

GROWING UP IN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

*Youth in
Community*

Fair Play

Raising Superheroes

Wilderness Journeys
and Cooperation

Esther and the Princess
of the Fairies

Community, Public School,
and Culture Clash

Fall 2013 • Issue #160

\$7.00 / \$8.00 Canada



communities.ic.org

Cooperative Communities & Sustainability Conference

November 15-17, Portland, OR

Gain more knowledge for your community, join the networking fun, and learn the latest trends and directions for all types of communities at the Fall 2013 Cooperative Communities & Sustainability Conference co-sponsored by the Northwest Intentional Communities Association (NICA) and Ananda College. To register or to reserve a display booth, contact: admissions@anandauniversity.org

- Keynote speaker Laird Schaub of Sandhill Farm community will lead sessions on concensus & decision making in communities
- Eco-village design presentations & hands-on workshop
- Latest in co-housing, eco-villages, urban communities & spiritual communities
- Permaculture & sustainable agriculture, cob building demo & more
- Organic vegetarian meals available, optional yoga classes, fun events & more



Reserve Now!

503-985-0030

admissions@anandauniversity.org

anandauniversity.org/events/communities-conference

Tickets

\$30 Saturday

\$50 Friday-Sunday

Location

Ananda College

38950 SW Laurelwood Rd.

Gaston, OR 97119



Laird Schaub



Speakers, events, schedule & updates at

anandauniversity.org

Sponsored by:



ANANDA COLLEGE

Higher Education for Higher Consciousness



Northwest Intentional Communities Association

Building a better society, one neighborhood at a time

Support the New Office



From Grunge to Green in 2013!

We are raising \$90,000 to construct a cutting-edge Green Office for the FIC headquarters at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri. The video above describes the project - watch it on our website!

Donate at www.ic.org/in/donate to receive goodies along with our thanks for your help!

 <p>\$10 - Become part of the Green Office History Many, many thanks for your generosity! Your name will appear on a sponsors poster in the new FIC office forevermore.</p>	 <p>\$250 - Visions of Utopia DVDs Visions of Utopia DVD Parts 1 & 2 + your name on sponsors poster. This amazing two-volume set offers profiles of 17 representative contemporary communities plus an overview of the Communities Movement.</p>
 <p>\$25 - Digital Magazine Free digital download of the current issue of Communities Magazine + your name on a sponsors poster. This perk is a prelude to what's coming in 2013, when we'll make many of our publications available as PDFs!</p>	 <p>\$500 - Community Made...Yum! Four-pack of East Wind nut butters - one pint each of peanut butter, almond butter, cashew butter, and sesame tahini. This no-additive nut butter is made in community! + Visions of Utopia Parts 1 & 2 on DVD!</p>
 <p>\$50 - Communities Directory One copy of a prior print edition of Communities Directory + your name on a sponsors poster. Help us find good homes for the 2007 edition in time to move to the new office. Give one to your library, school, a friend!</p>	 <p>\$1,000 - Relax Here or at Home Complimentary overnight stay at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, with a tour of the new FIC Office you helped build! Or choose a Twin Oaks large hammock! + Your name on the sponsors poster, and a digital magazine!</p>
 <p>\$100 - Communities Magazine Subscription to Communities Magazine or 4 back issues of your choice, + your name on a sponsors poster.</p>	 <p>\$5,000 - Complete Set of 95 Magazines! Receive an entire in-print set of Communities Magazine, with back issues from 1972 all the way to the present! Plus: Enjoy the perks of the \$10, \$25, \$500, and \$1,000 levels! Thank you so incredibly much!!!</p>

DONATE NOW

www.ic.org/in/donate.php

COMMUNITIES

Photo courtesy of Alyson Ewald



Youth in Community

- 8** **Childhoods at Songaia**
from Fort Can-Be to Coming of Age
Fred Lanphear, Nancy Lanphear, Leah Early, Michelle Grandy, Cyndi Kershner, Rachel Lynette, and Kate Arden
For kids growing up in this cohousing community, life has always been rich.
- 14** **Down at the Pond**
a youthful take on body image
Kim Scheidt
A child learns that it's fine to be comfortable in her skin.
- 16** **Reminiscences: Growing Up in Intentional Community**
Karin Iona Sundberg
Six grown community children reflect on their many memories.
- 22** **Fair Play: The Wisdom of Children in Community**
Karin Iona Sundberg
Spontaneous sharing and even-handedness erupt in Lost Valley's young "tribe."
- 24** **Raising Superheroes:**
How Our Kids Are Learning to Use Their Power for Good
Alyson Ewald
Community brings cross-generational teamwork, learning, and many other benefits to both children and adults.
- 28** **Esther and the Princess of the Fairies**
Brent Levin
Thanks to a magic borne of community, a five-year-old overcomes her fears.
- 30** **Home Schooling and Community**
Berwick Eclair
Two simple words send a community's education coordinator to the barricades.
- 32** **Community, Public School, and Culture Clash:**
Food for Thought from Rural Missouri
Sam Makita
The "public vs. home" debate brings lessons of moral relativism, humility, and tolerance for differing tastes.
- 34** **Quad-Parenting in Intentional Community**
Stephanie Powers
In a relationship's ending at Sunrise Ranch, children gain rather than lose parents.



- 38 Parenting in a Community of Friends: Happiness and Heartbreak**
Kristina Jansen
 Living in an extended community family brings joy, challenge, and new worlds of possibility.
- 40 A Multitude of Counselors**
Understanding Israel
 Grown-up community children recall struggles and rewards.
- 41 The Colors of Experience: Learning with Children and Adults in Cohousing**
Michelle Wheeler
 Navigating differing adult temperaments can be tricky; children provide relief.
- 44 Wilderness Journeys Meet Cooperative Culture: Teens in Community on the Trail**
Mary Murphy
 Group-building activities and conflict management strategies help teen expeditions thrive.
- 48 Learning the Art of Doing Nothing**
Nikola Kendis
 A college student jumps off the hamster wheel to discover “divine flies” in Wind Spirit’s “Bitchin Kitchin.”
- 50 The Remembrance of Roots**
Michelle Erica Price
 American students at Scotland’s Findhorn Ecovillage form enduring memories of connection.
- 52 NextGEN: Growing a Youth Movement within the Ecovillage Network**
Ethan Hirsch-Tauber
 The Next Generation of the Global Ecovillage Network welcomes a resurgence of involvement.
- 55 Dreaming an Ecovillage Youth Exchange Program**
Kira Taylor-Hoar
 Young people can create change, and they know it—but communities need to help.

VOICES

- 4 PUBLISHER’S NOTE**
The Peace Bridge
Laird Schaub
- 6 NOTES FROM THE EDITOR**
Youth in Community
Chris Roth
- 56 COMMUNITY LIVING**
WORLDWIDE
Exploring Positive Futures: International Communal Studies Association Conference
Bill Metcalf
- 59 Transparency, Equivalence, and Effectiveness—How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part I**
Diana Leafe Christian
- 64 REACH**
- 73 REVIEWS**
Communes Britannica
Pam Dawling
Spiritual and Visionary Communities: Out to Save the World
Nancy Roth
- 80 CREATING COOPERATIVE CULTURE**
Elders in Community: Bruce and Linda’s Story
Shen Pauley

ON THE COVER



Children in community are often quick to learn both social and eco-living skills. Here Terra Bousquet serves up solar-popped popcorn from Bart Orlando’s parabolic solar cooker at Lost Valley in Dexter, Oregon, July 2013. Photo by Chris Roth.

EDITOR

Chris Roth (*Lost Valley/Meadowsong*)

ART DIRECTOR

Yulia Zarubina-Brill

ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS MANAGER

Christopher Kindig (*Earth-Tribe.org*)

WEB SUPPORT

Susan Sloan (*Rising Community*)
Foxx Tupelo

CIRCULATION MANAGER

McCune Porter (*Twin Oaks*)

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Kim Scheidt (*Red Earth Farms*)
Rachael Mae Ferber (*Dancing Rabbit*)
Laird Schaub (*Sandhill Farm*)

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

Deborah Altus
Marty Klaif (*Shannon Farm*)
Parke Burgess

COMMUNITIES (ISSN 0199-9346) is published quarterly by the Fellowship for Intentional Community at RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563. Periodicals postage paid at Rutledge MO and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to **COMMUNITIES**, 138 Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa VA 23093. Indexed in the Alternative Press Index.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$24 US, \$29 Canada, \$31 outside US/Canada for four issues via periodical/surface mail. Single copies are \$7 US, \$8 Canada, \$9 outside US/Canada. All payments in US dollars. Available from **COMMUNITIES**, 138 Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa VA 23093; order@ic.org, or order online at store.ic.org.

BACK ISSUES: RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563; 800-995-8342.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: Chris Roth, Editor, **COMMUNITIES**, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431; 541-937-5221; editor@ic.org.

© 2013 by Fellowship for Intentional Community. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. Opinions expressed by authors and correspondents are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

FELLOWSHIP FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY: RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563; 660-883-5545; www.ic.org.

REPRINT PERMISSION: Community groups may reprint with permission. Please contact **COMMUNITIES**, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431; 541-937-5221; editor@ic.org.

ADVERTISING: Christopher Kindig, **COMMUNITIES** Advertising Manager, Baltimore MD; 443-422-3741; ads@ic.org.

WEBSITE: communities.ic.org.

This magazine printed on recycled paper, using soy-based inks, at Allen Press in Lawrence, Kansas, USA.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE BY LAIRD SCHAUB



In the summer of 1927, a mile-long steel bridge was opened spanning the Niagara River, connecting Buffalo, New York and Fort Erie, Ontario—about 20 klicks upriver from Niagara Falls. Commemorating the achievement of 100 years of (mostly) cordial relationships between the US and Canada, this structure was dubbed the Peace Bridge.

Building on that heritage 86 years later, I'm writing to celebrate a new partnership between the Fellowship for Intentional Community (the US-based publishers of this magazine) and the Tamarack Institute (dedicated to eliminating poverty in Canada). Think of it as a virtual peace bridge.

Our partnership with the Tamarack Institute started with a couple of phone calls in the spring of 2012, and ultimately led to their sponsorship of the Summer 2013 issue of **COMMUNITIES** (#159), on the theme of Community Wisdom for Everyday Life. It was a good fit for Tamarack because they've come to appreciate that you cannot end poverty without the engagement of healthy communities, and a central part of **COMMUNITIES'** editorial mission is chronicling what is being learned about how to build and sustain vibrant communities. (It's not accidental that the subtitle on our masthead is *Life in Cooperative Culture*.)

It was a good fit for FIC because part of our mission (since 2005) has been Creating Community Where You Are, taking what is being learned in the crucible of residential intentional community about how groups can function well, and making that available to the widest possible audience. We realize that the number of people hungry for more community in their life—a greater sense of connection, safety, and belonging—is vastly larger than the number of people interested in jointly owning property with others to create intentional communities.

As a lever for social change, the impact of the intentional communities movement will not be so much about how many people live in them, as how many people are able to lead better, more connected lives inspired by what intentional communities have pioneered about sharing and manifesting a high-quality life that isn't founded on the bedrock of material acquisition (he who has the most toys wins).

1,000 Conversations of Light

In pursuit of its mission to end poverty, Tamarack has conceived of a national effort to promote community. They reason that if they can advance caring about one's neighbors, that's the key to gaining a purchase on eradicating poverty. In line with that they have launched a three-year Seeking Community campaign to host 1,000 conversations across

Canada on the topic, “What are we learning about being in community?”* Think of it as dialog about how to move toward the light of cooperation, and away from the darkness of isolation and alienation.

The point of these conversations will be to enjoy each other, to care for one another, and to work together for a better world. To the extent possible Tamarack will record the conversations and make them available at seekingcommunity.ca. As the results come in, they will sift through the recordings to identify themes and lessons that can be distilled into guidance about what people want and what’s been successful in manifesting it. The concept that undergirds this initiative is the radical notion that people already know what they want, leaders just have to pay attention and help midwife its arrival. Community, after all, is something we do *together*, not something we do *to* or *for* others.

Inspired by the synergy of our collaboration on the Summer 2013 issue, Tamarack and FIC have decided to double down and do a second joint issue next year. On Tamarack’s part they’ll help put together a set of articles for our Fall 2014 issue based on what emerges from the recorded conversations.

On the Fellowship’s part, we’re inviting *you*, our readers, to join the party and host conversations as well (it doesn’t matter whether you’re Canadian, eh; *everyone* needs community). If you’re inspired to play along at home—and we hope you are—ask friends and neighbors (which, by the way, are not meant to be mutually exclusive groups) to join you for an afternoon or evening of conversation about community.

Here is a template of questions to consider posing (feel free to use whichever of these inspire you, or to make up your own—this is a participatory sport, not a test to see how well you can follow instructions):

After introductions you might ask:

- What has been a memorable experience of community in your life?
- What does community mean to you?
- Why is community important to you now?
- Where do you experience community today?
- If you’ve ever had a negative experience of community, please describe it.
- What would deepening your experience of community look like?

Toward the end of the gathering, you might ask:

- What did you hear today that stood out for you?
- What were the new ideas or perspectives that you heard?
- What ideas and feelings resonated with the whole group; what themes emerged from the conversation?
- Are you interested in continuing this exploration of community?
- Are there any specific actions you’re inspired to take based on what happened in this conversation?

If you can swing it, we encourage you to record your session and send the results to Tamarack. Contact Rachel Brnjas at rachel@tamarackcommunity.ca for help in getting this done. Who knows, maybe you’ll see something from *your* group quoted in COMMUNITIES a year from now.

While it’s rare for a single voice to be strong enough to change the world, I believe that collectively our voices will be substantial enough to bridge from where we are today, all the way to Peace. ☺

* See pages 13-15 of COMMUNITIES issue #159 for a more complete picture of what Tamarack President Paul Born has in mind for the Seeking Community campaign.

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.



EFFICIENT HEATING!

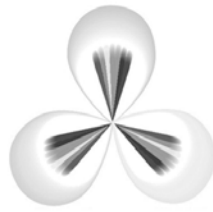
A Radiant Floor Heat System warms you from the ground up! Energy and cost efficient heat for new buildings, additions, basements, garages, greenhouses, and more. Free Shipping!

OrganicMechanic.com/Radiant
262-674-6324 • 262-ORG-MECH

Organic
Mechanic 

October 2013 to July 2014

What are the
natural principles
for living an
intentional life?



Prisma21.org
Creating the Future

Practical • Experiential • Spiritual

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.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR BY CHRIS ROTH



*Solar-popped popcorn,
à la Terra Bousquet.*

Chris Roth

Youth in Community

As often happens when assembling an issue of COMMUNITIES, I've been drawn into the issue's theme in my personal life in recent months. I don't know if it's synchronicity, or if it's because, in this case, I've made friends with a charismatic, nearly tireless, always-curious three-and-three-quarter-year-old with a musical desire to be a river otter swimming in the Indigo Creek, or her younger brother with few words yet but an impeccable sense of rhythm and a love of bouncing balls, or their older playmates whose skill on swingset and trampoline inspires their younger community friends. Or perhaps it's because a slew of 20-somethings have arrived here to learn new sustainability and community-building skills and take them out into the world—or because, at this point in my life, I was ripe to rediscover more of my own youthfulness and I found just the right people around me to help that happen.

In any case, thanks partly to community, my own experience of youth and age has been far from chronological. Having been told by a friend in high school that I was an “old man,” I'm happy to find decades later that I feel much younger than that now—able to share youthful energy with people who were still years from being born back when I was so old. Community has helped youth to rub off on me even as I enter middle age. It's also one reason for the sparkles in many community elders' eyes, especially those without nearby grandchildren of their own.

The ability to experience and appreciate youth and youthfulness—among the families and young people who lived here at the time, and among inspired elders—helped draw me in when I first joined my current community. It's a quality that I am appreciating even more now, during its resurgence here more than a decade and a half later.

Our species evolved with multigenerational community at its core. Youth, elders, and everyone in between have always depended on what we learn and gain by rubbing up against each other in our daily lives. Community, whatever form it takes, can help make that possible in ways much more organic than those normally found in the mainstream.

This issue's stories cover the full range of youth, from infancy on up. They give tastes of the magic as well as challenges of childhood, of teenhood, of young adulthood, of parenting—and of community, especially when it incorporates those particular phases of life.

As always, we welcome your feedback, your article proposals and submissions, your subscriptions and gift subscriptions, your advertising, and every other form of support you can provide for our 40-plus-year-old, but still young, publishing venture.

The world is new when we explore it together.

Thanks for joining us! 🐦

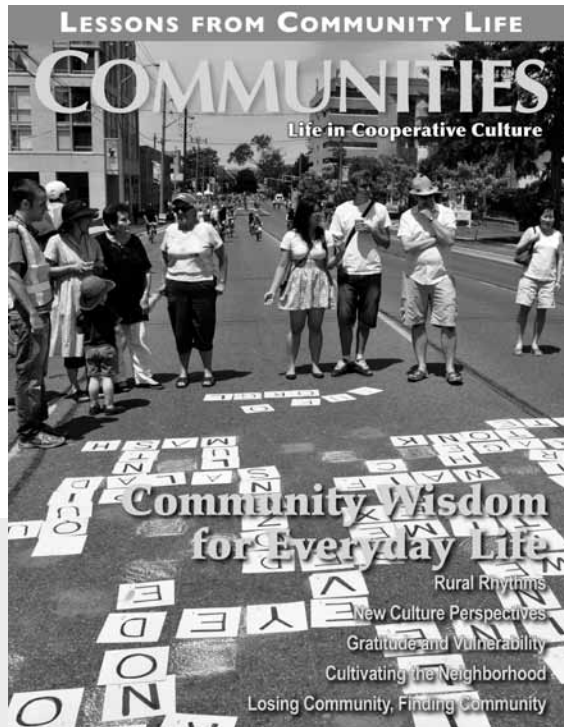
Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.

SUBSCRIBE TO COMMUNITIES MAGAZINE

Your source for the latest information, issues, and ideas about intentional communities and cooperative living today!

Each issue is focused around a theme: Conflict & Connection; Ecovillages; Growing Older in Community; Love, Romance, & Sex; Christian Communities; Cohousing ...

Reach listings—helping communities looking for people and people looking for communities find each other.



“Offers fascinating insights into the joys and challenges of communities... by their foremost pioneers.”

Corinne McLaughlin, co-author, *Spiritual Politics*,
cofounder Sirius Community

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please indicate number desired in each box (including gifts). For gift subscriptions, please attach additional addresses on separate sheet.

COMMUNITIES MAGAZINE delivered quarterly. (Outside US prices in parentheses)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-year subscription—\$24 (\$29 Canada, \$31 other) | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-year subscription—\$52 (\$66 Canada, \$73 other) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2-year subscription—\$40 (\$49 Canada, \$54 other) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sample of current issue—\$7 (\$8 Canada, \$9 other) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime subscription—\$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prepurchase of 10 copies of issue # _____—\$50, postpaid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Earmarked donation: \$ _____ for issue # _____ or for general fund _____ | |

Total Amount: \$ _____

- Enclosed is my check payable to FIC in US funds.
- Please charge Visa/MC/Discovery card (circle your choice).
Card # _____ Exp Date _____
- Please *don't* share my name with other like-minded organizations.

Please photocopy this form and mail to:
FIC, 138-CM Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa VA 23093
Ph 800-462-8240

(or subscribe online at store.ic.org)

NAME OF INDIVIDUAL OR CONTACT PERSON _____

PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

GROUP NAME OR AFFILIATION (IF APPROPRIATE) _____

STREET _____

CITY/TOWN _____

STATE/PROVINCE _____ ZIP/POSTAL CODE _____

Childhoods at Songaia from Fort Can-Be to Coming of Age

*By Fred Lanphear, Nancy Lanphear, Leah Early, Michelle Grandy,
Cyndi Kershner, Rachel Lynette, and Kate Arden*

The Songaia Neighborhood is a cluster of intentional communities in Bothell, Washington. It started in 2000 with the Songaia Cohousing Community (13 homes on 10.7 acres), and now includes the adjacent communities of Life Song Commons and New Earth Song (see www.songaia.com).

This article features stories about our Songaia children who are now teens or young adults. Fortunately, we have other children among us who are younger but their stories will be heard another time. The stories here are told by parents, other adults, and a friend of mine who came to interview the children three years ago—she was taken on quite a journey that day! Many of these stories are excerpted from a community autobiography written by Fred Lanphear before his death in 2010. Enjoy!

—Nancy Lanphear

Songaia's Fort Can-Be

“Follow me this way to the historic site of Fort Can-be.” Lucas led the way. Soon, we were across from the Common House and under the low branches of towering evergreen trees.

“We worked a year and a half on this fort,” said Lucy.

Similar to excavations of ancient antiquities that disappear with the passage of time, the partial remains of the once-sturdy fort lay before us, made from a discarded giant cable spool, branches, sticks, and mud. The fort has announced to all: “This is our territory, our place!” When has building a fort not thrilled a child? These children were no exception. Their voices rang with energy and pride.

“We have actually had several different forts here,” pointed out Christopher. “One was not big enough and we tore it down and built another one. We even built one that looked like a beaver den without water.”

All the children talked at once about their adventures building the fort, getting bored, tearing down the fort, and rebuilding something even better, and about how the forts led to an even greater challenge.

“Remember the time,” began Lucas, “when we decided our fort needed a source of water? You see, we needed a river, a stream—well, water close by. So look at what we did.” He pointed to a large dug-out mud hole and then to a four- to six-inch wide trench of similar depth. The trench continued up the hill through the green ferns, huge trees, and thick underbrush of the forest, and then out of sight.

“Up here is where the springs are,” injected Amelia. Off the group scurried, over and under the dark green ferns and bushes, following the curving trench beside and around the giant trees.

Suddenly, all stopped. “The ground’s always damp here,” Christopher showed me. “It’s an underground spring. Over here, the water hits the surface.” And sure enough, it did.

Lucy added, “We really worked hard on this trench—all of us. During the summer, we met after lunch and worked until almost dark every day until it was finished.” (The tools they used were trowels!)

“Yeah,” chimed in Ian, “and Christopher, that night he announced at dinner in the Common House—”

“The Fort Can-Be stream is unplugged today!” Amelia shouted victoriously. “Yeah, water flows!”

—Leah Early

Healing Friendship

Soon after we moved into Songaia, my son Lucas developed a serious chronic illness. Previous to then, although having food allergies, he had been a typical kid and was part of the tribe of children who roamed the property, playing for hours without much adult supervision. We called them our “free-range children.” Lucas was very happy, often taking the role of leader among the younger kids, and also being one of the kids who got along with everyone most of the time.

After developing his illness, Lucas was largely housebound for about eight months. He was no longer able to participate in community events, and in the beginning felt isolated and depressed. After some time had passed, Christopher, one of the the other community children, began a regular ritual of visiting Lucas. He would come over each day at the same time, and patiently do whatever my son could do that day. Since he lived about 100 yards from us, it was always convenient for him to come over, for which we were grateful. Christopher never got bored with Lucas, even when the day was sunny and he would rather have been outside playing with the other children. He always encouraged Lucas and tried to cheer him up. Every day Lucas looked forward to the time when his friend would come over for a visit. He would schedule his whole day around it, and his face would just light up when Christopher walked in through the door.

That December, Lucas was able to get out for a while and I took the boys to the store.



Children digging a trench to the hidden spring up the hill: “Every Fort needs a source of water, right?”

Photos courtesy of Nancy Lanphear

To my surprise, they took turns conspiring how to buy Christmas gifts for each other with what little money they had. They were excited to try to find things the other would like. It felt like a modern version of “The Gift of the Magi,” with both of them counting up their pennies to buy each other the nicest gift. I think Christopher, being raised in this community ethic of interdependence, found it natural to love and care for his friend when he needed it the most.

—*Cyndi Kershner*

The Detention Pond

Lucas was in charge. “Over this way to the historic detention pond!” The group picked up momentum. A few ran, others skipped or hopped. One little girl declared excitedly to the younger visitor about her same size, “These are the grasses where the fairies live.” “There are no such things as fairies—no real fairies,” the little boy stated firmly. “How do you know? This is only your first time here,” she threw over her shoulder as she scooted over the edge and down the 10-foot drop to the meadow. He scrambled to follow.

At the edge of the drop-off, I abruptly stopped. Chris, considerably ahead of me, shouted while pointing his finger, “Jump down right there!” “Wait a minute! Can I really do that without maiming myself?” (The author had just had a hip replacement months

“It’s cool; you have a big, big family—lots of people you can rely upon!”

prior to this site visit.) Ian quickly sensed my hesitation. “We have some stairs,” he offered. “Oh, yeah, come this way,” Lucy volunteered. While not missing a beat, she guided us around a cottage and down the stairs into the winter-dried grasses of the meadow. The grasses were high. Certainly high enough for fairies, the thought fluttered through my brain.

We headed toward a large cyclone-fenced area and through a gate. The detention pond was a bowl-shaped area that the County built years ago for water catchment in times of heavy rainfall. The children couldn’t remember a time when water stood in the bottom. Three goats baa’d from a rocky rise. Then, they trotted eagerly toward us to greet the children and to receive hugs and pats. Ian introduced me to Bella, Cookie, and Delight, and proudly showed me a tiny protruding horn on the head of one goat. I was impressed by the easy rapport shared by both the children and goats, by the warm sunshine, and by the calm that settled over all of us.

“So, here it is, the detention pond—where the girls crawled through the pipes from here to the brier patch up there in the meadow,” announced Lucas. “Up where?” I turned and looked back up the hill. “Humph, that was quite a crawl.” “Yup, and all underground, too!” “Who did it and what was it like?” Lucy stepped forward slightly. “Three of us crawled the pipes: Risa, Natasha, and me. It took us several days to plan what we wanted to do. I think Natasha went into the pipes first.” “I didn’t crawl through,” admitted Alaina. “I stayed here in case they needed help. If there was a problem, I was to go and get someone.” “We were fine. It was gross, though,” said Lucy, with her face scrunched up tightly. “It was disgusting, dark, wet, and there were lots of slugs, crunchy, slimy slugs. Since we did the army crawl, slug slime was all over our fronts. And we heard lots of weird underground noises, too.”

“Whenever anybody talked down into the tunnel to us, it was really echo-y and cool,” Natasha added. “A couple of adults saw us climb out and before we knew it, the adults put bars and rocks over the pipes so we couldn’t do that again. Good times, really good times!”

—*Leah Early*

Visits from Friends

This time it was Nancy who posed the question, “What do your friends like about coming to Songaia?”

Natasha answered first. “My last visitor to Songaia was Dylan, my boyfriend, and that was amazing. It was an unusual night. We all sang together before dinner while Kevin played his guitar. During dinner, we listened to a reading of one of Fred’s favorite authors and Dylan was like ‘Wow! This is heaven!’ Songaia folks were very friendly to him and seemed to really, really like him. It wasn’t until later that I was talking to one of Dylan’s friends, who said, ‘Yeah, I hear you live at a really cool place.’ ‘Yeah, I do,’ I said. His mom and some others have asked me about Songaia since and I’ve tried to explain. They say things like, ‘Oh, wow, I don’t know my neighbors at all.’ And, ‘it’s cool; you have like a big, big family—lots of people you can rely upon!’”

“When I stayed overnight at my friend’s house, her family thought we were a little weird, you know, because everyone’s all friendly and we do lots of singing,” said Lucy. “One friend said she feels really protected here, very safe.”

“Um, uh, guys don’t really talk much,” admitted Chris. “All they do is play soccer and then that’s it,” agreed Suzanne. Alaina quickly added, “Well, I heard Christopher’s friend getting excited about all the space that is here.” “Yeah, space for playing soccer,” Chris nodded.

“I like going to my friends’ houses,” said Lily, “cuz they have cable TV and we don’t.” “Well, there is so much more to do here than watch TV!” declared Amelia. “There is always someone to hang out with—even animals to touch and cuddle. We create our own games like Bench, Slip, and Slice and Ping. And, remember the car wash we held to raise money for fireworks on the Fourth of July? We’re always doing something fun!” “Yeah, and don’t forget our forest—we have a forest!”

—Leah Early

Rockstar

The annual Songaia “Talent Optional” Show has always been a well-attended event, with most of the community choosing to perform in one capacity or another. No one needs to audition and people perform alone or in groups. We’ve had skits, musical performances, dramatic readings, dances, and more. Each year I am amazed at the talent that our community possesses. However, one of the things I like most about the show is that you don’t actually need to have a talent



Easter celebration at Songaia: “There’s probably only healthy stuff in those plastic Easter eggs!”

to perform. Anyone who makes the effort will receive an enthusiastic response from the forgiving audience. This has led to children being unafraid attempting instrumental pieces, even after two or three lessons. Teens have paired with adults to perform interpretive dances. Adults have participated in numerous silly skits, including one memorable one about a dead parrot.

One of my favorite performances happened during one of the first shows. Ian, encouraged by his parents, was about four years old when he rocked out on a toy electric guitar. The performance itself was exactly what you might expect, a cute little kid randomly strumming and pushing buttons on a toy guitar. It was the community response that I found particularly heartwarming. As Ian played, the audience watched in rapt attention. When he was done, he was greeted with thunderous applause. Where else can a four-year-old be a “ROCKSTAR,” if only for a few minutes?

—Rachelle Lynette

Some of the Kids' Favorite Celebrations

Scott, an adult community member, asked a group of community children, “What is your favorite celebration at Songaia and WHY?”

Without much time for thought, Natasha piped up with, “My favorite is May Day with the maypole. I love dancing and I loved that chick (young woman) who came to clog, sing, and play the violin.”

“My favorite celebration,” said Amelia, “is either Thanksgiving or New Year’s Eve. At Thanksgiving we eat lots of yummy food and hang out. At New Year’s we always jump on bubble wrap and that’s fun.”

“I really like Easter,” remarked Lily. “I remember when I was really little, I just loved running around and finding

eggs in the bushes and the grass. One year Chris and I found the same egg. Chris said he found it first; I said no, that I did; and I took it and ran away.”

Ian glanced around the informal circle and filled in, “I like either Thanksgiving or New Year’s because at Thanksgiving we always have that big party (potluck feast) and get to eat lots of good stuff like pecan pie. New Year’s was neat because I got to taste some bubbly and stomp on that bubble wrap!”

“It’s neat on New Year’s Eve ’cuz we get to stay up until midnight or one o’clock in the morning,” said Chris. “I’m all for the bubble stomping, too, right at midnight.”

—Leah Early

As an only child in community, our daughter has been surrounded by “siblings” who teach many lessons about being with others.

It Takes a Village to Raise a Child

This is a phrase that has become almost a cliché...unless you live in a community! The “Village” of Songaia has been irreplaceable in my child’s life. For ecological reasons, my husband and I decided to have one child. As an only child in community, she has been surrounded by “siblings” who continue to help teach the lessons of sharing, compassion, getting along, teamwork, and the joys of being with others. The adults have mentored her. It’s not uncommon for an adult to be working in a project...and my daughter will come up with a million questions. In doing so, she has learned about topics I could never teach her: car engines’ workings, electrical circuitry, website design, starting plants from hardwood cuttings, goat and chicken husbandry...the list goes on.

As working parents, we have needed a lot of help with childcare over the years. We have swapped with other families that have children, and adopted elder members as grandparents. At common meals, my daughter gets to eat food I’ll never cook at home like beets and Brussels sprouts, which she learned she loves!

Parenting in community is also amazing. I've always had support and advice for every challenging moment I've encountered. To raise a child in our world who becomes an engaged, self-assured problem-solver while continuing to nurture one's own physical/emotional/spiritual journey as a parent...it takes a village...or at least a close-knit community like Songaia.

—Michelle Grandy

Mentoring Christopher

Last year we started up the mentoring program again so each child nine or older could have a new mentor for the year. I was really thrilled that Christopher picked me. The evening we were chosen, each mentor and their child sat together and made symbols of our team out of Fimo clay. Chris and I made a chocolate cookie from the clay, cut it in half, baked it, and wore each half as a symbol of our team. We also discussed our garden plot.

I took Chris running the other night. He recently had a birthday and talked about running a six-minute mile. Before we went out, I shared with him that I was a slow runner. As we began to move, he being out in front, he looked back at me and said, "I had no idea what you meant by really slow." We continued to run with Chris ahead of me, then he would stop and wait. Lately we've done a few things together, and it felt really special to be chosen. We have now added Frisbee to the list of shared activities.

