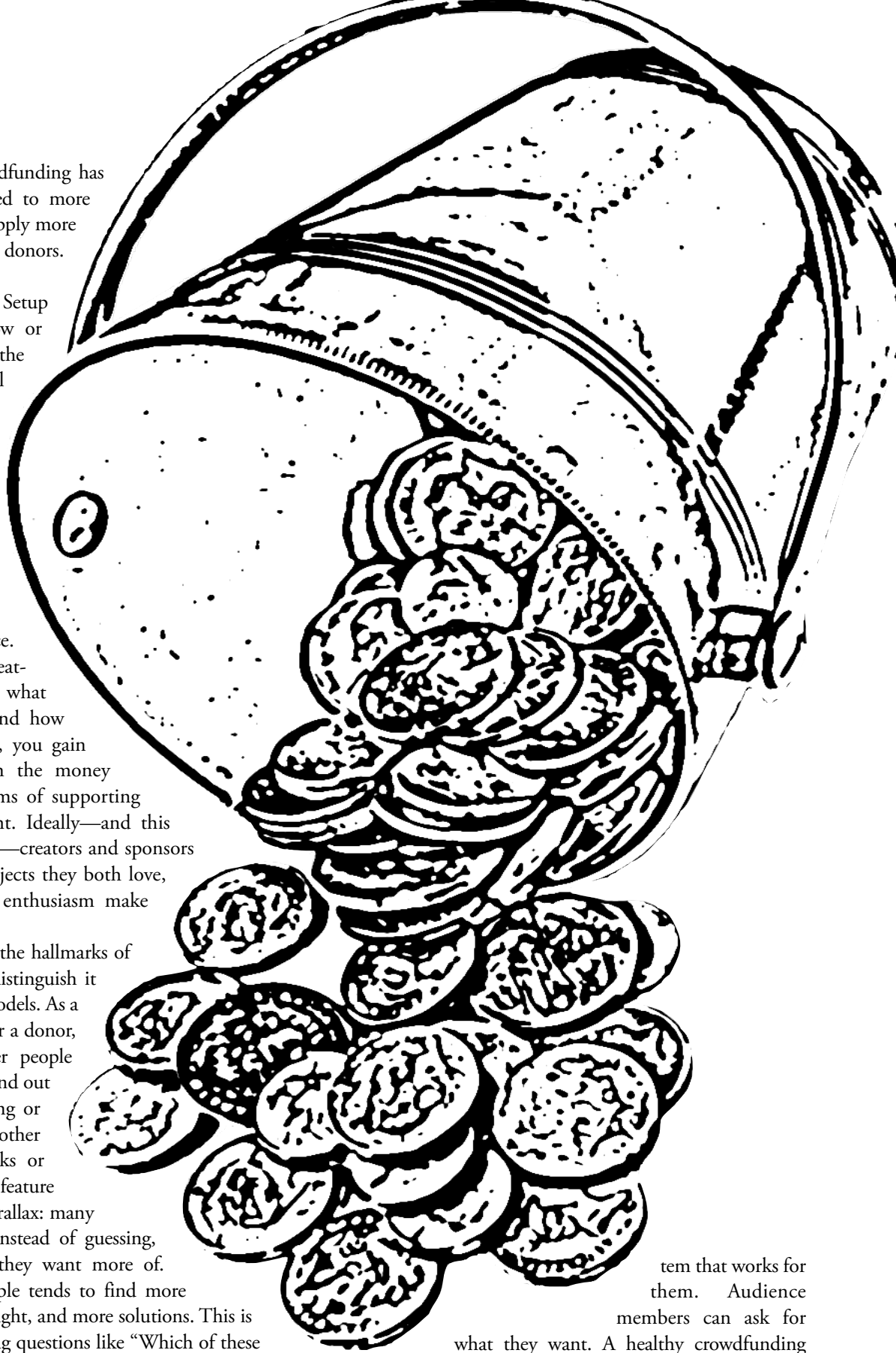
As a business model, crowdfunding has multiple advantages compared to more conventional models. Some apply more to creators, others more to donors. Some apply to both.

First, it's easy to start small. Setup costs for creators can be low or nonexistent, depending on the type of project. This is crucial in a world where most ways of making money start off with a lot of expenses. You can start a crowdfunded project in your garage or on your blog. Then if it proves popular, you can expand.

Second, crowdfunding is all about control and influence. As a creator, you retain greater control over your work: what you do, when you do it, and how you release it. As a sponsor, you gain improved influence through the money you spend, especially in terms of supporting ideas you consider important. Ideally—and this is where community plays in—creators and sponsors find common ground in projects they both love, and their shared ideas and enthusiasm make those projects thrive.

This interactivity is one of the hallmarks of crowdfunding, which helps distinguish it from mass-market business models. As a crowdfunding provider and/or a donor, you can connect with other people interested in this approach. Find out what projects they are creating or supporting, what techniques other people are using, what works or doesn't work and why. A key feature of crowdfunding is insight parallax: many heads are better than one. Instead of guessing, creators can ask fans what they want more of. Feedback from multiple people tends to find more errors than just one person might, and more solutions. This is particularly good for answering questions like "Which of these sketches should I finalize and paint?" or "Should we add an herb garden or a berry patch to our CSA next year?"

As a result of these factors, crowdfunding is more flexible in its initial construction and more adaptable to changing needs when compared to traditional models. Creators can design a sys-



tem that works for them. Audience members can ask for what they want. A healthy crowdfunding project grows and changes over time in a fairly organic fashion. The feedback loop is fast and tight so that necessary changes are usually noticed and enacted promptly. Cutting out the middlemen of traditional business makes for more efficient function.

The success of crowdfunding depends on making a connection between provider and supporters.

Challenges of Crowdfunding

Of course, all business models have drawbacks. Crowdfunding requires more work than standard models in some areas. It also misses out on benefits that are targeted toward conventional businesses.

First, in crowdfunding, the creator has to do everything or arrange to have it done. That means you either need the skills yourself, or you need to pay or barter for someone else to do what you can't. This can take a lot more time and energy. Compare this to, say, mainstream publishing where an author turns in a manuscript and then it's the publisher's responsibility to have it edited, typeset, printed, shipped, advertised, etc. With a crowdfunded webserial releasing a paperback edition, the author is responsible for all of that.

Next, crowdfunding creators must figure out fair pricing and keep things affordable. This depends on your offering and your market. It's hard to know what to charge if you can't find similar projects for comparison, and little information has been published thus far regarding typical examples. You also need to know what people need and can afford—an issue familiar in Community Supported Agriculture, which deals with weekly shares of food, and sometimes allows members to lower cash contributions with work-trade.

The success of crowdfunding depends on making a connection between provider and supporters. For the creator, this means attracting and maintaining an audience. For the sponsor, it means finding worthwhile projects to support. Since crowdfunding in its modern incarnation is relatively new, the venues and methods for connection aren't fully developed yet. Even a good project may struggle to find the people who would love it. Even a careful shopper may have trouble identifying which providers are reliable and will deliver what they promise.

Finally, crowdfunding practitioners must cope with a hostile environment from conventional business. Crowdfunded projects and providers are often ineligible for loans, grants, awards, facilities, and other benefits aimed at standard models. Crowdfunding as a movement has only a few replacements for these so far. Also, laws and expectations tend to favor conventional over alternative approaches. Compensating for this requires more research and sometimes more fiddling around to find a configuration that will work.

Crowdfunding in Community

Intentional community is a good environment for crowdfunding. You have a bunch of people already accustomed to working together. You can explore different options to find out what works for your community.

First, consider crowdfunding vs. groupfunding. Do you want a given project to reach beyond your immediate neighbors, or do you want to keep it all within your community? Ravan, who lives in a shared house, had this to say: "Regarding the household business(es) that we keep trying to put together: we do more groupfunding than crowdfunding—we keep it inside the household, and some put in time versus cash. We actually have an umbrella business partnership that we collectively assign our ideas to, and hope we can put together everything to make something work. I usually end up putting up the most actual cash, because I make the most at a day job (when I'm working)."

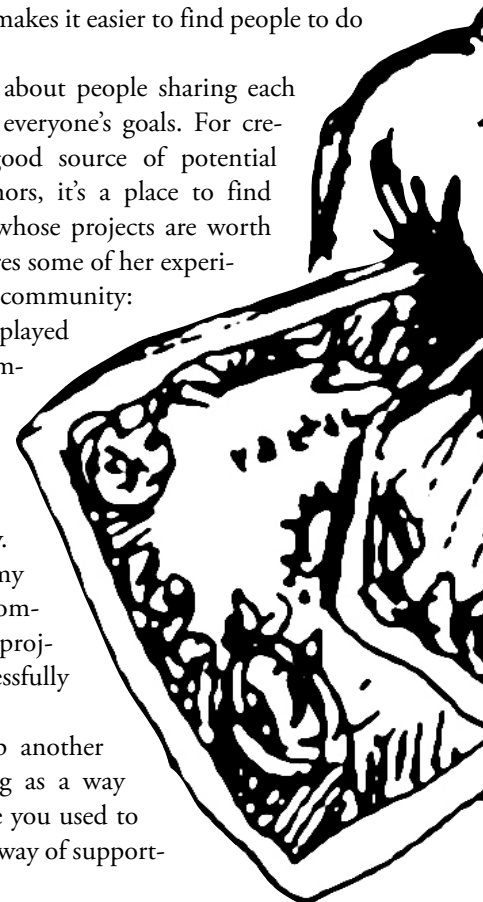
Bear in mind that you can also begin a project as groupfunding and then shift to crowdfunding if it works well enough to expand beyond your own community. Some Community Supported Agriculture projects start with a community garden and then grow into a business.

Crowdfunding can offer community members an opportunity for onsite employment. Many people dislike needing to leave their community every day for an outside job. If you have, for example, a small press running on a crowdfunded model, then it may employ an editor/publisher and a designer/artist full-time plus some part-time office work for other members. Similarly, community members enjoy opportunities to collaborate on projects (such as a spinner and a knitter making soft sculptures for sale based on audience requests) or to trade skills (such as a computer expert designing a gallery website for an artist, who reciprocates with original art for the other person's site). Community buffers some of the challenges in crowdfunding—among other things, it makes it easier to find people to do what you can't do personally.

Intentional community is about people sharing each other's lives and supporting everyone's goals. For creators, a community is a good source of potential audience members. For donors, it's a place to find people you know and like, whose projects are worth supporting. Vicka Corey shares some of her experiences with crowdfunding in community:

"When I played in bands, I played mostly house concerts. Community is very important to me, in a day-to-day way. I occasionally throw money at crowdfunded projects, but not in any organized way. I did a bunch of support of my ex-communal-housemate-from-Seattle Dara's Kickstarter project, which was indeed successfully funded."

Notice that she brings up another helpful aspect: crowdfunding as a way to keep in touch with people you used to live with. Similarly it offers a way of support-



ing people you'd like to live with, who are a part of your life long-distance, but circumstances don't allow living together.

Crowdfunding also offers benefits for the community as a whole. Shared projects give people a chance to work on their community-building skills. Brainstorming sessions provide inspiration and connection. Some projects can also enrich the community holdings. For instance, a community with plenty of artists and crafters might set up studio space for them to share, first crowdfunding the budget to build or stock the studio and then later crowdfunding gallery shows for members to display their work. Outside fans who admire a particular creator's work may become curious about intentional community and decide to explore that, too.

Conclusions

Crowdfunding and intentional community have a lot to offer each

other. Look for crowdfunding examples in intentional communities. Many people who live in community also prefer alternatives to mainstream business and may have personal projects in progress. Look for people interested in community among crowdfunding projects. Donors who enjoy supporting their creative friends, or creators who love interacting with an audience, may also like the idea of community as part of everyday life. Consider inviting your crowdfunding friends to an open house or other event. Encourage everyone to be creative and make connections. Networking makes the world go 'round, both in crowdfunding and in community. ♪

Resources

Community Supported Agriculture
www.localharvest.org/csa

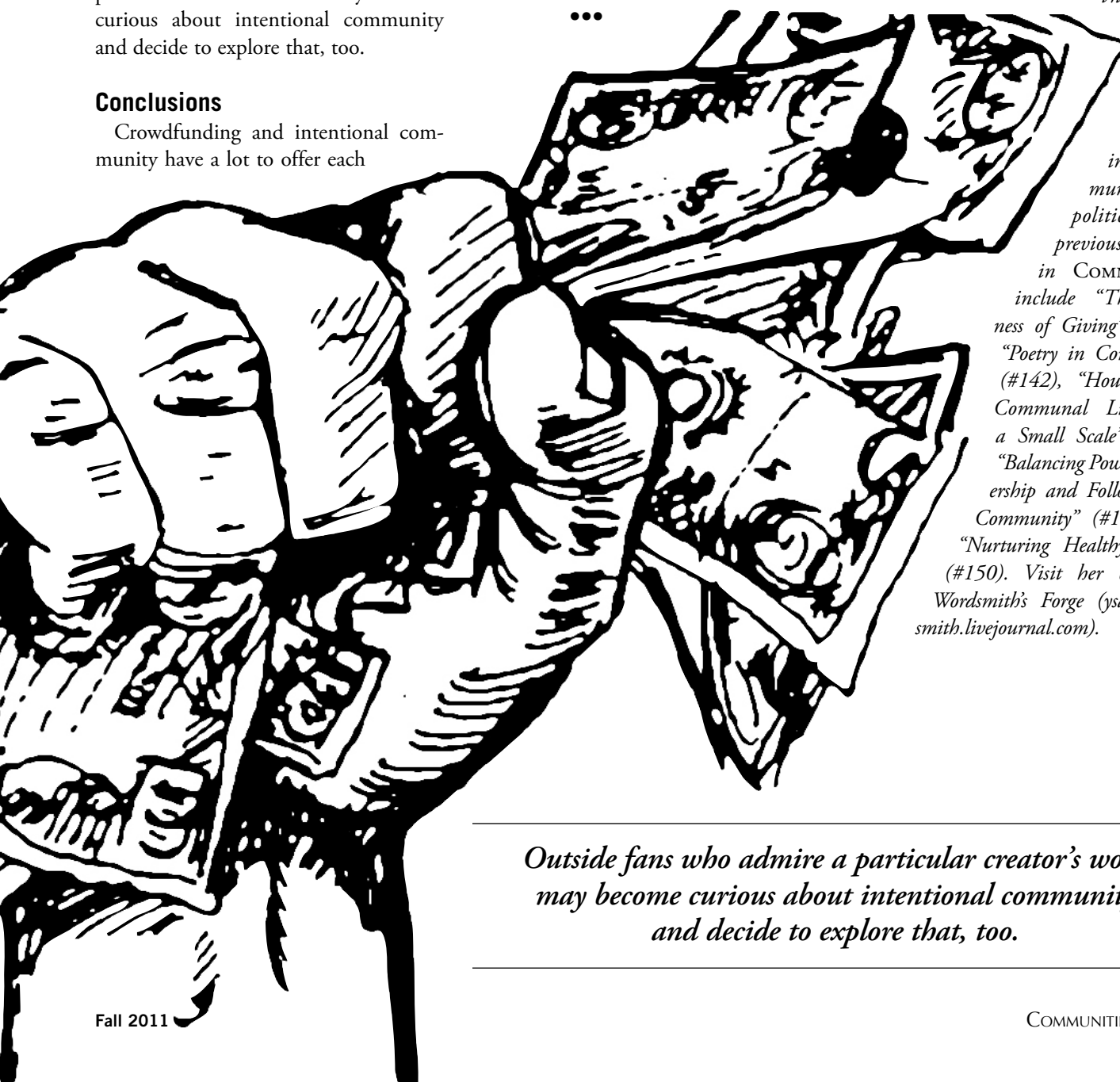
Crowdfunding communities online
crowdfunding.dreamwidth.org
crowdfunding.livejournal.com

Crowdfunding information
penultimateproductions.weebly.com/crowdfunding.html

IndieGoGo
www.indiegogo.com

Elizabeth Barrette writes and edits non-fiction, fiction, and poetry in diverse fields including

*speculative fiction, green living, community, and politics. Her previous articles in COMMUNITIES include "The Richness of Giving" (#141), "Poetry in Community" (#142), "Householding: Communal Living on a Small Scale" (#144), "Balancing Powers: Leadership and Followership in Community" (#148), and "Nurturing Healthy Minds" (#150). Visit her blog *The Wordsmith's Forge* (ysabetwordsmith.livejournal.com).*



Outside fans who admire a particular creator's work may become curious about intentional community and decide to explore that, too.

Which Comes First, My Community or My Career?

