

LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture



## Community Wisdom for Everyday Life

Rural Rhythms

New Culture Perspectives

Gratitude and Vulnerability

Cultivating the Neighborhood

Losing Community, Finding Community

Summer 2013 • Issue #159

\$7.00 / \$8.00 Canada



[communities.ic.org](http://communities.ic.org)

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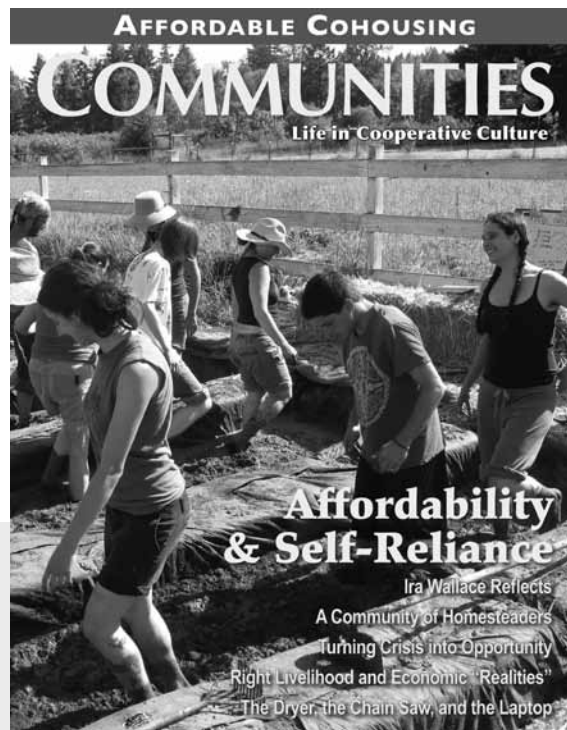
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## ON THE COVER



Residents of Waterloo, Ontario enjoy a game of street scrabble made out of vinyl

tiles by Jeffrey Marsh (in the khaki shorts). The main street in Waterloo was closed four Sundays in 2012 to allow residents to enjoy the outdoor space and bike and walk freely without car noises and hassles. These Open Streets Waterloo days draw all kinds of neighbours out to do yoga on the street, picnic, enjoy live music, play bicycle polo, eat ice cream, and much, much more. Photo by Matthew Bailey-Dick.

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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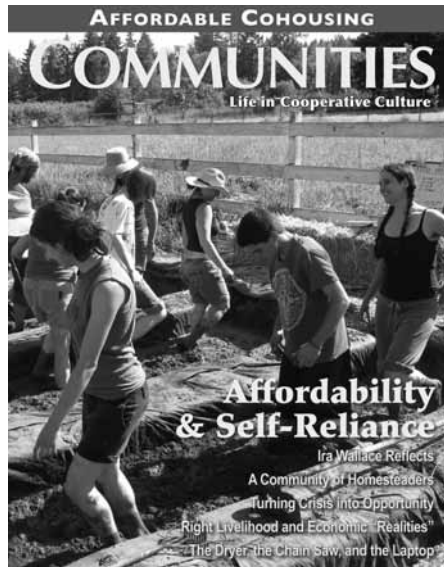
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## LETTERS



### Activism and Straight Talk

I would like to see more articles or an issue on activism in community, such as community and meeting the environmental crisis. (Why not have an article on the brave young people camped in Texas resisting the KXL Pipeline—they are living/camping in true community!) I don't remember reading articles about Occupy communities a year ago either.

I noticed that in the last COMMUNITIES issue on Affordability, there was not a lot of straight talk addressing the issue of true affordability. What really is affordable in a country that is in, and likely to stay in, serious economic crisis? What is affordable for the many alternative someones seeking community who are, and have been, activists and don't have a bundle saved up? How do we include them?

Hardly any of your authors dared mention what it costs to join or live in their communities. In some ecovillages it can cost over \$100,000 to buy into and build a house. Cohousing is often in the range of \$250,000 or more—off the charts for many of the good people who are most interested in community. Yes, I realize there are a few subsidized rental units in some cohousing communities, and that is good but limited. But what if one does not want to live a more conventional lifestyle in town? At the other end of the spectrum there is egalitarian community

where it's free to join and all income is shared. But you will only have a room in a shared building, you will work 40 hours a week at various kinds of community work, etc. and this lifestyle is not for everyone.

Why not compile and list what it actually costs to join, buy into, get a lot, build in, and live in 50 (or hopefully more) various communities from co-op housing to cohousing to ecovillages and land trusts? This would be a really interesting piece of information for those seeking and maybe those living in community.

Thanks for a great magazine!

Patricia Greene  
*via email*

**Editor's Note:** *While we at the magazine don't have the staff to research and write the article or extensive list you suggest, we welcome submissions from writers who want to take on that kind of project. Meanwhile, the online Communities Directory at directory.ic.org is a rich source of various types of information—some of it related to costs—about more than 1000 intentional communities.*

### Consensus at Rainbow

It's been a treat to listen in as Diana Leafe Christian, Laird Schaub, Tree Bressen, and other experts on group decision-making demonstrate so well the heart of their art: the ability to peacefully and respectfully disagree. (*"Busting the Myth" series, issues #155-present.*)

My own experience with consensus process comes from the Rainbow Family gatherings, a different decision-making arena altogether. Consensus is a firmly rooted tradition at the gatherings. Though most decisions are practical ones pertaining only to the week or month a particular group of gatherers spends together on a particular site, some have been reaffirmed often enough to become part of the culture handed down to each new generation of gatherers.

On the other hand, we have no means of enforcing or mandating a particular

decision to newcomers who did not participate in the original process. It's essentially an oral tradition, so from time to time we find ourselves recycling the same discussions, and our tribal traditions continue to evolve. But the basic guidelines that have made it possible for the Gatherings to continue for over 40 years remain in place.

Twenty years ago I summarized my observations of how Rainbow consensus process works. I was hoping it would stimulate a conversation, gather feedback from others with council experience, and evolve into a group-authored document like others the Family has produced. But to this day no one has suggested any improvements; the Family has either decided it's perfect as is, or totally irrelevant to their needs. You can look it up at WelcomeHome.org under "Focalizers' Info." Here it is:

### ***A Mini-Manual on Council***

*These are my observations, representing no consensus of Rainbow Family council; please feel free to suggest additions or improvements, and perhaps someday this will evolve into a Mini-Manual on Council Circles.*

—Wing

If at all possible, hold Council out on the land, under the sky. Make sure everyone concerned has plenty of notice of the time and place.

Especially invite the people you disagree with, or who disagree with you.

Always hold hands first and bless the circle. As soon as possible, pass a feather around the circle to hear what each person has brought to be discussed.

Make sure the feather makes it at least once all the way around the circle, so everyone gets a chance to speak.

If no one else does, explain the Council tradition: passing the feather; facilitating a discussion by pointing the feather; making a proposal and asking for concerns; consensus by silence.

If no one else does, offer a prayer for Spirit's guidance. If no one has a discussion to facilitate or a proposal to make, passing the feather and sharing heart-songs is always worthwhile.

Once everyone has spoken, the feather can be put aside if it is no longer needed.

Council is the process of figuring out how the group feels; it's not just for thinking.

The goal is not necessarily consensus of action, but of understanding; once we understand each other, what to do should be obvious.

The Council process works only if everybody present wants it to.

Councils get longer, not shorter, if more than one person is talking at a time.

Listening without interrupting the feather is a spiritual discipline (we do our best).

Listening to others is also the only way to be sure they will listen to us when our turn comes.

It is appropriate to interrupt someone who takes advantage of our willingness to listen.

Interrupting too can be done respectfully.

Anything can substitute for a feather; nothing can substitute for respect.

Just don't let respect disintegrate into a rule.

Watching out for the process is the responsibility of every person present.

Consensus doesn't mean that all of us agree, only that we agree to get out of the way of the larger will—a trusting, a humility, a surrender.

Consensus is not bending to the pressure of expedience or to anyone's personal motive.

A single person's proposal naturally changes as it becomes everyone's consensus.

It's dangerous when opinionated people get their way because someone doesn't love them enough to speak up.

It is not just a right but a duty to block a consensus which you see is not in the interest of the Family as a whole; it is a

sacred responsibility not to exercise it for any other reason.

It is not the person raising a concern that blocks consensus—it is the concern itself, once the circle recognizes it as everyone's concern.

If the circle cannot be convinced to honor a given concern, the concerned person may stand aside as an acknowledgment that the circle is not bound by individual concerns.

The Family cannot be expected to honor irresponsible blocking.

A lot of us didn't grow with Council and Consensus. Be gentle, be clear, be patient.

If the People disagree with the Council, they'll simply do something else.

**Stephen Wing**

*author, Free Ralph!*

*An Evolutionary Fable*

*(www.WindEaglePress.com;*

*www.StephenWing.com)*

### **Communities and the World**

Hi Chris,

Thank you for the fantastic job you do on the magazine. I truly appreciate the thoughtful articles and also your attention to detail when it comes to the use of language. FIC is not only composed of some of the best people—they're also some of the most intelligent. Maybe in most people's minds that order should logically be reversed, but I appreciate the intelligence...ha!

I've been reading about community for some time. I want to ask a question about the vision which FIC members may have about community's place in the world. I've read about community being sort of a laboratory and an example, etc. of what can be done to live cooperatively and sustainably, but I'd like to know what is thought about what community living has to say about the positive

*(continued on p. 67)*

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](mailto:editor@ic.org) or COMMUNITIES, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

## COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

## Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563-9720; 660-883-5545; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at communities.ic.org.

## Advertising Policy

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

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

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

Please check communities.ic.org or email ads@ic.org for advertising information.

## 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



*In each Summer issue, we check into the state of the magazine's finances. Here's our latest look at the numbers and future prospects:*

After an encouraging 2011, this magazine hemorrhaged over \$18,000 in red ink last year. When coupled with other organizational setbacks—notably from our web activities and events—FIC as a whole sustained a \$23,000 loss. Ugh! Most years we've been able to shore up magazine deficits with surpluses in other areas, but last year we needed more shoring than we had surpluses to go around, and we'll go out of business if we don't turn that around, and promptly.

Over the winter we did some serious jawboning with each of our program areas, explaining to managers and teams the imperative of manifesting a more robust performance in 2013.

The basic story with COMMUNITIES was not runaway expenses (our Production Team does a solid job of holding the line with expenses); our problem was anemic revenues, where we fell short of targets across the board excepting in the minor area of royalties.

## Help Is on the Way

Despite this bleak picture, we're staying the course and there are some good signs for the current year.

### —Advertising

Though ad revenues were down sharply last year (28 percent), we hired a gung-ho new Ad Manager at the end of last year, Christopher Kindig, who brought in over 60 percent of last year's total ad earnings in his first quarter on the job. Whoopee! Thus, there's solid hope that 2013 will be a banner year for magazine ad revenues, meeting or exceeding our targets for the first time in many years.

### —Donations

While donations earmarked for magazine support essentially flatlined last year, this year we're bouncing back. We partnered with the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement (Waterloo, Ontario) to produce this issue (Summer 2013) and have excellent prospects for securing funding support for two issues in 2014. That's better. If we could reach and maintain a steady diet of two sponsored issues *every* year, we'd be in high cotton.

### —Digital Access

Earlier this year we launched a major overhaul of our online Store (store.ic.org). Once it's debugged we'll be able to sell content as downloadable PDFs. Ultimately this will include a digital option for subscriptions, all back issues, and updated reprint packets—collections of what we consider our best articles on topics that readers have



most requested. Sometime this year we'll announce the availability of the Best of Communities, which we're expecting to be a popular offering. Because there are growing numbers of people who prefer to go paperless or who won't order something unless they can get it on the spot, we're expecting a definite bump from entering the Downloadable Age.

#### —Subscriptions

We have about 1300 paid subscribers. While each and every one of you is precious to us, that's not good enough. Our goal is to grow that number by 50 percent—to 2000—over the course of the next three years. We *know* that there are plenty of folks out there hungry for more community in their lives who would happily pay to have a copy of our informative and inspirational quarterly delivered to their mail box every three months. We just have to find them, and make them an offer they can't refuse.

#### How You Can Help

Our most valuable assets in turning around this magazine's financial fortunes are *you*—the people reading these words. There is no more potent marketing strategy than word of mouth from satisfied customers, and there are over 1000 of you! Creating cooperative culture is something

people do *together*, and we're hoping you're inspired by both our work and our financial reality to talk it up among your friends and loved ones.

There are lots of ways you can lend a hand without being heroic. Here are three:

—Strategically place promotional postcards at places where cooperative culture might find fertile soil: libraries, natural foods stores, independent bookstores, resource centers, etc. Tell our office staff how many you want and we'll ship them right out to you: [fic@ic.org](mailto:fic@ic.org).

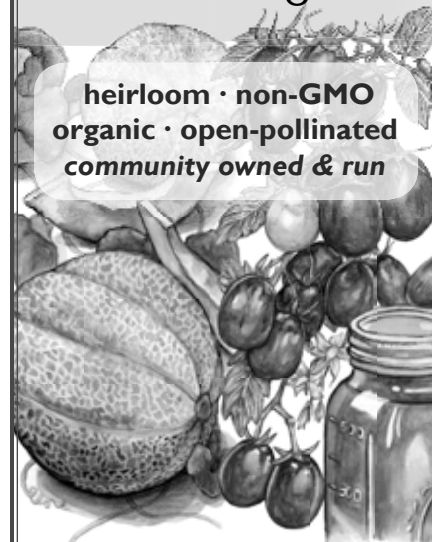
—Let your Facebook friends know when we publish something that catches your fancy. You can find us and like us at [www.facebook.com/CommunitiesMagazine](http://www.facebook.com/CommunitiesMagazine).

—Give the gift of community by giving a subscription to COMMUNITIES. You're never that far away from someone's birthday or anniversary, and this periodical is the gift that keeps on giving. Go to our website ([communities.ic.org](http://communities.ic.org)) and click on the "Subscribe" hyperlink to make it happen. It's that easy to make a difference.

We're doing everything we can to keep this magazine in print, but we won't succeed unless we have *your* oar in the water pulling alongside us. While it's a long haul to make it across the sea of red ink in front of us, together we can make it. 🐦

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Acorn Community celebrates our 20th anniversary this year. Prospective members and interns are welcome to write to us to request to visit, especially during the summer months. Come learn and garden with us!

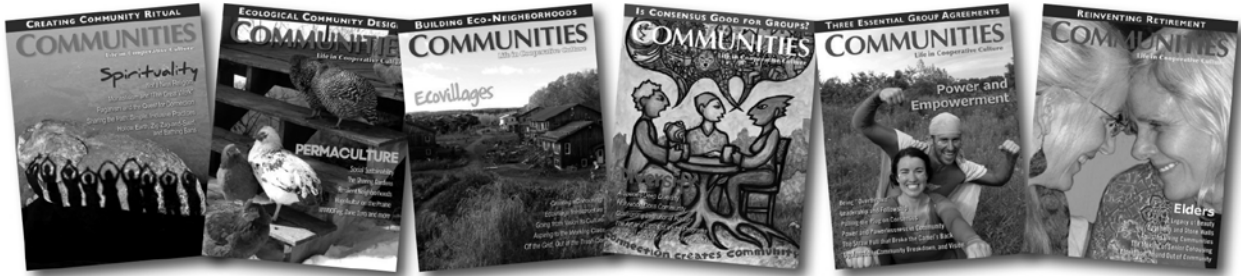
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Photo courtesy K.I. Hoang and Sean Thomas.

## Communities Magazine 2012 Financial Statement

Expenses		Income	
Printing	\$15,919	Subscriptions	\$27,213
Office overhead	7,361	Single issues	1,522
Production labor	27,270	Back issues	2,809
Fulfillment	11,776	Distributor sales	5,521
Marketing	2,385	Advertising	8,333
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>64,711</b>	Royalties	686
		Donations	185
		<b>Total Income</b>	<b>46,269</b>
		<b>Net Profit (Loss)</b>	<b>(\$18,442)</b>

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# Community Wisdom for Everyday Life

Welcome to our Summer issue. It was a brainchild of our conversations with Paul Born and The Tamarack Institute, who offered not only much-needed financial sponsorship but also assistance in soliciting and editing content from the members of their network. Six of the articles herein are results of that collaboration, in which Rachel Brnjas, Community Animator for Tamarack's Seeking Community project, also played a crucial role. The remainder of the contents came from the ever-widening COMMUNITIES author pool—people who learned about the topic from our emailed Call for Articles, from the submissions page at [communities.ic.org](http://communities.ic.org), or directly from a magazine or FIC staff member. (Speaking of which, we always welcome new authors and submissions—if you're interested in writing for the magazine yourself, please email [editor@ic.org](mailto:editor@ic.org) and we'll put you on our Call for Articles list.)

In an hour-long conversation with Paul last summer, I became convinced that Tamarack Institute was a near-perfect values match with FIC and COMMUNITIES, with the added bonus of their focus on using community wisdom (much of it gained in intentional community) to cultivate community-orientation in everyday life. This has become an important focus for FIC as well—so creating a jointly-produced magazine issue around the theme seemed like an ideal fit. My subsequent experiences have borne out those conclusions.

Here's what Paul writes about Tamarack:

"Tamarack builds and supports learning communities for social change. We were founded in 2002 to support citizens and organizations working together to build vibrant communities. Our mandate is to make the work of working together easier and more effective. We are a registered charity in Canada.

"We believe that when diverse groups of people learn together in community we build a stronger commitment to positive change and to each other. We believe that whatever the problem, community is the answer. We believe that better cities are built through better community and we really believe in the potential of neighbours.

"We are deeply interested in and are mandated to advance

the ideas of citizen engagement, collaborative leadership, and community building.

"Our passion is to end poverty in Canada and we are well on the way, with our work now present in more than 40 cities with a goal of having supported one million families on their journey out of poverty. We are a quarter way there. By supporting cities to collaborate and build a bold vision for poverty reduction, we effect policy changes and support program and broader 'systems' innovation. See [www.vibrantcanada.ca](http://www.vibrantcanada.ca).

"COMMUNITIES resonates with us because it represents the best example we can find of a learning community committed to people being intentional about living in community. We love the examples (stories), the practical ideas about organizing and making decisions together, the struggles and the joys documented. We want to inspire 1000 conversations about community and record these at [www.seekingcommunity.ca](http://www.seekingcommunity.ca). We want to learn from these conversations and document the wisdom needed to deepen our desire for and the experience of community in these times.

"By sponsoring this magazine issue we are inviting your learning community to join us on our journey. I know it is cheesy to use a sports analogy, but it best describes our intention. Most of us play 'house league' community, we dabble in it—but the learning community of COMMUNITIES—well, we see you like the NBA (professional basketball league) of community. You are highly trained and capable and we have much to learn from you and to be inspired by you. We are humbled that you would be interested in our journey."

The pleasure is mutual.

Thanks to all our readers for joining us on this journey as well. As always, we appreciate your subscriptions, gift subscriptions, donations, advertising, and leads towards other individuals or groups who might be interested in sponsoring an issue as Paul and Tamarack Institute have so generously done.

Enjoy this issue! ☺

*Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.*



*Dave Wagner and four participants trace the stories and wisdom of an old-growth tree-round at Mt. Pisgah Arboretum, Eugene, Oregon.*

# Wisdom from Within, Wisdom from Without

By Karin Iona Sundberg

Soon after moving to Lost Valley Educational Center, an intentional community in Dexter, Oregon, I found one member particularly difficult to resonate with. I did what came naturally—which was to avoid conflict at all costs. I shrank from her sharp edges and worked to soften my own; to see her as beautiful, to understand her perspective, to give her latitude.

One day she said to me, “You know, Karin, I have my part in it too.” She asked me to interact with her more, to tell her the truth. She wanted connection and understanding, perhaps to know why people reacted to her as they did. I still felt tentative, but began to offer her my perspective. Though we never became the closest of friends, over time we forged a more trusting bond. I appreciated her strength, and she responded to my warmth. Her willingness to ask for feedback took courage; she created an opening, and light shone in.

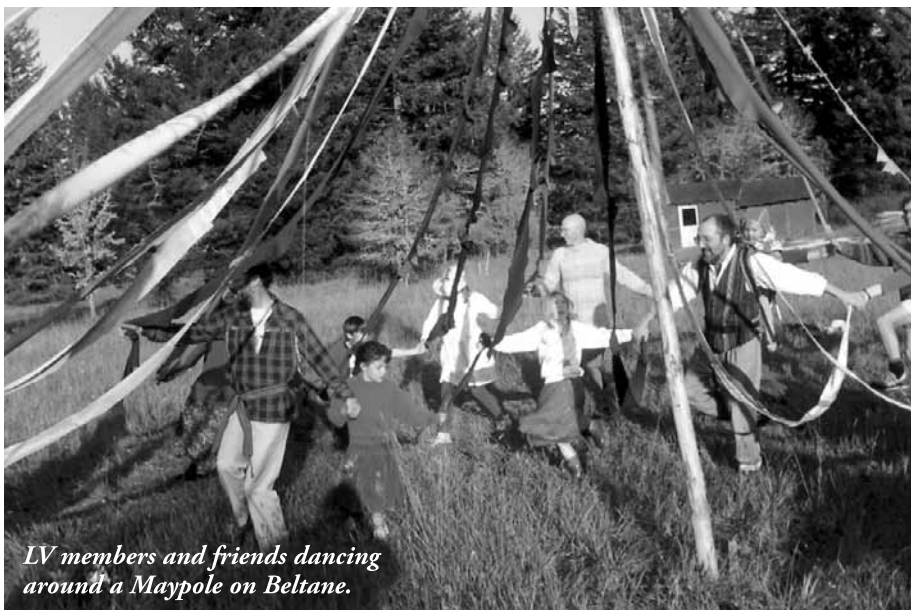
We all need each other to see ourselves clearly. In many communities, even those that are spiritually based, we don’t always connect from a place of honesty. By honesty I don’t mean sharing every judgment. Judgment isn’t honest, it’s delusion—it’s seeing someone else through harsh eyes rather than owning our own discomfort. But to share who we are, what our fears or dreams are, to say the hard thing that makes us feel vulnerable—especially when a lot is at stake—from a caring, responsible place within...can make or break the well-being of family or community. We have to risk. We have to keep our relationships clear.

A community offers a container into which the members can bring specific practices. This works best if everyone is aligned. At Lost Valley, when we brought in new practices meant to connect us more deeply, those who were not aligned left over the next couple years. This was not an easy period, though in retrospect it seems everyone flourished on their respective paths. During the transition, a core group of members held the vision of a connected,

enterprising, abundant, healthy community, and over time, we settled into a new rhythm, like spring burgeoning after winter storms.

We learned that having weekly well-being meetings—where we came together to share our personal challenges and triumphs, lessons we were learning about ourselves, and ways we could use support—was vital to having effective business meetings (where we’d make community decisions and manage the conference center).

Without well-being meetings, our business meetings could become bleak and dysfunctional when previously unexpressed emotions clouded issues and made it hard to come to resolution.



*LV members and friends dancing around a Maypole on Beltane.*

Any topic could incite stubbornness and resistance, and the fear of not being heard would have members pushing for their own private agendas. By keeping communication clear on a personal level, fewer issues became contentious and irresolvable. We were better able to listen to and understand one another.

We held regular Naka-Ima\* workshops in which many members of the community participated. Naka-Ima is a practice of honesty and letting go of attachments. One of the founders of Naka-Ima, Jaime Campbell, says, "Nothing can prepare us more fully for a harmonious future than the activity of unraveling the emotional and ideological patterns which make up our own psyches."

We also learned from other practices: consensus process, nonviolent communication, meditation, and we brought in mediators for sticky issues and to help us with overall visioning. In circles we passed a talking stick.

*Community Wisdom Lesson 1: Deepen connections with others. In community there is more at stake and more opportunity to come together to resolve challenges. Utilize the potential to learn from one another; emphasize the importance of kind honesty and keeping resentments clear. Experiment with group dynamics.*

• • •

Living in community offers an ongoing opportunity to welcome and celebrate the powerful indigenous custom of rhythmic celebrations and rituals. Sobonfu Somé, a wisdom teacher who led rituals at Lost Valley, grew up in West Africa. She has said of her tribe that their life largely consisted of planning for the next ritual, participating in the ritual itself, and talking about the ritual in the glow of the aftermath; then starting again to plan for the next.

"My people the Dagara people live in community. Their life blood is ritual. As a child I never thought much about ritual and its implications. I thought everything was a given and everywhere I went life would be the same as in my little Village." She was asked by the elders of her community to take their teachings to the West. This separation from her roots was shattering. Over time she found her strength, her place, and her power within the radically different culture of the United States by sharing and leading rituals. She says, "My experience being away from my community has taught me that the close relationship I experienced with community was essential for the growth of human Spirit and necessary for peace within the community."

At Lost Valley we sang before meals and when we gathered together each morning before working in the garden. Singing is a simple and powerful way to uplift and literally harmonize the energy of a group. We celebrated the changing seasons by performing rituals on the traditional Celtic holidays and cross holidays (Solstices, Equinoxes, and Imbolc, Beltane, Lammas, and Samhain). On birthdays we exchanged coupons, or promise notes as gifts. Everyone, even the youngest children, would write down (or have helping writing) what they would give—

childcare, going for a walk in the woods, a massage, a movie, doing the person's dishes for a week. We had rituals for transitions—initiations into being an elder or a healer, for children letting go of nursing, for becoming godparents, for grieving miscarriage or divorce.

Within the members we had various interests and individual practices, and in addition our conference center hosted groups of different faiths; we were living in the midst of many traditions—Buddhist, pagan, Native American, Jewish, Christian. This gave us all an opportunity to keep expanding our own understanding of others.

*Community Wisdom Lesson 2: Deepen connection with spirit. Learn from the wisdom of indigenous cultures; use rhythmic celebrations to infuse the community with a sense of the sacred within everyday life. Have fun together.*

• • •

Large Linden trees lined the walk to our office, and I came to anticipate their blossoming each spring. We called them the bee trees, because once the flowers bloomed, you could hear the buzzing from yards away. Watching the bees at work near the lower branches at eye level was a study in wild harmonious industry.

Other perennial rhythms could be counted on as well. Like a well-tuned orchestra, each living thing presented itself with perfect timing, springing from the ground or bursting into bloom...Shasta daisies, morel mushrooms, the rare Lady's Slipper orchids, maple tree blossoms, the slender purple irises that showed up along a tiny seasonal water catchment pond. They all could be reckoned on to rise up in a steady succession, and then recede back to the earth, quiet until their time came again.

Of course in cities we have access to and awareness of the changing seasons. But there was something remarkable about



*Author's daughter Grace Kaplowitz communing with nature.*

Photos courtesy of Karin Iona Sundberg

living on land year after year, having an expanse of nature outside the front door, walking through the meadow to the office rather than commuting, especially while paying attention, practicing gratitude, and working to improve the environment. Planting gardens, fixing infrastructure, creating sacred spaces, being committed to helping a place and community to flourish—all these gave an irreplaceable sense of being rooted.

One day walking along the drive I came to a deep recognition that Lost Valley was shaping me into who I was—as if I were an extension, or outcome, of this blend of land and community. I marveled at the thought: *I am Karin of Lost Valley*, as if I were springing forth like the growing things around me.

This was not an experience I've had before or since, and yet it feels like a vital missing link in our culture. I'm not sure how to create it, though one aspect seems to be to stay in one place long enough to develop an intimate relationship with our surroundings.

*Community Wisdom Lesson 3: Deepen our connection with place; commit to knowing it well. Watch the seasons unfold; tune in to the beauty of nature. Notice how the place where you are (family, work, neighborhood, community) shapes and grows you—that you are “of” a place—and how this elicits an innate responsibility, a sense of stewardship.*



Sometimes an intentional community, or any committed group of individuals, needs support from outside its borders. Nearly a decade of “post-community” experience has given me further perspective on both what worked and where we could have improved by incorporating wisdom from others. Areas of community living that may be challenging, and possible solutions (or at least well-intentioned suggestions), include:

### Governance

Consensus is a powerful tool, but perhaps not for every decision a community needs to make. Create a management team that listens to members' considerations and makes decisions on certain issues. Establish a Board of Directors to get support and outside perspectives.