—Kate Arden

Young Women's Coming of Age Ceremony

As the women of Songaia, we felt it important to celebrate the coming of age of our young women at the time of menarche. As our young women entered this important phase of life, we wanted them to feel celebrated, important, honored, and embraced by our adult circle of women. To this end, we met with our young women to design a ritual that would recognize the tender moments of childhood and symbolize this transition towards womanhood.

In preparation for the ritual, the young woman participates in the design of the ritual guided by a small group of women, perhaps a mentor and other women, or not. A date is set. All the women in the community are invited as well as any other women who are important to the participant, such as grandmothers, aunts, adult friends. The young women of the community who have previously completed their ritual are invited, along with the girl we think is likely to experience menarche next.

The ritual has three important parts: 1) recognizing important parts of childhood; 2) symbolic crossing over (we used a small garden bridge) to young womanhood; 3) gifts of sharing wisdom and welcoming into the community of women. The ritual has had a profound effect on young and old alike. I've been brought to tears at each event—so proud that our young women are strong in spirit.

For some, that recognition has built their self-esteem. For others, it is a way of staking claim to their young adulthood. For all, it is a bonding experience as we accept, as a community of women, a sense of responsibility in raising of all the girls—of working together to guide them along the path to womanhood. 🐾

—Michelle Grandy

Fred Lanphear was author of Songaia, a Community Autobiography and cofounder of Songaia Cohousing Community in Bothell, Washington. Fred passed away on September 9, 2010. He was the recipient of the first Geoph Kozeny Communitarian Award in 2009.

Nancy Lanphear has lived in intentional community for over 40 years, 24 years on the property that became Songaia in 2000. She and her husband Fred were cofounders

of Songaia Cohousing Community. Nancy has written other articles for COMMUNITIES about the Fabulous Food Folks of Songaia—the community's incredible food program. She now has compiled these stories of Songaia's Children in Community.

Leah Early is an old friend of the Lanphear family. She is also a great storyteller who now lives in Seattle. Leah came for a visit to Songaia one day and the children took her on a memorable site visit, sharing stories of their lives and play places here at Songaia.

Michelle Grandy has been a part of the Songaia community since 1992, although living off site until 2000 when the Cohousing community was built. She, her husband Tom, and her daughter Amelia have been critical to the ongoing community life.

Cyndi Kershner is a Songaia member and mother to Lucas, featured in several of these stories.

Rachel Lynette and Kate Arden are Songaia associates who return often to Songaia for meals, other events, celebrations, and workdays, bringing energy from the outside world. They live nearby in a shared home called Songburbia.

Nancy Lanphear adds:

"The Children were between the ages of two and 10 when Songaia Cohousing Community actually came into being. The families moved in on Thanksgiving weekend in the year 2000. Called our 'free range children,' they have grown up with each other in many roles, that of 'siblings,' friends, buddies, team mates...I could go on. One evening we asked the question, 'If you were the decision maker in your family, would you choose to live in community?' Every hand went up in the air and a resounding 'YES' was heard from all!

"These are the children about whom these stories were told, our current 'Youth in Community, Songaia!': Alaina Olson, Natasha Krasle, Risa Lysette, Lucy Lynette, Chris Olson, Amelia Barr, Ian Bansenauer, Lily Krasle, Suzanne Krasle."

Down at the Pond

a youthful take on body image

By Kim Scheidt

I genuinely value having candid conversations with my five-year-old daughter. I relish that she feels able to talk openly with me about anything, and I have hopes that we can retain that quality of our relationship always. These days I find that many of our frank conversations take place in the outhouse where she appreciates having company as she concentrates on the matter at hand. There is a feeling of privacy and intimacy of being together in the outhouse that often is reflected in the different subject matters we speak about while there.

I recall one such time last summer when she looked up at me with a serious and somewhat concerned face and asked, “Mommy, how come my yoni doesn’t stick out as far as Clover’s does? Is there something wrong with mine?”

For a moment I was taken aback. Clover is my daughter’s best friend and close neighbor of about the same age. They consider themselves to be “sister friends” and have known each other their whole lives. During the course of being naked together while swimming or playing in the hot weather, my daughter noticed that the glans, or tip, of Clover’s clitoris and the hood covering it stuck out farther than her own, and that was what she was referring to when she so matter-of-factly asked me that question.

I took the opportunity to reassure her that there were all kinds of shapes and sizes to “normal” and to talk a little about human bodies. It also gave me a moment to reflect on exactly how awesome it is that I live in a place where my daughter routinely sees a variety of naked people in a completely non-sexual setting whenever we go swimming at the pond. I cherish that she knows examples of people of varying proportions. I can say to her that some females have big yonis and some have small, that vulvas come in different shapes. I remind her that of the people she knows, some have large breasts, large hips, large noses, others have small breasts, etc., and all is normal. Some males have large penises or small or fat or skinny, some have small testicles or big testicles. Some males are circumcised and others are not. And in our community setting, where these kids are exposed to nudity and it is no big deal, it really sinks in for them on an almost unconscious level that every shape and size is normal. Not only that, just the fact that they do see a fairly large selection of human bodies provides so much information to them about the world they live in and how they themselves fit into the picture.

How healthy this aspect of intentional community upbringing seems in juxtaposition with my own and that of mainstream culture, where the majority of the nude or semi-naked bodies we are exposed to are on the pages of magazines, airbrushed to “perfection,” or in movies or even television commercials where nudity is nearly always linked to sex and only the top-tier human specimens are ever put on display for us to see. All the while we are encouraged to strive to achieve this body type, which for most of us would be completely unnatural, and we wind up feeling miserable in the process and acutely aware of our blemishes and imperfections. How much better it is in my opinion to see how unselfconscious these community kids are about their nakedness. One might say “They’ll grow out of it,” but I think not. If they are never taught to find shame in the human body then there will be none.

I felt triggered recently by an off-hand comment made by a relative of my daughter. Passing through the area on their way home from a wedding, her paternal grandparents stopped by for a few hours' visit. My daughter knew they were coming, and she patiently sat in the parking area for 20 minutes waiting for them to arrive. She was hot by the time they made their way down the hill to her dad's house and my daughter immediately stripped to the buff and launched herself into the pond. Her grandmother turned to me and quietly commented, "Well, she's not fat."

I understood that this was intended as a compliment and calmly responded, "She is a healthy little girl." However, inside myself I reeled in amazement that upon seeing her granddaughter's body this was the first thing that popped to mind to say. And yet, why is that surprising? Given the societal messages pounded into our heads from all angles about how bodies "should" be shaped, and given that most of us live in such a looksist culture where a person's worth is tied to how her physical beauty measures up, why would I be surprised to hear that a five-year-old is already being judged and compared to how she might rate according to a standard norm of beauty?

Meanwhile I applaud my daughter's happy abandon as she splashes in the shallows. She understands modesty and that certain times and places call for being covered up. She is comfortable in her skin and has no bodily shame that I'm aware of. She has seen bodies of old and young alike, and she does not judge the people inside the bodies based on their external looks. She knows that we are all unique and that no body has any reason to hide from the light of day down at the pond. 🐦

Kim Scheidt works part-time for the Fellowship for Intentional Community. She admits to feeling self-conscious while naked in the presence of others, even after eight years of living in intentional community and frequent visits to the pond.

Nik E. Bear & Katherine Sparrow



Reminiscences: Growing Up in Intentional Community

By Karin Iona Sundberg

Recently I asked six young adults who grew up together at Lost Valley Intentional Community* (LV) to explore how their experience shaped them. As mother of two of these amazing children, my experience of raising them is quite different from their memories of being raised. Although they each speak of the vast freedom they experienced—and it's true, they had this—there were many times Grace, for instance, was coerced into shoes or boots, mittens and hats by me or her dad...and the kids were watched over and guided by a strong, aligned network of adults living on this land—apparently in a way that was not noticed by the children. Or perhaps the safety and trust the kids felt is the result of this watching-over-without-over-interfering. It is fascinating to see we can all live in the same world and have vastly different orientations, impressions, and memories. I add this note here, not as a defense, but to acknowledge that raising children is complex, demanding, and requires watchfulness, guidance, love, attentiveness, limits, and engagement. I don't want the children's comments to sound like an argument for letting children run wild without physical, moral, emotional, and spiritual guidelines and markers. That said, there is a lot to say for trusting humans, even little ones, to make self-preserving, nourishing, wholesome choices, naturally.

The former LV kids interviewed here are: Noah Davidson (25), Hunter Stevens (23), Matt Kaplowitz (22), Danaan O'Donnell-Davidson (20), Bridget O'Donnell-Davidson (19), and Grace Kaplowitz (18). Noah lived with his mom in Portland most of the year and stayed at LV during summer and winter school breaks with his dad and step-mom. Hunter lived in New Orleans with his mom, and came to LV for several visits with his dad, including a yearlong stay. (Hunter wasn't present for the interview; he sent his comments via email. See sidebar.) Aside from Grace, who was born in Cabin 7 at LV, the other children arrived when they were between the ages of three and nine years old.

Another family's children, Cami, Dylan, and Tess White also lived at LV and were part of the tribe.

(See also the article "Fair Play: The Wisdom of Children in Community," page 22, for more about the Lost Valley children.)

Karin: We lived on 87 acres and you were free to roam, often unsupervised. You had tremendous independence. What do you remember about growing up?

Grace: Just being able to be outside all year around. I don't remember ever not wanting to go outside, even if it was raining. We had the feeling of, *this is where we live, it's just weather.* A lot of parents are so strict, you have to wear your mittens, you have to do it a certain way. We didn't have that. We'd go out, and if we weren't comfortable, we'd do something different like go sit by the fire.

Danaan: Yeah, or we'd go put on shoes.

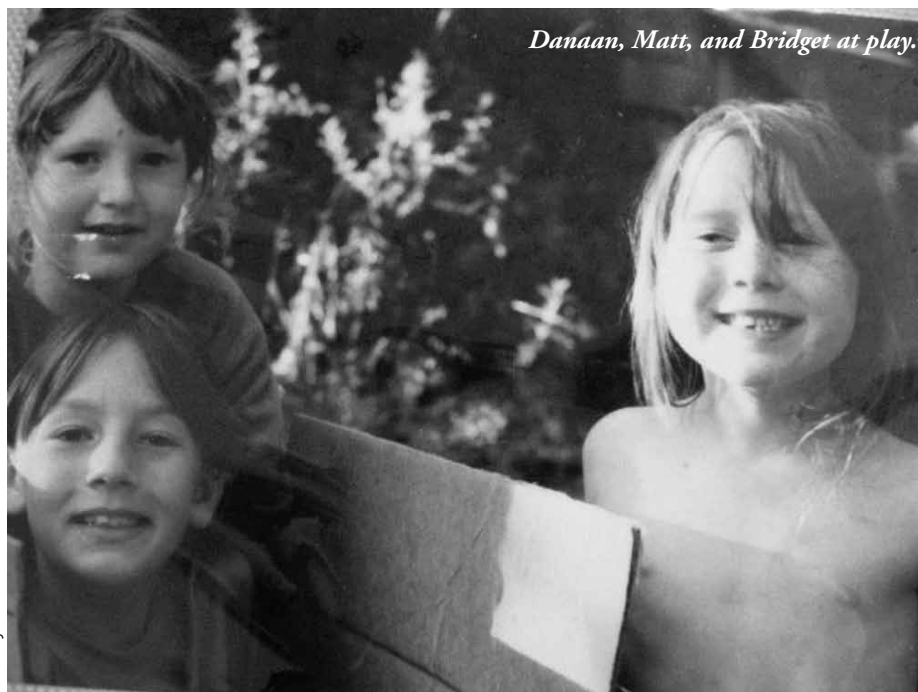
Grace: Right! We were barefoot all the time.

Noah: I'm remembering one of my favorite things about Lost Valley (LV). You read *Harry Potter*, about this magical, safe area you can explore—all these things that only you know about, like secret passageways and hidden spots off in the forest. It's this magical realm every kid dreams about. It felt like we had that. [Everyone agrees.] Every time we'd go out into the woods we could find a new hidden fort or a new little pristine stream valley. That sense of exploration and independence—that's something that I don't think most kids get. It was so amazing.

Grace: And we played all these imagination games where we'd run around in the forest with our magic powers...

Matthew: Yeah, we did a lot of role-playing...almost like live-action D&D** with intricate plots. We'd start with a premise: Danaan and I know each other; we'll

Danaan, Matt, and Bridget at play.



Tammy Davis



Hunter (with stick) and Matt near the spiral garden.



Grace and Matt with capes and swords.

walk through the woods; we'll encounter another person and they'll have a back story and we'll be captured or...

Danaan: We didn't need toys.

Matthew: We'd spend hours just describing the characteristics of our *sticks*, what kind of weapons they were. Danaan, your sticks were always staves with diamond blades that would shoot out.

Danaan: That was Noah's idea originally.

***Karin:* You really admired each other for your imaginations; for instance, Noah's diamond bladed staff, or his newfangled airplane designs.**

Noah: On Christmas we'd get all these silly toys, like battery-powered video games. We'd play with them for a week, and then they just seemed boring. Who wants to sit inside and play with a little plastic thing when you can go run around miles of forest and build your own castles in your imagination?

Grace: Except for Legos...we played with those pretty consistently. If we built something ourselves, that piece would be ours, and then the rest of the Legos were fair game.

***Karin:* Grace, when you were born, we told the kids, "You have to include her; it's not an option to leave her out." There could have been problems with that stance but you all seemed to accept it. You as a group also had a huge level of acceptance for one another's differences. I remember thinking this was an extraordinary thing, your depth of acceptance for one another. How did you resolve difficulties when you had them?**

Grace: We just couldn't get in a fight with one friend and leave to hang out with all our other friends. We accepted each other as we were. It didn't occur to me to want people to be different. If something was frustrating, I'd think, that's just how he or she is. It's fine. That's just Hunter. That's just Matt.

Danaan: One time Dylan and I went to Matt, because Matt was the leader at the time. We said, "Matt, which one of us is your best friend?" Matt answered, "You're both my best friend." But we kept at him, "No, Matt. Who is your best friend?" He sat there for a while. My family had only just moved to the community a short time before this. Eventually Matt said, "Dylan is my best friend." I left and hid underneath the stairs of the hostel. Pretty soon, Matt and Dylan came and got me, and apologized at length. By the next day we were hanging out again. I remember it was traumatizing, but it was only traumatizing for like, half an hour, and then it was done.

Noah: Hunter was such an interesting experience for me. You all knew him better than I did because he'd visited a couple times when I wasn't there. I was really skeptical of him. He seemed like the bullies I knew from school, and it took me awhile to get that, where he came from, that was how he needed to present himself to not *get* bullied. He was from a harder neighborhood. And to realize that someone might act that way, and just be a total sweetheart...that was one of my first experiences of realizing you can't judge a book by its cover. People are people.

I think it was good that we had some people coming in and out of LV rather than it being a little insular group. I could compare LV to my experiences in Portland and share my outside-world ideas, and Hunter brought a lot of culture and novelty into

* Our family lived at Lost Valley Educational Center and Intentional Community in Dexter, Oregon from 1994-2004. My husband and I moved there with our three-year-old son, Matt, and our daughter, Grace, was born there in 1995. For about a half dozen years, six to 10 children regularly played together.

** Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy, role-playing game the LV children played for a number of years.

HUNTER'S RESPONSE

Well let's see, where to start! I was an average '90s child back home; hyper, smart but unmotivated, ADHD medicated, heavily influenced by the dysfunction of my family and our society. LV was like a different world for me, a place where I learned not all hippies drop acid and not all vegetarian food is bad (except most of it is, lol ["laugh out loud"]).

But really if I helped them know about American culture, it was in exchange for them helping me know about the virtues of a good person, reflected in people my own age. The way I related to my friends back in Louisiana was totally different from the way I did at LV. Being at LV helped me see that not all people in the world act like people from Louisiana, opening the door for my mind to accept all sorts of different perspectives in the long run.

When I was home we would get in fistfights with each other every single day—it was just how we played. I remember the shock of doing something violent towards one of the kids at LV, and it being looked on as completely unwelcome and abhorrent. Sure we would run around with sticks and stuff, but smacking somebody with one was pretty taboo.

The most shaping experience was definitely when I spent that full year at LV when I was 11 or 12, when we home-schooled with Tanya and my Dad. I changed more that year than I have in the rest of my life combined. I calmed down a lot for one, at the same time not taking my Ritalin for the first time long term, and realizing I didn't need it and probably never did. I learned how to communicate, instead of shutting down or lashing out.

Lost Valley was such a major turning point in the formation of who I am that I shudder to think what may have become of me, or what I may have become, without it.

our group: new ways of interacting and challenges to overcome that all contributed a lot to how LV affected us.

Karin: Danaan, you said Matt was the leader; so there was a hierarchy?

Danaan: I think Matt was the most strongly opinionated and so in a way we'd just all form around him. Whatever Matt wanted to play that day, that's the game we would be playing.

Matthew: When Hunter was there he'd have a strong opinion about it too.

Danaan: Sometimes there was conflict between Matt and Hunter.

Bridget: We just naturally figured out that the most stable form of government is a hierarchy, and bi-polarity and multi-polarity don't work very well.

Matthew: As kids, there was a clear correlation between age and power.

Grace: One time we were all singing the Smash Mouth song together in the lodge as a choir and someone came in. Matt didn't want to sing it anymore. I was upset because I really wanted to finish singing it.

Danaan: It didn't really feel like a hierarchy though; it felt like we all just had ways that we interacted with each other...

Grace: Matt would suggest an idea and we'd started playing his game, but then we'd all add our ideas to it.

Danaan: And if Matt had a dumb idea we'd change it.

Matthew: I didn't feel like I had power over anyone; I had a strong influence and a strong opinion.

Noah: I think a big influence was that the older kids could most clearly express what they wanted and why they wanted it. When I was there and wanted to do something that other kids didn't, half the time I could convince them...first by being able to say *why* I wanted to do it and second, because they didn't have a reason for why they *didn't* want to do it. There were power dynamics with age but we did a good job trying not to be forceful with it.

Grace: I always wanted to do what everyone else was doing at the time. I just wanted to be with everyone.

Noah: Danaan would often want to do what I wanted because I was his older brother; it wasn't forceful at all. It's just how little kids look up to older kids as their role models.

Bridget: For me, the more time we spent trying to decide what to do, the less time was left to do it. I just wanted to start playing.

Matthew: It usually came down to: *Are we playing a weapon game or a power game?*

Bridget: That was the question. That was it.

Karin (speaking to Bridget and Grace): With game playing, you were strongly influenced by your brothers.

Grace: Yes, but we also played a lot of stuffed animals, Tess, Bridget and I. My stuffed animals would get married and kiss and have babies sometimes.

Bridget: And we built fairy houses.

Danaan: We made leprechaun houses...

Noah: With trap doors.

Danaan: They looked the exact same as fairy houses. The only difference is that ours were leprechaun houses. You guys decorated yours with flowers; we reinforced ours with bark.

Karin: How did you resolve disagreements in the group?

Danaan: I remember Matt and I got in a fight once; we each went and got our sticks. I got my best stick, which was a bamboo pole, and Matt found a big branch on the ground. So I had my best stick and he had a huge branch with

other branches coming out and we just started attacking each other. He hit me and I hit him, and then we decided—because my hand was hurt—*this is dumb*. I thought Matt got the better of me, but apparently I hit him too, because he was also in pain.

Matthew: We just smacked each other and then were done.

Grace: I bet there was more physical roughhouse fighting than emotional fighting.

Danaan: Something about unsupervised children—we could just, we'd get really mad, hit each other and then were friends again. It depended too, on personalities. Dylan would sometimes leave for a day or two before coming back to be friends with everyone again.

***Karin:* What was your experience having so many adults to interact with?**

Grace: Dad wasn't into roughhousing, so whenever anyone needed to be thrown around, it was really great that we had so many adults who liked to play that way.

Danaan: Except, everyone got mad at Ory..

Grace: Yeah, Ory was a little over the top.

He always used to try to make me salsa dance. And I'd be like, "No, I don't want to."

Grace: Tess, Bridget, and I had a massage business. We'd go around massaging everyone's shoulders during dinner at the lodge, charging 10 cents. Ory told us, you can't charge 10 cents—you don't have a business license.

Grace: Adults didn't talk down to us as kids and we didn't have to censor what we were saying; at the same time I was unaware of most adult concepts.

***Karin:* Were you aware of adult discussions and challenges?**

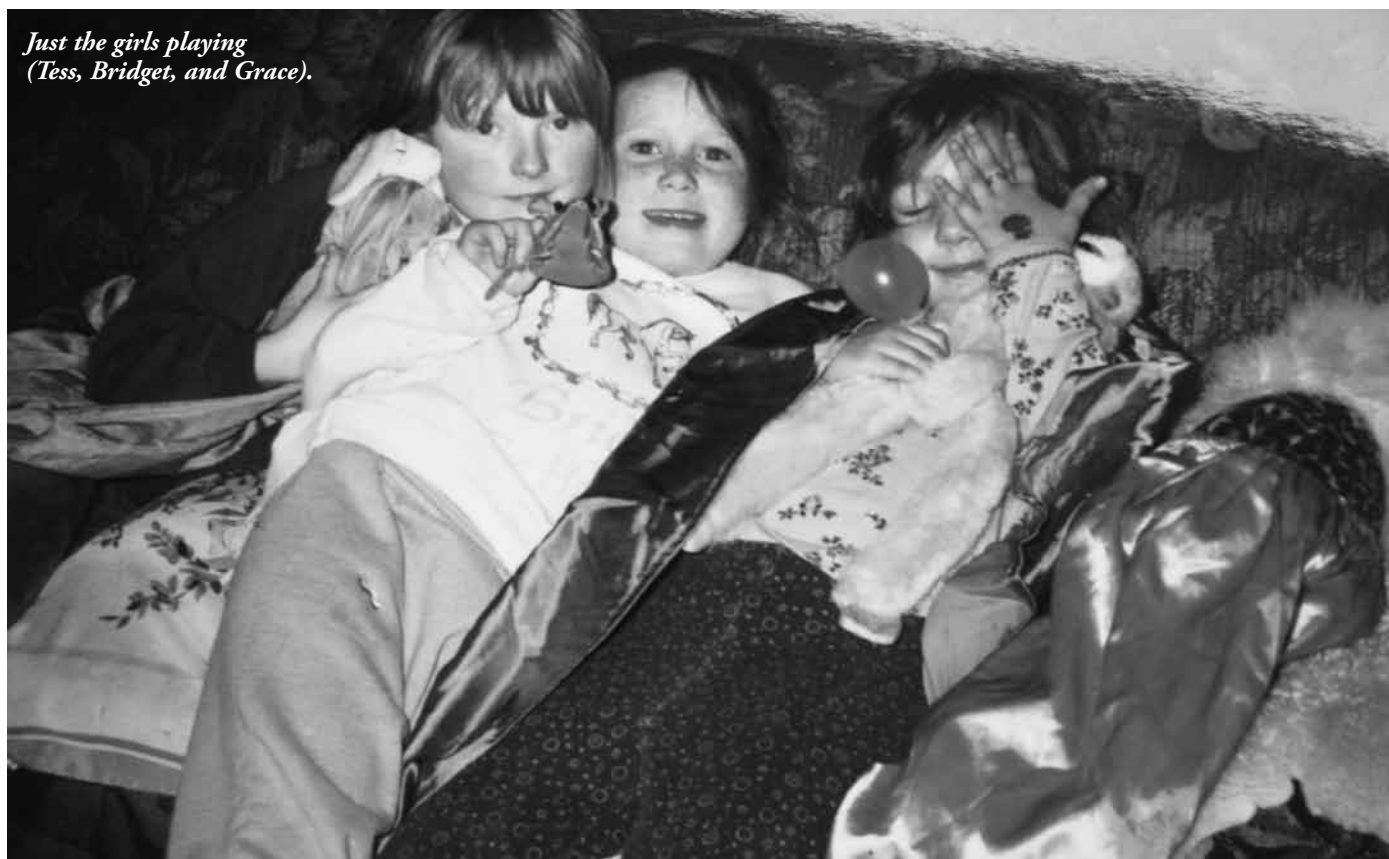
Matthew: I remember hearing numerous times about how difficult the meetings were. How nothing would ever get done, how it was really frustrating for people, and how there were certain people in the meetings who would become obstinate and difficult. I remember being completely confused, because to me, everyone seemed nice and got along. I thought, "What do you mean things don't get done? There are no problems." The biggest problem I remember is when we needed to dig a new well and there was some struggle around that. Mainly what I remember is walking around with a little dowsing rod thinking, *this is fun*.

Grace: I remember being at meetings and everyone would be talking back and forth and I'd just be sitting there drawing.

Noah: My dad would tell me there was a lot of difficulty with the governing of LV and on some level I just didn't believe it. I thought, "Really? No, you guys are just having a little spat. I know what that's like."

***Karin:* We had workshops where adults were expressing and moving through big emotions; you were welcome to come into the classroom and sometimes did. What were your impressions? It seemed much of the time as a group you were in your own world.**

Grace: Yes, like in a bubble. I don't remember any tension or anything like that. I remember people would either be together or they weren't together. Sometimes they'd



*Just the girls playing
(Tess, Bridget, and Grace).*

Tammy Davis

be yelling or crying...

Matthew: Mostly what I remember are skits and the dancing.

Grace: I remember some people really going for it, being really upset, but I don't remember being affected.

Karin: You didn't seem upset at the time.

Grace: Yeah I think it was just normal. And the idea of waking up and seeing a whole troop of naked people running by screaming, I'd laugh and think, *there they go!*

Danaan: Those crazy adults.

Grace: It's so funny to look at pictures from when I was little: there's all these adults covered only in mud, and there's me in the middle looking happy. Or there's this picture of adults all dressed up and looking crazy and there's me, smiling.

Karin: How has what you experienced and learned growing up in community affected your life choices?

Danaan: The community taught me an appreciation for nature that I don't think I would have learned by living in a city. My favorite memories are going for walks in the woods with my family and our dog. I remember the first time I ever saw a clearcut, where LV land ended at the neighboring property. Some time recently I was thinking of that sight and just started crying, it's that vivid in my mind.

Noah: When I'm deciding where to live, one of the first things I do is see where the parks are, how big they are, and go visit them. To be able to immerse in nature is a top priority—always having access to that. Nature is relaxing; changes your perspective. When you're just in square rooms, just with people, it's so easy to get caught up in human problems. As soon as we're in the woods, we are happy, we're relaxed...

Matthew: Nature helps me to be in the present. I'm not thinking about what assignment is due next week. I'm hearing the sounds, seeing the different colors in trees or bushes. It's grounding.

Danaan: I'm drawn to cooperative living environments like the student co-ops on campus. I love them; they're cool. Co-ops remind me of the communal idea of everyone taking turns cooking meals, everyone eating meals together. This builds community in a way that I don't see outside of that context. Everyone has tasks that help the community overall, and each member is intentional about their environment.

Noah: From a logical standpoint, co-ops make sense and from an emotional standpoint, living communally also feels so much better. This sounds cliché, but when you're afraid of your neighbors—locking your doors because you don't want your neighbors to steal your stuff—versus when you're family with your neighbors...you all have so much more or less when you share communal food meals, and take care of each other. I'm drawn to people who give big hugs when they see each other and who like to give each other massages. I think LV is such a huge part of why I'm always seeking that.

Bridget: For me at LV, honesty was a big thing. Then when I reached the age of 13 and 14, I thought: *screw honesty, I don't need that.* Later I figured out that honesty comes naturally to me. I'm terrible at lying. So now whenever I'm interacting with a new person, my go-to strategy is to be really honest with them. Sometimes I'll just say, "Hi. I need somebody to talk to. Do you?" Pretty reliably, they'll say, "Yes, this is a horribly awkward place..." I think that push for honesty is from LV, and I've finally accepted the lesson. Being honest is what I do.

Grace: I have so many friends who live with their immediate families and don't really have any other adult support. There's the whole family dynamic where a lot of people my age don't want to be honest with their parents. They want to separate from their families, but have no other support. Not only do I think we have special relationships with our families much of the time, but we were surrounded by adults that are basically like family. Even now when I see them, I feel loved and supported by them. They've known me forever. It would be so hard for me to have a horrible life and not know what to do, because I have so many people that are watching out for me, who would help me. I don't think I could ever really feel alone with it.

Karin: What happened when you left LV? How was your transition to the world outside intentional community?

Grace: The main thing I noticed leaving community was hav-



Larry Kaplowitz

Matt Kaplowitz helping his sister, Grace, learn to ride.

ing a same-age peer group in school. This made me uncomfortable, because I was used to interacting with a mixed-age group of kids and adults. I had very good social skills with adults and could communicate clearly with them, but was really shy with, and didn't understand other kids. Ever since then, although there are a few people my age or younger that I really enjoy, I generally tend to gravitate toward people who are older, who discuss ideas that I find more interesting.

Danaan: After homeschooling, we started going to third grade in the local school while still living at LV. On the first day of class, the teacher handed out a worksheet, and I immediately started crying because I couldn't remember the difference between addition and subtraction. But I was all caught up and doing well in math by fourth grade.

Bridget: The transition to school was rough. I remember being completely confused with a multiple-choice quiz. I didn't understand how to answer correctly and filled in all the wrong bubbles. It was embarrassing. And I'd always leave my shoes on the playground; the teachers would yell at me because I'd come to class without shoes on.

Matthew: Without Hunter, the transition moving into town would have been even more difficult. It took me a long time to adjust to all the social standards and new people, but if I hadn't had Hunter as a friend, I don't know if I would've made it. I remember one time he was telling me about Mardi Gras, and I asked what that was. He said, "You don't know what Mardi Gras is? What American doesn't know what Mardi Gras is?" There were so many broader cultural things he introduced me to, like boxers—what are boxers? Underwear is white and tight.

So many things...like music; he introduced me to not just rap but Iron Maiden and Raging Against the Machine. There was a time I thought Led Zeppelin was so hard I didn't even want to ask if I could listen to it. I didn't want to go there, I felt it inappropriate. He helped break me out of my little cocoon.

Karin: Any other special memories or impressions of Lost Valley?

Grace: For years whenever anyone found small animals in distress, they'd bring them to me and Matt. We had all these baby mice that would only live for a day or two. We'd collect frog eggs and put them in a tank, then watch them turn into baby frogs and let them loose again. When the raccoon killed all the other ducks, we found Peep, the baby duck, and brought her home. Being able to do that with animals, having an interactive relationship with animals was special.

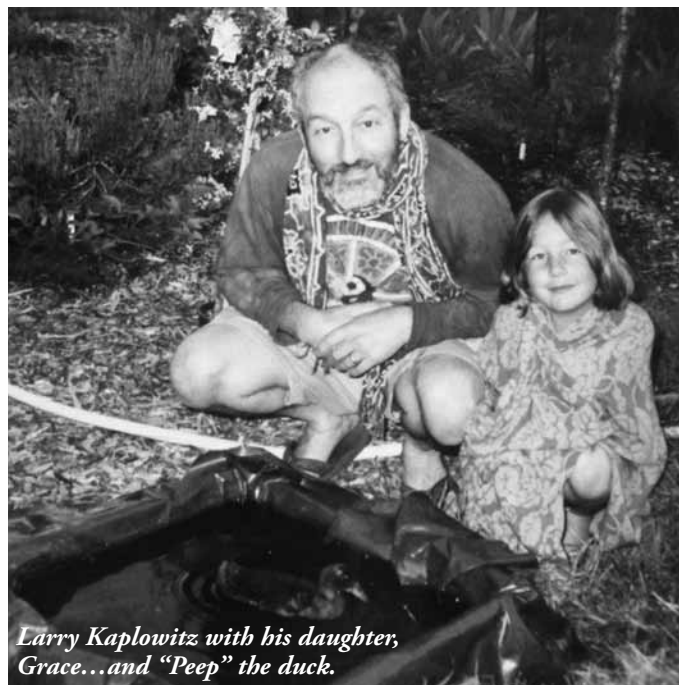
Danaan: We had chickens too.

Bridget: I thought all chickens liked to be picked up by me...

Grace: Yeah, me too!

Bridget: ...and it turns out that they don't like that. The whole time we lived at LV, I thought, *I'm great with chickens.* I'd go, "here chickens, here chickens."

Grace: The animals were awesome. I remember we had sheep



Larry Kaplowitz with his daughter, Grace...and "Peep" the duck.

Karin Iona Sundberg

and had to chase them down the road when they escaped.