For an Out-of-Work Philosopher, Suddenly It's Not So Theoretical

By Stephen Wing

“Growth is personal and individual; evolution is something we all do together.”

—*The New and Improved Law of Evolution*



Ano Wesu Dennis

moving from town to town. Our “communities” have grown more and more interchangeable, and so have we.

Most of our ancestors were nomadic, following migrating herds or changing seasons. But they lived in tribes, growing up and growing old with the same extended family and friends. Real community is not so much a place as a group of people bonded by a common history and experience. Genetically speaking, community is what it means to be human; this is how *Homo sapiens* survived and evolved over the millennia. Like many other modern inventions, the nuclear family may not prove as beneficial as we think.

Gary Snyder, the Zen poet and ecologist, makes a helpful distinction. A *network*, he says, is a group of likeminded people who are geographically diverse, scattered across the map. A *community* is a group of people who live in close proximity but are diverse in other ways. Living in community means learning to get along with folks who are different from us, rather than just moving away. These relationships teach us, stretch us, strengthen us—a process called “growth.”

On a species-wide level, “growth” is called “evolution.” I believe the next phase in human evolution will require a shift from networks of Facebook “Friends” to communities of neighbors. Neither government bureaucracy nor global corporations can shelter us from climate change, peak oil, or economic decline. By necessity, “local” will trump “global.”

So I decided to focus my job hunt in Atlanta, and broaden it to consider any useful type of work. Of course I

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I knew the honeymoon was over when my bride suggested I might look around for paying work.

Miraculously, the very first application I filled out in 1990 landed me in a stable, long-term job I loved—in the promotion department of a book wholesaler, where my education and skills in writing, editing, and design made me an asset.

Around the same time, a friend introduced me to the Lake Claire Community Land Trust, a semi-wild tract of land owned by a group of visionary neighbors near my apartment in Atlanta, Georgia. They had added a playground, a gazebo, a sauna, a bulletin board, and some garden plots. Their financial investment and hard work paid off; likeminded people began moving into the neighborhood. Before long, my wife Dawn and I had joined them.

A lifelong nomad, I had little experience with “community.” But when I finally realized what I’d been missing, I plunged in. I was elected to the Land Trust board, then became secretary, once more making use of my communication skills.

Then last fall I suddenly found myself unemployed. No hard feelings; the economy was down, the company was changing, and my expertise no longer needed. But what now?

After 20 years of doing what I had studied in college, it was tempting to consider my next step a “career move”—until I realized that such a move might involve actually moving. “Must be willing to re-locate,” as the want-ads say.

People no longer have communities, it seems; they have careers. We take for granted that a “career move” involves packing up and “re-locating,” leaving friends and neighbors behind. Going off to college is our initiation into the modern cult of mobility, separating us even from the nuclear family with whom we’ve spent our childhood,

The Gift of Compost

By Jesse Harasta

During the past three years while I have lived at the Bread and Roses Collective House in Syracuse, New York, my most frequent House Chore has been that of the “Compostmeister.” Beyond dealing with the one to one-and-a-half buckets of compost generated weekly by myself and my nine housemates, I have also picked up buckets from a nearby coffeeshop and roaster as well as a Vegan café, totaling perhaps 30-35 15-liter buckets of compost a week. I also was involved in the searching out of pallets to construct our six composting bins, and the purchase and maintenance of our finicky woodchipper, which provides layers of “brown” compost for the pile. This yearly total of around 26 cubic meters of compost is being used by the House to create what we hope to be the largest organic garden in all of Syracuse, including 12 two-meter by 10-meter raised beds, three terraces, and a small orchard.

As I gather, spread, and layer compost (not to mention wash buckets) I tend not to think about the future uses of the material, but instead of the various people and organizations that these food remnants represent: the potlucks, midnight snacks, lunches out, coffee breaks, and pancake breakfasts. The food scraps are organic material which break down into nutrients which we then use to grow more food, but they cannot be summed up only by their physical nature, because they also both represent and make real human relationships.

I am an anthropologist and as I teach Anthropology 101, I am always faced with the challenge of teaching my students to understand “economics” as not simply the measurable transfer of currency, but as the ways in which human beings use their physical surroundings to continue their social, cultural, familial and, yes, physical lives. One of the classic works I always refer to is *The Gift* (1923)

by Marcel Mauss. Mauss—and those who have worked with his ideas later—tell us that a gift is never “free” but is instead always couched within social relationships, and one gift is always meant to lead to another (though perhaps not directly back to the original giver). Everything about the giving of gifts, not just their worth, but the nature of the object (a dozen roses and a child’s book may cost the same but mean different things), and the circumstances of the giving all shape the nature of the gift. Gifts can “make real” relationships between people, such as an underling giving tribute to a lord or a gift of an engagement ring. They are more than symbolic, as they often allow people to have the resources to do important tasks, such as the gifts given at baby showers and graduation parties.

The buckets of decomposing coffee grounds, potato peels, and lemon skins that I pour into a heap and cover with ground-up tree branches make real relationships: between our House and the people at the two local restaurants that we frequent, between housemates cooking for each other, between me—Compostmeister—and my housemates, and eventually between the gardeners and those who eat the food. Food is remarkably rich symbolically and it is perhaps the most common type of gift given by humans. The ability for us to grow and give it is a far more powerful ability than the mere weight of the nutrients collected.

My compost musings point to a new economics, one that focuses upon human needs and human relationships, but one that does not try to have us subsist off of good feelings and hugs, but instead off of a firm ground of well-fertilized soil. 🌱

Compostmeister Jesse Harasta lives at Bread and Roses Collective House in Syracuse, New York. He is an anthropologist at Syracuse University who studies minority language survival in Britain.



Photo courtesy of Yulia Z.



Photo courtesy of Yulia Z.

Redefining Work

By Brandy Gallagher

In the wee hours of this morning, my four-year-old daughter asks, “Can we sneak down to the pond and see those silly quacking wild wood ducks who are making so much noise as it gets light this morning?” In robes and gum boots we grab her brother and venture out in the breaking daylight. As we arrive the pond is still, time stops, and I breathe in the million possibilities of the sacred space which we call home—O.U.R. Ecovillage. My being knows a resonance with what is the “richest” time of my life. This is what I WORK so hard for.

What does this word “work” really mean? What is my “job”? How does this all relate to the tragic economy of “greenbacks”? Do I need to be part of system where I could be tempted to feel that my recognition and value should be directly related to “money”? These are the questions the HearthKeepers (long term residential stewards) and folks of O.U.R. asked ourselves in the Monday night Way of Council Circle, where themes of the deep heart are spoken of weekly. It is often said around ecovillage/cohousing/intentional community circles that community living is the longest, most expensive personal growth workshop we will ever embark on! What is this expense we speak of? Are we paying with our heart to unlearn the societal norms of western culture? Being born and raised in the commune culture, coming of age in co-op housing, and now “spending” the past two decades within ecovillage culture, I wonder why it is so very hard for the mainstream western mind and heart to live as a village—to truly value a life of service to the land, each other, and something larger than our ego. Over 8000 folks come through O.U.R. programs and outreach per year now and it is recognized that the hardest thing these folks stumble over is how to live and work together cooperatively.

Perhaps we need to redefine “work” to align it with “right livelihood.” The origins of this phrase seem to be found mostly in the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path. Right Livelihood is tied directly to Right Conduct, Right Mindfulness, Right Action, and many other right ways listed. These days it may seem that language has taken many folks on a divergent path from the original meaning, one that seems to have so much more to do with “my” right to _____ (fill in the blank!). It may appear at times that we have moved from the “right liberation” of selfless service into the era of self-serving work, in which money is the means of exchange by which I might “self-service” what I consider valuable.

What is needed for our peoples of today to create a culture shift by which we are able to redefine value? The concept of rugged individualism belies our hopes of creating a cooperative culture and ways of working/living together that do not focus on the almighty dollar (yuan, peso, pound, etc.). How might we shift our work, or even the notion of right livelihood, into our “world work”? And what is the definition of “world work”? I see it as the process by which we consider the inner work we do as in fact shifting and changing one small piece of the outer world. Shifting, healing one little piece of the world at a time—now that could be “response-able” right livelihood!

A small break in my writing this morning and I am returning after being at O.U.R. morning check-in. In completely magical timing, this same conversation broke out through the tears of a new Co-op member. She spoke of her struggle in shifting from her former life of corporate, goal-driven, keeping-it-all-togetherness—and the pain/joy of feeling her heart chakra busting open. Each of us mused about the delicately painful journey of determining that *belonging* is not actually tied to how much money we have or make or the value of what we

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The Irony of Right Livelihood

By Arty Kopecky

It strikes me that, in our society, monetary recompense is often inversely proportional to the value of the work. At the top we have bank presidents, hedge fund managers, and corporate CEOs, earning outlandish sums, accumulating fortunes in the many millions. And they are overseers of a culture that promotes greed and is often destructive and is perfectly happy to run people over by the thousands. Their flagrant selfishness creates vast discrepancies of wealth that threaten our democracy, vacuuming up so much money that the middle class is being destroyed.

On the other hand, we have many kinds of worthwhile work that isn't paid monetarily at all, but is right livelihood. People who work for the hospices, food banks, mentoring programs for kids, doctors without borders, are a few examples—as are people in intentional communities who, by serving each other and creating important innovations in our culture, are developing what is sometimes called the “shared” or “sharing” economy.

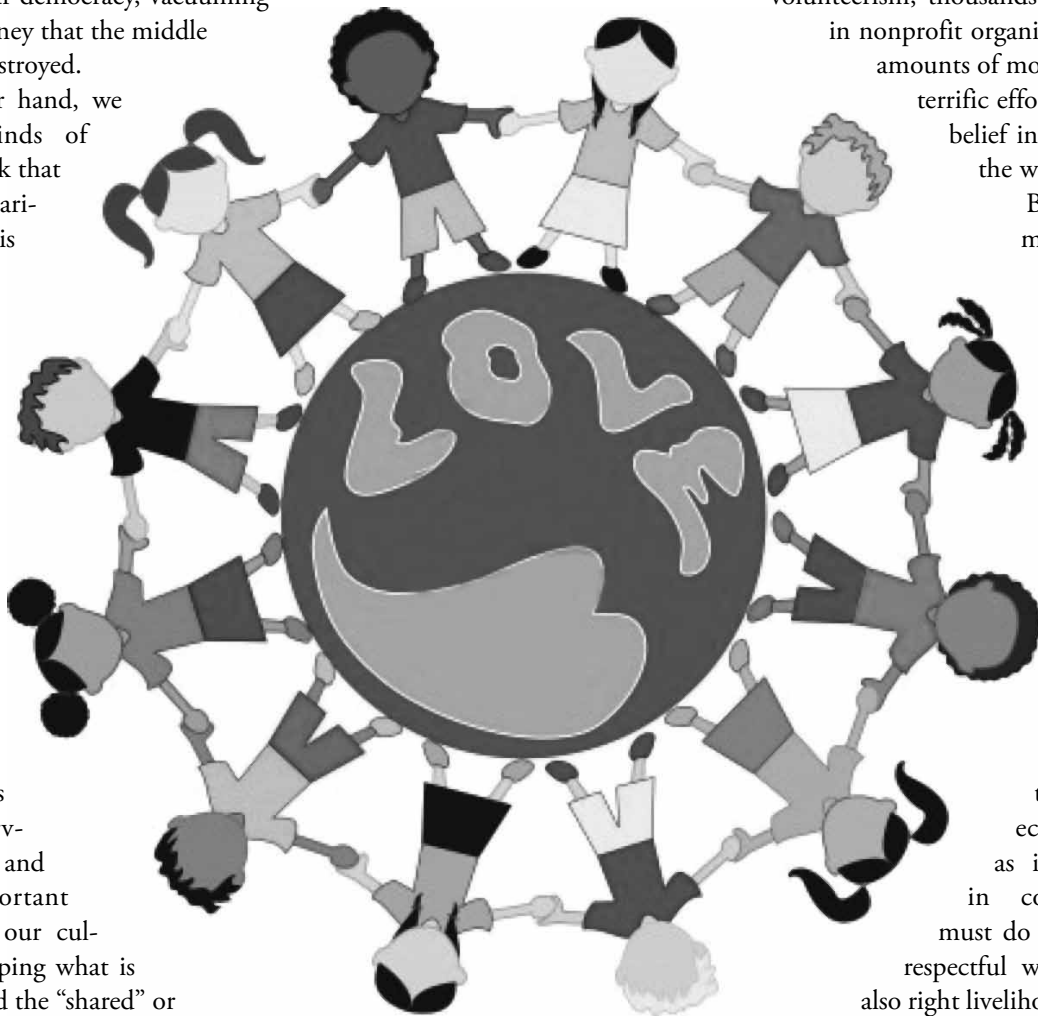
New Buffalo, the community (commune) where I lived and worked from 1971 to 1979, was a rather pure example of right livelihood. The land was gifted (105 acres with 40 acres of water rights). Then the pueblo, consisting of main meeting room kiva, central kitchen, washroom, pantries, and 15 or more rooms, was built entirely

with enthusiasm (and mud). No one received pay. I and others eventually planted the fields (main crop alfalfa), developed a dairy and extensive gardens, and did so for 14 years without a paycheck ever. We did it to create an alternative economy because it was right. Of course, this is also what keeps COMMUNITIES magazine going. For 40 years there has been a call for articles; people respond because they want to build this movement. And in our modern world, besides outright

volunteerism, thousands of people work in nonprofit organizations for small amounts of money, putting in a terrific effort, mostly out of belief in the rightness of the work.

Back to those masters of the macro economy: one of our biggest chores is changing the society's ethic, from a take-no-prisoners economy based on perpetual expansion, to a friendlier, more considerate, sustainable shared economy. And, as in everyday life in community, we must do it in a peaceful, respectful way. And that is also right livelihood. Pete Seeger's song “My Rainbow Race” contains the prophetic line, “Now's our last chance

to learn to share what's been given to me and you.” We're headed for eight billion people on earth. So many natural systems, forests, oceans, deserts, climates are being adversely affected by humankind. And often rage, blame, anger, and violence are the humans' response, rather than thoughtful



consideration and brotherly and sisterly love. Into this mix are developing many cultural innovations, from activists protecting trees and fish and forests to businesses creating more earth-friendly systems. And I believe the intentional communities movement holds huge, even the biggest promise. Indeed the growth and enlargement of communities sharing properties is the barometer for me of whether we can enter an Aquarian Age.

This effort is being done almost all through “right livelihood.” Some money is involved, but only a thin trickle compared with the moola flowing across Wall Street ledgers. Yet here is our best hope; so keep it up friends. Work your arses off (as they say). Create those ecovillages and land-based and city-based communities; help your friends. Make the whole world your friends.

As Pete Seeger sings, “Now’s our last chance to learn to share.” We’d better do it now. And many are rising to the occasion, reflected in the DVD *A New We*, increasing traffic to the IC sites, and especially the growth of more intentional communities. They are adopting “right livelihood” for their life’s endeavor. This optimism and upbeat attitude are familiar to community workers; you really can’t build sustainable communities without them.

My own environs of Sonoma County encourages my hopeful view.

We’re home to the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, a place calmly bursting with good

earth energy. They have two new large and very professional greenhouses. The main dining hall has been expanded to serve more family and guests. The goats and chickens look clean and healthy. The main garden hosts volunteers each Wednesday and supplies huge salads every day.

We also have the communities of Monan’s Ril (the Cadillac community), La Tierra, Bodega Pastures, Star Mountain, Ocean Song, and Wheeler’s Ranch. There are perhaps 10 cohousing enclaves. And now, six years old, is the Greenvalleyvillage (GVV) on 300 acres, half farm land, where I am helping on some construction projects. It is much reminiscent of New Buffalo and the pioneering Morningstar Ranch, whose original site is only 10 minutes away from this oasis of community energy. Most of the residents arise in the morning and...stay right where they are. They pick up where they left off fiddling around improving the gardens and facilities—40 or 50 or more people helping each other and creating this new Aquarian culture. And at the end of the week no one is handing out paychecks (I really wish I could). This is right livelihood.

Damanhur, the marvelous community in Italy, has created the elaborate Temples of Humankind—largely through love, which is right livelihood. Here in Sonoma County we built a

similar but temporary Harmony Altar encompassing the spiritualities of humankind and love of the people. The communities need spirituality, but it shouldn’t be a cult or dogmatic, so I am very impressed to see these all-encompassing beliefs manifesting in many places. Just a bit of money is involved but no one is paying the creators.