### Membership

Accentuate the positive impact of new members and mitigate the challenging aspects. Be clear where (on what physical areas and what types of projects) new members can focus their enthusiasm. Decide when a member has voting rights. There is wisdom in knowing why and how systems were designed before changing them.

Also, consider leaving the long-term vision creation to long-term members. In our community there were times when new members had a huge impact on our direction or commitments, and then left within the year.

### Vision

Work to create a clear, succinct, specific vision for the community. The broader the vision is, the harder it is to run a business or create alignment within a group. Having a clearly defined vision can help guide community members in making decisions on directions, opportunities, and incoming people.

Know that even when it's clearly stated, each individual will likely have his or her own interpretation of the vision. In this case, the work of Benjamin Zander, author of *The Art of Possibility*, may be helpful. When we make mistakes or clash with one another, Benjamin advocates that we throw our hands up in the air, smile, and say “How fascinating!” (In the office where I work we have chopsticks with little flags—with the words “How fascinating” on them—that we wave around when we need reminding of these helpful attitudes.)

### Struggles and Scarcity Mentality

For unresolved struggles, find a practice or practitioner that can help. There are countless options for mediation, workshops, counseling. Be courageous; be vulnerable.

To resolve lack mentality, bring in trainings for the overall business or individuals if needed—trade retreat time or workshop space for small business coaching for members to create their own businesses. The financial health of each individual impacts the whole. Much free information is available online from small business coaches as well.

Within community and decision-making groups, create study groups to focus on and support abundance. Work on unhelpful subconscious beliefs. Our environment has a big impact on us. If each individual is doing their own work to create an attitude of abundance, this will contribute to the group.



Those who know me are aware of the challenges I faced in the years I lived at Lost Valley. Being an introvert who loves people, I'm drawn to dive in, and then backpedal like crazy. What abides now in my heart is my deep gratitude for the experience, for the connections that blossomed, for the opportunity to take risks and be held by the strong support of my dear friends and fellow members.

Interacting within community, whether it's a family unit, an organization, or an intentional community, can be rigorous work. Yet I also believe that community is our heritage; that creating community wherever we are is life-giving and essential both for our highest good individually and for our culture. Through community we can create openings—in ourselves, into issues, with nature, beyond the mind—and let light shine in. 🌿

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*Karin Iona Sundberg is a writer, painter, and poet living in Eugene, Oregon. She lived at Lost Valley with her family from 1994–2003, and now makes her living as one of the flock at Hummingbird Wholesale.*

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\* Naka-Ima inspired other courses, including Solsara: the practice of opening, which is facilitated by a former member of Lost Valley and held regularly in Eugene and Portland.

# Seeking Community

## A Conversation to Shape Our Future

*By Paul Born*

As a reader of *COMMUNITIES* I am pretty sure you would have no problem agreeing with the statement, “Whatever the problem, community is the answer.” For those of us who are intentional about community, it is hard to imagine how there might ever be another solution than to involve those we care about to share our concerns and needs.

When I was first married, my wife Marlene and I lived for five years on the ninth floor of a relatively new apartment building in Waterloo, Ontario. I am having trouble remembering even one significant conversation with a neighbor in that building. I do not recall ever having a meal with one of our neighbors.

We came and we went. There was little or no connection between us and the others who lived there. There was no green space near us, no common room within which to gather, no building association—and, even though many children lived in the building, no playground for them to enjoy. If there had been a fire at night and we were huddled outside in the dark and someone asked me, “Are the people on your floor here?” I am not sure I could have identified them.

This is a terribly sad story. I had no sense of ownership or belonging in this community. No one there cared for me, and I did not take care of them. My story has of course changed and now my neighbors and extended community fill my life. But as I travel the country speaking about community and hearing others’ stories, my experience living for those five years in an apartment building is far too common a story.

### Chaotic Times

We are living in chaotic times, and I believe things are going to get worse. This from a guy whose wife introduces him as seeing the glass not as half empty or half full but as overflowing (though she quickly adds this gets annoying some days). Why does this eternal optimist have a growing sense that things are going to get a lot worse? Because the systems we have come to rely on are broken. They no longer serve us well. The environment is a mess, the economy is unstable to the point of being wonky, and people are angry and scared. They’re rising up all over the place, both against injustice and in fearful reaction.

Some may think my outlook is unwarranted. We live in a time of rapid and massive change, fueled by the hope of technology. We forge ahead, boldly believing that innovations are near that will help us address any challenge we might face. Science, we are told, is en route to curing every major disease, and solving every possible disaster. When this belief is challenged, the reply is confident: All we need is more time and more money and we will overcome this. We are asked to believe that we are a people of possibility, a people without limits.

Community, as experienced by generations before us, has broken down. Years of embracing individualism and consumerism and relying on government intervention to meet our needs have left us with few resources for building community. We live more densely than ever, but many of us do not know our neighbors, and most families are spread far and wide.



Traditional observances and religious practice are on the decline. Television and other individual pursuits have stripped us of the skills to play together and share our stories. The frenetic pace at which we conduct our daily lives carries—no, hurls—us forward.

### Let's Talk

I believe that people want to talk about the future of community in their lives and the growing need for community in these chaotic times. More people want to be able to rely on their neighbours and families and feel the assurance that when times are tough they can reach out to others.

I do believe that this need for a good heart-to-heart between us is about more than just fear. There is an awakening arising within humanity. There is a growing belief that relationships can trump most problems. If we are going to build a better world, enjoying each other, learning to care for each other, and working together to build our future, community is the solution.

To facilitate these conversations the Tamarack Institute ([www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca)) has launched a campaign to help people to talk and learn together about the possibilities of community. The campaign is called *Seeking Community*.

### Seeking Community

The Seeking Community is organizing around three themes: enjoy each other, care for one another, and work together for a better world.

To enjoy each other is build the social capital and resilience between us. The work of Robert Putnam, a professor at Harvard, has influenced our thinking here. The premise of social capital is that resilient relationships are the glue that binds us. If we know each other well enough and enjoy each other's company, we will be more likely to look out for one another and care about their well-being.

When mutual acts of caring happen, you will most often find a deep sense of belonging. There seems to be a connection between giving and receiving, caring and feeling cared for. Jeremy Rifkin's book *The Empathic Civilization* has inspired us greatly. As humans, our ability to share in another's plight connects us. Empathy is innate and natural.

To combat our fear, we can simply gather with others to first make sense of the worry and secondly, to work together to improve the condition. However, we do not want to organize against others and to allow our fear to drive our response. Instead, we want to unite our altruistic intentions, a process we call *collective altruism* to better the conditions around us. The joy of working together for a better world in this way opens us not only to others but to each other. My experience in building a Habitat for Humanity home is that those who build the house together receive as much or more from working with others as the eventual homeowner does in getting a new home. Altruism, when shared, builds community like nothing else.

In order to create spaces for and to inspire conversation, Tamarack is launching the programs described at [www.seekingcommunity.ca](http://www.seekingcommunity.ca).

Seekingcommunity.ca is a learning community where you can share your stories and engage with other community seekers. On this site you can build your profile, blog, engage in groups, and attend online events and small group conversations. There is an amazing library of resources and papers to fuel your curiosity and build your knowledge about community. Once you join this learning community you receive a free e-magazine called the *Seekers Journal* that connects members to each other on a monthly basis. This learning community is open to anyone and is led by a group of 10 thought leaders and a community animator.







## A Book

I have recently completed a book with a working title of *Much Joy—seeking, finding, and building community*. With this book we have produced a free Learning Guide that can be downloaded at [seekingcommunity.ca](http://seekingcommunity.ca) and used by people to both become inspired and learn together about community and how to deepen their experience. A central theme in the book is that we all have many communities in our lives and that we have a choice about how deep or shallow our experiences of community are. Living in a neighbourhood means you live in a community. Waving to your neighbour as you drive into your garage may be all the community you want—this is a shallow experience. On the other hand, inviting your neighbours to join together with you and each other in friendship is a deeper experience. Community, I say, is not an option, but the experience you choose is. This book is available on amazon and other leading distributors.

## Neighbours

There is a growing interest in neighbours. Communities are hosting neighbour days all around the world: encouraging people to get out and meet each other. We want to help fuel this movement and so we have started in our own community. We are sponsoring the Uptown West Neighbourhood Association, a dynamic community in Waterloo, Ontario. We are also supporting a group of young people (see Eli Winterfeld's story in this magazine) who call themselves the Stone Soup Collective. They are in the midst of engaging in their neighbourhood more deliberately and documenting these experiences on our learning community. As all of this unfolds, we are starting a larger conversation to discuss how policy can be written and adopted at a city level to support neighbourhood solutions to local issues.

## 1000 Conversations

Our short-term goal is to inspire 1000 conversations about community and have these recorded at [seekingcommunity.ca](http://seekingcommunity.ca). To this end, we have hired a conversation animator who is working with communities to host conversations and record them. We plan to group themes that arise from these conversations and produce learning guides and policy statements to strengthen community and investment in community. Ultimately we want to prove the statement, "Whatever the problem, community is the answer." To support this campaign, please host a conversation and then simply join the learning community at [seekingcommunity.ca](http://seekingcommunity.ca) to post it.

In working with COMMUNITIES to sponsor this issue, it is our hope that you, who are already intentional about community, will help us grow our reach to help many thousands more to also become more intentional about the community in their lives.

Much joy. 🌱

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*Paul Born is a best-selling author and activist who grew up with Mennonites—a people who taught him the value of the statement, "Whatever the problem, community is the answer." He is the cofounder and president of the Tamarack Institute, a Canadian think tank and lab with a mandate to advance collaborative leadership, citizen engagement, and community innovation. Tamarack sponsors Vibrant Communities—Canada's largest network of cities reducing poverty. Their goal is to reduce poverty for one million people. They are a quarter of the way there.*

# Being Human

*By Joyce Hollyday*

When I was part of Sojourners Community in Washington, DC, in the late 1970s, we were used to being targets of both antagonism and adulation. Most of us were young then—in our 20s—and idealistic. Our home was a devastated inner-city neighborhood, which had gone up in flames after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and was still referred to as the “Fourteenth Street riot corridor” a decade later.

We lived together in large households (mine included a dozen adults, four children, a collie, two gerbils, and a small army of cockroaches); shared all our money (what there was of it); and launched several ministries that served our neighbors and addressed the poverty and violence that surrounded us. We published a magazine that challenged our society and government on a spectrum of issues, from racism and domestic violence to foreign affairs and nuclear weapons. We also engaged in regular acts of peaceful civil disobedience in hopes of changing both hearts and policies.

One source of antagonism for several of us was our parents. They had grown up during the Great Depression in the United States and survived the Second World War. And they believed that being good citizens during the post-war boom meant becoming enthusiastic consumers and capitalists, embracing the ideals of prosperity, competition, and self-sufficiency.

To them, we were “throwing away our good college educations,” “jeopardizing our futures,” “risking our lives,” and—perhaps worst of all—“living like communists.” Never mind that our inspiration was the compassionate and dispossessed life of Jesus—and the witness of the early church, in which Christians “were together and had all things in common,” sold all their possessions, and “distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45).

In sharp contrast to the criticism was the adulation that arrived with a steady stream of visitors, mostly from across North America and Europe. They came to observe how we “did community.” Many had hopes of starting an intentional community back home, applying what they learned to their own neighborhoods and political contexts.

One small group of visitors I will never forget. They came from Central America. I believe it was Nicaragua, though it may have been Guatemala or El Salvador. All



of those countries were erupting in civil strife at the time, and Central Americans were beginning to flee to Washington, DC and other cities in the North to escape the violence and terror.

A couple of us from Sojourners were showing the group around. We introduced them to our tenant organizers, who were helping neighbors in massive tenement buildings join together to hold landlords accountable for fair rents and repairs. We stopped in and picked up a snack at our food co-op. We took our guests into our day-care facility for preschoolers and our neighborhood center, where older children were receiving after-school tutoring and adults computer training. There we talked with the group about the structure of our life: the shared assets, communal living, prayer.

All this was met with complete silence. We got none of the tough questions and challenging arguments we were used to from detractors—or the accolades of admiration and expressions of just-how-impressive-it-all-was that spilled readily out of the mouths of supportive observers. Just polite smiles. Translation was not the problem, as the Spanish interpreter had done a marvelous job of describing it all. The spokesperson for the group thanked us for our time, and they left.

The translator came back around a few days later to explain. “They didn’t understand that this is unusual in North America,” he said. “This is how they live—looking out for one another and each other’s children, sharing their food and everything they have, praying for God’s protection.” Of course.



Now I’m closing in on 60. As I ponder my life, I give thanks for a rich and round-about journey that has brought me back to community by intention. I share life on a small farm in the mountains of western North Carolina with friends. I co-pastor a faith community that includes additional friends and families that are committed to living justly and in peace.

I try to remind myself often that those of us who inhabit industrialized, digitalized, privatized early-21st-century North America are an aberration on our planet and in human history. That we even have to engage in conversations and write articles and organize conferences about how to “do community” speaks of our poverty and our alienation from the way of being human. We have lost sight of the fact that we are designed to live interdependently, caring for one another and sharing all that we have for the sake of the common good.

As it turned out, the visit by the Central Americans was not our last at Sojourners. They soon returned when they discovered the traumas and frights of our competitive and unwelcoming US culture. And as the terror in Central America escalated, Spanish began to be spoken in more and more of the homes in our neighborhood.

In December 1983, I had the opportunity to travel to Nicaragua with Witness for Peace, a faith-based effort that I helped to launch, which established an ongoing nonviolent and protective presence in that nation’s war zones. At the time, US-funded and -trained forces known as *contras* were raiding vulnerable villages, terrorizing, kidnapping, and killing Nicaraguan civilians.

Many moments from that trip are lodged in my memory, but one is particularly vivid. Our delegation was headed to Jalapa, an isolated village near the Honduran border. But soldiers in the people’s militia had stopped us in the little town of Ocotal, warning us that the *contras* were attacking the road ahead.

We spent a short and restless night on the floor of the Baptist church there. We shared the space with refugees—mostly women and children—who had fled their vulnerable homes scattered throughout the mountains. That night was punctuated with the sound of gunshots in the distance and filled with the cries of frightened children up close in the church.

We awoke before dawn and washed our faces in the rain barrel outside, ready to push on to Jalapa. The refugee women had risen even earlier. Firewood was stacked in the dome-shaped clay oven, and they were already slapping out tortillas when the first glint of orange from the sun appeared on the eastern horizon. They invited us to share their meager breakfast.

Those women had fled with their children and little more than the clothes they wore. Many were widows; some didn’t know if their soldier husbands were alive or dead. They were uncertain about where they would spend the next night or find their next meal, but they shared everything they had with us—affluent strangers from a country that was sponsoring a war against them. Our communion of tortillas and coffee at dawn was a sacrament of generosity that touched me profoundly.

Almost three decades separate me from that moment. I have related this story as a sermon illustration probably more than any other from my travels around the globe. I have longed to be like those women.

I don’t romanticize the poverty and violence that they suffered. But I envy their faith and the generosity they exhibited with one another and toward the strangers that appeared among them. They had learned how to live for each day and share all that they had. And that made them far richer than we.

I suspect that if they were ever to make a visit up North and run into a community of people sharing everything and watching out for one another, tied together in mutual destiny, they would offer the same unimpressed silence I heard in Washington, DC almost 40 years ago. For, after all, is this not what it means to be human? ☹️

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*Joyce Hollyday is a cofounder and co-pastor of Circle of Mercy, an ecumenical congregation in Asheville, North Carolina, and the author of several books, including Clothed with the Sun: Biblical Women, Social Justice, and Us.*

# Losing Community, Finding Community: Will Winterfeld's Story

*By Paul Born*

**W**hen you have experienced intentional community, going back to everyday life is hard. Will is seeking a community he feels he has lost.

Will can be very serious, but he is also warm and funny. He has a deep faith. He is always seeking a conversation, embracing people with acceptance, and sharing about his life with an openness that I seldom experience. Visiting with Will is like meeting with an urban philosopher.

Will is unique in that he has longed for and lived in intentional community most of his adult life. He formed his first intentional community with several friends in Toronto right out of university. It was there that Will first experienced a deep bond and a sense of belonging and purpose that only living together and sharing everything in common in community could provide.

That experience led him in his late 30s to an intentional community in the south-

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**Many days Will was frozen by the fear that he would never find true community in his new life.**

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ern state of Georgia. Jubilee Partners was drawn together around the needs of refugees and prisoners on death row. On average, five or six families have formed the core of the community, being joined by temporary interns, volunteers, and the refugee families that stay for a few months to learn English and other skills to help them integrate into US culture.

The partners in the community share everything—land, houses, and finances—in common. They sing together, pray together, and eat most of their meals together. The community provided a good life for Will and gave him a profound sense of belonging and purpose. He had found a community committed to building a better world, and it was there that he found it easy to be at his best.

Will met his future wife at this community, and they raised their three children there. Life was not always easy. They all worked hard, raised funds to support their vision, and lived close to the land. People joined the community for many reasons—such as for a simpler life, or for a safe place to raise their families—but only those deeply committed to the mission stayed for long periods of time. Will stayed 18 years.

Life in intentional community can provide so much to those seeking belonging, but it can also require them to give much of their identity and personal will to the community. This is not as large a sacrifice as it may seem, because the benefits of belonging, security, and purpose most often outweigh the need for personal expression. When living in a healthy and well-functioning intentional community, members can maintain the fine balance between personal creativity and expression and the will and needs of the community as a whole, to the benefit of everyone. Will and his wife were able to find this balance in Georgia for many years.

When their children were young, one area that was especially challenging for Will

and his wife was around community decisions about schooling. The community is near a rural town, which is where the children went to school. The community believes deeply that they should not isolate children from the outside world and that going to public school and forming friendships outside of the community are important. (The community also felt that it was important to work towards good public education for all.) But the Winterfelds had a keen interest in and deep desire to homeschool their children.

For numerous reasons they began to feel that homeschooling would be a better choice than the public school. For months the community deliberated this question, ultimately deciding that the significance of integration into the larger community was an important value. As a result, Will and his family left the community for a sabbatical to explore homeschooling and to explore their commitment to the community in light of the decision that homeschooling within the community would not be an option. After a year they returned, choosing again to support the community's stance for public schooling.

Finally, about five years later, as their first-born child was starting to near university age, Will and his wife began considering what the transition into dominant culture might look like. After much deliberation they decided that because their children would need to make this transition anyway, it would be best for them to transition as a family and support one another during this process. They chose to leave the community and move to Canada, where they both had grown up.

In Canada they found an exceptional school for their children and meaningful

jobs. They also met others who have a similar belief in community and bought a home next to one of these couples. Though they do not live in intentional community, the two couples are committed to supporting each other. Will and his family navigated this big change well.

A happy ending to the story, one might think. But even though Will and his family are now well integrated into their new life, the loss of community and mission as he had known them was profound. This feeling grew over time, and there were days when Will found it hard to get going in the morning. His job felt less important, his friendships less real, and his daily interactions lacked the sense of purpose he felt so deeply when he lived in intentional community. There were many days that Will felt he had lost a sense of belonging and was frozen by the fear that he would never find true community in his new life.

This is the point at which I found Will, or I should say that Will found me. He had heard that I was writing a book on community and wanted to talk with me. Ever seeking, desperate for meaning and fulfillment, Will had hoped that I might find something in my research that would help him find the community he was longing for in his newly chosen life.

Will and I have had many conversations. He deeply loves his children and is very happy that they have integrated well into their new schools, have made many friends, and are thriving in their new

environment. But Will has struggled to find meaning and belonging in our urban world, as he seeks to recreate that which he once had.

Will has tried harder than anyone I know to find community. He volunteers with refugees learning English, identifying with their sense of loss and displacement. He has joined two men's groups and is grateful for the sense of community he has found with the couple who live next door and in his welcoming church. But still Will has felt an emptiness that was not there when he lived in intentional community.

Working with others who shared a commitment to a better world, no matter how mundane the task, seemed always to be for the greater good. Even when Will has worked for a nonprofit to build supportive housing, he has not found the same sense of connection and purpose. And now as a professional renovator, he finds his work to be largely functional and aimed at earning money to support his family. The mundane needs of urban life—paying the bills, maintaining a single-family household, driving the children to their various lessons and appointments—consume so much energy. Life takes much more effort than it did when he lived in community.

In some ways Will's transition may be likened to Elizabeth's Kübler-Ross' stages of grieving, which start with denial, then anger, but end with acceptance. I am happy to say that Will has arrived at a place of acceptance and has found some peace with his choice. But he is still deeply interested in community. We spend many an hour talking about what we describe as "hybrid communities"—such as cohousing and neighborhood associations—which draw from the best of intentional community but are adapted for more mainstream life.

Will's observations about community include:

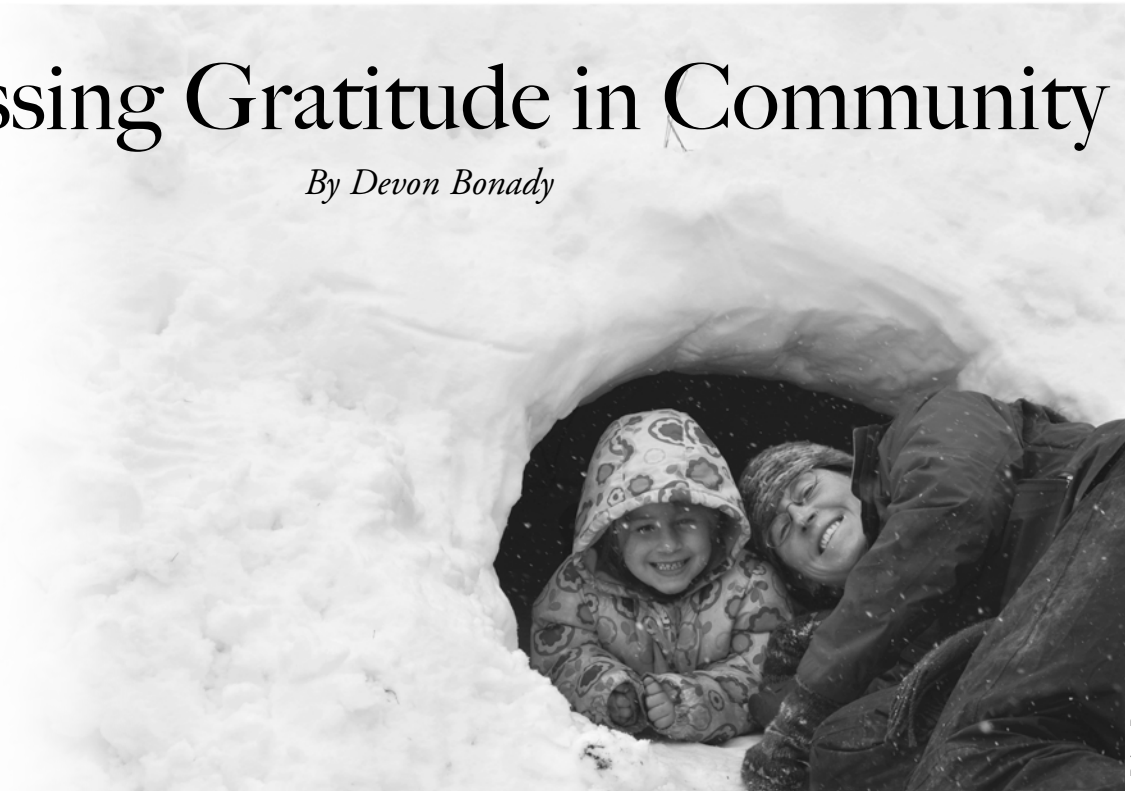
- Healthy community creates a deep sense of personal and financial security, both for the individual and for the family. (In the larger society, we are most often on our own as individuals or a family unit to fend for ourselves, which can create financial insecurity, fear, and feelings of inadequacy.)
- In community, meeting needs for belonging and meaning is a shared responsibility, and children have many role models as they grow up. (In the larger society, it is often assumed that one person can meet all the needs of a spouse, and parents all the needs of their children, which puts excessive pressure on marriages and families.)
- Community creates a cooperative environment, in which a focus on unity and the well-being of all is maintained. (In the larger society, concern for individual striving produces a competitive environment that marginalizes and impoverishes many.)
- In community, the sharing of material goods supports simplicity and creates interdependence. (In the larger society, sharing is difficult and often impractical, so every household has its own appliances and tools and has to work long hours to afford them.)

*(continued on p. 69)*



# Expressing Gratitude in Community

*By Devon Bonady*



Brian Basor

**I**t's a warm fall day on the shady pond, with a cool breeze, birds singing, and dragonflies buzzing. My dear four-year-old neighbor Ella and I sit silently in the paddle boat wandering the pond searching for water insects to catch. Leaves rustle in the breeze and a few even fall from the canopy into the water. Ella is poised at the back of the boat with her colander, directing me to a certain nook and then waiting for the perfect moment to dip the colander into the dark water. If we are lucky, a few species of water insects will appear as the water drains from the colander and she can swiftly transfer them to the temporary shelter of a plastic bucket on the back of the boat for examination and identification. Today she has already taught me the names of two species that we did not see last time we paddled together.

This is not the first afternoon I have spent this way, but it will be the last with her for quite a while. This peaceful pond exploration day, although in some ways like many others, is different because it is just a few days before she and her family move across the country to begin a new adventure. It is a painful time for me, but also an extremely precious time. One thing I learned while living in community is that I must appreciate and savor the present moments I have with special people in my life while they are with me, as they often move on. The vivid memories and strong feelings I carry with me from even simple days with special people lift me up in hard times and help me to remember the beauty and strength of connection in community. Ella's family has been contemplating and preparing to move away for over a year by this time, and as I deal with my grief, I also appreciate every moment I have to spend with them. Pond paddling, sandbox playing, coloring, or camping, I have been blessed with many opportunities to connect with this family, my neighbors, the biggest piece of my little neighborhood community.

Today, I reflect on the day, almost five years ago, when she was born. I was already a close friend and neighbor of her parents; her birth welcomed a new sense of family, closeness, and community into my life and our little neighborhood. Her birth gave me the opportunity to be of service and give back to my dear friends in a new and different way. As they met the challenge of raising a baby, I brought them meals, split firewood, and entertained the baby for a few moments to give Mom and Dad a break. Not only did I come to realize how much I love to show my gratitude by helping others, I experienced the magic of reciprocity in that, by giving to my community, I receive so much more than I could ever imagine.

From a very early age, Ella and I became friends. In the early days, I took her on long walks. For me, this opportunity was not just about getting to know a small child intimately, but also about learning what is important to me. My time with her started out as an act of service—to help her parents find a little time to get work done or a quick nap while the baby was away. I felt joy in giving, of course, and yet what I received in exchange from this budding relationship was more than I ever could have imagined. Now I have a very dear five-year-old friend and pen pal who sends me beautiful artwork by mail. Her brother, mom, and dad become dearer to me each day and provide love and support even from their new far-away home. Thanks to this family, I have tools and experience to guide me through the new and overwhelming process of becoming a new parent.

By my sharing appreciation for my neighbors through service, we all benefit greatly. My experiences in community throughout my life have shown me that serving and appreciating others while living in community is essential for personal and group connection. At this time in my life, as I begin motherhood, the lessons of appreciation, gratitude, and reciprocity that I have learned in a variety of community situations will be essential for my well-being and that of my family.

The opportunity to reflect on and learn from my experiences in a variety of communities is a gift in itself. I appreciate the wisdom that comes from others who share their stories, whether in conversations, films, COMMUNITIES, or other venues. Learning from others' experiences helps me to glean more from my own experiences. It seems to be a never-ending and always enriching process. I have lived in a variety of community settings: a rural intentional community with about 25 year-round residents, a rural educational center with 10 year-long residents, a three-family farm with 10 seasonal interns, a loose-knit community of eight people living in a cluster of houses, and a rural homestead with five

to seven adults and a varying level of community “intention.” My current community, the latter, also consists of neighbors and friends within a five-mile radius, and friends in a town 25 miles away. All of these community configurations have offered me a multitude of lessons in gratitude. In particular, I think of two ways that I have learned to express gratitude: by appreciating others and by offering myself in service to others.