Noah: There were almost no rules. Every once in a while someone would tell us, "this is off limits," and I'd be shocked that there was a rule. We would go play in the office building, turn it into our own play area, and we'd be okay about cleaning up after ourselves, I think. And we'd do that in the commons too. Experiments like dropping ice cubes on the stove... It felt like all the adults trusted us to be somewhat reasonable. They didn't say, "that's a bad idea to try and carry your Legos while you're on your bike." They just let us figure out it was a bad idea. They didn't tell us it was a bad idea to climb a tree that we might fall out of. I felt the adults trusted us to take care of each other and learn on our own. There were very few artificial boundaries.

Grace: We were able to go swimming in the creek and pond, and later in the season when it was dry, we'd walk down the creek and discover little creatures and salamanders.

Danaan: We were allowed to use the kitchen however we wanted.

Grace: Yeah, even go steal butter and noodles and eat them raw.

Danaan: Or take milk, cinnamon, and sugar and mix them together into our homemade horchatas...

Bridget: A lot of cooking of dry noodles over candles...

Noah: Or learning you don't need to cook oats if you put them in yogurt.

Grace: Nutritional yeast on everything. I remember anytime I ate anything, bread, pasta, rice, it was always yeast, olive oil, dulse, and tamari. I still do that to this day.

Danaan: We also learned that if a bike chain breaks and you put a stick there to fix it, it probably won't stay fixed. 🐣

Karin Iona Sundberg is a writer, painter, and poet living in Eugene, Oregon. She makes her living as one of the flock at Hummingbird Wholesale.

Fair Play: The Wisdom of Children in Community

By Karin Iona Sundberg

When the tribe of Lost Valley* children ranged between the ages of two to six years old, they did an extraordinary thing: they communally shared their favorite stuffed animals. At the end of the day, they piled all their toys into a suitcase, and one of the kids would bring it home for the night. The role of caretaker for and protector of their “pets” was an honored and earnest responsibility. In the morning he or she would slog the suitcase back into the circle for all to share, and that night another child would take a turn bringing it home.

Watching this scenario unfold, I saw that living in community gave my children something beyond what I ever imagined.

Of course, there was bound to be a struggle or two around who would bring the suitcase home, which the children resolved with logic, fairness, and giving in to whoever yelled the loudest. After several days the group decided the stuffed animals should live with their owners again, as some of the children couldn't sleep well without them.

A year or so later, it happened again with a game they became intensely engaged in: Pokémon. The children arrived at the decision to combine all of their cards, including the best and most powerful cards they'd each individually collected; because if one of them had a better deck it wasn't as fun for them to play, whether they won or lost. Playing against each other with “equal” decks was more engaging, enjoyable, and fair.

The idea of sharing their most precious treasures was done without adult supervision or suggestion. How did this happen? Was it a result of the particular temperaments of our children, especially the older kids who influenced their younger siblings? Or did their behavior spring from living in intentional community? Is it duplicable, and should this even be a goal?

My son, Matt, was one of the older children in the tribe; he's now 22. I ask him what he thinks influenced the group with regard to fairness, and what inspired them as young children to share as they did. He says, “I think it was both our personalities *and* the culture we lived in. At Lost Valley (LV) there wasn't a lot of social stratification. Our living conditions were pretty equal—none of the cabins were better than the others; we all had pretty much the same stuff.

“From a young age, I never understood why anyone would want to cheat on games. Games are for fun, and for me the satisfaction of winning a game came from the knowledge that we all had the same chance to win; it was a test of my abilities. So sharing the Pokémon cards made sense to me.

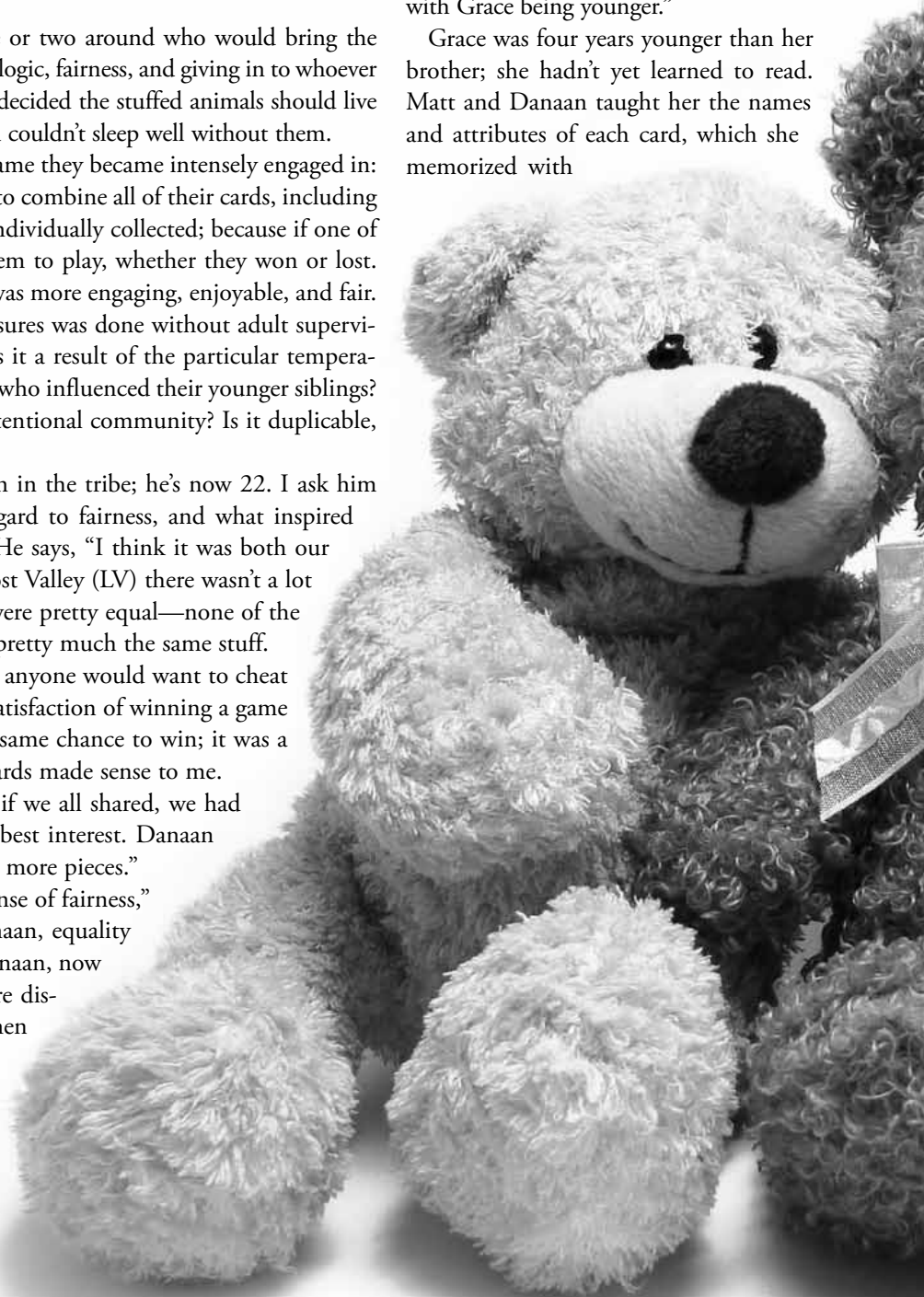
“There was a utilitarian standpoint as well; if we all shared, we had access to more resources. It was in everyone's best interest. Danaan and I shared our Legos so we could build with more pieces.”

“Danaan definitely took away a *ridiculous* sense of fairness,” his sister, Bridget, says emphatically. “For Danaan, equality and fairness are above all else in the world.” Danaan, now 20 years old, remembers that “when there were disparate proportions of material possessions—when one child had more of something than the others—there was more willingness to share” in order to level the playing field.

For a number of years the LV children immersed themselves in imaginative board games. Much of their playtime was spent trad-

ing *Magic*** cards to improve their decks. Danaan says, “It was important that trades were fair; it had to be good for both people. If there were just two of us instead of a group, I wonder how much we'd care about making it fair. Within the group, we monitored each other and made sure we'd not take advantage of each other, like with Grace being younger.”

Grace was four years younger than her brother; she hadn't yet learned to read. Matt and Danaan taught her the names and attributes of each card, which she memorized with



fervent devotion. Matt usually watched out for his sister, but he recalls, “Once Grace had a deck of cards I liked. She played with us but this time she didn’t understand what she had. I traded my deck for hers, knowing it was in my favor, ripping her off a little bit. This illuminates how important fairness was in our group, because I didn’t feel good about the trade and I still remember it. Shortly afterward when we began playing with the cards, she realized it was a bad trade and asked to trade back. I’m not certain if we did or not.”

Grace doesn’t remember this trade, but says, “I imagine I would get Matt to trade back.” Which she would, and the group

would support her; Danaan’s eight-year-old self would be heard telling his best friend, “Matt, that’s not a fair trade.”

Danaan went on to play in *Magic* tournaments around the country. He shines more insight onto the practice of fairness when he adds, “In the *Magic* community, older people look out for the younger ones, making sure they make good trades and aren’t taken advantage of. Then at around 14 years old you’re considered an ‘adult’ and have to fend for yourself.

“If I know I’m going to be playing with someone frequently, fairness in trading cards is important. There’s an ongoing relationship. At a state tournament where I see people maybe once a year, I’m more willing to take advantage of them, especially if they are older than me. If I thought I was getting a better deal in the trade, I’d think they must need the cards for something else.”

Danaan mentions that he was uncomfortable in and strongly influenced by the competitive “capitalist” culture in the *Magic* community, and feels that he would make different choices now.

We gave our children just a few rules: No hurting one another. No damaging property. Cooperate with adult requests (e.g., tone the noise down; play elsewhere; don’t “bury” dead mice in toilet with dirt and sticks and then flush). Clean up after yourselves. Include everyone who wants to play.

Of course there were times the children played by themselves or in smaller groups or pairs, but no child was ever ostracized. If excluding someone isn’t a viable option, if there is an ironclad directive that the group remains open and inclusive, does this in itself support a tribe in being honest, generous, kind, and fair? Only if the group has a strong culture of acceptance to begin with, and welcomes each individual on their own terms.

Bridget and Danaan’s brother, Noah, says, “We learned to let things go and accept people. We’d get in fights, but the next day I wouldn’t want to just be alone; I’d want to be with my friends. It wouldn’t cross my mind: *I’m not going to be friends anymore*. It would just fade into the past one day later. They’re your family; they are who you are hanging out with day to day.”

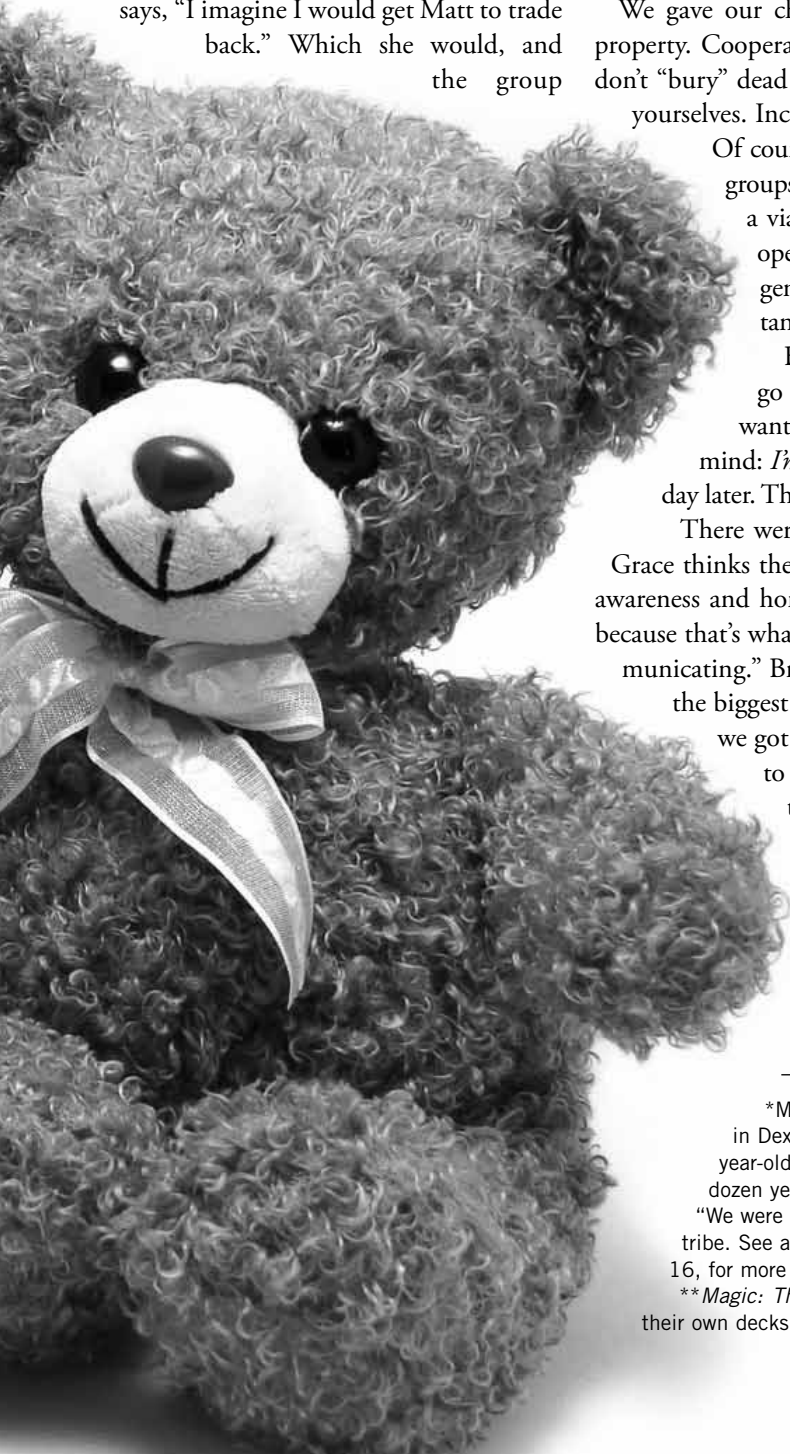
There were other influences that may have affected our children’s behavior. Grace thinks the regularly scheduled Naka-Ima workshops, which focused on self-awareness and honest, responsible communication, “had a big indirect affect on us because that’s what all the adults were doing. And so we got to see their way of communicating.” Bridget agrees that honesty was emphasized at LV, and adds, “One of the biggest things I learned with regard to interactions was the idea that when we got mad at each other it was important to understand what happened; to listen to the other person’s side of the story—which I didn’t want to do, especially with Danaan! We learned to ask, how can we solve this problem without anyone being wrong?”

Our tribe of kids imprinted honesty, fairness, and looking out for one another. I think in part, we got lucky. But what also helped was intentionally creating a strong, durable, flexible, safe, and nurturing container for our kids...which entailed facing our adult

(continued on p. 69)

*My family lived at Lost Valley Educational Center and Intentional Community in Dexter, Oregon from 1994-2004. My husband and I moved there with our three-year-old son, Matt, and our daughter, Grace, was born there in 1995. For about a half dozen years, six to 10 children regularly played together. As Grace recently explained, “We were like one big unit that happened to have a seven-year span.” In other words, a tribe. See also the article “Reminiscences: Growing Up in Intentional Community,” page 16, for more perspectives from those children.

***Magic: The Gathering* is a strategic game of trading cards; players design and build their own decks.



RAISING SUPERHEROES

How Our Kids Are Learning to Use Their Power for Good

By Alyson Ewald

“So I got suspended yesterday,” began the pierced, green-haired teenager with a grin. He was standing before a roomful of 50 friends, neighbors, and visitors at his community’s monthly No-Talent Show (“talent allowed but not required,” as the organizers explained).

Skyler, the teenager, cleared his throat and glanced around, betraying some nervousness behind his bold stance. “I wrote a poem that my teacher didn’t like, so he sent me to the principal, and she didn’t like it either, so I got suspended. So now I’m going to read you the poem that got me kicked out of school.” The room was completely silent, all eyes riveted on Skyler.

He began to read. In my opinion his poem contained nothing more provoking than a normal dose of adolescent rebellion, heavy with disgust at hypocrisy and abuse of power, spiked with a little profanity. It was clear why Skyler’s teachers in this small midwestern town had tried to silence his voice, and also clear that his critical thinking, integrity, and courage were healthy and strong. Now he was playing to his home crowd.

When he reached the last line, the room erupted in applause and whistles. Skyler, still grinning, shuffled offstage. Yet one more reason I live in community, I thought. A kid can stand up in front of his parents and his whole neighborhood, read aloud the daring poem that got him

suspended from school, and receive full support and approval. If all teenagers could get that kind of support, more of them might survive to adulthood.

What Community Does for Our Kids

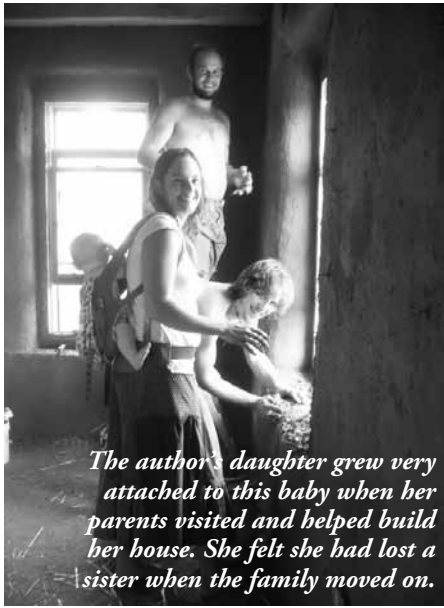
My daughter Cole, who is five, plays weekly with a group of children she calls her Puzzle Friends “because we fit together like a puzzle.” The three girls and two boys have known each other nearly since birth. Raising our daughter among like-minded adults has brought innumerable benefits to everyone in our family, although living in community has also brought some tricky challenges to child-rearing.



Cole and her Puzzle Friends at play. Left photo: Cole learns to sing along with Mark's music.



Photos courtesy of Alyson Ewald



The author's daughter grew very attached to this baby when her parents visited and helped build her house. She felt she had lost a sister when the family moved on.



Cole dances at a community party.



One of the most powerful ways it's helped us is in expanding my daughter's pool of adults to learn from. After receiving a hand-carved spoon from a community member as a gift, Cole decided she wanted to learn to carve wood. She asked me the man's number, called him up, told him she wanted to take wood-carving lessons from him, checked with me about her schedule, and made plans on the spot. The next week she came home with a butter knife she had carved and sanded herself.

Another benefit of living closely with like-minded adults is that I know I can trust the people Cole hangs out with to hear and respect her, and also to model for her appropriate ways of behaving with others. All the families have practiced baby sign, elimination communication, co-sleeping, baby-wearing, and nonviolent communication. When two of her friends recently reported an ongoing conflict that had come up between them at my house, the two mothers and I conferred about it with the kids in conflict, and together came up with a response which so far appears to have reversed the unpleasant dynamic. The children felt empowered to change something in their lives that wasn't working, and they experienced their parents and other adults as supportive friends and allies.

This kind of cross-generational teamwork and learning has become commonplace in our daily lives. As we learn to grow food, build our homes, collect rainwater, care for animals, and make medicine, our children are watching us and learning alongside us. Last week my daughter had picked a wild yarrow flower and was chopping it on the doorstep. "I'm making a tincture," she informed me. Our housemate took a break from her work to show Cole how to infuse the plant in alcohol and label it. Later that day Cole showed it proudly to her father. "That's amazing," he told her, "I'm not even sure I know what yarrow is, let alone how to tincture it." Good thing we don't live out here alone.

Closeness and Separation

When at times her papa Mark and I feel sad that Cole has no brothers or sisters, we watch her with her friends and realize she's not missing out on much. None of her closest friends have siblings, yet they have developed intense relationships with many of the opportunities for social learning that kids usually get from siblings. They walk to each other's houses, have sleepovers, develop intricate make-believe realities, know the same songs and games, and remember each other's favorite color and current name (I can't keep track, they change their names so often).

They also argue over sharing, struggle to establish, defend, and subvert pecking

orders, fight to be included by others, experience what happens when they resort to violence, and generally figure out how to use their power in the world for good and not for evil. Because of their parents' commitment to our local community, these kids are likely to remain near each other, and may continue to have this closeness as they grow older.

Being in community also brings its particular pain and loss, which can feel especially intense for youngsters. People frequently come into our lives and grow quickly into a fairly close relationship with us and our children, sometimes even sharing our work day, meals, and social time as if they were part of our family. When Cole was three, a family with a baby stayed with us for several months, and she began calling the baby her sister. The family ultimately decided to move elsewhere, and Cole felt bitterly betrayed and heartbroken. Since then she has been much slower to accept anyone close to her heart. Another parent confided in me that her son had experienced a similar heartbreak over a departing intern, and had been standoffish with new members ever since.

I have seen the same pattern in myself—it sometimes takes more than a year for me to begin opening up to someone new, fearing always that it will lead to suffering in the end, but eventually going for it anyway. I hope our children are learning to make new friends and keep the old, as the song goes, but I do think that living in community is causing them to be especially cautious before they dive in deep.

What the Kids Do for Me

It's important to me that my life yields a world that is better in some measure than it was before I was here. Being in community with young people helps me feel I'm creating the society that I hope will continue after I depart. When I learned recently a way of handling conflict called Restorative Circles, I began using tools from that practice that were age-appropriate for Cole and her gang. When someone calls a circle to deal with a conflict ("Alyson, Charles is leaving me out!" "How can I help?" "I want you to help him hear how I'm feeling!"), we sit down, make sure each person has a chance to be fully heard, let people explain why they acted as they did, and see if anyone wants to ask for anything to change. The kids run the circle; I'm just there to check whether they feel heard.

Admittedly, this is a pretty aware, creative, empowered group of preschoolers, but they immediately saw the potential in this technique, and I find myself facilitating a brief circle every couple of weeks. Conflicts have begun to lead to giggles instead of pouts. In offering them this tool, I feel confident I'm teaching them how much safer it is to step forward into conflict than to avoid it, and how much more likely to yield positive change in their lives. This is the world I want for them and their peers, and they are giving me the precious chance to help build it with them.

And that's just one way they improve my life. The younger set is teaching me every day how to remain present ("Mama, look at this huge spider!"), how to embrace creativity (have you seen a four-year-old's paintings lately?), how to have an open mind ("Of course this train might fly. Anything is possible!"), and about having the courage to take on new experiences ("Is 'sparagus spicy?"). Homeschooling is a whole new ball of wax when I consider that we're learning together, each from and with the other.

From being with a variety of children we adults are also graced with their mirroring presence, which shows us how important it is to model the behavior we want to see in them. If we expect our children to express anger appropriately, then we'd damn well better learn to express it appropriately ourselves. If we want them to learn that it's all right to cry, and that crying is part of healing, then we'd better learn



Photos starting from the top: 1. Kids in a strong community can learn valuable skills while spending time with neighborhood adults. Here the author receives valuable pecan-shelling assistance from a few young friends. 2. Children building homes alongside their parents gain a sense of accomplishment and deep connection with their shelter. The author's daughter Cole assesses her future floor alongside her father Mark. 3. Cole helps water the seedlings. 4. A group of "only children" connecting over The Red Balloon at a birthday party. Kids in community often spend so much time together that they become like siblings.



to let others see our own tears, with compassion for ourselves and others in sorrow or pain. And if we want them to learn great communication skills, we need to actually listen to each other in meetings, and over the dinner table. When it comes to personal growth, it's hard to find better motivation than my own kid's future. And hey, bonus! It's good for me too!

Bringing It All Home to You

We are experimenting with a number of things I think would work in many neighborhoods or villages. One of my favorites is our cooperative child care arrangement. Four families each send their child to our house once a week for three hours, then our daughter goes to each of their houses at other times of the week. So I have five kids for three hours, then I have four big chunks of kid-free time on other days—a precious commodity for any parent of a young child. All that's needed to make this work is a group of parents who trust each other to care for their children.

We also do some homeschooling collectively. We share books, curricula, and resources—one mother is currently compiling a database of books available at our local library that are good for teaching history and science. For several years there has been a self-organized preschool at a large central building with a kids' room and playground. One or two teachers from our community spend one half-day per week with whichever preschoolers show up, and parents compensate them in goods, services, our local currency, or dollars.

When I'm in town I'm often surprised at how few children I see at "grownup" events. Where we live kids are naturally integrated into many adult activities. Children here learn to be (reasonably) quiet during meetings, and in the past few months I've seen them participate alongside older people plastering houses, harvesting and planting, doing yoga, cooking pancakes, building fires, teaching songs, gathering wild edibles, cleaning the floor, smudging with sage at a ritual, shoveling compost at a work party, and even supplying dinner for the whole community. Last week when I went to pick up Cole at a five-year-old friend's house after a playdate, she said, "But Mama, I can't leave yet! Emory caught two bass today and we're going to eat them for supper!"



Straddling the Cultural Divide

Sometimes when our kids interact with those not raised in community, there are minor culture clashes. Last month when visiting her great aunt, Cole stepped next door to meet the neighbors and their father and to try out their trampoline. After several minutes, from my vantage point behind the shrubbery, I heard their father call from the porch, "You boys get on! She's had too long a turn! It's your turn."

"We don't want to get on," mumbled one of the boys.

"I'll let them get on whenever they want," Cole reassured their dad. "I'll just get down."

"I said it's their turn!" shouted the father, obviously used to being the one who metes out justice.

"But they said they didn't want to get on," replied Cole, used to speaking directly, taking people at their word, and helping her friends resolve conflicts. The father didn't know what to make of this and went back inside. And after another minute Cole got down of her own accord.

Sometimes a culture clash results in a more overt learning opportunity. Last summer when my brother's family was visiting, we were out walking together. Cole wanted to go one way, but I insisted we go the other way, because of a plan I'd made

(continued on p. 71)



Photos starting from the top: 1. Cole and the author dig spuds. 2. "Sister friends" (with Cole on right) showing off their homemade doll slings. These girls have known each other since birth and all were carried in slings, including by each other's parents, when they were tiny. 3. Helping papa Mark. 4. Children from three families get to know the goats. Kids in community have many opportunities for close association with other families, gaining insight into the many options available to them as they grow.

Esther and the Princess of the Fairies

By Brent Levin

“Noooooooooooooooooooo! I’m not going unless you will stay there too!” my daughter Esther pleaded with me as I attempted to coax her to attend our on-site preschool program. This was the third consecutive day she was choosing not to go. She was refusing child care as well, unless it were done by her mom Liz or me, and I was becoming frustrated. Esther was five years old, and wore a princess dress every day she was able. She was the type of five-year-old princess who climbed trees and got muddy, so thankfully she didn’t mind wearing dresses dirty.

Esther’s school was led by Cassidy, a community member who wove stories and adventure into a nature-based, mostly outdoor, learning experience. Emerald Earth is a small cooperative community, where all the adults share in domestic activities of cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. This meant that school and child care were provided by people Esther ate two meals a day with—most of whom Esther had known most or all of her life, but some who were recent arrivals or temporary interns. She knew Cassidy and the other adults and students well. Esther had loved school and appreciated most child care, until now.

The schoolhouse was on our land, and I would walk Esther there and try to leave but she would scream and cry unless I stayed. A panic came over her when I started to leave. It was so strong that I would just take her back out with me. It seemed like no solution I could create changed anything. After two weeks, I gave up walking her to school and would just ask her in the morning if she would go. The reply was always the same, “Will you be there, Papa?” She clearly wanted to stay with the other kids and Cass, but something didn’t feel safe.

When your child is stressed or acting out, being a parent in community can feel like living in a fish bowl. There is nowhere to hide. Everyone, with good intention, offers their analysis of what might be wrong or how you should handle it. “Maybe your attachment parenting causes her to be needy.” “I’ve heard teachers say you should just leave them at school and it gets better.” “You shouldn’t just let her do whatever she wants.” We absorbed these comments and others during this stressful time. Fortunately, though opinions were rampant, our community was supportive or at least willing to accept our choices and invite her into meetings and other adult activities. Weeks followed where Esther spent many hours sitting quietly in Emerald Earth business meetings or sitting next to me while I had work to get done on the computer. She would follow Liz or me wherever we worked so we would never be out of sight.

“You would really rather sit here while I do computer work, than play with Cass and the kids?” I’d ask. She would just nod

“yes” in reply or ask me to come to school or do my work there. I did that when I was able, sitting in the back bedroom of the house that was serving as our school using my laptop to complete my work as a GIS consultant.

It was challenging at times to trust that we were doing the right thing by accommodating her, and as weeks became months, I began to wonder how this would turn out.

One night, however, Esther created her own solution to her challenge. Esther asked me to join her in a role play game (which we often do). She made up the story, and she asked me to take the role of Esther.

“Go to sleep,” she said.

I slept, and she came as the Tooth Fairy and woke me to tell me to go to sleep again, as she was going to take me on a journey to fairy land.

I slept again, and the Tooth Fairy (Esther) came and flew me to fairy land to meet the Princess of the Fairies. The Princess (Esther’s new role) wanted to come back to Emerald Earth with Esther. She flew Esther back. Then the Princess went to live in an oak tree that another fairy we know lives in. She said to the other fairy, “Tomorrow, I’m going to go to school with Esther.”

“But, I don’t go to school,” I said.

“Would you go to school if I came with you?” she asked.

“Would you take me to my mama or papa if I needed them?” I asked.

“Yes,” she replied.

“So the next day, Esther met the Princess at the oak tree. The princess waved her wand and flew the two of them to school,” she announced.

I thought the story was over at this point, and was beginning to tell Esther it was time for bed, but she stopped me by insisting that it was very important to finish the story.

“Go in the door of the school,” she instructed. Then she (the Princess) asked me (as Esther) “How does it feel to be at school with me with you?”

“I feel good,” I said.

“Good,” she smiled.

“Then school finished and the fairy flew Esther home,” she wrapped up the story.

Then Esther really went to bed.

The next day, Esther shared some of the story with her mom. With Liz’s encouragement, they came up with a plan to make Esther a physical fairy to take to school with her the way the fairy in the story promised to do. While Liz was not confident in her own ability to create a fairy doll, thankfully in community we have other resources, and our dear friend Abeja began sewing the doll.



Princess Esther.



Angelina—the Fairy.



Esther and Brent.

Two mornings later, the fairy doll was finished; Abeja and the three other kids of the community brought the doll to our house. At Emerald Earth, we honor the magic of important moments with ritual or song and often ask for help and guidance from the Earth and Universal spirit. In that spirit, Abeja had brought the children, ready to do what was needed for Esther to gain the confidence to return to school with them.

The ritual began when Garnet (age six) sprinkled “fairy dust” in a circle around us all. We then gave our attention to the rising sun. As we called in the nature spirits of the four directions, Esther shouted out “Spirit of the East” or “Spirit of the South” passionately as I’ve never seen her in other rituals or songs here. She had spent two months struggling, missing the learning, adventure, and camaraderie at school—things she craved—while constrained by fear of being away from her parents. She needed this to work and felt the potential for a solution to her problem when surrounded by her closest friends and family cheering for her. Esther’s friends wanted her back in school so badly that it showed in the enthusiasm with which they too participated in the ritual. In our ritual words, we empowered the fairy doll to keep Esther aware that her Mama and Papa are always with her in her heart. When the ritual was over, we all walked to school with kids running everywhere to help Esther fill a lace “fairy bag” they had sewn for her, with flower petals. Her allies were doing all they could to help her move through her challenge.

We got to school and she confidently walked in. Then when I began to leave, she faltered.

“Papa, I need to be with you.”

I held her and said that she had created her own magic and now needed to test it by trusting it. “The hardest part of magic is believing in it and giving it a chance to work,” I counseled. After much hugging, and a little crying—and a promise that she could leave and come to me if she wanted to—Esther joined the other kids and their teacher Cass and sat down. She stayed in school all day and didn’t miss another day from then on. Child care became easier too, though there were still people she chose not to be left with.

The weeks she wasn’t in school had felt so frustrating and had me questioning my parenting. But the way this episode ended went beyond my wishes. With the help of our entire community, my five-year-old daughter created her own magic. It was truly a magic borne of community: friends who love her and help her—not the ridicule and bullying I hear about so often in public schools and neighborhoods. Our community (thank you Abeja and kids) was really there for her—supporting her getting what she needed. This helped her see that in community she has allies who will help her meet her challenges on her own terms.