A common refrain is “balance is the question” (and love is the answer, to live in harmony). Right livelihood needs to be rewarded more and if there is to be balance society cannot be so top heavy. At the highest level of wealth, Bill and Linda Gates and Warren Buffett are paying people for right livelihood in an organization dedicated to medical services for the poor worldwide. That’s a giant endeavor. Prince Charles of England, a devotee of organic farming, supports some country farms and crafts.

Thinking on the grand scale, for civilization to continue, not just for 10 more years or even 100, but thousands—for us to be in the middle of human history, not the end—the irony of the concentration of wealth must reverse. Intentional communities are a wonderful vehicle and they need to be supported. Those showing the way in the communities movement must make

this life so appealing that some of the wealth, instead of being concentrated on the selfish accumulation of mansions, vehicles, yachts, and finery, will support the good work of those

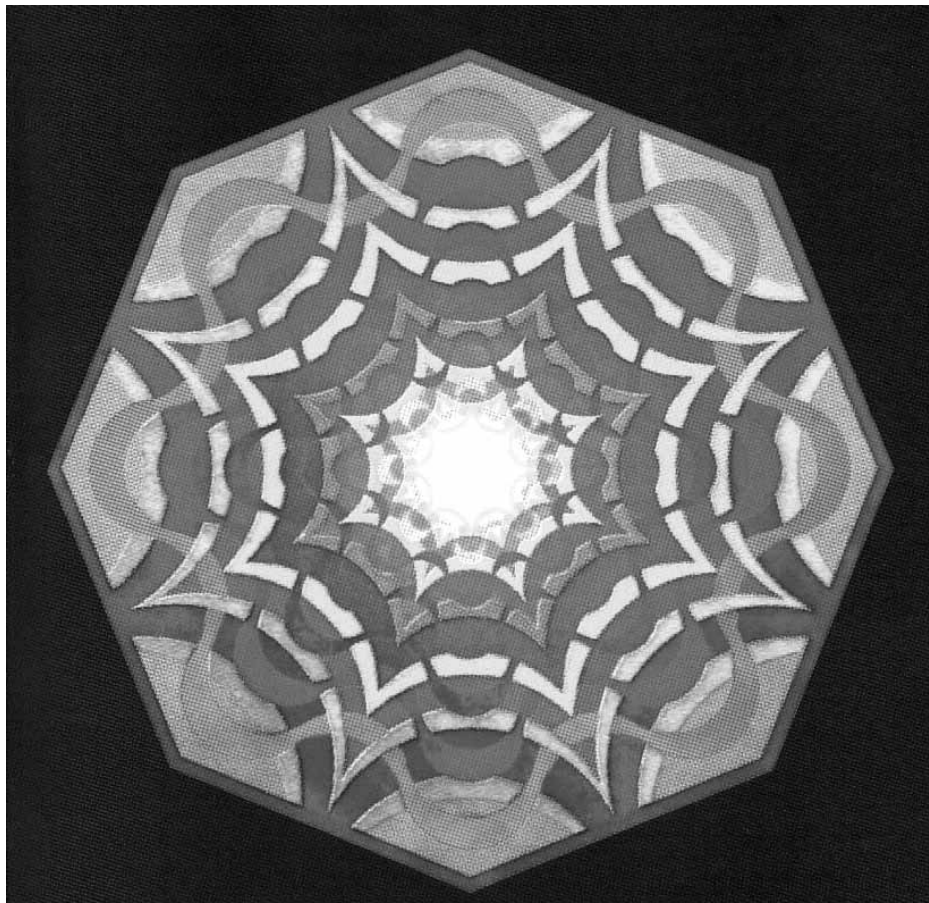
*Some money is involved,
but only a thin trickle compared
with the moola flowing across Wall Street ledgers.
Yet here is our best hope; so keep it up friends.*

pursuing right livelihood. The government taxing the wealthy, to redistribute it, goes too against the grain in America. But the Gordian knot of wealth concentration still needs to be unraveled: logically, it’s the next step in the evolution of human society.

There have been other momentous changes, historically speaking. We humans have only recently ended the 10,000 year rule of slavery and have ended the myth of the God-given superiority of the aristocracy. We are in (hopefully) the last throes of converting the human-wide belief system to equality of women. But we haven’t yet learned how to share. There’s that song again: “Now’s our last chance to learn to share.” I believe it; we’re in trouble now. We can take kindness and friendship a lot further. This isn’t that difficult of a puzzle.

Some might judge it naïve to believe we can save civilization with right livelihood. But the familiar words of John Lennon are appropriate here: “You may say I’m the dreamer, but I’m not the only one.” 🐣

Arty Kopecky is the author of New Buffalo and Leaving New Buffalo, recounting his eight years at this “free style” commune. For more information visit arthurkopecky.com.



Mandala painting by Michael Kelley

Right livelihood at The farm

By Melvyn Stiriss

Most communards, students and practitioners of intentional community have heard of The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee. In the '70s, The Farm was the biggest, best-known American commune. I am a cofounder of The Farm and author of *Voluntary Peasants Save the World*, the first inside, behind-the-scenes book to come out of The Farm written by a journalist and long-time resident. (Visit www.voluntarypeasants.com.)

I was in the landing party, the Caravan, where the community first began to gel. I lived and worked at The Farm from Day One, May 10, 1971, for 13 years, the collective years—learning, growing, and living in a way that made *livelihood* part of life. We were hybrid Zen hippies, attempting to live by the guidelines of Buddha's Eightfold Path of Enlightenment, and agreed:

Enlightenment is not just cerebral. Enlightenment requires physical work. We called it *karma yoga*. From day one, we saw—right livelihood is an essential element of The Path, The Way. We learned to work together, to grow food, build houses, create our own town, clinic, school, revolutionary cottage industries—and to help people in need, starting with our neighbors.

In 1980, The Farm Community's humanitarian outreach

program, Plenty International, was awarded the "Alternative Nobel Peace Prize," the Swedish-based Right Livelihood Award, "for caring, sharing, and acting with and on behalf of those in need at home and abroad."

The Right Livelihood Award was created by author/humanitarian/Member of Parliament, Jakob von Uexkull, who cited the Farm and Plenty International "as an example of that spiritual evolution which is working to save and change the planet."

Von Uexkull said the award "recognizes that the materially-poor hold the key to much ancient human wisdom, and so it is intended to support those who have invented and developed practical means whereby traditional societies can maintain their dignity and cooperative values."

On the Farm, I learned carpentry. In 1976, I was part of a Farm Plenty crew that responded to help rebuild remote villages in Guatemala after a devastating earthquake. I lived in Guatemala for a year, working with others from The Farm and Mayans to build schools, clinics, houses, an indigenous FM radio station, water, soy, and health projects. I was project manager of a crew that built a clinic for Mother Teresa in the slums of Guatemala City.

Before The Farm, I was a reporter, editor, and announcer for United Press International news service. In 1967, I interviewed

the Grateful Dead on its first New York tour and covered massive peace demonstrations. I worked a stint as a Madison Avenue publicist—a Mad Man, promoting Lucky Strike cigarettes—bad karma, and definitely not right livelihood. There were times on The Farm, like when I was digging a ditch in muggy Tennessee heat, when I thought *this right livelihood* is working off that old, *wrong livelihood* bad karma, and it gave more meaning to the work. Things got better.

An English literature major, I arrived in the backwoods of Tennessee, mechanically unskilled and inept. I had trouble hammering a nail or sawing a board. Through the years, I learned to build houses and roads, mill flour, run a community kitchen,

bakery, village newspaper, and I learned how to talk with people who arrived at the gate—10,000 a year, for all kinds of reasons, from wanting a tour to wanting to live with us, coming to us merely curious or on a spiritual quest.

The Farm community began as an Aquarian Age hippie cult, with Stephen Gaskin at the center as a self-styled, Zen, hippie guru. Through the years, Stephen said to his flock, “I’m trying to teach you to not need me.”

In time, we developed the concept and practice of “community as teacher.” We joined forces, pooled resources, worked hard, and had fun adventures in our collective effort to make a difference. This was right livelihood, 24-7.

Evolution of this history/memoirs

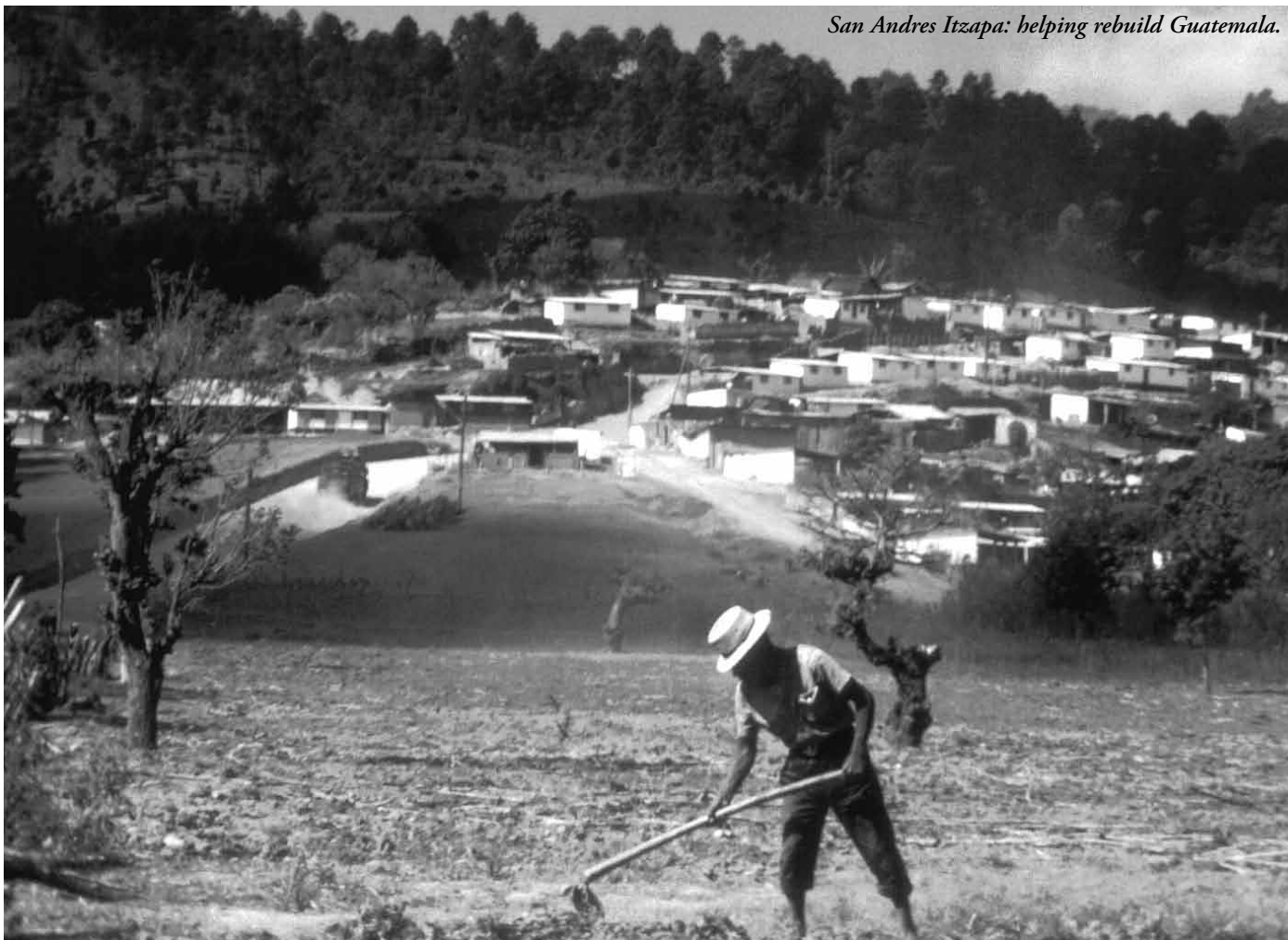
My book, *Voluntary Peasants*, has been in the works since I left The Farm in 1984. Ten years ago, a New York agent

Square dance.



Photo courtesy of The Farm

San Andres Itzapa: helping rebuild Guatemala.



Melvyn Striss

Voluntary Peasants

Following are edited excerpts from Melvyn's book, *Voluntary Peasants*:

Voluntary Peasants reveals the inner workings of a remarkable, experimental community and how its efforts helped to defuse a dangerously explosive crisis in the United States, in the '70s. At a time when the whole situation was spiraling out of control—demonstrations-turning-into-riots, the tragic deaths of four students at Kent State, shot by National Guardsmen—when some advocated striking back—here was a peaceful alternative: people who agreed to live together, peacefully, outside the system, and be self-reliant friends who work together, share, and take care of each other.

Imagine, as John Lennon sang, *living life in peace*. Now, imagine living and working with good friends, close to nature, growing your family's food and building your own town. Imagine, too, never thinking or worrying about money. This is the story of a very special place—a community that created a fully-functioning, eco-friendly, people-friendly, collective lifestyle and village in deep, rural Tennessee, with peak population 1,500, universal health care, and virtually zero unemployment.

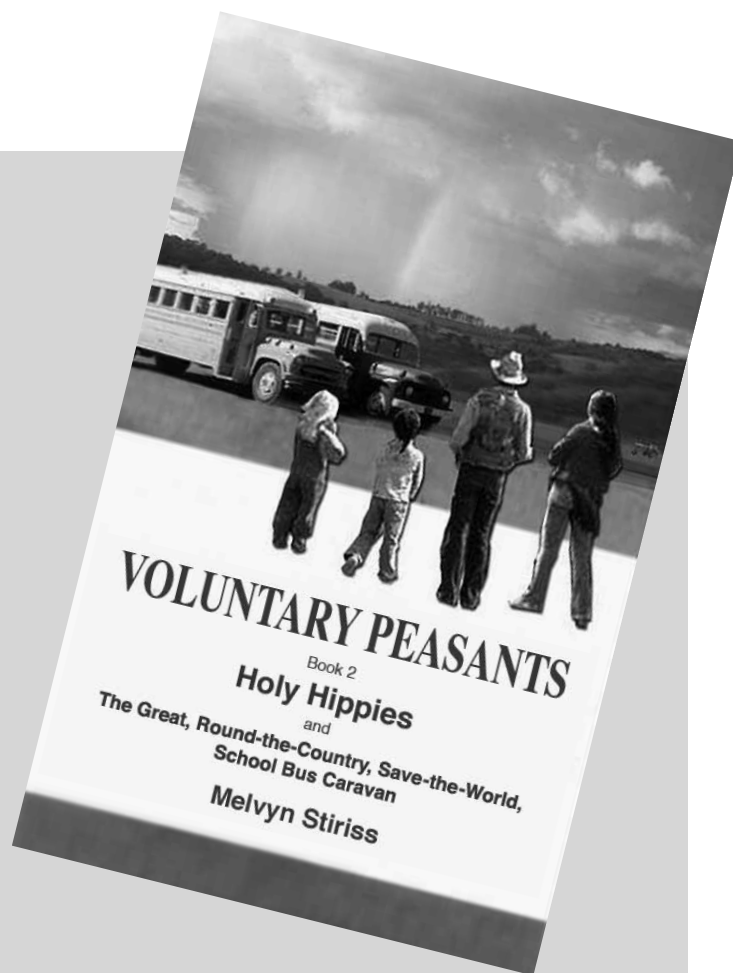
The Farm collective was a grand peace project and demonstration, involving mostly young people—who all volunteered to live simply, like modern peasants, voluntary peasants in the Volunteer State. These volunteers dared to get out of “the box” and experiment with their own lives to change the world.

In the beginning of our experiment, we all agreed: instead of just complaining about the world situation, we would take action. We threw in everything we had; put our butts on the line and dedicated our lives to create a gracious lifestyle the whole world can afford.

Everyone agreed to work for the common good. No one had their own money, but we got what we needed. Collectively, we were a millionaire and owned 1,764 acres of beautiful land, our very own piece of the planet, liberated, three square miles, twice the size of New York's Central Park!

More than religious, we were spiritual. His Holiness the Dalai Lama makes the distinction eloquently:

“I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion I take to be concerned with belief in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another—an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or philosophical reality, including perhaps an idea of heaven or hell. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual, prayers, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such



as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony, which bring happiness to both self and others.”

The Farm was an attempt to create a utopia, and at times we succeeded. The word utopia comes from Greek and literally means “not a place.” We learned utopia, the ideal life, is not limited to any place, but exists in the hearts and minds of people.

