

NEW RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY SEEKERS

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Finding or Starting a Community

Rediscovering Home
Cohousing Adventures
Community Founding Essentials
Learning from Failure
Finding the Right Community Fit

Spring 2016 • Issue #170

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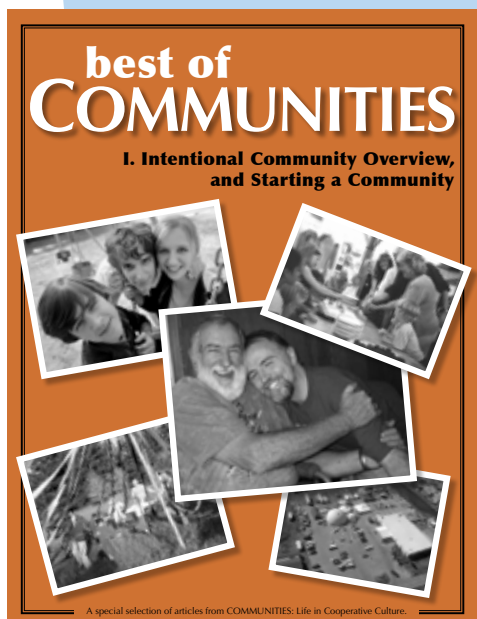
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Special Editions from our Best of COMMUNITIES Series

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I. Intentional Community Overview and Starting a Community

Many people yearn for community—for a greater sense of connection and belonging—yet genuinely wanting it and accurately knowing that it's good for you are not enough to guarantee that you'll be happy in intentional community, or that others will want to live with you.

These 15 articles in “Intentional Community Overview and Starting a Community” provide a peek behind the curtain at some of the pitfalls and challenges facing community builders, so that you'll have a more realistic idea of what it will take to survive your start-up years and actually become a home.

You'll find first-hand stories from forming communities, as well as sage advice about legal structures, the importance of community spirit, how to understand “cults” as a pejorative label, how to assess prospective property, and the importance of making process agreements before you need to apply them.

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES:

1. In Community, Intentionally by Geoph Kozeny, Directory 2007
2. Setting the Record Straight: 13 Myths about Intentional Community by Diana Leafe Christian, Geoph Kozeny, Laird Schaub, #112
3. A Communitarian Conundrum: Why a World That Wants and Needs Community Doesn't Get It by Timothy Miller, #151
4. You Know You Live in Community When... by Virginia Lore and Maril Crabtree, #124
5. “Cults” and Intentional Communities: Working Through Some Complicated Issues by Tim Miller, Directory 2007
6. Community Spirit, Community ‘Glue’ by Geoph Kozeny, #107
7. Wisdom for Within, Wisdom from Without by Karen Iona Sundberg, #159
8. Six Ingredients for Forming Communities (That Help Reduce Conflict Down the Road) by Diana Leafe Christian, Directory 2000
9. Legal Structures for Intentional Communities in the United States by Dave Henson, with Albert Bates, Allen Butcher, and Diana Leafe Christian, Directory 2000
10. Buying Your Community Property by Frances Forster and Byron Sandford, Directory 1995
11. Throwing in the Founder's Towel by Ma'ikwe Schaub Ludwig, #144
12. Emergency Community by Jesika Feather, #144
13. Yes, Wealthy People Want to Live in Community in Sustainable Ways Too! by Jennifer Ladd, #159
14. My Advice to Others Planning to Start an Ecovillage by Lois Arkin, #156
15. Dandelion Village: Building an Ecovillage in Town by Maggie Sullivan, #156

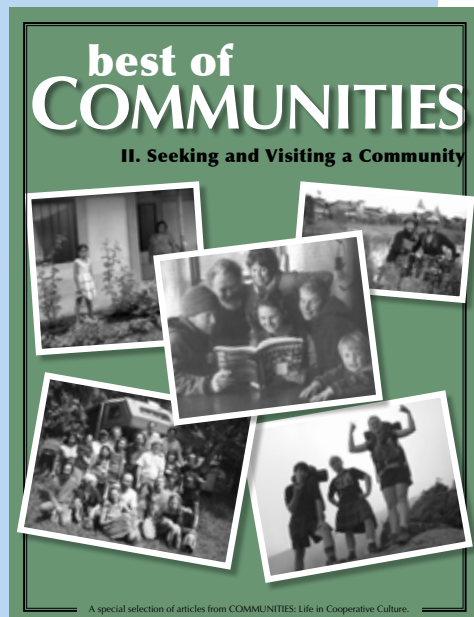
II. Seeking and Visiting Community

If you're seriously interested in community living, all experts agree that you're wise to visit first. Not just because reality may not align exactly with the mental image you had based on written descriptions or phone calls, but because what you think you want and what you actually want aren't necessarily the same thing, and it's far cheaper to discover that before you sell your home and move to another zip code.

These 14 articles in “Seeking and Visiting Community” address how to get the most out of community visits, and also share diverse stories of community exploration. They walk you through the etiquette of setting up a visit (hint: don't drop in unannounced), how to put your hosts at ease, and how to ask the right questions. They also provide tips to communities themselves on how to deal optimally with community-seekers.

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1. Red Carpets and Slammed Doors: Visiting Communities by Geoph Kozeny, Directory 2007
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O.U.R. Ecovillage, known for its work in crafting the legal path for ecovillages/intentional communities in Canada, is seen here in celebration of the newly legal "Green Burial: Commemorative Conservation Scattering Grounds" as a framework for protecting lands and projects for future generations. This park/farm space is created by more than 90 percent salvaged materials, including the once 15 logging trucks of rescued windfalls from the edges of clearcuts in the local community. Many wide-ranging precedents for regulatory approvals have developed this community since 1999 and allowed for innovation in the built and human systems—not previously allowed in Canada. Photo courtesy of O.U.R. Ecovillage.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

EDITOR

Chris Roth (*Lost Valley/Meadowsong*)

ART DIRECTOR

Yulia Zarubina-Brill

ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS MANAGER

Christopher Kindig (*Earth-Tribe.org*)

WEB SUPPORT

Pavan Rikhi (*Acorn*)

CIRCULATION MANAGER

McCune Porter (*Twin Oaks*)

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Kim Scheidt (*Red Earth Farms*)

Kim Kanney

Laird Schaub

Sky Blue (*Twin Oaks*)

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

Deborah Altus

Marty Klaif (*Shannon Farm*)

Parke Burgess

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

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Letters



Law, Neighbors, and Envy

Good day from Calgary, Alberta, Canada,

Just finished reading the “Community and the Law” issue (#168) and wish to share a few thoughts.

First of all, I am so pleased to know your magazine is out there; we have subscribed to it and will be ordering back issues.

Secondly, about the “Community and the Law” issue, I note numerous references to trouble from neighbors who are devious in their actions. I think the great difficulty that

so many of us have with getting intentional communities fully accepted in society is the result of fear that our neighbors have, and fear’s wonderful yet devious ally envy.

I have seen envy in my work in the politics of management in heavy industry and now I read of the same effects in neighborhoods where intentional communities are struggling to be accepted. The tricky thing with envy is that no one will admit to it and thus it is almost impossible to determine the source or the real reason for the trouble since no one will admit to being envious in such circumstances.

Envy is best prevented with clear action and planning beforehand, for once a neighbor gets envious, they take on a power struggle that is all too often impossible or at least impractical to stop.

Thanks again for the well written and presented articles.

Looking forward to upcoming issues as we recently rented a six-bedroom house as a co-op home and are on our way to building OCIC (Our Calgary Intentional Community; AKA “Oh See? I See!”).

Please do keep up the good work.

David Babich
Calgary, Alberta

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!

SUPPORT the FIC

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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, 23 Dancing Rabbit Ln, 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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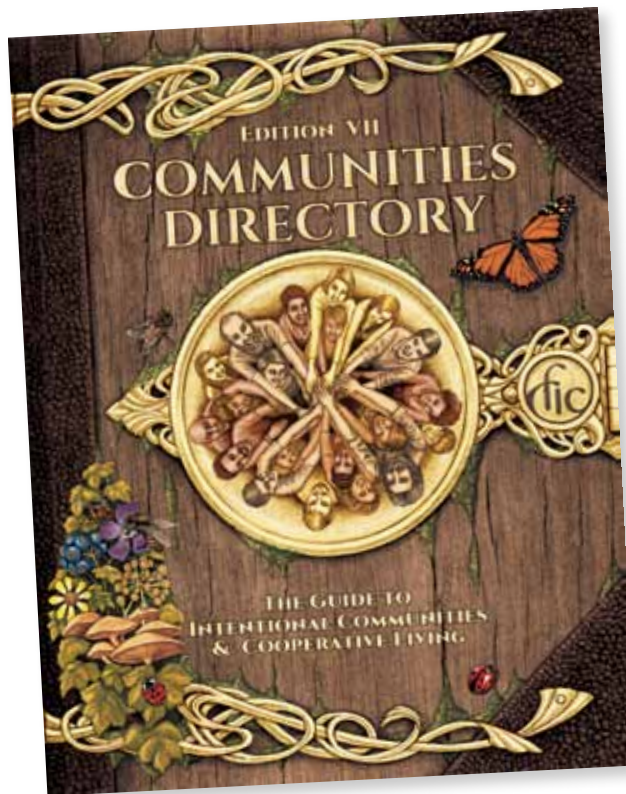
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What is an “Intentional Community”?

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.



**THE NEW
COMMUNITIES DIRECTORY:
A Star Chart for Seekers and Founders**

If you've ever participated in forming a community, or talked with people who have, you probably have some idea of what's involved. And if you have some idea of what's involved, you've probably asked yourself, why would anyone in their right mind want to do such a thing? It's like starting a family or having a child. You really have no idea what you're in for, and that's probably a good thing because you might not do it otherwise.

The reasons for starting a community are not dissimilar from those for starting a family or having a child: Desires for intimacy, to be bonded to other humans, to be part of the unfolding story of humanity, to contribute to and have hopes for the future, to feel like your life matters, to be intimately involved and watch in fascination the growth of another being, or, simply, because it's something you just need to do. But it's intensely hard work, and it doesn't always work out the way you thought it would.

The sense of intimacy, satisfaction, and meaning that living in community provides, being part of a village or a tribe, is something that is clearly lacking in most of mainstream society. Most of the blueprints for building community have been discarded. There are pockets around the world where traditional cultures and village life remain intact, but in most places it needs to be recreated, and in many places we're already several generations removed from the experience. Part of the work of the Fellowship for Intentional Community is documenting this recreation, and this issue of COMMUNITIES is focused on this endeavor.

But you don't have to help start a community to be part of this, and indeed there are plenty of reasons not to join the ranks of the pioneers. One in particular is that there are lots of communities already in existence and almost every one of them needs help. It's not a good idea to move to a community expecting it to change to suit you, but it's inevitable that the more you invest yourself in a community, while also accepting the community for

the unique being that it is, the more you will come to suit each other.

Work is underway to produce the 7th printed edition of the *Communities Directory*. Preliminary work for this has been focused online. Over the last few months we've been working hard to have all communities in the online Directory update their listings, and we're going to start requiring that groups update or verify their listings at least once per year. We've also been tweaking the new listings questionnaire to try to make sure communities are providing the most useful information possible. We ran a highly successful crowd-funding campaign to finance the new Directory, raising almost \$12,000 from over 170 donors, through online and offline channels. It was gratifying and humbling to see importance of this work reflected in this outpouring of support.

The Directory is an important road map to finding those places where the blueprints are being recreated. It serves not only those looking to join a community, but also those potential pioneers who can learn from the trailblazers before them. The Directory becomes a star chart, in which communities are the points of light guiding us to new hope. It also helps define the movement and lets each community know that it's not working in isolation.

The Directory is the keystone in the support we offer for the development and promotion of intentional communities. The bridge to cooperative living also includes COMMUNITIES magazine, as well as our *Best of COMMUNITIES* series, which pulls together the most helpful articles on the most important topics in building community. The Community Bookstore isn't just any online store; it includes only titles related to intentional community and cooperative culture. Ic.org's classifieds are another way we help people find community, and events we host or cosponsor are also essential aspects of the work we do to make sure you have the resources you need to get where you want to go.

This is our mission, to offer lifelines to those out there immersed in the challenges of recreating society. We couldn't do it without your support. 🌱

Sky Blue (sky@ic.org) is Executive Director of the Fellowship for Intentional Community.



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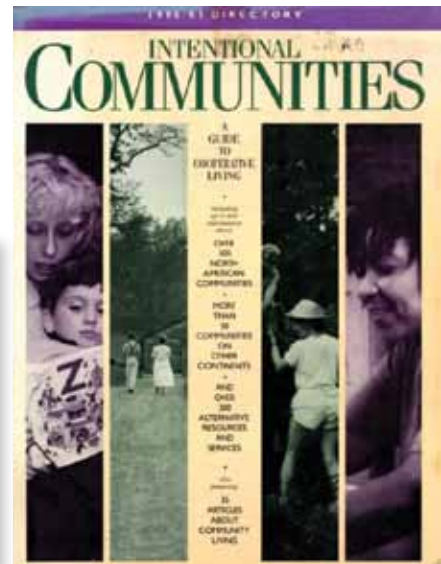
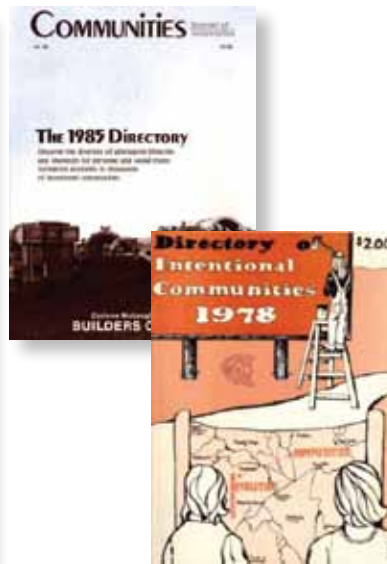
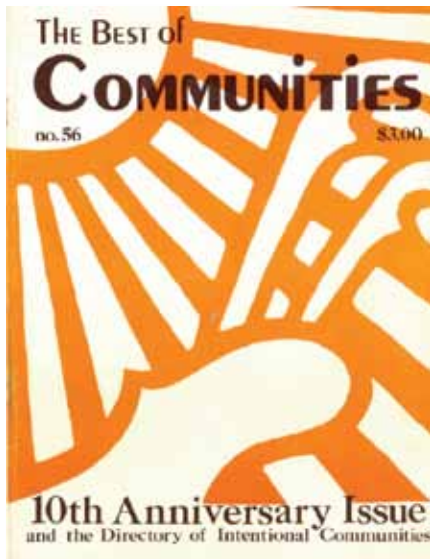


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The Quest for Community



My search for an intentional community began as a thought exercise during high school. I pored over pages of *COMMUNITIES* in my school library, including some of its “Directory” issues, and eventually ordered a booklet from the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, whose member groups seemed most aligned with my values. I then set all that aside to follow the beaten path to traditional undergraduate education, as most of my classmates were doing, but made a sharp turn after two years to enroll in a traveling environmental education community to finish out college. (My interest in intentional community had been restimulated by a couple visits to a monastery during early college breaks, followed a few years later by my first Directory-sourced visit, to a very idealistic, albeit sparsely populated indigenous-inspired intentional community in northern Wisconsin.)

After graduation, I resolved to enroll in the school of real life rather than further formal education, and relocated to a Native American reservation, where I was reminded daily of the stark contrast between native ways and the “settler” ways that had pushed those native ways onto isolated reservations, and in some cases (but fortunately not in this one) extinguished them entirely. Here in northern Arizona, much of the traditional culture and set of world-views was still intact, and even more than that, the sense of community (innate and inherent, not “intentional”) was palpable and even assumed. It was with regret that I recognized after a year and a half that I couldn’t fully remake myself as a native member of this tribe, and that my own path was calling me elsewhere.

Within a year of rejoining “white” society—a year in which I never felt at ease with the culture shock of returning to more mainstream America—I found myself at my first long-term intentional community, a rural educational center holding more in common with my former Native American home than with the suburban East Coast town in which I’d grown up. I’d gone there for the education (in organic gardening), but quickly discovered that the com-

munity aspect had just as much, or more, to teach me—both when it worked well, and when it was dramatically dysfunctional.

After a couple of years, with another “Directory” issue of *COMMUNITIES* in hand, I set out to find the “perfect” intentional community. (I still thought in terms of perfection and the “ideal community,” because I hadn’t yet recognized that finding or creating community is largely about the journey, rather than simply the destination, and that community itself is a process, not a static state or utopian end goal.)

The Directory led me once again to member groups of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, in which I ended up spending most of the next two years, interspersed with other community visits. Ties of affinity to people, culture, and land then drew me back to the Pacific Northwest—but the dysfunction in my former Oregon community hadn’t disappeared. After some particularly disillusioning experiences (instead of working together, my “community” eventually headed to court with suits and countersuits), I decided that intentional community was too difficult and intense for me. For a while, I found I was more comfortable working on small organic family farms, where the focus was clearly on one farmer’s goals rather than on everyone’s sometimes-clashing needs, desires, and agendas. But after a few years of helping out on others’ farms, I longed for more robust and empowered community in which we’d all be co-creators.

At one point I even drew up a description of my ideal community, having decided that I needed to start it myself. My “forming community” listing almost appeared in a print version of the *Communities Directory*—but I withdrew it before press date, as I recognized the many advantages of becoming part of an already-initiated project, if at all possible, rather than starting a new one. My personality seemed better suited to joining with others to help a struggling group survive and thrive, rather than creating a struggling group from scratch. I also found that I was more happy and fulfilled in situations where

there were obvious challenges that I could help address—where I knew I was making a difference—rather than where all systems were already established and a comfortable status quo prevailed.

I joined my current intentional community almost two decades ago, and over the ensuing years it's undergone many changes, as have I—both internally and in my roles in the community. I even spent a year away, exploring intentional community in a different part of the country, when I felt both I and my home community had fallen into ruts (fortunately, we both extracted ourselves). My sense of community now extends far beyond the bounds of my home community: my ties to others in town and elsewhere (many of them ex-community-mates) are just as strong as any I have to my current community-mates; my far-flung family of birth is also an essential part of my community; and the even larger number of people in the communities movement—especially those who choose to read and/or contribute to this magazine—are also important parts of my extended community.

As someone who benefited early on from COMMUNITIES and then the FIC, I've felt gratified to be able to give back over the years. Whether hand-drawing the maps in the 1990-91 *Communities Directory* when living at Sandhill Farm (with the snow-covered northern Missouri roads impassable at times that winter, this was a way to travel virtually), or contributing articles to the magazine in the 2000s, or editing the magazine for the last eight years, I've felt happy to be doing something to aid others in finding or creating community in their own lives. Sometimes small seeds (like those we in the FIC have the opportunity to plant through this magazine, the Directory, and other offerings) can grow into beautiful gardens, orchards, savannas, and forests. We hope this issue of COMMUNITIES will plant more of those seeds.

A final note: No magazine issue can be a comprehensive resource on our intentionally broad topics. Additional resources that will complement this issue include *Best of COMMUNITIES* Volumes I and II, numerous past articles posted on ic.org, other sources cited by various authors in this issue, and of course the new *Communities Directory*. 🐦

Chris Roth (editor@ic.org) edits COMMUNITIES.

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A Useful Tool for Founders and Seekers: SPECTRUMS

By Ma'ikwe Ludwig



Ma'ikwe Ludwig

I'm a little obsessed with spectrums. The world is pretty much one big grey area as near as I can tell. Anyone who has ever spent any time with me as a facilitator or a facilitation teacher knows that spectrums are one of my go-to tools.

In workshops I teach about starting an Intentional Community as well as finding a community home, I use this particular set of spectrums (see worksheets). These are things that every community lands on somewhere, either deliberately or by default.

Here's how I suggest people use them.

For Founders

It is very important that you get clear about what things are essential to you in your community vision and what things you don't really care about. I recommend going through these spectrums and marking on each one the perfect spot in your mind of how your community will be set up. (I do this with an X or some other simple symbol.) Then I would also mark (perhaps using a highlighter marker or brackets) your range of tolerance. In other words, you might have a preference, but for most of these you also will likely have some flexibility about how close to the ideal it needs to be in order for you to feel excited about all the work of creating a community.

As an example, you might ideally want to be very rural, but could live with being in a small town. So in that case, you'd mark an X all the way over on the far side above rural, and then place a bracket or highlighter mark from the rural side to, say, one-third of the way across the spectrum.

You may find that you have no opinion or preference for some of them. That's great! That means that your vision has some flexibility and will allow other people's preferences to come into play. However, it is very important to be as honest as you can be about your answers. If you really want to live in a community that is income-sharing or has a strong spiritual orientation, it is fine to place an X and then have no brackets at all. This will help people who are considering joining you know exactly what they are joining.

Many founders make the mistake of thinking that they can

answer all these questions after they have five or six or 10 people they really like who have decided to join. The pitfall in waiting to get clear about that is that you run the risk of not having enough alignment among that group and wasting a lot of everyone's time.

Get clear about your must-haves, articulate those clearly, and recruit from that place. Then drag this spectrum worksheet out and let folks know that the group is welcome to answer the rest of those questions or just let yourselves default to something. Doing this well will create a much stronger, aligned, and clear core group to build from.

For People Seeking a Community

I recommend following the same procedure as above for seekers: mark on each of these spectrums your ideal and your range of tolerance. Then step back and do a little soul searching. You may have a preference, but how strong is it? Which ones of these are your make or break criteria? The same advice about honesty applies here. Be as real with yourself about these answers as you can be.

Hint: If each of your answers is just an X or has a very narrow range to it, you are likely to be very disappointed when you get out there and start searching. One of the first lessons of community is to be able to articulate your preferences and then widen back into flexibility for the sake of being able to connect and work with others. Filling this worksheet out is a first chance at seeing just how flexible or rigid you currently are. Having a strong preference on four to six of these is probably healthy and will help your search be productive.

Seekers should take this with them when they visit places. I'd recommend sitting down with someone who has been in the community you are visiting for a while (at least three years if the group is established) and asking them for their realistic take on their community and how well it matches your preferences. This can be an invaluable guide for sorting out the communities that might really work well for you.

Once you've narrowed your search in this more logical way, I'd recommend setting this aside and considering communities from a more intuitive or felt place. Regardless of what the spectrums

say, which one feels right or the most like home? Is there a community that didn't quite match your answers, but your attention keeps getting drawn back to it? Can you flex and grow into that community? Is there something the spectrums didn't cover that you have found through your process really is more important than these criteria?

By the same token, if a place looks great on paper but feels wrong, trust your gut. Preferences can (and very likely will) change, but a good intuitive hit is almost always worth listening to.

Choosing an intentional community home is really all about being intentional. And generally, that will be a healthy mix of logic and love, criteria and intuition. Let me know if these spectrums help you on your journey! 🐰

Maikwe Ludwig lives at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, where she serves as the Executive Director of the ecovillage's nonprofit. She teaches workshops on group process, sustainability, and starting intentional communities. Her latest project is the Materialized Empathy project, a model policy development organization dedicated to economic and ecological justice, including helping reduce legal barriers to sustainable community formation. She can be reached at maikwe.ludwig@gmail.com.

Spectrums for Individuals within Groups

The following are common scales that describe basic approaches to life. In a healthy group, there are people spread out throughout these scales. All traits have a valuable aspect to them and all have pitfalls. Ideally, the membership of an organization takes into account these sorts of things when trying to find a good roles for someone to play, e.g., quick decision-making is valuable in a work-party leader, but not so much for budget team members, where you want more measured thinking; good facilitators see meetings as being both for decisions and connection; if everyone has a strong sense of aesthetics, you need great alignment or you're in trouble.

Suggested uses: Perspective. Create an exercise to get to know each other better. Use to reduce judgment.

- Interprets Negatively <-----> Interprets Positively
- Slow to Decide <-----> Quick to Decide
- Slow to Change <-----> Quick to Change
- Fact-Based <-----> Non-Rational-Based
- Meetings Are to Decide <-----> Meetings Are to Connect
- Manifest by Actions <-----> Manifest by Intention
- Follower <-----> Leader
- Planner <-----> Doer
- Holds a Grudge <-----> Lets Things Go
- Works on Stuff Privately <-----> Enrolls Others in Process
- Sticks to First Take <-----> Changes Mind Easily
- Gives Mostly Work <-----> Gives Mostly Thinking
- Strong Aesthetic Sense <-----> Not Strong on Aesthetics
- Prefers Noisy Bustle <-----> Prefers Solitude
- Comfortable in Groups <-----> Nervous in Groups

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Spectrums for Intentional Communities

ICs come in lots of flavors. Every group falls somewhere on these spectrums, which affect the feel, culture, and experience of being in the group (though be aware that the answers to these can change over time, and changes are not necessarily about how healthy or vibrant the group is). Misalignment in any one of these spectrums makes it a tough fit.

- Income Sharing <-----> Tithing <-----> Independent Finances
- High Resource Sharing <-----> Low Resource Sharing
- No Cost to Join <-----> High Cost to Join
- Spiritually Same <-----> Spiritually Diverse <-----> Supports Spiritual Practice <-----> Tolerates Spirituality <-----> Secular <-----> Intolerant of Spirituality
- Rural <-----> Urban
- Mission Driven <-----> Member Quality of Life Driven
- Inwardly Focused <-----> Outwardly Focused
- Family Size <-----> Village Size
- Low Technology Use <-----> High Technology Use
- Mainstream Appeal <-----> Radical Appeal
- Deep Alignment <-----> Consensus <-----> Voting <-----> Small Decision Group <-----> Sole Leader
- Flat Power <-----> Dispersed Power <-----> Strong Pockets of Power <-----> Very Lopsided
- Strong Group Role in Conflict Resolution <-----> Group Hands Off with Conflict Resolution
- Rules-based <-----> Relationally-based
- "Moving Toward" Energy <-----> "Resisting" Energy

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Community Search RESOURCES

By McCune Porter

Editor's Note: The Fellowship for Intentional Community receives many inquiries, especially via our web contact form (www.ic.org/contact-fic), from people interested in intentional community living. Working from our Virginia office (located at Twin Oaks Community), longtime FIC staffer McCune Porter answers most of these inquiries, and when appropriate also forwards them to others within the organization who may be able to help.

Here's a standard email McCune sends out to community seekers, containing some of the most helpful resources we know about.

• • •

Greetings,

We offer the following tools to help search for intentional communities that meet particular criteria:

1) ONLINE DIRECTORY

Search www.ic.org/directory for communities that meet any requirements you may have. Contact the communities individually on the list you generate to start correspondence with each community on the list. To contact an individual community, use the contact information at the upper right of that community's listing.

Communities by type: Ecovillages, Cohousing, Communes, Co-ops, Christian

www.ic.org/directory/community-types

Communities by geographic list

www.ic.org/directory/intentional-communities-by-country

Directory Advanced Search

www.ic.org/directory/search

Search using maps

www.ic.org/directory/map

The Search Our Site box at the top right of every page on our site might also prove useful if none of the other online Directory search tools seems to help locate what you're seeking.

2) ONLINE BULLETIN BOARD PLUS CLASSIFIED ADS

Post your interests in our classified ads section, which is read by thousands of people. Many free post categories are available as well as paid listings.

www.ic.org/community-classifieds

3) IN PRINT

Our print resources may be helpful, particularly the *Communities Directory*, COMMUNITIES magazine, and the book *Finding Community: How to Join an Ecovillage or Intentional Community*.

Shop here for the *Directory*, COMMUNITIES magazine, and other titles:

www.ic.org/community-bookstore

4) NETWORKING EVENTS

Attend one or more regional or national intentional community events. These are typically the best way to meet people already living in intentional community and/or who have visited one or more intentional communities.

www.ic.org/intentional-community-events

5) VISIT/TOUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

A visit to or tour of intentional communities near your place of residence can be very useful. (Always pre-arrange such visits—never show up without an appointment to visit or tour.)

6) FORUMS

There are community-related discussion forums on some third party sites, for example:

www.reddit.com/r/intentionalcommunity

intentionalcommunity.tribe.net

www.facebook.com/groups/636532239809454

Sincerely,

McCune

FIC Staff

Additional Editor's Note: McCune also manages our magazine subscription list, assembles FIC's weekly eNews (subscribe via left-hand column at ic.org), and keeps a general eye out for things needing attention. With a reputation for being exceptionally dependable, detail-oriented, and dedicated, he has provided essential "glue" and consistency over many years within an ever-evolving organization. His humility would also prevent him from writing anything like the above, so this paragraph is partly a stealth attempt to give him at least a little recognition. Thanks McCune! 🐣

New Directory, New Manager

By Roshana Ariel

Note from Sky Blue, FIC Executive Director: In early 2015 as we began planning the overhaul of the online Communities Directory and the publication of the 7th print edition, we learned that our Directory Manager was going to be leaving us. It was unfortunate timing, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It led us to hiring Roshana, a new member at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, who's jumped in with both feet and has been amazing in helping move this project forward. In the midst of our Directory crowdfunding campaign we asked Roshana to say a few words about her new position.



