

INTERGENERATIONAL LIVING • ELDER CARE

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture



COMMUNITY FOR BABY BOOMERS

Spring 2015 • Issue #166

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Aging Well | Time for Tribe | Senior Cohousing

A Boomer Rediscovered Community

Restorative Circles | Consensus | Sociocracy

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THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE promises an amazing lineup of offerings, from innovative approaches to developing new and affordable communities, to potent ways to enhance our vibrant communities.

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A PACKED AGENDA yes, but the conference allows plenty of time for networking, tours of cohousing communities, and fun!

THE NEXT GENERATION THEME HIGHLIGHTS

- The now-adult, children of cohousing
- The next wave of urban, rural and senior cohousing
- Emerging trends in financing, design and community models
- The evolving definition of cohousing
- Cohousing as a model for other types of communities
- Established communities celebrating 20+ years

SINCE THE FIRST American cohousing communities were completed in the early 1990's, more than 135 communities have been built, with more than a hundred in process. Small and large, urban and rural, newly built and retrofits, these communities have consistently been at the forefront creating environmentally and socially sustainable neighborhoods.

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COMMUNITIES

COMMUNITY FOR BABY BOOMERS

10 **Living Intergenerationally at Dancing Rabbit: “The Times They Are A-Changin’...”**

Sharon Bagatell

Finding themselves to be elders in a multi-generational community, two baby boomers resist, accept, then finally embrace the idea that age DOES matter.

12 **A Baby Boomer’s Guide to Community: Then and Now**

Valerie Renwick

Kombucha has replaced wheatgrass, and Michael Pollan has eclipsed Frances Moore Lappe, but some communal preoccupations, like dogs and dishes, never change.

13 **Every Eight Seconds**

Aurora DeMarco

As intentional communities model new approaches to elder care, baby boomers can lead the way in transforming how we age in our society.

15 **Intergenerational Living at Twin Oaks**

Stephan Przybylowicz

A 30-year-old communitarian discovers the benefits of living in a traditionally elder-focused residence.

16 **The Intergenerational Challenge**

Laird Schaub

Bringing in older members can present costs but also yield great benefits, especially in maintenance and development of the community and—when handled well—in mentorship.

18 **Integration of Different Generations**

Looby Macnamara

By seeing personal development through a permacultural lens, and assessing generational gifts and needs, we can start to heal fragmentation and separation in our society.

20 **My Father the Toddler**

Karbyn Eilde

An ex-communitarian tending full-time to an aging parent reflects on how intentional communities can help shift our approach to elder care.

23 **The Power of Community**

Charles Durrett

Cohousing can offer a much-improved quality of life to seniors and others; it’s time to break free of the self-inflicted “*Oh, that’s not me!*”

27 **How Community Can Help Baby Boomers Cope with Caregiving**

Cindy Nickles

Caregiving worries need not keep us up at night; we can design our communities to facilitate mutual support as we age.

28 **Senior Cohousing in Canada: How Baby Boomers Can Build Social Portfolios for Aging Well**

Margaret Critchlow

Aging in a community of relationships, with an emphasis on “co-care,” encourages a more connected, healthy, sustainable, and active life.

• **Progress at Harbourside Cohousing**



34 A Baby Boomer Rediscovered Community
Jeffrey Mabee

After falling into a disillusioning “status quo” existence, a baby boomer rekindles his zeal (and ability) to live by his values at Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage.

36 We’re Back! Still Beautiful, Bolder, and Hopefully a Whole Lot Better
Andrew Moore

The revolutionary baby boomers of the ’60s lost their way in the ensuing decades. Back now as elders, are they up to the challenge of completing needed changes?

38 Transparency, Vulnerability, Interdependence, and Collaboration: An Intergenerational Perspective from a Boomer and a Millennial
Melanie Rios and Skye Rios

We will realize our collective power by embracing a new paradigm that replaces our inherited emphasis on confidentiality, stoicism, and independence.

41 Time for Tribe: Boomers Get Connected
Bill Kauth and Zoe Alowan

Two baby boomers catalyze a new kind of “bicycle distance” tribe, one of shared values, support, and life-long commitment, and offer tips on how to replicate their success.

44 Short-Term Vacation Cohousing: A Great Way to Learn
Deborah Carey with Ray Shockey

Two retirees discover a way to explore cohousing without long-term commitment—and after several extended visits, decide it’s for them.

46 Kashi Ashram: Navigating the Transition from Baby Boomers to the Next Generation
Eileen Beal

An interfaith community finds many ways to reach out and expand beyond its baby-boomer base.

50 Restorative Circles and the Missing Link in Conflict Mediation
Arjuna da Silva

As the baby-boomer founders’ initial covenants fade into memory, new processes help members new and old deal with inevitable community conflict.

- **Restorative Circles: “A Community Self-Care Process”**

VOICES

4 LETTERS

6 PUBLISHER’S NOTE
Boomerang
Laird Schaub

8 NOTES FROM THE EDITOR
The New COMMUNITIES
Chris Roth

53 Sociocracy to the Rescue at Aldeafeliz Ecovillage: How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part V
Anamaria Aristizabal

56 The Top 10 Most Common Mistakes in Consensus Process and What to Do Instead
Tree Bressen

58 First We Take Manhattan
James Andrews and Paxus Calta

64 REACH

75 REVIEW
Turn Me On, Law Man!
Arjuna da Silva

76 CREATING COOPERATIVE CULTURE
Saying Goodbye to Mildred Gordon
Laird Schaub

ON THE COVER



Community builders Bill Kauth and Zoe Alowan play with many members of their “non-residential” tribe on a solstice holiday at the Pacific coast (see pp. 41-43; weneedeachother.net). Photo by David Landry.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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Letters



Life after Facebook

I read with relish the various exposés of social media technology in your last issue [#165, “Technology: Friend or Foe?”], such as Devon Bonady’s article [“Social Media or Social Isolation? Or is there a third way?”]. Like her, I have been wary. Like her, I’m about 40 and have passed through the social media gauntlet. I avidly used a cellphone and a Facebook account for six years, and dumped them both five years ago. I decided to prioritize face-to-face interactions over virtual ones. I now live a rich social life from my little urban village in the heart of Portland, Oregon. I’ve found my relationships with others to be more satisfying, as well as my cherished alone time. I’ve also discovered a good sorting mechanism for new friendships: if a person is unable to maintain a connection without texts and Facebook updates, I probably won’t be able to deeply engage with them. Like so many widespread fads—market-based capitalism, nation-scale representative democracy, leafblowers—we communitarians can measure the worth of social media technology against our own experience and choose a better way.

Naga Nataka
Foster Village
Portland, Oregon

Editor’s Note: For a fascinating overview of the impacts of the internet and social media on a global scale, see “Digital Dilemma: Is the Internet Killing (or Saving)

the Planet?” (www.worldwatch.org/digital-dilemma-internet-killing-or-saving-planet), published by the Worldwatch Institute, which reached us just after our Technology issue went to press.

Lesbophobic

I was disappointed but not surprised to see you dismiss Trina Porté’s criticism [in COMMUNITIES #164] of your Gender issue [#162]. Lesbian separatists are vilified in mainstream culture, and you let those lesbophobic and misogynistic attitudes win over the balance of your magazine when you featured the phrase “Beyond Women-Only Space” on your cover and printed a male’s dismissal of women-only space at Twin Oaks. You left out those intentional communities based first and foremost on gender (or sex, depending on who you ask): lesbian land, women’s houses, rape relief shelters, and other women-only communities that grew out of the women’s liberation movement. That you received no submissions on the topic is not an excuse. Does your call for submissions go out to marginalized groups? Are you alienating landykes and lesbian feminists from your readership? (Your lengthy defensive response to Trina’s letter suggests yes.) Are you just indifferent? Seeking out and amplifying marginalized and oppressed voices is totally something you can, and should, do.

I live in the women’s residence and work on the Women’s Gathering at Twin Oaks. Both are suffering from the cultural backlash against feminism since their heydays in the ’80s. It can be hard to scrape together a handful of women who want to be together, as women, when the cultural narrative is that we have already been liberated and that feminists need to “grow up.” But the war on women is real, and in women’s space like the Gathering I see women weeping at the sense of safety and wholeness that they desperately wish they could feel for more than three days a year. Patriarchy hurts. It also kills. Maybe you personally are numb to it. But when you disparage and tear down women’s space while claiming editorial neutrality, you prevent women who suffer the pain and terror of patriarchy from seeking some of the only relief there is. There is no excuse for that.

Brittany Lewis
Louisa, Virginia

Lesbophobic???

I finally got my Fall issue [#164] of COMMUNITIES today and I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Trina Porte's letter accusing the magazine of being lesbophobic! I was a writer for the Gender issue [#162] (and it sounds like she took exception to my article "Feminist Spirituality and Gender," which I knew some people would), and I am in fact a very proud and enthusiastic lesbian who is building a fantastic polyamorous partnership with the woman of my dreams while running an overtly LGBTQ-friendly wilderness business and occasionally teaching classes at the lesbian-run Huntington Open Women's Land community in Vermont. I don't know where Trina gets the idea that lesbians were excluded. Perhaps it is partially because it is now very rare for anyone under 35 to identify as "lesbian"; usually they claim the word "queer" instead. In fact, at 32, I'm often considered a little quaint for claiming the slightly-out-of-fashion "lesbian" identity. As we all age, the younger "queer" voices will no doubt increasingly eclipse the amazing lesbian and dyke politics of the '70s and '80s (which I have read extensively and always greatly admired, even if my own views are evolving as my life experience leads me to new conclusions).

I thought your response to Trina's letter was excellent, and I agree that your authors' sexual orientation isn't always pertinent to their subject matter. I've always found the communities movement to be so extremely lesbian-friendly that I don't even think to "come out" anymore because it is a total non-issue. Anyway, thanks for being a friendly publishing space for all of us, lesbian or otherwise! I hope Trina's letter has the effect of inspiring other lesbians to start sending you articles, and I can assure any aspiring lesbian writers that you've never turned down any of my articles on the basis of sexual orientation. I invite Trina herself to write an article some time; I'd love to hear her perspective as a veteran of many decades of culture.

Blessings of Sun, Wind, Rain, and Stone,

Mary Murphy

Lead Guide at Mountainsong Expeditions
www.mountainsongexpeditions.com
Worcester, Vermont

Editor's Note: Thank you both for your perspectives. We want to emphasize that the magazine's role is not to endorse nor dismiss any of the viewpoints it contains (nor do we believe we do that), but simply to offer a platform for them. As noted in our response to Trina, in seeking article contributions we cast our net as wide as we can, and we are always looking to cast it wider. Submissions information is always posted on our website, at www.ic.org/submissions-to-communities-magazine. In addition, close to 1,000 people, who have written for COMMUNITIES, expressed interest in doing so, or are for some other reason likely candidates, now receive the Call for Articles directly from us every quarter, and every one of those emails also contains the request "Please forward this email to anyone you think has a good story on this theme for COMMUNITIES."

Nevertheless, we do not intend nor claim to offer a comprehensive view of any topic we feature, nor are we capable of that, given limitations of space, time, and expertise. Most topics, especially topics as complex and dynamic as gender, would require many volumes to do them justice. The best we can do is offer a sample, based on what writers are excited about sending us, and what we are able to collect. In the case of "Gender Issues," the great majority of submissions questioned the traditional binary concept of gender—seeing that itself as a legacy of patriarchy. Had we received an article advocating for a separatist approach between men and women, we would have published it—and in fact, we did include an article advocating for women-only building courses—but the energy and interest of authors was definitely in a different direction from binary gender and separatism.

We can well imagine that, for someone for whom those two things are important, reading a magazine on Gender Issues where those viewpoints are scarcely, if at all, represented could be discouraging and reinforce

a sense of isolation. It's also true that none of us on staff are gender separatists, none of us share the experiences Brittany describes, and even a Call for Articles reaching upwards of 1,000 people interested in or involved in intentional community (including some living in Brittany's home community) failed to generate a single submission on the topic (aside from the women-only building course piece). We may have blind spots—we most certainly do—and we rely on people who see things that we don't speak up. For this reason, we appreciate hearing from people who consider themselves "marginalized," either by us, by the intentional communities movement in general, or by society at large. We can't know what's important to you unless you tell us, and share your own stories.

At the same time, we don't believe we disparaged or tore down any viewpoint. "Beyond Women-Only Space" on the cover referred to part of the title of an article; it did not represent any kind of official position of the magazine (and in fact the article advocating women-only building courses was also featured on the cover). The "male's dismissal of women-only space at Twin Oaks," if it indeed was a "dismissal" (it left some room for interpretation, though it certainly at least questioned whether women-only space aligned with some of the gender critique happening in the Louisa-area communities), appeared because it was quoted by someone else (Laird Schaub) holding some *different* viewpoints from the person being quoted. Yet we also understand how that kind of comment, when not balanced out by articles equally celebrating women-only space, could feel hurtful to those for whom that space is important. We invite Brittany, Trina, or anyone else who wants to share its value for them to please write for us!

Thanks again for your feedback and the encouragement to explore these issues further. 🐦

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue,
as well as letters of more general interest.

Please send your comments to editor@ic.org or
COMMUNITIES, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431.

Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

Submissions Policy

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

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What is an “Intentional Community”?

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



Susan Patrice

Boomerang

During the most recent Advent season I was discussing family traditions with my wife one evening. While I was thinking mostly about spiked eggnog and plum pudding, she recalled family rituals at Fourth of July waterskiing parties, where the featured libation was a thirst-quenching concoction of rum, limeade, and beer called a Boomerang. From what I could tell it went down easy, yet had a nasty habit of coming back on you.

When composing my thoughts for this issue on Community for Baby Boomers, that conversation came back to me, and I decided that boomerang was a fitting theme for my reflections.

In the last 25 years something different has been happening in the demographics of intentional community. For the first time in history there are significant numbers of people over 50 years old trying community living for the first time. What has historically been predominantly the domain of 20-somethings and 30-somethings—sticking one's toes in community waters—has widened considerably. Now everyone's doing it.

It used be that the way to get older folks in community was to recruit younger folks and age them for a few decades. Today, though, some people are raising families in traditional settings, retiring from regular jobs, and *then* trying community.

What's going on? I think there are a number of things.

Boomerang Hippies

Interest in intentional communities has ebbed and flowed over the entire history of the US. While we are currently riding a long wave that started around 1990 (and featured a secondary uptick in 2005-07), the prior boom to the current one was 1965-75: the Hippies Era. In fact, many of the inspirational and best-known US communities today started in that decade—notably Alpha Farm, Ananda, Camphill Kimberton, East Wind, The Farm, Heathcote, Lama Foundation, Love Family, Madison Community Cooperative, Magic, Miccosukee Land Co-op, Occidental Arts and Ecology, Prag House, Rowe Camp, Sandhill Farm, Shannon Farm, Twin Oaks, and We'Moon Land. Born in that decade of hope and chaos, they survived the lull of 1975-1990 to become mother trees for many of the seedlings that sprouted in the next warm spell and are flourishing today.

The reason I'm highlighting this era is that the people experimenting with cooperative

living then were mainly baby boomers—our focus group for this issue—when they were four or five decades younger. I think one explanation for the greater interest in community among gray hairs today is that there are a number of latent hippies who didn't scratch that itch back when Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead were performing live at Fillmore West.

This is a *large* age cohort, many of whom believe they were young adults at a special time in history. Have you ever listened to commercials for Oldies radio stations? (“Go ahead and embarrass your kids, turn up the volume!”)

Young men moved to Canada to avoid conscription into an unpopular war; people were questioning whether father really *did* know best; feminism and anti-racism were on the front burner (later, their crockpot cooking eventually led to Democrats choosing between a black man and a white woman for their Presidential candidate in 2008—something that was very hard to imagine in 1972, when a thoughtful George McGovern was getting crushed by Tricky Dick's reelection juggernaut).

There was widespread experimentation with sexual mores and recreational drugs, and suburbia was assailed as a cultural wasteland. Those were exciting times and some of us didn't get it out of our systems merely by following Timothy Leary's advice to turn on, tune in, and drop out. Many who came of age in 1965-75 went on to lead relatively normal lives, but we didn't necessarily forget those days of foment and what if...

Golden Girls and Silver (Haired) Boys

It's pretty clear today that the nuclear family is simply not able to provide a decent quality of life for seniors unless they're very well off. Kids are expected to leave home and not necessarily return to care for aging parents. In this bleak environment, seniors are increasingly thinking about options for aging in place, where there's familiarity, dignity, neighbors who know you, and meaningful ways to contribute.

For the most part, this translates to some form of group living. Remember *Golden Girls*, the critically acclaimed comedy series that aired 1985-92? The premise was four older women figuring out how to make

their latter years more vital, more fun, more affordable, and less isolating by living together—instead of alone or in a senior ghetto. They were a little ahead of their time, but not by much. While there are plenty of examples of people today (not just older folks) living together in informal enclaves of unrelated adults, the logical next step is intentional community, with full-spectrum demographics.

In many ways, intergenerational communities harken back to traditional extended families—the very thing we left behind when going nuclear. If you think of intentional communities as families of friends, there you are. To be sure, in recreating neighborhoods with benefits, participants are emphatically *not* yearning for the stultifying hierarchy and limited opportunities of yesteryear (think education, career, and partners). They're looking for connection, support, and context.

Information Age

It's probably not a coincidence that the current wave of interest in community living mushroomed simultaneously with easy access to the internet and the explosion of inexpensive options in electronic communications. It's now *much* easier to find out what's out there and to learn from the experiences of others, greatly enhancing the chances of avoiding others' mistakes, or of locating high-quality help when you inadvertently step in it.

While community living is still the road less traveled, there's at least a beaten path these days, as well as GPS and Google maps to help you navigate the road to Shangri-La.

Cohousing as the Missing Link

It happens that 1990 is also about the time when cohousing established a foothold in the US. This is significant because cohousing is the form of intentional community that looks most like traditional housing options (with somewhat denser, smaller houses), and is therefore more accessible to people who are ready for something different but aren't ready to jump off a cliff (which is what moving into community can look like to the immediate family left behind).

Though cohousing is a growing segment of the Communities Movement, it's less than 10 percent of the total. Nonetheless, that concept is drawing a majority of the community virgins who are north of 50. Without the concomitant rise of cohousing it would be hard to project the growth we're seeing today in boomers joining communities.

Many who came of age in 1965-75 went on to lead relatively normal lives, but we didn't necessarily forget those days of foment and what if...

If a Boomer Rang, Would You Answer?

While mostly I see the expansion of seniors seeking community as a solid plus, it is not without its challenges. If a baby boomer applies for membership at your community, how would you reply?

Overwhelmingly, communities are looking for members who offer the prospect of giving in proportion to what they receive. If a senior waits until this give-and-take is clearly out of balance, this will not be attractive. [See “The Intergenerational Challenge” on pages 16-17, 71 for additional exploration of this dynamic.]

If it's early in the group's life (say less than 20 years old) and it was started mostly by younger adults, then there won't be many older folks in residence yet and there will tend

(continued on p. 70)



The New COMMUNITIES

Welcome to the new COMMUNITIES!

Readers will notice instantly a number of important changes in the format of this issue. We on staff have been talking about potential changes for several years, and with the expiration of our latest contract with Allen Press (COMMUNITIES' printer for the past decade and a half), the time was ripe to assess whether we could now implement them. After extensive research by Christopher Kindig, our intrepid Business Manager, we were thrilled to find that we could make some changes that, we hope, will not only better convey the richness of life in cooperative culture, but also better align with our values, especially our ecological ones.

Those changes include:

A new printer: Out of the many available options, we chose Ovid Bell Press in Fulton, Missouri to be our new printer. Their level of responsiveness to our inquiries, and the values alignment we immediately felt with them, helped them stand out from the rest of the printers we surveyed. It would take an exceptional business to attract our patronage away from Allen Press, with whom we've had very positive experiences—and it became obvious that Ovid Bell Press was that kind of business.

New paper: Ovid Bell Press was the only printer on our list to offer paper with recycled content higher than 10 percent. Our new paper's recycled content is not just *a little* above 10 percent; it is **100 percent post-consumer recycled**. This means that not a single tree fell to produce this new issue of COMMUNITIES. The 54.1# Recycled Silk paper we chose also has a beautiful matte finish that stood out to us as much more attractive and earthy than the glossier alternatives. We are thrilled to be using this new paper and to be helping support a regenerative economy in doing so.

All-color: Many of us have felt it a shame that some of the beautiful color photos that we use in the magazine have appeared only as black-and-white to readers. Life in community (whatever form it takes) is colorful, and the purely black-and-white insides of our magazine up until this point didn't convey that as graphically as we hope this new format will.

We also discussed the potential pitfalls of going all-color. Many of us love the black-and-white-only format of *The Sun* (the monthly "magazine of ideas" from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, not the sensationalist British tabloid), which explores the many dimensions of what it's like to be a human being, in words and graphics that seem to gain power from being in black and white. We agreed that a color format in *The Sun* would simply be a distraction, and would compromise the contents. But COMMUNITIES is a different animal, despite the alignment we feel with *The Sun's* personal angle and the importance it places on what goes on *below* the surface of our lives. We wanted to become all-color not in a "glossy, glitzy" kind of way, but instead in a way that would enhance our contents rather than shove them aside for appearances.

We talked as well about the environmental impact of colored inks as opposed to black ink. In the end, we were convinced that any additional impacts from the pigments in soy-based colored inks were orders of magnitude smaller than the dramatic reductions in impact we achieved by switching to 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper. The new paper also helps us avoid the "glossy color" trap, by *not* being glossy.

New binding method: One way we made the switch to all-color more affordable was by eliminating the book-like perfect binding on our magazine, replacing it with saddle-stitched (stapled) binding. Some of us were initially loathe to abandon perfect binding, until we held the saddle-stitched samples from Ovid Bell Press

in our hands. We discovered that saddle-stitching was not only plenty strong to keep our magazine together, but actually made it easier to read: it sits wide open on a table or lap much more effortlessly than our perfect-bound issues did, leaving the hands free and the spine-edge of pages more readable. On the downside, we know it won't be as easy to identify each issue by looking at the spine on the reader's home bookshelf, but the very great cost savings we achieved by switching binding methods have allowed the other changes we are making. In the end, we all agreed on the tradeoff.

New covering method: We also reduced costs significantly by shifting to a "self-covering" format: the same paper stock used on the inside of the magazine functions as the cover. We had the most questions and reservations about this particular change, but multiple sources have assured us that this kind of cover usually survives mailing just as well as a heavier cover made of separate stock. Please let us know if your copy endures any damage in mailing; if yours is torn in transit, we will mail you a replacement copy in an envelope. If enough copies get damaged, we will reassess this choice of covering method.

We consider this new format a work-in-progress. This first issue in the new format is almost bound (stapled, to be precise) to have some glitches; we're curious to see what they may be, so that we can iron them out in future issues. We are eager to hear your feedback, whether specific or general—praise, complaints, reflections, or anything else. Please email them to editor@ic.org, or send them via snail mail to our editorial office in Oregon (see masthead).

We are excited to share this evolution with you. Baby boomers (featured in this issue) have come a long way, as you'll read about in the many articles that follow—and COMMUNITIES (born of baby boomers more than four decades ago, and now carried forward by multiple generations, including boomers, their offspring, and even their offspring's offspring) has come a long way too.

Thank you for joining us! 🍷

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.

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B. Outside county paid subs	991	993
1. In-county paid subs	5	7
2. Sales through dealers and other non-USPS paid distributions	1087	1431
3. Other classes through USPS	13	13
C. Total paid distribution	2096	2444
D. Free/Nominal Distribution		
1. Outside Country	0	0
2. In Country	0	0
3. Other classes through USPS	0	0
4. Outside the Mail	0	0
E. Total distribution	2096	2444
F. Copies not distributed	229	156
H. Total	2325	2600
I. Percent paid	100%	100%
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L. Total distribution	2098	2448
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Living Intergenerationally at Dancing Rabbit

“The Times They Are A-Changin’...”

By Sharon Bagatell

When my partner and I first considered moving to Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, our dear friend Patricia responded in great surprise, “But, you’d be the ELDERS!”

Yes, I agreed, we probably would; Dennis was 60 and I was 50 at the time, and most of the folks at Dancing Rabbit (Rutledge, Missouri; www.dancingrabbit.org) were in their 20s and 30s. And so what? As a teacher, I had spent a good part of my adult life with younger people, and had developed some close friendships with my former students as they grew into adulthood. The role of “elder” didn’t daunt me at all. In fact, the thought of living intergenerationally really excited me.

Soon after I moved to Dancing Rabbit I began to understand what Patricia was saying. I began to have a strange craving for conversation with ANYONE who looked to be over 40. I started an elders group of the few folks who were over 45. I began to be very conscious of the fact that I could have been the first grade teacher, or even the parent, of many of my neighbors, setting up an expectation for myself that I should behave at all times in a “grown-up” way.

At the same time, I was very conscious that I didn’t want to be teacher or parent, and that my neighbors weren’t looking for that either. I couldn’t quite figure out how to be “me.” While I really wanted to be “age-blind,” age kept seeming to matter.

It became particularly hard for me when the mostly young interns we call “work exchangers” populated DR each summer. With great energy and enthusiasm, they created their own 20-something social world, and most of them, understandably, had little interest in hanging out with someone their mom’s age. Though I still think of myself as just out of college, it appears that years have actually elapsed since the ’70s, and music, dance styles, lingo, and all the rest of young culture has indeed changed! Suddenly, I am the generation whose “old road is rapidly agin’,” as Bob Dylan so eloquently put it.

At some point I realized that I not only craved social connections with 45 year-old “elders,” I was actually needing a true elder, a guide, a “crone,” right here in my community. I was a woman going through that interesting transition called menopause, with all its wonders and hard-hitting manifestations. I realized that, in fact, I AM aging, but I’m not yet a true elder. I wanted to talk about it with someone in my community, someone who had experienced these changes and could share some wisdom.

I went to the weekly women’s circle in its early days, and found a group of dear and earnest 30-somethings winding their way through issues around birth control and raising young children. That seemed helpful for them, but it wasn’t what I needed. They weren’t asking for my wisdom, and they didn’t have the kind of wisdom I was seeking. I don’t blame them; I don’t think at that age I would have had much wisdom—or even interest—around the issues of, as some have called it, “crone-olescence.”

Most of us who live here—Rabbits, we call ourselves—grew up somewhere else. We have come largely from a culture where age has been a social separator. Third graders spend most of their social time with other third graders. Teachers and other adults are NOT your friends—they’re not supposed to be. By 18 or 20 you have no need of parent-figures in your life on a daily basis. Grandparents are faraway folks to be visited occasionally as you explore your own life in the big world. We come from—and still are—a culture that really

doesn't know how to interact deeply with age diversity.

Still, I'd wager that most Rabbits would say that intergenerational living needs to be a fundamental part of a new culture. That's a value I am convinced we hold, and it manifests in small, delightful ways. We have the advantage here in community of seeing each other grow through life's changes in a very up-close and personal way. I have "hang-out" dates with my neighbor Aurelia from time to time; I've watched her grow from a tiny two-year-old to a graceful and independent front-teeth-missing seven-year-old. (And who knows? Maybe she's seen me change!)

In a week's time the community celebrated one-year-old Dmitri's birthday and 60-year-old Bob's birthday, both with great joy. Many of us welcomed Dmitri just after his birth, and we've been present to the changes in Bri and Alex's lives as they moved through the first year of parenthood. We celebrated Morgan's 16th birthday with a rite of passage ceremony and cheered him as he left for college last year; he credits much of his ease of transition to college to his intergenerational experiences in community. And at every full moon and seasonal ceremony, the eldest and youngest present are honored as they jointly add a stick to the ceremonial fire.

As with so much of what we do here at Dancing Rabbit, we're in an experimental transition. The 30-somethings are pushing 40 and may soon find themselves part of Bob Dylan's "old road." ("As the present now will later be past, the order is rapidly fadin'. And the first one now, will later be last...") And that's a great thing for Dancing Rabbit!