One lovely Sunday morning in spring, the tribe was gathered in the meditation meadow. After meditation and a very juicy OM, Stephen Gaskin, our Zen hippie minister/spiritual teacher/life coach, stood before the community and said—

“You look around The Farm, and you see all this neat stuff—roads, houses, barns, water towers, the Meeting Hall, School, Motor Pool, Laundry, Bakery, Soy Dairy, the Clinic, Solar Electronics. We see all these fields under cultivation, orchards, tractors, semis, the ambulance and clinic.

“We see all this neat stuff, but, the *stuff's* not *the thing*. All that stuff, that's just a reflection of *the thing*. The reflection is all very cool and pretty, but *the thing*, itself, is a gas!”



Photo courtesy of The Farm

Farm kid herd.



Melvyn Stiriss

Ina May with children born on The Farm.



Photo courtesy of The Farm

Author in the The Farm Bakery, which he managed for three years.



Photo courtesy of The Farm

Author reading at the library.

once looked over a sample and told me the story was “too rosy,” “not a balanced report.” I had to admit: he was right. I was too concerned with presenting a positive image of the community I loved, but I was not being completely true. I have since made great effort to tell it like it is.

Voluntary Peasants does not air all our dirty laundry but does reveal costly mistakes we made through the years, with the hope other communities can profit from our hard-earned lessons.

The Farm began with high ideals, including creating a classless society, but sadly, over time, social classes formed and eroded the very fabric of our collective agreements. The insidious, unspoken-about formation of class structure played a major role in the community’s demise as a collective. I hasten to add that was just one phase of the community, which gave birth to the still-evolving cooperative, now living on the land and scattered around the world.

• • •

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties, and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

—Patajali 🌿

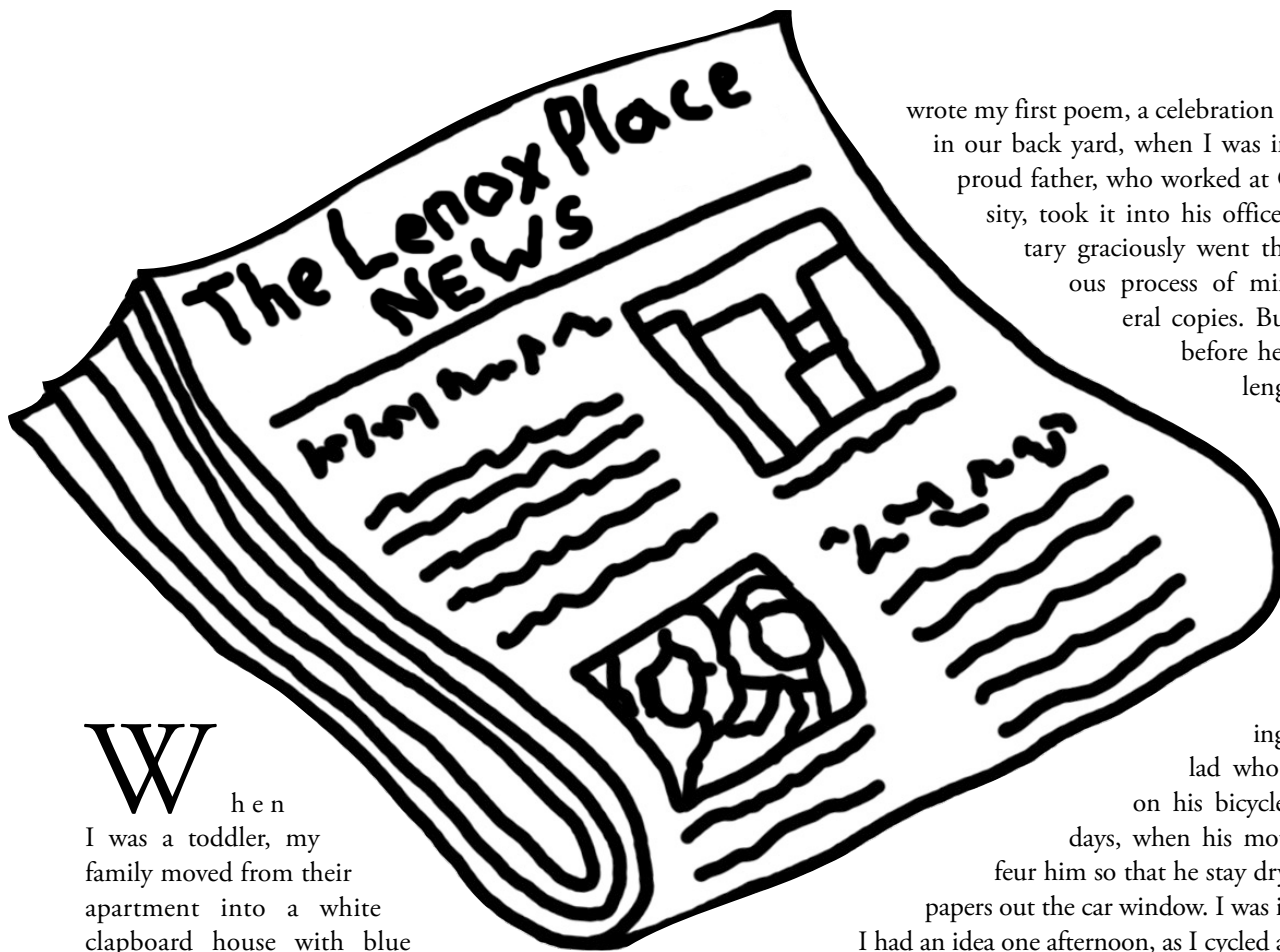


Melvyn Stiriss is author of Voluntary Peasants Save the World, which will be available in print, ebook, and audio books, Fall, 2011. Book One: Enlightenment—What’s It Good For and Book

Two: Holy Hippies and the Great, Round-the-Country, Save-the-World, School Bus Caravan are now available in all formats at www.smashwords.com and in Kindle at Amazon; see www.amazon.com/-/le/B0057X41UU. Melvyn is available to speak: 845-987-8958, mstiriss@yahoo.com.

The Lenox Place News

By Nancy Moore Roth



W

hen

I was a toddler, my family moved from their apartment into a white clapboard house with blue shutters in Scarsdale, a New York suburb north of Manhattan. Our street, Lenox Place, was a dead end shaped like the letter “L” with a small grassy circle at one end, enabling cars to turn around. It was a close-knit neighborhood, in part because of the many children who played together not only in our leafy yards but, since there was little traffic, in the street, playing jump-rope or hopscotch, or riding our bikes around and around what we called The Circle. On July 4th, the children would have a parade up and down the street, marching to the rhythm of my brother’s drum. I have to confess that, since I was the organizer of the event, photos from that period reveal, to my embarrassment, that I usually claimed the role of drum majorette, so that I could lead the parade.

As I made my way through elementary school, I discovered that of the three “R’s” the one I loved most was the second. I

wrote my first poem, a celebration of my favorite tree in our back yard, when I was in third grade. My proud father, who worked at Columbia University, took it into his office, where his secretary graciously went through the laborious process of mimeographing several copies. But it was not long before he would give her a lengthier task on my account.

My parents always looked forward to the daily newspaper, tossed on our driveway each morning by a high school lad who made his rounds on his bicycle, except on rainy days, when his mother would chauffeur him so that he stay dry as he pitched the papers out the car window. I was in fifth grade when

I had an idea one afternoon, as I cycled around The Circle, and thought about all my friends who lived in the trim clapboard houses with colored shutters that lined our street: *we too could have a newspaper*. It was not until I was in bed with a case of the mumps a week or so later that I actually had time to do something about it, and at the same time garner some sympathy about my plight. A featured item on the front page of Vol.1, No.1, of *The Lenox Place News* was entitled *Health Report*: “Nancy Moore has the MUMPS, and is she puffed up!”

The premier issue was published in October of that year, and six more were to follow it, until apparently I ran out of steam the following April. It was not due to the economy or lack of customers: our paper was only two cents a copy. And it was certainly not due to lack of news, which was readily available when I went from house to house to interview each family. I hired my little brother, who had just learned to write, as a second reporter. He was listed as such in each issue, except during

News from Lenox Place

(excerpted from *The Lenox Place News*)

REMEMBER! Hallowe'en is a time for fun, not harmful pranks. Play only harmless tricks. BOO!

A plane swooped very low over Lenox Place on November 13. It was only stunt flying, though Feld's chimney was in danger of getting knocked off.

We have several school orchestra members on Lenox Place. Sandra Stolle is playing the piano with Nancy Moore. Billy Smeltzer has started playing his oboe in the orchestra, and Bobby Moore plays the drum. Wouldn't some other children like to start the free instrumental lessons offered at school?

WE WANT TO BE PROUD OF OUR STREET.....KEEP IT CLEAN.

Mr. Heck left on Friday morning to go on a hunting trip with a friend. When he got there his friend wasn't feeling well and it rained all the time, so he returned home without even a rabbit.

Mrs. Hutchinson does not have to hang up her clothes any more. She is the owner of a new automatic General Electric Drying machine.

The boys have been making a dam across the brook in the field, with rocks and mud. They are now moving the dam because it was too shallow in the old place.

Our Lenox Place Library is coming along fine. It is a library for children from six on up. Come join it and share comments. The library will be closed this Friday as I am going to Schenectady for Thanksgiving vacation.

—Billy Smeltzer.

Lenox Place children will find that the mountains made by the snow-plow are wonderful for new sleds—unless you fall on your nose!

After caroling on Christmas Eve the carolers are invited to go to the Mings' house for cocoa and cookies.

There is a club in our neighborhood called the Fortnightly Boys' Club, though it meets twice a week. The members, who are Bobby Moore, Andy Feld, and Ford Hutchinson, have been meeting in Andy's garage. It got its name from some old membership cards Bobby got from his Aunt Inez.

FORTNIGHTLY CLUB NEWS: All members of the fortnightly club are to meet at the Club House January 1, at 4:30. Write a speech and bring it with you. Andy Feld will call each member to read his speech.

—Bobby Moore

On account of the heavy snow, the Cooks had to postpone their trip to the country. They are planning to go the first weekend the roads are open.

The Combe's car served as a shuttle car on Saturday, as most of the other cars could not get out.

Mr. Wonnacott got a drill-press in his stocking.

The Stolles entertained at an eggnog party on December 27, 1947.

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: no one can do much good if there is not peace in the world, and to have peace we must all do our part. Help to save food by wasting less. To have peace the people in Europe must work, but workers need food. Less food means less work. We won the war, but we did not win peace. We can all help by giving to Drives unselfishly. Let's make that our New Year's resolution—Help bring about "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men."

The snow on Freyermuth's hill is still too deep for coasting. The Freyermuths are glad to have the children coast if they can observe the rules of safety.

LOST—New Girl Scout wallet containing \$1.00. Color—green.

A NEW YEAR, GOOD YEAR THOUGHT: We have all had such a wonderful Christmas, with presents and a big turkey dinner. But we don't want to forget the starving people of Europe. For \$10.00 we can send through CARE a package of food to some family in Europe. Wouldn't it be nice if the Lenox Place children could earn enough money over the Christmas Holidays to send a package. Anyone who would like to join me in earning extra money to send to CARE, get in touch with Sandra Stolle.

—Sandra Stolle

FEED THE BIRDS: Best bird seed and suet cakes at GOLF AND LAWN!

Let's make a New Year's resolution to get rid of the rats. Rats are a health hazard and recently someone was taken to Grassland's hospital for an unknown disease caused by a rat bite. So set out your rat-traps and hope they'll work.

Jacky found Faith's Girl Scout wallet.

Andy's hut has not been as water-proof as presumed, and has been full of water lately. The boys are going to tear it down.

Bardy Collins is in the hospital with bronchial pneumonia.

Mrs. Collins had dinner with Count Zhukov of Russia a few days ago.

Mr. Wilson is trying to flood their pond, but every time he does it snows.

Christopher has five teeth now. Christopher is already showing the effects of being born on the 4th of July. In "fighting for liberty" a few days ago, he hit Diana in the nose and gave her a bloody nose.

Another room is being planned for the hut in Feld's back yard. The floor is now made of cracked ice.

The F.B.I. should award Andy a special citation for detecting a Graham Road resident who got on the Scarsdale Bus which meets the 9:05 train to New York and by using the rear entrance would have avoided paying his dime, had it not been for Andy's eagle-eye and warning cry to the bus driver, "Hey, that guy didn't pay!"

The newest member of Billy's library is Diane Roraback. She heartily agrees that everyone should join.

OUR LIBRARY: The Lenox Place Library is doing fine. It has 63 books to read, thanks to the children of Lenox Place who loaned them. If you have not joined the Library and want to, you have to bring two or more books to the Library. If you have a book out and you find you cannot bring it back, telephone SC 3-4406 and have it renewed. The Library one week had 15 books taken out.

The Library is open on Friday from 4:00-4:30. Have you joined the readers?
—Billy Smeltzer

CARE Report: Sandra has collected \$4.26 for the CARE packages. Contributions were given by Faith, Billy, Sandra, Janet, Nancy, and Bobby. More money is needed. Please don't forget to give your contribution. Do it now!

COASTING: The Freyermuths are very sorry but they have had to close their hill. There have been three serious accidents, and they are responsible for any injuries. People have been too careless and there have been many crashes. Unfortunately, the thoughtlessness of some has made this necessary.

SNOWBALLING: Snowballing can be dangerous. It's much more fun if you do it safely. Here are some helpful rules:

1. Fire only below the shoulders, never at the head.
2. Don't make iceballs.
3. Try to keep away from houses. Houses have glass windows. CRASH!
4. Don't snowball people who don't want to play. It just leads to trouble!



Photo courtesy of Nancy Roth

Nancy Moore's birthday party on Lenox Place, when the author was in third or fourth grade. Children appearing in the photo include Faith Heck (of the lost Girl Scout wallet), Peggy Feld (sister of Andy, of the Fortnightly Club that met twice a week), Sandra Stolle, little brother Bobby Moore (reporter/distributor, in the front row), and Nancy (middle row on the left, with the white dress and the big bow in her hair).

the times he was in my bad graces, when I demoted him to "distributor" and made him deliver the paper to all the neighbors. The paper was a major extracurricular project that year. It actually may have been even more important than what I learned in school, for it provided me with the satisfaction of strengthening the Lenox Place community and also gave me practice in one of the skills—writing—that was eventually to become part of my livelihood. Reading it now, I notice how tidbits of news that neighbors might have thought too trivial to share with a professional reporter were readily shared with a youngster: an incident on the commuter bus, a visiting relative, a child's musical endeavors, a childhood illness. I also smile at the preachiness of the editor (yours truly—later to become a *bona fide* preacher) who campaigned on behalf of sharing Hallowe'en candy with the children at the county home who had none, and laid down a list of rules for safety during snowball fights. It's also quite apparent from my editorializing that these were the years of scarcity just following the end of World War II.

My mother took me along to a local nursery during a shopping trip for bird seed, and must have told the proprietors about the newspaper, for they asked that an advertisement for their store be placed in the forthcoming issues, and paid for

it with a set of Christmas candles in the shape of carolers, which have graced our Christmas table for at least six decades now (I could never bring myself to light them). The entrepreneurial spirit was contagious; now that Billy Smeltzer, who lived a few houses away from us, had a way to advertise it, he created a neighborhood library, with its own set of rules.

The enterprise taught me the power of the written word, which can bring people closer together and also empower those who do so, even though they may be "only children." And the satisfaction it gave me as a writer has stayed with me all my life. My former playmates still talk fondly about our childhood on Lenox Place, and one day, we hope to have a reunion. For that reunion, we'll need a reporter, for sure, and perhaps, another issue of *The Lenox Place News*, since there's been lots of news since the last issue! 🐦

The Rev. Nancy Moore Roth is an ordained Episcopal priest, author of 13 books (including children's hymnals co-authored with her husband, Robert Roth, as well as books on yoga, prayer, spirituality, and ecology), workshop and retreat leader, and environmental and community advocate based in Oberlin, Ohio. She is also mother of the COMMUNITIES editor. Visit her website at www.revnanicroth.org.

Right Livelihood, Wrong Volunteerism

By Maïkwe Schaub Ludwig

“[Right Livelihood is] living in a totally authentic way, with no separation between work life and personal life.”

—Peter LeBrun, *On the Path to Right Livelihood*

Sometimes I think that volunteerism is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, volunteering gives us a creative outlet for Service. On the other hand, it can distract us from our pursuit of right livelihood.

Geoph Kozeny traces Right Livelihood all the way back to Buddha (see his “Peripatetic Communitarian” column in COMMUNITIES #119). He says, “Originally, it meant doing honest work and harming neither another person nor any living thing.” He offers a modernized definition: “It’s the art of clarifying what it is you are passionate about, then finding a way to make your living in pursuit of that passion... No longer is a teacher or higher authority required to determine what qualifies; the evaluation process has become personalized to the extent that each individual decides for himself/herself what’s worthy and what’s not.”