I feel blessed. 🌸

Brent Levin has lived at Emerald Earth Sanctuary (Boonville, California) for almost 10 years. He teaches natural building and milks goats, among the myriad other duties involved in keeping a rural community together, duties which include telling stories to the beautiful kids there. He can be reached at brent@emeraldearth.org.

Home Schooling and Community

By Berwick Eclair

“Not on my watch,” I kept telling myself as the emotions swelled up inside me, “They can leave the community if that’s what they want to do, but they are not doing that here.”

What was it that managed to so enrage me, an otherwise calm and sober character? I’ll give you a clue: I am responsible for the education of the 40 kids in this community.

Two words—“home schooling”—are all it takes to send me to the barricades. I am defending the values that bind us as a community. Those two words directly challenge one of the sacred chalices around which we develop our partnership with each other, and which enables us to actively engage in our surrounding neighbourhood and wider society.

We have built our own wonderful pre-school, that has been running now for almost a decade. A year and a half ago the local authority gave us an abandoned kindergarten building in the neighbourhood, which we renovated ourselves, to which we bring our youngest children daily (up to the age of four—national compulsory education begins at age five). Members of the community work with the kids in the nursery, some with state qualifications and/or many years of experience working with pre-schoolers, and some who come to work for a year or two between jobs—jobs working to improve the wider society (about 90 percent of the 80 adult members of the community work in activist educational projects). On principle, only members of the community work here—we don’t want to be the bosses of any hired workers, or for anyone to be working by the hour, or to be working for the money. As a fully income-sharing community, we are able to separate what we do, what we “earn,” and what we need—from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.

From the age of four our kids are enrolled in the local public neighbourhood kindergarten. The culture shock experienced by the kids with the transition from our own framework, which is run coherently with our community values, to the public system with its many deficiencies, is much less acutely felt than that of their parents. Yes, the parents are involved on the parents committee of the kindergarten, and try to support the overworked and underpaid kindergarten workers. My role also includes meeting with those in the local authority responsible for the kindergartens in the city. But the harsh realities of a much larger ratio of children to adults in the public system, together with educational outlooks and methods which seem alien to us, mean that parents in their first year with children in the public education system need a lot of support from the community.

We believe in the public education



system. Let me rephrase that: we believe in *a* public education system. Regardless of financial ability, every child is entitled to free, quality education. We want to be a part of strengthening the public education system, by sending our kids there, and being involved as teachers and parents, as opposed to being part of dismantling this system by embracing private education. For many in my community, this is not a simple choice, but by dealing with it together, we are able to support one another and overcome difficulties, both physical and emotional, thereby giving us renewed strength and courage in our convictions.

Home schooling, however, threatens everything that I stand for, the reasons that I get up every morning and do what I do. I am responsible for the communal education of our children—which doesn't just mean that our children are educated together in the same framework, but probably more importantly, we as adults are part of a conversation about our kids' education, and hence we can make decisions about them together. I am being faced with privatization, a dismantling of everything I hold dear, everything we hold dear...NO WAY JOSE!

I had long conversations with my coworker about the issue. We eventually reached agreement that we didn't want this to happen from within the community, even for

Raised voices and passionate discussions spotted from a distance meant only one thing...

a trial period of one year which the family had requested. We then convened the committee that works with us on all issues relating to children and their education to debate the issue. To my relief we agreed that we would like to find other ways to meet the real needs and difficulties that the family faces, without resorting to drastic measures such as withdrawing their three children from all educational frameworks in order for them to stay at home with their mother, all day, every day. By the way, the family had approached another community member to mentor them through the process of this trial, and she was also present for this conversation.

My coworker, together with the mentor, met with the family to explain to them why we cannot support their request. They heard how home schooling symbolized the start of a process of privatization within the community, and threatened the ideological and social fabric of our community. We make decisions together as a community about our kids, and now you want to opt out? It potentially also means opting out of the financial partnership too, as some members don't want to support this trial using community funds.

As we all live in the same building, how would other parents feel when they send their kids to the local kindergarten (which as we have mentioned before, is far from perfect), work very hard all day every day, and only see their kids for a short time each day, whilst "*she* spends all day hanging out with her kids"? And what will the other kids say: "I don't want to go to kindergarten—I want to stay at home all day with mummy too!"? And what about our aspirations when it comes to gender equality? The mother cuts herself off from the world, preventing her from having any impact on the wider society, becoming only a mother and nothing else. And if this is a real trial period, then the father needs to spend more hours working, to bring in more money (making a connection between what we do and what we earn—something we have gone to great lengths to break), only seeing his children on weekends? Who would support the family when things get hard? Home school-

ing usually happens in partnership with other like-minded families, not within an intensive community environment that is ideologically opposed to the idea. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Not unsurprisingly the family was shocked to hear that our stance was so hardline.

More conversations followed in various forums, and home schooling definitely became a hot topic amongst community members. Raised voices and passionate discussions spotted from a distance meant only one thing: they were talking about the merits and disadvantages of home schooling. A big part of my responsibility, therefore, was not to let this issue get out of hand; to prevent the storm that would pull us apart as a community.

Together with the family, we decided that we'd write down our reservations, and use this, together with the opinions of the family, as a basis for discussions in various community forums. The "no" that we declared is not a binding decision (we intentionally have no written constitution as a community), and I believe that this has both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, we don't ever want to be in a situation where the community (in this case represented by a committee) decides for the individual and hands down orders. We value individual freedoms, and our community can only work through members freely choosing equality—not having it dictated. In addition, there is something to be said about being able to cater to differences and the specific needs and desires of those that we love. On the other hand, there are dangers of such a pluralist approach. Where are the boundaries of our community? Can we ever say no to someone? Should we not be striving to prevent problematic codes ("codes" in terms of the ways in which we relate to each other—not necessarily in terms of rules and regulations) from proliferating in our "ideal society"? 🐣

To protect the identity of the community described in this article, Berwick Eclair writes pseudonymously.

Community, Public School, and Culture Clash: Food for Thought from Rural Missouri

By Sam Makita

When I was a teenager and I spent my long and boring work days in the summer watching people walk by (that was my job) and dreaming of a better life in my adulthood, I was sure that if I had any children, they would not go to school as I knew it. No, it wasn't that I believed the system is out to get us or that school is designed to keep the general population dumb and numb and under the control of some other class who want to control us. I just thought it could be done better and—with the hubris of a 14-year-old—figured I could make that happen, at least for my own kids.

There was another reason, too: The difference between what I believed was right and what I saw happening around me was heartbreaking and confusing to me. For a time, I wanted to shelter my hypothetical children from learning anything at all about the culture of greed and other kinds of violence that I couldn't help being a part of, even in the somewhat sheltered environment I grew up in. I had a vision that I'm now embarrassed to say was strikingly similar to M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village*.

Years went by, I became an adult, and I eventually did find myself the parent of a preschooler whose father has been out of the picture entirely since our child was less than a year old. Dancing Rabbit accepted me for residency when my son (let's call him Kody) was four and I was still actively managing the online retail business that supported us. Less than a year later, I sent him to the county kindergarten and he's thrived through three years of public school now. I'm considering whether to keep on sending him or take advantage of some of the co-home-schooling opportunities and resources that are appearing as Dancing Rabbit's kid population grows.

It turns out that in real life we make compromises; running my business, participating in community obligations, and teaching a five-year-old to read, write, and count was really more than I felt it was reasonable to ask myself to handle alone. It was hard to send him off those first weeks of kindergarten. Kody and I are very attached to each other, and eight hours a day away from each other was a challenging stretch for both of us. We cried a lot. At that point, if the other demands on my life had been less, I think I would have pulled him out of school. As it was, we powered through, and eventually he started to become more comfortable with getting on the bus, would talk



Sam and Kody.

Photo courtesy of Sam Makita

excitedly about the things he did at school each day, and seemed to be learning pretty well—better than I thought I could have managed at home, anyway.

In the beginning, I sent Kody with a lunch pail. Unfortunately for us both, I did a terrible job of packing a wholesome lunch for him that fit with the ethics I hoped to instill, that was also appealing enough to Kody that he'd eat it. I'm vegan, and out in the world of grocery stores and well-equipped kitchens Kody was too. At Dancing Rabbit in general it was harder to come up with food that he'd enjoy (or even eat at all) and when it came to his school lunches, I struggled particularly to find something practical, packable, ethical, affordable, and appealing. Compounding the difficulties, almost all of the other kids in the cafeteria ate the federally subsidized hot school lunches, and my kid, like many, possesses a strong desire to fit in.

The school lunches in our county are full of what I would call crap food: overcooked, chemically grown, GMO laden, factory farmed, and loaded with sugar, refined oils and grains, and artificial colors and flavors. Mostly it was the meat and other animal products that were hard for me to accept, but eventually, after months of having him come home ravenous, and after much contemplation and conversation, I stopped trying to pack a lunch. I made some overtures to the person in charge of the

The child I once was so proud was made entirely of vegetables is now enthusiastically and indiscriminately omnivorous.

cafeteria food, offering to help find more agreeable choices, and offering information about why I felt it important to put effort into that. Eventually, the person stopped responding to my messages.

Once Kody started eating crap food for lunch, it became even harder to feed him at home. It's been a few years and we still struggle with the gap between his tastes and my ethics, but we're learning to find ways to satisfy us both.

As it turns out, most of the struggles we've had around the difference in culture between school and home have been around food. The cafeteria food is one thing, and then there's also the tendency of teachers and other staff to use junk food as a reward. Besides that, there's enough difference between the kid culture at school and the kid culture at home that Kody notices. I notice, too, when his language includes violent allusions, pop culture references, and racism. These things are shocking to me when they come up, but really it's not too hard to conversationally clue him in that they're inappropriate and why. It's my hope that those conversations serve not just him, but the other kids at school, should he someday choose to share what he's learned with his friends "out there."

Sometimes Kody brings behaviors home from school that are upsetting to others in the community. Just because I've made the choice to include influences from the wider culture in the upbringing of my child doesn't mean that everyone here wants their children to experience or even witness those influences. It can cause tension between the children, and more so between myself and other parents when ungroovy bits of the wider culture creep into Kody's play at home. Dancing Rabbit is tolerant and even encouraging of diversity, though, and the public vs. home education is not the only division among the children here. We have lots of practice working out how to handle different parenting styles and lifestyle choices that overlap when our kids play together.

I think public school has had an overall positive effect on Kody's development. I think his life will be richer, for example, for having lived through the process of

experiencing the school foods and feeling compelled to ask questions about the different choices people make around food. Maybe he has a deeper understanding of the diversity of values and relative merits of various choices than he would if he didn't experience those differences firsthand, within our household. Maybe it will make whatever actions he chooses as an adult be more firm and well considered than they would be were he to have not witnessed such a diversity and understood so personally how different values can lead us down different paths. I can help him shape his understanding to include challenging modern concepts like the coexistence of diverse codes of ethics within a single geographical space.

So, the child I once was so proud was made entirely of vegetables is now enthusiastically and indiscriminately omnivorous. The baby I almost never put down now spends 40 hours per week away at school, one of 20 kids under one teacher's care. My dream of creating a brand new culture, uncontaminated by outside influences, in which to bring up a pure being to whom the troubles of the wider US culture would be unknown, has evolved to include moral relativism, humility, and compassion for those whose actions we disagree with. Now that he's a rising third grader, he's mastered basic reading and math skills, for which I feel very grateful to our county school system, his wonderful teachers and other staff, and the taxpayers who pay for his public education. We're considering home schooling next year, and Kody is not so sure that he wants to leave the classmates he's come to feel close to, and the the supportive environment of the public school classroom. I'm OK with that. 🐸

Sam and Kody moved to Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Rutledge, Missouri (www.dancingrabbit.org) in late 2009 from suburban New Jersey. Among other things, Sam writes for the weekly newsletter and runs the village dry goods store. Kody loves snakes.

Quad-Parenting in Intentional Community

By Stephanie Powers

Like most summer days in Colorado, it was hot and sunny. You could see the heat waves pouring off the car as we stopped at a rest area shortly after entering Colorful Colorado. The heat is noticeably different out west from my hometown of Waterford, Michigan. It is a dry heat, so it doesn't have that same unbearably hot humidity as felt in the Midwest. We didn't know it yet, but we were moving to Sunrise Ranch, a spiritual intentional community set in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. I still remember approaching the Ranch for the first time—the rolling hills of the countryside, farm animals strewn about the landscape. I thought to myself, “We could live here” as my two-year-old son Josiah sang songs in the backseat...“and on that farm he had a... door!” He has always been a creative little guy. “With a knock, knock here and a knock, knock there.”

We pulled up to the Ranch and had lunch with the community in the Pavilion dining hall, where about 40 people,

young and old, gathered for a communal meal. One table stood out to me, as there was a young woman wearing a brightly colored mumu, whose birthday it was that day. She was turning 18 and had lived at Sunrise since she was three years old. There was a strong sense of family and everyone was extremely welcoming. I felt as though we were long-lost family members and they had been waiting for us to arrive. After we met with the Spiritual Director and inquired about moving there, he simply told us, “If you feel called to be here, we'll work it out.” Little did I know that this fateful lunch would prove to be a critical turning point in the unfolding book of my life story.

My *wasband* (an endearing term I use for my ex-husband) and I began our search for intentional community in 2002, with a shared vision of raising our children in community. We lived in Hawaii at the time and there weren't a whole lot of options



*Step-dad Patrick (Dad-trick),
Charlotte, Mama (Stephanie),
and Josiah at the Pavilion
Pond, Sunrise Ranch.*

Photos courtesy of Stephanie Powers





Josiah with baby goats.



Halloween 2008 (day of the divorce) with the Sunrise kids.



Josiah painting brother's face.

on Oahu, where we lived. There were some forming permaculture communities on the Big Island, but they were really roughing it, living off the land and off the grid, something at the time I could not see myself happily doing. In 2004 we had saved enough money to leave the islands and go on a search for a community in which to raise our family. We visited several communities in the lower 48 over the next few years, including Ananda in Grass Valley, California; Dancing Rabbit in Missouri; Twin Oaks, Shannon Farm, and Acorn in Virginia; The Farm in Tennessee; Song of the Morning in Vanderbilt, Michigan; and the Center for Purposeful Living in North Carolina.

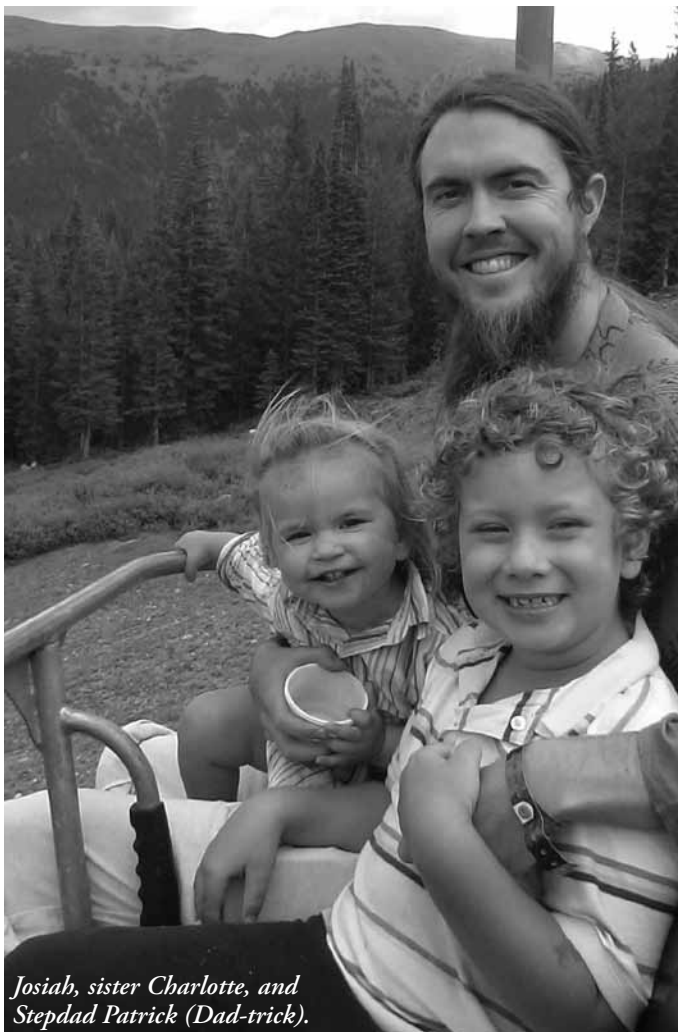
Each community was unique in their intention or reason for living communally. Some had shared income, whereas in others you had to have your own independent source of income. Some communities had a spiritual foundation; others did not. Some shared communal meals; some did not. Some grew their own food, while others did not. Through visiting the various communities we became clearer about what we were looking for. When we arrived at Sunrise, I was a bit leery and wondering if community was for me. I am so grateful that I found Sunrise when I did, because I was almost ready to give up the community search and my longtime dream.

Sunrise Ranch had so many aspects of what we in particular were looking for. First, a spiritual focus that was not dogmatic in its approach; instead it allows people to come into their own recognition of the truth of who they are as a divine being. A sustainable approach to agriculture that continues to expand and evolve—we grow and raise as much of our own food as possible, including annual vegetables, perennial fruit trees, and a host of native herbs. A thriving livestock program, including grass-fed cattle, laying hens, milking goats, and pigs. A childcare program where the parents and sometimes community members rotate in providing care for the children as part of their work pattern. A healthy balance of community time and private time—there are many communal meals throughout the week, and community-building days every other month or so.

The more time we spent there, the more it became clear that we were to be there on a longer-term basis. The feeling was mutual, and we were invited to stay and become a part of the Full Self Emergence program, an 18-month journey into learning and



*Josiah (3 years old)
and Mama.*



*Josiah, sister Charlotte, and
Stepdad Patrick (Dad-trick).*

living the teachings of Emissaries of Divine Light, the international organization of which Sunrise Ranch is the headquarters.

Everything was peachy; we were in love with the Ranch and all of what it has to offer. The only problem was that there was increasing tension in my relationship between my wasband and me. We had struggled for years to work through our interpersonal differences, which were becoming increasingly unhealthy. I came to a place inside of me where I was able to see that it is sometimes better to honor the completion of a cycle than to continue to live with something that is destructive and not allowing either of us to grow. By accepting that this cycle had come to a close, we could both move on to our next chapter.

We had a beautiful exchange, where we mutually removed our rings, allowing each other the freedom to move forward in our lives in a new way. We eventually held a private divorce ceremony led by a dear friend and community member, involving gift-giving and singing. We got divorced on Halloween, so we showed up to the court wearing a tutu, bunny ears, and an Afro. We went out for dessert afterward. When we got home we took our son trick-or-treating around the community with the other Sunrise kids and parents. My friends held a divorce shower for me, which included dozens of candles around the hot tub and a ritual of submerging ourselves under the water to release what we needed to let go of.

When we decided to part ways, we made an important agreement to continue to fulfill our mission of raising our child together in community. I strongly feel that we were divinely guided to Sunrise Ranch so that our family could continue to flourish in a beautiful and healthy way.

This morning, Josiah runs from my house to his Abba's (the Jewish name for Dad) house before school to get his bike, which he left there last night. His step-brother stopped by our house to pick him up and go to the bus stop together. It has been six years since I moved to Sunrise Ranch. Today, I am proudly raising my eight-year-old along "the quadrants," as we fondly refer to ourselves. Josiah has four parents now, two half siblings, and a step-brother. His step-dad and I also have a two-year-old daughter; and we live three doors down from his dad, step-mom, and their two other children. His step-mom and I take care of each other's children in our childcare program. Last night, both families sat together in the communal dining hall and shared a meal. Tomorrow we will all sing and have cake together to celebrate Josiah's step-dad's and step-brother's birthdays.

I am so proud of the way we continue to fulfill our original mission: we have persevered through thick and thin to actualize this commitment we have made to raise our child together in community. In many ways, I see us paving the way for so many other split families and providing a model for how to continue to raise children together after a divorce. Don't get me wrong—it is not all rainbows and roses. If raising a child with two parents with their own distinct viewpoints is challenging enough, try four people with four distinct viewpoints, all trying

to get on the same page. Some days it is so hard; I feel discouraged and can't see how we are all going to work through an issue.

But those days are usually the exception rather than the rule. For the most part, we have the ideal situation for both the children and the adults. Living in a spiritually based intentional community encourages me to have faith in the creative process. I have done this long enough to have learned that everything is a cycle, and if I don't hold on to it, it will pass. Some of the best advice I received while attending the Opening Class was, "If you're going through hell, keep going." Don't stop there and stew in it—rather, allow the creative process to unfold. Another wonderful aspect of living in community is the support that our families receive. We have needed a mediator to help us work through issues. We have needed shoulders to cry on, as well as someone to believe in us and remind us that, above all, we need to do what's best for the children.

It has not been an easy road, but one thing is for sure—it has all been worth it. All I've been through in the last six years has helped me evolve into who I am today. I am continually invited to stretch my capacity to love others and grow as a mother, a partner, and a friend. And I couldn't have done it without the support of the quadrants and my community, my family here at Sunrise Ranch. 🐦

I am continually invited to stretch my capacity to love others and grow as a mother, a partner, and a friend.

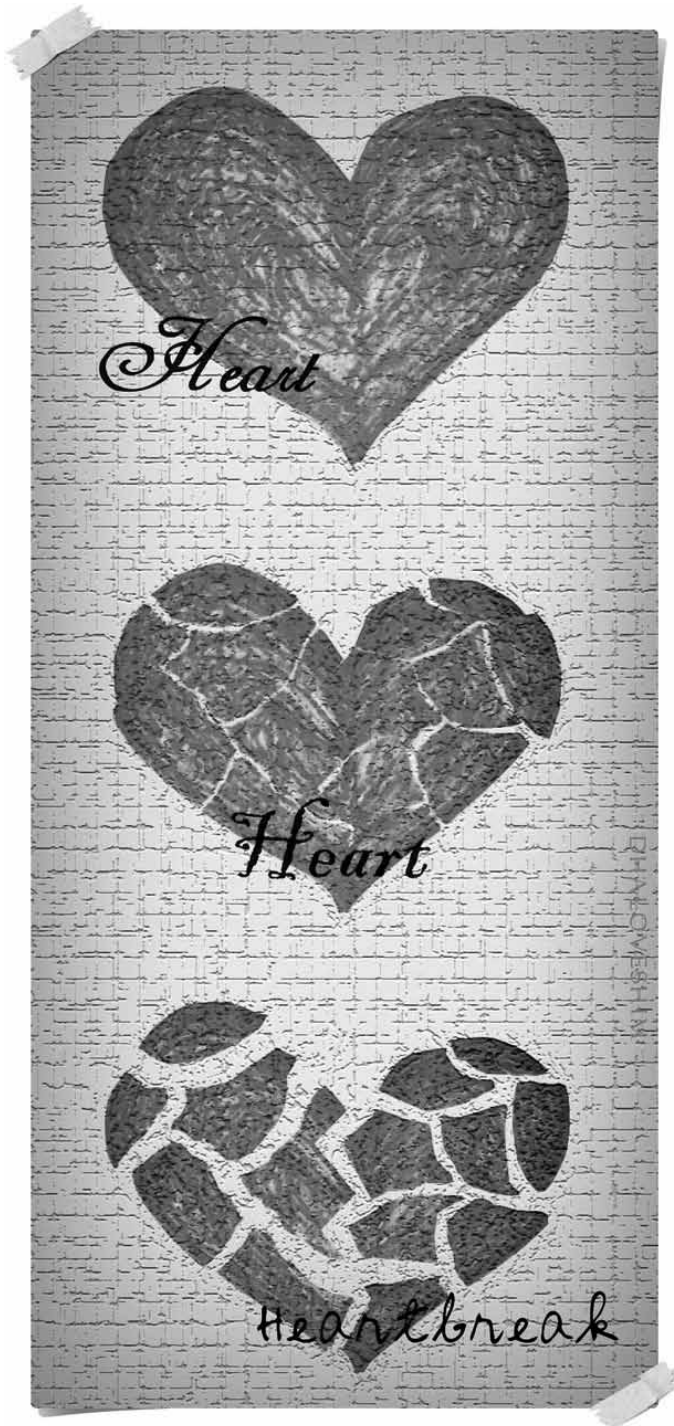
Stephanie Powers is a mother, partner, Youth Educator, and cook with a passion for nutrition, specifically food preservation and traditional foods for well-being. She has lived and served at Sunrise Ranch (sunriseranch.org) for the past six years, raising her two children along with the other children on the Ranch. She holds a Montessori teaching certification for Early Childhood, and has developed a summer camp, Camp Sunrise, which ran for the past four years. She is also a musician with a love for connecting people with each other and Spirit through song and dance.



Sunrise kids: Charlotte, Siri, Shemmesh, and Josiah.

Parenting in a Community of Friends: Happiness and Heartbreak

By Kristina Jansen



Orinda* is a community of about 100 individuals in California. We live in the hills above the city, on a ranch we own. There are roughly 20 children under the age of 13, and we have our own elementary school to educate them before they graduate to public high school in the larger community. While Orinda grew out of a shared ideal among a group of friends who were interested in a more honest and meaningful existence, it was not “intentional” in the beginning, but an organic outgrowth of a number of people with similar priorities: individual expression, emotional freedom, gender and age equality, honesty, harmonious households, psychological independence from early programming, personal growth, and a shared sense of adventure. That was nearly 40 years ago now, and to keep it going, it has evolved with intention, as well as affection and love and struggle and pain. It is more a very large extended family of friends than a purely functional intentional community, and it has been my home and my “family” since I was six years old, despite an eight-year stint in college and graduate school in the 1990s.

In 2006, my son Aaron was born. My choice to have a baby was a major departure from my earlier stance against procreating. But as I got older, it became something that really mattered to me, and when I was 35, I gave my long-term boyfriend an ultimatum: “We start trying to have a baby by the time I turn 37, or I will leave you and find someone who will give me a child.” It took him a few months to decide he wanted to share this with me, but he did, and I had Aaron four months before my 37th birthday. He turned seven in April. He calls me by my first name, shares a bedroom with two boys who are cousins with each other but unrelated to him, and besides me and his father, he has two other women and two other men who care for him as if he were their own. He’s never lived in a nuclear family situation, and this is something I love about his world.

As for myself, I could just as naturally say “I’m a superhero” as I could say “I’m a mother.” When it comes to identifying as a mother I feel like I’m playacting, just as I did as a little girl playing *Super friends* with the other kids I grew up with. It might be my temperamental allergy to labels and roles, or it could be that as a child of community, my relationships with my own parents and my own child are too complicated to fit into the stereotypical images that these labels invoke. In conventional

society, I avoid the subject as much as possible, and when occasionally I find myself “checking-in” as a parent at my office with conventionally minded coworkers, I feel like a fraud. That said, I actually do perform a fair bit of “mothering”—just not usually with my own kid.

My friends Hugh and Jeannie have a daughter named Lucy, the same age as Aaron, and for whatever reason, she and I click. The same with the other girls around Aaron’s age, and I have a strong attachment to all of them, as if they were my own kids. It turns out I’m a better “mother” to girls than I am for boys, and I spend more of my caretaking hours with the little chicks of my community than I do with the little clucks. When I am out and about in town, it is more likely to be a friend’s daughter who accompanies me than it is my own son. People assume she is mine, and I don’t correct them, for in many ways, she is just as much my child as my natural born son. Except sometimes things don’t work out the way we expect.

When I started writing this essay, it was April, and Aaron had just turned seven. The week after his birthday, two of the young people in our circle of friends got married in a big celebration on a farm in a different city. It was a big party, and nearly everyone we live with drove the five hours to join in. I brought two of the little girls to the wedding, and Aaron came with Joshua, who has been one of his primary caretakers since he was born. It was a joyous party, and one of the neatest parts of it to me was the easy flow of all the children and the adults, and the feeling of family among friends. I felt close to Lucy especially, and little details of our interaction that evening stand out to me now: reigning her in when she got hyper, removing a splinter from her finger, helping her find her discarded sweater when it got chilly, putting her to bed at the end of the night. Her father Hugh was at the party, but he had never been that involved in her day-to-day care, and she naturally came to me for what she needed as the “parental” adult in attendance. What I didn’t know that weekend was that it was one of the last times I would get to put her to bed.

Hugh and Jeannie and I have been friends since I can remember. In fact they are both half a generation older than I am, so when I was a little girl, each of them were my sometimes caretakers. Hugh taught me how to drive. Jeannie used to mend my clothes. Their relationship was a more recent development than the years I have known them: a third marriage for Jeannie, and a second marriage for Hugh. It had ended four years ago, when Lucy was only two. Both Jeannie and Hugh, having been longtime members of the community, stayed around, and it seemed to me they would always be here.

This illusion was shattered for me the first week of May, when Jeannie and Lucy moved off the ranch unexpectedly. When I thought about how things had been going for Jeannie over the past few years, it was no surprise to me that she would make the decision to move out, but I was still unprepared for the emotional shock of losing the day-to-day contact with a child I had cared for since she was born. Jeannie was no longer happy living in a communal setting, and over the past few years, she had been isolating herself more and more from many people who had been her lifelong friends. Of course this was challenged by some of them, and more and more often, Jeannie would end up at odds with one or another person. So, when I put myself in Jeannie’s shoes, it made sense for her to leave.

However, from Lucy’s point of view, it seems a cruel choice to have made. Lucy has gone from being enmeshed in an ideal children’s world—living with her friends

on a ranch in mountains and having a rich set of adults to turn to for any of her needs—to living in a tiny two bedroom apartment with her mother. Her father has visitation rights, but Jeannie is controlling how much time he spends with her, and also where they can go, who else Lucy can spend time with, and every other aspect of Lucy’s life. Anyone who was in conflict with Jeannie is off the approved list. I happen to be

When I am out and about in town, it is more likely to be a friend’s daughter who accompanies me than it is my own son.

approved as a person to watch Lucy, but my boyfriend is not, so if I want to see her, I have to carve out an hour or two to spend in town, completely outside of my normal life. This is not something I can explain to Lucy. I have made the effort several times, but the whole experience is surreal and makes me feel awful. And there is nothing I can do about it.

I feel Lucy’s absence in my life profoundly. I miss her. When I spend time with Lucy, she seems OK, though she complains to me about being bored in the apartment, and she keeps saying, “It’s SO small!” when we talk about it. I can’t imagine making the choice that Jeannie did. If I found myself unable to live within the context of my Orinda family, I might decide to move out. But from where I currently stand, I cannot imagine ripping Aaron away from the life he has known his whole existence, even if it meant being separate from him. Jeannie has her reasons and I know I shouldn’t judge her, but it still makes me mad. 🐾

When she is not “mothering” or spending time with her family of friends at Orinda, Kristina Jansen works in the renewable energy field, helping develop solar farms in California’s San Joaquin valley.

*Orinda is a pseudonym, as are all the names in this story. Names have been changed to protect people’s identities.

A Multitude of Counselors

By Understanding Israel, with contributions from Emmette Jorden, Eric Johannsen, John Ingraham, and Leah Block

“In multitude of counselors there is safety.”

—Proverbs 24:6

What perspectives can youth provide about a community they participated in as children? How do those reflections differ from the memories of adults who shared in the building of a community? The following are responses gathered from a posting of that question on a Facebook page for those who built a community and those who were the innocents born there. Participants in this research lived in the Love Family Community founded in the late '60s on Queen Anne Hill in Seattle, Washington, and each agreed to share their reflections for this article.

Older members who were adult participants or founders recalled both the struggles and the rewards of living and building community.

Royalty (now named John Ingraham), who spent over a decade in the community, wrote:

“Most issues in intentional communities are psychological and often lead to misunderstanding and breakup. Disagreement leads to mistrust, hence breakup. Consensus is very hard to maintain.”

Understanding Israel, now a Masters Level educator, added:

“The foundation of a communities’ future resides in building care and attention to their children. Agreements protecting children must be clear, firm, and well communicated.”

Emmette Jorden, another member, reflected:

“I learned patience, humility, integrity, how to do much with little, how many hands make light work. I learned the meaning of real charity. I learned to listen and see the layers of meaning people put in their words. I learned understanding.”

In contrast, the children now adults who responded remembered the impact of isolation and lack of individuality.

