

**PATCH ADAMS: 45 YEARS OF GESUNDHEIT!**

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

A photograph of two young women smiling in a greenhouse. The woman on the right is holding a long wooden handle with a red band. They are standing in front of a white plastic covering. The background shows green plants and a bright sky.

## SERVICE & ACTIVISM

**Grassroots Activism Starts at Home  
Coming of Age in Service Community  
Honoring Our Native Predecessors on the Land  
Camphill, Innisfree, Konohana Family, and More  
Homelessness and Tiny Houses: Two Worlds Intersect**

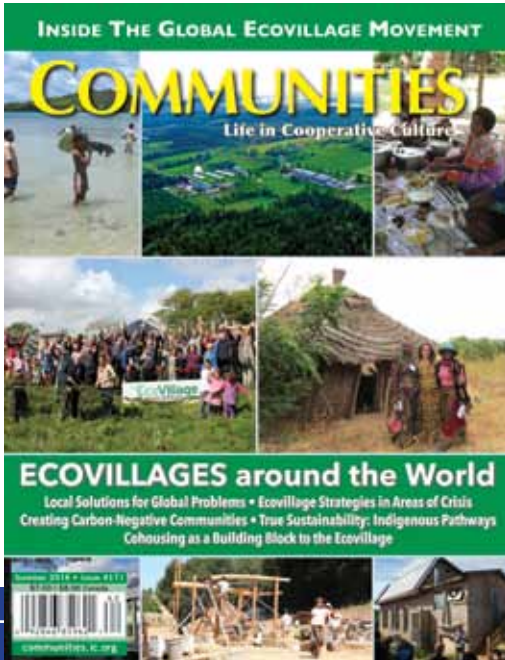
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I love COMMUNITIES magazine. I've read and kept every issue since 1972. Deciding to be communal is the best decision I've ever made in my life. COMMUNITIES has been there from the beginning.

—Patch Adams, M.D., author and founder of the Gesundheit Institute

Our mission at Utne Reader is to search high and low for new ideas and fresh perspectives that aim to start conversations and cure ignorance. To that end, COMMUNITIES has become one of our go-to sources for thought-provoking pieces about people opting out of the rat race and living life on their own terms. We're pleased to share the voices we come across in COMMUNITIES with our readers because they remind us all of the virtue of cooperation and the world-changing potential of coexistence.

—Christian Williams, Editor, Utne Reader

I've been subscribing to COMMUNITIES for over a decade. Each issue is a refreshing antidote to the mainstream media's "me, me, me" culture. COMMUNITIES overflows with inspiring narratives from people who are making "we" central to their lives instead.

—Murphy Robinson, Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

Community has to be the future if we are to survive. COMMUNITIES plays such a critical role in moving this bit of necessary culture change along. Thank you COMMUNITIES for beating the drum and helping us see.

—Chuck Durrett, The Cohousing Company, McCamant & Durrett Architects

For more than 40 years COMMUNITIES has done an outstanding job of promoting the communitarian spirit to a public in need of that message, as well as serving intentional communities and other groups of people coming together for the common good. I read every issue cover to cover.

—Timothy Miller, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Kansas

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—Shen Pauley, reader and author, Barre, Massachusetts

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Annie Jackson and Samantha Stanley enjoy their work in the greenhouse at Heartbeet Lifesharing located in Hardwick, Vermont. A Camphill community and licensed therapeutic residence that includes adults with developmental disabilities, Heartbeet interweaves the social and agricultural realms for the healing and renewing of our society and the earth. Community members live and work together in extended family households, forming a mutually supportive environment that enables each individual to discover and develop his or her unique abilities and potential. Photo courtesy of Camphill.

# 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*)

## SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Saul Of-Hearts

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Kim Scheidt (*Red Earth Farms*)

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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](mailto:editor@ic.org).

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

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# Community, Social Justice, Responsibility, and Accountability

Service and activism go hand in hand with intentional community. In a sense, central to the intent of intentional communities is providing the service of modeling an alternative society. But it's also common for intentional communities to engage in service and activism beyond themselves, and our history is full of examples.

An early Cooperative Community, New Harmony, founded in 1825 by Robert Owen, created the first store where items could be purchased based on labor credits. One of the first self-identified intentional communities, Celo Community, founded in 1937 by Arthur Morgan, received criticism for its opposition to World War II, and many of its early members were Quakers and conscientious objectors. In 1940, Arthur Morgan was also one of the founders of the original FIC, the Fellowship of Intentional Communities (now, we're the Fellowship for Intentional Community, a subtle but important difference), a mutual aid association governed by representatives from member communities. Catholic Worker communities began appearing in 1933, practicing radical hospitality, advocating nonviolence, and opposing economic inequality and social injustice. Koinonia Farm, an interracial Christian community, was founded in 1942 on the principles of the equality of all persons, rejection of violence, ecological stewardship, and common ownership of possessions. Members of Koinonia would eventually start Habitat for Humanity in 1976. The



Farm, founded in 1969, is often credited with rebirthing the midwifery movement in the US, and in 1974 formed Plenty, which is well known for its four-year presence in Guatemala helping rebuild after the earthquake of 1976.

Newer examples abound as well. The Camphill Communities and Innisfree Village have created communities for adults with developmental disabilities. Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon is a community with city support for the homeless population. The now defunct Rhizome Collective, in Austin, Texas housed a local Food Not Bombs chapter, a books to prisoners program, and a bikes across borders program. The Baltimore Free Farm cooked food for hundreds of demonstrators during recent protests in Baltimore following police shootings. Various communities, such as Sowing Circle (stewards of Occidental Arts and Ecology Center), Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, and EcoVillage at Ithaca, run education centers and programs. I was recently contacted by a woman interested in creating an intentional community for returning veterans, and I know of a retreat center looking to convert to a transitional community for people coming out of prison. There are individual members in just about every intentional community I've visited who are involved in all manner of peace and justice organizations.

"No [person] is an island," and no community is an island either. It's not possible for a community to be completely self-sufficient and sustainable in an unsustainable world, and there is no freedom or justice until there is freedom and justice for all. Inherent to the creation of intentional communities is a desire for another way of living. Creating and maintaining another way of living will always be an uphill battle until that way of living is accessible to everyone. As a predominantly white, middle-class movement, intentional communities have some soul-searching to do. It is not possible to remove yourself completely from the global economic system at this point. At their worst, intentional communities can be little more than examples of white flight, and by taking advantage of their privilege to avoid dealing with systemic injustice they are tacitly condoning those systems.

I'm writing this just days after the murders of Anton Sterling and Philando Castile



The banner features a blue background with a white 'sky' logo on the left and a vertical stack of colored squares (purple, blue, white, green, yellow, orange, red) on the right. The main text reads 'GEDS GAIA EDUCATION DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY E-LEARNING DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY ONLINE EDUCATION'. Below this, two promotional messages are shown: 'NEW SELF-PACED INTRODUCTION TO DESIGNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY\* AVAILABLE NOW!' and 'NEXT FULL CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME BEGINS ON 17 OCTOBER 2016!'. A paragraph describes the course's focus on social, economic, ecological, and worldview aspects. A callout box states that the introductory course cost can be applied towards enrollment in the full programme. The Gaia Education logo and website URL are at the bottom.

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The poster features a photograph of a conference room with people seated at tables. Overlaid text reads: 'WEST COAST COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE 2016 SEPT. 29TH - OCT. 2ND GROUNDSWELL INSTITUTE 2 HRS NORTH OF SF BAY SPECIAL FOCUS ON RACIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE WESTCOASTCOMMUNITIES.ORG'.

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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; 800-462-8240; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at [ic.org/communities-magazine](http://ic.org/communities-magazine).

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## What is an “Intentional Community”?

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

by police. The aftermath, including the shooting of police officers in Dallas, has made the need to address racial injustice more apparent than ever. There is a resounding call for white people in particular to start showing up for racial justice (check out SURJ, which stands for Showing Up for Racial Justice, for some great ideas on what you can do and find local chapters at [www.showingupforracialjustice.org](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org)). This doesn't necessarily mean everyone should drop everything you're doing, but it might mean some expansion of activities or a shift in focus, and it does mean that what you're doing should be looked at to see how it can challenge systemic injustice, which disproportionately affects women, poor people, and people of color.

And as I write, I'm attending CommonBound, a conference organized by the New Economy Coalition (NEC), of which the FIC became a member last Fall. There are over 150 members of this coalition, including *Yes! Magazine*, the Highlander Center, Code Pink, the US and Canadian Federation of Worker Cooperatives, Earth Island Institute, Equal Exchange, and on and on. What they're helping make clear is that all these issues, from housing and finance, to race and culture, to criminal justice and militarization, to climate change and energy, are interconnected.

At the opening plenary of CommonBound, the NEC's program director, Anand Jahi, shared the story of his cousin, who was unarmed and shot by an off-duty police officer two years ago (you can find a full article by Anand on *Yes! Magazine's* website). His cousin had been visiting the apartment complex he had lived at before he had been fired from his job for filing a racial discrimination complaint and then been evicted. The officer tried to arrest him for trespassing, eventually shooting him. Anand talked about the need to understand the economic devastation, which disproportionately affects people of color compared to whites, that is often the backdrop for these shootings. It's dangerous to be black in America, he said, but it's even more dangerous to be black and poor in America.

The privilege to create and live in communities where you have a relative level of economic security and physical safety should be a right to which everyone has access. The power to have an equal say in the conditions of your life, for the decisions that affect people to be made by the those people, should be a right. A key theme of the opening plenary was sovereignty and self-determination for people and communities. Intentional communities are often seen as laboratories, and I've often thought that self-determination, through collective ownership and participatory governance, is a key aspect of what intentional communities are trying to develop and model. There are many forces working against this: the criminal justice system and prison industrial complex; the military industrial complex; corporate rule and neo-colonialism; systemic racism, sexism, and classism in financing, housing, and business; lack of access to basic resources needed for self-sufficiency. The right to self-determination and the access to the resources necessary for self-sufficiency were quintessential aspects of the commons, a social structure that has largely disappeared in today's world, but was once the basis for livelihood for masses of people. The earth is the commons and all people should have equal access to the resources and decision-making about our common home. For those of us with the privilege to enjoy this access, at least to a greater degree than others, we have a responsibility to help make those privileges available to all people equally in a way that is sustainable for the planet

The nature of intentional communities is that those of us who live in them are in service to each other. As self-managed, self-governing entities, we are collectively responsible for meeting the needs of the community as a whole as well as the individuals, because the individuals are part of the whole community. An attitude of service goes a long way to creating harmony in community, and in the world. As social experiments, those who live in intentional communities are essentially activists, and must be active in their responsibility both for the success of the community and in the impact the community has on the world around it. Being an activist is essentially about responsibility and accountability, and taking those on also goes a long way to creating harmony in community, and in the world. 🌱

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



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Each collection is comprised of about 15-20 articles, containing a total of 55-65 pages. All are available in both digital and print format.

If you're hungry for information about cooperative living, we have a menu that will satisfy any appetite! If you're thinking about starting a community, this collection offers an incredible storehouse of practical advice. If you're thinking of joining a community, these special issues will help you discern the right things to look for, and how to be a savvy shopper.

While there are some classic pieces that date back to the '90s, the vast majority of the articles in The Best of COMMUNITIES Bundle have been written in the past dozen years, representing cutting-edge thinking and how-to explorations of the social, ecological, and economic aspects of sustainable living. We've gathered insights about what you can expect when raising children in community, and offer a wealth of information about what it's like to grow old there, too. For dessert, we have the collected wisdom of over 50 essays from Geoph Kozeny (1949-2007), the Peripatetic Communitarian.

**Please support the magazine and enhance your own library by taking advantage of these new offerings!**

[ic.org/best-of-communities](http://ic.org/best-of-communities)

# The Need for Greater Purpose



Photo by Chris Roth

As each issue of *COMMUNITIES* reminds readers (on page 6), intentional communities are comprised of people who choose to live or work together “in pursuit of a common ideal or vision,” sharing values that may be “social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological.” Not surprisingly, these values often encompass service and activism in various forms, and these can play major, often essential roles in community life.

In some groups, they manifest mostly internally (for example, people helping each other with childcare or eldercare, or advocating for green building practices or more equitable decision-making methods; experimentation that in itself can be valuable to others who learn of it). But many groups also explicitly dedicate themselves to service and activism aimed to benefit the wider world. The bulk of this issue focuses on the latter: communities whose core reasons for existence include being of service to others and/or working to change the world, on the local, regional, national, and/or global level.

These efforts take forms as diverse as communities themselves: from residential caregiving communities for those confronted with developmental disabilities or mental health challenges, to groups

attempting to save ecosystems and challenge oppression of indigenous people and the disadvantaged everywhere. All rest upon that sense of “a common ideal or vision,” accompanied by steps to put the group’s shared values into action in the real world.

The idea of intentional communities as idyllic retreats from the world’s woes, even if it were possible to manifest in reality (it’s not), would not be satisfying to many communitarians. Being able to live and simply enjoy “life for life’s sake,” undoubtedly a useful survival skill at times and perhaps even the ultimate form of enlightenment, is not an adequate or effective approach for everyone. For many of us, only living for some larger, outer purpose (even, in some cases, when that purpose is to help others live life simply for its own sake) seems to bring peace. Many people who come to community feel that same drive/need—to be making a difference in the world. Living for ourselves alone seems empty, not only lonely but meaningless. For those propelled toward service and activism for the greater good, self-focused “comfort” is not comfortable; in fact, it’s quite the opposite. (For example, most communitarians I know have far higher priorities than having their own private shower stall, though there are undoubtedly exceptions that prove the rule.)



• • •

Reflecting on the above, I realize that my own ability to simply enjoy life as it is, free of thoughts of consciously being of service or of being an activist for a better world, faded as I exited childhood. (As a child, I suppose I was an activist for enjoying life without worrying so much, and was therefore of service both to my playmates and to adults looking for models of being in the now.) High school taught me to be an editor but also instilled in me a need to achieve something other than enjoyment; and ever since, I have felt lost when I wasn't committed to a purpose, when I didn't have a clear direction to put my energies toward or a sense I was making a difference in the world.

I'm undoubtedly not the only one whose need (or need-based desire) to feel of service, to be making a difference, can at times be a curse rather than a blessing. When inner or outer circumstances have thrown me "off track" from a previous direction in my life, with no substitute one yet materialized, I have felt devastated. This happened at the age of 20, and it's happened several times throughout my adult life in intentional community. For better or worse, I've found no sports team, favorite beverage, or sitcom to use as a rudder to get me through those rough patches; I've had to brave life as a non-mainstream American sometimes painfully in touch with whether I am fully aligned with my life purpose or not.

I've gravitated toward education-oriented communities, whose service is offering skills, inspiration, and information to those seeking more sustainable ways to live (including personal and social as well as ecological sustainability); and whose activism is modeling different ways of being and living, while working for their spread in the larger world. Within those groups, at different times (some overlapping), I've been a dawn-to-dusk organic gardener and gardening teacher, using only hand tools and never quite saving the world through my efforts; a compiler and editor of the group's home-grown newsletter or magazine; a participant in the modeling and teaching of new ways of interrelating that emphasize self-awareness, honesty, and connection; the initiator of a nature center project and an active nature educator in the wider community; a member of several key groups and committees helping shape a newly evolving community; and a significant adult to two young children who filled most of my otherwise-unspeakable-for time.

Yet each of these phases has come to an end; and in equal measure to the fulfillment I got from those roles, I have experienced the pain of being relatively without purpose in the group. When, due to shifts in the group's priorities (the cessation of publications or personal growth workshops, for example), changes in its composition (the departure of my recent non-biological "family"), or major health challenges (first, a debilitating knee injury, from which I later recovered; and more recently, a serious ear injury and surgery, from which I'm still healing, and which has caused significant retreat from community life), my previous activities have had to be dropped. "Life for life's sake" seems a hollow alternative when an activity or service that once provided meaning is no longer possible—especially when chronic pain or chronic discomfort is involved.

Editing this quarterly magazine, though it always needs to be balanced with other activities, has helped get me through a couple major life transitions so far, even as the work also became more difficult during those times. While my sense of alignment and participation in my home community's mission has varied over the years, working for COMMUNITIES is a "service" and "activist" project I can consistently believe in and find meaning in. Every member of a service or activist community could likely benefit from finding a project that is *not* dependent on a steady sense of mission or success in their home community.

Some final thoughts for those drawn to service and activism: any of the communities outlined in this issue could theoretically be a great fit for someone seeking meaning in such work. At the same time, just as with any type of community, the match between the group trying to serve and change the world, and the individual with a similar calling, needs to be "right." When that happens—even for just a time—the individual, the group, and the world do change. With luck, the ripples of that convergence will continue to spread even after the moments of convergence have passed.

We hope this issue inspires you toward your own convergences of self, community, service, and activism. Thanks for joining us! 🐦

*Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.*

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# COMMUNITY LIVING as Social Activism in Camphill

By Kam Bellamy

In my younger days I fancied myself to be quite the social activist. I traveled to Washington DC to see the Clothesline Project and march against violence against women. In New York I spoke out at a Take Back the Night rally and walked topless through the streets of the City shouting, “Wherever we go, however we dress, no means no and yes means yes!” to show that even half-dressed, I had rights to my body. I visited the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp in England—an inspiring group whose work to this day influences my approach to life and to activism. I marched in protests opposing the World Bank, and in general was up for any “good fight” that came my way.

At a certain age, I became tired of fighting. Fresh out of college I took a job at an anti-hunger organization. I loved my job, but the weight of being “anti-hunger” in my work life, while fighting the military-industrial complex and violence against women in my free time, became more than I could stomach. I decided I wanted to work for something. As someone who was trying to create a more peaceful world, I realized I needed to stop fighting—to stop thinking about what I didn’t want in the world, and to start creating what I did want.

While studying Race and Gender Studies in college I read Riane Eisler’s book *The Chalice and the Blade*, in which she talks about “gylanic” societies—social systems based on the equality of women and men. I loved her book, and she articulated a lot of what I already knew in my heart: that societies did not need to be based on a culture of domination, and that humans could build (and in some situations already had built) cultures based on a model of partnership. I wanted to be part of such a culture, and express my activist self by modeling with others that a partnership-based society could exist. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines activism as “the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.” Did I need to “vigorously campaign” or “protest” in order to bring about political or social change? Did I need to “fight” for nonviolence to create a culture of respect? I hoped not.

In 1994 while backpacking through England, I walked into a beautiful, seemingly idyllic valley in a remote area of North Yorkshire and came upon a Camphill community called Botton Village. In Botton Village, people of all abilities lived side by side, each contributing what they could to the community, and in turn having their needs met by the commu-

nity. Individuals living in Camphill work out of anthroposophy, and believe that “in a community of human beings working together, the well-being of the community will be the greater, the less the individual claims for him/herself the proceeds of the work s/he has done.” We turn the proceeds of our work over to our fellow-workers, and in turn our needs are satisfied by the work done by others.

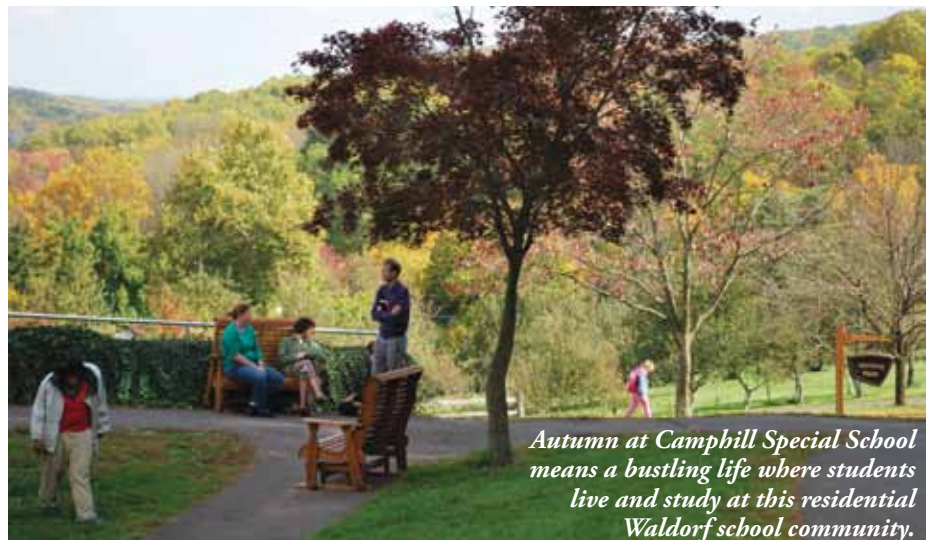
Three years after first walking in to Botton Village, I returned to stay, initially thinking I would live there for one to three years, to learn about and experience community life. Though I have moved from community to community, 20 years on I am still living in Camphill. (There are more than 120 Camphill communities throughout the world—most in Europe and the US and Canada, but some also in Southern Africa, India, Russia, and Vietnam.)

To me, community living is the highest form of social activism. Sharing resources, sharing burdens, expanding the concept of family beyond those who are related by blood: these are revolutionary concepts—not to be taken lightly. We can fight against certain political figures or certain economic, military, environmental, or human rights issues. But until we can find an alter-

*At Triform Camphill Community (Hudson, NY) individuals of all abilities make lasting friendships built around trust and respect*



Ben Kulo



*Autumn at Camphill Special School means a bustling life where students live and study at this residential Waldorf school community.*



native to the culture of domination, we will not succeed in addressing any of these things. Community living, to me, offers a real alternative to this culture.

Being a member of a Camphill community means making a commitment to ensuring that the needs of all your fellow community members are met. It also means establishing trust with others in your community that they will work to meet your needs. In Audre Lorde's 1979 address titled "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," she states that when we "learn how to take our differences and make them strengths" then true equality can be achieved. This is what we strive to do in Camphill. Valuing the wholeness at the core of each individual, we focus on what each individual brings to our community, whether it be a warm smile and a cheeky sense of humor, an ability to grow vegetables, or a keen knack for accounting—every individual's contribution is valued. When we know that others are dependent upon each of us to give to the best of our ability, a strong work ethic is cultivated.

Choosing to live in community made the personal political in my life in a very real way. Excusing myself from participating in the culture of domination allowed the very living of my life to be an expression of activism.

I love that in Camphill communities people of all abilities are given voice. People with "special needs" live side-by-side with people "without" special needs, and work together, celebrate together, and by and large self-govern, practicing consensus decision-making.

Today, CMS (the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services) is pushing to remove people with special needs from intentional community settings. Such settings, they say, are "isolating" and "restrictive." For me, as a person labeled "non-disabled," I can only say that community living offered a freedom from the isolation many experience in the modern world—the isolation of needing to be dependent solely on one's own resources for survival, and the isolation of not knowing who would care if I had what I needed or not. Community living also gave me freedom—I was not restricted to doing only the work that could produce money for the survival of my family. I was allowed and encouraged to do work that was meaningful, whether it was caring for my daughter, cooking lunch, working in the vegetable garden, or managing the accounts for the community. My work, and the work of all in the community, regardless of "capability," was meaningful and valued.

Going forward, we must be careful that this tightening of regulations does not have the effect of restricting the freedom of and consequently isolating people with disabilities in the name of inclusion. All of us, regardless of ability, need to be able to express our ideals and lead full, active, and whole lives by choosing to live in community. To restrict those who have been labeled "disabled" from so doing is unconscionable.

I may need to return to "vigorous campaigning." 🌱

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*Kam Bellamy is a longtime Camphill coworker and currently serves as the Executive Director at Camphill Hudson.*

*In Camphill communities individuals of all abilities live and work together to create community. Annie and Kaye are part of Camphill Hudson and share an apartment in downtown Hudson, NY.*

Thomas de Leon

*Artistic expression and an active lifestyle are important in Camphill communities, seen here at Triform in Hudson, NY.*

Ben Kulo

Ben Kulo

*Drama and performances are commonplace in the communities, this production was recently held at Camphill Hudson and centered around Camphill's agricultural roots.*

*A feeling of stewardship has always been a strong principle in Camphill communities.*



Ben Kulo

*The candle workshop at Camphill Village Copake (Copake, NY) creates a wide variety of 100% beeswax candles for use by the community and for sale to the public through retail stores and catalogs.*



# INNISFREE VILLAGE: Lifesharing in a Service Community

*By Nancy Chappell*



I have lived and worked at Innisfree Village for most of the last 24 years. I raised my son here. I have enjoyed a lifestyle of sharing, learning, caring, and laughing with people from around the world as well as with people with Intellectual Disabilities. We all have things we need and gifts we can give.

I can cook a meal for 20 with little effort and give some decent haircuts. I am not very good at measuring carefully and cutting things in a straight line. That's where my friend Willy comes in. He can be very exact and very literal. He challenges me to think in other ways or at least to consider the world from various people's viewpoints. I can practice a foreign language here, get help with my computer, or car, or bicycle. Hugs are free here and given quite freely.

This is a full, rich life that is not for everyone, but could be for many of you. We have quite a few similarities to egalitarian communities: we share resources, grow many of our own vegetables, have a pool of vehicles for our use whether "work"-related or for personal time. We are free to go in and out of each other's homes. We get fresh bread and granola delivered to our house twice a week. We have movie night, birthday parties, dances, and potlucks. There is always someone to be with. Finding alone time is possible but requires a bit more effort.

Some of the ways we are different from egalitarian communities: we have a Board of Directors, an Executive Director, and are bound by the License granted to us by the Department of Social Services for the State of Virginia. The population with Intellectual Disabilities, whom we call Coworkers, pays tuition to live here. Or more precisely their families do. In a more perfect world (and perhaps in more socialist-type democracies) this would be free to all who need it and a birthright of being a citizen. Unfortunately, we don't live in that world here in the US (yet?).

Innisfree Village is a Lifesharing community with adults with Intellectual Disabilities. We are a Service community in that we serve adults with disabilities. We were established in 1971 by some parents of young people with disabilities wanting a place for their children to grow and thrive in a community of respect and beauty.

Our mission includes:

1. Being a model therapeutic environment with people with intellectual disabilities, emphasizing empowerment, interdependence, and mutual respect of all community members.
2. Evolving with the changing needs of the individuals with intellectual disabilities within the Village community and beyond.
3. Valuing work and fostering creativity through artistic crafts, stewardship of the land, and daily community life.

4. Promoting efforts in the stewardship of our land to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between our human health and our natural environment.

5. Encouraging the integration of community members into the larger society through participation in cultural, educational, recreational, religious, and volunteer programs.

6. Relying for its financial resources upon family support, the spirit of volunteerism, and private funding.

7. Supporting and encouraging the talents and individuality of community members from diverse educational, national, ethnic, and social backgrounds

We are a community of about 75 people, 60 of whom live here. It is a dynamic community, as people do come in and out on a regular basis. The 40 Coworkers make up the foundation of our community. Philip, Bee, and Marny all arrived here in the 1970s. Kevin, Sian, Corinne, and the two Brookes arrived in the past five years. We all arrive from various places and bring differing problems, needs, and gifts. The more dynamic part of our community is the Residential Caregiver Volunteers who come from around the world to serve for at least one year within our community. At the moment, we have Volunteers from 20 to 68 years of age who have come from Germany, Maine, England, California, Alabama, Zambia, Michigan, Spain, New York City, and Japan.



We have 10 houses spread out on our 550 acres. Each house has one to six Coworkers living there, with one to three Volunteers who live together. This is what Lifesharing means. Our day starts with breakfast in our homes and we need to “get to work” by 9. One of my favorite times of the day is between 8:45 and 9 a.m. when everyone is heading out and walking to work. I lovingly refer to this as our morning rush hour.

We have seven main workstations where we might work. The Farm is where we collect and wash eggs from our 300 or so chickens. We consume this within the village and usually have enough to sell to some local restaurants and health food stores. We also have about a dozen mamma sheep. We are just learning how to shear the sheep, then clean, card, and spin the wool into a workable product.

We have two gardens; one is the Vegetable Garden, which grows veggies on about five acres of land. We have a CSA about six months a year, that is mostly for our use, with a few select customers outside of the community. We also have an Herb Garden which grows herbs and flowers. We sell flower bouquets in a local grocery store and once or twice a year will provide flowers for weddings. Our herbs also yield fresh (in season) or dried (out of season) basil, oregano, sage, dill, parsley. We make a variety of teas that get put into tea bags and also we make an assortment of soaps.

Our weavery and woodshop have both been up and running since the early '70s. We are especially known for our beautiful cutting boards, placemats, and scarves. We sell to some local craft stores as well as various artisan fairs.

Our bakery produces about 50 loaves of bread twice a week, for our own consumption. In addition, we make granola that is enjoyed by the Village and sold in some local stores, including Whole Foods. The making of our communal lunches is one of our workstations. All 70 of us join together for a delicious vegetarian lunch four days a week. We have some excellent—and possessive—garlic peelers and cheese graters, so we probably eat more than our share of garlic and cheese at our lunches, thanks to Heyward and Katie.

Is it paradise, you ask? Some days yes and some days no. As in most communities, we have to deal with difficult personalities. There are people in community that we may not like but need to find a way to live with. Because we are looking for the best in our Coworkers and try to work with people's strengths, that can also help in dealing with the Volunteers and Staff who live or work here. Our Coworkers can have challenging behaviors above and beyond what the general population has to deal with. Fortunately, having a large property means that people are free to move about and take long walks when frustration or anger is our motivator.

Folks with seizure disorders need a vigilance that most of us do not require. At Innisfree Village, we work long hours and may have little time for ourselves. It is necessary to be flexible, have patience, and enjoy a healthy sense of humor.

New Volunteers are joining and leaving our community every few months. This keeps a dynamism but is exhausting, as we are continually offering thorough training for the life

and the guidelines here, as well as constantly saying goodbye.

Coworkers might come to the end of their lives here and that can be difficult, powerful, and sad. Can we keep someone here or do we need to find another end-of-life situation for them? The most we can do is to consider each situation on its own and join with their families for the best option.