We're already developing infrastructure with the less physically-abled in mind. We're moving out of the pioneer phase of development and becoming a village with abundant living spaces and a robust internal economy. We have the creativity to experiment with more ways to incorporate the older crowd into the vibrant social fabric here. As a maturing community culture, we're ever-learning to value the wisdom of life experience for whatever it may offer us. I'm hopeful that, as we transition, we'll naturally attract older folks who are looking for a meaningful place to spend the rest of their lives. It's certainly been a meaningful one for me!

And as for me, I've stopped trying to convince myself that age doesn't matter. It DOES matter. We ARE different throughout the various stages of life. And with that acceptance, I finally embrace the role I apparently jumped into when Patricia identified me as "elder" at Dancing Rabbit. Though I have no crone to guide me, I will move, as gracefully as I can, into true elderhood, gathering wisdom as I go.

I'll be there to "lend a hand," as the Dylan song says, to those who make the aging transition after me. I find myself more and more dedicated to working with my fellow communitarians to build a place—and a culture—that counters the subtle practices of age separation. The times ARE a-changin', and I believe that soon we'll be celebrating a deeper kind of intergenerational living at Dancing Rabbit. 🌱

Sharon has lived at Dancing Rabbit for the past five years. A former elementary school teacher and environmental educator, she coordinates and teaches programs on sustainability to the visiting public at DR. With a passion for permaculture, she is creating a permaculture homestead and forest garden learning center with her partner, Dennis. Sharon is also owner of a small organic farm in Ecuador, where she and an Ecuadorian family collaborate to produce artisanal chocolate. A version of this article appeared in "The March Hare," Dancing Rabbit's electronic newsletter, on May 1, 2014 (see www.dancingrabbit.org).



Photo courtesy of Sharon Bagatell

A Baby Boomer's Guide to Community: THEN and NOW

By Valerie Renwick

	Then	Now
You Live in a...	Commune	Ecovillage
Who Visits You	Hippies	Hipsters
Your Community's Diet of Choice	Macrobiotic	Paleo
The Whole Community Is Reading...	Frances Moore Lappe	Michael Pollan
The SuperFood Someone Is Making in the Kitchen Corner	Wheatgrass	Kombucha
The Group's Personal Growth Experience	EST	Landmark Forum
"Some of Our Best Community Members Are..."	Gay	Trans
The Community Sends a Delegation to the March on Washington about...	Civil Rights	Climate Change
Button-Pushing Issues	Dishes and Dogs	Dishes and Dogs
On the Community Library Shelf	COMMUNITIES Magazine	COMMUNITIES Magazine

Valerie Renwick lives at Twin Oaks Community (Louisa, Virginia; www.twinoaks.org). She is not a baby boomer, but her life partner is, and she sometimes (lovingly) despairs at their lack of shared cultural reference points.

Photos courtesy of Twin Oaks Community



Every Eight Seconds

By Aurora DeMarco

“The problems of aging present an opportunity to rethink our social and personal lives in order to ensure the dignity and welfare of each individual.”

—Daisaku Ikeda



Photos courtesy of Aurora DeMarco

Every eight seconds, another baby boomer turns 65. Seven in 10 of us will need home care assistance at some point in our lives, due to disability or the simple process of getting older. Much of the time this reality is described in negative terms; the sentiment is “what a burden to society this will pose.” However, this situation can offer a great opportunity to once again advance the idea of communal living. Baby boomers spawned many social change movements that shifted our thinking on issues of personal freedom and choosing alternatives to the traditional nuclear family. Boomers may also be the generation to lead the way for changes in how we age in our society.

According to Caring Across Generations, a national advocacy organization to improve elder care in this country, we need to develop a comprehensive plan to make sure that we all age in dignity and are cared for. Currently, elder care is geared to those people who live in traditional families where there is a spouse and/or children who can provide and care for their sick and elderly loved ones. Often paid home health aides care for the sick and elderly in home-based care. Many also end up in institutional-based care settings such as assisted living or retirement homes or hospitals. Unlike the spirit of connectedness and caring of intentional communities, these institutions often strip seniors of their rights to self-determination and governance. Many arrive there as a last resort, frail and no longer able to provide their self-care needs. Many do not want to burden their family members and some have no family members at all.

Intentional communities offer an alternative to the isolation and loneliness that many seniors experience as they age and need more assistance. With fewer and fewer people coming from traditional

families, now is the time to reinforce that intentional communities can be an antidote to social isolation and loneliness.

Fortunately there are existing models, like *kommune-niederkaufungen*, which generates income with its elder care worker collective (www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de/english-informations), and the Fellowship Community, whose elder “members” contribute about 35 percent of the community’s income in the form of different fees (www.fellowshipcommunity.org/our-elder-members.html). Furthermore, existing communities are carving their own paths towards care as members age and need care. My daughter is part of the care team for the elderly and disabled in her intentional community, which has built a separate building that offers care from birth to hospice when their members need it. Moreover, new communities are forming with the intention of offering elder care to their members.

At the 2014 Twin Oaks Communities Conference a group of us met to discuss how to provide elder and hospice care in intentional communities. We created a list of ideas for helping existing communities and for advancing the idea of intentional communities as a new model for senior living. It is by no means comprehensive, but rather a beginning of a much larger conversation about providing elder care in intentional communities.

1. Encourage communitards to have advanced directives and co-caring agreements in case communitards need elder/hospice care. These directives/agreements can help avoid conflict later on. This may be especially true for those who have families who may disagree with their choices. Many people have chosen to live in community because they have

different values and lifestyle preferences than their family of origin or family of procreation. Advanced directives and co-caring agreements give individuals the opportunity to spell out clearly their wishes on medical interventions and how they wish to be cared for. One communard's son called the police on her when she notified him of her choice of voluntary starvation and dehydration to expedite her dying process—a legal practice which does not contribute to suffering among the dying and might actually contribute to a comfortable passage from life. Having her wishes put in writing and shared with her family members might have helped her family members understand and respect her choice to die as she wanted.

2. Put together a work exchange for people wanting to visit communities in exchange for helping to care for disabled/elderly communards. Volunteering time in exchange for room and board is a good way to travel inexpensively. Living in community offers opportunities to explore different regions, socialize, and be of service. Being part of a care team is one way to volunteer and could be a way for communities to have their labor needs met. Many people want to put their big toe in the intentional community waters and this may offer a clear way to volunteer and be of service, while also experiencing communal living.

3. Develop an exchange program with other communities who can send caregivers to help with hospice care/elder care when communities are in need. Often various communities send help to fellow communities when there is a need. One communard spoke about his wife's end-of-life care. She was a beloved member of the intentional communities movement and when she needed end-of-life care a few members traveled from their home communities to assist her. This is a great way for communities to support one another.

4. Reach out to networks of retired nurses who may want to still practice nursing in the more pleasant settings that communities offer as opposed to the harsh conditions of institutional-based care. Most nurses I speak with say they love nursing, but dislike their workplace environments. In the community I live in, a long-term community

member who is in her 90s is cared for by three home health aides. All three women are valued members of the community and enjoy the openness, kindness, and caring that my community is especially known for. During our Thanksgiving celebration a special word of gratitude was given to these hardworking caregivers.

5. Be aware that hospice is always paid for through Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance plans, and charity pools. Hospice care includes four hours a day of a professional home health aide, as well as the help of physician, nurse, social work, pastoral care, the training of nonprofessional caregivers, and pain relief, as needed. When I have traveled to intentional communities to talk about elder care, I am shocked at how many people are not aware that hospice is paid for and that it is an option that most people don't know they have.

The beauty of aging is that it can be a time of life where the demands of work and family are behind you. Yet culturally people still follow a paradigm that may not work for them. Rather than retirement being a time of exploration and connectedness, many seniors feel depressed as a result of feeling unproductive, isolated, and uncared for. Many of these issues are explored further in the article "Communities and Old Age: Opportunities and Challenges for People over 50" by Maria Brenton (see www.ic.org/wiki/communities-old-age-opportunities-challenges-people-50). I would like to end with a quote from this article, because it captures the spirit that needs to be harnessed so that people over 50 can create communities that work for them:

"Being part of an intentional community in old age is a way to challenge the isolation and social

exclusion that many older people experience in our youth-oriented western societies. Living in an intentional community is a way to maintain personal autonomy as well as add an active, vibrant, companionable dimension to one's later life. While group living is not everyone's cup of tea, if you are interested in it don't wait until you are really old to explore the available options. Anticipate and take action to join or start such communities while you have plenty of drive and energy for new opportunities, challenges, excitement, and personal growth. Don't wait for the future to be decided for you. Shape it for yourself. There are other people out there with whom you can share the experience." 🐦



Marione, who lived for many years at Twin Oaks, died peacefully at home on Hospice Care.

Aurora DeMarco has over 30 years of community organizing experience. She has written and published on various topics including health care, child care, migrant workers, parenting, women's issues, and cyberbullying. She has worked with senior advocates pushing for Health Care for All and was successful in getting a single-payer bill through the New York State Assembly. Aurora is a Licensed Massage Therapist with a specialty in working with Trauma Survivors. She has worked as a Grief Counselor for Hospice of New York, and developed and presented workshops on working with trauma survivors in hospice settings. She most recently facilitated a workshop on providing elder and hospice care in intentional communities. She lives at Ganas, an intentional community on Staten Island, New York and is working with Point A, a collective dedicated to building more intentional income-sharing, egalitarian urban communities.

Intergenerational Living at Twin Oaks

By *Stephan Nashoba*

Nashoba is one of Twin Oaks’ seven communal residences; it was originally built with the intention of housing primarily elder communards and people with limited mobility. This was generally the demographic utilizing the space, until recently. With two elder members passing away and several new members landing in Nashoba and not wanting to move out, folks under 65 now outnumber elders in the house. (At age 30, I am one of the younger members there.)

There are several perks I see of living in Nashoba:

- It’s one of the cleaner small-living-groups at Twin Oaks, with a chore chart and kitchen cleaning schedule that members of all ages participate in with regularity.
- It’s generally quiet and has thick, insulated walls.
- It’s climate-controlled better than most other houses, especially in the summer when the living room is one of only a few air-conditioned public spaces on the farm.
- The rooms and hallways are large, which is great for mobility or when folks just have a lot of stuff.
- It’s attached to Appletree, the new addition to the building, which means having a second kitchen and set of accessible restrooms close by—a real benefit when 10 people are sharing a house!

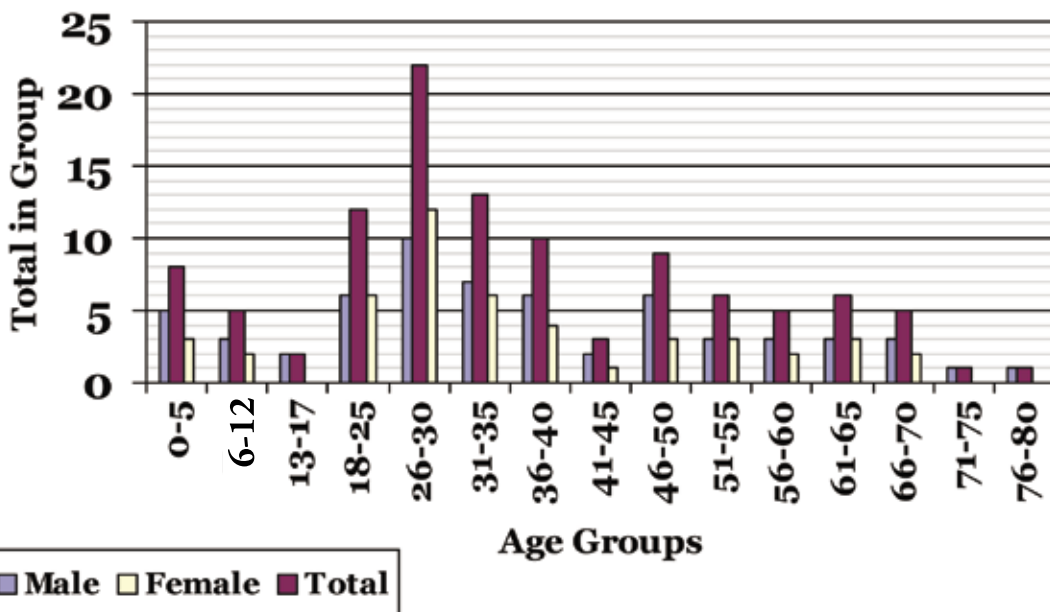
As a new member landing in Nashoba, I thought a downside to living there would be the lack of socialization with peers my same age. However, I quickly learned that I personally like it when the party is at someone else’s house and I can come home to my nice,

clean, quiet space. I was also worried that my presence would be invasive or that I wouldn’t be welcome since I’m not the target demographic of the house. However, existing residents of Nashoba welcomed me with open arms and immediately invited us younger folks to be a part of group activities—there are regular movie nights, card games, and Steve’s famous pancake breakfast on Sundays! Jayel, one of the elder residents of Nashoba says, “Intergenerational living here is great! Most of my care team has been young people...I think we do a good job here at Twin Oaks.”

Living at Nashoba and interacting with elders at Twin Oaks has inspired me to join the newly formed Elder Team, which is designed to ensure that elder communards are getting the care and support they need. While care teams are responsible for organizing and administering care for the individual whose team they are on, the Elder Team is responsible for addressing issues and concerns that effect all elders, or when an issue pertaining to one elder may set a precedent for others. My hope is that working with elders on issues regarding “aging in utopia” will help Twin Oaks become an even better place to live and grow old in community. 🌸

Stephan Nashoba has lived at Twin Oaks for about a year, loves working and playing in the woods with friends, and enjoys consuming a variety of potato products. Twin Oaks is an egalitarian, income-sharing community which began in 1967 in Louisa, Virginia (www.twinoakscommunity.org). It is home to 90 adults, spanning six decades in age, and 15 children.

Age Groups at Twin Oaks on 10/1/2014



The Intergenerational Challenge

By Laird Schaub

At the Fellowship for Intentional Community we get a steady flow of inquiries from people who are seriously shopping for a life in community. A significant fraction of those are older than 50—for convenience, let's label them “seniors.” Overwhelmingly, seniors want an intergenerational community—not a seniors-only enclave. To be sure, there are *some* for whom it is a greater priority to have a reliably adult decibel level at common meals (one more conducive to congenial conversation, especially for those with compromised hearing) and less danger of stray toys on the sidewalks, yet this is a distinct minority. Mostly seniors want to live in a community with a full age range, where there's the option to engage with those in different stages of life as feels appropriate.

One of the prospects of community that attracts seniors (and seniors-to-be) is the hope of graceful and dignified aging in place. In an intergenerational community it is easier to imagine how the many can be a support network for the few (providing that a community doesn't accidentally get too top-heavy—it won't work so well with 70 percent of the population in wheelchairs at the same time). This dream is much more than just on-site elder care and dying in your own bed. It's the hope of being able to make meaningful contributions as late in life as possible.

To be sure, seniors often are not able to contribute with the same physical strength and stamina of younger folks, yet there are many others ways to contribute. While they may not be as stout stoking boilers, shoveling snow, or pouring foundations, they can show up strong when it comes to research, mediation, problem solving, and committee work. (While people don't necessarily get wiser just because they get older, they've had more passes at the trough of knowledge and surely some of them have been drinking.)

If you conduct a cost/benefit analysis based only on the factors above, seniors may seem only of marginal benefit: increased care needs measured against limited capacity as an asset in the labor pool. But there is much more to the story.

Modeling a Better Quality of Life

Communities purposefully strive to provide a superior life for *all* residents, regardless of age. On the younger end, for example, there is ample evidence that community is a terrific

place to raise children, no small part of which is the support parents get from other adults (often seniors, by the way) in regularly spending time with their kids—providing both enrichment for the young'uns and a much needed break for the 'rents.

When it comes to the older end of life, the mainstream culture does an abysmal job. In a culture built around the concept of the nuclear family (which is in sharp contrast with the intergenerational model that has predominated for the vast majority of human history) either you succeed in saving enough money to take care of your elder years or you face the bleak prospect of being warehoused in some institutional setting.

Further complicating the equation is that the mainstream culture is competitive, which means there's a tendency to push seniors out of the workplace prior to their desire to leave, to make room for younger employees who can be hired for less money.



Susan Patrice

Essentially, profit and return on investment come ahead of people and relationship.

Thus, even if you had planned carefully for your retirement, a cold-hearted employer might have decided it was time to trim payroll prior to your having worked long enough at peak earnings to have salted away sufficient funds in your 401k.

In community, we're trying to move deliberately away from defining security in terms of bank balances, and towards a wealth of relationship. In short, we're trying to address a major societal need without relying on a governmental safety net. Further, we want to do that with dignity, which generally means finding ways for *everyone*—young and old alike—to contribute meaningfully to the health of the whole.

Time

Seniors, by virtue of being either near the end of or beyond their full-time careers, tend to have a great deal more discretionary time in their lives. Even when you factor in decreased stamina, they tend not to have dependents at home or jobs that claim their attention 40 hours/week. It's not unusual for seniors to be contributing way beyond their numbers to the work needed to maintain and develop the community. Independent of their skill and wisdom, they simply have the time, and many communities would struggle mightily without a willing cadre of seniors to be in harness to the myriad needs of a vibrant community—you can expect to extract only so much blood (sweat, and tears) from the turnips that are working parents with kids at home.

Mentoring

In addition to the above, seniors can offer groups much more than merely more oars in the water. In many cases they possess a wealth of experience, some of which may be highly

useful to younger folks hoping to acquire it. While many seniors are attracted to the concept of mentoring younger members (passing on what they know), there are a number of potholes on the road to this aspect of elder heaven, and I want to focus the remainder of this essay on what I label Misadventures in Mentoring.

—*Pothole #1: Misalignment of Interest and Skill*

The senior's knowledge may not be of interest to other community members, or their knowledge may not be as valuable as they think it is (perhaps because it relates to conditions that no longer apply, or relies on technology that is obsolete—for example, I could teach people how to use a slide rule or how to cut a mimeo stencil, but who gives a shit?).

—*Pothole #2: Misalignment of Teaching Style and Learning Style*

The senior may have useful knowledge yet may be weak at transmitting it. Doing and teaching are different skills; they may be solid at the former yet poor at the latter, or at least have a teaching style that doesn't work well for the person interested in learning that skill. The senior may well take that as a rejection of them as a useful person, when what's really going on is a rejection of their teaching style. It can be tricky.

—*Pothole #3: Misalignment of Culture*

One of the important things about intentional community is that it's an attempt to create cooperative culture, which stands in direct contrast with the mainstream competitive culture in which we were raised. When younger members join, they are most commonly fresh from that competitive culture. Even though they may be purposefully trying to move away from it, they have been deeply conditioned in it and thus are likely to bring with them a fairly well-defined sense of individuation that results in their not being so likely to approach others for advice about how to do things. This tendency undercuts the creation of a culture where mentoring thrives. If it depends on the seniors taking the lead in blowing their own horns, there will not be much trumpeting, or at least not much that will be heard as a clarion call by the younger set.

• Honoring elders is fine in theory, but how do we actually shift to it? **Hint:** It has to be more than asking them to call in the Four Directions on pagan holidays, or reserving

for them a front-row seat at house concerts.

• How do we encourage younger members to reach out to seniors for advice? **Hint:** Mitch Albom's 1997 bestseller *Tuesdays with Morrie* is the tender story of a young man in the prime of his career seeking out the company of a former sociology professor who is nearing death from ALS. In the course of their 14 Tuesdays together, Mitch is touched by his mentor's wisdom—even though that's not what motivated him to visit in the first place. How do we encourage mentoring under less dramatic conditions?

• How do younger members even find out what seniors know? **Hint:** This will not magically happen on its own; it'll need help. I think it could be approached from either direction:

—a) Residents could be encouraged to let the whole group know what they're looking to learn, which could entail anything from a 10-minute download/demo to a formal apprenticeship.

It's not unusual for seniors to be contributing way beyond their numbers to the work needed to maintain and develop the community.

—b) Seniors (or anyone willing to mentor others, regardless of the mentor's age) could be asked what they think they could teach. This could come out as part of a getting-to-know-each-other-better ritual where all residents take turns telling their life story (one per night, every other Thursday until you're done?), or it could be something as mundane as a posting on the community's website, updated as people are inspired. Part of new resident orientation would be to make sure that everyone knew that the postings existed and was encouraged to add their own offerings.

• • •

This mentoring challenge interests me a great deal because my instinct is that the solution will have to arise from the mentees—not from the seniors—and that group, almost by definition, is least equipped to understand the cultural shift

(continued on p. 71)

Integration of Different Generations

By Looby Macnamara

Excerpted and adapted from pages 187-190 of *People and Permaculture: Caring and Designing for Ourselves, Each Other and the Planet* by Looby Macnamara (published by Permanent Publications, 2012, 304 pages).

Permaculture—“an approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems modeled on the relationships found in nature” (see COMMUNITIES #153 and Wikipedia for more info.)—offers, in the words of *People and Permaculture* author Looby Macnamara, “a vision for humanity, a way of being with each other and ourselves that doesn’t harm or pollute; that empowers and allows us to be the best we can.” In her book, she sets out to “explore how to see things differently, find new ways of approaching our lives, care for ourselves, act compassionately with other people, and move towards our hope for humanity.” Part 4, “Living in Society,” examines “what is happening in our communities and how, with shifts of thinking, we can create abundant systems of peoplecare” (one of permaculture’s three main ethics, along with earthcare and “fair share”). Chapter 11, adapted below, addresses “Integration of Different Generations.”

Phases of Development

Every person follows different phases of development. Within our cultures we have different generations of people at the same phase.

Child—Apprentice—Adult—Elder

Each phase has different approaches to learning about the self and the world, as well as different perspectives. These phases relate to the design web, where the child phase is about growth, the apprentice one about searching and experimenting, the adult phase about doing, being decisive and productive, and the elder phase is reflective.

In the past there was, and within current indigenous cultures there still is, a web of connections between the different generations embedded into everyday life. (See accompanying illustration, based on a diagram by Wolf White.) Each generation would have connections between all of the others as well as peer support.

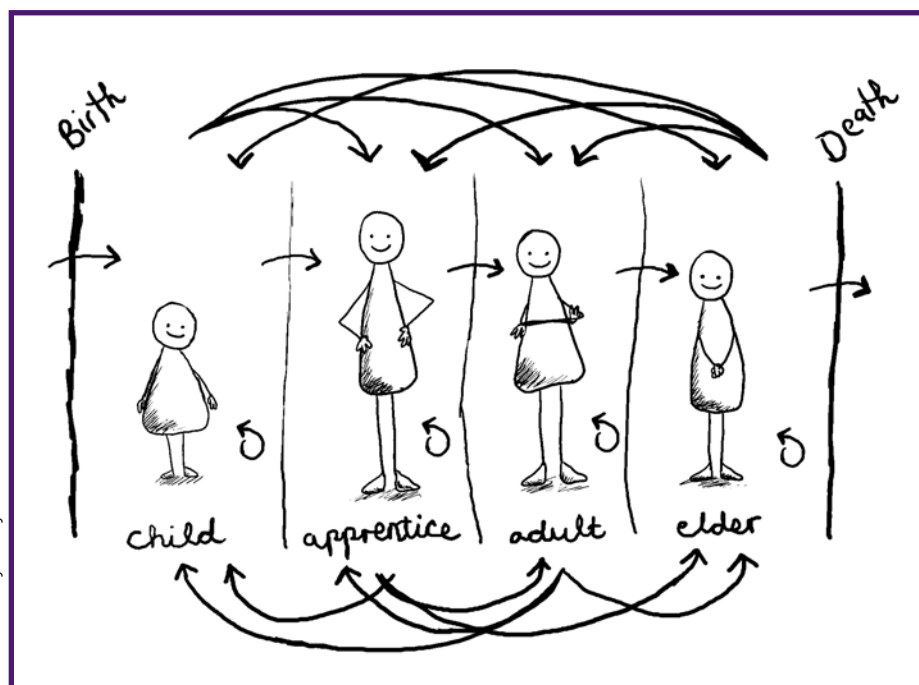


Illustration by Looby Macnamara

Segregation and Integration

Now, along with so many other connections, these have been broken and people are segregated. Children are isolated within their age groups at schools, elderly people are alone in homes, the apprentice stage is being eroded, and adults are lacking in support. The consequences of this are probably much deeper than realised. We are unable to learn from the other generations and we expend energy making the same mistakes or reinventing the proverbial wheel.

We are falsely insulated from the need to connect with each other by the reliance on fossil fuels and material goods. The broken web means our communities—and we as individuals—are less resilient. Our emotional health suffers from the lack of connections, as does our ongoing education.

When we lived in extended families we would have had natural connections with different generations, but now there is greater distance between families, both physically and metaphorically. We have grown up in a culture of “stranger danger” where we are actively discouraged from talking to people we don’t know. These broken pathways in our culture mean it is difficult for us to respond on a person-to-person level with each other.

This isn’t to say that we need to take integration to extremes; there are times when children and work don’t mix, for example.

Mending the Web

The connections are not just linear from one stage of life to the next, or within each generation, they are woven between all of the generations. There can be flows of energy, wisdom, learning, and support in all directions. We can recognise our interdependence.

Increasing tolerance by having a “look to like” attitude, valuing diversity, and examining our own beliefs creates flows of respect in all directions. Personal connections help to break down the media caricatures of grumpy old man/woman, bossy adult,

young hooligan, and troublesome child. When we know individuals we can move beyond these stereotypes and prejudices. We can see the wise elder, active adult, enthusiastic teenager, and playful child.

Each generation has different strengths and characteristics. By respecting the value of each, people will start to have more time and incentive to connect. Combining these strengths will compensate for weaknesses. We can try to find ways to harvest the gifts of each stage. Focusing on the strengths will start to shift some of the negative language and attitudes that we have about the different stages. Every human (unless their life is cut short) will go through each of these stages. By not honouring them in other people we are actually pushing away part of ourselves, whether past or future. It is important to know about the stage of life that is coming next.

There is a natural succession from one phase to the next. As well as acknowledging birth and death, the movement from one generation to another would be recognised with people clearly knowing which stage they are at. Indigenous cultures honour the progression with rites of passage, acknowledging the loss of the previous phase and welcoming the gifts of the new stage. In the West youths might create their own, possibly destructive, rites of passage such as stealing a car, or getting drunk.

By listening we will build a better picture of how to meet everyone's needs. We can find out what they think life is about, ask them what they want and what they know. Elders and teenagers are both marginalised groups in our culture; together, though, they represent a significant proportion. They have things in common and similar needs; when they speak together their voices are louder. There has been a push for more buses and public meeting places when these groups have connected.

Generational Gifts and Needs

Each of the generations has its own gifts and abundances, as well as challenges; these could be matched up to share both to create beneficial connections.

Children bring joy, enthusiasm, curiosity, creativity, humour, wonder, lightness, playfulness, imagination, and observation. They need entertaining, teaching, and care.

Apprentices have willingness, new ideas, ability to think outside the box, and energy. They need teaching, self-esteem, and a

channel for their energy. The apprentice can be the role model for children. Playing with children allows apprentices to stay connected with this aspect of themselves.

Adults bring stability, knowledge, and responsibility, taking care of hearth and home. They need support with their work and home life. They are able to share their responsibilities with apprentices who are thirsty for real life experiences.

Elders are the wisdom keepers holding a wider perspective; they have time, patience, introspection, and reflections. They need to be honoured, have dignity and respect, and be listened to. As elders slow down they are in tune with the pace of children and able to walk together, hopefully having time and patience to spend with children too. Traditionally elders have had the role of passing down ancestral wisdom and tribal knowledge through storytelling to children and apprentices.

Matching Inputs and Outputs

When we look from a permaculture perspective at inputs and outputs in a system, we find that when there are unmet needs in the system there is work, and when there are unused outputs there is waste or pollution. This is exactly what is happening within generations. If you imagine elders who have no one to share their stories with, this then becomes a waste and they can feel depressed.