Certainly, one can volunteer in an area he or she is passionate about, so on the surface it seems to be a compatible thing, and often it is. There’s a downside, though. Volunteerism can serve a similar role in the work world that recycling sometimes plays in the world of ecoactivism. How many times have you heard someone say, “Oh yeah, I care about the environment, I recycle!” This is a case of one good act being used as a smokescreen to mask an otherwise unconscious life. In the overall arena of environmental responsibility, there are literally hundreds of acts one could undertake. By focusing on one of these acts as complete evidence of care, we take a very narrow view. Put another way, it isn’t evidence of a *lifestyle* of care so much as an *act* of care.

We all want to look good. In pursuit of this, we often publicly cultivate certain acts, certain places in our lives where we are living our values (or, sometimes, living the values we think others want us to live), and then privately let ourselves off the hook from looking at all the other areas.

Now, I hesitate to go too far with this, because this can lead to the same thinking that some people use to really beat up on others in their lives, or on themselves—the “you aren’t doing enough” approach. This is NOT where I want this to go. Nor do I wish to give the impression that I think volunteerism (or recycling, for that matter) is a bad thing.

I want this to head somewhere much more subtle, and that is looking at our own values, and our own acts, with the intention to explore which ones are coming from real alignment and which ones are coming from an attempt to draw people’s attention away from those parts of our lives that WE, ourselves, feel could be better. The ego is a powerful thing. We want to look good; we want to be right. But it takes incredible amounts of energy to be right and look good, and right now the world needs that energy to be redirected into real, aligned Service.

My experience has been that when we stop defending our lack of alignment, and

creating schemes to draw people’s attention away from it, all that energy going into defenses and scheming becomes available to us to take the daily steps of being more aligned. It takes energy to defend ourselves (think of how exhausting it can be to argue with your mate). *This is especially true if the defense is partly designed to defend our actions against our own internal wisdom.*

So back for a moment to volunteerism. How many of us stay in jobs that occupy a huge percentage of our energy, and then work at doing the right thing (for ourselves, or our own creative dreams, or the planet) in our “off hours”? But try this on: “I am in part-time Service to others to try to make up for my full-time destruction of my personal vision for how I want the world and my life to be.” Ouch! Certainly, that isn’t who we want to be.

There is a solution, a long-term one that requires you becoming more committed to your own highest vision for your life and the planet, and that is this: *Cultivate a life that doesn’t need to be atoned for.*

One of the arguments that keep us locked into our destructive work choices is that there aren’t enough “cool” jobs out there for everyone. And in the current economic and social systems, that may be true. We (and I’m going to say we here, because there are many, many people out there advocating for similar things) are suggesting something that is about a

major cultural shift in values.

Let me address this question of “not enough cool jobs” in a couple of ways. First, realize that many lines of work can either be destructive or creative, depending on *how* we do them. There is a positive role for reform within many companies and many industries, and there isn't a right answer as to whether or not you give something up and switch work. Look with open eyes at your company, your job, and your products or services with the question, “Is how and what I am doing with my time truly in Service to the world?” This may reveal ways that it could be changed to be in Service, or those places in your life where there is room for improvement.

You may also be able to keep doing your work, but change *what you are doing it on behalf of*. In other words, work for one company may be destructive, while doing the same basic work for another could have a positive impact. This may or may not involve a pay cut (sometimes it still does, because our culture is in transition, and doesn't yet place full market value on Service to others) but then again it may not (because we ARE part way into that transition). If it does, just recognize that money is energy, but it is only one kind of energy, and you will have far more of those other types of energy from doing good work than you currently have from a bigger paycheck. The people I know who are most fully living in Service to others would put the energizer bunny to shame, and they live lives that, contrary to popular belief, do not suffer from lack on the material plane.

Now the second answer I have to the “not enough cool jobs” issue is that this is, in and of itself, something that we need to address as a culture. What the majority of us do for a living is reflective of what we, as a culture, value. We often feel the lack of opportunities for real human connection, for really nurturing health care and food, for art and opportunities for creative expression and personal growth, and other interesting, nurturing resources. Meanwhile, we are flooded with access to stuff and readily available jobs to make more stuff.

Many of us who are making it doing “alternative” work are doing so by piecing together a number of strands of these things. For instance, my current work scene includes teaching facilitation and consensus classes, writing for various projects, doing planning work for a future Ecovillage Design course, organizing an intentional communities event, managing the FIC's bookselling branch, and doing a variety of committee and group process work for my community. Not all of these are for money; some involve bartering and exchange. And while I could have a regular (and singular) “job” I (like many of my companions) prefer the life of variety that I have for its richness and the economic stability that comes from not relying on just one thing in a changing economy.

We don't have the apparent security of a 9-5 job with health insurance and paid vacations. We have, instead, a life of creative living, real connections, and the extra energy that comes from knowing we are doing what our hearts have called us to do. We also have tremendous flexibility, and we don't have to be afraid that if one thing we are doing goes out of vogue, we'll be left without options, or that our skills won't be applicable to the changing job market, because we have so many skills we are actively cultivating. And while I don't have any hard evidence for this, we seem on the whole to be much healthier people, reducing our reliance on health insurance.

We are also typically engaged in work that has a lasting value outside of fads. It is the difference between building homes that last for 50 years versus building homes that last for 500. There have been healers and builders for many, many thousands of

*We don't have the apparent security of a 9-5 job.
We have, instead, a life of creative living,
real connections, and work of lasting value.*



Money IS energy, and we can direct it toward those places and with those people who are most aligned with Service to the planet.

years, and artists and musicians, and spiritual counselors and ministers, and growers and preparers of food. These are examples of timeless, cross-cultural work of real value, meeting timeless needs.

And there are, of course, better and worse ways to do any of these things. Take, for instance, the difference between using a law degree to do mediation work that fosters real understanding versus being a cutthroat, divisive legal “counsel.”

I was part of a group a few years ago that was looking at the question of what ethical business practices were and how we could tell if we were engaged in them or not. One of the criteria we came up with was that an ethical business is one that recognizes and meets a real human need; an unethical business is one that creates a need or desire to be addressed and puts itself in the position of filling that (newly created) “need.” Perhaps the best question under all of this is asking, “For whose benefit is this company or product being created?” and if the answer is the company itself, then it is not likely to be something that is in Service to others.

Doing business for the sake of doing business is rarely of benefit to the planet, because that simply isn’t the intention behind it. By the same token, governmental programs that encourage a rise in the Gross National Product for its own sake rarely ripple out in a real positive increase in our quality of life. A government program that gave grants for the pursuit of right livelihood—or for teaching children how to recognize what is truly right for them—would be a quite different animal! And one, perhaps, of enlightened government.

Another trait of those who have made the leap into Service to others as a primary motivator is that we also *cultivate each other*. I use money to support people who are doing other work of real value. I shop at the food co-op or other companies that have as a primary goal planetary health; I get massages from friends who are truly committed to healing; I buy art, or go to workshops, or send my son to a great program, or send money to organizations that are cultivating good works in the world. Or I loan money out to someone trying to get a new business off the ground or going to a meaningful personal growth course, or I put it into installing a better greywater recycling system at our house.

In other words, money IS energy, and we can direct it toward those places and with those people who are most aligned with Service to the planet. If I wouldn’t talk up a company that is actively acting against my values and the planet’s health, why would I put money into it? The simple direction of money toward aligned businesses is part of how we support a cultural transition toward Right Livelihood. My hope is that, like “alternative” music stations of a decade ago, “alternative” work will shortly become the “top 40.” ☺

This article is adapted from Chapter 10 of Passion as Big as a Planet: Evolving Eco-Activism in America by Maikwe Schaub Ludwig, 2007, available through Community Bookshelf, store.ic.org/catalog.

Maikwe Schaub Ludwig lives, gardens, and creates community as a member of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage. She is currently finishing her strawbale house, starting planning for an Ecovillage Design Education course at Dancing Rabbit in 2012, and teaching facilitation with her husband, Laird Schaub. She has a 14-year-old son, and a lot of exceptionally cool friends that she partners with in making the world a more joyful and balanced place.



Right Livelihood in the Belly of the Beast

Bringing community, cooperation, and ecological responsibility into the practice of real estate

By Cassandra Ferrera

I am a community real estate agent. Here is my story:

At a significant choice point in my early adult life, I was guided (by prayer) into the field of real estate. It was a total surprise. How could a spiritual, intellectual person like myself work in what is often a competitive, heartbreaking business? How could I make a contribution to our hurting world by working for commissions and selling land in one of the most expensive regions in California?

And yet...there I was, starting a career in an industry in which I was more a glaring black sheep than a member of the herd. Sometimes, when I found myself surrounded by perfectly dressed BMW-driving real estate agents, I would wonder: Am I in the right movie? Can this really be what I have chosen as a path of right livelihood?

I ask myself that question over and over again, and the answer continues to be “Yes.” I have found that there is a requirement I must fulfill in order to stay in my assignment: that is a willingness to embrace the conflicts I have about the business on an increasingly deep level.

Based on my upbringing, I am uniquely well suited to help clients along their path. My mother is a minister and spiritual

counselor. My father is a math teacher and mystical philosopher. Both of my parents role-modeled the value of bringing passion and purpose to one’s work. With that background, I chose to develop a specific niche in the industry that would satisfy my academic, spiritual, and financial interests. I became a real estate agent for sustainable communities. It hasn’t been easy.

From Traditional Real Estate to Responsible Real Estate

Real estate is a traditional business whose inner workings are slow to change, a business whose fundamental assumptions go unquestioned even in this “greening” time of the world. The business of real estate is intimately involved with our current economic collapse, and the business and its contracts are also right there between us and our relationship with the planet. While many conscious people consider real estate transactions and private property rights as necessary evils, I see them as incredibly fertile grounds to re-engage our responsibility to place. But how to make a difference? How to help it change?

There are so many important questions to ask. What is



responsible land ownership? Why does the business that is contracting the sale of the earth have very little to do with the actual care of the earth? Do we have a right to own the earth, and if so, what is the best way of doing so?

How do other cultures conduct this business? How do we shift our “ownership” of earth into kinship with earth? Why is there so much competition in the real estate business? Is this a healthy way to transact with each other about our homes and gardens? Why is it so challenging to own land in community? How can cooperation be infused into real estate and between neighbors? I knew I had to try to answer these questions.

Beginning with the lofty vision to help people share real estate and create rural ecovillages, I was grounded enough to know that I needed to cut my teeth in the nitty gritty details of agency and contract negotiation. I had to be a *real* real estate agent, not just an undercover agent playing at the job.

And so it is that I got into the business. Unfortunately, that happened just as the real estate boom ended. The wave was climaxing, and I tumbled along in the white water with everyone else. As other agents who managed to remain in the business became short sale and foreclosure experts, I decided that it was time to fully develop my niche as well. It was time to start flying my “community real estate agent” flag. Along with my inspiring clients, it was refreshing to be a beacon of positive solutions amidst an unraveling, broken system.

Catalyzing Community

A very close ally and I started hosting monthly events called Catalyzing Community for our community clients. We hoped to build all of our collective intelligence, help our clients meet each other, and hopefully take the necessary steps toward buying land together. While I think we were successful on the first two points, the journey of Catalyzing Community led me to some unexpected conclusions. The most important one is that community is an essential value no matter where you live. I realized that just helping people form rural ecovillages was too limiting, and that what people needed was to find and cultivate community in the suburban neighborhoods and the city too. I broke out of my own rural fantasy and came to regard very highly all the neighborhood organizing work done in our larger population centers. Community for everyone, everywhere! If “intentional” wasn’t part of the community at the beginning, it’s never too late to cultivate intentionality and resilience into our existing built environment. And real estate agents must have a role to play in supporting this.

I started tracking local neighborhood associations and more loosely organized, but still tight-knit groups. I imagined a world where real estate agents used interactive maps to highlight the endeavors and flavors of neighborhoods, and in so doing helped to build these neighborhoods. I imagined real estate agents being tooled up as watershed educators, connecting people with an even larger sense of place and natural community. I imagined a lot of things, and became even more dedicated to catalyzing

community than I had before. (I guess the monthly series worked!)

Keeping It Real, Living in Balance

My charge was slowed down a bit by having my second child. As a mother of two, a novice homesteader, and a dweller in community, I do hold the possibility of a balanced life, though I rarely achieve it. In my ideal picture, the activities of my life layer and weave through each other symbiotically. While this is occasionally a reality, more often than not I am tired, too busy, and over-extended, and dream of a slower, closer to the land lifestyle. Along with many others in our culture, I am always trying to turn the dial toward S-L-O-W in this face-paced life. This is just as important to me in the context of Right Livelihood as it is to bring passion and purpose to my world-changing work. Right Livelihood is surely not a destination or an accomplishment, but more a work in progress, a lifelong journey.

Re-Birthing Green Key Real Estate

Again guided by prayer, I accepted a very heartfelt opportunity to collaborate with a dear friend and fellow agent provocateur to co-own California’s first ecologically responsible real estate company, Green Key Real Estate. My dream had come alive. This company was being sold by its founder, and we were the most natural and willing new executive team. Founded six years ago with a cutting edge commitment to the green certification of real estate agents, we now see “green”-trained real estate agents as commonplace. Which is wonderful, and truly the first step.

My new business partner, Ericka, and I knew that it was time to take it to the next level, and that perhaps the progressive Bay area was ready for a real estate company which really gets the concept of sustainable community, and approaches real estate with an ever increasing capacity for systems perspective.

Ericka had also just had her second child, and so it was that as we breastfed our baby girls we re-birthing Green Key

Real Estate and a new real estate paradigm, in which collaboration, responsibility, and deep connection to place would infuse our struggling industry. It seemed fitting that two mothers would together re-imagine a deeper green approach to the sacred business of contracting the earth.

The Shadow Side

While this story has its poetry and soulfulness, it is also full of significant challenges. Real estate is an intensely traditional and slow-to-change business. Innovations tend to occur in technology, but not in business practices. Clients may be inspired by our grounded, connected approach, but their own fears and scarcity issues often drive their real estate choices as they opt for agents that play the game of real estate with more of a traditionally competitive edge. We are dealing with money after all, and people's largest investment of capital. Even the most radically thoughtful person will often choose a traditional real estate agent.

The very nature of the industry breeds competitiveness and scarcity, primarily because agents are not paid for their work until the deal is closed. Because of this, agents have been known to act unethically and lead clients away with offers of lower commissions, etc. It truly is the belly of the beast.

A New Contract

And yet, is this not a critical intersection of relationship between people and place? Between human community and natural ecology? I co-founded the new Green Key Real Estate because I believe our industry must change with our evolving concepts of how to live sustainably on the earth. It's happening fast. On local and smaller-scale levels, we have seen a shift toward cooperation between owners, and more shared resource ownership. We have begun to shift our paradigm from just "rights" toward "responsibility" as owners of the earth.

To this end, we are working to develop a new contract with the Earth. It is essentially a voluntary contract with your place on the planet, no matter where you

live. In the reams of legal paperwork involved in transacting real estate, none of it includes our contract to the earth we are purchasing. What if we took that into consideration? What if we knew that as we made a home purchase, we were also making a commitment to place? To acting responsibly as a steward of that piece of the whole planet?

The Earth Contract

When I'm working with clients looking at a piece of property, the questions I help them to ask themselves include: Can I take responsibility for the health and integrity of this land? Do I have the time and the means? How much land do I have the capacity to care for?

When we start to ask ourselves these questions, it is natural to think about community. If we are considering a larger, wilder land, we are going to need a village to care for it. If we are looking at a smaller, more urban plot, then who our neighbors are and what they are doing with their land makes a world of difference. Ultimately, we are led to an awareness that caring for the earth where we live is a group effort no matter how you look at it.

Our proposed areas of the Earth Contract include the following:

- Seasonal observation and participation
- Soil building
- Water cycle and watershed awareness and participation
- Energy use and conservation
- Preventing pollution and toxins in the environment

My vision to bring a team of experts from the fields of law, finance, mediation, permaculture, real estate, and public policy together has begun taking shape. Green Key holds close partnerships with individuals, organizations, and businesses in all of these areas. It takes a village to do just about anything!

From Right Livelihood to Right Lifestyle

I believe the concept of Right Livelihood needs to expand to include what our work allows us to do when we are not working. It is more like "Right Lifestyle"—such that we consider our capacity to connect with community and earth as part of the pattern within which we do our work.