On a lighter note, a colleague just piped in with these “hardest aspects of our community”: working 24/7, allergies, Virginia summers, cohabiting with spiders and snakes. I can say that this challenges me regularly. I just walked home to put away some of our eggs and meat in my fridge, to find a black snake wiggling on my kitchen floor. Not fun for me. For many people, especially for those not used to our climate and life in the country, these are the biggest challenges.

One needs to **want** to live with people differently-abled in a rural environment and to be willing and able to share of themselves in a community that is big and sometimes messy, but where smiles and hugs are plentiful too.

There are many opportunities to experience life in a Service Community, whether one commits for one year or 24 years. The benefits of Lifesharing are limitless. We welcome visitors and more importantly, Community Members. 🐦

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*Located in Crozet, Virginia, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Innisfree Village welcomes visitors and new Community Members (see [www.innisfreevillage.org](http://www.innisfreevillage.org)). Nancy Chappell is Innisfree Village's Associate Director.*

Photos courtesy of Nancy Chappell



# THE GESUNDHEIT! INSTITUTE: A 45 Year-Old Communal Hospital Experiment

*By Patch Adams*

I entered medical school in 1967 to use medicine as a vehicle for social change. I immediately saw that hospitals were expensive, hierarchical, frantic, unhappy places easily causing burnout to all levels of staff. I saw nothing “healthy” about a hospital setting. There were high levels of racism and sexism where the rich “elite” were treated so much better than the disadvantaged poor. I decided to spend my four years in a medical school studying hospitals with the idea upon graduation to create a hospital that addresses all the problems of care delivery, not as the answer, but to show that answers to these problems are possible. Two years into medical school, in 1969 I went to visit the Twin Oaks community. After having wonderful words with Kat Kincade and others, I realized I was a communal person—part of the great tribe called human.

When I graduated in 1971 no one gave us a hospital, so I decided to form a commune that was a hospital open for 24 hours a day, seven days a week for all manner of medical problems from birth to death. For 12 years we did this experiment, mostly with 20 adults and our children (three were physicians) in a large six-bedroom house. In the peak years we had 500-1000 people in our home with from five to 50 guests a night. We did not distinguish the patient from the “non-patient.” Instead, our focus was to try to have a relationship with everyone who came. If one came “as a patient,” our ideal was to have a three- or four-hour-long initial interview (instead of the 7.8-minute one we were taught) and to visit their home. By 1980 we had gathered enough resources together to purchase 321 acres in West Virginia (the least served state for healthcare).

Everything was given freely. We didn't feel like a charity since our focus wasn't on helping the “poor.” We simply didn't want people to think they owed us something in return. We wanted them to be excited to belong to something called community, a nest of care.

In this same flavor, we never heard anyone praise insurance companies. They are, after all, one-quarter to one-third of the cost of

care created by the practice of medicine. So, we never had anything to do with them. One can never know before a treatment what the effect of that treatment would be, so we need the right to make a mistake, so we are the only hospital in the United States that refuses to carry malpractice insurance.

In medical school, we never had a single lecture on health and so had to discover how to spark interest and give examples of exercise, diet, love, and spirit. For example, we would host all-night dance parties, and yoga sessions during the day, as examples of exercise. For dieting, we kept extensive gardens and learned to feed lots of people. We showered everyone we met with love and affection; my longest hug was 12 hours! To encourage spiritual growth, we allowed all practices to show themselves, and generally feel that spiritual means love in action.

At this time the only complementary medicine that was legal in our state was chiropractic medicine, so we welcomed it. Then, we broke the law by welcoming acupuncture, homeopathy, naturopathy, and so many more—even some that others may think are profoundly strange.

We were all so well known for our integration of human and play that others began calling us “the Zanies”! For me, it was so thrilling and enchanting to be alive every day for those 12 years.

Since those early days I have been constantly, relentlessly raising the funds to build a hospital. This ideal hospital will be a technologically modern hospital that will show a happy, funny, loving, cooperative, creative, and thoughtful atmosphere. A hospital that will run at only 10 percent of typical operating costs.

In those early years, we never asked for money. And so, we ran with little support for those 12 years. In fact, our staff had to work outside jobs—imagine having to pay to







*In March of 2002, we took 22 clowns from six different continents and 10 tons of aid to Afghanistan for five weeks. This is outside of a pediatrics hospital in Kabul.*

practice medicine! And yet, no staff left in the first nine years. I believe this is because the playful, deep, friendly practice of care is such an enchanting experience that it is worth paying to do. No one was making a sacrifice to be there. Love, play, and care are so seductive of appreciation.

All these years later, I'm still raising money for our dream hospital—even though a majority of financial promises have fallen through, and we may have asked over 1400 foundations for a grant. With all the setbacks, we still look to the successes that have sustained our effort.

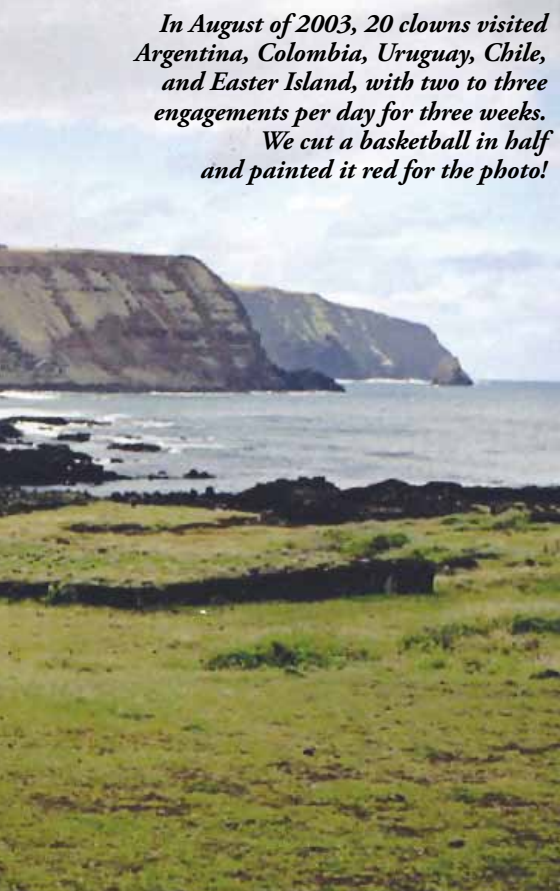
We are a political project. And, as a political project, we realized that our style had become so intense, we would soon run the risk of burning out many people. It was then that I realized that to continue our project, we have to build a communal ecovillage to protect this dream of a hospital. It became clear that every staff person must have a room for their own and the other projects that hold their interest (like the arts). The way we had been was no model to show possibility—we had to actually have a hospital, albeit our style of hospital. We had refused publicity up to this point. We realized that if we were to raise the millions of dollars we need to build and endow our hospital, we would have to bring in publicity. In order to raise this money, I would become some sort of a celebrity. So, we closed our doors in 1983 and held a press event. Shortly after we closed the hospital, I was invited to lecture and perform all over the world. We tightened up the communal home for six to eight people for the next 15 years—waiting for that chance to build our fantasy.

By 1985 I was feeling such an emptiness from not being able to do direct care that I started our clown trips to foreign countries. This was a second wonderful exploration of communal living because the clown trips were a totally random collection of people. People have ranged in age from three to 88, from over 50 countries, and many come with no prior experience. We started in the Soviet Union and we have gone there usually with 35-40 people for two weeks. Our Russia trip is now in its 31st year! Using the same six qualities—happy, funny, loving, cooperative, creative, and thoughtful—complete strangers become a coordinated team of beautiful clowns. Over 150 trips have happened since the initial outing, involving over 6000 people; maybe only five or six did not work out.



*Here we are working in our community site in West Virginia, summer 1990.*

*In August of 2003, 20 clowns visited Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, Chile, and Easter Island, with two to three engagements per day for three weeks. We cut a basketball in half and painted it red for the photo!*



*The crew dresses up at our hospital building site in West Virginia, 1988.*



*A home-grown 1975 performance of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's The Physicists.*



Of course, the big trick was that all were going to human suffering with love and fun, which extracted these six qualities out of whoever came. The trips have been universally enchanting. Twenty-three years ago

received such donations that as I write we are putting the roof on our first big building.

In 1987, at a conference of the International Cybernetics Association, I met a radical group of artists and activists who put the conference on, and I instantly felt a connection. The next five years we got closer and they changed their name to the School for Designing a Society ([designingsociety.net](http://designingsociety.net)). We invited them to do the school in the summer on our

land in West Virginia because it was like the missing piece for our project. We are here to teach and show social change. So right was this union, that we decided that the first big building we would build will be a school building. We had agreed from the beginning that our medical and clowning work would be free, and our educational work would be how we would raise our funds. By educational work, I mean

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## We've taken clowns into war zones, refugee camps, and horrible disasters all over the world.

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we were touring some orphanages in such an unhappy state that we were overjoyed when we met our astonishing friend Maria. Maria began work that has continued all these years with over 600 orphans, exceeding our wildest dreams.

In these years we've taken clowns into war zones, many refugee camps, and horrible disasters all over the world. Eleven years ago we were touring the Peruvian Amazon with a group of clowns when we came upon an unsettling number of children (ages three to five) that have been afflicted with gonorrhea. Our shock has emboldened us to return there every year since then and help out in any way we can. Now we team up with 100 clowns from all over the world for a two-week extravaganza filled with humanitarian projects and clowning for all. We will return this August! For this past year we have also maintained a year-long presence in the area with four women who moved there to see what can happen: a doctor, a psychologist, and two musicians. A similar project was started in Nepal eight years ago by our dear partners, Ginevra and Italo.

In 1999, Hollywood released a film about my life called *Patch Adams*. I agreed to do this foolish thing because they promised to help us build our hospital. The film made hundreds of millions of dollars—but we made no money from the film. We are here to end capitalism after all. However, the film did make my speaker fees go way up, and so another kind of communal project developed where I could give a talk, and with volunteers we could build a clinic or school in a poor country. The fees also made it possible to build three beautiful buildings on our West Virginia property in preparation for the big buildings we want for the hospital. In the last few years, through three bequests and some sweetly eccentric people, we have

lectures, speeches, workshops, and classes. Here was an in-house way to raise funds and to teach nonviolent revolution. What may be interesting to communal societies is that we have combined our communities, but kept the styles for each community as they are. The School has also created clown trips that have clowning in the morning, and education in the afternoon and evening. They have annual trips in Ecuador and Costa Rica. They have also returned recently from a clowning event in Mexico.

So yes! We have failed to build the hospital that I began in 1971, and was sure it would be funded in four years. Imagine my glee when I realized that the delay has been a great gift! The design of the hospital is a lot more intelligent now than we ever dreamed at the beginning. For



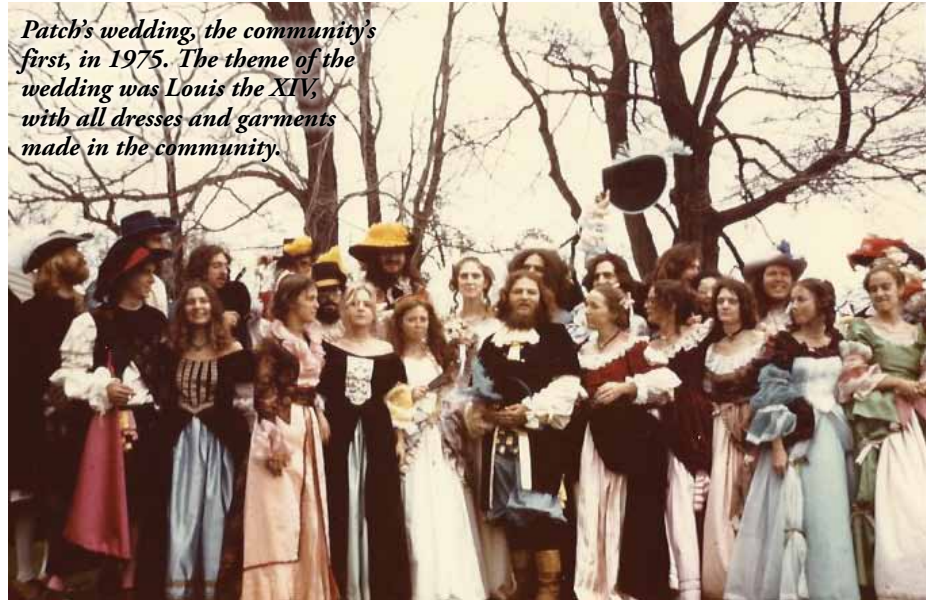




*Clowns from 15 different countries parade in Belen, Iquitos, Peru.*



*Participants in annual "Laughing Body" seminar enjoy the mud pit.*



*Patch's wedding, the community's first, in 1975. The theme of the wedding was Louis the XIV, with all dresses and garments made in the community.*



*Every year since 1985, 40 clowns travel to Russia for two weeks and take a picture at this location.*



*Our annual Commune Christmas Picture, taken in 1978 in Charles Town, West Virginia.*

example, environmental consciousness and desire have really progressed these 45 years. So we will have 120 staff, all living together in our communal ecovillage. This will eliminate 85 percent of the village's ecological footprint. Permaculture and other ideas have leapt into our concept. With our global outreach and fame we are connected all over the world in our project, and those of other countries. It is thrilling! Clowns are now going into hospitals in over 130 countries, and in Argentina laws have been passed to require pediatric departments in every hospital to hire clowns. I lecture 300 days out of the year, and have done so for over 30 years in 81 countries, spreading seeds of a love revolution of enlivening community and a call to end capitalism. I have corresponded with letters to 130 countries so it feels like a global family—each with their own special directions of care.

I have never been discouraged; in fact the pursuit has given me a vigorous life. The smartest thing I ever did was be communal. This was the sweetest gift to myself. The hospital, the clown trips, the lectures and correspondences have made me feel that the earth is my commune, and all of us are truly brothers and sisters. Let's get to work!

Our funding must be right around the corner!

In Peace, Patch 🐦

*Patch Adams, M.D., founder of the Gesundheit! Institute, is a doctor, clown, activist for peace, justice, and care for all people, and lifelong reader of COMMUNITIES magazine (since its birth in 1972). See [www.patchadams.org](http://www.patchadams.org).*



# SERVICE IN COMMUNITY: A Fijian Success Story

By Philip Mirkin

Service is an integral part of Fiji Organic Village (FOV). From the start of our effort in 2006 to build a self-sufficient ecovillage (as requested by the islanders), our mission included helping the local communities. We began creating jobs for locals by hosting overseas guests, creating income for the ecovillage. (See also “Building an Ecovillage in the Friendly Islands,” issue #171.)

We had the idea of providing free medical assessment and care to islanders living in a remote island chain who can't access free community services. Universal medical coverage is available to all Fijians, but without transport they can't access it. We created a win-win-win situation where New Zealanders, Fijians, and North Americans happily shared our wealth of services, community buildings, boat transport, knowledge, expertise, medical supplies, and feasts.

I became the accidental nurse on the island. But with little training in Bush Medicine, I was unprepared for the challenges I faced. In the tropics, I dealt with serious skin infections, diabetes, untreated chronic illnesses, etc. I had first aid and CPR training as well as other emergency medical experience.

The island remoteness was also a deep challenge to providing medical care. If the tide was low or the seas were too choppy we couldn't go anywhere. Sometimes people walked over from other villages on our island to have me treat their infected tooth, or infected boil. We became an important community resource. Eventually I came to rely on a great field guide that Rene Steinhauer, a war-seasoned humanitarian, gave me called *Where There Is No Doctor*.

## New Zealand Heroines

A tall, slim, very sweet and pretty nurse from New Zealand became a Heroine of our story. Ann Lloyd has a broad, ready smile, and a gentle, soft voice. I first met her at a public gathering in an art ecovillage in northern New Zealand, at a place dear to my heart, The Quarry. I told Ann that I lived in Fiji much of the year. After I moved to New Zealand in late 2004 to set up a new ecovillage, I consulted on many small five-acre sustainable developments. By 2007 I was dividing my time among New Zealand, Fiji, and California.

I mentioned to Ann that I was the de facto nurse on the island because I was the only one with a first aid kit. Locals asked me “My tooth is hurting, can you make the pain go away?” Who could deny these lovely people? In the face of their limited access to medical care, I had to treat people to provide relief when their native medicines and herbs were not being used. I continued funding the first aid outpost on my own, buying from the local pharmacies in Lautoka, “Sugar City,” on the Big Island.

I thought Ann could help our community by providing (at no cost) free top-notch New Zealand medical care. I asked her, “Why don't you come to our ecovillage in Fiji as my guest and stay for a week at the lodge?” She said she might take me up on the offer and then we hugged. We stayed in touch. Things happened fast. I worked out the logistics for her to arrive, sending a 12-page briefing with advice about cultural sensitivities and warnings of the dangers in remote island travel: deadly sea snakes, sharp coral, stingrays, skin infections, etc.







With permission from the Chiefs at the various villages (followed by bowls of kava), we agreed to prepare for their visit to our remote island homes. A few months later, Ann and another wonderful nurse named Liz Finn boarded the plane to Fiji. They brought with them very valuable and necessary medical supplies and medicines that had been donated. These supplies became valuable for my first-aid efforts. Meanwhile, these big-hearted nurses could examine the islanders on their own terms.

I couldn't have asked for two better nurses to join me. They arrived with a New Zealand doctor's authorizations and, literally, boxes of material, from injectable lidocaine to antibiotics (plus a blood-pressure gauge, surgical kit etc.). Time to learn!

### Island Time

Islanders greeted the nurses with warmth and the utmost respect and grace as if they were senators or royalty, with a relaxed, barefoot Fijian-style. The village children sat on their laps, smiling adoringly at our new Kiwi friends. Before you knew it they were aunts to the whole grateful ecovillage! As village concierge, I showed them our lovely 68-acre organic farm, the kayaks, snorkel gear, and all else. Delighted by the four-star organic cuisine, they stayed in our gorgeous beachfront bures (cottages).

After a day to relax, Ann and Liz were eager to get cracking. First, assessments for the villagers at FOV. The grateful villagers learned about their blood pressure, diabetes, treatments, preventative care, etc. as I logged the information in a small book. Smiles were in great evidence despite the seriousness of our mission. On successive days we took them to Yaqeta Village, Vuaki Village, and then on to Nacula village northwards.

We were all about business. Each morning our boat captains prepared the boats as we




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**The nurses enjoyed doing Bush Medicine. The islanders' health improved dramatically.**

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began separating supplies. Then we powered the boat over to a neighbor island. These days were so beautiful. Scores of villagers waited happily in line as the nurses gently asked what each person was suffering from, and what the hospital had already told them. Then they checked their vitals.

The assessments came in: untreated diabetes, severe infections, hearing loss, skin diseases, etc. Liz and Ann gave immediate care where they could, offering up free medications to take home, etc. Feasts followed. Ann and Liz were escorted in our little 24-foot boat around the islands making new friends. I learned what I could. With the success of our ecovillage, it was imperative to spread the wealth to our neighbors. The nurses absolutely fell in love with our island, and the villagers.

The nurses enjoyed doing Bush Medicine, without computers, ignorant doctors, bureaucracy, or nosy administrators. The islanders' health improved dramatically. We are in deep gratitude to all involved, especially our New Zealand partners.

I am honored to have helped sweet nurses to provide over 200 villagers with healthcare, while also providing them a holiday in our island paradise. We hope to inspire other ecovillages to do the same for their neighbors, as the goodwill and healthcare created will last many years. 🐟




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*Author of The Hybrid Adobe Handbook (Soaring Hill Press, 2003), Philip Mirkin co-founded Fiji Organic Village and has designed ecovillages and buildings in New Zealand, Puerto Rico, California, Colorado, Native Reservations, and Fiji. Philip consults on new ecovillages and sustainable buildings, in the US and overseas. Contact him at philipmirkin@hotmail.com or visit [www.EasyAdobe.org](http://www.EasyAdobe.org), [www.HybridAdobe.com](http://www.HybridAdobe.com), and [www.ic.org/directory/flying-fish-organic-village](http://www.ic.org/directory/flying-fish-organic-village).*

# When Each One of Us Changes Our Mind, the World Changes: LIFE WITH KONOohana FAMILY

By Yoko Oki

“**W**hat is this place...I have never seen a group of people who live as peacefully as this! If I can live with such a mind, I will not need to wish for anything else in my life.”

When I was 29 years old, I visited Konohana Family, located at the foot of Mt. Fuji in Japan, for the first time. I encountered a world that I could not have even imagined before, and thought, “I have finally found my purpose for the rest of my life! I am going to improve my spirituality, which everyone here practices in their daily life, so that I can have a peaceful mind forever.” Four months later, I became a member of Konohana Family at the age of 30.

Konohana Family is an agriculture-based community where about 100 non-blood-related individuals—80 members, from babies to elderly people, plus guests—live as one big family. Since 1981, Isami Furuta, who is the founder of Konohana Family and called Isadon, has received divine messages, and in 1992, he was given the divine afflatus to spread the divine will to the whole Earth. In 1994, 20 members founded Konohana Farm, which was later renamed Konohana Family. The name “Konohana” comes from the goddess of Mt. Fuji, “Konohana Sakuyahime no Mikoto.” Since then, the Konohana members have established the Village of Bodhisattvas at the foot of Mt. Fuji, where people connect and support each other, and live in harmony with nature and all living beings on Earth. Bodhisattvas consider others’ joy as their own and always live for other people and the world.

What I saw in the members’ hearts when I first visited Konohana Family was the exact spirituality of Bodhisattvas. After I became a member, I figured out that Konohana Family provides various social contributions based on the spirituality of Bodhisattvas. As one of the examples, we offer the Natural Therapy Program. Isadon is mainly in charge of this, since he has provided advice on various social issues to more than 10,000

people over 30-plus years. We offer physical and mental healing based on the Konohana living and harmonious spirituality for those with mental disorders (depression, schizophrenia), various dependencies (drug, alcohol, and nicotine), problematic tendencies (school refusal, shut-ins), and lifestyle diseases; we do not rely only on conventional medical treatment.

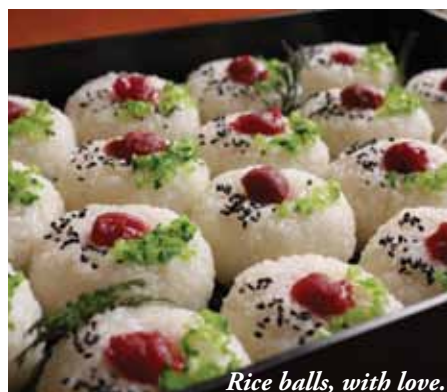
When I started to take an unknown path of improving my spirituality, I sensed that it would be best to learn from Isadon and hoped to be in charge of the Natural Therapy Program with him. Moreover, I witnessed someone become completely cured with only one month of participation in the program, after suffering from depression for more than 20 years! After this experience, I strongly believed that unlocking its secret could be a clue for creating an awakened society for the next era. The members who felt my eagerness willingly accepted my wish to be in charge of the Natural Therapy Program, and so began my path of improving my own spirituality!



*Grandmom and baby boy.*



*Isadon, the main coordinator of the Natural Therapy Program.*



*Rice balls, with love.*

*Our rice paddy and Mt. Fuji.*





*Mom and girl.*



Photos courtesy of Yoko Oki

*International network of harmony.*



*Best couple in the rice paddy.*



The first 10 years at Konohana were spent creating the foundation of the community, and then the Natural Therapy Program started as one of our means for social contribution 12 years ago. In the beginning, everyone with issues was welcome to join this program. Then, some could not communicate and used violence on us, and some ran out of the facility naked. As a result, the police called us once in a while, and we had a lot of difficulty helping care guests recover due to a lack of will to improve on their part. We realized that it was impossible to accept people whose time for improvement had not come. Later, we came to confirm the will of our care guests in advance, and accept those who have possibilities for improvement. As a result, almost 100 percent of people who come to us with depression recover now. On top of that, even those with diseases claimed to be incurable according to a doctor's diagnosis have recovered here!

### **The Story of Y-san**

Since I became a member, I have met so many people who suffered long-term from mental diseases. Out of them, the meeting with a 28-year-old woman, pseudonym Y-san, was the most sensational of my life! In the spring of 2015, she visited Konohana Family for the first time to recover from the schizophrenia that she suffered from for five years. She had a counseling with Isadon, with her 61-year-old father who became depressed



*Network of good will, love, and harmony.*



*Farming at the foot of Mt. Fuji.*



*Vegetarian meal.*

due to her disease. She had hallucinations, could not communicate smoothly, and moved her body awkwardly like a robot, so I thought, “I have never encountered such a serious case as hers. Even if she stays here, it would be difficult for her to recover her health.” However, Isadon sensed a slight possibility for her improvement, and said to her, “If you seriously face the mind of yours that has created your current condition, and improve it, you will be able to recover and return to society healthy.”

Of the first counseling with Isadon, she says, “I DO remember that he pointed out

age of medications, which she consequently stopped taking by Day 10. After witnessing that her status remained the same even without taking any medicine, I started to think there must be something that replaces the medicine here.

She reflects on her stay for the first two months: “I was able to learn from the positive attitude of the members who are trying to improve their spirituality very seriously in their daily life. When I talked with them, I found out that a love to care for others is at the center of their hearts. In addition, the weekly counseling given by Isadon was very effective. He would give me a task for the week, and after I worked on it, he would give me a new one! One such method of self-improvement he offered me was to write a daily journal. Since then, I have been allowed to observe myself through my daily life, and gradually realized what I feel and think upon every moment.”

Two months into the program, an opportunity arrived where she finally faced the exact fact of why she had created the phenomenon called the disease! Now, she reflects on that time as follows: “I was so self-conscious that an instinct for self-defense must have functioned—I did not want to admit my mistakes. That is why two months were necessary for me to prepare to face my mind that has created my disease. When I did not have to protect myself anymore in the warm-hearted environment of the

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## Diseases operate as a self-cleaning function to return us to our original state.

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my exact nature without any hesitation, although he had just met me for the first time! He told me that I have a dual personality and lie to myself, and I admitted that he was absolutely right. Therefore, I could tell that he is genuine and I can trust him. Then, I decided to take the Natural Therapy Program in the fall of the same year.”

She began to stay here to take the program. She felt that everyone interacted with her with goodwill, so she could release her tension and anxiety gradually, and at the same time, her physical movement was returning to a natural state. It was unbelievable and a great joy to see her making such a recovery. On Day Three she was able to relax more gradually, and began to reduce her us-

Konohana Family, and came to accurately observe my mind, Isadon explained to me about the process for creating my dual personality. According to his analysis, I have had a tendency to suppress my emotions toward my mother and other people around me since I was little, and suppressed my emotions even more after I started to work. When I started to suffer from hallucinations at the age of 23, my suppressed emotions became separated from myself and went out of control. I escaped from my reality and as a result, another personality (a voice to abuse myself) emerged.... When he analyzed the process of creating my disease, I already came to realize that there is the seed for my disease inside of my mind. Before that time, I blamed my parents and environment for my disease, so it would have been difficult for me to accept his analysis. With this counseling as my great turning point, I made it a top priority to identify another personality within myself, and I tried to be aware of the fact that my mind created such a pathological state. Then, the theme for my life was to become aware of how strong my self-consciousness is, and control myself.”

Following that realization, she came to think in a more orderly way day by day, and her journal and comments during the community meeting became objective and stable. Moreover, her facial expression became bright and healthy. After three and a half months had passed, she marvelously finally graduated from the Natural Therapy Program!



## Sharing the Gifts

After that, she continued to stay here as a long-term guest, and found a part-time job. Moreover, she began to go to school to become a psychiatric social worker because she wanted to support people with mental diseases. Two years later, she successfully received her qualification and started to work at a mental hospital in the summer of 2015.

Currently, she listens to patients at the hospital and has a busy life. Here is her message to all the readers: "With modern medical treatment, experts give just a symptomatic treatment mainly to deal with symptoms superficially. There is psychological counseling in general, but I have never encountered such a highly effective healing program as the Natural Therapy Program at Konohana Family. There are many patients I've met at the mental hospital who, I think, should take the Natural Therapy Program. By knowing myself and mastering self-control through this program, I have become confident. When I observed people taking the program, I realized that those who were eager to work on improving their minds changed rapidly and recovered faster. I have been moved by their process of recovery so many times and thankful for having an opportunity to see their healthy states at the end of the program. It is amazing that the Konohana members accept care guests, stay with their changes, take the path together, and share a great joy for their recovery. The fact that many people, including myself, have recovered from diseases and returned to society is proof that this is a loving place that provides an authentic healing. Konohana Family is a precious and important community for the coming era and for humanity."

When she came to Konohana Family six years ago, she was trapped in the narrow frame of herself and as a result, she reached a pathological condition. However, now the spirituality of Bodhisattvas who consider others' joy as their own has sprouted inside of her. It has been almost nine years since I became a member, and, now more than ever, I truly feel that it is my mission to improve my spirituality for other people as well as myself through being in charge of the Natural Therapy Program. I am so honored to have received such precious opportunities to witness people's changes in an unbelievably short term. On top of that, I have learned that not only mental diseases, such as depression and schizophrenia, but also any mental and physical issues such as atopy and diabetes stem from the mind. Knowing that truth is the same as getting a key to unlock all of the issues in this world!

"Diseases (病氣)" are written as "energy (氣) is sick (病)" in Japanese, and the cause of diseases is a stagnation of mind (energy). Diseases are a state where life loses its balance, and does not echo. On the contrary, health means "original (元) energy (氣)" and a state where life echoes with each other as the way it is, links, and circulates. There are many cases where those who suffered from mental illness for more than 20 years joined the Natural Therapy Program and recovered in a few months. People call it "a miracle." However, anyone can get over the illness if he/she has a strong will to observe the mind thoroughly from past to present, understand why he/she reached such a state, and improve the mind that caused the illness. From the law of this world, it is not "a miracle," but just a natural matter! In the true meaning, diseases are a message to let us know that we have deviated from our original figure, and

operate as a self-cleaning function to return us to our original state. Therefore, diseases are a joyous attribute which give us various insights and help our spiritual evolution. However, if possible, it is much better for us to realize how profound our life is while we are healthy, and be so grateful for it. In order to do so, the Konohana members make it a top priority to improve their spirituality, and take the path to become Bodhisattvas to live for other people and the world.