While living in community, I have learned the value of appreciating others for the work that they do. In intentional community, each resident invests a lot of time and energy into people and projects. People are busy and do not always take the time to notice the work of others, nor do they always have the opportunity to hear how their work has been received by other residents. Members want to feel that their personal gifts and the work they do benefits everyone and allows them to feel part of the group vision and goals. They want to know that their efforts are valued and worthwhile. A successful community requires people with a wide variety of skills to accomplish tasks, and sometimes members are not aware of all that each member does to keep the gears in motion. How many of us feel like others do not realize how much work it takes to do our job?

I lived in a 25-member intentional community that derived most of its income from conference center management. Members worked in diverse jobs such as facilities management, conference coordination, and growing fresh vegetables for the community and conference center meals. At that time, the main garden was a 10 minute walk from the community center. Some community members who worked in the conference center office had not even been to the garden after a year or more of living on site. Those unfamiliar with gardening, farming, and manual labor did not realize the amount of time and effort that the gardeners and interns put into growing food. The gardeners did not feel appreciated and their perspective on some community decisions was misunderstood. In an effort to boost their morale, community members initiated a community day in the garden. We had everyone out there planting potatoes, singing songs, having fun, and experiencing the work that is required to grow food.

At that time, I was a gardener, and I received helpful positive feedback after the community day. As a result, I reflected on my own perceptions and judgment of other community jobs and work styles. I am a “do-er,” and I tend to focus on physical projects.



*This page: Devon and Ella playing in the snow. Opposite page: Devon and Ella on a special summer day.*

Matt Emrich

My job as land steward covered so many arenas that I tended towards immediate needs like keeping trees alive, and fixing fences. I did not always take the time to understand and appreciate those who were “talking” and “planning” or those who were dealing with community conflict, both of which are essential roles in the functioning of a healthy community. Over time, thanks to our community’s emphasis on personal growth work, I became very grateful for the healers, planners, and elders in our community and came to see how their gifts, although very different, were way more valuable than mine (though some may argue, just as valuable). Expressing interest and curiosity in what others do to help hold it all together helps community succeed.

While living in this intentional community, I learned how to appreciate others for who they are, not just what they do. That started with myself—learning to separate my identity from my work, which was very difficult for me and came about only because of all the emotional support I received from my fellow community members. As a community, we placed a high value on direct communication and appreciation. We set aside times for members to gather and share their appreciations with each other. Using a practice of one-on-one sharing, each week when we met for our well-being meetings we took time to mingle and connect with one person at a time, first silently and then by speaking. Usually, one person would be moved to speak and share something with the other. Certain days, facilitators asked us particularly to share an appreciation for the other person who simply listens and takes in the appreciation without judgment.

This activity was very uplifting for me. By practicing with a variety of people with whom I lived and worked, I came to understand that we always have things to appreciate in each other, even during conflict and challenge. If we can focus on the gifts we have received by connecting with an individual, we will always find something to appreciate. Through practicing this activity, I also realized how much of what we appreciate in others is related to their way of being or connecting, not just the things they accomplish. This allowed me to give myself permission to put more effort into connecting with others instead of always pushing to get the physical work done and “prove myself” by what I have accomplished that others can see.

The varied work that we all do as members of a community is an expression of our appreciation for the land and physical structures in community, and for the founders and members of the community. Our work is an act of service. As I learn the history of communities in which I live, I begin to grasp the effort required, and the risks

that people have taken to make it possible for me to experience community in a particular place with certain people. From purchasing and investing in land and buildings, to long hours of labor and meetings, to dealing with challenging neighbors and uncomfortable living situations, founders and sustaining members work hard and dedicate themselves to a vision from which we continue to learn and benefit. I like to think that the work I do now, whether it be helping my neighbor build a greenhouse, caring for someone’s goats while they are away, or organizing a benefit to raise funds for someone’s health crisis, is a service to those who came before me and laid the foundation for my community as well as those who keep it thriving today.

Now that Ella and her family as well as other friends here have moved to a new place and a new focus, it is time for me to re-envision my sense of community. It is a prime time, as I am also learning the meaning of family as community with a newborn son. Before my son was born, a friend of mine gave me a bead to wear as a reminder of the strength of community. As a neighbor and friend, with the bead she offered some wisdom for me as I learn to parent while also adjusting to a shift in my neighborhood community. She reminded me of the support that I have in this quirky and beautiful community in which we live. Together, she and I are choosing to focus on appreciating this community that we already have, and to reach outside of our comfort zones to connect with people new and old. Since her blessing and my son’s birth, I have been reconnecting with a few neighbors and getting to know new ones. Through this process, I once again feel gratitude for all of my community experiences, for my friendship with Ella and her family, and for the opportunity to help them and many others. 🌿

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*Devon Bonady lives with her family in a cabin in the treetops of the Oregon forest. She appreciates her new lifestyle as a mother, gardener, and environmental educator. She continues to learn many lessons from her constantly evolving community.*



Ella



# Fostering Vulnerability

By *Eli Winterfeld*

Vulnerability has played different roles for me in the various settings I have called home. I was born and raised in an intentional community in Georgia; from there my family moved to Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario to live as a nuclear family. My other homes have been my university town, summer camp, and most recently, a collective house of like-minded peers.

My community experiences have shown me how essential vulnerability is. The breakdown of community that we are experiencing as a society can be attributed partly to individualism and pride in providing for oneself. People place great emphasis on independence—both material and emotional. Our society views people who “depend” on others as weak. Being open about one’s needs is taboo in our society. Many people do not feel they can allow themselves to be vulnerable and receive help from others graciously. I believe it takes great humility and strength to allow others to help you with your various burdens. Deep, genuine community cannot emerge without personal vulnerability. Additionally, openness to interdependence and resource-sharing can also help us live more frugally, with a greater respect for the environment, and help meet our need for human connection.

I grew up, until the age of 16, in an intentional community. Jubilee Partners, a Christian service community in Georgia, focuses on assisting refugees who are transitioning to life in the United States. Of course many organizations could facilitate such a program, but what makes Jubilee special is the intentionality of the work and lifestyle they demonstrate. The members of the community live on the same rural property as the refugees and they share together many aspects of life: work, meals twice a day, food production, games of soccer and volleyball, parties, worship, and other communal activities.

One of the most intentional and invested aspects of life at Jubilee is its communal income sharing. Resources are pooled to provide each individual or family with everything needed for a fulfilling life—which is largely non-material, in my own experience. As a child I sometimes felt materially vulnerable in a negative way when compared to my peers at school, especially because I didn’t have a TV or a trampoline. However, as I grew older, I began to appreciate the purposeful, interdependent life that comes with common resources and a focus on relationship, rather than material goods. My friends would visit and would be struck with awe as we built skateboard ramps in the communal workshop, borrowed a car simply by writing a name and a time on a blackboard, and received weekly groceries to our doorstep. I felt rich even though the income we lived on fell well below the poverty line.

This intensity of sharing time, energy, resources, and emotional fluctuations



necessitates personal vulnerability. Members, volunteers, and refugees become quickly and deeply connected because of the atmosphere of openness that allows for deep vulnerability. Though I could not have articulated it at the time, as a child and youth I found this interdependence comforting and empowering. I felt surrounded by support and lived a fulfilling life, both emotionally and materially.

Another place I have found belonging is the summer camp where I have worked for the past six years. To initiate community during staff orientation, each evening we set aside time for staff members to share openly about their experiences during the previous year. With these reflections, we open ourselves up and invite others to partake in the joys and hardships of our journeys. We welcome support and embrace our own vulnerability.

This setting has allowed people to feel comfortable enough to “come out,” discuss mental health issues, and share concerns about the future. As each person shares, they light a candle from a circle of candles in the centre of the room. At the end of the five days, the ring of connected lights is a beautiful symbol of our common embrace of interdependence and vulnerability. This process is nourishment for relationships

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## Because the current measurements of success stress individualism and competition, we must actively seek alternatives.

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and community building and creates a sense of trust and community that I have not experienced in any places that do not intentionally create space to actively foster interdependence and vulnerability.

My experiences at university were quite different, as they lacked the intentionality of camp and Jubilee. I want to note that there are many positive aspects of university settings in terms of networking, collaboration, knowledge development, and personal growth. However, in the realm of fostering vulnerability and interdependence, the institution seems to be moving in the opposite direction. University was one of the most individualistic, prideful cultures I have ever been a part of. In most academic settings, students and professors are pressured to be as independent and competitive as possible. Most students strive to appear more knowledgeable and articulate than their fellow classmates. The existing systems of appraisal in the university setting channel one’s energy into personal achievement rather than interdependence and personal vulnerability.

Different forms of community create different atmospheres in which individuals operate and varying attitudes toward vulnerability. Some types of community make it very easy for an individual to be vulnerable. In other community settings, not only is vulnerability not facilitated, it is discouraged and made inaccessible. These types of settings focus on individualism, pride, and personal achievement.

I currently live with a number of my peers from the camp I discussed earlier. Now, in a collective living situation yet still in a new neighborhood, we try to determine how to create space that encourages the kind of vulnerability and interdependence that can lead to deeper communal and neighborhood relationships. We hope to host gatherings and initiatives that are part of creating this space, but it also must come from a very personal level.

I learned this first-hand in November when we moved in. We did not have internet or a printer and I was leading a session for a youth conference the next day and had no way to access or print the proposed lesson plan. Being my relatively disorganized

self, by the time I set off in search of a computer, the library was already closed. So, barely even knowing the subject of the lesson the next morning, I began to think of options.

I had met only one couple (in passing) on my street so far. So I mustered all my courage to be vulnerable, walked over, knocked on their door, and asked to borrow their printer. After hearing my plight my neighbor was very gracious and invited me in and set me up in her office to allow me to print a 20 page document. Before this, I had assumed, without a doubt in my mind, that my first act of community in my new neighborhood would be through giving rather than receiving. I guess I needed to practice a little vulnerability myself.

In my past experiences with various forms of community the spaces that encouraged vulnerability were already established. Now, the space must be discovered through a combination of active creation and of tapping into the existing energies of the neighborhood.

I believe our communities, neighborhoods, and institutions would benefit from creating atmospheres that facilitate vulnerability. Because the current measurements of success stress individualism and competition, we must actively seek alternatives. The importance of intentionality cannot be overstated here. I believe we need to encourage both material and emotional vulnerability, because the two work in tandem and perpetuate one another. If we create atmospheres that invite vulnerability, our relationships will be deep and genuine. 🐾

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*Having grown up in intentional community, Eli feels a strong draw to creating community in everyday contexts. He is currently working at a nonprofit organization on a “localism and livelihood” project that helps facilitate local, relationship-based economy. Living in an urban collective house of six, Eli and his friends build community mostly through having fun: hosting dinner parties, playing board games, making music, growing food, and other projects with similar themes.*

# Bringing Home Lessons from Community Living

By *Melanie Rios*

A few months ago I landed in the “real world” after 35 years of living in intentional community. I was ready for a break from being the director of the Lost Valley/Meadowsong Ecovillage sustainability education center, where I’d lived for two years. I moved into a house in nearby Eugene, Oregon that my sister and I had been renting out to individuals in anticipation of moving there eventually.

In my first days living in this house, I noticed a difference between the norms of this household and the norms I had become used to through living in community. No one from the household offered to help me carry in boxes, and one was reluctant to move his car that was blocking access to the door. The fridge and cupboards were divided into four separate territories, and no one ate together, or even seemed to talk to each other. The yard had been neglected such that paths had been obliterated by weeds taller than my head. When I came down with the flu, a housemate became unhappy that a friend of mine was in the kitchen making me tea for me while I was in bed. He gave notice by email rather than discussing his concern with me, and another housemate followed suit, saying he was ready to live by himself.

And so I found myself experiencing the economic uncertainty, ecological decay, and social isolation that so many folks in the “real world” are facing. How could I apply the lessons I had garnered from decades of living in intentional communities to this situation in a way that might be helpful in addressing challenges faced not just by me, but by many others?

I crafted a vision for a community and nature-based household, put it out on Craigslist, and within three minutes, received a call from Alicia. “I could have written that ad!” she said with enthusiasm, grateful to have connected with a like-minded person. And so the ALEA (Alliance of Life-Enriching Advocates) homestead was born. This article describes how we are setting up our household based on what we’ve learned from living in intentional communities in a way that we hope will be successful not only for us, but potentially serve as a model to be replicated in homes in cities, towns, and suburbs across the nation.

## **Lesson #1 from living in intentional communities: Create a safe climate for expressing concerns, including issues of power.**

While serving as director of Lost Valley, I was a natural lightning rod for folks who had a distrust of authority, and other kinds of concerns also erupted from time to time, so I learned ways to diffuse resentments and conflicts. Especially helpful was the practice of “Worldwork” developed by Arnold Mindell. We’d gather in a circle to discuss a hot topic, such as “drug policy,” “child-raising practices,” or “power relationships within our community” as a form of theater.

The goal of Worldwork is not to change our agreements, but rather to simply



hear each other, with folks speaking to each other from flexible perspectives. For example, someone steps into the circle and says “I’m speaking for my grandmother, and she says ‘Children should sit quietly during the dinner hour.’” Someone else steps in and says “I’m speaking for an indigenous village elder, and he says that we are all responsible for the behavior of our children, not just their biological parents.” All voices have a chance to be heard, even those that aren’t in the room, and ideas are shared in ways

a wise, effective, and cohesive community. At the same time, it’s important to talk openly about the potential dangers of *unearned rank*, which is conferred based on something such as someone’s skin color, gender, or inherited wealth.

Applying this understanding to our forming household, I initiated a conversation with Alicia and her partner Robert about power differences amongst us. They acknowledged feeling concerned that they might feel like second-class citizens in the household given their relative age and non-ownership of the property. They shared their desire as responsible folks in their mid-20s to step into fully functioning adult roles. They also expressed wanting to commit long-term to being stewards of a piece of land without being worried about being asked to leave, as had happened to them recently when a house they had been renting was sold to different owners. I shared with them my desire to step back from the center of power and daily responsibilities to function more as a mentor or contributing elder. I also shared my gratitude

that they saw this half acre as a place to steward, as it is a larger amount of land than I want to dedicate myself to on my own.

As these intentions are mutually compatible, we thought of ways to encourage Alicia and Robert to step up into their power and for me to step back. One strategy was to give them a

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## Fostering good power dynamics requires not just a good structure and clear initial understandings, but also ongoing maintenance.

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that don’t lock someone into a rigid idea of who they are and what they believe.

We found that concerns that were expressed in this venue would often resolve themselves without needing to rewrite policy. This practice of Worldwork can be helpful in other settings besides that of intentional communities, from the individual household to the neighborhood to larger “town hall” type gatherings. When we understand each other well, it is easier to care for, respect, and adapt to each other.

Arny Mindell also offers us the concept that differential rank or power isn’t necessarily a problem, just lack of consciousness about power. Valuing *earned rank*, which is conferred based on someone’s knowledge or experience, can be helpful in supporting

long-term lease so that if conflicts arise between us, we either work it out or I leave. Another strategy has been to give them prominent roles of responsibility. Alicia has become the website designer, membership recruiter, and first screener for potential new housemates, and Robert is manager for the greenhouse and gardens. To deal with the potential problems associated with a structure in which Alicia is responsible for recruiting members while I’m responsible for paying the mortgage, we have decided to ask new folks coming into the household to give us 60 days notice before they leave rather than the normal duration of 30 days. This gives Alicia 30 days to fill a room before I might feel a need to step in and do so for financial reasons.

I know from experience living in community that fostering good power dynamics requires more than a good structure and clear initial understandings—it also requires ongoing maintenance. We have instituted weekly meetings that include time for sharing appreciations and concerns about each other. In daily interactions I have made it a practice to defer back to them when they ask me a question about their areas of responsibility. “What would you do if I weren’t here?” I ask. I see this as helpful as we



Melanie Rios.



Chuck and Alicia making pea trellis.

Photos courtesy of Melanie Rios

get to know each other, when our natural tendency is to fall into socially proscribed roles. I'm guessing that soon they'll be confident enough that I can offer my opinions without unduly influencing the outcome of decisions.

When creating the social and power norms within a shared household, I believe many different arrangements are fine as long as they are clear and consensual before people move in. I could have chosen to retain more power, and would have thereby attracted folks who are happy to live somewhere without major responsibilities. While equalized power is not essential to creating a successful household, I do think it is helpful if people living in close quarters have something they care about in common, whether it be a spiritual practice, a passion for a particular form of dance, or as in the case of ALEA, a shared interest in homesteading. It's also helpful if people are compatible in what they eat, how clean they like to keep the house, and their relationship with drugs and TV. The more clarity one has during the interview process the better, so that people know what they're getting into before choosing to live together.

## Lesson #2: Life feels rich when we live with a diversity of ages, genders, and species.

Robert and Alicia are both eager to start their own family, but are not feeling financially ready for that step. They were hoping to get a dog as a substitute for a baby in the meantime. I had learned from living in intentional community how much children contribute a sense of connection, wonder, and exuberance to a home, and how dogs can be great sources of affection and protection. So we decided to look for a child and a dog for our newly forming household.

It wasn't hard to find just the beings we were looking for, as Alison had been turned down by many landlords before she found us because of her four-month-old baby and her dog. She says "I felt so isolated before I moved here, as the folks I lived with both worked during the day, and were busy with their own projects in the evenings. I feel so grateful now to be living with people who talk with me, are willing to stay with my dog when I go out with friends, and who are helpful in so many ways. It was great when you all helped me move in, and played with my baby while I assembled my dresser."

Soon after Alison arrived, we interviewed a man in his 50s who was potentially about to become homeless. He had recently received a Master's Degree in counseling and was setting up a private practice, but didn't yet have enough clients to pay a deposit or a full month's rent. He came with good personal references from friends of mine, so we welcomed him into a vacant bedroom on a temporary basis while he stabilizes his finances. The arrival of three generations of people and a dog has jelled

for us in the ALEA household a sense of abundance and connection.

## Lesson #3: Ritual and storytelling help create a sense of meaning and connection to each other and the world.

Alicia learned from living and working at the Living Earth School in Virginia how much she loves daily rituals such as singing and expressing gratitude before meals, and sharing "stories of the day." "Telling our stories helps us create meaning from our lives," she said. Sobonfu Somé, whose name means "Keeper of the Rituals" in her native African land of Burkina Faso, was asked recently what she feels is the most important thing to do for nurturing the health of a community. "Mark the comings and goings of people with ritual," she replied.

We at ALEA are creating our new family rituals drawing on resources such as the Singing Alive! repertoire of songs that express our values so beautifully, and the book *Coyote Mentoring*, which teaches the arts of questioning, storytelling, and nature awareness. We'll invite the larger community to gather for storytelling, beginning this Sunday to celebrate the Jewish holiday Purim, which honors

*(continued on p. 71)*



*Chuck and Charlie.*



*Alicia with chicks.*

# New Culture Perspectives for Everyday Life

By Sarah Taub with Michael Rios

It's 11 p.m. on a cool West Virginia night at New Culture Summer Camp East, where 90 cultural explorers have gathered for 10 days in the woods. Some are asleep in their tents, some are gathered in the big dome, others are chatting in the brightly lit main lodge. As I pass by the kitchen, the tension among the late-night prep crew is palpable. Judy comes over to me and says, "Could you talk to Steve? He thinks he's helping me out by being here, but he's really not!"

I tap Steve on the shoulder—"Looks like you're having a tough time. Let's talk." He is furious and resentful—two other shift members did not show up for the late-night prep for the morning's breakfast, and his partner Judy was trying to handle it by herself. "I don't know my way around a kitchen, but I couldn't leave her to do it alone," he says. I ask him to take a deep breath. "It's great that you want to help Judy out—but you don't really want to be there, and your resentment is making it harder for her."

He looks skeptical. "Let's think about this," I continue. "You're forcing yourself to do something you don't want to do. Remember, you are always at choice, and only you are responsible for your own happiness—just like Judy is for hers. I bet I could find someone else who would love to step into the kitchen right now." I circle the building, putting out the request for good energy in the kitchen, and within minutes I get a volunteer—plus the original shift members, who have now arrived. Steve walks away, incredulous but relieved. No one is "made wrong" because they were late, and laughter and joking soon fill the night.

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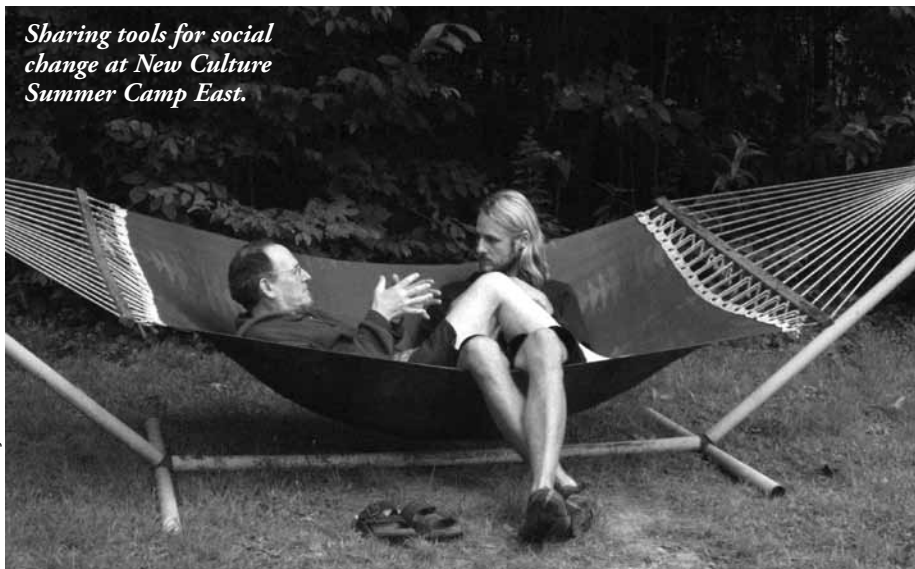
Being "at choice." Personal empowerment and responsibility for one's emotions. Flexibility and non-attachment. Asking for what you want. Contribution and ser-

vice. No blame, no shame, no guilt. These are some of the values that have emerged over nearly 20 years of Network for a New Culture's experience as a community.

Most of us in New Culture don't live together, but we are part of an extended tribe that connects us in an intimate and powerful way. We have no gurus, no dogma, no guiding philosophy or established practices. Instead, our Summer Camp is always described as an experiment—we'll try anything that looks like it might work, and learn from that experience.

The vision of New Culture is to create a sustainable world based on love, freedom, and community. We explore this by creating gatherings where people explore the big questions about culture

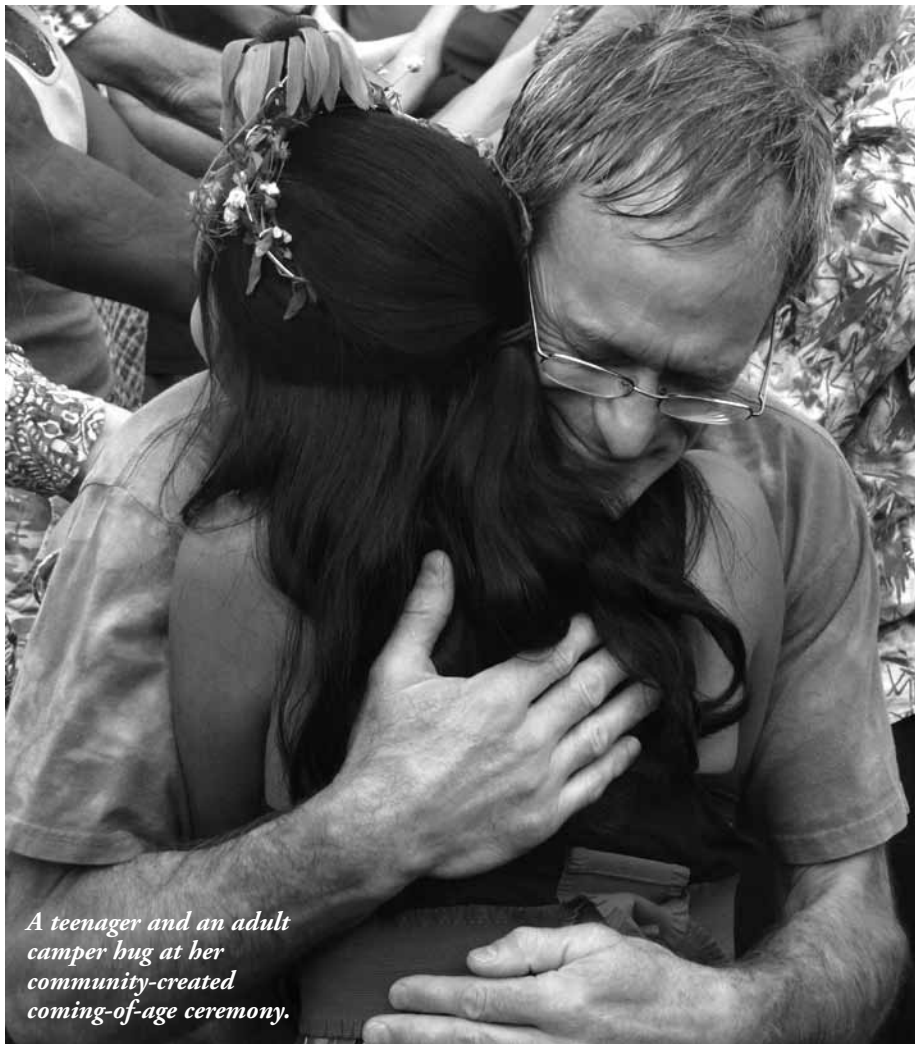
*Sharing tools for social change at New Culture Summer Camp East.*



Photos courtesy of Sarah Taub



*A spontaneous "backrub chain" at a New Culture Weekend.*



*A teenager and an adult camper hug at her community-created coming-of-age ceremony.*



*New Culture Summer Campers give and receive support for intense feelings in a “triad” format.*

re-design—how do we get our food? how do we deal with money? how do we care for kids and elders? how do we handle relationships?—and practice living, loving, working, and having fun together.

At my first New Culture camp in Oregon in 2002, I experienced a depth of kindness, intimacy, and acceptance that I had never thought possible. I made meaningful connections with 100 people and felt a deep intimacy with many of them. My experience the next year was much the same. I felt profound changes in myself—I was more personally powerful, more self-accepting, more heartfelt and connected. Whatever was being created at New Culture Summer Camp, I wanted more of it!

So in 2004, Michael Rios and I, with four co-organizers, created our first East Coast Summer Camp. We copied the Oregon camp as best we could. With 40 attendees, only a few of whom had been to a New Culture camp before, we didn't know if we had “cultural critical mass.” Three days later, we looked around at 40 people in a massive cuddle pile sharing from their hearts and gazing into each other's eyes and said, “It worked! This is New Culture camp!”

This experience taught us that certain perspectives seem to be at the heart of New Culture. We don't claim any originality for them—many of them have been taught for centuries. However, extended immersion in deep intimate relationships allows these perspectives to emerge in new and interesting ways.

Relationships of all kinds provide an opportunity for healing and personal growth. For instance, someone with a dependent personality who looks to others to meet their needs is likely to be disappointed in relationship. Yet that disappointment (or anger, or sadness, or fear), when explored insightfully, is the doorway to emotional

independence; painful emotional reactions show us the places where we have not yet healed.

Without a skilled response, though, emotional reactivity can aggravate problems among people, and the more people involved, the more the reactivity can intensify and spread. Joe can't use the kitchen because Susie is cooking dinner—Joe gets mad, Susie gets offended, Lisa tries to intervene but is rebuffed and starts crying, and soon the whole community is in an uproar.

Our experiences over the years have shown us that certain attitudes and practices promote space around reactivity. Curiosity, transparency, gratitude, compassion—all of these require a person to take ownership of their inner reaction and create enough emotional space to think about it. If either Joe, Susie, or Lisa has the skills and empowerment to take an inner “step back” and witness their own process, they can break the cycle of reactivity. And the more skilled each person is in doing this, the more stable the community as a whole becomes.

With 90 people exploring intimacy and relationship, and living/working/playing together for 10 days or more, we can certainly count on a wide range of emotional reactions and growth opportunities to arise. At camp there are dozens of fellow travelers who have learned many ways of growing through these reactions, and who are happy to model and guide new ways of being. People often experience great leaps in personal power, freedom, and happiness during camp—and the strong extended community helps this continue all year long.

