

AFFORDABLE COHOUSING

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Affordability & Self-Reliance

Ira Wallace Reflects

A Community of Homesteaders

Turning Crisis into Opportunity

Right Livelihood and Economic "Realities"

The Dryer, the Chain Saw, and the Laptop

Spring 2013 • Issue #158

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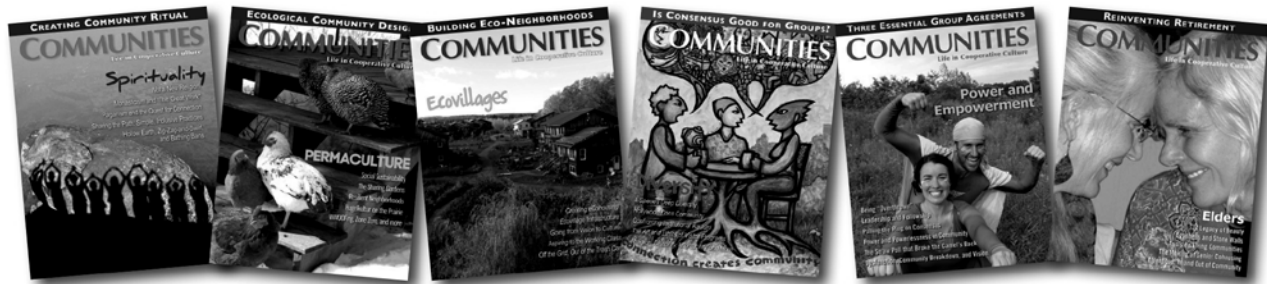


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ON THE COVER



Work-partiers mix moistened clay, sand, and straw at an adobe brick-making party hosted by Luna Marcus and Larry Kaplowitz

outside Eugene, Oregon, July 7-8, 2012. Using local materials and lots of volunteer labor and other non-monetary exchange, Luna and Larry’s extended community is constructing a 35-foot diameter adobe Sanctuary inside a barn on their land—a space for yoga, meditation, performance, gatherings, and Solsara personal growth workshops. For more information see www.solsara.net, www.facebook.com/larry.kaplowitz (especially Sanctuary photo albums), and www.facebook.com/luna.marcus. Photo by Chris Roth.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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LETTERS



Kids, Community, and Nature

I recently read the Winter 2012 edition (#157) and wanted to share my thoughts about the article written by Heather M. Barnes ("Community for a Minute: Discovering Nature, Self, and Group at Sixth-Grade Camp"). I thought she did a very nice job sharing how parents can blend the idea of an intentional community (human-made) with our deep-seated need to commune with nature. More of this needs to be done! As a grandparent, who homeschooled my own kids, I am saddened by the current trend that removes kids more and more from outdoor experiences. She is a brilliant author and does an excellent job portraying her experiences trying to amend this. I'd like to read more from her...can you bring her back again?

Peggy J. Albertson
via email

Editor's Note: All COMMUNITIES contributors are added to our quarterly *Call for Articles list*, so hopefully we'll hear from Heather again. In fact, anyone who requests can be added to that list, by emailing editor@ic.org.

Marginalized, Outmaneuvered, and Outvoted

Dear COMMUNITIES,

Thank you again for allowing me to

do this long article series on decision-making, and thanks again to community consensus trainers Tree Bressen, Ma'ikwe Ludwig, and Laird Schaub for their response articles.

In his response to this series Laird wrote "I've found it far better to assume that people are coming from a good place until you can't find it. While I have reached the conclusion that some people are too much work for too little benefit and don't belong," he continues, "I never start there, and I worry grievously about Diana's advocacy of adopting policies and decision-making processes that encourage this." (COMMUNITIES #156, Fall 2012)

Actually, I don't encourage this or start there either. I also want people to assume meeting participants are coming from a good place unless you have reason to think otherwise. I *do* expect and assume that communities using consensus will take process time to find why people feel significantly different ways about a proposal, and what emotions or deep inner beliefs might underlie their views. I've been focusing on what happens when, *after* the group has done this work, it hasn't seemed to make any difference. That's when people feel frustrated and demoralized.

All three community consensus trainers who responded to these articles assumed the communities I wrote about had not first tried processing with their frequently blocking members. Oops!—my blind spot. I didn't realize I failed to make this clear, unconsciously taking for granted readers would know I was writing about what happens *after* processing seems to have failed. In my Letter to the Editor in the Fall 2012 issue I cited a member of the community I've called Green Meadow who made a dramatic scene when her block was declared invalid (described in "Busting the Myth," Part 1, Summer 2012). In that letter I outlined the efforts, over 12 years, of other community members to understand and connect with this member through deep conversations, emotional processing, and so on, with little success.

Laird also wrote, "I am very nervous about encouraging groups to disenfranchise and marginalize members after labeling them emotionally immature." He also described me as encouraging "outmaneuvering." (Fall 2012)

Actually this is not what I advocate. I think community members cannot help but notice people who block frequently or disrupt meetings. And while they may draw conclusions about the underlying reasons why these folks do this, I don't advocate that they treat these folks disrespectfully or as if they don't count. What I *do* advocate is a decision-making method that places limits on blocking and which requires outliers to collaborate with other members to co-create a solution, as the N Street Consensus Method, Sociocracy, and Holacracy all do. Laird advocates that blockers do this too: "The individual's right to block," he wrote, "is paired with the responsibility to take into account the views of others and to put personal energy into attempting to close the gap." (Summer 2012)

Here's how I see the differences in these views. When consensus is facilitated well, outliers are encouraged to be collaborative, and if they cannot or will not (like the Green Meadow member mentioned above) the group begins emotional processing...for as many times and for how-ever long it may take. And if that doesn't work, the group may have to determine whether the non-collaborative member doesn't fit the group, and perhaps should withdraw from governance or leave.

However, in the three newer methods outliers are not encouraged but *required* to collaborate. If they cannot, the group moves forward on the proposal anyway. And the outliers have another chance to collaborate in the next proposal.

One can see this as being outvoted and outmaneuvered. Or, one can see it as limits being placed on the power of the outliers to stop the group. And, while they

are required to collaborate, if some reason they can't, they will have plenty of other, future opportunities to do so.

Lastly, both Tree and Laird note that in their experience baby boomers don't seem more emotionally distressed than other age groups. While this has been my experience so far, they both have considerably more experience as community consultants than I, and I'm happy to concede this point.

Thanks again.

Diana Leafe Christian
Ecovillages Newsletter

Measuring Success

In the Summer 2012 issue (#155), "Diversity," Diana Leafe Christian argued that consensus creates a competitive and war-like culture. Others responded that more training will fix that.

A focus on process and method of decision-making can obscure the purpose of the community. I dare say no community has ever been founded to more perfectly follow a decision-making process or method. Or that one was successful because it had more process training, or when it decided to use a different method.

Consensus decision-making is only possible when the decision-makers have a common, actionable aim, choose to make decisions together, and are willing and able to deliberate long enough to resolve objections. In the examples Diana has given, it appears that neither the groups nor their aims fit these criteria.

Decisions should be about actions that bring a community closer to its vision. Most intentional communities were founded with visions of improving the quality of life—creating conditions such as happiness, peacefulness, cooperation, and diversity. How many communities have studied ways to define actions that might produce these conditions and then measure their results? Sociologists have been doing this

for decades. Do we know how they do it? Have we paid a trainer to help us do it?

Diana points out that we use consensus blindly even when it doesn't produce the results we expect. We certainly do, whether it is consensus or another method. Instead of focusing on the method of decision-making, however, we should focus on evaluating the results of our decisions. Research on productive teams has discovered that teams work well together because they are successful, not the other way around. In the face of success, all other factors become unimportant. This suggests that if we measured success based on actionable aims, the frustrations with personality differences and endless process discussions would fade away.

Sharon Villines
Takoma Park, DC

Affordability in Cohousing

I just read your post to the Coho mailing list on a call for articles about affordability. 8-) and :-(-

So glad to know you will focus on this topic! So sorry I missed the submission deadline. *[Editor's note: fortunately, we can squeeze in "late" letters, like this one, even past the article deadline.]*

I'm a long-time list "agitator" concerning affordability in cohousing. I've posted on and off for about 10 years. I'm gratified to see a slow shift toward accepting the financial limitations facing so many of us who would like to live in community.

I applaud your efforts to identify the barriers faced by persons such as myself to joining cohousing. It's a perspective that can be difficult for existing cohousers to truly understand.

There are many financial economies that come with living in community. More importantly, living in community provides richness that's not quantifiable in dollars but has great value. People who
(continued on p. 69)

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



The Dryer, the Chain Saw, and the Laptop

This issue's theme is Affordability and Self-Reliance. When reflecting on how those concepts intersect my life, it occurred to me that my answer depends a great deal on what part of the elephant you're touching.

I've been leading a homesteading life in an agricultural income-sharing commune for the past 38 years. While my intention was that my life would be an experiment in simple living, my relationship to self-reliance has rarely been simple. Let me walk you through three examples that illuminate the complexities...

The Dryer

Sandhill's founding group was two couples: Ed and Wendy plus Annie and me. When we first arrived in 1974, our property had one small livable house that featured one bedroom, a living room, a kitchen, plus a back pantry and a tiny bathroom. We arrived in May, and the couples took turns: one month in the bedroom, and the next in a tent. Meanwhile, we committed ourselves to a 16' x 30' expansion of the house so that by the time it was too cold to sleep outdoors we'd have two more bedrooms (plus a house that was better insulated, rewired, reroofed, and with an expanded bathroom).

For washing clothes we relied on an old Maytag wringer washer (complete with mangle) and a clothesline. I can still recall my sister visiting in our third summer and not understanding how we could choose to live without a clothes dryer. To be fair to her, she had two small children at the time and was probably thinking about managing diapers with a husband who worked all day, leaving domestic chores solely in her hands. To be fair to us, we've raised many babies at Sandhill—all of them in cloth diapers—and have never owned a clothes dryer.

While it's true that my sister had to cope with laundry for a family of four on her own and at Sandhill the number of adults capable of washing clothes has always outnumbered the quantity of small children dirtying them, it's also true that at Sandhill we've always had a strong commitment to being aware of the ecological consequences of our choices. When it comes to clothes drying, the sun works just fine. Yes, it takes longer and the sun isn't always conveniently available when you'd like to do a batch of

laundry, but we have indoor clothes racks and it always works out.

How much difference does not having a dryer make? According to US Department of Energy statistics, Sandhill is among the less than four percent of American households with a washing machine but no clothes dryer. They estimate that the average household will use about \$100 worth of energy per year running a clothes dryer (interestingly, though gas dryers are twice as efficient as electric dryers, they've captured only 20 percent of the US market). Given that we're a community of 7-10 adults (depending on whether or not it's intern season), I reckon we do twice as many loads of wash as the typical American household, which means we've been saving \$200 annually by air drying. If you throw in the cost of the dryer itself and figure we'd at least be on our third one by now, our savings are in the vicinity of \$10,000. Note that this does not put any price tag on how our choice has beneficially slowed demand for the next power plant.

In December I was installing a submersible water pump in a cistern at Dancing Rabbit (a neighboring community, just three miles from Sandhill) and needed to make a watertight splice to power the pump, as the connection was going to sit in several feet of water. From an electrical supply house I bought a heat shrink tube that you slide over the splice and then apply heat. Well, we had the devil's own time trying to find a hair dryer or a heat gun in either community. Who needs 'em? (We finally made do with a propane torch, used gingerly, and the resultant connection is indeed waterproof. Whew.)

So when it comes to dryers, we mostly do without. It isn't worth the money to buy one, and it certainly isn't worth the energy to run one.

The Chain Saw

The first outdoor construction project that we tackled at Sandhill was building a barnyard fence. We inherited an old barn (that lasted for another 20 years or

so), but needed a fence around it if we wanted to keep our chickens separated from raccoons and dogs. Never having used a chain saw before, we decided to experiment with building the fence by hand. The barnyard encloses about seven-tenths of an acre, so this was not a trivial matter.

Using axes and a two-person crosscut saw, Annie and I felled black locusts growing on the property to yield all the fence posts. For the larger segments, I split them into halves or quarters using a maul and wedges. We dug all the postholes by hand, and stretched the woven wire employing a wooden clamp, log chains, and a hi-lift jack. For the barbed wire used at the top and bottom, we relied on a hand-held fence stretcher that produces a mechanical advantage through ropes and pulleys.

In short, I have a *very good* idea how much faster it is to cut wood with a chain saw. Though they're noisy (you're an idiot if you don't wear ear protection), smelly (two-cycle engines spew out all manner of exhaust), and dangerous, you can accomplish an incredible amount of work with one. Given that Sandhill owns and actively manages 60 acres of trees, there is no question in my mind but that we're better off operating a couple chain saws—one for dropping trees of 16-inch girth or more, and the other for limbing and trimming. (Also, if you own two, the second one can be used to free up the first one if you read wrong the stresses on a log and pinch the bar part way through your cut.)

How much difference does having a chain saw make? Chain saws last us about five years. Given that we didn't start using two until the '90s, we've owned 10 in our history. At an average purchase price of \$300 a pop, plus annual operating and maintenance costs of \$100 per machine, we've sunk around \$8,000 in that technology. Have we gotten our money's worth?

In addition to the time saved by not cutting wood by hand, all of our space heating is accomplished by burning wood (which translates into no additional heating costs), we cook all of our sorghum with wood (from which we typically earn \$20,000/year), we cut our own wood for fencing, rely primary on homegrown wood for construction and trim, and we cut our own oak logs for shiitake production. In recent years we've established a steady market for some of our surplus black locust at Dancing Rabbit, where it's in demand for post and beam construction. Taken altogether, I figure conservatively that we've saved or earned at least 10 times what we've spent on chain saws.

It's still dangerous (or perhaps I should say *Stihl* dangerous, as that's our preferred brand), but it's definitely a positive cost/benefit ratio.

The Laptop

Sandhill was slower than many groups to embrace computers. What's a foregone conclusion today appeared as an explosion of indiscriminate information just a generation ago, and it was by no means obvious at the time whether computers were more intrusive or instructive. When a friend sent me a free cast-off desktop computer in the late 1980s my community was so skittish about letting the genie out of the bottle that I was not allowed to *even open the box*. Instead we transshipped it sight unseen to a sister community that was more ready to embrace the brave new world.

A few years later, in 1990, my close friend Geoph Kozeny took up residence at Sandhill for several months to work on the FIC's first edition *Communities Directory*. During that visit I had daily contact with his Mac Plus desktop and got my first glimpse of what was possible when regularly immersed in the information candy store that is the world wide web. While it wasn't all that fast—modem speeds were slow enough that you could actually read email messages *as they downloaded*—and you didn't dare send images (it took eight hours to transmit a single photo back then, and cost \$100), it still seemed like magic to me.

By 1995 the mood had shifted enough at home that I was allowed to take receipt of a used laptop when Geoph upgraded (I got his old Outback—a Mac clone), and



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my world has not been the same since. Today I spend an average of three hours a day in front of a computer screen, and it simply wouldn't be possible to function as the administrator of a continental nonprofit or to work nationally as a process consultant without a computer.

At first, I simply relied on Geoph to be my supplier. Whenever he got a new one, I got his old one. That strategy lasted until 2006, when I experienced a mother board meltdown at the start of a two-day train ride, and I freaked out realizing how dependent I was upon what I stored in my laptop and my having ready access to it. In addition to getting religion about backing up data, I realized that relying on used computers was not the same as buying used cars (where you could avoid first-year depreciation by never owning something less than a year old).

In fact, much of my work life depends so much on my having a dependable computer that I changed strategies and started buying new machines, trading them out every three years when the extended warranty expired. When I buy a new laptop. I don't need extra memory, I don't need an extra large screen, and I don't need a titanium case. I just get the basic machine, which already comes bundled with more bells and whistles than I'll ever ring or toot. At this point I doubt if I use more than one percent of my laptop's capacity, but that's good enough for me.

Being partial to Macs, I always get a white one (or whatever color is least expensive). It's hard to imagine people who are willing to pay an additional \$400 to make a fashion statement with the color of their computer case, but you know they wouldn't offer that option if people weren't buying it.

How much difference does having a computer make? Today Sandhill has three laptops and one desktop. Two of them are for the dedicated use of members who regularly work off-site (Stan and me), and another two are for general use in our office. It's rare to not have a computer available when you want one. Does it mean members are no longer as connected to one another (because they're so connected to the internet)? No. Community is all about relationships and we've kept our eyes on that prize.

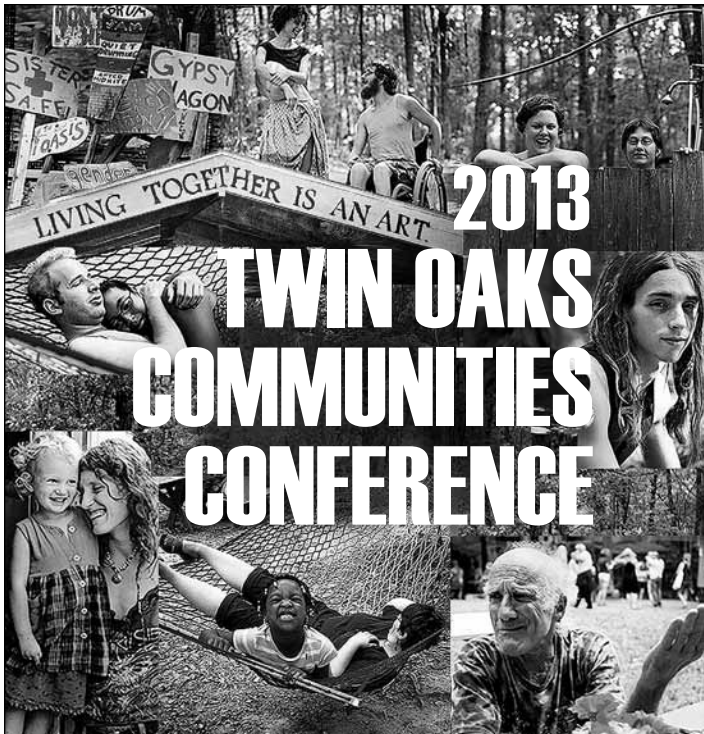
Even as my time at a keyboard has gone up, my time on the phone and writing letters (remember typewriters?) has steadily declined. I can stay in touch with many more friends than before (even without Facebook), and I don't spend more time doing it. Amortized over three years I'm paying about \$300 annually for my laptop. Last year I earned 100 times that as FIC Executive Secretary and as a process consultant. It's a tool of my trades and there's no doubt in my mind that it's worth it.

• • •

In summary, we try to make choices with our eyes open, but that doesn't necessarily mean the technology door is wide open. Sometimes it's better to do without; sometimes it's better to have it as an option, and sometimes it makes sense to use it every day. While we can effect simple repairs and perform normal maintenance on chain saws and laptops, when it comes right down to it, we couldn't manufacture either if our lives depended on it. If those technologies become too expensive or unavailable, then we'll have to adapt.

While the impact of that adaptation may be profound, I've no worry about whether we'll figure it out. It will merely be another chapter in our experiment with simple living and self-reliance. ☺

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. A version of this article first appeared in his blog December 27, 2012.



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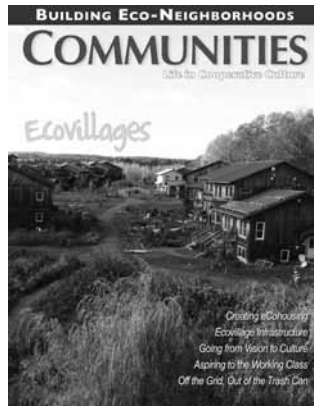
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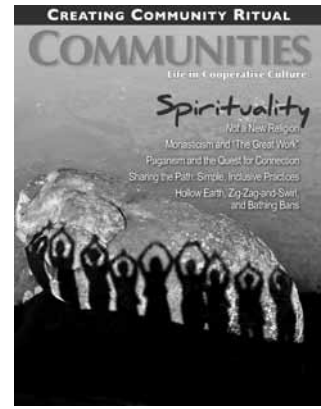
#157 Endings and Beginnings
The Adventure of Starting Over; Gratitude, Loss, Rebirth, Community; A Crucible; Journeying on the Ark; Honoring Life Transitions; Bookends; Within Reach DVD; Grief and Growth; Senior Cohousing; Greening Your 'Hood; Fear of Change in Ecovillages; Crossing over the Threshold (Winter '12)



#156 Ecovillages
Off the Grid and Out of the Trash Can; Aspiring to the Working Class; Findhorn; EcoVillage at Ithaca; Dandelion Village; Creating eCohousing; Belfast Ecovillage; Vision and Reality in Ecotopia; Nashira; Getting Ecovillages Noticed; Ecovillage Infrastructure; Vision to Culture; Advice to Ecovillage Founders (Fall '12)



#155 Diversity
Racism in Social Change Groups; Diversity Issues in LA Eco-Villages; A Species Deep Diversity; Mental Minorities; Affordability; Religion and Diversity's Limits; Art and Ethics of Visitor Programs; Busting the Consensus Myth; The Lighter Side of Community (Summer '12)



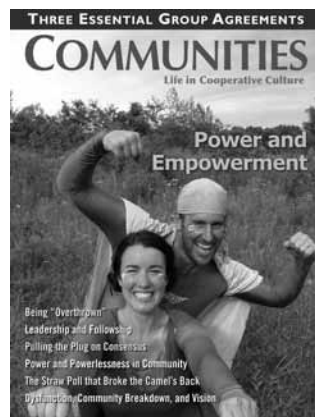
#154 Spirituality
Creating Community Ritual; The Farm; Sharing the Path; Inviting God to Dance; Monasticism, Community, and "The Great Work"; The Hermitage; Ananada; Paganism; Gnosticism; Localization; Creative Spirituality in Historic Groups; Common Ground in an Uncertain World; Spiritual Warriors; Spirit in the Woods (Spring '12)

#153 Permaculture
Social Permaculture; Sociocracy; Attending to Zone Zero; The Farm; The Sharing Gardens; WWOOFing; Changeaculture; Prairie Hugelkultur; Permaculture Stole My Community!; The Growing Edge; eCOOLvillages; Nature's Friends; Future of Water; Ecological Community Design (Winter '11)

#152 Right Livelihood
Work Less, Simplify More; Crowdfunding; Which Comes First, Community or Career?; The Lenox Place News; Recreational Therapy; The Gift of Compost; The Farm; Wrong Volunteerism; Income Sharing; Redefining Work; Remade in Edinburgh; Buddha Being, Buddha Doing (Fall '11)

#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)

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#158

Affording COMMUNITIES

It seems appropriate that this issue of COMMUNITIES is focused on “Affordability and Self-Reliance.” We at the Fellowship for Intentional Community have been grappling in recent months with the question of how to “afford” publishing the magazine itself. We believe strongly that keeping the magazine in print is important, but *how* we go about doing that is still a conundrum. In flush years, the FIC can afford to lose some money with the magazine, as other sources of income compensate. But in years like 2012, when other areas don’t produce surplus, the magazine can present a dangerous drain on meager funds.

We contemplated the option of cutting this issue to 64 pages instead of 80. This would have saved us about \$600 to \$700. It also would have meant that some of the stories that comprise the “heart” of this new issue, but that are just a little less directly related to the main theme, would not have been able to appear. As you read Ma’ikwe Schaub Ludwig’s account of grappling with Lyme disease in community, or Diana Leafé Christian’s new installment in the “Busting the Myth” consensus series, or the interview with veteran community activist Ira Wallace, think of how much would have been missing from a shortened issue.

Fortunately, we decided to visualize abundance rather than dwelling on scarcity. We chose to print the full 80-page issue, trusting that readers and potential readers, existing and future advertisers, would continue to see this journal’s value and would provide the financial resources that we need to keep going. We know that COMMUNITIES is a unique resource internationally as well as nationally, a one-of-a-kind publishing effort ever since its inception in 1972, a “niche” periodical with an increasingly broad appeal, a magazine that certainly deserves to exist.

This means that we really do need your subscriptions, and your gifts of subscriptions to new readers. We need your advertising support, if you’d like to reach the COMMUNITIES audience. We need your word-of-mouth recommendations to others, your Facebook “likes,” your participation as writ-

ers and photographers. We need sponsorships for individual issues—such as that from Paul Born and the Tamarack Institute, who will be providing financial support for our Summer 2013 “Community Wisdom for Everyday Life” issue.

And we also need you to support the FIC’s broader efforts, if you appreciate them and benefit from them. COMMUNITIES cannot thrive apart from its publisher (the FIC), nor can the FIC thrive unless its flagship publication does. The FIC offers abundant resources, from its online directory to its Community Bookshelf offerings to educational events, gatherings, and other public services. Please consider supporting and participating in its activities (see www.ic.org).

This year will see a number of innovations for the magazine, including the availability of digital subscriptions (in addition to the ongoing print edition), and digital back article packets on various themes. We hope these will help improve our bottom line. Whatever our offerings, however, we are depending on you to keep us going. If every COMMUNITIES reader and Facebook fan diverted the cost of a single tank of gasoline to us rather than to the gas station, our financial worries would be over, at least for now. Please consider doing it!

Our new Advertising Manager, Christopher Kindig, is helping with our movement into the digital age, and bringing new enthusiasm into helping advertisers place ads in print and online. Christopher found us at the 2012 Twin Oaks Communities Conference, where he held a workshop on ways the communities movement can thrive using the power of the internet. He has already been helping turn us toward greater abundance financially. If you’re a potential advertiser with something to share with COMMUNITIES readers or with FIC website visitors, you will not regret contacting him.

Together (but only together), we can afford COMMUNITIES. Thanks again for joining us! ☺

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.

Self-Reliance, Right Livelihood, and Economic “Realities”: Finding Peace in Compromise

By Abeja Hummel

The dirt road to the valley floor winds its way through oak woodlands and past an enormous corporate vineyard. It bisects our neighbors’ small horse farm and a massive overgrazed cattle ranch. If you had told me seven years ago that I’d have a 30-minute commute alone in my car to get to work twice a week, I’d have pointed out that I’d never even owned a car, that I don’t need much money, and certainly don’t work for “the man.”

It’s true, I have biked the road many times, and even driven our mule cart to town. Still, I’ve grown to really appreciate my biodiesel Jetta, and find I actually enjoy the time and space I get driving slowly through the countryside on my way to my bodywork practice in Boonville. Some would say I’ve grown up, some would say I’ve sold out. I would say that I have learned to compromise for love and a larger purpose. Having a child and living at Emerald Earth—a small, rural ecovillage in northern California—have taught me a lot about compromise.