We did not give medical treatment to Y-san. What we did instead was just explore together why she reached such a state, and upon reflection she returned to an original and harmonious mind. Both my life, and the Konohana lifestyle, are for spreading a network of harmony all over the world. Therefore, our wish is for the health of all people. Each person's healthy body and mind creates a healthy world. When each one of us changes our mind, the world changes. Only when our mind returns to the original and harmonious state, will diseases disappear naturally, all the global problems will be solved automatically, and peace will prevail on Earth.

The 21st century is the era during which people will realize this. Hoping that this network of goodwill, love, and harmony encompasses the whole Earth, we welcome others to join us. 🌸

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*Yoko Oki lives in the Konohana Family, a spiritual eco-community at the foot of Mt. Fuji in Japan. She is an international coordinator and also in charge of the Natural Therapy Program. Her passion is to live for the human awakening. For more on Konohana Family: [www.konohana-family.org/for-non-japanese-speakers](http://www.konohana-family.org/for-non-japanese-speakers); [intl@konohana-family.org](mailto:intl@konohana-family.org).*



*Family photo.*

# Taking Death by the Hand

By Lindsay Hagamen

*Oh, to love what is lovely, and will not last!*  
—Mary Oliver, *Snow Geese*

I had met Marilyn only once. She had come to our community, located on the high plateau that descends off of Mount Adams in southern Washington State, on a late summer day to visit the forest where she was choosing to be buried.

Marilynn had a deep love for birds. Her professional life did not afford her much time outdoors, but after she retired she devoted herself to traveling to observe the marvels and diversity of these winged migrants. Marilyn had been diagnosed with Parkinson's, and as the condition progressed, she began evaluating how she wanted to make her final life transition. It was this search that brought her to the Windward Community.

Marilynn did not want a funeral service. She did not want a headstone. What she wanted was to be buried in a place that provided refuge and habitat for the migratory birds she had grown to cherish. Her final wish was to rest her bones in the soils of the mixed oak savanna and open coniferous forest where, in summer, such intricately-colored songbirds as western tanagers and yellow-rumped warblers come north to breed.

Now, Marilyn lies beneath wildflowers and native grasses within a cluster of Oregon White Oak trees in Herland Forest Natural Burial Cemetery—a nonprofit cemetery stewarded by members of the Windward Community.

Marilynn's final stand was to lay her body down amidst the tree roots and mycelial networks and protect the forest for the birds for years to come. In turn, now it is these birds who travel each summer on their winged migration to visit Marilyn.

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In 2011, the Windward Education and Research Center—the nonprofit umbrella organization managed by volunteer members of the Windward Community—dedicated 20 acres of the

community's land as a natural burial cemetery. The initial impetus for the project was to enable community members to be buried on the land they had come to call home. Since the land is owned by a nonprofit, rather than an individual, the only way for someone to be legally interred in the forest was for a portion of the land to become a licensed cemetery.

As the idea developed, so too did the recognition that death—death itself, care for the dying and our own death in turn—as *Die Wise* author Stephen Jenkinson so passionately explains, is “the proving ground, the cradle and the grave both, for every conviction we have about justice and mercy, about the meaning of life, about what love should look like and what it should do.”<sup>1</sup>

Since its conception, Herland Forest has evolved into a service that the community extends to any who desire that their death—or the death of a loved one—nourish and support new life. In offering an opportunity for individuals to connect more holistically with death, we hope to contribute towards the rebirth of a culture that understands and honors the depths and fullness of the life—and death—cycle.

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I used to think that late Fall was the time in Nature's cycle when things died. Marked by the crimson beauty of the senescing maple trees, Fall would bring with it the first hard frosts and the retreat of life underground towards the silent incubation of Winter.

Later when I moved into a forest and onto a farm, I began to see that Spring too is a time of death. The birthing of vibrant lambs is accompanied by stillborns and hungry coyotes who see vulnerable newborns as food for their own young. Summer then brings its causalities as the green flush of Spring is replaced by the dull brown of the dry season characteristic of eastern Washington. Usually by





late August, fires have burned thousands of acres of forests, leaving behind blackened silhouettes, signaling the path of destruction with rivers of smoke traveling south with the winds.

Now I see that there is no season of death. Death comes when it comes. Far from an interruption, when death comes it reveals that it has really been here all along—creating the fertile soil from which life sprouts, nourishing the living, recycling the weak, transforming life over and over and over again. Sometimes violently. Often not. Without death, life comes to a screeching halt.

Yet in today's society, many go to great lengths to try to disconnect from the hand of death. Purchasing food from the grocery store disguises that death is an intrinsic part of nourishing our bodies. Sterilizing homes to protect against germs or quickly medicating any psychological "abnormality" suggests a fear of the very nature of what it means to be alive—our whole being is impacted by and responds to the world around us. Acting from this place of fear has its costs. Protecting against the inherent destruction of death disconnects us from the fullness of life—what it means to live, what it means to be alive, and what it means to be human. In this disconnection lies the root of a great number of the crises western people now face.

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Herland Forest is named after an utopian novel<sup>2</sup> that describes a society whose economy and way of life is founded on people tending to the forest and the ecosystem that supports them. Nestled into the eastern edge of the Cascades—a transitional zone where moist mountain forests give way to the high prairies of the Columbia River basin—Herland Forest is dedicated to stewarding the reintroduction of humans with the Earth in a simple and holistic manner and providing individuals or families opportunity to create meaningful ceremony to honor the lives of their beloveds. Home to towering Ponderosa pines and ancient Oregon white oaks, migratory birds, fungi, coyote, and everything in between, Herland is also protecting the forest from future development.

Establishing a forest as a legally recognized sanctuary for the dead, and the living who survive them, creates enduring restrictions on the use and development of the land—helping ensure that the ecosystem's vitality remains intact. So the power we hold in our bodies to create a more beautiful world does not wither with our death. Instead, by carefully choosing where we rest our bones, we can become a living embodiment in the native grasses and wildflowers, a bold example of what it means to embrace death—and the life that it then nourishes. We call those who choose to be buried in Herland Guardians, as they literally are helping to protect the life of the forest as they lay their bodies down amidst its trees.

Creating end of life traditions that recognize a life well lived is an essential aspect of a personal and collective relationship with death. Jenkinson offers that "the meanings of life aren't inherited. What is inherited is the mandate to make meanings of life by how we live. The endings of life give life's meanings a chance to show." Herland Forest is an invitation for individuals and families to create for themselves—during life or after death—these ceremonies and rites of passage that give life's meaning an opportunity to be incorporated into our felt experience.

Stewarding this container, both the living forest and the legal framework of Herland, is one of Windward's responses to the increasingly clear and urgent call for creating a working model of a bet-

Micco Emmerson



*The team who buried Marilyn.*



*Marilynn's family and friends look over her grave.*

Walt Patrick



*Mixed Conifers in Herland Forest - All of Nature is a Graveyard.*

Andrew Schreiber

ter way to live on and with this Earth. It is our way of publicly acknowledging that creating a culture that supports Life means creating a more grounded relationship with Death and the process of dying.

Providing people with the opportunity to engage intimately in a fundamental part of what it means to be alive—this is the kind of structural alternative that activist and author Joanna Macy is referring to when she says “these actions may look marginal but they hold the seeds for the future.”<sup>3</sup> In an age of disconnection, we are offering through Herland Forest the chance for people to bear witness: the contract we each signed the day we were born that “Life has to continue. Not ‘you’ have to continue” is written into the freshly mounded soils with wildflower seed or a newly planted tree.<sup>4</sup>



Being animal, being human, we each eventually come face-to-face with our own mortality. Every time I take the life of a pig or chicken we have raised on our homestead farm, I am reminded viscerally how easy it is for that same life to drain out of me. It’s a humbling experience, and it awakens me like no other to how precious, how unique, life truly is. I feel in my own blood the pulsing imperative to love and live as deeply, as fully, and as freely as I can.

Yet I have come to understand, too, that Life simply takes from us. All that Life gives, it gives freely and generously. But anyone who has lived long enough knows that eventually the day comes when Life will swallow someone you love, whole. It is the death of a dearly beloved that can make the whole body wretch in a pain so deep it’s as if the very cords connecting you to Life are being severed by a dull knife.

There is no sugar-coating Death. As true as it is that death inherently nourishes new life, it doesn’t make the dying or the loss easy. Death has its own timeline and when it comes, it brings with it a complexity of feelings with as many variations as there are lives that have lived. Death can be tragic. Death can be a relief. Death can create chaos, confusion, or questions that scrape at the very fabric that is the meaning of existence. For the dying, some even suggest that death can be ecstatic. Death intrigues as much as it frightens—for in death lies the heart of the mystery and miracle of Life itself. In death lies a key piece of the Story in which we each have a role and each play a part.

When Death reveals itself, I am learning to be present with and respond to as much, or as little, as it asks of me. As a steward of land, I have come to understand that being in service to Life means being in service to Death—reaching down to that well of knowledge and intuition that tells me when to stand blocking Death’s path and when to meet Death’s gaze as I step aside and bear witness.

As a steward of community, I have come to experience that being in service to community means being in service to life transitions, those liminal spaces that mark the evolution of each person, or organization. It asks me to help facilitate the shedding of what no longer serves—allowing the death inherent in organic growth to create space for rebirth in the individual or the collective.

As a steward of a Natural Burial Cemetery, however, I am just beginning to understand what it means to be in service to the dying, to the dead, and to their living beloved. I am no stranger to intimate conversations. But this feels different. I am being invited into the lives of those preparing for their own death—those who are choosing for their bodies to nourish the very soils, grasses, and trees that then give me and so many other living creatures refuge and solace, air to breathe and food to eat.

In this place of deep connectedness, politics are set aside and lifestyle choices become irrelevant; religion too falls away and with it our deep-seated beliefs. The web of life itself begins to collapse in on itself, and the embodied understanding sets in that we are each a part and each the whole of something so beautiful it stuns. The only response I can muster is for my mouth to drop open and to let the tears fall as I take it all into the marrow of my bones—knowing that, somehow through the mysteries of the human experience, something will well in me that I can offer in return.



On a warm morning in late March, we gathered to bury Marilynn. The snow had melted and the ground was moist. The spring grasses were racing against the arrival of the shade that comes with the leafing out of the oaks in May. Marilynn’s family was not arriving until the following day, and it was our task to bury her body. Dressed in her Malheur National Wildlife Refuge t-shirt, Marilynn was ready to be returned to the Earth and returned to the birds.

We carried Marilynn through the oaks and pines to her gravesite, dug with shovel and sweat. Her coffin was a simple cardboard box. We did not know Marilynn well, but as we lowered her into the ground, we recounted the stories that we did know of her life and what she loved. And as we shoveled the soil and stone into the grave, something remarkable happened: we began recounting stories of our loved ones who have died and our preparations for our own death.

Opalyn shared about her grandfather who had died while she was serving overseas in the military and the struggle that persists today because of not being able to attend his funeral. To the surprise of some listening, Andrew spoke to the intention of digging his own grave—not as a cathartic contemplation of Death—but as a simple recognition that his death and burial is as much a part of his life as seeding the garden in Spring or cutting the firewood to warm us in Winter.

When we invite Death into our lives, or rather, acknowledge its presence all around us, we invite with it the depth and complexity of feelings that begin to heal and restore a piece of our humanity. Because of Marilynn’s determination for her death to foster the growth and renewal of life for generations to come, she offers each person who visits Herland Forest an invitation to feel the vulnerability and potency of what it is to live and die with dignity. 🌸

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*For the past eight years Lindsay Hagamen has called the Windward Community home, where she lives, loves, laughs, and plays on the high plateau that descends off of Mount Adams in southern Washington. She coauthored *Eco-sexuality: When Nature Inspires the Arts of Love*. You can find more of her writing at [www.windward.org](http://www.windward.org) and [www.mylovereearth.org](http://www.mylovereearth.org).*

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# ACTIVISM AND SERVICE AT BLACK BULGA COMMUNITY: Inspiring, Nurturing, Challenging, and Not All Hard Work

*By Geoff Evans*

Our small rural land-sharing community, Black Bulga, comprises 13 people and is located in the forested, healthy, and clean headwaters of the Karuah River in the Hunter Valley in Australia, near the city of Newcastle, which is about 100 miles north of Sydney. We have been forming together as a community for seven years and have owned our land for five years.

We formed as an explicitly “service” or “activist” community having gotten to know each other mainly through social change activist networks. We are very fortunate. We enjoy a healthy environment in a country where there is relatively little violence or war. Being aware of our special luck, we were determined when we formed our community that our purpose was not to retreat from the world. Rather our purpose is to create a community that will sustain us, and inspire us to engage with the wider world to help make it a better place for our generation and those that follow.

Our shared commitment to activism gives Black Bulga a distinct purpose, and our commitment to service and activism is written into the vision and values sections of our bylaws: “Our vision is to act as custodians of the rural land upon which we live, working together to create a sustainable and just future in our immediate community and in the wider world.” The values written into our bylaws include commitments to use our collective resourcefulness and creativity to care for the land, and for each other, our neighborhood, region, and the planet. While we subscribe to no particular ideology, our politics is informed by ecological libertarian socialist values. We pay attention to how we can support each other to sustain our activism in the spirit of these values.

Our members’ activist work spans multiple roles and locations, including as front-line defenders joining local residents blockading proposed gasfields in the nearby town of Gloucester and elsewhere; as managers of social change organizations; as activist trainers, community organizers, and facilitators; as mentors and elders to a wide community of activists in multiple fields and in different places and age groups; as educators and researchers in a wide range of academic and activist programs including in family well-being and sustainability; in international community development and medical aid work; as practitioners in community arts and sustainable food growing; and as parents and allies to fellow parents. Our collective and individual activism inspires us, exhausts us, nurtures us—and challenges us.



*The youngest and oldest Black Bulga community members (and friends) marching for climate action in Sydney in November 2015.*

We have found that our social change activism builds local community and connects us with our neighbors as well as the wider world. In fact, we did not need to go far to find opportunity to put our individual and shared passions for social change into practice. In our local valley, our service work gets literally “down amongst the weeds.” We are

and other residents from the length of the Karuah River catchment together to learn about and fight the proposal. We formed the Karuah River Protection Alliance and together we spoke out strongly through local and national media, to government officials, and directly to the company. Following our extensive lobbying the proposal was dropped, and by winning the campaign, we helped secure the future of the valley for nature-based tourism and sustainable food growing.

Before the campaign we were known rather disparagingly as “The Commune,” but through the campaign our neighbors got to appreciate the campaigning skills of the “new kids to the block,” while we admired their skills and capacity to organize locally. The campaign sped up the process of us being accepted as part of the community. We now share farming knowledge, host our neighbors’ horses and cattle on our land, regularly have meals together, and celebrate family events such as children’s birthdays, Spring

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## Balancing social change work with building a strong community poses many challenges.

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proud to have been instrumental in forming a local Landcare network to protect our river catchment from weed infestations. In Australia, this Landcare movement has been a powerful social movement that has brought farmers and environmentalists together at grassroots and national levels, with government funding support. As Landcarers we’ve worked and sweated in hot sun and along riverbanks with our neighbors, removing weeds and creating space for local native plants to regenerate. John Mac, the Black Bulga member who leads this work, reports the benefits:

“This service work builds local community networks to collectively protect our local environment. We have in our valley, between us, hundreds of years of land management knowledge. We share stories of about what is effective and efficient land management, and what doesn’t work and is a waste of time and effort. We also share lots of cakes and cups of coffee.”

We have among our members some very experienced activists who have spent decades campaigning around mining, environmental protection, and human rights, working with mine-affected communities locally and globally. When a gold mine was proposed upriver in upper reaches of the Karuah River in 2011, soon after we had bought our land, the mine-owners may not have realized who they were taking on. The whole catchment community saw the mine as a threat, with the risk of sediment pollution and, potentially, cyanide contamination jeopardizing local farming and tourism industries and the rural lifestyle and amenity.

We were quick to act, and with our neighbors, we used the extensive networks throughout the valley to bring farmers, eco-tourism business operators, oyster farmers,

and Autumn (Fall) Equinox, and New Year’s Eve.

While our valley is mining-free, thousands of residents and farmers in neighboring valleys across the Hunter Valley are fighting the devastating impacts of vast open-cut (open-pit) coal mines and the threat of gasfields with severe impacts on their environments and health. The Hunter is one of the world’s largest coal-exporting regions, with hundreds of millions of tons of coal exported from the port of Newcastle annually to North and East Asia. The region is also the home of coal-fired power stations that have historically been the major source of Australia’s electricity. Together these industries make the Hunter region one of the world’s climate change hot-spots. Many times our members have joined frontline action against coal and climate change including blockading gasfields in the nearby town of Gloucester with local residents, and other peaceful blockades and lock-ons at coal mines and coal export terminals in Newcastle and elsewhere.

Balancing externally-oriented social change work with building a strong and viable intentional community poses many challenges. Our service and activist work takes our focus away from building our relatively new community and from working on our land. This challenge is compounded by the fact that actually living and working on our land is very difficult as it is quite remote and there are few jobs in the local area. We have had to find ways to transition from careers in large cities to work that we can do from the land or in nearby towns. Jemma, who manages a small international development organization as well as co-parenting three children under eight years old recently moved from Sydney to Newcastle, as part of her family’s strategy to be closer to the land and spend more time at Black Bulga, highlights the tension:

“To make Black Bulga grow and thrive in the long-term, it needs people there, planting through the seasons, working together, creating a hub. But it is a tricky tension to manage—how to be on the land while still being an active part of social change campaigns. At the moment, we are all in the transition to spending more time at Black Bulga. We have monthly community meetings, regular all-in working bees, and big social gatherings. There is a real network of friends and family—many of whom work in social change—who have a genuine connection to Black Bulga, who visit regularly, talk politics, get their hands dirty, dream and replenish. I love that the Black Bulga community is bigger than just the group of unit holders.”

The heavy demands and occasional heady excitement that comes from activist work—which in some cases allows us to travel the world, be in the national media spotlight, and confront powerful political and corporate interests—makes a stark contrast to the work of building community and caring for food crops, stock, and buildings. John, who is often away supporting local coal and gas campaigns around Australia and globally, reflects that “It is too easy for me to live in my head but Black Bulga helps to keep me grounded. The place has a wildness that replenishes the soul.”

Another member, James, who develops education programs for activists, also grapples with the challenge of balancing his external community and Black Bulga community focus: “I try to meet my own and my intentional community’s needs by being at Black Bulga as much as possible and when here, I get stuck into a hands-on project such as building work, and



joining in the cooking and sharing of great food, and reading and playing with the children. Black Bulga helps me keep the relentless demands of work in its box. It's not easy, but my fellow community members help me meet this challenge."

As individuals, and as a community, we are still in transition when it comes to combining our activism with a rural farm-based lifestyle. We are trying to work part-time rather than full-time. We use internet, Skype, and email technologies as much as possible so we can work from the land. Our aim to make Black Bulga an arts and ecology education center is part of our community's purpose but, like living on the land permanently, we recognize that this vision is long-term and is happening in small steps. Dan, who recently held a successful solo exhibition of paintings inspired by the vast and ever-changing Black Bulga skies, comments:

"The arts and ecology project is part of a lifelong journey of the community. We are giving effect to the vision by organizing arts and ecology events and activities on the land, even though we don't yet have a building specifically for this purpose. Our community celebrates the equinox and solstice with gatherings that involve rituals that range from reverent to ridiculous. We have raced down the river on inflatable rafts, built clay pizza ovens and cooked seasonal feasts to eat under the stars, made beautiful lanterns and ugly effigies of 'baddies' to set alight, woven baskets from weeds, and healed a gully with plantings. Already many friends and community come here to draw, paint, and take photos; some have learnt blacksmithing; others have come to write, take nature walks, go bird-watching, and more."

The community consciously works on integrating the service elements of our lives with the personal and community care elements of our lives in an intentional community. Deb, who works in family studies and relationship research programs at the region's university and across Australia, as well as with academics and family relationship professionals and activists in India, Southeast Asia, and the US, identifies the need for balance here: "At Black Bulga we work hard at supporting each other to pay good attention to both our work and personal lives. The demands of managing complex decisions about the future of the community requires care and a strong commitment to listen to and support each other. We look out for each other. This work on building

positive relationships helps us be whole, well-balanced people at Black Bulga and in our family, professional, and activist lives as well."

Prue, mother of two-year old Blake, is a campaigner supporting communities trying to stop fracking for gas in various parts of the state. She is often away from home: "Activism work can be hard on the family. Luckily I have a very supportive partner, but the activist life requires a strong and constant focus on our own well-being individually and collectively, particularly on our work as parents. All members of the Black Bulga community are great support and allies to us as parents, and to Blake as a young toddler."

As individuals and as a community we at Black Bulga know that service and activist work is incredibly important, rewarding, and challenging lifelong work. Our community is a vital support foundation for us being able to go out into the wider world as effective change agents. As many of our friends are also activists, we recognize they have the same challenges balancing service and personal lives as we do. We encourage them to get "out of the city and into the bush" and to use Black Bulga as a place to enjoy nature, and to swim, walk, and play together with family and friends. Reconnecting with the rhythms of nature—and enjoying collectively-grown and cooked food, fireside conversation under starry skies, and being woken by the sounds of the dawn chorus of birds—helps us see that service and activist lives are not all hard work. 🌱

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*Geoff Evans is a wannabe farmer. He keeps the Black Bulga dream alive through activism on mining, climate change, and community development, and working with the community to build a small house and grow an organic garlic crop each year on the land.*



**Black Bulga hosting a celebration dinner for the Community Organising Fellowship in our big strawbale shed in July 2015.**

Photos courtesy of Geoff Evans

# Coming of Age in Service Community

*By Jen and Hilary Bayer*

**W**ere Jen and Hil, 17-year-old twin girls born and raised at Magic, a service learning community where today about 20 people share three adjacent houses a few blocks from Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. Magic community is the keystone project of a public service organization also called Magic, which owns the properties we occupy. The mission of both Magics is to demonstrate how people can more successfully address individual, social, and environmental ills by using science to know and do good.

Magicians serve at several levels. A half dozen residents who've lived here from five to more than 40 years are "fellows." They receive room, board, and other basics on terms similar to those offered by the Peace Corps and some monastic communities. Fellows serve residents here for shorter stays by modeling how to use valuescience to be healthier, to be more cooperative, and to care better for Earth. They lead other residents and volunteers from outside Magic in serving neighbors by closing streets to eliminate short-cutting, planting street and park trees, organizing picnics and block parties, lobbying local government to repair streets,

and similar actions. Magicians also serve a larger surrounding community with programs that range from salvaging farmers' market surplus for a social services agency that feeds the hungry, to planting and caring for trees and other native species on local open space lands, to life coaching, to teaching hatha yoga and swimming.

Researching and teaching valuescience—scientific methods and principles applied to questions of value—underpin and are central to Magic's service. Fellows teach people from around the nation and the world at Stanford, at Magic, and in educational, business, service organization, and governmental settings in the US and abroad. They also publish in scientific journals with international circulation, and in the popular press.

In more than 40 years since Magic was founded, the San Francisco Peninsula where we live has gone from being birthplace of the Grateful Dead and the Whole Earth Catalog, and home to Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, to birthplace of Facebook, Google, and Apple, and home to thousands of people who've joined the one percent by creating these and other technology enterprises. Magic has flourished through these sweeping changes by demonstrating how a valuescience approach to health, cooperation, and stewardship can be means to further individual and common good.

Growing up at Magic has been mostly fun, sometimes confusing. As the two of us transition to adulthood we're understanding better benefits we've enjoyed here and challenges we've faced and may continue to face if we decide to stay here or base our lives on ideas we've learned here. We hope this writing will be useful to young people growing up in residential service communities, to parents raising children in such communities, and to anyone thinking about creating or joining a community of this kind.

When we were small children we took it all for granted: that we had more than one mom and one dad, that all of them were single, that we walked or biked everywhere, that we were outside exploring nature most of each day, that we were able to have fun without TV, junk food, new clothes, Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, or Tooth Fairy, and that we were able to be good people without god. We saw science as how everybody learned. We thought Saturdays were for planting and caring for native trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs in parks and open space, that Sundays were for salvaging surplus food from farmers'



*Hil hanging laundry, her regular chore at three.*



*Oak Habitat Stewardship - 100 volunteers headed out to plant native California oaks on openspace land.*



*Hil (left) and Jen (right) at six at San Gregorio State Beach on their first ride to the beach, 26 miles each way over a 2,000 foot ridge.*

Photos courtesy of Jen and Hilary Bayer





*Hil vacuuming, age three.*



*Jen peeling carrots with dinner cook at three.*



*Jen, age six, and Robin putting cattle excluder on young tree.*



*Hil and Jen cutting cordwood, age eight.*

market for the food bank, and that when adults talked it was about how people can use evidence and reason for common good. Someone was always around to help us, teach us, or play with us.

Then we went to kindergarten at our local elementary school, because parents wanted to cultivate solidarity with neighbors by supporting public schools, and because they wanted us to be with age peers. It was our first taste of being different. We met nice kids and had good times, but we'd been taught from before we can remember to question everything, even what parents told us, and we were in trouble from the start when we did that at school. To PTA moms, "Why do you sell junk food to raise money?" To teachers, "Why do you let boys monopolize playground equipment? Why do we watch movies in 'physical education'?" To classmates, "Why do you believe in god and Santa Claus? Why do you leave other kids out? Why do you throw clothing on the ground?" Everybody treated us as if we were weird. We had a hard time imagining that so much we learned at home was wrong, and an equally hard time concluding that everyone at school was crazy.

When we started in school we needed to eat before everyone else and go to bed early. Interacting with adults over supper and afterwards had been a big part of our social lives and we missed it. During first grade parents let us stay up in the evenings, sleep in, and go to school at 10:30, so that we entered without disruption as kids returned from recess. We were late so often that the district attorney threatened to put us in foster care and send Mom to jail. When she offered Mom a "no contest" plea with a \$100 fine and a year's probation, Mom said, "I'll consider it." One of us piped up, "Mom, we were late more than a hundred days. That's 50 cents a time. Take it!" The DA looked surprised, maybe less because a seven-year-old did the math, than because she told Mom what to do in that setting.

Recoiling from this encounter with "the system," parents enrolled us in a charter school that sends a teacher to Magic once a month to assess our learning. We settled back into life at home and started taking a more active role in the household and with Magic projects. We felt good assisting new residents as they learned about living in community, and in transitioning from being mostly cared for and supervised to doing more useful work.



One thing we really enjoyed was dragging adult residents to run and swim with us, and leading them on bike rides up and over the Santa Cruz Mountains to the ocean. We loved it when they called us personal trainers and told friends about us. Watching them shed pounds and become stronger and more enduring, we understood better why Magic fellows took so much satisfaction in helping people become healthier, and why prior residents so often came back and expressed appreciation for healthful living habits they formed while here.

By the time we were old enough to go to middle school we were supervising field-work crews on nearby open space where a half million people hike each year. Being young, and female on top of that, we had some “interesting” interactions with volunteers. Though many quickly realized that we were strong and knowledgeable, some ignored our instruction. We learned a lot explaining to men two, three, or four times our age and twice our size why the tree they planted was likely to die unless they dug it out and replanted it.

Magic fellows have been pioneers in drawing attention to and working to arrest decline of California’s native oak populations. They’ve led tens of thousands of volunteers in establishing thousands of native oaks. The oaks project is a great example of how Magic promotes health, cooperation, and stewardship based upon valuescience. Volunteers, many of whom have little experience with manual labor, dirty their hands, get tired and sore, and gain new appreciation for this kind of work and for those around the world who do it day in and out. School kids, retirees, clerks, venture capitalists, engineers, lawyers, and more come together and give. All of us feel good working together without any compensation except satisfaction generated by caring for the environment we share.

When fellows explain that species we plant can live for centuries, and that only if we and people everywhere re-examine and change our ideas about value—about what we want and how to get it—will they be able to do so, volunteers have incentive to reflect. One former resident, a mechanical engineer, started volunteering on the oaks project and is now Apple’s arborist. At the company’s new campus he’s overseeing the largest urban planting west of the Mississippi since Golden Gate Park in San Francisco more than a hundred years ago. A



*Jen and Hil with Farmers’ Market food salvage volunteers and portion of a day’s donations.*



*Hil explaining valuescience to Magic visitors, age 16.*



*Jen presenting dinner, age 16.*



*Jen with watering crew, age 16.*







*Jen and Hil receiving donated surplus oranges from FarmerBob.*

middle school volunteer later became Mayor of Palo Alto and described in his inaugural address how he and his family transformed their relationship with nature as a result of his planting with Magic.

Since we were 13 each of us has prepared supper one night each week for about two dozen residents and guests. We've a set of guidelines evolved over the years so that we eat in a way that reflects concern for diners' health, for other people's work and wants, and for Earth. We aim to be efficient in our use of labor and other resources as we procure and prepare food, and maintain kitchen, dining areas, equipment, and furnishings. We've become closer with several residents by inviting them to be sous-chefs to us in preparation for taking a cook night themselves.

As we've grown older we've become more able to participate fully in community social life and to interact with residents and the larger Magic service community more purposefully. One resident taught us to knit and included us in a knitting circle. Another taught us computer programming. Others help us learn to sew, to paint and draw, to play music, to dance, to repair bicycles, and to maintain buildings and furnishings. In all of these activities we've developed a better sense of how people beyond a single family can live together and learn to feel and express more love for each other and for those beyond our doors.