Meanwhile there are children and apprentices who want entertainment and guidance, and this becomes extra work for adults. Age UK has schemes where the elders help young people with their reading and provide mentoring roles (see www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-in-your-community/integrational-volunteer). Connecting these generations makes use of the skills and wisdom of the elders so that they feel useful and valued, and gives children and apprentices the attention they need.

There are many other ways we can connect up the inputs and outputs of the different generations, saving energy and avoiding waste. This will ultimately mean that education will improve by us having a more complete understanding and different perspectives to draw upon, and all aspects of health will be enhanced. Our emotional health will be increased through being valued and the feeling of belonging. It can become a web of kinship, love, learning, health, reciprocity, and support.

Training the Next Generation

My colleagues and I run teacher training courses. We are all permaculture teachers and it could be seen as strange that we are training up our competition. If thinking in the scarcity model of the world then it wouldn't make sense to do this. However, we are thinking from an abundance mentality and have the belief that there is enough for everyone. Training up other teachers, and having them apprentice with us, has allowed us to pass on our skills to the next generation. We have improved and developed our skills in the process of transferring them. If we did not pass on our knowledge and skills to the next generation they

(continued on p. 72)

Activity: Who Do I Know?

Some questions for reflection:

What generation am I in?

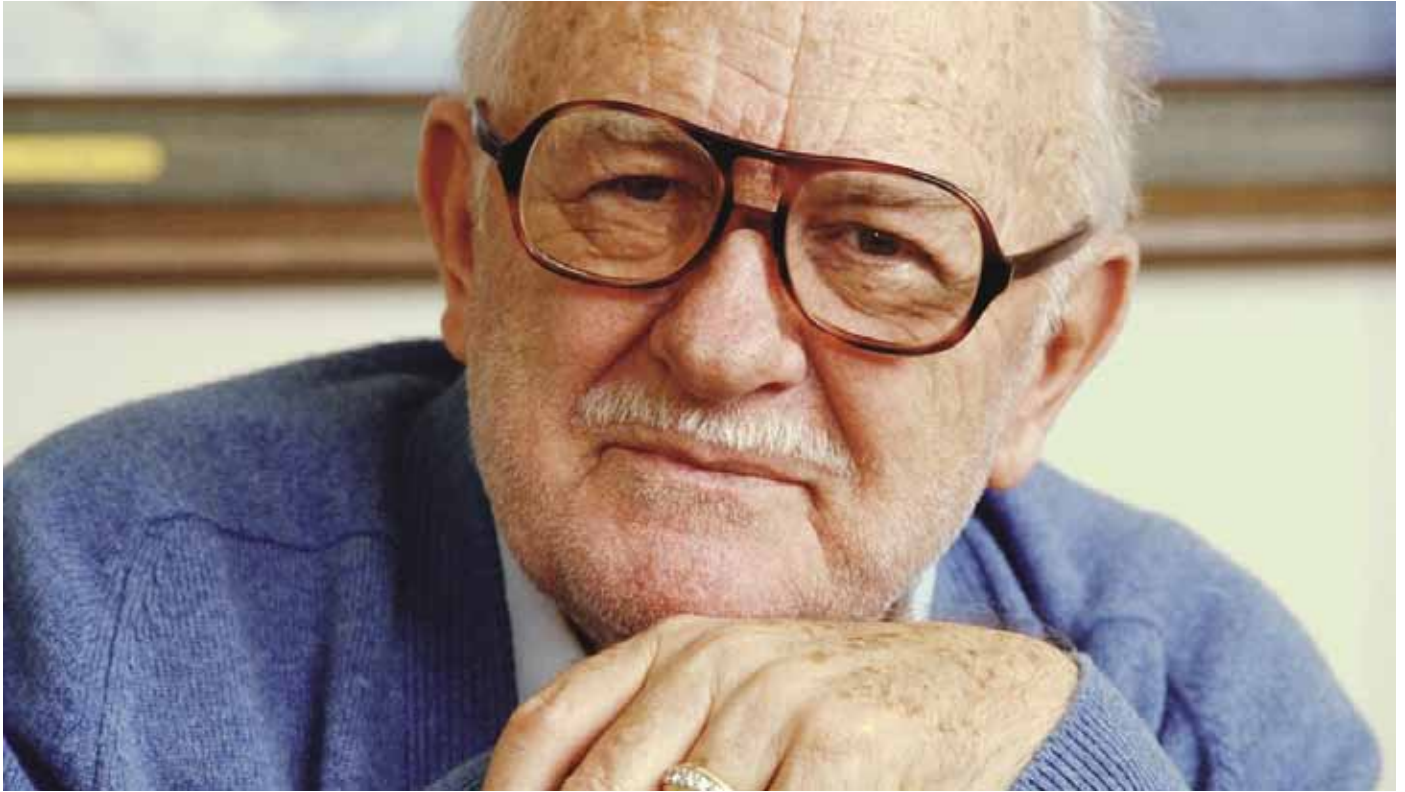
What strengths do I hold?

Identify three people that you know from each of the different generations. Perhaps you can't personally name three people from each generation outside of your own family; it wouldn't be too surprising if you can't. Now that you have some awareness of this, perhaps an opportunity will present itself to you to connect with someone from another generation. This could be something simple like initiating a conversation at the bus stop or in a shop. Perhaps you might even choose to go looking for an opportunity, volunteering or offering your services.

—L.M.

My Father the Toddler

By Karbyn Eilde



I'd like to start this conversation with a flashback to 20 years ago, when I was still living "on the farm" at a rural income-sharing community. Although the "income-sharing" part is what usually gets the most press, the "community" part was the most important to me at that time in my life, as I was deep in the throes of toddler-dom with my first child.

She was sweet-natured and happy, easy to get along with and eager to help out however she could. She loved to paint and draw and take things apart to figure them out, and in general she was a creative and intelligent little girl who was an interesting conversationalist from a very young age. In short, she was delightful, and she was adored and doted on by all.

All that notwithstanding, young children do require constant attention, especially during infancy, toddlerhood, and the early years of childhood. It is a life stage that is both physically and mentally exhausting for the parents and so I say *thank goodness* for my community during that time in our lives, or we might not have made it safely through the fog of exhaustion that is typical for parents of toddlers.

Now skip ahead 20 years from those days to my life now, and I find myself in a similar caregiving role, only this time with my aging father. He has been staying in my home for the past month and the similarities are numerous and poignant.

My father is also sweet-natured and easy to get along with. He's content to hang around the house most of the time, but he likes to

go out for ice cream now and then, too. He has interesting stories to share and he likes to sit and talk with whoever will take time to listen and visit with him. He has always been a kind and loving father to me, and I love him very much, too. I'm willing, and even glad, to be there for him during this time in his life.

Other things are also true, though.

He rarely sleeps more than a few hours at a time, so we are back to the 24-hour day that is common with infants. His vision is blurry most of the time because he misplaces his glasses often. He's "lost his teeth" again, after accidentally throwing away his dentures one evening, so we must make sure to serve soft foods or cut up tiny bites at every meal. He sometimes drools and he loses things and he leaves a trail of tissues and washcloths throughout the house. I'm reminded of tripping over a toddler's toys in the old days. He's unsteady on his feet and wobbly when he walks, but as determined as toddlers who are just learning to walk; we can only encourage him to hold on to a nearby wall or chair, since he insists that he is fine and therefore refuses to use the several canes and walkers that are available around the house.

Sometimes he falls and we make another pilgrimage to the emergency room. I can already foresee a time when he will need more (ahem) "personal" assistance, though we are not at that point quite yet. For now, I'm grateful that we only need to remind him to bathe...although we do stay within earshot in the house while he does so, just in case. His frequent medications schedule is relentless

and has much the same effect on our lives as having a nursing baby did previously.

In terms of his mental status, things are much the same. Most notable is his sense of immediacy—everything is Important for him and needs to happen Right Now, much the same as with young children who simply don't quite yet understand that "later" and "tomorrow" are even real things that can occur. And so, we are re-teaching Dad how to wait. His memory is okay, but not quite reliable enough anymore for me to be confident he can handle the details of modern life on his own, such as paying bills on time, monitoring his spending, calling the utility company, or even reliably knowing what day it is. But he is quite aware enough to remember that he should know all these skills, and in fact he is confident that he still *can* do all that, so it's a delicate balance for me, to keep him involved as a decision-maker, but still help him with making appropriate decisions. He wants to live on his own, and has rented a house close by me to do that very thing, but I'm not sure that he should, or even that he will be able to live independently. We have compromised on a six-month lease as a trial.

All in all, our "new normal" is very much like having a young child in the home again, and I'm not nearly as young and energetic as I used to be, nor do I have the same level of patience or interest in full-time caregiving that I used to have for a baby. I think back to when there were 10-15 adults willing to share the work of intensive caregiving, and I long for it in a new way now, when there's only myself, a housemate, and one teenager to help out. It's not nearly enough. More importantly, I know what I'll be missing in terms of having someone who is close by and readily available to help out during a bad moment or talk to about how hard it all is, and depressing, too, on some days. Sure, I could phone someone, but anyone who has lived cooperatively or communally for very long

at all knows that a phone call is not the same as having someone a shouting distance away when needed on short notice, or available late at night, when there's finally some quiet time for recovering and processing the emotions of the day. We in the house are working well together as we face this, and we talk things through every day, but meanwhile, we're all the same amount of exhausted.

We are only one family, with one aging parent in our home, but there are about 75 million other baby boomers facing similar situations, either now or soon. As those 75 million people start reaching this stage in their lives, where will they go? How will they and their families cope? Residential care facilities are exorbitantly expensive and can drain an entire lifetime of savings within a year or two. Personalized in-home care costs even more. Adult children with full-time jobs and children still in school can realistically be pulled in only so many different directions, and for only so long, before they are bound to crack under the pressure—will it be the Child or Adult Protective Services who end up being called in...or both?

Intentional Communities and Elder Care

Can intentional communities help with these situations? Should they? And if so, how? I think the answer is yes, they both can and should. Communities have led the way for encouraging all sorts of cultural shifts in how we eat, what we wear, who we support, what energy we use, how we communicate and care for the environment and all sorts of other areas. They can do the same for elder care, too, if they will. Here are some ideas about the "how":

First, stay open and welcoming to adults in late middle-age. With active lifestyles into the 70s, 80s, and 90s increasingly common, those visitors and potential members in their 40s, 50s, and 60s could very well contribute many long years of productive work to your community, before they would begin to need assistive care.



It's also likely that if they come to community later in life, it's because they have already fully explored and lived "out there" and they do indeed know what they are missing and are glad to be rid of it. Now that their children are grown and moved out, they are free once again to seek out a different life for themselves. They will bring extensive real-world experience and skills to the group and have great potential to be solid steady long-term members.

A reasonable concern, though, is to wonder if being a support for an aging population might become a financial drain on your community. I think, instead, it can be an income-producing situation, in much the same way that good things like organic gardening or clean energy have become. The world needs kind and loving people to help with caring for the elderly and communities need income. Based on our experience, I can suggest several ideas that would meet immediate real needs and provide a new source of income for your group at the same time. Families are already paying someone else for these services, and they could just as easily pay you, instead. There are opportunities for nearly all types of community-minded people.

For the more physically oriented community members, a great way to connect with the aging baby boomers and their families, while generating income for your community at the same time, is to offer a packing/moving service. When the time comes for an older person to move from their three-bedroom home where they've been collecting a life for 50 years, there's a LOT to pack and move and do and it can be overwhelming for the family to deal with all that STUFF at the same time they are assisting their loved one with the mental stresses of the transition. Just think what a relief it would be for them to see a truck full of friendly communitarian faces arrive on the scene each morning to sort and pack and clean and move, and with several people to help, the work is certainly more manageable and goes much faster. If someone from your group is ready for a road trip, then driving the moving truck to the new home could be another win-win bonus.

The process-oriented people in communities can fill an important role in helping families with the emotional issues that come with watching Mom or Dad regress from the confident, strong, and knowledgeable Parent into the shuffling uncertainty of advanced age. Granted, not everyone's aging experience is like that, but most of us will reach that point eventually. With young children, you know they are learning more all the time and you can look forward to their eventual independence. With your aging parent, however, the exact reverse is true. You know to expect only less and less as time marches on to its foregone conclusion. It's heartbreaking, truly, and hard to face these changes on your own.

Intentional communities, by and large, place a high value on communication and emotions and managing those effectively, and families need a safe and welcoming place to go for those kinds of conversations. Won't your community consider hosting a caregiv-

ers support group at least once a month, either for "donations accepted" or a small fee to cover the costs? And while you're at it, will you serve a meal, as well? It would be so nice for caregivers to have at least one night off from cooking each month.

After some time making connections in the extended area in these ways, it might be time to consider some type of more complete assistive care service as a community business. "Elder daycare" is a growing area of need. Many adult children feel comfortable caring for their elder parents at home just fine when they are home, but they are usually away at their jobs during the day and it's not always clear that Mom or Dad are safe to be alone on their own for so many hours. It's reasonable to charge a fee for your services, as any regular daycare for children would do. Or perhaps consider forming a separate nonprofit organization so that you can seek out grant monies for funding.

Providing elder daycare could work well both on-site and as an in-town business.

If your location is within a 20-30 minute drive of a town of any size, you can be fairly certain that there are elderly people there who would be glad to make that ride (on your bus, with your driver, since many of them no longer

The world needs kind and loving people to help with caring for the elderly and communities need income. There are opportunities for nearly all types of community-minded people.

drive) in order to spend the day at your Center doing various fun activities with their peer group. There's a tendency, I fear, to think first of endless games of BINGO, but clients would probably also enjoy art or gentle yoga classes, classes in other new skills, book study groups, helping with preparing garden produce or basic office work or any of many other similar tasks. And if your location is too far from town to bring the clients to you, then it's worth it to consider renting or buying a suitable space in town, and sending a few community members in to run a similar program. It need not be every day, at least not at first while you build up your reputation for providing a high quality program, but it's likely to grow quickly and soon be worth it to offer programs more often or every day.

When you extend your reach into the local area, everyone wins. Your community can diversify your sources of income while making more connections locally, leading to greater understanding, more support, and meeting more potential new members. Families get the help they need, and with more people helping, no one needs to be so entirely exhausted by the experience. Aging parents have a wider circle of supportive friends to help them stay physically, mentally, and socially alert and active for as long as possible. The world needs the leadership, influence, and example of how to care for elders that the communities movement can provide. 🐦

Karbyn Eilde lived at a rural community for several years in the 1990s and intends to get back to the farm (somewhere!) as soon as she can. The "little girl" mentioned in this article is now a young woman in her 20s and she is still wonderful. She is currently majoring in Engineering at a university in Texas. Visit Karbyn at www.karbyn.me.

The Power of Community

By Charles Durrett

Today we can text our sibling to find out what they are having for lunch in Paris, but we don't know the name of our next-door neighbor, nor probably their birthday—unless we've looked him or her up on PoliceReport.com...because, you know, we should know who our neighbor is. It's only prudent to be cautious.

Similarly, the increased need for police surveillance, emergency rooms, assisted care, after-school tutoring, out-of-the-neighborhood childcare, psychological therapy, and so many other institutionalized care activities that we have created reflect a waning of true community—for community can render these institutions much less necessary, if even necessary at all. There are so many pathologies in our society, and so many attempts to remedy them through institutions, graduate degrees, research, police, fire departments, social services, and every conceivable method other than personal engagement.

Many people are familiar with the idea that if the neighbor next door cares, or better yet, if an entire covey of neighbors that surround you really care about who lives next door—and who can act to support them—then the need for external behavior control mechanisms (from outside the community) diminishes immensely; likewise, the need for outside care or support, like psychological therapy, are less frequently outsourced from the community or not outsourced at all. Every one of these line items is immensely affected.

When folks feel accountable to their next-door neighbor, and don't call the police just because someone parked in their driveway, then the costly police are less required. The number one call received by the fire department where I live in Nevada County, California, is a "pick-up and put-back" call (i.e. a senior has fallen in their own house and needs to be helped into bed). A huge portion of our county's millions and millions of dollars of fire department budget goes toward providing services that a neighbor could do.

Last year the Paratransit shuttle for seniors (the big lumbering bus carrying usually one or two seniors, but capable of carrying 12) made 64,000 trips in western Nevada County for about 2,000 seniors to go to the doctor, to the pharmacy, to the store, or to visit a friend. Some people say that 30 trips per year per senior just to get them out of the house is far too few—others say far too many. Needless to say, there were zero pick-ups needed for the 20 seniors living in our cohousing community. Neighbors swing by to offer assistance if needed—"I'll just pick up your medicine when I'm there"—and their best friend lives next door. Last year Americans drove five billion miles to serve seniors at home, mostly meals on wheels and nurses on the go. At Nevada City Cohousing, that didn't happen at all.

We know that this is not sustainable when the funding necessary to provide these services shifts all the time: Kansas City just went from 14 provided senior meals per week to one, because of lack of gas money. Paratransit also just went from 64,000 trips per year to **zero**, because of a \$247,000 shortfall.

But: What's in community living for you? Why would you want to live in a community? What would you get out of it? Before I say more, allow me to tell you a couple of relevant stories.

First, recently our local newspaper's



Cohousing comes in all forms.

headline read, “17-year-old boy passing an 80-year-old woman has a head-on collision with 76-year-old man. 76-year-old man perishes.” That reminded me that, in the new senior cohousing community just two miles from that “accident,” a 77-year-old resident recently told me at common dinner that he went from using four-to-five tanks of gas per month before moving into cohousing to less than one tank per month after moving into cohousing. That was no accident. *That* same evening, an 80-year-old resident said that after moving in she sold her auto altogether. Less driving equals less collision risk, and *that* is no accident. Both of them now meet with others at their convenience, have dinner with others at their choosing, and often have coffee with their neighbors in the mornings. Most mainstream senior living is no accident either, but more of a set-up: a set-up for either isolation or institutionalization.

My late father once visited us in our community for 10 days. Before his visit he kept saying, “Ya Chuck, I’m coming up. But now please explain to me one more time, why do you live in cohousing? You could have your own house.” I could only respond, “Ya, well we do live in cohousing and we still hope you visit. Oh, and by the way, we do have our own house, but in the context of a high-functioning neighborhood.”

Long story short, he was the last one out of the common house every single night for all 10 nights—while sparing Katie and me the travel and construction stories that we had heard many times before. During those 10 days he cooked common dinner twice (without being asked once)! Then, once back in Sacramento, he lamented incessantly, “Why doesn’t anyone ever visit me?” And “I don’t know my neighbors.”

Finally I asked him, “Dad, you had so much fun in Nevada City. Why don’t you

just move into cohousing?” He retorted, “What would my friends think?” I was bewildered! “You mean the ones living in Colorado and Florida?” I asked him, hardly believing my ears. “What would your friends think? Dad, you’re 73! What are we, in high school? Besides, just don’t change your email. They’ll never know!” His words reminded me of Steven Covey’s sentiment, that one of the worst things that you can do to your own well-being and growth is to stereotype yourself: “Oh, that’s not me!” or “I couldn’t do that!”

I share these stories with you because for me they were a rude awakening. They made me realize—in a very close and personal way—that we *ARE* living according to nonsensical social restraints. And those are the same social restraints on which people base their “reasons” *not* to embark on senior cohousing. The number one of these “reasons”—or excuses—is the time it takes to put together a project. To which I say, nonsense! It doesn’t take long when there are homes available in a number of existing cohousing projects that people can just buy and move into immediately, and it’s OK to take advantage of the hard work of your predecessors and the profound community that they have already built there.

Community is what made my grandmother’s final years worth living. She lived in a small town of 325 people and was mostly bedridden in her waning 10 years. Fifteen locals looked after her; she didn’t spend a day in a nursing home. But she had that kind of small town caché. Cohousing is just that kind of reconceiving; the kind of reconceiving of community that we have been waiting for. It’s time to stop boxing ourselves into narrow parameters and face our realities. Many of us don’t have extended families nearby, we don’t have stay-at-home daughters to take care of us anymore, and we have few high-functioning small towns. According to *Harper’s Magazine*, 6,000 small towns have evaporated in Kansas since 1970, bought out by agribusiness. But if we look up, we do have cohousing, and cohousing-inspired communities, within our reach.

We have all heard it said, “People have to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Have you ever actually seen anyone do that? What we all need is support, companionship, to feel needed—part of something—and we need to have fun! My concern is: are people doing the best they can to achieve these goals that really aren’t that far off? As a cohouser myself, I’m motivated to make the lives of my neighbors as easy as they make mine. We are each other’s stewards in the ebb and flow of our living landscape, which allows us to know, therefore care, and therefore support each other without it hindering my life or theirs. To



Growing old is timeless.



These residents are musicians. They have to practice somewhere; their neighbors love it!



Cohousing comes in all forms.



We say in our office, "if it doesn't work socially, why bother?"

Photos courtesy of Charles Durrett



*Work days are also fun days. See the new book by Charles Durrett, *Happily Ever Aftering in Cohousing* (bit.ly/HEAiC).*



learn how to grow old together is a natural part of life, more of a freeing experience than an encumbering one.

Let's look at the issues at hand in a broader scale, a scale that lets us see the big picture. In Nevada County, we are collectively considering what to do with a couple of million dollars of federal Community Services Block Grant funding. It looks like the money will mostly go to seniors' meals and rides: food sustenance and social sustenance. Although there are in fact a lot of other needs—like drug counseling, childcare, suicide prevention, homeless shelters, and halfway houses—still the seniors' needs seem to get the nod. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but that isn't the most efficient way to ensure that seniors have a healthy life. Nevertheless, this CSBG grant at most will provide a tenth as much money as necessary to even support the elder needs. A supporting community allows seniors to be part of the solution, without consuming the lion's share of the already thin resources.

At the other end of the spectrum (from community to disconnection), I find it disturbing when I read that the suicide rate of seniors is up to all-time records. According to the *New York Times*, suicide in citizens over 50 increased as much as 60 percent from 1999 to 2010. The social restraints, excuses, and myths that we let rule our lives produce an isolation that demonstrates that all of the current social norms are unfortunate at best. Perhaps suicide has come to be the ultimate individual statement: you really are all by yourself. Which reminds me of a young local homeless woman who told me once that her grandfather committed suicide while alone in his big house. It made me ponder: who was better off? At least she had a community in her homeless camp.

The time has come to work harder for community. So what's holding us back? What's the elephant in the room? Is it ignorance? Decreasingly so. You can find information and articles about cohousing published almost every single day. Is it shame? *"I would be giving up my ranchette."* Are we talking about the same "ranchette" you work on until the waning moments, as the myth goes, and then they take you out boots first? Is it fear of commitment

and obligation? If so, then you really don't understand cohousing. Cohousing is not that you *have* to do things for others, rather it allows you the opportunity to *grow* to do what you want for, and with, them. For example, I received an email from the Mountain View Cohousing group about how they spent a couple of hours reconsidering the heating system, and telling me about what a profound, inspiring community building conversation that was.

Our society isn't conducive to making choices that contradict what is "normal." Choosing cohousing isn't normal, but it's smart. And sometimes we have to make choices that are the best for us, even if they aren't the easiest thing to do. That is what we tell our children, but we need to listen to the advice ourselves.

When I think about the amazing support the 20 seniors in our community receive, I realize that these were the few willing to look around and ask: What will *really* make my life easier? More convenient? More practical? More economical? More interesting? And more fun? I'm inclined to respond that it is the obvious ease of relationships, knowing that you're not alone.

I certainly do not want to overlook the 50- and 60-year-olds who move into cohousing because they want to live in a healthy and fun environment. For example, I went to a concert in Nevada County a



Seniors in cohousing elder each other, which is exactly how to have a successful elderhood.

month ago, only to meet two cars full of senior cohousers who had carpooled over. Having neighbors that you can break bread with—community—is simply essential to your wellness. Contrast this image of wholeness with how wasteful and deleterious to the well-being of most people the alternatives are, and ponder the self-imposed restraints. The myths that we live by keep many from considering cohousing and cohousing-inspired communities as an alternative to traditional housing models.

Can I say that growing older is timeless or is that a non sequitur? If you're lucky you grow older. But having a good time with it

is no accident. You have to plan ahead—to "grab the fun" as my daughter Jessie would say—to enjoy what cohousing does for you. Like, going to a restaurant for dinner and all your friends are there; like, when you get sick, having warm chicken soup brought to you; like, having more help than you need for lifting something heavy; like, enjoying plenty of space for your family to comfortably stay when they come to visit; like, several real belly laughs at every dinner. Sometimes people annoy you, but you come to realize those are beautiful people, and you realize that they prepared this incredible dinner last night, or they drove to the concert and got you out the door. What's in community living for you? Real life, and a lively life at that.

This is a call to break free of the self-inflicted "Oh, that's not me!" This is a call to action. Many resources—workshops, books, and opportunities to visit—are available. You too can achieve the kind of community cohousing seniors enjoy every day. 🐦

Charles Durrett, noted architect and author of Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living, introduced the concept of senior cohousing to the US from its success in Denmark. He has designed over 50 cohousing communities in North America and has consulted on many more around the world. His firm, McCamant and Durrett Architects, is known for its affordable and community-based senior cohousing communities, intergenerational cohousing communities, as well as mixed-use neighborhoods and neighborhood centers, town planning, and for its expertise in sustainability in the context of budget.



Dinner in the common house at Wolf Creek Lodge.

How Community Can Help Baby Boomers Cope with Caregiving

By Cindy Nickles

What's keeping us baby boomers up at night? I think caregiving responsibilities are. We're worrying about who will take care of us, how we'll take care of family members, friends, and pets, and what it will all cost. We're thinking about the most obvious caregiving responsibilities such as shopping for groceries, preparing and delivering meals, doctor visits, physical therapy appointments, hospital stays, and pharmacy errands. Also on our minds might be what happens after the call to begin hospice care is made.

"Four in 10 American adults are family caregivers," according to *The View From Here: Who Cares*, a documentary from Capital Public Radio in Sacramento, California (www.cpradio.org/news/the-view-from-here/2014/05/09/who-cares).

"Everybody I talk to says, 'How are we going to get older?'" said Kira Reginato, an elder care manager, before introducing architect and author Chuck Durrett of The Cohousing Company, who spoke recently at the Commonwealth Club's Grownup Forum in San Francisco.

In his presentation titled "The Power of Community—Senior Cohousing," Chuck described how he "grew up in a neighborhood where people knew each other, cared about each other, and supported each other."

He said, "Unless you know each other, you're not going to care for each other." His quote is now my bottom line when I think of caregiving.

As I write this, Dottie's napping on the sofa, snuggled in a blanket and snoring away. Am I Dottie's caregiver? Yes—if dog-sitting counts as caregiving. We go for walks and play games of fetch; I feed her kibble and keep her water bowl filled. Long story, short, I volunteered to take care of Dottie when her owner, a neighbor of mine, had her original pet-sitting plans fall through. Her friend, also a baby boomer, had to back out of Dottie's care to instead care for her mother after surgery.

In addition to pet-sitting, I think caregiving also covers being available to listen; taking time out for a friend's favorite activity, whether it's bocce ball, cards, a cup of coffee, or a chat about the weather; and checking on a neighbor's home who's away on vacation, on sabbatical, or for work.

Isn't it wonderful that three generations will all be living in Eu-

gene's Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing? Think of the endless opportunities for caregiving.

California's Mountain View Cohousing Community offers this perspective: "We expect that neighbors in this cohousing community may give more assistance to each other than those in typical single family, condominium, or apartment settings. This mutual assistance as we age may enable us to stay living in our own units for a longer time than would otherwise be the case." (*See mountainviewcohousing.org.*)

During his Commonwealth Club talk, Chuck said he has watched seniors living in cohousing where they have figured out how to manage their own caregiving better than anyone else. "It means hiring caregivers, don't get me wrong."

A roundup of options to help with our future needs could include set-aside rooms in the common house or other shared facilities for caregivers; the use of units for short-term rentals for friends and relatives to stay close by for extended visits; offering a first-floor room in the common house to a community member who breaks a leg and owns a second-story unit; and having a household helper or care-



giver live in one of the bedrooms in our units.