Hello! My name is Roshana, and I'm the Directory Manager for the Fellowship for Intentional Community. I started the job in mid-September, shortly after moving to Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in northeast Missouri. This is my first experience living in an ecovillage, and it has been, to put it mildly, quite an adventure. I'm staying in a strawbale house and getting ready for my first winter in Missouri, with only a wood stove to keep me warm. Wish me luck!

I discovered the *Communities Directory* a couple of years ago, when I thought about moving to an intentional community. I was feeling burned out at my job (as assistant editor at a daily newspaper in Kansas) and thinking it was really time to walk my talk, as it pertains to living sustainably. At the newspaper, I wrote a weekly column and talked a lot about climate change, natural building materials, using passive solar design, measuring my carbon footprint, and many other "eco" topics. But I was still driving my car to work every day, even on nice days, and even though I lived just a mile away from my job.

Sure, I recycled and turned my thermostat down and conserved on water, but I didn't think I was doing enough to live my values.

The FIC Directory led me to Dancing Rabbit, along with several other interesting communities. After that, it was the many videos on Dancing Rabbit's YouTube channel that enticed me to visit, and a 10-day visitor session in June helped me make up my mind to take the plunge.

I have certainly learned that it's challenging to live sustainably, and I so admire the people in this community who have been doing this for years. I also admire all the people who have been working to build intentional communities, whether their focus is on living sustainably or living according to spiritual or religious convictions, or just trying to live more closely to their fellow human beings with integrity.

I'm excited about having a hand in making the Directory as useful as possible, both for the folks who are looking for just the right community and the communities who are looking for just the right members so that all can thrive. As an editor, I find it important that everything be accurate and up to date. I have an eye for errors and inconsistencies that helps me with my new job with FIC.

Work has been especially busy lately as we prepare to publish the print version of the Directory this spring. I enjoy getting in touch with communities and letting them know how we might make their listing more clear and bring it up to date. The communities I've heard from have been wonderful to work with. They make my job a real pleasure. Maybe there's something about living in an intentional community that helps people roll with the punches more easily and become more patient, more appreciative, and more joyful.

We hope to continue to make the FIC Directory as accurate and valuable as it can be, so that intentional communities and potential residents can find each other quickly and easily. We thank you for helping us do that! 🐰

Roshana Ariel is the Directory Manager for the Fellowship for Intentional Community. She lives with her cocker-poodle mix, Booda, at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in northeast Missouri. A longtime editor at a daily newspaper in Kansas, she also wrote a weekly column called Ariel View. Many of those columns can be found at www.roshanaariel.com.



Finding Home

By Eridani Baker

Editor's Note: the author sent us this story in late September 2015; its timeline reflects that date.

**He aha te mea nui?
He tangata.
He tangata.
He tangata.**

What is the most important thing? It is people, it is people, it is people.

—*Maori Proverb*

In the past year and a half I have called a lot of places home. Last year I left London, my home of two years, and traveled to Greece. I stayed a month, made new family, then traveled to Eugene, Oregon and called Lost Valley community my place for three months. I left America for India and lived at the Ananda Ashram near Pondicherry; it was home for over half a year. Then I went back to Greece, an unsettling place to be at this point in time. I stayed for three more months before hopping a plane back to London en route to my final destination, New Zealand, where I was born.

The history of words teaches us that together we are stronger. Community, from the Latin *com* meaning “with, together, in conjunction, joint” and *munire*, meaning “to fortify, strengthen, or defend,” reminds us that it is in unification with the other that we are truly heartened. To live in a group requires an amount of dissolution of Ego. To share space with another implies a level of support. To a degree you are saying to your fellows: I am committed to your safety and security; fear not for we are in this together.

Living in intentional community offers insight into a fuller spectrum of earthly experience than one could ever hope to glimpse living in a city of great population. At Lost Valley I was able to discover what it really means to be connected, not only to the other residents but also to the environment. I loved watching the beans grow up the corn stalks while the summer squash crawled around on the ground; we watched it actively but without judgment. It's the same for people in community: the people you live with bear witness as you falter, they see that you go down when you ought to go up, they see signs of decay before a normal life cycle would suppose it, and so they provide a stake. Without becoming responsible for another person, and without letting one rotten apple spoil the barrel, for the most part the overall effect of community is that it creates a structure, it offers scaffolding as well as something to graft to. In the natural flow, eventually you will be picked up and moved forward.

Community living takes time to settle into and my time at Lost Valley marked the beginning of a new chapter. I'd left the media industry in London and was on the long way home to New Zealand to work somewhere in the field of yoga. My plans were vague. My experience of being at Lost Valley was one of primordial support.

It afforded me time to compost, to turn the soil and create a rich base to grow out of. For me, to see the world existing in miniature, to see a community operating as a whole whilst still being within a wider local structure, gave me pause to reflect on who I have been, who I am, and the version of me I want to be in the future. It offered me space to share stories and personal histories with other people; sharing, and living with the people with whom I had communed, was an accelerant to the digestive process that has to come before moving on. Composting is hard and dirty work.

At first, community living didn't seem much different from sleep-away camp or a holiday at a campground. I didn't immediately feel like I was part of something, but when I went to leave I realized that I had glued these people to my heart and now they were being ripped away. Let me tell you just one story that made me realize that I was becoming part of something. I spent one sunny day shoveling duck and chicken poop, filling wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow and moving the stuff to a different part of the property to make potting mix. I did this with a guy I'd instantly recognized as my opposite. Unlike me, he preferred to be nude, he always used soft words, and he is the kind of hippie that will crawl up in your lap and sing himself to sleep. We swapped stories and shared our ideas, no Nonviolent Communication techniques required, just talking and listening, both of us just sincerely striving to understand the other's experience of being alive.

That story doesn't have a profound conclusion; it's just something that I think would only happen in community, and I feel richer for having shared time with someone so different from me. I feel personally invested in him; I want life to be good for him. The night before I left Lost Valley everyone came out to the basketball court to have a big family photo. It wasn't a very well-planned photo-shoot; we weren't all there at the same time and it was getting dark. But I love that I have those photos and I know that everyone came out because they had, in whatever small way, tried to understand me; however mildly, those people feel personally invested in me. Community living helps you to understand “other” and that's the kind of thing that will change the world.

In yoga circles, when a bunch of people hang out together it is called Satsang. “Sat” means truth and “sanga” means company, so

to be in Satsang is to be in the company of other truth seekers. Delete the religious connotations this brings up for you: yoga is not a “religion” in the modern sense of the word. It’s more like being on a scavenger hunt with a bunch of people who have different skills than your own. Together you are just jamming it out, trying to figure out which pieces of each other’s knowledge help you towards your goal. You are doing this with an open mind, letting go of things you’ve previously held as valuable. That can be a really hard thing to do. I have a ring with a red stone in it. I used to think the stone was a ruby; now I know it’s not, but since I’ve seen the ring as hugely valuable monetarily for years, it’s hard to make my brain understand that really, it’s not. What I’m saying here is that sometimes someone else’s knowledge is more valuable than your own.

Living in India will make you rethink all your previous irritations really quickly. I flew out of Eugene, Oregon bound for Chennai. The last coffee place I visited in the States had run out of nondairy creamer; I was pissed because, like, I’m a vegan so I do no harm. *Shut up*, I now tell that past “me”: most of the village people you meet in India have literally never experienced the feeling of “full”; they have never loosened a belt or popped the button on their jeans as a symptom of overeating. The size of your large popcorn bucket is utterly incomprehensible to them. Milk comes in a vacuum-sealed pouch in India; if villagers can afford it they have most likely worked harder than you; and coffee is a luxury.

I lived at the Ananda Ashram near Pondicherry while completing their intensive residential six-month Yoga Teacher training. Ashram living is not for the wanderlust traveler. MC Yogi is not here, not everyone wants a hug, and if you are wearing a bindi you are wearing only one and it is with sincerity, to remind other people that we should be residing here, at the ajna chakra, the center

for deep contemplation. Living in an Ashram is like living in an intentional community only that the person you’ll spend most time with exists only in your mind. That little demon in your head that has been telling you that you are ugly and stupid for years will be given a microphone. With nothing else to do you will sit down and listen, but with no place to escape to and a routine you can’t get out of, you will start to notice that the demon is not you, you’re the one listening, and you don’t have to. Ashram life runs like clockwork; the same things happen at the same time every day, and it can feel like you are going around in circles, but when you look back you see that you are actually spiraling upward. In India I learned about consolidating the community in my own head.

When I left India I just sort of floated around Greece and Cyprus for a few months, with no fixed group of people and no real plan. It was the opposite of community and it was alarmingly destructive. I left India feeling like I was Captain of my own vessel and arrived in New Zealand having forgotten how to swim. Unless you are a monk or a nun, people need people. I think even monks and nuns need people.

The moral of the story is: find a passion, have goals, surround yourself with other people with clear passions and goals, and then talk to each other. Hopefully you will come to understand some truths that are different from your own, and those moments of understanding will propel you forward in a direction that will be good for everyone. 🌸

Eridani Baker is a yoga teacher living in Auckland, New Zealand. She has spent time living in Melbourne, Greece, Cyprus, Oregon, London, and India. Her dream is to start a yoga studio that doubles as a permaculture education centre.



REDISCOVERING COMMUNITY: A family's journey back to appreciating Home

By Devon Bonady

This fall, my family received an unexpected gift, in the form of an unsolicited offer to buy our homestead. When I agreed to write an article for this issue of COMMUNITIES, I had no idea that this gift was coming to my family. I was planning to write about my family's journey towards finding our true vision of community. Before I got too far into writing, we were blindsided with the unexpected offer and my daily life became an emotional roller coaster. One day I was excited and ready to pass our home along to a wonderful family and find our new community—one that would be larger and more “intentional” than we have at our single-family homestead. The next day I was in tears imagining the effort it would take to explore and find a new home with a toddler and newborn in tow, not to mention a not-very-mobile family business. (We run an edible, medicinal, and native plant nursery.) At one point in the process, I even drafted this article as if I had sold my “home,” because that is what I thought we were going to do! We had an opportunity to really delve into the emotions and issues on both sides of our choice.

The happy ending of the story could be that we accepted the offer with gratitude and grace, appreciating the way in which it allowed us to pursue finding community in a new place, something that we have been envisioning. But that's not the happy ending we are living now. The gift for us was the chance to very seriously examine the reality of leaving our home, which until this point was just a “pipe dream” or visionary idea. After much examination and many long nights, the gift allowed us to really see how much community does exist in our lives and to appreciate all that we have instead of longing for that ideal place with “more.”

Here are some of the issues we have been dealing with in the past few years around creating and finding (or re-finding) community where we are and elsewhere:

Community is not static. How can we stay in one place, continue to get our community needs met, and adapt to change?

I have lived in the same small western Oregon town for over 15 years, with a few short breaks, and have lived on the same land for over 11 years. While I have stayed, so much has changed! When I look around at the friends I have in my neighborhood, only a handful have been here even half of the time that I have. My neighbors have changed drastically and, because of that, my friends and local community too. Quite a lot of people have come and gone here on our property as well. In some ways, that is the nature of community, especially among 20- and early 30-year-olds.

Community is not static. Even if I stay in one place, community changes around me. This has positive and negative impacts. I appreciate change and, I, too, am always changing, as my vision for community also changes. When I first moved to this small town, I was excited to have like-minded 20-somethings around me, doing service work and environmental work and spending a lot of time getting to know each other. Many of my wonderful friends from that time have moved on, and as a parent, I am now seeking other people with small children focused on alternative education. Committed to staying here, I try to adjust and create new avenues for community. Sometimes I get frustrated and sad and miss “the old days.” Then I wonder, “Could I find more of what I need now somewhere else?”



The paradox of wanting to grow roots in one place, but participating in the ever changing community that grows out of our modern “moving” culture.

I have lived here longer than any other place in my life. When I moved here in 2000, as a young college graduate, I was excited to move across the country. I was also excited to grow roots and make a serious commitment to place: land and community. To me, the idea of “home” is meant to be for the long haul. Fifteen years later, I am a mother and overwhelmed and apprehensive about moving at all, especially if it means moving away from my first-ever “home.” Now, as before, I seek a stable long-term committed community.

Having children and creating a family has helped me see how important extended family is for our overall health and well-being. Traditionally, in early “American” culture, before suburbia and the push to move for a career, most people grew up and grew old in the same place, surrounded by family. Whether or not they got along exceptionally well, family members helped each other when needed; grandparents and aunts and uncles watched young children so their parents could work. In many cases, children had instant playmates. I experienced much of this, growing up in Wisconsin within an hour of where my parents grew up and where all of my family lived. As an only child, I still had frequent playtime with my cousins and lots of social time with many aunts and uncles. Now, I am very far from that family in physical distance and in lifestyle choices and values. When I think about what community lifestyle I envision for my family, I see how it is very close to what the extended family role has been. Basically, what my husband and I, as well as many of the intentional community and cohousing seekers out there are looking for, is to **create a new extended family**.

One of the main challenges I see is that people are still moving. At this point, if I want to stay in one place, the place where my “new” extended family also lives, I need to either accept that members of this family will come and go, or make some kind of pact with family members that we all agree to stay together or move together. The latter seems quite unrealistic, even for true relatives. For now, I see that accepting the fluidity of community and “family” will allow me to accept and appreciate what I have.

As a new parent, my needs for community are changing. My family’s needs for community are changing and our vision for community is changing. Do we adapt to what we have, find ways to create what we want, or find a new “home?”

A year after I moved to this town, I was very excited to be part of a dynamic community of inspiring people. My previous plans to travel fell away as I made the choice to delve into community and place. I attended a 10-day course at an intentional community less than an hour drive from my current home. During my stay, I met some amazing people and

learned about the personal growth work that the community was focused on at that time. Recognizing my need to do similar work, I participated in several courses over the next five months and then made a decision to move to the intentional community. I felt sad to leave the place I first landed and yet knew I needed to make the move.

One of my friends responded to my choice by saying, “So, the grass is always greener, huh?” At the time this statement truly hurt me because I felt fear that I was letting down the people I had committed to work with that year. It also shook up the part of me that always feels uncertain and ungrounded about large decision-making experiences. Is there really something better or am I just projecting my vision onto a different place instead of trying to create what I want where I am?

Reflecting on that experience, moving was just what I needed. And soon I came back to this community where I first landed, to reconnect with friends like the person I mentioned above, who remains an essential part of my community to this day. This reflection reminds me to follow my instinct and heart, and trust that the right path will unfold.

If we want to find a new “home,” where and how do we start our search?

Visioning is always the first step for me. I like to do visioning every year for my personal needs and goals, my work and business goals, and my family. As new and busy parents, our visioning took a back seat after our



Devon Bonady



Lindsay Howells, a friend and community member who lived and worked with us this past year, mixing earth straw and sand to install a beautiful earthen floor in our home.



Our seasonal intern Claire helped us with growing and harvesting food.

son was born. As we talked casually about finding ways to better meet our needs for community, we kept “meaning” to find time for more visioning. The reality of making a serious legally-binding decision to move forced us to put visioning back at the top of the list. As I looked through our old vision writing, it was interesting to note two things. Our vision that we worked hard to write out clearly has changed very little. Much of our current home and community is aligned with our vision, except for a few key things. The key things are what we grapple with and what urged me on to considering a move.

With our vision in hand, including general geographic areas of preference, it was time to start searching. I felt daunted, and still do, about the idea of finding the community we envision, knowing that we might not find a place that fits all of our criteria. I want to be hopeful and trust that we will find what we need, yet also must keep my feet grounded in reality so that we can be successful. That is why we must include in our vision the following questions: **What do we need? What can we give up? Can we make it work where we are?**

Our initial search included searching the ic.org site for communities that might fit our specific vision of living rurally with other families interested in homeschooling and creating community around children while also allowing us to make at least some of our living off the land. We found some great questions posted by some communities to help us clarify our needs and how we might fit best in one or another intentional community or cohousing setting. I particularly appreciated the following questions, from Champlain Valley Cohousing:

What about you (and your family) makes cohousing a good choice for you?

What is the one thing—yes, an actual thing—that you could never live without in your next home?

In fifteen words or less, what’s most important for your happiness?

What do you need that you don’t have right now? (There’s no wrong answer!)

During our search, we found a few options that looked good “on paper” at least. It was easy for me to get very excited about the possibilities, then have a reality check reminder that we really have no idea what a community is like until we visit and get to know the people. For me and my family, community is all about people. At that point, and the place we are today, we feel like we need to visit places and stay a while to really get a sense of if that place might be worth considering our future home. That said, traveling across the country with a toddler and newborn is not easy. Not to mention that we have a homestead and nursery to care for at home, although luckily we have great neighbors willing to help out a little. And those great neighbors are the people who keep bringing me back to focus on staying where we are.

The lesson I learn when I get the chance to spend time with my “real” extended family is to focus on shared values to create connection. I believe that is also one way to discover and rediscover commu-

nity in my current home. Instead of seeing the differences between me and others in my existing community, if I focus on the similarities such as shared values, shared needs, and shared vision, I will see the possibilities!

In recent years, I have worked hard to create opportunities to feel surrounded by the community that I want. When my first son was born, I began to see clearly that I needed a network of moms. I started a weekly play group at my home with a handful of mothers and young children in my town. Whether the children played together or not, it was a great chance for us mothers and fathers to connect and share resources and support. I also started a child-care trade with a good friend and neighbor which has continued consistently for over a year. We each watch our two boys for one morning a week, which means we each get one morning free. We also have time to connect and chat before and after. I find that regular scheduled meet-ups are the key to consistency and continuation of relationship. Some of these same families and others from a nearby larger city have joined us in celebrating seasonal festivals; this is very nourishing for me.

Our business and homestead have also provided opportunities for creating community. We have two smaller structures on our land where we can house guests or young people excited to learn by helping us. This past year we hosted two people who helped us grow food and plants for our nursery business. We also hosted someone who helped us install an earthen floor, do home remodeling and a variety of maintenance and building projects. We shared meals and other opportunities to connect as these people became enfolded in our family life.

Our nursery and botanical sanctuary hosts workshops for local people to learn about plants and gardening. My husband and I both get the chance to teach on- and off-site. We enjoy the connections made through teaching with other institutions, communities, and individuals. Our business thrives on word of mouth and personal connection. We also hold open houses for people to come and see what we do. We have strengthened our community ties through our business as well as personal endeavors.

During the time in which we were grappling with our timely decision to sell our land and start again, we attended and hosted events for our nursery business. Each day that we spent connecting with people about our passion for plants and food and healing I could see how lucky we are to be part of this community. While I struggled to remain grounded in choosing to go or stay, I felt an upswelling of appreciation for my friends and community as I called on them to listen and give advice about this big decision. It was the biggest decision I have ever made in my life. And it was so amazing to have so many people to call and talk with, most of whom live nearby. Imagining that we might choose to move across the country, away from such a strong support network, helped me to appreciate my community and home so much more. 🌱

Devon Bonady is a gardener, mother, and teacher living in the Oregon forest. She is excited about creating and participating in community around family, nature-based homeschooling, and seasonal festivals. She can be reached at devon@fernhillsanctuary.com.

Finding a Healthy, Happy Cohousing Community that Fits Your Values

By Cynthia Dettman

How does one go about locating a cohousing community that is a good personal fit? Here are my suggestions on how to go about finding a healthy, vibrant, and happy community.

For lots of background information, join and follow the national cohousing listserv (www.cohousing.org/cohousing-l) to read current conversations that are taking place. Watch videos about cohousing (www.cohousing.org/videos) and read the *Best of COMMUNITIES* Cohousing Compilation (www.ic.org/community-bookstore/product/cohousing-compilation). Use a variety of ways to do your research (www.cohousing.org/node/1717) and follow Diana Leafe Christian's tips for making the most of your cohousing visits (www.cohousing.org/node/1538). Go to meetings, eat meals, and interview people. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions, and don't rely on what just a handful of people tell you.

If you really are adventuresome and willing to relocate, travel the country and visit a wide variety of communities, as did Keith Carlson (maryandkeith.blogspot.com) and Two Chicks and a Guppy (twochicksandaguppy.wordpress.com). Or find a housesitting or short-term rental opportunity (www.ic.org/short-term-vacation-cohousing-a-great-way-to-learn) in a community. Better yet, rent or share a rental with someone in a community for a longer period, as I did, before making a commitment.

What Will Your Questions Be?

Identify first your own high priority needs and values. Are you mostly looking for a sense of community? Or is sustainability an equal passion, with specific ideas you want to see implemented? Do you most value support for aging in place? Living with many generations, including children? Support for children and families? A high level of shared resources and activities? A farm or ecovillage with lots of land and gardens, or an urban, bicycle community? Intense focus on sustainability and climate change activism, or not so much? A spiritual focus and strong commitment to consensus, or more focus on efficiency with some hierarchy involved? A community with a lot of meetings and teams, or one with less to do and more fun? Shared meals that cater to your food preferences, or are you an omnivore?

Communal Life

Most folks are drawn to cohousing communities primarily for their social, collab-



orative, and communal cultures. Here are the questions you might ask:

- How do people get along at such close quarters and how well do they communicate?
- What is the community's culture in regard to decision-making and conflicts?
- Generally, how do people treat each other?
- Are children's and families' needs addressed?
- Are people helpful and caring in times of crisis?
- Does the community use a traditional consensus model of decision-making and how successful is it?
- Has sociocracy (www.cohousing.org/node/2610) been considered?
- How much time is spent in meetings?
- Is the community in transition and why?
- How high is the participation rate in the ongoing work of maintaining the community?
- How well does the meals program function and how important is it to the community's sense of family?
- How does the community handle "difficult" people who are not as skilled in expressing and resolving concerns in a positive, collaborative, compassionate, and solution-focused manner?
- Are renters treated as equal participants, including in decision-making?

My recent visits to three cohousing communities in Santa Fe confirmed my sense that communities do go through stages, and that strong meals programs, regularly used shared spaces, and a culture of respectful communication are three keys to creat-

ing a happy environment.

According to Ellen Kemper, one of the founding members at The Commons (santafecohousing.org) who seemed to have her finger on the pulse, her well-established community's social fabric is strong. "We truly love and respect each other here—it runs deep." The community has an active meals program and monthly work parties. Many have attended communication trainings and have actively worked to promote collaboration and peaceful conflict resolution.

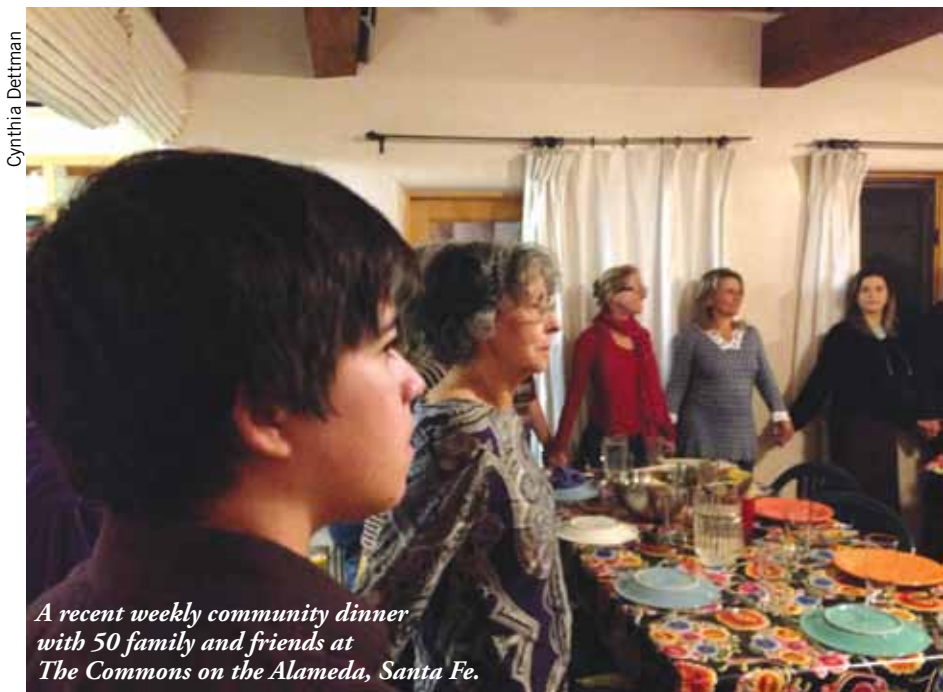
At Sand River (www.sandriverriver.org), a seniors-only community, a consensus-based culture was established during formation by a spiritually inclined group of folks from Buddhist and Quaker backgrounds who already had experience with peaceful collaboration. "That really made a difference," says Pam Gilchrist, one of the founding members.

Another community was in a period of transition. At the small community of Tres Placitas (tresplacitas.blogspot.com), founding members chose to save for rather than immediately build a common building for shared activities. Later the plan was modified and the building was never built. They have also struggled with the consensus model of decision-making. But communities do evolve. The current residents are working hard to increase their connections, with more shared meals in their homes and more focus on collaboration.

What about a community's relationship to its neighbors and larger social environment? Here are more questions about external relations:

- If the community is or was a part of a larger-scale gentrification of the area, what is happening to support people and businesses of color in the area to prevent economic flight?
- What efforts did the community make at its inception to address racial diversity and affordability? What efforts are being made now?
- If the community is located in a low-income and racially diverse setting, does it welcome its neighbors and support "off campus" neighborhood events?
- Are there activists in the community who are working on social justice issues in the larger area?

Although Columbia Ecovillage, my community, appears to be primarily focused on sustainability, food production, and climate change issues, I've been pleased to see a fairly high degree of involvement in neighborhood issues. People don't want to put up a gate. CEV members are active in various area efforts to clean up, show up, and support the community. But we have not made much progress on making our units more affordable or accessible to lower-income folks. People of color seem a long way off, except for the African American and Latino neighbors living in large apartment complexes all around our four-acre property! More could be done. This is probably true of many communities.



Sustainability

Cohousers are also drawn to cohousing because of its focus on sustainability. People want to live a smaller, simpler life with less impact on the environment. In my case, I was primarily drawn to one aspect of sustainability: gardening and farming and producing healthy food. What I didn't know was that in this "ecovillage," the largest source of conflicts appear to be related to land and plantings. I didn't know that we had sustainability factions with hot disagreements between ornamental gardening, native plant, and permaculture factions. We disagree about planting and taking down trees, about moving plants, about maintaining the landscaping, about how we will continue to do the hard manual work as people age. And we have eco-activists like Marilee Dea (atu.com/news/local/City-Council-approves-anti-oil-train-resolution-considering-another) and permaculture advocates in our village who may be disappointed that most other members of the community are not so interested or engaged. Find out what exactly your prospective community is focused on in its efforts to be sustainable and decide if the type of focus is a good fit for you.

Take Responsibility!

There is no perfect cohousing community. As you interview residents, you will probably hear a wide range of opinions about how healthy or happy their community is. One resident will tell you there are lots of problems and conflicts. Another will tell you that the community is harmonious and that folks are content. A third may be moving out because cohousing didn't fit them, and a fourth may tell you it's the best thing they ever did.

Once you choose a community that seems the best bet, take responsibility to create an experience that is fulfilling, peaceful, and satisfying to you. In the final analysis, much of your satisfaction will depend on where you place your focus, with whom you spend time, and with which areas of the community's work you want to be engaged. If you are actively involved in governance, you may experience significant conflicts and need to become skilled at compassionate assertiveness. If you contribute service hours only to activities you truly enjoy, such as gardening or cooking where policies are not being debated, you may be happy as a clam. If you hang out with folks who are unhappy, you may become

more unhappy yourself. If you have trouble adjusting to the relative lack of privacy and autonomy in a community, you may rebel. And if you have fixed opinions about how things should be done, you may make yourself miserable.