Over the years, we've noticed that the perspectives that we have gleaned

from New Culture camps all seem to depend on one core practice: radical, compassionate acceptance of all parts of ourselves and of others. We have learned that every perspective and every voice has something of value to contribute and is beautiful when seen as one part of the great symphony of being human.

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Walter walks up to me while I'm checking campers in. He's angry. "Why did I get assigned to work shifts on Tuesday? Can't they be on another day?" I immediately feel defensive; his bad teeth and strident manner put me off. "Well, I can't change your shifts—we have no one else to cover them." We go back and forth a few times; finally Walter walks away unhappy.

On the third day of camp, in our daily ZEGG Forum—where the community gathers and creates a "stage" for anyone to show themselves more deeply—Walter stands up to talk about his life. "I don't understand people," he says, pacing around in the middle of the circle of seated watchers. "I've never known how to get along with people—everyone seems to get it but I'm not in on the secret." It dawns on me that I have seen this before in people with Asperger's syndrome. Walter doesn't perceive social cues—he doesn't know how to tell when the person he's talking to is angry, bored, interested, or deeply moved. "I really wanted to go to tomorrow's workshop, because it's all about relationships and I thought I could finally learn something there." His anger makes sense now; he had wanted so much to tackle his lifelong problem. His sharing creates empathy in all of us, and several campers volunteer to be his replacement the next day.

Walter stays with us through camp takedown. On the first morning of takedown, a helper has an emotional meltdown and leaves camp angrily, creating emotional chaos for the rest of us. Walter, though, is an island of calm—the emotional interplay passes right through him. I spend the day with him taking down

tents—his measured, objective approach is exactly what I need. Later that evening, six or seven of us sit with him and brainstorm ways he can employ his considerable intellect to connect better in social situations. My time with Walter is the highlight of this year's camp for me.

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Listening to Walter opened up a space of curiosity and compassion, and helped me past my initial reactivity to an appreciation of the skills and needs of someone very different from myself.

One critical exercise of personal power is what we call "being at choice." This means that at every moment, you are making the choice to continue with what you are doing or to shift and choose something else. Many societies attempt to control their members through guilt and obligation—"You agreed to this, so you have to follow through!" Yet we often make agreements based on how we feel at a particular moment, and when the moment changes, our desires may change as well.

When people force themselves to continue on a no-longer-desired course, the inner conflict can lead to such negative feelings that the original intention is undermined, as with Steve's experience in the kitchen. Too often, people are afraid to re-negotiate their obligations, for a variety of reasons—and consequently, simple solutions to problems go unrecognized. In New Culture, we encourage people to acknowledge that their desires have shifted and to re-negotiate their commitments at any time. The result is that people are following their joy rather than their obligation. Work, relationships, and other undertakings flow without tension because everyone is there by choice, and can walk away if they wish. This creates a magical energy that draws people in, rather than pushing them away.

Even the concept of commitment, which in mainstream society is never allowed to be questioned, is subjected to critical exploration. One novel way to look at commitment is that it amounts to substituting a judgment made by our younger, less experienced, and possibly less wise self for the fully-informed judgment of our current, older, more experienced self.

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I'm sitting next to Alice just before the start of Morning Circle. The sun is already hot and bright on the white tarps covering our geodesic dome. Her body is



*A New Culture Summer Camper shares her truth with the community in the daily ZEGG Forum.*



slumped in a chair. “I’m so exhausted...don’t know how I’m going to handle my lunch prep shift this morning. Mark and I stayed up all night talking...what an amazing connection! But now I’m going to pay for it.”

I can hear the self-blame in her voice. “Why don’t you ask for someone to take your shift? Kevin did yesterday when he wasn’t feeling well.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that! Kevin was sick—I was just stupid!”

“Just give it a try—you chose to follow your excitement when you stayed up so late, and you may find that other folks support you in your choice.”

At announcement time, Alice stands up and tentatively asks, “Could anyone take my kitchen shift this morning? I could trade for any other day...I’m just so exhausted today!” Three hands go up. Marie calls out, “I’d be glad to—Claire is cooking today and I want to spend time with her!” Despite Alice’s protests, Marie refuses to assign one of her other shifts to Alice. “This is my gift—pass it along if you like.” Gratefully, Alice heads off to her tent for a nap.

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Rather than silently pushing herself to follow through on her work commitment, Alice reveals her feelings and needs to the group, and finds that her need creates a welcome opportunity for someone else. The experience of having her needs met creates a sense of abundance for Alice, and she will likely respond generously when others have needs that she could meet. Acceptance of oneself and one’s own needs also makes it much easier to accept and respond empathetically to others.

Because of our practice of radical acceptance at camp, we have been able to include in our community people who have been forced to leave various other events and gatherings because of their behavior. What makes this possible is the community’s empowered stance: clear communication, good personal boundary-setting, curiosity about others, and transparency about what we need and where we are struggling. And

rather than being a strain on others, this radical acceptance becomes a benefit to the camp as a whole.

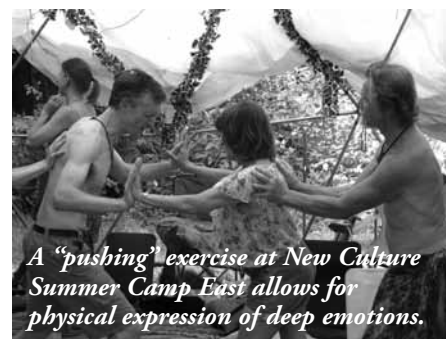
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When Bruce shows up to help with camp setup, he’s cheerful and willing to help, but his thinking is fuzzy, he doesn’t get social cues, and he’s impulsive. Three days into camp, we start getting complaints about him from other campers. “Bruce is stalking me. He followed me to my tent and hung around outside. I don’t feel safe. Can someone escort me around camp?” Other women say the same thing, and report that he has touched them without permission. One man comes to us in fierce protective anger for his girlfriend’s sake. Some are demanding that we kick him out.

We sit down with Bruce and try to explain how inappropriate his actions are. He is confused. “I was just trying to be friendly...other people were touching her, I thought it was OK.” “Did she say ‘no’?” “No, I don’t think so...?” We realize that he is not getting the message that the women he has followed and touched did not want that contact with him—and we also realize that they did not deliver that message in a way that he could understand, with unambiguous direct words.

Bruce gets up in ZEGG Forum the next day and starts talking about what it’s like to be him. “I’ve been kicked out of so many groups... Everyone else is connecting and touching, and I just don’t know how to do it.” Bruce’s confusion and desire for intimacy shine through his words. When he sits down, Michael offers a reflection: “Bruce simply cannot get nonverbal cues. If we want to

*Two Summer Campers hug.*



*A “pushing” exercise at New Culture Summer Camp East allows for physical expression of deep emotions.*

help him stay here at camp, we need to give him clear verbal feedback about our boundaries. If he still breaks clear verbal boundaries, he's on notice that we'll ask him to leave. But let's see what happens if we give him clarity."

From that day on, there is a shift in camp. I watch as he approaches a woman in the main meeting space. "Can I sit next to you and hug you?" "You can sit next to me, but I don't want you to hug me." "OK." The women have stepped into their power and are giving him clear directions, and he is respecting their desires. Camp proceeds with no further incidents from him.

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## We allow the wisdom to arise from experience and practice, rather than starting with predetermined tactics and philosophies.

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The understanding and compassion that arose during Forum inspired greater personal responsibility and clearer boundaries from the women. Initially, they saw themselves as victims of an abuser. As their understanding of Bruce shifted, their understanding of themselves shifted as well, from victims to powerful actors—they realized that in this situation, they could choose to act as mentors, providing clear, compassionate feedback on his actions. Bruce's difficulties became an opportunity for many women at camp to practice "being in charge" and speaking from their power.

Since New Culture is not primarily a residential community, it is our practices and insights that hold the New Culture community together and create our characteristically strong sense of *family*. They permeate and define all the different ways in which New Culture manifests itself: immersion camps, weekend gatherings, evening events, spontaneous informal get-togethers, and intentional communities that have built themselves on these insights.

We've found that these practices are effective in the rest of the world as well. For instance, my mother's strategy for getting needs met was to expect me to guess what she wanted. This led to disappointment for her, and guilt for me, because she wanted the sense of being valued that a surprise gift would bring—"If I have to tell you what I want, it doesn't count!" After long conversations about New Culture, my mother shifted her strategy. She told me, "I'm going to write a letter that explains what I want out of our relationship, and then I want to sit down and

talk with you about it." That conversation, seven years ago, marked a turning point in our relationship. We have far less disappointment and guilt, and far more love and connection.

In the nine years since our first Summer Camp East, Michael Rios and I have developed a number of New Culture based programs—New Culture introductory courses, workshops on relationships, boundaries trainings, and other group transparency and connection processes. In 2011, we also began building a New Culture intentional community in West Virginia.

We regularly offer public New Culture programs in the Washington, DC area, as well as at conferences, festivals, and special events up and down the eastern United States. Over the years, Michael and I have trained over a thousand people in New Culture skills. We have also used these same insights to help other groups, social enterprises, and communities to increase their sense of connection, intimacy, and well-being.

We attribute the effectiveness of New Culture to a willingness to allow the wisdom to arise from experience and practice, rather than starting with predetermined tactics and philosophies. Even our systems of community decision-making evolve from year to year, and from one context to another. As we continue to grow and deepen our community processes, some of these insights will change, be added to, or be complemented by other perspectives. The willingness to hold lightly to all insights, to stay curious, and to let experience be our teacher, is the core insight that makes all the rest work so well. 🐦

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*Sarah Taub, Ph.D. and Michael Rios are part of the Network for a New Culture ([www.nfnc.org](http://www.nfnc.org), [www.cfnc.us](http://www.cfnc.us)). They live at Chrysalis, an intentional community in Arlington, Virginia ([www.chrysalis-va.org](http://www.chrysalis-va.org)), and are co-creating Allegheny Crest Intentional Village ([aciv.cfnc.us](http://aciv.cfnc.us)), a new kind of entrepreneurial community in the West Virginia mountains associated with New Culture and the Abrams Creek Conference and Retreat Center ([www.abramscreek-center.com](http://www.abramscreek-center.com)). They regularly organize New Culture events aimed at creating a world based on awareness, compassion, and freedom rather than on fear and judgment.*

*Sarah is a cultural activist whose passion is creating events where people transform. She traded a tenured professorship in Cognitive Linguistics for a full-time focus on teaching the skills of peaceful, sustainable community—self-awareness, honesty, clear boundaries. Sarah's current koan: only when you let go of urgency can you be truly effective.*

*Michael is a social entrepreneur and practical visionary who has been creating living contexts for alternative lifestyles, social change, and personal growth for 45 years. He founded one of the first '60s communes, the first domestic violence hotline, and one of the first computer stores in the US. His favorite social organization principles include guerrilla capitalism and responsible anarchy.*

*For more information on New Culture, see ad on page 63.*



# Sharing Community Wisdom

*By Dianne G. Brause*

Everywhere I go, as I travel across the country, I hear friends and strangers talking about the difficulty of learning to navigate the waters of change and transformation which we all seem to be swimming in right now. As the systems of our society break down at a rapid rate and people do not know where to turn, the communities movement has a great deal to offer the larger society.

Those of us who have braved the world of intentional communities, ecovillages, shared housing, and the like have all gained some wisdom over the years—or we wouldn't still be doing it! Collectively, we also have a great deal to share with those who haven't taken this route in their lifetime.

What are a few of the “wisdom teachings” that I have gleaned from my 40-plus years of involvement in one kind of community or another?

**Sharing Makes Sense:** Most communitarians learn to share to a greater degree than the majority of people in the larger society. I remember one day in our community watching the kids play with their Pokémon decks of cards. After lots of discussion and some arguing about trading cards with one another to get the best deck, one of them suggested that if they all shared all of their cards they would have “the biggest deck in the world!” Everybody thought that was a perfect solution and they went on playing very happily.

In community, even the adults often come to the same

conclusion regarding vehicles, gardens, tools, stoves, irons, dishwashers, showers, books, babysitters, swings, accountants, town runs, etc. The list is endless. The more that is shared, the fewer things need to be owned individually and thus the fewer precious resources are expended by the same number of people. And, it is usually much less expensive that way. Simple wisdom—but not heavily practiced in our dominant culture!

**Living Closely with the Earth Is Healthy:** Many communities have a tendency to be more in contact with the “living earth” than others in the culture. In my community, we had gardens, woods, a stream, meadow, swampy areas, a “fairy forest,” as well as chickens, ducks, bees, cats, and dogs on the land we “owned” and “stewarded.” Every day we had the opportunity to walk on, roll on, swim in, play with, and tend to this land and its living inhabitants. In addition, we bordered on miles of private and public forest land, and were near enough to the mountains, rivers, ocean, sand dunes, and high desert to get there and back in a day. We might have the privilege of seeing deer, elk, eagles, and occasional cougar or bears on our property and beyond as well as giant Douglas Firs, tiny wildflowers, spawning Salmon, beautiful night skies, and many rainbows.

I think that our kids (and we adults of course) were physically and emotionally healthier due to this constant interaction with the natural world and “all our relations” than we might have been otherwise. Our children felt safe to spend the day outside

without adult supervision wherever they felt like wandering and playing. Sometimes they decided to sleep out under the stars at the fire circle by themselves. They also learned lots of skills which made them confident to take care of themselves in the out of doors and the “wilderness.”

**Experiencing the Cycles of Life Gives Meaning:** In my community and others, there is generally a diversity of ages, with people at all stages of life from pregnant mothers to elderly grandparents. Although these people may not be related by their DNA, they certainly get the opportunity to learn about birth and death, love and romance, strife and calm, challenges and successes—and often from a variety of points of view. Children, teens, adults, and elders get the opportunity to choose one another for sharing, caring, playing, learning, and just hanging out. Almost everyone finds a special friend and confidant when times are hard or when they have had a success they want to share.

Celebrating the seasonal cycles in addition to religious and cultural holidays can give a breadth and depth to one’s life. For a while in my community, we had a practice of giving handmade coupons to a birthday person, which offered a special gift of relationship (taking a walk together, going ice skating, reading bedtime stories, going out for ice cream or a special movie, relieving one of a cook or clean shift, or giving a parent a date night out by kidsitting, a massage or hair-cutting session, etc.) which could be cashed in at any time within the next year! At other times, we would each light a candle and tell the person

ship—which were both necessary to navigate the multiplicity of daily tasks. We also offered monthly workshops during which we practiced the skills of clear and honest communication—which again are not skills generally learned in school.

I recently attended a weeklong program which taught and modeled the skill sets associated with the “Eight Shields”—each with a different way of perceiving and acting in the world. Over the course of a lifetime, people were encouraged to practice and improve their skills in each of these ways of being. I noticed that the teachers in this group tended to be unusually good at both leadership and communication and it was a pleasure to watch them do their work.



Of course, not all ecovillages or other intentional communities hold equal amounts of wisdom in all of these areas, and many don’t even aspire to do so. However, my guess is that the average communitarian holds more wisdom in these areas than those who have not lived in community. Some of our wisdom has come from the many “failures to thrive” that communities have experienced over the decades. Certainly, I have gained wisdom both from the successes and the failures that I have had the pleasure and the agony of living through!

Out of the depths of experience gained from people within the communities movement, there is a wisdom that is sorely needed on the planet today in order for us to survive and perhaps even to thrive! The question is: Are we ready and willing to offer our gifts of community wisdom to the larger culture? Or will we choose to “hide our light under a bushel” and sequester it for some imagined other time or more deserving recipients? My hope and desire is to offer what I know in a way that may be of great help to others looking to find or create community as a way of life. 🐦

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## Acceptance into our community depended on the ability both to lead and to follow.

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something special that we really appreciated about them. The success of celebrations was usually not related to money spent or material gifts received, but rather to the depth of intimate sharing by the people involved.

**Leadership and Communication Skills Are Enhanced:** In the majority of communities (where there is not a designated leader, guru, or set of unbreakable rules), everyone tends to learn at least some of the skills necessary for leadership, since they most likely will be strongly encouraged to become a leader in some area or activity within community life. How this is done varies greatly and people come at and to leadership with very different perspectives. Every community has endless decisions that must be made by someone, and usually there is not one “daddy” to make them all. In my community, we tried to spread leadership around as widely as possible, and acceptance into the community was judged partially on a person’s perceived ability to have skills in both leadership and follower-

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*Dianne G. Brause grew up in a close-knit farming community in the midwestern US. While doing her M.A. degree in New England she explored the concept of intentional community while living cooperatively with others running a retreat center. In the late 1980s, she cofounded an educational retreat and conference center in Oregon, where she lived until she returned to her birth community in rural Ohio to help her parents in their waning health. Currently, she is completing a Ph.D. program and is helping the newly founded Ubiquity University to make contact and links with intentional communities which may want to take in Ubiquity’s B.A. degree students for internships, apprenticeships, or training programs in areas of particular expertise and wisdom held by that community. Please contact Dianne at [diannebrause@gmail.com](mailto:diannebrause@gmail.com) if your community or ecovillage might like to offer this type of opportunity for students from around the world.*

# The Values of Shared Ownership

By *Tim Miller*

When the call for articles for this issue came out, I immediately thought that the editor would get plenty of essays dealing with personal relationships, solving problems, and other things having to do with human interaction. No one who has lived in community, I suspect, could fail to have learned many things about people and the way they relate to each other, and I'm no exception. Many years after leaving my community, however, the lesson that sticks with me most prominently is a rather material one: I learned about shared ownership and its practical benefits.

Sharing is not uncommon at the micro level; many a homeowner, for example, buys and shares tools with neighbors. My sister and her partner own a car-top carrier with another couple, and they pass it back and forth as one family or the other goes on a trip. My neighborhood has an appliance dolly that any of several dozen people can use at moving time. Most of us know of shared ownership at that level.

But real estate? That's a different matter, or at least it seems to be today.

I lived in a small community (seven or fewer members most of the time) whose house and land were owned, initially, by five individuals. We never could have bought the property in the first place had we relied on individual resources—rather meager savings, plus minimal income from public-service jobs. Working together, however, we pooled what money we had, found an outside supporter who bought a large share without intending to live on the property, took out a loan, signed the papers, and moved in. It never really occurred to any of us that what we were doing was dangerous, or even unusual. That was in the 1970s, and shared ownership didn't seem all that unusual in those days of idealism and rural romanticism—it was just what a lot of people were doing.

After about three years some owners left, and others came on board, with the reconstituted group of owners, plus some non-

owner members, still living together. Although all of the owners moved out over time, and the house thus became a rental (again, from time to time, to a group), we continued to own the property jointly and use it in various ways for more than 30 years. Finally, however, with the inevitable changes that come over time, three of the four owners decided it was time to sell. I was the only one who wanted to keep the place.

Although by then I had a job and an income, I couldn't afford to buy them all out. So I began searching for new partners. But I quickly learned that carefree hippie days were long past. The people who had some interest in living in the country and/or owning rural property all seemed scared stiff of joint ownership. Some proposed to buy the house and part of the

land—an unacceptable arrangement, because the layout of the land and the various amenities of the place didn't fit neatly into proper parcels. The things I liked best about the place were scattered here and there over many acres.

Finally it was time to fish or cut bait. The real estate market had hit bottom, but the others wanted to go ahead and get it over with. So I flung the net one last time, sending

a message to everyone I could think of, searching one last time for interest in shared ownership. And from those hundreds of people I got one expression of interest. It all went forward from there, and today we are joint owners.

The reason why my new partners weren't scared with joint ownership is that they had experience with it. One of the new couple was a pilot who had wanted an airplane but couldn't afford one, so bought a new airplane jointly with another pilot. That had all worked out well, and she was ready to try again. A few weeks later we were signed, sealed, and delivered.

So I now have access to many mostly wild acres of land, a nice swimming hole, and a couple of structures that provide shelter in the sometimes-harsh climate of the central Midwest.

*(continued on p. 73)*



# Yes, Wealthy People Want to Live in Community in Sustainable Ways Too!

## Fourteen suggestions from those who are trying it

*By Jennifer Ladd*

In this time of peak oil, climate change, and economic instability, many people are looking to build sustainable community close to home and close to their values. This is true for people across the entire class spectrum, including wealthy people. Money can protect one from many things but we ALL feel the effects of climate change, of extreme inequality, and of the breakdown of people-to-people connection, albeit in different ways. Many people with wealth are looking for ways to leverage their resources for good—to help heal the environment and to support the emergence of a new culture based on cooperation and collaboration. And so wealthy people are playing a role, with others, in the growth of intentional communities and other collective working and living projects.

For over two years, I have been facilitating a telephone support group of people with financial resources who have started, want to start, or already live in intentional community-like situations. The conference calls allow people to learn from one another about ownership models, questions of responsibility and stewardship, vision, clear agreements, and power dynamics. The group alternates between having a support group call amongst themselves one month, then having an outside speaker come to the conference call to share information, experience, or expertise the next month.

Members of this group are located in 10 states from around the US. They come from all different kinds of situations: One person has owned land for 20 years and is now interested in attracting others to live, garden, and work together. One person bought land with the intention of living there with community but the community fell apart. Others bought land or buildings with the expressed intention of turning that property over to community over time either in the form of cohousing, land trusts, or cooperatives. Some group members live in the country, some live in cities. One person grew up on a farm that he expects to inherit, at which point he wants to open it up to others. Some have started out with friends to do this, some have started with a spouse, some have journeyed this road on their own with others coming and going along the way.

The taboo of talking about money and class makes this an important topic. Many of us struggle to have these discussions, but in my 20 years of personal and professional experience working on cross-class projects, I have found it is essential to do so. Whether they are made explicit or not, power dynamics, judgments, and fears exist in this area—along with those related to race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, and so on. The more that each person in a community is committed to examining and understanding their attitudes and beliefs about money and class, the stronger that community, or any community-based endeavor, will be.

The individuals who have participated in this group value building a healthy, sustainable world both environmentally and socially. Each person is looking at their particular circumstances and working to understand how he or she can work with others, and with the resource of property, to embody those values.

But it's not always so easy.

Primary funders can be in control but also feel a great deal of vulnerability as they expose their capacity to fund. Many people have inherited their money. They want to do something of service and they are well aware of how people with a lot of money can

be viewed in this time of growing inequality—viewed both with envy/jealousy and with antipathy/resentment. Sometimes they can be seen as an endless source of funding. All told there are distances and differences that need to be acknowledged and grappled with.

### **Suggestions, Ideas, Considerations**

This article is not an exhaustive study of how people with money have started or participated in communities. It is a collection of lessons being learned by this particular sample group—lessons that many others have learned along the way.

#### **1. Encourage early and open discussion of class, money, and power dynamics, realizing everyone plays a part.**

Tackle money discussions early on in an open and curious way. Clarify your own values around money, land, and control and ask others to do the same, and then find the structure that embodies those values. Share your class and money stories with each other so you have an understanding of the circumstances and conditions from which you come as you deal with conflict and with moving forward together. Spend time really understanding your own needs and desires for community.

#### **2. If you are someone who already owns property and have a close connection to it, read or re-read the section “When You Already Own Property” (pages 23-24) in Diana Leafe Christian’s book *Creating a Life Together*.**

She writes clearly about the challenges of forming community when there is one sole owner. She writes, “If you’re a property owner seeking to create community on your land...be willing to release total control and find ways for people to become fully participating, responsibility-sharing fellow community members. And if you cannot or don’t want to release full control but still want to live in close proximity with others, please do so and enjoy it—but don’t advertise it as ‘community!’”

Why do some people choose to keep control of the land or property? Well, there are a number of reasons but a primary one is that people have history with the land and care for it. One person has owned her land for many years. She knows its valleys, hills, watersheds, and other resources. She has invested in building a house, barn, greenhouse, and other buildings. She has put a great deal of time and money into a vision and place at which she has much history and many ties. She cares for it deeply. This is also true of another woman who owns land. With others, she has made it a model of sustainability and a place for workshops and retreats. She too has put a lot of money, time, and attention into this land.

Even though both of them feel somewhat burdened by the responsibilities and liabilities and are willing to sell some portion of the land, they feel a great deal of concern for its future care and stewardship and are looking for (and also finding) models of ownership that will assure future care for the land. Members of this group are exploring conservation easements, land trusts, and cooperatives, making the ownership not an individual right/responsibility but a group entity.

#### **3. Be very clear what rights and responsibilities everyone has from the very start.**

Most people who own the land/property want to live in community in a way that does not highlight the fact they have the control. They long for a sense of connection and camaraderie. They feel this can’t be done if they have the power of ownership and all that it implies. But, in an ironic way, the clearer one is about what control in decision-making the owner has and what others have, the more trust can be established. At least three people in the group have written agreements with renters about their own rights and responsibilities.

**4. If you already own property and want to start a community, be as clear as you can about what part of the property you want to hold on to and what part you want the group to own.**

One person took the time to determine this, and that clarity has been a relief for all concerned. She says, “One way to share some power, if you are not willing to give it all over to the group, is to have long-term leases for members. Having some more long-term security will allow others to engage more and feel more empowered. Making sure there are plenty of things the group and/or other individuals decide will help a lot too.”

**5. If you have a very strong and clear vision, do your best to be aware of how the strength of your vision both attracts people and potentially disempowers them from contributing their own vision.**

Some people have bought land with a fairly well formed vision of building a program, a school, a model gardening place, a place of retreat and renewal. If the land was bought with the express purpose of achieving a particular vision and mission, it can be difficult to maintain a balance between opening the visioning up to others and keeping the main thread of intent. Sometimes founders are so afraid of betraying their own vision that they become rigid, discouraging other potential community members from fully joining in. There may be ways to let others direct some aspect of that vision for which they have passion and expertise.

**6. If you are going to start a community, do so with others, not by yourself.**

The danger of finding yourself in an almost parental role is high. You will have to hold all the financial and vision responsibility by yourself to begin with and have to navigate the rocky shoals of transitioning and sharing with others. Yes, have an idea, passion, and vision, but start out as early as possible with others if you can possibly do so.

**7. If you do start out with others, get to know and form relationships with those with whom you might build community before living in community together. Take your time.**

Allen Hancock, who spoke to the group about his experience with Du•má in Eugene, Oregon, said that if he could do it over again he would have spent more time forging relationships with people in the geographical region where he lives—learn what it is like to work together in some endeavor, get to know people over time—then begin the process of visioning and planning together.

**8. If you are starting a community with others, find ways to make living together financially possible AND make sure everyone has some “skin in the game.”**

It seems to hold true in some people’s experience that when community members can come in easily, they often can leave easily. Find ways for people to make proportionately similar financial commitments. One person may have more money than another but the degree of stretch or commitment can feel comparable. Look for structures that will enable others to gain some form of equity or share over time as you, the primary or initial funder, lessens your ownership—cohousing, cooperatives, creative LLC structures, and community land trusts are options.

**9. Hank Obermayer of Mariposa Grove in Oakland suggests that there are five skills/elements essential in building community: Visioning, Time and Time Management, Financial Knowledge, Organizational Development, and People Skills.**

Make sure that either you or other core members have these assets and as Hank says, “Make sure that the entire core group trusts those skills in each other. Sometimes you need to accept what others in the core group say, without understanding why, when the



others have the relevant skill way more than you.” Very often (not always) the person with the money will also be the person with more time. Be careful about becoming the default primary mover and shaker because of an abundance of money and time. Look for ways that others can also give meaningful time so that the endeavor is more of a co-creation, while being aware that most others need to work for a living.

### **10. Consider having shared training in decision-making, communication skills, and conflict resolution.**

It can be hard to find the time. Whatever is decided, make sure the group who will undergo the training both chooses to do it and finds some way to help pay for it—again this can be done proportionately so that everyone contributes something. Make sure that this is discussed ahead of time.

### **11. Building a community takes more time and attention than most people imagine when they start the process.**

Be aware of what other activities you are involved in and be ready to give up some things so that you have the time and attention to make living together—and whatever project you choose to work on—successful.

### **12. Have an exit strategy.**

Things can change. Every person in a community most likely will have thought about what they might do if they need or want to leave at some point. If you are the sole proprietor or are the one holding the most responsibility for the land, it helps to think beforehand about how you might leave in a way that doesn’t damage the community-like living and working situation. Giving this some thought beforehand may lead you to looking into land trusts or other structures that enable you to follow your life path without disrupting everything that you and others have built along the way.