We are incredibly blessed in that our land is owned—outright—by a nonprofit, so we aren’t pouring money into a mortgage. As this is not currently an income-sharing community, we strive to keep the costs low for residents, and share the values of right livelihood and self-reliance. We are deeply engaged in rediscovering an interconnected, regenerative relationship with our land. We produce or wildcraft much of our own food, and sell or trade the surplus to neighbors for things we don’t have. Our kitchen is usually packed with fresh, local, healthy, nutrient-dense foods. Processed, packaged, and sugary foods arrive only with unindoctrinated guests.

The cows and goats produce way more milk than we can consume, which we share with friends and turn into cheese and yogurt—all grass fed and higher quality than almost anything you can buy in a store. The chickens move around, cleaning and fertilizing our gardens and pastures and giving us in return delicious eggs with deep orange yolks. Our gardens pump out amazing organic produce. And on top of that, people from all over (though mostly the San Francisco Bay area) pay us to come to our community to take our workshops in natural building and other land-based practices.

So why is it, then, that I’m getting into my car twice a week and driving to town? Why is it that most residents here find it essential to have a well-paying off-site job, some savings, and

little to no debt?

In the mythology of America, families can be completely supported by a successful small farm. Yet we find ourselves walking a line between radical self-sufficiency and the realities of the dominant culture’s economic and social systems. We work jobs in town out of fear—must keep health insurance, must have car insurance, must pay debt. We also make money to pay for the fun things we still want from “out there”—a ski trip this winter, a new guitar, a music festival. So we work for someone or something else—taking our time and energy away from the vision we hold for ourselves and this land.

Our plan is to move towards the possibility that all residents can make a living on the land. We believe that a bounty of valuable goods and services can be gleaned in the process of revitalizing degraded topsoil, caring for the forests and creeks, collecting nature’s abundance, and bringing life back towards the balance the native Pomo so carefully tended. This bounty includes milk and meat from goats that clear the underbrush from the thrice-logged tinderbox we see as an old-growth forest in the making. Proper management of our cows is rebuilding topsoil in our oak woodlands, as we watch the fertility and biodiversity increase over the years. We can envision a surplus of lumber—or at the very least firewood—resulting from a forestry plan that increases the health of the forest while decreasing the fire load. Mushrooms, acorns, and all sorts of other wild edibles offer themselves to us every year and we believe—as the Pomo have taught us—that wild things WANT to be respectfully gathered and used, and that their life cycles are benefited by that relationship.

I have a lot of time to think about these things, as I drive up and down the hill to work. I have considered abandoning my business in town many times and have experimented with various income sources from the land. Our first year here, my husband and I diligently went to the farmers’ market with surplus fruit from ours and our neighbors’ land, as well as wildcrafted mushrooms and seaweed. I also did chair massage. It was very socially rewarding and completely in line with our values. We made somewhere around \$4 an hour for the harvesting and time at the market—we did not calculate in time spent caring for the fruit trees. The only real income derived from that time is the regular clients I gathered for my bodywork practice.

In America we are accustomed to buying food—as well as every other mass-produced commodity—cheaply. Selling the tastiest eggs you’ve ever tried at \$6 a dozen, I would walk the line between red and black after figuring in the cost of supplemental organic feed. And that would come with a huge amount of work and folks complaining about my eggs being too expensive. Same math for the incredibly delicious fresh bread we bake in our wood-fired cob oven with local, organic, stone-ground wheat. (The saint who is growing the local wheat, I might add, is doing it as a labor of love at \$1 a pound.) With time, good marketing, and cultivated relations with neighbors, however, I see examples of folks in our community making a go at it in small-scale, sustainable food production.

It is not only the massive reduction of income that keeps me from making the shift to a land-based cottage industry that is more in line with the goals of Emerald Earth and leads to much greater self-reliance as a community. Another factor is just the effort required. It’s easy to go to town and come home with money. More than that, I would say, it’s pleasant to do so. I live in a small ecovillage where we share two meals a day, have a dozen community projects going, and are blessed with the presence of kids needing attention. My drive to work is

often the only quiet time I get all week, and being at work is the only time I’m not at risk of being distracted or interrupted by children, visitors with questions, or residents with needs or concerns.

Also, I get to make all the decisions about my business by myself, without asking anyone’s opinions or permission, and without receiving feedback about how my choices affect each and every person living with me! Save the lecture about how important it is to work collectively, how much better decisions are when made in a group, and the pitfalls of our individualistic culture. I know and I agree—that’s why I live in community. I also think it is important for individuals—adults and children alike—to have autonomy in some aspects of their lives. Running a land-based business on a property that you collectively steward with others is like navigating a ship through iceberg-laden waters.

Last year, my fellow resident Liz and I bought two cows, milking equipment, and miles of electric fencing. The goal—to use the cows to build topsoil and restore fertility to the native oak grasslands while producing delicious, nutrient-dense, raw dairy and grass-fed meat for us and to share with others who value that quality of food.



Everyone was supportive. Really, they were. It was hard to remember that, though, as we heard all the concerns—“Is that unsightly fencing going to stay there, where I like to go for a walk every day?” “The cows’ hoof prints in the wet soil look like they’re tearing up the land!” “It feels disrespectful that you keep having to leave meetings early to go milk.” “I don’t think you’re paying the community enough rent considering the impact you’re having on the land and the infrastructure” etc., etc. All valid concerns. All the sorts of concerns I would raise, myself, to someone else starting a business. But, as someone working her butt off trying to make a new project fly—or at least to be worth the money I’d put into it—it was difficult and discouraging.

All that for a project that if we wanted it as a business would make us less than minimum wage while not being quite exactly legal.

Which brings me to what I see as the biggest barrier many small, land-based businesses face—the prohibitive cost of time and money to comply with environmental, food safety, and other laws. I’m not a libertarian, and I fully support the spirit of most of these laws. Giant dairies—whose animals have numbers, not names—really should have a completely sterile environment and a \$500,000 bottling facility. They shouldn’t sell raw milk, and they do need to be inspected regularly. (I will not get into the debate over raw vs. pasteurized milk except to say that I would strongly warn against raw milk from an animal without a name, provided to you by a person you don’t know.)

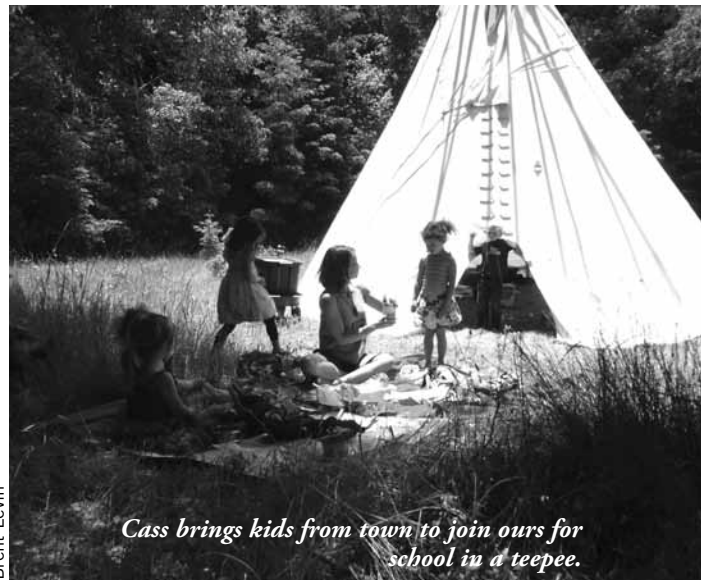
Some people use the “herd share” shared ownership model, where neighbors buy a “share” of the herd, and therefore get a share of the milk. Then they pay the farmer to care for and milk their animals for them. Everyone signs detailed contracts and understands what they’re doing and the risks they are taking, drinking milk from an uncertified dairy. They are welcome to come visit their cows and watch the farmer milk them. They can even participate and muck out the barn! We’d love to do this. The herd has grown to three beautiful jerseys—Blossom, Honey, and Molasses. If any one of them becomes the slightest bit sick, I guarantee we’ll notice.

And this is, as far as the feds are concerned, completely illegal. Last year, several herd share operations were busted throughout the state and the country. (Visit www.farmtoconsumer.org for more information.) This crackdown is ostensibly to protect public health, though it oddly seems to do more to protect corporate dairy profits. It is easier here in northern California to legally grow marijuana than it is to sell milk, cheese, pickles, or preserves—all of which require expensive equipment, commercial kitchens, and regular inspections. (Note: I recently learned of a new law passed in California which will make small cottage food production possible—though it excludes dairy.)

Other small business opportunities here are similarly legally dubious. Our work-



Tom makes firewood out of the byproduct of our restoration projects.



Cass brings kids from town to join ours for school in a teepee.

Abeja Hummel

Brent Levin

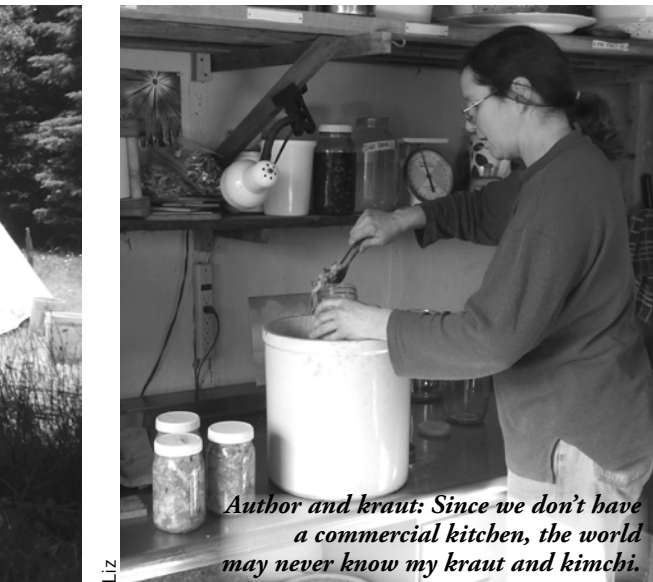
shops and classes, for example, involve us feeding folks. We do not have a commercial kitchen, or submit to regular inspections. Any plan to care for our forest through thinning will require an expensive and time-consuming Non-Industrial Timber Harvest Plan (NTHP) prepared by a licensed forester. Only then could we begin selling firewood or lumber legally. Capitalizing any of these ventures legally would take major investment or big debt, which is a part of the system we are trying to escape.

Liz took the plunge. She has taken a break from her eight-year-old acupuncture practice in town to fully engage with her passion. She is now working towards the greater vision, fully embodying the Permaculture principles of care for the land, care for the people, and return the surplus.

I chickened out. I still help milk the cows, and I deliver milk to friends in town on my way to work. But most days I sleep in 'til 6:30 or 7 a.m. (luxurious), spend more time with my family—not with them following me around as I do chores at the barn—and stress less about money.

And so I drive up and down the hill, freshly showered, back seat full of coolers of milk, with most of the dirt dug out from beneath my fingernails. I bridge the worlds, bringing some money back into our community, enjoying the drive and reviewing my decisions. For now, there is peace in the compromise. 🐾

Abeja has lived at Emerald Earth with her family for the last six years, and she has lived in intentional community for the better part of the last 18 years. Folks still seem willing to put up with her.



Author and kraut: Since we don't have a commercial kitchen, the world may never know my kraut and kimchi.

The New Membership Challenge

We want (and need) more people here to help us really fulfill the vision we hold for this place. Unfortunately, the last several people in the membership process have struggled and ended up leaving Emerald Earth. Much discussion and reflection on why things haven't worked here has pointed at least one finger at money.

It has become much more difficult to make ends meet here since the financial crisis. Our monthly consumables cost per adult has risen from \$180 to \$265 in the last four years, while income earning potential in the area has stagnated or even dropped. Our current lack of strong cottage industries means that people arriving need to figure out their own source of income while still plugging into all the great unpaid work we have to do here.

Of course, debt only makes this situation even more tenuous, and, with the cost of education skyrocketing, it is a rare person under 35 who is not burdened with debt. Our current community financial system makes it nearly impossible for the majority of young, intelligent, hard working, educated folks to be able to live here without defaulting on loans.

“Living within our means” (i.e., eschewing debt) is a radical, revolutionary act in this day and age. Most kids today get trapped in the debt cycle as part of getting an “education,” so the choice is often made before they can truly understand what that means. I have witnessed that, for many, debt can be a slippery slope. Once you already owe many thousands of dollars, why not add a few hundred more for the latest iPhone or festival?

Interpersonally, I see money—and how people use it—to be a major source of discord. Although we're not income-sharing, we are financially intertwined. Folks often arrive from the outside world with nice cars, clothes, smart phones, laptops, online shopping habits, etc. It can be especially difficult to avoid judgment when these new residents then find they can't meet their minimal financial obligations here due to debt, lack of planning or savings, and/or the difficulties of finding decent paying work in a rural economy. It can also be a big learning curve for folks from the dominant culture to integrate into our current culture of thrift store and craigslist shopping, mending and repairing, creative reuse, and making do with less stuff.

We come to this life with a vision of a new way. This begins with an escape from the parts of the culture that are holding us back, beating us down, keeping us separate, keeping us working jobs that don't serve us. But how do we disentangle ourselves? How do we help others in that process? Can we choose to leave some parts and keep others? How patient can we be with people who share our lives yet make different choices? Can we live our values without succumbing to the fears that are put on us to engage in the the current systems of health insurance, social security, and retirement investment?

The work we're doing is difficult and won't be completed in my lifetime. To keep going, I have to remind myself of the big picture—the future we envision for our children's children.

—A.H.

Communities, Political Empowerment, and Collective Self-Sufficiency

By Mary Wildfire

As an activist concerned about climate change and environmental degradation, as well as peace and social justice, I've gone to countless demonstrations, spoken at many public hearings, had over a dozen op-eds and scores of letters to the editor published, and written hundreds of letters to "my" representatives. None of it, as far as I can see, has done any good.

So what's an activist to do? I've come to think that any effort to challenge the entrenched power structure is doomed—they have amassed such power over the past 30 years that we really can't win by electoral politics, by trying to influence officials, or even by massing in the streets (not without 10 times as many people as we've ever had). Instead, I believe our best course is to ignore that structure and focus on building alternatives ourselves.

We need alternative *livelihoods*, to assist middle-aged people being laid off as jobs are outsourced, and to provide young people an alternative to going deeply into debt for a college degree that likely won't lead to a good job anyway. We need an alternative to *paying taxes* to the IRS, which funnels half of it into the Pentagon for hideously immoral purposes. We need alternatives to *a way of life* that comes with a huge carbon footprint and endless stress, that provides a decent income to the lucky but provides joy and meaning and satisfaction to almost nobody.

Now is the time to work toward finding ways to declare independence from corporations, to provide for our most basic needs ourselves—whether as individuals, families, or communities. Community makes it easier. It takes a lot of time to do for yourself what we in the "developed world" have gotten used to paying others to do—those others now usually faceless and distant corporations. Declaring independence from corporations means no longer being an employee; thus one *has* much more time...for growing food, harvesting rainwater, managing an independent power source, and so forth. Within a community, though, one doesn't have to do everything.

Take my community, the Hickory Ridge Land Trust in West Virginia. Because the land was already paid for when my husband and I joined four years ago, we could get started with building a house at least a year sooner than if we'd had to save money to buy land as well as the building materials. To build a house, we needed a truck, which we still have. The Wilsons, the couple who were already here, need a truck sometimes—now they just use ours. I had some notion of a bicycle-powered washing machine, but they got a super-efficient one, so I just use theirs. They work in a bigger city during the week, so keeping animals would be problematic for them. But we have free-range chickens, so we keep them in eggs part of the year, and our dog patrols their garden some. Meanwhile, they bring us books from the bigger library. They have sandy soil, so I can get sweet potatoes from them.

We put in an off-grid photovoltaic system—my husband Don is an electronics whiz, and he figured out how to do this himself. When the Wilsons put in a grid-tied system the next year, he helped them, and I helped set the posts. There has been a time, in the darkest part of each of the three winters in which we've had our panels, in which we took a little power from the Wilsons' grid-tie (only a total of about 21 kilowatt-hours, though). Then when the derecho came through a few months ago and knocked out power for millions, we were able to pay back a little, keeping the Wilsons' freezer running without the need for a generator. So each couple benefits from the presence of the other—but it would be even better if we had people on the other two leaseholds. Maybe I could share a goat project with someone, for example.

What if more and more people gathered into communities, and built or retrofitted highly efficient housing? What if they began setting up power from solar panels and/or microhydro turbines or windmills, and arranged rainwater col-



Our clearing in winter, which includes an orchard, garden, chicken coop, the house, our solar panels, and the flower/herb bed.

Photos courtesy of Mary Wildfire



The Commons in fall.



This is Mocha Java, HRLT's security chief, official greeter, and animal control officer.



Don making maple syrup.



The author in a "brag shot" in front of this year's field corn.

lection, greywater use, and composting toilets? If they grew increasing amounts of their own food? There would be:

1. less financial support for corporations, and hence they'd have less power
2. less money paid into the IRS and hence less governmental and military power
3. less college debt
4. less greenhouse gas emission, less resource use, less environmental harm
5. a model for the surrounding communities of what is possible, i.e. that one can have one-tenth the income and one-tenth the carbon footprint without "freezing in the dark"
6. protection for the inhabitants in the event of a breakdown, which looks increasingly likely
7. more freedom for activists, supported by their communities
8. last but not least, satisfaction of the repressed hunger for community that I believe to be endemic in America, with its ethic of extreme individualism

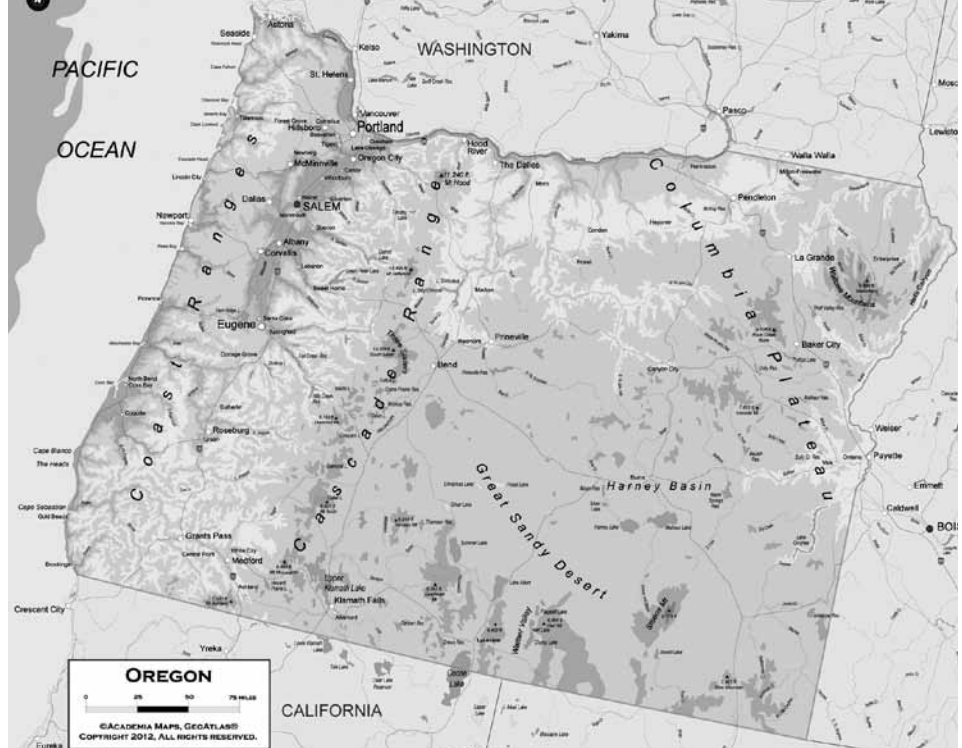
And eventually, this alternate economic and social structure would make possible the creation of alternate institutions into which we could transfer the legitimacy we have drained from the oligarchy-controlled old ones. Notably, we could have some equivalent of the IRS, into which communities could pay a surplus to support useful activities like scientific and medical research, maintenance of the internet, and the rescue of climate refugees.

But this leads to the question of whether such a phenomenon, if sufficiently widespread to challenge the current power dynamic, would be tolerated. Exchanging seeds is already illegal in Europe; in the US, a sensible socialized healthcare system was eliminated from discussion but the Supreme Court ruled that citizens can be made to purchase health insurance. With this as precedent, what else can we be made to purchase? However, as of now it's perfectly legal to pool resources to buy land and build efficient housing on it (especially in rural areas where zoning restrictions and building codes are not impediments), set up your own power sources, and grow much of your own food. It seems likely that even if measures are brought to bear to make this more difficult, those of us already thus situated will be free to maintain our independent lifestyles...and we will want to do what we can to assist others.

It's also possible that societal breakdown caused by oil depletion, wars and conflicts, climate change, or some combination of these and other factors will create circumstances in which those of us set up to maintain our own food, water, and heat will be best situated for survival...and threats from the state can be forgotten. In such a scenario, being part of a community would be an enormous advantage. Of course, such a scenario might actually eliminate one of the biggest barriers to growth of self-sufficient communities: the need to buy back our land from the owning class.

A community working to continually reduce what it must purchase from outside (and to source that part locally) is thus best situated to survive catastrophe, to foster activism, to adapt to what may be a permanent recession, to do its part to reduce its environmental impact and to provide a local model for comfortable but low-impact living...as well as meeting the needs of its members for that deep home we all long for. Humans evolved in tribes and I believe we are happiest when part of a group of more than just a few people, with whom we have personal relationships and reciprocal obligations. ☺

Mary Wildfire is a writer, activist, and gardener, living on a ridge in West Virginia. She is part of Hickory Ridge Land Trust. She admits to being a hippie and a tree smoocher, kind of a pinko, who believes subversion to be the highest calling.



Affordability: Angst and Angels

By Kim Goodwin

I have a confession to make. I'm not a communitarian...or even a prospective communitarian. Instead, I've held a fundamental, lifelong attraction to community living from the first day I became aware of that way of life.

In 1982, I was five years old, accompanying my Mom on a real estate appointment with a potential client who wanted to list his home in Deadwood, Oregon. As a treat, after the appointment my Mom let me pick a place on the map that I wanted to see, and let me navigate the way. I loved maps, but even more, I loved going down a road not yet traveled by my five-year-old self. Since I had been reading the map on the way to the property, I already knew the spot I wanted to visit. "Mom, what's Alpha? Let's go there!" As we drove along the winding, forested gravel road, my Mom explained that Alpha was an unusual sort of "town"—a place where many people lived together sharing the same land. At the time, a fascination sparked in my mind that never left. I wanted to be a fly on Alpha Farm's wall, or a butterfly in their garden. What is it like living in a place like that? Why do people want to live that way? Why don't more people live that way? My questions at the time went beyond what my Mom could sufficiently explain.

When I grew up, I became a real estate agent, as well. The question that would define my adult life became, "How can I help people live the way they want?" When COMMUNITIES' call for "affordability" articles came up, I realized it was a topic I would love to learn more about. So I proposed interviewing an experienced communitarian about affordability in community. The resulting interview was surprisingly compelling to me. I was left captivated by the depth and greater implications of affordability in community living.

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Kara Huntermoon lives with her family at Heart-Culture Farm Community in Eugene, Oregon. They moved to the 33 acre farm five years ago. Kara and her husband each have over 10 years of community experience, and "wouldn't raise [their] children anywhere else." Kara graciously shared her experiences of living in community:

How did your community get its start?

Our community began as a cooperative land purchase with five investors. Within two years, the onsite owners had so much irresolvable conflict that all moved away except for Reba. Reba was able to buy out the ownership share of those who moved away. Even though she never wanted to be a landlord, Reba found herself as sole resident owner of the community land. She believed enough in community, and had hopes that others would move in to take the place of the owners who moved on—she became our “land angel.”

“Land angel” is a nice description. How is Reba a land angel?

Heart-Culture couldn't exist without Reba. Her vision, persistence, and hopefulness are the heart of our community. But not everyone has seen her that way. We have had difficult periods where our community expectations and policies were being formed, and idealistic people moved in to help “create” community. I believe these people were very well intentioned, and none of us had the answers. These people were very committed to equality and justice, and wanted to make the world a better

place—like all of us. But the reality of community finances was too much for them. They could not wrap their minds around Reba's experience of community: \$250,000 invested, a \$600,000 mortgage in her name with monthly mortgage payments coming out of her bank account, and a \$2,000 per month community income shortfall that she personally paid for over two years—all on a city bus driver salary.

So there were financial equality and responsibility differences...how did residents respond?

The people who shouted for equality generally wanted equal power, but were unable to take on equal responsibility. They paid \$300 per adult per month plus an equal share of utilities, for a total of about \$360 per month. They complained when Reba made decisions about land use or who could move in; they called her power-hungry. I saw Reba consistently being committed to community process, including other people's opinions in her decision-making, and wanting to share the power and responsibility. I also saw her taking a reasonable amount of time to build trusting relationships with new people, and holding a memory and knowledge of the land that new residents simply couldn't have. The name-calling was painful, and the lack of trust hurt. Mediation wasn't solving the basic imbalance of responsibility.

How did the “equality issues” finally get resolved?