I moved into my community in stages; first a three-month rental, then a 12-month

Much of your satisfaction will depend on where you place your focus: which people and work areas you invest your time in.

rental, then finally a purchase. When I first moved in, I threw myself into multiple work groups and projects. I learned with time to better balance my community involvement with my life outside the community. I found I was not sufficiently motivated or skilled to participate in teams where I experienced a lot of conflict or domination by individuals. I became clearer about what aspects of community life I really enjoyed. I learned that governance leadership roles, after all, were not right for me. I also learned that I was most able to contribute to happiness and health through food production, cooking, and meals program support. It was up to me to create my own joy within a group of equally imperfect people and processes. My main aim was to be part of a "family," to share, to grow spiritually, and to develop greater patience and serenity. I contribute to larger policy issues but try to do it in a respectful and constructive manner. My aims have been more than met. I hope yours will be as well. 🍷

Cynthia Dettman recently toured the Southwest in her camper van and visited four cohousing communities, delighting in their variety. For more details on cohousing in Salt Lake City, Utah and Santa Fe, New Mexico, check out her blog posts on cohousing at [Voyage to the Present \(voyagetothepresent.wordpress.com\)](http://Voyage to the Present (voyagetothepresent.wordpress.com)). Cynthia has been a member of her community's conflict resolution team and is working on developing her NVC (nonviolent communication) skills. At Columbia Ecovillage (columbiaecovillage.org) in Portland, Oregon, she leads the meals team and tries to inspire cooks to prepare delicious and affordable food for meals and celebratory events.



Queer, Person of Color, or Low-Income; IS COHOUSING POSSIBLE FOR ME?

By Cynthia Dettman

The predominant demographics of American cohousing communities are pretty clear: white, middle or upper middle class income and background, educated, liberal, with a strong tilt towards older folks and older women. There is a small sprinkling of non-white people, but very few are African American, Latino, Native American, or Asian. What are the realistic options for people who are interested in cohousing but don't fit the typical profile?

My experience has been positive, but I have only one mild strike against me, and in a liberal pool, it's barely a strike. I'm a lesbian.

Birds of a feather flock together. LGBT folks have created their own intentional communities for decades with need for safety and support (see www.ic.org/wiki/queer-community). In North Carolina, Village Hearth Cohousing (www.villagehearthcohousing.com) is forming for LGBT folks and allies. The current planning group is an all-lesbian group of older women. As the US has become more gay-positive, most cohousing communities pride themselves on LGBT acceptance.

My only complaint at Columbia Ecovillage (columbiaecovillage.org), where I live, is that I feel invisible. There are so few of us queer folk and our rich history as a minority subculture is lost in the homogeneity of our largely heterosexual community. Most of us LGBT folks

are older, which means we grew up in a more closeted, conservative era and are not on the cutting edge of queer culture.

Aitch Muirhead (theadventuresofaitchalexandar.com), a young transitioning man who lives with his wife at Wasatch Commons (content.csbs.utah.edu/~ehrbar/coho) in Salt Lake City, has felt accepted during his transition from woman to man and the couple are happy to be living in a supportive community. If we queer folk were half our communities, however, and if more of us openly challenged traditional gender and sexuality norms by refusing gender pronouns or practicing polyamory, there would likely be negative reactions or concern. In general, though, cohousing culture seems to be a safe place for those of us queer folk who can afford to join!

I do otherwise fit the cohousing profile: middle class, educated, liberal, and 64 years old. I am not a person of color nor am I poor. If I were, I would face almost insurmountable barriers to living in cohousing today.

Cohousing communities are increasingly concerned about their homogeneity, but seem pretty much stumped on what to do, particularly when it comes to race and ethnicity. Why do people of color not typically join cohousing planning groups nor purchase or rent in cohousing? When Diane Leafé Christian, a leader in the cohousing movement, queried how communities are responding to this challenge in a National Cohousing Association blog post (www.cohousing.org/node/1672), it

looks she didn't get any replies. She was of the opinion, however, that cohousing communities are "welcoming" to people of color.

Tavi Baker, who works for the Boys and Girls Club of San Francisco and is one of several organizers of the The People of Color Sustainable Housing Network (www.meetup.com/People-of-Color-Sustainable-Housing-Network), would likely disagree. Baker has experience living in cooperative housing and attended meetings of the East Bay Cohousing network to consider cohousing, which is predominantly white. She left, she says, to join other people of color to set up the POC Network and to plan their own communities. "I was tired of being the only one in the room," Baker says.

Mainstream cohousing organizations tend to reproduce the same unequal power relationships that exist in society, says fellow organizer Deseree Fontenot, who is in the process of getting a masters degree in Social Transformation. POC Network organizers agree that cohousing and other communities must engage and provide a "point of entry" for

people of color from their beginnings and must focus not only on sustainability and community, but also on activism and social change—including being willing to share power.

And, they say, people of color will not be drawn when they are a

tiny minority in a white cohousing community. Without a critical mass of racial and ethnic minority representation, many interested people of color will not feel truly welcomed, no matter how friendly cohousing planners might be.

We liberal white folks are often unaware of our own attitudes and subtle behaviors when it comes to race and class. We typically lack personal connections to and within minority communities. We are often blind to our privileges and are not able to put ourselves in the shoes of someone who is racially or ethnically different, surrounded by white people. And we easily forget that people of color continue to be economically disadvantaged and targeted.

Some cohousers like Zev Paiss, a former Executive Director of the Cohousing Network, have theorized that people of color may not have the same need for intentional community as white folks do (www.ic.org/wiki/desire-diversity-cohousing-perspective). The POC Network organizers disagree. "There is a rich history of intentional communities developed by people of color," says POC Network organizer Lina Buffington, an organizational consultant and activist with a Ph.D. in Philosophy. African American farmers were the first to use land trusts in the South. The Black Panthers created a variety of communal housing groups. The MOVE activist community in Philadelphia lived communally. Most of these efforts, she says, were systematically destroyed by the white establishment, but all were en-

We liberal white folks are often unaware of our own attitudes and subtle behaviors when it comes to race and class.

gaged in social justice work.

In the Bay Area there is clearly a high interest and demand among people of color for intentional community. The need is especially critical in Oakland and the Bay Area in general due to gentrification and extreme increases in housing costs. The POC Network, launched in February 2015 as a Meetup group, already has 140 members with 450 friends on Facebook. The Network's aim is to create and support the development of POC-centered sustainable communities, with an eclectic, connected network of alternative housing and organizing communities in the area. Options could include cohousing, land trusts, bedroom rentals, large shared houses, accessory dwelling units, and more rural communities with existing or new construction.

Cohousing communities today are typically not focused on issues of poverty, racism, sexism, immigration, LGBT or other community justice issues. In contrast, the POC Network's projects will emphasize social change activism by and among residents, with organizing centers and mutual networking and support. The leaders are themselves activists, and say that without this focus, people of color are unlikely to be attracted to cohousing communities.

The POC Network organizers report that they have drawn a racially diverse group of folks, including a significant number of LGBT people. Although the majority are in their 20s to 40s, the network hopes to draw an intergenerational community of participants. Currently their focus is to build infrastructure by raising funds for staff. Current projects include helping to develop two three-acre communities in East Oakland and El Sobrante using a land trust model. This model would allow communal land use that is affordable for low-income families in perpetuity, protecting residents from the vagaries of the housing market and economy.

Although the busy volunteers who have spearheaded this movement are focused on the Bay Area, they are in communication with a variety of similar efforts throughout the country. They are willing to provide support and consultation to other networks of color. "We are in the infancy stage," says Buffington, who was preparing to speak to a group in Atlanta who wanted to discuss ideas for a joint communal land purchase. "And we want to connect people to each other whenever we can."

I trust that this Network will be a catalyst for communities of color, at least in urban areas with high diversity and activism. I have doubts, however, that the current mainstream cohousing world will begin to attract more people of color without a significant shift to social justice aims and activities, and without better addressing issues of privilege and affordability.

The good news is that affordability is a hot topic within the cohousing world. Communities are very focused on environmental sustainability, and build or remodel housing units using green, high-cost technologies. Large properties with significant communal structures require higher prices. Many cohousing communities have various limits on the number of rentals permitted. Cohousing tends to be concentrated in urban areas with high housing costs in general. And because of the concentration of older residents, there is sometimes conservative resistance to non-traditional housing arrangements which may cost less.

Creative solutions are beginning to emerge, with some good results. Within the constraints of local housing regulations and available affordable housing programs, communities are expanding affordable options, including government-subsidized units, shared housing, and construction and rental of small accessory buildings.

At The Commons (santafecohousing.org) in Santa Fe, 11 casitas (little attached homes) were constructed next to their larger, more expensive homes to provide lower-cost rentals. At Sand River (www.sandriverriver.org) in Santa Fe, a seniors-only cohousing community, a partnership with a local affordable housing program permitted the construction and sale of several lower-cost homes. Troy Land and Gardens (www.communitygroundworks.org/what-we-do/troy-land-gardens) in Madison, Wisconsin uses a land trust model to create a majority of income-restricted homes. And the nonprofit Partnerships for Affordable Housing (www.affordablecohousing.org/home/mision) is working nationally to support the development of affordable cohousing options for low- and moderate-income residents, with a mission that includes empowerment of tenants and greater involvement in local community social justice goals.

As a person who has worked in social and empowerment services my whole life, I continue to feel ambivalent about the concentration of whiteness and relative wealth in cohousing. But if I were still living alone in a single family home, would I somehow have more integrity? Not really. I have to be honest that I am flocking with birds of my feather, and that I prefer communal living to solitude, no matter what social justice values I may find missing from my community. It's my own responsibility to promote these values within and without the fences of my ecovillage, and to help create the kind of community I want to see. 🐦

Cynthia Dettman is a lesbian and retired community college counselor who moved in to Columbia Ecovillage in 2014 and has not looked back. She worked as a legal aid attorney and later coordinated empowerment services for low-income women at Mt. Hood Community College. In retirement, she is writing about social justice issues, working on a novel set in South India where she grew up, teaching college success classes, and cooking gourmet meals for her cohousing community.



***Aitch Muirhead and Shira Frank,
a trans man and his spouse,
who live at Wasatch Commons
in Salt Lake City.***

Photo courtesy of Cynthia Dettman

LEAVING EDEN:

One man's quest for community in a divided land

By David Leach

In the summer of 2010, the International Communal Studies Association gathered at a college near Afula, in Israel's Jezreel Valley. The symposium coincided with the centenary of the legendary kibbutz movement, but the event held an oddly mournful air. Some American and European members had balked at visiting the country in the aftermath of the Israeli Defense Force's Operation Cast Lead and the Gaza Flotilla deaths. The heyday of the kibbutz had passed, even attached to the iron lung of tenured attention. Over the previous decade, most of Israel's socialist communes had undergone "privatization" that stripped away the radical equality on which they'd been founded.

By the end of the conference, the scholars were hungry for inspirational words about our common future rather than bemoaning our tainted present or fixating on a nostalgic past. A panel of experts discussed the communal impulse and why it matters even more today, with the dogmatists of global capitalism waving victory flags. A feel-good aura descended on the auditorium.

Then a tall delegate with a shaved head raised a hand. He was in his mid-30s but dressed younger and had been video-recording talks and tweeting highlights on a smartphone. "Hi, I'm David," he said, in a North American accent. The moderator asked him to speak up. He talked about the growing divide between the ideals of the kibbutz and the global environmental and social-justice movements. He described how "Zionism" was becoming a dirty word for a generation of international activists and progressive Jews in the Diaspora.

"I've been surprised that 100 years after Zionism, 62 years after the founding of the State, 43 years into the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, there wasn't discussion whatsoever of an Arab-Palestinian narrative. Of how some kibbutzim were built on them. Of how Arabs who tried to join kibbutzim were refused membership. Of how the plan to create an Arab model for a kibbutz was not allowed. All this talk about how we're equal and we want to live together as equals just completely ignores the fact that..."

The room ignited. People clamoured to be heard. Several demanded the microphone. "This will tear the association apart!" shouted one Israeli academic. The moderator tried to regain control. "Stop right there!" he demanded. "I think that's a big area. We could spend a whole session on how the kibbutz has responded to the Occupation. But I would like to bring us back to this room. We are all experts in community..."

Clustered in the foyer, several attendees told David he had raised a vital question that still tainted the kibbutz: How can an intentional community of equals exist in a larger society of oppression? How long can the kibbutz—and Israel—ignore the aspirations of the Palestinian people before cognitive dissonance eroded their higher ideals? And how can an uncompromising seeker of utopia find a home in our broken world?

• • •

David Sheen seems an unlikely shit-disturber, a gentle giant with a restless heart and a buoyant optimism we can build a better world. That we *should*. A few days after the conference, we arranged to meet on the beachfront promenade of Tel Aviv. Even in a crowd, David stands out. He towers six inches above the average Israeli and eschews beach-wear for the radical chic of the urban anarchist. An Arab *keffiyeh* hung around his neck, a Mao cap perched on his bald dome.

Our rendezvous was next to the boarded-up shell of the Dolphinarium, a once-thriving nightclub. I asked what happened to it. David told me it was the site of a suicide bombing, in June 2001, at the start of the Second Intifada. A Palestinian bomber had walked into a queue of young Russian immigrants and detonated a belt of explosives. Twenty-one bystanders died; another 120 were injured by shrapnel. In 2003, Israel began to erect its Security Fence, osten-

sibly to prevent similar attacks. Nine years after the blast, Tel Aviv had sunk back into its days of languor, its nights of forgetting. And yet the Dolphinarium remained a derelict monument to the past.

David suggested we meet his journalist friends at a café on Ben Yehuda Street, so we dodged strollers and talked about his personal quest for the Holy Grail of community. He used the C-word with solemnity, as though “community” were as solid as the gold standard, the only thing of true value in a society that reduced every relationship to a commodity. And yet finding community, for David, had proven as elusive as tracking down El Dorado in the rain forests of the New World.

Talking to David felt like stepping back in time and meeting a kibbutz pioneer. He had the same intellectual intensity, I imagined, as the young Jewish *chalutzim* from Eastern Europe who had founded Degania, the original kibbutz, and built a new society from scratch. Like many of these pioneers, David grew up in a conservative, middle class Jewish family that ate kosher and went to synagogue on *shabbat*—in Toronto, in David’s case, rather than Tsarist Russia or Poland. He was a bookish child with an artsy bent and a future guided by his bourgeois upbringing: a professional job in the city, big family, bigger house.

His father had been born in Israel; David had visited many times and spoke Hebrew, so he moved to Tel Aviv at age 25 to escape Canada’s harsh winters and start a career as a graphic designer. But the art of advertising felt barren, and Tel Aviv’s relentless entrepreneurialism lost its lustre, too. He longed to be an artist. Instead he found himself shilling for weapons-makers, pornography stores, and—even worse for a vegan—producers of *foie gras*. “How do I get out of this system?” he wondered. “How do I live a life that doesn’t involve these moral quandaries?” His instinct was to get his hands dirty to cleanse his soul. “I had a romantic idea of going back to the land,” he recalled. “I wanted to work in agriculture or horticulture, something to do with nature.”

David was a creature of the city, however, and knew little about farming. He hadn’t even joined the Scouts or Jewish youth groups as a kid. In Israel, he approached the Kibbutz Movement, where officials gauged his suitability for joining a community with a battery of psychological tests. “They weren’t able to discover my inherent axe-murdering tendencies!” he joked. He was a young, healthy, well-educated, highly skilled, ideologically motivated immigrant from North America. He toured a different kibbutz every other weekend. Communities with open doors, however, tended to be in demographic decline or economic crisis and desperate for young blood. David had no interest in a kibbutz that had abandoned its socialist ideals. “I was looking for a place that had not gone through a privatization process—and wasn’t planning on it.”

He moved to his first kibbutz and marveled at desert scenery straight out of *Lawrence of Arabia*. There, David learned about permaculture and fell under the spell of a new religion:

David Sheen speaking at a church in Atlanta, Georgia in November 2015.



Photo courtesy of David Sheen

ecological architecture. “It really moved me,” he recalled. “I ended up spending the next decade being obsessed with it.”

He lived on the kibbutz for nearly six months. One weekend, he caught a bus to Tel Aviv for a wedding. In his absence, the

community that was ecological and *really* socialist—not just socialist for the Jews.”

Before leaving the kibbutz, David had articulated his evolving political philosophy to his boss, who gave him a copy of *The Dispossessed* by the science-fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin. In her novel, a tribe of austere anarchists live as colonists on a moon that circles a planet ruled, in stark contrast, by a decadent capitalist society. David felt inspired again. He read everything he could about anarchism and discovered a philosophical tradition deeper

than the stereotypes of bomb-tossers and punk-rock anthems. “These are the principles that are important to me,” he realized. “This is an accurate description of how the world should be.” The self-sufficient cooperative society of equals mirrored ideas in Peter Kropotkin’s classic manifesto *Mutual Aid*, the blueprint for the early kibbutz movement. In Israel, a hundred years of compromises had eroded these ideals. David

“I wanted there to be a community that was ecological and *really* socialist—not just socialist for the Jews.”

kibbutz secretary posted a notice, called a meeting, and oversaw a vote in favour of an issue that troubled David: foreign labour. The original kibbutz movement had been built on the philosophy of “self-labour”: neither exploiter nor exploited. However, over the years, many kibbutzes had outsourced farm labour to Arab hired hands, new Jewish immigrants, foreign volunteers and, more recently, Thai guest workers, who were often housed—and sometimes treated—like second-class citizens. Guest workers were a major issue on kibbutzes in this area. Many members felt the agricultural branches couldn’t stay profitable without cheap labour. At the kibbutz, David had argued against the idea. In a kibbutz democracy, any important decision was usually advertised a week in advance, so members could mull the consequences before the vote in the general assembly. But this time, the decision happened in mere days. David felt betrayed.

“Many people’s commitment to human rights and against racism ranked lower than economic concerns,” he said. “And the way of getting that decision approved was anti-democratic. What depressed me was that even in a community of 150 people there was still political manipulation. I realize that in a system of millions there will be a lot of abuse. That’s why I want to live in community, so that we can have human-level interactions with each other and honest dialogue, not bureaucratic interactions. But that wasn’t the case here.”

After the decision to allow guest workers, he couldn’t live on the kibbutz in good conscience. He wrote a long, emotional letter and left copies in every member’s mailbox. Then he walked out of the desert Eden.

“At first, I didn’t know what the solution was,” he admitted. “I wanted there to be a

vid realized he was frustrated living in a society that wasn’t—and didn’t want to be—as good as it could be. He wanted utopia in *his* lifetime, not his grandchildren’s.

David returned to North America and apprenticed with reclusive eco-building gurus in mud-walled, straw-baled, solar-paneled, compost-toileted off-the-grid lairs. He learned how to hand-craft “cob” houses. He studied “biomimicry,” the design philosophy that mirrors, rather than dominates, its natural surroundings. A friend donated a video camera, so David recorded interviews as he travelled around the world to the meccas of natural building: the cob mansions of Dorset, England; the millennium-old rock-hewn cities in Ethiopia; the straw-roofed villages and mud mosques of Ghana; the adobe counterculture “earthships” in New Mexico. He edited the footage into a documentary extolling what he called “uncompromising ecological architecture.” He had seen the future. And it was made of mud.

In 2006, he returned to Tel Aviv and organized a collective of eco-communards to start an off-the-grid settlement. For a hundred years, Zionist organizations had helped young Jews colonize the Promised Land. But a band of anarchists who rejected corporate capitalism? No thanks—not any more. David’s collective of Israeli eco-anarchists faced a dilemma. “We were too politically radical to get funds from the state, nor would some of us have wanted to,” he said. “But there wasn’t a critical mass of us to start from scratch.”

Then David remembered visiting Kibbutz Samar, in the Arava Desert. He returned to give a talk there about ecological building, stayed for 10 days, and asked if he could remain longer. Samar had been founded in 1976 as a rejection of authority and bureaucracy—of the state, of the family, of the old kibbutz hierarchy. Its members were true anarchists. The kibbutz’s economy was built on organic date plantations and members had rejected the “need” to recruit cheap Thai labour for the harvesting. It was perhaps the last kibbutz in Israel to hold to the original Zionist ideal of self-labour: *Do the work yourself or not at all.*

• • •

Other communities had embraced a libertarian philosophy of almost total freedom, both in Israel and abroad, but few lasted more than a year or two. “Samar deserves its place in the communal equivalent of the *Guinness Book of World Records*,” observed Daniel Gavron, in 2000, after a visit. Not everyone was impressed by Samar’s woolly ways. In Tel Aviv, I asked a kibbutz leader and former member of the Israeli Parliament about the anarchists in the Arava Valley. “Samar is not a kibbutz!” he exclaimed. “They’re like Bedouins in the desert!”

Just the idea of Samar divided people. The kibbutz had been founded by young members from traditional kibbutzes disillusioned with the ideological drift of their homes. Samar’s founders declined an offer to settle in the occupied Golan Heights and travelled instead to the desert on a quest for wisdom. Here, away from prying eyes, they could discard their parents’ mistakes. Here, communal living would give people more freedom, not less. What they wanted was a blank slate—both freedom *to* and freedom *from*, in the famous distinction by philosopher Isaiah Berlin. Freedom to express their better selves. Freedom from bureaucratic rules. After retiring from public life to Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev Desert, David

Ben-Gurion, Israel's founding prime minister, had written: "For those who make the desert bloom there is room for hundreds, thousands, and even millions." The pioneers of Samar took him at his word.

It's hard to separate fact from legend in the story of Samar. On the kibbutz, no single authority, no guru set the rules or even said there were no rules. Such *laissez faire* anarchism had been tried in communes and hippie outposts throughout North America and Europe. It usually imploded after a few years, when finances ran low and emotional tensions ran high. Love might be free; not much else was. Somehow the members of Samar made it work. They did away with the weekly work schedule and job rotation. Members decided when and where they laboured; if a kibbutznik needed help on a job, to milk the cows or pick the dates or scrub the kitchen, he or she made a request, stated the case, and took whomever would come. Usually, the work got done. Samar's financial philosophy was equally radical. In the traditional kibbutz system, every member received a tiny allowance while the kibbutz paid for living expenses. To buy anything extra, a member had to plead to the finance committee; the result of the vote was final. The tense, political, and often humiliating experience made adult members feel like pre-teens asking their parents for a raise in allowance.

Samar said to hell with that. If members couldn't trust each other, their community was doomed, so they agreed to keep an open cash box. If someone needed to take a trip to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, they could go into the dining room, flip open the lid, and—if enough money was there—remove the bus fare and maybe a few shekels for a falafel. The box was refilled with profits from the date orchards or other enterprises. If the cash box was bare, everyone made do.

The common purse was a giant middle-finger to the Tragedy of the Commons—the thought experiment that assumes when a resource can be accessed collectively, people will devour more than their fair share until the resource has been squandered. Conservatives believe the Tragedy proves our genes really are selfish and we should accept capitalism as natural law; some environmental activists use the Tragedy's outcome to argue for state intervention before we consume all our natural resources. Samar's experiment in radical trust cast doubt on the theory.



On Samar, David Sheen found an outlet for his restless energies amid the social, cultural, and political life of the desert commune. He held slideshows and films, talks and concerts. Inspired by his experiences at the Burning Man Festival in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, he tried to organize a similar event on Samar. He made an immediate impression on the kibbutz—and not always a welcome one.

David understood his communal faux pas. "What I did was the equivalent of walking up to your face and screaming. In the city, you have to be loud for anyone to hear you—there are so many competing messages. In a community, they don't have huge billboards, you don't have the same level of intense dialogue and debate. It's quiet. It's the desert. You have to be more measured in your discourse. Some people felt that I had come to the community and started preaching. Some people felt that I was talking too loud. Other people felt I had no right to do it at all. They said, 'Only after living here for seven years do you have a right to start talking about your opinions.'" Even an anarchist utopia has rules, apparently. "Obviously, I can't abide that," said David. "That's stymieing voices. That's not cool. It's imperial to say, 'We'll take your labour but not your personal opinions.'"

When David applied for full membership, residents of Samar debated his suitability, whether his personality felt simpatico with the kibbutz. His friends could not sway the skeptics. The vote failed. David could remain living there as a non-member. But he didn't want to live in a village where he felt the majority of his neighbours didn't value his voice and might not even want him around. It was a painful discovery. After a decade of searching, David

found his personal utopia, an organic Eden in the desert of Israel that was more than a mirage. Samar had only one problem: the kibbutz didn't want David.



David still lives in Israel. He copy-edited for the left-wing newspaper *Ha'aretz* and produced documentaries and YouTube exposés. He fights the rightward political tilt in Israel and gives presentations around the world about his experiences. During the "J14" economic protests in the summer of 2010, when young activists camped out in Tel Aviv and 500,000 people marched the city's streets, David chronicled how even this mass revival of progressive ideals avoided any mention of the Occupation. His country continued to frustrate his ideals.

"Why do you keep being drawn back to Israel?" I asked. He seemed locked in a love-hate relationship that bordered on the codependent. "Do you consider yourself a Zionist? An eco-Zionist?"

"That's a loaded question," he replied. "Today, there is a new parlance. Yes, there is Zionist. There is also anti-Zionist. There is also non-Zionist. There is also post-Zionist."

David professed to be an "ambi-Zionist"—a Jew who has not firmly committed to Zionism, non-Zionism, or anti-Zionism. "Someone who is still on the fence," he explained, "because they feel there are some positive elements to the word and some negative elements to it."

David still felt the tug of family and cultural history in Israel. It fueled his extended

He had found his personal utopia, an organic Eden in the desert. Its only problem: the kibbutz didn't want David.

argument with the divided nation. "I do feel a connection to the land." He laughed. "Call it education, call it brainwashing."

A year and a half after I first met David Sheen, I was back in Israel and curious if he had made any progress in his quest for community. He and his now-wife had moved from Tel Aviv into a rental unit in Jaffa, so I reunited with him under the clock tower at

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YOU ARE HERE: Finding the Feminine Energy that Cultivates Community

By Beth Ann Morrison

In March 2014, I uprooted myself from the community I had been cultivating in Jersey City for over 12 years and relocated to Los Angeles. It was a major step in a long-term vision. I'd been creating sculptural spaces meant to encourage intimate conversation between strangers for years. Now it was time to become central to those conversations myself—to shift from singular to collective and begin to build the world that I want to be a part of.

As an undergrad, I came across Suzanne Lacy's book *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, and found a description of how I want to function as an artist: one who works with people, effecting real change in society. I knew I would move out west to learn from this woman, and spend time in the desert building homes with the earth. I just didn't realize it would take me 15 years to get here.

Now I am a second-year student in Suzanne's Public Practice MFA program at Otis College of Art and Design. I found a kindred spirit in my small cohort, Jenny Kane, and the two of us set out to find and define a sense of community. We built a transformable trailer that met multiple needs of people in the desert towns of northeast Los Angeles County: *You Are Here* was a platform for education, commerce, conversation, and celebration. Its recognizable yellow and white umbrella became a symbol for finding oneself in relationship to the land and each other.

I began working with Elektra Grant, a lecturer at Otis with degrees in fine art and sustainability, who helped ensure the values of permaculture and regeneration were woven through the process of creating *You Are Here*. We discovered a shared interest in intentional community, as Elektra is a former resident and I am trying to shift my lifestyle more in that direction. She turned me on to the Transition Movement and began an exponential chain of introductions that continues to grow.

One of the first people Elektra connected me with was the mentor of her Human Ecology class at Otis, Joanne Poyourow: author, educator and environmental activist. Joanne partnered with Peter Rood, a rather progressive Episcopalian priest, to launch the Environmental Change Makers (ECM) 10 years ago, in my new neighborhood of Westchester. Together, they fought to help the public understand that global warming existed, pre-*An Inconvenient Truth*. The team enhances our community's post-peak sustainability in stages, focusing on low-hanging fruit: solutions that people can put in place in their own lives, right away. They have been instrumental in the creation of many community food gardens, the advancement of the sharing economy, the fight for food justice, and the movement against GMOs in the city.

The Environmental Change Makers brought Rob Hopkins to Los Angeles in 2008 to introduce the Transition Movement: a replicable model of the efforts that groups like ECM had been doing to build community resilience in the face of climate change, peak oil, and economic crisis. I found my tribe when I realized I have long shared the international movement's stated goal of co-creating "a life that is more abundant, fulfilling, equitable and socially connected" (quoted from www.transitionus.org). Apparently this area is filled with like-minded folks, as eight local Transition groups and outliers have since become active.

Elektra knew that ECM was planning to build a cob bread oven at Peter's church, a site that the group has activated as a hub for like-minded "changemakers." My interests to learn the skill and build collectively made this project an uncannily good fit.

When Joanne and Peter invited me to envision the oven sculpturally, eyebrows were raised. There was some friction among the members of ECM who were already knee-deep

in planning the oven when I came along. They had an architect, a landscape architect, and an engineer already on board; why did they need an artist? I was honored to be included in the process, though, and as the weeks proved ECM's prowess in fluid group decision-making, delegation, and fundraising, the team grew to embrace me as a member, outlandish designs and all.