Eric Johannsen of Santiago Films created the film *It Takes A Cult*, which reflected upon his life as a child born in our community. As an adult he added this wisdom:

“People living in community must recognize legitimate outside views—that is paramount to successful community endeavors. *Avoid groupthink!*”

Leah Block, who was also raised in the community, described that “groupthink” and the pain it caused her:

“All the adults around me said the same things over and over again, and any individuality was absent. People dressed the same, wore their hair the same, all focused on the same thing. Everyone was taught to be positive. So I did not see open

expressions of anything considered negative: just keep shining and giving love.

“I found that people’s needs were ignored, including the children’s, because of this sort of group conformity. As a child, it was a frightening experience being around adults who were not individuals but who were all trying to be the same.”

Royalty (John Ingraham) added from an adult’s perspective: “I cherish my years in different communities, but don’t miss the drama. It only takes a few nuts to sink the ship.”

Our children observed that an alternative lifestyle devoid of individuality can impact its children negatively, while the general experience can also produce positive adult attitudes in a global society.

Eric Johannsen, now the filmmaker, said:

“As an ex-communitarian and current New Yorker, I have developed a personality that is open to new ideas and new people.”

Leah, now a professional counselor and mother, concluded:

“One of the lessons that I took with me from that into my adulthood on the outside was how important my feelings are—all my feelings. My anger, my hurt, things that cause me pain—I really pay attention to them because I know with all my soul that my negative feelings have something valuable to offer me. There is a message there. It is a teaching moment. I never ignore my feelings, because I know that can lead to trouble. And for me expressing feelings is a freeing experience. That is one thing that may set me apart from others: I am in touch with my feelings and I embrace them. I trust them. I listen to them. I own them. They are mine and I have a right to them, so that does not threaten the people that I get along with.”

Eric Johannsen summed up the importance of a focus by COMMUNITIES and like-minded forums and gatherings on communities and recognizing their impacts:

“The best way to translate wisdom gained through intentional community is to continue to tell our stories and keep our doors open.” 🐾

Understanding Israel is working towards a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and is a Washington State approved trainer for early child care providers. She holds a Masters in Education from Antioch Seattle First People’s Program. Emmette Jorden, Eric Johannsen, John Ingraham, and Leah Block are all former members of the Love Israel Family.

The Colors of Experience: Learning with Children and Adults in Cohousing

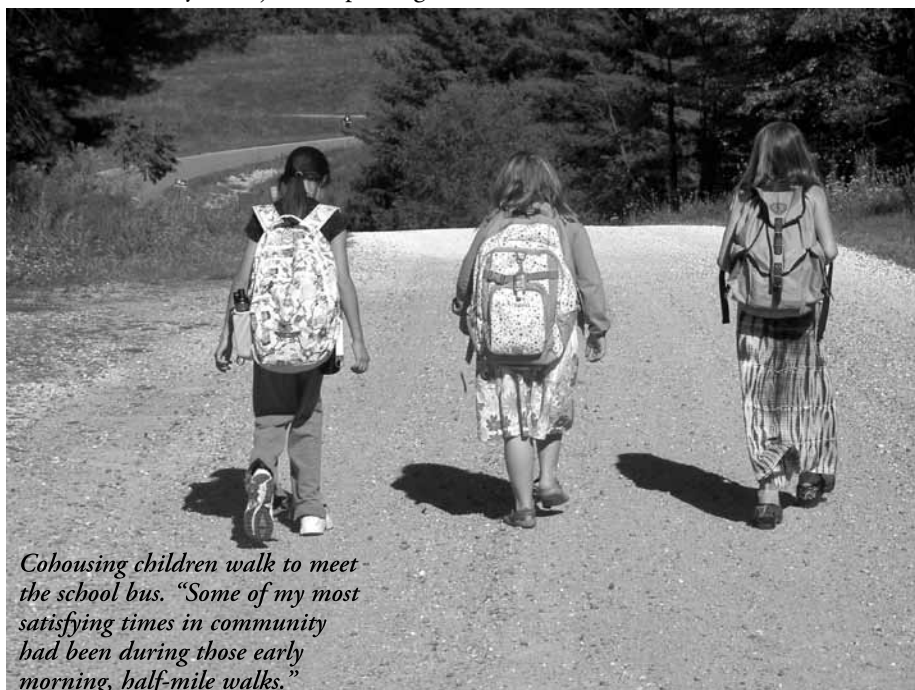
By Michelle Wheeler

“You look like Helen Keller,” seven-year-old Moby said enthusiastically, watching his nine-year-old neighbor tap a stick in front of her as we all walked one morning to the school bus. “You ought to learn Braille, because you never know.” Just weeks earlier, he had confounded me as he squinted and stared pensively into the empty five-acre lot at the top of the lane. When I asked about what was catching his eye, his words slowly oozed out like those coming from an adult sizing something up, “I’m visualizing a house.”

Grateful for precious moments like those when I have been present to witness the amazing multi-dimensionality of a child—for that matter, another human being—I thought how easy it would have been to just continue to think of him as the rough-and-tumble little boy who loved to choreograph and dramatize sports plays by diving for footballs, rolling with little concern for injury. Some of my most satisfying chunks of time in our intentional community had in fact been during those early morning, half-mile walks to the bus stop, a distance short enough not to physically weigh down the spirits of those walking, but long enough to invite that which resided in hearts and minds to be pronounced and shared.

Vermont’s visual beauty alone explained the attraction felt by tourists and second-home escapees from the city. Gently rolling hills, fresh water lakes, and swiftly moving rivers nestled small villages surrounded by green wide-open spaces, all against a backdrop of mountains on both the east and the west. In our valley, the sun rose over the Green Mountains and set beyond Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks of neighboring New York. When late afternoon clouds rolled in from the Northwest and bunched up against the northernmost ridges of the Appalachians, they darkened the sky as if lights were going down for a stage show. As the falling sun’s rays shone through openings in the cumulus from across the lake, it was as if spotlights from heaven illuminated the fields and forests surrounding our home.

For many outsiders, the words “intentional community” conjured up images of communes left over from the ’60s and ’70s, but the closest ours came to the stereotype in my mind was when the occasional naked toddler ran across the green or when two or more young farmers harvested fresh produce or stood with hunched-over backs pulling weeds from the market garden. While our cohousing residents indeed maintained some hippie-era consciousness of civilized living as an ongoing experiment, and were willing to toss aside some preestablished norms for a chance to live more deeply in community, I preferred to imagine that our efforts resembled the historical establishment of a new village or town. With 26 households full of different histories, politics, and expectations coming together to co-operatively manage over 100 acres of common property, we followed various



Cohousing children walk to meet the school bus. “Some of my most satisfying times in community had been during those early morning, half-mile walks.”

Photo courtesy of Michelle Wheeler

tried and true protocols as counseled by veteran communitarians but also made up rules as we went along, setting the stage for the unleashing of impulses to implement additional creative ways to be with each other.

Sharing and realizing what was in our hearts, minds, and wildest imaginations had seemed to come more easily during the earlier years. Some had even mentioned it feeling like summer camp for them as well as their children. But as time moved on and novelty wore off and the stresses of everyday life took priority again, it became clear that for many adults, the honeymoon was fading. I imagined that many even retracted

The children reminded us that present moments were golden and that greener pastures were here.

some of their previously-shared multiple dimensions in an attempt to regain firm footing in appearances that had served them well at another time, in another place.

Unable to see how various hot issues among community members were over make-or-break, life-or-death decisions, and inexperienced with the stress that must accompany ownership of property and improvements, I was left to believe that interpersonal difficulties must be rooted simply in irritation and inexperience with contrary styles, in misunderstandings between differing personalities. Wanting to ease the pain of my neighbors, I took the opportunity to bring the topic of temperament to the stage during our third summer in cohousing. Having minored in drama in college, I knew that a “play” in the theater provided a place where everyone’s part, no matter how large or small, was integral—as, I believed, it should be considered in community. Relying on the season to provide a relevant metaphor, I likened the combined personalities of a community to a rainbow and wove pedagogy with fun for our annual solstice celebration.

More than aware that many resisted and resented “typing” as pigeon-holing with all its negative connotations, I knew that in my own life, recognition of patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behavior had allowed me to accept myself as well as others with less judgment. Obviously, none of us were simple stereotypes, but by focusing our attention on more well-defined, caricatured types, we could at least all start our thinking from the same place. I hoped we might then be more comfortable thinking in terms of each of us having “preferences” or “leanings.”

Faced with myriad theories on why we think, feel, and act as we do, I discovered on YouTube a brilliant one-man presentation showing four different reactions to inadvertently sitting on a tack¹, each coming from one of Rudolph Steiner’s descriptions of the Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic temperaments. I took the liberty to imperfectly map Steiner’s labels to the colors yellow, red, blue, and white, a terminologically simpler code suggested by Taylor Hartman in *The Color Code* (Simon & Schuster, 1998), and then asked a veteran actor-neighbor to lead our solstice production with a reenactment. On the day of the event, my neighbor’s “yellow” character leapt up and with a smile on his face sought the kindred spirit initiating such a great gag. His “red” jumped up and with a scowl on his face looked around for the scoundrel who dared do such a thing. His “blue” eased up cautiously and with sorrowful eyes stole glances to see who might have reason to humiliate him. His “white” just lifted one cheek of his buttocks, grabbed the tack and tossed it aside as if nothing even happened.

Laughs died down and I as the mistress of ceremonies acknowledged the discomfort some might have felt in identifying with the red or blue response, those being the least attractive under the circumstances. I assured my neighbors that it was the situation of sitting on a tack that had given rise to the limitations of these control-seeking colors. If the context had been finding the car keys to get to work on time, we might have seen

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7mEh53rTc0

them rise better to the occasion than their less organized comrades. Knowing every temperament had both strengths and weaknesses contributing to the drama called getting along together, I displayed posters listing each color's strengths, hoping we might choose to accentuate the positive.

Sure, it was easy to appreciate the yellow sanguine's core motive of having fun and the challenge it gave the rest of us to lighten up, but we also needed the balance the red choleric gave. They knew life was serious business, too, and they had no problem with following through on jobs needing done even though their focused, goal-oriented ways sometimes lacked a warmth others of us missed. Along the same vein, while the equanimity and Buddha-like composure of the white phlegmatic suggested inherent enviable wisdom that carried them through crisis, we blue melancholics super-sensitive to the twisting and turning of life's ongoing challenges were more than happy to talk about it, to be accessible to others needing empathy and compassion.

The production and afternoon continued with other neighbors performing additional skits and song, winding up with a rendition of "If I Only Had a Brain" from *The Wizard of Oz*. My intention was to emphasize through this selection the noble quest of trying to become a more "charactered" individual, one who exhibited the positive traits of each personality, that multi-dimensionality that turned each of us into our own rainbow. Hartman defined character as "essentially anything we learn to think, feel, or do that is initially unnatural and requires an effort to develop." He believed that "it is predominantly character, not personality, that ultimately determines the quality of our lives."

After all was said and done, someone living outside the neighborhood used the word *compelling* to describe the event. Grateful for her kind words, I knew that added nuances stemming from gender, generational, and cultural differences made our community palette a veritable explosion of color. To be sure, I wanted peace among the people, as in resolution of conflict, but not at the expense of that color and the good plot of struggling against the odds to create a more satisfying model of community. Though individuals might resort to less civilized behaviors from time to time, better selves would prevail when eyes shifted back to the prize, when players questioned their behavior as either adding to or detracting from larger goals. Knowing the prize for us had always been the lifting of loneliness brought about by living in a largely conventional, conformist industrialized world, I was afraid if we had to leave cohousing, I wouldn't know where I could so intimately experience being one of such an assortment of original personalities bearing witness to hard edges chipping away. Good books and theater provided fictionalized versions of what I sought, but the real thing was so much better.

Moby delighted me one spring morning as he caught the spirit of dance and spontaneously joined a group of us women doing Zumba in the back of our neighbor-instructor's house. Some say that a Sanguine life comes naturally for children. He warmed my heart on another occasion when he gently put his arm around the back of an injured friend and offered comfort as he walked him home. While I watched him one afternoon get off the school bus, break into a smile, and open his arms to one of our many waiting toddlers, I knew he was already well on his way to being a true character. When we adults taxed with keeping all the balls of life up in the air occasionally dropped them, at least there were the children. Their numbers in our community had exploded to nearly double in four years' time. In between forced excursions here, there, and everywhere, their presence offered us a welcome reminder that present moments were golden and that greener pastures were here and that with a little bit of imagination, we could indeed go a long way in a richly-colored world of our own making. 🐣

Michelle spent three decades in her native West Virginia before agreeing to move through all four corners of the country with her New Yorker husband. She has been happy to live the past five years with her family at Champlain Valley Cohousing in Charlotte, Vermont.

Wilderness Journeys Meet Cooperative Culture: Teens in Community on the Trail

By Mary Murphy

“I think we should decide this by consensus,” Albert declares, running a hand through his wild uncombed curls. Eight teens and two adult guides are circled up on a flat spot on this steep mountain trail in New Hampshire. Our bulky backpacks are lined up on the side of the trail, and everyone is sipping water from their colorful Nalgene bottles.

“Okay, who’s going to facilitate?” Eric asks.

“I will! Let me get out some paper to keep track,” Rita volunteers. “What is the question again?” she asks, swatting at a mosquito that buzzes around her head.

“We need to decide whether we are stopping for the night at the campsite that’s closer, or pushing on to the one that’s still four miles away,” I remind her. “Our decision needs to fit with the Leave No Trace guidelines we have learned, so we have to stay at an established campsite.”

The group settles down on the ground and dives into the consensus process.

Albert, ever the organized thinker, points out that the longer we hike today, the less distance we’ll have to cover tomorrow when we traverse the Presidential Ridge. Bobby grimaces at his words, rubs his sore calves, and reminds the group how nice it would be to stop early today and make a really nice dinner and play some games. Rita scribbles notes and stack lists on her writing pad, biting her tongue with concentration as she tries to keep up with the lively discussion.

This group knows each other well: we have just finished a nine-day canoe trip in Maine and this is our first day on the backpacking section of this wilderness trip. As in any community, there is a wide diversity of strengths, weaknesses, and personal styles among these teenagers. Some are very fit and eager for a challenge, others are out of shape and want to drag their feet. Some think of the group first, others feel a need to prioritize their own needs. I’m lucky to work as an expedition guide for Farm & Wilderness Summer Camp, a Quaker-based camp that already embraces many of the principles of consensus in its daily routine and culture. On this trip my co-leader (who was trained in Formal Consensus in the student co-ops at Oberlin College) has taught a simple consensus decision-making process to our trip group. She and I have facilitated it for them twice before, but this is the first time the campers have done

A musical canoe journey on the St. Croix River in Maine.





Settling down for Silent Meeting on the trail in New Hampshire.



Shallow waters on the St. Croix River in Maine.



Working as a team to portage canoes and gear around a dam on the Androscoggin River in Maine.

the whole thing on their own.

The discussion grows and weaves in the dappled shade of the mountain birches. Finally Rita announces a series of proposals and the campers all vote. Three pass, and a new discussion blooms about how to best combine them into one decision. The end result is a complex and nuanced negotiated agreement that involves dinner recipes, the time we get up in the morning, who has to retrieve the bear-hang food stash for breakfast the next day, and promises to play a round of the game Mafia on top of Mount Washington when we get there. I never would have guessed all these things were pertinent to a decision about where to camp for the night, but the glow on the teens' faces show me that they were. They are all relieved to have navigated the consensus process successfully, and they shoulder their backpacks with an enthusiasm and determination that never would have surfaced if I'd made the decision for them.

I've been leading wilderness trips professionally for eight years, and following the intentional communities movement for 12 years. While I find that many wilderness guides I've worked with don't know what an intentional community is, the culture of the outdoor education industry embraces many of the same guiding principles as communitarians do. A wilderness trip group is its own community, albeit a temporary one. Each trip has a different synthesis of individual personalities, so wilderness guides have to learn to set up community structures and norms that will accommodate whoever shows up. Unlike most residential communities, we can't screen out members of our trip community based on emotional maturity or willingness to compromise. Whoever pays the trip fee will come on the trip. Therefore, most wilderness guides who last more than a year or two in the profession are those who learn to nurture harmony and cooperation amidst the many kinds of diversity they find on their trips. We use many of the same strategies residential communities do: creating shared agreements, rotation of leadership, fostering trust, sharing emotions honestly, and mediating conflict.

I have found that many kids take to this like a fish to water. After they are taught the skills and see them modeled a few times, they start initiating these techniques themselves. In the opening scene of this article, the teens themselves decided they could use consensus to make the decision. Having seen it work well twice before, they suggested it immediately when the conversation about campsites began to feel tense. Kids instinctively recognize healthy cultural norms when they experience them,

and they naturally gravitate toward them. While many adults come to this work with emotional scars and triggers from the past trauma of living in a hierarchical power-over culture, kids have less emotional armor and an incredible willingness to try new things. The level of functional community that a group of teens from diverse backgrounds can create on a 15-day wilderness trip rivals that of any intentional community I've visited. The number of lifetime friendships that are forged on my trips attests to the staying power of positive group culture.

So, let's learn from the youth! Below is a list of some of the group-building activities and conflict management strategies I use on my wilderness trips. All of these are teen-approved and have worked well to foster a community culture among the youth I work with. Most of them are common activities that are used widely across the outdoor education industry.

- **The Group Agreement:** The night before the trip starts, the group gathers together and brainstorms guidelines, behaviors, attitudes, and norms that they would like the group to strive for on the trip (always phrased in the positive). The agreements typically include respectful communication, positive attitude, following safety guidelines, using forest-friendly Leave No Trace practices, etc. We talk about what these statements mean to each person, discuss and clarify any controversial ones, and, once everyone can agree, we all sign the agreement. We carry this agreement with us on the trip and refer to it whenever conflict arises. In essence, this is a simplified version of the agreements and bylaws most intentional communities create for themselves.

- **Fears in a Hat:** On the first night of the trip, we sit in a circle. Each person writes down three fears they have about the trip and we put all the anonymous slips of paper in a hat. We each draw out someone else's fears and read them aloud. Typically many people share common fears, so hearing that others have the same worries eases their minds. This also helps group members take actions to prevent triggering other group members' fears: if three people said they are afraid they won't be able to keep up, the speed demons in the group may be inspired to self-regulate their pace (and the guide can remind them of the fears when addressing impatience).

- **Truth Circle:** In the evening we sit in a circle, speak a self-reflective question or prompt, and then pass a talking stick. Each person may talk for as long as they

Teens celebrating their new confidence on the Presidential Ridge in New Hampshire.



Portaging a canoe in the backwoods of Maine.



like with no interruption. The talking stick goes around the circle again and again until no one has anything else they'd like to say. In this way we learn how others think about themselves and have a space to speak vulnerably in a safe and predictable environment.

• **Evaluation Circles:** Every few days we circle up and each person answers two questions: What do you think the group is doing well? What do you think could be improved? We speak our answers and promptly move on to the next activity. This activity fosters awareness of group dynamics and how behaviors are affecting others, while also asking each person to think about what is working for the group, not just what is working for themselves. The evaluation circle acts as a self-correction mechanism for the group: usually everyone takes action to improve dysfunctional dynamics that have been spoken in the circle, without any discussion or nagging.

• **Leader of the Day:** Every day a different camper leads the group. They carry the map and compass, they decide when we have rest breaks and where we have lunch. This mirrors the systems of non-hierarchical leadership that inspire many intentional communities to rotate their leadership roles.

• **Silent Meeting:** When working for Farm & Wilderness, a Quaker-based camp, we have a daily 20 minute gathering to sit in silence together in a beautiful spot. This shared reflection time allows our spiritual selves to be honored in the same place without any layers of dogma. I find that the shared silence brings the spirits of all the trip participants into a quiet harmony once a day, gives us a break from any conflict that may be present, and fosters an attitude of gratitude. Many spiritual New Age communities open their meetings with a period of shared silence for the same reason.

I hope these activities will inspire readers to try some new strategies for keeping their own communities cooperative and dynamic, and offer kids who don't live in community a way to learn about cooperative culture: go take a hike with a wilderness guide! 🐾

Mary Murphy is a community-minded wilderness guide. After eight years of guiding for teens, she has recently started her own wilderness trip company (www.mountainsongexpeditions.com) focusing on spiritually grounded backpacking and canoeing trips for adults and families. She lives in Worcester, Vermont, on a cooperative homestead she shares with four adults, two kids, and various goats, chickens, and llamas.

A hazy mountain view in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.



Canoeing Lake Umbagog in Maine.





Learning the Art of Doing Nothing

By Nikola Kendis

In the fast-paced “real world,” taking it easy is seldom praised. In general, society values the “stressed-out executive type” over the laid-back stoner with a heart of gold. Severely polarized stereotypes, perhaps, but I think I get my point across: society wants you to *do* something, or else!

Fear of that “or else!” has been the petroleum to my jet-pack of superhuman ambition. Through high school, I stuffed my schedule with as many honors classes as possible, studying with a sense of animalistic survival that can only be explained by the inevitably savage nature of the high school experience. My niche was on the outskirts of the “nerds” and I felt my very existence hinged on how I compared to my peers’ marks. As my life became more and more ascetic and self-punishing, the “human” parts of me shrank away. Only the sham fullness of my ever-expanding ego, led on by adult praise, prevented the feeling of utter emptiness from registering.

Something called for me to stop. Halfway through my sophomore year, I withdrew from college, a rebound reaction similar to the snapping of a band overstretched for too long. Pulled, pulled, pulled in the wrong direction, I catapulted into a world diametrically opposed to my own and landed nine states away in Winkleman, Arizona, home to the wonderful community of Wind Spirit. Wind Spirit’s website asks visitors to not expect a “utopian ideal.” However, in my 20 years, it has come closest to what I define as “utopia”—a milieu similar to happy childhood: full of possibilities and friendly faces, unrestrained by ageism, sexism, racism...

Alas, I had arrived completely exhausted, and not in the physical sense. With my heart and soul completely depleted after mustering up just enough energy to propel me past personal and parental doubts to Arizona, my hungry ego took over. Inner peace? Right now, right here! I told myself I would understand the ways of these people through sheer drive and hard work, the same way I had achieved everything else in life. I couldn’t simply absorb “Zen,” I had to work towards it like a mountain climber, escalating higher peaks of consciousness.

I soon learned that to achieve this quest, I had to drop the drive and do nothing.

For the first week, I harassed work-exchange visitors my own age about imperative activities—what time should I get up? Should I do work after or before breakfast? Lynne—how do I cut an onion?!

Little did I know that at Wind Spirit, the concept of “imperative activities” did not really exist. Residents explained chores like thoughtful prophecies: somewhere out there, in the future, “when you have time,” and for however long you felt necessary. Despite this *laissez-faire* attitude towards the community “to-do” list, somehow, miraculously, the community continued running smoothly. This completely obliterated my preconceived notion that accomplishment, especially within a group, requires labor-intensive micromanagement. The realization that even without a clear authoritative figure, everything fell into place let my over-analytic, perfectionist habits rest.

I can sum up the next step to mastering the art of doing nothing in one Linnaean classification: *Phylum arthropoda*. Insects, spiders, and their kin. It may seem petty, but to a control-freak, bugs,

especially ones with bad people skills (i.e. flies), occur as an ultimate threat. The usual armamentarium of domination has no effect on their well-being or life plans; they'll spoil your food and tickle your nose if they want with a total disregard to persuasive argument. The majority of the modern world has bought into this neurosis. At Wind Spirit, however, bugs held a comparatively respectable place in the social order. As one resident exclaimed about flies ever so often, "there's so many of them! They must have a purpose! Flies are DIVINE!" And with that mentality surrounding me, my level of arthropod warfare decreased exponentially: I learned to do nothing, although every primitive urge yearned to do something very violent.

This particular lesson generalized to other areas of life. For if I could grant the smallest fly the right to life and freedom, how could I deprive anyone else of that privilege? Something in me expanded when I started regarding all life as "divine." At first, it seemed ridiculous, overboard sentimental. But after restraining violent reaction again and again in the kitchen, after seeing the gentle way a visitor from New Zealand coaxed a six inch wolf spider from my RV wall, after hearing over and over again "they're more scared of you than you are of them,"

kindness towards the "creepy crawlies" became natural. And, in a larger context, kindness towards all life followed suit. I came home with a newfound understanding of acceptance towards others, and concurrently, myself.

The serene, passive lifestyle at Wind Spirit reined in my metaphorical wild horses. After a lifetime of galloping towards unattainable perfection, my ego stomping all inner peace in the process, Wind Spirit provided a watering hole for reflection and rejuvenation. And for that, I am very grateful.

I may not want to give up ambition altogether. I still have some ways to go before settling in a community permanently; my ego has not had its last rodeo. But in the midst of my horse hunt I rediscovered an inner light. When I close my eyes and take a deep breath, my inner light guides me towards certainty. And I would rather stumble

Something in me expanded when I started regarding all life—including flies—as "divine."

upon dangerous knolls on my own accord than dumbly follow caravans on roads more traveled by, swallowing indignation. After all, life's not really a wild ride until you loosen the reins and follow fate bareback.

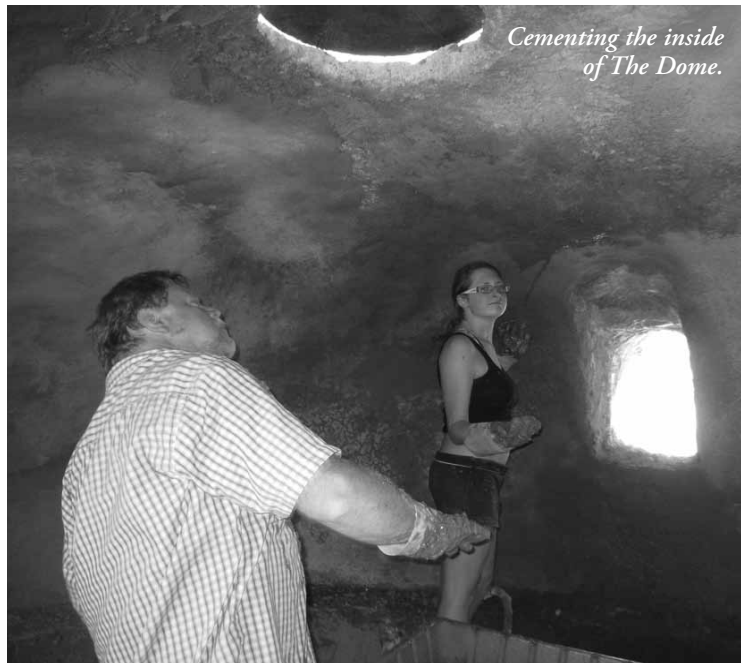
I doubt I'll end up tangled in the underbrush, though. I spent hours fraternizing with "divine flies" in Wind Spirit's "Bitchin Kitchin"—at least some of that sanctity must have rubbed off on me! 🐛

Nikola Kendis was a sophomore at Rutgers University before withdrawing to go on a soul-searching journey. She visited Wind Spirit intentional community in Arizona as part of this journey, and is now attending massage therapy school in her home state of New Jersey. She plans to return to college in fall of 2014; she hopes to live life passionately no matter what major or career she chooses.

New friends!



Cementing the inside of The Dome.



Photos courtesy of Nikola Kendis

The Remembrance of Roots

By Michelle Erica Price

In the fall of 2006, I was part of a group of 12 American students ranging from our late teens to early 20s that participated in an experiential academic program, Living Routes, which focused on the human challenge of sustainability. The following passage is a reflection on the three months that we as a youth-based transient group spent participating in community life at the Findhorn Ecovillage in Scotland.



is confident in the kitchen, but spends most of her time alone in her bedroom thinking thoughts that will never be said aloud. She is extremely bothered by chunks of toothpaste left on the bathroom sink and loud laughter that interrupts her heavy slumber. Without her, voices wrestle with one another and there is no referee of silence to break things up.

Rae likes to disappear into the woods for hours and never fails to return empty-handed. She is not afraid of dragonflies landing on her slender arms or standing up for what she holds to be true. Each night, she says a silent prayer for the earth and wonders why others don't do the same. She believes in strong whiskey, the music of Jerry Garcia, and the magic of unicorns. The stars aren't the only ones who have seen the sadness she tries to hide during the day. One can always tell if she has secretly spent the night somewhere; she leaves a trail of herself wherever she goes.

Ian has a small tuft of hair growing from his chin that makes him appear slightly elfish despite his generous height. He eats cornflakes out of a huge plastic jug every morning. If he is feeling extra creative he will sprinkle muesli and cocoa powder in his prized possession and call it dessert. His hands are always occupied, and if he is not busy plucking the strings on his guitar then he is probably knitting a scarf or molding a piece of pottery. He needs to move, and so he has a terrible time falling asleep. The shape of his eyes is perfect for storing tears, and if you ever see him cry, you too will start to weep.

On the corner of Christopher Street in the West Village stands a stylish thrift shop that, from the outside, could easily be mistaken for a posh boutique. When entering the store with observant eyes, one sees a large metal picture frame propped up against a rickety old chair. Wedged in between the smooth glass and the backside of the frame lives a simple sketch of a mushroom nuzzling an old tree stump.

I find myself staring at the picture the way a parent would watch her newborn child from behind the nursery window. With only a sheet of glass as separation, the longing to touch what is on the other side is overwhelming. Then again, it is not so much the image that I miss as it is the people that this picture reminds me of. Once upon a time, somewhere on the other side of the world, where mushrooms nuzzle tree stumps, a circle of hands first formed to create the place I call home. Although this home of mine is abstract in design, it has a structure that is supported by supple spines and a doorbell fashioned out of 12 beating hearts. There is only one way to invite you in, but you must listen closely.

Sarah shows up late to class every day. She once told me that she feels invisible most of the time, and that people don't mind if she arrives late to class, because they can't see her anyway. As if one could miss the black glasses that perfectly frame her electric blue eyes, or the sweet scent of rosewater she uses in place of deodorant. Strangely, she

K.C. keeps bones and bubble gum in her pocket. She has hair the color of a crow's wing and a tall lanky build that keeps her closer to the sky than the rest of us. She has slept with despair and wrestled with uncertainty, though one would not know it from the look on her face. She is a mushroom connoisseur and knows exactly which ones will cause great pleasure and which ones will cause great pain. She is constantly questioning things, though she does not always find the answers she is searching for. She is fiercely loyal, and will love you long after she has lost sight of your whereabouts.

Melissa has the face of a sparrow. She also has a very tiny frame, and her back is laced with knots that require years of untangling. Her cheeks turn a dusty rose whenever she takes a sip of wine or when a certain British bloke enters the room. She folds pieces of fabric that have been abandoned by their owners and gives them a new home by wrapping them around her head. A delicate pendant in the shape of a tree hangs from her noble-looking neck and when she dances even the branches sway. She smokes cigarettes socially but likes to sip barley tea alone. Her witch's cackle can be heard from a mile away.

Catherine effortlessly embodies both sexes. She has strong masculine hands, though there is something divinely feminine about her touch. When she cries, she cries with her entire body, and it is clear there are hidden wells inside her heart that she hasn't even begun to drink from. She always appears to be in a state of colorful contemplation. Whenever she is swimming through her thoughts, she presses her pen gently against her lips leaving the tiniest hole for her breath to travel in and out. She has a deep respect for spiders and the intricate webs they spin, because she too is a weaver of worlds.

Russel has strong shoulders that are perfect for carrying burdens. The trouble is he can never decide which burden is his to bear. His favorite scent is wood spice and he believes the willow to be his power tree. In his past life he was prob-

ably a woodsman, which would certainly explain why he seems so at home amongst the trees. He could put fires out with his piercing blue eyes and start them up just as easily with his warm hands. He likes to eat eggs after midnight, when the rest of the house is quietly sleeping. Watching from windows, he is always slightly out of reach.

Ariana always wraps herself in layers. This way, she can easily peel away the pieces that no longer serve her. Her mood is mainly metallic, but when she smiles it feels more like silk. During the day she walks around with a jug that she likes to fill with fresh water and silent screams. She understands the importance of human touch and how one can become weakened without it. Sometimes she dresses up in black to mourn all the lovers she has lost along the way. She has a creamy complexion and a cropped coif that is fiercely feminine. Her face says things that make words seem obsolete.

Wes has the spirit of a wolf. He wakes up the same time every morning and goes to bed the same time each night. He has roots planted so deep in the earth that it is hard to imagine him ever feeling groundless. He is shyer than he appears and if one is too loud then they can easily scare him away. However, if they have proven themselves to be comfortable with stillness, he will reveal his silly side to them in time. After he learned how to circular breathe, he carved his own didgeridoo out of a piece of wood he found not far from his house. He plays music, the same way he does everything, with humble awareness.