Then there's also the use of doors designed for easy opening, units and common houses made wheelchair accessible, and Braille signs and hearing loops.

If health deteriorates to the point that the only option is a long-term care facility that offers round-the-clock care, friends can visit—especially at mealtimes—to continue the relationships formed in community.

"Caregivers cannot change or lessen their responsibilities," wrote Mary McDaniel Cail, author of *Alzheimer's: A Crash Course for Friends and Relatives*, in a recent *Los Angeles Times* commentary. "But friends can join forces to help in ways that will make a real difference."

Caregiving is not a new conversation, and it's not one that is going to go away. It's one we baby boomers need to continue...so that it won't be a worry keeping us up at night. 🐦

Cindy Nickles is a member of Oakleigh Meadow, a cohousing community forming in Eugene, Oregon (www.oakleighmeadow.org).

Senior Cohousing in Canada: How Baby Boomers Can Build Social Portfolios for Aging Well

By Margaret Critchlow

The news that household debt is on the rise in many parts of the world is usually cause for anxiety rather than celebration. But in the southwest Pacific country of Vanuatu where I have lived and worked as an anthropologist, household debt reassures people that they can relax and not worry about the future. Indebtedness is their best insurance. Some of their debts are financial—they may owe a fellow in the next village who contributed a pig to their mother’s funeral or be indebted to a brother for paying a child’s school fees. But what is important to understand is that financial debt follows social pathways, and that social indebtedness ensures enduring relationships.

To be fully human in Vanuatu is to live in a community of relationships. If exchanges are square, like a cash transaction in which both sides end up owing nothing, there is no relationship. Social investments—a pig given at a wedding, a chicken to appease a grudge, cooked rice for a toothless elder—are always slightly imbalanced—I owe you or you owe me—and our indebtedness ensures that the relationships continue. In

crisis or as you age, you can call on those relationships and be confident that you will receive what you need. There are few doctors, scarcely any pensions, little cash, but also no starvation and a lot of joy. In fact, Vanuatu topped the first Happy Planet index in 2006.

In Vanuatu, everyone ages in place because there are no alternatives—no retirement homes, assisted living, etc. Like the people of Vanuatu, most of us want to age in place. In North America and Western Europe, most don’t want to move to “The Home” until they are ready. Often people don’t think they are ready until it’s too late. So we may stay in our homes for “as long as possible” or sometimes longer. Eventually, perhaps our children move us into a place they select for us.

Aging in Place

In Canada, it is fortunate that most of us want to age in place, because we may not have many other options. The demographic bulge as baby boomers age will tax our health care systems. In a decade, 30 percent of the Canadian population will be retirement age. Our state-supported health care system is challenged to keep up with the demands of our aging population. Meanwhile a sluggish global economy, not fully recovered from the recession that began in 2008, inhibits state support even as it reduces personal savings and increases household debt.

Aging in place may be necessary but it is not always the ideal choice that it appears to be. First, retrofitting a home to meet the needs of aging occupants may be financially unaffordable. Second, once a home is adapted for aging in place, the cost of maintenance, taxes, and bringing in outside help may be unaffordable, especially to seniors on a fixed budget. The wealthy can afford these costs. The poor can receive basic services at little or no charge. The middle class may be out of luck.

A third reason that aging in place may not be an ideal choice is this: Rich, poor, or part of the middle class, no one can afford the social isolation that often accompanies aging in place. Recent research suggests that stronger social relationships are associated with 50



Kids in Vanuatu are some of the happiest on the planet.

Douglas Campbell



Douglas Campbell



To be fully human in Vanuatu is to live in a community of relationships.

Douglas Campbell



Course participants learning new ways to play.



Harboursiders hosting pizza night.

Weekend “Aging Well in Community” participants, September 2013. The course appeals to young people, too.



Andrew Moore leads course participants in learning new ways to play.

percent greater chances of longevity. Surprisingly, the mortality risk posed by social isolation is as great as other risk factors such as smoking.

Building a Social Portfolio

What if building a **social portfolio** had the same importance as building a financial portfolio? Could you act like you live in Vanuatu? Invest in relationships? Diversify? You probably won't need a lot of support to age in place, just a little. The baby boomer generation has a chance to take charge of the next chapter of their lives as they did the earlier ones. What a great opportunity to reconnect with youthful dreams of changing the world by living values of co-operation and sustainability!

A rich and diverse social portfolio is much easier to build if one is not car-dependent. Imagine living in a beautifully designed home in the centre of a town that is walkable to everything you need. A home that has few steps, little maintenance, and lots of connection with cooperative neighbours. It is compact but shares a large common house with guest rooms for visitors and a suite for a caregiver when needed. Not an institution, but a home you own in a sustainable neighbourhood you help organize and manage. You work with the architect to design it. It is built green to keep energy costs very low, maybe even at zero. You don't have to be “old” to live there but you have to endorse an “aging-in-place-friendly” vision and be willing to cooperate with your neighbour.

This kind of place exists—it's called senior cohousing.

Canadian Senior Cohousing

Our nonprofit Canadian Senior Cohousing Society raises awareness, applies for grants, and conducts research. In partnership with Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia, we offer a two-day course called “Dare to Age Well in Community.” Our society promotes the development of senior cohousing communities in Canada. Ronaye Matthew, an experienced project manager who created Wolf Willow, the first senior cohousing in Canada, is working with us to create Harbourside Cohousing, the first in British Columbia. We believe that this can be a prototype for a made-in-Canada model for aging, not just in place but in community. For me, it is a

model for a Canadian solution for aging in place, inspired by one of the happiest places on the planet.

Senior cohousing creates socially, financially, and environmentally sustainable communities for the second half of life. Common facilities include housing for a caregiver whom residents hire as needed. Members provide voluntary mutual assistance for each other (co-caring) that encourages well-being and aging in place. Like multi-generational cohousing these are intentionally cooperative neighbourhoods where each household owns a small but complete home and spacious common facilities are shared. Well-established in Europe, especially in Denmark where it emerged from multi-generational cohousing in the 1990s, senior cohousing is new to North America.

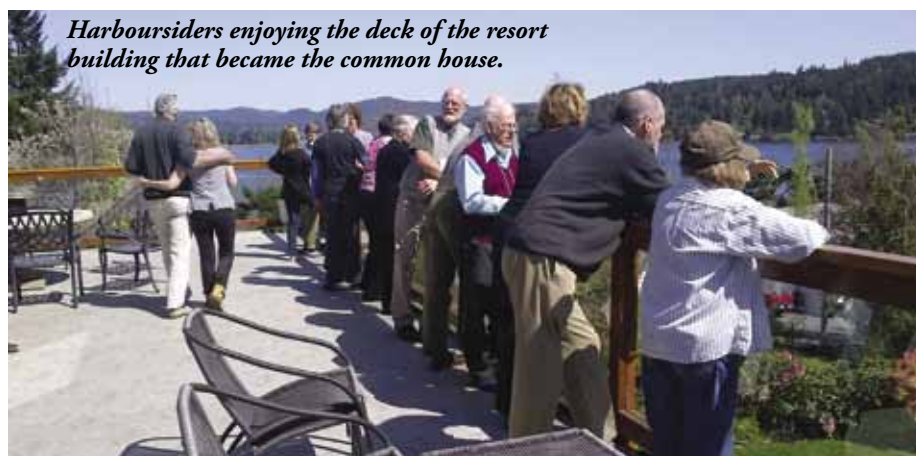
The Right Place at the Right Time

Senior cohousing is about being in the right place at the right time in one's life. The creation of Harbourside exemplifies that serendipity. After lecturing about cohousing for years in York University anthropology courses, I left Toronto in 2004 for a sabbatical year on Vancouver Island off Canada's west coast. The small town of Sooke, self-described as "where the rainforest meets the sea," captivated me with the beauty of its place and its people. I soon knew that if there were ever a place to walk my cohousing talk, this was it. A group of



"Dare to Age Well in Community": Day Two flip chart.

Margaret Critchlow



Harboursiders enjoying the deck of the resort building that became the common house.

Susan Eyres



Some Harbourside members on the cohousing's wharf with common house in background.

Margaret Critchlow

like-minded people formed and went so far as looking for land, but, as is so often the case with such ventures, when it came time to put money on the table, no one was quite ready.

By 2010, the time was right. I moved my mother into a "very nice" retirement home back east and knew in my heart it was not what I wanted for myself as I grew older. I wanted to have a say in the location and design of my home, be car non-dependent, choose who was hired to provide my care, and most of all, give and receive mutual support that would enable me and my neighbours to flourish as we aged well in community. My friends and I talked, and discovered this was what they wanted as well. We could see the pressure our baby boomer demographic was about to put on the health care system. We decided to get creative and look after our own old age. A

friend and I called a meeting above a grocery store to gauge local interest and 30 people showed up. Our journey into co-housing had begun.

Meanwhile, in 2009 *The Senior Cohousing Handbook* was published. It clearly outlined the many steps for a grassroots group to create a senior cohousing community. The author, Charles Durrett, had brought the cohousing concept to North America in 1988 from Denmark where he had observed its success, especially as housing for young couples with children. For these families, supportive neighbours, economies of scale from shared ownership of resources, and the privacy of a single family home all made cohousing very attractive. In the 1990s, Durrett had seen the adaptation of this model to a way of housing people in “the second half of life” in Denmark. He called it “senior cohousing.” In these communities, members’ priorities shift from raising children to aging in community. Both the physical and social design reflected these priorities.

A group of teachers in Denmark who wanted to help seniors age in place recognized the critical role that social connection plays. Even then, the dangers of social isolation were apparent. More recent research, mentioned above, suggests that the mortality risk posed by social isolation is as great as other risk factors such as smoking. The Danish teachers created spaces for seniors to talk about the issues of aging in place.



Margaret Critchlow

One of several design workshops at Harbourside.



Sketch of Harbourside's site by member Warren Moore.



Sheila Whincup

Harbourside's Groundbreaking Ceremony, September 2014.

Durrett calls these meetings Study Group One. He developed a 10-week Study Group One to prepare North Americans for aging in community and he began training facilitators to offer it. In the spring of 2011, fellow Sooke resident Andrew Moore and I took Durrett's training at his Nevada City Cohousing where he lives in California. We then offered the 10-week study group twice in 2011 to a total of 44 participants. By the completion of the second study group it was clear that there was plenty of interest and commitment to the idea of senior cohousing.

Settling on a Site

The next challenge was to find a suitable site. (See “When Do We Begin to Flourish in Cohousing?,” *COMMUNITIES* #157, Winter 2012). Our group considered six sites before settling in 2012 on a two acre

waterfront property in the village where we could walk to everything as well as enjoy a spectacular view and the use of our own wharf. The property was operating as a small resort. The 3,900 square foot resort building included a common area for cooking, dining, and entertaining, three guest rooms and baths, and ample multi-purpose space. It could easily convert to a common house for the cohousing group.

To purchase the property, a group of eight households committed to pool equity of \$C 20,000 each, creating a limited liability company for the development phase with the help of an experienced cohousing project manager, Ronaye Matthew. The property was purchased subject to preliminary feasibility studies (e.g., environmental, geo-technical, archeological). Once these were complete the seller became a member of the cohousing group, which came to be known as Harbourside.

While development proceeded into preliminary design and a rezoning application to build 30 (later 31) units of housing on the site, our educational outreach changed tacks. From the beginning we had required that all potential members

purchase a copy of *The Senior Cohousing Handbook* and complete the study group. As interest in Harbourside grew, Andrew and I lacked the capacity to offer the 10-week study group as frequently as required. We also felt that the experience could be just as effective, perhaps even more so, if condensed considerably. We redesigned the curriculum and we developed a relationship with nearby Royal Roads University so that they handled registration and local arrangements for a two-day course called “Aging Well in Community.” We offered this course eight times in 2013 and 2014, revising the curriculum again and changing the name in autumn 2014 to “Dare to Age Well in Community.”

Co-Care

A crucial part of the course prepares participants for “co-care,” which is central to senior cohousing as an adjunct to the medical system in Canada. The idea of co-care is as old as good neighbours, but the concept has yet to be defined—there is no co-care entry in Wikipedia. In our course, we define co-care as a grassroots model of neighbourly mutual support that can help reduce social isolation and promote positive, active aging. It encourages independence through awareness that we are all interdependent. In a cohousing

community, giving and receiving co-care is entirely voluntary. We may choose to support each other through such activities as doing errands, driving, cooking, or going for a walk with our neighbour. We believe that being good neighbours helps us age well in community and have fun doing it.

While co-care is customary in cohous-

Co-care is a grassroots model of neighbourly mutual support that can help reduce social isolation and promote positive, active aging.

ing communities, in senior cohousing it can be essential to living independently. Studies show that seniors need relatively little support as they age, especially until they are older than 85. Co-caring neighbours can provide much of that support. A caregiver, living in an affordable suite in the cohousing and paid for by the members who need him or her, can help with dressing, medications, bathing, and other activities that are more than neighbours say they are willing to do. Economies of scale are possible as one caregiver can tend to multiple residents. Other medical and housekeeping services can be provided to our central location.



Lessons Learned and Prospects for the Future

It is clear from the enthusiasm for Harbourside that senior cohousing is an idea whose time has come in British Columbia. Harbourside, with its caregivers' suite and reliance on the Royal Roads University course, has taken a different approach than that taken by its sister community, Wolf Willow in Saskatoon. We believe that these aspects of Harbourside have made it more attractive to potential members by raising awareness and increasing acceptance of issues that can occur in the aging process. It is also encouraging that Harbourside has sold all units so quickly. A fearlessness, adventurousness, and sense of community arise that bode well for our success.

What else have we learned?

- There is a pent-up yearning for community that will come as no surprise to readers of COMMUNITIES. Senior cohousing appeals particularly to baby boomers who had an agenda for social change in the '60s but did not often live communally for their child-raising years. Now that they're in their 60s, the desire to reactivate youthful values is palpable, especially as boomers respond to the state of the world and the planet. Can we be the change we want to see? Are we the people we have been waiting for? Many seem eager to find out.

- Affordability is highly valued and difficult to achieve. There is a dance always between values of affordability, aesthetics, designing for physical accessibility, and building "green." Harboursiders, like many baby boomers, want it all.

- A personal and community commitment to combine co-care with a potential caregiver gives members confidence that they can age in place in senior cohousing and enjoy healthier, richer, more active lives than if they lived in conventional housing, or in the institutions they dread. One of the hardest things to learn, apparently, is the obligation to receive. Participants in our course are eager to share what they would offer to their neighbour but find it much more difficult to agree to request or even accept the same care. We recognize the challenge of learning to accept help in a culture that values individualism so highly.

- We have benefited greatly from retaining an experienced project manager with a strong commitment to cohousing. This adds to the development cost at Harbourside but we know that without her, the cost of our inexperience would be far higher and the results less successful. At present, only a handful of people in North America have this expertise, which is a major constraint on the ability to scale up senior cohousing to meet demand.

- Finally, Harbourside Cohousing is a prototype. If well-documented and if the lessons from our experience are learned, Harbourside can lead to the creation of other senior cohousing projects. Increasing capacity to facilitate the "Dare to Age Well in Community" course, and to develop senior cohousing, could allow for scaling up senior cohousing as a radical social innovation to respond to the "silver tsunami" of aging baby boomers. Who

knows, perhaps like the people I learned from as an anthropologist in Vanuatu, we will soon be cheerfully indebted to each other and topping the Happy Planet index ourselves. 🌸

Margaret Critchlow is Professor Emerita of Anthropology (York University). She lives in Sooke, British Columbia where she is a director of the Canadian Senior Cohousing Society and a founding member of Harbourside Cohousing. This article is substantially revised from a presentation to the 11th International Communal Studies Association conference in Findhorn, Scotland. The conference proceedings were published in the UK in Social Sciences Directory 2(4), 106-113, October 2013.

Progress at Harbourside Cohousing

The course and the participatory development process at Harbourside Cohousing are creating community long before move-in. As Harbourside's membership has grown, so has the sense of community. Shared experience helps create solidarity (see "On the Ropes at Harbourside Cohousing," COMMUNITIES #164, Fall 2014).

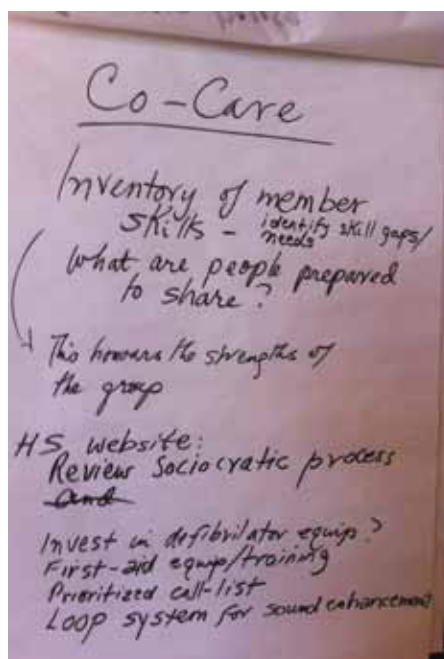
All 31 units at Harbourside sold before construction began in autumn 2014, and demand continues for what Harbourside offers. We are taking a waiting list, but also supporting other senior cohousing groups to succeed in meeting the growing interest in this form of housing for an aging population.

Not everyone who wanted to join us has been able to do so. We are building in affordable operating costs through construction to Built Green Canada/Energuide 80 standards. But this adds to the initial cost, so only people with equity in a home (or other net worth) have been able to purchase a unit at Harbourside. We have active participants who do not intend to move in immediately, and others who want to rent from them, but this has its own complications, including insecurity of tenure for renters, different commitments to the community, and the potential for a socioeconomic gap to appear between landlords and tenants.

—M.C.



Construction begins for 31 units at Harbourside Cohousing, November 2014.



Co-Care

- Inventory of member skills - identify skill gaps/needs
- What are people prepared to share?
- This honors the strengths of the group
- HS website: Review Sociocratic process and
- Invest in defibrillator equip > First-aid equip/training
- Prioritized call-list
- Loop system for sound enhancement

A Baby Boomer Rediscovered Community

By Jeffrey Mabee

Community was important to me as a child. My mother's parents came to the United States from Austria-Hungary. They were devout Russian Orthodox and founded and built a church around which a sizable community grew up. I spent many happy hours in that community, running free and yet knowing there were watchful eyes in most windows. All of my grandparents' peers had suffered persecution and they knew hunger and poverty. The US was their hope and their freedom to worship was their salvation. They were very grateful for the place they had found for themselves. They tithed. Their legacy is one of great generosity and gratitude.

Generations of families lived, worked, and played in this community. I was the second generation and enjoyed all the fruits of my family's labors. I had little idea of how hard won all this was, although my parents would remind me, when I did not want to eat something, that there were "starving people in Africa." I sometimes have thought of this as shaming, but it was an important lesson. Waste is an issue for me, and yet my parents made sure we were wanting for nothing. My mother labored her childhood away in her father's various industries. Her mother died when she was 13. She did not want me to suffer and she tried to protect me from her own suffering. She gave generously of herself and to her church also. She was both frugal and generous.

My father's legacy to me was more complicated. He protected me from the horrors of war that he experienced. He wanted to make sure that I would never have to experience the heartbreak that he, as a combat physician, had endured. He talked about it not at all except for two funny stories. I never saw my father get very upset about anything. It was as if there was nothing that important to fight for in the day-to-day living of 1950s small town life.

I do not know if my father had learned to create peace in his heart or if he just wanted to avoid conflict. But I do know that he never would have allowed me to go to Vietnam. He did not have to show his cards on that one because I pulled a high number in the first draft lottery. I believe my father was a peacemaker and felt heartbroken that we were at it again.

I decided at a very young age that I wanted to create a community to live in. I believe that this idea must have been born during my time spent in my mother's family's community. I saw a place where every-

one lived in peace, where there were no arguments and everyone loved one another. Steve, the man who came once a week to do our landscaping, was a member of the Russian Orthodox community and I used to talk to him about my vision. He would often greet me with "How is your utopia going?"

I left home for college and moved into a dorm with 550 other freshman boys (and I do mean boys). I loved it and thrived in this thrown-together community of burgeoning testosterone and newfound freedom. It is a miracle I survived it. My thirst for creating community increased and then I attended the festival of music at Woodstock and it was here that I came to truly believe that we could live together in peace. I returned to the university and fought against the war, helped shut down the university, and marched on Washington DC. A community came together in unity against the war. I moved into a

I took my broken heart home and my vision blurred. I started on the same journey that so many of my peers were on.

men's coop of 25 men.

And then my world fell apart when my father died. I took my broken heart home and my vision blurred. I started on the same journey that it seemed so many of my peers were on—wanting to continue living in the manner to which we had become accustomed. And so I did: a wonderful wife, two amazing stepchildren, an oceanfront home, good work, and two cars in the garage. My wife and I helped found a church, just like my grandfather.

But I was so disappointed in the first baby boomer president who I had so much hope for. Then came the second one who perpetrated war and told us all to go shopping. It seemed as though we boomers had lost our way. Where was the outcry against war? Why did we have to fight so hard to protect our environment? What was I doing living in an enormous house using 800 gallons of fuel/year for me and my wife? I felt I had lost my way in the pursuit of happiness.

Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage has given me the opportunity to redeem myself in so many ways. Here I live in an energy efficient home that, last year, was net zero. What a good feeling to conserve in this way. I also love that I no longer need one of everything. One notice on the community website or a few phone calls gets me anything I might need in, literally, minutes. This is frugality of the highest order. I love that my trash men are eight-year-old boys who also will collect my recyclables because we develop only a small plastic grocery bag of trash per week. That they understand the difference is a joy as well.

Living here also gives me the opportunity to correct some of the legacies that were not so useful. Here I am learning to speak my truth out loud, even if it is anger or pain or fear. I am learning how to accept the many different ways people have of encountering their world, which in the case of living in community might also be mine. It is one thing to witness people from a distance and another entirely to have to make decisions with them. There is, I would venture to guess, no more challenging place for me to learn how to create peace in my heart—no more challenging place for me to create deep compassion. It is incumbent upon me here, like no other place I have lived, to take responsibility for how I create my reality.

I think many parents of baby boomers would find this way of life fascinating. I wish my parents and grandparents were around so I could show it to them. And Steve, I've found my utopia, it just isn't quite as utopian as I had fantasized! 🍷

Jeffrey Mabee has lived in Belfast, Maine for 33 years and is a founding member of the UU Church of Belfast and Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage (mainecohousing.org). He is a seaman, plantsman, photographer, horologist, grandfather, kite flyer, and bubble master. He has a psychotherapy practice with his wife of 25 years. Now that he has downsized by 75 percent he spends his time trying to figure out what to do with all his stuff!



Photos courtesy of Jeffrey Mabee



Some would say we've never been away, but we have, joining the rat race, hibernating, accommodating, making a living, and raising children. This time we have to come back to finish the job we started 50 years ago. The first time around we liberated ourselves, for just a brief moment; now we have the monumental and contradictory job of liberating the world from our selves.

Selfish citizens, we baby boomers once had it all but did not know what we were supposed to do with it. For the first time in history, with the invention of the pill and before AIDS spoiled the party, we had sex and free love without guilt and consequences. We had illuminations of the herbal and chemical kind and super consciousness of the magical mystery trips. Our world, bathed in the glow of the summer of love in 1967, reverberated to the political and social challenges of 1968.

Fed on an intoxicating diet of "sex and drugs and rock and roll" we even had the choice between "sitting in" or "dropping out." By decade's end we felt like champions of the world; freed of generations of limiting social mores, we reinvented ourselves. Music, art, and a new experimental culture took a quantum leap into the future. We did not care for the mundanities of life. Earning money was easy, as work was plentiful; and even better still, if you still lived at home, parents would provide. Going to war—as many a poorer people, missing out on this adventure, had to do—was anathema. Our new mantra was "make love not war."

The revolutionary '60s danced straight into the hedonistic party of the '70s. Under the influence of our addictions to the trappings of our newfound lifestyle, we were losing sight of our ideals and our vows to each other to relate passionately and compassionately to all sentient being who share the planet.

By the '80s these ideals had given way to a new reality of greed

and consumerism. We exchanged freedom for a mortgage and life for life insurance. The writing had been on the wall for some time, or in our case it was "one more brick in the wall" of separation. "Greed is good" was and still is the Wall Street mantra.

The '90s and the beginning of our new millennium have consolidated our position in the world that knows only continued growth at the expense of finite resources. We have no one else to blame; we have always been the voting majority in our society. Later generations, including those of our children and grandchildren, known by such impersonal names as X, Y, and Z, continue to live in our shadow and will now be expected to provide for us in our retirement.

We have come full circle. Those of us who were adolescent (a

recent phenomenon at the time—the word teenager had just been coined) in the 1960s and 1970s are now on the verge of reaching a similar unique experience in our 60s and 70s years. Our life's journey resembles

What are we going to do with this opportunity while we still have reasonable health, wealth, time, and hopefully greater wisdom?

a palindrome, a word that reads the same forwards as backwards like ABBA. We start with childhood, move into adolescence, take on adulthood but now, before succumbing to the inevitable second childhood (Shakespeare's *sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything*), we have a chance for one last fling—second adolescence.

Just as the teenager concept was first introduced as a recognized stage in life in the late 1950s and early '60s (old photos of our relatives confirm how before then we went straight from childhood into adulthood), we stand at the beginning of what can easily become a new social revolution. There are so many similarities between adolescence and second adolescence (Elderescence?) which dovetail neatly, signifying amazing opportunities for both us and the world. In adolescence we had a relatively carefree lifestyle, before the responsibilities of mortgages and children. In second adolescence we have just paid off our mortgages and our children have

left or are leaving home and we are relatively carefree again.

That first groundbreaking period of our adolescence lasted only 10 years or so for each of us, yet now we have approximately 20 years before we settle into serious old age. What are we going to do with this opportunity while we still have reasonable health, wealth, time, and hopefully greater wisdom?

There are massive challenges awaiting us, including the effects of climate change and rampant economic instability, which are developing into potentially global, life-threatening catastrophes. The causes of these we were well aware of in the 1960s; President Carter even installed solar panels on the roof of the White House in the '70s; but we got sidetracked and dropped the ball.

These issues have now come back to haunt us and if we are not sharp, bury us. We consciously and unconsciously created these monsters and it clearly falls on us to resolve them rather than leave them to the next generation, who will all be struggling to keep us in the manner to which we have become accustomed. Einstein said "The world will not evolve past its current state of crisis by using the same thinking that created the situation. This requires us all to think and to act differently, and that's the challenge."

Are we up to this challenge? Our track record is not good; our current preferred lifestyles still make us all complicit in maintaining the status quo. At a national level this is reflected in the self-interests and missed deadlines that are now the norm at global climate change treaties. Vested political and business interests keep the oil industry thriving and ensure the renewable energy alternatives stay alternative. Fear and greed are still the prime motivators for running the world's economies.

This breakdown on a personal and global level could give Moth-

er Earth a chance to purge herself of her parasitic offspring. Alternatively, it could give us the motivation for a last collective superhuman effort to break through our collective insanity to create a liberated physical, social, and spiritual world.

Yes, we're back, but do we have what it takes this time? 🐦

Andrew Moore is an Architect who ensures that communities define architecture, not the other way around. He has worked extensively with all levels of government, the private sector, and many grassroots organizations over the last 30 years. He likes to work on the "front line" where lasting change can take place quickly. He is usually embedded in the communities he works with: deprived inner-city areas of London UK, or squatter camps on the outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa. For the last eight years he has been working on an Indian Reserve employed by the T'Sou-ke Nation on Vancouver Island, transforming its community vision into a reality. (See "Power to the People: T'Sou-ke Nation's Community Energy Solutions" in COMMUNITIES #161.)