More than 100 people came together throughout the process of building the cob oven during the summer. The daily mud-covered collaborations—with conversations that ranged from the southern California sunshine to the mystery of creation—were a balm to my transplanted soul that so longed for connection.

It was my esteem for the deeper conversations that led Peter and Elektra to introduce me to Swami Omkarananda and the chai talks of Transition Mar Vista/Venice. Swami lived in ashrams for years, easily sharing her space and possessions, before being asked to relocate to Venice and assume the role of director of the Sivananda Yoga Center. Though she muses that her initial impression of Los Angeles was as socially warm as her idea of Siberia, Swami began to recognize an opportunity to in-



A potluck gathering brings together women who are building the resilience of Los Angeles' west side.

Beth Ann Morrison



The You Are Here trailer: a mobile, transformable platform for community building.

Beth Ann Morrison



Nearly 100 people created over 280 adobe bricks for the cob bread oven at Holy Nativity in Westchester.

Peter Rood



Peter Rood and Joanne Poyourow, cofounders of Environmental Change Makers.

Peter Rood



The Westchester Community Oven.

Beth Ann Morrison



Jennifer Kane



Oven in progress: volunteers form the glass bottle thermal layer just below the fire brick surface.

tentionally create the community she was accustomed to. She became involved with the emerging Learning Garden nearby and helped to found Transition Mar Vista/Venice in May 2009.

The chai talks (named for Swami's delicious contribution to each session) represent the "inner transition" process for this group of roughly 10 core members: supporting each other as we work to shift our own beliefs and behaviors toward those that will regenerate harmony between all life forms and the earth.

I was so drawn to Swami as a mentor, and to these discussions, but found myself in a holding pattern as the small group debated my membership. "Chai" had become so personal and productive; one small energetic ripple could potentially damage the safe space they had created. I practiced patient observation and respected Swami's efforts to create community through *communion* in contrast to the onslaught of "communication" in today's technological society. Chai presented a chance to slow down, enjoy each other's presence and insight, and, somehow beyond language, gain a deeper sense of connection than text messages and social media updates will ever provide.

A series of deeply engaged, one-on-one conversations at cafes, potlucks, and an ice cream social turned out to be a sort of Chai vetting process that I greatly enjoyed: I felt solidly anchored in community when I was finally invited into this intimate discourse about *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible...* (Chai has been discussing Charles Eisenstein's book that happens to perfectly address the inner transition).

As this epic summer continued to unfold, I made plans to establish a meetup group for people who share my desire to experience a deeper sense of community in their lives. Elektra agreed to co-organize the meetup as a means of exploring the possibility of turning her home into an intentional community. We joined forces with Carla Truax, who had already compiled a group interested in cohousing in Los Angeles. The three of us discussed learning what it takes to be a community by visiting others who are "getting it right." We needed to find an identifiable form that would tie our experiences together as we traveled around the region: enter the bright yellow You Are Here symbol and the values it stands for!

TheYouAreHere: Intentional Community
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Words of Experience: STARTING A COMMUNITY

By Kim Scheidt

One gorgeous sunny day last fall I was set up at an informational table as a representative of the FIC (Fellowship for Intentional Community). This was at the annual community open house event put on by the local ecovillage. Since my table was located right near the entrance I got to be one of the first people to interact with the hundreds of guests who came out for the event. Some were neighbors or people who had been to the open house in years prior, but most were folks who had never before traveled to the area and were seeing it all with fresh eyes. Quite often that day, as people milled about waiting for their scheduled tours to begin, I found myself engaged in conversations many of which focused on people wanting information on setting up an intentional community back at home where they lived. Some already had land available for such a project, others had a core group of interested friends, some had a well-developed vision of what the as-yet-unformed community would one day become, and a few special folks had all those things but were still unsure where to go from there.

I genuinely enjoy listening to people talk about their visions for community life, and often I find myself in situations where I am given the opportunity to pass on knowledge and wisdom stemming from my involvement in community. As a cofounder of a 10-year-old intentional community (ours focuses on homesteading) I have insights into what some of the challenges can be and lots of empathy for people who are going through the start-up phases of setting up a community, seeking one to join, or trying to decide if they want to join one that's already in existence or begin one of their own. I want to share my perspectives with others so they can avoid pitfalls and hopefully learn from my experiences. Setting up a legal entity, figuring out financing, having a committed core group, preventing overwhelm and burnout, anticipating population turnover, and dealing with power dynamics are a few of the myriad topics to ponder when making the decision to launch a community venture.

Now usually my first piece of advice goes something like this: "It is a LOT of work to start an intentional community. A LOT. If you can possibly find a community already out there that seems to be mostly aligned with what you envision for yourself, then I recommend you try out living there. Just give it a try. And by the way, intentional communities are an incredibly varied phenomena; each has its own different flavor. So if you have the means and resources to travel and visit different ones before settling down, then I totally recommend that too."

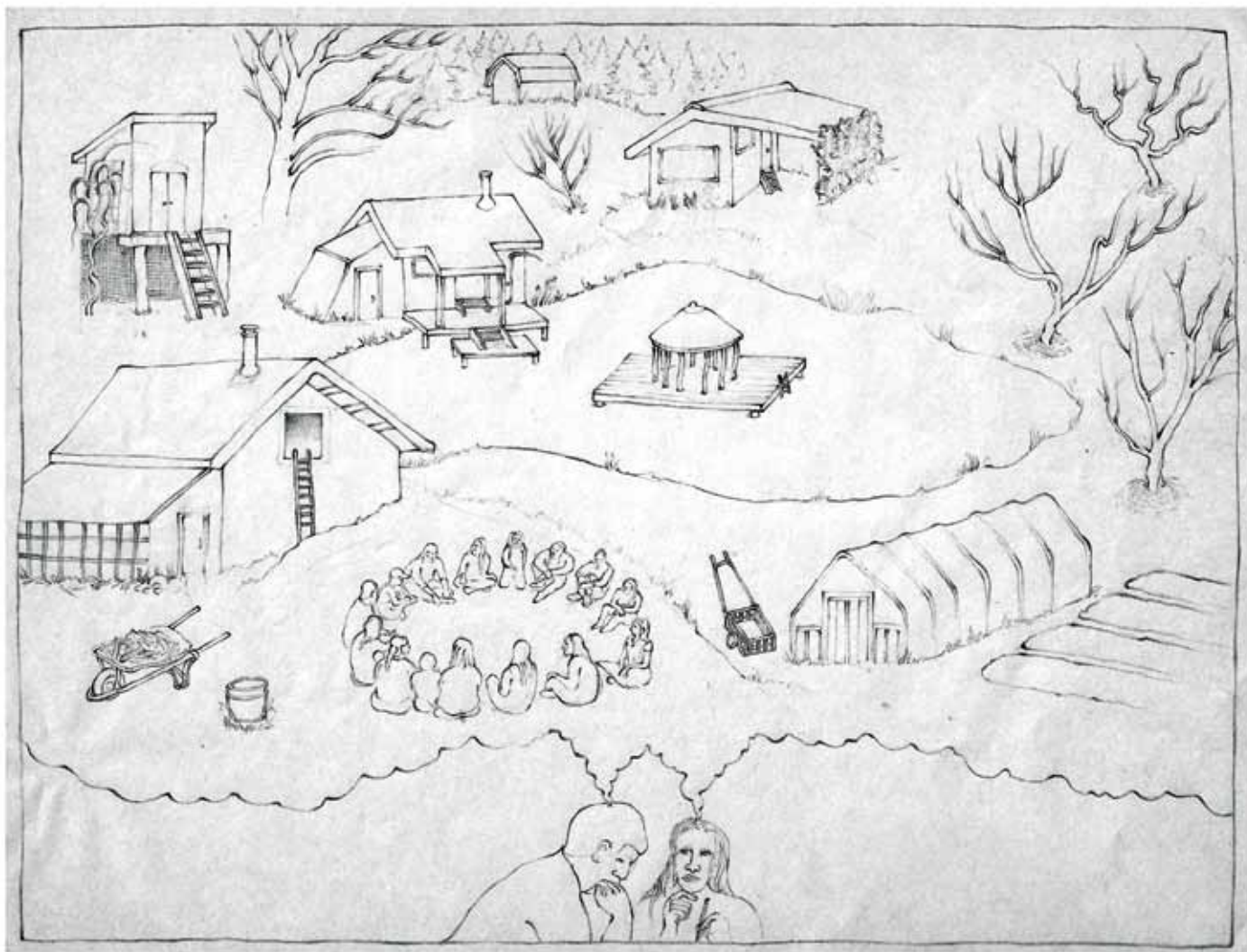
On the other hand, I personally have never been one to follow the usual way of doing things—or even my own retrospective advice. I am a peace-loving rebel at heart, and after limited experience of a few days visiting one ecovillage in the US and a handful of eco-farms in Central America I decided to join a group of three other people in creating our own intentional community. At the time we were starting it certainly felt like the right thing to do because no other community we knew of embodied enough of the values we were holding to be a good fit, we wanted to be located in a particular geographical area, and we figured that it really would be an attractive community model for others in the future. We were visionaries with pioneering spirits and a lot of dreams and excitement, so we took the plunge and decided to become community founders.

We spent many hours together clarifying our vision and mission statements as well as researching how to set up the legal entity. The book *Creating a Life Together* by Diana Leafé Christian proved to be a great jumping-off point. After examining our legal options we eventually settled on establishing a community land trust corporation. We then spent many more hours poring over the bylaws, articles of incorporation, and lease documents from sources we could scrounge up—other intentional communities or land trusts that had been similarly established. We took bits from many sources, as well as some of our own

original input, to eventually craft our founding documents; upon completion we showed them to a kind lawyer knowledgeable about intentional communities who recommended a few tweaks. It seemed that our number of four founders was probably the bare minimum to successfully handle such an undertaking. It was a struggle at times not to feel burned out or overwhelmed with all the details. And when life kept us busy, progress on the technical aspects moved at a snail's pace. Although having a smaller group was probably conducive to more easefully crafting a workable combined vision, having a larger group would have helped to spread out the burden of all the research and wordsmithing.

Part of our research involved finding possible sites in our area on which we could develop the community. Cold-calling names listed on a county plat map resulted in success—a local landowner agreed to sell his tract of pasture land at a reasonable cost. But although the four of us came with some savings, our pooled money would cover only about a third of the purchase price. Choosing how to finance the rest was another somewhat complicated process for us. We contemplated a few different loan options and also the possibility of recruiting other founder-investors. We finally negotiated borrowing from a friendly acquaintance who, although he did not want to join as a member of the community, had definite attachments and opinions on what we should be doing which at times was tricky to navigate.

We pushed forward and got things settled to buy the land. We celebrated and began camping on the property. Life progressed until the next little bump in the road for me personally as well as our newly formed community. Approximately three months after we purchased the land, one of the founders decided to leave. He and I had been involved romantically for over four years and as our romantic relationship declined he recognized that he needed to move on and travel to other places. So among other challenges of that time,



Darien Flores

this also meant our forming community had lost a quarter of its membership during this delicate beginning phase.

Most intentional communities are familiar with the concept of a high turnover rate in population. It was not surprising that someone would choose to leave and more people would come in as residents. There were folks who had not been part of the visioning stage but who were there with us early on. Each time it was a learning experience. Our first new resident was a charismatic guy who was going through a break-up and had kids in the area for whom he shared parenting responsibilities. He was friends with us and we were wanting more people to join. Although not a perfect values match it seemed like it would work out beneficially for all. The membership group gave approval for him to construct a “tiny house” on the property as well as a small shed and some animal housing. After some months as a resident he then decided to move on. In the beginning we had not foreseen all the possible complications that could arise with such a situation. Things eventually worked out fine; however, our experience with this resident and the structures he left behind led us to come up with some policy norms that we didn’t have in place prior to that. Namely: a person has to be a resident on the land for six months before becoming a member, and during

that time the expectation is that they will not make any permanent changes to the land or construct permanent dwellings (we have made rare exceptions to this by full group consensus). Also, when an individual or family begins camping on unleased land, they are to pay a monetary deposit to help ensure that the site gets satisfactorily remediated in the event of their departure.

One topic that has come up with the advent of additional people in the community is the power imbalance that exists between members and residents. For our group, this dynamic is something to acknowledge and simply accept as unavoidable as part of the process of creating a functional and healthy community. The understanding is that this power imbalance exists as a temporary phase while the community and resident get to know and trust one another. It can help ease relationships if the existing members make a concentrated effort to integrate and support new residents rather than leave them flailing on their own feeling isolated. We’ve tried our best to do this by appointing each resident a liaison to the community and by offering to help the residents organize work-parties for settling in or tackling projects that seem daunting. We set aside time in our meetings to have a resident check-in with the full group at least once a month to provide space and a scheduled format to address any issues that arise.

To a lesser degree an imbalance of power also exists between founders and those who join later. Members who did not help to

craft the founding vision will perhaps be holding some different core values or ideal ways of being together in community. The default will be the position of what has come before, and once a rule or norm has been instated it can take substantial effort to create a change. Though not impossible, it takes a lot of momentum to shift the status quo, and it can feel like an uphill battle—that those who crafted the vision have their desires incorporated into the basic structure of the community, and those who join later hold valid and useful preferences which are not necessarily upheld by community norms. Therefore it can be very helpful to make certain from the outset that both the current community norms and the longer-term community vision are explicitly communicated to incoming visitors, residents, and members so as to make sure everyone is clear about what they might be getting into.

And how do we attract those new people best suited for joining

the community? That is a question that nearly all communities wrestle with at some point. In fact it is one that I continue to spend a fair amount of thought energy on even now. “If you build it they will come” only goes so far. Getting people involved who have a propensity for networking can come in handy. Listing with the FIC Directory, creating an attractive website, and using social media can be great. There are con-

It is very helpful to make certain from the outset that both the current community norms and the longer-term community vision are explicitly communicated to incoming visitors, residents, and members so as to make sure everyone is clear about what they might be getting into.

ferences to attend and a multitude of ways to get the word out. When contacted by community seekers I ask them pointed questions to attempt to quickly determine if their intentions are serious and if their vision would be something that could practically happen within our particular framework. At times we have been nearly overwhelmed with people wanting to live at our homestead community and at others we go an entire season without serious interest. At one point we were considered full and then about a year later we have leaseholds available again as members decide to explore other life adventures. I believe it is important to keep in mind that it is natural for a community’s population to wax and wane. I have hopes that this intentional community of ours will continue to function long after I am gone. And I know that frequently people who come for even a short visit are impacted in ways that can be life-changing. I try to keep an open mind and open heart and trust that what we are doing is making a difference. 🌱

Kim Scheidt lives at Red Earth Farms in northeast Missouri at the egalitarian sub-community homestead of Dandelion. She works part-time doing accounting for the Fellowship for Intentional Community and other area nonprofits. She is excited by the ideas of simple living, feminism, spirituality, permaculture, and open communication. She can be reached via email kim@ic.org.

Off-Grid, and In Community: 'TIS EASIER TO FIND THAN TO FOUND

By Dan Schultz



I had no epiphany or precipitating event that sent me out of the suburbs toward off-grid life. As it has been said: “The day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” I think that’s what took place, except that my edit would read: “A time came when it took more energy for me to stay in ‘the system’ than to leave it.”

Probably aside a grocery list or a refrigerator note to my kids, I penciled out a few mildly appealing steps to acquire some land and do what Henry David Thoreau suggested I do. “Simplify, simplify, simplify,” he said, and “I wanted to live deliberately.”

Soon I found myself signing a deed on a 160 acre plot in California’s Siskiyou Mountains—an unlikely parcel for the endeavor of creating an organic farm and community. It was densely forested with steep, rugged terrain. I had never started a chainsaw in my life. Never grown a tomato. I had never known community at all, living alone for the lion’s share of my days, avoiding roommates as often as possible. I just knew what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be.

Seven years later, with two handfuls of calluses, eight buildings, orchards and gardens, five full time members plus wwoofers and interns, and a bank account that perpetually hovers about zero, I confess that I have learned a few things. Starting from scratch was a massive and often overwhelming task. I do not exaggerate when I speak of 70 hour work weeks during the first few years. I began to see everything around me as an unfinished project (and sometimes still do) as the land was transformed from beautiful, raw native forest to a construction site. One can learn to ignore, as best they can, material piles, slash, and clutter. Not many show up when it’s like that, so mostly you’re on your own. When it all comes together and starts to look more polished, more like a retreat, that’s when more people take interest.

From inception to today, I’ve always been a little surprised at the shine people take towards the subject of off-grid living and community. I suspect few of them are willing to actually make that leap, but they’re still quite interested, even intrigued, which seems to be something of a zeitgeist. Amongst wwoofers, interns, and visitors of all kinds one of the most common sentiments expressed is an ardent desire “to start their own thing like this.” I understand the appeal.

But I often recommend against them “starting their own thing,” mostly because that’s what too many want to do. I appreciate my

fellow dreamers and drivers, and yet I see the movement (and I definitely see a movement gaining way) getting a little ahead of itself. Isn’t it the case of too many chiefs and too few Indians? Too many head chefs in the kitchen, captains on the ship...pick your metaphor.

People in the West need to learn to work together again, co-creating a new existence even as the old system fails, and one of the most important steps in replacing the old paradigm is the abandonment of our rugged independence. I hear that independence in their enthusiastic voice even while speaking of community ideals, and I shrug a little.

Excepting of the two wonderful children I have raised into this world, my most satisfying achievement has been to integrate my life into a landscape, build something special with people and the earth. But would I do it again the same way? Actually, no.

I didn’t mind the blood, sweat, and tears, nor the long hours and messes that came from starting from scratch. And while I am pleased to have been a part of creating something grand and beautiful, I think now the opportunity cost could have been too great and my priorities sometimes upside down. Knowing what I know now about finding true community and a healthy, potent place in the world, I would do it differently. If I had to do it all over again, I would probably search for an existing, congruent community that works, and find a place for myself there.

Nearly every day something at our mountain village reminds me that co-creation trumps individual vision. Applying the principle on a larger scale: if everyone were primarily focused on cooperative culture most all of the world’s problems would vanish, while the every-man-for-himself M.O. hasn’t been working out so well. While this country will indeed need more community places, I try to steer most of the idealistic visionaries in the direction of first joining the collective, because I believe they will find a more humbling and empowering purpose in becoming part of something bigger than themselves. 🐦

*Dan Schultz is co-director of Maitreya Mountain Village (www.maitreyamountainvillage.com), which creates intentional, caring community and farming in an off-grid, wilderness setting. Dan hosts and produces a talk radio program called *New Culture Radio* focused on sustainability, and together with his partner Jane leads *Transition Del Norte* in Northwestern California.*



Photos courtesy of Dan Schultz

Building Community and Learning from Failure

By Jenny Pickerill and Ruth Hayward

Many have dreamed of living in community but have struggled to know where to start. You can read all the books out there and still flounder. Both of us had explored the possibilities of starting a community, and feared that we were repeating the same mistakes others had already made. Despite a long tradition of eco-communities in Britain, there are relatively few successful examples, and among our friends many had experienced failure. More than that, most successful eco-communities are full of people who have endured multiple failures on their way to finally building a project that worked.

We didn't want all that experience and knowledge to go to waste so we started a small research project where Ruth interviewed members of groups either in the early stages of a project or who had decided to abandon an idea. We worked with five groups in Britain: two cohousing projects, a cooperative, an eco-community, and an emerging group. Talking about failure is not only emotionally difficult but stirs up all sorts of accusations about who, how, and why things didn't work out. As we don't want to make this personally difficult for those involved, we have had to anonymise who we are talking about. We want to share stories about three of these groups and the lessons they learnt about starting a community.

In the west of England people started meeting about the possibility of setting up a cohousing community in the region. There were lots and lots of meetings and various visits around the country to other communities and cohousing projects—like LILAC in Leeds—to learn from what worked. The group spent two years discussing and evolving their plans; they also had support from the local Council and a government agency who were both keen to facilitate community self-build projects in the region. The group had significant expertise and knowledge amongst them, including an architect, an academic who had worked with numerous communities worldwide, members of previous housing cooperatives, and a trained group facilitator. Many participants noted how much they had enjoyed meeting new people who shared their goals and politics, and the optimism of feeling like they could build a new way of living.

Yet after years of meetings little progress had been made. The main problem, it seems, was that the group was too open to new members and every time new people arrived the discussions would repeat. As one member argued: "It seems a shame but had there been a small core group with clear ideas, a possible location, and an agenda, a stronger group might have formed earlier and those with a different intention might have gone off and formed another group rather than too many disparate people hanging on together for too long." This lack of clarity about, for example, whether this was an urban or rural project and everyone being too polite to argue over points of potential disagreement eventually led to the group fizzling out. Rather than simply celebrating points of commonality it is also necessary to explore the detail and different perspectives around which people might diverge. It eventually emerged that some members wanted the group to be a support network, others an information sharing point, and others still a practical building project. While it can be hard to start a community with a clear vision, especially when you want to be inclusive and democratic, it was obvious in this instance that the lack of agreement on what the purpose was and the turnover of people involved used up the energy of the group. As one member suggests, "don't open the group out to all and sundry until you have a firm base of understanding in the core group...different people dipped in and out all the time and affected the dynamics."

Further south a group began with public meetings and quickly a large number of people were interested in building an urban cohousing community. They worked out a finance plan only to realise that although they all had money to invest they did not all have capital immediately available and they could not, therefore, purchase the land they had found. They con-

nected with a Housing Association (a nongovernmental social housing provider) who was keen to work with the group and very quickly the land was purchased. It was at this stage, when the group was tied into working with this third party, that things got complicated. The group began to lose control of the project as the Housing Association began to act like a private developer. The quick success of the group also attracted more people, each with their own agenda. The Housing Association started, as one member described, “making conditions on the cohousing project” so that “finally we didn’t feel we could [afford] the cost of each unit.” Also, “we had all said we wanted intergenerational” but the Housing Association said it would be only “over 55s.” It became unclear to the group what the final houses would cost. Eventually most of the original group withdrew from the project, with those remaining setting up a new group to continue working with the developer. The new group is going ahead and cohousing with a shared common house is due to be completed by January 2017.

Another group of people participated in several attempts at starting communities in the south west until just four of them decided to set up their own rural eco-community. The initial attempt, a cohousing community, suffered from a lack of clarity, as one of the group recalled: “it was very, very difficult to create...you can’t really create a vision out of an amorphous group. I think it is better to have a smaller, better defined group than larger amorphous groups.” There was a fear, by some of those involved, of limiting the group, and yet “they’re going to have to learn to say no to some people,” for practical reasons if nothing else. Having decided to leave that project, the four of them went on to work with another group that was working with a Community Land Trust. Much like the group in the south, once this outside agency got involved, the members began to lose control of the project. The group got sidelined as the Trust negotiated with planners in development jargon and “the whole thing was going so fast, we were running to keep up with it.” Eventually people walked away from the project, disheartened at the way it had been co-opted by others with different agendas, feeling “exhausted...I’m going broke...I’m quite anxious.” Now the group has purchased a small piece of land and is establishing a rural eco-community.

These stories share several common threads: from frustrations with ideas being co-opted by others, often external organisations, to the difficulty in balancing a clarity of vision with being inclusive. The entrepreneurial drive needed to push a project through to realisation requires determination and spirit and to grasp opportunities as they arise, but this very drive can take groups into alliances with those they ultimately do not wish to work with. Perhaps stereotypically for the British, some members felt that people were too polite to each other, not identifying points of disagreement until they became highly divisive.

Avoiding disagreements does not strengthen a group; rather, there needs to be space to discuss and resolve conflicts, with agreed conflict resolution processes. This is especially important as the need for an entrepreneurial spirit to get a group off the ground means that groups are full of initiators, people with lots of skills and passion, who also tend to be strong characters. This is a good thing, and necessary, but it can result in quite serious personality clashes and differences in approach that can result in groups splitting up.

It is better to work out conflict resolution processes before being in conflict. While strong characters can help a group move forward, disruptive personalities can undermine the ability of people to work well together. Without some ways in which to minimise disruption, people who you would like to keep in your group will walk away, probably without telling you why. If you are in a group that works well, then develop a membership policy to help it stay like that. Also, everyone involved could ask themselves periodically, “is my behaviour helping or hindering the process?”

Moreover, being inclusive is not about assuming everyone brings the same expertise and skills, and yet feelings of unease around certain members overplaying their expertise can lead to conflict. There are productive ways to acknowledge and identify different skills in complimentary ways and often naming them lessened people’s anxiety about them.

Eventually people walked away from the project, disheartened at the way it had been co-opted by others with different agendas.

People also have differing levels of knowledge around cohousing, which can become an issue when the group remains open to all, and new people have to catch up very quickly in order to be able to make an informed contribution to discussions—or else feel they don't have the knowledge to contribute and so drop out.

Although we focused on attempts at starting communities that did not quite work, many involved went on to be part of other successful projects. In getting members to reflect upon what worked and what didn't, many felt that they had actually been too willing to compromise too quickly. Finding land, funding, or a project partner (such as a Housing Association) had blinded some

3. Decide decision-making processes early: Without clear governance structures through which it is clear how decisions are made, recorded, and checked, problems will emerge when people seek to challenge already-made decisions. If decision-making is unclear groups can end up in loops of repeating debates endlessly.

4. Create space for informal sharing and conversations: Taking the time to get to know each other is vital in building trust and in helping people decide if they want to live together. Sharing regular meals, beers, dancing, etc. enables one-to-one conversations and friendship building. Having fun is vital to a successful project and keeps people wanting to be involved. You could also develop a “friends group” through which people can get to know each other without necessarily formally committing to the group.

5. Good practice in meetings: Hold regular meetings in a neutral space and agree who will facilitate and who will take minutes. Most groups rotate the roles around different group members. Within meetings try out different communication techniques to ensure that everyone is heard. These practices should help prevent power struggles in a group and reduce misunderstandings or assumptions.

6. Find points of commonality and difference: While part of the point of community is to work in common with others, it is just as important to identify, discuss, and resolve points of difference. Only by articulating differences can their importance be understood.

7. Use structured activities to help group progress: Few people have time and energy to waste in endless meetings. Structured group activities (such as visioning exercises or sharing workshops), especially those that allow small-group work, enable people to see progress being made, their views included, and momentum sustained. These activities can be

While part of the point of community is to work in common with others, it is just as important to identify, discuss, and resolve points of difference.

to the risks involved. Balancing levels of pragmatism, and knowing what is worth fighting for and sticking to your principles was ultimately more important than progressing a project quickly.

There is a truism shared by those who have successfully built communities: building houses is the easy bit, building community requires all the work. The groups we worked with were emotional on their reflections of wasted hours and energy on projects that did not materialise, but none regretted their involvement. They had not just learnt personally from being involved but had hugely enjoyed the humour, laughter, and friendships made in the process. Not wanting to simply list how things can go wrong, we would like to end with 12 lessons that the groups we worked with identified as important in starting a community:

1. Start small: Starting with a small core of people helps build a firm base of communal understanding and enables key principles to be agreed more quickly.

2. Decide purpose early: A lack of a clear purpose wastes people's time and energy. Deciding early on that, for example, the project is for urban senior cohousing or rural low-impact development helps people decide if it is something worth investing in.

within regular business meetings or held separately; as long as sufficient time is given to them. However, it is hard to find group activities that are tailored to the needs of setting up communities, with groups having to invent their own each time. The sharing of activities that work is something the support networks could do to help emerging groups.

8. Develop a robust and clear system of communication: This might be a group email list or posting of minutes online, but it needs to be available to all.

9. Develop a standing agenda for meetings: This saves time and helps in consistency. This could include: greetings, icebreakers, apologies, minutes, matters arising, current issues, reports from the task groups, any other business. Some groups also end with a short period of silence.

10. Share case studies: By exploring other examples of community self-build projects and sharing information and knowledge, groups can reach a collective understanding of what housing they are interested in and the detailed issues involved. Be aware that all projects have their strengths and weaknesses, so look closely at more than one example.

11. Use external agencies, training, and expertise: Using third-party help brings additional knowledge and fresh perspectives to your project. Through this process you also build good support networks. You will also need, eventually, to have access to professionals, such as lawyers, preferably those who understand what you are trying to achieve.

12. Find an external project manager: Some of the most successful groups had an external project manager. Ideally you need someone who can help with people processes and someone else who understands the technicalities of building. Having someone external also means that the group does not become reliant on one individual; assuring that no one person is indispensable gives the group more resilience. 🌱

Jenny Pickerill is Professor of Environmental Geography at Sheffield University, England, and lives in a self-built eco-house. Her new book Eco-Homes: People, Place and Politics, about eco-communities worldwide, is published by Zed Books.