Lauren has sharp white teeth that are perfect for cutting through bullshit. She has a powerful presence that is both alluring and intimidating. At night she wears a clear retainer and glasses that awkwardly fit her face, yet there is something incredibly endearing about her after-hours appearance. Whenever she plays volleyball, she always returns with a collection of bruises on her forearms but she never complains, because she knows only strength. She once had an Italian lover who used to call her piccolo and every time she hears that word she is reminded of the time they spent together. It is when she lets her guard down that her true beauty emerges.

Emma bakes bread when the rest of the world is wasting time. She doesn't like to pick up after people though she finds herself constantly cleaning up dishes that do not belong to her. Her gorgeous red curls make rich golden sunsets seem plain and ordinary. She has very regal features and it is not surprising that she sleeps best on a

(continued on p. 72)



Photos courtesy of Michelle Erica Price

NextGEN:

Growing a Youth Movement within the Ecovillage Network

By *Ethan Hirsch-Tauber*

I meet many young people who are quite confused about what they can do in the world to make a difference. Increasing ecological, social, and economic instability give a rather unclear and even bleak picture for the future. At the same time, alternatives are being created that have tremendous potential for radical change. I see the ecovillage and intentional communities movements as among the clearest demonstrations of this. For young people growing up within and outside of intentional communities, there needs to be a way to get involved that feels inviting and exciting. To this aim, I've put a lot of time and energy in the past two years into NextGEN, the youth movement of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN).

GEN is a "growing network of sustainable communities and initiatives that bridge different cultures, countries, and continents. GEN serves as umbrella organization for ecovillages, transition town initiatives, intentional communities, and ecologically-minded individuals worldwide" [gen.ecovillage.org]. NextGEN identifies itself as the youth initiative of GEN. But what does that mean? Many people have asked why young people don't just get involved in GEN directly instead. What is the point of NextGEN having its own group?

Jumping straight into the larger GEN network can be intimidating, especially with all of the established and active communities with many years of experience. NextGEN seeks to offer immediate opportunities for young people to engage and take leadership roles. While we are clearly part of GEN, we are also creating our own youth-initiated projects, vision, and mission. NextGEN has the intention to connect youth from all over the world, with projects unique to every region, as well as collaborative projects between regions. NextGEN can be a training ground: a creative space to get involved, work with other youth from around the world, and develop skills for building sustainable intentional communities. One final, clear distinction is that GEN membership primarily consists of ecovillages and

their residents while NextGEN invites any young people who wish to join the youth movement in ecological communities.

NextGEN History and Regional Activity

NextGEN grew out of a youth-initiated effort during the annual GEN Conference in 2005, held that year in Findhorn Foundation Community, Scotland. The group was quite active, but eventually lost its momentum and became dormant for several years. [One interesting NextGEN tool that was almost lost to antiquity is a NextGEN Handbook created in 2009 by several of the group's initial organizers. It can be downloaded at www.wiser.org/resource/view/0e4877d96f682a39778a95e1e6db66a7.] However in the last three years, there has been a resurgence. This revival started for the NextGEN in Europe at Tamera in Portugal at the 2011 annual GEN Conference [nextgen.ecovillage.org/2011/08/nextgen-conference-2011-in-tamera]. The following year, meetings were held at the conference in Krishna Valley, Hungary, during which we decided to host another NextGEN convergence. Last October, at the community of ZEGG in



NextGEN representatives from six continents receive a standing ovation following a morning of inspiring presentations at the 2013 GEN Conference in Schweibentalp.

Alfonso Flaquer



NextGEN Meeting, Zegg 2012.

Alfonso Flaquer

Germany, a group of 55 youth came together for work and play, further reviving the energy of NextGEN in Europe [gen-europe.org/about-us/nextgen/nextgen-meeting-in-zegg/index.htm].

In December of 2012, during a GEN Africa meeting at SEKEM in Egypt, two NextGEN representatives joined the newly-elected GEN Africa council. Many members of GEN Africa are younger than 35, and connected to a growing youth movement in Africa which is working towards positive social and environmental change, taking leadership roles on issues from climate change to women's rights. Examples of NextGEN projects include permaculture education in Ghana and Zimbabwe, youth empowerment in Sudan, and a planned Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course at a gorilla sanctuary in the eastern part of Congo (DRC) [gen-europe.org/activities/news/news-detail/artikel/dr-congo-gen-congo-connecting-to-eastern-congo/index.htm].

For several years now, NextGEN organizers in Asia have been creating exciting projects, most recently including workshops on climate change in Thai schools, tree planting nature camps, empowerment workshops, and an upcoming journey through Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh! [genoa.ecovillage.org/index.php/26-news/news/54-news-from-nextgen-genoa, genoa.ecovillage.org/index.php/country-activities/thailand/56-volunteers-needed]

The other regions of GEN, which include CASA (Council of Sustainable Settlements of the Americas), ENA (Ecovillage Network of the Americas), and GEN Middle East all have youth eager to get involved. This year's GEN Conference at the community of Schweibenalp will host an international meeting of NextGEN representatives to coordinate the organization's efforts around the planet [gen-europe.org/about-us/nextgen/



Alfonso Fiaquer

Top photo: More than 50 young people from just over 20 countries around the world attended the NextGEN gathering at the GEN Conference in Schweibenalp 2013. This photo: NextGEN attendees of the 2013 GEN Conference share their visions during a group hike in the mountains around Schweibenalp.

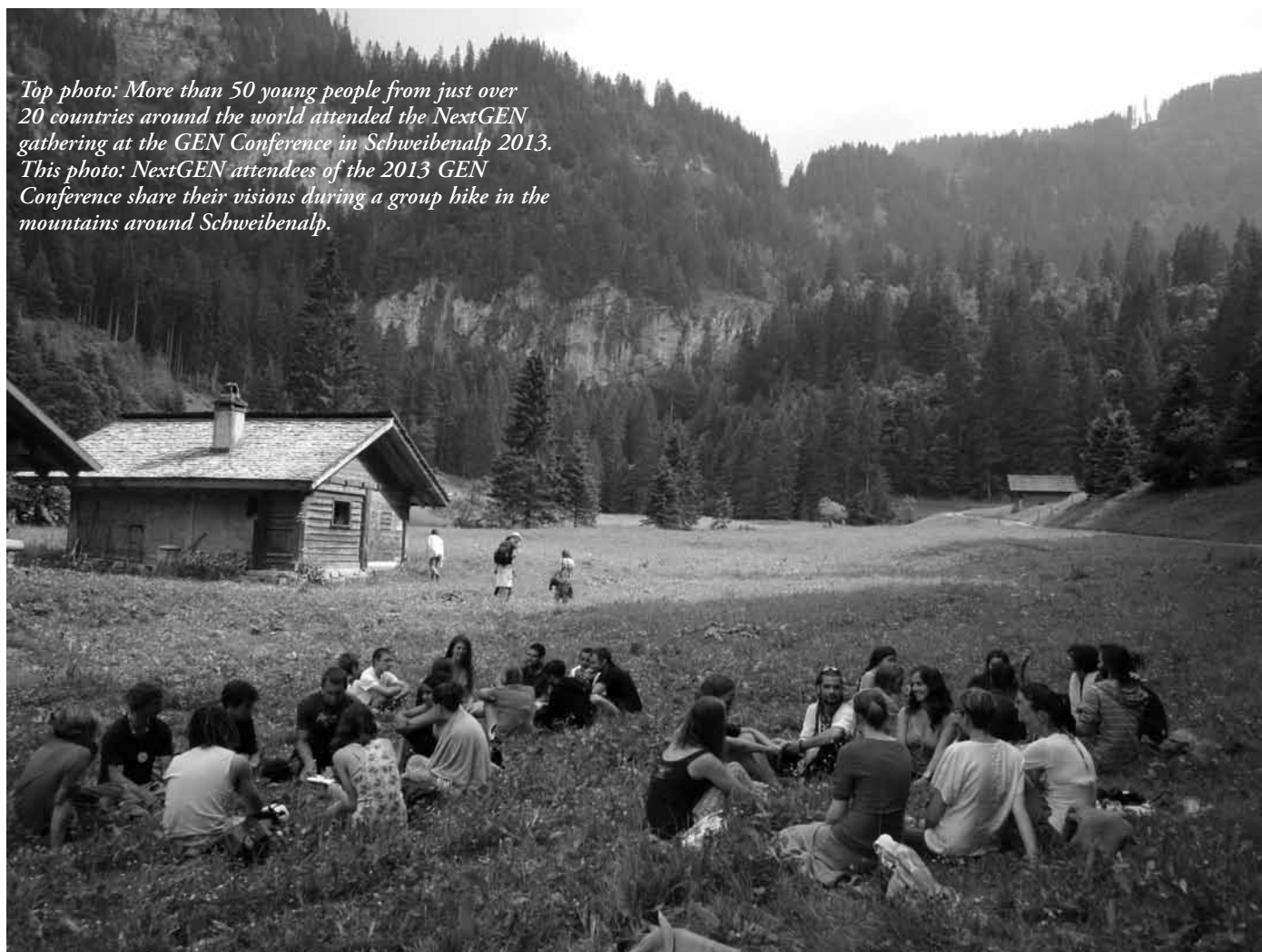


Photo courtesy of Ethan Hirsch-Tauber

index.htm]. Partnership between the global North and South is one of the key priorities for NextGEN and GEN. The legacy of colonialism and now neo-colonialism has created enormous economic inequality and social injustice. The bridging of these worlds and the mutual sharing of sustainable solutions are crucial steps in creating social justice, equality, and diversity.

Challenges

As NextGEN seeks to expand and connect globally, staying involved with members scattered around the world is one of the biggest challenges we face. Skype and social networking tools make it comparatively easy to communicate globally. But for keeping up energy and enthusiasm, it seems very important to have local connections where individuals can meet away from a computer screen. Online meetings can be derailed by internet connection issues or simply devoid of energy from lack of personal contact. NextGEN must focus on creating smaller, localized, yet interconnected groups around the world, rather than trying to constantly communicate from afar.

Continuity in membership and clarity of vision are two other big blocks to NextGEN growing as a global movement. Many young people today are very mobile, and don't stay in one place for long. We need more young people eager to step into leadership roles for a longer duration. For this we must also hold a more clear vision and mission. Finding the financial resources to do projects we want is of course a challenge. But I strongly believe when dedicated people commit to a shared vision, the money will appear. It comes down to growing a committed membership that is willing to stay the course.

The Opportunity

I believe NextGEN can be a powerful global movement of youth, connected around the planet, and making effective change. We have dreams to invigorate an ecovillage youth exchange, create education programs for learning about sustainability and community, and start many other inspiring projects. NextGEN reflects many of the issues alive in the world for young people and communities today. It's crucial to look at how and why the organization has gone through its growing pains, and how we might move beyond them. I hope and pray that the tremendous potential for youth worldwide to mobilize and take action for positive change is realized, through whatever means best serves humanity and our planet. 🌱

Ethan Hirsch-Tauber is an ecovillage nomad, traveling the world, making connections between communities of inspiring individuals, and searching for truly sustainable solutions in our turbulent times (as well as the perfect momo). In his journeys, he has been working with other youth as an organizer, an educator, and a peacemaker in training. He is now moving to Kibbutz Lotan in the Holy Land, to direct their program in Environment, Peace, and Social Justice. Contact him at ethan@ecovillage.org.



Photos by Om Sunisa

Top two photos: NextGEN representative Om Sunisa (from Thailand) facilitates a NextGEN Empowerment workshop in Sri Lanka.

Bottom photo: NextGEN representative Om Sunisa planting trees and raising awareness of climate change in her home town in Thailand.

NextGEN Update: Serving Gaia

In July, during the 2013 GEN Conference in Schweibenalp, Switzerland, NextGEN received the 2013 Gaia Excellence Award for best project of the year, primarily due to inspiring presentations about our youth-based projects around the world. We were so honored to receive this huge show of support from the entire GEN community, and redoubled our commitment to creating a strong movement. We look forward to sharing our progress as our momentum builds. You are also invited to join our work.

—E.H.-T.

Dreaming an Ecovillage Youth Exchange Program

By Kira Taylor-Hoar

Hi, I'm Kira. So far I have traveled to 10 different communities in Europe and have interviewed youth from each of them, seeing all kinds of different ways of living together and sharing spaces and livelihoods. What I have seen so far is beyond what I can explain in this article. I have learned about the communities, how they work, how they don't work, how the people cope with problems and also how they celebrate life. What I have done so far is simply travel to these communities, asking young people what they like about living in community, what they would like to see changed, and how it has been important to their personal development. My main goal has been to create the connections necessary in order to implement a youth exchange program between villages.

I don't think I can give you one answer that will cover all youth in all communities everywhere, but I can give you a taste of some of the responses I have received.

- Anna Fee Angeoaare currently lives in Sieben Linden in Germany, and her response to the question of personal development was a common answer amongst young people I talked to: "Since living here, I feel like I am accepted, like I can be myself."
- Elle Adams of Findhorn had a similar answer as Anna, but along with all other youth interviewed, would also like to see some changes in her community: "I would like to see more community action, such as building or creative projects to be involved in. I would also like to see more opportunities to change things for the better."
- Patrick Grotz currently lives in the ZEGG community (Zentrum für experimentelle Gesellschaftsgestaltung or Center for Experimental Cultural Design), but has also visited other communities and finds it difficult to stay in these places: "Often it is pretty hard to go to a community: it is easy to go as a visitor, but if you decide to stay for a long time, it is hard to have the chance to be there and

be involved (not just as a visitor)."

- Fabian Lecher is another young person from ZEGG who believes that young people are essential in intentional communities. His response was also a common answer amongst many of the young people I spoke with: "Young people have the energy to change something, to create something. As they are the leaders of tomorrow it is really important to educate them in a proper way. You can get proper education in community—the kind of education you really need in life." Fabian says that for his personal development one month of living in a community like ZEGG is equal to one year of living in "reality."

Creating an ecovillage youth exchange program has multiple purposes. From what I have seen in these places, it could bring energy and a transfer of human resources, skills, and knowledge that could accelerate the rate of information sharing between and within these communities. Bringing youth to these places could show them the ways they function, what works and what doesn't. Youth could then bring this information back to their home community or even create their own new ones. My hope is that this will bring new energy into these places, acting as a catalyst for change and growth. Inter-community youth exchange programs could perhaps even help those communities to become all that they can be, through sharing the wealth of information that is presently available. 🐾

Kira Taylor-Hoar is a freelance NextGEN and GEN (Global Ecovillage Network) volunteer and traveler. She has a passion for sustainability and loves animals. Connection with nature is imperative in her life.



Ethan Hirsch-Tauber

Youth from the organization NextGEN at the 2013 GEN Europe conference in Schweibental, Switzerland.

Communal Pathways to Sustainable Living: International Communal Studies Association Conference, Findhorn Foundation

I have just been at Findhorn Foundation, that well-known, 50-year-old intentional community in Scotland, for ICSA2013 (June 26-28). The community hosted 250 delegates (including 120 presenters) from over 40 countries. Academics, graduate students (including two of mine), and intentional community members socialised, debated, and shared information and inspiration.

After ICSA Chairperson Jan Bang (from Norway) and conference organiser Dr. Graham Meltzer (from Findhorn) opened the conference, Dr. Robert Gillman (from the US) spoke about “the Dynamic Planetary Context for Intentional Communities.” Giving an up-beat assessment—“I have never been more encouraged about the future than I am today”—Robert argued that “there are no environmental problems—only environmental *symptoms* of human problems,” and promoted the role of intentional communities as demonstrators and exemplars of change.

Over the next three days, we heard topics as diverse as David

Leach’s (Canada) “Kibbutzing the Burbs: Can sustainable community be scaled-up for suburbia?”; Nicholas Anastopoulos’s (Greece) “The Crisis and Emergence of Communal Experiments in Greece”; and Ruth Kark’s (Israel) “Christian Communes in Israel.” Other speakers came from Australia, Austria, Brazil, Congo, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the US.

My personal highpoints included Stephen Lloyd-Moffett’s (US) explanation of “lavra” forms of communal monasticism, Ina Meyer-Stoll’s and Achim Ecker’s (Germany) update on the iconic ZEGG community, and Iris Kunze’s (Germany) insights into “Why is Community so Popular in Individualistic Society?” My presentation, “Single-Sex, Secular Intentional Communities in Australia,” was well received.

We also had 22 workshops on offer with titles including:



Photo courtesy of Dr Graham Meltzer

World map showing countries from which ICSA speakers came.

“Light Your Fire: How to create enthusiasm, focus and passion in the individual and in an intentional community”; “Story Telling in Community”; “Moving to Connect: Sacred and popular dance to build intentional community”; “Creating a Conscious Culture for Community Sustainability”; and “Punch Drunk Love: The spirituality of wine in community.”

At our second plenary session, we heard detailed accounts of how the Findhorn Foundation thrives, with over £1.8 million (US\$2.7 million) annual income, mainly from education and guest programs, allowing the community to engage with a wide range of NGOs as well as the United Nations. The Findhorn Foundation supports over 100 “co-workers” while another 600 community members support the Foundation in a host of ways. Recent research confirmed their extraordinarily small ecological footprint. Our electricity was generated by their four wind turbines, most of our food was grown in their gardens, and our wastes were treated by their “living machine.” The Findhorn Ecovillage is one of several iconic leaders of the global intentional communities movement.

At the third plenary session, six senior scholars (including me) and community members looked at the future of the global intentional community movement. Most, including me, were positive, albeit with reservations. Intentional com-



Speakers at the final plenary session, from the left: Graham Meltzer (Findhorn), Joanna Macy (US), Tim Miller (US), Bill Metcalf (Australia), Kosha Joubert (Findhorn), and Bindu Mohanty (India).

Photo courtesy of Deborah Altus



ICSA delegates discuss in front of some of Findhorn Foundation's ecohouses.

Photo courtesy of Deborah Altus



Findhorn Foundation Bongo Drum Players opening final plenary session.

Photo courtesy of Deborah Altus

munities are no longer a wealthy, western phenomenon (niche or otherwise), nor limited to middle-class “drop-outs,” but have enormous implications around the globe—particularly within the guise of ecovillages and cohousing.

When not speaking, listening, discussing, and learning, we enjoyed Findhorn’s Taizé Choir, ate superb vegetarian meals, slept comfortably within ecological housing, and danced, sang, meditated, discussed, and shared life with each other and with Findhorn Foundation community members. Each evening, we enjoyed a range of entertainment, wrapping-up this ICSA conference with a traditional Scottish *Céilidh* where professors, students, intentional community members, and other guests danced such classics as

“strip-the-willow” into the night.

The International Communal Studies Association (www.ic.org/icsa) was founded in 1985 by Professor Yaacov Oved of Israel and Professor Donald Pitzer of the US. The ICSA meets every three years somewhere in the world, usually in an intentional community or an historical communal site. Recent conferences have been held at Damanhur (Italy), ZEGG (Germany), Amana (US), and Kibbutz Mizra & Emek Yezreel College (Israel). Membership is open to anyone interested in learning about intentional communities around the globe.

Professor Yaacov Oved, being unable to attend, sent farewell wishes via DVD. He reminded us how ICSA came into being, and of the important role it continues to play in bringing together scholars and communards from around the globe.

This ICSA conference, my 10th, was a wonderful opportunity to appreciate the exciting and dynamic nature of the global intentional communities movement, to meet and learn from people from different continents, to appreciate how to create positive futures for members and for the world—and to have fun.

Our next ICSA conference, under the new chairmanship of Chris Coates (Editor of *Diggers and Dreamers*, and founder of Lancaster Cohousing, UK) will likely be held at Tamera community (Portugal) in 2016, so I hope COMMUNITIES readers will start planning to attend and enjoy a unique, intentional-community experience. 🐣



ICSA conference participants having lunch in Findhorn community's dining room.

Photo courtesy of Bill Metcalf



Maypole in front of guest accommodation.

Photo courtesy of Bill Metcalf

Photo courtesy of Bill Metcalf



ICSA delegates and Findhorn members dancing at the Céilidh after the final conference session.

Note: Conference proceedings and video-recordings of the plenary sessions and paper presentations are available as free downloads from the conference website: www.findhorn.org/icsa.

Dr. Bill Metcalf, of Griffith University, Australia, is the author of numerous scholarly and popular articles, plus seven books, about intentional communities, the most recent being The Findhorn Book of Community Living. He is Past President of the International Communal Studies Association and has been COMMUNITIES magazine's International Correspondent for many years.

Transparency, Equivalence, and Effectiveness

How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part I

By Diana Leafe Christian

At first the question stumped me. I was giving an informal presentation on Sociocracy one morning in a grass-roof-covered building at Findhorn in Scotland. Sociocracy (which means “governance by peers,” also called “Dynamic Governance” in the US) is a whole-system self-governance process and a decision-making method. (See “Sociocracy: A Permaculture Approach to Community Evolution” by Melanie Rios, Winter 2011 issue.)

The presentation was for the New Findhorn Association (NFA), a network of local friends, neighbors, businesses, nonprofits, and projects influenced by and/or affiliated one way or another with the Findhorn Foundation. Begun in 1962 in a caravan (trailer) park on the coast of northern Scotland, Findhorn was famous originally for its founders’ spiritual guidance about working with Nature in its gardens. The Findhorn Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded in 1972 to offer spiritual and ecological education for residents and guests, was the first member of the New Findhorn Association, and integral to the Association’s creation in 1999. Together, the Foundation, the New Findhorn Association, and the wider network of Findhorn-affiliated neighbors and friends who live and work nearby are often referred to locally as “the Findhorn Foundation Community,” but usually known internationally as simply “Findhorn.”

I was asked by the Association to lead a morning workshop introducing Sociocracy to a small group of Council (board) Members. John Buck, the man who introduced Sociocracy to the English-speaking world, had given two Association-sponsored Sociocracy workshops at Findhorn in the last two years, and the group had recently begun using two Sociocracy methods in their meetings. I was invited to give a presentation because, while some Council Members wanted Sociocracy, others felt uncertain about it and newer Council Members hadn’t been exposed to it.

The question I wasn’t sure how to respond to came from a Council Member who asked if the Association’s use of Sociocracy

might not diminish the group’s spiritual function and impact. Sociocracy, she said, doesn’t seem to acknowledge or support the spiritual principles upon which Findhorn was based.

To better understand, I asked if she was concerned that the Association using simply a secular governance and decision-making method like Sociocracy might pull them away from the deeply important spiritual reasons they were there in the first place? Yes, she said, that was her concern.

Suddenly inspired, I said that when people do gardening at Findhorn, besides tuning in to the spirits of the plants, they also use trowels and spade forks—secular tools that nevertheless help them accomplish their spiritual purpose while gardening. And that Sociocracy is similar: it’s a tool that can help a group, no matter its purpose, to more easily and harmoniously achieve

that purpose. And for any times when a group might be less attuned to each other for awhile,

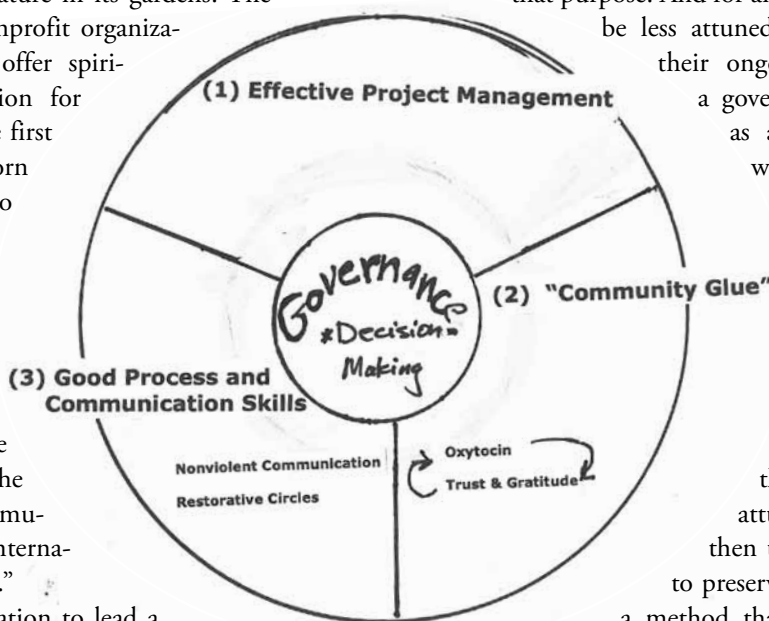
their ongoing use of Sociocracy as a governance method could serve as a safety net to help them work effectively until they returned to a more attuned state again. Smiling again, the Council Member said that’s what she wanted.

Another Council Member was skeptical, he said, as he favored the way Findhorn traditionally decides things: taking time to silently attune with each other first and then using consensus. He wanted to preserve democracy and not adopt a method that might reduce fairness or equality. But by the end of the morning he was

smiling too, as hearing about the basics of Sociocracy had alleviated his concerns. In fact all the participants were smiling, and me too.

Three Aspects of a Healthy, Thriving Community

This article is about what I see as the benefits of using Sociocracy in communities, especially when compared with using consensus. (See article series, “Busting the Myth that Consensus-with-Unanimity is Good For Communities,” Summer 2012-Summer 2013 issues.) Part II, in the Winter 2013 issue, will focus



specifically on how Sociocracy works.

I recommend Sociocracy for communities and similar organizations because I think that, when practiced correctly, it tends to result in more harmony and good will than using consensus decision-making often does. I see a group's governance process, including its decision-making method, as powerfully influencing and helping manifest what I believe are three crucial and mutually reinforcing aspects of a healthy, thriving community.

One aspect I call **Community Glue**—taking time to do shared enjoyable activities that tend to generate feelings of gratitude and trust, and which also tend to create the “pleasure hormone” oxytocin. Research shows that oxytocin in the bloodstream generates feelings of trust and gratitude towards the people one is with, although it may be experienced simply as “feeling good.” This oxytocin in the bloodstream keeps the “feeling good” going throughout the enjoyable shared activity.

Thus, community meals, shared work tasks, singing, dancing, drumming, playing music, playing games or sports, group meditation, storytelling evenings, describing emotionally meaningful aspects of one's life to friends and colleagues, making decisions together smoothly and effectively, accomplishing community goals—all tend to produce these feelings in the group. And this—the good will, the sense of “us” or “community spirit”—is like having good credit or a “community immune system” of trust and good will. The more trust and good will a community has, the more effectively its members can respond to and resolve conflict when it comes up. When a community draws on abundant community glue, it may be easier to just talk to each other simply and figure out how to resolve things.

A second aspect of a healthy, thriving community, in my opinion, is **Good Process and Communication Skills**. While this is obvious to most experienced communitarians, the need for these skills becomes obvious sooner or later in newer communities too. By “communication

skills,” I mean the ways people talk with each other, both in groups and meetings and one on one. By “process skills,” I mean the ways members gather together specifically to get to know each other better, consider ideas, understand each others' emotions or upsets, or discuss and resolve conflicts.

Nowadays I recommend what I believe are the two most effective communication and process methods for communities: Nonviolent Communication, a way in which people speak with others that tends to create a sense of connection between people and reduce conflict, and Restorative Circles, a conflict-resolution method similar in some ways to Nonviolent Communication.

The third aspect, **Effective Project Management**, is obvious to founders of successful communities and cohousing professionals but often less obvious (or even invisible) to more idealistic or countercultural folks. It's comprised of the ways a community creates and maintains its legal entity(s); the ways it finances, purchases, and physically develops its property (including, for example, hiring any outside professional for design or construction work, bookkeeping, website design, or other work); organizes and tracks its internal community finances and member labor requirements; attracts, processes, and orients new members; and maintains the community's documents, policies, and decisions. These are all actions that well-organized businesses or nonprofits use too. Sooner or later members of new communities learn that clear, thorough, well-organized management is necessary not only to found their new community but also to successfully maintain it.

I believe these three aspects of community mutually reinforce each other. If a group has abundant community glue, for example, people will tend to feel connected enough and harmonious enough so that most of the time they'll get along well and not need to speak so carefully, and will probably need less conflict resolution as well. But if a group's reserve of community glue is low—perhaps because they don't yet realize how important it is or don't have enough time to schedule enjoyable group activities often enough—they may have to choose their words more carefully, and may need to resolve conflicts more formally and more frequently.

Similarly, if a group has effective project management, the sense of accomplishment they'll feel when people experience the community moving towards its goals can create more community glue—increasing their feelings of trust and gratitude and thus reducing their need for super-careful ways of speaking and more frequent conflict resolution sessions. But if a community is managed poorly—for example, if they miss important opportunities; experience unexpected or un-prepared-for legal



Photo courtesy of Findhorn Foundation



Council Members of the New Findhorn Association, a network comprising the Findhorn Foundation and affiliated businesses, nonprofits, neighbors, and friends.

problems, bookkeeping snafus, or financial shortfalls; lose documents or records of meeting decisions—this can create anger, resentment, blame, shame, and demoralization, which of course erodes the group's sense of trust and connection. A group in this situation will, once again, need to speak to one another more carefully and will probably need to resolve conflicts more often too.

(I advise groups to go for all three, of course.)

How Effective Governance Helps a Community Thrive

Community governance, in my opinion, is at the center of all three aspects of healthy community—and effective governance benefits and enhances all three. (See figure 1, p. 59.)

By “governance” I mean how the group organizes its time and work tasks, manages its money, and shares its information—along with its decision-making method for deciding these things.

When I ask groups what their method of governance is and they reply “consensus,” I assume they're confusing “how” they make decisions with “what” they make them about. Solely decision-making methods such as consensus-with-unanimity, the N Street Consensus Method, majority-rule voting, supermajority voting, etc. don't specify how the group might organize and manage itself or which decisions they might make about this.

A community accomplishes its project management *through* its governance process. Its governance is the *way* it effectively organizes its legalities, finances, building and construction, membership process, work-contribution policy, how it collects and manages its documents, policies, and decisions, and so on. In my opinion, effective governance is at the heart of a healthy community.

This is why I believe using a governance method like Sociocracy* absolutely con-

tributes to the three aspects of a healthy, successful community. Using Sociocracy for community can, in my opinion, not only eliminate some of the unintended consequences of using consensus (as it's practiced in most intentional communities), but also can help a community thrive.

Transparency, Equivalence, and Effectiveness...and the “Three Parents of Sociocracy”

Sociocracy in its modern-day version was created by Dutch electrical engineer, inventor, and cybernetics expert Gerard Endenburg in The Netherlands in the 1970s. As a boy he attended the famous Quaker Community School in The Netherlands, led by the renowned Dutch pacifist Kees Boeke, in which school decisions were made by teachers and students using Quaker-style consensus. After graduating from college Endenburg worked for the Netherlands branch of Philips Electronics, where he invented the flat speaker used in car doors and cell phones.

As mentioned, Endenburg focused on cybernetics, the science of communications and control. Communications and control happens naturally when you ride a bicycle—constantly adjusting to the requirements of whatever's happening, moment by moment. You continuously adjust your body weight over the bicycle frame, adjust the direction of the handlebars, pedal faster or slower, shift gears or apply brakes as you continuously get information about the bike's position in space through your proprioceptive sense and by what you see and hear. Your “feedback loops” are the continuous adjustments you make to keep the bike upright and going towards your destination.

Endenburg also read widely in science, mathematics, and philosophy. He was especially influenced by learning about self-organizing systems, and how everything in nature tends to self-organize...including people. He designed

* I recommend Holacracy as a governance method also, but it tends to be more expensive than Sociocracy to learn. It was designed for businesses and is marketed to them and priced accordingly.

Sociocracy for his company, Eindhoven Elektrotechniek, to be a more harmonious organization, based on the values of transparency, equivalence of voice, and effectiveness.

So I like to say Sociocracy has three “parents”: Quaker-style consensus (which shows up especially in Sociocracy’s “Consent Decision-Making” method; engineering, cybernetics, and feedback loops (used in proposals); and Nature, especially self-organizing systems (reflected in its “circles and double-links” governance method). *(Part II of this article will cover governance using Circles and Double-Links and the Consent Decision-Making method.)*

“Plan-Implement-Evaluate” Feedback Loops

Just as we constantly use feedback loops when riding a bike, any engineer will tell us that measuring, evaluating, and learning how a product actually performs in real life, by field-testing it many times, helps ensure it does what it’s designed to do and works well. An engineer first plans (designs) the product, then implements the design, measures and evaluates the product once it’s made, and modifies it as needed. Thus the developing product responds and adjusts to conditions in reality—which may be quite different than what was anticipated in the planning stage. So, too, for an intentional community. A plan begins as a proposal in a meeting. After approving the proposal or a modified version of it, the group implements the proposal, putting it into effect.