Ever since our experience in public school we've been aware that we were different. From the time we were nine until we were 16 a Magic board member took us and one of the moms to a family camp near Lake Tahoe. Being there was like school all over again. People frowned when they heard we lived in community. As we grew older we felt less and less comfortable with prying questions about family and home life. We sometimes wished we were "normal" even though when we went on overnight trips with the other kids we were glad to be who we were.

In the past year or so we've come to see growing up at Magic in a different light. We've paid more attention to valuescience, to how every part of our lives to date has been based on it, and to how we've gained and lost as a result.

We've heard thousands of conversations at Magic about valuescience and "ecological analysis." For many years these seemed self-evident (e.g., Why drive when we can walk or bike?), or too abstract for our young brains (e.g., How might "saving lives" today adversely affect those who may live tomorrow?). Recently as we're increasingly asked, "Where do you want to go to college?," "What do you want to be when you grow up?," we've been thinking more about what we want to ask of and offer to others, and looking at valuescience in a new way. Having been taught to question, we're wondering how much of it to keep and how much to shed.



*Jen guiding volunteers watering, age 16.*



*Jen and Hil, age 16, fellows, and residents gather for resident birthday celebration over evening meal on porch of Magic residence.*

We first learned to describe valuescience in simple terms before we went to school. We understood in some primitive way that we had ideas about what we wanted, that we based these on predictions about how we were going to feel when we got it, and that we were sometimes mistaken. Eating too much pizza, getting sunburned, and

diverse NGOs, and expert consultants, Bangladeshis sank millions of tube wells to tap drinking water from a shallow aquifer and end reliance upon surface waters teeming with disease-causing microbes. Only later did public health workers realize that the aquifer was contaminated with arsenic, resulting in tens of millions of people being permanently damaged in what the World Health Organization terms “the largest mass poisoning in human history.” Countless other schemes to “help” others have similarly, albeit usually less spectacularly failed.

Only to the extent that we’ve evidence and reason sufficient to support predictions about outcomes of our service efforts can we anticipate that we will achieve intended results. We find this humbling, and it’s the biggest lesson we’re taking from valuescience practice to date. Even as we engage in putative service through Magic, we wonder how well we’re predicting consequences. Will trees we plant die young as a result of how humans are altering climate? Will volunteers think that planting

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## Effective service is a combination of good intention and competent action. Valuescience underpins both.

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a tree makes jetting around sustainable? Will salvaging food and feeding the hungry contribute to perpetuating a system where some lack necessities while others wallow in luxury? Will teaching valuescience be one more example of idealism forever short of real?

playing in poison oak remain vivid reminders that what we think we want can be very different from what we really want. From before we can remember we learned to think of science less as a set of facts or theories than as a way of life. We saw that by introspection and observation we were able to discern repeating pattern and use it to make predictions more successful than we were able to make by other means. We understood that this was a way to have meaningful choice, to get more of what we want and want more of what we get.

If we do embrace a valuescience-based existence with all its questions, how will we interact with those who prefer simple answers? Will we be shunned for eating, dressing, grooming, traveling, sheltering, relating, parenting, religing, communicating, and more in ways we think compatible with scientific understanding of our own and other humans’ place in the universe? Will we be able to create sangha, community of shared practice, with others who find merit in valuescience? Will we be able to evolve how we serve in a manner that we think has integrity and that others deem worthy of support? What lessons learned coming of age in a valuescience service learning community shall we carry forward, and which shall we shed? 🐦

Only recently have we come to see more clearly how this has to do with public service. Effective service is a combination of good intention and competent action. Valuescience underpins both.

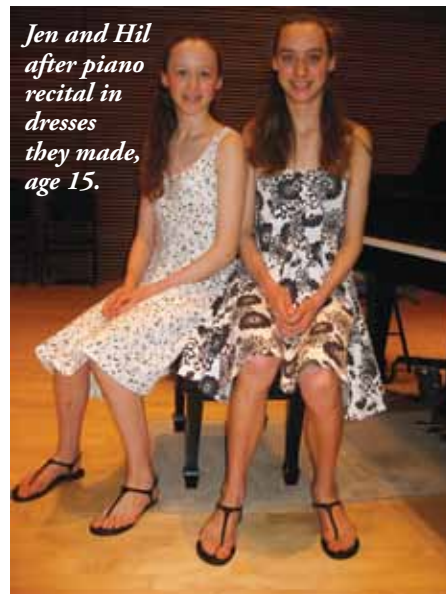
Though many of us have been conditioned to think that people who know better what we want and how to get it will ever more rapaciously plunder Earth and exploit those around us in pursuit of wealth and fame, we have growing scientific basis to reject this. More than 50 years ago Abraham Maslow discovered that loving and caring for others and ultimately transcending our sense of separate self are key to living and dying well. Researchers today are gathering mounting evidence for these conclusions. They’ve shown, for example, that we may derive more satisfaction by giving than by keeping for ourselves or receiving. And they’ve affirmed Maslow’s findings that people who work for common good are more satisfied and feel a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

*Jen and Hilary Bayer live at Magic, an intentional community owned and operated by a public service organization located in Palo Alto, California, founded in the early 1970s on the premise that individual health and awareness, social peace and fairness, and environmental protection are tightly connected, and that ecology is a framework for addressing all of these issues. Magicians see themselves as cognitive activists, aiming “to bring about social change by evolving the framework we use to think about the world and our place in it, often by reframing debates or redefining terms.”*

Sound analysis also is essential to serve. Tube wells in Bangladesh are illustrative. With unanimous support of government,



*Hil and Jen loading salvaged peaches, nectarines, and leeks for transport to food bank.*



*Jen and Hil after piano recital in dresses they made, age 15.*



# NOT the Last of the Mohicans: Honoring Our Native Predecessors on the Land

*By Jeff Golden*

*Let it not surprise you my friends, when I say, that the spot on which we stand has never been purchased or rightly obtained; and that by justice, human and divine, it is the property now of the remnant of that great people, from whom I am descended. They left it in the tortures of starvation and to improve their miserable existence; but as a cession was never made, their title has never been extinguished.*

—Mohican Chief Quinney  
*from a speech delivered the 4th of July, 1854, in New York*

For the 98 percent of us in the United States who are not Native American, what does it mean to live in this country today, to live in the shadow of what was done to the native people? What does it mean to be living on and trading in land and resources that were taken from the native people through intense and chronic violence and deceit?

The Common Fire Housing Co-op was created in 2005 in New York's Hudson Valley with a vision of providing a home for people who wish to be very intentional about living in a just and sustainable way. One of the four core principles was Aligning Our Lives with Our Beliefs. We shared a sense that much of the violence and destruction in the world today arises not from malice, but from people being invested in the current systems and contributing to them in small ways that add up and give the systems power. And so we sought to think and act together to try to weave greater integrity into our everyday lives and into our work and service in the world.

That showed up in a number of ways, many of which will not be new to other community-minded people. Community members were selected specifically with an eye to their commitment to making a difference in the world, in whatever ways that showed up in their lives. The building that housed the co-op was built to be extremely environmentally-responsible, and earned the first Platinum certification in New York from the US Green Building Council. The food that residents bought and prepared together was primarily local and organic. Residents organized and participated in regular trainings on important issues and critical skills related to living in community and being effective in the world. And so on.

We also sought to grapple with those fundamental questions about the history of the land and the people who once lived there, and what was done to them and what became of them.

To do that, it was first necessary to find out just what that history was, and even who those people were. Asking other locals about it revealed that most people had no idea what tribe had lived in that area, and the town's website and the few individuals who did offer answers turned out to all be wrong. None of the basic histories of

New York or of the local area had any solid information, so the residents had to dig deeper into histories and primary materials specifically focused on Native Americans.

## The History and the People

But the history and the people did reveal themselves with some persistence. The first people arrived in what is today known as New York's Hudson Valley some 12,000 years ago. Their descendants lived in the area for about 600 generations before the first Europeans (led by Henry Hudson) arrived in 1609. At that time the Mohicans lived where the housing co-op would be built nearly 400 years, or about 20 generations, later. And it turns out the story of their interactions with the Europeans is as grim in its own way as any tale told by other native people in America.

A huge percentage of the Mohicans died from diseases that came with the Europeans. Another large number of them died from violence with other Indians that escalated with the arrival of guns and trade with the Europeans. And a large number of them were intentionally killed by Europeans. Those who survived were forced from their land and driven away. The pre-contact population of the Mohicans is unknown, but was somewhere between 5,000 and 12,000. Within a mere 50 years that had dropped to less than a thousand, and there were virtually none left in the Hudson Valley.

Some 50 Mohicans took refuge at a Protestant mission near the border with Connecticut where the missionaries were very helpful, exposing traders who illegally sold the Mohicans alcohol, and offering legal support in their dealings with the Europeans. The local settlers spread rumors of atrocities committed by the Indians, they prevented people from visiting or trading with the mission, and they eventually petitioned the governor for permission to kill the Indians at the mission. The petition was denied, but it sufficed to drive away the remaining Mohicans in 1746.

Many of the survivors found their way to western Massachusetts and tried to survive by adopting the customs and occupations of the Europeans. In the 1780s they were forced to relocate to

western/upstate New York with the Oneida tribe. In 1818 they were in turn driven from that land to Indiana. And in 1822 they were forced to Wisconsin. The 40,000 acres they were given there was reduced to 16,000. The land was not generally suitable for farming, so much of it was turned over to logging companies who clearcut the land. With very little food or shelter, some of the Mohicans moved into the abandoned offices left by the logging company. Many of their children were sent to boarding schools run by non-natives that forbade the

some 750 out of about 1500 enrolled tribal members today—live on that same reservation today. The forests have returned, along with the wildlife; housing has expanded greatly; there is a health center, a meeting hall, and more. The largest employer in the county is a tribal casino, which generates a large degree of the income on the reservation. In the words of one Mohican, Molly Miller, “The road from colonization is long and painful but we continue to work at it.”

### What To Do?

Which brings us back to those initial questions. What does it mean to “own” a portion of this land that was so violently taken from those people who had lived there for 600 generations? What does it mean to live on that land, to enjoy it and so many of the benefits and riches that have flowed from these lands, benefits and riches largely denied to the children and grandchildren of those people? And what does it mean to go about our daily

lives in a larger community and society while this massive violence and injustice is largely ignored, unacknowledged, and even unknown by so many, and on some levels continues to be perpetuated against those people?

For those of us in the co-op, it meant writing up and sharing publicly what we had learned about the Mohicans, as well as what we learned about other aspects of the history of the area, including a signifi-

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## What does it mean to “own” a portion of this land that was so violently taken from people who had lived there for 600 generations?

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cant use and abuse of black slaves, and sharing that history with all who visited the co-op, and making it available on our website.

kids from speaking their native language and practicing their native customs. Their population at one point fell to 600. Contrary to what James Fennimore Cooper might have had us believe, however, with his fictional book, *The Last of the Mohicans*, the Mohicans did survive.

A large number of their descendants—

cant use and abuse of black slaves, and sharing that history with all who visited the co-op, and making it available on our website.

It meant creating an initial pool of money. Without knowing for sure what we were going to end up doing or what kinds of resources we would need, everyone in the co-op agreed to pay an extra \$10 a month towards the “Mohican Project.”

It meant reaching out to a number of Mohicans both in New York and on the reservation to discuss with them what they thought the residents could or should do. Once again, a little legwork was required. Who to reach out to? And how? We read through the tribe’s

*The author and others helping with the construction of the Tivoli Co-op.*



Photos courtesy of Geff Golden



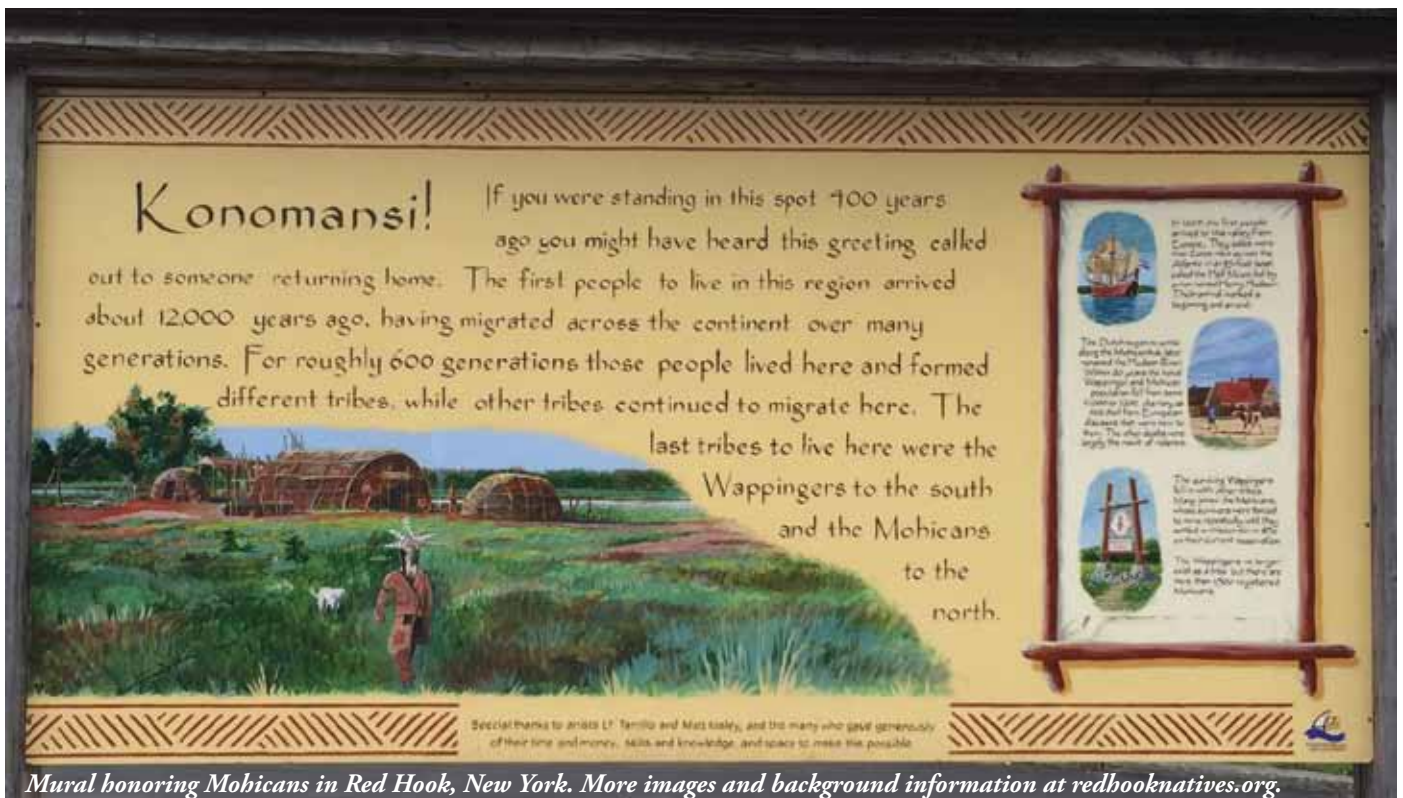


website and found that they have a couple committees that felt related to our efforts and concerns. One is the Historical Committee, the other the Language and Culture Committee. (The last fluent speaker of Mohican died in 1933, and many aspects of the traditional culture were intentionally stamped out by the Europeans, so nurturing the cultural and linguistic roots of the Mohican people, in a sense the spiritual roots of the people, is an important focus for some in the tribe.) So we wrote to those committees.

We also read the tribe's biweekly newspaper online and subscribed to it. There we gleaned a few other names of people who seemed like good contacts for us—one who writes a regular history column; another, apparently the only enrolled tribal member located in the Mohican homeland, who was a Masters student in history; some people involved in the local museum.

We wrote these people, sharing a little about who we were, and seeking whatever thoughts they might have about ways we could help to heal this history and take responsibility for the legacy we had inherited. Some people we never heard back from. Some very kindly referred us to other people. And a couple of them fully engaged us, sharing deeply of their own experiences and suggestions, and reaching out to other tribal members for their own thoughts.

The history of what had been done to the Mohicans and what had become of them was obviously well-known to those people, but the questions we were asking were generally new to them; they hadn't been asked them before. The 400-year anniversary of Henry Hudson's arrival in this area was about to be commemorated a year later and some of their initial ideas included providing a place for people to stay if they were able to organize a trip back to their home-



Mural honoring Mohicans in Red Hook, New York. More images and background information at [redhooknatives.org](http://redhooknatives.org).

land for that, supporting them doing some kind of “wiping of the tears” ceremony, and helping them with their land claims, as well as continuing to educate locals about their history and who they are today. They were all very supportive of what we were doing as a co-op, both in relation to the Mohicans and in general, though one person courageously added, “To be really true to your thinking, if there comes a time that the co-op were to be no longer, then will your land back to the tribe.”

We had the Mohican who lives in New York come and speak at one of the annual Harvest Festivals held at the co-op. We

look like, including some of the history and some key images. We scouted possible locations and decided that the most popular ice cream shop in the county was hands down the best place to really get our images and information before a lot of people, and in a positive, familiar environment.

We asked around about the owner and were told by one person that there was zero chance, that he was politically not at all the kind of person who would support us. But we reached out to a couple prominent people in town with whom we had relationships and who were of the same political party/perspective as the owner of that land, and they helped us connect with him. We sent him our request along with the draft image. We had a meeting on-site and found him to be really supportive of the idea. We discussed the location and he ran it by some of the store owners in the plaza there. He asked for just a couple changes to the language and gave us a green light.

We then took the images and text to our main contacts among the Mohicans for their feedback. Again, with a couple minor but meaningful changes they felt good about it as well.

We got in touch with a prominent muralist in the region who advised us on what kind of wood, paint, and finish to use. We got someone to project the image and paint it for us on a piece of 4'x8' high quality plywood. Another person donated some rustic posts; other people donated the labor of putting them in the ground and erecting the mural. Using our pool of money and fundraising from locals and friends and family, we raised the \$1,000

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## We focused our educational efforts on getting a mural about the Mohicans erected in town.

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tried to get the local town to correct its website to acknowledge who the real native people were in that area and what became of them, though there was some defensiveness and uncertainty about whether what we had discovered was true, and the website never was changed. There are a couple “Welcome to Red Hook” signs at the edge of town. We also requested that the town add to those signs, “The Southern Boundary of the Mohican Homeland.” That required going through one of the local clubs, and we didn’t get too far with that. We also considered trying to get some information about the Mohicans in the local school curriculum, but the process for that seemed very daunting.

One of the co-op residents helped us really focus our intentions by posing the simple but powerful question: “Today almost nobody knows who the native people were here. What do we need to do to make sure that a generation from now almost everybody does?”

We decided to focus our efforts on getting a mural erected somewhere very visible in town, but on private property, where we really would only need to deal with one person, the owner. Using images of Mohicans from a painter in the region who seemed to have an informed and not stereotype-based or derogatory sense of the Mohicans, we created a draft of what the mural might

that the mural ended up costing us on top of the volunteer labor and donations. And we created a companion website to the mural, sharing what we had ourselves learned about the Mohicans. You can see that at [www.redhooknatives.org](http://www.redhooknatives.org).

The mural turned out beautifully, and it is seen by so many people!!! We couldn’t be happier with that part of our journey.

### The End of the Co-op

For a variety of reasons, in 2013 we decided to close down the housing co-op. The question of how to be in right relationship with the Mohicans through that process was important to us. We owed a lot of money on the building in the form of a mortgage with a local credit union, so we couldn’t just “will the land back to the tribe,” as that one Mohican had suggested. But we were willing to sell the land to the Mohicans for the rock bottom amount of money we needed to cover that mortgage. And we reached out to some friends who are native and very active in their communities, and we discovered that there are a couple organizations that donate money and offer loans in support of native people regaining access to their original land.

We wrote the person who was our main contact on the reservation about what we were thinking, and about those two organizations, and about our willingness to do our best to help with fundraising as well through our own networks. Our contact forwarded our letter to the tribal government for them to consider. We weren’t sure how important taking ownership of this land would be to the Mohicans, or whether they would feel it was worth whatever effort or money it would take to pull off this purchase. But we never heard back from them one way or the other, even after following-up a couple times.

So we did what felt to us like the next best thing. We sold the property and committed to in some way investing any money left over to supporting the Mohicans. We took the responsibility of shepherding that money very seriously. Tribal governments are often not particularly effective. We did not have any reason to believe that was true in the case of the Mohicans, but by that time our relationship with our main Mohican contact had deepened, a couple of us had actually met her and visited the reservation in Wisconsin, and so we had a lot of trust in her and felt very good about her helping guide us in terms of how to direct that money.

So far we have donated \$28,000, with a little bit of money still tied up in legalities around the property that will hopefully be freed up at some point for us to add to this amount,



though that is uncertain. The money has been donated to the Historical Committee, which is part of but has separate finances from the general tribal government. The money has been used to support a gathering of native people on the Mohican reservation, a gathering of native people near the Mohican homeland, and efforts to reconnect with the Mohican language.

In the letter we wrote that accompanied our last donation, we wrote:

“It’s a strange and cruel thing that we have had the opportunity to live in the Mohican homeland, to enjoy many of the blessings of this land, and to have even ‘owned’ some of this land by the laws and customs of the United States, knowing full well that these

laws and these opportunities rest on a foundation of profound violence, disrespect, and oppression that killed and drove off the Mohicans and other native peoples who had lived here for thousands upon thousands of years.

“We are clear that we are returning a very tiny portion of so much that is rightfully the tribe’s to begin with—riches that were stolen long ago. This is not a gift or donation from us to you, it is that tiny portion finally finding its way back to its proper place.

“It is our hope that this money and the spirit in which we offer it help to bring greater joy, peace, and health to some in the Mohican community.”

In that same vein, I offer this article, not because I think we got everything “right” or others need to do exactly what we did, but in the hope that it is helpful and inspiring to you on some level, and does help to feed greater joy, peace, and health in relation to the native people of these lands. 🍁

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*Jeff Golden cofounded Common Fire and played a central role and lived in its two communities in New York’s Hudson Valley, including the Common Fire Housing Co-op in Tivoli. More recently, he contributed the article “Common Fire’s Top Ten Hard-Earned Tips for Community Success” to COMMUNITIES #170.*



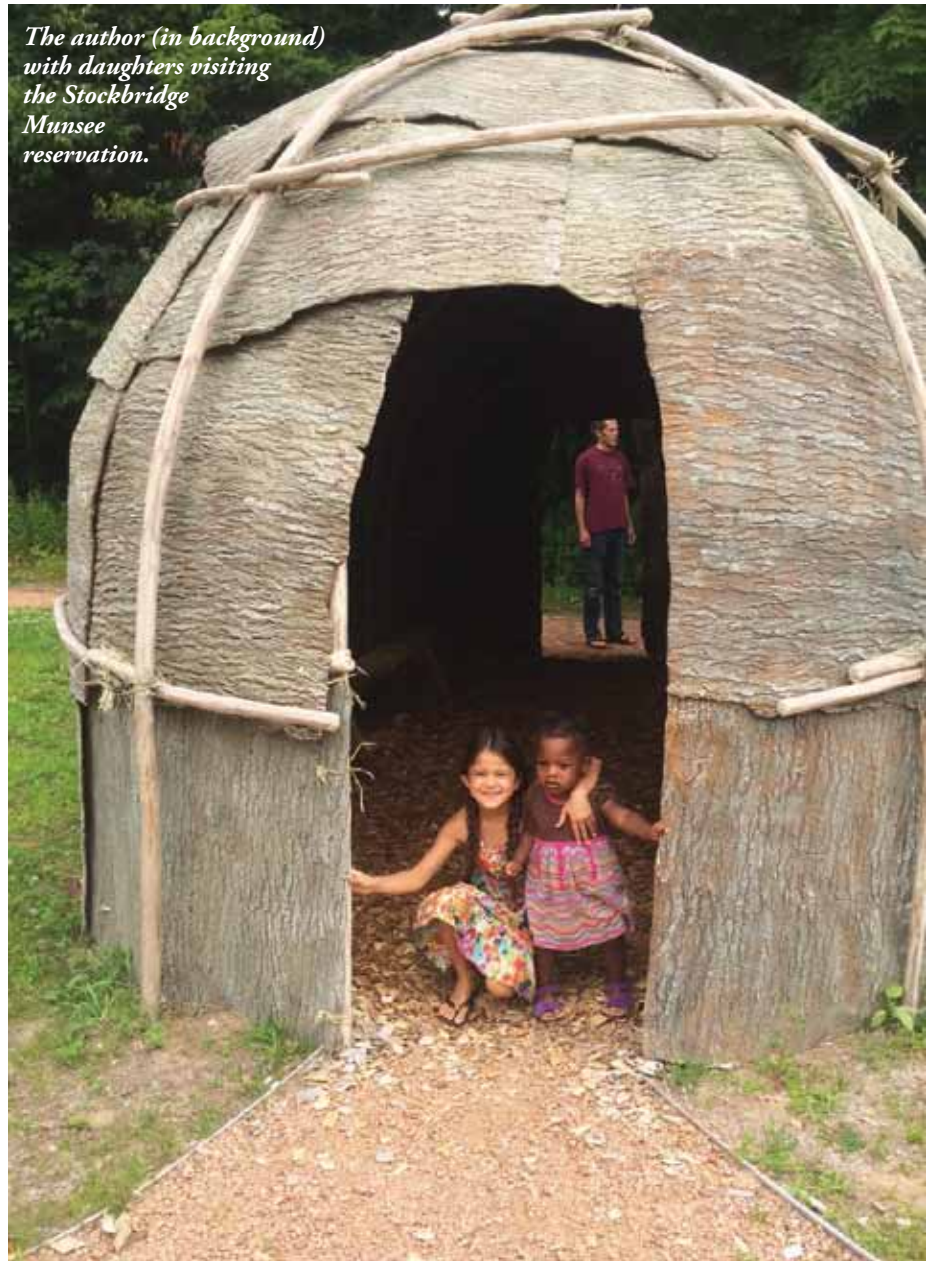
*The Tivoli Housing Co-op was a new construction project.*



*People gathered at the grand opening of the Tivoli Co-op.*



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



*The author (in background) with daughters visiting the Stockbridge Munsee reservation.*

# THE CASE FOR MASS CIVIL DISRUPTION AND RESISTANCE: The story of how 15 intentional communities and experiments came together to form a national coalition to defend life, come hell or high water

*By Ethan Hughes (edited by Laila Johnson and Gavain U'Prichard)*

*Now I greet you from the other side of sorrow and despair,  
with a love so vast and shattered, it will reach you everywhere.*  
—Leonard Cohen

**T**he first question we must ask is: Why? Why is it time for mass civil resistance? As you read this, many of us are building strawbale structures on lands stolen generations ago from indigenous people; 64 people own more wealth than the poorest half of the planet (3½ billion people!); 90 percent of the planet's fish populations are gone; and 150 species will go extinct today—a rate 1,000 times higher than Earth's natural background rate. Forest fires rage across huge swathes of our taiga, temperate, and tropical forests every year; the US has more people incarcerated than any other country on Earth—the majority of those unjustly incarcerated being people of color; Donald Trump has a chance to become the next president.

If we glance forward just 30 years, our future outlook is shocking and unbelievable. The United Nations estimates that, due to carbonic acidification and rising temperatures (both driven by burning fossil fuels), there will be *no fish in the oceans* by 2048, over one-quarter of humanity will be displaced or dead due to sea level rise, war, and violent weather; there will be 50 percent less fresh water available; and significant portions of the Earth will be uninhabitable due to extreme temperatures.

People of color, indigenous people, and other oppressed and marginalized people will be most impacted by all of this—a double injustice because they are the least responsible for the environmental and social breakdown we face. Murder, genocide, slavery, mass incarceration, rape, and untold other atrocities have been heaped upon Native Americans and people of color for hundreds of years, and these abuses continue today. The ancestors of America's white majority stole 1.5 billion acres of land from Native Americans and claimed it for themselves between the years of 1736-1887. The unpaid wages of the forced labor of US slaves from the period of 1776-1865 would today equal, by recent estimates, up to \$14 trillion. Privilege, inheritance, land, and resources have come from theft. It is this same privilege that has us biding our time in ecovillages, sanctuaries, and permaculture centers.

One of the shared world views of this new coalition is that all oppressions are one and the same. There will be no life-sustaining society without massive atonement, reparations, and healing. There will be no heart-unity between all peoples without the end of extraction industry and the pillage of the Earth, cultures, species, and ecosystems that humbly and majestically sustain all of us. Katy Chandler, of Be the Change in Reno, Nevada and a member of our new coalition, wonders: "What if the earth cannot be restored until the captives are set free? What if the captives cannot be set free until the earth is restored?"



With our hearts attuned to these and other devastating questions, members of 15 projects gathered for several days in April at the Possibility Alliance and Peace and Permaculture Center in rural Missouri. The wisdom of Dominic Barter, “You must feel the world to be changed by it,” guided our broken hearts to find one another and to try to collectively respond to this crisis in new, powerful, and creative ways. In the words of Naomi Klein, we feel “There is just enough time left for the impossible.”

### Part One:

*No problem can be solved by the same level of consciousness  
that created it.*

—Albert Einstein

Questions we must ask: How do we respond to our current crisis in a way that does not reinforce or recreate the crisis? How do we develop a new consciousness? Where lies a consciousness beyond white supremacy, patriarchy, and lifestyles that contribute to theft and ruination? What is that consciousness like, which transcends repeat cycles of shame and denial, and develops self-honesty hand in hand with self-esteem and self-love? Can we embody a consciousness that leads us to wholeness? We will need all of our gifts and capacities for what lies ahead. As Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi says, “Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

We have decided, for better or worse, that the path to this expanded consciousness is described in an archetypal map, previously sketched by the civil rights/freedom movement, India’s independence movement, and many other groups and movements. Joanna Macy describes the map in *The Work that Reconnects*.