Ruth Hayward is an environmental organiser, teacher, and researcher based in Newcastle Upon Tyne, England.

Reflections on Setting Up an Intentional Community

By Arjuna da Silva

Editor's Note: Every quarter, we post and distribute a "Call for Articles" describing the theme of the issue to be published a half-year later, and supplying prompts to stimulate the creation of articles. Here, an author from Earthaven Ecovillage in Black Mountain, North Carolina responds directly to some of those prompts:



NikiAnne Feinburg via Earthaven.org

What are your experiences starting or attempting to start a community?

I imagine founders are just as clueless as new parents about what their "offspring" will be like, even though they haven't a clue that they haven't a clue! Life is like that in general, but when what you're doing involves other people, including people you don't know yet, well...perhaps in terms of disappointments over time, it might be helpful to expect the best and plan for the worst!

I like to tell folks who come on the community tour that if they're thinking of starting a community, they should get their founders to commit to being together for a minimum of five or (better yet) 10 years, depending on how much prep they have to do to move in. Sure, no one can be forced to stick it out, just like a marriage, but one of the hardest things for me at Earthaven is that most of the original people with whom I committed to building my long-time home in community were gone within five years. Why? Here's my sound bite: visionaries aren't necessarily pioneers. Know your people and the odds!

What led you to start a new community rather than join an existing one?

This was the third or fourth time I was involved in the inception of an intentional community. Twice before they were rural, and short-lived (two years) but full of rich experience. Once it was an urban, guru-inspired intentional community connecting many households, much more autonomous in so many ways than sharing land or long-term worldly goals. It lasted a decade but was dependent on reasons other than being in that particular town. As locational focus shifted, the community dissipated.

Interestingly, I got involved with Earthaven's founding because two of my best friends from the urban community moved to the Asheville area and got involved in the founding group. We had often dreamed of starting a land-based community together, and we felt the combination of spiritually-focused folks among the founders, albeit from a variety of traditions, wrapped in a cloak of permaculture, had a good chance of making a valuable difference.

(And it does!)

What preparations are necessary or helpful for those aspiring to found a community?

Visit and interview others who lived through it! Learn how to dialog well in conflict situations; in fact, decide what kind of internal justice system you will have. Practice some sort of meditation (not necessarily sitting still). Never lose sight of the importance of celebration. Get superb legal advice, even if you have to look out of town, and be willing to pay for it!

What resources have been helpful to you in starting a new community?

Having tried many times before. Being with a brilliant group of people in the beginning, particularly folks familiar with community among the founders. Permaculture trainers and trainings brought confidence to a land-based project, and the spirit of adventure allowed us to experiment with so much that was new to us: consensus, solar technology, natural building.... Connection with and through the FIC was especially beneficial early on.

What advice or guidance would you have for others starting a community?

All of the above. Don't overdo the idealism!

What do you wish you'd known when you began that you know now?

More about the legal implications of land ownership in our area. How to do better new member orientation and education. 🐦

Arjuna da Silva helped found Earthaven (see www.earthaven.org) 21 years ago and watched this dynamic ecovillage become something quite different than she had thought was being built, thus learning that while the satisfaction of your own vision may not be as important as the survival of your offspring, the vision itself can live on, evolve, and look for fertile ground. These days she finds it in and beyond Earthaven, practicing and demonstrating facilitation of Restorative Circles, a restorative justice community dialog process on the long arc to freedom.

Common Fire's Top Ten Hard-Earned TIPS FOR COMMUNITY SUCCESS

By Jeff Golden

The Common Fire Foundation was established in the early 2000s to support the development of intentional communities strongly committed to social justice and environmental sustainability. It was involved in the establishment of a housing co-op in Tivoli, New York (shuttered in 2013) and a cohousing community in Beacon, New York, and it was involved with a group of people in the Bay Area in California that did extensive foundational work over several years but never turned the corner of acquiring property or moving in together.

Common Fire is no longer actively working with groups, but some of the resources they created, including their original vision document and video, are available at www.commonfire.org.

The author cofounded Common Fire, worked with each of the three groups to some degree, and played a central role and lived in the two communities in New York.

Anybody striving to create an intentional community couldn't do better than to read Diana Leafe Christian's book, *Creating a Life Together*. The depth and breadth of information she offers is staggering and invaluable. The following tips are humbly intended to add to or tweak some of what she and others offer, or to highlight some of what she offers that we think is just so important (or that might be taken for granted or misinterpreted, etc.) that we urge everyone to really take the time to appreciate them.

They come from our own sometimes triumphant, sometimes traumatic experiences in community. Some represent things we did really well and are grateful for. More often they are things we didn't do well and we paid a heavy price for. Our prayer is that they may help you tip the scale towards ever more triumph and ever less trauma in your own journey with intentional community.

A number of people collaborated with me on this article, and these are ideas that have been voiced in different ways by many people in the three Common Fire communities. So I offer them as "our" collective learnings. However, this article still very much reflects my own perspective, and the way I have come to understand our experiences and prioritize the lessons learned. So in that sense, I want to be clear that I am not writing this as representative of anyone else who has been

The author Jeff Golden giving a tour of the Tivoli Housing Co-op while under construction.



Photo courtesy of Jeff Golden



The Tivoli Housing Co-op was a new construction project.



Residents at the Tivoli Housing Co-op cooked for each other six nights a week and all sat down together to eat once or twice a week.



Preparing a meal at the Tivoli Co-op.



involved in those communities or the Common Fire Foundation.

1. Set a High Bar for Selecting People Who Fit Your Vision, and Stick With It

Diana Leafe Christian's chapter on "Selecting People to Join You" is fabulous and you should take her advice very seriously. If you have misgivings about anyone joining your founding group or community, or just have a gut concern, no matter how wonderful they may seem in other ways, you should simply say no, or at least hold off on accepting them. And if you think you're already setting a high bar, set it just a little higher. Really. And that includes being sure that you're selecting people who will themselves help to maintain that high bar for other people joining.

Think especially about how people seem to handle conflict, and explore how successful they have been in long-term relationships including friends, family, and partners, as well as their history in past communities and group living situations. Talk with some of these people or involve them in the process in some way.

People have compared joining a community to marrying someone. The comparison has its limitations, but it can be a very helpful idea. The interweaving of lives on such an intimate scale, and the interplay of such complex and often triggering elements as money, family, home and place, power, decision making, and legal structures—all of these mean that we become very interdependent and have a huge impact on each others' lives exactly as we are dancing with very profound personal questions and issues. This can be a good thing—it is exactly why many of us are drawn to community—but it amplifies the challenge and gravity of grappling with these issues, and can be deeply draining and traumatic. We need to be very thoughtful in who we bind to our lives in this way.

As hard as it may feel to say no to someone, take any feelings of regret, shame, sadness, resentment, distrust, etc., that come up and imagine them being blown up a hundred times over, and imagine being tied to that person. That and more is what you are quite possibly inviting into your life and the lives of everyone else in the community, including this person, by dealing with someone who is not right for your community *after* they've been accepted rather than before.

(One person with extensive experience in community who gave feedback on this document suggested that we offer a tip entirely

(Sometimes we didn't need much time at all for this. However, we capped Elephants in the Room time to 30 minutes unless the whole group agreed that extending was more important than moving on to the other things on the agenda. I should also note that we tried to introduce this practice at the Beacon community at a point where there was already some serious conflict and it was too late to be effective or welcome.)

Depending on how we approach it, conflict can be a path to self-discovery and stronger connections or it can make people want to run for the hills.

on the topic of “We Live in a Violent, Disassociated World and Everyone Is Screwed Up and You Are Screwed Up Too.” I didn't manage to make this its own tip, but I think the title alone says worlds about tips 1, 2 and 3.)

2. Deal with Conflict and Conflictual People Immediately

Conflict is inevitable. Depending on how we approach it, it can be a path to self-discovery and stronger connections within the community or it can block all forward movement in the community and make people want to run for the hills. Part of addressing conflict in a positive way is dealing with it *as quickly as possible*, when it comes to both small and big things. The small things add up to big things fast, and they set the tone for how easily and effectively people deal with the big things. A seemingly minor conflict that is not addressed can become toxic.

The same thing goes with someone who is very conflictual or doesn't deal with conflict in a healthy, proactive way. Set some clear boundaries for them and stick with them, including requiring them to leave if necessary, or you will pay a *much* higher cost down the road.

Most people are conflict-averse. Many are VERY conflict-averse. One thing we did in the Tivoli community that was *very* helpful: at our one night a week together, we had a specific time for “Elephants in the Room.” People were expected to use that time to name anything large or small that was bothering them, and we made it clear that it was unacceptable for people to let anything bothering them sit beyond that weekly gathering. In that way we helped normalize discussing concerns and problems, people got more comfortable and skilled at it, and people didn't have to take the initiative or find the time during the rest of the busy week.

3. Adopt Some Clear Norms around Good Communication, Deep Connection, and Conflict Resolution

We were very successful in creating spaces that invited people to share deeply with each other, to invite the fullness of who we each are and what we are experiencing in our lives into our communities, and to really go deep when problems arose to try to get at the fundamental issues within ourselves that were being triggered or stimulated. This was primarily thanks to our use of the Be Present Empowerment Model and trainings from Be Present, Inc., which are incredible resources. (See www.bepresent.org.)

This allowed our communities to be very rich and connected, and it promoted a huge degree of personal growth. This level of seeing and knowing each other went a long way to helping prevent conflict in the first place, and to easing moving through conflict when it did come up. More than once this was named as essential to the Beacon community sur-



Tivoli residents enjoying breakfast outside.



Most of the electricity for the Tivoli Co-op was provided by on-site solar panels.



viving some challenging times, and it was cited by many people in all three communities as the glue that held them together and the most precious part of their community experience.

At the same time, what we did not do so well was have a more immediate and solution-oriented process for our groups to use when conflict came up. People are not always able to rise to the occasion of trying to process things at a deeper level, of being that vulnerable and introspective or compassionate, and in that case a complex and demanding tool like the one we used is vulnerable to being undermined or abused. That kind of processing can also require a good amount of time. When people are pressed for time or when a number of different issues start to come up at the same time, it can overwhelm even a group that has a strong commitment and practice of doing deep work with each other.

There needs to be something in place to provide some immediate relief and clarity, to help the group get through those times, and to provide some accountability and clear next steps around particular issues or individuals. Having these norms and processes in place early on is critical, because trying to introduce them when something really big has already come up can be very tricky, and you miss the opportunity of practicing and getting everyone more comfortable with the

process by working on smaller issues.

[We created a draft document on the topic of “Empowered Relationships and Conflict Transformation,” that is available on the Common Fire website that goes into all of this in more detail.]

4. Hold a Balance of Connection Time and Logistics Time (or “Don’t Rush! But Don’t Be Too Slow Either”)

In California the time for checking in, connecting with each other, and learning more about each other often took up most or all of the monthly meeting time, leaving little room for any forward movement on the logistics front. The group did powerful work creating a rich human community, but after several years they had not been able to move forward much in terms of a physical site. For some in the group who had long been dissatisfied with the group spending so much time on connecting, this was demoralizing, and it undermined some people’s faith in the group’s ability to move forward.

In Beacon, there came a point where the emphasis shifted so significantly to the logistics side of things that almost no time was given to the connection time for a number of months. Most people felt a strong need to take a step back from the emotional processing of the group for a while because things had been so emotionally taxing leading up to and during people’s move-in, and there were so many logistical things to take care of. But it meant that issues lingered for months, people became disconnected from each other, and some of the tensions in the group deepened and contributed to the eventual fracturing of the group.

Both pieces are necessary for the group to not only thrive but even survive as a human community and as a group of people striving to accomplish some very real logistical goals as well.

5. Sequence the Big Things So They Come at You One at a Time and Stagger When and How They Affect People

The Beacon community purchased a small apartment building one October. The months leading up to October were very stressful, dealing with money and legalities, deciding who would live in which apartment, and so on. There were some impor-

tant renovations to do before we moved in as well. While those were going on, people were paying the monthly costs on their new apartment while also paying for the place they were still really living. Then we all had to move, which involves time and money and support from friends, and also affects us deeply in terms of our connection with

may not be able to identify up front some of the topics that will be central to the community experience further along. For example, in one situation someone felt deeply betrayed by the community when some of us had hesitations about loaning her \$300 a month for six months while she transitioned to a new job. (“I thought we were a community.”) In another situation someone was disappointed and scornful that the rest of the community didn’t hang out more outside of our scheduled time together. (“Where is our community spirit?”) In another situation, we experienced a conflict in which someone was deeply hurt and angry that the community didn’t agree to add a

training on race issues to our schedule. This person felt that a training on race should be a top priority; others felt it was not so important as to bump the other trainings scheduled or to add onto the existing schedule. (“What kind of community won’t add a training around something one of the members is really struggling with?”)

I don’t think there is a right answer to how a “community” should respond to each of these situations. Yes, you want to support each other in times of need, but are there limits to what seems fair or healthy in terms of time or money and how it balances with other commitments? Yes, you want to live sustainably, but are there limits to what you should expect of each other in your daily lives? Yes, you want to be kid-friendly, but what should be expected in terms of community members being available to look after other people’s kids? And so on.

You aren’t going to be able to figure everything out ahead of time, and you are going to have disagreements about what is right for the community for as long as the community exists. But taking the time to go a level or two deeper with your visions will help you identify potentially serious differences that will help people make the best decisions for themselves and the group about how to move forward.

(Another tip that was suggested to me for this article was “Developing Appropriate Boundaries in a Counterculture.” I think that is relevant to thinking about conflict resolution as well as to clearly articulating expectations of each other in community.)

[Common Fire has a guide for groups to use in discussing this topic entitled “Why Community?” It is very rough but it is on our website in case it is helpful.]

Taking the time to go a level or two deeper with your visions will help you identify potentially serious differences.

place and people and things familiar to us. All of this means that there was no time for us to process people’s issues and triggers right at the very time when lots of issues and triggers were inclined to come up.

By January most of us had moved in, but not before some of our relationships were damaged and we were deeply wounded as a group.

What if we had bought the building and then filled much of it with short-term tenants from outside our community, perhaps with a mix of six-month and 12-month leases? We could have spread out the stress and been more available to support each other.

6. Be Detailed in Your Visioning

Diana Leafe Christian’s chapters on “Community Vision” and “Creating Vision Documents” are invaluable: yes, start with a very small group; yes, make the visioning one of the very first things you do; yes, write it all down; etc. The idea of community can be deeply seductive, and it can indeed be very rewarding and purposeful. But a bunch of people banding together to pursue the seduction without getting really clear about just what that means for each of them is a recipe for potentially serious conflict down the line.

That was true with our Beacon community. What we did not have the insight to do well was to make our visions sufficiently detailed. Make sure you have someone with experience living in community providing support around what kinds of guiding questions to use. Folks who don’t have experience in community

7. Establish a Clear and Relatively Easy Process for Removing Someone from the Community

We used consensus decision-making in all three of our communities and were generally happy with it. The Beacon group had an important exception to consensus, requiring only a simple majority vote to remove someone from the community. The idea was that most people will set a very high bar for themselves around this kind of decision already, so if more than 50 percent of the community believes that someone really needs to go without any more processing or trying to work things out, then the community—and probably that person as well—will be much better off just getting on with it than investing the vast amount of time and energy it would take to get to consensus-minus-one or somehow keep that person in the community in a way that doesn’t leave other people feeling completely exasperated and exhausted, and quite likely to just leave themselves.

Also, our experience is that there are some people who are so uncomfortable with the idea of kicking someone out that they cannot ever bring themselves to do it, short of that person perhaps being a physical threat to other community members. It was difficult to actually exercise this 50 percent option when the question of removing someone from the group came up because we had developed such a strong norm around consensus. So we spent a huge amount of time trying to get to consensus because one person continually rejected the idea of kicking someone out, and this was immensely damaging to the group. So when we did finally use the 50 percent rule we were deeply grateful we had it to turn to, and most of us wished we had used it *much* sooner.

8. Strive to Balance Autonomy and Community, and When in Doubt Go With Autonomy

In seeking to create a community, we are all seeking a greater degree of closeness and interrelation than we already have with each other and with most other people. And yet, the more we weave our lives together:

- the more opportunity for conflict to emerge, which requires additional time and energy to process;
- the more each of our lives can be disrupted by what's going on in other people's lives, as well as by each other's baggage;
- the more decisions that have to be made collectively rather than individually or as families, requiring more time and more shared vision.

This means that the more we weave our lives together, the more time and the more aligning of visions and values that will be needed from each person. Think about what it takes to launch even a single project or nonprofit or business. Between 50 and 80 percent of businesses fail within the first few years. Diana Leafé Christian has estimated that 90 percent of communities “never get off the ground.”

We want to give ourselves the best shot at success by keeping things as simple as possible. Through the visioning process we want to establish some real confidence about the things we definitely *do* want to do together and the ways we *do* definitely want to be in each other's lives more, and anything that does not feel essential is best left to be done separate from the community—either as individuals, collectives, businesses, or workshops, either within the community or with people and groups outside the community.

For example, is a birthing center, a CSA, or homes for immigrants, etc., an essential part of the community this group wants to create? Or is it instead an important dream of some or many of the people present, but distinct from the essence of what people want in community? We want any ventures that are not essential to the community to experience their own challenges, slow-downs, speed-ups, shifts in members, conflicts, etc. without having too significant an impact on the success of the community and the “essential” aspects of the community.

[That same guide, “Why Community?” can be helpful with this.]

9. Some Brief Offerings on Decision-Making

All three groups came away with appreciation for the benefits of modified consensus but many people in the Beacon community also had serious concerns about it, feeling that the benefits simply were not worth the vast amounts of time it required. We did not ever get to the point of exploring other options, but the idea of supermajority voting was named as attractive to some because of the idea of “most people getting most of what they want most of the time” while spending so much less time on decision-making. Also attractive to some was the idea of sociocracy.

The Tivoli co-op very happily used a modified form of Formal Consensus as described by C.T. Butler and Amy Rothstein in *On Conflict and Consensus* (www.consensus.net/oc-

[accountents.html](#)). Our most significant departure was that we allowed more time for processing emotions than that process generally allows because we were a small enough group and we saw that as a key part of how we learned and grew as a community, even though it compromised some efficiency.

10. It Takes a Lot of Time to Create Community

It's just that simple. It takes a lot of time. So people need to be ready and able to commit to carving out a good chunk of their lives to make this real. Some people can't do that, and that's fine. Have them be consultants. Invite them to join later. But make sure you have a critical mass of three to 10 people who are committed and can make the time. Otherwise you'll spend all your time trying to just corral people to meetings and there will be little forward progress—a disappointment to you and to the people who were gung ho and only later realized they can't really make the commitment.

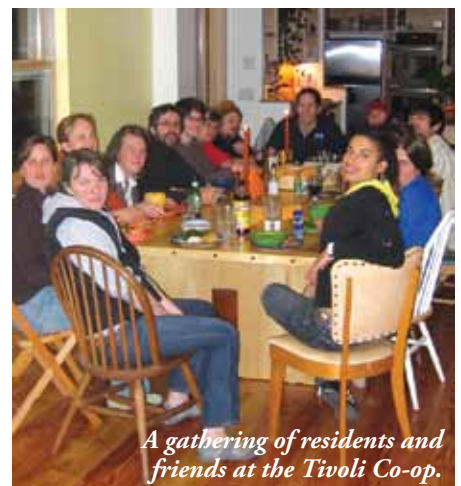
At some point in all the communities that we know of, one or more people made the switch to working for the community at least part-time if not full-time. This is especially critical at certain junctures (like when you're purchasing property). There will be certain tensions around power and vision as the people with more time move things forward for the group, but you just have to work with that as best you can.

Creating community is important and potentially deeply-nourishing work. We wish you all the best in your journey! 🍷

Jeff Golden cofounded Common Fire and worked with each of the three intentional community groups that it nurtured.



The kitchen at the Tivoli Housing Co-op, featuring extensive salvaged wood.



A gathering of residents and friends at the Tivoli Co-op.

Community Essentials

By Arty Kopecky

Sometimes, when explaining intentional communities (ICs) to people, I say “we” are living in the future: communitarians are developing the ethics of a more sharing, cooperative economy and lifestyle that will be more prevalent in the future. And this I very much believe. But the two communities that I was devoted to, New Buffalo (NB—near Taos, New Mexico) in the 1970s, and Green Valley Village (GVV—north of San Francisco, California) in recent years, both foundered on some very basic principles, though the visions had such high hopes. So believing ICs are still in the formative stage, I want to share my experience, in the firm hope that more of you pioneers will get it right and make ICs a bigger part of our culture.

I was not an initiator of either of these “on a farm” communities, but instead, found them and then spent hundreds of hours working to help them. New Buffalo and Green Valley Village shared a number of common features though they came from different eras. They both involved a lot of people, hundreds anyhow. They were what I call “welcoming communities”—they had a lot of flow, many guests, friends, visitors, and new members, as well as a hard core who lived there for years. And they were accepting of all. They weren’t intentionally Buddhist or Christian or centered around a leader either; they were very democratic. They did circle at meals, were thankful, and had a home-made spiritual life with chants and prayers. And they were both on what was a former farm with fabulous vistas and with the possibility to be a very productive farm.

Now to the crux of the matter. New Buffalo was started with a gift of money to purchase the land, and a corporation was formed to own the land. This is essential: to create an LLC or some organization to own, or be purchasing, the property. Green Valley Village was started by Chris and Kai and friends, with the funds supplied by Chris’ dad. Sadly they never got beyond this personal ownership of the land, which is one of the prime no-nos of community formation. It was hoped that, in time, this would be rectified, but there never was a “land fund” and not until the last year or so was a serious effort made to transfer title to an LLC. But by then the property had been put on the open market, the owner never having become infatuated with the group that had

gathered. I never could transfer to him my love of the group, though I tried.

But Green Valley Village did become a marvelous example of democratic governance through a village council that met frequently, an elected board of directors called the “nitty gritty,” and some very skilled moderators and mediators. I would marvel at the love and commitment of the people as they continually refined the tiers of membership and dealt with all issues. They would be gathered around on old couches and stuffed chairs or on carpets on the barn floor, or the Vic floor, or the school room. Often a projection screen was used with a laptop. To reconvene they sometimes sang a song: “We are circling, we are community, we are sacred.”

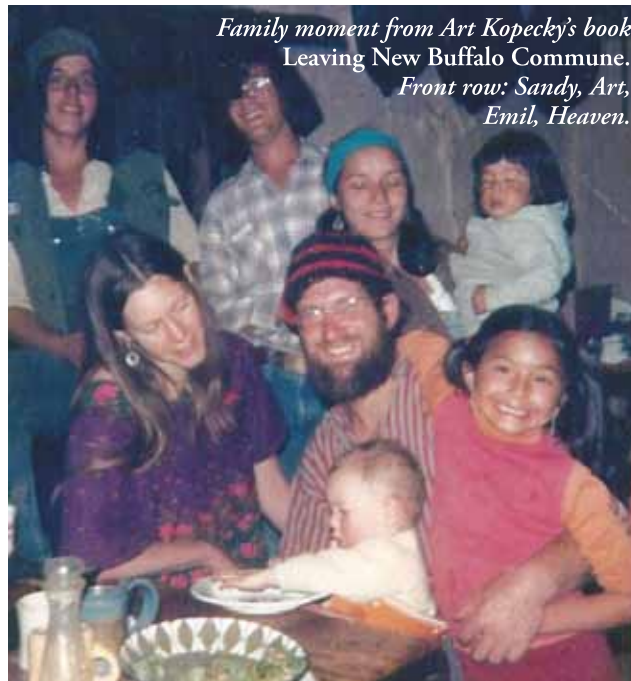
They were doing what New Buffalo failed to do. In the anarchistic ethic of the day, similar to the fabled Morningstar Ranch (circa 1968), the NB group was all-embracing, had the idea of including “everyone,” thus they failed to seriously establish a defined group with membership rules. We used what Diana Christian called “a kind of amorphous vibe grok among folks there at the time.” This is another of the prime no-nos of the communities movement.

GVV had an eight-year run, NB a 15-year run. But NB is still there! It’s in a toned-down version and is actually up for a new governance and ownership. Hundreds of people used these places, made them work, pioneered this essential cause and gave thousands of hours of volunteer service. I thank you, thank you, thank you. And thousands of people will follow in service to each other in community, in love of the land, and in turning greed to non-greed, a most revolutionary endeavor.

New Buffalo got the ownership right. GVV got the membership right. If they had each gotten both things right, perhaps they’d still be contributing to this revolution today.

Since we are discussing essentials of ICs let me add a few more, now that I am reaching elder status and heading for the end of my road. Pepe, I, and friends had a communal scene in Bolinas, California starting in 1969. Woody Ransom of Rock Bottom, a community in Vermont, donated use of a charming West Coast house. I’ve had a lot of experience since then, some of which is

(continued on p. 76)



Family moment from Art Kopecky's book
Leaving New Buffalo Commune.
Front row: Sandy, Art,
Emil, Heaven.

The Rocky Road TO ROCKY CORNER COHOUSING

By Marie Pulito

Rocky Corner will be the first cohousing community to be built in Connecticut. That seems strange, considering how many cohousing neighborhoods exist in New England. Being the first in our state has presented unique challenges. Dealing with those challenges makes for a good story, but it's the more common challenges that we've really learned from and that other cohousing communities can learn from.

Key decisions and actions over the past few years have helped us in creating our new community. When we started meeting back in 2007, we worked hard on becoming a cohesive, fair-minded group. We found guidance in Diana Leafe Christian's book *Creating a Life Together*. We used activities from her book and from *Heart and Hands*, by Shari Leach, to learn more about each other. We did our best to hold meetings where all were encouraged to participate. Having members who were Quakers and Unitarians was helpful at first. But those early meetings never had agendas or designated facilitators.

Hearing that many cohousing groups used consensus to make decisions, we hired C.T. Butler, who offered training in formal consensus, based on his book *On Conflict and Consensus*. We rented a local B&B and spent a full weekend with C.T. learning directly from him. He taught us the process of formal consensus and how to base decisions on our shared values. More important, we learned from C.T. how to hold a meeting. He demonstrated and had us practice how to create an agenda and how to facilitate a meeting. This is a process we still use.

Formal consensus was not easy. We realized early on that we needed a written statement of our shared values to direct our consensus decision-making. We knew that people could block decisions if any proposal conflicted with our values. But we had never decided as a group what our common values were. We generally knew that we were all looking for lives that were more sustainable, energy-wise and community-wise. In retrospect, it's not surprising that it took us more than a year to write our vision statement. It was difficult to get a group of 10-plus people to agree on a statement because we had different dreams for our cohousing neighborhood. But on top of that problem, how does a group agree on proposed values when all consented decisions are supposed to be based on values already agreed upon? What a crazy Catch-22! After many versions and much wordsmithing, we have our vision in a document that has helped us attract more people (see rockycorner.org/our-vision).

I'm sorry to say that having a written vision statement and practicing formal consensus did not solve our internal conflicts. Now that most of us had invested money and years of hard work into this project, tempers often flared and feelings were hurt during meetings. We were still struggling with the work needing to be done. Which of us could do this work? Which of us knew how? How do we buy land together? Do we incorporate? How do we protect our investments and assets? Were there loans or grants available that could help us?

These questions led us to our next key decision—hiring a housing consultant. His name is David Berto, and his company, Housing Enterprises, Inc., is here in Connecticut. We interviewed a few people but David seemed perfect right from the start. We love him and he loves our project, as well. With nearly 35 years of experience helping organizations



Rendering of construction plan.

build affordable housing, David had never worked on cohousing. He immediately understood what we were doing and what we wanted. He understood how much we needed to be a part of the process of getting our neighborhood built. Without Housing Enterprises, we can honestly say we would have given up. With his help we have found a property, designed the neighborhood with a nationally known local architect (see centerbrook.com), worked with lawyers to get zoning approvals, written condominium documents, obtained loans for the pre-development expenses, and applied for (and won!) a Connecticut Department of Housing affordable housing grant to subsidize the prices of 13 of our 30 homes. He has done all of this while fully respecting our vision and our ways of making decisions.

The decision that I personally believe has helped us the most has been adopting dynamic governance as our decision-making and organizational model. Again, we wanted to learn directly from the experts. Our first training was run by John Buck, who was instrumental in bringing sociocracy to the United States. He and Sharon Villines wrote *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy*. Jerry Koch-Gonzalez, from Pioneer Valley Cohousing, and Diana Leafe Christian, from Earthen Ecovillage, assisted with the training. We invited other cohousing communities to join us and had participants from Nubanusit, Belfast, Burlington, Pioneer Valley, Cornerstone, and Legacy Farms. Since that weekend training in January 2012, we have had a follow-up workshop with Jerry Koch-Gonzalez and one with Diana Leafe Christian. We have learned that we need ongoing training.