### **13. Have a way to get support from others grappling with similar questions, challenges, and possibilities.**

I have found that when people are living and working in cross-class situations it is very valuable to have caucus or affinity groups where people can air their feelings and sort out their thinking in order to come back to the group with more clarity and energy to engage.

The people on these conference calls do get support from the people they live with, and it is also very valuable to share ideas with others grappling with similar questions of control, power dynamics, and the confusion of how to live one’s values in such an inequitable world.

### **14. It is absolutely worth it.**

Everyone in the group has waded through difficult times living and working with others, but they are also well aware of the pitfalls of isolation, which wealth can bring. People want to be connected with others, want to share, want to find ways to work together with others. All these experiments have helped people to learn about themselves, have provided them with joyful times, have helped people to be better co-creators of sustainable living that we so direly need at this time in history.

As noted earlier, this is not an all-inclusive or even original set of lessons, but they may bear repeating. The more we can openly, collaboratively, and sincerely search for ways of stewarding land and property and living in community in life-affirming ways, the stronger we *all* are. ☺

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*Jennifer Ladd is a philanthropic coach and cofounder of Class Action, a nonprofit organization dedicated to cross-class efforts to educate about and eliminate classism. She lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.*

# Cultivating the Neighbourhood

By Nina Bailey-Dick

Photos courtesy of Nina Bailey-Dick



“Now, why did I start a neighbourhood association?” I ask myself as we approach the two-year anniversary of the beginning of the Uptown West Neighbourhood Association in Waterloo, Ontario.

I could say that this is an example of the “starting with why” reflections that Simon Sinek wrote about, but it’s also genuine, somewhat desperate soul-searching as my energy for neighbourhood organizing ebbs and flows. Did I want more friends? Not really. Did I think there’d be fame and fortune in being on the board? No. Was I bored? No! I’m introverted...what was I thinking in starting this?!

I think I wanted to build trust between neighbours so we’d be better-prepared for emergencies. So my motivation was fear of emergencies? I guess so. But there was more to it than that. I knew what a strong interdependent community felt like from growing up in an Amish community and from living in intentional community for three years, and I wanted to recreate some of that here. I grew up on a country road in Indiana where three households of cousins my age lived within a quarter mile of each other, plus my grandma was there in her house. I was welcome to walk into any of these houses without knocking. My formative years of living in close community have left me yearning for that community-feeling again here.

“Here” is a square section of Waterloo near the uptown main business area filled with older brick homes and tall maple trees. Most of the 1500 households generate middle-class incomes or higher. Quite a few neighbours work at one of the two nearby

universities. I live in a 1915ish red brick house with my husband, three children, my mother, and 10 hens in the backyard. The housing market is strong in this neighbourhood with many people wanting to live where they can walk to everything: hardware, grocery, market, work, bus lines, new light rail transit line, movies, restaurants, park, coffee shops, and stores of all kinds. As proof of the housing market’s strength, our property assessment rose \$80,000 since 2008—without making any improvements to our house!

Yes, this is a middle-class neighbourhood. What does neighbourhood organizing look and taste like when it is middle-class and neighbours don’t *really* need each other for anything? To stereotype my neighbours, I’d say that they don’t really need their neighbours because they can hire professionals to do whatever is needed (repair the roof, mow the lawn, walk the dog, etc.). My neighbours are socially strong with many friends and activities; they don’t really need or want another activity to attend. My neighbours are involved in the community and give their time and hearts and money in many ways; they aren’t looking for more ways to volunteer and give. Most of my neighbours are good at being a “good neighbour.” They get to know the people in the houses close to them, they share and loan things with their neighbours, they visit when a new person moves in, and they drop off food when a tragedy happens.

My neighbours don’t *need* much. So, then, what is the role of our neighbourhood association? This is the question we are asking ourselves. Maybe in a couple years I will have an answer. Right now it seems to be stuck in “event planning” as we plan monthly events to see if momentum will build and to learn from what works and doesn’t work. We adopted the mission statement from Seeking Community (The Tamarack Institute): to have fun together, take care of each other, and

work for a better world. We seem to be in the “have fun together” mode and I don’t know how to move into the other roles.

Our board has been talking about shifting from being an event planner to being the facilitator and communicator that helps YOU plant events. For example, a woman emailed us to ask if she could volunteer to lead a few yoga classes. One of our board members booked the nearby school’s gym (as an association, we can do this for a very low annual cost), we promoted the first yoga class via social media, and eight people showed up! We’re hoping to do more of this and less initiating of events ourselves.

We’re struggling with how we move beyond “have fun together” to our other goals of helping each other and making the world a better place. Brainstorming about fundraising for a cause or matching up with a “higher needs” neighbourhood make me cringe at the danger of paternalism and of patronizing. A recent opportunity comes from within our neighbourhood: the local school has asked us if we would help raise funds for them. We are considering this possibility.

A barrier to helping each other is our fear of asking for help. One successful example of helping each other was a work day on a neighbour’s roof. We live next to Will and Josie Winterfeld, who know how to ask for help from their years of living in the community Jubilee Partners in Georgia. Will modelled this a couple autumns ago when he organized a work day to tear the old shingles off of his roof. He asked for help via email. One friend who didn’t like heights offered to help by cooking the workers a Mexican lunch.

I was on the roof with my dad, my nine-year-old son, and my six-year-old daughter, and everyone was dirty, happy, and working hard. My husband offered his support by bringing out still-warm cinnamon rolls with caramel icing for our mid-morning break. (Those rolls are etched into my sensual-delight memory forever.) While on the roof I had a great talk with two young men who were living in an apartment nearby. I also bonded with men in their 50s and 60s in a way that just wouldn’t have happened in clean

clothes and chatting on the sidewalk. We sweated together and complained about aches and pains and cheered each other on.

Will did well asking for help and at the same time I noticed that even he was not quite brave enough to invite neighbours who had never asked him for a favour. It is a risky thing to ask for help and then feel indebted to someone! So the learning I take from this is to risk asking for help—and to be sure to serve warm cinnamon rolls as a thank you. My asking for help makes it easier for the helper to ask me for a favour later on.

Last spring the local church began hosting monthly Friday Night Community Suppers, sparking neighbours’ interest and providing another opportunity to help each other. Volunteers from the church prepare a big pot of chili, baked potatoes, a veggie or salad, and a dessert, and invite anyone and everyone to come and partake. The neighbourhood association promotes it over email and Facebook. Donations are accepted with enough always being collected to pay for the food costs for the next meal. These meals have left many people with a warm glow from the good food and good conversation. One neighbour explained that he loves to go because it’s one of the few times he gets to talk to “strangers” from the neighbourhood beyond just a hello. We need these places for strangers to meet that feel safe and comfortable enough to begin a conversation.

Last summer I tried to create this safe place. Two new households moved in near our house. I invited them and the other closest neighbours to a barbeque in our backyard. It was an idyllic time, with a couple tables set up in the sunny but not too hot backyard, the fire pit sending out cedar and hamburgers smells, and the kids playing happily nearby. Toward the end of the meal the 50-something new neighbour turned to me and pointedly asked “So why do you do this?” while gesturing at the picnic scene. I was surprised and shrugged my shoulders and said: “It’s important to me to know my neighbours.” I wish I’d had a better reply for him but I’m still not sure what I would have said.

Maybe this new neighbour would have been generous even if I hadn’t hosted the barbeque. I don’t know. What I do know is that a couple months later he split and delivered three trailer loads of walnut firewood to our backyard. Despite being an introvert, I have a strong inner urge to know my neighbours enough to trust them and know we can depend on each other. I don’t need or want to visit with them every day or even every week; I just want to know that we are each ready to help the other if and when it is needed. 🐦

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*Nina Bailey-Dick writes: “I’m a local foodie, spiritual seeker, mother of three, and organizer at heart with a passion for working together to make life richer and deeper. I plan and facilitate a poverty reduction program for the Region of Waterloo. A Community Psychology perspective (M.A.), years of housemates, and growing up next to an Amish community flavour my experience of community. Current community projects include nurturing a new neighbourhood association and starting a community farm.”*



# The Veterans Writing Group and the Military Community

By Shepherd Bliss

I have been a member of the Veterans Writing Group (VWG) for the last 20 years. The intentions of our community include the following: being together in a non-military environment, telling our stories to each other in a healing context, and writing them down. We also like to laugh together, and sometimes some of us surrender to expressing our grief through crying. When we started we met each month in various San Francisco Bay Area locations, and we now meet seasonally in Sonoma County, northern California. People come from all over the state.

At first we were all military veterans, except our writing teacher Maxine Hong Kingston, an award-winning author and former University of California professor. Then widows, nurses, children of vets, peace veterans, former gang members, and others impacted directly by the violence of war asked to join us. How could we say “no” and follow the Buddhist principles that guide us? Our members span the American wars from World War II to Desert Storm. We have had Chinese, Israeli, Korean, and Vietnamese participants.

Around 40 of us attend each meeting, drawing from a base of around 100 members. New people come to most meetings. We have published the award-winning book *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*, edited by Maxine ([www.vowvop.org](http://www.vowvop.org)). We have read from it at various book festivals and Maxine and group members sometimes offer workshops.

Our get-togethers start with informal socializing and then we sit in a circle in a large room in the Redwood Empire. We meditate, check-in, meditate some more, and then someone describes the writing prompt which was distributed earlier by email. Then we meditate more and disperse to write in silence, returning for a potluck lunch, which starts in silence.

In the afternoon we each read—either something we’ve written that day, or something we’ve been working on. We listen without judgment, supportively, rather than critically. Both the check-ins and readings can include highly emotional moments of grief and joy, often involving crying and belly laughing together. Then we do a walking meditation into the nearby tall trees, which provide an open container that holds us.

These last 20 years with this vets group differs sharply from

the first two decades of my life. I was born into a different kind of intentional community—a military family. Though there are similarities between the two communities, their differences are important. The intention of this essay is to describe some of the lessons that I have learned from participating in these two distinct kinds of families.

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I was born during World War II into the military family that gave its name to Ft. Bliss, Texas. My family moved every three years, which is common for military families. In addition to being away from my birth, my father was away for a few years

while stationed in Saudia Arabia, where our family could not accompany him. As a young child I attended mainly military schools.

I started playing chess at a young age, to learn military strategy. I liked marching around with the boys and rough-housing.

The military is an intentional community whose intention is to protect the nation. We form a tribe quite distinct from civilians. It is usually possible for most of us to recognize what are called “military brats.” As the old saying goes, “You can take the boy out of the military, but not the military out of the boy.”

The military family in the film and book *The Great Santini* by Pat Conroy was a lot like my own, including having five children. It was not until I went to college that I learned how different the military community is from the civilian community. We of the military are Other than the majority. We follow a different set of rules, including firm obedience to the chain of command.

In the military I learned many values, such as discipline, team work, duty, honor, country love, a sense of mission and something larger than the self. When I became of age, I joined the US Army during the American War on Vietnam. Though I had been militarized for a couple of decades, I was not always comfortable being in the Army. I did like boot camp, being with other teenage boys, playing in the woods.

I was organized out of the Army in the late ’60s by my first real love for someone outside the family. She invited me to pot-

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**Both the check-ins and readings  
can include highly emotional moments  
of grief and joy.**

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lucks, where the food was better than military food. And there were girls there. Instead of calling us “paid killers” and “death merchants” as some war opponents did, these peace activists treated us as humans.

My girlfriend back then, Marilyn Yeo, showed me pictures of napalmed babies. This may seem stupid on my part, but I had not connected our playing with guns in the woods to killing people. When I got it, I resigned my commission as an officer, disappointing my family of origin. I went on my way to other kinds of communities, like the academic community, the religious community, and political activist communities, often waging peace. I finally found the Veterans Writing Group.

For many years I despised the military for what I saw it do in Vietnam, Chile when I lived there, and elsewhere. I eventually came to a more balanced approach to the military and the positive things that I learned from being raised in a military family, separate from the war-making part.

Since joining the VWG, I have felt at home there. Our group has a clear, wonderful leader, Maxine Hong Kingston, a peace activist. Can you imagine what it would take to hold together vets from each of the different services and a wide array of other kinds of people? Her form of leadership is different from that of the military. For one thing, our group is totally voluntary. You can come to meetings or not, as you need to. Each meeting has a different facilitator. Each all-day meeting has a clear structure.

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Some of my best writing has been stimulated by the VWG community. Even when I am not able to attend, I am aware

that it is happening and feel nurtured by it. The prompt for the fall 2012 meeting was to write about trees. I wrote a piece that has been widely published under various titles, including “Trees Transform.” I used it as a study guide for a walk into the woods with my Dominican University of California students.

Our winter 2012 meeting began the morning after Pearl Harbor Day. One of the things that some of us discussed was the term “moral injury,” which some are using to replace the clinical term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“Moral injury” is a relatively new term to refer to what veterans and others experience, especially those who saw combat or violence. “Moral injury” places the blame on war itself. “Disorder” implies that something is permanently wrong, whereas “injury” suggests that healing is possible.

“Every generation gives war trauma a different name,” explained Korean vet Jiwon Chung at our last vets’ meeting. “Moral injury de-pathologizes the condition. If you go to war and come back troubled or suffering, it is not because you are *psychically weak*, but because you are *morally strong*. What you witnessed or did went against your deepest moral convictions.”

Chung later added, “That we vets suffer moral injury, despite the tremendous suffering and anguish it brings, is actually a validation of our humanity. War is the reason for moral injury. Peace, justice, and reparation are the cures for moral injury.” 🐦

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*“Satellite” group photo from the July 2012 Veterans Writing Group retreat at Ala Kukui.*

# Humaneitarians Unite

By Caroline Abels

Does a new word—a few letters strung together in a unique way, used in earnest to describe an emerging way of thinking or being—have the power to connect like-minded strangers and turn them into a new community?

Or is it more typical that a like-minded community—as amorphous, spread out, and unmaped as it may be—inspires the word?

As with most things in life, probably a bit of both. You need a word to help create a community *and* a community to help create a word.

This delicious conspiracy between words and communities was not on my mind in 2007, as I sat in my Boston apartment, putting together a shopping list. That morning, I must have been keenly aware of my desire to move back to Vermont, to keep farm animals, and to raise them for meat. My ruminations must have wandered to factory farms, and what happens to animals in those desolate places, and I must have felt glad that I was making a point to buy meat from small, humane farms at the food co-op down the street.

The exact thought process escapes me now, but all of this congealed in a moment, and I formed a new word.

I'm a *humaneitarian*, I thought. A person who eats meat only from humanely raised animals. Who believes in eating meat but not if it's from a factory farm. Who eats only animals that were treated like sentient beings, not machines.

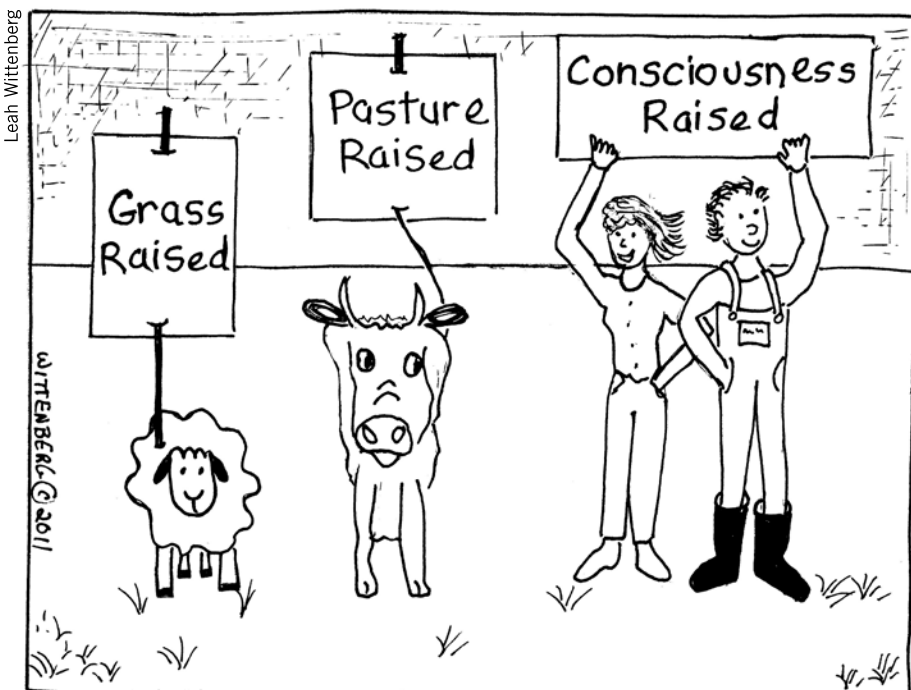
*Humaneitarian*. I liked the play on the word “vegetarian.” I liked the play on the word “humanitarian.” It seemed pronounceable (though maybe not spellable). It said pretty much everything about how I wanted to eat and it put my concern for animals at the forefront of how I ate.

I suddenly became “something” that no one had named before—a humaneitarian. And then I probably went off to buy my groceries.

It turns out I wasn't the first person to come up with the word: Google told me

it was being used, in a different context, by the Willamette Humane Society in Salem, Oregon, which gives out annual “Humaneitarian Awards” for “compassionate service to pets and people.” I think it turned up in a blog by a woman in Texas, in a culinary context. But there was no indication of widespread use.

So initially it was just a word that described *me*. Only a few days or weeks later did I wonder whether other folks out there might be crafting and practicing a meat-eating philosophy similar to my own. I wondered if they'd like to call themselves humaneitarians, too. This is when the chicken or egg question—which comes first, the word or the community?—could have been asked. “Humaneitarian” came to me because I knew that a nascent community of American farmers was raising animals in more humane ways, and a nascent community



of consumers was seeking out their products. But “humaneitarian” also came to me because I knew that these like-minded practitioners—the “we” spread out across the country—needed to be *named*.

Who else is out there? What are we all thinking? How can we support each other? All this wondering—common, I suppose, among people practicing a new way of living—eventually led me, in 2011, to launch an eponymous website, *Humaneitarian.org*. It provides information and inspiration to people who want to give up factory farmed meat and switch to the humanely raised kind. But it’s a two-way street: I want to learn from my fellow humaneitarians as much as I want to assist them in learning.

In the past, it would have taken a long time for a new word to disseminate—traveling along carriage paths and railroad tracks, set in linotype or lithography or letterpress. These days, words can be spread within hours through tweets and texts. Within weeks of launching my website, I was gratified to receive messages from like-minded eaters all over the country. Here are a few:

“Thank you for creating this site! Me and my boyfriend have recently become humaneitarians and it can be quite difficult to adjust. We appreciate having this site for support (knowing there are others like us!).”

“Yes! I have been a humaneitarian for about a year now and am excited to connect with fellow humaneitarians!”

“I just became a humaneitarian (didn’t know it was a word) a few days ago after being vegetarian (vegan except for local eggs) for a year, so I will happily choose vegetarian over non-humane meat. I imagine that all the pain and suffering of an animal’s life is transferred to me when I eat it.”

A small community was born. A community of humaneitarians—or at least people who were interested in eating like one, at least some of the time. It’s not a visible community, not an audible community, not a community made up of anyone I can share a humanely raised pot roast with at my dining room table in Vermont, not a community as tangible and tactile as the ultimate man-made community—a farm.

But I need it, this virtual community. It not only helps me commit to humane meat eating myself, but allows me to contribute to the movement to end inhumane animal agriculture by encouraging meat eaters to make alternative choices. Factory farming is already discussed within the vegetarian community, which is plenty strong—they were named way back in the 1840s. And the vegan community, named 100 years later, is even stronger and more aware of factory farming. But people who care about animals *and* eat meat needed their own forum in which to learn and share.

While it’s been delightful to see the Twitter and Facebook followers roll in, I’ve realized that while I’ve connected just fine with other humaneitarians since 2011, and they’ve connected with me, we need to connect better with each other, go beyond our virtual community. After all, one definition of “virtual” is something that is “almost or nearly as described, but not completely.” Indeed, there is something about virtual communities that makes them feel “almost” and “not completely.” Chalk it up to the human need for interaction.

I’ve craved the kind of conversation and collaboration that goes beyond posting a quick comment on Facebook or replying to a blog post. Gathering people in a room produces richer, more brilliant results. Towards this end, I’m planning to put together a template for “humane dinner parties,” which people can host in their hometown, and where they can learn from each other, hone their humaneitarian skills, and enjoy a great meal. I’m also planning interactive presentations at food co-ops, and may even start humane farm tours. Meeting people in person, sharing ideas in real time, having fun—this is how change happens, how words catch on.

Perhaps women struggling for the vote around 1900, when the term “suffragette” was coined, became more emboldened in their work when they could use this peppy new word to describe themselves. Perhaps part of their eventual success lay in becom-



Rose Wall

ing part of a community that was *named*.

Perhaps the pockets of people who began hosting local food potlucks just after the turn of the millennium were motivated by the new word “localvore” (“localvore” on the East Coast), which was coined by a chef and cookbook author in California. Perhaps the word has helped unify the local food movement. (At the very least, it signals your values to family members, and clues them in to what your Thanksgiving table might look like.)

I don’t purport to put “humaneitarian” in the same category as “suffragette” or “localvore.” But when I drive down the back roads of Vermont, past farms where animals are raised with care and where conscientious consumers are stopping to buy meat that matches their morals, I do harbor hope that this new six-syllable word can bring together all the like-minded strangers who inspired it. 🐷

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*Caroline Abels, founder of Humaneitarian (www.humaneitarian.org), lives in north-central Vermont. She is also the editor of Vermont’s Local Banquet, a food and farming magazine.*

# Eat Like You Give a Damn *A Shibboleth from Seattle*

By Laird Schaub

**M**y community, Sandhill Farm, has maintained a core commitment to growing and eating high quality food right from the first of our 39 years together. As such, imagine my amusement when my Seattle friend Marni Rachmiel suggested we rendezvous for breakfast at the Portage Bay Café last November—a place I'd never heard of before—and arrived to find the coffee cups and waitstaff t-shirts festooned with the restaurant's defiant slogan: "Eat Like You Give a Damn." I loved it!

It turns out that this hometown restaurant (it has three locations in the metropolitan area) fiercely promotes local, organic, and seasonal ingredients. It makes an organic farmer from northeast Missouri proud.

Over the course of the decades I've lived at Sandhill it's been a passion of mine to try to develop a local cuisine—dishes that feature what we grow when it's fresh. We've achieved year-round self-sufficiency in tomatoes, so red pasta sauce is always a menu option. But not buying tomatoes means letting go of seeing fresh wedges in the salad bowl from November through June, as we have only canned and dried available those months.

We eat parsnips in March and April. We eat fresh strawberries only in June. Butternut squash lasts from first harvest in the fall through to the spring. With care we can make our garlic and potatoes last pretty much all year; it's harder with onions. We extend access to certain vegetables through fermentation and pickling: cabbage, cucumbers, carrots, beets, and green beans. Other things we regularly dry: leeks, celery, peppers, shiitakes, jerky, and many herbs.



If you are what you eat, it makes sense to be local and organic. Though without as much fanfare (and no t-shirts) Sandhill stands for the same principles as the Portage Bay Café.

Further, we intentionally try to be conscious of the energy it takes to get our food to the table, and that calculus extends way beyond the propane that fuels our cook stove. It includes the transportation it takes to get the food to the store and then home (if we buy an ingredient rather than grow it), the energy invested in processing the food (if we're not eating it fresh), and the energy invested in storing the food (if it's refrigerated or frozen instead of canned or dried).

In the summer we're able to save propane by extensive use of a solar cooker—essentially an insulated box with reflective sides that focuses the sunshine onto a cooking shelf. On sunny days we can sustain a temperature of 250 degrees, great for slow cooking or reheating last night's dinner for lunch. In the winter we make the wood stove do double duty as a space heater and a cooking surface. By keeping a tea kettle on the stove all winter, it takes much less propane to bring the water to a boil for hot drinks. These steps require a bit more forethought, yet add up to considerable savings. And you don't have to pay taxes on money you didn't earn because you were frugal in the first place.

I've wondered for years what world politics would be like if everyone—and I mean *everyone*—had a garden and was responsible for growing at least some portion of what they ate. Would we be as belligerent as a species? Would we be as wasteful? Would we tolerate so many food products with five-syllable ingredients? Would we make so many development choices that destroy farmland? Would  
*(continued on p. 75)*



# “Dreeeeem On!”

## The Re-Education of a Nonprofit Seeking to Build Community

By Danielle Phoenix

**F**ebruary 2009. We had finally unpacked the remaining wrinkled clothes from our three-month European backpacking adventure. There’s something about returning from travels that calls me to reevaluate my life missions.

“OK, after the first six months of ‘Dreeming,’ I think our goals for this thing have to be refocused. Traveling around the world to teach people how to ‘Manifest their Dreems’ may be a bit too broad,” I admitted to Melinda as we settled in for the evening.

“Yeah, I agree. Let’s get specific,” she asserted as we sat rolling around the acronym that presently fit our new-born life goal of creating a nonprofit, called Dreem Reality—“Dare Reason. Evolve Existence. Manifest Reality.” Idealistic, lofty, it needed some real fine tuning. I wanted to get in touch with my original motivation, so I thought back through memories and experiences. Sitting comfortably, I dug deep to remember what *my* “Dreem” has been.

In 2003 I was first introduced to the concept of “community” by a new friend and blissful advocate of something called the National Rainbow Gathering. The stories were enough to motivate Christopher Kindig (presently the COMMUNITIES magazine Marketing Manager) and me, then 19 years old, to purchase a school bus, convert it to run on veggie oil, and travel around with a group of friends on a mission (whether we knew it or not) to find community. “Earth Tribe” is what we called ourselves. We were super young, naïve, and full of powerful inspiration. Those first couple of years Christopher and I dreamt of a community in Costa Rica, away from society, away from the political turmoil of America, researching monkey habits, and living in ewok-style tree houses. We didn’t know how or when this would happen, but knew it had to be our future.

These memories bubbled up like the recently sampled springs of Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic—rejuvenating and providing clarity as to how to refocus.

“Let’s focus on education, of ourselves and others; learn how to create a community and share this knowledge with people along the way,” I suggested to Melinda.

This type of reevaluation and refocus appears consistently throughout the history of Dreem Reality. We’ve struggled to wrangle in this concept of “community” from the Dreemy ethers to enact it within the steadfast motions of everyday life.

**June 2011.** Dreem Reality existed officially as an educational nonprofit on paper. Melinda and I, as founders, had focused our literature and dialog, receiving the stamp of approval from the government. We even worked out a more relevant acronym: “Discover, Research, Educate, Evolve, Manifest Reality.” Now all we had to do was truly implement this mission of “education.” It’s amazing what a challenge it can be to turn ideas into physical presence...to make Dreems into Reality.



During this time, all efforts were poured into planning a kitchen for 2011's Rainbow Gathering in Washington State. This was the first true test of our ability to manifest a physical representation of community. We hoped to bring people together with a shared vision, inform them of our Dreems for community, let them know we were serious, and build our family network. At the time this was the only way we knew how. And what a success it was! DreemKitchen, nestled in a satellite, snow-drifted meadow, brought confirmation. It gave us a real taste of community: the power of strangers and friends who come together to collectively create something magical. Needless to say, Rainbow is a temporary community and exists as almost a retreat for many of us as we return to "Babylon" for the rest of the year.

Blissfully high on the success of DreemKitchen, Melinda and I dove into the evolution of the organization. We held Dreem Meetings every week, taking down minutes and coming up with idea after idea. But let's face it, we were youthful Californian transients at the time. Relocating every few months to a new city was thrilling, but how can you create everyday community unless you have a center to operate from, or a team of consistent locals to identify with, grow with, learn from? Without a community to belong to initially, we could never fully answer the question "But what do you *do* as an organization?"—let alone feel justified in asking for donations!

We were two mid-20s ladies floating around with great ideas, a cute newsletter, and a blog full of theoretical progress reports. We needed solid ground to plant these seeds of inspiration we had been carrying around for years—though hon-

estly, I don't think we knew this was the answer to our frustrating lack of progress.