In three parts, the course consists of:

1. Holding actions in the defense of life (nonviolent direct action);
2. Transforming the foundations of our common life (creating a life-enhancing society);
3. Fundamental shift in perceptions and values (self-transformation).

Joanna Macy and Molly Brown give our moment in time on Earth a name: “The Great Turning.” The Great Turning is a shift as major as the Agrarian Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, is going to be intentional and deliberate, and must happen within a few years. The archetypal map urges us to embody all three actions into our lives, knowing that all three support and reinforce one another. Our coalition refers to this map as Integral Nonviolence, and everyone in the coalition is committed to trying to embody the world we wish to live in.

### Part Two:

*The mind creates the abyss, the heart crosses it.*

—Sri Nisargadatta

Who or what will this coalition be serving? The coalition hopes to serve the converging movement of all movements seeking to address and confront the crises of our world. The Movement of Movements is manifesting as a decentralized, spontaneous global uprising of resistance; it is confronting on all sides the extractive, exploitative, and oppressive industrial-economic-military-academic-complex.

We are reaching out to, building trust with, and—when requested—serving women, people of color, and indigenous peoples who are part of this emerging movement. Taking honest account of the limitations of our perspective, we sense that white-led environmental efforts to confront climate change are coming up short of addressing, at its roots, the racism, sexism, and gender coercion, economic inequality, theft, genocide, privilege, addiction, and belief in industrial technology that are fundamental to the agents of climatic destruction. We trust that, to truly serve, our thus-far predominantly white coalition must go out and deeply listen to those people, cultures, and species most oppressed. It is from this respectful attunement, we believe, that we will begin to hear answers to all these questions.

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**To truly serve, we must go out and  
deeply listen to those people, cultures,  
and species most oppressed.**

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We are also trying to open up to hear the voices of nonhuman species and ecosystems that are also being destroyed and oppressed. During the gathering, we held an all-night vigil in the woods, accompanied by barred owls, coyotes, evening bats, gray tree frogs, and each other's silence. Many prayed, meditated, listened, opened, and struggled from dusk till dawn, sitting on an unraveling planet, hoping to hear Creation's wisdom.

### Part Three:

*I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense that once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with their own pain.*

—James Baldwin

How do we enact a grassroots movement for reparations and atonement to begin healing our history of genocide and theft?

Two women reported to the gathering, having just returned from a Black Lives Matter action in Minneapolis with support from the Catholic Worker movement. The first important challenge we received to our risk-it-all impulse was that the Black Lives Matter movement is interested in not risking lives; it is interested in the protection and preservation of lives.

We were shown that we must really present ourselves on the actual battlefronts of racism and oppression, on the terms of the oppressed, rather than our presumed affinity with their struggle, if we want to truly embody solidarity and build trust. During the action in Minneapolis, a black man walked by as a white woman was being arrested for her participation. He said, "God is smiling today. Whites are getting arrested over the murder of a black man, after hundreds of years of white silence and oppression. Amen."

How do we support one another to take bigger risks on behalf of our families, all peoples, and life? Heavy with grief, we agreed that the best permaculture design was not going to save us, and could even very easily contribute to further inequality, privilege, and unequal access to resources. If the world becomes untenable for humans and many other species, will you be able to look your child in the eyes and say, in all honesty, that you tried everything, risked everything, to prevent it? Most of us gathered realized we were not able to say "yes" to that question, to our heartbreaking dismay. We are called to do it all: tend gardens and confront our privilege; ride bikes and launch massive disruptions; turn off the electricity and go to jail; heal our spiritual wounds and restore what has been stolen; reckon with our calamity at every level.

### Part Four:

*Don't forget love, it will bring all the madness you need to unfurl yourself across the universe.*

—Mirabai

How do we make all of these visions, conversations, and ideas tangible for all peoples and all of life? On day eight part of the coalition headed to St. Louis to participate in a direct action led by Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment. M.O.R.E. invited elders from the Hopi and Navajo Nations to participate in a joint action against Peabody Coal. Peabody Coal has been occupying and extracting from Navajo and Hopi lands for decades, leaving watersheds, soil, and ecosystems destroyed. The first action of our coalition was to offer ourselves for red-level risk during this direct action: an imperfect and incomplete offering from a predominantly white coalition, to show up and risk on behalf of Native American and African American Justice—but a beginning.

Another group from the coalition headed to Des Moines, Iowa to train with members of the Lakota Sioux to learn about and hopefully contribute to the ongoing resistance to the Bakken pipeline—a pipeline being engineered to go under rivers, streams, and waterways. Other coalition members joined a 10-day peace march with Voices for Creative Nonviolence ending in Iowa at a supermax prison being built to include over 1700 cells for solitary confinement—considered torture by the UN and Amnesty International. Still others joined the Break Free actions to shut down fossil fuel infrastructure, which included blocking coal trains and using over 1,000 kayaks to obstruct an oil tanker. I believe that only through action do we become; thus our coalition moved out into the world becoming something real. Imperfect, but real.

### Epilogue:

*Have wings that feared ever touched the sun? I was born when all I once feared—I could love.*

—Rabi'a

As I conclude this essay the train sways from side to side. I am headed to a SWARM training led by Carlos Servada of the Co-secha movement to learn about the power of decentralized movements and organizations. We go to listen, to be disrupted, to be changed.

The Indigenous Women of the Americas, in their Treaty Compact of 2015, ask all of us to:

- commit nonviolent acts of civil disobedience where destruction is occurring until it is stopped.

- continue these acts until "business as usual" is halted and life on Mother Earth is safe for generations to come.

These courageous women ask much more than this in their challenging and inspiring cry for action and justice. How can we get everyone in the communities movement to respond to this call? What does it mean for the rest of the western world if the communities movement does not respond—a movement which extols such values as justice, equality, and peace?

Everywhere we turn people are wrestling with this crisis. The Movement of Movements is reaching out into many communities, like our own, and drawing us out of our old, progressive lives, to take extraordinary risks and roles in this final opportunity to defend life. What shall become of this coalition I do not know. I can say that each new day I get closer to being able to look into the eyes of my two daughters and say I tried everything, I risked everything for this beautiful world and for you. 🐦

*If you are interested in learning more, joining a direct action, attending trainings involved in the coalition, call or write The Possibility Alliance, 28408 Frontier Ln., La Plata MO 63549; 660-332-4094.*

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*Ethan Hughes likes to listen to the songs of frogs in northeastern Missouri. He enjoys collecting magic pebbles in the creek beds with his two daughters Isla and Etta. He hopes to participate in the Nation's largest mass arrest in history with his family. His wife Sarah has a very loud laugh that he cherishes and hopes to use as a secret non-violent weapon to make the police smile.*



# ACTIVISM REVISITED:

## Personal reflections on trying to make a difference

By Daniel Christian Wahl

*If success or failure of this planet and of human beings depended on how I am and what I do [...] HOW WOULD I BE? WHAT WOULD I DO?*

—R. Buckminster Fuller

*We cannot individually comprehend the range, depth and detail of the consequences we are collectively generating for ourselves.*

—Tom Atlee (2002)

**M**y plane is inbound to Amsterdam. For the next two days I will be joining a group of innovators, futurists, designers, activists, and technologists who have been invited on behalf of the Dubai Futures Foundation to brainstorm and envision what the Museum of the Future exhibition for the 2017 Dubai Government Summit might reveal to its visitors about the world of 2050. How did I end up in this film and on this plane?

For more than five years I would not fly to avoid the carbon emissions and environmental impact associated with this mode of transport. I wanted to walk my talk. I was somewhat indignant of

people who jetted around the planet, in a similar way I had been indignant about meat-eaters when I was a vegetarian for a year. I still don't eat much meat, but I don't judge others for it anymore.

I started flying again, to teach sustainable design and futures techniques to activists, innovators, policy-makers, and students. I traveled by plane to do foresight work on climate change impact and community resilience with government agencies, to take part in climate summits and activist gatherings. I also built up a fair few "love miles" when visiting family and friends.

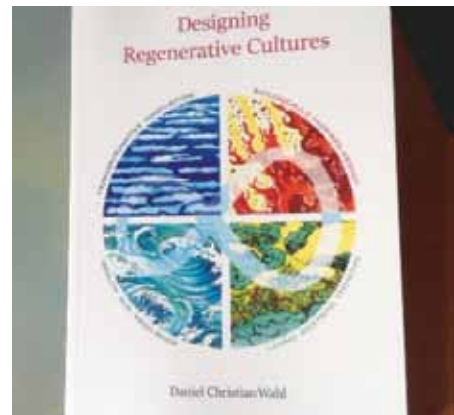


*May East (first from the right) at the launch of the UNESCO Global Action Program.*

Gaia Education

May East teaching a Gaia Education course to women in a village in Senegal.

The Museum of the Future, to be opened in Dubai in 2018.



Gaia Education

Gaia Education

Dubai Futures Foundation

### On digging trenches, creating an other, and fighting against

There was a time when I would have questioned my own integrity and commitment to the cause over these actions. Have I sold out? Well, I am not sure if I earn enough to call it that. At least I make myself believe that I do most of my work to contribute to the emergence of diverse regenerative cultures, thriving local communities, and vibrant regional economies in global solidarity and collaboration.

Do I really not earn enough to call myself a sell-out? Enough seems to me a curiously relative concept that is subject to very different interpretations depending on someone's point of view or level of consciousness. Our perceived needs seem to increase rather than decrease as we get wealthier and move in wealthier circles.

Over the last few years I made it my regular practice to "count my blessings": health, a loving partner, good friends, meaningful work, access to beautiful nature, a roof over my head, running water, clothes to wear, and food to eat. None of that can be taken for granted in today's world. Not to mention the rank and privilege that come with being a white male in his mid-40s with a B.Sc. in Biology, a Masters in Holistic Science, a Ph.D. in Design, and a German passport, who speaks three languages fluently. Who am I to ever complain about income or really anything else?

I do make it a practice to gently point out to self-righteous activists—still stuck in the fight-the-system or blame-the-perpetrators loop—who are angrily mobilizing against the evil "one percent," that most of the folks who camped out in front of Wall Street during Occupy were in fact themselves part of the top 10, many of the top five, and some even the top one percent of the global wealth pyramid (see [www.theguardian.com/money/2015/oct/13/half-world-wealth-in-hands-population-inequality-report](http://www.theguardian.com/money/2015/oct/13/half-world-wealth-in-hands-population-inequality-report)).

I personally know more than a handful of anti-globalization or climate change activists who are expecting an inheritance approaching a million dollars, simply because the properties their parents and grandparents live in have shot up in value. Expecting to own a

million dollars in assets puts you into the top one percent yourself. According to the Credit Suisse "Global Wealth Report 2015," 80 people (who would find a seat on a London double-decker-bus) own more than half of the world's wealth, while the bottom 71 percent of humanity share only three percent of global wealth.

Have a look at [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com) and enter your annual income and where you live in the world. I did that for someone getting by on less than 12,000 dollars a year in Spain, and guess what, that person is still in the lucky top 10 percent of the global comparison.

My point? What is the purpose of self-righteous finger-pointing and feeling superior about our transport or dietary habits, our political convictions, our oh-so-evolved level of awareness, or for being a little further down the global wealth pyramid constructed on hundreds of years of colonialism and exploitation of people and planet?

What is the point in beating oneself up over one's own imperfections or privileges we were born with? We need to start with self-compassion and gratitude for what we have, and then reach out to others to co-create a world that works for all of humanity and all of life. Trench-digging activism, based on more of the "them-against-us-thinking" that got us into this mess in the first place, will not heal this ailing world.

### On building alternatives and activating a more beautiful world

*To make the world work in the shortest possible time for 100 percent of humanity, through spontaneous cooperation and without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone.*  
—Buckminster Fuller

To shift from a "story of separation" to a "story of interbeing" is how Charles Eisenstein framed the transition ahead in *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*. In my recently published book *Designing Regenerative Cultures*, I explore how we might be able to individually and collectively facilitate culturally creative conversations



that will help us to co-create this future.

We are capable of shifting our culture's guiding myths and central story from the narrative of separation to the narrative of interbeing. Together, and only together as one humanity in service to life, will we be able to create that more beautiful world. It is already all around us, but the story of separation makes us blind to seeing it.

During my time at Findhorn, I had the opportunity to collaborate with May East on a wide range of projects. May is Brazilian and has been an activist since the 1980s. She is a cofounder of the Global Ecovillage Network and Gaia Education, and directed the United Nations training centre CIFAL Scotland. More than most people I know, May embodies the role of a global change agent and bridge-builder between the often-separate worlds of civil society, business, and governance.

Her work stretches from teaching capacity-building courses to activists all around the world, to working with local and national governments on a wide range of sustainability issues, and delivering sustainability training courses for UNITAR and UNESCO. May has actively contributed to the collaborative process that formulated the new UN Sustainable Development Goals.

May and I share our passion for helping diverse constituencies and stakeholders explore whole-systems design solutions that draw on collective intelligence and integrate diverse perspectives and needs into a win-win-win approach. I firmly believe that through bridge-building and new types of collaboration across "the trenches" we will be able to co-create a more sustainable world. We need to maximize the edges. The good old permaculture design principle suggests that the more diversity we integrate, the more creative, diverse, and generative our solutions will be.

May once shared her personal practice of activism with me: "The first thing I do after my morning meditation is to consciously choose

where I will put my attention that day, what conversations and projects I will *activate* through the power of my attention."

We are all activists, activating one story or another through the power of our attention and the way we participate in our communities. We can choose to activate and embody the story of separation or the story of interbeing. We can choose what kind of world we want to bring forth together with the people we are in contact with.

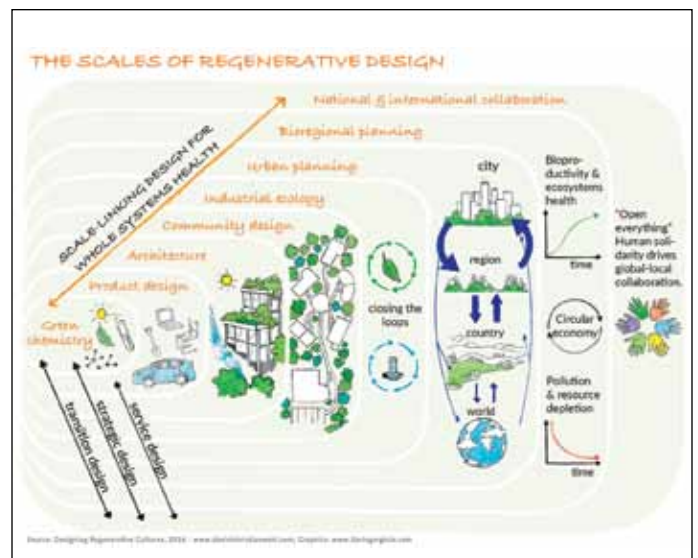
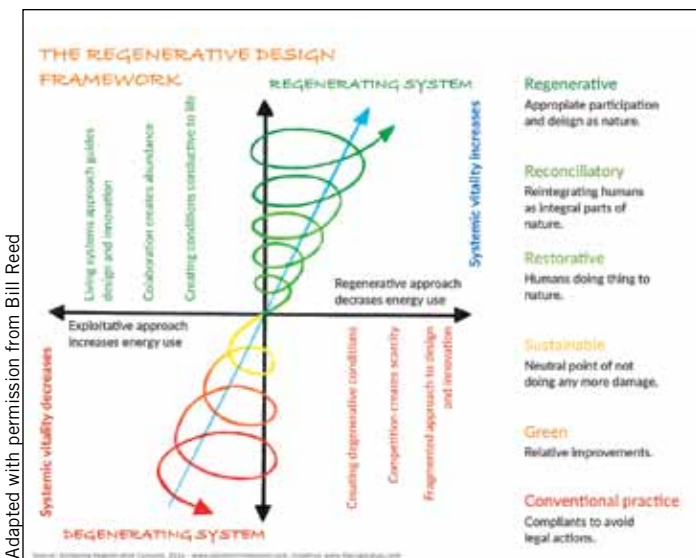
We are all designers! Regenerative cultures are co-created by people who have become conscious of the way their participation activates certain possibilities—people who share a vision for a better world, collaborating to co-create a thriving future for all Life. Mindful practitioners and conscious activists ask themselves every day: How can I activate the future potential of the present moment by living a more beautiful world today?

The first step is to be *aware* of what we are activating in the world by the power of our attention and the story we propagate through our thoughts, words, and actions. We all are, already, shaping the future of things to come, by the power of our attention and by both our actions and our failures to act in the face of converging crises and abundant opportunities to create a more beautiful world. 🌈

of things to come, by the power of our attention and by both our actions and our failures to act in the face of converging crises and abundant opportunities to create a more beautiful world. 🌈

*Daniel Christian Wahl is an educator, activist, and consultant, specialized in whole systems design and transformative innovation for regenerative cultures. A member of the International Futures Forum, a fellow of the RSA, and a Findhorn Foundation fellow, he has co-authored all four dimensions (social, ecological, economic, worldview) of Gaia Education's UNESCO recognized online curriculum in Design for Sustainability (see [www.gaiaeducation.org/index.php/en/how/learning](http://www.gaiaeducation.org/index.php/en/how/learning)). His book Designing Regenerative Cultures is published by Triarchy Press, 2016 (see [www.triarchypress.net/designing-regenerative-cultures.html](http://www.triarchypress.net/designing-regenerative-cultures.html)).*

## We are capable of shifting our culture's guiding myths and central story from the narrative of separation to the narrative of interbeing.



Adapted with permission from Bill Reed

Graphic Design, Flavia Gargiulo

# The Co-Evolution of My Communities, Co-Intelligent Process, and Activism

By Tom Atlee

Thirty years ago I found myself in a 400-person mobile intentional community walking across the US for global nuclear disarmament. The Great Peace March had launched from Los Angeles on March 1, 1986 with 1200 people but was officially closed down two weeks later, bankrupt. Stuck in the Mojave Desert, 800 marchers returned home and 400 holed up at an MX track in Barstow. After two long weeks of arguing and strategizing, we launched again with no formal leadership and few resources.

Nine months later we arrived in Washington, DC with 1200 people, still with no formal leadership. The remarkable self-organizing dynamics that got us across the country (what do you do with 400 people each night and how do you feed them all?!) transformed my life. I'd never seen or experienced anything like it. Here are just a few examples to illustrate:

- When the volunteer marcher kitchen crew became overwhelmed, they replaced a dinner with DIY bread and peanut butter. More kitchen help materialized almost immediately out of nowhere!
- From our one Native American marcher we learned about circle process and the importance of listening. When we almost broke up over disagreements about whether to march all together or strung out in an anarchic straggle, a Colorado thunderstorm forced us into a fertilizer factory where, with a portable mic and public address system, we took turns in a 400-marcher "circle" from which we all realized it made sense to march together in the cities and strung out in the country. End of conflict. As Oren Lyons, a Native American elder has put it, "We talk until there's nothing left but the obvious truth."
- From our diversity—and the fact that no one could throw any other person or faction off the march—we'd learned not only tolerance but that we could actually *use our diversity creatively*. Conservative elderly marchers and punk marchers with Mohawk hair went together to churches and schools to demonstrate that nuclear war was an issue that transcended all other differences.

## Exploring Self-Organizing Systems

When the march concluded late in November I began what became years of intensive exploration into self-organizing systems and collective intelligence. I was sure there were secrets there for progressive activism. What I discovered was that there were secrets there for moving beyond all positions—including progressivism—to tap human diversity and public problems as raw material for co-creating public wisdom in a far wiser democracy through well-designed public dialogues, deliberations, and choice-creating conversations. Addressing power dynamics, participation, and human rights become means to those wisdom-generating ends, rather than the whole point of democracy. Activism became for me a process for instilling wiser processes into the larger political and economic processes of society.

My subsequent 13 years of "co-intelligence" research led me in November 1999 to Port Townsend, Washington for a workshop on Dynamic Facilitation (DF)—the most powerful conflict-transforming process I've run across so far. The training was taking place the same week that the WTO demonstrations were happening across Puget Sound in Seattle. I tracked both developments with mounting excitement.

I was so blown away by DF that I wanted activists like those in the Seattle streets to know about it. So on my return to Eugene, Oregon (to which I'd moved just a few months earlier with my partner Karen) I recruited a group of local activists to take the next DF workshop in March 2000. They'd not met each other before, but during the five-day training we all stayed in the same house and afterwards many of them drove back to Eugene together in a van from Port Townsend. They got to know each other pretty well.

## Walnut Street Cooperative

A short time later several of these folks—including long-time FIC associate Tree Bressen—decided to launch a new urban intentional community. They found a big duplex in the university district and one of them—longtime communitarian Adin Rogovin—bought it. And thus was Walnut Street Cooperative born. From the begin-





ning, this was not your usual co-op. By fortunate circumstance *and* intention, a high percentage of the founding members were activists, experienced communitarians, and/or trained in conflict resolution. I, who had catalyzed the co-op without even realizing it, joined a year after it was formed, when Karen's and my previous living situation no longer worked for us. The co-op became formally incorporated in 2003 when Adin sold the property to the newly formed Walnut Street Co-op, Inc., whose board consisted of four Walnut housemates.

The co-op was founded with three purposes: to provide affordable housing, to support socially and ecologically responsible lifestyles, and to provide a base for people doing social change work. Although we don't have a shared group activism, the vast majority of the dozens of housemates who have come and gone through Walnut Street Co-op have been activists or environmentalists of one stripe or another. We've had forest activists, Occupy organizers, homeless advocates (even a housemate who got a tiny house village built for Eugene houseless people!), a designer of sustainable transport systems, and linguists preserving endangered languages. Housemates have marched for climate activism, held a conference on community resilience, sponsored an Oregon tour for an expert on gift economy, designed and facilitated City-sponsored community conversations leading up to a Climate and Energy Action plan, and are catalyzing an Aging in Community network in

the Eugene area.

Having moved from Oakland, California, I quickly re-established my nonprofit Co-Intelligence Institute (CII) office at the co-op, where it remains today. In the past 15 years five of my co-op housemates have been on the CII board and two of them helped design the covers for two of my books, *The Tao of Democracy* and *Reflections on Evolutionary Activism*.

Over time the process-sophisticated people moved on. I was left as the lone "process person" to experiment with how to apply my understanding of deep process dynamics to cooperative living. Over time our internal house process—influenced by both Consensus and Dynamic Facilitation—evolved into a shared quality of empathic attention I came to call "co-sensing." It is a lived process—a quality of our house culture, both in meetings and in everyday life. It is based less on formal agreements and more on continual collective awareness of how we are doing, what's involved in any problem or possibility, and the use of everyone's ideas, feelings, and concerns as resources to gain a deeper understanding of what makes sense.

### Co-Sensing

Co-sensing involves an attitude that life is not always clear-cut and thus we should feel our way together. Issues come up in personal conversations, our internal listserv, or in house meetings. We rotate facilitator and agenda creator/note-taker roles and actively encourage anyone who has anything to say to say it, often using "stacking" to establish speaker order and avoid back-and-forth arguments.

Our process won't work if housemates are either too insistent or too quiet. We need to hear everyone's ideas, information, feelings, needs, etc., in order to see the big picture of what's going on and what we should do. When we seem near agreement, we often check for any concerns. But more often we just end off when no one has anything more to say, expecting we are all on the same page—at least enough to work with for now.

Since we aren't logging new agreements-to-be-followed, we are somewhat laid-back about recording our shared understandings. When we find ourselves not doing what we thought we had decided, we take it as a sign that we need to "sense into" what's happening and what makes sense *now*, rather than trying to reinforce whatever seemed appropriate before. We do that well to the extent

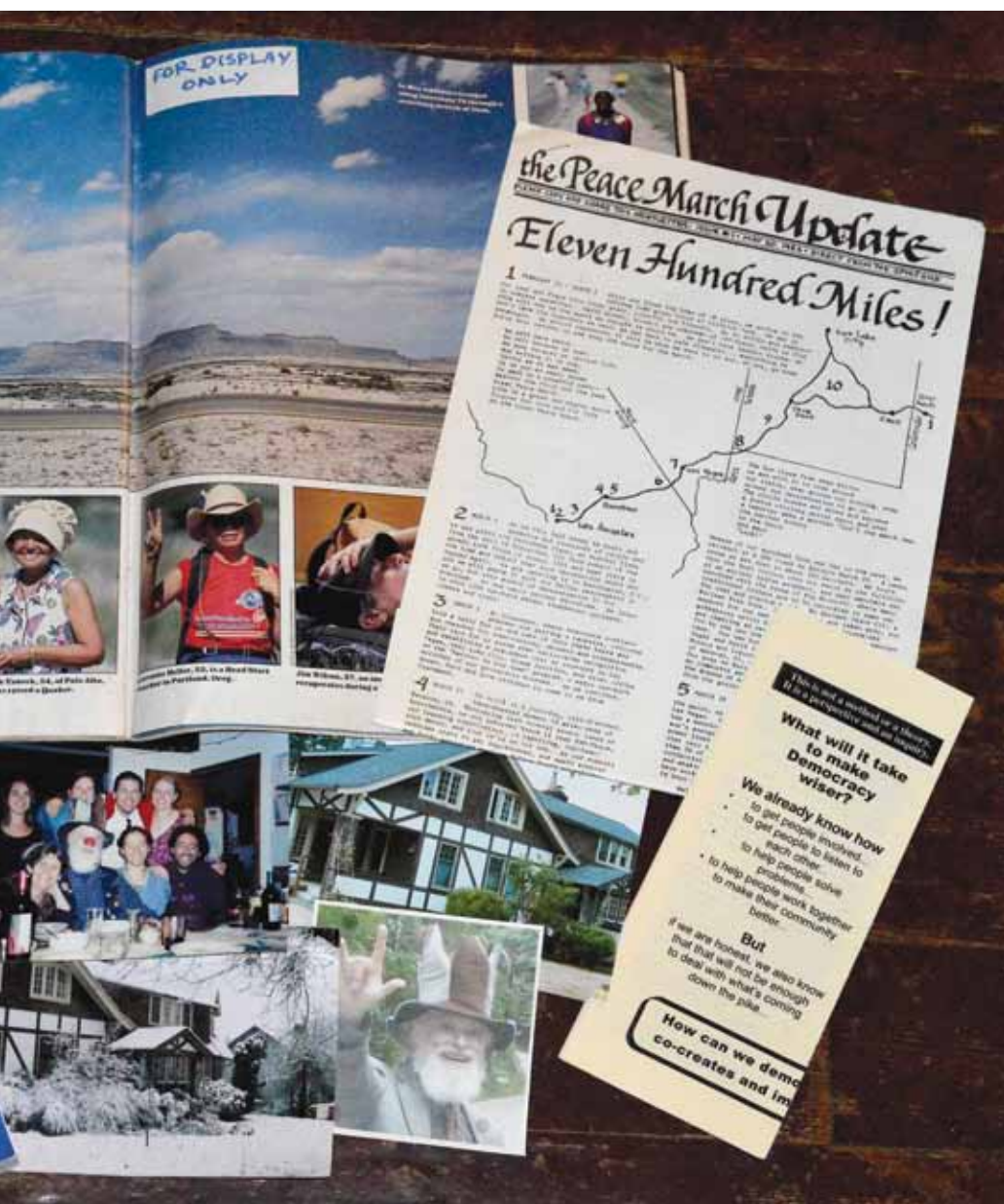


Photo courtesy of Tom Atlee

we take sufficient time to reflect together, to “talk until there’s nothing left but the obvious truth.” That effort produces a strong sense of shared ownership, co-creativity, and mutual regard.

## Maintaining House Culture

Those of us who’ve been around a while try to keep the good parts of our house culture going. But when there’s turnover, we know that the new group may have a different sense of what’s important and how

ability. A couple of years ago we hung a large chore chart grid on the wall listing chores down the side and housemates across the top with movable markers showing who was responsible for which chore in any given week. Most chores rotated among all of us and we reviewed the chore chart at every meeting. This very sophisticated linear approach proved time-consuming, unwieldy, and ultimately ineffective. In fact, our responsibility levels didn’t change much despite our gorgeous system.

So we talked about the problem until we stumbled on an extremely simple approach that we’ve used ever since. We each have certain “passion chores” we volunteer for because we either love them or because we really want to see them done. Anything else that needs doing can be done by anyone who feels inspired to do it. If certain things don’t get done well enough, it comes up as a reminder, a request, or an item on our agenda. Our ongoing answerability system is very light: After our pre-house-meeting personal check-ins, we do

a round of “chore check-ins”—each of us saying what we have done for the house during the previous week. There’s no shaming or rating, but there’s a gentle *implicit* reputational nudge felt by those of us who have done what feels like too little. During chore check-ins we’re all delighted to hear about anything special anyone has done and we can raise and address chore-related questions and issues. This approach

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## Putting signs up in public suggested that everyone in the house supported those candidates—how did we feel about that?

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to do things. So we try to “sense into” that, helping everyone observe how what’s happening may or may not fit with our traditions, so that new choices can be made with full awareness.

Those of us on our co-op board work for the co-op’s long-term physical, legal, financial, and PR well-being. But what shapes our daily community operations and shared life is our collective awareness that we *CO-create the quality of our community life*—for better or worse. The more we connect with *both* our own *and* each other’s personal experience and needs, the better our co-created life will be.

## Case Study: Chores

How we share chores can serve as an example of this approach. Since we cook for each other five nights each week, we organize cook shifts during conversations exploring everyone’s availability and needs. Cook shifts remain stable—with temporary substitutions negotiated as needed—until a major change is required for new housemates or new personal schedule demands. We all want to ameliorate co-op/life stresses *and* we all value our own and each other’s participation in co-op life, so we seek to work out a good fit between our individual and communal lives.

As for other chores, we have gone through 15 years of various combinations of assigning, volunteering for, and/or rotating chores, and various systems of answer-

ability. It has evolved through co-sensing each step of the way, and its conversation-based application is now the chore-related thread of our overall co-sensing about our lives together.