Dynamic governance has helped us organize committees in a way that we were never able to achieve under formal consensus. Our general circle, consisting of leaders and delegates from all our committees, meets twice a month to review committee progress, consider proposals that affect the whole community, and select leaders for new or existing committees when needed. By using the selection process we learned from John Buck (which we all seem to love, by the way), we have ensured our ability to choose effective leaders. The general circle consents to the vision, mission, aims, and authority (VMAA) for each committee. This basic charter clarifies what the committees are charged with and what they can do under their own authority.

We have stopped using formal consensus and now make decisions using the consent model we learned from our dynamic governance teachers. The two are similar, and we still bless C.T. Butler for all we learned from him. Consent decisions are made with a planned time for reevaluation. "Good enough for now, safe enough to try" is usually said aloud by at least one of us whenever we consent to a new proposal. We have been repeatedly surprised how well this decision-making process has worked for us even for difficult matters like deciding on our pet policy and our firearms policy.

I personally place so much value on dynamic governance that I have become critical of every other organization in my life. The redundancy of work done in the department where I am employed is horrendous. The congregational meetings of my Unitarian society, which are run using Robert's Rules of Orders, make me cringe. The annual town meetings in my small New England town, where the budget is "discussed," fall far short. Where is the equivalence of voice, the power of many minds coming together to find a solution to a problem? *I want every organization in the world to convert to dynamic governance.* I must admit, however, that the energy needed to get Rocky Corner built leaves us with little energy to bring conversion to others. This article is the closest to spreading the word that we can manage right now.

Just like formal consensus, dynamic governance is not easy. We have not been good at timely evaluations. We work so diligently at getting our neighborhood built that there are some processes we have not found time for. We struggled at the start just to consent to the terms we wanted to use: dynamic governance vs. sociocracy, committees vs. circles. Every committee, every leader and delegate, has to stay focused on correct practice. Otherwise, members of Rocky Corner don't feel fairly treated, don't feel heard. Correct process builds respect. As Diana Leafe Christian taught us: Plan, do, measure...and trust will follow.

I am one of those who believe that cohousing can save the world, one neighborhood at a time. Working toward a built neighborhood has taught us how important good will and collaboration can be to building relationships and community.

So if you skipped ahead to this last paragraph, that's OK, because here is the big advice:

- If you are a newly forming cohousing group, I highly recommend that you look into hiring a housing consultant.
- If you are a cohousing group at any stage of existence, discuss your common values and write your vision document.
- Learn how to run a good meeting with a planned agenda and skilled facilitation.
- **Most of all, adopt dynamic governance to organize the ongoing work you need to do and to make good decisions that are safe and smart and build trust.** 🌱

Raised in suburbia, in love with rural living near a small city, Marie Pulito is proud to be a long-time active member of the first cohousing being built in Connecticut on the outskirts of New Haven (see www.rockycorner.org). She works as a lactation nurse specialist at Yale-New Haven Hospital. She is looking forward to a shorter commute to work, a farm right outside her door, a small energy-efficient home, and neighbors she knows well.

Photos courtesy of Marie Pulito



Land.

Leaps of Faith

By Rebecca Reid

It all started three years ago when we took a leap of faith. It was one of those moments when you knew your parents would not have approved, but you were going to do it anyway. Except that we were in our late 60s, and our leap was out of a cohousing community and into a duplex farmhouse in need of renovation on a nine acre farm, to live with a young family with two small children.

The Story

My husband Michael and I were living in Pioneer Valley Cohousing Community in Amherst, Massachusetts with 31 other families. I was a founding member, deeply entrenched in the community. We were pretty happy with our situation there. I thought I was at the culmination of a life in search of community and had finally found one where I could live out the rest of my days. I was born into a Quaker family, went to a Quaker school that was a cooperative farm, lived in cooperative houses most of my adult life, and worked in a consensus-run nonprofit organization. The balance of public and private in cohousing seemed ideal: I could be part of a healthy community and have my own private (read clean) kitchen. I believed (and still do believe) that consensus decision-making is an elegant, inclusive, and powerful way for human beings to relate to each other.

Then a young pregnant couple with a small child moved into the unit across the path as temporary renters, considering membership. We became fast friends as we discovered how much we had in common in spite of being of different generations. We had the kind of personalities that work together well, and we enjoyed each other's company. We respected each other's skills, which were many. We all valued simplicity, good work, and living as lightly as possible. We all wanted to grow as much of our own food as we could and find local sources for the rest, and to raise animals for meat and milk. They wanted to raise their children to be connected to the land and to where their food comes from. Because of my relationship with this new family, I began to be aware of what I was missing at Pioneer Valley: close connections based on deep common values and common purpose, and I wanted a farm. It gradually became clear that Pioneer Valley Cohousing was not the place to begin. There was not enough land for all of the uses the community had in mind, and there was considerable resistance to farming and farm animals.

It wasn't easy to do. I was still attached to the idea of cohousing, and a little afraid to leave such a safe environment on the cusp of my old age. At some point I realized that to be in a small close community with people who love me was much safer than the idea that "someone" in cohousing would step in if I needed help. We talked about starting a new, smaller cohousing community, but abandoned the idea because of the time it would take, and the difficulty of finding other members. We decided to look for land with living space for both families.



A two-family house with nine acres and two barns came on the market, and without looking back, we leaped off into the unknown. We spent six months doing a deep energy retrofit, creating an energy efficient house from scratch out of a series of sheds in the rear for the other family, remodeling and insulating the large old colonial front house for us. We set aside rooms that would always be owned in common: a large pantry

We started small with chickens, a small garden, a hedgerow, and the beginnings of an orchard, and gradually expanded to include two hoop houses for season extension, a small herd of goats, more gardens, and lots of projects in the planning stages.

We were hoping for another family to join us, but knew that they had to be kindred spirits, not just people wanting to farm. A year and a half into our adventure, another young couple, friends of our farm-mates, bought a little house right across the road from us and joined us as equal partners in the farm. We became a community of six adults and three children, now ranging in age from two to 71. We made conscious effort to integrate the new family, since they were coming in after we had established ourselves, and their house was not connected the way our houses were. We wanted to be sure that we broke down any barriers

before they arose. It is still more difficult to include them, since so many conversations happen naturally at random times during the day as we wander in and out of each other's houses, but we have regular farm meetings after dinner once a week to make sure to catch each other up on our lives and farm business.

We all share the work of the farm, but each of us has an area we are most drawn to and know most about. I am a longtime gardener; Seth devises systems, builds and

fixes things, and loves the goats. Jason knows all about engines, and loves the garden as much as the animals. Jess is my garden buddy. Bethany manages the orchard. Michael is the grease that makes it all flow smoothly by running errands and helping with any manual labor that needs doing. The children, being very social creatures, love to help out and are learning real-world skills. Since many of our projects are new to us, we are constantly searching out information and skills and we research in our area of expertise and then share it. We have work days, usually a half day, when we all work together on some project. Recently we reroofed a portion of one of the barns in preparation for solar panels. We have work days to plant the garden and to prepare it for winter, to tend the orchard, to get in the hay. We struggle, however, with getting it all done, as you might imagine. Four of us have full-time jobs, but two are teachers and have the summer off. Michael and I are retired, and have lots of time, but limited energy. We are all constantly excited about starting new projects and have to rein ourselves in with practical considerations.

I realized that to be in a small close community with people who love me was much safer than the idea that “someone” in cohousing would step in if I needed help.

on the first floor between the two kitchens and a guest room on the second floor and a common front porch. During the entire renovation, we never had an argument. Plenty of decisions, some disagreements, but all peaceful. It still felt totally right.

We moved in in June of 2012 with great ideas. A permaculture farm, with gardens, goats, chickens, meat chickens, turkeys, pigs, a pond, hedgerows, rainwater system, compost system, sugarbush. We designated an area around three sides to go wild and provide habitat for local flora and fauna.



Rebecca Reid

Photos courtesy of Rebecca Reid



Alina and Seth.

We don't sell our produce, but hope only to feed ourselves as sustainably as possible. We are not aiming for self-sufficiency. We believe that sustainability can't be achieved without the wider community. We are cultivating interconnections, first among our three generations, then outward to neighboring farms, farms in our watershed, and to local and regional businesses. Barter and sharing labor are an integral part of our philosophy: we share, lend, and trade with several nearby farms for manure, seeds, tools, equipment, labor, and produce that we don't grow. We participate in Valley Time Trade (a local labor/barter system). A neighbor pastured his geese and ducks on our land, fertilizing our pasture, and gave us some meat in return, and two geese to guard our chickens. We traded two oil tanks left from the renovation for manure from the horse farm nearby, spread by a neighbor with access to a manure spreader. We save and share seeds. We hope to create a web of interconnections that will be resilient in what may be difficult times to come.

Our finances are separate, but we have a farm account that we all contribute to every month, which pays for the things that we buy in common: fencing, animal feed, tools and hardware, fuel for the tractor and mowers, supplies of various kinds. Bulk food we pay for as we go, splitting the cost. We transformed the ownership

of the duplex house from co-ownership to condominium ownership, in a nod to the fact that one or the other (probably us) will one day leave and need to sell. Jess and Jason own the house across the street, and we are working to find some legal arrangement that recognizes their commitment to the farm.

The door between the houses in the duplex is always open, unless there is a specific reason. We eat dinner together almost every night, unless one family needs solo family time, or someone has guests and wants quiet dinner conversation. There is no meals schedule, no payment for meals; generally someone will come up with an idea for dinner, and tell the rest by email in the morning and serve it up at night. Often others will contribute some side dish to the meal. The cost of food evens out over time, especially since we grow most of our food and buy together in bulk what we can't produce. My husband and I have the largest dining table, and the biggest space, so dinners usually happen in our house, the downstairs of which functions somewhat like a common house in cohousing—everyone is free to walk in any time. I come home

sometimes to cheery small voices greeting me from my living room. When I get up in the morning, small footsteps run through the pantry that connects the houses and it is Case, five years old, with his cheerful and charming smile come to see if I am ready to play. Alina, seven, had a little desk in my study for art projects, until she outgrew it. Alina and Lyla, who is now two, have a big/little sister relationship that is very sweet to see.

The kids are learning all about food, and acquiring a sense of place that is rare in the world. They are also seeing adults collaborate and work through problems.

I asked Alina what was the best thing about being a kid here. She replied that because we are on a farm, there is always something good to do, and sometimes kids can do things that grownups can't do, like milk the goat with little teats. The kids are learning all about food, and are acquiring a sense of place that is rare in the world. They are seeing adults collaborate and work through problems. They have a chance to learn to use tools and be part of a working team, and to develop confidence and strength.



What Makes It Work?

I also asked Alina what makes the farm work. She said (not in these words) that we know each other very well, we generously share things without feeling territorial, we don't keep score, we all work together as a team, and we talk to each other about important things at dinner. She's right. Since we are a small community we can get to know each other in depth. We all believe that community rests on generosity, communication, and openness. Because we are so small, and know each other so well, accountability is built in—there is no anonymity. If we agree on a decision, it is because everyone has thought about it, talked about it, and genuinely agrees to uphold it. If we need to change our minds and do something different, we can easily do that. We have no disgruntled minority. We give each other the benefit of the doubt, knowing that we are all doing the best we can because we are all committed to our adventure.

Since our farm mates are younger than our children, it might have been easy to treat them like children and to be constantly aware of the age differences, and for them to see us as parent figures. But somehow we don't think of them as anything but farm mates, with their own unique skills and personalities. They don't see us as parents, but respect us instead on our own merits. To the children we are essentially surrogate grandparents, and when the real grandpar-

ents come, we take a back seat.

Our struggles center around communication—with three small children and four jobs, it is difficult to find time to talk over all of the things that we need to, both farm business and interpersonal issues when they arise. For the same reason, the time line of many projects is not what we hoped, and that sometimes causes tension. Our priorities are not always the same. Why are you cleaning the barn when the tomatoes need to be staked? Should we get pigs or meat chickens next year, or just do a better job with what we are already doing? What can we realistically expect to be able to do?

We also struggle with the finer points of some of our values and with our attitudes toward money: a riding mower would enable us to spend less time mowing and more time growing, but it uses fossil fuels and emits pollution. Is it better to hay early for the sake of the health of the hayfield, or do we wait until the ground-nesting birds are gone? When there is not enough time, what is it ok to let go? Do we buy what we need, or try first to make or borrow it? How strictly do we try to vote with our money? Do we buy it from the big box store because it is cheaper and available sooner, or support the local hardware store no matter what?

We do manage to navigate these more perilous waters with the spirit of community as our guide. Our relationships and connections with each other are more important than our differences of opinion. We would rather have a happy community than be right. We find solutions to our problems that work for everyone because if we win only individually, we lose as a community.

We were incredibly lucky to find the right people and the right land, at a time in our lives when we could take advantage of the opportunity. I think it would be very difficult to set out to create something similar with only the idea and the desire. But what is possible is what I did: Take time to find and build your community. Nurture your connections. When you find it, don't let it get away; leap into it and give it your whole heart.

I wake up in the morning to the sun streaming in the east window, making the hallway glow. I hear Seth's and Jason's voices in the barn, and the soft bleating of the goats. I hear children's laughter downstairs; I smell coffee and hear the rattling of dishes as someone enters our kitchen to put last night's supper dishes away. I am filled with gratitude every day, and I have only one question: What do you do when you have everything you've always wanted? 🐦

Rebecca Reid is a grandmother, a farmer, and a photographer who thinks that community is the answer, and has been trying to prove it for years. She lives in Leverett, Massachusetts with her chosen family, and is very happy.

Kids reading.



Living in a Multigeneration Household: HAVEN OR HELL?

By Maril Crabtree



Photo courtesy of Maril Crabtree

A few years ago, my husband and I moved from our downsized 1200 square-foot townhouse with no outdoor maintenance to a five-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath suburban home surrounded by green lawns, decks, and leaf-shedding trees.

No, we didn't have to acquire new furniture or a new lawnmower. We chose the house along with four other "new" household members: our son and daughter-in-law, both in their 40s, and our two teenage grandchildren.

Heart arrhythmias that made stairs difficult for me started the whole conversation. Added to that was the fact that Jim, Tiffany, Jamie, and Jessica yearned for a bigger house with a little more room for everyone. The two families lived just a block apart when one day my son said, "Why don't we sell both our homes and buy a house where we can all live together?"

Many of our friends shook their heads.

"Sounds like a nice idea, but I don't think I could ever live in the same house with my children," they said. They cited personality conflicts, too much noise, and different lifestyles as the big stumbling blocks.

Some of Jim and Tiffany's friends were having similar reactions.

"What happens when your parents start giving you advice about how often to clean the kitchen or take out the garbage?" one said.

Even the grandkids' friends expressed doubt.

"Won't it be like living with two sets of parents? Yuck!"

All valid objections. The six of us sat down one evening to discuss the idea seriously. Each of us in turn spoke about doubts, fears, and hesitations.

"I need a certain amount of privacy."

"Will I be able to watch my favorite TV shows?"

"Will we still be able to entertain our own friends?"

Then we looked at the positives.

"There'll be more people to share the chores with."

"By combining households both families can share resources and maybe save some money."

"The dog won't be so lonesome during the day."

"I won't always have to be the one to go to the grocery store."

We decided to look for a house that might fit our needs. There were some things we weren't willing to compromise on: the grandkids wanted to stay in the same school district; both couples wanted a master bedroom suite with their own bathroom; my son wanted plenty of deck space for his barbecuing and grilling passions.

Astonishingly, the first house we looked at, an older home that had been renovated and updated, fit all those needs and more. The main floor had a large kitchen and dining area with floor to ceiling windows that looked out on a large deck. We had a master bedroom suite, another room that we could use as a sitting room with our own TV, and a guest bedroom and bath. Upstairs was another master bedroom suite and a room Tiffany could use for her home office. Downstairs, a finished basement beckoned as a teen hangout with space for a lounge area and two bedrooms.

Seven years later, we're all still happily living together, although life has continued to change. Jessica has finished college and moved to another city for graduate school, so she'll be home only during holidays. Jamie is also away from home at college, and he's living full-time in another city for residency purposes.

The house seems much emptier without the grandkids. I have as much quiet writing time as I could possibly want, with only Stevie, our dog, to keep me company on many weekdays.

What are the key ingredients for our success? Simple things like communication and respect go a long way. We respect differences in lifestyle preferences and honor the need for privacy. Just because we

(continued on p. 77)

KINDLING NEW COMMUNITY: Village Hearth Cohousing

By Pat McAulay

Listening to the steady drum of rain on the roof as I write, I'm reminded of our first big tabling event: North Carolina Pride. Thankfully, in anticipation of fall sunshine and high humidity, we'd reserved a spot under a big tent. That day, the rain was mostly gentle but persistent, making the grounds a soggy mess. But my optimistic side likes to say that we joined 10,000 of our closest friends that day to celebrate Pride. We had a good day, talking to a steady stream of interested folks who took this flyer, that card, this brochure, and did or didn't sign up for our email list. As importantly, two of our members joined us and turned out to be formidable marketers!

My wife, Margaret, and I are the "burning souls" behind Village Hearth Cohousing. We're gathering with LGBTs, friends, and allies to create a caring community in Durham, North Carolina, with the intention to age in place in a community of "good neighbors." Our vision has followed a long path originating 15 or more years ago with long weekends and, eventually, weeks at the beach. We fell in love with the sound of women laughing, the aroma of brewing coffee, the sight of souls braving the ocean currents in November. We thought we wanted to create the ODH (Old Dykes Home): what turned out to be a shared housing concept. When our gang started to retire, we faced the reality of *actually living together under one roof permanently*, as well as the standard reply, "I'm going to stay in my home until I can't." That forced us to seek out other solutions. Having the close-knit community with a balance of privacy in cohousing is where we landed.

We read the cohousing canon, *Coho/US, COMMUNITIES*, the cohousing listserv, and we knew that we were blessed with several existing communities in our area. Well, let's figure out which one we want to move to. Oh, wait! We're talking about this being the last home we move to. That means we need the community to be totally accessible and visitable. What good is an accessible home if one is kept prisoner there by not being able to visit neighbors or go to the Common House? Wait! We don't need a second story; we won't be able to do the stairs. Wait! We already live in an apartment building with an elevator that doesn't work when the power goes out. Wait! We don't want to be so far from downtown Durham that we'll choose to stay home because the drive is too far. Wait! I need some green space. Wait! What? Well, hell; we're going to have to build our own community.

We chewed on that concept for awhile. I spied the Boulder regional cohousing conference, *Cohousing: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* happening in September 2014. I convinced Margaret that we needed to hear these realities of cohousing and then could make a decision about moving forward to create community or give up the idea and figure out where else to build or buy in Durham. So, we drove to Boulder, where we were struck by the golden glow of the aspen. The conference was hosted by three communities, including a senior community, Silver Sage, and was well-attended with around 90 participants. Succinctly, the best thing about cohousing is the people, and the worst thing about cohousing is the people. We came away fired up and ready to start. On our way home, we toured three additional senior cohousing communities: Valverde Commons in Taos, Sand River in Santa Fe, and Oakcreek in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Cohousers are generous people and want to spread the good news, so we spent several hours among the three communities and learned a lot. But we fell in love with the McCamant & Durrett single-story attached cottage design of Oakcreek, and that community became our touchstone.

Next we had to figure out who we wanted in our community. We knew we wanted an adult-centered community—not that we wouldn't welcome the occasional visiting grandchild, but we don't have children and don't want to live among them. The complexities of ownership structure steered us away from saying women only or lesbian only, as the Old Dykes Home would have been. We decided we want to be around people who have had a

similar path. We know that just because one is gay or lesbian doesn't mean we'll be fast friends, but we want to be around people who can relate to our past: not having any role models and thinking there was something wrong with us; struggling to come out again and again and again to oneself, one's best friend, one's parents, one's co-workers, one's faith community; experiencing discrimination and being marginalized by society; maybe even being the victim of a hate crime. With this shared experience, we hope we'll have a basis for coming together in community. We're welcoming friends and allies to join us—anyone who has witnessed our paths and supported us throughout—and, frankly, we can't exactly check sexual preference IDs at the door.

At the Boulder conference, we heard from at least three different communities from the US and Canada that they strug-



Pat McAulay

Margaret and Pat celebrate on the land after closing. Holding the boundary survey, Land Day 8/28/15!



Paul J. Stinson

gled to get going and keep going because members were sure they could save money by foregoing the “experts.” They related that as soon as they brought in a professional, the project began to move along and move in is slated for “_____.” With that level of sharing, we decided to bring in the experts as soon as we hit a snag. We want to do this as fast as possible and not have any expensive missteps along the way. The first bump in the road was the water department referring me to a 232-page document to figure out what size sewer pipe and water lines I might need for this 22-30 unit development. Luckily, the 2015 national cohousing conference was coming up right in our home town! There we connected with Katie McCamant of CoHousing Solutions and Chuck Durrett of McCamant & Durrett Architects, who worked with Oakcreek, and they agreed to provide consulting to our group.

Pat McAulay



Fifty-five people attended Katie's public presentation—half of whom we'd never met before!

We've been holding Outreach meetings since April 2015, and we had a small group bonding over the concept. We cajoled Katie into providing a preliminary home price, and half our group had to drop out because of anticipated cost. This was a very difficult blow for Margaret and me: we'd spent months developing and deepening relationships, and we really *liked* the people we'd gathered. The hard facts are that we can't build what we want where we want it and come in at a comparable market price. The common amenities and land, the higher grade sustainable materials and better than standard fixtures, the things that are really important to us just cannot be produced at a price comparable to a development of 300 homes. We expect energy savings with our attached homes built well with proven materials. We must learn to communicate the value of community—the people—to ameliorate the shock of the initial investment. We need more than just our vision and a few pictures of Oakcreek.



NC Pride. Margaret's ready for the 10,000+ who braved the rain.



Long winding road leads back to a secluded area where we'll build.

Terri Murphy

“More” means land. We looked for land for months. Dozens of MLS listings daily, trying to figure out the zoning, the watershed, the buffer, the “this,” the “that” from the GIS maps. Printing maps, enlarging maps and printing them and taping them together. Killing trees right and left to get the right view to decipher the alphabet soup that would add up to the right piece of land. With a house; without a house? Finally a word from Chuck at the conference, “It doesn't matter if there's a house on the

property or not. We'll figure out the best way to use the land either way." Generous Ann Arbor folks told us on a visit there to look for commercial, office, or industrial land with a land broker. We tried that on our own, and finally were just about to get hooked up with a land broker...then the MLS listing came through. Fifteen-plus acres, relatively flat (tough to find in Durham), next to a subdivision with city water and sewer, less than 20 minutes to downtown, zoned at two dwellings/acre, but with future land use at four dwellings/acre. City water guy said, "Yeah." City planning guy said, "Yeah, with x, y, and z, it's doable." Price well under \$200,000. After a few days of going back and forth with the owners and getting nervous about a builder sniffing around, we jumped with a full price offer to close in 10 days. Since the land appears to have been underpriced, we're pretty sure we could turn around and sell it if it isn't right for the project. Now we had the motivation to move forward and something to "sell."

Must gather more people. We'll talk to anyone, anywhere, about cohousing and what we're doing. More Outreach meetings, individual meetings, a "friend" sponsorship for the big arts festival, materials to pass out at the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, an ad in the Pride guide, tabling at Pride. Then, a connection to a couple we used to know casually, an invitation to join them for a common meal in their cohousing community, a couple we don't know at the table who had heard about us from "so-and-so": you know "so-and-so," don't you? No, we don't. Finally, evidence that the word has spread beyond friends and friends of friends. We have a member in Athens, Georgia; a couple in Virginia. We're just thinking about dipping our toes into national advertising. This week we've had inquiries from Asheville, North Carolina, and Golden, Colorado. Coho/US, Katie, and Chuck have all promoted us to their mailing lists. One sweet man from Tennessee mailed us a box of cohousing books since he'll never be able to talk his partner into it. A lot of people are interested in the concept, but we find that most people think they don't need to do it now.

When Katie and Chuck brought cohousing from Denmark in the 1980s, they also brought along a class for elders about successful aging known here as "Study Group I." Chuck says we need to get people out of denial. It's tough. The Department on Aging person who worked with me to set up the class at the senior center

said, "Oh, don't call it Senior Cohousing: Successful Aging [which is what the book is called]. Successful aging has the connotation of climbing mountains and zip lining. We need another term to describe what most people do. Something with 'thriving' maybe." While I appreciate that she's trying to find terminology that works, I find it very frustrating that we can't use the words "senior," "elder," "aging," "aging in place," etc. We don't "die," we "pass" or are "not here anymore." Walking this terminology minefield is an impossible task. We can't wait until someone invents a new word to call one who is older. At any rate, the 10-week class was wildly successful, precisely because no one feels safe to talk about aging in any other setting. The course led us right up to this last weekend when Katie came to town.

All the while the course was going on, we marketed Katie's visit. She came to do our first weekend workshop with us, but also planned a public presentation on senior cohousing. (Back to, "What do we call it??") We did paid ads and press releases, resulting in a lengthy article in the real estate section of the newspaper. Fifty-five people attended, and we had never seen at least

We believe in our project, we're riding some good momentum, and we understand even better now just why we want to live in community.

half of them! None decided to join us for the weekend workshop, but the seed is planted. This is a slow-growth forest, and yet, look how far we've come. Katie led us in an informative weekend explaining the timeline, the budget, what impacts both, best practices of other communities, walked us through our shared values, and sent us on our way with committee assignments. We come together again tomorrow, and we're waiting with bated breath to see who's in and who's leaving us this time. It will be hard if it's the latter, but we believe in our project, we're riding some good momentum, and, after hearing Katie talk about living in cohousing, we understand even better now just why we want to live in community. 🍷

Pat McAulay loves her adopted home of Durham, North Carolina, and can't wait to get settled into Village Hearth Cohousing with her wife, Margaret. They are both looking forward to fun and new experiences while living in community, as well as being and having good neighbors. Pat can be reached at naturepat@aol.com, and you can follow Village Hearth Cohousing on Facebook, Meetup, and on their website, www.VillageHearthCohousing.com.

Looking back from the rise.



Terri Murphy

The Dog that Brought Us a Community

By Jim Daly



The Fates can be capricious. Three years ago I was hale and hearty, financially sound, and my novel had just been published. The doctors caught my wife's breast cancer in its earliest stage and had successfully removed the affected tissue. Though she still faced a program of radiation, we felt optimistic.

The sun shone on my two grandchildren, me, and our terrier as we played in the backyard with a weakly inflated volleyball. My wife smiled upon us through the kitchen window while she peeled apples for a pie. I kicked the ball into the air and we all ran, yelling, to retrieve it. The Fates have their fun. I reached the ball as my dog grabbed for it. Her tooth grazed my finger, breaking the skin on the order of a paper cut. So minor that I didn't stop playing. Nothing serious, right?

The next evening I didn't feel well and went to bed early. In the morning, my wife could not awaken me. At the hospital, I was diagnosed with septic shock and was helicoptered to a bigger hospital in Seattle. I was in a coma for a week and kept in the hospital and rehab facility for two months. When I was able to come off dialysis, I returned home 40 pounds lighter, balance problems, no fingers and nubs of thumbs on both hands. The Fates lost interest in me.

Eventually, I regained my strength and health but could no longer count on my fingers. I was confronted with a series of challenges. Putting on my socks for the first time was a great victory. Even though everyone around me seemed amazed at all the things I was able to accomplish, some challenges flummoxed me. I could no longer mow our large lawn or clean the gutters on our two-story house. My wife became cancer-free and assumed many of my duties. I felt less of a man and slipped into a dark hole.

My doctor prescribed Zoloft and counseling, and I climbed slowly out of my "melancholy," a.k.a. depression. We decided that we needed less yard and a smaller house closer to town. We also had a taste of the care and love, that came during our period of need, from our congregation and from acquaintances we knew only slightly.

Because I had experienced how life can change in a moment, I had a new feeling of vulnerability. Our neighborhood seemed sterile. The

houses were far apart, with many vacant lots in between. The neighbors nodded and waved politely, but withdrew into their houses, garages, cars without much contact.

I had left my slowly accrued friends in southern California, and had not made any close ones in the 10 years we had lived in the small town of Port Townsend, Washington. We wanted to become part of an involved community. We wanted more friends.