**January 2012.** Eureka! No, not the city, though we had visited there for a bit too. More "Eureka!" in that Melinda was inspired to attend school in Santa Cruz, California. Nothing grounds you more than your partner dedicating to a Masters program in Chinese Medicine. It took us about three months to plant our first significant seed, DreemGardens. And as is appropriate, we launched this project on Earth Day, watching it blossom rapidly.

Similar to DreemKitchen's mission of bringing people together to build community, DreemGardens was really the grassroots movement we needed. The project proposed bringing teams of volunteers to homes to establish backyard gardens, for free! All the

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## My ego squirmed at the loss of my rurally reclusive DreemLand.

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while volunteers got hands-on gardening education and we built a team of Dreemers that emerged as leaders and co-creators. Gloriously, each weekend held a new home garden planted with more volunteers involved. Educational/motivational videos for each garden accompanied our proud newsletters, and requests for donations/grants now seemed reasonable—though mostly unanswered. (YouTube "DreemTV" to see DreemGardens in action.)

All the while, the Dreem for a rural community persisted in my mind as the ultimate goal. It had taken form over the years, now playfully called DreemLand, We decided after reading Diana Leaf Christian's *Finding Community* that it would be an ecovillage, complete with educational workshops, permaculturally successful gardens, WWOOF-ing, internships, workshops, 50+ acres of preserved land, and a year-round kids' camp—the whole nine yards. And I wanted to start a new one, my own way, like the generation of pioneering hippies had done all over the States when they were my age.

As swiftly as DreemGardens fruited, it quickly went to seed. Perhaps it was the shift in seasons. Perhaps it was that we were all tired from our over-commitment the first few months. Perhaps, though, it was my well-intentioned selfish Dreem of this far-off rural community and the millions of project ideas I had to "get there." I was unable to see the community that existed right in front of my face, every day.

In a powerful "last hurrah" before the winter season set in, the core group of Dreemers attended the FIC's 2012 Art of Community event in September. In true Dreem style, we came onto the scene with handmade team shirts, business cards (Dreem cards we like to call them), sponsorship in the event program, a plan to attend



as many different classes as possible, and our infamous “Dreeeeeeeeeeeem Onnnnnn!” cheer. Our youthful motivation was well received by our elder community creators and we soaked in as much knowledge as possible. We made connections to many experienced community builders who, upon reading this article, will probably recognize a familiar struggle while making their own Dreems into Reality through their multi-decade-long journeys.

I want to honor some of these pioneers by sharing very poignant lessons from this event:

- Starting your own community is very difficult; it may be better to put your energy into those already established. (Thank you to the Monan’s Rilllers.)
- Own your home town, transforming it radically by reclaiming public spaces and bringing down fences. (Thank you Mark Lakeman and City Repair.)
- Begin local, inspire your home street. Allow that people will naturally organize and connect as is appropriate. (Thank you Richard Flyer and Connecting the Good.)
- Don’t give up. (Thank you everyone else there!)

These lessons and the onset of winter brought a stumbling confusion as to where Dreem Reality was headed, and what my role as a leader was. My fellow Dreemers celebrated the power of transforming our home town of Santa Cruz. My ego squirmed at the loss of my rurally reclusive DreemLand. The newsletters, videos, gardens, and meetings went into a necessary hibernation. A time to reflect, self-nourish, and once again...refocus.

**February 2013.** My first decade of seeking community accompanies the approaching spring, as pink-white plum blossoms take to the trees in our DreemGarden-transformed back yard. I am rejuvenated and ready for the next evolution. The time is coming to actualize the reality that our society consists of growing centers of populated spaces. Most people spend their everyday life in towns and cities, and these places are hot spots for true change. It is here where Dreem Reality will focus its efforts fully to create community this year.

We will persist. We will find our niche among the growing list of organizations, groups, and projects in Santa Cruz that seek to establish everyday community. We

will embrace Time Bank Santa Cruz, The Homeless Garden Project, Resilient Community Leaders, various Farmers Markets, and the like. We will work in cooperation while continuing to provide our Dreemy enthusiasm in the gardens of Santa Cruz. We will remain open to the vast array of community possibilities—rural, urban, and everything in between. As the story of Dreem Reality unfolds further, I anticipate the process of continued reevaluation and refocus necessary to fulfill our goals of community, everyday. Above all, we will never give up, and always be sure to...

“Dreeeeeeeeeeeem Onnnnnn!” ☺

*Danielle Phoenix, Executive Director and Vice President of Dreem Reality (www.DreemReality.org; YouTube: DreemReality), grew up many places across the States, but feels at home in California, Dreeming it up out west. She’s very interested in facilitating successful systems to make positive change in the world. She has a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and presently pursues American Sign Language and Deaf Studies.*



Photos courtesy of Danielle Phoenix

# Jump on the Wisdom Train

By Colin Doyle

*All aboard! Fast track to wisdom! High-speed life experience, with views from every window.  
Departing whenever you're ready, from the intentional communities platform*

I only partly recognized I was hopping on this train when I joined my first intentional community over two years ago, but along the way it's been an illuminating ride. My life experience during this time has been both concentrated (with opportunities to learn and mature coming faster than otherwise) and varied (community is a microcosm of society at large, in one spot). It's like life from the window of an express train rather than a slow-moving subway, experiencing diverse things faster. And since the primary ingredient in wisdom is life experience, this makes intentional community life a fast track to wisdom.

This is my general belief, based mostly my own experience. To get specific, let's dive into this personal case study. Roight!

## Passenger #1

First off, some background. In fall 2010 I moved to Lost Valley Education and Event Center (the community side of which is now called Meadowsong Ecovillage), 18 miles outside Eugene, Oregon. It's a combination of aspiring ecovillage of about 50 residents, conference center hosting outside groups, and education center offering sustainability experiences. There are a number of sides to Lost Valley, and I've been involved with almost all of them since early on in my time here.

I came to Lost Valley as an assistant to one of the two main people in the organization. Soon after, we washed up on the financial rocks, some of the crew left in dinghies, and I was given more responsibility. I learned first-hand about internal business operations as we did things like choreograph payments to elude the feared bounced check, and try to extricate ourselves from an overpriced phone lease. I didn't expect to play this role at a sustainability-inspired center, but flowery fields are not what the train was passing through during that dark winter.

The situation thawed and I was soon promoted by the group to run the education programs. The main focus of them was permaculture design, of great interest to me but not something I knew much about (I had just spent two years teaching, but not that). Since then, my permaculture knowledge has grown, from the nitty gritty of things like greywater systems and grape pruning, to who's who on the Northwest scene, to designing an ideal course progression.

At Lost Valley I've also gotten a lot of experience in facilitating meetings. I hadn't run many before this journey, but have done so dozens of times now. They are also of varying types, such as our managers' team meeting with clear agenda items, goals, and time limits; and the more informal community meetings where

residents' being heard is more important than efficient decision-making. It's been fun, too, wearing different hats (literally—I take off my facilitator hat when speaking for myself) and evolving with the people around me—for example, reading the situation to insert humor or swiftness or appreciation as appropriate.

Then there's the inner realm. In the community at Lost Valley there is an underlying culture (plus occasional workshops) of spiritual life and personal development. Using tools I've been given and role models to guide, I'm better able to recognize my personal patterns and their possible roots, notice if they serve me or hold me back, and identify those same things in others. I contrast this reflectiveness with a typical night in my earlier life spent glued to a television (as a kid) or engulfed in a world-conquering computer game (as a teenager), and note the chasm between the two approaches. With reflection, I can see my personal trajectory more clearly now, and move away from that which is false.

Heck, on this trip I've even upped my ability in the food car, gaining lots of experience cooking balanced vegetarian meals for a crowd. My life at Lost Valley includes everything from balance sheets to cookie sheets.

A final area that I have been much exposed to is interpersonal communication and dealing with conflict. At Lost Valley individuals actively choose to *be* and *live* together rather than remain atomized couples or nuclear families. Sharing things like bathrooms, meals, and feelings, there is extra need for functional communication and ways of dealing with conflict as it arises, which it inevitably will. I have been frequently privy to conversation that is rooted in honest and soft communication of needs and problems, mature ways of dealing with each other that can breed peace or at least mutual understanding. Certain individuals continually impress me with their ability to successfully navigate situations away from looming hurt or anger and toward clarity and openness with each other. It's like turning out a great dinner, no matter what the ingredients are on hand.

For my part, I've been involved with such situations more than some people at Lost Valley because for much of my time I've served on Community Council. It is the subgroup that deals with infractions of community rules and mediation between individuals who need it. It's kind of where the community dirty work happens, addressing so-and-so who is violating the smoking policy, or X and Y who've had two recent volatile interactions. If there's a place for wisdom, it's in these spots. And I'm learning as I go—this is truly experiential education, but not in the usual sense of the term, referring to wilderness skills like making fire by hand (though I have learned about

that, too—it's a well-rounded experience, indeed!).

In my two-plus years at Lost Valley I have been exposed to many different arenas of life and work, much more so (I believe) than if I had not been in intentional community. Perhaps part of this varied experience and therefore learning is due to Lost Valley's small size and unusual combination of nonprofit and community, but I believe this effect is common in other intentional communities.

## Two Other Factors

Based on my experience and observation, I see two further reasons why life in intentional community breeds concentrated life experience and therefore wisdom.

One is that people in intentional community tend not to distract themselves as much as people in conventional society, and choose to connect to each other and themselves more. People can learn from others' life lessons much better through conversation than through watching television; learn about the world and our place in it by being outdoors rather than paying attention to supposed "news"; and gain personal insight by sitting with one's thoughts and emotions instead of watching YouTube videos. This has certainly been the case for me on this train, and for many in my community—heck, out of 50 residents at Lost Valley, none have television service, and finding a way to watch the Super Bowl takes some effort.

A personal example of connecting with others—and learning from it—is when I hiked up rocky Diamond Peak with a fellow community mate, along the way hearing from him what it was like to be in the military. I could have done the hike alone, and likely would have before I moved to community, but living in community made it easy and natural to do this hike together. Connecting with a community member in a meaningful way added a bonus layer of second-hand life experience.

A second reason that living in intentional community generally accelerates life is because people who choose to live in a communal setting with like-minded strangers are, in my experience, typically headstrong and passionate, and "go for it" more than the average. These folks shoot high, actively trying to make their ideal future a reality and engaging in less complacency than is common in conventional American life. This more engaged brand of living breeds life experience faster, and therefore more wisdom.

An example that I've seen often at Lost Valley is an individual informing coworkers when her or his role is chafing, and seeking to alter arrangements so it works better, rather than just

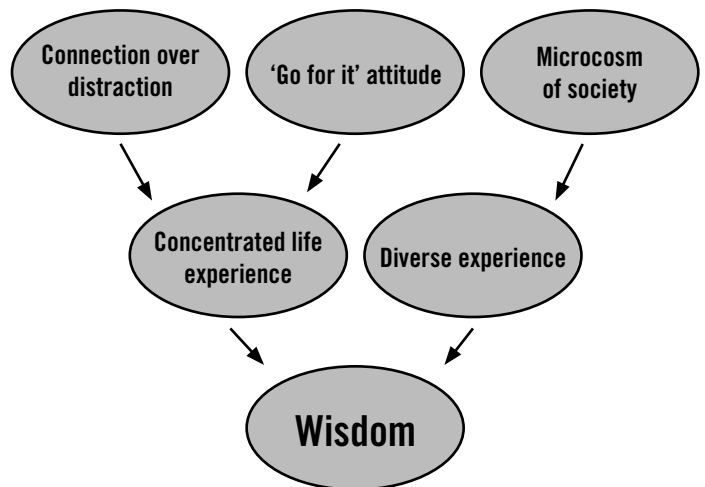
putting up with it. Individuals also actively stimulate work parties to get things done, or social events to have fun. Whether this succeeds or they get flak from others, either way it's more fodder for long-term insight. A personal example is that I'm now more willing to approach someone to tactfully say things that could easily be left unsaid, like telling a woman that I'm interested in her romantically.

## Full Speed Ahead

Based on my personal experience at Lost Valley, plus the second-hand experience of others I've spoken with or read about (including in this here magazine), I believe life in intentional community on the whole leads to a broader, more rounded life experience than is typical in the surrounding society, and concentrates this experience into a shorter time. As a result of this enhanced life experience, I believe intentional community living on average makes its participants wiser than they would otherwise be. So, if you're up for it, come jump on the wisdom train—*chugga chugga!* 🐘

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*Colin Doyle lives at Lost Valley Education and Event Center in Dexter, Oregon (its resident community is now called Meadowsong Ecovillage). His job is to get permaculture systems active on site and run educational programs. See [lostvalley.org](http://lostvalley.org) for more information. Colin enjoys different places and cultures, and loves to hike up big mountains to see vast views.*



## What Is Wisdom?

To me, wisdom is the highest thing (though love is up there, too). I define wisdom as "knowing what to do when," which also includes knowing what *not* to do and when. To me, this highest of virtues (this sounds Socratic) encompasses the other extremely important ones of honesty, integrity, and justice. But really, it's living these characteristics that matters—carrying out a wise action or speaking honest words, not just the ideal of them in the abstract (now it sounds Platonic). So when I speak of wisdom in this article, that's what I'm getting at. But you—what do *you* think? What is wisdom to *you*?

—C.D.

# Mount Madonna's Wisdom for Everyday Life

*By Ward Mailliard with Avi Kruley, Brajesh Friedberg, Dayanand Diffenbaugh, Iris Kachuck, Ratna Jenna Sturz, Savita Kay Brownfield, and Stephanie Conway*

It has been our privilege, challenge, joy, and everyday struggle to be part of the founding and growth of the Mount Madonna Center community since it was first envisioned in 1974. We began actually living in community in March of 1978, on a 350 acre mountaintop property overlooking the Pajaro Valley and the ocean. Our community is upheld by three traditional pillars: Sadhana (regular spiritual practice), Karma Yoga (service to others), and Satsang (supportive community in the seeking of truth).

The story of what we did to build a retreat facility and private school (K-12) could fill a very hefty volume or two, as we suspect there would be as many different narratives as people who participated in this journey. One of the things we believe about community is that the world suffers deeply from its loss. The disconnection and isolation of a society that moves too fast, depends too much upon material things to fill the void of trust between people, and holds competitive individualism among its core values is an unfolding tragedy of great proportion.

This is not to say community is easy. At least in our experience, it definitely is not. At Mount Madonna we have struggled, made lots of mistakes, experienced many joyous moments, struggled some more, constantly revised, inevitably changed, and by the commitment and hard work of many, we have survived and prospered. Now, after 35 years, we still remain as curious about the future of our community as ever.

We know that a community is a living ecosystem that goes through stages of development. What began with a hardy crew of five pioneers has become a residential community of about 80. The programs that hosted 10 to 20 people in the old ranch house now accommodate 20 to 300 people in a fully developed

conference center and campgrounds, often hosting three or four program groups on a weekend. Our Yoga Teacher Training that started with a dozen participants now draws up to 65. We now offer a master's degree program in Ayurveda and we are creating master's degree programs in Yoga and in Community Studies. Our children's school (Mount Madonna School) that began in an enclosed carport now has its own campus and serves about 200 preschool through high school students.

Somehow the constant growth and change do not strike us as the most important thing to know about community, although they are integral to the experience. Growth and change are an unavoidable byproduct of sustaining any enterprise. More important to understand is that healthy community is based upon good relationship, shared vision, and commitment. This goes to the heart of the matter. To thrive, a community requires a collaborative effort based upon a shared vision, and that is nourished by the willingness to listen to each other with curiosity.

Mount Madonna community was inspired and guided by the



Photos courtesy of Ward Mailliard



presence of a wise leader, Baba Hari Dass, a silent monk. The trust we have in him has greatly accelerated our development. He has acted as a magnetizing force and an absorber of the shadow of community. However, no community can survive the inevitable passing of a charismatic founder unless it finds a way to make the journey to a true collaboration.

To do that and to see the way forward for the community through the challenges that will surely arise, we need to develop a greater clarity about what sustains us and the capacity to include diverse viewpoints. If we imagine that the best answer to a problem sits in the middle of a circle, then each of us is going to see it from a different angle. Each of us may be correct, and at the same time incomplete in our individual understandings.

This is not a new concept. The Rig Veda talks about sages of ancient times being in a circle of dialogue to name the world into being. They were in search of the truth of what things were. The verses say that truth could come only from taking into account many perspectives. The Vedic hymn also says when the sages spent the time and effort to be in this kind of dialogue to discover a shared vision of the world, friendship developed and community emerged.

In our understanding of this, true dialogue is not positional compromise, but rather an opening that produces a richer, truer conception of the good. So after many years of being part of the Mount Madonna circle, this is what we are still learning. We must honor different viewpoints, and still be able to decide and move forward.

What is next? The work of community is never finished. We have much to do in improving communication, relationships, inclusion, and decision making. We need to envision and enact

a future that will be sustainable and adhere to the principles on which we are founded. We need to think about the next steps beyond the gift and experience of living with an inspired teacher. This will mean strengthening all the processes of our community so that decisions are as fair and as transparent as possible. We also have to think about how to preserve the essential teachings that are the roots of the community since its inception. The essential question is how do we conserve the perpetual inquiry into the nature of truth that lies at the heart of spiritual practice?

We are currently working on a major initiative: the Mount Madonna Institute, offering master's degrees in Yoga, Ayurveda, and Community Studies. We believe that by creating an officially recognized degree program we can attract others who want to be in a shared inquiry and practice of spiritual values and the many aspects of creating a healthy and sustainable community. This will also compel us to continue our own inquiry. The basic principle is to teach what you need to learn. We intend that the very act of continually engaging with and exploring these subjects, in the context of a degree program, will produce a continued commitment to important values on which we were founded.

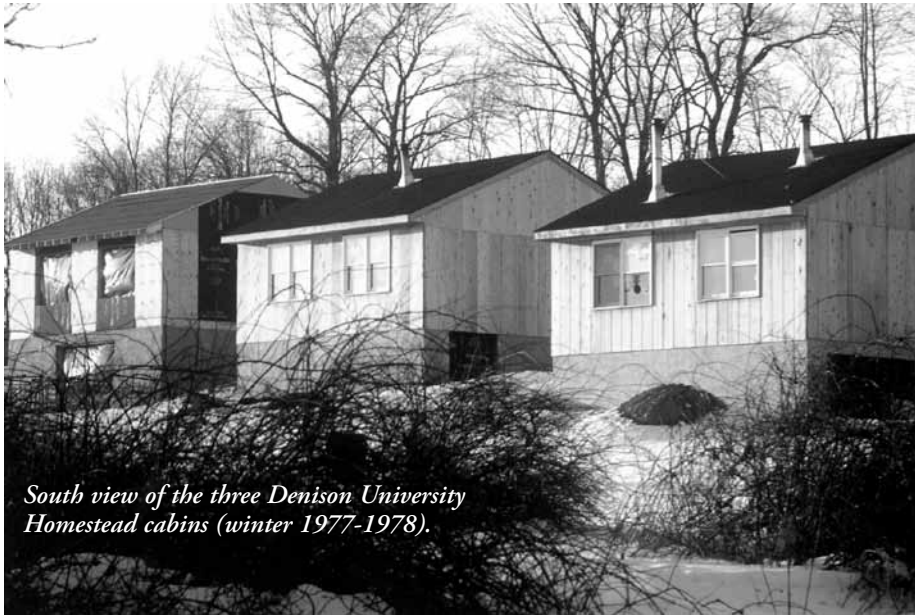
We agreed that the very process of creating the Community Studies degree program would be based on the principles that create good community. That means that it must be collaborative, in service to the whole, based on good relationships, dialogue, and fun. It also requires that we reach beyond our known boundaries to connect and collaborate with others seeking to bring greater awareness and new skills to all aspects of community life. We'll need to partner with others beyond our own system, and that will bring fresh energy to our community and allow us to explore new ways to serve the larger society. Being of service to the greater society and welcoming new energy into the community are two of the enduring principles of Mount Madonna. They have been consistent sources of vitality throughout this journey. And the journey continues. 🐦

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*Ward Mailliard, Avi Kruley, Brajesh Friedberg, Dayanand Difenbaugh, Iris Kachuck, Ratna Jenna Sturz, Savita Kay Brownfield, and Stephanie Conway are members of Mount Madonna Center; see [www.mountmadonna.org](http://www.mountmadonna.org).*

# Community Archiving: Denison University Homestead

*By Joshua Finnell*



*South view of the three Denison University Homestead cabins (winter 1977-1978).*

In 1977, a group of students and Dr. Bob Alrutz, a biology professor at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, began an experiment. Their mission was to create an agriculturally based self-reliant democratic community. The land would serve as the experiment station; and they would test environmentally sound building materials, agricultural methods, and living practices. Faculty and students worked together doing research and building. They had a seminar with a variety of teachers including Dr. Bob Alrutz and Dr. Paul Bennett. They built three cabins to house 12 students, with the expectation that those cabins would come down and new ones would be built about every three to five years. The Homestead thrived.

Today, the Denison University Homestead (see [homestead.denison.edu](http://homestead.denison.edu)) continues to thrive, though buildings are no longer constructed and subsequently demolished on the aforementioned three-to-five-year cycle. Over a 35-year period, the Homestead has proven to be a unique living experience among private liberal arts colleges. In addition to balancing the responsibilities of living in an intentional community in terms of food production and building maintenance, residents are also required to engage in outreach opportunities to the larger Granville community. The longevity of the Homestead is a testament to both individual and institutional support for this intentional community.

## Collective Memory

“The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it,” wrote the American pragmatist William James. For most people living in ecovillages, communes, cohousing, co-ops, or some form of intentional community, this sentiment finds expression in efforts at building and sustaining generations of community members. The underlying mission statement of most intentional communities is longevity. As a corollary, each successive generation needs to negotiate their relationship

to those who came before and those who will come after. This idea is explicit in the mission statement of the Homestead:

*The Homestead family encourages enrichment of the self and community through exploration and expression of our individual and collective creativity, ideas, emotions, and intellect. Our dynamic community nurtures life experiences that are self-affirming and empowering. These experiences contribute significantly to our future endeavors and create a collective spirit that unites the Homestead past and present.*

In light of this mission, how will each new member draw from and contribute to the collective memory of the Homestead?

A community archive is the foundation upon which collective memory is negotiated, framed, and constructed. Drawing upon a range of archived objects (pictures, meeting minutes, rosters, oral histories, letters, and diaries), members of a community produce an awareness and appreciation of their history. However, since most intentional communities do not have a professional archivist in their employ, or affiliation with an educational or heritage organization, the community archive is too often a neglected afterthought facing a range of challenges: dispersion among various members past and present, lack of interest, theft, format obsolescence, preservation issues, and accessibility issues. The Homestead, much like other intentional communities, had a 35-year history that was both geographically dispersed among past members and locally vulnerable to environmental elements.

## The Project

After two years of serving on the Homestead Advisory Board, and familiarizing myself with both the mission



and culture of the Homestead, I introduced the idea of organizing and digitally preserving the archive at a Homestead advisory meeting. There had been several attempts by previous Homesteaders to build an archival history, but those projects never manifested. My affiliation with the William Howard Doane Library would ensure that this archive would be preserved and made accessible for generations of Homesteaders. Several current Homesteaders expressed interest in the endeavor and began collecting materials from the cabins and delivering them to the library in December of 2011.

In the early phase of the project we began organizing items into categories of medium: documents, photographs, postcards, letters. Each document was then digitized and saved to an external hard drive. However, it became abundantly clear as we started scanning items that identifying people, places, and dates of photographs was going to be an obstacle in creating an accessible archive. Because the Homestead is an intentional community within a university context, residency rolls over every one to four years. Though this provides an infusion of fresh ideas to the Homestead, it also destabilizes the collective memory of the community over time.

Luckily, since its inception in 1977, the Homestead has held a reunion every five years. This event is held over a weekend in early summer, and allows past and present Homesteaders to connect with one another through the sharing of stories and friendship. The 35-year reunion was to take place in the summer of 2012, providing the perfect opportunity to harness the collective memory of Homesteaders from 1977 to 2007.

In preparation for the event, the reunion invitation outlined the details of the archiving project and encouraged Homesteaders to bring any items they wished to donate to our collection. This was also an opportunity for past Homesteaders to let us know if they did not want their image or writing to appear in an online archive. In order to identify images, posters of all the photographs we

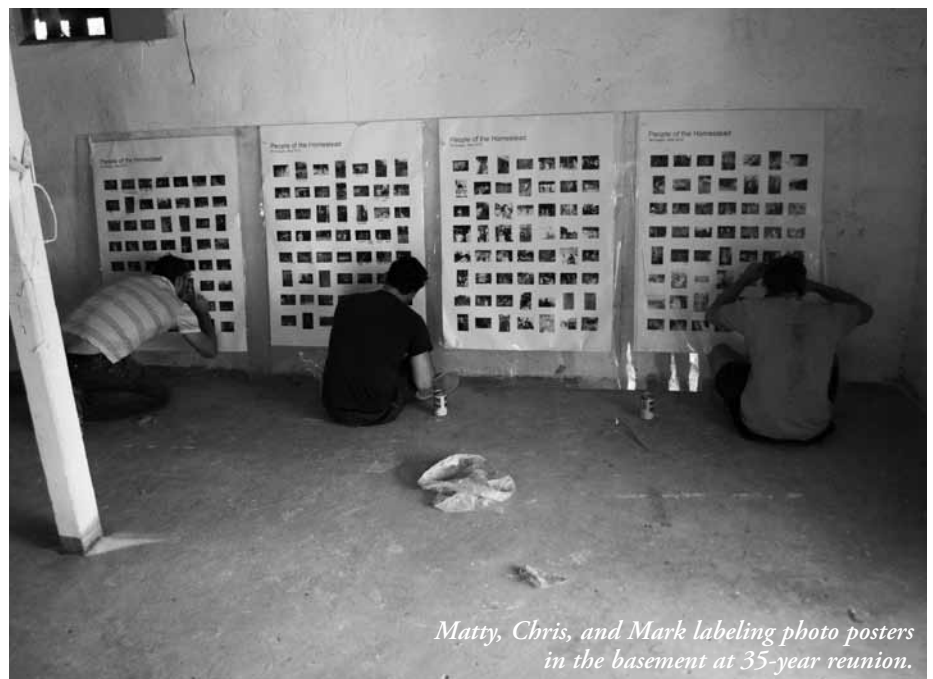
could not identify were hung around the cabins for former Homesteaders to write on during the reunion. Digital voice recorders were also employed in capturing oral histories from Homesteaders, past and present. The reunion not only proved fruitful in helping us create metadata (names, dates, pets), but also allowed us to capture the immaterial history of the Homestead embedded in stories and anecdotes.

After the reunion, the marked-up photo posters were used to identify all of our unknown images and to create a controlled vocabulary for keyword searching our digital archive. Over the summer of 2012, Homesteaders worked every day, scanning, identifying, and uploading the archival material to the Denison Resource Commons ([drc.denison.edu/handle/2374.DEN/775](http://drc.denison.edu/handle/2374.DEN/775)), our open-source institutional repository. The final product resulted in 2,600 items, all digitally preserved and searchable by keyword. At the end of the project, the physical material was either returned to the individual donor or integrated into the university archives collection.



*The Homestead archive delivered to the library digitization room by Elizabeth Schoby and Juan Pablo Sarmiento Torres.*

Photos courtesy of Joshua Finnell



*Matty, Chris, and Mark labeling photo posters in the basement at 35-year reunion.*

## Why Archive?

Succinctly, an archive is a discourse on power. It wasn't until the 1970s, coincidentally the same decade in which the Homestead was founded, that a radical critique of traditional archiving practices began to creep into institutional understandings of collecting. Leading the charge was Cornell University historian and archivist Gould P. Colman, who wrote in *The American Archivist* that the biggest problem facing archivists is the tendency to collect that which is most easily accessible. The collected papers of prominent individuals and receipts of financial transactions concerning construction and development litter the walls of institutional archives across the country. As a corollary, archives become, in the words of Colman, a "studied preservation of unrepresentative indicators of culture." The historical implications of archiving have been thoroughly explored by Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Jacques Derrida.

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## Archiving and authoring your own community history begins to preserve the cultural impact of your intentional community.