I can stay in the real estate business because I am exposed over and over again to people seeking to answer the question of right livelihood as a function of being in place and in community. My clients have such an inspiring integrity in their endeavor that I am continually renewed in my faith in humans.

Is it too much to ask, to have work that allows me to give my gifts in service to the whole and make a living in the process? Work that keeps me close enough and spares enough time to stay close to home and raise my children in our village, and to dig my hands in the earth where I live? I think the answer is no—it's not too much to ask. In fact, it's one of the only questions worth asking these days. ☘



Cassandra Ferrera lives with her husband and two kids in a three-home "micro-community" called Casa Verde in Sebastopol, California, where they cooperatively raise children, grow food, and "live the experiment" of how to reweave cooperative culture. Green Key Real Estate is both a full-service brokerage as well as a mission-driven company guided by ecological and community values. Cassandra brings her deep reverence for nature, personal community experience, and practice of permaculture to her work as a real estate agent. She is available for agency and consultation for forming and existing intentional communities. Feel free to email questions or comments to cassandra@greenkeyrealestate.com, or call her at 707-228-8400.

Managing Management

I recently read *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just World* by the Australian futurist Ted Trainer (2010). Among other things he makes a strong case for the need to create The Simpler Way, which will reduce resource consumption by 90 percent of current levels and require lifestyles that are based much more on local resilience. This will necessarily translate into people relying hugely on self-governance, which he bravely suggests shouldn't be a problem. He holds up the Spanish Anarchists in the late '30s as one example, and the success of the Mondragon system of cooperatives in northern Spain as a more contemporary demonstration of what he has in mind. He goes further to promote local communities (intentional or otherwise) as the exemplary building blocks for local governance.

I'm also optimistic about what we're learning about cooperative problem solving in intentional communities and the hope that gives us for a more sustainable future—and I agree with Trainer's basic premise that we're running up against resource limits at an alarming rate (oil depletion being just one example). I don't, however, have Trainer's faith in anarchy. After a quarter century as a process consultant attempting to help cooperative groups work out of deep mud, I don't hold the view that one person is as good behind the wheel as the next. Instead, I've come to the belief that there are definite skills involved in management and some people are flat better at it than others. People are no more interchangeable parts when it comes to decision making than they are in the auto shop or in the classroom.

While I'm all in favor of giving everyone the opportunity and encouragement to learn the skills of cooperative management, I think people ought to be slotted in jobs where there's the best intersection of skill, motivation, ability, and capacity building (you can't always pick the "best" person for the key roles because the up-and-comers need time in the saddle in order to get better; thinking strategically, you're sometimes better off picking someone who's good *enough*). Trainer's assertion that people will simply know what the right thing to do is in the moment gives me the willies. Even if you assumed that everyone had equal ability (and they don't), you'd still have to navigate the bewildering extent to which good-minded people disagree about what the "right thing" to do is. It just ain't that easy.

Here are my thoughts on what constitutes the hallmarks of good management as seen through a cooperative lens:

For the most part, I don't think the answer depends much on what form of decision-making is used. That is, I'd define good (or effective) management pretty much the same way whether the group is using consensus, voting, ouija boards, tea leaves, or do-whatever-Ralph-says. While I understand that there are very different power gradients in different forms of decision-making (and I have a strong personal preference for consensus), I believe that the most effective management always attempts to balance

I'd define good management the same way whether the group is using consensus, voting, ouija boards, tea leaves, or do-whatever-Ralph-says.

the impact of actions on the whole system.

In addition to that prime directive, I want to recommend a handful of other qualities to keep in mind. (Although I will use the term "manager" below, my comments apply equally to subgroups that are identified as teams or committees.)

- **Good managers are accessible.** This flower has a number of petals:

- Ease of getting information from them (this is both about gracefully and promptly answering questions—even the stupid ones—and the degree to which they offer a clear rationale for their actions).

- Ease of their receiving information and concerns about the issues touching their area of responsibility.

- Their relative openness to receiving critical feedback. (I'm not talking about their agreeing with the feedback; only their ability to demonstrate that they've heard it accurately and are thankful for having been told.)

- **Effective delegation requires clear mandates.** That is, managers need to know a number of things in order to do a bang-up job, including:

- What is the manager expected to accomplish (and how will success be measured)?

- Are there deadlines for when things need to be done?

- What resources will be made available to accomplish the work (money, labor, and access to equipment and facilities)?

- What are the limits of their authority to act on behalf of the group? (Put another way, when can they proceed on their own and when do they need to consult?)

- What are the factors they are expected to weigh in making decisions? (The

simple answer may be the group's explicit common values, but there are subtleties here about additional factors that may be peculiar to that managership.)

—What are the expectations, if any, around collaborating with other managers?

—What are the reporting standards?

—To what extent can the manager self-govern (conversely, to what extent is the manager expected to act in a way that is consistent with the culture and precedents of the whole group)?

—Are there limits on how the manager selects people to work in their area?

• **Effective delegation goes hand in hand with effective evaluation.** How will managers be reviewed, both in terms of how well they're fulfilling their mandate, and in terms of how good the mandate is? It's rare in my experience to find a group that does this well. Think of it like getting your teeth cleaned at the dentist. If you skip that regular chore, there tends to be a build-up of plaque that can lead to serious consequences. If you don't periodically clear the air, it leads to pockets of unresolved grouching and undermined trust in the manager (as well as in the system that placed that person there). Yuck!

• **Cooperative groups have trouble appreciating managers in proportion to criticizing them.** Where successful managers in the capitalistic mainstream get rewarded with bonuses, new cars, and an office with a corner window, in cooperative groups managers typically are rewarded with little more than the opportunity to serve and an occasional attaboy. If a cooperative group wants to have enough good managers to cover their bases (and who doesn't?), they'll be wise to develop a culture that regularly appreciates good managers. Warning: In communities bent on pioneering sustainable culture, this may require some creative thinking about what coin appreciation can be paid in.

• **Great managers see ahead of the curve.** While you can be a good manager

Leaders can count on incoming arrows whenever they propose abandoning the current, familiar craft in exchange for a different vessel.

without this quality, great ones bring up important issues and focus resources on their consideration before an opportunity is lost (or before a crisis has arrived). They inspire the group (or at least their staff) to see a bigger picture and to dream beyond the current reality. One of the insidious aspects of consensus is its conservative nature, which tends to punish initiative more than reward it. That is, leaders will not tend to be criticized for work done diligently to improve the seaworthiness of the boat the group is in, but they can count on incoming arrows whenever they propose abandoning the current, familiar craft in exchange for a different vessel, the better to weather the seas ahead. And the further ahead the storm, the greater the resistance to changing ships.

For my money, this is perhaps the most serious governance conundrum that communities face. At the outset, almost by definition, intentional communities are pioneering new culture and creative folks, at the outset, are often celebrated for their out-of-the-box thinking and willingness to experiment. This applies to governance every bit as much as building greener houses and learning to live with fewer cars. Then, as the community succeeds, it starts to attract people who are not solely pioneers. It starts to attract settlers as well—people who are drawn to what the group has created, rather than what it might yet create.

This will act as a brake on dynamic managers unless great care is taken to make clear how their dynamism serves the group—both now and in the future. Part of what managers need in order to maintain high morale is latitude to do things their way. (I'm not talking about a blank check; I'm talking about no straight jackets.) It will not work if the concept of Servant Leader gets translated into Manager Slave, where it is all responsibility and no room for individual expression. ("Just have a seat here on this bench and keep pulling on that oar until you drop.")

As a group gets bigger, there is simultaneously pressure to delegate greater amounts of authority to managers, and a greater tendency to develop an us/them dynamic between managers and the governed. How to navigate this? Managers must wrestle with how much information to share with the group, when to consult before acting, and when to simply go ahead—even when the expectation in that regard has been clearly spelled out (which it typically hasn't been).

There is a dynamic tension between the demand for more streamlined governance (read fewer meetings, and therefore incentive to give top managers greater authority to act on the group's behalf) and members' expectations that if they complain about something they don't like it will get addressed (read uneasiness about getting steamrolled by bureaucracy, and thus caution about advancing authority levels too far, too fast).

I advocate a five-part strategy for coping with this dynamic (if you like the metaphor of five fingers on a helping hand, I invite you to envision an open palm, not a fist):

1) Insist on clear mandates (see above).

2) Insist on good reporting (there's a strong link between access to accurate information and trust; if good information is not readily available, eventually, neither will trust be readily available).

3) Delegate the highest authority levels you can stand (if your mandate and reporting standards are high, you can do a lot with this, minimizing the need for meetings to gather input or to clear the air). Hint: for this strategy to work well, the group

(continued on p. 77)

Buddha Being...Buddha Doing

Bone deep. Literally. That was the impact on my body after 10 days of personal retreat at Deer Park Monastery.

There were 5 a.m. mornings when I told myself, half asleep, warm and comfortable camping in a pickup truck, “Nope, today I will NOT respond to that gong. I will NOT walk up that hill in cold darkness; I will NOT sit in that chilly meditation hall, NO, NO, Nada, it *ain’t* happenin’!”

Then my 12-step recovery would kick in, “If you want what we have, you have to do what we do...this is an action program. You take the action, you get the result.”

UGH!

Quickly out of the warmth, splashing sleepy face with cold water, pulling brush through hair, wrapping a scarf around and around, then “trudging the road of happy destiny” up to the meditation hall, with certainty that by now, with all that internal dialogue, I was late.

And behold, every friggin’ day I was early!!! This meant I had to sit LONGER than the shadowy figures quietly arranging themselves on cushions for the next 15 minutes. Karma, karma, karma, karma.

It served me well. Diligence, not discipline, “Progress not perfection.”

What actually happened there?

I lived with Zen Buddhist nuns who all seemed bilingual in English and Vietnamese. I ate warm (important adjective), nourishing, healthy vegan food. I walked when they walked, worked when they worked, sat when they sat, bowed when they bowed, and would sing when they were singing, even when their preferred language was foreign to my ear consciousness.

What did not happen?

I did not drive any vehicle or machinery for 10 days. I did not speak on the phone, although I did text a few times while being mindful of doing so, and took a few

photos as well. I did not read novels, or watch dramatic films, read newspapers, use a computer, listen to music, dance, or write except to journal at night occasionally. Always striving to be mindful, always watching what was arising within my mind.

“Practice, practice, practice,” a sister said to the small group of lay women visitors. “Use *all* your time here, *everything*



you do, as an opportunity for mindfulness practice.”

Observing what arose in my mind and emotions, while living and practicing in a monastic community committed to transforming suffering into loving kindness, was profoundly beneficial.

The TMJ, jaw pain that the dentist said could not be cured, disappeared. Gone. Outta here friends, vamos!

I relaxed to my bones. This was a unique sensation. Something deep within had slipped away and something equally profound had grown in its place. All very subtly, while I was resisting, acquiescing, working, resenting, feeling confused, etc. I kept practicing mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful eating, mindful thinking, mindful resting, etc. Even mindful turtle-raft-building, for the two



Photos courtesy of Karina Sabot



*Left photo: Deer Park Entrance.
This photo: Deer Park main Meditation Hall,
guitarist visiting on Day of Mindfulness.
Right photo: Deer Park, climb from Clarity Hamlet
to the main Meditation Hall.*

*It was the application
of the teachings that
produced the result.*

cold reptiles seeking sun refuge in the nuns’ pool.

It wasn’t the philosophically induced, intellectual realization of dharma teachings. It was the application of the teachings, the actual gardening to get vegetables, “watering the seeds” of loving kindness to manifest loving kindness, that produced the result. The ripening of conditions manifested in myriad ways.

Prior to 12-step recovery, before exposure to Thich Nhat Hanh’s books and monasteries, I visited many intentional communities in North America. This included hippie communes, land trusts, organic farms, Radical Faeries, Michigan Wimmins Festival, tribal reservations, et. al. You name it, I was probably there searching for a “true home,” where people lived and worked cooperatively.

In lieu of finding Utopia, exhausted and road weary, I slithered into a stone and mud underground hole in the sizzling Sonora Desert. I also designed my

suicide by freezing to death in the Northern Territories of Canada, which was six months away, and in the meantime tearfully entered a 12-step recovery program. That was 2002, Americana time.

Working the 12-steps of spiritual recovery for nine years, in areas of my life prone to clinging kleishas, mental obscurations, and attachments to all dualistic formations possible, put a pause into my untidy life of action/reaction. "We pause when agitated or doubtful and ask for the next right thought or action," says the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Hmmm? Ommmm. Ahhhhhhh!

Years ago I discovered Green Mountain Monastery and stayed there unexpectedly while visiting Vermont for a lesbian wedding. I recall crying a lot over the deaths of my two closest friends, cleaning the nuns' house with obsessive zeal, and being told by a Sister that it would be best if I didn't fly back to Tucson so soon.

"But I have a job interview," I whined.

"You won't do well in the interview," she stated honestly.

I called a friend with long-time 12-step recovery.

"Dorothy, the nuns think I should stay. What do you think?" I asked tearfully.

"I left a place once after being advised to stay. I drove around lost for eight hours. It wasn't fun," she replied.

The Sisters got on their computer and re-arranged my flights, I returned the rental car, and allowed myself to be held in the fine golden threads of compassion.

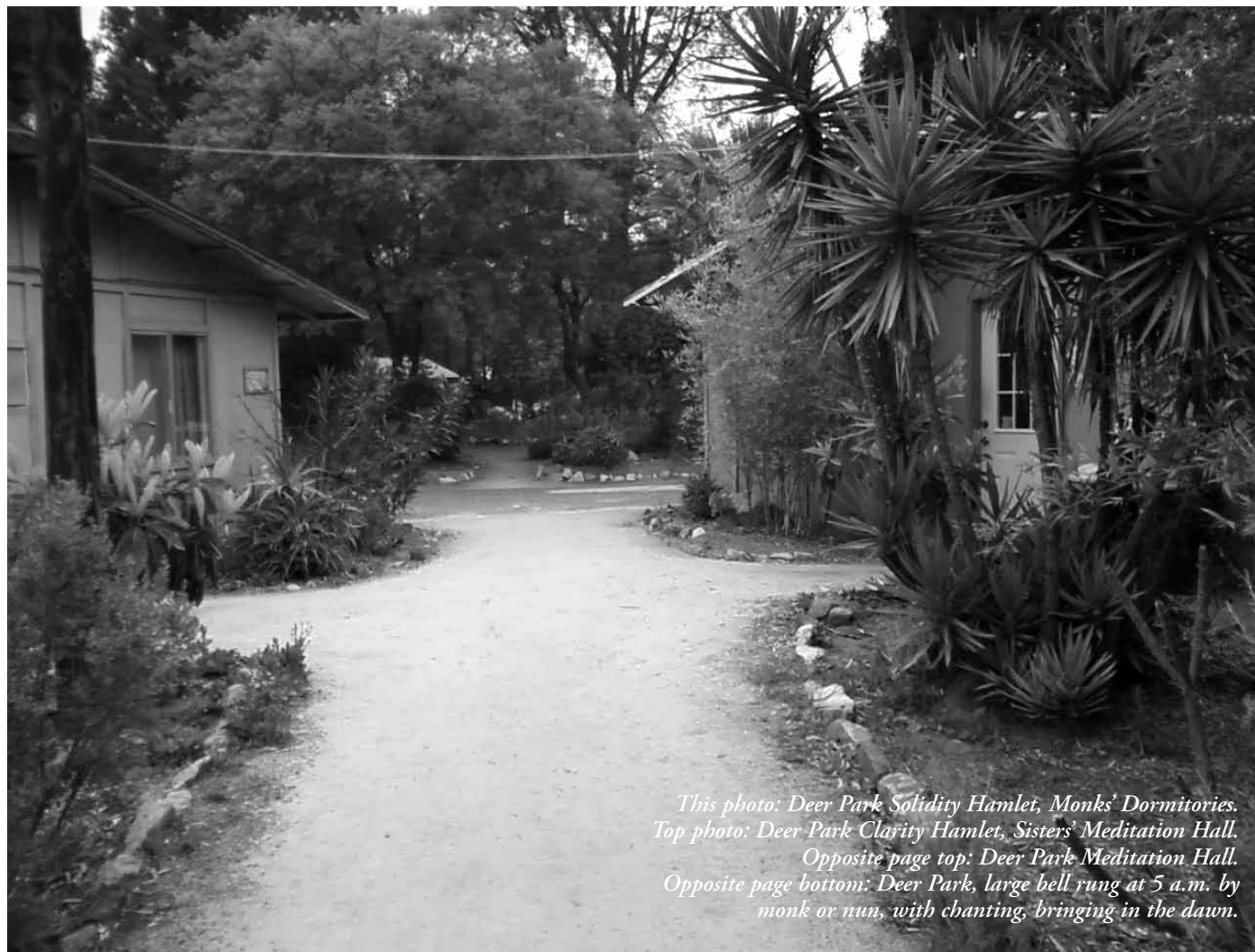
THANK YOU SISTERS!!!! Many blessings to you all, even though you told me I was too OLD to be a nun...