Measuring and Evaluating Proposals

However, when using Sociocracy, there’s a third step—measuring and evaluating the implemented proposal, and modifying it if needed. Thus a proposal, when possible, includes the criteria with which it will later be evaluated (including numeric measurement if possible and desirable) and the upcoming dates when the group will do this. *The criteria and future measurement/evaluation dates are included in the text of the proposal itself.* When possible, implemented proposals

are considered as modifiable or temporary—an experiment, if you will—as the group can later decide to change it or even dismantle it and go back to what they had before or try something else. (Changing an implemented proposal later is much easier with Sociocracy’s “Consent Decision-Making” method than when using consensus, as described in Part II, in the Winter 2013 issue.)

Let’s say, for example, a committee wanted to create a library in the community building. So they present a proposal for a set of shelves in a particular location in the community building, and note who will build the shelves, what it will cost and where the money will come from, and who will organize and maintain the library. The proposal might have the following criteria for later evaluating and measuring the project: Do people donate books to the library? Do they check out books? Can they find the kinds of books they want? Do they return books on time and in good condition? Are library volunteers keeping the shelves clean and orderly every week?

At each of the pre-scheduled future meeting dates for evaluating the implemented proposal, the new library project would be evaluated and measured by the members according to these criteria, as well as to any other criteria the group may think of at the time. New criteria can be added to the list for future evaluations. If some aspects of the library aren’t working well, such as, say, people aren’t returning books on time, the meeting participants doing the evaluation can revise the library policy, perhaps by creating a new way to remind people to return books.

When using Sociocracy, people already know they might modify any future implemented proposal to adjust how it operates in day-to-day reality. Like creative engineers with a project on a drawing board, they know they have to try it under real-life conditions to see how it actually functions before they know it will work.

People can also change the dates of future evaluation times, moving them up, increasing the number of evaluations, decreasing them, stopping them altogether, or adding new evaluation times later, depending on what they find out as they respond to how real circumstances impact their implemented proposal.

“Good enough for now,” “Safe enough to try”

Thus, because most proposals can later be modified or removed, community members don’t need to “support” or feel they must “approve” the proposal—but simply be willing to try it. A proposal need not be perfect, but merely “good enough for now,” “safe enough to try.” (While true of most proposals, it’s not true of one-time yes/no issues, such as fixing the sudden roof leak or not fixing it. In cases like these the group tries to do the best that can be done to address the immediate need, with the knowledge and resources available. And future evaluations, in this case, of the new roof, can inform future similar decisions.)

The plan-implement-evaluate model and proposals needing to only be “good enough for now” confers three benefits. First, the group can adjust and modify an implemented proposal to stay current with real-life circumstances, like a bicyclist adjusting his or her body over the frame and adjusting the handlebars and pedaling speed to meet existing conditions. Thus an implemented proposal can improve over time, so the various projects and processes of a community can become ever-more effective.

Second, this freedom and flexibility allows a community to try things that they might not normally risk for most proposals, because they can always change it or discard it later.

Third, knowing they can easily change a decision in the future has a beneficial effect on the mood and energy of a meeting, especially when a proposal is complex or controversial, as the group can *relax and feel confident as they consider it*. This is in sharp contrast to the consensus decision-making process, especially when there is a controversial or complex proposal.

“Evaluate and Respond” vs. “Predict and Control”

Any consensus trainer will confirm that consensus is an inherently conservative

process because by the very nature of how consensus works it favors whatever agreements the group has already made. While there's no reason that criteria for evaluating/measuring a proposal later and the dates for doing so couldn't be included in a consensus proposal, it's not likely the proposal could be changed easily. Let's say a group using consensus has a complex or controversial proposal to do something new or change something. They may modify the proposal—perhaps multiple times over several meetings—to suit various concerns before everyone (except stand asides) agrees to approve it. However, it may have been so time-consuming and arduous and taken so much negotiation and compromise to finally approve it, that it's difficult for the group to imagine going through all that again in order to change it a few weeks or a few months later. This is why, when considering a proposal in consensus, there's a lot of pressure in the group to “get it right.” The pressure is so much worse when a proposal is complex or controversial because it feels like so much is at stake—they'd better get it damn-near perfect right now.

This creates the energy and vibes of “predict and control”—meaning the group has to try to predict how the implemented proposal will play out in real life, and control all the anticipated factors that could come into play ahead of time. When using Sociocracy, however, unlike in consensus, the group need not clairvoyantly predict the future of the implemented proposal and the range of factors that will affect it then. Rather, they only need wait and see what happens and then adjust the decision if need be. Rather than put themselves through the stressful mode of “predict and control” they can relax into the considerably simpler and easier mode of simply waiting to see what happens, evaluate and measure what they find, and then respond appropriately. Thus they need only “evaluate and respond” instead of “predict and control.” “Evaluate and respond” rather than “predict and control” removes pressure on the group to make the proposal damn-near perfect.

This, the ability to relax, feel confident, and feel free to try new things and experiment is one of the best reasons for a community to use Sociocracy, in my opinion.



All this is why I advocate Sociocracy as an effective governance method to help a community thrive.

As noted earlier, Part II, in the Winter 2013 issue, will focus on how Sociocracy works: how communities using Sociocracy organize themselves in circles and double-links, the “consent decision-making” method, how objections are not blocks but gifts to a circle, and why “tyranny of the minority” can't really happen in Sociocracy. It will touch on five meeting processes, from forming new proposals to selecting people for roles, that all use consent decision-making. It will consider the challenges of using Sociocracy incorrectly, what works well and doesn't work for communities in learning and implementing Sociocracy, how consent decision-making is similar to and different from consensus, the facilitation skills and methods common to both, and the similarities and differences between Sociocracy and Holacracy.

Meanwhile, I hear that the New Findhorn Association is continuing to implement Sociocracy in their meetings, and John Buck will teach another Sociocracy workshop there in October. I'm so glad! 🐾

Diana Leafé Christian, author of Creating a Life Together and Finding Community and publisher of Ecovillages (EcovillageNews.org), speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops internationally. A former consensus trainer and now Sociocracy trainer, Diana specializes in teaching Sociocracy to communities, and has taught in the US, UK, Sweden, France, and Quebec. See www.DianaLeaféChristian.org.

Some Intentional Communities Using Sociocracy

North America: Lost Valley Educational Center, Oregon; Pioneer Valley Cohousing, and Katywil Cohousing, Massachusetts; Green Haven Cohousing, Connecticut; Ecovillage of Loudon County, Virginia; Cohabitat Québec, Quebec City, Quebec.

Europe: Kan Awen Ecovillage, Spain; Les Choux Lents Cohousing, France; Centraal Wonan Cohousing, and Bergen Ecovillage, The Netherlands; Bridport Cohousing, England.

Sociocracy Resources

- Video: “Lost Valley: A Tale of Sociocracy.” Youtube.com
- Article: “Sociocracy: A Permaculture Approach to Community Evolution,” Melanie Rios, COMMUNITIES, issue #153, Winter 2011
- Sociocracy.Info: www.sociocracy.info
- The Sociocracy Consulting Group: sociocracyconsulting.com
- Governance Alive: www.governancealive.com
- Sociocracy UK: sociocracyuk.ning.com
- Sociocracy Center in the Netherlands: www.sociocratie.nl

Sociocracy Trainers Who Teach Intentional Communities:

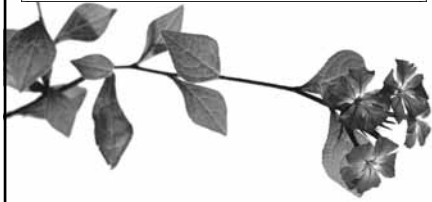
North America: John Schinnerer: john.schinnerer@sociocracyconsulting.com
Jerry Koch-Gonzalez: jerry.koch-gonzalez@sociocracyconsulting.com
Diana Leafé Christian: diana@ic.org

UK: James Priest: jamespriest@thriveincommunity.co.uk

Australia: Gina Price: ginaprice@optusnet.com.au

Bach®

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM



Mind-Body Health with Dr. Bach's Flower Remedies

Learn to alleviate stress and improve well-being. This all-natural system is a safe and gentle complement to any modality.

- Three levels of training available, leading to practitioner registration with the Bach Centre, UK
- Level 1 distance learning available
- NCBTMB Approved CE provider. Courses approved by Bach Centre, UK.

Sponsored by
Bach® Original Flower Remedies

www.bachflowercalendar.com
1-800-334-0843

Ready for Spring?

**Shop at our
Monastery Gift Shop
Online
Monastic Treasures
from around
the world...**

No matter what the occasion is,
send a gift from a monastery...

Visit us at:
**www.communityofsaintbenedict.org
860.519.4088**



REACH

REACH is our column for all your Classified needs. In addition to ads intended to match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, Reach offers ads for events, goods, services, books, personals, and more to people interested in communities.

You may contact the Advertising Manager Christopher Kindig to place a Reach ad. Email Ads@ic.org, call 443-422-3741, or go to communities.ic.org/ads/ for more details or to submit your ad online.

THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #161 - Winter 2013 (out in December) is October 24, 2013.

The rate for Reach ads is \$15 per issue for up to 50 Words, or \$49 for annual placement of four issues. For up to 125 Words it is \$29 per issue, or \$99 for four issues. For up to 375 Words it is \$49 per issue, or \$175 for four issues. If you are an FIC Member you may take off an additional 5%.

You may pay using a card or paypal by contacting Christopher online or over the phone using the contact information above, or you may mail a check or money order payable to COMMUNITIES with your ad text, word count, and duration of the ad, plus your contact information, to: The Fellowship for Intentional Community, RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge, MO 63563.

Intentional communities listing in the Reach section are also invited to create a free listing in the online Communities Directory at Directory.ic.org, and also to try our online classified advertising options. Special prices may be available to those who wish to list both in the magazine and online.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

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

COMMON GROUND IN VIRGINIA. Intentional Community of 30 years on 80 acre land trust, with cooperative focus on large organic gardens, has openings for members with space to build, rent, or buy individually owned homes. Located in picturesque area near college town of Lexington. Live close to nature in the wooded mountains of the Jefferson National Forest. Seeking young families and hard working individuals of a homesteading mindset/spirit to add to our small but growing group. Kids welcome! Community freshwater spring, trout pond, swimming pond, pavilion, schoolhouse/learning center; auto shop, wood shop. Transitional housing available with partial work exchange and internships available. Interested visitors please contact Kari: 540-463-9422 or through listing on ic.org.

WANT TO BE MORE SUSTAINABLE? 54

acre biodynamic farm near Tampa Fl. Lot of stuff in place, no debt, mission of sustainable living through the principal's permaculture ("Gaia Garden" 2nd addition). Vegetable farm, pastures, native wetlands, syrup making, dairy barn, housing, solar systems, host Sustainable Living on Tampa WMNF 88.5 FM. www.ecofarmfl.org

CO-WORKERS WELCOMED: Join our Biodynamic farming and handcrafting community, which includes adults with special needs, located outside of Philadelphia and winner of multiple awards for sustainability. Looking for the right individual or family to help maintain a healthy home environment, guide the physical, spiritual, and social well-being of people with disabilities, and share in the governance of the village. Based on the insights of Rudolf Steiner. Learn more at www.camphillkimberton.org, 610-935-3963 or information@camphillkimberton.org.

PACIFIC GARDENS CO-HOUSING IN NANAIMO, BRITISH COLUMBIA. We have one, two and three bedroom plus den units available for singles or families interested in sharing our West Coast lifestyle. Located on four acres of property we are surrounded by organic garden plots and park space on the Chase River. Walking distance to all levels of schools and the downtown area, we are also on two bus routes as well as having car sharing available. Our building houses 25 units with over 8,000 sq. feet of shared living space. We have guest rooms, an exercise room, workshop, art room, music room and more! www.pacificgardens.com 1-250-754-3060 joinus@pacificgardens.ca

MANITOU ARBOR ECOVILLAGE is looking for people who want to live a healthier, simpler, more sustainable lifestyle on a beautiful piece of property just outside of Kalamazoo, Michigan-

a city with outstanding services and cultural activities. Check out our website: www.manitouarbor.org or give us a call at 1-800-354-0382

JOIN US AT LIVING ROOTS ECOVILLAGE

on our 75 acre farm near French Lick Indiana. Looking for leaders to join our vision of creating an intentional, sustainable and integrated community. Shared community space and individual homes on community land. Decision Making by Consensus. Organic Farming including Conscious Animal Farming, CSA and Community Orchards. Permaculture Design. Natural Building. Waldorf inspired cooperative education. Strong interest in empowered childbirth including Midwifery, Doula work, birth counseling, Wholistic Healing Arts. Support for Individual Businesses particularly Farming with an established network of local markets. Lots of local job opportunities. next door to historic French Lick spa/resort, Hoosier National Forest & State Recreation areas. Current work exchange opportunities for Experienced Builder and Maintenance Leader: www.livingrootsecovillage.org Contact our New Member Coordinator for more information. newmember@indianacomunity.org 513-260-3939

DANCING RABBIT, RUTLEDGE, MISSOURI.

We are a growing ecovillage of more than 50 individuals and are actively seeking new members to join us in creating a vibrant community on our 280 beautiful acres in rural Missouri. Our goals are to live ecologically sustainable and socially rewarding lives, and to share the skills and ideas behind this lifestyle. We use solar and wind energy, earth-friendly building materials and biofuels. We are especially interested in welcoming natural builders and people with leadership skills into our community. Help make our ecovillage grow! 660-883-5511; dancingrabbit@ic.org

DREAM RIVER RANCH - An 80-acre horse ranch community on the Oregon Trail in SW Idaho. Equestrian facility with ranch house, gardens, shady lawns, tool sheds, riding arenas, hay barn, horse pens and storage unit. Building sites available sized for small sustainable eco-homes. Memberships available at \$10,000 per adult. www.DreamRiverRanch.org

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES

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

WHY PAY RENT, OR MAKE MORTGAGE PAYMENTS, WHEN YOU CAN LIVE RENT-FREE?

The Caretaker Gazette contains property caretaking/housesitting openings, advice and information for property caretakers, housesitters, and landowners. Published since 1983. Subscribers receive 1,000+ property caretaking opportunities each year, worldwide. Some estate management positions start at \$50,000/



ANANDA COLLEGE
Higher Education for Higher Consciousness

Cooperative Communities & Sustainability




- Dynamic B.A. & A.A. curriculum with personalized learning
- Unique residential cooperative community on campus
- Universal spirituality, inner self growth, yoga & meditation
- Delicious organic vegetarian meals and organic gardens
- Degrees & certificates
- Scholarships, internships, study abroad, career preparation

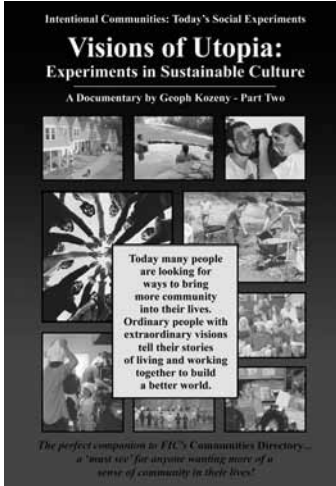
Gaston, Oregon | (503) 985-0030
www.anandauniversity.org



It's Done!

\$30

The long-awaited Part Two of
Geoph Kozeny's *Visions of Utopia*
is now available as a DVD



124 minutes profiling 10 contemporary communities:

- Catholic Worker House (San Antonio, TX)
- Community Alternatives & Fraser Common Farm (BC)
- The Farm (Summertown, TN)
- Ganas (Staten Island, NY)
- Goodenough (Seattle, WA)
- Hearthaven (Kansas City, MO)
- Miccosukee Land Cooperative (Tallahassee, FL)
- N Street Cohousing (Davis, CA)
- Remote Hamlet (CA)
- Sandhill Farm (Rutledge, MO)

The bookend companion to Part One (released in 2002) which features a 2500-year overview of community living, plus profiles of seven current groups. Get 'em both!

Order: store.ic.org or 1-800-995-8342

CAMPHILL SCHOOL OF CURATIVE EDUCATION

Foundation studies
Professional certification
BA options

Practice-integrated studies in education for special needs



For more information contact :

Camphill School of Curative Education
c/o Camphill Special School
1784 Fairview Road, Glenmoore, PA 19343
610.469.9236 schoolofce@camphillspecialschool.org
www.camphillspecialschool.org

Cohousing for pro-active adults ~
a new, exciting community



Wolf Creek Lodge

Historic Grass Valley, California

30 green built, energy efficient homes
Balance of private and community living
Close to shops, services and trails
Forested open space along Wolf Creek

www.wolfcreeklodge.org



Designed by national
award-winning firm,
McCamant & Durrett
Architects

For more info: 800.558.3775
info@wolfcreeklodge.org

www.permaculture.co.uk

Digital Subscriptions:

<http://bit.ly/pocketmags-permaculture>



A magazine which helps you transform your home,
garden & community

App available for iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch from the App Store

yr plus benefits. Subscriptions: \$29.95/year. The Caretaker Gazette, 3 Estancia Lane, Boerne, TX 78006 caretaker@caretaker.org (830) 755-2300 <http://www.caretaker.org>

DO YOU COHOUSEHOLD? See Cohouseholding.com

FORMING COMMUNITIES

LIFE ENRICHING SUSTAINABLE FARMING COMMUNITY in Willamette Valley Region. People with 10+yrs. farming/intensive gardening and homesteading experience from NW sought to form core group. I'd like to hear from you, Kevin, 541-461-3798, kjashbow@gmail.com

INTENTIONAL LIVE/WORK COMMUNITY FORMING NEAR EUGENE, OREGON. 3.5 acres near lake/river, \$250,000. 5 adjacent lots, each \$50,000. Cohousing or community land trust. Septic, wells, electricity, wifi. Organic gardening, two commercial greenhouses. Commercial/residential zoning. Housing to be built; yurts, tiny houses. Trilium PO Box 803 Pleasant Hill, OR 97455 oregonland2013@gmail.com 541-937-3073

REAL ESTATE

COMMUNITY WITH 8 CABINS FOR SALE NEAR MENDOCINO ON CALIFORNIA COAST. 30-acre ex-commune with 8 rustic

cabins on northern California's Mendocino Coast. Redwood forested south-facing property with year-round creeks, orchard & garden space on quiet road 1.5 miles from Pacific Ocean, 5 from Albion, 12 from Mendocino, 20 from Fort Bragg. Rural beauty near urban amenities. Photos & info at 707-937-5071, www.BigRiverRealEstate.com/1a/23303/index.htm

EVENTS

EARTH HARMONY SUSTAINABILITY SEMINAR, Jan. 9-12. Building an ecovillage. Organic Gardening. Learn from 1 of largest EcoVillages in US for 24 years. Early reg. by Dec. 9 - \$500; Late reg. - \$700 (incl. housing & meals). 520-603-9932, info@gccalliance.org

SEEKING COMMUNITY

Hello - I would like to live in a Creative, Meditative, mostly Self-Sufficient Community, Ashram, Eco-Village, Personal Growth (Retreat) Center; or Household. I play musical instruments - different styles of music - and do artwork. In addition to working, I feel my main contribution would be playing soothing, relaxing piano & electronic music, and want to live in a place where this would be regarded as beneficial and welcomed. I'd prefer being in Cal., Ore., the N.W. or S.W. states, or possibly in another country. - Thanx - Jay 831-479-4560

O.U.R. ECOVILLAGE



• Practice • Learn • Play •
Join • Celebrate • Diversity

TOPIA:
**The Sustainable Learning
Community Institute**

We are inviting an exciting team of international teachers for the season. Programs offered at OUR ECOVILLAGE Shawnigan Lake, BC, Canada

- *Sustainable Food Internship
- *Natural Building Internship
- *Timber Framing Programs
- *Permaculture Design Certificate

Please note: dates for more Workshops and Speakers as well as info on other educational opportunities available on O.U.R. website

Contact us to book a tour!
info@ourecoovillage.org 250-743-3067
Stay with us at
O.U.R. Eco-GuestHouse

www.ourecoovillage.org



Join us at Living Roots EcoVillage

on our 75 acre farm near French Lick Indiana

Looking for leaders to join our vision of creating an intentional, sustainable and integrated community

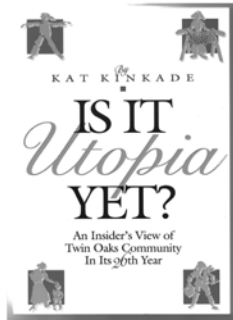
- Shared community space & individual homes on community land
- Organic Farming including Conscious Animal Farming, CSA & Community Orchards
- Permaculture Design -Natural Building -Wholistic Healing Arts
- Waldorf inspired homeschool cooperative
- Strong interest in empowered childbirth including Midwifery, Doula work & birth counseling
- Support for Individual Businesses particularly Farming with an established network of local markets
- Next door to historic French Lick spa/resort, Hoosier National Forest & State Recreation areas
- Decision Making by Consensus -Lots of local job opportunities

**Current work exchange opportunities for
Experienced Builder and Maintenance Leader**

newmember@indianacommunity.org

www.livingrootsecovillage.org

513-260-3939



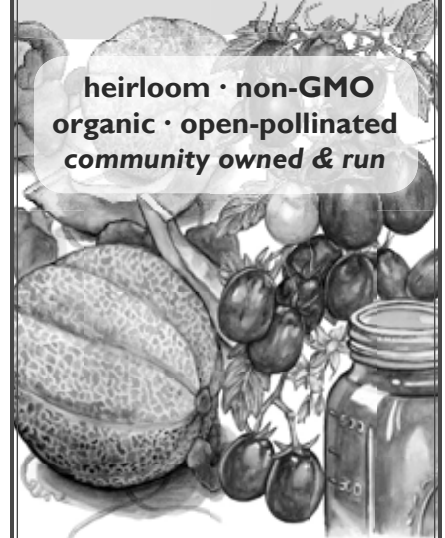
**An Insider's View of Twin Oaks
Community in its 26th Year
by Kat Kinkade**

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.

 **Twin Oaks Publishing**
\$18.00 each includes S/H (US delivery)

Twin Oaks Publishing
138-CM Twin Oaks Rd Louisa, VA 23093
540-894-5126
www.twinoaks.org publish@twinoaks.org

**Southern Exposure
Seed Exchange**



**heirloom · non-GMO
organic · open-pollinated
community owned & run**

Request your **Free Catalog**
& place your seed order online:
SouthernExposure.com

Our community seed business supports our growing membership while promoting sustainable food systems. We preserve heirloom seed varieties and provide certified organic and non-GMO seeds to gardeners and farmers, all from our farm in the rolling hills of Central Virginia. Explore our 700+ varieties of vegetables, flowers, herbs, grains, and cover crops.



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!

AcornCommunity.org

Photo courtesy K.I. Hoang and Sean Thomas.

OCCIDENTAL ARTS & ECOLOGY CENTER

COMMUNITIES COURSES

Facilitation for Group Decision-Making
August 23 – 25

Starting & Sustaining Intentional Communities
April 15 – 19 November 4 – 8

PERMACULTURE COURSES

Permaculture Design Course

Certificate-Granting, Two-Week Course

March 2 – 15 July 13 – 26 Sept. 28 – Oct. 11

**Edible Food Forests: Designing and Cultivating
Your Edible Forest Garden**
August 2 – 4 (tentative)

Please see www.oaec.org for costs and all details.
All Courses are Residential. Course Fee Includes all Lodging and Meals.

15290 Coleman Valley Road, Occidental, California 95465
707.874.1557x101 • oaec@oaec.org • www.oaec.org

FAIR PLAY: THE WISDOM OF CHILDREN IN COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 23)

difficulties with as much integrity, love, and faith as we could muster.

At LV we as members ran a conference center, summer garden apprentice programs, year-round internships, and at one point, a hostel. We grappled with typical community challenges: frequent meetings; financial challenges; ongoing maintenance issues; relationship turmoil; recurring discussions on food, pets, child-related topics (do we allow plastic toys? is gun play okay?); and the sometimes grueling meter of consensus decision making.

The families and individuals—between 14-28 adults—who lived in the community during our time there shared similar values, and we did our best to stay open and supportive with one another. Being transparent and compassionate in our relationships was ongoing work, irreplaceable and vital. There were inevitable clashes and challenges in communal living, yet we all agreed on the importance of respect: for one another, for our children, and from the children towards adults and one another.

This is not a new idea: that the more connected we are to those we play or live or work with, the more invested we are in a good outcome for each individual. Connecting like this seems a goal worth pursuing, an antidote to the fractionalized, righteous, quick-to-blame (and sue) plugged-in society we live in. By coming together face-to-face and establishing deep trusting relationships, we seed our broader culture with healthy, durable, flexible living connections.

This feeling of connection seems deeply ingrained in this group of LV-raised kids, and continues to inform their lives outside of intentional community. Matt says, "Something I've noticed pretty dramatically in living with other people since (LV) is that, with myself and with all of us, there's a certain conscientiousness—how our actions impact those around us—that many people don't seem to have. Being aware on an emotional level of how your energy impacts other people's energy, and how what you're doing or not doing is impacting the people that you're living with or spending time with."

Our children, from a young age when they shared their stuffed animals, through their adolescence, bonded beyond friendship, into family. Now working and at University, they aim to recreate this sense of family wherever they can. Perhaps that's what the world needs in order to play fair. 🐦

Karin Iona Sundberg is a writer, painter, and poet living in Eugene, Oregon. She makes her living as one of the flock at Hummingbird Wholesale.



The Edenhope Nature Preserve

occupies almost 2,000 acres of protected wilderness on the remote west coast of Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu (an island in SW Pacific). The Project seeks to heal the broken relationship between Mankind and Nature. It is already upon a Sacred Pathneeding only some very special people. Help us establish the new paradigm. Explore your Truth. Recreate the Worldin Peace.



EdenHope.org

Helen Goldstein
The Work Place
Wellness Academy

Wellness Providers:
DOUBLE OR TRIPLE YOUR INCOME
with The Work Place Wellness Academy
VIDYA SERIES (bringer of knowledge and illuminator). This on line certification course teaches you how to deliver wellness in the workplace, resorts, conferences, more.

theworkplacewellnessacademy.com • 416 737 2118


**LIVE
SUSTAINABLY**



Biospharms
.com

**Sage
Woman**

*Celebrating
the
Goddess
in Every
Woman*



**96 pages of
Goddess Spirit
in every issue.**

Classic print or digital pdf editions;
\$23 for 4 issues, sample issue \$6.
P O Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116
888-724-3966 · www.sagewoman.com.

Sacred Fire

The Heart of the Living World

In these crucial times of change, discover a fresh outlook on modern culture. **Sacred Fire** magazine calls people to connect with each other and the sacredness alive in the world.


As a Communities Magazine reader, and for a limited time, you will receive 43% off as a first time subscriber!

www.sacredfiremagazine.com
Sale page: <http://tiny.cc/fp8i3>



Coworkers Welcomed!




**Camphill
Village
Kimberton
Hills: a
lifesharing
community**
Kimberton, PA
610-935-3963

*What's so special
about Positive News?*



See for yourself:
www.PositiveNewsUS.org
or call us 415.868.9011

Looking for individuals and families who would like to live within the rhythms of community life and:

- Live and work therapeutically with adults with special needs
- Help with homemaking, dairy, orchard, herb garden, pottery or weavery workshops
- Partake in a rich social and cultural life with training and educational opportunities

Based on the insights of Rudolf Steiner

Learn more and apply at:
www.camphillkimberton.org

RAISING SUPERHEROES: HOW OUR KIDS ARE LEARNING TO USE THEIR POWER FOR GOOD

(continued from p. 27)

that she hadn't known about. She did what we call a "flop-down," which is when she collapses spread-eagled on the ground and wails. "Sweetheart," I said gently, "I can really hear how disappointed you are, and I'm glad you're letting me know what you want, but we're going the other way." Then I waited a few seconds for her to cry it out.

My brother, wishing perhaps to help solve what he saw as a problem, told his daughter to go scoop Cole up for a hug and distract her. When her cousin got to her, Cole, who has healthy boundaries and also enough self-respect to know when she needs a good cry, pushed her away and cried harder. Her cousin returned crestfallen, and I was hard pressed to explain to her (and my brother) what it means to respect boundaries, and why we think it's OK to just let a person cry for a minute. Before I was done talking, Cole had bounded up and was running on ahead of us, full of spirit and energy.

There's a reason I waited until my late 30s to have a child. And that's because I wanted her to grow up feeling like she and her peers could do anything. I wanted my child to be surrounded by loving, thoughtful people who valued trust, clear communication, compassion, and respect. I also wanted her to see adults practicing real-world three-dimensional skills like building homes, putting up wind turbines, and growing food. If I could start her off like that, I thought, she'd be able to handle whatever messes she found herself in. It took me a while to feel ready for the responsibility of launching that life. And now, here we are, raising superheroes. You can too. Up, up, and away! 🐦

Some names have been changed to protect individuals' privacy.

Alyson Ewald is a nonprofit fundraiser, facilitator, and homesteader who lived in a cooperative house as a toddler. She has spent time with children as a babysitter, swimming lesson teacher, women's shelter caregiver, English and Russian teacher, aunt, mother, and friend. She serves on several boards, including Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, Scotland County Farmers' Markets, and the Fellowship for Intentional Community. She cofounded Red Earth Farms in Rutledge, Missouri, where she lives with her family.

2013 Ready to Be Ready
National Preparedness Month Special
 Purchase a "SunRunner" Portable Renewable Energy Generator during September and get the 2nd solar panel FREE (or 5% off, see details, code "NPM13")



Stored sunshine anytime, anywhere - Sustainable, clean, powerful, plug&play, silent, stand alone, off grid or backup

SUNNR of Virginia, Inc
 PO Box 102
 Port Republic, VA 24471
 IC@sunnr.com
 www.sunnr.com
 540-271-3403



FRESHBOOKS
 painless billing

communities.ic.org



OAKLEIGH MEADOW COHOUSING

Reinventing the way we live!

Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing is a community-minded neighborhood designed by and for its residents, along the river in Eugene.

Are you looking for a simpler, more sustainable lifestyle?

Visit www.oakleighmeadow.org to see what we have to offer you!

541-357-8303

Site Visits: 3rd Sundays, 3-4pm
 Fun Fridays: every Friday, 4-9pm

Find Love & Save the Planet



free to browse
 free to join
 join today!

dating
 friendship
 romance

GreenSingles.com
 "where hearts and minds connect"

Solar Electricity with \$0 Down



Sign up for a free consultation:
Sungevity.org/IntentionalCommunity



Free installation, monitoring, maintenance • Save 15% from your typical energy bill
 Earn \$750 credit towards your energy bill • Give \$750 donation by Sungevity to FIC

Sungevity is a social value "B-Corp" that makes it affordable for all homeowners to use solar power. It has stopped over 200,000 metric tons of carbon from entering the atmosphere, and has raised over \$1.1 million for non profit organizations. Sungevity donates \$750 to the Fellowship for Intentional Community for each home, community, or business who requests a consultation through our link then switches to solar electricity!

FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY

The Fellowship Community & Duryea Farm is centered around the care of the elderly. Join either as a Coworking single or family or as a Member who is retired & independent or needing assistance or nursing care.

RUDOLF STEINER FELLOWSHIP FOUNDATION
 241 HUNGRY HOLLOW ROAD
 CHESTNUT RIDGE, NY 10977
WWW.FELLOWSHIPCOMMUNITY.ORG

Living together
Cohousing Ideas and Realities Around the World

This book, edited by Professor Dick Urban Vestbro, a comprehensive documentation of housing with common spaces and shared facilities. It includes examples from Europe, North America and other countries. With its 234 pages and 180 illustrations it is an excellent source for researchers, housing companies, politicians, activists and NGOs interested in how to solve challenges such as transformations in household structure, problems of urban anonymity, and how to promote gender equality, neighborly cooperation and sustainable lifestyles.

The book may be ordered from: kollektivhus.nu@gmail.com.
 The price is USD 23+ postage.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF ROOTS

(continued from p. 51)

queen-sized mattress. She is a great companion on long hikes since she has a real eye for spotting poisonous plants and potential fairy dwellings. Autumn is her favorite season. She is the softness the world is so desperately seeking.