## Advocacy

Another recent example was a request by a housemate to post lawn signs for the political candidates she supported. We noted that putting signs up in public suggested that everyone in the house supported those candidates—and how did we feel about that? One housemate said he was disturbed that it was *assumed* that he supported the presidential candidate whose sign was being proposed (even though we found out later he was planning to vote for that candidate!). In our discussion it became clear both that any lawn sign should be discussed and agreed on *and* that we actually *liked* the idea that we might put up lawn signs for competing candidates, demonstrating that we were a diverse household and were ok with that. (But it was also clear that some housemates considered some candidates totally unacceptable and, if a sign for them was proposed, all signs for that office might need to be removed from our lawn!) So this “agreement” basically clarified some shared understandings and a process for communicating about this issue in the future—essentially some guidance for co-sensing about this topic as we lived into it.

A final example is our recurrent discussion about whether to prioritize *local* or *organic* when we purchase our shared food. That conversation needs to happen *newly* whenever turnover has created a new house population with a possibly new values profile, or when an existing housemate has a need or issue with the food we’re buying. Health, environment, economics, affordability, and other issues make this a complex realm of options, with no obvious clarity about the “best” approach. Most recently we’ve evolved into considering specific products of specific companies, in one case deciding to use *both* a local cheese company that has no hormones in their milk and is inexpensive *AND* the most popular organic cheese company which is both more expensive and has faraway suppliers and distribution networks. It seems our co-sensing has in this case taken us beyond a single generalized standard.

I feel these stories—and the history and operation of Walnut Street Co-op—exemplify how community-as-process and process-as-social-change can co-evolve into a single form of human engagement. 🐦

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*Tom Atlee has lived in some form of group living most of his life and at 69 is joining the growing population interested in developing better ways to “age in community.” His granddaughter Iris will be 88 in 2100 and he has no idea what life on earth will be like at that point.*



# The Choices We Make

By Paul Freundlich

In the fall of 1963, the fourth cohort of Peace Corps Volunteers bound for the subcontinent—otherwise known as “India 4”—arrived at the New Delhi airport with minimal luggage and a lot of ideals. More than half a century later, the experience of their service carries forth in a biannual gathering of lasting community.

In those early days of the Peace Corps, I’d made a film about their experience; it was of sufficient integrity that in 2007, they tracked me down via the internet, and invited my presence. I brought a video copy of that film, *A Choice I Made*, as well as a camcorder to capture their reactions to it, after all these years. Given what a sucker I am for the many faces and phases of community, it shouldn’t be surprising that I was the one who was captured—charmed and bemused by the power of half-century-old memories to bond them together; saddened by their inevitable losses along the way; impressed by the continuity of values that shaped the choices they made in the rest of their lives.

Tom, who had worked for Vista, Job Corps, and FEMA, talked about there being a “secret staff” based on a re-acculturation that occurred during volunteer experiences. No matter where or when they had served—in foreign lands or the US, recently or decades ago—they intuitively recognized each other, and were able to collaborate creatively and efficiently across the usual bureaucratic boundaries.

Linda, who had added a doctorate to her nursing degree, took the passion for social justice honed in

India into the challenges of the healthcare systems in the US: first, breaking down the barriers that prevented spousal presence in the delivery room, winning a suit against Princeton University; then, becoming a nationally recognized leader in facing the challenges of AIDS.

Kathy doubted that as a group they had much effect on national politics, but noted that each in her or his own way had been strengthened by their seminal Peace Corps experience to express their values in the towns where they raised families and the professions in which they worked.

Rick and Georgine were initially baffled about how to translate what they had deeply felt to America, but working with Habitat for Humanity defined a path. The travels and work that followed influenced their children to take their turns as volunteers with Action and Peace Corps.

Recently I wrapped up a re-edit of the composite video/film, *The Choices We Made*, and posted it on YouTube, in preparation for establishing a website for Peace Corps films (the 10 I’d made as the

in-house filmmaker between 1965 and ’68, as well as those made by others). Alerting the India 4 gang to this new version produced another invitation to an upcoming reunion. Whether I can attend or not, the possibility sparked musings about the nature of community in this often fragmented and fractious world.

I would say there is a communion which transcends time and space, but is deeply recognized. That there is a direct correlation between the intensity of experience and its longevity in guiding our life choices. Near the end of my video, Kathy tells of being queried during training by a Peace Corps psychologist as to whether she had doubts about taking two years out of her life. Her response was amazement: She likely would have a very long life, and two years was such a small part.

“Was it such a small part?” I asked.

“In actual time, yes. In what it meant, no. It was a fabulous time.”

“Fabulous” may not be an appropriate description of some of the other formative experiences, small and large, which lead to community—from those who gather nightly at the neighborhood bar, to the stunned communion shared by millions in the wake of 9/11.

In 1989, I led a delegation to Vietnam on the eve of an expected normalizing of diplomatic relations with the US. Its purpose was to explore cooperative trade and financial alternatives to the exploitation that would likely accompany exposure to a neo-colonialist market economy. What made access to

senior Vietnamese ministers possible was that we traveled under the auspices of the Vietnam Vets, who had achieved a bond with their leadership that transcended the history of a brutal war. Beyond who was right and who was wrong (to paraphrase the Billy Joel song) there was a powerful, shared experience among former soldiers, and strangely, it had become the basis for mutual trust. Is it stretching too far to say there was a community which allowed for dialog not otherwise possible?

Is there a danger in defining community so widely that it means nothing? The financial community of Wall Street doubtless shares many assumptions, but it could also be said that the attachment to competitive success and inequity contradicts the essence of community. When Jim Jones passed out the Kool Aid or ISIS sends out its suicidal minions, are those expressions of community, or is there a distinction to be made when the communion involves an authoritarian prophet? Do virtual chat rooms, friend networks, listservs count as communities, or are they, at best, supplements to community?

(continued on p. 74)



Photo courtesy of Dan Hines

# Grassroots Activism Starts at Home

By Dan Hines

*You need only claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done...you are fierce with reality.*

—Florida Scott-Maxwell, *The Measure of My Days*

I am unsure how *fierce with reality* I have truly become!

Yet I have found inspiration from these hopeful words: to be more daring in claiming the events of my life. Indeed, I can recognize a slowly emerging fierceness within me. I can begin to see more clearly the interaction between my experiences of living within intentional community, my work and travels, and of the growing activism and engagement in political life.

It has been easier in the past to consider and share about these areas of life in isolation from each other. This wider perspective is a new discovery.

My day-to-day life happens within a shared cooperative home that my spouse and I have built with a group of friends in Kamloops, British Columbia (the RareBirds Housing Co-operative). My working life involves considerable travel away from the house as a freelance leadership consultant and small group facilitator. In another sphere of life, I am engaged in grassroots political activism and tossing my hat into the ring as a provincial election candidate with the Green Party.

I can readily talk about any one of these areas of involvement. What intrigues me more and more is how they dance with each other: how they inform, challenge, and sustain one another into a whole, integrated, and less divided life. As I claim this intercon-

nection of events, gratitude grows in me for the gift of being a member of an intentional community.

Living with others is effectively a mirror for the human heart. My fellow “birds” help me to better see myself. They witness me into being. In that daily witnessing I am able to recognize my strengths and limitations; the light that I project into the world and my shadow as I block some of the light. It requires great courage to see myself as I am. Yet the community lends me a courage that I lack. My ability to facilitate small circles of leaders has been deepened in the difficult and joyous relational realities of living with friends in our shared home.

The cooperative has also gained from what I bring back into the community from my vocation. We have included some of the small group practices in our way of being together that I use for my work with leaders. For example, we have explored in our extended retreats together the Quaker-inspired practice of hosting a “Clearness Committee” for each other: a two-hour disciplined listening that uses simple, honest, and open questions.

The evening meals and lively conversations together with my fellow “birds” have been a generative field for political engagement. We challenge the conventional views. We rant and rave! We slow down

*(continued on p. 75)*



# HOMELESSNESS AND TINY HOUSES: Two Worlds Intersect to Foster Community

By Kerri Fivecoat-Campbell

Life is a funny thing. Take mine, for example. One day I'm helping my mom plan a memorial service for my brother, Steve, who died homeless in an alley in Fargo, North Dakota. Seemingly in a flash, my husband and I come very close to losing our own home during the Great Recession. The very next instant, I'm evaluating how our decision to move to a tiny home in the woods intersects with my experience writing my brother's story and how I might use my experience with the homeless and tiny homes to help build tiny house communities.

Tiny homes are all of the rage, starring in reality television and frequent news stories. Millennials, caught in an economy that continues to undercut the middle class and socked with five-figure school loans, love them. Generation Xers and young Baby Boomers such as ourselves, who were caught in layoffs during the recession and are still paying off debt we incurred to live, love tiny homes. Older Baby Boomers who are downsizing are all interested in how tiny house living can save them money and help them simplify their lives.

How does that add up to advocacy for the homeless? As the tiny house movement—a moniker given by the media that stuck—has grown, advocacy organizations across the country are trying to figure out how to build tiny house communities to help the homeless. Some have been successful and some are still struggling.

## My Own Journey

It was a cold, gray day in late January 2001 when I began what would be a few hours' search to try to find my brother who had been missing since late 1999. A Vietnam veteran, Steve had left the home he shared with our parents nearly two decades before. His mind and soul were lost those years he had spent in the war and for reasons we couldn't understand, he went searching. Steve always remained in contact with us, though, especially taking care to call our mom and even send her a little money when he came off drinking binges to work.

That was until December 1999 when he didn't call Mom on her birthday or at Christmas. We had no way to reach him and so we had to wait. By December 2000 when he still didn't make contact with anyone in the family, we all knew something was terribly wrong. When I began making those calls in January 2001, I thought finding him would be harder, but one call to the Social Security Administration confirmed our worst fears.

Once my grief had subsided to a manageable level, I vowed to our mother I would try to find out what went wrong. Why, when we thought he had access to the best medical care through the Veteran's Administration, Steve couldn't be helped. My research involved poring through over 300 pages of accessible VA medical records and even speaking with a doctor who had once treated my brother.

The reasons Steve wasn't helped are many and complex, but the ending was not. Steve had died of a combination of hypothermia and alcohol poisoning. The result of my exhaustive research, the book, *No Immediate Threat: The Story of an American Veteran*, although cathartic for my grief, did little to provide an answer to America's homeless problem, except for noting the obvious: The homeless need homes, no matter what types of problems and addictions that they may suffer.

Two years after my book was published, my mother died and mired me in new grief for the last surviving member of the nucleus of the home in which I had grown up. My husband Dale and I decided to move to our 480 square foot lake home with the hopes of building a larger home within the year. We sold our home in Kansas City, Kansas and I left my volunteer work with the homeless behind to heal my heart in the woods.



Photos courtesy of Mark Solomon

Little did we know that the largest economic downturn to hit the world was just around the corner. The Great Recession claimed about 80 percent of my freelance writing business and resulted in an 18-month layoff for my husband from his new job. As I worked tirelessly to rebrand my business to fit changing reader habits and technology and my husband went to work for minimum wage, we began using credit cards to survive.

One day before a planned meeting with a real estate agent to see if we could unload our tiny house and property for at least what we owed, Dale was called back to his job. We escaped homelessness literally by a day.

During that time, I realized we had stumbled into a movement of people who were choosing to move to smaller homes. When I realized this movement lacked a community of people to discuss the lifestyle, I founded [livinglargeinourlittlehouse.com](http://livinglargeinourlittlehouse.com). The site provides a global virtual community forum in the tiny house movement of people who help each other navigate the nuances of a downsized life. As time went on, I began hearing more about tiny house communities that were helping the homeless.

## The Tiny House Movement and Advocacy

One of the earliest and possibly one of the most publicized tiny house communities to assist the homeless to spring up has been Occupy Madison, a Wisconsin-based nonprofit. In November 2014, they opened

three homes on private property and have aspirations, as soon as more funds are raised, to build more.

Operation Northern Comfort and A Tiny Home for Good, two nonprofit organizations that help the homeless in Syracuse, New York, built two tiny homes on a vacant lot on the south side of the city this past spring. The organizations partnered and found the volunteers to do the work, while the lot was owned by the city.

In one of the most recent tiny house community stories, Veterans Community Project, a nonprofit founded by veterans in my hometown of Kansas City, have finished one 240 square foot home on what they hope will one day be a 50-house community called Veterans Village.

Chris Stout, a veteran and president of Veterans Community Project, said in a press release, “We identified too many veterans suffering from PTSD and addictions who were going untreated and not doing well in traditional shelters. We decided as vets that we had to do something to help.”

Of course, this project tugged at my heart. What if Steve had such a community to go to during his life? Things might have been different for him.

## Two Books Intersect

When I began writing my current book, *Living Large in Our Little House: Thriving in 480 Square Feet With Six Dogs, a Husband and One Remote—Plus More Stories of How You Can Too*, the book’s focus was to write about the people who have chosen to live a tiny house life. But I could not ignore in my research and mention in my book the nonprofits that are taking what seemingly is a hipster movement of tiny house development and turning it into a vehicle to help the homeless.

I’ve reached out to a couple of programs that I plan to meet with in the next few months, including the Veterans Community Project, to see how I, as one of the voices for the tiny house movement, can help these efforts. It’s as if the only two books I’ve ever written, subjects that weren’t seemingly connected at all, have now come together.

I believe those of us who have chosen a life in the tiny house movement and who have come together as a global community can help those who have no homes become a part of it. It would be wonderful if the millions of people who enjoy the tiny house television shows, internet pages, and books all come together to help in this effort. 🍷

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*Kerri Fivecoat-Campbell is a freelance writer and author living her dream in a 480 square foot cabin in the woods with her husband, Dale, and their five recycled (rescued) dogs. Kerri’s latest book is Living Large in Our Little House: Thriving in 480 Square Feet With Six Dogs, a Husband and One Remote—Plus More Stories of How You Can Too.*





*One of the Buddhas at Harbin that survived the fire.*



Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Huckabay

# AFTER THE HARBIN FIRE: Reflections on a Community Disrupted, Not Defeated

*By Geoffrey Huckabay*

**Editor's Note:** *On September 12, 2015, the Valley Fire swept through Harbin Hot Springs, a well-loved nonprofit retreat and workshop center and intentional community in northern California. The fire destroyed the buildings and scorched the landscape, although the hot springs and pools remained intact. Thankfully, Harbin was successfully evacuated before the fast-moving fire hit. An initial reopening of the pools to the public is hoped for in late summer or early fall of 2016. Meanwhile, members of the Harbin community have been finding various strategies to cope with the sudden change: some staying nearby, some moving on, some helping rebuild.*

*Here one survivor of the fire reflects on its effects on the community.*

**A**s I write this, nine months have passed since the fire. That seems like a long time, some days a lifetime, and other days it feels like it was yesterday. So much has happened during this time that I don't really know what to share about.

I was a resident of Harbin Hot Springs for only a year before the fire, and while many of the people who make up the Harbin resident community still live here and are now my "family," the loss was much deeper for those who had lived here for many years.

The first question that people ask me after they hear I am from Harbin is whether they are rebuilding. To be honest, that question

can be really offensive to many residents. A better first question would be, "How are you?" or "Are you finding your way in this new life?" While this is the question many of us want to be asked, we realize that unless you had an experience like this, there is little understanding of what it feels like.

Then there is the response, "Everything happens for a reason." Ooooh, be careful of that one. Saying that to someone who has lost their home can be very hurtful if they haven't come to that conclusion themselves.

The fire was terrifying. It was an unbelievable experience that my mind couldn't comprehend was happening at the time. I wrote



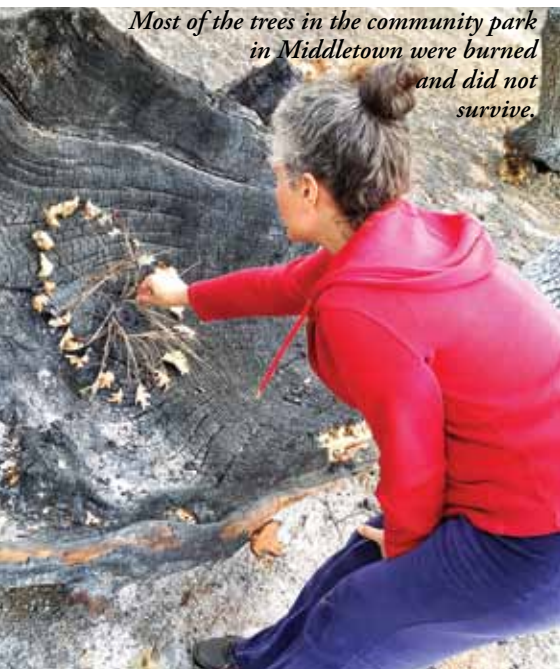
*Sama picked up this acorn in the town park and it fell open into a heart, about three weeks after the fire.*

David Agasi



*Looking toward Harbin on the day of the fire, before it reached Middletown.*

David Agasi



*Most of the trees in the community park in Middletown were burned and did not survive.*

Geoffrey Huckabay



*Our neighbor's yard, the day after we returned home from the evacuation center.*

Geoffrey Huckabay

about it in a blog titled "Ordinary Love." "Keeping the Window Open," and its companion piece, "Keeping the Window Open, Part 2," included my descriptions of the experience; I also wrote another piece six months after the fire ([geoffreyhuckabay.wordpress.com/2016/03/08/keeping-the-window-open](http://geoffreyhuckabay.wordpress.com/2016/03/08/keeping-the-window-open), [geoffreyhuckabay.wordpress.com/?s=Keeping+the+window+open+part+2](http://geoffreyhuckabay.wordpress.com/?s=Keeping+the+window+open+part+2), [geoffreyhuckabay.wordpress.com/?s=6+months+after+the+fire](http://geoffreyhuckabay.wordpress.com/?s=6+months+after+the+fire)).

Coming out of the event, I made an agreement with myself to write every day after the fire. I have for the most part kept it, although some of my writing has nothing to do with the fire, some is poetry, and some is mainly thoughts about what we as a community are going through.

I post every Wednesday on Facebook, and many of those from Harbin, and now the community of Middletown, Hidden Valley Lake, and Cobb sometimes follow. While I write mainly to sort out my own thoughts and feelings, I have gotten feedback that the posts help others to put things in perspective as well. You can find some of those posts put into blog form in "Ordinary Love." These posts may or may not say anything about the fire, but they are motivated by the opening of all of our hearts after such an event, an opening that is allowing for a coming together like I have never experienced.

There is that saying, "Misery loves company." That is one side of it. The other that comes up in my yoga class quite often is that after watching an entire community, a life, and a lifestyle burn to the ground, what was left was love. Love for each other, for ourselves, and love from other communities that still support us—Calistoga, Sebastopol, Davis, so many.

I feel so much gratitude just writing this.

After the fire, I got terribly sick from the environmental toxins of ash and debris. While down for almost four months I decided to stop working in the trades and to finish my schooling as a massage therapist (I was an electrician at Harbin). Davis is two hours away, and I needed places to stay. Within two weeks classmates opened their doors to me, without my having to say a thing, and have continued to do so over the last five months. My story is not the only one.

Right now, my wife, Sama, and I live in Middletown. A local therapist was very gracious and opened up her office for me to share yoga within a week of returning to the area after the fire, and classes have been ongoing, by donation. She made it possible for me to share even if people couldn't pay.

Sama and I have been doing bodywork on those residents and some community members who stayed. Harbin had an incredible bodywork culture, and many of the bodyworkers are still in the area because they had enough savings to weather the loss of work. I am so grateful to them because, while many of them have taken a break, they are mentoring me as I learn.

There is a community of elders here that has kept me and many others together when we fall apart. Their wisdom and life experience have been invaluable. Some of the women meet regularly in a wisdom circle that has no purpose other than to hold a space for the women and energetically to support the community.

There is an art community that has been reaching out and supporting the community healing through art.

Many therapists and bodyworkers have given their time.

The Thursday Unconditional Dance that was a regular thing at Harbin continues as Undefeated Dance in Middletown.

There have been heroic efforts, quiet efforts, surrendering, and accepting. There have also been tears of grief and sadness, as many of the residents who lost their homes are scattered to the winds, and some are still homeless. Every week I say goodbye to someone I care about, and every once in a while greet someone who is returning.

One of the biggest lessons we have learned is that valuing our community means listening deeply to each other, even when it is difficult. I thank COMMUNITIES and its readership for taking the time to listen to one of our stories. 🐦

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*Geoffrey Huckabay currently lives in Northern California with his wife, Sama Morningstar, and together they practice hands-on healing through bodywork, massage, and energy work. They also teach yoga, coach life skills, create art, and write. You can reach him by email at [geoart108@gmail.com](mailto:geoart108@gmail.com).*



# UTOPIAN POLISH AND THE DUST OF EVERYDAY LIFE:

## Twenty-Five Years of Creative Failure— What Can We Learn from the ZEGG Experiment?

*By Dieter Halbach*



Photos courtesy of Dieter Halbach

I have known the “Zentrum für experimentelle Gesellschaftsgestaltung“ (ZEGG—Centre for Experimental Cultural and Social Design) in Bad Belzig ever since its inception in 1991, and I also knew its precursors a little bit. I’ve been living close by for a year now, and I’m impressed: so many great people! For a long time, I was a little critical and reserved, partly because of what I perceived as the missionary zeal of wanting to put the world to rights and the omnipresent message of “free love” in ZEGG’s early years. This attracted me, yet it also worried and repelled me.

In ZEGG I now feel there is great personal sensitiveness and competence, a mature willingness to cooperate on an equal footing. But I don’t want simply to write a tribute on this 25th anniversary. I will be pointing out successes as well as bringing out examples of questions which remain open. My aim is that together we can learn what the community adventure is and what it could be.

### ZEGG Today—Stability over the Years

In 2016, 110 adults live in ZEGG, half-and-half men and women. Fifteen residents have been there since the start, and 38 have arrived only within the last five years. There are also 16 children and teenagers. The combination of a place to live and a place to learn makes ZEGG a special sort of community. Today it is a charitable training centre which accounts for 20,000 bed-nights annually. On the website you will read: “In the middle of our social and ecological model project you will find life and learning interwoven. The learning experience we offer unites tangibility, warmth, open

communication, and personal responsibility. A visit to us may well open new worlds for you.”

ZEGG has done a number of things right which are often ignored by most other such initiatives: the formation of a stable, experienced group from the very beginning, and working on the human themes of power, love, competition. To quote Bill Nickl: “ZEGG didn’t start from scratch; we evolved from a community—the ‘Bauhütte’—in which human themes were central. We had 80 people right from the start—40 of them with community experience. That meant we could afford to lose 10 without everything collapsing about our ears.” In the Bauhütte, “free sexuality” was the central theme. With the formation of ZEGG, the themes and aims changed, as Ina Meyer-Stoll recalls: “The intimacy and the precision of understanding we had in the ‘Bauhütte’ era was gradually lost. On the other hand, we realised that we had been neglecting needs such as protection and security. Over the course of time, we became aware of the many levels which have to be observed if we want to treat love and sexuality in a responsible manner.”

Something else changed too: the community had to develop from one with a leader structure to one able to organise itself. “That was a major challenge, and it forced us to look at ourselves,” says Achim Ecker today. “Trial and error were the bywords for years. The founders of the previous ‘Bauhütte’ project, Dieter Duhm and Sabine Lichtenfels, never actually lived in ZEGG. When they founded the Tamera community in Portugal in 1995, almost half of the ZEGG residents decided to follow them. That left behind

the pain of parting, and a feeling of helplessness and not knowing what the future held in store. We began a process of intensive basic democracy; everyone had an opinion, and we spent hours and days in decision-making processes. Whereas we had earlier run Forum [“a ritualized form of transparent communication for larger groups”]; see [www.zegg-forum.org/index\\_en.phtml](http://www.zegg-forum.org/index_en.phtml)] and life science studies on a daily basis, it now came down to much more practical things. It was an exhausting but very necessary period.”

The ability to deal with conflicts cre-

But even in a normal marriage between two people, we can be no more than “company for the other’s loneliness.” (Rilke) Community often strikes me as a hungry, demanding being, from whose suction effect we can scarcely withdraw even with the frequently-invoked need to set personal boundaries. Communities may need a different type of “new social contract” which embraces and supports, within and alongside the community, elements of peace and quiet, self-love, parents, family, friends, and all the other forms of community life.

### The Stress of Democracy

There is a direct connection between excessive social pressure and the demands of basic democracy. ZEGG successfully managed decoupling from the initial hierarchy, but the problems of a basic democracy are still present: excessively complicated decisions made by too many people. I have often wondered what happens to people when they become decision-makers. A moment ago they were nice, sensitive colleagues; now they have mutated into politicians, number devils, and so on. Cordula Andrä experienced it like this: “There are defining moments: when 40 or 50 people raise their hands. It feels existential, as if everything were at stake! Sometimes I’m a little worried that something fundamental is getting out of control. Some people then start arguing while others freeze and stay quiet.” This ego quarrelling seems to crop up in all societies when it comes to power. It isn’t

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## ZEGG successfully managed decoupling from the initial hierarchy, but the problems of a basic democracy are still present.

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actively and in a spirit of common research formed the foundations for the survival of the community.

But what problems remain unsolved in ZEGG, and what are the challenges facing it after 25 years?

### Open Questions: Communal Burnout

The high level of fluctuation—estimates speak of some 400 people living (and mostly departing) at ZEGG up to this point—is remarkable, but many of the present residents talk too of excessive social stress. This specific community burnout—too much communication instead of too little—seems to me a major problem in all the communities with which I am familiar.

Cordula Andrä, for example, has the impression of having to listen to too many stories to be able to stay in touch. “Getting involved with all these people and to open up to them costs strength and energy which I won’t have elsewhere when it’s needed.” And Silke Grimm observes that “there’s often unsatisfied longing for contact—meaning its quality (intimacy, friendship). At the same time there is an excess of contact, meaning in terms of quantity.” The attempt to obtain the longed-for quality by making more contacts can be one cause of community burnout.

Contact in communities is often organized. I myself feel it as a right to be expected of others, a “contractual entitlement” to attention, as it were in a polygamous marriage.

prevented by basic democracy, nor indeed by hierarchy.

Following the introduction of the era of basic democracy and the consensus principle in ZEGG in the mid-1990s, their disadvantages were also seen. In votes, things became emotional and it frequently happened that a veto brought entire processes to a dead stop. Achim Ecker sees one of the causes in the neglect of emotional work: “I find that consensus decisions worked very well for a long time after their introduction. For me, things started







enough the position of people with 30 years and more of service often counts more than any official rank, even in a common business. Cordula Andrä sees a lack of willingness to talk about this: “Such role conflicts are unproductive. People tend to interfere in subjects for which they are not responsible. Apart from that, I think we generally tend not to give our management staff adequate implementation possibilities.”

Personally, I appreciate good leadership, both when managing and being managed. I dream of being trained in cooperative leadership and of a radical, personal coach for every management staff member. And we need a change of attitude within the people being led: letting go of the need to control and taking a further step into trust. Obviously, that’s only possible on the basis of clearly-defined common power and ownership relationships. Then it becomes an open experiment: how can decisions be reached professionally, constructively, and in such a manner as to promote energy, at the same time recognising fears and making use of the collective intelligence? Finding answers to this question is crucial for the viability and political survival of ecological and social movements and grassroots organizations in general. In ZEGG, the balance seems to work more and more often. Cordula Andrä’s summation: “Sometimes we succeed in an almost magical moment to find a way where feelings are integrated, which is practical and productive and where everyone feels involved. We then benefit from the incredible abilities of the community to navigate common processes.”

to change in around 2005, once we had lost the Forum as a central component of internal decision-making. That’s the point when things started getting emotional.” As time went by, fewer and fewer people came to the votes and decisions were often made by small groups outside the general meetings.

In 2009, this crisis led to the determination to try out something new for the whole operation: holacracy. Holacracy is based on circles which manage their work sectors on their own responsibility. The leaders of the circles are chosen—some of them from the respective circles, others from the wider community. Central to the practice of holacracy is the awareness of tensions. If these are not discharged in other directions, they can serve as signals for things that need to change. This requires a great deal of personal responsibility—indeed a pinch of positive anarchy. That means that it’s no-one else’s fault, and that it requires creativity along with the desire and the courage to meet.

There is a further unsolved problem in those hierarchies which are flat, but indistinct. There are hierarchies in all companies, both official and unofficial. And naturally

### Love Is Free

I have experienced many communities which have suffered from unresolved questions of love and have even disintegrated because of them. Often in social life there arise new loves and with them pain and jealousy; established couples split up; singles arrive hoping to find contact; single mothers seek support. And all this often occurs unintentionally. I am very grateful to ZEGG for making this theme its number one community subject.

In the beginning at ZEGG in particular, however, there was repeated infringement of boundaries, accompanied by hurt feelings. One of the earlier residents tells how she totally failed in the matter of “free love” and lost her partner of the time. “Personally, when I was very young I found the

suggestibility of the individual in a strongly-ideological community difficult to handle. More than once I had the impression I was being manipulated rather than being supported in my development as an individual." In retrospect, she speaks of a "gruesome" situation—a justifiable word to describe the feelings of an individual standing opposite an apparently homogeneous group.

That leads us directly to a basic dilemma: community will touch old fears in every one of us. We may expect protection or feel threatened by the collective body. Joining a community today means looking for the truth within oneself, speaking with one's own voice. No community can release us from our own personal responsibility; on the contrary, a free community can only be strong if each of its individual members is too. Anyone looking for "WE" will find "themselves." Communities today are accelerators of personal development, rather than collectives where one finds one's identity. This is where an old, yearning image dating back to a biographically childlike and early evolutionary stage is being changed.