The community has three septic systems, and they needed to be pumped out. The cost: \$4,000. Reba went to the four people who were shouting for equality, and said, “It's time for equality. Let's equally share the cost of pumping the septic systems.” Of course, they declined. But it didn't stop their criticisms. Within a month, all four had moved out—to more mainstream housing options with less possibility of equality. I believe what they really needed were clear boundaries and expectations. Since that time, we have strengthened our boundaries with

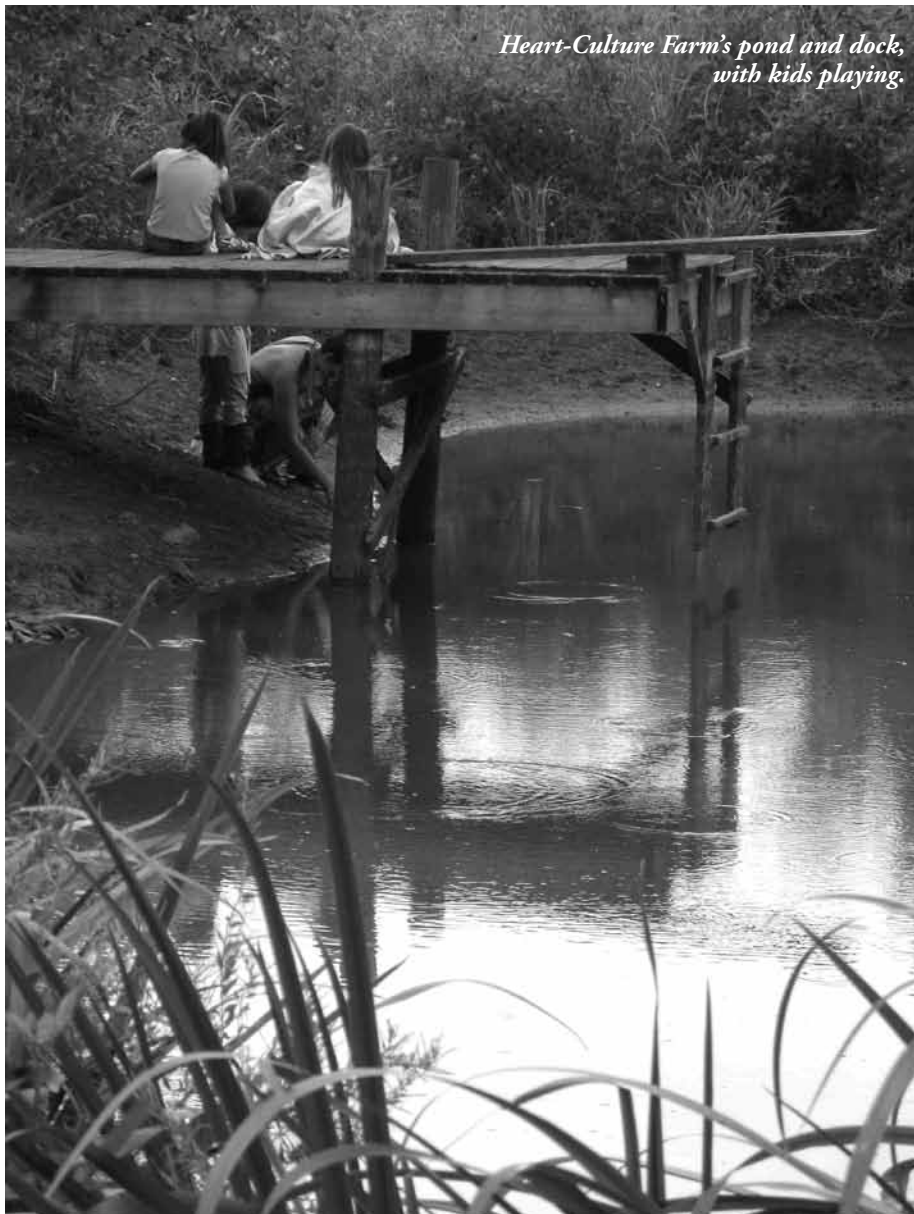


Photo courtesy of Kim Goodwin

new residents, expecting signed rental contracts, move-in deposits, and other “mainstream” money agreements—and we have avoided any repeat of the “equality” agitation.

What is your relationship with Reba (the remaining founder) like?

We’ve been here over five years, and at this point we are founders of the community as it exists—we moved in one year after Reba and her partners purchased the land. Our relationship with Reba is our primary investment—we’ve been through multiple intense conflicts, and always came out of them knowing we are allies.

Serious conflict can be a lot to deal with...did you ever consider moving?

Several times, in the midst of intense drama—including a gun-toting, Ritalin-addicted 60-year-old woman who decided my husband was scary enough to call the police on him—I’ve looked around at other housing options. I always come to the same conclusion: I would have to pay more for less of what I want. A lot of that has to do with our values;

we want to share space with people, we want to milk cows by hand and raise as much of our own food as possible, we want to build relationships over time that can last, we want to live modestly. In our current location, we are less than five miles from my extended family, close to town and our activities there, next door to 14,000 acres of wildlife

preserve, and we have more land for gardening and pasture than we currently use. People come and go, and we’ve had to accept that, but people also stay. Reba is still here, and every time someone new moves in, we wonder if they will be a person who could stay.

Do we kick out someone whose rent helps us survive financially, but who disregards community agreements?

It sounds like affordability is closely entwined with relationships in your current community experience. What affordability issues have you encountered in other communities you’ve been a part of?

I haven’t always found community to be so affordable. In general, yes, but almost always because the owner is an angel. Rob Bolman at Maitreya Ecovillage allowed me to live in an eight-foot cardboard dome and pay \$100 per month at a time when I was a single mom and refused to put my daughter in daycare. But before I found Maitreya, I could not afford the \$500 per month community fees [of other communities I was interested in].

Was that your first experience in community?

My first experience with community was living with a friend’s multigenerational family on five acres near Hillsboro, Oregon. My friend’s mother was the angel there; she charged me a dollar for every hour I worked for pay, and otherwise she treated me like one of her kids, including buying much of my food. I remember we sat down within a day of me moving in, and wrote community expectations: “This is sanctuary. Everyone is responsible for and to the community.” I thank her every day for helping me when I would otherwise have been on the streets as a teenage runaway.

It seems like your “angels” were very committed to helping others and society. What problems do communities run into when trying to balance helping people in need with community necessities?

Affordability and financial sustainability often intersect with social issues. For example, do we kick out the young man who consistently disregards community agreements, even though his rent payments are a significant portion of the mortgage, and he always pays on time? If we do kick him out, will we be able to find a replacement resident quickly enough to cover our financial needs? Will another person be willing to live in the tiny yurt he is vacating, and pay as much and as cheerfully as he does? One of our goals is to have enough housing on the property that we can have a couple of spaces vacant at any time, and still be making the mortgage. That will give us the flexibility to deal with inevitable social conflicts and resident turnover.

What other social/financial issues do intentional communities experience?

Another intersection between social and financial: we want people to be excited to live here. Some things that contribute to that include cleanliness, well-kept landscaping, abundant and well-cared-for food gardens, and exciting projects. Doing and creating these benefits does not directly make us money, and often costs money. But when people do them, others are attracted to move here and to stay here. There is a financial benefit for our community in having motivated self-directed residents who care for our space. At Heart-Culture, we recognize this contribution with social and sometimes financial appreciation. For example, one motivated resident who consistently does more than her share of the landscape maintenance had a late fee waived when she was unable to pay her rent on time.

How do communities decide what to charge, in your experiences?

Expectations for individual financial contribution have to be high enough to attract the right people, and low enough to be fair. For example, when I first moved to Maitreya Ecovillage, rents for the cardboard domes were \$70 per month. Most of the dome residents were not able to contribute fully in community—some were alcoholic, others were unwilling to learn effective communication styles. When the rents were raised to \$150 per month, a whole different group of people moved in: single parents who wanted to stay home with their kids, young travelers who were motivated to find work, and enthusiastic idealists. We find a similar issue at Heart-Culture. While we do make an effort to work with people who must pay less (including those who own their own RV home, for instance), we insist that people pay—even tent campers pay \$150 per month. By doing this, we automatically weed out a whole group of people who would be unable to contribute meaningfully to community.

I understand that; in my experiences as an herbalist I've noticed that people often treat plants or herbal preparations more seriously when they paid for them—myself included. It seems easier for us to waste or not fully commit to things we don't pay for ourselves. What other cost-related values come up in community?

We have community values about space use that limit us somewhat in who we allow to move in. For example, a single woman wanted to rent a small house with a loft, [which] happens to have one of only three kitchens on the farm. Traditionally, the kitchen and bath were shared with other residents who had huts without those amenities. She was prepared to pay more in order to have the entire house be private space for her [alone]. We decided we would not allow that, because we have a value of living communally, and we imagined that her larger payment would not be worth the compromise in our values. In addition, taking the kitchen/bath out of communal use would overload the remaining two kitchens. I would describe our value like this: no individual person is allowed to monopolize shareable space, even if able to pay for it.

It appears Heart-Culture has really invested in establishing its core values and how they interplay with financial needs. What other values are central to your community?

Heart-Culture is the most family-friendly community I have found. We regularly give financial discounts to single parents, and we hold a strong community-parenting value. Parenting is understood to be valuable work, and parents often are excused from certain work requirements, or encouraged to participate in ways that are practical for them (cooking lunch for the work party, for instance).

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Kara Huntermoon's experience seems to point to the very core of the affordability issue. How do we weigh the true costs of living—including all of the social aspects? How do we balance between those who can pay monetarily, and those who are willing to give a greater commitment to our society? And fundamentally, how do we decide who becomes decision makers in our world?

This interview not only gave me a deeper understanding of the affordability problem in intentional communities, but it gave me a better grasp of the issue as it plays out in our entire culture.

In a world where competition over resources is increasing dramatically every day, finding the answers to these questions is more and more urgent. I came away from this interview with a new observation: People in intentional communities are passionate researchers who, through practicing a way of life, are finding solutions to the most serious problems our world faces—how to create affordable, meaningful living for all people. 🐾

Kim Goodwin is a real estate broker, herbalist, and food rights educator in Eugene, Oregon. Her first direct experience with community was in helping an IC purchase their new home. She continues to love those "roads not yet traveled."

Creating a Community of Homesteaders

By Kim Scheidt

This morning I gave a tour to some nice folks visiting our intentional community. They arrived a little earlier than planned so when they called from their cell phone to say they were only a few miles away I brought my breakfast mug of oatmeal with me to eat as I walked the quarter mile from my house to the parking lot where they left their vehicles. I greeted them and as they got geared up for our walk I learned that they were all most interested in taking in information about the styles of buildings that our different members have constructed, and that they were also keen to hear about the overall structure of our community—Red Earth Farms—which is set up as a community land trust.

I usually bow out of giving tours, leaving that task up to some of my more extroverted community neighbors. However, this time I hadn't, and as I walked around answering questions I remembered that there is something extra special about talking with interested people about the intentional community in which I live.

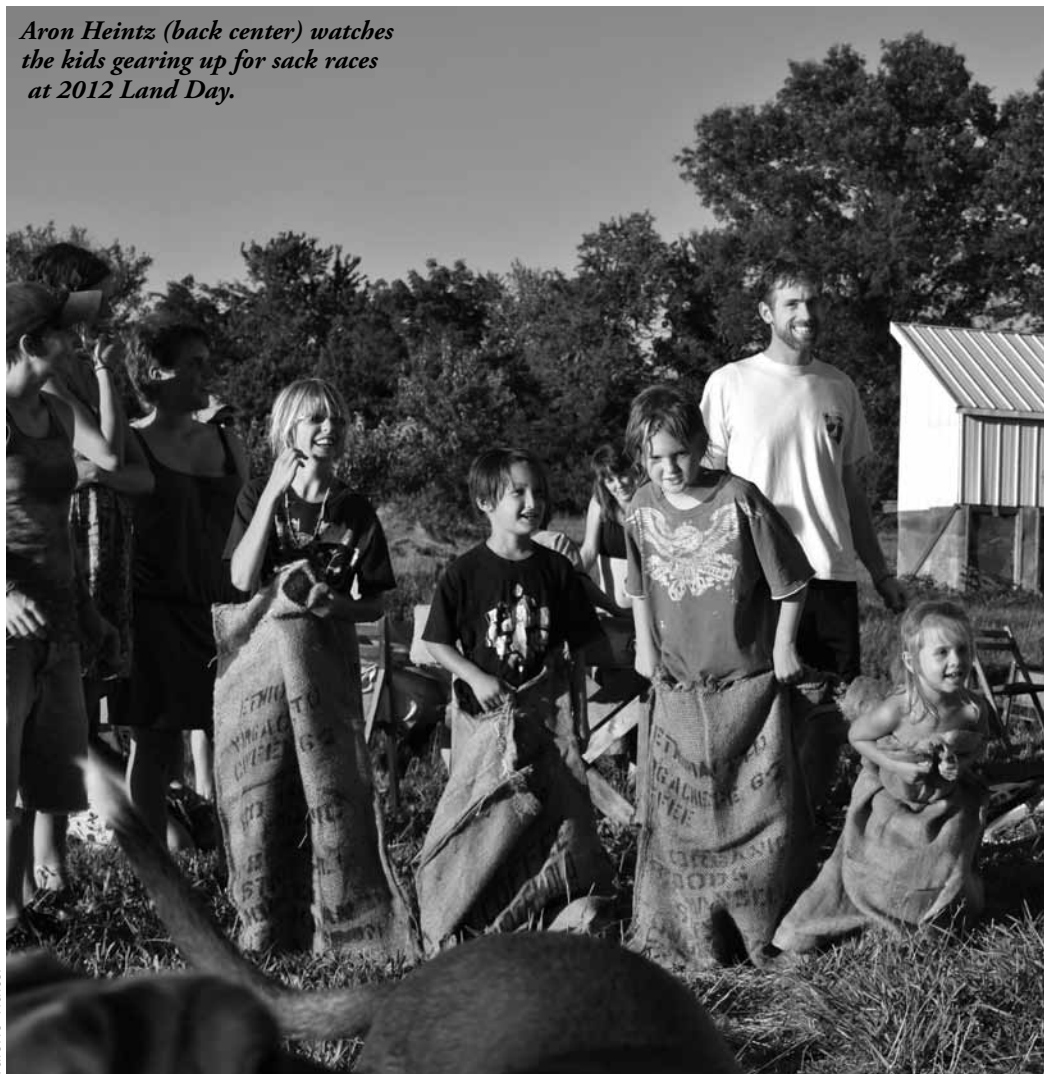
At our community you'll see many passive-solar buildings and some interesting rocket heater stoves, as well as quite a few

greenhouses attached to the south side of buildings. There are also rainwater catchment, mouldering toilet, and animal housing examples. We have a wide spectrum of building styles ranging from a two-story strawbale home to small energy-efficient homes built using much more conventional methods.

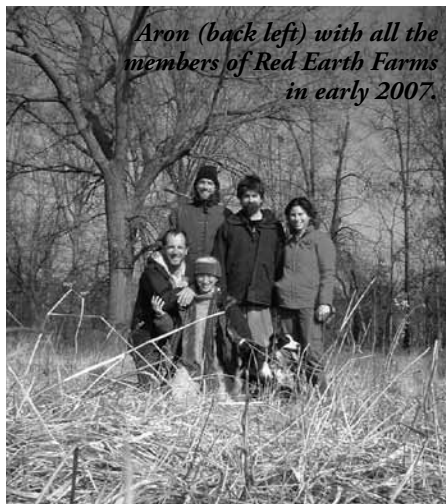
Moving on to land with no preexisting infrastructure is tough. Doing that kind of thing requires a pioneering spirit. Creative solutions are reflected in the buildings of our different members. We do not have rules about what materials a person can use to construct buildings. Some people went for low-cost, some went for speed of construction, for aesthetics, low ecological impact, or all of the above in different combinations. And keep in mind we are doing this in rural northeast Missouri, a land of few zoning laws or building restrictions. We are granted the ability to construct things as we see fit for the most part and then live with the results of what we've crafted.

Our intentional community formed in the Spring of 2005 with four of us living

Aron Heintz (back center) watches the kids gearing up for sack races at 2012 Land Day.



Aron (back left) with all the members of Red Earth Farms in early 2007.



Aron Heintz

Valerie Walter

This is Red Earth Farms' Land Day Celebration 2012.



Valerie Walter

We liked the idea of creating affordably priced plots of land where a leaseholder would have creative control over their particular parcel.

The 76 acre tract we purchased was sold to us at a much more affordable price per acre than what smaller plots in the area were going for. However, we did not have the means to pay for it all outright. Aron Heintz, an acquaintance of Alyson's from the communities circle, was our investor who backed the venture. He was a man who had made a fair amount of money at a young age and was looking for socially responsible ways to invest it. I have to confess that it was a little difficult at first ironing out the details. Though Aron didn't desire to live in our community, he had some strong attachments to how we set things up with the thought that perhaps one day he would want to join. He wanted to be more deeply involved than a typical investor might have been, and there were times when his ideas of how we should set things up did not coincide with our own. But it all worked itself out, and on Summer Solstice, with Aron funding the purchase, we closed on the land and had a lovely party to celebrate. (We didn't pick the closing date, it was just chance. Our original closing date had been April Fools Day but the seller pushed it back. No joke.)

Aron's name went on the deed when the land was first purchased. The task was then ours to form the legal entity that would purchase the land from him. Coming up with a name for our intentional community turned out to be a surprisingly difficult part of the process, as did figuring out exactly what type of legal entity would best suit what we wanted to do. It was also quite a task searching for example documents of how to go about setting up a community land trust. Writing bylaws and making decisions about what needed to be incorporated in them took a lot of time. We borrowed heavily from a few sources, blending things together to create exactly what we envisioned. We vowed that when we were through we would always keep our founding documents openly available online for anyone else to use as a model in forming a similar community.

in the '70s era double-wide trailer parked on land across the road from Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage (established in 1997) and three miles away from Sandhill Farm (established in 1974). We were a group of agriculturally minded, independent, idealistic people with a similar vision—homesteading...but not isolated.

None of us had debt. We were all fit and not afraid of physical labor. We had all spent time in places of other culture—Russia, Central America, Alaska. We were influenced by the study of permaculture and wanted to live a low-impact life. We valued diversity and were humble enough to admit we didn't necessarily know what would be the best solutions for living in a sustainable manner—though we were all gung-ho to try our best and put our ideas into action.

We wanted to structure our intentional community so that members could be relatively autonomous on a multi-acre leasehold. We desired that members be empowered to enact their personal visions, whatever they happen to be, just so long as we held similar fundamental values and agreed to adhere to a few policies. We threw around catch phrases like “we can agree to disagree” and have “freedom of choice of implementation.”



We structured our community so that a nonprofit corporation, Red Earth Farms Community Land Trust, Inc. (REFCLT), holds title to the land. Only members in the nonprofit corporation can become leaseholders. After making a one-time payment, they hold a 99-year lease on their piece of land. The lease is renewable, inheritable, and salable, the only caveat being that it would have to pass to someone approved to be a Red Earth Farms member. In many ways it is a lot like ownership with the one-time payment for land paid at the current lease fee, the amount that a member would pay to lease an acre of land, which is determined by REFCLT.

It took nearly three years for us to write the documents and go through the steps to transfer title of the deed to REFCLT. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we did not attract many new members during those formative years. Often visitors who were potentially interested in membership stated that they would be hesitant to commit to living in our community until the land trust officially owned the land.

In order for REFCLT to buy the land, we negotiated with Aron a mortgage deal for 73 percent of the purchase price with the remainder being fronted by the existing community members as lease payments. We agreed to a three-year term loan, to be refinanced with Aron when the term was up, that did not require us to make payments on any certain schedule. Payments were to be made as we got incoming members leasing land. And we did begin attracting new members who eventually became leaseholders. It was a gradual process.

In order to prevent speculation and to keep the price affordable, land can be transferred and leased only for the current lease fee amount. This number is tied to the mortgage with Aron and increases over time. As the last acre is leased out we will have paid off the loan. REFCLT does not intend to hold property in common long-term. We encourage co-ops to form if there are groups of people who would like to manage property in a certain way together. We'd like to minimize our time spent in meetings and avoid compulsory cooperation.

I'm pleased to report that the frequency of our group meetings has gone down from once a week to only once a month. And lately the meetings we do have often finish earlier than the allotted hour and a half. Community members now connect in more enjoyable ways such as our weekly potluck dinners and work parties that rotate location so each homestead gets a recurring opportunity to have neighborly help on big projects. We also see each other at less structured gatherings and connect over sharing things such as child care, machinery or tools, and rides to town.

The choice to locate our community of homesteaders where we did brought many advantages. We gain so much from interactions with the vibrant ecovillage next door and from picking the brains of communitarians who've lived in the region

for many years. There are social opportunities and work opportunities that would otherwise not exist in such a rural location, and area locals have long been exposed to the idea of intentional community so are less likely to raise their eyebrows at us. Being near other established communities helps immensely to mitigate the feelings of isolation one can experience setting up a household on land where community neighbors are out of eye-sight.

After seven years, with nearly all of the available land leased out, we can say that our project has been a success. We have received a lot of interest over the years in this format of an intentional community of homesteaders. At our last annual board meeting we entertained the idea of expanding so as to accommodate even more people who might wish to join in with our vision. However, we all agreed that we would supportively pass the torch on to new people in other places but not look to increase the size of our holdings at Red Earth Farms. We are happy to no longer be spending so much energy and time on drafting documents and recruiting new members. We're glad to get down to the dirty work of just living our lives. 🐦

Kim Scheidt is a founding member of Red Earth Farms in northeast Missouri. She works part-time at the national headquarters of the Fellowship for Intentional Community.



Alyson Ewald



Kim Scheidt

lessons from a CHILDHOOD
in
MAINE

By Sarah Fanslau (née Hewes)

As a child growing up in Downeast Maine, I learned about community from an early age. Community meant boiling stinking pots of brown beans for suppers in support of the neighbor diagnosed with cancer, hours spent rehearsing for the town theatre production, and summers

in the blueberry fields earning a few dollars a quart. As much as the wild beauty of Maine demanded community of her residents, more than the place, it was my parents who ingrained in my siblings and me a sense of service.

It all makes sense if you know my mother is a Lutheran min-



ister, born of Swedish stock in the Midwest, raised with the sense of duty and embarrassment at pleasure that is a hallmark of the American Swedes. Not only was my mother forced to attend a hated summer camp each year, she had to pay for half of it. Rising early, she would bake Swedish coffee bread, delivering it to the neighbors in the dark hours of dawn before school.

If today we understand the idea of community, as a child in Maine what I learned was the reality.

While my mother's community was built on foundations of hard work, my father learned community by proxy. The son of an absent factory owner and sickly mother, he grew up in Washington, DC with the aid of a nanny and two older brothers. Much like the protagonist in Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory," my father was shipped off to the elite boarding schools of his day, and when he could, joined the legions of his peers disenchanted with the excesses of life and moved to Maine.

The story goes that my father had a girlfriend when Ed, a friend who frequented the Seagull on Main Street, Blue Hill, first told my dad about the new girl in town. Whether they met before being cast as leads in *The Mikado*, I don't remember. But pictures show my beautiful young mother singing on the small stage at the Grand Theater in Ellsworth, and my handsome bearded father singing back. The girlfriend disappeared and my parents got married, the community coming out, and bringing food, for their potluck wedding supper. It was as Maine as you could get.

And Maine our life was. In the beginning my parents lived in a small cabin on some land my dad bought with a friend. They had no running water or electricity. The outhouse lacked a door and on winter nights I'm told you could do your business with the backdrop of moon and stars reflected on the frozen snow.

Blue Hill and the surrounding towns were ripe for the kind of childhood pictured in water-colored stories of Maine. We spent a lot of time outdoors: cutting our own Christmas trees, making maple syrup, and raking blueberries in the summertime. My father built a wooden swing set on the side lawn, and many an early evening we could be found climbing her limbs or riding bikes around the rotting crab apple tree.

Maine was magical for more than her scenic wonders. The kind of people that my parents joined in the '70s were musicians, activists, thinkers, and artists. My friends' parents' cars were covered with bumper stickers against the Contra war in Nicaragua, or world hunger. "Bread, Not Bombs" was a favorite.

Growing up in Maine, community wasn't so much of a concept I was aware of. It was just the way it was. But if today we understand the idea of community, as a child in Maine what I learned was the reality, governed by a few simple rules.

The first: community is not a choice. As kids we helped because our parents told us to, and because it was what they did.

The second: everyone needs a hand up sometimes. As a child I learned that community wasn't a far away continent (although sometimes it was that too), it was the kids we shared the backseat with on the way to school and the moms we bumped into at the local IGA supermarket.

Recent political debates about community seem devoid of these two lessons. Some politicians neglect to speak about the need for individual responsibility in serving the poor, advocating for a large role for government. Government

is an essential glue for keeping community together; many community-based initiatives depend on government monies. But my experience in Maine taught me that we must also be intentional about taking responsibility for the people that live around us, and even more intentional about teaching that responsibility to our children.

Other politicians place too great a burden on individual and family, promising to drastically cut the supports offered to those in need. But while they push communities to take greater responsibility for their own, they advocate policies that would further separate the Haves from the Have-Nots, making it less likely that the groups interact, learn something from one another, or have the impetus to help each other out.

The promise of community in Maine was the ability to make a difference you could see and experience. Both individualism and governmentalism threaten to take us further from knowing people who are different than we are, and therefore further from benefiting from the reciprocity of giving to those in need. This seems like a losing proposition. After all, we Americans are progress-driven; when we cannot see the outcome, we forget why we are working.

So what does community cost—and who is going to foot the bill? From the perspective of someone who grew up in Maine, the answer is pretty simple: community is as valuable as we make it. The more we invest the more it is worth. And investing in community has to be driven as much by the individuals who live in it, as the government that supports and regulates it.

It is clear that this country has a lot of work to do in helping individuals and communities re-build a sense of self-efficacy, a belief that we can shape our own destiny, and that everyone has something to contribute.

There is a role for community, government, and business in re-building our belief in each other, which must begin with habitualizing service. Communities could jump on the time-banking bandwagon, giving individuals a platform to trade their skills in exchange for those they are lacking. Imagine swapping Spanish lessons for help balancing the checkbook, or babysitting in exchange for lawn mowing. It is reciprocity in action.

Government and employers have a role to play as well. Government should mandate service learning as a standard component of every child's education through programs like Youth Services Opportunity Project, or Health Leads. And more employers could support their employees in giving back by allowing individuals to set aside 10 hours a month for service to the community, while offering benefits for doing so, like a day off after 50 hours served.

The work ahead is hard. The good news is that we already have a lot of tools in place to get it done. We just need to put them to use. Actions repeated become habits. Let us put in place the building blocks that shape habits in support of community, rather than solely in service to our self. 🌱

**Community is as valuable
as we make it. The more we invest
the more it is worth.**

Sarah Fanslau (née Hewes) was born in Blue Hill, Maine and currently resides in New York City. Sarah has a Master's degree from the London School of Economics, where she studied social policy and development studies. Sarah's work has been focused in the health and research sectors, where she has been interested in the intersection of social policy and cultural sociology. Currently, Sarah is working as a freelance writer and consultant.

Affordability at Sunrise Ranch

By Gary Goodhue

I have been interested for some time in living in an intentional community. I now do, in an event and conference center and intentional spiritual community called Sunrise Ranch, in Loveland, Colorado.

Living in community, I find that almost all of my basic needs are met, many of them with greater abundance than I would have imagined. We have an organic farm and garden program, as well as a farm-to-table culinary academy. Because we are an event and conference center, many people from a variety of walks of life come to visit and stay with us. We have a commercial-size kitchen that often feeds over 100 people per meal. Our head chef and director of the culinary academy used to be the executive chef at a Whole Foods and regularly prepares amazingly healthy and delicious cuisine for the community and guests to enjoy. The food that I eat daily would be very expensive to acquire and prepare if I had to go out to eat or buy it from a grocery store. For some reason, in today's world, good, healthy food costs more than the processed, pre-packaged meals that I once lived off of as a modern-day bachelor.