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The importance of archiving one's history is not only to preserve the collective memory of an individual intentional community, but also to document the cultural impact an intentional community has on its surroundings. The Homestead has its own individual history, but its history is also tied to the collective memory of Denison University. Until we undertook preserving the Homestead community archive, the only documentation the university held in its archive was two slender boxes full of financial reports and correspondence from the founding members. Not represented in the institutional archive were the stories and images of the members who not only created the Homestead, but also sustained it for the next 35 years.

Every intentional community exists within a larger town, city, or geographic community. Establishing regional connections with an allied cultural heritage institution (a historical society, museum, or university) is an excellent first step in the archiving process. Not only can you find financial support in the form of grants for an archiving project, you can also begin to amend the cultural authority concentrated in the domain of historical curators. By archiving and authoring your own community history, and creating dialogue with broader community partners, you can begin to preserve the cultural impact of your intentional community for future generations.

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# Picking Fights for Peace

By Janna Payne

**S**creaming, storming in, slamming doors, rolling her eyes, threatening, bad-mouthing, bullying, lying, and occasionally telling community members to f\*#! off are memories I have of someone I'll call Karen, with whom I lived in intentional community. In my memory, she was almost always speaking from a place of powerlessness.

Community members quickly learned not to challenge Karen: dancing around, tip-toeing, avoiding eye contact, and shrugging our shoulders. We acknowledged that even the slightest suggestion or subtlest criticism could set her off.

While we prided ourselves in negotiating, dialoguing, and offering honest feedback to one another, we avoided Karen at all costs, trying not to upset her.

It wasn't long, however, before I realized that avoiding conflict isn't the same as peacemaking. By not holding Karen accountable, I was encouraging her behavior. By remaining silent, I was allowing Karen to spread slander to outsiders and to negatively influence both the pulse and reputation of the community.

And so I stood up.

Gently and gradually, I mentioned to Karen when I disagreed, mentioned when I felt uncomfortable with her behavior, and mentioned when her actions were against the community code of conduct. I didn't raise my voice. I didn't fight. I didn't make any below-the-belt digs.

While my intention was to hold her accountable for her divisive behavior, Karen would usually respond by yelling, pointing her finger, accusing me of attacking her, or telling other community members that I had really laid into her: "Who the hell does she think she is telling me how to live?"

I wasn't surprised.

I knew the consequences of standing up to Karen and knew that she wouldn't take it well. What I didn't expect, however, was the reaction of other community members. They turtled

and squirmed. Most saw *my* behavior as disruptive. Most interpreted the situation as a "Janna vs. Karen" issue—not as my way of maintaining the collective or supporting the harassment-free community values. One person suggested I was egging Karen on, bringing out the worst in her. Another hinted that if I couldn't get along with Karen, perhaps community wasn't the place for me.

The unspoken—or perhaps spoken—consensus was that our community should be a conflict-free space. Our role was to honor the dignity and worth of Karen, to give her space to grow and heal, and to love her into existence.

With that philosophy in mind, a community leader announced that Karen was being asked to leave, citing that she seemed ready to move or to start her career, and not mentioning her aggressive behavior. In failing to address the real reasons behind this request, I felt that the leader shielded us from the truth, dishonoring our capacity for dialogue and relationship, dishonoring how we could learn from conflict.

While I know my understanding puts me at odds with some interpretations of peacemaking, I affirm setting healthy boundaries, giving/receiving honest feedback, and occasionally confronting others as essential practices for honoring the collective, promoting solidarity, and creating safe, egalitarian spaces. I think it is more important to maintain the collective than to forge a pseudo-relationship with an aggressor.

While it may be uncomfortable or even taboo, I believe intentional communities can benefit from having discussions and thinking critically about navigating tensions and responding to conflict. 🐾

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*Janna Payne is a Canadian who has lived in intentional community in Los Angeles, California; Toronto, Ontario; and Cork, Ireland.*

## Divisiveness

Am I divisive? Am I divisive when I point out time-honored, tried and true divides? Am I divisive when I point out the divide between the powerful and the powerless, the mattering and the marginalized, the haves and the have-nots, the leaders and the led, the helpers and the helped?

The easy answer is "yes."

Experience has shown me that ever-so-gently mentioning, whispering about, or pointing out a systemic injustice or divide has all eyes glaring and all fingers pointing:

How dare you?

How dare you not value relationship or unity?

Why can't you be happy?

Why can't you be happy with a little less pie and a lot less power?

Why can't you be happy, you critical, selfish bitch?

It seems I am divisive when I forget that, as a "less than," I am socially obligated to: listen and never speak, obey and never lead, relate and never teach.

I am divisive when I forget that, as a "less than," I am supposed to: be polite, maintain unity, respect others, and honor established power structures.

I am divisive when I stand up, find my voice, and point across the many preexisting and profound divides between the powerful and the powerless, the mattering and the marginalized, the haves and the have-nots, the leaders and the led, the helpers and the helped.

And so it is that I am divisive.

—J.P.

# Saying Goodbye to Consensus-with-Unanimity in European Communities

## Busting the Myth that Consensus-with-Unanimity Is Good for Communities, Part IV

By Diana Leafé Christian

*“Holacracy works so much better for Schoenwasser Ecovillage than consensus.”*  
—Ronald Wytek, Schoenwasser Ecovillage, Austria

As those who’ve read previous installments in this articles series may know, I no longer believe that consensus, as practiced by most intentional communities, is an optimal governance or decision-making method, or that it actually fosters greater harmony, trust, and connection, as promised by consensus trainers. Instead, I believe most communities that use consensus are hobbled by this choice and experience more conflict as a result. (For why I think this is true, see “Busting the Myth” Parts I, II, and III in COMMUNITIES #155, #156, and #158.)

In the last few years several European communities created modified versions of consensus. The modified methods still embody inclusion, equivalence, and transparency, and now seem more effective and efficient as well. And these communities report liking their modified methods a lot more. I’ll describe three such communities below.

Other European communities have switched to other methods of governance and decision-making method entirely, with similarly good results, as also noted below.

### Modifying Consensus for More Harmony, Trust, and Connection

**L’Arche de Saint Antoine, France.** Housed in a 900-year-old former Catholic seminary, this spiritual community is located in the small medieval village of L’Abbaye de Saint Antoine near Valance. It’s one of the network of income-sharing L’Arche (“ark”) communities in France established by 20th-century Christian mystic and Gandhi scholar, Lanzo del Vasto. L’Arche de Saint Antoine’s 21 adult members run a successful 90-bed conference center business, hosting over 80 groups and 3,000 visitors a year. I visited this unique “medieval” community in June 2012.

Early in its history L’Arche members modified their consensus process to use a smaller decision rule than unanimity for some of their decisions, and unanimity or 100 percent for more significant decisions. Here are their decision-rule percentages:

- Proposals in committee meetings: 66 percent supermajority vote
- Proposals in monthly business meetings: 75 percent
- Approving provisional members: 100 percent/unanimity
- Approving new full members: 100 percent/unanimity
- Electing their Director: 100 percent/unanimity
- Changing their bylaws: 100 percent/unanimity

**Kommune Niederkaufungen, Germany.** Kommune Niederkaufungen is a large, successful secular income-sharing community I had the pleasure to visit in August 2011.

Founded in 1986 in the small village of Niederkaufungen, the community has 60 members, who live and work in seven large adjacent timberframed houses. Their community-owned businesses include a seminar center, catering service, wood-working business, car-repair business, welding shop, daycare facility for elders, a private holistic kindergarten, and several other businesses. When I was there some people had concerns about their consensus decision-making process, which they’d used for the last 24-plus years. I did a short presentation about N Street Cohousing community’s modified consensus method, and am delighted they incorporated some aspects of this method into their new consensus process. Here is an excerpt from their report on their new method:

“When we couldn’t reach consensus on a proposal, whatever policy was currently in place remained in place, reflecting the conservative principle of consensus. One person, through the right to veto a proposal, could stop the community from changing something everyone wanted to change. Thus that person had power over the whole group. As a result, some community members withdrew from the decision-making process altogether.”

In June 2012, the community agreed to test a new modification of their consensus method. At the end of the two-year trial period they’ll decide if they want to continue using it.

Here's how it works:

First, they added the option of standing aside to their previous two options of approving or blocking a proposal. As an attempt to create a better balance between those who wanted change and those who wanted things to stay the same, they strengthened the position of those who wanted change, and now a block doesn't stop a proposal. Rather they use consensus-minus-three (meaning it takes four blocks to stop a proposal).

The following five steps of their new method apply to all proposals except to approving new incoming members, which still requires *everyone's* approval.

*Step One—Proposal Presented, Opinions Sampled:* Written proposals are posted on the community notice board in the dining room two weeks before the plenary meeting where it will be decided. A week later, the proposal is read out loud during the plenary meeting as being up for decision for the following week.

*Step Two—Expressing Concerns, Objections:* If in this first meeting someone raises an existential objection to the proposal, they are asked to explain their objection. (By "existential objection" they mean a basic, foundational objection to the proposal that is more significant than simply how to implement the proposal.) Others express their opinions about the proposal too. If, during this first plenary meeting, people have pressing questions or concerns about the proposal, the proposal's advocates will attempt to clarify or modify the proposal during the following week.

*Step Three—Testing for Consensus:* In the following week's plenary meeting the facilitator tests for consensus by asking if there are any stand-asides or blocks.

If there are any blocks, the next two cycles of their normal small work groups/discussion groups are set aside for continued conversations about the proposal in order to create a proposal acceptable to everyone. If this doesn't bring agreement, someone in the small work group can call for the fourth step.

*Step Four—Solution-Oriented Meetings:* Those expressing criticism or vetoing the proposal choose two or three other mem-

bers to participate in up to six solution-oriented meetings in up to two months' time in order to discuss the issue further and arrive at a decision which can be accepted by all. "We consider it a moral duty to the commune to participate in these meetings if one is asked to," they write. Any support which might help, such as another member facilitating the meetings, or using representatives in discussion, is offered on behalf of the community as a whole.

*Step Five—Supermajority Vote:* If no agreement can be reached after six small-group meetings in a two-month period, a decision of all members is called for on the original proposal. This is announced two weeks in advance and a written survey of opinion is posted on the notice board. The decision is called for in the following plenary meeting. The proposal is adopted if there are no more than three blocks (that is, four or more blocks are needed to reject the proposal). If there are four or more blocks the proposal is not adopted and the group continues the existing agreement or policy.

"We hope that we will now have better-quality decisions and more satisfaction with them, and we can reach agreement more often than in the past," they write. "At the same time, we hope to develop solutions that come as close to consensus as possible in situations in which we are not likely to reach full agreement."

After they use their new decision-making method for a year and a half, they'll evaluate it and decide whether they want to continue using it, modify it, or return to the more conventional consensus method they used before.

**Sieben Linden, Germany.** Sieben Linden is a large, successful, independent-income ecovillage on 203 acres of farmland outside the small town of Poppau in the former East Germany. One of the leading communities in GEN-Europe, it has 140 residents, who earn incomes through various private businesses and social enterprises. Some run a book printing and distributing company, publishing *Eurotopia*, the European version of the *Communities Directory*, among other books. Others teach strawbale construction or Gaia Education's Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course. Others work as employees in the community-owned conference center business. I was delighted to finally see this famous ecovillage in August 2011.

*Changing their decision-rule.* Before they revised their consensus method, Sieben Linden often had what they called "lukewarm" decisions, when rather large percentages of members had strongly held views and feelings about different sides of an issue (for example, vegans' and omnivores' differing views about the issue of whether to farm with livestock). So, since everyone knew that controversial proposals would certainly be blocked, the only proposals that could pass were those which solved a problem in ways that no one really wanted much but nobody would block either.

Of course this meant they originally had far too much blocking. One evening during an informal talk I gave about governance and decision-making, I asked if they'd ever had too much blocking. People shook their heads. "No," several said. Yet one of their longtime members said she had been so demoralized by all the blocking they formerly had that she would have left the community—but stayed because her kids loved living there.

So in the early 2000s Sieben Linden modified their consensus process to specifically address these issues.

Like L'Arche de Saint Antoine and Kommune Niederkaufungen, they still use the consensus *process* itself, but they changed their decision rule to four decision options and a supermajority vote.

Their decision options are: (1) Support the proposal. (2) Stand aside. (3) Do not support the proposal. (If a person hasn't read it, doesn't know enough about it, can't decide, or has no opinion, but doesn't want to stop it either.) (4) Block.

They ask for a show of hands for each of the four options: supporting the proposal, standing aside, not supporting the proposal, and blocking, and require a 75 percent supermajority vote to pass a proposal. Thus a proposal passes only under two conditions: (1) more than 75 percent support it, and (2) there are no vetoes (blocks).

If, for example, enough people had no opinion or didn't like the proposal much or stood aside, there'd be less than 75 percent supporting it. It would be a so-so proposal and it wouldn't pass—too "lukewarm." But when 75 percent actively want a proposal, it passes.

Unless there's a block.

*Blocks at Sieben Linden.* If there is just one block, the person who blocked must meet with the person who brought the proposal and other, more neutral people—maybe six to eight people total—in solution-oriented meetings, like at N Street Cohousing and Kommune Niederkaufungen. The purpose of the meetings are to co-create a new proposal to bring to the next monthly meeting.

If this doesn't happen, the original proposal comes back and can be passed if 75 percent support the proposal. Thus the block is overruled and the proposal passes.

If there are two or more blocks, they use the same process. However, if no new proposal is created in the solution-oriented meetings, they just continue meeting for awhile. But if the small group cannot create a new proposal, the block stands and the proposal does not pass.

*Choosing Committee Members.* Sieben Linden members were getting tired of the time-consuming process of monitoring committee decisions in the monthly meetings too. Too many people were monitoring and/or deciding too many things—it was wearing them out. "Is there a way we could just trust our committees to just do their job and then leave them alone do it?" Here's how they also revised their committee system.

They reserve the monthly whole-community meetings for big-picture policy decisions only, delegate all other items to their five committees, and (through a ballot nomination process) *choose* each member of each of their five big committees—and then wholly trust the committee members to do a good job of carrying out each committee's duties and spending its allocated budget money without oversight.

This means that unlike most communities, they no longer allow any community member to volunteer to join a committee. Rather, they specifically *elect*

the community members they most trust for each specific committee. Then it's easy to trust each committee and just let them do their jobs. It's like a community's new-member selection process carried out at the committee level.

Their ballot nomination process is based on each Sieben Linden member's opinion of each other member's level of maturity, skill, and experience relative to the required responsibilities and tasks of each committee. (When I first heard this my jaw dropped. It's so *radical*—communities don't *do* things like this. But I now think it's an excellent idea, and advocate this process in my workshops.)

When it's time to elect committee members, everyone gets a ballot which lists all Sieben Linden members with blank nomination boxes for each of the five committees after each name.

	<b>Settlement Cooperative</b> <i>(land co-op legal entity)</i> Property and infrastructure co-ownership	<b>Land Use and Building Policy</b> Neighborhood development, new buildings, etc.	<b>Social</b> Process, communication, group dynamics (including sub-committee on membership)	<b>Food</b> <i>(non-exempt nonprofit)</i> Food: purchase, storage, preparation	<b>Circle of Friends</b> <i>(tax-deductible nonprofit)</i> Sieben Linden Educational Center workshops and courses; newsletter
Member A			X		X
Member B					
Member C					X
Member D	X				
Member E					
Member F					
Member G			X		
Member H					
etc., for all 100 adult members					

Each Sieben Linden member gets to nominate five people for each committee, putting a check mark in the box next to each of the five people they believe will be the best to serve on that particular committee. The members who get the most nominations for any given committee are asked to serve on that committee.

People can let others know ahead of time that they'd like to serve on a particular committee. They can also decline to serve on a committee if they're chosen. And not everyone who wants to serve on a particular committee necessarily gets enough nominations to do so. Two Sieben Linden members told me they wanted to be on certain committees but didn't get on because they didn't get enough nominations.

(Of Sieben Linden's five committees, three are their own legal entities—one co-op and two nonprofits. All Sieben Linden members are members of these three legal entities, yet only those who are elected serve on the committee in an official capacity.)

I'm impressed with this method because it empowers committees—and thus the whole community—and reverses what happens when different people distrust a committee or certain people on it. When this happens there can be *retroactive* blocking of committee decisions after publication of committee minutes. This can result in committee members getting burned out, demoralized, ceasing to meet for awhile, and/or committee members quitting in disgust. Then the community loses valuable experience, expertise, and labor for needed tasks. And/or the tasks just don't get done at all. This happened several times at the community I've called "Green Meadow" in this article series. Ouch! (See previous articles in Summer 2012, Fall 2012, and Spring 2013 issues.)

## Changing to Newer Governance and Decision-Making Methods

Some European communities stopped using consensus altogether and switched to newer methods.

Sociocracy, developed in the Netherlands in the 1970s, and Holacracy, developed in the US in the early 2000s, are each whole-systems governance methods which include a decision-making process. (Governance is how a group organizes its flow of work, money, and information, and is more comprehensive than simply a way to make decisions.) In both Sociocracy and Holacracy everyone has a voice in modifying and approving proposals and everyone's consent is required to pass a proposal. However, unlike in consensus, decisions can be changed easily, which means there is far less pressure to make a "perfect" decision. Decisions need only be "good enough for now" and can easily be changed again with experience or new information. This seems to liberate energy, optimism, creativity, and freedom to try new things. Both methods have a collaborative, win/win decision-making process which doesn't allow the kinds of power-over dynamics that can occur with consensus-with-unanimity and no recourse if someone blocks. Both methods, when used correctly, tend to generate a sense of connection, trust, and well-being in the group.

ZEGG is a 35-year-old community in Belzig, Germany, and founders of the ZEGG Forum process, which, like L'Arche and Sieben Linden, run a conference and seminar business. ZEGG switched from consensus to Holacracy in 2010.

Schoenwasser Ecodorf, a forming ecovillage in Zurndorf, Austria, switched to Holacracy in 2010. They also use Systemic Consensus, a new mathematics-based decision-making method developed by two systems analysts at the University of Graz.

In Systemic Consensus the group develops and discusses proposals just as in the consensus process; however, when it's time to make the decision, each group member expresses their amount of resistance to the proposal through a point scale of 0 to 10. Its founders, Professors Erich Visotschnig and Siegfried Schrotta, say that using this point scale to indicate the felt-sense of resistance to a proposal allows people to express a gradient of support for a proposal, which more closely matches how people really feel about proposals instead of only being able to choose between supporting, not supporting, or standing aside from a proposal. For more about Systemic Consensus, see the online article, "Systemic Consensus: Fast, Visual, and Hard to Argue With."

Other European communities that switched to Sociocracy or used it from the beginning include Bridgeport Cohousing, England; Centraalwonen Cohousing, De Doortzeters Cohousing, and Bergen Ecovillage in The Netherlands; Les Choux Lents Cohous-

ing in France; and Ecovila KanAwen in Spain. Two communities in Australia, Blue Mountain Cohousing and Narara Ecovillage, chose Sociocracy from the beginning.

In the US, Lost Valley Educational Center/Meadowsong Ecovillage in Oregon switched from consensus to Sociocracy in 2010. (See "Sociocracy: A Permaculture Approach to Community Evolution," Winter 2011 issue, #153.) Katywil Cohousing in Massachusetts, Green Haven Cohousing in Connecticut, and Ecovillage at Loudon County in Virginia all used Sociocracy from the beginning. And Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri is now considering the Town Meeting method, in which eight elected representatives will make decisions previously made by consensus in whole-community meetings.

In the Fall 2013 issue we'll look at how the Sociocracy governance and decision-making system works, which North American communities now use it, and how it's working for them. 🐰

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*Diana Leafe Christian, author of the books *Creating a Life Together* and *Finding Community*, is publisher of Ecovillages, a free online newsletter about ecovillages worldwide ([EcovillageNews.org](http://EcovillageNews.org)). She is a trainer in GEN's Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) program, and speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops internationally. See [www.DianaLeafeChristian.org](http://www.DianaLeafeChristian.org).*

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### Resources

- *Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making*, Tim Hartnett (New Society Publishers, 2011): [consensusbook.com](http://consensusbook.com)
- N Street Consensus Method: "How the 'N Street Consensus Method' Helps N Street Cohousing Thrive" (COMMUNITIES Winter 2012 issue, #157—or Google the online article, "Is Consensus Right for Your Group? Part I")
- "Sociocracy: A Permaculture Approach to Community Evolution," Melanie Rios (COMMUNITIES Winter 2011 issue)
- *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy, A Guide to Sociocratic Principles and Methods*, John Buck and Sharon Villines (2007): [www.sociocracy.info](http://www.sociocracy.info)
- SocioNet online discussion: [www.socionet.us](http://www.socionet.us)
- The Sociocracy Consulting Group: [www.sociocracy-consulting.com](http://www.sociocracy-consulting.com)

- Videos, "Pioneer Valley Governance," Parts 1 through 4, YouTube.com (Author Diana Leafe Christian giving a presentation about consensus and Sociocracy at Pioneer Valley Cohousing in February.)
- *Holacracy One*: [www.holacracy.org](http://www.holacracy.org)
- Systemic Consensus: Google online article, "Systemic Consensus: Fast, Visual, and Hard to Argue With"

#### Community Websites:

- L'Arche de Saint Antoine, France: [www.arche-de-st-antoine.com](http://www.arche-de-st-antoine.com) (French)
- Kommune Niederkaufungen, Germany: [www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de/english-informations](http://www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de/english-informations) (English)
- Sieben Linden, Germany: [www.siebenlinden.de](http://www.siebenlinden.de) (click British flag for English version)

- ZEGG, Germany: [www.zegg.de/english](http://www.zegg.de/english) (English)
- Schoenwasser Ecodorf, Austria: [www.keimblatt.at](http://www.keimblatt.at) (German)
- Les Choux Lents, France: [leschouxlents.potager.org](http://leschouxlents.potager.org) (French)
- KanAwen, Spain: [www.valldebiert.org](http://www.valldebiert.org) (click "In English")
- Ecodorp Bergen, The Netherlands: [www.ecodorpbergen.nl](http://www.ecodorpbergen.nl) (Dutch)
- Lost Valley Educational Center/Meadowsong Ecovillage, US: [lostvalley.org](http://lostvalley.org)
- Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, US: [www.dancingrabbit.org](http://www.dancingrabbit.org)

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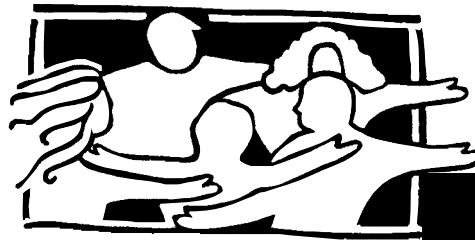


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## PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEB SITES

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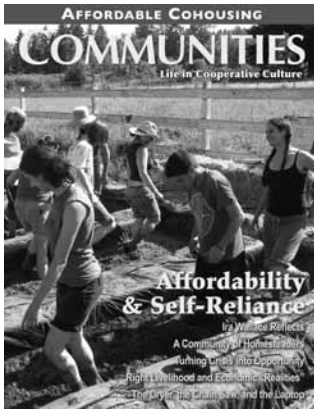
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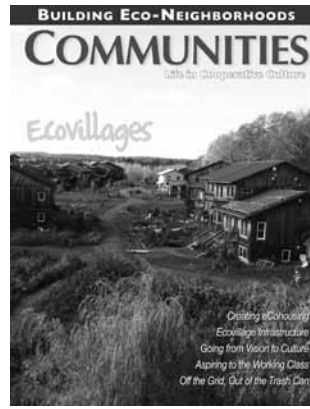
## #158 Affordability and Self-Reliance

Right Livelihood and Economic Realities; Creating a Community of Homesteaders; Lymeade: Turning Crisis into Opportunity; Lessons from a Childhood in Maine; Achieving Affordability with Cohousing; Canadian Ecovillages; Consensus; Money, Sustainability, and Ecology; Affordability: Angst and Angels (Spring '13)



## #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-Village; 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

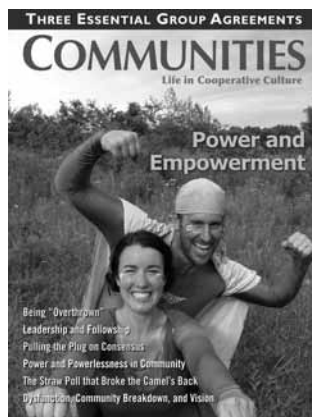
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## #152 Right Livelihood

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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#159

## LETTERS

(continued from p. 5)

aspects of the larger, non-communitarian world. What is FIC's vision of how the world can be if we were calling the shots? Can the entire world be converted to our principles, while retaining the positive attributes of modern technology? Can one invent and produce the iPad, run a steel mill, or make high-tech shoes and camping gear competitively while being a communitarian, or is community destined to remain a valuable but non-mainstream offshoot of normal society?

I ask this because it's obvious that some of the beneficial aspects of the modern world are due to economies of scale, volumetric efficiencies, outsourcing of labor, etc. and that these factors may not be considered positives by communitarians. Are these products considered undesirable, or as having too high an impact on the environment, to be sustainable? Or, on the other hand, should the ultimate goal of community living be to produce them just as well and efficiently, but while somehow still incorporating our core goals? (and if so, how is this to be done?)

I love everything about the idea of community, but philosophically and as an engineer I'm having some difficulty embracing it wholeheartedly unless it's respectful of some of the best aspects of the progress that America has made in the world producing goods and services through specialization and mass production. I'd appreciate any of your thoughts on this you have time to write. This may even be a good topic for an issue as well, if you're interested.

Thanks again for the great magazine and for all your work in community.

**Jack Cronk**  
via email

**Editor's Note:** *This email did indeed provoke responses to Jack from some FIC staff and volunteers, which are too lengthy to reproduce here in full. Instead, we'll excerpt from a response from Eric Best:*

*"Many thanks for a very thoughtful and inquiring note here. You seem to be calling for an increased conscious/aware inclusion of the total system we live in...communally, in 'normal' society, and in the world at large. ...*

*"One immediately interesting element in your call for 'FIC's Vision' is that of course, not all the communities (people separately within or grouped together) will have the same 'vision.' There may well be individual voices which are louder and more prominent than others, but that does not mean they represent all communitarian efforts or even FIC's vision....*

*"I think your desire for inclusion of the best from all avenues (those brought forth from 'community' and those achieved by current society) is really an excellent one. It represents for me an inclusion of the importance of actively striving to continue learning as we go along; not just learning as new obstacles or opportunities arise and perhaps 'demand learning' from us. It is a realization that not only is the world we live in changing rapidly, but also that we as humans have the capacity to continue to consciously develop. And if we truly desire to help 'save the environment' or support more honest relationships or raise our children in a more loving and positive manner or provide a better vision to the rest of the world, it may well be that this capacity to continue to learn and develop ourselves is the most important one we can undertake."*

*This issue on "Community Wisdom for Everyday Life" also touches on some of Jack's questions, and we invite continued reflections from readers as well.*

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## LOSING COMMUNITY, FINDING COMMUNITY: WILL WINTERFELD'S STORY

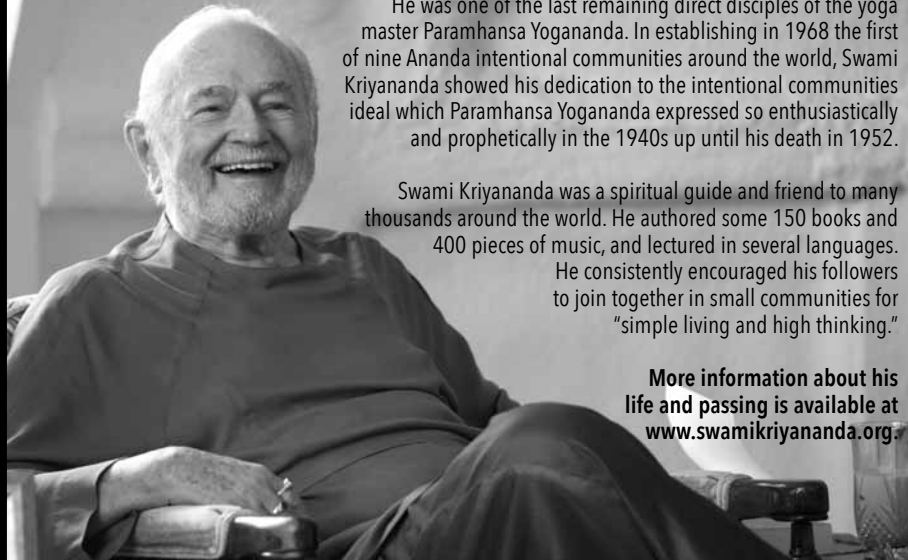
(continued from p. 19)

- Community conserves energy and helps the environment. (In the larger society, work, church, family, and friendships are often separated and require time and energy consumption for all the commutes that are necessary to maintain connections.)
- Community can help people to focus on their spiritual lives, as faith-based communities rely on trusting God and one another.
- Job satisfaction is often quite high in community because of the cooperation and sense of mission. (In the larger society, a job is often a means to an end—to pay the bills and feed the family.)
- Socializing is always available in community, through singing, playing games, traveling together, etc. (In the larger society, having fun often involves significant money and time.)
- In community a person becomes a generalist, open to learning and doing new tasks. (In the larger society, work has for the most part become so specialized that a generalist struggles to find a place.)
- In community, the weekend is an extension of the week. (In the larger society, people often live for weekends.)