In ZEGG, on the subject of love, an intensive process towards more (personal) responsibility has taken place. Ina Meyer-Stoll says: "Today we have become more sensitive and careful. In the community there are many types of relationship: friendships and loving partnerships, open and monogamous partnerships, families and experimental relationship networks. The individuals make their own choice of relationship and form of love which best suits them and their phase of life. Our principle is that we show each other mutual respect and communicate openly." In the community there are currently four groups researching love. Roger Balmer reports: "The groups are part of our social network, offer mutual support and friendship and a place for the topics which are not suitable for the wider community."

In recent times, families with young children have come into being and some older couples have married. Families with children in particular need all their strength and love for themselves. On the other hand, they also need support and social intercourse. Is the community now a burden or a help for families? It will be exciting to see how the search for commitment can be combined with the freedom of love. This is where ZEGG can build on a huge wealth of experience. With the educational offers on love and sexuality, ZEGG also offers its guests a room for respectful ways of getting into contact. In ZEGG, many couples have met and learned to love one another.

### Learning and Living in One Place

The education centre is the heart of ZEGG. It is the largest employer, and all members contribute to the work which has to be done. It has its effect on the community in many ways. One's own life as a community experiment? A continuous growth crisis as a life form? Too many guests in one's own living sphere? This is an ongoing conflict in many communities. Dolores Richter describes the inconsistency between place of learning and place of living as a conflict since the foundation: "For many, ZEGG was a search for a home, a

place to live with all one's loved ones at last! But in the impulse that established the preceding projects, there was always a pronounced spirit of research, a vision of society which reached out far beyond the community. In many phases, self-regard and interest in pleasant coexistence within the community was stronger. On occasions, the 'avant-garde' and 'garden fence' symbolically faced up as groups."

For the artist and festival director Barbara Stützel, education activity is one reason for the continued existence of ZEGG: "With festivals and seminars we are always able to link up with our vision." All internal learning processes add to the quality of the education. But for many the integration of guests gives rise to stress, taken alongside that caused by inspiration, working, communication, and self-improvement. With its high standards, is ZEGG—at the same time perhaps driven by market forces—continually trying to catch up

with the latest world liberation theory? How then can community life and private life be harmonised with a public undertaking? Wouldn't you have to create more separation between place of learning and community, to plan more in line with needs, such as establishing quiet zones, family areas, space for research and political activities?

Every person and each of life's phases has different requirements, but when your life changes do you then immediately have to split up and leave

the community? In ZEGG and the surrounding area the beginnings of an extended community can be felt. Dolores talks of "an onion-skin model as a possible future design of community in which there can be different degrees of intensity and commitment." This model is in the initial stages of its creation, already becoming visible in the future construction plans for ZEGG and in the many link-ups with the region. It is the picture of a community which has freed itself entirely from collective thinking.

### Region—the Wider Community

For many alternative people in the region, ZEGG is an important initiator; many projects have been encouraged from here and by the large number of ex-ZEGG residents.

I ask new arrivals in the region—for example, my two new neighbours. They tell me what I have heard from so many of the people here. Beate Simon, a painter and performing artiste, says: "I feel many of those from ZEGG have worked on themselves. These meetings focusing on conscious coexistence are very beneficial. I also like the fact that their events are laced with artistic elements." Tatjana Bach, returning to the Fläming region with her "Institute for Feminine Self-Expression" after some years: "For me, ZEGG is a pioneer location of people who for decades now have been battling with the question of how living together *really* works. And without *fighting*? Nowadays, they are even called up by people from totally different contexts to share their skills! I am delighted and proud to have such neighbours!" There are also constructively critical voices such as that of Rocco Hammes, a former ZEGG

(continued on p. 76)





# AGING IN COMMUNITY:

## How an Older Couple Helped Launch a New Multi-Generational Ecovillage Neighborhood

By Wallace Watson

### Getting Here

Nine years ago, my wife Shannon and I decided (at ages 65 and 71) to downsize from our roomy Victorian house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and head north—in spite of the admonition of my daughter in South Carolina: “But Daddy, when people get old, they move south.”

We were drawn northward by a small vacation property on the Canadian side of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence River, a retreat that Shannon had acquired through her family many years earlier. We wanted to live closer than eight hours to that magical place after Shannon joined me in retirement. A friend had handed us an issue of *Time* magazine with a story on cohousing featuring EcoVillage at Ithaca, New York (EVI). “This might interest you.” It did indeed. At that time we were fairly serious about living sustainably—recycling, composting, gardening, replacing inefficient old windows, adding home insulation, even buying a hybrid car. But we knew little about cohousing and had never heard of an ecovillage.

A short time later, we briefly visited EVI. We were impressed by what we saw as we wandered through its two neighborhoods, “FROG” and “SONG,” which were completed in 1997 and 2003. There were 60 small-to-medium sized duplex homes of modern-rustic design tightly clustered on walking paths free of automotive traffic, with large south-facing windows, and a lot of rooftop photovoltaic and solar hot-water panels. Nearby were two organic farms, community gardens, a swimmable pond, and several miles of paths leading through fields into thick woods. All this was just four hours from our island cottage.

We heard that a group was planning a third neighborhood, which had just been named “TREE,” and decided to get involved, even though that meant making a six-hour drive up from Pittsburgh every few weekends. We soon came to both understand and appreciate the group’s commitment to the principles guiding the first two neighborhoods: both older and younger residents living together lightly on the land, taking responsibility for finances and maintenance, self-governing by consensus, living cooperatively while respecting privacy—not at all typical of the few retirement communities we knew about. Our growing interest in EcoVillage at Ithaca was now motivated by much more than its closeness to our Canadian vacation spot.

Early in 2008, we put down serious money (\$1,000) to become charter members of a newly formed TREE Joint Venture. This, with the increased payments that soon followed, constituted a fairly serious financial risk for an elderly couple with moderate fixed incomes and no guaranteed return if the project should fail. We hoped we could help it succeed.

### Planning the New Community

Shannon and I took on major responsibilities early in the planning process. A retired attorney, she coordinated the Legal

Committee, which developed bylaws and guided the group’s evolution from Joint Venture to Limited Liability Company and then Cooperative Corporation. As a former professor and academic administrator, I was inclined toward organizational processes and soon found myself convener of a new Co-ordination Committee, among other tasks.

We sold our Pittsburgh house in July 2011 and spent most of the next three years in rented apartments near Ithaca, anxious to know when we would be able to move into our new home. That finally happened in July 2014, shortly after my 78th birthday. By then, I had begun to wonder if I might be getting too old for this kind of adventure.

Like our predecessors in FROG and SONG, the TREE planners were intent on building not just a physical neighborhood but also an intergenerational community of people who knew, trusted, cared for, and cooperated with each other. We accomplished this in large part by resolving increasingly difficult strategic and financial challenges.

Aubrie Entwood



*The author, Wallace, and his wife Shannon, in front of their house in TREE, fall of 2015.*



James Bosjolie

## What TREE Built

Construction of the first seven stand-alone homes and two duplexes was completed in the fall of 2013. The remaining 10 singles and two more duplexes were finished in 2014. The Common House was occupied last fall. It contains a large dining room, kitchen, and other common spaces on the ground floor, as well as 15 private living units ranging in size from efficiency to three or four bedrooms.

Early in the long TREE planning period, we realized how many in our group were at or near retirement age or would soon be dealing with physical challenges. So we identified “aging in place” and “accessibility” as major considerations. Thus the Common House includes a four-story elevator, and all its living units and common areas are wheelchair accessible. So too are the entrances and first floors of the 25 stand-alone homes in the neighborhood; only the eight duplex units do not have bedrooms or complete baths on the ground level.

Our house, just one door down from the Common House (and thus, happily, close to the neighborhood laundry room), is one of 10 similar free-standing homes: a story and a half, with 1050 square-feet of living space, bedrooms and baths upstairs and down, a flexible living-dining area, and modest storage space. If Shannon or I ever need to use a walker or wheelchair, we can live on the first floor; a resident caretaker, if it comes to that, can use the second floor bedroom and bath.

All the homes in TREE are Energy Star certified; the houses have met LEED Platinum standards, and the Common House

*Residents of TREE and the two other neighborhoods at a goodbye party for a couple returning home to Austria after a short-term residency in EcoVillage at Itihaca.*

As in the two older neighborhoods here, our major decisions were made through unanimous consensus. When on occasion this method didn't seem workable, Shannon and I found it hard to disguise our impatience. Given our ages, we didn't have that long to wait! Still, the consensus process did help us all to listen more thoughtfully and eventually come to agreement, rather than to fight for narrow majoritarian victories likely to leave the losers embittered. (Last June, TREE changed its decision-making process to “Dynamic Governance,” a much more flexible way of making decisions in community.)

## Delays, Cost Increases, Solutions

At times, the planning process moved along fairly quickly, as on one memorable afternoon when we planned the general layout of the neighborhood by arranging small wooden blocks on contour maps. At the west end would stand a large Common House containing living units; from there, double rows of single-family homes and duplexes would extend eastward and northward.

It took several months, however, to agree on a detailed Architectural Program, and several years to work through increasingly difficult financial challenges. Those money problems were exacerbated by the Great Recession, as well as serious construction delays. We lost about two years' progress because the first two construction managers we hired didn't fit our needs.

Those delays of course meant increases in construction costs. The price of my and Shannon's shares in the Corporation (which gave us modified ownership of our house) rose inexorably—increasing from the architect's initial preliminary estimate of \$195,500 for the base design (to which we added over \$14,000 in optional features) to the final base cost of \$248,000, which is approximately in the middle of the range of TREE house prices.

Those increasing costs created considerable tension within the group. But TREE weathered the storm in creative and empathetic ways—including implementation of a turnover fee of three percent on future sales of TREE homes; purchase of second units by a few members for rental to those unable to secure mortgages; donations of tools, furniture, kitchenware, etc.; and extensive (in some cases heroic) sweat equity.

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**On one memorable afternoon we planned the general layout of the neighborhood by arranging small wooden blocks on contour maps.**

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is expected to be so certified soon. All the homes are equipped with very thick outside-wall insulation and unusually energy-efficient glass in windows and doors; when necessary, the interiors are warmed by a few small electric baseboard heaters. Large windows on the south allow us to shut down the



heat during even the coldest days in winter when the sun is out. In the winter, air is circulated by a sophisticated energy recovery ventilating system; in warmer weather casement windows (opening from either the top or the side) make possible natural air circulation that has virtually eliminated the need for air conditioning in any TREE homes.

### Affordability

Early on, Shannon and I hoped we would be able to pay cash for our new home, after selling the Pittsburgh house. But rising costs

However, our costs are significantly less than those in some similarly energy-efficient communities I have heard about. Moreover, many TREE members hope, with Shannon and me, that in the not-too-distant future we will figure out ways to make it possible for more lower-income people to share the TREE-EVI experience—perhaps by applying some of the proceeds of the three percent sales fee we have instituted.

### Living in TREE, EVI, Ithaca

In spite of the long wait to move into our house, Shannon and I are very happy with our decision nine years ago to undertake this challenge. Outside of EVI, she has been able to continue her lifelong participation in choral singing, through her Unitarian Church choir and a large community chorus. I've become fairly active in the Quaker Meeting here, as I was in Pittsburgh. We enjoy, often with EVI neighbors, an unusually rich variety of cultural and entertainment opportunities in Ithaca and environs: excellent movies, music, and theater; an impressive Museum of the Earth; hiking trails near dozens of waterfalls in our gorgeous Finger Lakes region ("Ithaca is gorges"); and a surprising number of good eating opportunities for such a small city.

Within EcoVillage we have hiked many nearby trails and Nordic-skied them occasionally; cooled off in two swimmable ponds; picked organic berries; regularly

joined in delicious and healthy common-house meals; and enjoyed a variety of spontaneous or planned events such as the winter-solstice "Spiral" ceremony and the "Sparkfest" celebration of village talents. As an amateur stargazer, I have attended many astronomy programs at nearby Cornell University (where the spirit of Carl Sagan is still alive) and have often taken advantage of the intentionally low outdoor lighting in EcoVillage for nighttime viewing. I am usually joined by Village neighbors old and young—including the young boy I was pleased to hear shout one afternoon last summer: "Hey, Wallace, the sky's clear. Are you getting your telescope out tonight?"

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## We who helped plan TREE have not yet fully reached the third of our goals: "Sustainability, Accessibility, Affordability."

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required us to get a mortgage. Nevertheless, our monthly payments (mortgage plus monthly maintenance fees) are only moderately higher than what we paid for the modest two-bedroom apartment we had shared before moving into TREE. Moreover, those monthly fees cover property taxes and part of our home insurance—and of course we are now building home equity.

Our energy-saving measures, including both the tight home construction and solar panels that we added during the first year after move-in, are definitely paying off. The average monthly cost for electricity (hot water, heat, all appliances) during the final year in our small ground-floor rented apartment was \$192. That expense dropped to \$73 during our first year in the TREE house (including one of the coldest winters on record). In our second year, the monthly electric bill has averaged \$33. We expect the cost of those photovoltaic and hot-water solar panels (totaling \$12,800) to be fully recovered within six or seven years of their estimated 25-year life expectations.

All in all, living in the new TREE neighborhood of EcoVillage at Ithaca is definitely "affordable" for Shannon and me. We realize, of course, that living in this community—even renting a small apartment—is an option available almost entirely to middle-class households. Thus we who helped plan TREE have not fully reached the third of the goals we so often invoked: "Sustainability, Accessibility, Affordability."

### Environmental Education and Inspiration

EcoVillage is by no means a "gated community." Many of the residents are actively engaged in important local, state, and national issues—political, economic, social, and (of course) environmental. Just living here constitutes for Shannon and me a substantial senior-citizen education on ecology and sustainability. The Village email server regular sends messages about recycling and garbage disposal, work parties for tree-planting and



Wallace Watson

*Several generations of TREE residents gather for a special breakfast in their Common House.*

other ecological improvements, environmental workshops and seminars, and ride-sharing. Some of our residents have taken leading roles in the (so-far) successful effort to ban fracking in New York State. At least a dozen have joined protesters at the site of proposed gas storage facility in the fragile salt caverns underneath nearby Seneca Lake—for which some have willingly been arrested.

### Intergenerational Living

One of the most appealing features of living in EcoVillage at Ithaca as septuagenarians has been the opportunity to share our lives with an amazing mix of people of many ages, backgrounds, personalities, and lifestyles, in an intentional community committed to sustainability.

Of the three neighborhoods, TREE has the highest proportion of older residents. A recent informal estimate indicates that there are 30 people over 60 years old in the 40 TREE households, compared to 19 and 13, respectively in FROG and SONG (each of which has 30 households). Even so, we in TREE encounter younger people continually. Our neighbors on both sides are couples with six of the 16 young children in TREE; several other households include teenagers full- or part-time. We regularly join younger adults, and sometimes children, in social events, meetings, and work-team projects. We particularly enjoy watching younger folks' outdoor activities through our large kitchen windows (which, as in all the EVI houses, are deliberately placed to look out on neighborhood pathways): parents and children hurrying to and from school and jobs or appointments downtown; kids rough-housing or having tea-parties on the grassy swale out front, and building snow-houses in winter.

### The Challenges of Aging

In many ways, our experience in TREE and EVI confirms the saying "60 is the new 40." Most of the post-60 EcoVillagers lead relatively active lives; many hold leadership positions in local and regional religious, civic, and environmental activities. I think of one resident slightly younger than I am who paused only briefly after having a second mastectomy before resuming her volunteer advocacy work opposing extraction of fossil fuels and promoting use of solar and wind energy. Seniors are major contributors to committee work and social events—as well as physical labor, from snow shoveling and grass cutting (in both of which I have been a regular participant) to preparing the new TREE common garden.

Still, an aging population will inevitably face physical and other limitations. One of our friends in TREE died of long-term cancer last spring, before she could move into her apartment in the TREE House. I know of two other residents who are dealing with cancer, and a third with serious lung disease.

Although EcoVillage at Ithaca does not provide formal medical assistance, there is a long tradition here of neighbors helping neighbors—particularly so for elderly and physically impaired residents. When I needed to make an emergency trip to the hospital one afternoon last year, I was relieved to see a dozen or so neighbors appear in our front yard

as the ambulance was parking; one of them drove Shannon to the emergency room, and several others came by to check on us later. A village Community Health and Aging Team (CHAT) is making such help more systematic. The group meets monthly to discuss present and anticipated needs of individuals in EVI, review relevant books and video presentations, and plan information-sharing events. Using a free website called "Lotsa Helping Hands," the team coordinates volunteers who provide meals, grocery and medicine pick-ups, and trips to doctors. Last year for CHAT I organized a team to help residents in health emergencies; members of the team stand ready to guide ambulances to homes, contact family members, and temporarily take care of children and pets as needed.

Shannon and I, the oldest couple currently living in TREE, have lately had to limit our participation in neighborhood and village activities because of medical problems. In 2010, Shannon was diagnosed with likely early-stage Alzheimer's disease. Shortly afterwards, she bravely explained in a TREE meeting why she could no longer chair the Legal Committee and would have to limit her other work within the community. Happily, her short-term memory loss has proceeded very slowly, and she has so far been able to continue most of the other activities she has enjoyed in EVI and the surrounding area. It is possible that her high level of social, intellectual, and physical activity at EcoVillage and in the wider community has slowed the progression of her cognitive impairment.

I too have been obliged to cut back on my participation in the community, because of

*(continued on p. 77)*



*Two women on the TREE snow-shoveling team pause from work during the hard winter of 2014-15. The unfinished Common House is in the background.*



*Ecovillagers gather to greet new TREE residents in the fall of 2015.*

Wallace Watson

James Bosjolie



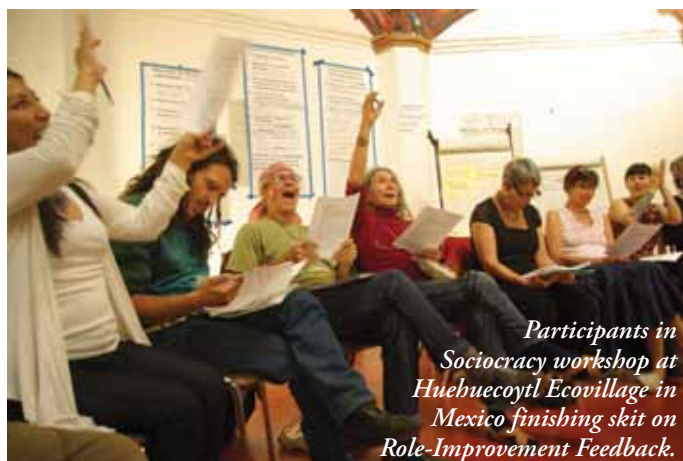
# The Seven Steps of Sociocracy —Putting it All Together

By Diana Leafé Christian

Diana Leafé Christian



*Sociocracy workshop participant in Sweden summarizing Role-Improvement Feedback for the group.*



*Participants in Sociocracy workshop at Huehucoytl Ecovillage in Mexico finishing skit on Role-Improvement Feedback.*

In every community there's plenty of work to do, from typing reports and sending emails to physical labor like weeding gardens and chopping firewood. Even though many people may mostly imagine community as lovely social gatherings with shared meals, kids, dogs, and volleyball—and not as a lot of “work”—work it certainly is, and it never stops.

Every community needs governance and decision-making. What may not be obvious is that governance is about management, and management has to do with planning, accomplishing, and monitoring the flow of work. Community governance is mostly about effectively managing the community's projects and work tasks and the funds needed to accomplish them. Since Sociocracy was designed specifically to plan, accomplish, and monitor the flow of work in an organization, it has been adopted in the last few years by various intentional communities. How does it help communities? They have faster meetings and get more done!

*“We've made more decisions in the past two months than we have in the past two years!” —Davis Hawkowl, Pioneer Valley Cohousing, Massachusetts*

*“The biggest thing is that we get things done. We don't have a backlog of things that people are afraid to bring up.” —Mike April, Pioneer Valley Cohousing, Massachusetts*

So far in this Sociocracy series we've examined the governance structure of circles and double links; specific Aims for each circle; feedback loops—including ways to measure and evaluate a proposal built into the proposal itself; and three meeting processes: Proposal-Forming, Consent-Decision-Making, and Selecting People for Roles. This article describes how a community uses all of these parts together. It also includes brief descriptions of the last two meeting processes, Role-Improvement Feedback and Consenting to Circle Members.

## A Circle's Work—“Operations”

“Operations” is a term used in business management to mean “work.” A circle, for example a community's Finance Circle, has Aims—

what it produces or provides for community; in this case, ongoing management of the community's finances.

The Aims of a functional circle are ongoing, and can change only if the General Circle changes them, but the details or specific goals or tasks that express these Aims can change or stop, depending on circumstances. (For example specific tasks or goals derived from the Aims of the Finance Circle could include proposing annual budgets, paying bills, sending invoices, collecting money, doing bookkeeping, managing bank accounts, and providing reports about the group's assets and cash flow to the General Circle and/or to whole-group meetings.)

When circle members perform their individually assigned tasks for the circle, they're doing its work—its “operations.”

In most intentional communities people propose and decide policies for how to accomplish needed tasks, and the same proposal might also include details about those tasks. In Sociocracy, however, there are two kinds of meetings: “Operations Meetings,” which are relatively frequent, informal, shorter meetings for organizing and coordinating work details; and “Policy Meetings,” more formal and infrequent meetings to create policies for the circle's work. In Sociocracy the larger and more abstract issues of creating policies to guide the work, and the more focused, concrete issues of coordinating the details of the work, occur at different times and in different meetings, which helps organizations function more effectively (and get more done).

## Policy Meetings

In a Policy Meeting circle members use one or more of Sociocracy's various meeting processes—creating new proposals through the Proposal-Forming process (including creating feedback loops in each proposal), making decisions through the Consent Decision-Making process, choosing people in the Selecting People for Roles process, and/or two more: Role-Improvement Feedback (p. 65), and Consenting to Circle Members (p. 66, this issue). Circle members can also discuss and decide ways to measure and evaluate

## Four Parts of a Policy Meeting

### 1. Opening Round:

- Check-In, transition into meeting

### 2. Administrative Matters:

- Requests for changing agenda items
- Announcements, if any
- Consent to minutes of previous meeting
- Confirm next meeting (date, time, etc.)

### 3. Matters of Content (any or more of the following):

- Proposal-forming
- Consider proposals with consent decision-making
- Evaluate implemented proposals
- Select people for roles (elections)
- Role-improvement feedback for circle members in roles
- Consent to proposed new circle members (Consent to removing a circle member)
- Accept reports from lower circles

### 4. Closing Round:

- Evaluate facilitation, group effectiveness: “What went well? What can we improve?”  
—DLC

## A Circle’s Logbook or Log Website

For a more thorough description of Logbooks and Log Websites, ask the author for her “Logbook” handout at [diana@ic.org](mailto:diana@ic.org).

### Logbook sections about the whole community that are the same for every circle:

1. The community’s Vision, Mission, and Aims.
2. Diagram of the Community’s circles and double-links structure, showing the General Circle, Top Circle, each functional circle, and any attached smaller or “lower” circles, and the Domains and Aims of each circle.
3. Community Bylaws.
4. Community agreements about how they do things that apply to all members and to all circles.

### Logbook sections for the the circle itself:

5. The circle’s Domain and Aim.
6. Each circle member’s name and their general and specific responsibilities and tasks for the circle’s specific work for community.
7. The term length, responsibilities of, qualifications for, and desired characteristics of each role in the circle, including (but not limited to) Representative, Operations Leader, Facilitator, and Meeting Administrator.
8. Minutes of each Policy Meeting of the circle.
9. The circle’s Development Plan. This includes any training, experience, teaching, and research that circle members may need for their circle to function effectively.
10. Individual work plan. A description of the responsibilities and tasks of each circle member for which they are solely responsible in the circle, including each person’s own development plan or “plan for improvement” from each Role-Improvement Feedback session.

—DLC

and possibly change a proposal they’ve previously implemented. They also hear reports and approve meeting minutes. (See, “Four Parts of a Policy Meeting,” this page.)

Policy Meetings are facilitated by the circle’s Facilitator. Every circle also has a Representative and an Operations Leader. In a Policy Meeting of the Finance Circle, for example, one circle member would function in the role of Representative to the General Circle; another would function in the role of Operations Leader from the General Circle.

A fourth role in Policy Meetings is the Meeting Administrator.

## The Meeting Administrator

Before each Policy Meeting the circle’s Meeting Administrator (called “Secretary” and “Circle Administrator” in Sociocracy literature) gathers items for the agenda and helps prepare the agenda for the next meeting, along with the circle’s Facilitator, and, in most businesses that use Sociocracy, with the Operations Leader as well.

The Meeting Administrator is also responsible for seeing that someone takes the minutes at each Policy Meeting, and can either take the minutes themselves or arrange for another circle member to do so.

The Meeting Administrator also maintains the circle’s Logbook and/or Log Website. This is a three-ring binder or a website or both, with documents that contain the history of the circle and its relationship to the whole community. For Logbook/Log Website documents, see “A Circle’s Logbook (or Log Website),” this page.

## Operations Meetings

In Operations Meetings circle members organize and coordinate the details of their specific work tasks. (These could also simply be called “Work Meetings.”) A Building and Grounds Circle, for example, could have a brief work-coordination Operations Meeting before the start of a work party.

The specific details of how policies or projects are implemented and which circle member does which specific tasks and coordinating these tasks and arranging the logistics for them are decided in Operations Meetings. If the circle wants to coordinate work or decide the details of how it gets done, it’s an Operations Meeting.

## Difference between Operations and Policy Meetings

Sociocracy trainer John Schinnerer describes the difference between the two kinds of meetings like this:

*“In Policy Meetings policies about work tasks are decided by consent among people with equivalence.*

*“In Operations Meetings, previously consented-to decisions are implemented.”*

In businesses, Policy Meetings take longer and might occur once a month. Operations Meetings are quicker and might occur more frequently or whenever needed. They are separate meetings, and separating the concepts of operations/work and policy-making is an important part of Sociocracy.

In businesses and nonprofit organizations, each member of a circle usually works five days a week, and at the same time and in the same place. Thus it’s easy to have quick, stand-up Operations Meetings several times a week to discuss and coordinate details of everyone’s work.

But in an intentional community, each circle member is a volunteer who doesn’t work five days a week like in a business. Each circle



member of the Finance Circle, for example, might perform their different tasks at different times and in different places, probably in their own homes. The circle members would still do all the work of their circle, but not at the same time or in the same location.

(However, there are exceptions. Members of a community's Grounds and Landscaping Circle, for example, might perform their landscaping tasks all at the same time in a work party, in which case they would be working at the same time and in the same places).

But even though members of most circles in intentional communities don't work together every day in the same location, they still need periodic Operations Meetings. So it can work to schedule an Operations Meeting at the end of a Policy Meeting, with a break in-between the two kinds of meetings, to clearly indicate they have completely different functions.

### Decision-Making in Operations Meetings—the Circle's Choice

In Operations Meetings circle members can make decisions any way they like. They need only propose a decision-making method for Operations Meetings and consent to it (which they would do in a Policy Meeting).

The Operations Leader could decide everything unilaterally, and this is how it is done in most businesses and nonprofit organizations using Sociocracy. The Operations Leader decides the details of how policies are implemented in terms of discrete tasks, which circle member will do which tasks, and how these tasks are coordinated. This is why this role is called Operations "Leader." If the circle discovers they don't have a policy for something that comes up, the Operations Leader decides in the moment how to handle it, and the circle creates a policy for it at their next Policy Meeting.

But since circle members can decide how they'll make decisions in Operations Meetings, if they didn't want the Operations Leader to decide they could use consent decision-making, classic consensus or one of its modifications, or majority-rule or super-majority voting. Or circle members could just talk about how they'll orga-

## Eight Steps of Role-Improvement Feedback

*For a more thorough explanation of and details about this Sociocracy meeting process, request the author's comprehensive article on Role-Improvement Feedback at [diana@ic.org](mailto:diana@ic.org).*

### 1. Feedback Team meets, comprised of:

- Person in the role who will receive feedback
- One to two people in his/her circle
- One to two people from smaller circle who work with the person
- Another person as Facilitator

### 2. Facilitator goes over:

- Term length, duties, requirements for, desired qualities for the role

### 3. Person states:

- Positive aspects of their work in role so far

### 4. Team members state:

- Positive aspects of person's work so far

### 5. Person states:

- Any improvements he or she could make

### 6. Team members add:

- Their views of any improvements if needed

### 7. Person summarizes things going well and needed improvements. Proposes plan for improvements.

- Plan can include actions other circle members take too

### 8. Consent Round for person's circle to consent to plan

—DLC



*Huehucoytl workshop participants getting a sense of Policy Meetings.*

Jan Svante

## Five Steps to Consent to a Circle Member

*For a more thorough explanation of and details about this Sociocracy meeting process, request the author's workshop handout on *Consenting to Circle Members (and when needed, asking people to leave a circle)* at [diana@ic.org](mailto:diana@ic.org).*

### 1. (Optional) Applicant's questions/comments

- Person can ask circle members questions or makes comments.
- Person could ask more questions in addition to those asked during earlier interview process.

### 2. Circle's questions/comments round

- Circle members ask person questions or make comments about their potential inclusion in the circle.

### 3. Circle's consent round

- Assuming nothing alarming or difficult comes up, facilitator proposes the person be invited to join the circle.
- If there is a concern, proposal can have conditions; for example, a Garden Circle can ask applicant to not bring their dog to garden work because he loves to dig holes, and the person agrees.
- Consent round involves all circle members except the person (since the proposal is about them), but the person is still present.

### 4. Applicant's consent

- Facilitator asks applicant, "Do you consent to be part of the circle?" (And names the condition to return, if there is one.)

### 5. Celebrate decision

- Applicant consents; circle celebrates the decision.

## Four Steps to Remove a Circle Member

*A circle might ask someone to leave for a specific period for further Sociocracy training or to improve communication skills, or to leave indefinitely. Person can be present and offer reasoned arguments but does not participate in consent round. (Or they may choose to not be present.)*

### 1. (Optional) Person's questions/comments

- Person can ask circle members questions or makes comments.