In Arizona I continued visiting the Garchen Buddhist Institute, sitting with Sing-

ing Bird Sangha, led by an OI member in Tucson, listening to the Dalai Lama whenever, and reading dharma texts.

I was able to attend Thay's teaching in Deer Park, and later "One Buddha is Not Enough" in Estes Park, where I posted a sign for a 12-step meeting, and had a great time sharing with other folks in recovery from around the globe!

My latest visit to Deer Park held a small wish that I might be able to escape from being a weary RN and unfulfilled



*This photo: Deer Park Solidity Hamlet, Monks' Dormitories.
Top photo: Deer Park Clarity Hamlet, Sisters' Meditation Hall.
Opposite page top: Deer Park Meditation Hall.
Opposite page bottom: Deer Park, large bell rung at 5 a.m. by
monk or nun, with chanting, bringing in the dawn.*



writer/filmmaker, and from a bunch of muddled aspirations to do “the next right thing,” with skillful means.

What happened was miraculous. The Buddha said there are 84,000 paths available, just hop on one and get going. I have so much gratitude to Thich Nhat Hanh, and Sister Chan Khong, for designing places where monastics and lay folks can live and grow together in their dharma practice! It is vitally important for me to be able to read and practice the dharma in the footsteps of Thay.

Thank you again Sisters and Brothers, and lay friends. May all beings benefit. 🐦

Deer Park Monastery is a community in Escondido, California, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. For more information, visit plumvillage.org.

Karina Sabot welcomes your correspondence at kasabot@gmail.com.

Unto the Second Generation: Can Cohousing Survive and Thrive?



Bruce Trueman

When the first residents moved into our sparkling new cohousing complex, Oak Creek Commons in Paso Robles, California, it was spring of 2004 and spirits were high. Compared to some projects, our planning process was not too drawn out. Over the planning period, some families and individuals dropped out for both practical and personal reasons, and now it seemed as if we had arrived at move-in with a group of people who were, as a 95-year-old friend of mine puts it, “hot to trot.” These were the people who were meant to be here. And this was the honeymoon period.

Over the next few years, there were some storm clouds and even a few hurricanes. For example, there were disagreements over the location and construction of a children’s playground, over the concept of private gardens, about the way one mother was supervising her children, about putting a cat tower on a front porch area, and about the way one individual interacted with children. Sometimes those who were disappointed with the way the community handled conflict dropped out of cohousing life and other times the people involved moved out.

Over time, move-outs occurred for other reasons. People aged and moved into assisted living. Several people tired of our consensus decision making process that to them seemed drawn out and cumbersome. A very active founding member moved to another area for a career opportunity. And then, complicating matters, along with other indicators of the recession, the housing market collapsed, and people lost 30 percent or more of the value of their home. As a result, three households who wanted to move let their homes be foreclosed on rather than taking a large sale loss.

Since the move-outs were spread out over a few years, for a while there was no real discussion as to whether the community as a whole needed to take a proactive approach to marketing, such as a policy of the Board paying for advertisement of the units on the Cohousing Association website. Some sellers tried for a while to look for people with an interest in cohousing but ultimately listed with local realtors and property managers. Because fair housing laws prohibit discrimination against buyers or renters, there is no *legal* way of ensuring that cohousing units are sold or rented to people who are committed to the community’s values.

When the sales or rentals resulted in new residents with an interest in cohousing, we were thrilled. But this wasn’t always the case. Some new residents simply liked our attractive design and amenities such as 10 acres of woods, a large common house (one realtor referred to it as a “clubhouse”!), and a swimming pool. The newcomers had an active social life in the town and unlike many of us, who were retired or worked part-time, they often had full-time jobs and several young children. But most important, they hadn’t moved to Oak Creek Commons to be part of a cohousing community as was the case with the original 36 households in 2004. What does this mean for the future of our cohousing community?

In the last two years, the changing composition of the community has resulted in fewer households participating in the social, governance, and work life of the community. By my estimation, a subjective process to be sure, about 60 percent of our 36 households are somewhat or very involved in the community, and

the other 40 percent is infrequently or never involved. In all fairness, I have to add that those who don't participate very often include a number of households who were among the original members. But the combination of participation attrition—to be expected no doubt—and a turnover in residents makes me wonder whether our community and others experiencing turnover can survive *unto the second generation*.

This concern leads me to question the whole concept of “participation” or involvement in community life: what exactly do we mean by that? And even if we could agree on a meaning, does a decline in participation necessarily point to a decline in community spirit or a decline in our ability to carry out expected functions including the upkeep of our physical “plant”? Is cohousing, by definition, a place where the residents participate in the life of the community? “Duh,” “no brainer,” the reader is probably saying, but I still think it's worth raising the issue.

Oak Creek Commons' definition of “participation,” I should note, has morphed every few years. People often think of it as participation in the work, so I'll start with that. During our first four years, residents got credit for cooking and cleaning at meals, for serving on committees, and even for coming to a Saturday morning bagel breakfast (a way of enticing newcomers). Households were required to give eight hours of work to the community per month or to pay \$2 per hour for work not performed. When this system didn't generate enough money to hire people to complete the work not done, we switched to a two or three hour per month requirement and charged \$20 per hour for those opting out. Only the most essential tasks counted toward this work credit; coming to social events, cooking/cleaning, committee work, and other tasks no longer counted toward our “work program.”

Surprise, surprise! Participation in the work program increased. Even people who were rarely seen at community events put in their two hours, possibly

for economic reasons. Others liked the exercise of landscaping tasks or the challenge of fixing things, though I can't say that anyone thought that toilet cleaning would improve either figure or psyche!

The areas in which we have fewer households participating, however, are to me the most vital and essential ones to keep our cohousing community from becoming just a friendly condo complex. These are:

- Meals: cooking and cleaning is required to attend more than two meals per month; only 15 out of 36 households are active participants.
- Governance: in this category I include serving on a committee such as facilities, landscaping, design; common house maintenance; kitchen; and community life; about one-third of the adults serve on a committee.
- Community Decision Making: decisions and discussions happen at monthly business meetings that last two-three hours and at “discussion circles” when there is a special issue or complex decision to be made; I estimate that about 50 percent of households are involved in community decision making on a fairly regular basis, allowing of course for vacations, illness, etc.
- Social Life: this includes special occasions such as weddings, our annual Solstice Dinner; films shown once per month in the common house; the weekly free bagel breakfast (the best attended event); approximately 60 percent of households come to social events more than occasionally.

Let's say I'm right and that participation in these four key aspects of cohousing life *does* decline if the second generation doesn't have a particular interest in or commitment to cohousing. (Note that the question of *how much* participation is enough will never have a cut and dried numerical answer). The question is at what point does the community cease to function as and feel like cohousing?

My own view is that balance is the key to an active, thriving community. If there are too many members of the “second generation” who for whatever reason are only infrequently or never involved in several areas of community life, the cohousing aspect of community will decline. It is hopeful to believe that over time, their attitude will change and they will catch the cohousing spirit. That may happen, and Oak Creek Commons has taken action to welcome and include newcomers. In a few cases, this has been gratifyingly successful. However, I think it over-optimistic to rely on that process making up for the loss of the “gung-ho” first generation.

There may be a “tipping point” where there are too few people doing too much. Should they decide to cut back, the community is in trouble. If the second generation has too many of what I call “coholders by happenstance” rather than the first generation who were “coholders by intent,” I would worry about the future of that community.

As cohousing communities are starting on their second decade, the issues of turnover, integration of new residents, renters versus owners, and the meaning of participation are probably being talked about or should be.

I can't offer answers about the best ways to approach these challenges, but would like to start a discussion among the communities—as Oak Creek Commons recently did at a potluck held at the nearby community of Tierra Nueva—that will help us to share our best thinking.

And I hope that future conferences and issues of COMMUNITIES can foster a lively debate as to the best ways to bring about a committed and engaged “second generation” of cohousers. ☺

Judith Bernstein moved from Oregon to California's Central Coast in order to try life in cohousing at Oak Creek Commons in Paso Robles. She has many interests: the arts, writing about environmental preservation and sustainability issues, photography, and caring for cats at the local humane society. In addition to writing fiction and poetry, she works as a consultant for nonprofit organizations, focusing on fundraising and communications.

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REVIEW BY ARJUNA DA SILVA

A Surprise at Dancing Fields

By Ronit Elk

Illustrated by Renee Rivas

AuthorHouse, 2009, 76 pages

Available online; autographed copies available from Ronit.Elk@cancer.org



Ah, the cohousing life!
In Ronit Elk’s story for children, four girls pushing pre-teen go to the next level in interpersonal processing without ever quite having to formally resolve the conflict that subtly arises in their midst.

It all starts out innocently enough. The girls live near each other on carless streets in an urban community that sounds a lot like East Lake Commons in Atlanta, where the author lives. They are a mixed bag of lucky kids whose freedom to roam their community is unparalleled in urban or even suburban settings. Only the pond is off limits!

They can peek into each other’s unlocked front doors for available playmates without so much as a knock or a ring. In the field where they camp out together, creature intruders

come in the form of a shifty cat stalking a turtle. Unless you count boys.

Despite the serenity and safety of the setting, the girls still get to fuss and freak out from time to time, and to have a couple of significant adventures, including turtle eggs and a genuine, if not dangerous rescue. Plus the girls’ individual and interpersonal landscapes are where a good bit of the action takes place. Between Andrea’s ho-hum attitude (what’s the big deal about growing your own vegetables on the community’s farm?), Tali’s eagerness and curiosity, Jennifer’s perpetual verbal pout, and Sand’s sweetness—not to mention the real heroine of the story, Katarina, an orphan from far away—the tale of the “surprise” unfolds amidst the subtle and not-so-subtle tensions of maturing female relationships.

Kids in community will recognize themselves in the settings and the situations that light up a summer for the girls at Dancing Fields. The black-and-white illustrations by Renee Rivas are superb, and provide a neat opportunity to puzzle out just which girl is which! All in all, a tale worth seeing...and telling! 🐾

Arjuna da Silva is a long-time resident and cofounder of Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, North Carolina.



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 #153/Winter 2011** (out in December) is October 1, 2011.

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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 non-profit 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 danandmariana@gmail.com

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

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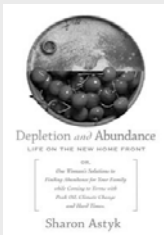
Nestled in the Little Applegate River canyon, we invite you to join us creating intentional community in a wild and rustic setting. Our focus is living in a neighborhood of wilderness cabins, south facing solar exposure, growing food, celebrating the abundance of nature, serving the greater good. Our spiritual work helps us to provide a sanctuary for educational retreats including the 11th Continental Bioregional Congress in August 2011. www.bcc-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

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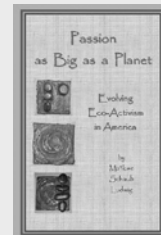
Community Bookshelf



Depletion and Abundance
288 pp, 2008. Great, non-strident guide to the personal in the peak oil transition.



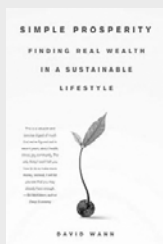
Radical Simplicity
288 pp, 2003. Furthering the vision of voluntary simplicity, and offering an explicit invitation to dive in.



Passion as Big as a Planet
219 pp, softcover, 2007. We only work on behalf of what we love. See right livelihood excerpt in this issue of COMMUNITIES!



Local Money
192 pp, 2010. Your guide to getting local currency and a vibrant local economy off the ground wherever you are.

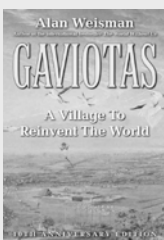


Simple Prosperity
304 pp, 2007. Dave Wann's usual mix of stats, stories, and inspiration, turned this time to prosperity.

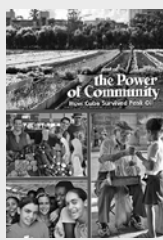


1,000 listings.

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



Gaviotas
256 pp, 2008. This updated edition tells over a decade of the Gaviotas story, an inspiring sustainable village experiment.



eration to be more sustainable.

The Power of Community
DVD 53 minutes, 2006. Tells the story of Cuba's transition to a no oil culture and highlights what we can all learn about cooperation to be more sustainable.



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

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with the rest remaining commonly shared property, which includes 2 ½ 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. or photos and more information: Canadian Co-Housing: <http://cohousing.ca/openrealty/open-realty208b/index.php?action=listingview&listingID=67BC>. Homes for Sale: <http://www.bchomesforsale.com/view/nelson/lilli/Default.htm> Lilli Ruth Rosenberg, (250) 825-0023. Lilli23@shaw.ca

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#151 Intimacy

A Nomad Ponders Family and the Ecstasy of the Group; Internal Intimacy; Honesty and Intimacy; Bee Intimacy; The Solace of Friends in Community; Intimacy in the Village Setting; Twenty Years of Open Marriage; A Communitarian Conundrum; Love Is the Answer; Fascinating Selfhood (Summer '11)



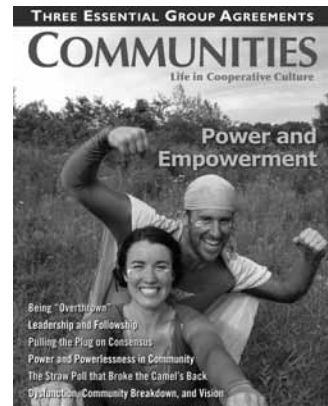
#150 Mental Health: Challenges and Hope

Gifted, Mad, and Out of Control; Walking Wounded; Nurturing 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 Followership; Power and Disempowerment on the Ecobus; Pulling the Plug on Consensus; Power and Powerlessness in Community; 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

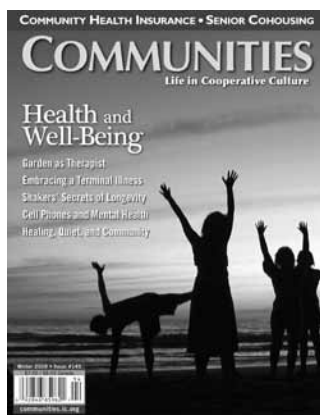
An Abundance of Dads; Second Family; When an Ecovillage is Raising Your Child; Parenting in Community; Exploring Family; Being Almost Two Years Old - Again; A Community Newcomer Finds Her Rhythm; Nudging at Boundaries; G8; Asperger's; Together and Apart; Family Dramas; Problem Solving in Community (Spring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

#145 Health and Well-Being

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

#144 Community in Hard Times

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



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#152

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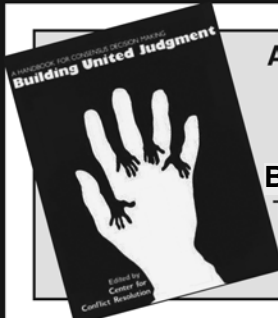
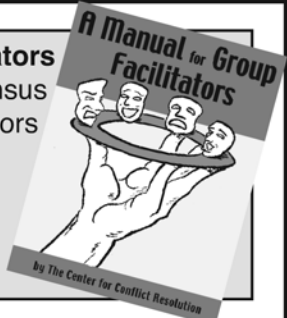
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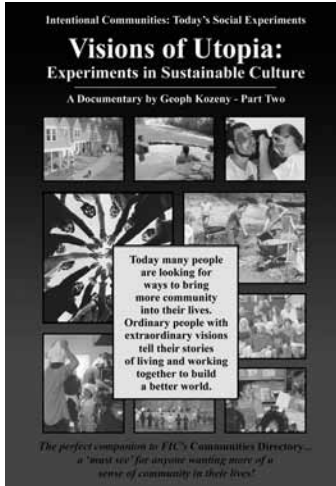
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At a permaculture-based ecovillage in North Carolina, care for the earth, care for people, and care for inner health all benefit from a dynamic culture based on local self-reliance, holism, and community. (From Issue # 145 - Health and Well-Being)
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LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)



Thank You

This is a comment—a thank you and a cheer!

I'm a member of the Episcopal Order of St. Helena (Chris's mother, the Rev. Nancy Roth, knows us) and we recently received your magazine for our library. Several of us here absolutely love it and read it cover to cover. I love it so much that I'll be getting my own subscription, so I always have access to my own copy.