I know that Will will continue seeking a deepened sense of community for the rest of his life, whether he finds himself living in dominant culture, some sort of housing cooperative, or an intentional community once again. ☺

*Paul Born is a best-selling author and activist who grew up with Mennonites—a people who taught him the value of the statement, “Whatever the problem, community is the answer.” He is the cofounder and president of the Tamarack Institute, a Canadian think tank and lab with a mandate to advance collaborative leadership, citizen engagement, and community innovation. Tamarack sponsors Vibrant Communities—Canada’s largest network of cities reducing poverty. Their goal is to reduce poverty for one million people. They are a quarter of the way there.*

**Swami Kriyananda, founder of the Ananda communities worldwide, died peacefully April 21, at the age of 86.**



He was one of the last remaining direct disciples of the yoga master Paramhansa Yogananda. In establishing in 1968 the first of nine Ananda intentional communities around the world, Swami Kriyananda showed his dedication to the intentional communities ideal which Paramhansa Yogananda expressed so enthusiastically and prophetically in the 1940s up until his death in 1952.

Swami Kriyananda was a spiritual guide and friend to many thousands around the world. He authored some 150 books and 400 pieces of music, and lectured in several languages. He consistently encouraged his followers to join together in small communities for “simple living and high thinking.”

**More information about his life and passing is available at [www.swamikriyananda.org](http://www.swamikriyananda.org).**



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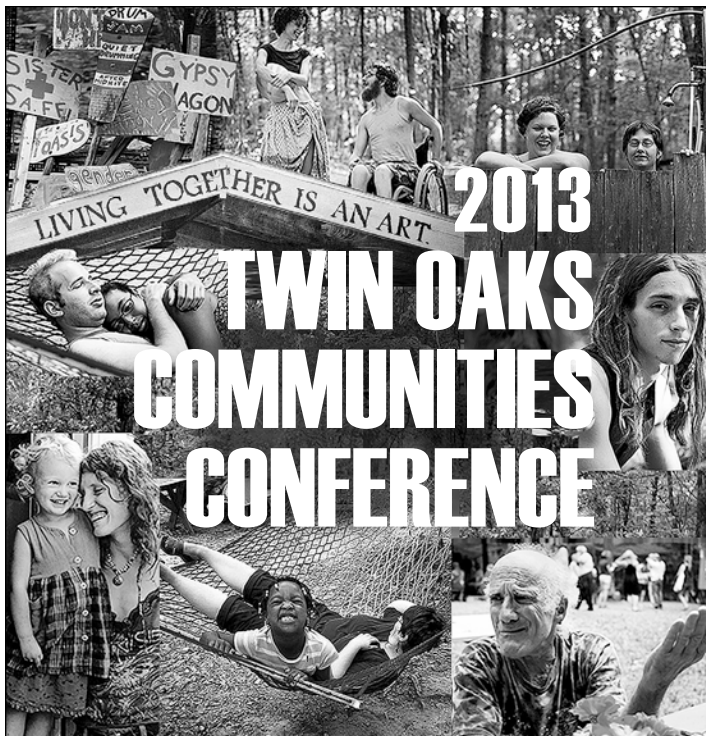
  
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## BRINGING HOME LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY LIVING

(continued from p. 27)

Esther risking her life to save her people. We'll share our own stories of courage, and act these stories out for each other using "playback" theater.

### Lesson #4: Create a generous social climate with a free flow of goods, services, and acknowledgment.

I've observed while living in intentional communities that a sense of obligation can kill joy and energy. Required assigned chores seem to create a climate of resentment, with essential tasks still not getting done. On the other hand, I've noticed that in communities with a more anarchistic approach, chores often fall to just a few people who notice what needs to be done, and who over time burn out on doing them. I wondered if there is a way to encourage folks in our new household to freely and energetically contribute to the good of the whole.

Recently Charles Eisenstein had come through town with his workshop on Sacred Economics, and an outcome of that has been the creation of *gift circles* in neighborhoods around Eugene. Folks show up for an evening to tell the whole group what they have to give and what they'd like to receive, and then they meet with each other individually to exchange promises of gifts. Once I asked to borrow a sewing machine, for example, and someone gave me one instead! How might this free and generous approach to life be sustained day by day amongst folks who live together?

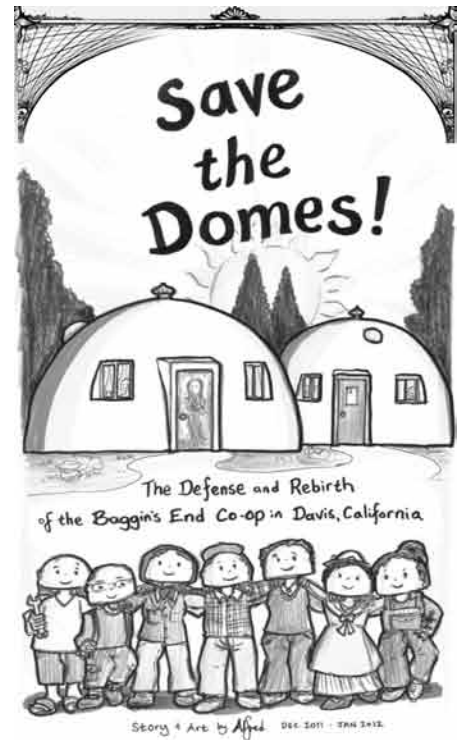
To conduct an experiment in answering this question, I stocked our newly forming household with healthy bulk foods, and the garden shed with tools and seeds, so there would be a sense of abundance from the start. Then I committed to a practice of noticing and expressing gratitude to my housemates for work accomplished, household items contributed, meals offered, and stories told. At our house meetings we expand this practice when all of us offer specific appreciations to each other. We made a list of chores, and we each chose what we want to commit to doing based on our own sense of available time and what tasks we enjoy.

The results of this experiment in creating a space of freedom, service, beauty, and abundance are promising thus far. Our home is clean and orderly. The yard is becoming cultivated through love, with tender greens growing in our greenhouse. Here are some scenes from yesterday: All of us taking turns with a paintbrush to make one of our kitchen walls more colorful. Chuck and Alison making granola while Alicia creates a permaculture design for our homestead on her computer. All of us sharing a meal while telling our "stories of the day." Robert taking notes from our house-meeting while the dog soaks up affection. The baby smiling at us all. It feels like family.

At the same time that our own personal quality of life is improved through sharing a home together, we are contributing to solving a host of societal challenges. We reduce our per capita carbon footprint through sharing resources such as the energy needed to heat our common spaces. People who had been landless have access to gardens for growing organic fresh food, which improves their nutrition and health. It costs less to live in shared housing, which means those of us with small incomes can be housed rather than homeless. A single mom gets the support of an extended family, a young couple eager for parenthood get to help raise a small child, and middle-aged folks function as grandparents, reducing social isolation all around. For the benefit of people and the planet, I look forward to the day when it is normal for folks with shared interests and dreams to live together. ☺

---

*Melanie Rios has lived in several intentional communities over the course of 40 years, most recently as cofounder of ALEA in Eugene, Oregon. Her passions are growing food on their half acre, singing and playing violin, nurturing a multigenerational household, and consciously transitioning towards eldership as a form of vital contribution to our world. Contact melanie@rios.org.*



In 2011, the Davis Domes – a community of 28 UC Davis students in fourteen dome-shaped cottages amongst gardens and forests, faced one of the biggest challenges in their 40-year existence. Threatened with closure, the Domes rallied together and with the help of thousands of volunteers and supporters, they gained the support of other cooperatives, changed the minds of administrators, raised money, and fixed up the Domes. This is the story.

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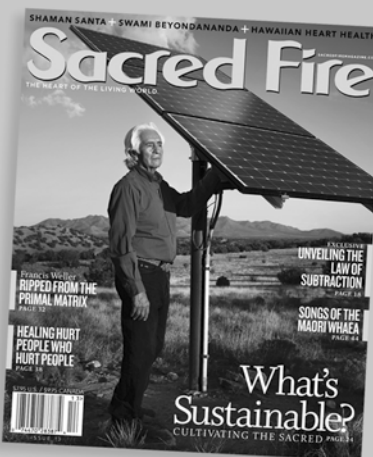
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## THE VALUES OF SHARED OWNERSHIP

(continued from p. 35)

I can walk all over the place and enjoy the wildlife and the solitude. And my partners have just what I do—ownership of and access to a place they could not have afforded by themselves.

Do we ever have conflicts? Not very many, actually. Everyone involved is fairly reasonable, and we have a live-and-let-live attitude about what we do on the land. I look forward to many more years of having a place to go unwind, and if another sensible opportunity for group ownership comes my way, I'll consider it seriously. That's my greatest takeaway from my years in community. I don't think of myself as a relentless materialist, but I'm pretty convinced that cooperation can lead to practical material outcomes: if you share you can have more. ☺

*Tim Miller teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas and is a historian of American intentional communities. His books include The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America and The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond, both published by Syracuse University Press, and The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities, published in 2013 by Richard Couper Press.*

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*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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**EAT LIKE YOU GIVE A DAMN  
A SHIBBOLETH  
FROM SEATTLE**

(continued from p. 46)

Monsanto even have a *chance* to corner the market on germplasm? I doubt it.

Of course, when you think about it, giving a damn in general is a good idea. Come by for dinner sometime and I'll whip up a batch of fresh pasta made with flour ground that day from wheat grown on our fields, mixed with eggs our chickens just laid. I'll make a sauce based on garlic, onions, and shiitakes grown within 200 feet of our kitchen, simmered in local butter and seasoned with last year's black currant wine. After rolling out the noodles with a hand-cranked Italian pasta maker I'll boil them in a five-gallon pot until they're *al dente*, then dump them into a colander that's been lined with fresh spinach, so that the pasta water will flash wilt them perfectly. After tossing together the noodles, the bright green spinach, and the sauce, I'll garnish the dish with sage leaves that were plucked from our herb garden that afternoon and fried to a crisp in butter.

In short, I'll treat you to food we give a damn about and we'll see if you can distinguish it from a TV dinner. Maybe there's hope for us yet. 🍷

*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](http://communityandconsensus.blogspot.com). A version of this article first appeared in his blog January 11, 2013.*





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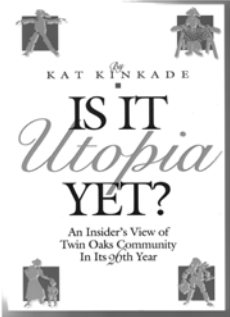



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**An Insider's View of Twin Oaks  
Community in its 26th Year**  
by Kat Kinkade

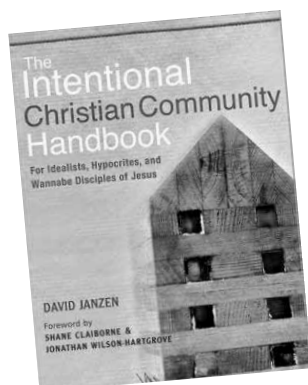
*Is it Utopia Yet?* is a lively, first-hand account of the unique struggles and triumphs of the first 25 years of Twin Oaks Community, one of America's most prominent and successful communes. This thoughtful and entertaining 320 page book from the author of *A Walden Two Experiment* is illustrated with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



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# Christianity in Community



## The Intentional Christian Community Handbook: For Idealists, Hypocrites, and Wannabe Disciples of Jesus

By David Janzen

Paraclete Press ([www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com)),  
Brewster, MA, 2012, 352 pages

It happened one afternoon several years ago, in a small conference room. I had arranged to meet there with individuals who wished to discuss aspects of their ministry that had arisen during a clergy wellness program in which I was a faculty member. A young priest named Ted came in and sat down. After a period of silence, he began to speak. Rather than the usual questions about prayer disciplines, difficulties in the parish, or the challenges of scheduling family time while being a faithful pastor, he surprised me with “I believe that I have a call to found an intentional Christian community.”

If only *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook* had been in existence then! Although I tried to advise him (and certainly recommended a subscription to *COMMUNITIES!*), I did not yet have access to this book, which is engagingly described on its back cover as being “for young seekers and for old radicals. Like a farmer’s almanac or a good cookbook, it’s a guide that doesn’t tell you what to do, but rather gives you the resources you need to find your way together with friends in the place where you are.”

I began to read my copy because I had promised to write a book review, but soon read it because it was so interesting. While designed for the specific purpose of guiding those who are taking part in what is sometimes called “the new monasticism” (seeking or participating in residential religious communities), it shed light also on “the place where I am”: my own experience of parish, neighborhood, and family.

The author begins with identifying the yearning for community as part of the human condition. The three chapters that comprise Part I remind us that we are creatures who by nature want to be together.

We are given first-person examples of people who give life to that theory: it is obvious that this book is grounded in many conversations all over the United States, for Janzen travels from community to community to do his research.

People also seek community because of disaffection with the culture they live in and the desire to live according to other values. This can be true not only of religious communities but those based on environmental sustainability, justice, or serving the poor. In the case of Christian communities, the impetus is often following what the earliest followers of Jesus called “the Way,” and Jesus called “spreading the kingdom of God”: the way of service to the outcast of society, of forgiveness, respect for all human beings, healing, and peace.

The Iona community, for example, began life in the slums of Glasgow, although people most often associate it with its beautiful setting on the island of that name in the Inner Hebrides. The Taizé community, near the border between Germany and France, began as a witness to peace, after a war that devastated Europe. L’Arche communities were formed to serve the mentally and physically challenged among us. Koinonia in

Georgia was a witness against racism before the civil rights movement, and created Habitat for Humanity, which is now a worldwide initiative.

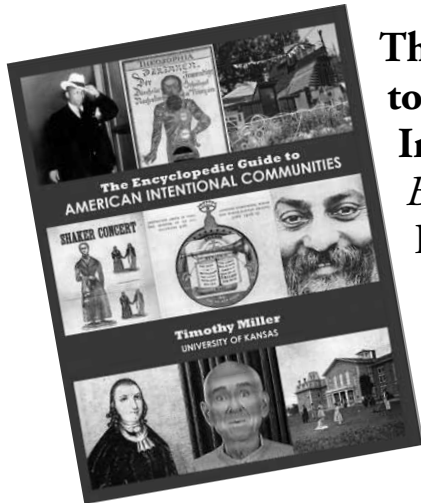
Part Two helps those who feel a “call” (as Ted did) discern whether it is bona fide, and, if so, to what incarnation of community one is best suited.

The next four sections might be labeled “pregnancy,” “birth,” “youth,” and “maturity.” Communities, like the human beings within them, go through stages of life, each with its gifts and challenges, and understanding that fact helps communities avoid undue expectations and fears. It is not easy, even in a Christian context (or, one might argue, sometimes *especially* in a Christian context!), to move from an individualistic worldview toward one that includes others. Janzen comments that so-called “contemporary” Christian music reveals the extent to which the “Good News” of Jesus can be “straitjacketed” by the culture: “so many songs are about ‘me’ rather than about ‘us’ as the objects of God’s love. ‘Mine, mine, mine; Jesus is mine.’” A wise warning to the institutional church and its liturgists and musicians!

Janzen sees this journey of growing from an “I” framework to a “we” framework to be the prime work of a lifetime—not a grim duty but a joyful task. Dorothy Day sums it up in the final paragraph of this excellent book by quoting Catherine of Siena: “All the way to heaven is heaven.” ☺

*The Rev. Nancy Roth, an Episcopal priest and writer, worked for several years as program coordinator at Holy Cross Monastery in New York’s Hudson Valley, and is an Associate of the Order of St. Helena, an Episcopal women’s community based in Georgia. She has visited members of the Taizé Community in Manhattan and the Iona Community in Scotland. As a communitarian’s parent and avid reader of *COMMUNITIES!*, she also has become familiar with several other intentional communities in the United States.*

# Encyclopedic



## The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities

By Timothy Miller

Richard W. Couper Press,  
Hamilton College Library,  
Clinton, NY, 2013, 608 pages

This massive volume collects in one place information about as many American intentional communities as the author's research could identify, from early European colonization of what are now the United States down to the present. To keep the subject matter manageable, certain categories (such as Christian canonical communities) are not included that otherwise fit the definition of an intentional community—and nevertheless the book documents approximately 3000 communities, giving brief descriptions of each along with up to three references to sources for further research.

A longtime Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas and author of several previous volumes about communal living, Tim Miller includes groups here that have, or had, “a sense of purpose and distinctiveness, with deliberate intent to be a community; some kind of shared living space; some shared resources; and critical mass [defined as a membership of at least five, not-all-related adults].” A few active groups I am familiar with are missing from the descriptive section (the Possibility Alliance, featured several times in *COMMUNITIES*, was too small in population at the time of Tim's research; another group I know never bothered to list themselves online until recently). However, most qualifying communities that are or were ever open to being known publicly (like those listed in the FIC's *Communities Directory*) are included in this book. What makes this book's coverage broader than the *Directory* (which lists about 1000 American groups) is its inclusion of historical communities—very useful if one is attempting to get an overview of the communities movement throughout American history, or find information about a specific group that once existed but no longer does.

The downside of attempting to be so comprehensive is the brevity of each description: one paragraph for each group, anywhere from two to 10 sentences (with about 4 or 5 being most common). Moreover, the number of groups listed precluded getting up-to-date information on all the current ones (as evidence, the population data on my own home community is 8 years old). Creating a truly comprehensive, up-to-date resource of this type would require more than one person's efforts, even if that person is as meticulous a communities scholar as Tim Miller. Including current, accurate information in any communities reference resource depends on active participation of the many communities listed—which is why the FIC's *Communities Directory* has always needed to be a broadly collaborative effort. Today, the online *Directory* at [directory.ic.org](http://directory.ic.org) is so useful only because the groups included help keep it current.

So don't expect to get a full or entirely updated picture of any group here; Tim's purpose is only to provide a starting point for further exploration or research. And if you've had personal experience with any of these groups, you may even find yourself with suggestions for improvements or changes in emphasis in their listings. In most cases, a book or multiple books could be written about each of these groups and still oversimplify the community's experience; to reduce that richness to a paragraph is necessarily to sacrifice depth for the breadth of a one-volume reference.

On the other hand (and it'd better be a strong one—the *Guide* can double as a door-stop), this resource will be extremely helpful to anyone who's longed for that kind of one-volume reference—including both formal and informal students of intentional community and its history in the US and colonies. Communal Studies professors and departments, members of the Communal Studies Association, and other intentional community buffs will surely welcome this tome into their libraries.

At \$70 per copy, it is unlikely to find itself onto the bookshelves of most current communitarians or communities. And by itself, it says very little about what life in community is actually like; Tim himself warns that it cannot capture the “spirit” or “vibrancy” of any of these groups. It's more an enhanced “index” than anything else, but for those whose interest extends beyond present-day communities (covered more thoroughly in the FIC's own *Communities Directory*), it fills an important gap. From its thoughtful introduction through its painstakingly-assembled (if necessarily incomplete) listings, it's a major contribution to the field of communal studies. 🐾

Chris Roth edits *COMMUNITIES*.

# Community Rhythms



## The Rhythm of Rutledge

By the Last Volunteer

DVD, 28 minutes, 2012

[postcarbonfuture.org](http://postcarbonfuture.org);

[therhythmofrutledge.com](http://therhythmofrutledge.com)

**T**he *Rhythm of Rutledge* is a beautiful, radically original film. Depicting life at northeast Missouri's tri-communities—Sandhill Farm, Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, and Red Earth Farms—it contains almost none of the standard information community documentaries usually attempt to convey. Instead, it immerses the viewer in essential experiences to be had in this rural hub of cooperative living, along with a few simple conversations about what life is like there for a few of the residents.

The majority of the footage comes from Sandhill Farm, where long shots of beekeeping activities, grain processing, meal preparation/sharing, and natural scenes are interspersed with personal conversations with Micah, Stan, and Laird, each sharing their experience in community and on the land. At Red Earth Farms, Alyson hangs

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**The simple rural and cooperative skills shown here have been passed down through generations.**

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laundry and pushes her daughter on a swing while reflecting on the reasons she has chosen this lifestyle and way of parenting. Dancing Rabbit has the shortest segment, with Tony describing why the founding group chose to start their ecovillage on “average” rundown farmland. The movie both opens and closes with train scenes, in which first cows and then communitarians find ways to relax and/or entertain themselves in a land where almost everything happens much more slowly and deliberately than it does among the hustle, bustle, and overstimulation of typical modern life.

The cinematography is striking. We often get an unexpected view—whether perched on a tractor next to a spinning duct-taped steering wheel, watching from behind a beehive smoker, sitting at butcher-block level in the Sandhill kitchen, or being eye-level with Micah's feet in the solar shower. Though expressing lots of appreciation for their lives in community, the interviewees don't sugar-coat them—Stan mentions the many weeds that slow down harvesting, Micah mourns the lack of wilderness in northeast Missouri as she recalls the pure fun she used to have outdoors before she took up farming, and Laird talks about the trickiness of navigating a marriage while living in a separate community from his wife. For each person, though, the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks, and this film helps us feel why.

I found a particular resonance with this film because I have lived in the tri-communities—for a total of about two years at Sandhill Farm (in 1989-90 and in

2010), for several months at Dancing Rabbit in 2010-11, and as a friendly neighbor with Red Earth throughout my 2010-11 stint. The “rhythm” that this film portrays is very much the rhythm that attracted me there and that drew me back when I was seeking again to live “at nature's pace.” Even the soundtrack (in which I noticed, among others, the distinctive songs of the wood thrush and Carolina wren, not present where I live now) evoked memories of being there. It's a magical place on the planet, and the simple rural and cooperative skills shown here have been passed down through generations. I believe the film captures the rhythm of Sandhill and Red Earth much more accurately than it does the rhythm of Dancing Rabbit, which is more densely-settled and therefore typically busier on the human level—but because it spends almost no time there anyway, this is a minor complaint.

I've shown this film to a few dozen people now, none of whom have lived in these places, and the universal reaction is the same as mine: this is beautiful, extremely well made, a pleasure to watch, a work of art, inspiring. Unlike many documentaries, this is one I could watch with pleasure many times. As already mentioned, this movie is not information-rich; it's not a way to find out about governance and ownership structures, budgeting, community documents, how to set up visitor programs, etc. Instead, it shows what it could be like to live in one of these places—which very few other community documentaries more than hint at. I hope it inspires more such efforts. ☺

*For the filmmakers' perspectives, see the article, “Finding Community, Producing Durability,” p. 80.*

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*Chris Roth edits* COMMUNITIES.



## FINDING COMMUNITY, PRODUCING DURABILITY LEARNING FROM THE RHYTHMS OF RUTLEDGE

(continued from p. 80)

munities, we sought to represent our perceptions of living within them—not simply their numbers or mission statements. We realized what we wanted to communicate only after immersing ourselves in the rhythms of Rutledge.

Learning a new culture means learning how another experiences their world. It goes to the fundamental level of perception: how their daily existences give shape to their world, how they experience time and space. We could not have learned this by working from stereotypes. Yes, we found windmills and solar panels; but more importantly, we found a new way of perceiving.

Laird Schaub offers some of the relatively few words spoken in the film: “I can tell within 24 hours when the spring peepers will emerge from the mud and start singing because I can feel it, after living here through 37 springs.” Reflecting on how he has “stumbled into rootedness,” into a sense of place by slowing down enough to learn its rhythms, he suggests that “it’s something [that] is a deep human connection most people had, because most people lived in one place...even the nomadic tribes had their circuits. We don’t have it—as a contemporary Western civilization—and I think that’s why we’ve lost our way as a culture; we’re rootless.” A long shot in the film doesn’t precisely signify the pace of the community. Rather, it represents the possibility of immersing oneself in a place by slowing down to look. The audience can then begin to feel the rhythms of a place and imagine the possibilities of participating in its vernacular culture.

Amongst thousands of acres of corn and soy, the Rutledge community is part of a great movement, but not because they are growing organic. Sure, they have constructed impressive agricultural and energy systems towards self-sufficiency. But when considering *what is possible*, we’ve learned that there is much more. When talking to people about intentional communities, we are often confronted with accusations that they are examples of escapism and idleness. We understand how it might be difficult to see from the outside the ways the movement can create social change. After all, it was only by immersing ourselves that we were able to learn about these forms of activism thriving in intentional communities. Their approaches teach us that we don’t need a radical overthrow overnight when revolutionary action and thought is embedded in the culture and created through daily existence. This process of producing durability is a slow and deep movement.

Perhaps a great shift will come not through confrontation but through resonance, through learning the unique music of place. And when we learn to resonate with our place, and when these places begin to resonate together, the song will last forever. ☺

*The authors write: “the Last Volunteer (tLV) is a self-organized community of producers. Our work is a life project and a project of life. As a group we seek to collaborate with the people we encounter through our work and share the ideas we come to embody. We are baking, crafting, farming, loving, learning, sharing, dreaming, walking while questioning: what is possible? We are currently working on a third film, Saving the Past, about Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, a cooperatively owned seed business based at Acorn Community, and writing a book titled Producing Durability.”*

*For upcoming screenings, see [postcarbonfuture.org/events.html](http://postcarbonfuture.org/events.html). See also [therhythmofrutledge.com](http://therhythmofrutledge.com); the review on page 78; and [Community Bookshelf at store.ic.org](http://CommunityBookshelf.at.store.ic.org) for possible future availability of this DVD.*

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## Finding Community, Producing Durability Learning from the rhythms of Rutledge

We don't know what we'll find when going out to film. This has come to define our approach to filmmaking: going out to explore and learn instead of searching for something specific already in mind. When first starting work on *Finding Community* we were searching—searching for a counterculture fighting in the United States. When we got to Rutledge, Missouri, however, we didn't find any fights. Instead we found something more creative than antagonistic. We learned about a different movement—something more like a music, resonating underground.

In fall 2011 at Dancing Rabbit we screened a rough cut of *The Rhythm of Rutledge*, the second film of the *Finding Community* collection, which focuses on the tri-communities of northeast Missouri: Sandhill Farm, Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, and Red Earth Farms. Two of us braved a brutal Q&A session afterwards. "I don't mean to be rude, but what's the point?" was one question that particularly stuck out. "I found it agonizingly slow," was another concerned comment. Despite the challenges it posed, this was the most important part of the process for us. Without the collaboration of the community, there is no *Finding Community* project.

As a rule, we didn't film during our first 10 days at Sandhill. Part of our approach to documentary is being aware of our status as outsiders when entering a new community. Knowing that this status is exaggerated by the presence of a camera, we kept the equipment in bags and out of sight. We hoped to connect with

community members first as friends, not as cinematographers. During the first community meeting we attended at Sandhill, there was a great appreciation for this process. Not only does it foster a trust, but it also allows us to construct a deeper and more honest representation through our film. If we were to start filming on arrival, we would look at stereotypes and latch on to anything that resembled our presumptions about life in the Rutledge community. Instead, we got to know folks more intimately and began to participate in their culture.

A few voices from Dancing Rabbit's crowded common house felt the pace of the film did not accurately represent the pace of the community. Although the final version of the film is perhaps more "pointed" than the first rough cut we screened (and a subsequent screening at Dancing Rabbit suggested that the community agreed), the critique of having made a "slow" film is a fair one. A community aspiring towards a village of 500 to 1000 residents does indeed keep a busy schedule. But to communicate what we found most inspiring about these three com-

(continued on p. 79)



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