He writes: "Some of society's biggest challenges are yet to come, with massive demographic changes upon us (the Silver Tsunami) together with stresses created by climate change and rampant financial inequality. But there is hope: we have one big asset—us!—particularly the baby boomers. Boomers are one big community, whether we like it or not, and as such have always had a massive influence in the world. We must use this power, not in our previous selfish ways, but through our wisdom gained, activism learned, and compassion for all sentient beings on this Earth. Courage, Compassion, and Cooperation—a new Mantra for our new age."

Participants at a "Dare to Age Well in Community" workshop: revolutionizing what it means to grow old.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Moore

Transparency, Vulnerability, Interdependence, and Collaboration: An Intergenerational Perspective from a Boomer and a Millennial

By Melanie Rios and Skye Rios



Photo courtesy of Melanie Rios

I (Melanie) stepped out of the saddle shoes and plaid skirt that comprised my grade school uniform, adorned myself with a pair of faded blue jeans embellished with colorful patches, and began my four-decades-long journey to manifest the peace and love-based ideals of the '60s. But despite our best intentions, I've observed that it's not so easy to live and work together effectively in our intentional communities, social activist organizations, and workplaces. Dynamics that groups sometimes face include spending more hours trying to decide what to do than accomplishing tasks to support their goals, breaking into factions of people who judge and blame each other, becoming distracted from addressing what is needed in our deeply challenged world, and becoming bogged down in power struggles and resentments.

So what's holding us back from protecting our planet's ecosystem, reducing poverty and injustice, or peacefully addressing conflict? How can we interact with each other based on our authentic needs and offerings, rather than mask our needs with consumerism and violence?

Interacting authentically and tackling major world issues will require us to look critically at our history and challenges and improve our efficacy in collaboration. I propose that drastic improvements in our negotiations with each other will require us to break down our dominant social conditioning that was prevalent in the 1950s and continues today, which values individual achievement, identity, and intellect over the benefit of the collective. Instead, we will realize our

collective power in the embrace of a new paradigm where we value interdependence over independence, transparency over confidentiality, and expressions of vulnerability over stoicism.

My perception is that many of the Millennial children who were raised in intentional communities and other alternative settings by boomer parents are capable of leading the way towards this shift in paradigm, standing on our shoulders with regards to communicating authentically, expressing vulnerability, and offering and accepting collaborative support.

Interdependence

Our mainstream culture teaches us to value being independent. As children we are expected to complete school assignments on our own, working in competition with fellow students for good grades. A sign of successful growing up is for us to get a job that pays enough for us to leave home and live on our own until it's time to marry and raise a family. Elders are considered to be in good shape if they qualify for "independent living" situations.

I question this value of independence that was inculcated in me as a child. My 23-year-old son Skye was raised with a different approach to education called "unschooling" that allowed him to create interdependent relationships with mentors he admired; he helped them out with their work in exchange for opportunities to learn from them. He reports that when he entered college, he felt discour-

aged to see so many of his peers not know what they wanted to learn or do with their life. Ironically, their upbringing, which compelled them to focus on accomplishing tasks on their own, led them to become less independent as authentic learners. Once free from their parents, many of his peers spent their time partying and feeling lost. Even those that find a passion are often weeded out of competitive career tracks because of enormous demands placed on individuals.

Now that Skye is in graduate school studying capture and storage of solar energy, collaboration is encouraged, but so is competition. Students feel pressured to become “first authors” on research projects in order to earn their Ph.D., while senior professors spend much of their time competing for grant funding rather than designing experiments or working in labs. We’d be more effective in accomplishing our goal of providing the world with clean energy, he says, if we focused more on doing research without worrying about who takes credit for the work. In his vision, motivation would come from curiosity and progress of the lab as a whole, rather than hyper-focus on individual contribution and the prize of first-authorship.

Interdependent living is as important as working and studying interdependently, especially when there are children present. A Millennial friend of mine who was raised in intentional community currently lives in an urban community where three children are being raised by 10 adults living in two side-by-side houses. One community member is an apprentice midwife who leaves home to assist at home births while her two-year-old is cared for by other members of her community. One person works from his computer at home, earning enough money to subsidize the living expenses of several others. Another person grows food in their gardens, and distributes produce from the local health food store to neighbors in need. One person specializes in knowing the medicinal uses of plants, while someone else who enjoys negotiating bureaucracy has started a company which manages construction contracts to keep their network of carpenter friends legally employed.

This community seems pretty happy and relaxed raising young kids, especially in comparison to the couples and single parents I know who are raising children outside of intentional communities, hurriedly getting them off to daycare and schools in order to earn enough money to make ends meet. By increasing the ratio of adults to children and sharing resources, no one has to work too much, and their ecological footprint decreases along with their work load.

Some communities shy away from creating interdependence amongst members by requiring everyone to contribute the same amount of time and money to the whole, expecting everyone to participate in every decision, and rotating jobs amongst everyone. In my opinion, they are confusing egalitarianism with sameness. Embracing interdependence allows people to offer work and resources to their communities that match their interests, resources, and capabilities, while at the same time affirming that everyone is fundamentally of equal worth, and that each contribution is important. It may ap-

pear idealistic to think that everything that needs to get done will happen if there isn’t a structure to fairly enforce contributions from each member, yet I’ve been continuously amazed to see how given enough people in a community and an attitude of respect and appreciation for each job, there is someone available to accomplish each necessary task who enjoys that kind of work.

Specializing in our work also encourages us to develop excellence in what we do. I appreciate living and working in communities where a few especially qualified people facilitate meetings, for example, as good facilitation requires skill. At the same time, it’s important for there to be effective mentorship opportunities so that those without experience in an area of interest can gain skills in that area. Mentors and those being mentored have an interdependent need for each other, as it’s natural for people with mastery to long to share what they’ve learned with others, and for those without skills to long for learning.



Transparency

Living interdependently effectively requires that people practice transparency, meaning that they share with each other what is true for them, and listen with deep respect for what others are saying. Those who have learned the art of transparency are good at asking for what they want, setting clear boundaries, sharing with gentle honesty their perceptions of others while those people are present, perceiving and acknowledging their own weaknesses and strengths, and deeply listening to

each other without acting out on their emotional triggers.

The value of transparency contrasts with the values of personal privacy and confidentiality, which are both emphasized in mainstream culture, and are both important in settings in which there is a danger of violence. Clients need confidentiality to be honored in therapy sessions because they may have family members who might hurt them if they knew what was being said, for example. Many of us don’t want the government or corporations to be violating our personal privacy by tracking our online activities and conversations because we don’t trust them to use this information with our best interests in mind. Yet intentional communities, social activist groups, and workplaces operate best when there is trust amongst members. This trust is both a foundation for and created by transparent communication; they reinforce each other. Groups that want to function together effectively can use practices such as Sociocracy, Deep Democracy, Worldwork, or the Zegg forum to help them practice transparency if this sense of mutual trust doesn’t emerge organically.

I witnessed a courageous form of effective transparency when some founders of an intentional community requested feedback from their community about how their actions as founders were perceived by others. Their boundary was a request for this feedback to be offered in the form of nonviolent communication if they found themselves triggered by what was said, and interpreters were available to assist with translation for speakers who weren’t already skilled in using NVC. The community founders listened deeply to what others said, acknowl-

edged mistakes they agreed they had made, and gently corrected what they perceived were misinformed rumors. This process of transparency helped to build increased trust between community members and these founders, and set a precedent for community members to graciously offer and accept feedback in other contexts.

The value of confidentiality, when misapplied, can contribute to communication breakdowns and broken relationships within workplaces and communities. Gossip is one form of confidentiality in which people talk about others in secret for the purpose of venting and/or for turning some people against others. In healthy communities, people sometimes discuss perceived weaknesses of someone when that person is not present, but it is done in a way in which it's clear that the person being discussed is cared for, and that the intention of the conversation is to improve relationships rather than to turn people against each other. In these contexts, it would be fine if the person walked in on the conversation and heard what was being said, and they are often gently informed about what was said if it is perceived they can make a difference in the dynamic. But when these expressions of concern about someone are gossip, the statements made secretly often get back to the person being discussed in ways they can't directly address because they don't know who said what. This secondhand communication often leaves people feeling upset, powerless, and depressed.

An example of when transparency would have been more helpful than confidentiality was when I invited a friend to stay with me at a community where I was living as a resident coach for several months. One community member let another community member know about her concern with my friend staying, and this sentiment was expressed to me, without telling me who held the concern, or why. I felt sad and resentful because I was living in a new town where I didn't have friends, and working too much to make new friends outside of the community. A month later the person who had spoken with me revealed the name of the person with the concern, and I was able to talk with her. Her concerns were alleviated once we had a personal, transparent conversation, and this went a long way towards healing my feelings about living and working with this community.

Vulnerability

One form of transparency is revealing our vulnerabilities to each other. In the world I grew up in we were not supposed to cry, shout, or admit our weaknesses; we pretended to feel "tough and cool" at all times. At 20 years old I felt hopeless regarding our planet's ecological crises and confused about my dad showing up for the first time in a dozen years. I didn't discuss my thoughts and feelings with friends or family members, but sang "I am a rock, I am an island" as I sat alone in my room for three months, emerging only to forage for food.

I witnessed stoicism recently when a man in his 50s came down with a life-threatening illness that required his full attention. He

didn't tell anyone of this illness, and many of his fellow community members grew frustrated with his lack of follow-through on completing work he had promised to contribute. When I asked him why he hadn't revealed his health struggles, he replied that he didn't want to appear weak. He perceived that if people were to respect him in his field, he had to consistently show a strong face to the world.

My son Skye recently took a different approach to his own feelings of vulnerability. He was contemplating the more broken parts of our world: human trafficking; drone strikes on innocent people; the injustice in places like Ferguson, Missouri; and the causes of climate change. The burden he shouldered grew too heavy and he went public with his struggles, posting on Facebook a plea to crowd-source his mental health and request help in his recovery. Soon thereafter he flew from Denmark, where he was working, to Italy, to meet a friend with whom he felt he could share his concerns. He felt called to sit in a church in Venice, where he experienced an overload of insight about his role in addressing insanity in the world.

A confluence of factors resulted in a brief stay at the Psychiatric Hospital Ljubljana in Slovenia. When he shared this experience a few days later, friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances showed up in droves to offer appreciation and support in person, by phone, and by email. I feel so grateful for this support, for without it, he may have ended up like many others who land in psych wards and are drugged into mental sluggishness for months or years. With continued assistance from others, he is channeling what he learned in the Venetian church to inform his choices going forward.

I've come to see that expressions of vulnerability, affirmation of our interdependence, and transparent communication are attributes that strengthen community. By sharing our fears, struggles, and great ideas with each other, we relieve our sense of isolation. Others naturally open up their compassionate hearts to us, and feel safe to talk of their own thoughts, feelings, and difficult experiences. This transparent communication helps us to become available for receiving gifts of help from each other, weaving webs of interdependent connections to bring to life the ideals we hold. 🐣



Illustrations by Kristen Reynolds

Melanie Rios has lived in intentional communities for 40 years, though she is currently living with just her partner in Portland, Oregon. She consults with communities, activist groups, and workplaces on conflict resolution, governance, and culture shift. As part of her role in cultivating community, she enjoys dancing, singing, and gardening.

Skye Rios is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow and works around the world to study new technologies for capturing and storing solar power. He is active as a dancer and activist. Among other pursuits, Skye serves as Board President for a nonprofit, Youth M.O.V.E Oregon, that is dedicated towards ending stigma surrounding issues of mental health.

Time for Tribe: Boomers Get Connected

By Bill Kauth and Zoe Alowan



Tribe on holiday together on the Pacific coast.

We are a tribe of 21 people mostly born in the 1940-50s and a few in the 1960s. We are clearly boomers edging gracefully into geezer-hood. Lightly we refer to each other as “tribalites,” a play on the word tribe and trilobites (fossils). Humor is not formally one of our core values, but perhaps it should be as we laugh a lot.

We are group of people who share specific values, hold each other as a priority, and formally commit to each other. We become each other’s dear, trusted friends, social safety net, and extended family. The old story of “fear and scarcity” is giving way to “love and sufficiency” as together we are transformed into a new life.

Our “new tribe” model is different from the usual “intentional community” as we live in our own homes and not on shared land. “Bicycle distance” is our metaphor for living close enough to meet face-to-face with weekly consistency.

Over the years, we have experienced many living situations and know that living together does not automatically lead to intimacy and deep trust. Without property considerations, we are able to come together quickly to build our intimacy. We can imagine a wide range of possibilities, including living together, but it is not our main focus.

If this vision of your own tribe intrigues you, we boldly suggest that your tribe will become the ones you spend the most time with, trust the most, and will become your dear friends. These people

will cover your back as you will cover theirs. They are the ones with whom you co-create your life and have made commitments; they’re the ones you think of first in joy or emergency. You will know these people for the rest of your life, or their lives.

Learning how to engage people in our “New Tribe” model took us seven years of devotion and focus. There were some dramatic fails, like repeatedly calling a group of people together saying “Let’s build community!” They were always wildly enthusiastic, but for some reason that was the last time that group ever met. After too often “expecting a different result from the same action,” we remembered that classic definition of insanity. We learned the big lesson that tribe forms one person at a time, as a series of one-to-one relationships. This was almost too simple for us to grasp right away.

Once we learned what actually worked it took less than a year to have the first wave of our “tribe” committed and bonded around shared values and commitments in a workable ongoing structure. We meet eagerly at least every week!

What has been a most difficult and important part of building a co-creative tribe has been navigating our old conditioning. Often we have had to acknowledge and name our “recovering patriarchal male” and “recovering angry unseen female” aspects. Formative times have been when Zoe would challenge Bill’s very masculine structures and also be able to honor the masculine focus—and

when Bill has let go of protocol to follow Zoe's wisdom in listening to the group's need for organic flow and inclusive language. Both of us have been called by our commitment to each other and this work to mature and gently transform.

The process of transformation or evolving as a new human is something we know about from powerful weekend training events like the ManKind Project work and similar women's work. In tribe we see constant transformation in ourselves and others catalyzed by the week-after-week process of being together in powerful mutual support and love. We see the flowering of each other's genius!

Please note that we choose the word "tribe" very deliberately, as the word "community" has proven to be too big, with too many meanings. Tribe by definition is face-to-face, bound by kinship (chosen in our case), reciprocal exchange, and strong ties to place. Also tribe (not the family) is the essential social unit and is hard wired in us. We say "you can take the people out of the tribe, but you can not take the tribe out of the people."

Tips on Getting Started

Here is how we evolved the model we have found works. First and most noteworthy, we underscore that tribe starts with one person. This is a most important detail! One person must be committed to making it happen. And so it begins when the

"champion" or one who founds the tribe talks with friends she/he has come to trust over the years, about intentional friendship.

After enough conversation there comes a time to formalize the acceptance of an invitation. In our case, Bill invited Zoe and presented her with a written document to formalize her intention. Upon completing and signing her "Testament of Intent" she dramatically presented Bill with the same opportunity. This created a movement from thought to action and established a base for expansion. Now we could reach out, and present the shared vision, values, structure we held as essential, to one person or one couple at a time.

Some friends liked what we offered and accepted our lead. A small core group of men and women formed. Beginning with a commitment of three years we called this our family of choice. A small core group can become an energetic cooking pot and source of nourishment. This wonderful caldron of support catalyzed the next steps of building our tribe.

We eventually learned that for a larger body of people to stick together as tribe, they would need to enter a formal process of shared intention and belief. We needed a tribe training.

The Orientation and Initiation

Next—and this is BIG—we invited four trusted friends as "initiates" into a 15-hour training over five weeks, every Tuesday for three hours (though it could all be done on one weekend), to learn to feel safe and build trust. Here we shared in depth our values and structure, a practical conflict resolution process, and, very important to us, a way for men, women, and those of gender fluidity to be together in deep safety.

Everything we do is absolutely by invitation and mutual respect. Our ceremonies and rituals are such fun and often surprise people. Arriving the first day, they come up our steps to find two of us welcoming them with a feathered fan spreading sweet smoke around them with a special heartfelt welcome. They are asked to enter in silence past a transparent silver cloth, and are greeted with music.

We create a safe space for initiates to consciously practice intimacy skills. In one process we like, we invite each person to take the time to be with each other person, one at a time, and looking eye-to-eye, one says, "I am here to be seen." And the other responds from the heart, "I see you." (Then reverse. Move to next partner. Try it in your core group.)

The training is an experiential orientation where they begin to find their own place in the tribe. They learn our values of living near each other and staying put, meeting face-to-face every week, long-term commitment, the deep importance of gender safety in our tribe, how to resolve conflict in a safe way, and how the membership sequence unfolds.

The "tribe training" brings everyone onto the same page as to who we are, what we be-



Tribes members dance.



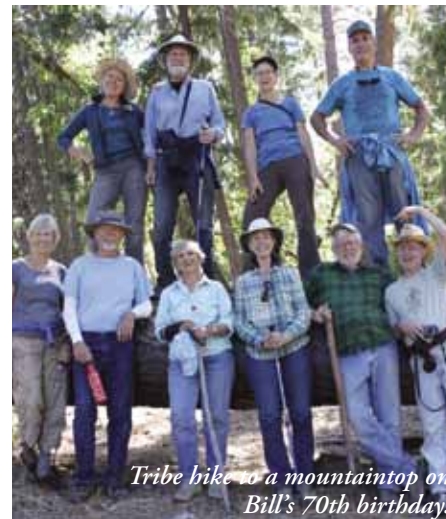
Part of the tribe just after an initiation ceremony.



The tribe circles-up in a park to share some delight together.

Photos courtesy of Bill Kauth

Mindful thanksgiving.



Tribe hike to a mountaintop on Bill's 70th birthday.

lieve, and how we function. At the end of the training they are “initiated” into the tribe as provisional members for three months to a year. It’s a bonding time of mutual observation, and when they are ready each creates their own initiation ceremony into full membership. They may then sponsor their trusted friends as possible members.

Our Commitments Reflect Our Values

1. To Place: we choose to stay put, to not move on.
2. To Each Other: seasoned friends growing together.
3. To Gender Safety: clear boundaries and transparency.
4. To Personal Integrity: we’re accountable and tell the truth.
5. To Long-Term Intention: we imagine a lifetime together.
6. To Celebrate Relationship with Divine Presence: spirit.
7. To Cultural Co-Creation: action toward sustainability.

Unlike some communities, our tribe fully exercises our right to choose who joins us. Here is why. Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, offers us a most useful distinction as he identifies “bridging” and “bonding” groups. Bridging groups focus outward, including different types of people in order to be of service to them in some way. Bonding groups are people of like mind, focused inward, working together with the intention of personal growth and evolution. Our tribe is designed as a bonding group, therefore we choose carefully whom we invite. The beauty of this is that once people have a safe place to grow and thrive, they naturally find themselves bridging out in service to others.

As founders we designed our roles to move from leaders to co-creative equals. Thus, once our group was of adequate size and competence, they felt ready and released us as founders. In a wonderful, blessing “de-role-ing” ceremony, the first dozen or so stepped up to be more fully responsible for the co-creative tribe process, and we as founders no longer had to hold so much responsibility.

Now as peers we are wrestling with how to make challenging group decisions in a good way. We have been exploring a Nonviolent Communication/Sociocracy Consent Decision-Making model. With each new challenge we are enjoying the dynamic process of building the plane as we are flying it.

The Process in a Nutshell

In summary, here are the specific steps of the process we developed that actually works:

1. Start with a Champion, the ONE who gets it started.
2. Identify others choosing this physical place, open to the adventure and possible commitment.
3. Carefully invite one person or one couple at a time.
4. Training in values, structure, and skills. This is the glue that bonds the tribe.
5. Ceremony and initiation, with formal commitments.
6. Develop a decision-making process.

7. Founders are de-roled and tribe runs itself.

A final closing story: this fall we had a tribal event relevant to our boomer status. One of our newer members was informed after a routine physical that he had a growth on his heart valve. Suddenly he was scheduled for open-heart surgery. His wife was away for the weekend. Within hours of this discovery, men from the tribe stayed with him in the night prior to surgery. In the morning some others joined his wife at the hospital as he underwent the procedure. A large portion of the tribe adjusted their schedule and held a song circle for him—singing and holding space until the surgery was complete. The surgery took half the time expected. Once he was home we regaled him with more song, and his recovery has been remarkable.

The biggest challenge when several of us visited him in the days following was to not make him laugh too much while he was recovering. Pretty tough for a tribe that should have humor as a core value. 🐦

Cofounder of The ManKind Project in 1984 and author of A Circle of Men in 1992, Bill Kauth has launched literally thousands of support groups (mostly men), many of which have become communities. He met multi-talented artist Zoe Alowan at Burning Man; they married in 2008 and live in Ashland, Oregon. Together they have been working with men and women building long-term, committed, non-residential community. They wrote the book We Need Each Other (Silver Light Publications, 2011), and their new book, Toolbox for Tribe: How to Build Your Own Community, will be released in 2015. See giftcommunity.net.

Short-Term Vacation Cohousing: A Great Way to Learn

By Deborah Carey with Ray Shockey

We are two retirees whose horizons have expanded through new opportunities offered in the intentional communities world. We hope other groups and individuals may be inspired to pursue similar options, which can benefit all parties while facilitating the transition to community living. This is our story...

A Turning Point

We are at another turning point in our lives together. After several decades of relative stability in our living situation, it is time once again to make changes. There are many reasons for this.

First, our only child, Carey, is now a grown man, graduated from college, and in the Coast Guard. He is stationed in Gloucester, Massachusetts, due to be discharged in June of 2015 and preparing to enter graduate school when he is no longer on active duty. He has also passed the Massachusetts Firefighters' tests. With a great boxer mix dog, and a lovely girlfriend, he has made his choices known for the next few years, at least. He will be in Boston.

I grew up in the milder climate of Long Island, New York, and Ray in Seattle, Washington. We met when I went West to graduate school. After I graduated, Ray found employment in California, which took us away from his brothers and best friend in Seattle. Soon we found jobs in Connecticut and ultimately our present location in Massachusetts. While living on the East Coast allowed us to be physically close for a rewarding reconnection with my parents Allene and Dick, and my brothers and their families, the passage of time brought with it my parents' struggles with mortality and finally their deaths. Our "temporary" stint back East has lasted 24 years and counting!

Now we are both "retired." However, because of our 11-year age difference, planning for the future has been more difficult than anticipated. Ray left his career in the public power industry 10 years ago. I left my architecture job to join him at 60, three years ago. The first year of my employment freedom (my Panamanian friend calls it jubilation) was a whirlwind of travel and obvious overcommitment to regional volunteer work. Now I find I need a more focused effort. However, Ray is happy reading, puttering, cooking, and serving on a few city boards.

Although we live in a highly functional town, we find ourselves becoming more isolated from much of it. When we bought our house, we knew it was within walking distance

to a grocery, the library, and town hall, and Carey walked to elementary, middle, and high school. There was also great energy in our neighborhood, with children learning to bike on our dead-end street, potlucks, and so forth. Our village has many social support networks. When a house burns or someone has an illness, there are instant fundraisers and other efforts to help. There are many activities in which we can participate and have done so, from the library book club to serving on a city committee. What isolates us is the harsh winter weather, the need to drive to attend most events, and the fact that because our son is grown, and we have left the work force, we have removed ourselves from the daily social and business life around us. We feel this separation deeply.

We are also living "lighter" on the planet. We have fully insulated our 1920s bungalow, put in energy efficient windows, and built a deck constructed with recycled plastic and certified sustainable lumber. We converted to a highly efficient gas furnace, refrigerator, and even a 2001 Prius. We garden, purchase winter and summer consumer supported agriculture shares, and such. We recycle and share our skills and resources.

The Move toward Cohousing

As a permaculture and Transition Town advocate, I find that shared housing is also a cultural fit for me. However, I wasn't sure that Ray would be interested in this approach.

To downsize and move seemed a good idea, while we both have healthy lives and are young enough to have the energy to make new connections and friends. When we agreed that we wanted to move "back" to the West Coast, the next decision was what did we want to move to? Would it be a yurt on a small farm, or a modest house in a neighborhood, or some other traditional retirement solution? Were these the only options?

I knew about cohousing, having learned about it in architecture school. I mentioned the idea to my husband. His reaction was less than enthusiastic! Ray was worried that living with consensus decision-making would



Photos courtesy of Deborah Carey

be tedious and intrusive, and that his privacy would be circumscribed. I too worried about endless meetings. We had attended meetings for a start-up cohousing in our area. If cohousers ran their meetings like this group of well-meaning folks, then maybe this option was not for us.

I decided to spend more time learning about cohousing, because I recognized that living in this manner would provide us with functional community from the start. We would also be able to share resources and meals. My 80-year-old parents had missed the opportunity to move to a supportive community, and I saw the result in the way that they became separated and alone.

First I did more online research. Exploring the Cohousing Association's website, I learned that many groups took a long time in forming, and that some never got built. In addition, I learned a bit about active listening, and continued to take the opportunity to visit cohousing communities. In the summer of 2011 I stayed overnight at Loch Lyme Lodge in Lyme, New Hampshire, not far from Hanover and Dartmouth College, where Pinnacle Cohousing is being built. There we had a visit from the Ecovillage at Ithaca designers, and I listened closely. I was energized by the possibility but unsure of how to proceed.

On February 15, 2012, Liz Ryan Cole, my contact at Pinnacle, sent out an email. "Unique opportunity to experience cohousing life in beautiful Sonoma County, California, during one of the best times of the year... AVAILABILITY: March 26-April 28, 2012. \$1300 for the nearly five weeks includes wi-fi, water, gas, electricity, garbage, laundry, community facilities, hot tub, etc. Owners pay HOA dues. No smoking...contact Kate."

Fate had dropped in and given us a chance to try out cohousing for a month, in one of the most beautiful parts of the country. How could we lose? I remember yelling upstairs to my husband, here's a great opportunity and his reaction was "Why not? If we don't like it we can always visit the city, and if we do, that's fine too." With no apparent effort while on vacation, we could live in cohousing for a month, sampling community meals, meetings, and events. I immediately contacted Kate, who with Marcin owned the unit. Once assured we would be selected, we worked out the arrangements online. I credit our landlords with being completely open to this approach; their generosity and kindness speaks legions about what cohousing can offer.

Testing the Waters at FrogSong

We arrived at FrogSong sight unseen, and were introduced to the community (www.co-taticohousing.org). First, Kate and Marcin picked us up at the Park and Ride. Once we were checked into the guest room they gave us an orientation. Kate had made a map of all the owners with their names and animals. Marcin took me to his yoga class in Sebastopol. They gave us access to the listserv, so we could sign up for community meals and join committees if we wanted to. They gave us a tour of the facilities (the laundry room was a highlight because of the system for letting others know what to do with clothes in the machines), connected us to community "mentors," and introduced us at the community meal. We signed a contract, gave them a damage deposit, and then off they went on THEIR vacation!

Living in the cohousing was different. Some rules were overt and some were not. Learning how to live there meant taking social relationships baby steps at the beginning. For example, loving gardening, I was happy to see the community garden needed help, and there was an Earth Day plant and mulch. So I joined the landscape committee to assist them, went plant and mulch shopping with members, and Ray and I pitched in to help that day.

But initially we weren't so sure we wanted to participate in every community meal, and we wanted to investigate the town, so we ate out and cooked at home often. The FrogSong community email listserv was very helpful, for arranging rides, finding out about group events like trips to concerts and speakers, and team decision-making. But some of the activities were informal, not listed, like the three-time-a-week walks, some celebrations, once-a-week group yoga instruction, and group meditation. To learn about them, we talked to our "mentors" and met the rest of the group at community meals. We participated as much as we could.

To learn more about consensus decision-making was very important to me, so I attended the monthly business meeting. Here I saw the five-card consensus system in action for the Homeowners Association voting portion, and for the cohousing discussion. I was impressed that this group had asked everyone to take facilitator training and then to use it in meetings. Along with respect for the rewards and difficulty of the process, we saw evidence of deep community in their interaction and mutual support. Apparently cohousing folks had developed a system for consensus decision-making which was both relatively expedient and inclusive. That was very encouraging and inspiring.