On top of this generous availability of food, my housing accommodations, utilities, laundry facilities, and internet are all provided for and included within the work-trade program. For the most part, I have been able to let go of the rat-race world of making a paycheck in order to pay bills and live comfortably. This has freed me up to focus on the things that are most important to me—like personal and spiritual development and discovering my passion and purpose in life. There are a number of options for work-type services that I can choose to engage in: cooking in the kitchen, doing maintenance and landscaping, childcare, growing in the garden, stewarding the land and animals on the farm, taking care of guests and the events business, marketing and sales, program development, outreach, publications, financials, or overall community operations.

Another huge benefit of living in community is that I live and work in the same place. I do not have to deal with commuting or traffic or gas expenses. I get more time in my day because the walk to work from my home takes only a few minutes, and

I have the opportunity to engage in different activities through multiple work duties. Sometimes I am helping take care of the children of families that live in the community; sometimes I am cooking in the kitchen or working on a new building project or editing a website. This diversity keeps me from getting stressed or burnt out from doing the same thing all the time, day in and day out. And because of our beautiful surroundings, I get to enjoy hiking and interacting with plants, animals, and the natural world that I formerly had to drive to different locations to enjoy; here they're within a couple minutes' walk.



Photo courtesy of Gary Goodhue

While living in the city, I had to be self-reliant and could rarely depend on others to help me out with areas of life that I had difficulty with. In community living, people support one another; we know that we are stronger existing together as a whole than individually and separate. It is almost like living inside of a large extended family, where people actually care for each other and will go out of their way to help one another when they are in need.

This doesn't mean that it is a utopia, where everything is perfect and everyone is always happy. People are still people everywhere you go, and we are all growing and learning in our own individual areas of life. However, there is a greater inclusion and support for each other than I have known in any other way of life.

One of the challenges in such an environment is that it is similar to living in a very small village, where everyone knows everybody else. Sometimes it can be like living in a fish bowl; everyone seems to know your business. Often that is not the case, but sometimes that is what it feels like. Maybe that is because it is common to think that, just because my world revolves around me, other people are paying as much attention to my experiences as I am. Usually they are not, but still the fact remains that many people hear what I say and see what I do. That can become a problem if the two do not match.

The upside to this is that, if you allow it, others can help to hold you accountable and support you in becoming more transparent. This means releasing the lies and sneakiness and general incongruences within your character. This is a good thing to be moving toward. However, you may feel frustrated until you get there, as the old ways of being are no longer working the way they used to and outdated selfish behaviors can no longer be kept in the shadows.

Some people may imagine being bored in an intentional community, living in such close proximity to neighbors and without many varied experiences. Such boredom may happen in some situations, but not here on Sunrise Ranch. We always have something going on because this place also serves as a conscious event and conference center. Dances, drumming circles, musical jam sessions, workshops and classes, healers' gatherings, spiritual and inspirational services, harvest and garden parties, game nights, outdoor group sports, activities, and much more happen on a fairly consistent basis. I can choose to involve myself in these options or not, depending on my availability; and most of them are free and easy to participate in. Often there are new people who come to visit and interact with us, and the ones that I live, work, and play with on a daily basis are like family; I know who I am spending my time with and they know me.

All in all, living in an intentional community environment has been a rich experience—the most fulfilling way of life I have known. I believe that this is a model for the type of living that the world as a whole is moving toward. Imagine trading money focus, self-centeredness, and separation for shared abundance, service consciousness, and interconnected living. I am blessed to be in such a supportive and abundant environment. ☺

**Imagine trading money focus,
self-centeredness, and separation for
shared abundance, service
consciousness, and interconnected living.**

An author, actor, and poet, Gary Goodhue has been a seeker of universal truth and spiritual awakenings his entire adult life. He studied at the School of Metaphysics, where he taught classes and directed one of their school centers. He was involved with a spiritual community called Community of Light for two years, then pursued intentional community living for a number of years after that, even planning to start his own with friends. He currently resides at Sunrise Ranch (sunriseranch.org), headquarters for Emissaries of Divine Light, and one of the oldest continual intentional communities in the United States.

Money and Sustainability at Green Valley Village

By Fen Liano

In my community, Green Valley Village, someone recently suggested the following financial goal: “GVV as a community and every individual resident member who wants to are able to have all of their dollar needs met on the land or from the land.”

Then he asked for feedback. Many of my land mates like this idea of earning an income on our own property. It is rooted in the desire to center our lives around our homes and put our energy directly into our community rather than dividing our time between working here and elsewhere. As an aspiring homesteader, I too really appreciate that.

But I am wary of measuring our success as a community by our ability to provide ourselves with paid employment. So I wrote back.

Let’s face it, money is required for us to exist. We cannot live in community without paying to do so. What choice do we have? We stop making the mortgage, someone takes our land away. If we cannot afford the rent, we cannot be here.

But at Green Valley Village we are not a typical group of land owners and renters: we are an intentional community, part of a greater communities movement to create an intentional culture. We are 40 people stewarding 330 acres of forest and meadowland in northern California,

striving towards ecological self-sufficiency. So while we, like every other American, must pay to inhabit our space, we are taking on the additional challenge of meeting our own basic needs on our land. We try to do things ourselves so we can limit what we take through the oppressive financial market and at the same time we must give time and energy to that market so we can live here.

So what would earning our income on our land actually mean for Green Valley Village? Economic success would reflect the amount of resources and services we could access from outside our own community, not whether we could generate resources

Green Valley Village has a herd of goats that provide milk for the community.

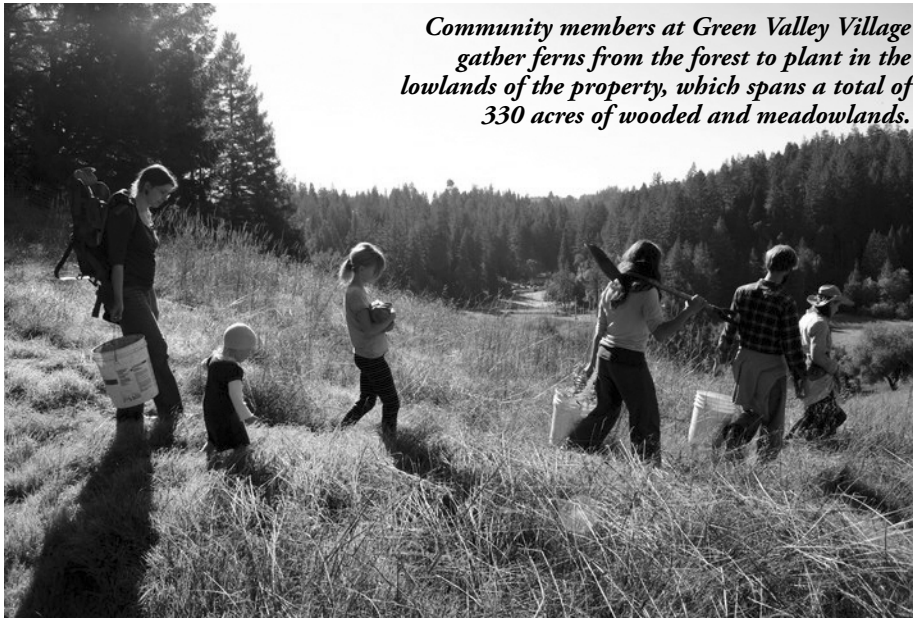


Fen hand waters Green Valley's oak nursery, Oaktopia, home to more than 40 varieties of oak trees and one of the village's on-site businesses.

The community at Green Valley Village gathers around the maypole to celebrate Beltane with family and friends.

Photos courtesy of Fen Liano

Community members at Green Valley Village gather ferns from the forest to plant in the lowlands of the property, which spans a total of 330 acres of wooded and meadowlands.



The community takes a trip to the ocean, 20 miles over the coastal mountains.



and services that meet our human needs. Rather than base our goals on an economic system, capitalism, which values immediate growth, I would prefer to base them on our ideological system, sustainability, which values long-term coexistence. Only then can we begin to prioritize the work we believe in.

At Green Valley Village, we are starting to do that. We are creating goods and services that support our community and, as it turns out, some of these do earn money: a cow share, a CSA farm, an oak nursery, the sale of eggs, solar-baked goods and chocolates, massage work, and a hops field and vineyard in the works.

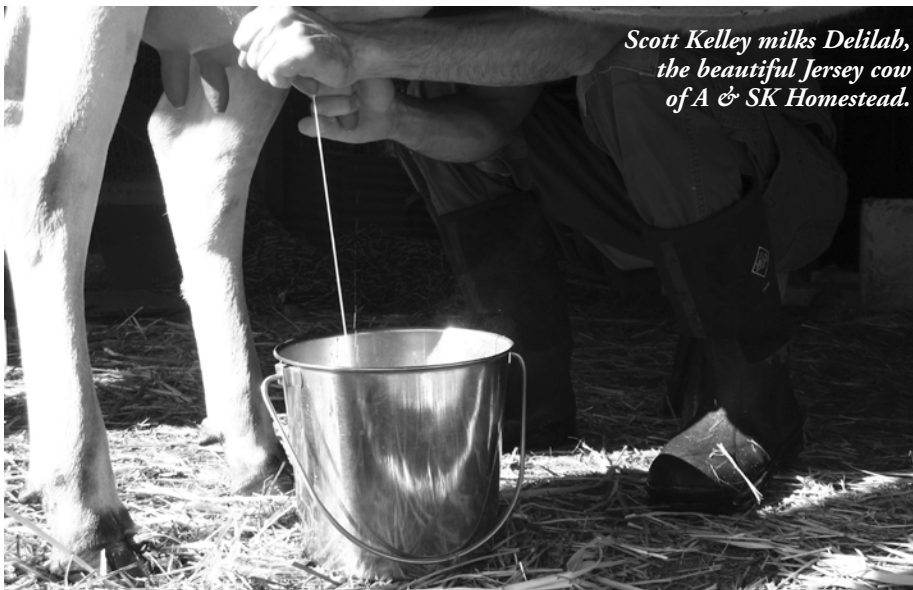
I am grateful when people take entrepreneurial risks to create employment on the land and distribute the benefits of what we have here with people in the outside world. But because the amount of money a business brings in may not reflect its true worth in an economic race to privatize collective resources, I see financial gain as a byproduct of creating goods and services that meet real needs over time, rather than as an aspiration of our community.

At my home the CRIC House (Cultural Rehabilitation Internship Center, a semi-egalitarian anarchist community within Green Valley Village), I have learned that I can have a high quality of life at a low cost of living. At CRIC we practice homesteading and waste reclamation. Caring for our home and each other and the earth where we live takes time—time when we are not making money. However, we can afford to claim that time as our own when we set up our lives to keep our expenses low.

I live in the San Francisco Bay Area and

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Scott Kelley milks Delilah, the beautiful Jersey cow of A & SK Homestead.



Fen stewards Green Valley's oak nursery, Oaktopia, home to more than 40 varieties of oak trees and one of the village's on-site businesses



Self-Reliance In and Out of Community

By Janel Healy



Moving to the Twin Oaks Community in 2010 was a pure leap of faith. After a year and a half at sea as a cruise ship singer, all I wanted to do was live on a farm, taking in the pleasure of land and the homegrown food that came with it. I didn't really understand this yearning (and my parents certainly didn't). But the heart often understands things long before the head does.

When I became a member of the Virginia community at 23, I was sure of only two things: that I wanted A) to have an adventurous life and B) to challenge the status quo. Up to that point, I had the adventurous part down. Living in an alternative society certainly seemed to satisfy the second life requirement. Little did I know that Twin Oaks would challenge me. No one expects that they're going to move to a commune and learn more in two years than in 18 years of school. Twin Oaks is where I learned to discipline myself and be my own boss. It's where I learned that I have the entrepreneurial energy to take a floundering project and turn it into something new. (Few are the places you can be a manager at 24.)

Twin Oaks is where I figured out why I moved there in the first place—that I have a deep passion for sustainably produced food. I guess it took one ultra-processed cruise ship meal too many to set me on a journey to figure that out. After working with the community's poultry program and gaining networking skills through the Twin Oaks Communities Conference and nearby Acorn Community's Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, I realized that my goal is to propagate the local food movement currently sweeping the nation. After two years at Twin Oaks, I decided this goal would be best fulfilled in California, the

agricultural heartland of the United States and location of my childhood home.

I know it can be hard on Twin Oaks to see members come and go. But as much as it is a home for 100, Twin Oaks is an incubator—of new ideas, of skills, of people who think outside the box. Twin Oaks is where my understanding of my ideals, talents, and dreams crystallized. Twin Oaks is where I truly grew up. If there's one way that the community challenges the status quo, it's through people whose worldviews have been rocked; people who take what they've learned at Twin Oaks into the wider world and do their part to transform it. My hope is to do exactly that.

A few years before he died, Steve Jobs said it was only in looking back on his life that he could "connect the dots" and understand the implications and effects of every action he took. I already feel this way about my time at Twin Oaks—it illuminated the direction I want my life to take. For now, that direction is west.

Now that I'm no longer safe within the confines of an income-sharing community, I am nervous about making it on my own financially. I've never had to do it before, as I was living on cruise ships out of college. But I think to truly be able to appreciate income-sharing, I have to try to make it on my own.

Meanwhile, a piece of my heart will always lie in Virginia. 🐦

Janel Healy recently moved from Twin Oaks Community in Louisa, Virginia back to her home state of California. She still sings wherever she goes. She adapted this article from one she wrote for Leaves of the Oaks, Twin Oaks' newsletter.

Affordability: What It's Good For

By Irena Hollowell

Of all the countries I've been to, the US is unquestionably the one where people have the most. And of all the countries I've been to, I'd say the US is the one where people worry the most about whether they will continue to have enough. I've been to Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay, Spain, Thailand, India, and Nepal.

In South India, I spent three months at Sadhana Forest, a settlement of the intentional township of Auroville. Volunteers from around the world slept in huts built to let the breezes through, without walls between our sleeping spaces, and with minimal electricity. We worked together to reforest community land, and we shared three vegan meals a day, as well as frequent laughter, frustration, and intermittent lessons ranging from reiki to tightrope walking.

Now, living at Acorn Community in Virginia, I've built up some attachment to a number of things I didn't have at Sadhana Forest—like internet access at night, and more clothes and books than I can carry on my back, and putting my laundry in a washing machine. I don't know if these things really make me happier or healthier, but they make my life easier, and it might be hard for me to give them up.

At Acorn, though we may easily become attached to certain comforts, we generally don't become attached to status symbols. For example, it's easy here to remain unattached to driving a fancy car, or riding a fancy bike, or having a cell phone, or how my hair looks, or any number of other things that most Americans spend money to keep in order. To the extent that there are any differences in status here, these are defined by what we do, not what we have. When someone takes on an important job that hasn't been getting done well enough—like poison ivy removal, in my case—other people are grateful. But no one gets more personal

money as a result. If one person has more saved money than another, it doesn't tend to show in what they own here.

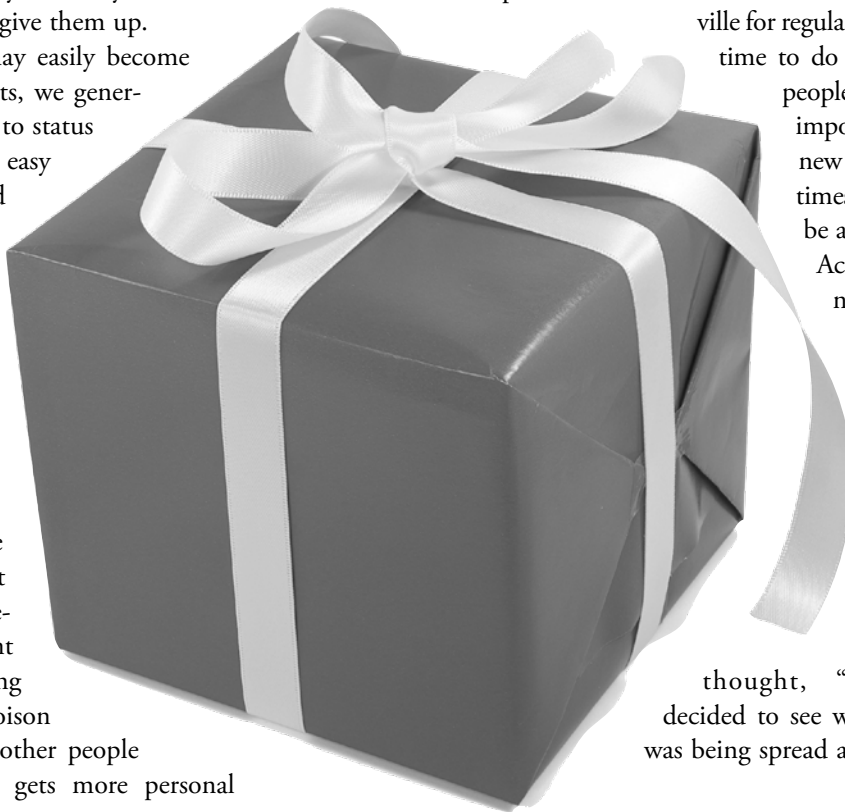
I love Acorn's business, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, even more than the income it brings us. I love helping other people become more self-sufficient and live more sustainably. But it's in part because we have a successful eco-friendly business that I often get overwhelmed with too many projects related to it. I can get frustrated thinking that it's so hard to find the time to write certain things for the Southern Exposure website, or thinking that I forgot to plant sesame early enough to know how it does in our area. When I get overwhelmed, I am less likely to spend casual downtime with the people I live with. Even the coolest sources of income have their downsides.

In the end, does it not matter what we can afford, materially? I have known people, at Acorn, who have claimed that it doesn't matter, and I have wondered myself. Yet in an income-sharing group, I think more money can mean fewer arguments. Some people, like me, really want the community to buy organic food. Sometimes someone really wants the community to support another pet. Sometimes someone wants to drive to Charlottesville for regular play rehearsals, or take

time to do volunteer work. Some people thought it was really important for us to get a new saw-stop table saw. At times like these, it's great to be able to say "Yes." Lately, Acorn can generally (but not always) afford the things that are really important to certain people here.

• • •

Recently I came across a YouTube video about "how to buy happiness." I thought, "What a farce," but decided to see what kind of falsehood was being spread around. The guy in the



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Achieving Affordability with Cohousing

By Joanna Winter and Charles Durrett

Cohousing tends to conjure up images of a happy but homogeneous group of communitarians—middle-class, highly educated, and culturally similar. This picture may feel out of reach, or even distasteful, for many people who don't have significant financial resources, whether due to choice or circumstance.

The fact is that this picture represents only one segment of the cohousing movement—the segment that gets the most press. There are many cohousing or cohousing-inspired communities that are partially or totally populated by single parents, working-class singles or families, seniors with fixed incomes, and students. Successful homeless shelters and affordable housing complexes have been built using cohousing principles.

However, very few people have heard about these projects, which don't fit the stereotype. Affordably priced cohousing homes are snapped up so quickly that their community's members don't go to great lengths to seek publicity in the way that the higher priced communities do when they're trying to market their units. Were these low-income communities to seek media attention, the story would likely be less compelling to journalists and their predominantly middle-class audience than the more culturally relevant (to them) story of middle-class-oriented cohousing. So the stereotype remains.

Cohousing is intrinsically an affordable model: one of its main purposes, outside of a strong sense of community, is limiting resource consumption by sharing resources. The savings in energy, maintenance costs, and food outweigh the apparent up-front costs due to new construction. A survey of 200 cohousing residents showed minimum cost savings per month of \$200 per household, with some even saving over \$2,000. With the addition of solar systems, residents at Nevada City Cohousing are actually *earning* money on their electric bills instead of owing it.

In senior cohousing, proximity to friends and shared resources means that residents can live independently for a longer time instead of having to spend money on costly retirement homes, and have less need for professional caregivers. Cohousers also get more amenities for their dollar: instead of investing in an individual facility that may

rarely get used, such as a workshop or guest room, for a comparable amount of money they have access to workshop, gardening, laundry, guest room, celebration and other shared space.

Costs can also be kept down through the creativity, ingenuity, and discipline of the residents and architect. A cohousing team starts by determining the price per square foot that the residents can afford, and works backward from there. The discipline to stick to this price comes from needing to ensure that all the future cohousers involved in the process will be able to afford to live there.

Cohousing members intentionally choose smaller units that are right-sized for downscaled lives; instead of spending their money on large personal houses, they channel it into shared facilities that can take advantage of economies of scale and efficient construction, and with the money saved, still have remaining funds to spend on other quality of life activities. Berkeley Cohousing was started in part by four single women, three of them mothers, whose individual cohousing home prices were \$120k at a time that

Photos courtesy of Joanna Winter





the average home in Berkeley was \$500k. In nearby Emeryville, Doyle Street Cohousing's prices started at only \$130k. A combination of extremely efficient construction, adaptive reuse, prudent site selection, and a serious investment in up-front design kept the construction costs to \$57 per square foot (in 1991).

In addition to systematic affordability for the entire community, there are multiple strategies for making individual units meet low-income cohousers' needs. Communities with units specifically designated as affordable to low-income residents may often take advantage of government incentives like fee deferrals, density bonuses, and low-interest mortgages. Many cities actually require that a certain percent of new units be permanently affordable. To be self-reliant as a community, some cohousing groups have created their own funds to help low-income members finance homes. And of course, as cohousing grows and matures and more families are able to move into long-established cohousing communities, newcomers to cohousing won't always be paying the cost of new construction.

Cohousing also has great potential for partnerships with public and nonprofit affordable housing developers, who have access to subsidies but still have limited budgets. In 2009, Affordable Housing Associates, a nonprofit housing developer, completed one of the first entirely affordable rental cohousing communities in the United States, Petaluma Avenue Homes. Wild Sage Cohousing in Boulder partnered with the local public housing authority, Boulder Housing Partners, to build cohousing as part of a larger redevelopment housing project. Similarly, Southside Park in Sacramento was developed in response to the local Redevelopment Agency's request for proposals, and is a mixed-income community where 11 of the 25 units are affordable to low- and moderate-income residents, partially financed by second mortgages from the Redevelopment Agency. Other communities have partnered with Community Land Trusts, who purchase and manage long-term affordable units.

Affordable housing agencies have the potential to save money with cohousing because the residents manage themselves, and are therefore not reliant on costly management companies. Also, neighbors like cohousing—a huge benefit for affordable housing, which is often blocked by NIMBY neighbors—because it becomes a resource for the neighborhood and its residents are invested in the upkeep of the community. Unlike

traditional development, neighbors actually meet the cohousers who will live next door during the development process, which can head off neighborhood opposition campaigns that would otherwise be costly to overcome.

Communities and housing developers can also apply cohousing principles to non-cohousing communities

Affordable housing agencies can save money with cohousing because the residents manage themselves.

to increase their affordability (and of course their level of social capital, which provides measurable benefits to low-income families). McCamant & Durrett Architects has worked with numerous affordable housing developers to apply cohousing design and social principles to new affordable communities. Involving residents in design, development, and management; designing right-sized units offset by large, efficient common space; and creating systems for residents to share material goods and responsibilities are practices that are transferable from cohousing to help communities become more financially sustainable.

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Making Cohousing Affordable: Strategies and Successes

By Betsy Morris

This article is adapted and revised from one that first appeared at www.cohousing.org. We include it (and the accompanying piece by Oz Ragland and Wendy Willbanks Wiesner), despite some overlap with the preceding article by Joanna Winter and Charles Durrett, because affordability is among the hottest topics in discussions of cohousing, and we're hoping to bring as much light as possible to the subject.

A glance at a detailed map of US cohousing communities would show that most cohousers are living in areas of relatively high property values: on the coasts, in college towns, or on the outskirts of high-tech growth centers. That's one reason why making cohousing affordable to the widest possible number of people has been of intense interest to prospective community members throughout the history of the cohousing movement.

Over the past decade, I have identified strategies used by more than 30 communities to include households at lower-income levels. The number of communities and strategies continues to grow. We'll delve into these strategies in a moment.

What Is Affordable Housing?

The term *affordable housing* has a regulatory meaning beyond the notion of "what I can afford to pay." The US Census and other federal agencies define housing as affordable if the costs (rent and utilities or mortgage, taxes, insurance, and HOA dues) are no more than 35 percent of a household's gross income. That cap has risen from 25 percent over the past few decades.

There are a lot of reasons why housing has become more expensive and a bigger part of the typical household budget. Suffice it to say that the market is not building housing based on actual incomes, but tends to produce a glut for upper income households, particularly in the form of second homes and investment properties. Relatively little housing is built for those of us on the downside of the national median, a troublesome trend.

In response, a growing number of cities and regions in higher income/high growth/expensive market areas now have "inclusionary zoning" policies to ensure more housing for greater income diversity. In parts of California, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, and New Mexico, new housing built with more than four units (the numbers vary) must have at least 10, 20, up to as high as 30 percent (Santa Fe) of its units selling or renting for below-market rates. *Affordable* in this sense means housing that has been subsidized in some way. More specifically, the rents and sales prices must again cost no more than a third of the household's monthly budget, but here the households targeted range from those living at poverty level up to those at 120 percent of the city or county's median household income. Most inclusionary zoning requires that a fifth of new units be affordable to families making 80 to 120 percent of median income for homeowners. In the case of rental projects, prospective renters earn 30 to 80 percent of the median income.

So that brings us to the essential question: How do cohousing units or communities become more affordable? There are two ways: by controlling costs, and by bringing in subsidies, usually in the form of low-cost loans or shared equity investments.

Controlling Costs

In real estate development, time is money. Developers save money by making costs predictable, not simply by cutting costs. Controlling costs means keeping close tabs of all three phases of development:

- “soft” or variable costs associated with pre-development, such as permit fees, architecture, and planning
- “hard” costs of land, labor, and materials during development
- operating and reserve costs required to maintain the buildings, and other community and household expenses after move-in

All three phases are affected by the cost of money, i.e. interest on loans used to cover each phase.

Making housing affordable to a range of households requires thoughtful planning well before anything is built or people move into a new community. The development costs and long-term operating costs will be spelled out before construction starts in a new project because of bank and other legal requirements. Retrofit communities should also be mindful of the long-term impacts of choices made early on that will affect household expenses 10, 20, and 30 years out.