One evening, we ran into a couple we knew, Pat and David, at Sweet Laurette's, a restaurant in town. They too had some physical limitations and were pondering how they could take charge of their future. They had heard of a concept that was both intriguing and quite foreign to my wife and me, the idea of being in what our friends described as a committed community, among like-minded people committed to being supportive, cooperative, friendly, and helpful. But because it seemed like an overwhelming undertaking, a pie in the sky idea, I left it on the table along with the remains of my pasta dinner.

Then our church's education classes offered a course in *Aging Successfully*. My wife and I got in on the last session, and found our friend Pat from the restaurant leading the class. Different ideas were being discussed for a senior population on how to take charge over the course of their aging. One of the speakers, a handsome man in baggy pants named Chuck Durrett, along with his pretty wife Katie, turned out to be the gurus of cohousing in the US and Canada.

His imaginative ideas grabbed us. The idea of a group of like-minded people buying a site, hiring an architect, and constructing their own community sounded inviting but scary. We talked more to Pat and David. As it turned out, the project was already in progress. They had gathered a small group, hired McCamant & Durrett, Architects, and were in the process of moving forward.

Being curious but cautious as we always have been, we took a half-way step and became associate members of Quimper Village. We attended meetings, joined one of the teams, and went to the social gatherings. The caliber of the members, their congeniality, and

(continued on p. 78)



Photos courtesy of Jim Daly

Roger Ulrich: A Founder Reflects

By Deborah Altus

Roger Ulrich, the octogenarian founder of Lake Village Homestead, a 44-year-old intentional community near Kalamazoo, Michigan, has been on a lifelong community journey. From an Amish-Mennonite background, he learned as a child what tight-knit Anabaptist church community is like. Then, after rebelling from his pacifist roots and spending a couple of years in the Navy, he learned about military community. Finally, he ended up immersed in academic community, earning a Ph.D. at Southern Illinois University and later chairing the psychology departments at Illinois Wesleyan University and Western Michigan University—the latter where he served for many years as a research professor.

Ulrich pursued the study of behavioral psychology with the fervor of a convert. As chair at WMU, Ulrich recruited well-known behaviorists in an effort to turn the department into one of the top behavioral psychology programs in the country. But he wasn't content simply to study behaviorism or to apply it to others. Rather, he wanted to live what he was studying in an authentic way. This quest led to his longest and most personally meaningful exploration into community: the building and sustaining of a cooperative farm community.

Spurred by B.F. Skinner's 1948 utopian novel, *Walden Two*, Ulrich was drawn to creating an intentional community based on behaviorism. After meeting with a group of *Walden Two* enthusiasts (including folks who went on to start Twin Oaks community in Virginia), Ulrich went on to found Lake Village Homestead in 1971 on 265 acres along Long Lake, just outside of Kalamazoo.

Trying to put *Walden Two* into practice was at first eye-opening and eventually paradigm-shattering. Although he was still at WMU as a research professor, Ulrich felt an increasing pull to experiment with his own life—not only through behaviorism but in ways ranging from psychedelic drugs to Native American spirituality. Doubts about behaviorism started creeping, then pouring, in.

Despite his far-reaching fame as a scholar and author of articles and books on the control of human behavior, Ulrich came to the difficult realization that he couldn't even solve everyday problems at Lake Village. Kids were cleaning up by sweeping cat litter under the carpet and he didn't know how to stop it. The more he tried to experiment with his life, the less he realized he knew. To say that it was a humbling experience for him is an understatement.

Skinner's views, which Ulrich had held in the highest esteem, felt increasingly false—not the principles of behavior (he still buys into the science upon which behavioral psychology is based)—but the idea that control of human behavior is easy or even possible. Skinner

was telling others to experiment with their lives in *Walden Two* but he wasn't doing it himself.

Ulrich finally concluded that *Walden Two* was a fairy tale. He knew he'd need to find other teachers and other ways to help Lake Village move forward. So he started searching in earnest. He drew sustenance from Native American spirituality and was drawn, in particular, to the ideas of Rolling Thunder. Surprisingly, though, he found that his previously cast-aside

Amish-Mennonite roots provided the clearest direction.

Ulrich began to see that his forebears weren't quaint relics of a bygone era but were full of practical wisdom on how to live in a more self-sufficient, sustainable way. He realized that they “were in many ways attuned to the Native American way of life that I

Skinner's views, which Ulrich had held in the highest esteem, felt increasingly false—in particular, the idea that control of human behavior is easy or even possible.

later came to know in greater depth.” Their focus was on living on, and learning from, the land that nourished them. This focus felt truthful and authentic to Ulrich and was a path he wanted to follow.

To Ulrich, the bottom line is that “you have to live the truth to understand it.” But this piece of wisdom did not come quickly or easily. “For years as a research professor,” Ulrich notes, “I ran experiments, but I kept finding that there is no experiment other than the real situation.” His message is reminiscent of Skinner’s words in *Walden Two*, advice that Ulrich is quick to note that Skinner never followed except in superficial ways: “I mean you’ve got to experiment, and experiment with your own life! Not just sit back—not just sit back in an ivory tower somewhere—as if your life weren’t all mixed up in it” (Skinner, 1948, p. 5).

So Ulrich lives day to day with around 20 Lake Village members on close to 300 acres of land—with another 20 or so former members living on an adjacent 100 acres. The community refers to itself as a “pasture based, beyond organic, farm cooperative” where they offer sustainably grown local food, farm education, recreation, and community living (see www.lakevillagehomestead.org). Ulrich estimates that about 400 people have called Lake Village home at one time or another over the past 44 years.

Ulrich has a take-charge approach, honed in roles ranging from student-body president to university department chairman, and he is the first to admit that there have been power struggles over the years. He says that coping with his own stubbornness and “tendency to act like a god” has created challenges for him and others. But now that he finds himself “on the other side of 80 years on the globe,” he is better at taking life’s challenges in stride. And while community life has not always been smooth sailing, he is glad he’s stuck with it and pleased to see Lake Village move into its fifth decade—no small feat in the annals of intentional community living.

Having once referred to himself a “Behaviorist Amish Indian,” Ulrich quips that his current alias might be “Amish Indian trying hard to behave.” While he feels that he has learned infinitely more from the land than from the lab, he nonetheless honors his behaviorist roots and adds that “I most certainly cherish the memory of my friendship and the fun I had hanging out with Fred Skinner.”

He’s also learned to cherish the piece of the earth he has settled on, and to cherish the surrounding community. In return, he says he has been cherished in even greater ways. He is learning to practice “the art of living comfortably with the inevitability of change” and doing his best “to make heaven here on earth”—a process that he finds “exciting and extremely meaningful.”

As he grows older, Ulrich’s thoughts sometimes turn to what is next for him. Ever curious about what he calls the experiment of life, he says he finds himself “considering the possibility that death is perhaps nothing more than just another change of perspective during the eternal trip.”

When asked what’s next for Lake Village, he responds as you might expect from someone who greatly values diving into life and learning from whatever comes your way: “Veremos. We’ll see!” 🌱

This article is based primarily on an interview by the author with Roger Ulrich from Spring 2015. Other sources include:

Altus, D. “Roger Ulrich & Lake Village Community: ‘The Experiment of Life.’” COMMUNITIES: Journal of Cooperative Living, no. 98 (Spring 1998): 52-54.

Ruth, D. “An Interview with Roger Ulrich.” COMMUNITIES: Journal of Cooperative Living, no. 30 (January/February 1978): 12-18.

Deborah Altus’ interest in Walden Two communities dates back to living in a Walden Two-inspired co-op in college. She lives, loves, and plays in Lawrence, Kansas, and is a professor at Washburn University in Topeka. She is on the editorial review board for the FIC.

Once a self-described “Behaviorist Amish Indian,” Ulrich quips that his current alias might be “Amish Indian trying hard to behave.”

IN LAND WE TRUST for the Lake Claire Community Land Trust

By Stephen Wing

“I don't want to go to school,
I want to stay here!”

When you come to the gate with no fence,
relax. You're safe here.
We've all come looking for the same thing.
Not shelter, exactly,
because it's the same sky everywhere, but
sanctuary. "Peace and love"
laid out in wood-chipped paths among the trees,
gardeners kneeling
beside their beds, children on the sandpile
and the swing,
Big Lou the Emu gulping grape after grape
through his fence . . .

One day someone wondered aloud
what lay hidden
under the blanket of kudzu and trash on that hill
of Georgia clay
overlooking the commuter traffic and the railroad
tracks.
A generation later
we're still excavating, still exploring, still in search
of a definite answer.

Sunset deepens over the downtown skyline
from the tall chairs
on the deck, the hidden tank beneath us slowly
filling with water
to irrigate the gardens as the sun gives
the day's last kiss
to the south-facing panels that power the pump
down in the dark well . . .

Colored lights tint the corrugated tin overhang
above the stage
where raucous picking and fiddling and singing
entertain an empty
amphitheater of old granite curbstones while
invisible voices rise
in ceremonial laughter from the dark sweat . . .

The Lake Claire Community Land Trust celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2015. Founded by a group of visionary neighbors whose visions sometimes conflicted, this 1.5 acre greenspace in the heart of in-town Atlanta became a 501(c)3 nonprofit in 2008 and is now protected from future development by a conservation easement. No one lives on the land, but several surrounding communal households give it a village atmosphere. It has become a place where multiple communities cross paths, hosting gardens, workshops, scout troops, drum circles, sweat ceremonies, yoga and meditation classes, pumpkin-carving, Easter egg-hunting, music festivals, and more. Its lack of off-street parking and ever-growing popularity continually reinforce the motto: "Every neighborhood needs a Land Trust!" Learn more at www.LCCLT.org.

Stephen Wing is a neighbor, secretary of the Land Trust board, and the most famous poet on his block. He has written for COMMUNITIES on the topic of the Rainbow Gatherings. He is the author of the novel Free Ralph!, two books of poetry, and the Earth Poetry chapbook series. Visit him at www.StephenWing.com.

Flames burst skyward as the firetender heaves
a dried-out Christmas tree
across the roaring coals, and the circle
of dancers and drummers
whoops the ritual response to that dark infinity
between the lights
of skyscrapers and jet planes and galaxies . . .

It's the exact center
of the known universe—a humbling honor
when you consider
how much of the universe remains unknown,
and how much beyond that
must be orbiting completely unsuspected around
this insignificant little
asylum for the sane and all-ages playground.

The stubborn red clay
underneath these trees and gardens and pathways
must have soaked up
so much joy and delight and loving attention
over the decades—
so many running footsteps of children who grew up
playing here—
so many boots and sneakers and bare feet,
trowels and rakes,
wheelbarrows of wood-chips or drums and
guitars—
so much that by now
the land just can't help radiating it all back out
again
in continual waves
which even the smallest visitor instantly tunes in
like a compass needle
seeking the exact center of the human heart . . .

"You don't have much
in the way of playground equipment here,
but after we go home,
my kids are happy for hours!" 🐦



Photos courtesy of Stephen Wing

Reflecting on a Quarter Century of O.U.R. History

By Brandy Gallagher



Photos courtesy of O.U.R.

In the 25 years of O.U.R. (One United Resource), first as an urban intentional community house with city-based projects, and then as O.U.R. Ecovillage, a 25 acre Sustainable Living Demonstration Site and Education Centre on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, we've learned much about how community shows up in the wider world. We are now known globally for our work in regulatory reform and legitimate development of ecological design, and yet there is still so far to go in transforming the notions of what "cooperative culture" might mean. That transformation will require all of us, and so we have become ever-more inclusive in our approach to change-making.

Over 17 summers as a living research project, we have had the privilege of hosting some of the top sustainability experts in all fields: local and international teachers, facilitators, community development experts, natural builders, permaculturalists, and many professionals from key stakeholder industries (e.g., waste, energy, and regulatory systems). And yet the challenge of incorporating all perspectives is still a dance.

Flashback: imagine the early days of working with all levels of government, business, and academia in your local community. What would the neighbours say if you proposed creating an ecovillage in their local area? For O.U.R. Ecovillage we imagined it would be a "shoe-in" to bring a green project home to a community where most of us were from. And yet, the reception was not what we imagined. In 1999, not only did local folks never utter the word "permaculture" (and had no construct to relate to what we were describing), many never even stated the term "sustainable." A fast track to being ignored or shunned is to use language that is not used as common culture, with no one relating to your dialect.

Moreover your experience might be that at educational events, folks will stand two steps back from your information table and wonder if you are safe to interact with because 1) you are a "hippie commune" (and goodness knows, there goes the neighbourhood, given that hippie folk drive down the price of your Real Estate and make big messes); or 2) everyone knows what you really mean by the "Green Economy" in your educational presentations, especially in British Columbia, and you are faced with being seen as potentially being a "grow operation"; or 3) clearly if you describe yourselves as an altruistic organization, you might be a *cult!* (given the assumption that anyone who does something for nothing must be hiding something—and is probably a religious order of folks who are trying to persuade others that they could organize around a seemingly dysfunctional model of living in service to humanity).

Despite these obstacles, the O.U.R. team persisted, and 10,000 folks per year are now involved in our efforts, through visiting, living, working, learning, and/or collaborating together with us. We've experienced a steep learning curve ourselves. Any model of social experimentation attempting to move people from mainstream consumer culture to alternative culture is going to awaken conflict in its participants and visitors. It is not easy to persuade either the Next Generation or the mainstream generation who are now leaning into

intentional communities and the ecovillage movement to give up the culture of addiction which is prevalent in the larger world.

We continue to promote change, social justice, and community development with a range of K-12 programs and alliances with 11 universities and colleges, with business and corporate interests, and with stakeholders we would never have imagined in our wildest dreams when we started 25 years ago. Neighbours are buying food box programs and learning about the the nature of organic farms which are intercultural, inter-generational, and interfaith. We have a basic commitment to being all-inclusive folks who wish to build unity in our community. One of our messages is: we all can become champions of what we believe in.

In our early days, we were radical change-makers. These days, we no longer "act now and ask for permission later." We open ourselves to all possibilities of partnerships, not just "the likely suspects"—we invite everyone possible to the table. It is socially just and practical to craft a team of invested players who wish to see real-life change manifested. We are no longer "eco-kooks"; we are "eco-consultants"; and the process of change continues. 🐾

Brandy Gallagher works with Sustainable Community Solutions Consulting (SC2). She is also Education and Outreach Coordinator of O.U.R. Ecovillage (www.ourecovillage.org), a 25 acre sustainable living permaculture demonstration site, education center, and learning community on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

SELECTING PEOPLE FOR ROLES (SOCIOCRACY ELECTIONS): How Sociocracy Can Help Communities, Part VII

By Diana Leafe Christian

Selecting people for roles (elections) is one of the four meeting processes in Sociocracy, and like the other meeting processes, is based on Consent Decision-Making. In an intentional community, for example, this process can be used to select people who will lead special projects, its annually elected officers (depending on the group's legal entity), and the four roles in a circle.

Selecting People for Roles has six steps.

Step One: Review Role

The most important aspect of the Selecting People for Roles process is to first agree on the following four criteria before nominating anyone for the role. Nominations are based on these four things:

1. Length of term.
2. Responsibilities of the role.
3. Qualifications of the role (in order to fulfill its responsibilities).
4. Desired (though not required) characteristics of the person filling the role.

Can the person do these responsibilities? Does the person meet the qualifications? Does the person have some of the desired characteristics? (See "Role Description: Community President," page 63, for these criteria in one community.)

The reasons people would nominate someone for a role, the facilitator would then propose someone for the role, and circle members would either consent to or object to the proposed person are based solely on the responsibilities, qualifications, and desired characteristics of the role.

Step Two: Submit Nomination Forms

The facilitator hands out small pieces of paper that serve as nomination forms. Each circle member, including the facilitator, writes their own name at the top of the paper, perhaps also writes "nominates," and writes the name of the person they nominate for the role. They hand their papers to the facilitator. People aren't nominated for personal reasons, such as liking or being friends with someone, but only because the person meets the qualifications to perform the responsibilities of the role and may have one or more of the desired characteristics.

Step Three: Share-Reasons Round

The facilitator reads the first nomination, and says something like, "Jill, you nominated Jack. Would you tell us why?" Jill then tells the circle why she suggests Jack, saying why she believes Jack fits the qualifications for the role, and has demonstrated one or more of the desired characteristics noted for it. The facilitator does the same with each nomination form. (The facilitator might write on each paper the reasons that person nominated someone, which is easier than trying to remember what everyone said later.)

The facilitator reads each nomination paper (including their own), until each one has been read and everyone has heard the reasons for everyone's nomination. Hearing everyone's reasons for their nomination is important, and leads to the next step.



Author Diana Leafe Christian facilitating the Selecting People for Roles process at the Jewish Intentional Communities Conference, Baltimore, 2016.

Step Four: Invite-Changes Round

The facilitator asks each person if they would like to change their nomination or keep it the same, based on the reasons they've heard other people say for why they nominated their candidate for the role. People may say things like, "Keep my nomination," or "No change." Others may change their nomination to another circle member who was nominated, because they were convinced by the reasons for their nomination when they heard them stated by others. The person says *why* they are changing their nomination. Reasons for changing a nomination, again, are not based on personal preferences.

NOTE: Changing one's nomination from one person to another is not designed to be insulting to the first person and is not taken that way in Sociocracy. Rather, Sociocracy trainers emphasize and well-trained circle members assume that the person changed their nomination because of the strength of the reasons given for nominating the other person.

Optional Step Five: Open Discussion or Questions

Circle members can choose to have an open discussion or ask each nominated person more questions at this point if they like. However, two Sociocracy trainers in the US discourage a discussion, and Gerard Endenburg did not design it into the process. John Buck, Sociocracy trainer and coauthor of the Sociocracy book *We the People*, notes that the elections process was designed to proceed seamlessly through each step without the need for discussion. This is because the process of objecting and resolving objections tends to bring out the points that would arise in a free-form discussion anyway, but takes less time. This step is not usually needed, he says, and he recommends it only in one specific situation (*see below*). Sociocracy trainer John Schinnerer, who's quite familiar with typical intentional community meetings, finds that the elections process is more effective without a discussion, because not using it promotes more understanding of Sociocracy and helps change former meeting behaviors "once people get used to really listening to reasons for nominations without reacting and focusing on the responsibilities and qualifications rather than personalities and popularity." If people want to try a discussion for some reason, John cautions people to watch out for the discussion becoming

typical election behavior in our culture. "These include 'campaigning' for a candidate (and the resulting loss of equivalence), domination by a few, arguing, negative comments about a nominee, 'attacking questions' (comments disguised as questions), and so on."

In any case, if circle members want a discussion, as in Consent Decision-Making, they would propose a discussion with a specific time limit, such as five or 10 minutes, and then either end the discussion when the time was up or propose more time.

Step Six: Consent Round

The facilitator chooses someone who was nominated and proposes that person for the role. The facilitator might say something like, "I propose Jack for the role of _____, based on the reasons you stated in your nominations and changed nominations," and then states those reasons.

The facilitator doesn't propose the person with the highest number of nominations, but the person for whom the most convincing arguments have been given for fulfilling the role. Here "argument" means a reasonable, convincing reason. The facilitator proposes the person for whom the reasons—arguments—given by circle members seemed the most convincing in relation to the responsibilities, qualifications, and desired characteristics of the role, rather than the number of nominations. However, the relative number of nominations the person received can be one of the factors that the facilitator considers.

The facilitator then conducts a consent round, with people saying "No objection" or "Objection." Saying "No objection" means they consent; saying "Objection" means they don't consent yet. People cannot object because they want a different person for the role instead. Just as in the Consent Decision-Making process, the same principle applies of "Good enough for now," "Safe enough to try," and "OK—let's find out." The proposed person doesn't have to be perfect for the role, just good enough and safe enough to perform the responsibilities of the role.

Objections. People might object to the proposed person for several reasons—for example, because they could not fill the role for the stated term length, as when the term is for a year and the person will be away traveling for several months that year. Or someone might object because the person doesn't have one of the skills required for the role, and thus doesn't meet its qualifications; e.g., the role is Bookkeeper and requires skill in using Quickbooks software specifically, but the person is unfamiliar with that software. Again, disliking someone is not a valid reason to object.



People write their name and the person they nominate on a nomination form..

Resolving objections. Objections are resolved just as in Consent Decision-Making, with the person objecting, or any others in the circle, including the facilitator, suggesting ways to resolve the objection. In the first instance, above, circle members might modify the proposal to shorten the term length to accommodate the person's schedule, or have another nominated person fill the role after the first person leaves. The proposal could be modified so that two people share the role, with the second person taking over after the first one leaves, or it could propose a different person fill the role instead.

In the second example above, circle members might suggest the proposal be modified so that the current bookkeeper would train the proposed person in Quickbooks before they took over the role. Or, that a different

she thought meetings might be awkward and people might feel put off, given that, "Excuse me, Carol, but sometimes you seem kind of grumpy when facilitating a meeting, since you don't much like it." "I sure don't!" Carol affirmed. "Would you potentially be available to facilitate the meetings?" the Facilitator asked Tom. He said he would.

The circle then modified the proposal to something like, "Carol as the Land Use Manager for the next year, but she won't facilitate meetings; Tom will facilitate them instead." Everyone consented to this modified proposal, and Carol was elected for the role for the next year.

NOTE: The facilitator does not *choose* the person for the role, but only proposes someone who has previously been nominated. As you can see, the actual choice is made by the circle members through the principle of consent.

When Two Nominees Seem Equally Qualified

John Buck suggests that the optional Step Five, Discussion, can be used when there are equally strong arguments for two different people. In a discussion, and before proposing one person for the role, the facilitator could ask about the potential availability of each person during the term length, in case one was less available, and whether each might be willing to fill the role or if one were less interested in it.

However, John Schinnerer suggests a different solution and recommends *not* having a discussion. "What value would an open discussion add?" he asks. "I suggest it would be a waste of

time; like going for the 'perfect' candidate instead of knowing that either one was already more than adequate." He suggests the facilitator simply proposes one of the nominees, and then checks for consent. "If there are purely practical reasons why one person cannot serve (and then that person would then object), then simply propose the other, similarly well-qualified person."

In my experience, it works well for the facilitator to acknowledge to circle members that two nominees seem equally qualified.

This helps people understand that the facilitator

is not proposing one of them without realizing the other would be equally good. The facilitator might say something like, "Well, it seems either Jack and Jill could do a great job in the role. But since we need to select someone today, I propose Jill."

Don't Volunteer for the Role—Nominate Yourself!

The Sociocratic value of equivalence is reduced when someone volunteers ahead of time or volunteers at the beginning of the elections process. Let's say Marcia volunteers for the role and several of us planned to nominate Peter. We might hesitate to nominate Peter or not nominate him at all, because we fear that nominating someone else other than Marcia might offend her. Maybe we will all nominate Marcia so she won't feel slighted, even though she's not who we really want. As Sociocracy is designed, Marcia would not volunteer, but would simply write her name on the nomination form. When asked why in the second step, she would say she wants to do the role and why she qualifies. This is perfectly legitimate in Sociocracy.

Do's and Don'ts—Selecting People for Roles

- *Don't do this process without already having a clear, already agreed-upon term length, responsibilities of the role, qualifications, and desired characteristics for the role.* I suggest writing these criteria in big letters where everyone can see them. Seeing this information visually helps people focus on why they might nominate someone for that specific role, or why they might consent to or object to that person for the role.

- *Don't ask who is interested in the role and who's not.* This has the same unintended consequence as volunteering for a role. Encourage those who are interested to nominate themselves.

- *Don't select someone for an unlimited term.* It's much easier to suggest someone if you know it's for a specific period of time, not indefinitely, and if you know you will later do the Role-Improvement Feedback process (*described in next article in the series*).

- *Ask for the candidate's consent last.* This helps the proposed person enjoy the impact

The facilitator might say something like,
"Well, it seems either Jack and Jill
could do a great job in the role.
But since we need to select someone
today, I propose Jill."

nominated person who did know Quickbooks was proposed for the role.

Just as in Consent Decision-Making, the circle returns to a consent round after suggesting ways to resolve an objection. And as in Consent Decision-Making, consent rounds and resolving objections may alternate several times as objections are raised and circle members resolve these objections. The process is complete when there are no longer any objections and someone is selected.

I once observed a community using this process to select a Land Use Manager for the next year, and one of the responsibilities was to facilitate meetings. After reviewing the term length, responsibilities, qualifications, and desired characteristics for the role, and after the nominations, the facilitator proposed Carol. Two people objected, explaining rather diplomatically (since Carol was right there) that she was ideal for the role in terms of land use skills and experience; however, she didn't like to facilitate meetings and didn't have as much skill in it as Tom (also sitting right there) who also had the same skills, though was not as experienced as Carol. One person objecting said

of other circle members consenting to them in the role. Also, if the person didn't want the role and planned to object, they might change their mind and consent to it after they hear all the other circle members consenting to it.

- *Don't have a dialog during a round.* If a brief discussion is proposed and consented to, do it in-between steps rather than in the middle of a step, as that can disrupt the process.

- *If you're nominated and don't want the role, just object when it's your turn in the consent round.* When asked why, let the circle know you don't want to do the role, and why.

- *Don't seek the perfect candidate.* Each candidate will have specific strengths and weaknesses, and you're going for "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try," not perfection.

- *Use Sociocracy's Role-Improvement Feedback process* to help the person get even better in their role's responsibilities.

Remember, the number of nominations a person receives is far less important than the strength of the reasons for nominations, relative to the responsibilities, qualifications, and desired characteristics.

Why Do Facilitators Have So Much Power?

They don't! The facilitator proposes the person based solely on what other circle members have said about their reasons for nominating that person—not according to the facilitator's personal preference. If people don't want the person the facilitator has proposed they simply object during the consent round and say why, based on the role's responsibilities, etc. as described above.

"I find that people constantly project power on facilitators that they do not formally have in Sociocracy," John Schinnerer says, "especially in elections." In terms of resolving objections, he reminds us that the facilitator is not more important in suggesting the actual resolution itself, which should be the work of the circle as a whole. Any one or several members may suggest ways to resolve objections, and one of those may be the facilitator, but only in equivalence with other members, John says.

Also, the facilitator is originally chosen through this very same elections process, and fills the role for only a specific term length. Further, if circle members don't like how the facilitator does the job, they can convey this and suggest solutions in the Role-Improvement Feedback process. If that doesn't work well they can also propose to replace the

Role Description: Community President

Here is a description of the role of President in one intentional community.

Term Length: One Year

Responsibilities:

1. Maintain overall community vision for the community with the other officers.
2. Oversee and provide support for the Care Circle, Safety Circle, Ritual and Celebration Circle, and Peace Team Circle.
3. Provide direction in handling community conflict.
4. Sign official documents and perform official duties of the President as outlined in Bylaws.

Qualifications for the Role:

5. Willingness and ability to perform the responsibilities of the President.
6. Ability to see, draw out, and weave together all perspectives of an issue—being "multi-partial."
7. Ability to perform or delegate the facilitation group processes, such as meetings and conflict resolution.
8. Demonstrated ability to collaborate, cooperate, and work well in teams.

Desired Characteristics:

9. The wisdom to discern when to act quickly and when to wait in a crisis; keeping a balance between action and patience.
10. Remaining impartial and hearing all sides of a conflict; not causing dissension.
11. Confidence in processing conflicts.

—DLC

When Someone with a Reputation for Conflict Volunteers for a Role ahead of Time —John Buck's Advice

Someone "running for office" by publicly volunteering ahead of time can generate the same unfortunate consequences for the community as volunteering during a meeting instead of nominating oneself. Volunteering ahead of time violates the Sociocratic principle of equivalence, because it puts people in the awkward position, described above, of having to decide whether to nominate someone one truly wants for the role, or nominate the person who volunteered in order not to potentially trigger their hurt feelings by nominating someone else.

This awkwardness is especially poignant—and challenging for the group—when the person who publicly volunteers ahead of time has a history of triggering conflict but appears not to realize this.

John Buck advises that if this situation occurs, various people should take this member aside and describe what could and maybe would be said about their past behaviors if they publicly seek the role, and ask the person to publicly withdraw their nomination ahead of time if they don't want to experience this possible outcome.

—DLC

facilitator before their term length is up. If everyone consents, the facilitator stops doing that role and they choose someone else.

Objecting to Someone With a Reputation For Conflict

To help reduce the likelihood of triggering someone feeling hurt, please consider including a phrase like “Has a reputation for getting along well with others” or “Demonstrated ability to collaborate, collaborate, and work well in teams” (see #8 in “Role Description: Community President,” page 63) as one of the desired characteristics or even one of the qualifications for the role. This can reduce the triggering of hurt feelings later, in the unlikely scenario that the facilitator proposes a disruptive or uncooperative person for a role they are otherwise qualified for. If the group does not include a requirement like this, they risk the possibility someone might nominate such a person (or that the person might nominate themselves). However, requiring that a candidate must be personable and cooperative as one of the desired characteristics or qualifications for a role will reduce the likelihood that circle members will nominate a disruptive or uncooperative person, or that the facilitator would propose them.