By the time I return to the thrift store, the picture frame will likely be gone. I will of course stand there in that empty space as that feeling of grief spreads across my chest, and wonder about the beautiful community that I left behind. And what of the elusive twelfth beating heart? I am not so hard to find if you learn to read between the lines. I am the one who leaves toothpaste for Sarah, who picks up after Rae, who runs towards Russ, who laughs with Lauren. I am the feverish pulse, the empath, the storyteller. I am the keeper of memories, whose only compulsion is to travel onward. 🐦

Michelle Price is a writer and massage therapist living in Asheville, North Carolina. She is inspired by the power of community to make us aware of our edges as well as the places inside ourselves that need nurturing. When she is not on the move, she spends her time swimming and practicing archery. She dreams of being a travel writer, as her most prized possessions are a pen, notebook, and world map. Her email is mplilypad@gmail.com.

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

communities.ic.org



Communes Britannica: A History of Communal Living in Britain 1939-2000
(The Second Volume of **Utopia Britannica, 2000**)

By *Chris Coates*

Diggers and Dreamers Publications, 2012, £25

www.utopia-britannica.org.uk,

www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk

This big book, over 500 pages, is fascinating, intriguing, fun, and well-written. Some of the stories I know from my years of communal living and networking in the UK (1972-1991). Others were a complete surprise for me. I am grateful to Chris for preserving so much of the history of our movement.

The last hundred pages comprise a directory of communal groups 1939-2000, including those that have folded, and two pages of fictional ones invented for literary or spoofing purposes. I remember our surprise at Lifespan community when monthly articles about “The Lodge” started to appear in the national *Guardian* newspaper, clearly written by an “insider,” later identified as Bob Fromer from Birchwood Hall.

The author, Chris Coates, is a long-time friend of mine and we collaborated (with others) in editing and publishing the first two *Diggers and Dreamers* directories of communal living in the UK. I know he knows his stuff! Chris lived communally for 20 years at People in Common in Burnley, Lancashire. He is now a member of Forgebank Cohousing in Lancaster.

The book is easy-to-read. For instance, the first chapter, about pacifist groups during the Second World War, includes the story of the Bruderhof moving to the UK in 1936 to escape the National Socialist regime in Germany. All went well until 1940, when British forces suffered under the German army in France. Some British people were no longer happy with German nationals owning land in Britain, suspicion grew, and under duress, the community decided to emigrate to the Americas (across the U-boat patrolled Atlantic). The continuing story of the Bruderhof is found in the second chapter, with a note telling readers this, so those wanting to follow the story know where to find it.

I was unaware of the rich history of pacifist communities and conscientious objectors banding together to provide agricultural and forestry services during WWII (1939-45). In 1945, Leonard Cheshire set up Cheshire Homes for disabled ex-servicemen, where the “patients” were expected to join in the chores. The shared sense of purpose helped many rebuild their lives. In the ’40s and ’50s, a new Bruderhof community formed in Shropshire; Braziers Park Community was set up; small communities around London were founded by professionals—some purpose-built cohousing type developments, others rented existing property; others squatted ex-military facilities.

In 1961, a mainstream women’s magazine ran an article by Isabel Cole, one of eight adults with one child living communally. I know community members now in their 20s and 30s are often surprised to realize we in our 50s and older experienced much the same challenges, desires, and ideals as they now do. I look at the photo from *Woman’s Mirror* in 1961, the men in suits and ties, the women in twin sets and pearls, and realize, yes, they probably too dealt with issues of sexual jealousy, ideals about socialism, gender politics, and alternatives to monogamy and nuclear families.

After the war, residential schools for children with disabilities were set up by the

Camphill movement. In 1955 the much-respected Botton Village was established as a permanent home for adults with special needs (“villagers”) living in family groups with coworkers to help them.

The concept of community as therapy grew as the Anti-Psychiatry movement and People Not Psychiatry (PNP) expanded in the ’70s. They provided sanctuaries for people facing a breakdown who didn’t want medications or psychosurgery, and people who wanted to support them. Jenny James founded the Atlantis Commune in 1974, after several years running a PNP house offering free encounter groups and primal scream therapy. Atlantis was a center of dramatic, noisy, frequent emotional release. In 1987 the community moved to Colombia.

Probably the British spiritual community best known in the US is Findhorn, in Scotland. Nowadays, Findhorn combines spiritual and personal growth courses, ecological buildings, retreats, and various other businesses, under the umbrella of The New Findhorn Association, which has over 350 individual members and about 32 organizations as members.

I found it hard to read about many of the spiritual groups. So many “celibate” gurus weren’t; so many gullible people lost their savings, their homes, years of their lives, and in some cases, their children. Scientologists, Gurdjieffians, Rajneeshes, Divine Light Missionaries, Children of God, Jesus Freaks—all had some bad surprises.

The Transcendental Meditation Movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi attracted celebrities including the Beatles. Later the TM movement shed its hippie image and targeted business people, academics, and government workers. They set up several more centers, and then started a political party (the Natural Law party) and a Golden Dome in Skelmersdale, Lancashire, where Yogic Flying and Transcendental Meditation are taught.

(continued on p. 74)

COMMUNES BRITANNICA

(continued from p. 73)

Moving on from TM, George Harrison bought Bhaktivedanta Manor for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), aka Hare Krishnas, to be an ashram, in 1973. At that time, I lived in a community in nearby Radlett, and commuted daily into London. I well remember the Hare Krishnas walking the commuter train tinkling bells and chanting, and meeting some women in the laundromat, folding many yards of saffron saris.

For many Buddhist monasteries, communal living was incidental to the spiritual path. An expelled teacher from the Vihara Centre set up a new non-sectarian monastic center. From this grew the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, who ran summer retreats for up to 80 people at a time, introducing Buddhism to many Brits, who then wanted to practice in their everyday lives. In the early '70s, the FWBO expanded rapidly, set up Right Livelihood businesses, and networked with other Buddhist groups and other communal groups. They were accessible, open, low drama, single gender households. In the late '90s, a crisis hit when the guru was accused of pressuring young men into having sex with him. This was while he was claiming to be celibate. The FWBO did come to terms with what had happened, after soul-searching internal debate. In 2010 the movement changed its name to Triratna Buddhist Community.

In the '70s, the New Creation Christian Community, later known as the Community of Celebration, had a well-known musical outreach group called the Fisherfolk. After amalgamating with another Christian community, Post Green, they developed more communal homes, becoming known as the Jesus Fellowship. The anti-cult movement was very suspicious of them, and the group was expelled from the official Church. In response, they exercised their freedom and formed the Jesus Army, seeking converts among drug addicts and alcoholics.

A Christian Community Congress in 1980 attracted 42 established religious communities and 50 lay residential communities. They established the National Association of Christian Communities and Networks (NACCAN), with a quarterly newsletter. They helped set up new Christian communities. Little Gidding and the Pilsden Community (with residents supporting visitors in need of respite, drug addicts, homeless people, ex-prisoners, runaway teens etc.) were the forerunners of a wave of similar communities such as Kingsway and Bystock Court.

"Big House" communes were the stereotype of a '60s or '70s commune: a faded country house with a bunch of long-haired hippies on the lawn, surrounded by a gang of exuberant kids. Crow Hall in Norfolk, established in 1965, survived until 1997. Eel Pie Island Free Commune started in 1969 in an old hotel on an island in the Thames. The group grew to 100-130 residents, after it became famous as a crash pad. It was a chaotic community with fairly high drug use and very little money. After their utilities were cut off for non-payment, they started to heat the house by burning the less-necessary woodwork. During a mass arrest of most of the members at a local pub, a perhaps-connected fire occurred at the house. The owner threatened to evict them, and the group disbanded.

During the '60s, about 40 communities formed and joined the 10 or so surviving communes from the post-war period and earlier. In 1963, a vegan group, the Agriculture and Hand Industries Mutual Support Association (AHIMSA), aimed to help other communes start up. Unfortunately, disagreements led to a splitting off of a Vegan Communities Movement (VCM), later the Communes Movement. A magazine called *New Life* (a revival of *The Broadsheet*, which had published info about communities), came out. In 1969, the members of the New Life Movement who were interested in communes merged with the Communes Movement. A period of growth occurred, the magazine came out regularly, and a fund was set up to help finance other communities. The London alternative information service BIT helped connect people. The Communes Movement published their magazine bi-monthly, and drew up a manifesto for *A*

Federal Society Based on the Free Commune. Gatherings were an assortment of organizers and partiers. In 1970, Joan Harvey in Cambridge formed the Commune Services Agency to help groups form communes, with weekly Communes Seminars. She started Parsonage Farm community outside Cambridge with others, including Sarah Eno and Patrick Boase, who in 1975 became two of the founders of Crabapple Community. Crabapple, of which I was the fifth founding member, was modeled on Twin Oaks. I lived there for the first six years. We quickly bankrupted our labor credit system because we couldn't bear to set quota higher than 50 hours a week, and yet it was impossible to pioneer a new community on as little as that. We couldn't afford for anyone to "cash in" their labor balance and take the amount of vacation we'd earned. So we scrapped the system and kept on building community.

Other "Big House" communities were established in the '70s. The annual directory for 1972 listed 30 groups. Squatters groups, free schools, alternative technology centers, and books about communities were all thriving. Communes Movement was not—it was dysfunctional, tied up in disputes. Communes Network was formed in 1975 to bypass the problems. In 1976, the book *Communes, Sociology and Society* by Phillip Abrams and Andrew McCulloch surveyed communes in Britain. The authors showed awareness of the gap between the "myth of communes" as described by other authors, and the commune-on-the-ground, and noted that "The special quality of their lives has to be found in their efforts to shift the implicit values of their experiences step by step towards their ideals through such simple, difficult things as forcing themselves to face up to the meaning of quarrels, of demands for privacy or of the failure of some to contribute what others consider their share. What distinguishes them from families is not the absence of such episodes but the effort that is made to treat them as

occasions for serious self-questioning and collective change.”

In the late '70s a rival organization, the Alternative Communities Movement, was started by a community called the Teachers. They prided themselves on extreme rationality, on following their leader, and a fairly severe set of rules. They ran gatherings and published directories, which received mixed reviews. At the end of the '80s they faded from view amid accusations of right-wing ideologies and child sexual abuse.

Another attention-grabbing effort (more beneficial) was Cartwheel, a group who pushed a giant cartwheel around the country to gather recruits and resources for a large-scale alternative community. They gathered many people, but were divided on how to proceed—whether to start “seed sites” in order to have something on the ground, or to keep working for the big vision. Jan Bang wrote, “This debate was never effectively resolved, and the consensus nature of the decision-making process effectively blocked a great deal of progress. In effect, it was possible for one person, or a small group, to veto any suggestions, and this happened time and time again over the next two years. The question of membership was discussed at great length, but no formal structure was ever set up. This had the effect of giving newcomers as much voice as everyone else immediately, even though they were not familiar with previous discussions and decisions on issues.”

Another large, brave effort that came to nothing was Fair Ground, an attempt to help new communities set up by giving them loans raised on the strength of the equity of properties owned by existing communities. Members of 15 communities met quarterly for three years to set up Fair Ground. I often attended. Efficient meetings they were not. We had no fixed starting or ending times for the meetings, weren't good at facilitating, and attempted to reach unanimity of whoever showed up. Some delegates were more focused on the social side of the weekends. It's a testa-

ment to the persistence of a few that Fair Ground did see the light of day, although by the time of registration with the Registrar of Friendly Societies, the original 15 members were reduced to seven. Unfortunately only two were then actually willing to put ownership of their homes into Fair Ground. The magnificent vision had got bogged down under the discussion of legal structures—a male-dominated discussion as I remember it—and the ordinary communards no longer saw the value of giving up autonomy in decisions about their own property.

Rapid Transformations was a cross-community collection of members with building skills who would travel in a green bus once a year to a community to work on some big, skilled project, usually roofing. They included training newbies, and worked just for board and lodging, and a party provided by the host community.

The Communes Network Infopack was another cross-community effort, which was intended to be the precursor to a video, but in fact led to *Diggers and Dreamers*, the biennial directory of UK communities.

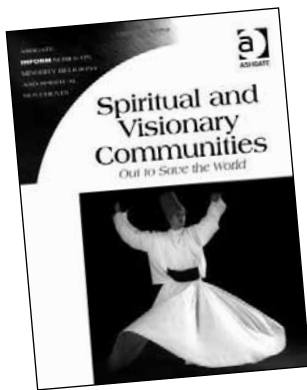
As Chris draws towards the end of his book, he points out that doing his research

Anyone who has lived communally will find some episodes here to resonate with. I found many.

into late 20th century communities showed up the influence of the Second World War communal groups. Specifically, he mentions the connections between communal living, peace, and non-violence; the development of therapeutic communities; the vein of apocalyptic thinking after the war leading to back-to-the-land communes and environmentalism. Perhaps the counterculture has led us to the green movement, sustainability, organic farming, appropriate technology, the many kinds of equal rights, the Transition Network, the Occupy Movement. At the same time communities persist, providing a viable way for a wide variety of people to organize living arrangements more consistent with their values and preferences.

Chris's “Author's Tale” is a delight to read: honest, sweet, amusing, inspiring. I felt empathic with Chris describing his decision to leave People in Common (PiC): a long time living a simple life led to “a poverty trap of our own making—the longer you stayed, the harder it was to get out, as you had no collateral to feed into the housing market.” Secondly, he became frustrated “over the lack of progress on any expansion of the community—or any real opportunity for growth. Despite repeated times when we looked to become a bigger group—it never happened. Why? Perhaps because the people who joined were attracted by what we were, not what we might be... Our visions were just too big for our resources and all the things we had dreamed of were never going to happen if left to such a small bunch of people.” This second part precisely mirrors my own reason for leaving Lifespan for Twin Oaks in 1991. Anyone who has lived communally will find some episodes to resonate with. I found many. 🐣

Pam Dawling lives at Twin Oaks Community in central Virginia, where her main work is as the manager of the vegetable garden. Her book Sustainable Market Farming: Intensive Vegetable Production on a Few Acres is available at www.sustainablemarketfarming.com, or by mail order from Twin Oaks. Pam's blog is also on [facebook.com/SustainableMarketFarming](https://www.facebook.com/SustainableMarketFarming).



Spiritual and Visionary Communities: Out to Save the World

Edited by Timothy Miller
Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 248 pages

I had a fascinating time “armchair traveling” recently while I was reading the collection of essays in *Spiritual and Visionary Communities: Out to Save the World*.

Each chapter, written by a member of the community I “visited” in the pages of this book, not only provided information about the community, but gave me a feel of what it was like to live there. Writers were lively, articulate, and honest.

Timothy Miller, the editor of the volume, acts as travel agent, preparing us for the journey with an introduction entitled “Persistence Over Millennia: the Perennial Presence of Intentional Communities.” He gives us an overview of the history of the human beings who chose community living through the centuries, beginning with the Buddhist Sangha (still going strong after 2,500 years); Qumran, of Dead Sea Scrolls fame; and the early Christians, reported in the book of Acts to have “all things in common,” distributing their possessions and goods “to all, as any had need.”

We learn that the movement is flourishing in our own day, as well. In subsequent chapters, our itinerary takes us all over the Western world, with each writer serving as a tour guide, sharing frankly their experiences and those of others in their community and focusing on various themes.

At our first stop, Damanhur, located in the Piedmont region of Italy, we learn about dealing with change, as we watch its members adjust to some of the unsettling shifts that happen in any human institution.

When we head north to France, we visit Mandarom, the “holy city” of Aumism, a blend of *advaita* Hinduism and Western esotericism, and hear about persecution by outsiders. Its leader, Hamsah Manarah, was considered by his followers to be a “cosmoplanetary Messiah” destined to usher in a Golden Age, but the French public and hostile media decided he was *fou*—crazy—and possibly dangerous, and proceeded to generate false rumors about the activities there.

A chapter entitled “Henpecked to Heaven?” tells the story of a man living at a matriarchal retreat center in Oxford, England, where the power struggles involved, in his words, “tough, pint-sized sisters facing down brawny brothers,” usually with the tough prevailing over the brawny.

A disturbing chapter follows, about a young woman under the spell of an autocratic Tibetan guru in the British Isles.

It is a relief to encounter a healthier environment at Tamera, a “model for the future” in Portugal, where a Solar Village has created a water landscape in an arid land and developed an international peace education program. The words of the founder, Dieter Duhm, would resonate with all who work for a better world: “The crisis inside of us and the crisis in the environment are two parts of the same whole and can only be solved from that perspective.”

Those two crises are addressed in practical ways in the Camphill villages, found all over the world. Inspired by the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, the residents serve children with special needs, tending the spiritual and emotional development of the

children along with tending their gardens biodynamically: parallel ways to respect the integrity of life.

I will not give away the further adventures that await the reader, other than to tell you where they will be: The Farm, an eclectic religious community in Tennessee; the Twelve Tribes Community, zealous for the “simple beginnings” of Christianity; The Family International, a fundamentalist Christian, world-rejecting movement, mostly comprised of “converted hippies”; and “Arks” founded to provide refuge from impending doom during the war-torn 20th century.

In the final chapter, for those who would like to embark on more local travel in our own country, Timothy Miller provides an overview of those groups who came from elsewhere and still flourish, most already familiar to the reader: Shakers, Mennonites, Mormons, Theosophists, Krishna devotees, and Harmonists (see my article in COMMUNITIES #149 about Jane Owen, the late matriarch of New Harmony in Indiana.)

The last paragraph helps us understand why this literary journey has had so many destinations: the universal human longing to live with others and work together for something worthwhile. For that reason, I would suggest that almost every intentional community can be described by the title of this book: *Spiritual and Visionary Communities*. I have not heard of one yet, or visited one yet, or read about one in COMMUNITIES yet, that does not fully deserve those adjectives! ☺

Nancy Roth is a writer, an Episcopal priest, and the parent of a communitarian. She has worked at a monastery in the Hudson River valley and visited New Harmony in Indiana, a branch of the Taizé community in New York City, and the Iona community in Scotland. She is ready to travel to more and is happy there is a magazine that enables her to do so through the written word.

ELDERS IN COMMUNITY: BRUCE AND LINDA'S STORY

(continued from p. 80)

I chose to focus on Bruce and Linda, although to highlight them alone would be misleading. There are other exemplary elders, including cofounders/former members Gordon Davidson and Corinne McLaughlin (authors of *Builders of the Dawn, Joyful Evolution, Practical Visionaries*), who have had a lasting influence on the community. The interdependent matrix of these key elders in the evolution of Sirius is an integral part of the synergistic magic of the place. The strength of a group resides in the quality of the individuals.

Bruce and Linda invited me to their home, a “longhouse” designed in Native American fashion and built by Bruce, Linda, and the community. They provided a beautiful meal, harvested primarily from their amazing organic gardens, in an atmosphere of simplicity, humility, and attentiveness. They both radiate an intensity and sense of the preciousness of the moment. Bruce is tall, lean, and flinty with a sturdiness that shines through a body healing from a near-death fall from a tree. Linda moves like a Hindu Goddess with the thousand hands of service. She seems to be constantly attending to some useful activity. Listening to them and taking in their energetic fields as we sat together felt unusually powerful.

Bruce's Journey

Bruce, once a highly physically active man, a brilliant carpenter, loved to work the land, moving boulders, harvesting trees, gardening, and building. He is responsible for the state-of-the-art ecological building construction at Sirius. In his 60s, while working, he fell 40 feet from the top of a pine tree and shattered his backbone and rib cage, injuring internal organs. Abruptly confronted with catastrophic change—complete disempowerment of his physical body and vital roles—he was confined to a body cast in intensive care.

An outpouring of support came to nourish his return. The accident revealed the depth of respect and care that members and friends of Sirius hold for Bruce. His capacity to anchor Sirius, even when seemingly incapacitated, encapsulates the nature of inspiration and sheer grit that is one of his gifts and magnetizes others. His recovery has been nothing less than miraculous. This recovery is mirrored by Linda's extraordinary resilience in an earlier accident in which a large tree fell on her and knocked her unconscious. Their work has not been for the faint of heart, and survivability is one of the aspects of their Eldership.

Bruce related to me a spiritual awakening he had in the 1970s. Like so many people of that time, he was coming from traumatic life experiences—in his case, related to family of origin and the military. Once out of the military he began the search for meaning. Often very depressed and even suicidal, he desperately needed understanding and purpose. After a serious auto accident, he found himself staying with his brother in New York City. Intense pain, doubt, and confusion led him to a spa, where he encountered a holistic healer. Despite his hard-bitten doubt and disbelief, the healer did a laying of hands on him that catalyzed a shift.

Rapidly, some new part of him opened in hunger for meaning and he says he devoured spiritual books on Eastern philosophy. “I read every book I could get my hands on.” At the end of that period, completely saturated, he came to a life-changing decision. He realized that for him to find a satisfying answer to his quest, he needed to “go within.” This sounds like a cliché to us now, but his direction was an amazing recognition of “the most sane truth I had ever heard or could imagine.” His steps were immediate, direct, determined. He sold everything and bought a backpack, hitchhiking around the country for two years as archetypal seeker. He became a vegetarian. He practiced affirmations. He met many who served as guides during this time. He walked far into the wilderness, out into Canada and parts of the West. He discovered a strength

in his capacity for solitude and silence.

At Yellowstone, a snowstorm hit and he was so profoundly cold, all he could think of was WARMTH. In response to biology, he hiked out of the wilderness and hitched to San Francisco where he hopped a cheap flight to warm Hawaii and soon came to live at Robert Aiken's Zen Center. Here, he discovered the healing, stabilizing, and nourishing depth of meditation, receiving instruction from Robert. Bruce would refine this meditative capacity and offer it as a pillar for community members to serve as a key practice for providing ongoing peaceful evolution at Sirius. He and Linda would also go on to participate in global meditative work.

Bruce was still unsatisfied at this juncture, and went back on the road to seek ever deeper truth. Many perils ensued as he crisscrossed the country on his quest. When he was offered a free place in San Francisco at the Mission District, he stayed all winter, adapting to the “very free and open” culture there. He pursued Psychosynthesis for personal transformation, which gave him a new tool for understanding.

Traveling on to the magnificent Sierra Nevada, he was—yes!—at the top of a mountain when another pivotal moment of realization arrived. He heard a clear voice say: “It is time to come down off the mountaintop and find others of like mind.” He unhesitatingly responded and from that day forward never went back to the wilderness.

From here he went to Findhorn Community in Scotland, where he met Linda.

Linda's Path

Linda was attracted as a young child to a perspective based in faith and devotion. She would walk on her own to a Baptist Church in California. She remembers being seven years old and having a transcendent experience with bees in a field, experiencing “everything as interconnected.” It is this kind of holistic overview which Linda embodies and which

ELDERS IN COMMUNITY: BRUCE AND LINDA'S STORY

(continued from p. 77)

gives her a powerful perspective for unifying diverse parts of the community.

In college she majored in religion and, not finding the satisfaction she sought, she became agnostic. She too had inner promptings that caused her to question and seek. She responded to the Christian message that she knew from childhood by immersing herself in working for draft and tax resistance and justice issues during the Vietnam War era. She went to rallies and participated for social change. When she was exposed to pictures of children in Africa who were starving, the poignancy of their suffering moved her empathic nature deeply to a tipping point, and she told herself from that time on that she had to make a difference in this world. Linda's character is defined by such recurrent abiding commitments that she strives to fulfill and offer to others as reliable and trustworthy support.

Still she had not reconciled the inner messages of her heart and her activity in the world. For her the seeking was about finding congruence between the inner and the outer. She went to live at Ananda Cooperative Village, Nevada City, California, where she was influenced by Swami Kriyananda, a disciple of Parmahansa Yogananda. Yogananda provided a clear basis for intentional community with his World Brotherhood Communities and Kriya Yoga meditation. It was here that she became more grounded in meditative practice and community values. Embracing the support of Ananda Community, her outer life of marriage started to fall away. As her need for community became more focused and the inner and outer were balancing, she left for Findhorn, with her nine-year-old daughter, who was troubled with "oppositional dynamics."

Learning through Findhorn

Findhorn was the leading center for community consciousness and activity in the

'60s and '70s and continues to thrive and provide a model for intentional community. It served as an ideal training ground for Bruce and Linda.

Bruce arrived at Findhorn one evening at dusk. As he looked up at the gate to the entrance, an intense terror raced through him. A vision came of his "Soul's Deep Purpose," what he had been seeking arduously. Overwhelmed, he turned away and stayed outside that night, too "freaked out" to enter.

But Bruce was ripe for change and once through the gates, he soon joined the Guest Services and became Guest Coordinator. He would welcome 50 people at a time and orient them.

Once arrived at Findhorn, Linda found rewarding service in the gardens, close to the nature for which she had an enduring connection of reverence. The challenges with her daughter evolved in new, more effective ways at Findhorn, for the community offered space for the possibility for love and harmony. People were seen beyond their personalities, as "living souls filled with life." It was important to look for the inner person's nature. It was a matter of shifting lenses.

Bruce and Linda came to similar conclusions in their own ways. They saw that spiritual community had the power to transform individual lives and society as a whole, and they both witnessed so many people go through huge transformations, including themselves. Problems were always about the people, what they carried in with them, fundamental problems of humanity. The difference was these people sincerely *wanted* to change. With up to 200 new guests a week, Bruce met people from all walks of life, who were "radically transformed." "Army generals, lawyers, professional people" all came in with issues and genuinely shifted their ways of living and seeing the world. When Bruce and Linda returned to Findhorn decades later for an Anniversary Reunion, they found Findhorn 500 members strong and the stories of transformation fully manifest.



Linda Reimer in front of Bruce Davidson. The community celebrates the construction of a stone circle with very large boulders, in the woods at Sirius.

Photos by Joseph McCormack

The challenges and struggles that people bring to community are the same, but when problems are held with awareness and compassion, this provides a different lens. Findhorn modeled an alternative way of understanding that is inclusive of many levels of human life. Fluid, dynamic spirit is accepted as a part that expands understanding beyond personality and physicality.

Ongoing Community

This dynamic view continues to sustain Bruce and Linda's interest after 40 years. They stay motivated by responding to their inner selves and connecting with others in this way.

When asked for advice on how to start a community, Linda joked, "Don't do it." She smiled and said, "this is because it is very difficult. You have to have the willingness to go through deep and profound experiences of change." The community will accentuate and accelerate the difficulties and inner blockages. Working on "the dark shadowy places" is not fun or easy.

Besides willingness, service is essential. "You will be disturbed and disappointed, but serve you must," and it is important to envision the highest aspirations as unfolding and to renew that every day in the sooty face of human stubbornness. Practicing with "The Namaste Impulse: Love Your Neighbor" is an important aspect that Linda believes supports members in their struggles.

In Bruce's view, the essentials for developing and sustaining community revolve around clarity:

1. Vision and Purpose. Attract people to your purpose.
2. Clear guidelines on conflict when it arises.
3. Practical forms for power, and authority. Process for decision making.
4. Clear agreements on money, finances, and ownership.
5. Common shared practices, agreed upon, beyond personal desires and needs.

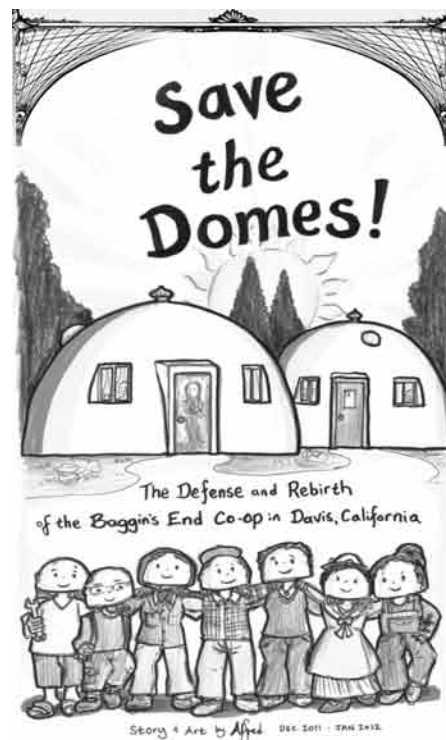
What is in the future for intentional communities? Bruce sees people coming back to more local sustainable systems, returning to spiritual understanding and starting to incorporate more spirituality into their activism. People will integrate and embody aspects of their community experience and take this out in ways of effecting change, what Bruce calls the "Ripple Effect of Consciousness."

For Bruce and Linda, there are many other ways to create consciousness ripples. Intentional community can embrace consciousness for the entire planet and other species. It can foster a sense of caring and connection and working cooperatively. Bruce and Linda frequently receive feedback from people about how time at Sirius affected them and led to major changes in lifestyle, attitude, and relationships. Sirius elders understand that working consciously with the energy field of life is a sure way to actively purify the human being, and the most fulfilling way to function.

Qualities such as sensitivity to deep inner currents, strength of will and heart, determination to serve, resiliency, commitment, and steady consistent application of principles and skills are truly a living resource.

Elders like Bruce and Linda become familiar and beloved guideposts and bridges for the well-being and continuance of intentional communities. The essence of what Bruce and Linda bring to Sirius and what keeps them motivated can be expressed by Elder of stature, Ram Dass, who said that the inner work is "the only dance there is." Bruce and Linda believe that "we might as well participate fully in this dance, in a nonjudgmental and compassionate way" if we wish to thrive. 🌱

Shen Pauley is a freelance writer and dharma practitioner. She has lived in many intentional communities over the past two decades and writes about planetary healing.



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.

Read the story online or
order the book at
books.firstcultural.com



Elders in Community: Bruce and Linda's Story

As in tribes, elders in intentional community are those who have visioned, initiated, developed, guided, nurtured, and anchored their groups over the decades. Elders are traditionally those who hold essential wisdom and knowledge for the group and sustain it by the respect and trust they gain and the practical value of their experience. They also offer essential reflection.

“Elders have experienced enough of the stages of life that they can look back and reflect on them, and this really can't happen before 50 and maybe not before 60. Sometimes, though, a younger person surprises everybody with their wisdom and is considered an elder.” —Erjen Khamaganova, Siberian Indigenous Leader [email to author, May, 2012; see also *Wild Earth, Wild Soul: A Manual for an Ecstatic Culture*, Bill Pfeiffer, Moon Books, Winchester, UK, 2013]

To gain a closer look at contemporary Elder presence, I visited a thriving intentional community in western Massachusetts, Sirius Community.

Sirius was founded in 1978 and named for the Dog Star. It is a “seed” from Findhorn's model of intentional community. Sirius describes itself as founded on a spiritual basis, and “nonsectarian in a manner that allows for each person to find his/her own way to the heart of all beingness and reality. This shared expression reflects a reverence for all life and willingness to live in accord with this intention as much as possible.... Sirius seeks a balance between work and play in all activities, between individual and the collective needs, spiritual and worldly pursuits, hierarchy and egalitarianism. The heart of governance is meditative consensus.” [www.sirius-community.org/SC-About.html: Fourfold Purpose]

The community serves as a spiritual development center, a developing ecovillage, a model of intentional community, and an educational nonprofit, and hosts hundreds of visitors every year. Membership hovers around 25 on the land including families and children.

Sirius is very fortunate to have two of the founding members, Bruce Davidson and Linda Reimer, living on the land and fully engaged with the community.

(continued on p. 77)

Bruce Davidson.





ECOLIVINGDOMES
PACIFIC DOMES

888.488.8127
www.PacificDomes.com



COMMUNITIES: Life in Cooperative Culture
RR 1 Box 156 Rutledge MO 63563



Subscriptions - 4 issues: \$24; \$29 Canada; \$31 outside US/Canada; US dollars

Seeking Community?



Enjoy each other



Learn to care for one another



Work together for a better world



Learn more at SeekingCommunity.ca

Seeking Community is a learning community where you can explore your questions, connect with other seekers, and access information, inspiration and ideas to help you discover the power of community and to create social change. Learn together, share your story, start a conversation, explore, or simply sign up for our FREE e Magazine, *The Seeker's Journal*. Join us at www.seekingcommunity.ca

Tamarack is the proud sponsor of the Communities Magazine Summer Issue 2013: Community Wisdom for Everyday Life.

SEEKING COMMUNITY IS AN INITIATIVE OF TAMARACK-AN INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - TAMARACKCOMMUNITY.CA

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER: @ COMMUNITYSEEKER, ON FACEBOOK, OR LINKEDIN   