Internal strategies for lowering housing costs include methods used by architects and builders, and other methods specific to cohousing. Widely used examples include choosing smaller unit sizes, building “at scale” (building the number of units sufficient to get better prices on labor and materials), designing for energy efficiency in materials, siting homes for passive solar gain, and clustering homes to use less land. Bathrooms and kitchens are the “high ticket” rooms, so having only one bathroom per unit and standard kitchen appliances is another way to lower per unit costs. Other less common methods include:

Affordability Strategy	Community Examples
Space for future in-law studios/rental units in private homes	Commons on the Alameda (Santa Fe, NM) Nyland (Lafayette, CO) Jackson Place (Seattle, WA)
Controlling construction costs rigorously; profit sharing	Jamaica Plain (Boston, MA) WHDC/Cohousing Partners projects
Cooperative ownership of a single unit	Sunward (Ann Arbor, MI)
Equity sharing with non-resident partners	Bellingham Coho (Bellingham, WA)
Leaving some spaces unfinished (rooms over a garage, basement, or common spaces) so homeowners can improve as their incomes rise (as allowed by building code)	Two Echo Cohousing (Brunswick, ME)
Shared utilities or other facilities among households—for example, one laundry rather than 30 hookups, one water or gas main versus 30	Cobb Hill Farm (Hartland, VT) Takoma Village (Washington, DC) Eastern Village (Silver Spring, MD) Westwood (Asheville, NC)
Community system of loans or gifts among members of the cohousing community before construction, to either lower housing prices or help families be able to afford the sales prices needed to cover costs	Jamaica Plain (Boston, MA) Island Cohousing, (West Tisbury, MA)
Community as a whole (or part of membership) purchases units or raises their own unit costs to lower price of another unit to make it affordable to another family	Bartimaeus Cohousing, (Bremerton, WA) Cobb Hill Farm (Hartland, VT) Coho Ecovillage (Corvallis, OR)

These kinds of strategies can take tens of thousands off the purchase price, or thousands of dollars off operating costs or interest payments a year. Let’s take a closer look at a couple of those internal strategies.

Sharing utilities is a cost-saving method specific to cohousing because of the cooperation necessary among homeowners to negotiate these systems and convince bankers and local planners. In areas with extreme seasons, utilities for the typical home can often go over \$200 a month. In addition to passive solar and other design elements, communities such as Westwood in Asheville, NC, Cobb Hill in Hartland, VT, and Swan’s Market Cohousing in Oakland, CA use highly efficient centralized boilers for heating and hot water for two dozen and more households. Nyland, Wild Sage, and other Wonderland Hill projects were all early adopters of green technologies for documented lower utility costs. Takoma Village in Washington, DC and nearby Eastern Village in Silver Spring, MD have geothermal systems that tap the relatively constant temperature of the underlying rock to help heat and cool the homes and common house to a comfortable temperature year-round. I have heard of costs as low as \$9/month for heating and cooling in the most extreme months.

An internal loan fund was another affordability approach taken by Boston’s Jamaica Plain Cohousing. Ten percent of the 30-unit community was required by the City of Boston to be affordable to buyers earning 80 percent of area median income or less. In fact, half the community households qualified. To make more units affordable, the community funded a \$100,000 loan fund so buyers who needed more than the bank would lend could apply for a loan from the fund. Half the loan funds came from a voluntary assessment from all members, raising their home prices slightly; the other half came from individuals in the community. The fund is managed by an independent third party.

External Strategies to Lower Housing Costs— Subsidies and Partnerships

External affordability strategies involve partnerships or relationships with other public or nonprofit entities. Groups need to bring these partners in very early, often before land has been found. In more recent cases, nonprofit developers are deciding to build cohousing and recruit a group after they have gotten a site and an approved design.

External Strategies/Partnerships	Community Examples
Limited equity/appreciation recapture	Berkeley Cohousing (Berkeley, CA) Elderspirit (Abingdon, VA) Wild Sage (Boulder, CO) Nomad (Boulder, CO) Island Cohousing (West Tisbury, MA)
Land trust	Mariposa Grove (Oakland, CA) Troy Gardens (Madison, WI) Ithaca Ecovillage (Ithaca, NY)
Nonprofit community housing development organization	Elderspirit (Abingdon, VA) Eldergrace (Santa Fe, NM) Sequoia Village (Sebastopol, CA) Coho Ecovillage (Corvallis, OR) Swan's Market (Oakland, CA)
Habitat for Humanity—"sweat equity"	Wild Sage (Boulder, CO) Arboretum (Madison, WI)
First-time homebuyer assistance	Swan's Market, (Oakland, CA) Doyle Street (Emeryville, CA)
Low/moderate income homebuyer Assistance	Sequoia Village (Sebastopol, CA) Wasatch Commons (Salt Lake City, UT) Village Cohousing (Madison, WI)
Density bonuses	Pacifica Cohousing (Carrboro, NC)
Nonprofit or public housing agency owns unit; uses federal or private funds to subsidize rent for very low-income households, including disabled persons	Quayside Village (Vancouver, BC) Jackson Place (Seattle, WA) Cambridge Cohousing (Cambridge, MA) Coho Ecovillage (Corvallis, OR)
Low-income homeowner lottery	Island Cohousing (West Tisbury, MA) Jamaica Plain (Boston, MA)
Mix of affordable rentals (owned by nonprofit) and homeowner units	ElderSpirit (Abingdon, VA)

Let's explore a few of these external strategies in more depth.

Limited equity: Limited equity arrangements allow eligible buyers to purchase homes at very favorable prices with low down payments. *Limited equity* means when the property is resold, all or some of the equity returns to the fund that subsidized its purchase, sometimes revolving to subsidize the next eligible buyer of the same home. Berkeley Cohousing's 14 units were renovated at market rate with costs kept as low as possible. Half the residents were first-time homebuyers. To avoid a condo-conversion fee required by the city, members agreed to cap future appreciation for 30 years to remain affordable to people with similar incomes. Five homes have sold over the last 12 years, for roughly 33 percent to almost 50 percent below market rate for units of a similar size.

Land trust: Mariposa Grove is another retrofit community a few miles from Berkeley Cohousing. The original buyer brought in people to share and renovate three existing buildings into seven units, create common space, and make decisions cooperatively. Last year the land was sold to the nonprofit Northern California Land Trust. The units are being purchased as condominiums affordable to households making 60 to 80 percent of area median income. Banks will supply a mortgage in the normal manner.

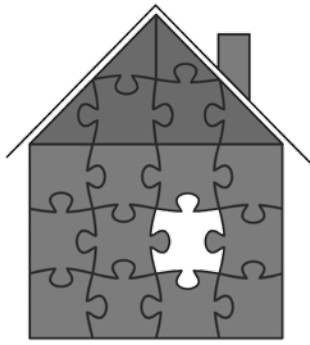
Partnering with a nonprofit housing developer: Elderspirit in Abingdon, VA pioneered a mixed-rental/homeowner cohousing model to provide more affordability. Burning soul/founder Dene Peterson, an experienced nonprofit manager, created a nonprofit community housing development organization (CHDO), a special entity that is eligible for special federal, state, and private lending grants and low-interest loans. (Creating a CHDO

(continued on p. 75)

RESOURCES:

- Design Advisor (www.designadvisor.org)
- Institute for Community Economics (www.ice.org)
- *Cohousing Handbook* by Chris and Kelly ScottHansen (cohousingresources.com)
- National Low-income Housing Coalition, Washington (www.nlihc.org)
- National Coop Bank (www.ncb.coop)
- Neighborworks Institute (www.nw.org)

- Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org)
- *The Equity Sharing Book* by Dianna Bull and Elaine St.-James, Penguin Books, 1990
- Enterprise Foundation (www.enterprisefoundation.org)
- Fannie Mae Foundation (www.fanniemaefoundation.org)
- Community Next Door (www.communitynextdoor.org)
- Your local city or state trust or housing department
- wiki.cohousing.org



Affordability Strategies and Contrasts

By Oz Ragland and Wendy Willbanks Wiesner

Betsy's article on Cohousing Affordability does an excellent job of covering many strategies—internal and external—which have been used within the Cohousing (COHO) form of Intentional Communities (IC). This supplement describes similar strategies and the contrasts between most cohousing homes and those found in other forms of intentional communities.

Subsidizing Prices vs. Lowering Costs

As described by Betsy, many COHO communities have found ways to obtain subsidies that reduce the initial price of some or all of the units. In some cases prices have been shifted internally (some units are priced higher to allow some to have lower prices). In other cases, external funds from conventional public sources have enabled forming groups to reduce the purchase price of some homes. While this is difficult to assess, other types of ICs are certainly less likely to use public subsidies.

On the other hand, since COHO homes are relatively conventional, fully code-compliant homes, there are fewer opportunities to reduce housing costs.

Reducing Initial Move-In Costs

- **Smaller home sizes:** Most COHO homes are smaller than 2,169 sq. feet (average size of houses completed in the US in 2010), but few are less than 1,000 sq. ft. Many intentional communities include tiny homes (<500 sq. ft.).

- **Owner-built:** While most COHO homes are built by professional builders, who do not occupy the resulting homes, many IC homes are owner-built, which significantly reduces out-of-pocket labor costs.

- **Building materials:** While a wide range of materials are used in COHO homes, most use conventional, new-bought materials. IC homes include tents, yurts, cabins, and ones built with recycled or locally harvested natural materials, including wood, stone, clay, straw, etc.

- **Shared bathrooms and kitchens:** Few COHO communities contain private homes without private bathrooms and/or kitchens—in fact, this very feature would exclude the community from fitting within the cohousing model. Many intentional communities have homes with more sharing of these most expensive features found in conventional homes.

- **Shared households:** While there are COHO homes shared by multiple unrelated adults, sharing dwellings is much more common within other types of ICs, especially for small groups using urban single-family homes.

- **Supporting infrastructure:** Some COHO homes are supported by a common infrastructure, e.g., parking, landscaping, sewer hookups, etc., which costs less than for comparable multi-family homes. Many IC homes are created with far less infrastructure, reducing costs even further.

- **Property ownership:** Virtually all COHO homes are legally structured as condominiums, with private ownership of units and undividable interest in the common. Creating a condominium that complies with state law often costs more than the various legal

structures used by other ICs. For example, purchasing a property as tenants in common or making use of property owned by a single owner can be less expensive.

- **Owning vs. renting:** The initial cost of buying a home is typically far higher than the money required to rent. While some COHO homes are available for rent, the rental model is quite common for other IC homes. Rent-to-own programs can bridge the gap between the affordability of renting and the long-term security as well as equal democratic voice that come with ownership.

- **Moving expenses:** Many cohousing homes are purchased by families who have accumulated a considerable amount of material goods, which costs more to move. While this is rare, some ICs have policies restricting the amount of stuff which can be moved, and smaller home sizes typically reduce the amount of stuff that can fit into homes.

Reducing Ongoing Costs of Living

Some of these expenses are directly tied to items above.

- **Smaller home sizes:** Generally, the smaller the home or space available per person, the less expense is involved in heating and maintenance.

- **Volunteer labor:** Maintenance of most COHO homes likely uses far more volunteer labor than for conventional homes of families of comparable income. This is even more more probable for owner-builders. For both, this reduces labor costs from outside service providers, e.g. plumbers, electricians.

- **Sharing facilities:** For COHO homes, the costs of shared facilities are

(continued on p. 76)



Maintaining Affordability and Sustainability: Saving for the Future

By Sharon Villines

One of the best ways to maintain the affordability and long-term sustainability of your community is to save for future expenses. Many of us understand saving for emergencies, but communities also need to save for repairs and replacements of commonly owned property. Savings preserve affordability because they protect members from unexpected cash requirements. Savings contribute to sustainability because they build a more certain future. To be affordable, many intentional communities neglect long-term savings, but short-term affordability may not mean long-term affordability, or even be creating sustainability.

When we moved into Takoma Village Cohousing (in northwest Washington, DC), we knew almost nothing about the management of our buildings. It was our community, our home, our dream come true, but it was also a \$7.5 million real estate development with a complex infrastructure that included storm sewers, an elevator, thousands of square-feet of siding and roofs and basements, and a sprinkler and fire alarm system that encompassed 43 units plus a 4,000 square-foot common house.

As a self-managed community, we needed a crash course in advanced building maintenance and repair, but we didn't know enough to know even that. For several years we lurched from crisis to crisis, learning about the storm sewer inspection the day the city showed up with a bill for \$10,000 and the elevator inspection the day they showed up to shut it down. With community members who were completely dependent on elevator access, this was a crisis. Fortunately, one of the first things we had done was have a "reserve study" done and set up "reserves."

"Reserves"

Few of us really understood at that time what a reserve study was or why we were setting aside so much money every month. As we later understood, the reserve study determined how much we needed to save to repair and replace all our commonly owned facilities. Because we had it done and we followed it as best we could, it has provided us with the funds to weather many storms—literally. A few years ago lightning struck the building and fried everything electrical. Since almost everything these days is electrical, it was expensive.

Some households could have absorbed an unexpected expense of \$3,000, but others were living from paycheck to paycheck with no flexibility. Several either had

a child entering college, were unemployed, or had a serious illness. If we as a community had not had savings, the extra expense could have made the community unaffordable for some and put others seriously in debt.

"Reserves" are savings designated for a specific purpose—in this case, the repair and replacement of our major building parts like intercom systems, electrical wiring, heating systems, appliances, etc., which were damaged when lightning struck. Because we had been saving for predictable expenses, including normal deterioration, we had partial savings for the planned replacement of many of these parts and could borrow from our reserves for others. Having those funds available also meant we did not have to defer other repairs that had already been planned.

Deferred repairs can become costly. By not replacing deteriorated or damaged roofing shingles, for example, we would risk damage to parts of the roof structure that would cost much more to repair.

Reserve Studies

To determine how much we needed to save, we hired a reserve study specialist to study the property and calculate how much we would need to save annually to maintain it. The specialists reviewed the

condition of each of the elements and estimated its useful life. Predictions are never perfect, but their useful life estimates were based on data collected on the actual experiences of others and are used by the construction and housing industry nationally.

We follow the norm of having reserve studies repeated every three to five years. A new study reviews the condition of each element and any changes since the last study, and updates the financial calculations. Financial calculations are based on interest earned, inflation rates, and changes in construction costs and new technology. Variations can be significant, up as well as down.

The formulas on which the calculations are based take into consideration short-term expenses for replacements that occur repeatedly every five to 10 years, for example, and for long-term expenses that may occur every 30 to 50 years.

We have paid from \$3,000 to \$5,000 depending on whether the specialist was building on old studies or redoing the components list. It is important to consider the level of expertise that is going into your study. (See “Resources” at the end of this article.)

Using the Reserve Study to Maintain Property

A few years after we moved in, I joined the facilities team and began managing the action items list and the budget. The building was beginning to need repairs and heavier maintenance. This is when I really began to understand how much a good reserve study could help maintain affordability and sustainability.

In a building our size, just the listing of all the commonly owned construction and building elements is a seven-page spreadsheet. Because we had a very good company doing our study, it taught us about all the parts of the building, how much each would cost to replace, and when that replacement might be necessary. This is important because very few of us have an understanding of how our buildings work that is sufficient to self-manage our buildings. Very few communities are large enough to hire professional managers.

I've been through four studies now, not all worth the effort. Reserve specialists have varying backgrounds and levels of ability. Our best studies were done by architects and construction engineers who loved their work, and cared about energy efficiency and well-maintained buildings. They walked the property with us and explained what they were examining and what they found. They gave us tips on maintenance and materials, on new technologies, and often on local providers. People who enjoy their work like to talk about it, but not all this information will be included in the written report. It is more complex to write than to say. We got this information because we were present during the walk-through. In the less helpful studies, the specialist just took pictures and said almost nothing. We went home and wouldn't use them again.

The knowledge and skill of reserve study specialists in evaluating the condition of your property, their care in doing a complete analysis, and the quality of their financial projections will determine how well your study prepares you for the future. The better prepared you are financially, the more affordable and sustainable your community will be. You will be able to complete major repairs and replacements when needed without causing financial distress or embarrassment to individual households.

Resources

There is much more information I could share about reserve studies. The focus of this article is to raise awareness of how important savings are to maintaining affordability and sustainability. The following resources will provide more information about the studies themselves.

State of California Department of Real Estate Reserve Study Guidelines for Homeowner Association Budgets

The California Reserve Study Guidelines are the most complete information

available—extremely detailed and thorough. Each state has different laws but following the best practices can only benefit your community. Just because you don't have to do it, doesn't mean you shouldn't. See www.dre.ca.gov/pdf_docs/re25.pdf.

Association Reserves, Inc.

A large reserve study firm serving California and many other states with an excellent website, including a Q&A that covers many topics; most responses are from lawyers. They also offer do-it-yourself packets and inexpensive financial updates. See www.reservestudy.com.

Reserve Study Advisors

Another commercial site with good Q&A pages. See www.reserveadvisors.com.

Community Associations Institute

An association of and for HOAs. Members of local chapters can be very helpful in recommending a local reserve study specialist and sharing other information. See www.caionline.org.

An Email Discussion Group on Reserve Studies

A YahooGroups list for intentional communities to discuss reserve study issues. The files section also includes sample reserve studies and other resource materials. Members share experiences and their own practices. To subscribe, send a blank message to reservestudies-subscribe@yahoo.com. 🐣

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Making It Naturally Affordable: O.U.R. Ecovillage Breaks Regulatory Ground

By Brandy Gallagher

O.U.R. Ecovillage has shown an ongoing interest in working on the next horizon of precedent-setting—from land use zoning to governance models...so why not take on the affordable housing paradigm? In our neck of woods (Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada), “social housing” seems to have lost its focus on *social* and perhaps tends now towards *economic* housing—low cost to rent/own (not really what was implied when this all first began), cheap to build (cheap materials and cheap construction/labour costs), and who cares if it is inexpensive to run or maintain after it is built?! Somewhere we seem to have lost the social-justice right to have healthy and safe shelter; gone are the old barn-raising days when we did not have to be licensed to help our neighbour build something.

Now building has become so specialized, professionalized, and industrialized that the passion and pleasure of the craft or culture of building has dramatically shifted. We have seemingly put more value on fast construction, processed materials which are termed as “cost efficient,” and people who can be categorized as grunt workers in the trades or specialists in the trades. Less value is now “afforded” to the art of crafting a well-made building, understanding the costs of health and well-being when someone lives in a “sick building syndrome” home, or even the metrics when calculating the investment of time, materials, and craftsmanship into a more traditional natural building or ecologically designed building.

For 12 years O.U.R. Ecovillage has been working to redefine the value of sustainable living through many frameworks. This all really started with the sculpting of hand-built structures. In 2002 O.U.R.’s Internship and Natural Building program (P.L.A.N.-B. = Practical Leadership and Natural Building) took on the creation of the first natural building in Canada to be monitored for 10 years by regulatory authorities. Interestingly this was meant to open the doors of research and approval process for all the next nine homes O.U.R. zoning allowed us to build onsite as part of a residential stewardship housing cluster.

The ideals of communities of people building together, with natural materials, in the most socially just ways, with locally sourced resources whenever possible, was born out of the North

American natural building movement and brought into the Pacific Northwest largely by Elke Cole and Pat Hennebery. When these cob-parents initiated the wide range of education and community development surrounding “Cobworks” and “Houses that Love You Back,” a groundswell of people surfaced to help lead the charge.

O.U.R. Ecovillage could not help but step up to the idea that anything worth doing was worth doing out in the open—and that it was time to stop building beautiful groovy homes out of the eye-shot of inspectors and regulatory authorities. With designers from Mark Lakeman to Robina McCurdy (Pacific Northwest to international) hundreds of people have had their hand in designing this community project. The time has come to step out of the closet and fully



Photo courtesy of Yulia Z.

engage with, and actually partner with, the regulatory world so that socially and environmentally ethical buildings become legal!

Some dozen buildings later, after a good decade of building and teaching in community at O.U.R. Ecovillage, there still is a next horizon. Over the last two years our team has been leading a charge to take on affordable housing and challenge the notion of the economics involved in affordable housing models of today. With input from the Fuller Center for Housing and Habitat for Humanity (both for different reasons, though at times they might take on shared projects together in the world) we have been supporting the coalition of the Islands Affordable Housing Affiliate (I-AHA).

Imagine a group of interconnected and mutually supportive representatives bringing together builders/contractors, corporate material manufacturers, service clubs, engineers, systems professionals, designers/architects, regulatory folks, salvage masters, community organizations and churches, educational organizations, research and innovation through the Industry Trades Association and Universities/Colleges, etc. With I-AHA this is all becoming more and more possible. It is valuable for a corporate partner to donate new construction materials at or just above cost if they can put their name on a regional housing strategy for affordability—and they will be helping the construction become more affordable!

The I-AHA is also taking on the definition of affordability in terms of the life span of a building project. For example, when comparing a home constructed with materials some of which might be guaranteed for only 10 years vs. a home which is constructed with raw materials (wood, stone, clay, etc.) which may last hundreds of years, the current defining parameters and calculations for affordability must be challenged. The question of metrics also arises when it comes to how we calculate the cost of running a home—whereas it is mandatory to include energy modeling for passive solar design, ecologically appropriate energy systems, etc. And of course there is the cost evaluation of health services for folks who have allergies and illness issues which relate to building materials that include toxins and carcinogens. All these seemingly ethics-driven elements of affordable housing actually add up to a very large “cost efficiency” over time.

After winning multiple awards for green building, ecological design, and innovation, we still find it almost over-the-top challenging at times to move through regulatory processes, and certainly mainstream financing, for these types of beautiful, healthy, and affordable housing projects. Life might seem easier without taking on these immense challenges, and yet O.U.R. Ecovillage has never taken the easy path. These days the road less traveled for affordable housing may mean a future where we could simply consider that our investment in affordable housing stems predominantly from a social/environmental ethic, which is a high cost/benefit ratio for the economics of it all!

O.U.R. building team has recently met with the Premier of British Columbia and the Minister of Environment to take on this next phase of affordable housing. Who would have thought that folks who build those “interesting little house-of-three-pigs type buildings” would ever start to become “eco-consultants”? Now with a much more political and policy-oriented approach, which includes looking at how to develop strategies that focus on diversion of construction/demolition materials from the landfills, O.U.R. team is on to a new chapter. Living and learning together onsite is one thing but to work in the big wide world with the wider industry of affordable housing is quite another. This year we are opening up the circle with O.U.R. building school and inviting in a wide range of artisan crafter builders who might wish to take on affordable housing with the Islands Affordable Housing Affiliate project. 🐷

Who would have thought that folks who build those “interesting little house-of-three-pigs type buildings” would become “eco-consultants”?

Brandy Gallagher, BSW, MA, is Executive Director of O.U.R. Community Association at O.U.R. Ecovillage, Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia, and also works with Sustainable Community Solutions Consulting (SC2). See www.ourecovillage.org.

Canadian Ecovillages: Perspectives on Affordability

By Russ Purvis

Not all ecovillages are alike...this is such a vast understatement that it might provoke loud laughter within a group of well-traveled ecovillagers. Ecovillages are a global phenomenon on six continents. However, they share this common purpose: to be a living model of sustainability “**successfully continuable into the indefinite future.**” Although not explicit, affordability is a dominant underlying theme. Most of us no longer believe alternative means “free.” But there are a wide range of variations within Canadian ecovillages, as the following three examples illustrate.

Kakwa Ecovillage Cooperative, British Columbia

A “forming” ecovillage such as Kakwa can mean a lot of different things. In our case it means we have a small core group renting onsite accommodations preparing to build their own homes, eventually. Rural doesn’t begin to describe the remoteness some people feel when they arrive. But besides its natural beauty, the location provides reasonably priced arable land, a four-season climate, and inexpensive local building materials. It is 68 km from shopping and services. The concept of multi-generational self-build and development is not as common today as it once was but is the essence of what Kakwa promotes. The Ecovillage’s philosophy from its first day was to be affordable to most people. However, we recognize that affordability is not just about finances. It could mean: “Does it meet our basic criteria for comfort?” If you hate snow; a few days at minus 20C/-4F during the winter; home schooling; or being an hour’s drive from the closest hospital or shopping, then Kakwa might not be “affordable” for you.

Basic Facts: Kakwa has a land base of 540 acres adjacent to the Fraser River, with a residential area of 24 acres. One of the five adults works offsite. Housing consists of conventional dimensioned lumber and log cabins; it’s possible to build your own house. Renting rooms/cabins begins at \$450/month. Co-op land costs buy-in begins at about \$12,000/bedroom for a self-built house upon approval for Co-op membership. Finance options for members are available onsite. Other fees include a one time Co-op membership fee of \$4000/voting member and a portion of the annual ecovillage budget, which changes every year and is supported equally by all members. (See www.kakwaecovillage.com.)

Whole Village, Ontario

In July 2002 Whole Village completed purchase of its property, in an area of rolling

hills and farmland 1.5 hours drive northwest of Toronto. Affordability philosophy is nurtured at Whole Village by a range of policies and traditions, including rent-to-own options, reduced sale prices for new members, fundraising for lower-income people to create a down payment, room rental vs. suite rental, and negotiable in-kind labor for budgeted maintenance. Whole Village is a close-knit community with communal meals five nights a week.

Basic Facts: Whole Village has a land base of 191 acres, with a residential area of four acres. Offsite employment is 17 percent. The two dozen residents are housed in a farmhouse, and in the 10 suites plus five-bedroom shared space in Greenhaven. Suites are available for sale and rent in Greenhaven (bachelor, one, and two bedrooms). Suites for sale start at \$179,000, with rentals from \$700 to \$1100. Farmhouse room rentals are subsidized for gardeners; room rent in the farmhouse is \$300-600 per month. There is a group mortgage for those who cannot afford to buy their suite outright. A monthly fee for members covers the cost of maintenance, telephone, internet, insurance, etc. There are no additional fees for renters, although they are encouraged to become provisional members (\$150/month) after renting one year. (See www.wholevillage.org.)

Photos courtesy of Russ Purvis



Yarrow Ecovillage, British Columbia

Affordability is seen as a component of accessibility, one of the strategies of the Yarrow Ecovillage, since its founding in 2002 when the land was first purchased. The cohousing project at Yarrow has been underway since 2006. The Chilliwack City Council approved an “ecovillage” rezoning designation, one of the first of its kind in Canada.

One of the initial buildings, referred to as the “quad,” was designed to be affordable for people with less home equity or savings to invest in housing. The quad is comprised of four small suites within one unit of a large duplex. Each suite has its own bedroom, sitting area, and bathroom. The four suites are organized around a common kitchen, dining room, living room, and laundry. Members of the house each maintain their own space and cooperate on meals and common expenses. This unit has been a successful way to ensure that people without housing equity are able to live in the ecovillage.

Sweat equity has been a way to get necessary work done while allowing broad participation in the ecovillage. It has been used for development and property management tasks in the early days, in the Deli Cooperative, and in some of the construction work. Work hours are recorded and either credited towards shares, housing, or future payments.