If, however, someone *does* nominate such a person, whom I’ll call “Reginald,” and for some reason the facilitator proposes him, the group has two hard choices. One is to consent, watch how Reginald does in the role, and give him appropriate feedback and request any desired changes in one or more Role-Improvement Feedback processes while he’s filling the role.

The other choice is to object, and when asked why, to say you believe he currently doesn’t meet the specific desired characteristic or qualification: “Has a reputation for getting along well with others.” (One could add a conciliatory phrase like, “although this could always change in the future.”)

This option takes courage, and one certainly does run the risk of triggering hurt feelings in Reginald and discomfort in other circle members too, although some might also feel relieved. So consider choosing the option of objecting to Reginald only if his actually doing the role would be worse for the circle than the painful feelings and discomfort for everyone if he were denied the role.

If most people in the circle know his

Overview: Selecting People For Roles

1. Review Role

- Term Length, Responsibilities of Role, Qualifications to Perform the Responsibilities, Desired Characteristics for the Role

2. Submit Nomination Forms

- “I _____ nominate _____.”

3. Share-Reasons Round

- “I’d like _____ in this role because _____.”

4. Invite-Changes Round

- “I change my nomination to _____ because _____.”

5. (Optional) Open Discussion or Questions

6. Consent Round

Facilitator proposes candidate with strongest arguments re. responsibilities, qualifications, and desired characteristics.

- Numeric majority is less important than the strength of the reasons.
- Ask for candidate’s consent last.
- Re. objections, use “Resolving Objections” in Consent Decision-Making: i.e., modify the proposal and repeat Consent Round.

DO NOT!

- Elect someone for an unlimited term.
- Ask for a volunteer.
- Ask who is interested in the role and who’s not.
- Have a dialog during a consent round or any other round.
- Seek the perfect candidate. Each has strengths and weaknesses, so the proposed candidate needs only be “good enough for now.”

—DLC

reputation for conflict, others might object also. And please keep in mind community consultant Tree Bressen’s advice, “There’s no substitute for personal courage when living in community!”

Reducing the Likelihood of this Challenge Ahead of Time

Sociocracy is a whole system, and if a community uses all of Sociocracy, this kind of awkward situation would most likely not occur. Why? Because circle members would have previously had the opportunity to consent to each person in the circle, and with a reputation like this, Reginald would most likely not have been chosen as a member of the circle in the first place. (“Consenting to Circle Members” will be described in a future article.) So while some communities use the Selecting People for Roles process alone, without using the other parts of Sociocracy, I don’t recommend it because of the potential for this kind of unique challenge in an intentional community.

The next article will describe Sociocracy’s fourth meeting process, Role-Improvement Feedback. 🐣

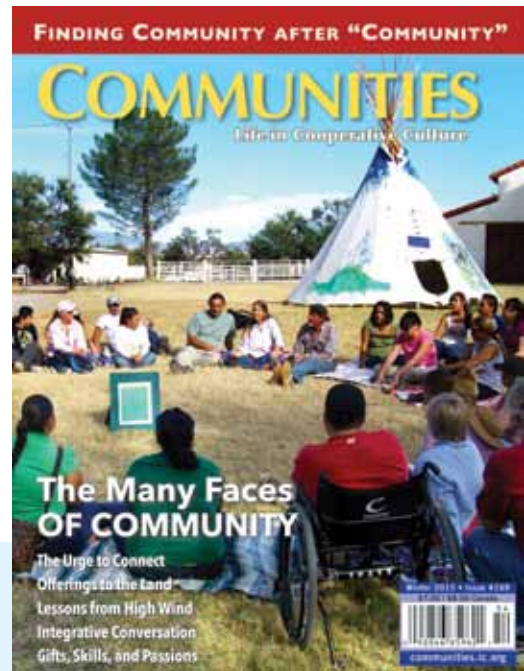
Diana Leaf Christian, author of Creating a Life Together and Finding Community, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops internationally. Specializing in teaching Sociocracy to communities, she has taught in North America, Europe, and Latin America. She is currently teaching an online course for the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). This article series is part of Diana’s forthcoming booklet on using Sociocracy in intentional communities.

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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

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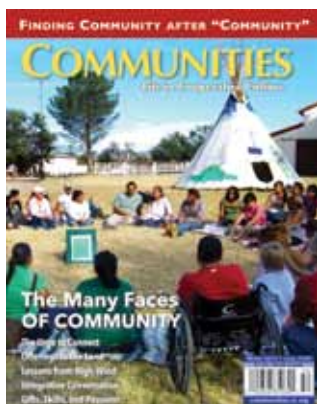
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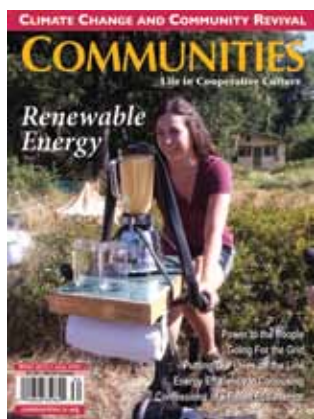


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LEAVING EDEN: ONE MAN'S QUEST FOR COMMUNITY IN A DIVIDED LAND

(continued from p. 27)

the entrance to the Old City. David was shooting activist videos about racist incidents against Ethiopian immigrants and the internment of Sudanese refugees. His wife was Jamaican-Canadian and often felt uncomfortable walking the streets of Tel Aviv. "She thinks that people here look at her like she is ugly," said David. "Over time, that wears you down."

The couple was planning to move to Dimona, a town of 33,000 in the Negev Desert. Dimona was also home to Israel's nuclear facilities and a community of so-called "Black Hebrews." In 1969, the 40 original Black Hebrews followed their charismatic leader from Chicago to Israel. They were African Americans who believed they belonged to the lost tribe of Judah and lobbied for citizenship under Israel's Law of Return. More followed and stayed illegally in the country. They forged a syncretic religion from Torah laws, African traditions, and their own unique holidays. Orthodox rabbis never recognized their claims of ancestry; only a handful of the 3,000 residents ever received citizenship. In 1984, the Speaker of the Israeli Parliament threatened to evict them with force; two years later, a standoff with the Israeli Army nearly ended in bloodshed. And yet the Black Hebrews remained in Dimona until they became an accepted, if eccentric, facet of the nation's multicultural mosaic. "Your community is beloved in Israel," said President Shimon Peres on a visit in 2008. "Your destiny is our destiny." Their gospel choir tours Israel and overseas, while the locally grown, organic, vegan diet of the Black Hebrews has become so fashionable that they opened restaurants in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. A banner above their gate announces to new arrivals: *Welcome to the Village of Peace*.

"If you're talking utopian communities," David told me, "at least in Israel, I can think of few that are so exemplary."

Well, except for one hitch, according to David: the Black Hebrews remain a patriarchal cult of personality that treats women as second-class citizens. "They're old school," he said. "There are things that we can't accept." He and his wife were considering how to enjoy their company without joining the settlement. "If we move next to them, we could have the advantage of having them as a community—without living by their rules."

The injustices he witnessed on a daily basis in Tel Aviv and Jaffa, his own financial insecurity and awareness of getting older made David philosophical about the receding possibilities of utopia. Can we ever reframe how we live as a society to be more fair and less damaging to our planet?

"I used to think we could change *everywhere*—that we could create a small fractal to change everything. Then I thought, at least we could create something that could be a refuge from all the shit. Now, I'm at the point where I don't think I'm capable of doing that. Not for a community and not even for myself. So I'm willing to accept less shitty. Less cesspool in my life—that's my goal right now."

"That's not exactly a good bumper sticker," I suggested. "*A Life Less Shitty*."

He laughed. "I shouldn't be a motivational speaker!"

The road from ideal to compromise, from utopia to suburbia, is a well-worn path. I'd seen it repeated on every kibbutz I'd visited; it pulls at every alternative community that dreams of a creating a perfect society in an imperfect world. Building community will always be ad-hoc and messy. David Sheen's frustrated quest for a flawless city upon the hill to call home was hardly unique. It reflected the century-long plot arc of an entire movement.

He nodded at the suggestion. "It really is the evolution of the kibbutz." 🌿

David Leach is the Chair of the Department of Writing at the University of Victoria and the author of Chasing Utopia: The Kibbutz in a Divided Israel (ECW Press, Fall 2016).

Find more resources at
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YOU ARE HERE: FINDING THE FEMININE ENERGY THAT CULTIVATES COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 29)

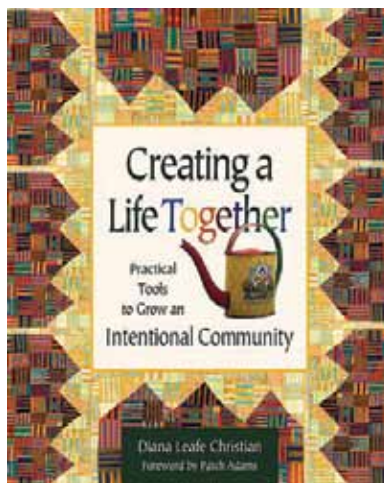
Los Angeles meetup group now has 65 members. I have found myself as a facilitator, leading circle conversations on intergenerationality, community beyond property ownership, diversity, the shape of our surroundings, and more. We visit intentional communities and talk about the steps we can take to build community where we already are. Many projects and side groups have already begun to form as a result of our discussions. I am grateful that the meetup has become a clearinghouse for those of us who choose to reach beyond consumer culture toward a more humane future.

Bringing the meetup group under the umbrella (no pun intended!) of You Are Here has not been an easy step in Jenny's and my collaborative process. Together, we are learning how to create a structure that is flexible enough to grow indefinitely—embracing any community that aligns with our core values and creating a global network. This polycentric system will hold space for ultra-local experience, shared dialogue between communities, and aggregated learning. We want to experience home wherever we go.

Coming together to prepare this article was a community-building experience in itself. As each of these sage women described her actions toward the cultivation of community in Los Angeles's west side, I began to see the ripple effects of their efforts on the national scale. It also became clear that these women are helping me claim my role in the lineage of mentorship. In deep gratitude, I will continue to seek the knowledge needed to co-create the radically alternative, socio-economically diverse, interdependent, sculptural urban ecovillages that I want to call home. 🌱

Beth Ann Morrison is an artist, community organizer, and professional grant writer living in Los Angeles, California. She is learning as much as possible about living sustainably in community so she can be of service as our society shifts in that direction. (See www.meetup.com/You-Are-Here-Intentional-Community-Los-Angeles, www.facebook.com/youarehere, www.bethmorrison.com.)

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COMMUNITY ESSENTIALS

(continued from p. 44)

recorded in my two books about the New Buffalo Commune published by UNM Press. Now I am 71 years old, just as enthusiastic about communities as when I was 23. I thank COMMUNITIES for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts.

To ownership by a democratically run entity and a membership process add, 3) need for one or more community businesses, 4) a friendly, open-to-society, non-paranoid attitude and 5) love, caring, and commitment.

The communitarians for the most part are a loving people and want society to calm down and stop chasing the almighty buck all the time. I am sympathetic with this view, but nevertheless I have always been keenly aware that ICs need to pay their way and establish successful businesses, not an easy thing to do. Occidental Arts and Ecology Center (OAEC), in Sonoma County, California has a thriving plant and seed sale business. In the last few years they have added two very professional propagation greenhouses and a charming nursery display area convenient to the upper parking lot. They have a series of display notice boards that they put up on some of the major thoroughfares, which gets the word to almost everyone. At New Buffalo we were establishing a cow dairy and so was a group at GVV running a dairy. I want to see a network of IC-run farms, with the Amish-style love of farming. At the Farm in Tennessee is the organization called Plenty, and plenty should be one of our goals. Get good at this: Food production. Of course those who are not farmers find other ways to contribute.

This is a peaceful revolution. But it is still a vital cause. It has to do with generosity, sharing wealth—not through laws, but through a change of heart. Make it shine, friends; make it work. It is not easy, this getting along, but it can be done. 🌱

Arty AnSwei Kopecky lives in Sebastopol, California and works as a finish carpenter. He also has a small bonsai nursery and, with his ex-wife Sandy, maintains a beautiful property. Art is hoping yet to find further ways to contribute to the IC movement.

LIVING IN A MULTIGENERATION HOUSEHOLD: HAVEN OR HELL?

(continued from p. 51)

live together doesn't mean we have to eat every meal together or like the same movies. (We made sure to subscribe to a TV cable company with enough room—and cable boxes—for all of our recording preferences!) We let others know what our needs are with respect to the use of common appliances like the washer and dryer. And we have ample room to spread out.

Having also lived in community households with nonfamily members, I think it helps to have basic values and goals in common, such as resource-sharing and living with environmental awareness. But if different values do emerge, it's more important to understand one another than to aim at changing one another. If compromise is needed, it often happens more readily in an environment of love, trust, and acceptance.

It helps to have a little training in, for instance, making "I" statements that communicate as factually and clearly as possible. "I feel angry and upset when I don't get enough sleep." "I dislike loud noises early in the morning." It takes some practice to communicate like this all or most of the time. But it pays off in the long run.

Perhaps most of all, it helps to be living with people you genuinely *like*. Even if Tiffany weren't my daughter-in-law, my heart would lift when I heard the sound of her car in the driveway. Even if Jim weren't my son, I'd look forward to hearing about his day's adventures practicing law or his latest photography coup. They're wonderful human beings and pretty easy to live with. *And* they don't expect me to do the yard work! (I try to make it up to them in other ways.)

Those casual moments when we're all making a meal together or watching an exciting baseball game are times when we all reap the benefits of sharing a home together. The bonus is knowing that we can also live out our values of resource-sharing and give each other support when it's needed. 🍌

Maril Crabtree is a writer and editor who has lived in several forms of intentional community in Kansas City. For more information, go to www.marilcrabtree.com.

Within Reach DVD



Within Reach is a film documenting one resilient couple's 6,500 mile bicycling journey across the United States in search of sustainable communities.

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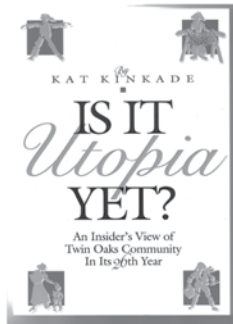
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An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community in its 26th Year by Kat Kinkade

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

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138-CM Twin Oaks Rd Louisa, VA 23093
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THE DOG THAT BROUGHT US A COMMUNITY

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their ability to move their ideas along impressed us.

They accepted us readily and we soon felt a part, and we became full members. This meant more commitment, which included paying up to the cash calls that had been required to that point. I awoke some nights asking myself: *What have we gotten ourselves into? What happened to our cautious selves?*

But every contact with members of the group set my mind at ease. We held workshops with Chuck Durrett and conferred with his wife Katie. We participated in deciding what the common house would include and how it would look. We joined the marketing team and learned quickly that we could market only to Washington residents. Soon we found ourselves as co-chairs of the policy team, which automatically put us on the coordinating team. No backing out now; we were in!

A few people wavered and some dropped out, but the aggregate number grew.

We participated in designing the 28 individual units. Our team wrote several policies, including the unit selection policy, the pet policy, and the smoking policy (No smoking).

We created innovative ways to get the word out, through a web site, speaking engagements, Google, bumper stickers, and other means, and now we have sold most of the units and hope to have the remaining ones sold by spring when we expect to get our building loan and begin construction.

We are excited to take charge of our future and happy to be a part of a talented and friendly community.

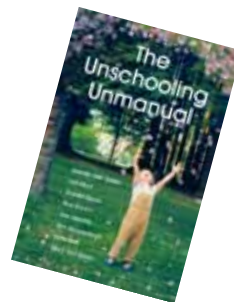
I know that my lack of fingers means I will need to work hard to fulfill my contribution, and I am willing to do so. It is worthwhile to have a community that will help if the Fates turn their attention on me again. 🐾

Jim Daly is a 78-year-old retiree who lives in Port Townsend, Washington with his wonderful wife, faithful dog, and ho-hum cat. He is a member of Quimper Village, an adult cohousing community for Washington residents only.



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EXIT DYNAMICS IN COMMUNITY

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representatives of the community (Membership Committee?) to pro-actively, yet discreetly, approach the person or couple to see if they're open to exploring how the community might be able to provide some outside-of-the-box support.

If the openness is there (no arm twisting, please) the support team can find out details of the situation beyond what is known publicly and perhaps help with spade work to follow through on promising suggestions, either on the private side (directly with individuals) or the public side (using community resources). Even if no appreciable help is realized through this effort, it will land well that the attempt was made and the community will feel better that it went the extra mile.

Possibility B: Where there are challenges in the community that have been named, but attempts at resolution have been unsatisfactory and the person is ready to leave in frustration

In this dynamic there is likely to be some hurt feelings, perhaps in many directions. It is a delicate thing knowing when you've tried enough, and when it's time to let go and move on. Not all problems are solvable and not all people are meant to live together. Exit can be the right choice.

Yet there can be considerable gold in panning through the dross of failed attempts at conflict resolution—if you approach it with an open, what-can-we-learn attitude, rather than with a how-can-we-assign-blame perspective. While it may not be easy to get the protagonists to engage in a post-mortem analysis (who wants to pick the scab off?), you might have success if a neutral team (Membership, I'm thinking of you again) approaches with a promise to simply listen, to make sure there's clarity about that person's side of events and how it landed for them.

It's possible that this kind of listening will lead to an insight about how things could get unstuck if approached differently, and—if it's not too late—those may still be tried. But I wouldn't hold my breath. Mostly the point of this kind of examination is to learn how to do things better next time; how to not dig the hole so deep that no one can get out.

Possibility C: Where there are challenges in the community that have not been named publicly, yet the person is willing to leave over them

This dynamic is a particularly interesting one because you may not know it's even in play unless you're privy to inside information or someone tips you off. The public presentation is that the person (or couple) has announced that they're leaving for personal reasons that have nothing to do with community dynamics (after all, they have to say *something* about why they're leaving), but that's not the case, or at least not the whole story. How will you know to ask about this if you don't know it's happening?

Why would people do this? Perhaps it's too embarrassing to disclose their reactions in group. Maybe they're conflict averse and would rather leave than try to work it out. Possibly they're intimidated by the particular folks they're conflicted with and don't have the gumption to face bully dynamics. Maybe there are a bunch of small things, no one of which is fatal, but the accumulation is overwhelming.

The beauty of this possibility is that if you're following my advice about being pro-active in Possibility A, the interviewing group might discover that it's really Possibility C (where the "personal reasons" were trumped up to deflect inquiries about community dynamics), or a combination of the two (where there are both personal reasons and community reasons). If you uncover this dynamic, you may have a chance to still work the conflict (by whatever means your group has in place for that purpose). But even if it's too late for that, you get more accurate information about the ways in which the community has fallen short, which gives you a leg up on dealing with whatever broke down.

Exit Interviews

With all of the above in mind, let's drill down on what you might ask if you're interviewing someone who has announced they intend to leave. Here are some questions you might pose:

- How well did life in the community work for you and your family? What were the high-

lights; what was hard?

- Did you find the community to be as advertised? If not, please describe the ways in which there was a misunderstanding about what you'd find, and give us any suggestions you have about how to correct those.

- What suggestions do you have for how we could more accurately describe what life in our community is like? Please be specific.

- What would you say to a prospective or incoming new member that you wished had been said to you?

- Did you get the interpersonal support you were looking for as a member of the community? If not, what can you tell us about how we fell short?

- Are there ways that you wish the community could be doing more for its members? If so, please describe the ways.

- What, if any, aspects of community agreements did you really appreciate, and which do you wish were different?

- What, if any, aspects of community culture did you really appreciate, and which do you wish were different?

- Are there any unresolved issues related to community life that were a factor in your decision to leave? If so, please tell us what they are.

- To the extent that there are personal reasons (unrelated to community life) influencing your decision to leave, have you tried to get help from the community in resolving those issues such that you could stay? If not, or you are willing to try more, we invite you to tell us in detail what those personal factors are. (While we cannot promise to pull a rabbit out of the hat, we're willing to give it a try.)

- If you had sufficient support from the community, would you be willing to try further to work things out so that you could stay in the community? If so, what would that support look like? 🐣

Laird Schaub is former 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 currently lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina where he is exploring community building with two close friends. 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 July 25, 2014.

EXIT DYNAMICS IN COMMUNITY



Although it's not what folks generally have their attention on when they start or join communities, the other side of the coin is that people leave. To be sure, this can happen for a wide variety of reasons. Let me give you a hypothetical dozen—all of which I've witnessed:

1. Maybe the bread winner in your household just had their job transferred to Kalamazoo or Timbuktu, and they *really* want to keep that job.

2. Maybe your 15-year-old got busted for smoking pot in the bathroom of the public library (there's a reason that "sophomoric" is an adjective that refers to poor judgment) and you're heart sick over the possibility that the negative publicity will give the community a black eye and lead to your family being ostracized in the community.

3. Maybe your mother is getting to the point where she needs one of her adult children to live nearby, and none of your siblings has enough flexibility in their life to answer the bell. You do what you gotta do and it's time to give back to Mom.

4. Maybe your daughter's asthma has worsened to where you have to move to a climate with lower humidity.

5. Maybe you love all the coffee shops, liberal politics, and Powell's bookstore, but if you spend one more winter in Portland's gray drizzle your SAD (which is bad) will make your partner mad and it's time to move to a sunnier pad where you can both be glad.

6. Maybe you're sick unto death of your neighbor's barking dog and, after years of struggle, you're willing to move so you can finally count on getting a decent night's sleep.

7. Maybe you can no longer tolerate the interminable meetings. Making decisions together sounded OK in theory, but OMG.

8. Maybe your youngest child just left for college and the nest is empty. You don't want to be rattling around in all that house but there is nothing smaller available in the community, so downsizing means moving.

9. Maybe your marriage has just dissolved and you cannot bear the thought of continuing to live in the same community as your ex. (Maybe 10 years from now, but not next week.)

10. Maybe your mildly hyperactive daughter has been accused of bullying the neighbor kids and is no longer welcome in community play groups with her peers. Though the kids still want to be together, the other parents won't allow it. You feel your kid is being scapegoated, and don't want to live in a community where other parents seem unwilling to look at how *their* child is contributing to challenging dynamics.

11. Maybe you came to community expressly to learn natural building techniques and how to incorporate energy saving technology into everyday life. Now that you've learned all that, you're ready to head off to your mountaintop property in Colorado to build your dream home and retire next to a trout stream.

12. Maybe you can no longer tolerate hearing youngsters scream at community dinners (ruining adult conversation) and you're bone weary of tripping over scooters and Big Wheels strewn about the pathways at night—right where the kids left them.

I could go on, but you get the picture. There are many reasons why people leave. Sometimes it's because there's a problem in the community that's not resolving; sometimes there are personal reasons that have nothing to do with the community; sometimes it's a bit of both.

From the community's perspective there are three particular possibilities that I want to highlight. These are important both because there may be chances to turn things around even at the 11th hour, and because it's an opportunity for the community to learn what it might do differently in the future.

Possibility A: Where the member is facing a personal challenge that suggests leaving and may not have explored how much the community could be an ally in finding a response that wouldn't require moving

In this dynamic there is probably no expectation that the community has anything to offer, and it's quite possible that the member has not even made an attempt to seek help from the community. But that doesn't mean there are no options!

For this to have room to fully bloom I think it makes sense for

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IN THE SPIRIT OF THE SONORAN DESERT

Las Lomas a Tucson Arizona landmark



An oasis seemingly miles from civilization, Las Lomas is a magical place where you lose yourself in the wonder of nature every day.

Built in 1940s by master architect Margaret Fulton Spencer as a guest ranch for her international friends. Situated on 91.04 acres, the “ranch” is surrounded by beautiful Sonoran desert and adjacent to Feliz Paseos Park on the West yet only minutes to cultural center of Downtown and most amenities.

For over 70 years, the Spencer family dedicated their lives to running Las Lomas. “The ranch has been in my heart and soul all of my life, but it’s time to move on to the next chapter of my life,” says Ms. Spencer and she has decided to put this gem up for sale.

LAS LOMAS IS EXTREMELY VERSATILE:

In the 1970s it was to become a Retreat and Healing center for a world-renowned Master teacher.

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In 2000 it was to become a “Maitreya” Academy and personal Western residence by a world-renowned Spiritual leader

Once you enter the property you are taken back to a more peaceful time, when nature was appreciated and cherished. Las Lomas is a tremendously healing place.

The property consists of 13 architecturally designed buildings some built of hand hewn stone (quarried on site) with 22,174 square feet of living space sited on either side of the ¼ mile long grated private drive, a large swimming pool and land that is surrounded by trails for hiking, horseback riding and biking.

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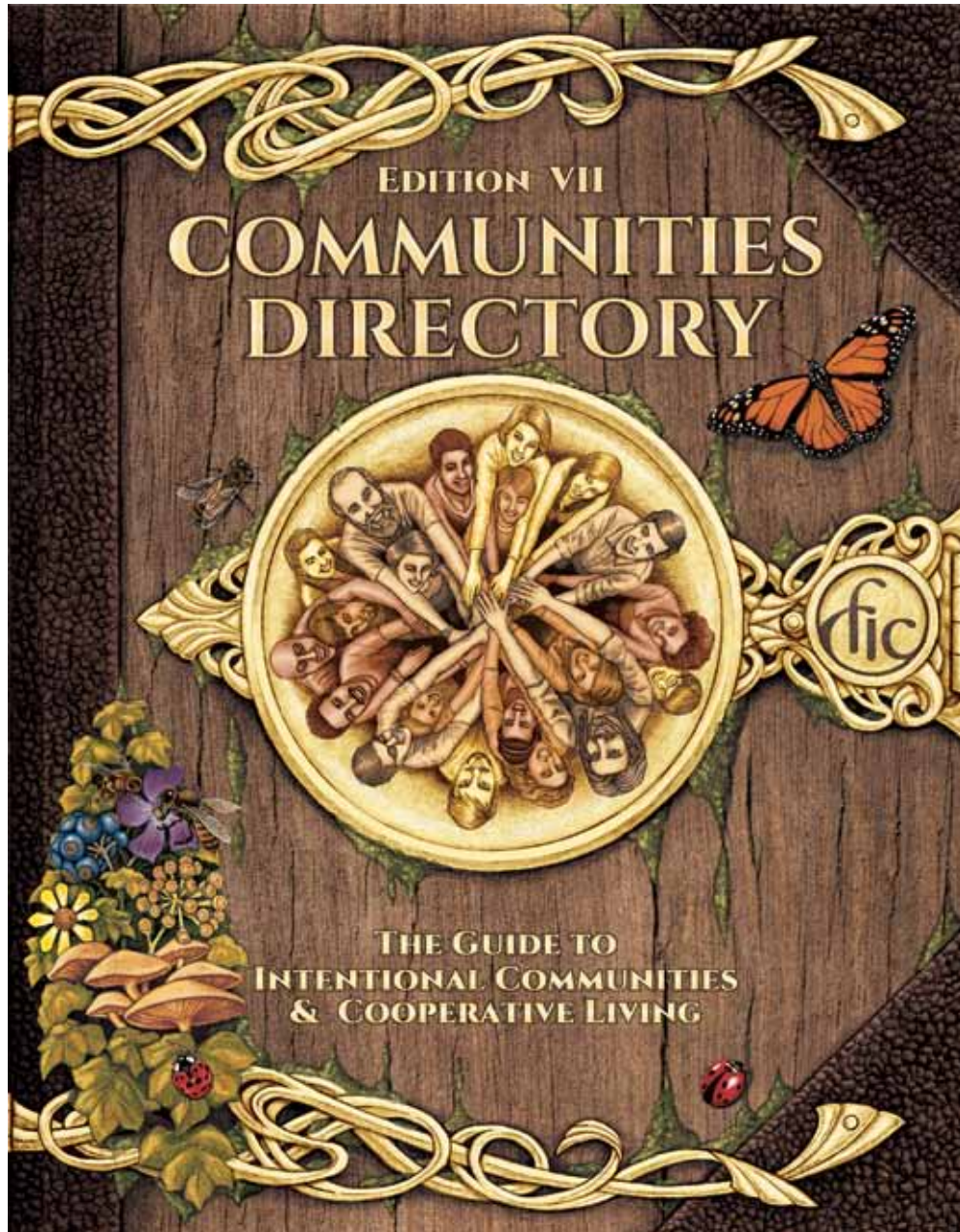
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