I know you're struggling, as many magazines are, and I want to do my part to help you stay alive. Best wishes and many blessings on your important work!

Lesley Morgan

Convent of St. Helena
Augusta, Georgia

Security

Please dedicate one issue of your magazine to security. Security is very basic and very important. Security is just as basic and important as food. I have been studying the communities movement for 24 years and have seen virtually nothing in the movement about security.

It is obvious to me that communitarians have serious security problems that they are not dealing with. Many people think they have a constitutional right to perfect security without spending a penny. Many communitarians think they can solve all of their security problems by saying "I don't want violence." People don't lose half a hand for no reason. People don't fall off a ladder for no reason. The Fall 2010 issue of your magazine had a story about a murder. Communitarians need to spend more resources of all types on security.

I learned from a magazine I once subscribed to that it is possible to publish a lot about a security system without endangering the owner, if care is taken to not reveal the owner's name or location.

Studying about security has been a major part of my life for 42 years. I have concentrated on security issues almost exclusively for the past 17 years. I would like to send you more on this subject if you are interested.

Lyle Winchell

Denver, Colorado

Editor's Note: We invite reader responses to this letter. Would you like to see more about this topic in COMMUNITIES? Do you have stories, resources, or perspectives to share on this topic? How would you respond to Lyle's ideas, observations, and concerns?

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WHICH COMES FIRST, MY COMMUNITY OR MY CAREER?

(continued from p. 36)

didn't rule out the possibility of finding something in my field—but if I had to choose, staying in my community came first.

And once again, the very first application I filled out landed me a job—at Sevananda Natural Foods Market. I'm stocking shelves, bagging dried fruit, and feeling very much at home. I frequently ride my bike to work. Every day I mingle with members of my community, including friends and neighbors. Though the work is humble, I am conscious of helping to build an alternative economy, living the cooperative philosophy I believe in.

Not only does my new job supply healthy, organic, and often local foods to people who happen to live in Atlanta. Sevananda provides the modern equivalent of the market square where people gathered to barter, gossip, haggle, and spin the web of community over the millennia.

Ironically, the company where I spent my first 20 years in Atlanta, New Leaf Distributing, started out in a broom closet at Sevananda. And come to think of it, when I first started there I stocked my share of shelves. Who knows where my new career path might lead? ☺

This article originally appeared in the March 2011 issue of Co-Options, a publication of Sevananda Natural Foods Market, Atlanta, Georgia (www.sevananda.coop).

Atlanta poet and activist Stephen Wing is the author of Free Ralph!, a comic novel with an environmental theme, and the creator of a line of original bumper stickers, Gaia-Love Graffiti. He has previously written for COMMUNITIES on the Rainbow Gatherings (still going strong). Email him at swing1027@gmail.com. For more of his writings, visit www.StephenWing.com.

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REDEFINING WORK

(continued from p. 38)



bring; that we may no longer need to be self-defined through the good job we do.

From macro to micro again....how might this play out in O.U.R. day-to-day reality? How can the value of what I “invest” myself in take on a manifest form? O.U.R. Ecovillage has been working on a recent process of Redefining Value. This project is part of our work with a provincial lending institution which focuses on Social Finance and Social Enterprises. For 10 years O.U.R. Ecovillage has not been able to obtain a mainstream mortgage and has had to keep the debt instruments (mortgage, credit line, etc.) privately held and backed. In order to register O.U.R. land and activities in the new multi-stakeholder ownership model we developed and incorporated in Canada five years ago, we need to find a new way to invest in O.U.R. livelihood. After the last two years of surrounding ourselves in the Slow Money movement, the Social Finance world (with Ethical Investment bankers and venture capitalists!), and social/environmental impact analysis, we realize it is quite simple: just redefine value. Culture shifting in this case means if the bank will not lend you money, perhaps create your own type of bank.

Remember O.U.R. Ecovillage’s last decade of declaring “No is just an uneducated Yes!”? The thinking is alive and well in this project, and many other new ones onsite too. We have created The Community Trust for Ethical Investment as an incorporated entity to allow community to invest in community. What if we actually used money in ways which heal (see the book *Money Can Heal: Evolving Our Consciousness* by Siegfried Finser)? Can you imagine an investment vehicle into which federal taxation allows you to transfer your retirement funds and other investments (at an equitable interest rate) and that is lent as mortgages and development money for right livelihood projects? The province of British Columbia is working, as we speak, to legislate a new ethical community investment model as well. Times are a-changin’ and Social Finance is the next big thing to come along in the mainstream money world.

Redefining value...time to get back to the pond and them wood ducks with my kids and do a *good job at my world work!* This is why I work so hard all day/eve long. 🐾



Brandy Gallagher (BSW, MA) is one of the original founders and developers of O.U.R. Ecovillage, Shawnigan Lake (Vancouver Island), British Columbia. She is also the Executive Director of O.U.R. Community Association, a nonprofit society dedicated to outreach projects (local and International), and the development of O.U.R. Ecovillage as a demonstration/model sustainable village. Her sustainable

land management planning and ecological design work has made her the main proponent behind precedent-setting rezoning which created the legal/political/community framework for multi-use allowances for ecovillages and shared land projects across Canada.

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MANAGING MANAGEMENT

(continued from p. 55)

has to be disciplined about honoring the work of the managers when they operate within their mandates. If you don't like something they did, yet they stayed within the traces, don't ream them out in plenary. Have a private conversation where you share your opinion while recognizing that they had the right to act as they did, and then move on.

4) Insist on regular evaluations of managers and committees—which should absolutely include appreciations as well as any critical feedback.

5) Educate the membership on the balance needed between rights and responsibilities. Thus, each member has the right for their voice to be heard on community issues. However, that right is inexorably linked with honoring the process the group establishes for how to contribute respectfully and effectively. Members who wish for their opinions to count have the responsibility to read the minutes, go to the relevant committee meetings, add their input in a timely manner, and contribute constructively (not obstructively). Skipping all the preliminary meetings, not reading the prior meeting notes, and then bursting into the final plenary with guns blazing to shoot down the proposal at the last minute is not cool. Independent of whether the complaint is based on sound thinking, it trashes the group's process and undermines the system of governance. Don't be that person!

What I'm talking about here is developing a community-wide culture where there's definition about what it means to be a good citizen. It's an important conversation, and it's not possible to have good managers without good citizens. 🐰

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. The above article is adapted from his blog entries of February 8 and February 11, 2010 at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

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HOW RECREATIONAL THERAPY HELPS FUN HAPPEN

(continued from p. 80)



The only group photo taken at the first annual two-week camping trip. Kara Cooper (right), Vivian (the slightly stressed one on the left), and four kids under two. They still go once a year.

two and under. Within a week of my expressing interest, the site was booked, the car was packed, and we were off. It was one of the best trips of my life, and somehow I came back refreshed and ready to take on the world.

I can't begin to relay the number of amazing days Kara has planned for us. Things that might feel like work become events, rainy days are opportunities for blanket fort cities, and garden work becomes time for wheelbarrow obstacle courses for giggling kids. The work still gets done but no one seems to notice how.

When someone comments, and people always do, Kara attributes her success in activity planning to her career in Recreational Therapy. According to the Canadian Recreational Therapy Association, Therapeutic Recreation is a profession which recognizes leisure, recreation, and play as integral components of quality of life. Service is provided to individuals who have physical, mental, social, or emotional limitations which impact their ability to engage in meaningful leisure experiences.

Very soon after Kara began to show me how recreation is key to my existence, I began to remember times in my life where a good night out dancing left me more invigorated than a 12-hour sleep. Gone are the days of spontaneous frivolity. The kids took well care of that. Now it seems like a struggle to get anything onto the calendar that we all have energy for. But I know deep inside it does us all good to get out of our daily routines. Oh but the exhaustion!

I know I'm not alone. Now that we have a village to build it seems that every spare moment needs to be multi-tasked. Everything has to be about the village. Work parties allow socialization—but the projects have to get done. Meals allow social activity—but you still have to eat. Very soon you can find yourself completely surrounded by have-to's instead of want-to's.

So how do you consciously keep a community from drowning in meetings and work parties? I find that everyone needs at least one truly frivolous experience a week

to keep going. For some people that can be board games and beer; others might need to get out into nature. I also find it very useful to drag community members out of the village for off-site activity. Truth be told there are so many ways to have fun and so many people who need to have fun that we all need to work together to provide each other with multiple outlets from which we can pick and choose. It doesn't always happen easily. Sometimes we have to create fun in our lives very consciously—the same way we have to make time to weed gardens and get laundry done. With time and practice everyone can become an event planner for their own community.

In Recreational Therapy there are three ways a person is thought to get something out of the experience of an event: looking forward to, participating in, and looking back on the experience. Each of these can allow people to get the most out of the events you plan.

Don't know where to start? I have some suggestions for you, inspired by my personal Recreational Therapist. Not every community is lucky enough to have a professional Rec Therapist on hand, but we can all learn to incorporate these simple behaviours into our own lives in order to intentionally provide more fun in our lives.

Jump to the pump. The next time people are sitting around talking about how great it would be to do something, be the person to pull out the calendar and book it! Don't worry about the greater community just yet. Try to find a date that works for those of you in the initial discussion.

Record great ideas. If no date can be found, stick the idea into a "Fun Day Jar." While we still await our common house, one of my great plans for the mail room is an easy-to-access jar with an attached pen and index cards. When an idea comes that we can use right away we can flesh out as much of the idea as

possible on a card and stick it in the jar. Even as I write this I wonder if we'll ever use the ideas we collect, but it will give us a place to store our passionate ideas, and remind us to take a break. It will also be a great tool for our Social team.

Branch out. Once a date for the event has been planned, invite as many people as you can think of. We may tend to assume other people are too busy to come out and play. I've found that it never hurts to try. Email is not nearly as effective as in person. An announcement at a community meeting or on a billboard helps, but a knock on the door ensures more people will take time to come out. Another thing we all do is accidentally write people off before we've asked. If a family has never participated before, invite them anyways. One day they may surprise you and themselves.

Speak often about the event in a positive light. Remind people that it is coming and discuss the parts you are most looking forward to. Try not to dwell on the work that it will take to make it happen, but rather the joy it will bring when the day arrives.

Let it be simple for your guests. If you are planning an event, people will naturally feel they should help. If someone has a specific contribution they would like to add, welcome it and say thank you—but otherwise be okay to answer the question “What can I do to help?” with, “Just come and have fun!” Take joy from the fact that you are treating your neighbours to a work-free night.

Don't let busy people discourage you. Okay, you may not get the turnout you'd like. And some events like a thrift shopping trip may be designed for a small and specific group. The size of the group matters less than the fun the group has. If you have 10 people interested and three people show up GO ANYWAY! Have fun and talk about it with others. Soon enough people will get the bigger picture and be more willing to drop the work and have a little fun.



Fun erupts at The Yarrow Ecovillage when two people are overheard discussing a desire to learn how to make Sushi. The Sushi party was held the next evening. Fifteen community members participated.

Go the extra mile. Instead of just making sushi, find some Japanese music and supply an origami craft as well. On a thrift shopping trip for the moms, insist on starting with dinner out and have a contest for the tackiest find. Try to have something for each of the five senses: taste, sight, smell, touch, sound. While not every event will allow you to think this way, it helps to start somewhere.

Take and post pictures. The internet has been a double-edged sword for this step. In some ways it has made it so much easier to share photos with friends and family but it depersonalizes the experience. The best luck I've seen for this step is the old-fashioned billboard. Take pictures, choose a handful, and print them. Print doubles and give copies to the people in the photos. Kara has been doing this for me for years. I have so many of them I have taken to taping them into the insides of my cupboard doors. When I go to put things away—there we are smiling out from our adventures. It makes us remember to plan more.

Go to events planned by others. Say thank you. I know more than once I would have preferred to stay home from any one of Kara's events. I go because I know she's worked hard to plan it. And you know? I always end up having much more fun with her than I would snuggling my remote control.

If meetings are the only way to get people's attention right now, try having a guest speaker in for a quick 10-minute participation session. Some great topics for this are Laughter Yoga, Belly Dancing, a synopsis of a really cool seminar a community member took. Chances are that a number of people may enjoy themselves so much that they'll respond when you invite them to a longer class. 🐾

Vivian Vaillant is a neighbour in waiting at The Yarrow Ecovillage, meaning she is an active member of the community still waiting for her home to be built. Vivian enjoys the one-mile-living aspect of the Ecovillage and expects her green-built home will be ready for occupancy January 1, 2012. See www.yarrowecovillage.ca.

How Recreational Therapy Helps Fun Happen

One of the greatest truths that I realized about joining cohousing came too late. Thank God.

“Let’s just go,” I remember saying. I was still in my jammies while lying, exhausted, cuddling my oldest who was sedated by the TV. “I’m so sick of racing around to get nowhere. There has to be a better way. I’m so done with the rat race.”

“Okay. Email them.” My husband was bouncing the baby on one knee and my son on the other with his eyes closed. He was trying to nap, the clean laundry from last week piled beside him on the coffee table, yet to be folded.

I think I’d expected some sort of fight, some sort of anchor from my conventional husband to stop me from firing off the email that changed everything. The truth is that if I was tired of Paul working all the time, he was more tired. We both craved a simpler life. We wanted to have energy for the fun parts of life. We were sick to death of working all the time. A handful of emails and some heart to heart conversations and we found ourselves in Yarrow for Yarrow Days, and the first of a series of workshops which eventually led to us buying into our new neighbourhood: Groundswell Cohousing at Yarrow Ecovillage (near Chilliwack, British Columbia).

The Yarrow Ecovillage, our answer for a simpler life, turns out to be far from simple itself. The Ecovillage Society has done a nice job of structuring itself as the umbrella organization that oversees three primary responsibilities: supporting organic farming, fostering cohousing communities, and building a commercial district to enable people to work close to

home. The wondrous variety of people we have attracted have mixed interest in these three parts. Some are farmers leasing land; others run businesses waiting for new commercial space to rent. Most of us live or will live in either the multigenerational Groundswell, or the yet to be named Seniors’ Cohousing planned for the near future. We feel blessed that we’ve come on board in time to help build and grow our little village. While we’re all so different, we share a common thread. We came to the village to enjoy a simpler, fuller life, and we’re working hard to get there.

And let me assure you there is always work to be done. Certainly it has been more fun working with our new neighbours than it ever was on our own. However, the great truth is: living in cohousing will not make me less busy. If I’m not careful I will be more busy than I ever was. And the kicker is that it’s up to me to make sure it stays fun.

Enter Kara Cooper; Recreational Therapist. About three years ago I met this “mom friend.” We started hanging out when our daughters were two. I learned very quickly that Kara was special. Specifically I learned never to say “We should do that!” about anything I didn’t actually have the energy to do, or I’d find myself a short week later in the throes of whatever activity I’d laid claim to. Kara never understood that “We should do that!” in the normal world really means, “I’d love to do that but the truth is I’m too tired and disorganized to bother trying.” It was with Kara that I found myself on a two-week camping trip with four kids aged

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Community members after a BBQ.

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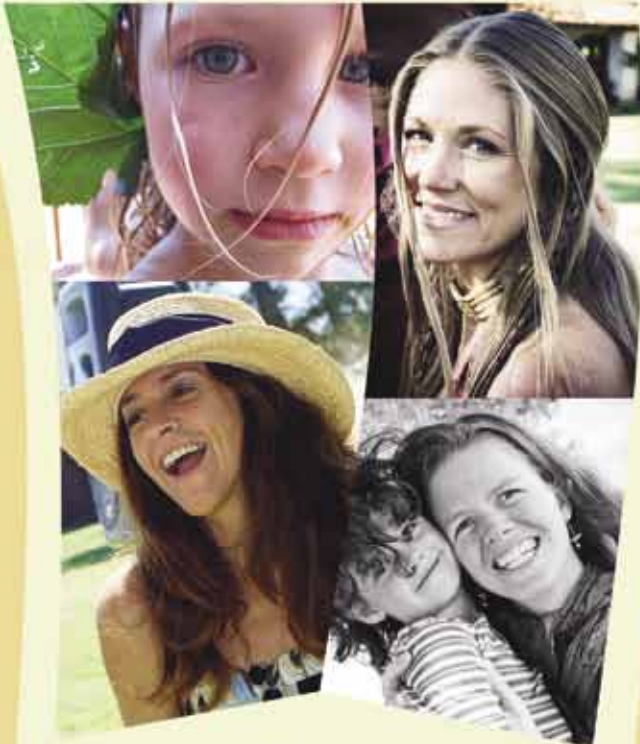
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