Basic Facts: Yarrow has a land base of 25 acres and a residential area of five acres (including some future commercial space). Offsite employment is 23 percent. The 65 residents own and rent a variety of living spaces, including two original farmhouses and 33 new units (15 completed at time of writing), ranging from domes and duplexes to fiveplexes. Purchase costs range from \$100K to \$160K for a suite in the quad and begin at \$250K for a one-bedroom cohousing unit. The local credit union provides take-out financing. Other fees include membership in the Yarrow Ecovillage, a cooperative \$250 share; and a \$500 joining fee. Home purchase is secured with a \$10,000 loan to be topped up to 20 percent of home price at construction start. (See www.yarrowecovillage.ca)



Shopping for an ecovillage in Canada as a place to live is, as you might expect, complex. Of course, living in community has some obvious layers that are not likely to be encountered in moving to a typical suburban subdivision! However, as noted, affordability seems to find a way to express itself in many ecovillages. ☺

Russ Purvis, M.Sc. is a founding member of Kakwa Ecovillage Cooperative, British Columbia, Canada (www.kakwaecovillage.com); currently President of the Ecovillage Network of Canada; and Host of Ecovillage Radio (www.blogtalkradio.com/ecovillage-radio). He thanks Mairy Beam of Whole Village and Michael Hale of Yarrow Ecovillage for their contributions to this article.



Welcome at Yarrow Ecovillage.



Living room: Whole Village.



BNB living room: Whole Village.



Greenhaven: Suites at Whole Village.



Kakwa Common House.

WORKING FOR SPRING TIME

A community model to generate occupational and cultural change

By Capra Carruba

As I write this article, I am in the midst of moving within Damanhur to join a pioneering self-sufficiency project of our community. Together with me, more than 100 fellow community members have been moving to different community homes (which we call nucleos) these last few weeks, representing a critical mass to shift the balance in every one of the 20 nucleo communities.

This fall has been one of our intense periods of transformation. We have had many moments of renaissance in 38 years of Damanhurian history in the constant attempt to renew ourselves from within. We call this present movement Olio Caldo 4 (Hot Oil 4), and I will explain why and how in a moment.

The general atmosphere is a mixture of excitement around new projects, fatigue after having carried myriads of moving boxes, and concern because the critical situation in Italy is impacting our community economy.

The economic situation is becoming a social and political question that affects all of Europe. In Italy, three out of five families have a reduced income, and therefore have had to reduce their consumption. Austerity creates problems for members of our community too, as earning money outside becomes more difficult and we still depend highly on the Euro.

But to think about this more optimistically: **The economic crisis corresponds to a crisis of values in our western world, which has been based on consumerism and globalization.** Thus, we welcome this occasion to rethink our lifestyle and what we define as quality of life based on our values—to eventually leave behind the idea of consumerism.

Damanhur has always striven to be an example of self-sufficiency and to share our practical experiences with other communities in order to learn from each other. For us, this venture encompasses much more than food—it means being able to confront all conditions in life autonomously. Taking into account how we all have been raised to be consumers, our dependency is not only economic, but most of all cultural; **we need to change how we think about money, work, and needs.**

If we consider self-sufficiency as a movement towards increased self-production, our objective grows beyond the concept of downscaling. We are not satisfied simply consuming less; we want to produce more, for ourselves. By producing our own things, we leave behind the imprinting of consumerism and thus reinterpret the quality of life according to our choices.



The farmhouse "Prima Stalla" seen through the artistic balcony—opening the view on the cow stables and the nearby alps.

A New Approach

An alternative economic model in which our choices as consumers and producer of goods are based on reciprocal exchange and commitment depends on the reconstruction of human relationships. Self-sufficiency is intrinsically linked to a concept of freedom, using our sensitivity and intelligence to create a system that allows us to live off of what we can produce ourselves. We need to leave behind the mindset of consuming what we find outside—to stop behaving like puppets of society. This is not possible alone; a critical number of people must follow this strategy to make it viable.

It is clear that the most important obstacle to embodying true alternatives, to making our strategy work, is in our minds.

In 1987, we called this project “Working for Spring Time.” It aimed to create jobs and economic growth without banks, capital, public funding, political parties, or industry, generating a productive system based on 200-300 people living close to each other that within four to five years would sustain itself.

We identified the first steps as: 1) analysis of the resources of the area: woods, land to be cultivated, meadows etc.; and 2) analysis of consumption and needs within the community: in which areas (e.g., for heating our homes, clothing, etc.) do we spend most of our outside resources?

We saw the next prerequisite for success as the commitment and self-discipline of all participants to become reciprocal clients and start producing onsite the goods and services most of our money has been spent so far to import. Over time, people would slowly move their income resources generated this way, thus creating a protected internal market with lower prices while offering the surplus to the surrounding area. For example, if someone started a new business as a car mechanic, he or she could count on 300 certain clients to support the start-up.

The picture intricately weaves individual self-determination within a collective strategy to overcome personal dependency on work conditions, consumption patterns, and a system that leaves us vulnerable as resources dwindle.

In a way, “Working for Spring Time” is a project for liberation. To achieve this we need to regain the self-determination and dignity to think of ourselves as the main actors in our lives, not only individually, but also by joining forces in an intelligent way.

How to put this model into practice has seen several iterations in Damanhur. Some have succeeded, some failed. The most prominent has been Olio Caldo, Hot Oil, in four editions, the last being played out right in this moment.

Olio Caldo

The term Olio Caldo is inspired by one of our myths, where the hero at one point finds himself and his friends in the cold, robbed of all their clothes. A friendly spirit saves them with a gift of magical oil which, when applied on the skin, warms their bodies for the time necessary to survive. Olio Caldo has become synonymous with self-sufficiency in an holistic interpretation



This little calf was born in the stables two weeks ago. In the background: the farmhouse of the nucleo family and the greenhouses.



Delegates from different nucleo communities join their forces on Sunday morning in the greenhouses of Prima Stalla.



Citizens who have joined the agricultural project share Italian lunch on Sunday after working together in the morning.

which includes food, furniture, clothes, means of transport, energy—every aspect of life you can think of. We have created our own fashion and introduced artistic elements typical for us in everyday life, which has characterized our cultural identity.

In 1985/86, a small group of community members experimented for one year with an extreme condition of self-sufficiency. They left for the woods with ambitious milestones in mind, progressively retreating from a western lifestyle while slowly creating from scratch the basis of their own autonomy. Precise rules determined what they could barter with the community to acquire—only goods they were not able to produce themselves. Olio Caldo 1 was an important experiment that has become a crucial reference point in our collective experience, framing our approach to self-sufficiency even for later generations that were not able to be there personally.

Three years later, in 1989/90, the experiment was opened to the entire community. In Olio Caldo 2, community members could opt to participate in varying degrees, where the most coherent included dressing in and eating only what had been produced within the community.

The next initiatives had less impact. Some aimed at merely cultural aspects, leaving aside food. In these collective dynamics everyone created objects of daily use, like chairs, spoons, forks, plates, to reflect the idea that we use what we create, therefore giving it a precious value over what we buy outside.

Olio Caldo 3 in 2010 had little effect beyond talk, and we called it ironically *olio tiepido*, lukewarm oil. It failed because of a lack of determination to change our choices for real.

In summary, it has been a challenge to manifest “Spring Time,” even though intellectually we all agree on the direction. The diverse initiatives have done an important job to pave the

way and slowly transform our community reality. The crucial point is always to maintain momentum and overcome inertia. In October 2012, we started Olio Caldo 4. We are in the midst of it as I type, and are optimistic that we have some important levers to push us into new terrain.

Where We Are Now

In the last year, Damanhur has integrated a number of new citizens contributing their fresh energy and enthusiasm, a critical mass unprecedented since 1983. Ten of them volunteered to focus on a rebirth of self-sufficiency within the agricultural project of a nucleo family. In parallel, the growing need for more coherence between our goals and what we do has given voice to self-critical debates on various aspects of our reality, creating a constructive unrest. One of the practical consequences of this movement has been the physical relocation of a great part of the population following their desires to re-launch new projects and nucleo families. Changing the alchemy of the family members means stirring up new perspectives and constellations at the core.

Olio Caldo 4 starts with agriculture as a first step. The ambitious goal is to be 100 percent food self-sufficient for 500 people within a year. In parallel, internal activities like carpentry and dress making are growing based on an increased internal demand.

Olio Caldo 4 is an instrument to reconsider ourselves starting from the material aspect, to pioneer a new kind of culture. What will be important, as always, is to ride the wave of changes, which means combining practical shifts with inner transformation.

The practical outcomes of this experiment include reducing costs and optimizing our purchases beyond just the shared economy of a single nucleo community. We are presently analyzing once again where we spend most of our outside money in order to possibly turn these areas into internal and/or centralized services. We are rethinking our cost structures and aligning our needs to our wants. We are working for Spring Time, and in a few months we can share with you what germinates from the seeds of this new endeavor. In the meantime, hopefully this snapshot from the midst of our transformation has been useful, and any feedback from your side is definitely appreciated! ☺

Capra Caruba (born Christine Schneider) grew up in northern Germany and has lived since 2001 in Damanhur, in Italy (www.damanhur.org). She has studied political science, and has worked as a consultant in organization development and training—currently in her own company, SOLIOS, commercializing products of green architecture. Capra teaches metaphysics and community building in the University of Damanhur.

This article could not have been written without the precious contributions of Stambecco Pesco and Coboldo Melo. Thanks to Yvette Soler for editing the article.



The harvest will be distributed in the community organic food store, open also to the public.

Affordability for Whom?

By Paul Freundlich

In a world of trouble—overpopulation, diminishing natural resources, deteriorating infrastructure, escalating climate risk, and desperation caused by widening economic disparities—the global market economy continues to insist that we define success by maximum consumption. Avoiding the logical outcomes of greed and short-term behaviors will require a high level of local to global collaboration and innovation.

What we need are practical examples that demonstrate our capacity to live lightly on the land, minimize dependency on scarce resources, and creatively share both challenges and joys. Even better if there were models that connected small initiatives, and in aggregate moved to scale.

In the '60s, as a documentary filmmaker, I traveled the world for the Peace Corps. In the villages of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, I discovered communities that were poor by Western standards, yet people survived and flourished through their familial, tribal, and cultural interdependence. I realized that substantially living outside a monetized economic system had virtues as well as limitations, and speculated that there might be some lessons to be learned.

In New Haven, Connecticut of the '70s, I joined with hundreds of folks redefining their lifestyles to establish a potent network of urban and rural communal houses, food co-ops, collective businesses, schools, and day cares. Through cooperation, we were able to afford spacious houses, eat well, educate our kids, dance hard, and explore our capacity for social and economic innovation, living on what society deemed subsistence income.

I even convinced the National Institute of Mental Health that our “alternative community” posed a challenge and a comprehensive set of options for a society that was riven with discord and struggling with disparities. In the waning days of the Nixon White House, we received a \$250K grant to document and sophisticate our activities. At its height, our alternative community had a core of several hundred, served thousands more, with a monthly publication and great parties.

At the distance of decades, I'm both touched by our innocence and impressed by our accomplishments. So many of our economic and social initiatives have been overwhelmed by the sheer plenitude of the cornucopia of capitalism. Yet many of us have persevered, insisting that affordability had to include what we could afford as a planet, nation, neighborhood; insisting that on a personal level, we could not afford to be without the mutuality of loving community; insisting that it is pos-



sible to replace or modify systems that are exploitive and wasteful.

Along the way, I've had a hand in creating institutions that helped redefine what is worth affording:

- For a decade, as an Editor of *COMMUNITIES*, I searched out social experiments that were both arcane and mundane, facing the contradictions implicit in the history we brought to community.

- At Co-op America (now Green America), which I founded, we established a resilient marketplace of goods, services, and ideas that reinforced the values of our individual members and strengthened the success of our business members.

- From its launch in 1980 to the present, I've been part of a thriving community, Dance New England, that has engaged and entertained thousands through our annual summer camp and other gatherings that span the seasons, and that involves generations from birth to death.

- As a founding Director of the CERES Coalition, Chair of the Stakeholder Council of the Global Reporting Initiative, and through involvement in other organizations,

I've been part of raising the concepts of accountability and mutual responsibility to the mainstream—insisting that affordability and sustainability must be linked by corporations.

“Affordability,” which was once a strictly economic measure, increasingly includes short- and long-term impact on the environment and society. The re-valu-

“Affordability,” once a strictly economic measure, increasingly includes impact on the environment and society.

ing of affordability is surely a function of necessity (global warming, et. al.), yet the brave endeavors we have created and maintained play an honorable part in a civilized dialog.

For the past year, I've been working on a documentary video about an innovation called the HUB. HUBs are collaborative workspaces focused on social entrepreneurship, serving more than 30 cities—Paris, Rome, Berlin, London, Sao Paulo, San Francisco, Johannesburg, Melbourne, to name a few. For the young (mostly) entrepreneurs, attention to the bottom line is not nearly good enough. The coin which they are investing must also move an agenda of sustainability, because that coin represents not only financial investment, but the lifeblood and time of their lives.

In each of these HUBs, their continuity and physical proximity, their interdependence and enthusiastic jams, are as critical as the window of the internet to the wider world. At the most recent Social Capital Conference in San Francisco (SOCAP), 1,600 entrepreneurs and investors gathered to further their own projects, connect with others, and return to their communities. Exactly how these nascent innovators will blend productivity with profits, sustainability with success, is an ongoing dialog.

HUBs, along with the proliferation of community gardens, farmers' markets, co-ops, co-generation via renewables, and the rise of social networking, all contribute to a revaluation of what matters, the processes to accomplish systemic change, and a redefinition of affordability. The rewards that accrue include what have always characterized communitarian movements: the richness of shared experience, the opportunity to know people over time, the satisfactions of purposeful work and playful entertainments, and the ascendance of hope. 🌱

*Paul Freundlich has engaged with issues of sustainability and community for five decades as participant and observer. He edited *COMMUNITIES* between 1975-85 and *Building Economic Alternatives* from 1984 to 1991; is the Founder and President Emeritus of Green America (formerly Co-op America) since 1982; launched Dance New England in 1980; has produced many films and video documentaries as well as two books; and has served on many Boards that have sought to mediate the bad habits embedded in the mainstream economy.*

Making Lymeade: Turning Mid-Life Crisis into Opportunity

By Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig

My story is boringly typical of a chronic lyme disease patient. Originally infected in 1997 while my family was living at East Wind in southern Missouri, I was given 10 days of antibiotics, which halted most of the symptoms. The lingering arthritis, I was told, was simply a matter of damage that had been done in my joints, and not evidence of any lasting infection. The worst of this first brush with lyme was that the doctor said they didn't know if it could be passed through breast milk, so he advised (and we followed) stopping nursing my three-month-old son, Jibrán.

Over the next eight years, the arthritis persisted and my health complaints were almost too vague to even have checked out. I remember talking to a nurse friend at Abundant Dawn Community in Virginia about whether it was possible (at 32) that I was starting perimenopause so early, but I can't even tell you the details of why that thought had occurred to me; I just remember that something seemed off.

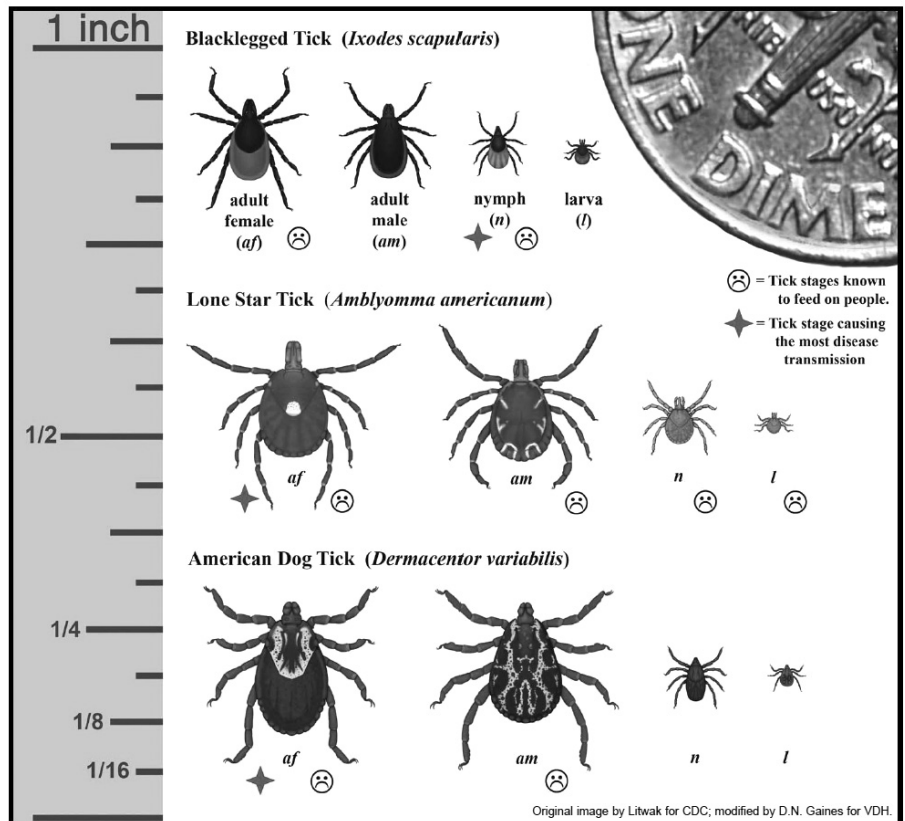
After a long and emotional birth with my second child, things got more marked—and more bizarre. I never really recovered from Ananda's birth. After that, I was always dragging a little, and my lower back pain has been almost constant since. But that wasn't the weird stuff. The strangest was that I'd be walking down the sidewalk, and my knees would suddenly just give out. The first time it happened, my potluck dish went sprawling along with me, and I sat for a full 10 minutes thinking, "What the hell just happened?"

It would become a more common thought as my illness progressed.

Living with Lyme

I'll spare you all the details, but what passes for a normal day for me these days includes headaches, stiffness, general malaise, easy exhaustion, aches, and a wild array of neurological symptoms: buzzes, tingles, seemingly random shooting pains, parts of my body going numb, and an ability to lose thoughts that just about rivals my old ability to lose my keys in a 10' x 12' room.

For a woman accustomed to being mentally sharp and energetic enough to keep up with my notoriously workaholic husband, being couch- and housebound has been—to say the least—an unwelcome change. My own work (which involves travel—the worst offender of all in terms of my symptoms flaring) has come to a screeching halt, my family has plummeted into debt, and I've gotten the



unlooked-for opportunity to reinvent myself at the age of 42.

Lyme is my mid-life crisis.

In fact, I'm writing this opening sequence from the couch at 2:27 in the morning: sleep disturbances have also become commonplace. Hardly anything in my life looks the same as it did five or 10 years ago. The main commonalities, in fact, are family and community.

And community has been my saving grace in all of this.

Ticked Off

Chronic Lyme Disease is the most controversial disease in North America. And if I'd hoped that controversy would somehow stay outside of the permeable boundaries of my home community (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, Rutledge, Missouri), I've been brought up short on numerous occasions. It has been hard to navigate in dynamics where (with the same people who would have no problems with the idea that the EPA's data or policies or perspective might be incomplete and politically motivated) some couldn't understand why "Because the CDC says so" is an inadequate response

to someone with an illness whose realities have been categorically denied by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for three decades.

Whether the CDC buys the existence, seriousness and prevalence of chronic lyme or not, I—and thousands of others—still have to live with it on a daily basis.

I am deeply blessed to have had a strong community before I got sick, who have rallied around me.

Dealing with insurance companies, doctors, and even family members who deny the reality of their illness is painful and life-impacting for most chronic lyme patients, but there has been an added feeling of betrayal for me here. These are people who know me, whom I've chosen as my tribe, and I know care about me. I simply didn't expect to have to fight this fight at home and with friends (who are also decision-makers in my life, including in my mutual insurance association).

While it is certainly better for me than most patients (at least I can talk to, reason with, and try to educate the people who are making those decisions, whereas most patients get the implacably anonymous insurance industry, and very little recourse outside of the court system), the doubts, questions, and occasional outright attacks have been the worst wounds for me in my battle with lyme. During a time of low energy and emotional turmoil, what I really want to do is focus on healing. Instead, I'm battling with culture-wide ignorance in my own home.

That issue aside, I can't imagine a better place to get horribly, persistently ill than in my community.

Support and Connection

I have afflicted friends who have been abandoned by family, literally being told to go find a homeless shelter. I have friends whose spouses have left. I have friends who haven't had a friend come visit in six months, and who have had to drive themselves to the emergency room after a seizure. I have friends who are dying, their only human connection flowing through an internet cable while they fade. Being part of the lyme community in the '10s is not so different from being an HIV patient in the '80s. I am deeply blessed to have had a strong community before I got sick, who have rallied around me. I'm equally blessed with a supportive family who are science-oriented enough to be able to cut through the propaganda and back me up with their faith in my sound thinking.

I haven't been abandoned or treated like I am crazy. Alyssa comes by almost every

day just to connect. Mac comes five mornings a week to help with breakfast, juicing, and dishes. Amanda organized a juicing crew earlier this fall of folks who'd volunteer their time, and who always had a minute of kindness to offer. Friends have done laundry, swept my floor, hauled water for us, and filled my prescriptions and made bank deposits in town. People listen, even if my check-ins are almost identical from day to day...yes, I still hurt, yes I'm still falling apart, yes I'm worried about my son, no I don't know when it will shift.

And for the most part, I am believed. This is huge. Lyme is considered to be an "invisible disease"—we don't look sick, in spite of being debilitated and in constant pain. Some of this I credit to the efforts and past pain of Tereza, who lived here at Dancing Rabbit through seven years of fibromyalgia. We are always benefiting from the past work of someone it seems. And now as others have gotten this same diagnosis, I'm laying a foundation of a better educated and realistic populace to support them in their journey.

Community is keeping me healthier. Fresh air, a lifestyle of natural and organic foods, and social support have all been huge factors, and a healthy balance between trust and questioning have kept me finding the resources I need.

Exposure to alternative culture and self-reliance ethics over the years means that I am making some of my own medicine, and willing to get out of the narrow box of long-term antibiotics to find alternatives that won't leave me with more organ damage from the treatment itself. I've been shocked at how matter-of-fact I am in looking at other options compared to most patients, and I'm sure being steeped in do-it-yourself culture for so long is the biggest factor in that contrast. Years of community have affected how I relate to everything, and those dividends are paying off now when I need them most.

Giving Back

I've received a lot of help, and it's important to me to give back. This has taken the form of encouraging people to get tested—for it turns out there are currently three confirmed "lyme positives" at DR, and more that I suspect. It means saying the uncomfortable, nosy things to neighbors because I care, and not getting caught in the trap of biting my tongue because it is none of my business. In community, it is my business if someone may have a debilitating and potentially fatal illness. And I've become the local tick bite expert (an uncomfortable position to be in, but an essential role).

I've also taken what I've learned out into the lyme community. I've brought my skills at facilitation to bear creating a safe space in online lyme groups, and am an

I've become the local tick bite expert (an uncomfortable position to be in, but an essential role).

administrator for one of the Facebook support groups.

I also created the Lyme Voices Project (www.lymevoices.blogspot.com). When I found myself frustrated last spring at a lack of collected information on patient experiences with lyme, I created a patient survey that got 450 responses in two weeks. Blogging about those results has both given me a way to feel like I'm still productive (since I can blog from my couch, being couch-bound doesn't mean being useless) as well as help other new patients feel like their experiences are shared.

On the Brink

I'm busy. Slaying dragons, taking pills, getting zapped by the rife machine, and facing down death. In the 13 years lyme went unchecked, it nestled its way into my brain, making everything sluggish and foggy, stealing words from me when they are halfway out of my mouth. On days like these, it is easier to just not talk to anyone. The silence within my strawbale walls becomes a good friend. My noise sensitivity is out of control, and I jump at small sounds. Plus my joints and muscles ache, and this once extroverted happy communal camper would just as soon be left alone.

Someone wants to talk to me about our latest village council proposal or get my take on the new draft of the agricultural policy, and I feel stoned on my own daily inertia. "Is it really that important?" I want to whine.

But the thing is, it is that important. I don't mean those details necessarily, but the human interaction, the small scrap of normalcy, the community that doesn't let me forget that I have a role to play outside of Lymeland, in this place where I am. The Rabbits are keeping me from slipping into a neuropathic slumber, or the isolated depression that so many of my fellow chronic illness patients are left alone to sink deeper into. They pull me back from the brink when my lyme brain goes into emotional over-reactivity. They remind me that I'm human—even while some amused part of my brain insists on pointing out that it was community that irritated me so much in the first place.

And sometimes, community pulls me back from other brinks as well. In the spring, I was having very frightening, cardiac-like symptoms. One evening, near panic, I went next door to Alyssa's house and asked her, the local midwife, to take my vitals. Was I having a heart attack like another (now ex-) Rabbit, chronic lyme patient had in her early 30s? And then Alyssa sent me on to talk to Bri, our nurse. Her sense was that, no, I wasn't having a heart attack, but, yes, I should be going into the doctor soon to get it checked out. Given the expense (monetarily and psychically) of going to the Emergency Room, I'm more than happy to have these resources at home to keep me from wasted trips. (It turned out just to be another batch of lyme-related symptoms, and my heart is fine.)

—M.S.L.

A Few Quick Lyme Facts

Lyme is the fastest growing vector borne illness in the US. Even the CDC's conservative estimates say there may be as many as 300,000 new cases every year.

Lyme is in every state in the US.

There is growing evidence that lyme can be passed in the womb, through breast milk, and sexually.

Lyme is often misdiagnosed as Fibromyalgia, ME (a.k.a. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome), Multiple Sclerosis, ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), rheumatoid arthritis, perimenopause, and Alzheimer's. Over half of the chronic lyme patients in my survey were told they had a "psychosomatic illness."

Testing for lyme is tricky business. The most reliable test is a blood culture test, with the next most reliable being a Western Blot run by a specialty lab like Igenex in California. The one your doctor will probably offer is nearly worthless; ask for a better test.

Chronic lyme is best diagnosed based on clinical symptoms, with testing being of secondary importance. Only 20-80 percent (depending on whose numbers you believe) of people get the classic "bullseye" rash.

There are over 300 documented symptoms of chronic lyme, which is part of what makes diagnosis tricky. People with "mystery" illnesses might want to get evaluated for lyme.

Just as there are doctors that specialize in cancer and women's health, there are also doctors that specialize in tick borne illnesses (called Lyme Literate doctors), and they know a lot more of what you'd need as a lyme patient than your average general practitioner.