A Sea of Opportunities

During the time of our first of four month-long visits to FrogSong, we traveled to cohousing communities in Portland, Oregon and stayed overnight at one in Corvallis. We wanted to see if our California experience was unique to this cohousing, or shared. What we found was that although each cohousing community is made up of different people, with somewhat different visions, most had very similar values, facilities, and activities.

Because of this rental opportunity, we have learned about the value of conscious

(continued on p. 73)



Informal walking group.

Kashi Ashram: Navigating the Transition from Baby Boomers to the Next Generation

By Eileen Beal

The seed for Kashi Ashram, an interfaith community on the south bank of the St. Sebastian River a few miles north of Vero Beach, Florida, was planted in New York City in the early '70s by spiritual teacher-leader-mentor Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, who grew up in Brooklyn as Joyce Green.

“We have always been a faith-based community,” explained 49-year-old Durga Das Hutner, who grew up on the ashram and is now the community’s CFO. “But that doesn’t mean we follow the practices or principles or traditions of any one religion. Ma’s teachings focused on the commonalities of all religious paths, and our belief system is based on the kind of seeking, learning, and exploring that helps you know what and who your are, and on kindness and compassion and nurturing and service to self and others.”

“It’s kind of ironic,” he added, “that we are a very spiritual and faith-based community, but that we aren’t about religion.”

Seven Acres and a Dream

When the community moved to Florida in 1976, it had seven acres of land. The followers who came with Ma to establish the teaching-spiritual community lived in the two rambling houses that came with the property. It wasn’t until 1978 that the community incorporated as the nonprofit Kashi Church Foundation, with a charter, board of directors, and bylaws.

“We were faith-based and that ‘box’—church—was the one that we seemed to fit into,” explained Hutner.

Fast forward 36 years, and Kashi Ashram has grown to a sprawling 80 acres and is now a mature community, with over 60 permanent member-residents, many of whom have lived

and worked (and raised families) at the ashram since it was established. Satellite ashrams in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and New York City are led by Kashi Ashram-trained swamis (spiritual teacher-mentors). Kashi Ashram also has hundreds of non-resident members and thousands of followers all over the US. Most of the latter receive daily messages and updates via Darsha Line, the ashram’s daily online newsletter, and attend or dial in once a month to satsangs (gatherings) that include meditative chanting, prayer, and commentaries or homilies delivered by a guest spiritual teacher (swami) or one from the ashram.

Kashi Ashram is dotted with ponds, which double as holding ponds as well as water features, and gardens, many of which are used for meditation and yoga. And it’s criss-crossed with paths, many lit with solar powered lamps, leading to interfaith shrines honoring Eastern and Western religions. Five communal houses (some including accommodations

Photos courtesy of Swami Anjani



Yoga class on the dock.



Kashi Sunday Market.





Dinner at Kashi.



Durga Robinson and friends at Feed Everyone, one of Kashi's ongoing service projects.



Temples surround the Ganga.

for visitors and guests), a community dining hall (open to the public on weekends), and a number of other buildings have been erected at the ashram over the years.

Nothing Is Forever

Like many communities established by baby boomers in the counterculture '70s, Kashi is figuring out how to address the challenges presented by the community's aging residents, many of whom hold important leadership or administrative positions.

"Probably about 70 percent of our residents are in their 60s," explained Hutner, "and we are being active and assertive about retaining and providing for them." He sees the aging of the community's residents and leaders as "an opportunity to maintain our focus on service and for our elders to give back to the community by being mentors."

"Through the years we've done a lot of work around AIDS/HIV, dying, hospice care, education projects overseas, and senior care at By The River [a senior residential facility]. Since service has always been a big part of what we do, I think what we've done in the past has probably made us more prepared for what is coming than most [other intentional communities]."

In addition, since many of Kashi's buildings date from the '60s, '70s, and early '80s, it's dealing with the aging of its physical infrastructure.

It's also dealing with the challenges of attracting younger members and residents to ensure the future of the ashram and its teaching and works.

And it's dealing with the loss of its founder, spiritual leader, and "face," Ma, who died of pancreatic cancer in April of 2012.

"Nothing is forever and nothing remains the same," explained Becky "Yoga Ma" Allan, who became a non-resident ashram member in 2009. "The people who are now 'in charge' are absolutely moving forward in the direction things need to go to make the necessary adjustments to ensure that we [the community] don't just survive, but thrive, too, while at the same time honoring and acting on Ma's teachings."

"That," she added, "is Kashi's challenge and its goal."

Pulling Together to Create Opportunities

To meet its challenges and achieve its goals, Kashi is reaching out to and including

the children who grew up at Kashi, the “next generation,” in the plans now being made for Kashi’s future.

And, with the full support of the ashram’s older and next-gen members, it has begun a conscious, service-focused, and in some instances income-generating campaign to introduce potential new (not just younger) members, residents, and followers to Kashi Ashram by creating opportunities for them to experience what Kashi is, does, and believes.

Kashi’s recent initiatives are led by both old-timers—boomers—and the increasing number of next-geners who have returned to the fold.

“We don’t recruit,” stressed Swami Anjani Cirillo, a long-time member of the ashram and its director of community relations. “We make people aware of the opportunities—for physical well-being, for spiritual growth, for community—that are here.”

One way the ashram is doing that is through weekly Saturday tours, followed by a buffet-style, vegetarian dinner in the community dining hall with ashram residents and members, followed by a Saturday night satsang.

“There’s been a real shift in the last year or so in the age of the people who are coming to our satsangs,” said Cirillo. More and more younger people are attending.

In addition to the Saturday tours, the ashram has begun hosting a monthly Sunday Market that’s become a local event and tourist draw. Not only are Kashi-produced items—everything from organic salad greens to spiritual books, CDs, and meditation beads—sold at the market, so are art, craft, and food products made by people from all over Indian River County, where the ashram is located.

Yoga, including Kali Natha Yoga developed by the ashram’s founder-teacher, has always played an important role in the teachings at the ashram and the spiritual and physical health of its residents and members. So another way the ashram is offering opportunities for outsiders to experience Kashi has been by expanding the number of yoga classes offered at the ashram and opening a

yoga teacher training school there, too.

“As we promote both [the classes and the school] through our website we aren’t just increasing the number of people who come here for classes and teacher training, we are also building community, locally and globally,” explained Shakti Durgaya Zaks, a longtime Kashi resident and director of Kashi School of Yoga.

When the yoga school opened it became obvious that students taking weekend and week-long classes needed accommodations and, especially since they were yoga students, healthy meals, too.

Their needs planted the seed for a new venture: Kashi’s retreat center. To make this possible, the ashram expanded the staff in its kitchen on an as-needed basis, and repurposed buildings that had been used, until 2005, for the school the ashram had opened for members’ and (as word of its progressive curriculum spread) local children.

“It didn’t take much to renovate and repurpose things, so we’ve been hosting retreats now for a couple of years,” explained longtime resident-member Baba Rama Mitchell, who is helping market the center.

“But,” he added, “we don’t ‘market’ to just anyone, only like-minded organizations and groups that are service-focused and have a connection to spirituality.”

In her final months, Ma saw the birth of Sustainable Kashi, a new enterprise that’s using

permaculture to turn under-utilized land at Kashi into organic vegetable and herb gardens, orchards, and demonstration patches. The new enterprise provides fresh, organically-grown food for Kashi’s residents; as production has increased it’s also being sold at Kashi’s Sunday Market. As more land is put into production, plans are afoot to sell to local restaurants.

Through the international World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) Program (wwwoofusa.org), the new enterprise has provided an unexpected opportunity for “green-living younger people to get hands-on experience in sustainable farming methods and connect with Kashi on a physical and spiritual level,” said Soo Se Cho, the next-gener who’s managing and coordinating the program.

“Because of permaculture’s strong emphasis on community and sustainability it’s a way to



*Kashi founder
Ma Jaya Sati
Bhagavati.*



Yoga in the Dattatreya.

The River Fund's Feed Everyone program.



Happy youth.



Dorm guest accommodations.



grow community,” added Cho, “so, from the get-go, that’s what it’s been about too.”

Build It and They Will Come

Since Kashi Ashram and Sustainable Kashi don’t need 80 acres to thrive into the future, the ashram has made the decision to devote 25 acres to Kashi Village, a development with individual homes, townhouses, and a homeowners association. To date, seven homes have been built, and most of the new residents are active ashram members.

The decision to build on Kashi’s land, said Mitchell, who is more-or-less spearheading the development enterprise, will benefit the ashram in several ways: Money from sale of the land will pay off their final loan; it will ensure that the original seven acres and land where some of the ashram’s other buildings are located remain unencumbered; and it provides opportunities for more people, including those with young children, to not just build at the ashram, but become active Kashi members too.

“Unless residential membership grows, Kashi Ashram is in trouble, so we think the on-site housing opportunities are going to be a win-win for everyone,” said Mitchell.

The community-, infrastructure-, and enterprise-building initiatives and strategies outlined here are broad and sweeping in their scope and impact, and are supported and led by both old-timers—boomers—and the increasing number of next-geners who have returned to the fold, said Hutner. And he and the ashram’s board, which now includes several next-geners besides himself, feel they will carry Kashi well into the 21st Century.

“Yes, this is all new to us,” he admitted, “but we think we’ve found the resources—not just the human and financial resources, but the wisdom, too—needed to not just maintain Kashi but to ensure that it thrives and grows going forward.”

And, added next-gener Durgaya Palmieri, that forward movement will “consciously uphold the spiritual value system and principles that have always guided Kashi: kindness, service, and consciously and intentionally making the choice to live together.” 🌿

Eileen Beal, M.A., is a Cleveland, Ohio-based writer who covers aging/senior issues, among the most important of which are programs and initiatives that provide options and opportunities for older adults to continue living and aging in place.

Restorative Circles and the Missing Link in Conflict Mediation

By Arjuna da Silva

A Short History of Conflict

When Earthaven dreamed itself up into a group of a dozen-and-a-half baby boomers (and one Millennial) pledging to finance a deed on 300-plus acres of Southern Appalachian forest land, we already knew that conflict was in our future. There had been conflict in our past, in the group that researched and designed the vision and agreements we would soon tweak and then commit to. So we approved placing a clear mandate for accountability in dealing with conflict in our “Re-Membership Covenant,” which states that, “if conflict should arise,” we would agree to “first seek resolution with the individual(s) involved” and, if that didn’t satisfy us, “seek mediation...as soon as possible.” We were also to commit to “supporting and encouraging each other in moving ahead with this clearing process, if we notice that conflict has arisen.”

This procedure pretty much worked for a time. The Covenant was fresh in everyone’s mind, founders and new members both, and we were still able to pay a lot of attention to problems as they came up. Occasionally, I could say there were “casualties,” meaning that one or two members became so disenchanted with our attempts to mediate with them or their issue that they felt they couldn’t stay. Sadness ensued on both sides, of course, including the grief of their remaining friends.

As the complexities of conflict in a community setting increased, we went from simple mediations consisting of two or three people and one or more mediators, using basic techniques like *mirroring* (repeating back what we’ve heard another say), and processes gleaned from Worldwork (Group Process Work) such as *taking sides* (speaking on behalf of the other person’s position as well as your own in order to better appreciate their side), to a community-wide embracing of Nonviolent Communication education and practice. Occasionally, we’ve held larger group meetings we

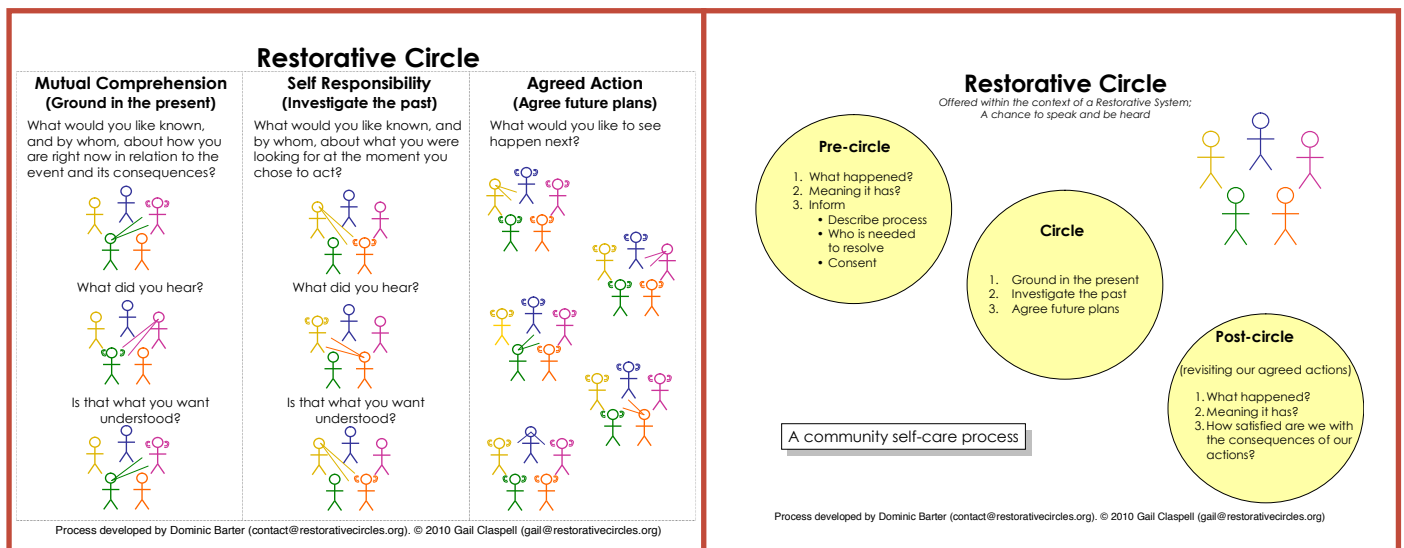
call “heartshares,” usually because the community itself is in conflict over an individual or point of view. Heartshares are sometimes quite helpful, but can also be heartbreakingly difficult to manage when the stakes are high, such as when someone’s ability to stay in the community is in question.

Our need to be able to walk our talk and fulfill our quite visible goal of “nurture[ing] personal growth, interpersonal understanding, and mutual trust, as a foundation for a deeply connected community,” pressed in on us once our promising first decade was behind us. Not only were there an accumulating number of unresolved disagreements that nudged their way between people’s ability to connect, a few really big conflicts showed up that for some time caused serious barriers between certain people, neighborhoods, and factions. Ugh. Were it not for the considerable size of our community, these difficulties might have become unbearable.

You might never know this was the case if you visited, because most of the time we are really friendly to each other, often demonstrably affectionate, and have made many close and lasting relationships that enrich our lives every day, and this also shows. But we’re human, evolving under all kinds of 21st century pressures, and we have *stuff*. Stuff—maybe I should call it congestion—*stuff comes up!* Sometimes really icky stuff comes up, when people do infuriating things they can’t seem not to, when we can’t stop ourselves from reacting.

Enter Restorative Circles

In the middle of a particularly low period, some of us feeling hopeless about unhealed disputes and the morale problem they create, a new way of approaching conflict showed up, literally, on our doorstep. Dominic Barter, founder of the Restorative Circles approach to addressing intractable conflict, had an entirely different



reason (he thought!) to visit Earthaven, and on the ride from the airport decided to speak to an impromptu group of us about his work. Surprisingly, close to 20 people assembled to hear what he had to say about working with conflict.

Without making too much of a fuss about him, let me say that most of us were transfixed.

After briefly describing the RC process to us (*see sidebar and diagrams*) and its evolution in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, Dom also expressed excitement over the possibility that a conscious restorative justice system like RC might take root in a community like ours. Then he jumped right in and asked if anyone wanted to bring up a conflict, to have a look at it, RC-style. After a few squirmy minutes, when no one seemed likely to speak, I brought up one that most troubled me. (Why not go for gold?) I didn't offer many details right away because the person I was most upset with was in the room, and I wasn't ready to name her. Yet my brief outline of the circumstances and my dilemma within them made immediate sense to Dominic, and his few sentences acknowledging it gave me such a needed sense of validation, I fairly glowed.

As it turned out, the other gal walked out, and Dom said we could continue without her, if someone was willing to sit in her place. But I hated seeing how tense everyone was, so I said I wasn't attached to working on it right then, it was just that no one else had spoken up. Someone did offer something less edgy at last, and we were able to experience how RC helps shape a reasonable outcome. It was a swift tour through the main three-part format, and it worked well, given that the two participants basically like each other and are pretty open people.

Thus began the last few years of study, practice, and a bit of training (or, better yet, *entraining*), distinct from the widespread eye-for-an-eye model of justice we've been exposed to all our lives. We now have several *entrained* facilitators who've already led a handful of both short and long Restorative Circles on a variety of issues.

It isn't yet clear to me *how* RC makes a difference, and I'm paying attention to that and asking questions. Yesterday, when our monthly practice group met, someone I've been close to brought up the possibility of working on the nest of unhappy encounters we've had with each other this last year, which we've been hemming and hawing about doing. Although neither of us needed much coaching—we'd both been to an *entraining* with Dom in Rochester, New York two years ago—we were helped to remember the guidelines by the other facilitator present. Well before the hour we had was up, we managed to use our NVC background inside RC's simple, back-and-forth format to move through fear, sadness, worry, guilt, anger, remorse, and even some shame, not always about each other. Although I was plenty doubtful to begin with, we seemed to each gain and also contribute to deeper insight on both sides.

I wondered at the end why it had been so much easier than I imagined it would have been if it were just the two of us, since we'd had little need for facilitation. Perhaps, we conjectured, the very presence of other community members, curious and compassionate as they were, was a key. Perhaps RC's grounded structure gave us just enough guidance. Perhaps, as I like to imagine, something is building around the world as Dom increasingly travels to teach, assist, consult, and entrain people. Perhaps we are tapping into an energy field that amplifies our potential for success.

Restorative Circles: “A Community Self-Care Process”

Restorative Circles are gatherings in which conflict in a community can be addressed non-punitively. This means the process doesn't seek judgments or penalties for perceived and experienced wrongdoing (although agreements may be made in order to make amends). Instead it seeks to restore broken connections within a community; its philosophy includes the tenet that conflict is “the most underutilized community resource.” Love and caring between individuals (if it ever existed) may not get hooked up as a result of the process, but a loving, caring approach to understanding what has happened, and how it's affected everyone, goes a long way to creating sustainable community.

The peaceful existence of any community depends on the way conflicts are handled.

Any community can design its own restorative system using the process originated by Dominic Barter (see below). A system for creating “omni-partial” conflict facilitation that is open to all community members helps build confidence in the community's future.

The Basic Process

When conflict occurs, anyone involved in or impacted by it can call a Circle. There are three basic roles to fill—the Author, the Recipient, and the Community Member(s)—plus a Facilitator.

Step 1. Pre-Circles. The person calling the Circle is “pre-Circled” (interviewed) by a Facilitator, which means they are helped to describe the conflict in terms of something specific that happened, the meaning it has for them, and any others needed to possibly resolve it. This person may be in any one of the three basic roles. The Facilitator invites the others who've been mentioned to be “pre-Circled,” following the same format.

Step 2. The Circle. All who agree to participate, including anyone “substituting” for a person in a key role, meet at the earliest possible time. This is a chance for everyone to speak and be heard. The intention of the format is to help ground the issue in the present, give space to investigate the past, and make future plans. In the course of the Circle, participants are invited to think about what happened, the meaning it's had for them, and how satisfied they each are with the consequences of their actions.

There are three basic rounds. In round 1, “Mutual Comprehension,” participants volunteer to respond to the question, *What would you like known, and by whom, about how you are right now in relation to the event and its consequences?* It is important for each speaker to speak directly to one particular person in the room. The Facilitator asks that person, *What did you hear?* and when they reply, asks the original speaker, *Is that what you want understood?*, assisting with some “translation,” if necessary, for the communication to feel authentic.

Once everyone has had a chance to speak, the second round, “Self-Responsibility,” begins with the question, *What would you like known, and by whom, about where you were at, at the time it happened?* When appropriate, the question might be, *What would you like known, and by whom, about what you were looking for at the moment you chose to act?* Again, each person has a chance to speak. The person they speak to is asked, *What did you hear?* and when they reply, the original speaker is asked, *Is that what you want understood?* Again the facilitator may assist with “translation.”

After the “Meaning” and “Self-Responsibility” rounds, the third round, “Agreed Action,” takes up the question, *What would you like to see happen next?* In this round, participants are asked to suggest, request, or volunteer actions they feel would help move the process forward. These can be anything: specific conversations, shared activities, classes to attend, gifts to offer, and so on. Ideas are discussed, and the ones people agree to are given a time frame and written up, even signed.

Step 3. Post-Circle. “Revisiting Agreed Action(s).” At the agreed time, participants meet to review and discuss the successes and failures of their Agreed Action(s). If further action(s) remain to be taken, a new agreement and date are set and signed.

—A.d.S.

RC Nuts and Bolts

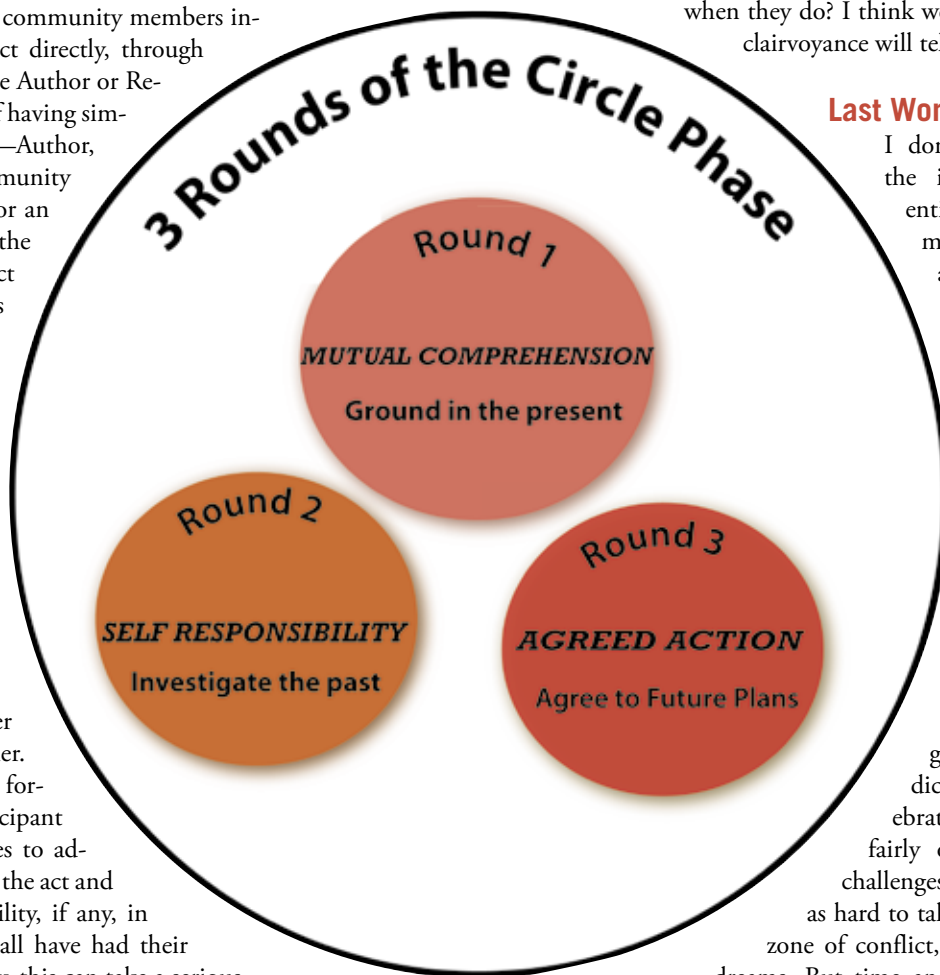
The Restorative Circles system describes a conflict as revolving around an “Act,” an “Author” and “Receiver” of the act, and the “Conflict Community” impacted by it. I’ve heard Dom say conflict is a community’s most abundant unused natural resource, a sure thing when people share resources and risks. Most conflicts reach the surface between a few people, but conflict never happens in a vacuum; it’s part of a community’s relational landscape. (In the places he works in Brazil, Dom said, any conflict is likely to involve thousands of people and be hundreds of years old.) The RC process includes community members involved in the conflict directly, through relationships with the Author or Receiver, or by virtue of having similar issues. Anyone—Author, Receiver, or Community member—can call for an RC process; thus the role of the “Conflict Community” is as vital to the process as are the “Author” or “Recipient.”

In a series of interviews by an “omni-partial” RC facilitator, those involved gain clarity on the meaning the act has had for them, then they’re asked to decide whether to participate further. The main Circle format gives each participant specific opportunities to address the meaning of the act and their own responsibility, if any, in the conflict. When all have had their say—and, admittedly, this can take a serious amount of time over more than one meeting—suggestions, requests, and offerings from anyone present are placed on the table to be considered as potential “Agreed Actions,” and what is agreed to is followed up on a set date when the group comes together again. When I asked Dom what gets restored in the process, he said “Connection...community.”

One RC process I facilitated, ostensibly between two people, though community issues obviously played their part, also led to a deep insight and that person’s decision to make a significant personal change. But the Circles we’ve had involving more complicated community issues have taken longer, and have not produced clear, crisp outcomes, which some participants criticize.

My view is that we are learning something different while we allow ourselves to work the process, something that might even change our community culture if we give it time and the space to grow. I feel that even the subtlest results—less tension, more

patience, some amount of insight—take us in the right direction, toward the very high bar we originally set for ourselves in that Covenant of ours. Those who are critical of the Circles reckon with impatience, with a yearning to focus on results instead of process, and a limited ability to hang out with the long, evolutionary view. The uncertainty of whether we are doing the right thing, or the best we could do, to resolve community conflict will continue, at least for a while. Will RC provide the missing link for living with conflict? Will we find out that over time we have less intense conflicts because they don’t build up, or fewer barriers to connecting when they do? I think we will, but only time or clairvoyance will tell.



Last Words

I don’t want to give folks the impression that we’re entirely dysfunctional in my community! This is a great life—we secured 300 acres of beautiful forested land, designed to be sustainable and regenerative; some of us started productive farms, built beautiful and/or simple homes, and many harmonious neighborhoods and relationships have blossomed here.

Folks homeschool their gorgeous, free, unprejudiced children. We celebrate and party together fairly often. We have other challenges, too, that don’t seem as hard to talk about as those in the zone of conflict, such as financing our dreams. But time and time again, conflicts that aren’t attended to return or simply complicate the next iteration of issues to show up. So (Dom’s advice to facilitators, and mine to anyone dealing with conflict): if we can give ourselves adequate exposure to uplifting natural and human resources—nature, art, great literature and spiritual texts, acts of loving kindness—we may find we are able to sustain a growing omni-partial spirit as we learn to restore the Circle, and the justice within it, to the way we live. 🌱

Arjuna da Silva helped found Earthaven Ecovillage (Black Mountain, North Carolina; www.earthaven.org) in 1994; since then, she has been learning more about herself and group dynamics than she ever would have “out there.” Her enthusiasm for the potential of Restorative Circles has led to her spearheading an international conference at Earthaven in June 2015 on Restorative Circles in Intentional Communities. For more information, write arjuna@earthaven.org.

Sociocracy to the Rescue at Aldeafeliz Ecovillage: How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part V

By Anamaria Aristizabal

Some of our “Turtles”—Aldeafeliz members who live onsite.



We share meals and hold meetings in this large kiosk.



Anamaria Aristizabal

Anamaria Aristizabal

Colombia is a country where side by side you see light and darkness. There is our bloody 60-year war where brothers and sisters kill each other. And yet Colombia is a country blossoming with social innovation movements. This is paradoxical, but it is said that pain can be a motivator to find solutions. The ways of the past clearly need to be changed, reversing the prevailing inequality, poverty of resources and spirit, lack of leadership or governance, and violence. A number of us, tired of the bad news, aspire to create solutions, inspiration, and innovative examples—we want to show that it is up to us to build a better country and a better planet.