Lyme is a bug that has developed a wide range of sneaky tactics to survive in a mammal's body. It can go into hiding for months to decades, change its form in the body to evade treatment, and do some fairly bizarre things that make it tough to treat.

Two great resources to learn more:

- *Under Our Skin* is a documentary about the politics and treatment of chronic lyme.
- *Cure Unknown* by Patricia Weintraub is the best researched and written book that I've found for learning more.

—M.S.L.

I don't buy into the idea that we can't have a voice in the politics of lyme; in fact, I think I'm capable of being a force in that. I have the curiosity and connection-making ability of a consensus trainer, and the articulation skills of a facilitator and writer. All of these skills came from community, and are being put to work to help "create community where I am"—doing what I can, in this semi-functional physical body, to help a large group of people in desperate need for hope and help. This aligns well with the FIC's mission of helping people create community wherever they are, and in diverse forms, rather than just in intentional community.

Here in community, DRMIA (the Dancing Rabbit Mutual Insurance Association) and PEACH (Preservation of Equity Accessible for Community Health) have helped us insure ourselves affordably in a time of madness in the insurance industry. (See www.dancingrabbit.org/about-dancing-rabbit-ecovillage/social-change/economy/co-ops and thefec.org/projects/PEACH.) In this and other ways, living in community has greatly reduced my medical expenses.

Chronic lyme has become one of my ongoing opportunities for learning and service. For better or worse, it has helped shape my life in community in recent years, and I hope that not only I, but others, are growing from the experience. It's not easy, and it raises difficult questions (see sidebars), but it's the reality I am facing. If you have any questions or want to share stories of your own, please be in touch. 🐰

Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig has lived in intentional community for 17 years, and is currently a member of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Rutledge, Missouri, where she is co-organizing its five-week Ecovillage Design Education course for 2013. She is also author of Passion as Big as a Planet, which looks at the relationship between self-awareness and effective earth activism. Ma'ikwe teaches facilitation and consensus with her husband, Laird Schaub, and has also offered workshops on starting communities, leadership, and spiritual activism. Contact her at maikwe.ludwig@gmail.com.

PEACH and DRMIA

PEACH was created over 25 years ago by a group of income-sharing communities, the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. The intention was to pool resources in order to help communities handle larger medical bills, partly to protect a community from folding financially under the weight of a member's health crisis.

Five years ago, Dancing Rabbit joined the fund as the first non-income-sharing group, forming the Dancing Rabbit Mutual Insurance Association. DRMIA covers health claims of up to \$5,000 and then PEACH takes over from there. Both organizations operate by consensus.

Essentially, any 20 or more people can get together and form an MIA. The basic model is that you pool money over a period of time and provide partial or full coverage for members' needs at the time they arise. What we now think of as insurance companies were originally MIAs. I first heard the term in a college African American studies class, because the model was used heavily in the early 1900s by the African American community to help them weather the harsh realities of life as a group, rather than having to fend for themselves. (Gotta love historical examples of community.)

The biggest challenge for a bouncing baby MIA is getting together sufficient capital to provide a real sense of security for their members. Part of why insurance companies have gotten so huge is that larger groups of people pooling money is more financially sustainable than a small group. However, it can be done, and there are a number of interesting examples out there of community-based mutual insuring, including the Ithaca Health Fund (see www.ithacahealth.org/healthfund.html).

—M.S.L.

The Chronically Ill in Community

Is it easier on a community to deal with someone dying than someone having a chronic illness? I don't mean *emotionally* easier—the answer to that is obviously, emphatically, “No.” The “loss” of someone with a chronic illness isn't complete, and it is certainly a lot more subtle, and there is no sense of urgency around saying and doing the “important stuff.” Emotionally, it is a whole different ball of wax.

Tangibly, it might not be so different. The dying and the chronically ill have a similar package of tangible needs: emotional support as our lives have changed involuntarily and our self-images lag behind (with the package of anger and grief that this entails), daily physical support, help thinking about money and other practicalities, and (especially for those of us with kids) help keeping things normalized for our families. But what's different is the process of rallying around someone in need, whose body is betraying them. When someone is dying, there is an end point, and at some point in the process, we all recognize that end point. My mom always says that you can deal with anything so long as you know there is an end point.

With a chronic illness, there is no promise of an end point. By definition, it drags on—maybe not forever, but into the foreseeable future. A part of coming to terms with a chronic illness is coming to terms with the possibility that this is just your life now, that relief (in the form of a return to normalcy) may not be yours. And no matter how much people love me, asking them to stay on full “support alert” *forever* just isn't fair.

And so what do we do with our chronically ill?

This is a very hard question for a community (whether the residential kind, or the more common community of friends out in the wider world). Community is a relational thing, and relationships are powered by social capital—the invisible balances of give and take, contribute and receive. And the chronically ill are chronically in need.

What I'm learning is that I am having to find ways to give back that don't look like they used to. And I'm being forced to value within myself things I used to take for granted. My contributions used to be flashier...sexier...cooler. And now they are a lot more subtle, and the public ones fewer and further between. I spend more time just being a friend, assuming that another friend is willing to come to my couch for time together. And much of my world is now expressed online, where it used to be a lot more in person.

My communal center of gravity has shifted: away from Dancing Rabbit and the intentional communities movement in general, and out into the Lymelands. But of course, Dancing Rabbit is still providing the bulk of my support. For someone with a deep “fairness” paradigm, I've become profoundly uncomfortable with this, and have discovered that

learning to live with uncomfortableness is part of the journey. “Yep, Ma'ikwe. Life isn't fair. Deal with it.”

As far as whether to accept new people with a chronic illness (a common question Laird and I both get asked), I can't advocate for anything community-policy-wise, without feeling myself stretched too thin in two different directions. I think that when communities ask whether taking on a new member with a known chronic condition is best for the community, it is a rare group that can see beyond the surface-level social capital exchange—and really understand what they are getting themselves into—and say yes. It may be possible in a group of 200, but in a group of 20?

And I'm honestly not sure that it is the best thing for a community. How much drain can a group handle, and still survive? The heartbreak involved in answering that question is huge, and yet it serves no one if the community is so overloaded with care requests that the whole thing fails. Maybe it makes sense to save your energy for the inevitable needs of members you already have?

This may be an increasingly important question for groups. The more I learn about the vast numbers of undiagnosed Lyme cases, the more I think we may have infection rates of five to 25 percent in some communities and have no idea. (Think that's crazy? One Army base in Wisconsin did a study and found they had a 40 percent infection rate.)

Still, I have many friends with chronic illnesses that would love to live in community—to have the 95-percent good experience with it that I have—and I'm basically saying I think it is OK to turn them down. This reminds me of that Ani DiFranco lyric: “I try to draw the line, but it ends up running down the middle of me most of the time.” I want to be able to say, “Take care of your own,” and yet I know that means, “Bar the door.” If I didn't already feel like crap, this would get me there.

So I'm left with this choice: advocate for letting in people with chronic illnesses (even when I know so much about how hard it is to get a community off the ground, sustain it, and have it be vibrant—and that this advice is probably ignoring what I know), or tell groups to keep the door closed (even when I know so much about how hard it is for chronic Lyme patients to find support in the wider world, and that many of them, once recovered, are the kind of people whom communities want—funny, bright, strong, independent thinkers, who were either that way before Lyme or have become that through the trial by fire that it is). So here I am looking myself square in the face and feeling that no matter what I say, I'll be betraying one of two worlds I've come to love. (Sometimes I long for the unexamined life!)

—M.S.L.

Consensus and the Burden of Added Process: Are There Easier Ways to Make Decisions? Busting the Myth That Consensus-with-Unanimity Is Good for Communities, Part III

By Diana Leafé Christian

“I need to say something,” the consensus trainer interjected. She and other visiting consensus advocates were facilitating a meeting in a real community I’ll call Green Meadow. “I can see that one of your biggest problems is trust. You’re talking about all these different things you don’t agree on, but you really need to work on trusting each other better.”

“Get on the stack!” roared one community member, annoyed by the interruption. A few others glared as well. They believed not trusting each other was a *consequence* of their problems, not a cause—one of the unfortunate results of their members’ different interpretations of their community purpose. Some members consistently blocked proposals most others wanted in order to protect what they saw as the community’s mission. Widespread distrust also resulted from what was seen as disruptive behaviors in meetings by a few people, some of whom were also the consistent blockers.

The annoyed meeting participants wanted to spend *less* meeting time with the blockers, not more. They’d already done too much emotional processing over the years with no visible results. They were “processed out.” They wanted instead to use a decision-making method that didn’t allow a few members so much power over the group. They believed trust could return only if people could feel hope for the community again.

Others in the meeting, however, agreed completely with the visiting trainer and appreciated her insights. Clearly there was massive distrust at Green Meadow. Clearly the group needed to spend even more emotional process time than they already had. They needed to really *hear* each other—to deeply understand each others’ choices, values, and emotional wounds. This, they hoped, would rebuild trust.

Sharp differences had also surfaced when the community first considered the outside facilitators’ offer of low-cost facilitation for whatever problems the community wanted to work on. “I’m *not* going to those meetings,” snorted one farmer. “Me neither,” growled another. Discouraged by the community’s three consistent blockers (who had already blocked or tried to block most agricultural proposals), and no longer having the patience to do more processing, which had so far yielded neither mutual understanding nor resolution, few of the farmers or entrepreneurs planned to attend. (See “*Busting the Myth*,” Part II, COMMUNITIES #156, Fall 2012.)

Green Meadow chose its agricultural conflicts as the challenge requiring the

most help, and asked two members to communicate this to the visiting facilitators. “Please, no more emotional processing,” begged the representatives. They instead wanted the facilitators to ask Green Meadow’s most frequent blocker to make a proposal for an agricultural policy she *did* want, so the visiting facilitators could facilitate a community discussion about it.

However, the facilitators didn’t do this. Instead, they hosted three special meetings over the weekend devoted to...more emotional processing. Their purpose, they said, was to explore the beliefs, values, and emotional distress of anyone who felt upset about the community’s agricultural dilemma. Only half the community, mostly older members, ended up participating in these process meetings. Most farmers, entrepreneurs, and younger members stayed away.

Afterwards the community rift seemed worse. And the frequently blocking member—for whose sole benefit the meetings seemed designed—sat through each one grim-faced and silent, reporting later that she’d been miserable the whole time.

Two Versions of Community Reality?

This tale illustrates what I suspect are at least two different assumptions about the amount of process time people are willing to put into community. And these two assumptions, I suspect, are themselves based on deeper, possibly unconscious, assumptions about why people join community in the first place.

Assumption A: We’re willing to put in a lot of emotional process time because the main reason most of us live in community is for a deeper connection with others. Processing emotions in a group is one way to feel connected.

Assumption B: We don’t want much process time. Most of us live in community for neighborliness, sustainability/ecological values, and/or changing the wider culture. Some of us may want more emotional closeness with others (and are fine with a lot of process time) but most of us don’t.

Here are some examples of this latter view, first from Oz Ragland, former Executive Director of Cohousing Association of the US:

While theoretically I’d enjoy a deeper connection with all other community members, in actual practice and given the limits of time, I only seek deeper connections with some—my closer friends. Besides, process time in meetings seems a poor way to grow closer compared to working together, sharing meals, and generally having fun together.

Regardless of the advice from consensus trainers to do as much emotional processing as is needed when we get stuck, I don’t personally want to live in a therapeutic environment requiring long hours of meeting process. I want to choose when I do processing rather than having it forced on us because we use consensus.

Before Songaia Cohousing was built we spent many hours processing decisions in meetings. However, for some years now, we’ve used a decision-board rather than taking all proposals to consensus meetings, and it’s working well. We’re currently exploring ways to apply ideas from Sociocracy and the N Street model as we improve our process.

Lois Arkin, founder, Los Angeles Eco-Village:

I believe that what seems to me like “endless processing” with people you simply want to be congenial neighbors with, lowers the quality of community life, at least for me. Living in community with people who share some of your values does not guarantee close friends. I want to know my neighbors can be depended to help and cooperate in case of emergency, wave and give a friendly smile in passing, loan ingredients for a recipe, or just hang out

Green Meadow’s rift reflects two different assumptions about why people join community in the first place.

with in the garden—people I enjoy working with. Mostly though, given time constraints, this is enough for those of us committed to deep and rapid change on the planet.

Steve Torma, President, Earthaven Ecovillage, North Carolina:

When you're creating all the physical and social infrastructure an ecovillage requires, especially when you have people with as widely diverse viewpoints as we do, consensus-with-unanimity doesn't make sense. We're not small and close-knit enough, and we don't have a large enough budget of time, money, and energy for the kind of group processing that consensus requires.

The community members boycotting the meetings believed that a high level of emotional processing was not only unnecessary, but onerous.

I believe the facilitators visiting Green Meadow and the community members who attended their process meetings held Assumption A about community—“We live in community for relationship and connection”—

and therefore also believed that a fairly high amount of emotional processing was necessary and desirable for a well-functioning community.

And I think the community members who boycotted the meetings held Assumption B—they joined community for other reasons, including mostly (in their case) to create a sustainable village. And they therefore also believed that a fairly high level of emotional processing was not only unnecessary, but onerous.

“Added Process Overhead”—Unrealistic for Most Communities?

If I'm correct about these two assumptions, it may explain why communitarians who hold Assumption A believe consensus decision-making, which often requires huge amounts of process time, helps communities—and why those who hold Assumption B, like me, believe that using consensus often harms communities.

As you may know, many community-based consensus trainers advocate consensus because they believe it creates more harmony, trust, and connection than majority-rule voting or top-down leadership.

I now believe consensus—as practiced in most intentional communities—*may* create more harmony, trust, and connection than if they used majority-rule voting (because of “tyranny of the majority”) or than if they used one-leader-decides (because of such concentrated power), but using consensus can *also* lead to disharmony, distrust, lower morale, and dwindling meeting attendance (because of “tyranny of the minority”).

In contrast, three newer methods—Sociocracy, Holacracy, and the N Street Consensus Method—*do* seem to foster more community harmony and well-being.

In this article series I've criticized what I call “consensus-with-unanimity”—when everyone but those standing-aside must support the proposal for it to pass, with no recourse if someone blocks. In contrast, community-based consensus trainers who've responded to these articles *do* advocate recourse for blocking, such as (1) having criteria for a valid block (and a way to test it), or (2) requiring meetings between blockers and proposal advocates to create a new version of the blocked proposal.

However, in this article I'm using the term “consensus” to include when it's used with *or* without recourse if someone blocks, because I'm questioning whether the rather strict and specific requirements for a group to even use consensus in the first place—including its “added process overhead”—are realistic for most groups.

Pre-1980s Communities and the Hunger for More Relationship

For me, the light bulb went on when I read the following observations by community-based consensus trainer Laird Schaub in his responses to this article series (*italics are mine*):

- “the hunger for more relationship in one’s life *is one of the key reasons most people are drawn to community living.*”
- “the fundamental challenge of cooperative groups...(is) to disagree about non-trivial matters *and have the experience bring the group closer.*”
- “I see what we’re attempting in community (resolving non-trivial differences in a fundamentally different way than happens in the mainstream) *to be one of the crucial things that intentional communities have to offer the wider society.*”
- [using a decision-making method other than consensus may be] “*learning to settle for members being less involved in one another’s lives.*”
- “I am saddened by the choice *to accept less when you’d rather have more.*”
- “I find it far more inspiring to offer hope for getting...better relationships than advising folks to *downsize their dreams.*”

Laird’s comments helped me realize there may be different underlying assumptions about community, relative to the quest for more relationship, because I and many other communitarians I know have a different view.

I agree that some people do join communities mostly to experience deeper relationships and are willing to put in the time required. But I don’t think most people join for this reason. Most cohousers and ecovillagers I know seem to have other reasons for living in community. (See sidebar, “*So Why Do Cohousers and Ecovillagers Live in Community.*”

In fact, I suspect that people who might have what I’m calling Assumption A joined intentional communities formed in the 1980s and earlier. And I suspect Assumption B folks mostly live in communities founded after the 1980s, and this includes cohousers and most ecovillagers.

Please note that the two assumptions are not opposite or widely divergent, but just different points on a continuum. Each places different degrees of emphasis on the importance of wanting more relationship, more connection, and more “community” in one’s life. And thus each represents different degrees of willingness to spend many hours processing emotions in meetings. And each assumption has implications, I believe, for whether slogging through consensus decision-making and its associated process time is worth it, or whether trying less time-consuming but equally fair methods—such as Sociocracy, Holacracy, or the N Street Consensus Method—may appeal more.

New Hope at Green Meadow

After nearly 18 years of conflict, heartbreak, and demoralization (see “*Busting the Myth,*” *Parts I and II, COMMUNITIES #155 and #156, Summer and Fall 2012*)—and with increasing numbers of members clamoring for a new decision-making method—in the fall of 2012 Green Meadow modified its consensus process.

To choose incoming new members they retained their previous method: consensus-with-unanimity with no recourse if someone blocked.

For all other proposals except annual election of officers (see *below*) they added criteria for a valid block and a way to test blocks against that criteria (i.e., a block

Some people join communities mostly to experience deeper relationships, but I don’t think most people join for this reason.

So Why Do Cohousers and Ecovillagers Join Community?

Here's why I think cohousers and ecovillagers choose community, based on conversations with many of these folks over the years:

- Friendly relationships with neighbors—the old-fashioned neighborliness and helpfulness of former generations—instead of the more isolated, anonymous experience of mainstream culture. Feeling good about spending more time listening to each other's differing views, helping make sure people feel heard, and devoting process time to resolving differences amicably than people do in mainstream culture. But not valuing this so much that they're willing to spend the amount of process time in meetings that Laird and other consensus trainers often recommend.

- More safety for raising children and in elder years; having the assurance, comfort, and ease of finding help nearby when needed.

- The satisfaction of working with friends and neighbors on community projects and achieving shared community goals.

- (For ecovillagers and many cohousers) Living sustainability values in daily life; creating a smaller ecological footprint than is usually possible in mainstream life.

- (For ecovillagers) Learning and living ecological, social, and economic sustainability, and then inspiring and teaching others through onsite workshops and tours.

—D.L.C.

is declared invalid if 85 percent of members in the meeting say it's invalid).

For any remaining blocks that have been declared valid, they use an adaptation of the N Street Consensus Method. (See "The N Street Consensus Method," *COMMUNITIES #157, Winter 2012*.) To deal with these blocks they organize up to three solution-oriented meetings in which blockers and one or two proposal advocates are asked to co-create a new proposal to address the same issues as the first one. If they cannot do this, the original proposal comes back to the next meeting. While the group originally sought an 85 percent supermajority vote to approve any original proposals that came back, their most-frequent blocker only agreed not to block the whole proposal (as everyone feared she might) only if this part was changed to consensus-minus-one, so they did.

To choose officers in their annual meeting, Green Meadow adapted a technique from Sociocracy: a transparent and collaborative series of "go-rounds" to nominate and choose people for these roles. In their annual meeting in December 2012, community members cautiously tried this out. Many were nervous; in previous years these elections were characterized by hostility, contempt, and outright character assassination. However, the meeting went well. Each person around the circle described how the skills, experience, and relevant qualities of the person they nominated qualified that person for the officer role. In subsequent go-rounds people asked questions of the candidates, with potential solutions for various people's concerns built into the questions. Hearing all these solutions and getting a sense of what the most number of people most wanted to do seemed to generate a sense of confidence and good will. The officers were elected with people feeling good about it, and feeling good about each other. And, maybe, feeling some trust again. 🐦

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Resources

Consensus:

- *On Conflict and Consensus*, C.T. Butler, available for free download on his website: www.consensus.net
- *Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making*, Tim Hartnett (New Society Publishers, 2011): consensusbook.com
- "Laird's Commentary on Community and Consensus": communityandconsensus.blogspot.com

N Street Consensus Method:

- "How the 'N Street Consensus Method' Helps N Street Cohousing Thrive," *COMMUNITIES #157, Winter 2012*

Sociocracy:

- *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy, A Guide to Sociocratic Principles and Methods*, by John Buck and Sharon Villines (2007): www.sociocracy.info
- Sociocracy Consulting Group: sociocracyconsulting.com
- Video, "A Tale of Sociocracy," by members of Lost Valley community, Oregon: sociocracyconsulting.com—click "Resources," then "Videos," scroll down to the fourth video.

Holacracy:

- *Holacracy One*: www.holacracy.org

With Arms Spread Wide with Love

By Arjuna da Silva

When Earthaven was in its infancy, we were eager to learn encouraging songs and aphorisms to help us on our way to achieving our community dreams. One in particular I remember goes like this: “Sometimes I just spread my arms, wide like wings, breathe deep, and sing for my life, sing for the Earth, sing, sing, sing!” Singing for our lives and our Earth, we’d spread our arms wide and feel the love.

Some years later, a cofounder who no longer participates in community activities sent me a greeting card I actually framed. It’s a Robert Andreas design, with two odd, colorful characters, hands and hearts connected, and a text that reads: “In those days, we finally chose to walk like giants and hold the world in arms grown strong with love...and there may be many things we forget in the days to come, but this will not be one of them.” It’s the purpose of this article to nudge those arms (mine and yours) just a little wider, maybe open them again after a sad while, and rekindle the excitement the intentional, consensus community vision is all about.

When Consensus Is a Wall You Can’t Get Through

My community, like so many others in the industrialized world, has been working on how to cope with its vision of collaborative, inclusive consensus decision-making and its members’ habits of debate-oriented, competitive individualism.

Only recently, after more than two years of seemingly fruitless discussion and argument, we agreed to approve a new policy for working with “blocks” (a term we might be wiser to call “unmet needs,” now that we understand ourselves a little better). Sometimes, of course, a block keeps us from rushing over a cliff, or later turns out to have led to a better and not even oppositional out-

come, but sometimes blocks (and blockers) just feel like a painful load of mental and emotional work.

From the point of view of folks who see no problem with their own intentions and proposals, someone “standing in the way” of approving their proposal needs to be talked down or out of their opposition. I mean, really, how often can folks say their intentions include listening deeply and with caring to the concerns of others about what *they* want to do? And when we can’t please a blocker with our compromises, isn’t it all too easy to fall into the trap of pegging them as someone who just has a bug up their butt?

From the point of view of someone whose block or unmet need (say, for clarity or caution) is up against others’ hopelessness or just plain resistance to working through those concerns—and, if necessary, giving up some ground—that resistance is just more of the same old politics we thought we’d come to community to get away from. We have lived through this kind of tension and stalemate in my community more than once, and we don’t yet know if our laborious journey coming up with a new plan for working things out will bring enough satisfaction. Nonetheless, we’ve decided to follow up blocks with a carefully monitored series of “solution oriented meetings” followed by an in-depth evaluation of the process, giving us a chance to learn how to be more reasonable, to help us work things out as consensus *builders*, not just consensus seekers.

That we decided to come to this outcome, even though it includes a last-ditch option of consensus-minus-one (or “soft consensus,” as we called it initially), if we aren’t able to find the solutions in all those meetings, means we overcame our habit of taking sides on issues and focused, *despite* our original preferences, on the essential question: what will work for this group of people?



Unity and the Yearning for Autonomy

In the years since we first started struggling with our different styles and opinions, we've taken on a whole battery of methodologies to help us through the fog and storm. We've learned Nonviolent Communication practices, we've dabbled with Worldwork, some of us explored the DISC Communication Style Profile, we're working with Restorative Circles, we've got a Peace Team, a group of "Firetenders" to help us cope with community hot spots—and now we've agreed that if we can't come to consensus after a series of solution oriented meetings, we'll accept consensus-minus-one, if it comes to that. I feel surprised and a bit proud that the current core group of members who manage our Council and Committee work for us have chosen to turn a new page.

All this effort to hold to the original vision that "Yes, we *can* be extremely inclusive with each other" clearly demonstrates that most of us still want to learn how to *build* consensus. Perhaps we'll soon decide (as Tim Hartnett suggests in his "Thinking Flexibly" article, COMMUNITIES #157) that we'll come closest to our vision if we use consensus-based processes to work things through and then a formal, less-than-perfect consensus-minus-something for decision making in the pinch. Or maybe it's not "less than perfect"; maybe even unity needs a shadow of a doubt. Perhaps our community's transition from youthfulness to maturity is when we discover that indeed (Hartnett again) if a prevailing widespread disagreement over a block festers

and becomes "toxic to morale," we need stop-gaps and other ways and levels at which to work on our ability to unify.

As we go through the coming years as Earthaven Council members, drawing aspects of Sociocracy into our process so the yearning some members feel for greater autonomy might also be satisfied, we will need to do much more to

Maybe "consensus-minus-something" is not "less than perfect"; maybe even unity needs a shadow of a doubt.

evaluate how each piece of the puzzle is working out, to stay on top of the "atmosphere" of our meetings, and to continue to learn and use methods for improving relationships. So far the blessings of this place, these friends and neighbors, and this opportunity to try life another way, have kept inspiring those of us who stay toward our original twin goals: to live this way, out of the box, and, yes, to be able to offer inspiration, experiential advice, and honest evaluations to other groups and families who set themselves similar challenging goals.

The Quest for Transformation

Thinking about transcending my original understanding of consensus makes me think of the bigger picture—transformation on all levels: cultural (collective) and individual (personal). Among students of spiritual enlightenment, attainment to the state of sublime inner peace (a.k.a. *nirvana*) modeled by our mentors may seem so out of reach as to be pure myth. Long-suffering practices, survival-threatening pilgrimages, tolerance of great violence—some ordeal beyond the imagined capacities of ordinary people seems required for this kind of personal transformation.

Similarly, in the realm of intentional communities, *collective transformation*—for example, the ideal of consensus decision-making—may become so elusive as to appear illusory, so that we want to leave its fruition to folks with more gumption, or to the next generation. Instead we make great efforts to change the way we decide because, basically, we don't want to spend that kind of time working things out with each other. We don't seem to have the magic, the medicine, or the miracle-workers who can show us the way out of this mind-boggling labyrinth. And working through painful discoveries about ourselves "in public" is not what we had in mind when we joined. We came

for healing, not distress, but it's distress we encounter when we come face to face with how disagreeable people can be who have decisive things to say about our common resources and risks!

If this is a growing challenge for our communities, perhaps we have come to the next chapter for ICs. It seems a number of us have worked long and hard to achieve a satisfying consensus process, and may be at our wits' ends to bring its demands under control. If people don't become overtly uncooperative, they may simply withdraw their energy. Either way, community wellness falters.

Really, it's awful living in an intentional community and being stuck. Just like half-hearted monks in a monastery, doing our best to follow our agreements, we relegate the Shangri-La of our collective dreams to legend and the archetypal fairy tales that keep us dreaming. Where is the magic solution to our troubles in the annals of the movement's history? Attaining successful, satisfying results ("enlightenment" or "unity") becomes an unattainable ideal. For a growing number of cynical consensus practitioners, consensus itself becomes an unsustainable way for people from diverse spiritual and cultural backgrounds and points of view to get along.

In this case, getting along means calling forth an optimistic spirit so that collaboration can be creative and inspire more of itself. It means studying the deeper layers of meaning of ideas like mutual cooperation and enthusiastic compromise, and how those ideas have been defiled in industrial culture.

Consensing on the Right Side of the Brain

I remember, in the founding days of Earthaven, carrying out our intention to find consensus by approaching certain challenging topics from the right rather than the left sides of our brains. We used prayer, divination, ritual, or prolonged periods of meditation to seek guidance from beyond the limitations of our discursive minds. We did this several times, and each time this more

receptive approach worked out well. On top of the time we saved going straight for answers without deliberating or debating them, we'd have a great time! Of course, in those days, we must have been less diverse, for we didn't have any vocal nay-sayers regarding this kind of woo-woo way of reasoning.

One example of this was working out the Permaculture Site Plan for the hundreds of acres we'd gained stewardship of. While considering the zones and sectors of our regenerating forest, the conversation came to ridge top development. With several ridges within our boundaries, it was inevitable some folks would start dreaming of perching on one in order to access one of the rare distant views in our narrow valley. At the time, though, we were still basking in the glow of "founders' joy," and once we saw the tug-of-war that might ensue on this issue, we decided to take a spirit journey together to see what we could see. ("Founders' joy" manifested for us as the shared, even giddy sense that a lucky star had brought us together with a noble project headed for success, and that this star would protect us from mischief and malcontent.)

Drums and toning and guided relaxation followed by an invitation to shape-shift on an inner journey must have taken a good 20 or 30 minutes of our meeting time. When we reported back, one woman told us of seeing through the eyes of a big bird, flying over its mountain home. She could feel this *native* being beseeching us to stay off the ridges, upon which its winged cousins look as they tour the local skies. Through their eyes, it was easy to imagine the scarring even permaculture-style development could cause if we agreed to go up that far. I remember the room becoming completely silent as we all saw with that bird's vision, and felt deeply the consensus that we would not build on ridge tops, which we have neither done nor ever regretted not doing.

One big problem with "founders' joy," however, is that it can obscure the need to prepare for the challenges of diversity, generational disjuncts, relational upsets, disagreements about the meanings of things—the true grit of community experience, because morale hangs in the bargain. It would be easy, now, with 20/20 retrospective vision, to give sound advice to folks starting out about what not to postpone. Once in the midst of difficulties, though, even more so than in marriage, the thing is to keep going toward the possibility of reconfirmation of commitment, with the potential for a second honeymoon down the road (they do happen, you know!).

You'll have to check in with this magazine again, probably about a year from now, to find out how we've done with some of our new policies. (Of course, you can also get in touch and ask!) Having recently begun choosing officers of our corporation (we call them Weavers) with a method we adapted from Sociocracy, already many are saying they've had a surprisingly positive experience dealing with our diverse needs for good leadership. Small signs of hopefulness are everywhere!

If we don't give up on consensus either—if we keep our eyes on its essentials, namely working through trust issues, communicating empathetically, taking the time to hear each other's true stories—we might be able to solve the dilemmas of our diversity with much needed patience, humor, and some good old-fashioned inner work. It takes a lot of time and attention to build community from the ground up, and discouragement hits us all from time to time. We want to give up, but we've already come this far! We don't want to face our own ego limitations, but if we don't, we cause suffering to ourselves and others.

If we let our troubles lead us to a deeper understanding of human nature, I'll bet we can find out how to be the builders we started out to be of a transformed, significantly inclusive culture. 🐦

Arjuna da Silva is an inveterate optimist, certified alchemical hypnotherapist, group facilitator, and visionary. She lives in a beautiful, mostly hand-built home at Earthaven Ecovillage (www.earthaven.org), and offers classes locally in the mystical system called The Enneagram of Conscious Being. She can be reached at arjuna@earthaven.org.

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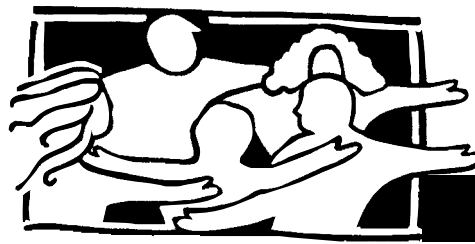
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LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)

can't afford to buy into cohousing have valuable, non-financial assets to contribute to the success of a project.

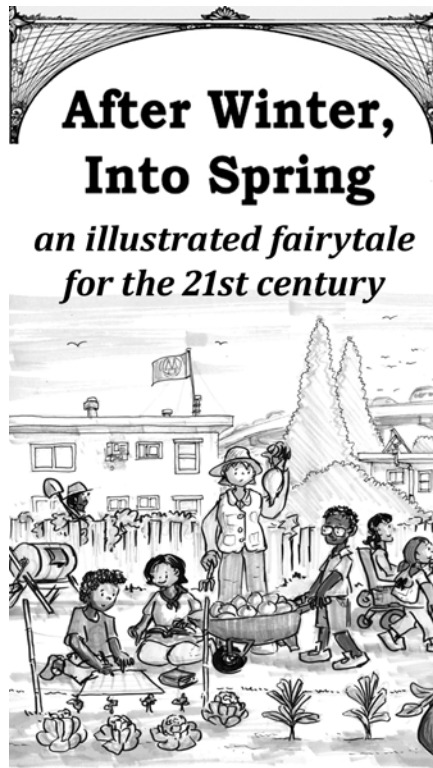
In my case, I never imagined I wouldn't be able to "afford" living in community. Finances only are part of what qualifies a person to successfully be part of a cooperative community. Sometimes people eager to join cohousing (and with the assets to do so) don't have the skills or temperament necessary to navigate community life. Other times, an otherwise qualified and valuable potential community member simply doesn't have the financial ability to join.

In your call for articles, you asked for personal stories. Mine is about connecting with the cohousing concept more than 10 years ago and believing it was part of my future. Soon after that discovery, through illness, I lost my financial ability to purchase a home. I still have a hard time switching from a life-long expectation of being a modest homeowner, hopefully in cohousing, to facing insurmountable obstacles to living in community.

This circumstance has given me a better understanding of the difference between affordability "for some" and affordability to those with low income. Low-income membership in our society is skyrocketing. How can we, as a species, NOT "afford" to live in community with a large part of our society?

Marganne Meyer
via email

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Below is a selection of articles from our most recent issues.

- **JOURNEYING ON THE ARK: One Woman's Experience at L'Arche**
Janna Payne

Questioning her community's philosophy and practices, a live-in caregiver ends her involvement there in order to focus on greater self-expression and self-care. (From Issue # 157 - *Endings and Beginnings*)



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communities.ic.org

MONEY AND SUSTAINABILITY AT GREEN VALLEY VILLAGE

(continued from p. 31)

pay \$400 a month for everything I need: my rent, utilities, food, house assets, access to communal vehicles, communal dues, and more. When a group of people shares everything from life dreams to toothpaste, we do not need as much money as we would independently. Even if I had more money I cannot imagine what I would spend it on because rather than buy the things I want for myself, I can create them. What I want to help create more than anything is a society based on cooperation rather than consumerism. If the cost of that is going without things I do not need, at least it is free.

So we consume less and share more. Yet at the end of the day, no matter how simply we live, money is a reality for us at GVV. Making our money offsite in the very society that requires us to use money in the first place may be an efficient way to meet our economic needs. I see little distinction between whether I earn money offsite or within my own community. What matters is that I keep my consumption low so that I spend less time earning access to money and more time stewarding the land where I live and the community I share it with.

I would like to transition away from seeing dollars as measures of real value and deal with paying the bills as we need to, while we still have to. If we can stack functions and make money while creating or sustainably acquiring the things that our community agrees are essential, then that is ideal. But if not, I would rather focus on collectively caring for ourselves and the life around us than creating work for profit. When we put our energy into actualizing a healthy culture, our source of money does not have to be our source of meaning. How would we really spend our time if there were no paycheck at the end of two weeks? ☺

Fen Liano is a member of Green Valley Village, an intentional community 70 miles north of San Francisco in Sonoma County, California. She spends most of her time caring for an oak nursery and participating in her aspiring egalitarian, homesteading collective, the CRIC House. Please email Fen at slowerandless@gmail.com.

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AFFORDABILITY: WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR

(continued from p. 33)

video spoke about research showing that when a person casually spends money on another person, the first person is happier than before. Perhaps this is the most important thing to be able to afford: giving something away.

Of course I don't mean to embrace the yearly holiday gift-giving mania that starts around Halloween. (In fact, I'm notoriously hard to give gifts to—there's almost nothing that I want people to buy for me.) I think that unlike the casual gift-giving mentioned above, socially obligatory holiday gift-giving doesn't make people happier, and I'm grateful that it's not obligatory at Acorn. We have other ways of giving in community. Giving something away can take the form of putting a coveted item on a grabs table, or approving the use of community money to support a new neighboring community, or giving away surpluses from our businesses.

I think it is in large part because we don't worry about keeping up with the Joneses that we can afford to buy what we really care about buying, and to give gifts that really feel meaningful. ☺

Irena Hollowell lives at Acorn Community in Mineral, Virginia; see www.acorncommunity.org.

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ACHIEVING AFFORDABILITY WITH COHOUSING

(continued from p. 35)

There are a number of different strategies for building affordable cohousing, but cohousing residents living in houses that cost half of what the neighboring houses cost know that there is only one reliable way to achieve affordability—jump in together and make it happen against all apparent odds. Over and over again, The Cohousing Company faces and meets the challenge of designing homes for those who come to the table, sometimes with very little cash. Like cohousing's intentional community counterparts, we know that joining together and making a dedicated effort is how it gets done. Cohousers show great creativity, whether it's buying cheap, nontraditional land, creating public/private partnerships, sharing a house (much more comfortable when you have access to a welcoming common house), or using less costly building materials. And of course, all cohousers save money after they move in by sharing creatively, lowering the cost of everything from dinner to lawn mowers, tools, cars, and energy, while building community with their neighbors. ☺

*For more information about affordable cohousing and cohousing-inspired affordable housing designed by The Cohousing Company/McCamant & Durrett Architects, see Charles Durrett and Kathryn McCamant's book, *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities*.*

Charles Durrett is an architect, author, and advocate of affordable, socially responsible and sustainable design who has made a major contribution in the last 20 years to a multi-disciplinary architecture and town planning—one that involves and empowers the inhabitants and enriches the sense of place and sense of community in both the urban and rural settings in which he works. Charles has designed over 50 cohousing communities in the United States, including Muir Commons, the first cohousing community in North America, and has consulted on many more around the world.

Joanna Winter is a planner with The Cohousing Company/McCamant & Durrett Architects. She has a background in sociology and has worked in local government on affordable housing development and policy. She studied intentional communities and community sociology at Grinnell College before receiving a master's degree in City and Regional Planning at Cornell University, and is currently working with the US Cohousing Association's task group on affordable cohousing.



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MAKING COHOUSING AFFORDABLE: STRATEGIES AND SUCCESSES

(continued from p. 38)


is not for amateurs—partner with an experienced one in your area if you can.) Elderspirit has 16 subsidized rental apartments and 13 homeowner units.

Santa Fe Housing Trust (another CHDO) is building Eldergrace, 28 units of senior cohousing at the behest of a small group of future residents committed to conscious aging. The city requires that 30 percent be affordable to low-income seniors; the community hopes that 50 percent of the units can be subsidized to sell at below-market rates.

Sequoia Village in Sebastopol, CA is the first 100 percent below-market-rate cohousing community to use what developer Burbank Housing Development Corporation (another CHDO) calls “sweat equity light.” Prospective community members didn’t help design the community, but they will be putting in 500 hours of labor per household to build, landscape, and participate in policy setting and other group development workshops. The city of Sebastopol and various other public funding sources combined to provide almost \$190,000 in subsidies per unit. The subsidies include a “100-year” roof (to reduce monthly replacement-reserve contributions that are a substantial component of HOA dues), active and passive solar features, and significant reductions in down payments. A portion of the subsidy will be paid back only on resale, but members will get most of the additional appreciation in value once the first and second mortgages are paid off. The payback will go back into a fund managed by Burbank to help subsequent homeowners purchase the unit.

Betsy Morris, Ph.D., M.C.P., is a partner in Planning for Sustainable Communities (www.cohousingcoach.com), helping people build and create cohousing, ecovillages, and other intentional communities. She is also director of the New College MBA program in San Francisco, California.

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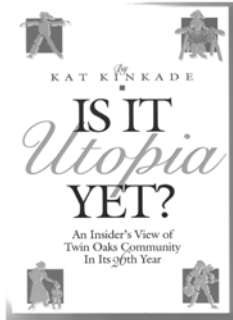
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AFFORDABILITY STRATEGIES AND CONTRASTS

(continued from p. 39)

generally shared, through monthly assessments (generally hundreds of dollars per month). Many other IC homes are also associated with recurring costs that support shared facilities. In some cases, shared costs are assessed annually and are remarkably low (tens of dollars per year).

- **Local culture:** Most COHO and other IC groups develop active community lives, including shared meals, movie/game nights, etc., which creates a rich life at a lower cost.

- **Optimizing facilities for DIY:** Many COHO and IC groups include facilities that can shift some costs of living from external services to internal, e.g., changing oil in a car.

- **Sharing:** People living in COHO homes often share equipment and other resources; e.g., few COHO homes have private lawnmowers. IC homes, especially shared households, share far more resources; e.g., few shared households have more than one vacuum cleaner.

Community Income

Few COHO communities have opportunities for income, other than what is created privately. Many other ICs operate businesses which provide private and/or community income which offsets private and/or community costs. ☺

A long-time Intentional Community activist, Oz Ragland served as the Executive Director of the Cohousing Association of the United States (Coho/US) for three years, where part of his work was developing the organization's position on affordability. He is a member at Life Song Commons and Songaia Cohousing in Bothell, Washington, and past Project Manager at New Earth Song Cohousing.

Growing up in a family business, Wendy Willbanks Wiesner came to see that if artificial separations between "labor" and "management"—between people—were eliminated, work would be more productive, creative, rewarding, and fun. She has helped found Partnerships for Affordable Cohousing (PFAC), an organization dedicated to making cooperative living arrangements more accessible.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH IRA WALLACE

(continued from p. 80)

built on cooperative self-reliance that provide safe, healthy food for everyone—starting with home and community gardens.

I caught up with her in 2010 and at a rare moment in the Acorn kitchen, pulled out a tape recorder and asked her about her life. You can tell just by looking at her that there's wisdom on those bones. Here's what she had to say.

How long have you lived in community?

My entire adult life. And I'm now 62. (That was nearly three years ago. Ira turns 65 in 2013.)

ALOE COMMUNE

I came to a Twin Oaks conference in the early '70s. My daughter was four at the time and Twin Oaks didn't accept children. So a group of us with kids got together, met over a few months, and decided to move to together to North Carolina to start a commune. We bought 250 acres near Chapel Hill and called it Aloe Community.

We were young and so *gung-ho!* that it was sort of hard to live with us. A couple of us had jobs at the University but we'd get up and milk the cows before we went to work, come home and milk the cows, look after the kids, and all the other stuff of life. We had it in our mind that we wanted to pay off all our debt in five years, which was probably the death of the commune. It just meant work, work, work. People who weren't high energy had a hard time there.

We were also experimenting with some radical social ideas not only in alternatives to traditional relationships but also in the idea that people should get to know each person equally. We would have these sleepover dates (not necessarily to have sex) so we'd have one on one time with everyone. Sometimes it was just a little much. So we paid off our debt and more or less split up at the same time.

At the time we split up we owed maybe \$25,000 to a couple of parents. We thought we might find another group who wanted to start a community and we'd sell them the land for the amount of money we still owed. We put it out and also tried to get the Federation of Egalitarian Communities to help us but no one would do it because they were sure it was a fake deal—too good to be true. We actually tried for four years and in the end we divided the land and sold it off to various homesteaders. It was sad but we got tired of paying the taxes.

After I left Aloe I spent a year on kibbutz.

DANDELION

I still had a young child so Twin Oaks wasn't yet an option, so we moved next to a community called Dandelion in Canada and lived there for almost five years. My daughter and I started having immigration issues and the only way to solve them would have been to marry a Canadian and we decided to come back to the States.

I was planning to go to nursing school so we went to Florida and lived just the two of us for nine months or so. Then came the summer and Raphy, my daughter, was out of school. We decided to visit Twin Oaks and have a good time. We did and everyone liked us. And even though Twin Oaks is funny about kids they invited us to be in the visitor group and apply for membership. And so we went to live there. During that time though Twin Oaks had decided to send the bulk of the younger children to private school, which was great except that Raphy was five years older than the other kids. Because of the private school there was no money for extracurricular or after-school activities. This was pretty isolating and hard on her, given the fact that

she was a young teenager. She decided at that point to live with her dad in Florida.

TWIN OAKS AND ACORN

I lived at Twin Oaks starting in 1984. The Women's Gathering just started when I was a visitor and I worked on that for 10 years or so. I started Acorn Community in 1993. We started Acorn because Twin Oaks was full. So full, in fact, that the waiting list was over a year long.

A few of us put our heads together—Kat Kinkade, who started Twin Oaks, my partner Gordon Sproule, and I—and we wrote people who seemed interested, then we figured out what needed to happen, and put a plan together. We started out by saying “We've got a new idea. We can start a new commune. And we want Twin Oaks to lend a quarter million dollars to get us going.” And son-of-a-gun, within the course of a year, everyone thought it was a reasonable idea. And it did become reasonable because we slogged away at all of the concerns until it was clear.

In a similar way I restarted the Communities Conference at Twin Oaks. Twin Oaks is very based on labor credits, so I said, “Can I do this thing if I don't take any labor credits and if I make it pay for itself?” Some people said OK. So now people take labor credits to organize it and it pays for itself.

What keeps you in community?

I don't have much of a biological family so I guess it's become my family. And as long as I can remember I've had a desire to make some difference in the world. But the world is one great, big, hard place to make a difference. Community is a small enough chunk that you can make a difference. And it also is a good place from which you can, from time to time, try to make a difference in some bigger subset of the world.

I think of it as not perfect but more in alignment with my values than when I was married and trying to have a house

AN INTERVIEW WITH IRA WALLACE

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and do all those things. So much time was taken up with providing for myself and my family that there wasn't much time for other things.

What values does community meet for you?

1. RACE: It's easier to be a black person in community than in the larger world. There are intersections of race and class that make this style of living less likely for most people of color, but once here, race is not a big deal.

For example, I used to dread going to job interviews. I'm well spoken enough so that the person wouldn't know I was black until they met me. The person would be enthusiastic on the phone and I never knew how they were going to be once they saw me. It's a relief not having to deal with that kind of stuff.

2. FEMINISM: When I first lived in community, I was fired up about feminism. Now I'm not as fired up because I'm used to things that used to be a big problem not being a problem in my day-to-day life. Not until some crazy visitor comes along who reminds me how bad it can be.

3. ECONOMICS: I am interested in ideas of economic justice and this particular style of income sharing community is trying to figure out how to achieve that. At the very least, community plays with those ideas.

4. ENVIRONMENT: You have a small environmental footprint just by living together and sharing stuff too.

Can you say more about feminism and how it informed your choices?

It seemed at the time to bump me all the time in these everyday kinds of ways.

When I first started Aloe Community, we moved to Chapel Hill and I applied for various teaching jobs. We were just starting and needed the income. It was summer so I applied for a summer grounds job and they just didn't even consider me. They told me they didn't have any position, and then this guy that I happened to know got hired the next day. I was so mad. I wrote a letter to these people calling them racist and sexist (in a nice way). I was as qualified as this person and I had experience using the equipment they had talked about. I told them that I was going to talk to the equal opportunity people about it. They contacted me and invited me back for another interview almost immediately. But just in general it was this kind of thing. You go in and they look at you and decide that you can't do something. It's bad enough dealing with race and then having gender stacked on it—very unpleasant.

Throughout my life I did a lot of things I really didn't like doing. I spent a good part of my late teens and 20s getting under my car and fixing it, even though I didn't like it, because it just made me so mad that somebody thought I couldn't do stuff. Or worse, people would try to rip you off because you were a woman.

I grew up in a neighborhood with a fair amount of physical abuse of women by men. People didn't bother about it. They'd say, "That's her husband. You shouldn't interfere with it. He didn't really hurt her." It was unbelievable.

All of that has informed my living in community. People weren't even talking about trying to be different. But when I would visit Twin Oaks there were strong equal opportunity policies in place. It just seemed like a brave new world.

Do you have a spiritual practice?

I grew up Catholic and liberation theology got me into feminism and social activ-

ism. When my favorite priest ran off with the organist I said, "I don't know if I can do this." It was sort of the end of my strong spiritual moments.

Do you feel like you are missing something from living this lifestyle?

For me personally, not so much. I'm energetic and a networker so living here and having not so much money doesn't keep me from doing things that I want to do. For some other people who can't figure how to do what they want to do without spending money, sometimes it's difficult for them.

One thing I think might be better is to be able to cook what I want if I lived by myself. From time to time I try to lose weight and it's a hassle because I can't get other people to cook what I want.

What's your relationship to the media? Do you follow national or regional politics? Or pop-culture entertainment?

I am on the board of the Organic Seed Alliance and we have lawsuits against Monsanto going so I follow it avidly. Being involved with Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, I've started to pay more attention to what people say about seeds. With national media and the first election, I got excited about Obama and read everything. Now, not so much. I'm vaguely informed.

There is a lot of turnover in community. How does that work for you?

Sometimes I think the fact that I don't get that attached to people is a good thing. And at the same time the people I really like and sometimes haven't seen for five years, we can just take up where we left off. I guess it suits me.

Do you feel you have enough privacy?

I never grew up with privacy. We had this crazy house that my grandfather had

built and you had to walk through someone else's room to get somewhere. There were always cousins, aunts, and grandparents staying for a while. So growing up in a household with a lot of people in a small space didn't seem strange to me.

What do you love and what do you hate about living in community?

I love the opportunity to do a lot of what I'm excited about, which has changed drastically from time to time, for my main work. I think I'm the luckiest person in the world. When we started Southern Exposure Seed Exchange I never got to work in the business. We needed money and I was immersed in the craft business to bring in the money. One day I got to start working in the seed business and it's been real fun. In the past I got to have a market garden, start another commune, teach herb workshops.

Sometimes what I hate is having to listen to someone go on and on about something that I've heard over and over again through the years. Probably every other year for the past 12 years we've had to hash out the dog thing or how clean things should be. It's frustrating when people who just come in that minute say things like "I just got here and I should have equal say on things that are long-term."

What keeps you committed to this life?

It's the people. It's true that you get tired of people leaving. But some great person comes along and you get to work with them. And it's really fun. It's possible to be equal colleagues with people who are in their 20s. I love learning stuff from them, like computer things. It seems that usually people only know others in their age and stage of life groups. Not here. I can play with people's babies and give them back. I like that.

Honoring an Elder

Aside from being a force, both in community and in the world, Ira Wallace is a true elder. Many of us have learned from her over the years and consider her a friend and community ally. The whole movement was shaken in 2011 when Ira was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Luckily Acorn and Twin Oaks are near Charlottesville, home to the University of Virginia (UVA), which boasts an outstanding medical community inclusive of people without health insurance. "I had the best surgeon," Ira said. "He was the guy who took care of Superman (Christopher Reeves) when he was ill. I figured 'If people with lots of money want this dude, he's probably good.'"

Come to find out the tumor was malignant—which can be a near-term death sentence. Thankfully, her Superman surgeon team removed the whole tumor during surgery. In a year of going back every three months for MRI's, she's still free of cancer. Blessedly, her recovery has been amazing. She spoke at length about her new projects for finding seed growers in the Southeast and all sorts of fun she's having.

In closing a recent phone call with Ira, I asked her how she felt about this article. "It's sure nice to get recognized as an elder instead of only getting the aching knees."

Well, honor we do. Thanks to Ira and others like her in community who have paved the way for us. We stand firmly on your shoulders. 🐾

Lee Walker Warren has lived in community for 15 years—a year-and-a-half of that with Ira at Acorn Community, back in 2000 and 2001. At that time Lee co-managed Southern Exposure Seed Exchange. Now she is a writer, herbalist, homesteader, and the manager of a cooperative, organic farm at Earthaven Ecovillage. She is the cofounder of Village Terraces Cohousing Neighborhood, a permaculture and agriculture based sub-community within Earthaven.

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An Interview with Ira Wallace

Ira Wallace is a force. Most everyone who's been through the doors of Twin Oaks Community in Louisa, Virginia over the last three decades—and this numbers in the thousands—knows Ira. Many of us who have known her over the years wonder how it is that she seems to have her hand in everything: to have either started or helped maintain so many pieces of importance in the communities movement.

Another significant point is that Ira Wallace was born in 1948. She grew up in the South in the '50s and '60s—in a world full of race, class, gender, and sexual oppressions.

Audre Lorde famously said, “Let me tell you first about what it was like being a Black woman poet in the '60s... It meant being invisible. It meant being really invisible. It meant being doubly invisible as a Black feminist woman.”

Yet Ira has created a world where she's become far from invisible.

Ira Wallace lives at both Twin Oaks and Acorn Community as a dual member. She was central in restarting the Twin Oaks Communities Conference (after a 10 year dormancy), established Acorn Community, developed a thriving craft business that kept Acorn alive in the early years, and co-manages Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, which offers 700+ varieties of

non-GMO, open pollinated, and organic seeds. In November 2011 Southern Exposure was awarded Sustainable Institution of the Year by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) and named one of the Top 15 Vegetable Seed Companies by *Mother Earth News*.

These days Ira's force is spread far and wide, just like her seeds. Ira blogs about gardening in the Southeast, writes for *Mother Earth News*, contributes to the Southern SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program)-sponsored Saving Our Seeds Project, presents throughout the country at sustainable agriculture events, serves on the board of the Organic Seed Alliance, and is the organizer of the Heritage Harvest Festival at Monticello, a fun, family-friendly event featuring an old-timey seed swap, local food, and hands-on workshops. The Festival has become an important regional gathering, growing to over 4,400 attendees in 2011.

Ira is also writing her first book, which will be available from Timber Press by early 2014. The working title is *Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast*. Her goal is nothing less than the creation of sustainable, regional food systems

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