Aldeafeliz is one of these examples. A group of 20 friends got together eight years ago around a common vision of creating an ecovillage. We are all seekers of new ways of being and doing things, in search of new models for organizing ourselves, relating to each other and to the land. We all agreed that ecovillages strive for sustainability in four dimensions: ecological, economic, social, and spiritual. We wanted a place that welcomed diversity and did not subscribe to a single ideology or spiritual path, but was open to all kinds of worldviews as long as there was alignment on how to work as a community.

Our Ecovillage Vision

Our vision started to materialize in August 2006 when we purchased seven acres of land. We created a membership structure where half lived on the land (the Turtles), half off the land (Beetles), to encourage more kinds of people in different levels of engagement with the project. Over the years we have built both common and individual infrastructure through ecological building techniques. We have planted gardens and built a ceremonial space, work space, guest spaces, and (so far) eight individual houses.

We have an economic system that promotes individual and collective entrepreneurship. Collective initiatives include thematic weekends with organized activities, festivals (like an arts festival, a dance festival), workshops for organizations and schools, and workshops

for individuals on holistic topics, from ecology to personal development. Individual initiatives include food products, exotic flowers, curriculum and education for kids, as well as T-shirts and memorabilia of Aldeafeliz.

In our starting phase, we adopted a form of consensus as our decision-making modality. We felt it was a revolutionary step, contrasting with the autocratic or secretive way that many organizations make decisions. We felt more spiritually enlightened to take into account the perspectives of everyone in the group, and confident of our capacity for dialogue. But this slowly turned into a sense of exhaustion with stagnation of our processes, as any proposal took what seemed like eons to get approved, with many egos standing in the way. Our meetings were excruciatingly long, and being the facilitator was a dreadful place to be, as facilitators were often criticized if they interrupted what looked like unhelpful behavior.

Our Sociocracy Workshop—March 2014

Around those days we heard about Sociocracy. And we learned that Diana Leafe Christian, author of the popular book about ecovillages, *Creating a Life Together*, had become an advocate for Sociocracy. An ecovillager herself, she and her community had suffered from many of the same ills we had using consensus. She started teaching ecovillages around the world about the methodology of Sociocracy, with a step-by-step, easy-to-follow approach. She had given careful thought to how to teach Sociocracy so that intentional communities like ecovillages could learn and implement it easily.

We organized a Sociocracy workshop taught by Diana, who came in March 2014. Given our desperate situation, we all agreed we needed a solution. People were willing to trust and give Sociocracy a try. Around half of the community members attended; the rest were willing to “learn by doing” during meetings. The Sociocracy workshop allowed for some quick wins. In a workshop exercise we had a meeting of our Elders’ Council, of which I’m a member, and

approved our proposed protocol for exiting members, an issue that had been lingering for a while, needing closure. We found out quickly how effective the methodology is, and felt the thrill of having made some progress we could show the other members.

We had already started revising our governance structure, which the workshop helped consolidate. A few weeks before the workshop, based on the Sociocratic model, we reorganized our teams, as we needed urgent change. Before Sociocracy, whoever wanted to fill a position ended up doing so. It was all according to willingness and volunteering. This turned out to be a headache, because often not the most qualified person would volunteer and create chaos or deliver a mediocre performance. We had no accountability system, no way to avoid falling into the command-and-control culture of mainstream society. The result was an environment of ineffectiveness.

Sociocracy Elections—Our First Success

In contrast, in Sociocracy positions are filled according to the nominations of community members. Roles are filled based on transparent criteria: how convincing is the grounding for nominations, based on the tasks of the role and the requirements to fulfill those tasks, and to a lesser extent, the people who get the most number of nominations from the community, provided there are no objections that can't be resolved. (People don't volunteer, but they can nominate themselves.)

This Sociocratic election process was a success at Aldeafeliz. We started by decreasing the number of teams in order to streamline the organization. Instead of many dysfunctional teams, we wanted fewer, more effective teams so we could provide more follow-up. Although Sociocracy uses the term "circle," we called each team a "cell" (except for our Elders' Council, a typical team in ecovillages, which we called a "seed group"). For each cell we defined the core purpose, the tasks to be carried out, and the profile of people needed in it. We decided that each cell would be led by three people and no more. They would have the freedom to invite others into their decisions, if need be. The smaller size would allow for more agile decision-making and faster meetings.

Since we carried out Sociocratic elections, we've experienced a number of positive results. First, there is much more ownership of the roles assigned. There is a sense of accountability to the community, because community members nominated you for your position, so there is also much more at stake—your reputation. Second, elections have provided an opportunity for our members to experience personal growth. At first, many of us were worried about the people who did not get elected for any roles. We thought that this might cause a lot of chaos in the beginning, and it did. But we pointed out the level of maturity that it takes to use Sociocracy, as it brings to the forefront issues that would otherwise remain hidden. I suggested in a meeting: "If you are not elected, this is an opportunity to reflect on your contribution to

the teams and projects of the ecovillage. Seek out lots of feedback and use it to generate new ways of being and doing things."

Consent Decision-Making

Next came another gem from Sociocracy—the "consent decision-making" process and its feedback loops. As I write this I am feeling relief and gratitude for what this process has brought about. As I said before, our meetings were long, with constant obstacles and sabotage to any given initiative brought forth by the group. As Diana colorfully pointed out, when using consensus the facilitator practically needed to be a shaman to know how to manage the unmanageable egos that kept defending their turfs. And once a decision was finally, excruciatingly reached, it seemed "carved in stone," given the amount of energy it took to agree on the decision in the first place. Burned out from the back-and-forth arguments on any given topic, no one wanted to ever discuss the matter again.

Sociocracy's consent decision-making process turned all of this around. It provides very clear guidelines of how to bring in a proposal and use a sequence of rounds, when the facilitator checks in with each person around the circle in turn rather than calling on people who raise their hands. Here is a snapshot of the process: a round to ask clarifying questions, a round of quick reactions, a "consent round" to either consent to the proposal or bring up objections, a round to resolve objections by modifying the proposal (or postpone the decision until further work or research can resolve the objections), and going back and forth between further consent rounds and resolving objections until all group members can consent to the now-modified proposal. The facilitator can be just a regular human being (not a shaman!), who makes sure we are on track with the different rounds, gently reminding us when we're off track.

A key word here is *consent*. This means that we each give our consent to this proposal because it is "good enough for now," so we can start learning whether it will work out well. (Because of our feedback-loop process, we know we can always change it later if needed.) People don't necessarily have to be "for" the decision, but simply have no objection to trying it. Each proposal has a date to be evaluated, with a set of evaluating criteria. So consent does not mean that people have no objections indefinitely, but until the proj-



Many others attended the workshop besides our ecovillage members. Many seeds for Colombia were planted there!

ect is evaluated.

The objective or aim of the organization and each circle is central to the functioning of Sociocracy. Objections need to be aligned with the group's aim, as well as with the specific aim of the team which is considering the proposal. Objections need to follow certain guidelines to be acceptable. In this light, objections become contributions to the aim of the group, as well as to the proposals themselves. They are gifts to the group, not blocks like in consensus. The spirit of "good enough for now" is profound and fundamental. It creates a culture of exactly what we are after—innovation and experimentation—instead of making some kind of perfect "final" decision that can't be revised.

Modifications and Blessings

We have made the methodology our own, not always following the Sociocratic method to the letter. In Sociocracy's governance structure each circle has representatives to the "General Circle," with two representatives from each circle creating what is called "double links." Because of our small size, we named only one person as both representative and "operational leader" of each cell ("circle"), and are starting to have General Circle meetings of cell representatives.

Here are some of the blessings we identified from using Sociocracy these first six months:

- All the energy used before to create noise and sabotage projects is now channeled into making useful changes to proposals to make them more effective.
- Some key issues that had lingered for years have finally been decided, like setting a common annual fee for both Turtles and Beetles.
- There is much more experimentation at many levels. New protocols have been proposed to manage our houses, our members, and our legal structures.
- We're experiencing more effective management. There is more follow-up to the decisions we make; they don't fall into a black hole. There is a clearer sense of responsibility for who does what. Information has started to flow more. We have more structures to share data and updates, creating greater transparency.
- There is a stronger cohesion overall. Our meetings are faster and feel lighter; there is a kind of rhythm to them that is satisfying. At the end of our last meeting we started dancing for joy!

During the workshop with Diana, I com-

mented that Sociocracy requires that people in the organization be proactive leaders. She responded by turning it around: Sociocracy actually contributes to people developing more proactivity and leadership. I have seen this at Aldeafeliz. Here is one example. One of our members complained that our economic system was not acknowledging his work. I responded that the spirit of Sociocracy is to be proactive instead of complaining, and that the floor was open to bring a proposal on how to change things. In the next meeting he proposed a new way to make his contributions be recognized economically. The community consented to this proposal, and I could tell he was excited by the outcome.

Our Six-Month Sociocracy Evaluation

In our most recent meeting we evaluated Sociocracy. We all agreed just how far we have come in our first six months after implementing it. For the first time, we evaluated the performance of cells according to the tasks that the community assigned each of them. In an organization where there are no bosses, or anybody to order you around and tell you what to do, this is a huge accomplishment. People are performing out of pure intrinsic motivation, and from a sense of responsibility to the whole group. These feelings were there before, but the actual structure of Sociocracy helped us to manifest them. I have come to believe that the *type* of governance structure we use has a huge influence over our behavior. If it encourages finding flaws, discussing endlessly, and having no accountability, the results are poor. But if our governance encourages peer accountability, proactivity, leadership, clear evaluation criteria, the same group of people will exhibit a completely new set of behaviors.

We still have much to learn. One key area is feedback. In our last meeting we had some rounds of feedback that were meant to be different from the emotional processing we have traditionally done, focusing more on roles and tasks. However, we are not yet accustomed to this, so the feedback rounds were painful for some people. This is delicate, because people can lose trust in the process.

"Green" Meme, "Teal" Meme

I consider this is part of the growing pains of changing, in the terms of spiral dynamics, from a "green meme" culture to a "teal meme" culture. The "green" culture, in which Aldeafeliz was founded, is all about feelings and organizational culture, disregarding structures. All perspectives are given equal value, regardless of how helpful they are to manifest the purpose of the organization. The "teal" culture, however, is a combination of culture and structures. Organizations develop all kinds of structures to accomplish the purpose of the organization more effectively. This means creating some boundaries and making sure that good ideas flourish and are favored over interminable discussions.

(continued on p. 74)



THE TOP 10 Most Common Mistakes in Consensus Process and What to Do Instead

By Tree Bressen

Editor's Note: For decades consensus has been the decision-making method of choice for many baby boomer communitarians and activists, as well as for younger generations of cooperators inspired by them. In this document crafted originally for the Occupy movement, long-time group-process trainer and consultant Tree Bressen shares tips on common mistakes in consensus and how to help the process work more smoothly.

1. Inappropriate Blocks

Blocking because you disagree, object, don't like the proposal, it doesn't match your personal needs or values, it goes against tradition, you'd have to leave the group if it passed, etc. Also includes premature blocks, where someone threatens to block if a group explores a particular direction.

- Consensus works only when the power to block is restricted to concerns that are demonstrably based in the core principles of the group. Consensus means giving a fair and heartfelt hearing to substantive points—it does not mean you always get your way.
- Remember the Stand Aside option exists for people with passionately held concerns and objections.
- Establish a clear procedure regarding how the validity of potential blocks is assessed and what happens when one arises. Create a robust response to inappropriate blocks.
- Blocking does not have to mean end of discussion. Some of the most effective consensus groups require the blocker to help work out a solution.

2. Enabling Bad Behavior

If disrespectful statements or behavior from one member toward another or the group are tolerated (yelling, sarcasm, put-downs, jokes at someone's expense, etc.), this degrades the meeting environment for everyone, impacting the whole group's safety and well-being.

- Set a constructive tone and insist on following it, kindly but clearly putting a stop to any meanness, attacks, undercutting, oppressive "isms," etc. We are fully capable of disagreeing fervently with respect.

3. Poorly Planned Agendas

People's time and life energy are precious; when this is not respected, they stop showing up. Prioritize clearly and be realistic. Reserve the bulk of time for the things that appropriately call for widespread active involvement.

- Put advance time into creating the best possible agenda—and then be willing to shift it if the group as a whole needs something different.
- Put the most important items early so they don't get squeezed by less important items.
- Avoid lengthy reports (just get the highlights, or put it over email) or announcements (use a big sheet by the door instead, so people see it when they come in and when they leave).
- Provide breaks at least every 90 minutes (and don't pretend you can have a five-minute break).

4. Having the Same Person Facilitate and Present Topics

When the facilitator is also the person offering information and context on an issue, it lessens safety for those who may disagree with the general thrust, putting them immediately on the defensive.

- Presenters supply information and context and should be free to advocate.
- Facilitators need to be neutral so that everyone in the group feels supported by them.
- Mixing roles can work OK in small, committee-like groups (seven people or less?); the larger the group, the more need for facilitator neutrality and formal roles.

5. Starting from a Proposal instead of an Issue

In situations where people want to feel fully empowered and included, any overly developed proposal on anything important will inevitably evoke resistance. At that point, the recipients of the proposal feel scared that they'll be steamrolled, while the developers of the proposal feel unappreciated, and no one is happy.

- For smaller proposals that don't require many people's energy for successful implementation, starting from a proposal can be fine.
- For more complex or controversial situations that touch many people, start by describing the situation and exploring ideas together in the larger group. A committee can be useful in helping frame the topic, as long as they don't go too far down the road. Later, once a basic direction is established, a committee might work out details. Or if the larger group doesn't easily come to resolution, they may request a task group of people with diverse viewpoints to work together on it.

6. Too Many Details

There's nothing like a tedious, overly detailed conversation among a few involved people to put the rest of the meeting to sleep while everyone checks out.

- See #3 above.
- Delegate! Send the rest to committee.

7. Rushing the Process

Leads to inappropriate blocks, situations where legitimate concerns were not dealt with in an integrated way and so the only option left to the person raising it is to block the whole process, which feels rough on everyone involved.

- Allow plenty of time for discussion. Take the space to really listen to people's diverse viewpoints and concerns. Trust the wisdom of the whole.
- If you have time and if it's important, discuss the matter, then let it sit and settle, then return to it.
- Wait to make the official call for consensus until a sense of unity emerges.

8. Spending All Your Meeting Time in Open Discussion

In general discussion, only the boldest get their voices heard—many others never even raise their hands.

- Change formats (planned in advance or on the spot): break into pairs or small groups (three to five people), line up to show the spectrum of opinion, use dot voting, fishbowls, roleplays, write stuff on sheets around the room, etc. See treegroup.info/topics/handout-formats.pdf for a bunch more ideas.

9. Attaching Proposals to People

Once something is out on the floor, it belongs to the group, not an individual member. Thus it's better to refer to an idea as "the proposal to do X" than as "Jenny's proposal." For this same reason, avoid the taint of "friendly amendments," a holdover from Robert's Rules and voting process where you ask the proposer's permission to modify. You wouldn't ask one person "Can I add this bed to the garden?" unless it was their garden; since it's the group's common plot, it's up to everyone whether and how the proposal gets modified.

- Expect every proposal to get modified a lot before adoption.

10. Fuzzy Minutes

Failing to accurately record the sense of the meeting can mean hours of lost group work. Don't record verbatim who said what, because it's too long for others to read later and it ties issues too closely to personalities.

- Make sure the decision and reasons for it are written clearly for the records. Record any stand asides (names and reasons), and tasks for implementation (who will do what, by when). 🍷

Tree Bressen lived in intentional communities and shared households her whole adult life until she discovered in 2011 to her surprise and dismay that she enjoyed living alone. She is the founder of Group Pattern Language Project, authors of the deck Group Works: A Pattern Language for Bringing Life to Meetings and Other Gatherings, available for free download at www.groupworksdeck.org. She is based in Eugene, Oregon, where she consults with a wide variety of organizations on how to make meetings better.

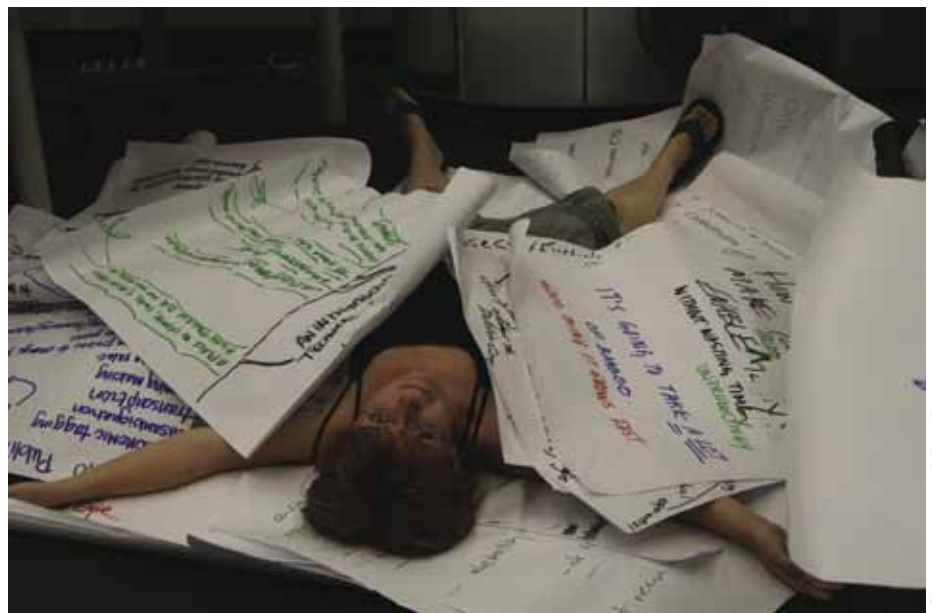


Photo courtesy of Tree Bressen

First We Take Manhattan

By James Andrews and Paxus Calta



Taking the 6:45 a.m. ferry to Ganas on Staten Island.

For over two and a half decades there was a single income-sharing community in central Virginia, Twin Oaks. Historically, when Twin Oaks reached its population capacity and had a waiting list for a while, they built a new building and expanded the number of adults that could live there.

In the early 1990s, with about 90 adults and a dozen children, they again found themselves at capacity with a waiting list, but instead of growing larger Twin Oaks decided to start a new community nearby. In 1993 Acorn was born with a similar income-sharing requirement and labor expectation, but with different internal decision-making and labor tracking systems. The initial members of Acorn were Oakers and folks drawn from the waiting list.

In 2010 Living Energy Farm was started by some current members from Twin Oaks and some ex-members. It dedicated itself to modeling post-petroleum solutions. In 2013, also in Louisa County, Acorn found a highly desirable property and purchased it for a new community called Sapling. All four of these central Virginia communities are income-sharing, they are all part of the Fellowship of Egalitarian Communities (thefec.org), and they all model slightly different collective solutions and cultures.

In a rural context, we now have this community-starting stuff pretty together. In urban areas we don't have as much experience, and so we launched the Point A project, to extend the communes movement into urban areas on the East Coast, in collaboration with friends who have long-term roots there.

Point A began in December of 2013 with a meeting in Washington, DC at a collective house known as the Keep. Representatives from the Virginia communities came and discussed their willingness to help in the forming of urban egalitarian communities. The enthusiasm and engaged curiosity were enough to convince the group that it should dig in deeper and start meeting and building events around the idea of urban communities.

We put up a simple wordpress site (frompointa.org), hopped in a scruffy community mini-van with over 200K miles on it, and, following the breadcrumbs of our rural networks, we dove into Washington, DC and New York City in March 2013 to meet up with a shortlist of trusted friends and contacts. In New York we decided to organize

a series of dinners, learn-ins, brainstorming meetings, workshops, and presentations on egalitarian living, transparency tools, biological swarming techniques, and European communes at collective spaces such as dZong, 3B Cooperative Bed and Breakfast, Ganas community on Staten Island, The Museum of Art and Design, and Flux Factory. We met up with people in parks, in living rooms, at free schools, and at convergences—discovering and unraveling the onion-skin of social conditions and cultures in this fascinating and alien city, strategizing and considering our best options and approaches.

After the initial flurry of events over the summer and early fall, we decided to spend some time with mentors and friends at Ganas, which is New York City's longest-running secular intentional community. We spent time with them in conversation and debate around the nature and potential for social change among existing communities and did some deep listening and reflecting on many of Ganas' achievements and challenges as they work through their own transitions.

Ganas is located on Staten Island, which is about an hour-long journey via bike and ferry to either midtown Manhattan or northern Brooklyn. This distance creates a sense of cultural and spatial detachment—fantastic if your goal is to write a novel from home, not so great if your goal is to tap the heart of the Big Apple, which we view both as a patchwork of smaller local communities and neighborhoods and as an amplifier and harbinger for new forms of culture and social movements.

One of the biggest reasons communities are important is that the sharing practice from the rural communes is the only viable solution we know of to address the climate disruption of industrial capitalism. Point A's strategy is to loop the cooperative techniques and sharing practices from the mostly rural communes into the reproductive circuits of America's East Coast cities, thereby saving the planet from the effects of predatory capitalism without the need for mythical heroes, benevolent aliens, patriarchal gods, or bloody uprisings. For such a process to work, however, the wisdom of the rural communities and the wisdom of New York need to be carefully woven together. Similar to how interconnecting threads of a handmade sweater create strong, resilient, and flexible bonds, we must weave together the rural and

urban, the hive mind with the wolf. Instead of supplanting one set of habits with another, we can interlace the two together in ways that strengthen both as a new multi-layered whole.

The weaving metaphor references the ideas of Gregory Bateson, the ecologist, anthropologist, and counterculture scientist whose work helped map ecological thinking into the domains of planning, science, technology, and communications research, spawning the science of cybernetics. From a Batesonian perspective, the act of consciously applying the rural commune tactics within an urban context requires more than information transfer and assistance. New rituals are needed: rituals to help stabilize the thinking of city-dwellers whose world is processed through the filters of fear and competition, and who have developed blind spots around these issues, as well as around race and class. Yet in order to make a substantial and positive difference in a place as vast and complex as New York City, we must also consider our own blind spots, as well as those of our urban friends, and then consider the gaps in awareness separating these two patterns, or habits-of-mind.

Further, we can learn from the emergence of movements such as the #BlackLivesMatter wildcat marches responding to the police killings of unarmed blacks, and Occupy Sandy, with their fluidity, flexibility, and agility. Similar to the fast-paced flow of bodies along crowded city sidewalks, New Yorkers participating in these progressive collective efforts flow quickly and accurately as organizers and marchers, self-correcting and adjusting their course of action through continuous micro-movements.

One approach would be to establish commune incubating TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone)-like apartments or nodes, nexus points where numerous recurring social events can take place, maximizing the potential for sociality and network spinning, but with no anticipation—yet—of long-term homesteading. Such arrangements could boast the pragmatism and hospitality of 3B Cooperative and

also draw from other off-the-radar collectivist projects that combine couchsurfing, community programming, potlucks, and cooperative businesses. We hope that from all of this social richness will come not only ideas and relationships that lead to numerous new communes, but continued questioning of the nature of life and potential forms of solidarity in this increasingly unaffordable city.

What started as a project with seemingly a low probability of success has already had significant and promising results in its first year. In Washington, DC a solid group of about a dozen people is crafting income-sharing agreements and seeking suitable properties for a new 20-member community. In NYC, on Staten Island, a new forming community, The Fay, neighbors Ganas and consists mostly of ex-Acorn community members who now want to be in the city. We are still in the midst of it in these cities, still finding allies, learning and weaving different cultures, discovering where we can push back against the pointy edge of capitalism called gentrification. The project is potentially much larger than just starting a few new communities, and its exact shape and size are still unfolding. 🐦

James Andrews is a founding member of Nsumi Collective. Nsumi focuses on collective intelligence and emerging forms of grassroots, collective organization. Recent projects explore formal decentralization and politically-engaged art, in the form of trainings, workshops, think tanks, curricula, and street actions. For Point A he is part swarm expert, part local culture guide, part analyst and strategist.

Paxus Calta is a dual member at Acorn and Twin Oaks Community. He blogs recklessly at Funologist.org. He is an inegalitarian recruiter for egalitarian communities and is part of the organizing team for the Twin Oaks Communities Conference. For Point A, he co-manages the impossible collection of projects which have started in NYC.



Shoes outside the door of an event at 3B Cooperative Bed and Breakfast in Brooklyn



Point A operative attending the Flux Factory 20th anniversary Banquet and Homecoming show.

The Point A Project

The Point A project is working to create a network of urban, income-sharing, egalitarian, democratic, ambitious, and engaged communes as a starting point on the road to a more humane, satisfying, and sustainable world for all. (See frompointa.org.)

Our challenges in starting communes in New York include navigating blind spots such as:

- Trust and fear issues
- Race, class, and our potential complicity in gentrification and displacement
- The speed and intensity of daily life
- Transitory social patterns
- Lack of time and money
- Individualism and ego, especially among young creatives
- Hyper-capitalism, the costs of living in NYC, and the predatory real estate market

With its nexus of networks, airports, schools, culture industries, and circulating tourists; its walkability and inter-connected urban fabric; its place as the birthplace of movements such as graffiti art, Act-UP, Occupy Wall Street, the beats; as the site of the UN general assembly; as a magnet for intelligentsia, analysts, writers, poets, artists, inventors, decision-makers, and media-makers in all fields; as a city of social entrepreneurs and media hubs; and in many other ways— NYC's capacity to amplify and broadcast new social developments compels us to work there, in spite of the challenges. Underneath the rush and the stress, behind the money-lust and simmering beneath the dust and deceit of Wall Street, we hear the percolating of another, more sustainable world.

—J.A. and P.C.

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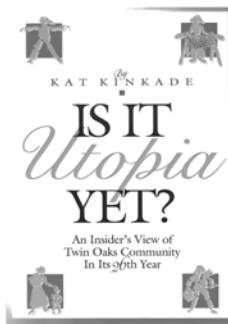


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An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community in its 26th Year by Kat Kinkade

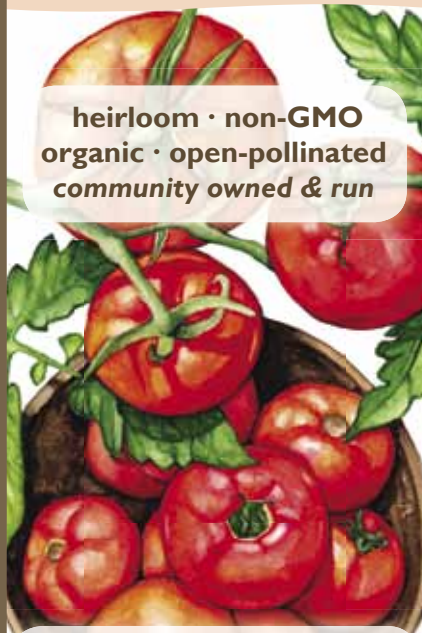
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REACH

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 #167 - Summer 2015 (out in June) is April 24, 2015.

The rate for Reach ads is Up to 50 Words: \$25/issue or \$75/year; Up to 125 Words: \$40/issue or \$125/year; Up to 350 Words: \$60/issue or \$175/year 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

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY LIFE? Consider Triform Camphill community - we are "work based" intentional community with "spiritual" background. We are actively seeking mature coworkers, volunteers and interns with enthusiasm, patience and interest in working with special needs youth. We offer diverse work areas like farming, gardening, cooking, music, weaving, pottery, crafts etc. We look forward to hearing from you! WWW.TRIFORM.ORG/volunteer@triform.org/ 518-851-9320

HUNDREDFOLD FARM COHOUSING COMMUNITY IS AN AWARD WINNING ECO VILLAGE LOCATED NEAR HISTORIC GETTYSBURG, PA. We are on 75 acres with clustered energy efficient, active and passive solar single family homes, pedestrian friendly design, spectacular vistas. Our summer and winter community gardens provide organic produce for the community We feature an innovative waste water treatment facility. Come grow with us. For information about a visit/tour call (717) 334-4587 or e mail us at info@hundredfoldfarm.org - <http://www.hundredfoldfarm.org/> 1400 Evergreen Way, Orrtanna, PA, 17353

VALVERDE COMMONS, A SENIOR COHOUSING COMMUNITY IN BEAUTIFUL AND ARTY TAOS, NM, has eight lots still available for purchase. Located in a pastoral setting, it is walking distance to the library, shopping and the famous Taos Plaza. We have a stunning commons/meeting hall where classes, book club, meetings and potlucks are held regularly, and a barn which stores our gardening equipment and tools and has a workshop for ceramics and woodworking. We boast soaring views of Taos Mountain from our homes and common buildings. - Our town is small and charming, nestled in the Sange de Cristo mountains, and only an hour and a half from Santa Fe. We don't have big box stores but we do have 7 museums, countless galleries and a rich cultural life. We even have a brand of the University of NM where seniors can take courses for a pittance. - Singles and couples have built sustainable houses of all sizes from 750 sf to over 2,000, and we will assist new members in building their dreamhouses. Visit our website at www.valverdecommons.com, and plan to visit our community. Email us at valverdecommons@aol.com or call Carolyn Schlam at 575-751-3751 for further information. Join Us!

HEATHCOTE COMMUNITY, FREELAND, MARYLAND. We are an intentional community living cooperatively on 44 acres of land held in trust with School of Living. We have a permaculture farm and demonstration site. Our mission is to live sustainably and share with others through education and service. Heathcote was one of the first "hippie communes" and we are celebrating our 50th Anniversary in 2015! We are seeking new members who want to live cooperatively, engage in permaculture and sustainable farming, and contribute to our educational work. We have rooms available in shared houses and one more building site available for a new residence. We also seek participants for our education programs, which include Visitor Days, workshops, and internships in farming and carpentry. For details see www.heathcote.org. Contact: 410-357-9523; info@heathcote.org.

BOULDER, COLORADO MORE AFFORDABLE, URBAN "CO-HOUSEHOLDING" OPTION: Boulder Creek Community is offering rent (\$600 to \$900/month per bedroom, starting 8/1/15) and/or rent-to-buy, shared living opportunities in our Common House for: community-focused persons, families or couples looking for short or long term community housing. We are inviting self-aware, heart-centered, service-oriented community members. Being located next to an exceptional Health Club, to Boulder Creek bike/hike path, parks, 2 universities, on-site car-share and bus options, frees community members to enjoy a better quality of life exploration... in community with others. See BoulderCreekCommunity.com or call Greg at 303-417-1690

FAIR OAKS ECOHOUSING, EAST OF SACRAMENTO, CA. Join new cohousing community in planning stages. 30 townhomes & flats, 3.5 acres. Close to Rudolf Steiner College, Sacramento Waldorf School, American River Parkway. Potential cohousing opportunity. Please contact Christine O'Keefe at (310) 597-1250 or christineokeefe80@yahoo.com. FairOaksEcohousing.org

LITTLE RIVER TENANCY IN COMMON IS ON THE OLYMPIC PENINSULA, NEIGHBORING OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK. Our 132 acres have Little River running through on the way to the newly undammed Elwha River. We have five resident members, and one vacant membership tied to a home for sale. The land is owned in common but members have exclusive rights to their homes. Most of our land is dedicated to forest growth with stewardship the main goal; sustainable

commercial uses are possible in our Forest plan. Decisions are governed by our Agreement although consensus is very typical. We highly value participation in group designated projects which maintain our infrastructure, our forestry and garden projects. The available home is two story, one bath, two bedroom (or three, counting the finished attic). It has wood siding outside and wood paneled walls downstairs inside, sheetrock upstairs. Wood heat from a Finnish/Russian style cooktop stove heats the house with about 3 cords wood per year. Included are an unattached two car garage with additional area of workshop plus a rustic cabin with power and water (cold). The Tenancy membership would be about \$35,000 and the home \$150,000. CONTACT: Bob, at 360-452-4768 or e-mail: ruumax@outlook.com

BELFAST ECOVILLAGE IN MIDCOAST MAINE IS A 36-UNIT MULTIGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY ON 42 ACRES. The super energy efficient homes are clustered to preserve open space for recreation, agriculture and wildlife. Automobile access is limited and the houses are connected by a pedestrian path, making it a safe place for young children. A 4,000 square foot common house is nearly complete, and will have several voluntary shared meals weekly. Many homes have solar systems, making them near net zero. Members gather weekly to harvest food from the 3-acre worker share community farm and there are two multi-household flocks of laying hens. Members come from all walks of life and include educators, naturalist, carpenters, medical professionals, social workers, musicians, and artists. Belfast Ecovillage is located two miles from the quaint coastal town of Belfast, with a harbor, library, YMCA, schools, employers, and health food coop. For more information visit: Mainecohousing.org or call 207-338-9200

CITY/COUNTRY FARM IC FUSION & 5 STEPS BEYOND - LOCATED IN YORK, PA (¼ acre city land), our focus is on radical simplicity, alternative transportation, and community involvement. Being two people in our 2nd year at the Art Farm, we continue to expand on: developing an urban edible food forest, small bike library, art studio (& book library in the making) - all on premises. Benefits of these endeavors focus on those in the community who have the greatest need for transportation and healthy food but few resources. Most recent off-site projects include: spearheading a local intercity youth permaculture garden project in conjunction with Crispus Attucks Early Learning center & Transition York PA and collaborating with Sterling Farm CSA (located @ the Horn Farm Incubator Center, Hellam, PA) - Future plans include facilitating the creation a rooftop multi-modal garden/ playground/ cultural/ green science area @ Crispus Attucks and establishing an IC farm component easily accessible by bike from the urban Art Farm property & with opportunity to create earth shelters. Seeking individuals & families to join with us: -Permaculture experience & engineering skills a plus. -Openness to permaculture style gardening, consensus-based decision making, & willingness to use primarily human power transport a very high priority. -Creativity, personal responsibility, & progressive/enthusiastic spirit deemed of high value. Feeling the love? Contact Francie D or Vince Hedger @: fdrecycles4community@gmail.com OR 717-495-8576

DANCING RABBIT, Rutledge, Missouri. A growing ecovillage on 280 acres of lovely rolling prairie, we welcome new members to join us in creating our vibrant community! We are building a village focused on sustainability, living abundant and fulfilling lives while using about 10% of the resources of the average American in many key areas. Our ecological covenants include using renewable energy, practicing organic agriculture, and no private vehicles. We use natural and green building techniques, share cars and some common infrastructure, and make our own fun. We welcome individuals, families, and sub-communities, and are especially seeking those with leadership and communica-

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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.

EVENTS

SCHEMATA WORKSHOP - EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH ARCHITECTURE - www.schemataworkshop.com - Are you part of a new community and wanting to know the next steps to build your dream? Do you need a community space to better serve your community life? Do you want to work with a professional who will listen to you and your unique community needs? Is your community growing and looking for ways to better use the space you currently have? Schemata Workshop is an architecture firm founded in 2004 with a passion for empowering communities through architecture. We have extensive experience facilitating collaborative workshops and in designing multi-family projects with a strong focus on community. Through working with cohousing groups on completed and current projects we have developed a successful practice based on honest collaboration, creating meaningful spaces, and optimizing our clients' budget. To see more of our projects please visit <http://www.schemataworkshop.com/> or email info@schemataworkshop.com with any questions you may have.

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COHOUSING COACHES / COHOUSING CALIFORNIA / AGING IN COMMUNITY: Hi, we're Raines Cohen and Betsy Morris, longtime communarians living at Berkeley (CA) Cohousing. We've both served on the FIC board and have collectively visited over 100 cohousing neighborhoods, lived in two, and helped many. We have participated in the Group Pattern Language Project (co-creating the Group Works Deck) and are on the national cohousing advisory board. Betsy has an urban planning/economic development background; Raines wrote the "Aging in Community" chapter in the book Audacious Aging. We're participating with the Global Ecovillage Network and helping communities regionally organize in California. We'd love to help you in your quest for sustainable living. Let's talk about how we can help you make your dream

real and understandable to your future neighbors. <http://www.CohousingCoaches.com/> 510-842-6224

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COME BIKE WITH US! - The Art Farm is an integrated Art/activism project located in York county, PA. Based on a 1/4 acre urban forest garden in York City, two residents work with permaculture focused urban & rural Farming projects in an expanding community web. We infuse Art into almost everything, whether it pays or not. We aren't independently wealthy, we're also not needy...Our focus is on radical simplicity & human power. Partners, families, helpers, collaborators & possibly interns welcome! Space available for inside, outside, and in-between lifestyles. What you pay-give-share and what we pay-give-share is negotiable, contingent upon interest, willingness to work & travel via human power. Knowledge of permaculture friendly farming, interest in bikes, Art, & cooperative living desired. A strong work ethic is likewise, valued. For more information or discussion contact Francie Delaney or Vince Hedger @: fdrecycles4community@gmail.com or call/leave a message @: 717 917-8498 - COME BIKE WITH US!

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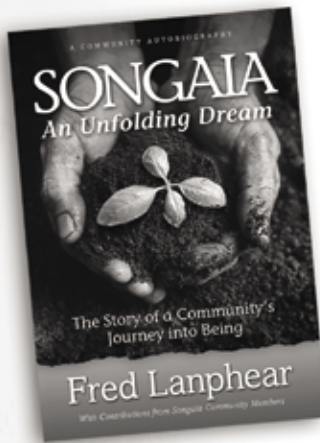
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Charles Eisenstein, author of Sacred Economics & The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible

BOOMERANG

(continued from p. 7)

to be more openness to seniors joining as a way to help normalize the age distribution. (It was true for me joining 17-year-old Dancing Rabbit last year. In a group of 50+ adults, I was one of a small handful of people over 60 and the welcome mat was out.) However, that's not usually how it works. Mostly people want to join groups in which peers are already present. If the "senior quota" is already fully subscribed, the welcome mat may be withdrawn.

There's delicacy about how much communities can stretch to support those in need, and the first priority is to be there for established members, not for the ones yet to come. For that matter there's a limit to what groups can do for each other *even if no one joins as a senior*, since very few communities promise nursing home services, and aging is inevitable. Taken altogether, communities need to exercise considerable discernment about the limits of support, or else risk swamping the boat for everyone—which is an unpleasant kind of boomerang where good intentions come back to knock you in the drink. And nobody wants that.

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), publisher of this magazine, and co-founder of Sandhill Farm, an egalitarian community in Missouri. He is also a facilitation trainer and process consultant, and he authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com. This article is adapted from his blog entry of December 26, 2014.

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THE INTERGENERATIONAL CHALLENGE

(continued from p. 17)

needed to make it happen. Let me conclude with a story that illuminates my point:

About 20 years ago at Sandhill Farm, when my son was a young teenager (think smart aleck), we had a member in her late 20s who was highly frustrated with the community's standard that adults were expected to give children a reason when asking them to do something or limiting their behavior, and that they were further expected to listen and engage constructively if the child objected (not that kids had the same power as adults—in the end they had to go with the adults' limits—but they *did* have rights).

That was decidedly *not* the way she had been raised and it grated on her that she was getting the worst of it both ways: as a child, she was supposed to shut up and take it; as an adult, she was expected to be courteous and engaging with obnoxious junior lawyers. Yuck!

I tell this story because this woman was: a) young and Sandhill was her first taste of cooperative living; b) a cherished member of the community; c) someone who was determined to develop her own niche in the community, and therefore not likely to ask others for advice; and d) someone who often experienced the community's attempts at culture shift as more awkward than advantageous.

While it's not so hard to grow amazing fruit on the tree of community life, accessing that nourishment through mentoring can be a tough nut to crack. 🌱

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. He is also a facilitation trainer and process consultant, and authors a blog that can be read at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com. This article is adapted from his blog entry of December 27, 2013.

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INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

(continued from p. 19)

would have to take the same learning curve as we have. Instead the energy saved has allowed everyone to advance their skills. The overall body of knowledge of permaculture teaching has increased through sharing. Our sense of “we” and being a community is also enhanced.

Contrary to the thought of competition, having more permaculture teachers has actually enhanced our work opportunities. We have expanded the centre, the core of teachers, which has also expanded the edges and links with interested people. The more edge the more links and the more people come on everyone’s courses.

Knowing that there are other people to run introduction and design courses we are also able to move away from this centre and into different niches, extending our skills to more advanced and specialised courses.

The formal passing on of knowledge to apprentices is just one of the ways in which we can value and use this stage.

Healing Society

Bringing these generations together on a person-to-person and group-to-group level will enhance our understanding of the whole human experience. Building these connections will start to heal the fragmentation and separation and create a friendlier, more balanced, sustainable society. Connecting the different generations is a way of using *renewable resources* to increase health and education in society. 🌱

Looby Macnamara has been teaching permaculture since 2002, and is partner of a leading teaching and consultancy partnership, Designed Visions. She runs full permaculture design courses as well as teacher training, advanced permaculture design, and peoplecare courses. She has a passion for creative teaching methods and likes inventing participatory activities and games to enhance learning. She lives in Herefordshire, England with her partner Chris Evans and two daughters, Shanti and Teya, and enjoys singing, yoga, gardening, and making all sorts of things from cakes to wine, and clothes to blankets.

WIN a day with BEN LAW page 88

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SHORT-TERM VACATION COHOUSING: A GREAT WAY TO LEARN

(continued from p. 45)

community for us, as well. In *Creating Community Anywhere: Finding Support and Connection in a Fragmented World*, authors Carolyn R. Shaffer and Kristin Anundsen describe the difference between a functional community and a conscious one. "In a conscious community, members not only help each other take care of business together—the external task—but they also reflect together on their common purpose, internal processes, and group dynamics... (It) honors the individual as well as the group, knowing that the well-being of one cannot be bought at the expense of the other... Such a community renews itself regularly, celebrating individual and group passages and revising and recommitting to its vision and mission. In doing so it challenges its members and itself to move beyond roles to wholeness...like a living body..." (CCC Press, CA, 1993/2005, page 11).

Since our first visit in 2012, we have been back three times. We visited other built cohousing communities and settled on becoming full members at Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing in Eugene, Oregon, with the same architect, and similar shared values (www.oakleighmeadow.org). We have learned how the character of cohousing intersects with our own character, because we have had the rare opportunity to rent for a short term. Indeed, we recommend this approach to others who want to explore what cohousing means to them, both as a way of housing and as a way of living. Short-term vacation cohousing: what a great way to learn! 🐾

Deborah Carey discovered cohousing while getting her architecture degree at the University of Washington. She didn't get serious about living there until she retired from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 2011. Her husband Ray Shockey didn't consider living in cohousing until they rented a unit for a month. Now she and her husband are involved in Oakleigh Meadow Cohousing in Eugene, and in explaining the value of short-term "vacation" cohousing rentals to others. Email her at boies-ter@gmail.com if this appeals to you as a way to "try on" cohousing.

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SOCIOCRACY TO THE RESCUE AT ALDEAFELIZ ECOVILLAGE: HOW SOCIOCRACY CAN HELP COMMUNITIES, PART V

(continued from p. 55)

Our community's direction and growth are getting clear as we evaluate these first six months. Can we set aside our feeling orientation sometimes and focus on the business at hand? Generating results is not necessarily counterproductive to a thriving and values-based organizational culture. This will require our using an effective feedback methodology like what Sociocracy's "feedback loops" provide.

The name Aldeafeliz means "happy village." At the end of a recent meeting one of our members said, "If we continue like this, not only will we be happy but also millionaires!" While we're not motivated by money, his metaphor indicates that we welcome more abundance as a sign of our individual and collective bountifulness. We all laughed when he said this, realizing that if we combine our inner abundance and joy with outer abundance and prosperity, we contribute greatly to helping our country lift itself out of poverty of resources and of spirit. 🌱

In the next article in this series, Diana Leafé Christian will be back to describe Sociocracy's proposal-forming process.

Anamaria Aristizabal, based in Bogotá Colombia, is an integral coach who works with New Ventures West as faculty in coach training. She is also currently facilitating, mentoring, and coaching in organizations that train young leaders in leadership for sustainability and social innovation. She cofounded Aldeafeliz Ecovillage in 2006 near Bogotá, Colombia, where they are experimenting with various social and ecological technologies, including Sociocracy. She is chair of the Colombian chapter of the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL), and a member of the SoL Global board. Find her online at www.linkedin.com/in/anamariaaristizabal.

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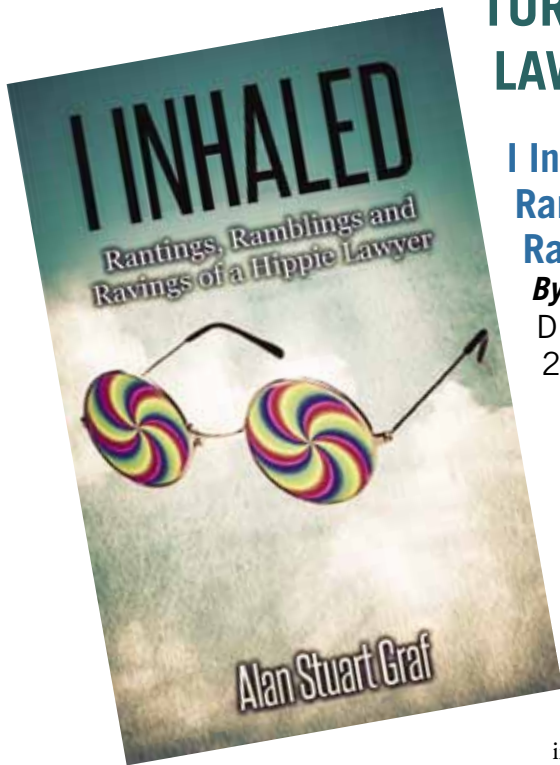


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TURN ME ON, LAW MAN!

I Inhaled: Rantings, Ramblings and Ravings of a Hippie Lawyer By Alan Stuart Graf

Di Angelo Publications, 2014,
268 pages



Alan Graf “writes like he talks,” I heard that one of his friends said about him. His book is definitely a no-phrases-barred mix of wise-guy intelligence, metaphysical intellect, hippie innocence, and lawyerly outrage. In a wild weave of stories from Stony Brook University on Long Island, back and forth a few times to the The Farm in Tennessee (including a few jaunts

in the death-squad-haunted villages of

Guatemala), and eventually to Portland (Oregon) and Austin

(Texas) to try out an empowering role for a change (and to please his Jewish mother at last) as an attorney-at-law, we’re treated to a tapestry of one baby boomer’s hippie social activist adventures. Vignettes featuring Stephen Gaskin and Ina May Gaskin are priceless! And never fear: despite lawyering, Graf’s love of the underdog wins out. Someone should make a movie about this man’s exploits as a defender of the exploited.

Graf was already a trippy kid, long before his acid days at Stony Brook University. He remembers imagining himself as Spiderman walking down the side of the apartment building he grew up in. There were times his habit of gazing intensely at nothing in particular altered his physical perception to a radical degree.

Later on, as an acid head in college, he had a realization that altered him for the rest of his life. “As I learned that night...the small you is an illusion that the big you cooked up to allow the real you to deal with the art of surviving on this planet. It’s a handy concoction that, after a time, we all start believing is the real thing. When you understand the illusion, it’s like facing your own death.”

Over the next decade, while his metaphysical views evolved within the culture of The Farm, Graf married, had a family, played lead guitar, fixed Farm vehicles, and came to terms with his own version of revolution and liberation.

“The sixties were a time of special energy. All of us kept thinking, ‘What are we going to do with this energy?’ or ‘What is this energy going to do with us?’...There was a belief, maybe wild and crazy, that we...would metamorphosize [sic] the entire world’s collective consciousness, so that it would heal itself, reach self-understanding, and result in peace and prosperity for the entire planet. Rastafari!”

Inspired, Inspiring, and in Need of an Editor

The fact that Alan Graf wrote his own testament to hippie culture and the pacifist evolution, got it published, and sent it around to social activists, folks in the communities movement, and regional venues for reviews attests to his dedication to grassroots “we the people can do it” principles. He wants us to remember our revolutionary mission!

“If you are paying attention, you know...how our consumer-based lifestyles are demolishing the planet,” Graf writes, naming the other major challenge to our survival as fundamentalism

in any form. In the face of these, he declares, “human rights activists and environmentalists who commit civil disobedience...are the warriors of the revolution and protectors of the earth.” As a dedicated hippie lawyer, he is committed to defending the First Amendment rights of these (s)heroes against “the injustice system.” Nonetheless, he repeatedly laments the insanity of the system he is licensed to serve. “[Our] justice system doesn’t have the methodology or the moral understanding to relate with revolutionary beings. The justice system has no vision, no empathy, and no compassion. It is in some ways a dumb computer, programmed to resist change.”

You can’t use literary criteria on this book—not and enjoy its wealth of great stories, meaningful cultural discourses, and poignant rants about stupidity and injustice. So what’s a reviewer to do? Be honest with the reader who wants a flowing narrative and well-proofed manuscript—*this book needs an editor!*—but be sure to make it clear that the writer’s approach to telling his story and sharing his truth would be hard to separate from the purpose and meaning of the book.

Occasionally there’s a page of poetry that’s hard to follow but easy to imagine the author wrote while still inhaling. It all goes into the essential portrait of the man.

Graf writes: “The hippies were the beginnings of what may be a newly born tribe sprung from the ruins of a civilization, kind of like sprouts growing out of the compost. The hippies have dispersed since the sixties. Some of us have put on ties and jackets and gone to law school. But despite the ties, in many of us, the fire still burns strong. We know what is going on....”

“I believe in my heart of hearts that our future, our kids’ futures, your and my grandkids’ futures, all depend on and are directly tied to the choices that WE (that’s right, YOU and ME) are making now. Are we going to get along with each other, care for each other, and care for the planet? I sure hope so.”

May the force of hippie love and the unrelenting passion for justice lead our way! 🌿

Arjuna da Silva has lived at Earthaven Ecovillage (Black Mountain, North Carolina; www.earthaven.org) since 1994.

Saying Goodbye to Mildred Gordon

Photo courtesy of Foundation for Feedback Learning Archives



Mildred Gordon with fellow Ganas member Ana Caneda, late 1970s.

Mildred Gordon died peacefully in her sleep January 4, 2015, surrounded by family and friends from Ganas, the community she helped found on Staten Island, New York in 1979.

I knew Mildred for about 30 years. We first met in the mid-'80s when she and others came down to Twin Oaks to participate in a Federation of Egalitarian Communities assembly, to explore what other income-sharing communities were doing and the extent to which it made sense to make common cause.

In addition to being a fellow traveler, Mildred was also a teacher and mentor to me in the field of group dynamics.

My relationship with Mildred was not that of peers. She was always the teacher and I was the student (who was sometimes enthralled by the lessons and sometimes balked at them). While she enjoyed probing what was going on with me, she did not encourage that kind of examination in the other direction. While I chafed at this imbalance for quite a while, I finally came to accept that learning from Mildred was a gift and it was unwise of me (not to mention churlish) to push away the invitation just because the exchange did not flow both ways.

For many years Ganas was home for the Foundation for Feedback Learning, Mildred's pet project and social experiment. She was keen on investigating the ways that people shoot themselves in the foot by

limiting or distorting the intake of critical information about how they are perceived. (The idea here is not necessarily that others are seeing you accurately, but that it's never in your interest to not know how your statements and behavior are landing with others. In fact, it's highly beneficial to discover at the earliest opportunity any discrepancies between what you intended and how you are received.)

It turns out that most of us engage in all manner of shenanigans to avoid or insulate ourselves from receiving feedback, even when it's directly against our best interests to do so.

In pursuit of this work, Mildred was perhaps the most adept practitioner I ever witnessed at working a dynamic both emotionally and rationally, which approach had a profound influence on how I developed as a professional facilitator. Under Mildred's influence, I consider it foundational that skilled facilitators learn to work simultaneously with content and energy.

One of Mildred's foibles was the feeling that she was going to die young (mainly, I believe, because that was the fate of many of her immediate family). Well Mildred, having lived to be 92 it's hard to say you got cheated—and all those who knew you are the richer for your longer stay. 🍷

Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community.




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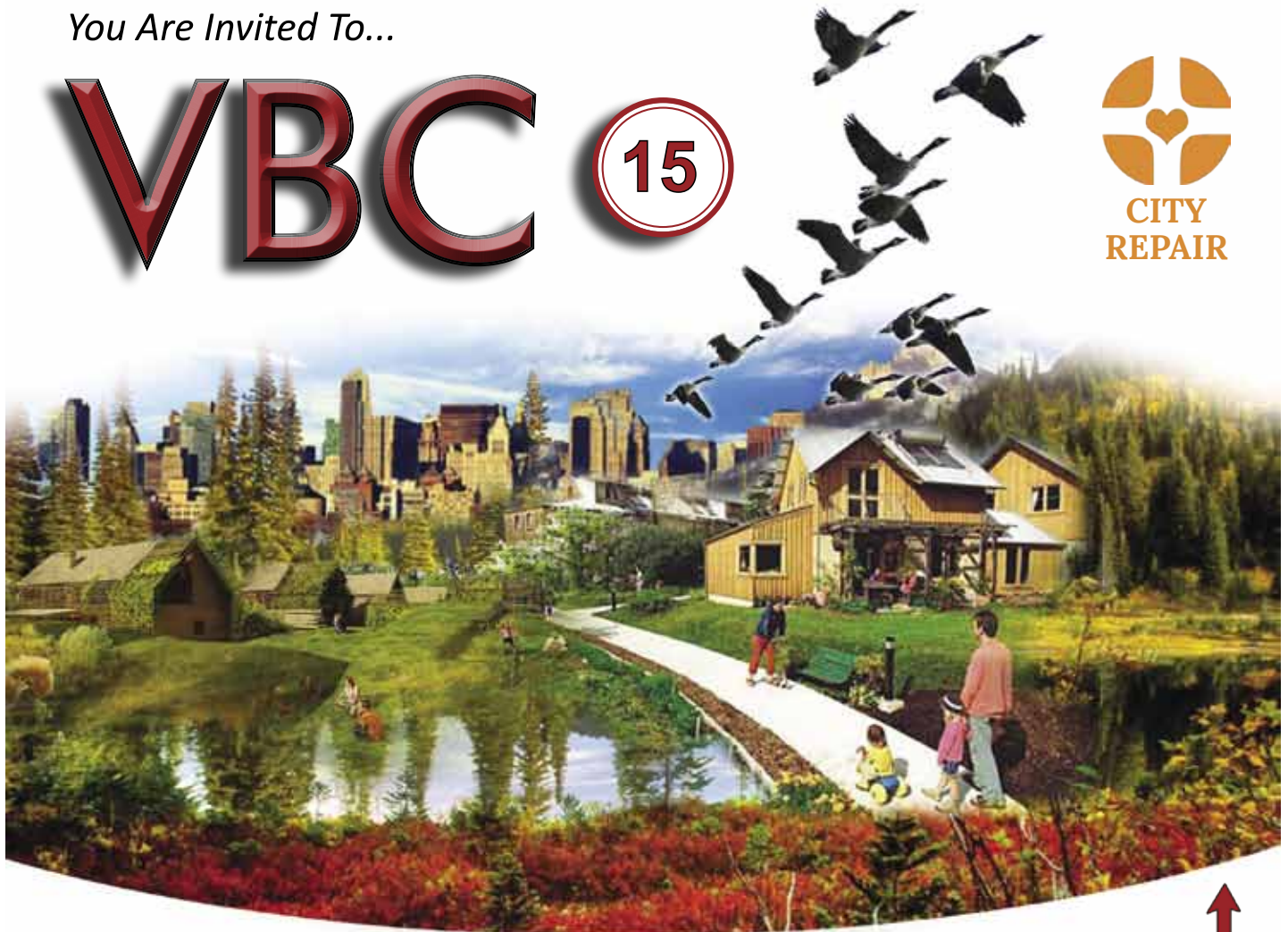
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