### 2. Circle's questions/comments round

- Circle members ask person questions or make comments about their potentially being asked to leave.

### 3. Circle's consent round

- Assuming nothing changes, facilitator proposes that person leave the circle, temporarily or indefinitely.
- If temporary, proposal can have conditions for their return.
- Consent round involves everyone except the person but they are still present (unless they choose not to attend the meeting).

### 4. Acknowledge decision

- Assuming there is consent to remove the person, facilitator offers everyone present the opportunity to say how they feel (sad, frustrated, relieved, and so on). If person is not present, circle determines who will tell the person about the decision.

—DLC

nize their work without any particular decision-making method.

Bottom Line: In Policy Meetings decisions are made solely by Consent Decision-Making. In Operations Meetings circle members choose whichever method they want.

By the way, if the Operations Leader makes the decisions in Operations Meetings, that role is the only role that is really "active" in these meetings. The roles of Facilitator, Meeting Administrator, and Representative are inactive when performing the circle's work tasks and in Operations Meetings. These three roles only apply to Policy Meetings.

Why is the "Operations Leader decides" the default method? Because if the Operations Leader decides these details it's easier and faster for the circle. It can be a relief to know that every small work decision doesn't have to be made by consent decision-making, which is rather unwieldy for such simple, straightforward issues. John Schinnerer suggests that it's easy enough for an Operations Leader to make unilateral decisions about implementing the circle's policies and coordinating work activities, since each person in the circle already proposed and consented to these policies in the first place. This is a "circular hierarchy," since an Operations Leader can't carry out any policy the circle members didn't already decide themselves.

Remember, some of the main reasons a community uses Sociocracy in the first place are to help projects and work tasks go more smoothly and effectively, to save meeting time, and to get more things done more quickly with more enjoyment.

*"People are happier and more satisfied and getting more things done."* —Laurie Nelson, *Pioneer Valley Cohousing, Massachusetts*

*"A visitor said she'd never seen a community meeting be so effective, efficient, and fun!"* —Hope Horton, *Hart's Mill Ecovillage, North Carolina*

The next article, the last in our series, will examine the specific benefits experienced by various communities that have used Sociocracy for several years, and what can go wrong when well-meaning community members use only some parts of it and use it incorrectly. 🐦

*Diana Leafe Christian, author of *Creating a Life Together and Finding Community*, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops internationally. She has taught Sociocracy to intentional communities in North America, Europe, and Latin America, and recently offered 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.*



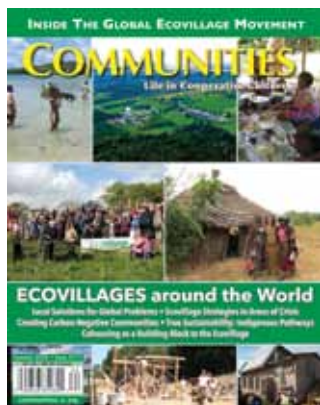
*Huehuecoytl workshop participants discussing the differences between Policy and Operations Meetings.*

Jan Svante

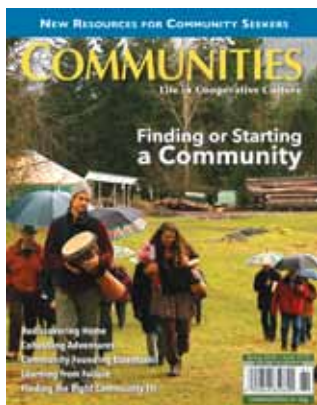


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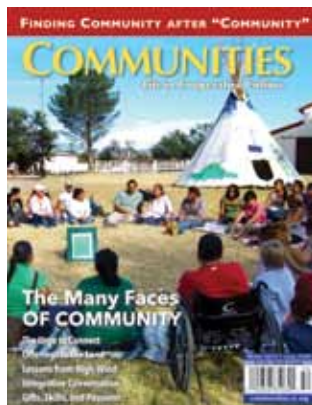
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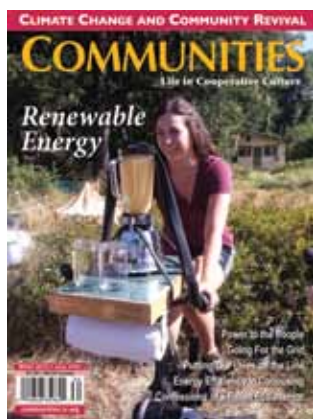
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**DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE, RUTLEDGE, MISSOURI.** Come live lightly with us, and be part of the solution! Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage is an intentional community and educational non-profit focused on living, researching, and demonstrating sustainable living possibilities. We live, work and play on 280 acres of lovely rolling prairie, and welcome new members to join us in creating a vibrant community

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**BREITENBUSH HOT SPRINGS IS HIRING!** Information Services - Network Administrator/Assistant. - Breitenbush Hot Springs (BHS), a worker-owned cooperative, is a remote, rustic retreat and conference center located ten miles north of Detroit, Oregon. The community of 60-80 people is surrounded by the Willamette National Forest and has access to countless outdoor activities. BHS has an immediate opening on our Information Services Team for a full-time Network Administrator/Assistant. This position works with the Network Administrator to provide end-user technical support and maintain hardware and software infrastructures for a unique Apple OSX-based network that provides a wide array of services. Thorough working knowledge of OS X Server and Ubuntu Linux is required. For more information, please visit our website at [www.breitenbush.com](http://www.breitenbush.com). Full-time regular hire positions at Breitenbush make Oregon Minimum wage. For more information email [personnel@breitenbush.com](mailto:personnel@breitenbush.com) or call Personnel at 503.854.3320 ext. 119 for more information. Applicants can use our online application at: <http://www.breitenbush.com/community/employment.html>

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**PERMACULTURE TEACHER TRAINING WITH PENNY LIVINGSTON, JUDE HOBBS, ANDREW MILLISON.** Sept. 3-11, 2016. Sharing information is Regenerative ~ Be Part of the Permaculture Solution. Commonweal Garden, Bolinas California - 1 hour North of San Francisco on the California Coast. [regenerativedesign.org/programs/permaculture-teacher-training#175](http://regenerativedesign.org/programs/permaculture-teacher-training#175)



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**PERMACULTURE IS ALL ABOUT CREATING SUSTAINABLE HUMAN HABITAT.** What better place to learn about sustainable human habitat than an ecovillage? Dancing Rabbit's Center for Sustainable and Cooperative Culture is delighted to team up again with Midwest Permaculture to offer another 9-day Permaculture Design Course (PDC), happening September 17 to September 25, 2016, at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri. [www.dancingrabbit.org/permaculture/](http://www.dancingrabbit.org/permaculture/)

**WEST COAST COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE 2016: RACIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE** - Thursday September 29th to Sunday October 2nd 2016 @ Groundswell Institute, ecovillage and retreat center. [groundswell.institute/our-programs/west-coast-communities-conference/](http://groundswell.institute/our-programs/west-coast-communities-conference/)

**ARTHUR MORGAN INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS. OCT 21-23, YELLOW SPRINGS, OH.** A community of educators, authors, filmmakers, and activists exploring Community Solutions to Peak Energy and Climate Change, this year's conference focuses on the theme of, "Charting a New Course." Topics will span community activism, economics, ecopsychology, permaculture and more. [www.communitysolution.org/2016conference/](http://www.communitysolution.org/2016conference/)

**NORTH AMERICAN STUDENTS OF COOPERATION (NASCO) INSTITUTE 2016** - Over 400 participants will converge on Ann Arbor, Michigan from November 11th through 13th, 2016 to share ideas, learn new skills, and look at issues affecting the cooperative movement worldwide. [www.nasco.coop/institute](http://www.nasco.coop/institute)

**GREEN FESTIVALS** in LA, NYC, Portland, DC, San Francisco: [www.greenfestivals.org/](http://www.greenfestivals.org/)

## PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS

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**COHOUSING COACHES / COHOUSING CALIFORNIA / AGING IN COMMUNITY:** Hi, we're Raines Cohen and Betsy Morris, longtime communitarians living at Berkeley (CA) Cohousing. We've both served on the FIC board and have collectively visited over 100 cohousing neighborhoods, lived in two, and helped many. We have participated in the Group Pattern Language Project (co-creating the Group Works Deck) and are on the national cohousing advisory board. Betsy has an urban planning/economic de-

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velopment background; Raines wrote the "Aging in Community" chapter in the book Audacious Aging. We're participating with the Global Ecovillage Network and helping communities regionally organize in California. We'd love to help you in your quest for sustainable living. Let's talk about how we can help you make your dream real and understandable to your future neighbors. <http://www.CohousingCoaches.com/> 510-842-6224

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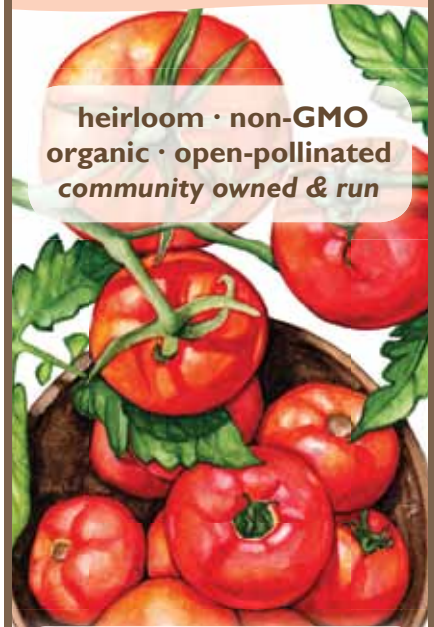
Model Homes currently under construction - starting at \$285,000. [www.villagesatcrestmountain.com](http://www.villagesatcrestmountain.com) Lee Schrein, Broker- Crest Realty, LLC (828) 252-7787.

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**LIVE YOUR DREAM - AND HELP FIC!** -- Incredible property now for sale, which includes a \$10,000 donation by the seller to FIC when it is sold! 80 acre retreat in the mountains of Western NC has everything needed to start and sustain a Community of 35-40 members in hard housing, plus 100 or more in primitive housing and camping. Includes Canopy zip line business, orchards, honey bees, trout farm, bath houses, greenhouses, laundry facilities, workout room, hydro power generator, chicken coop, pig sty, picnic shelters, 18 hole disc golf course, hiking & biking trails, and much more! \$1,250,000. Owner financing available. Contact Cleve Young @ 828-765-9696, or email [ads@ic.org](mailto:ads@ic.org).

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**THE CHOICES WE MAKE**

*(continued from p. 49)*

The answer I'd propose is that if you've experienced community, you know it when you feel it; that generally it's a good thing; and that if it isn't the whole answer, it may be the best part. The Volunteers of India 4 shared an intense experience. Some of them already live on only in memory. Yet even so, they are part of a long chain which stretches into the future through their children and those they have affected; a chain that links with similar communities through the thousand times thousands of shared and collaborative commitments; a chain that makes life on this planet more than an aggregate of gated isolation and greedy indifference; a chain that supports the choices we make to cohere through community, our most hopeful alternative. 🌸

*Paul Freundlich was an Editor/Publisher of COMMUNITIES (within our collective framework) for a decade (mid '70s-mid '80s). He is the founder and President Emeritus of Green (Co-op) America, launched Dance New England, helped found the CERES Coalition and served on its Board for 23 years, was Chair of the Stakeholder Council of the Global Reporting Initiative. Paul's novel, Deus ex Machina, and a collection of short stories, The Most Amazing Night We Ever Spent, are available through Amazon, and many of his films and videos, dating from the early documentaries about the Peace Corps, are on YouTube. His most recent project, a portal to discover and explore the world's most potent and promising places and projects in terms of community and sustainability, is accessible through [www.exemplars.world](http://www.exemplars.world).*



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## GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM STARTS AT HOME

(continued from p. 50)

enough to allow our self-righteousness to lessen in the light of a deeper wisdom. We find our voice and personal agency as we try out new perspectives together. I wonder how it would be possible for me to consider political involvement without this safe space to hear my voice, to be heard and respected, and to also be safe enough to be transformed in my own thinking.

I have also been recognizing some of the practical benefits of being in “a village” and living in this supportive way. I write this from the airport as I travel yet again to facilitate some programs. Meanwhile, the community is planting the front garden as I sit here typing. I will come home in a week and find new vegetable garden boxes in the back yard. I will see some photos of the progress this week on Facebook! And I look forward to arriving back home next week to contribute to this work. I benefit from the flow of life that goes on when I am away and for the warm welcome on return back into that flow of life. We will exchange stories and from that exchange, we will see further into the reality of things.

I was interviewed recently about a documentary film I had included in one of the programs I was leading. At the end of the interview, I heard some wisdom emerge from within myself and I see the fierceness of life in what stumbled out of my mouth:

“Anything that’s going to be sustainable in activism or in mysticism has to be done with others. We’re all in this together. Thus I think the first movement for anyone who is serious about activism and spiritual growth is to find a community. I need to find like-minded folks to share my vision, to sustain me and also to hold me accountable.” 🌱

*Dan Hines lives in RareBirds Housing Co-operative ([www.rarebirdshousing.ca](http://www.rarebirdshousing.ca)). In addition to working in leadership consulting and small group facilitation (with the collaboration of the Center for Courage & Renewal and Parker J. Palmer), he is active in a refugee resettlement team and the Green Party. See also Dan’s website, [www.danhines.ca](http://www.danhines.ca), and the interview at [www.asmallgoodthingfilm.com/dan\\_hines](http://www.asmallgoodthingfilm.com/dan_hines).*



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La Cité Écologique is located in Colebrook New Hampshire.

Our ecovillage gives priority to education, the well-being of its members, sustainable development, and respect for all living things. We also believe strongly in serving our local rural community.

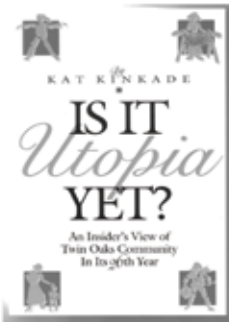
We are surrounded by 325 acres of beautiful land, forest and mountains. So far we have built one single family building, two large community residences where people live in a kind of condo arrangement, one community building which includes a community kitchen, a community hall, a laundry room and a nice fireplace for our long winters.

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Contact: Leonie Brien (603) 331-1669

[www.citeecologiqueen.org](http://www.citeecologiqueen.org)



## 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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## UTOPIAN POLISH AND THE DUST OF EVERYDAY LIFE: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CREATIVE FAILURE—WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE ZEGG EXPERIMENT?

*(continued from p. 58)*

resident, now engaged in local initiatives. He says: "Many communities have been absorbed by their internal processes right at the start, and ZEGG was no exception there. Looking back, I wish I could have installed an advisory committee of long-term residents from the Fläming region and the new residents of ZEGG. I could have gotten the message over to these little by little and outwardly have 'translated' in both directions. The way things went, even after 25 years there is still some ill-feeling."

### The Door Is Open

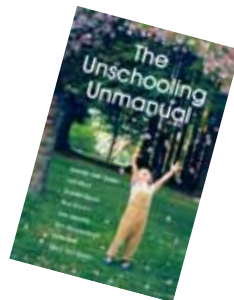
When I visit ZEGG today, I feel welcome and free. ZEGG has managed to reinvent itself repeatedly and to integrate new people and impulses. It has developed from a quite ideological model for a way of living which was intended to be adopted by others, to an open educational facility and place of inspiration with many and diverse links. People learn to live in community and take this with them into their everyday lives. Within the region, too, ZEGG has established itself as a centre of diverse and sustainable development. The "closed community" of the early years, which is symbolised by the fencing around the former secret police land at the edge of the town, now receives me with a new artistically-designed open wrought-iron gate. The fence alongside has gone. The path is inviting and anyone can walk it. ZEGG has arrived in the gentle Utopia of open questions. I am convinced that it will continue to grow and find exciting answers. 🌸

*The article was written at the request and with close and critical cooperation of the ZEGG community.*

*Dieter Halbach, born in 1953, has been living in communities since the end of the '60s. He was part of the anti-nuclear movement, lived in a self-sustaining community in northern Italy, and is one of the founders of Sieben Linden Ecovillage. He is a passionate musician and author and works as an editor.*

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## AGING IN COMMUNITY: HOW AN OLDER COUPLE HELPED LAUNCH A NEW MULTI-GENERATIONAL ECOVILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD

(continued from p. 62)

my increasing responsibilities as Shannon's care partner as well as a cardiac arrhythmia that required insertion of a pace-maker last spring, I am now intent upon making most of my contributions to our community life through less psychologically and physically stressful tasks than those I took on earlier. I am happily involved in committees dealing with land use, gardening, and composting, and Shannon and I frequently join in spontaneous projects meeting unanticipated needs of the community. I will still enjoy joining others in clearing light snow from our paths, but I won't be lifting the heavy, wet stuff anymore.

It is frustrating to have to limit my contributions to our community life in these ways, and to have to start saying "no" increasingly to the many social and cultural opportunities available in EVI, Ithaca, and the surrounding region. But it's good to see how many younger people have taken increased responsibility for major tasks in the Village and are taking the initiative for organizing pleasurable activities here and outside.

### Elderhood

Of course, those of us who have to limit our more active work in the community can feel good about contributing in quieter ways. I think we have a lot to offer younger people. We can share the breadth and depth of understanding that comes with having lived long, and the serenity that many of us often feel as we contemplate the coming end of our lives. In the final chapter of *What Are Old People For?* the well-known writer on aging, Dr. Bill Thomas, describes three "late-life developmental tasks" of Elders (as distinguished from more action-oriented Adults): "peacemaker," "wisdom-giver," and "legacy creator." I can't say that I aspire to all of those roles. But I have noticed that I speak up a lot less often in TREE meetings than in my earlier years here. I now find it easier to look upon whatever current issue is raging within our community with a sort of benevolent detachment, taking a long-range view. Others have told me they find this valuable. I expect to devote myself increasingly to writing, astronomy, photography, and music—in general to slowing down and to spending more time getting to know well the extraordinary people who live here (young and old), paying more attention to the natural phenomena so close at hand, and sharing these experiences as I can with Shannon and others.

In spite of all the volunteer support and assistance that is offered by our friends and neighbors in EcoVillage, Shannon and I (as well as others here, I am sure) are trying to be realistic about our present and future needs and the limits of long-term health care available here. We fully recognize that a community such as ours cannot provide the kind of medical care that would be available in a continuing care retirement community.

We are doing what we can to prepare for what may come. Of course, we regularly see our primary physician and specialists. We have taken advantage of support programs in the outside community sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association, the county Office for the Aging, and a senior resource center. In consultation with our children (all of whom live a considerable distance away), we are beginning to look into residential health care facilities in and near Ithaca, and elsewhere, in case we need to make such a move.

Meanwhile, we look forward to living as long and actively as we can in the very stimulating and satisfying intergenerational neighborhood that we helped create over many years—and in the larger community that includes it. We are convinced that we did the right thing in undertaking this late-life adventure in EcoVillage at Ithaca. And we are grateful for the stimulation and support we expect to continue to receive from our age-peers as well as our younger neighbors here—up to and beyond the point at which we may have to make the difficult decision to leave this community. 🌿

*Wallace Watson and his wife Shannon Wagner joined the planning group for the TREE neighborhood of EcoVillage at Ithaca (NY) in 2008 and have lived in TREE since July 2014. Wallace was formerly a professor of English and college/university administrator, most recently at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

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## HAPPINESS IN COMMUNAL LIFE: A SCIENTIFIC PROJECT

(continued from p. 80)

life persons living in these communities?

A key observation was that people in ICs reported to be very happy with their lives. Obviously, happiness is not as easy to probe as weight or body temperature. One accepted measure is based on questions of the type: “I am satisfied with my life”, where people respond on a scale from *Strongly disagree* (value 1) to *Strongly agree* (value 7). We used a set of five such questions (based on a strategy developed by the psychologist Ed Diener). The participants scored on average 5.4 (on a scale from 1-7 where 7 is the most happy). This is on par with the best results obtained in any population, and well above the typical response of North Americans.

There are some obvious caveats. For one, individuals who choose to live in ICs may be characterized by a more positive sentiment than the average population. Moreover, the sub-population that filled in the questionnaire may have been further selected in the direction of positive attributes. In fact, we did see that the respondents had a high level of education, and they scored well above the US norms as to desirable psychological traits—such as emotional stability, agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness.

Although a selection bias may partly explain both the satisfaction with life and other attractive attributes, there are reasons to believe that the results also reflect an advantage of communal life. This position is supported by the highly positive response to the following two questions: 1) How satisfied are you with your community?; and 2) How has your life changed since becoming a member? The average scores were respectively 5.9 and 6.1 on the 1–7 scales used. At least most of the participants expressed very strongly that their lives had improved by living in an IC. Moreover, the high scores on *Emotional stability* and *Conscientiousness* correlated with the number of years in the community.

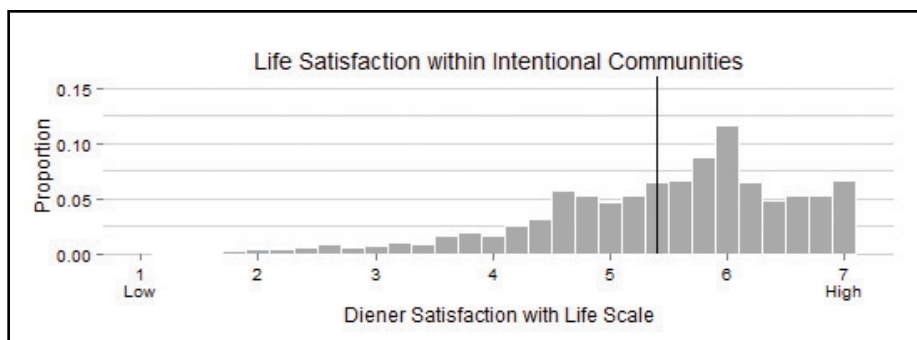
We went on to examine which features of life in ICs might be responsible for the reported satisfaction with life. Satisfaction had a strong correlation with social support; inhabitants with a high level of supportive friends and associates were happier. The same was true for those who engaged themselves in, and felt oneness with, their communities. These results are not at all surprising. Social connectivity is generally found to be the most prominent predictor of happiness, and the participants scored relatively high on measures of social life.

Perhaps slightly more surprising was the observation that the number one predictor of life satisfaction was to have found a *meaning in life*. Again, the present population scored high on this measure when compared to other studies of US populations. Moreover, those who reported to be searching for a meaning were considerably less happy than those who had found a meaning.

### Evolutionary Perspectives

Social connections were presumably important for the survival of prehistoric humans. We evolved to live in small-scale, tribal communities (perhaps 20-40 people) with tight connections and considerable engagement in tribal affairs. Some of the benefits we uncovered in our study may be ascribed to ICs offering a somewhat similar setting.

The importance of finding *meaning in life* is less obvious. It may be explained by an evolutionary mechanism installed to spur the individual to do whatever is construed as conducive to the propagation of life (and thus genes). In a hunter-gatherer society, daily activities required for sustenance probably reduced the need for seeking meaning elsewhere. The





present focus on meaning, or purpose, may reflect an alienation from the traditional way of life. Daily activities no longer entail the same palpable relevance, thus meaning has to be sought in other spheres of life. ICs are probably better at catering to this need compared to general (industrialized) society. As implied by the term *intentional*, they gather people under an umbrella of some form of intent. Furthermore, many communities stress the importance of growing, and preparing, their own food.

### Sustainability

It is important to reduce the ecological footprint made by the average citizen of industrialized countries. We need, in other words, to decrease consumption. The participating communities belonged to three loosely defined categories: 1) ecovillages (focusing on sustainability); 2) cohousing and related initiatives based on practical and/or psychological benefits of communal life; and 3) religious communities (where a shared belief system is the main foundation). Regardless of their main focus, most ICs converge on a lifestyle of less expenditure. Indeed, many respondents in our sample mentioned sustainability concerns as a primary reason for joining their community. Supporting the effectiveness of this position are several existing studies indicating that members of ICs do leave a smaller ecological footprint.

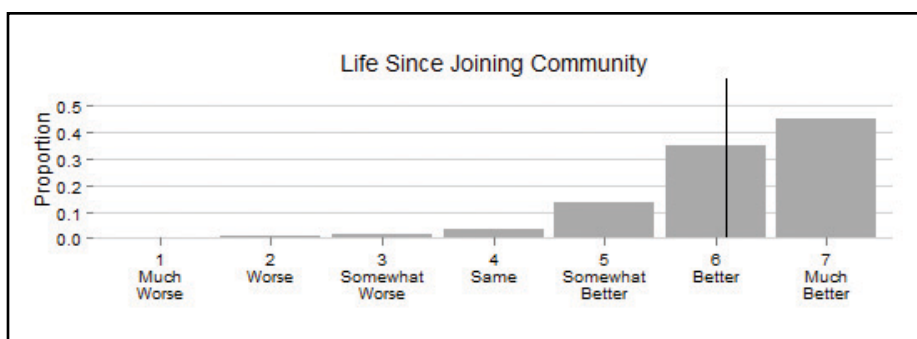
It is difficult to sell a low consumerism lifestyle to the general population if it means a reduced quality of life. That, perhaps, is the real beauty of our results. The participating IC members proved that it is possible to combine happiness with a low impact lifestyle. The research was admittedly based on long-standing communities—the respondents had on the average 10 years of tenure. Establishing a flourishing IC requires hard work and considerable perception; but when successful, there are distinct benefits for both members and future generations.

The success is apparently due to features that may be manifested, or at least reached for, by both mainstream and alternative societies: a strong social network and a meaningful life. The feasibility of these attributes, even within large cities, is suggested by the fact that many of the participating communities were indeed situated in cities—typically in the form of cohousing ventures.

### There Is More To Be Learned

The first scientific paper based on the project has been submitted to a scientific journal, yet our research project is far from finished. There is a lot more data to mine from the questionnaire responses already obtained. We also find the IC movement to be a very interesting venue for further investigations. Hopefully, this research will benefit both the community initiatives and greater society. 🌸

*Bjørn Grinde is educated in biology, anthropology, and psychology. He presently works as a chief scientist at the Division of Mental and Physical Health, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, where he tries to understand how evolution has shaped the human brain (see grinde.wikispaces.com). He has published several books related to this topic, including one that explores alternative ways of living: Improving the Human Zoo (The Darwin Press, 2015).*



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BETH G. RAPS

Ph.D.

# Happiness in Communal Life: A SCIENTIFIC PROJECT



*Traditional societies benefit from resilient social bonds. Here, Masai women and children in Tanzania.*



*Working together in producing food offers both social life and meaningful tasks. Here, attunement outside one of the greenhouses at Findhorn, Scotland.*

Bjorn Grinde

I am a biologist with a special interest in what happiness is about. I am in the fortunate position to pursue that interest as a scientist working for the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. For me, a key question is: How can we organize a society in a way that caters to human well-being and at the same time saves the environment?

The intentional community movement attracted my interest several years ago for two reasons. For one, as a scientist I like to perform experiments. While that is relatively straightforward when dealing with mice or rats, humans are difficult. Fortunately, humans are quite keen on doing experiments on themselves. They set up all sorts of strange environments to live in. As a scientist all I need is to harvest information as to how these experiments proceed. Intentional communities are perfect in this respect as they are located within mainstream society, yet have particular qualities that set them apart. It means the inhabitants start out with the same cultural background, yet choose to live in a way that contrasts with what is typical for industrialized countries. The question is what impact this choice has.

My other reason for approaching ICs is that they do, in certain ways, lead us back to the “roots of the human soul.” At least, that is the way I see it. For most of my professional life I have tried to understand how evolution has shaped the human brain—a topic that may be referred to as *human behavioral biology*. Industrialized society has a severe problem reflected in the statistics of mental disorders and the concomitant reduction in quality of life. As a human behavioral biologist I look for possible causes in whatever is different between the present way of life and the environment that shaped our genetic constitution. The latter can loosely be referred to as Stone Age tribal life. We appear to be in a situation similar to animals living in a deprived setting such as an unsavory zoo. There are elements in ICs that reflect an adaptation to our genes. I do not suggest that we should move back to the Stone Age—there are too many benefits of

modern life—but we may take a lesson or two from our past.

In order to utilize the potential inherent in the IC movement, I contacted Professor David Sloan Wilson at Binghamton University (upstate New York). Like me, he is a biologist who brings an evolutionary perspective to the question of how to best organize society. He recruited his Ph.D. student, Ian MacDonald; while I recruited a psychologist from my Institute, Ragnhild Bang Nes. Together we formed a team aimed at tackling the required research.

## The Research Project

With the help of the Fellowship for Intentional Community, and Laird Schaub in particular, we contacted a large number of communities to ask their members to fill in an anonymous questionnaire. The questions probed topics such as life satisfaction, social connectedness, and mental issues. To motivate participation, respondents were entered into a cash lottery draw, with prizes totaling \$6000 being awarded to the community the winners represented. In total, over 1000 people responded, spanning 174 communities (primarily in the US).

The number of participants was sufficient to do meaningful statistical analyses. We were particularly interested in: 1) How people were coping in intentional communities compared to outside populations; and 2) what communal features correlated with well-being. We hoped the results might help communities improve their organization and philosophy. Moreover, there might also be communal features that can be applied to mainstream society in order to improve life satisfaction. The world is in dire need of finding ways of living that combine a happy life with a reduced ecological footprint.

## What We Found

So, how did our scientific musings fare when confronted with real-  
*(continued on p. 78)*





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### PLOWSHARE FARM

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### CAMPHILL VILLAGE KIMBERTON HILLS

Camphill Village Kimberton Hills is a dynamic farming, gardening, and handcrafting intentional community that includes adults with developmental disabilities. Over 100 individuals, living and working side by side, create a caring community for people of all ages and varied abilities on 432 acres in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Contact Craig Brown: (610) 935-3963.

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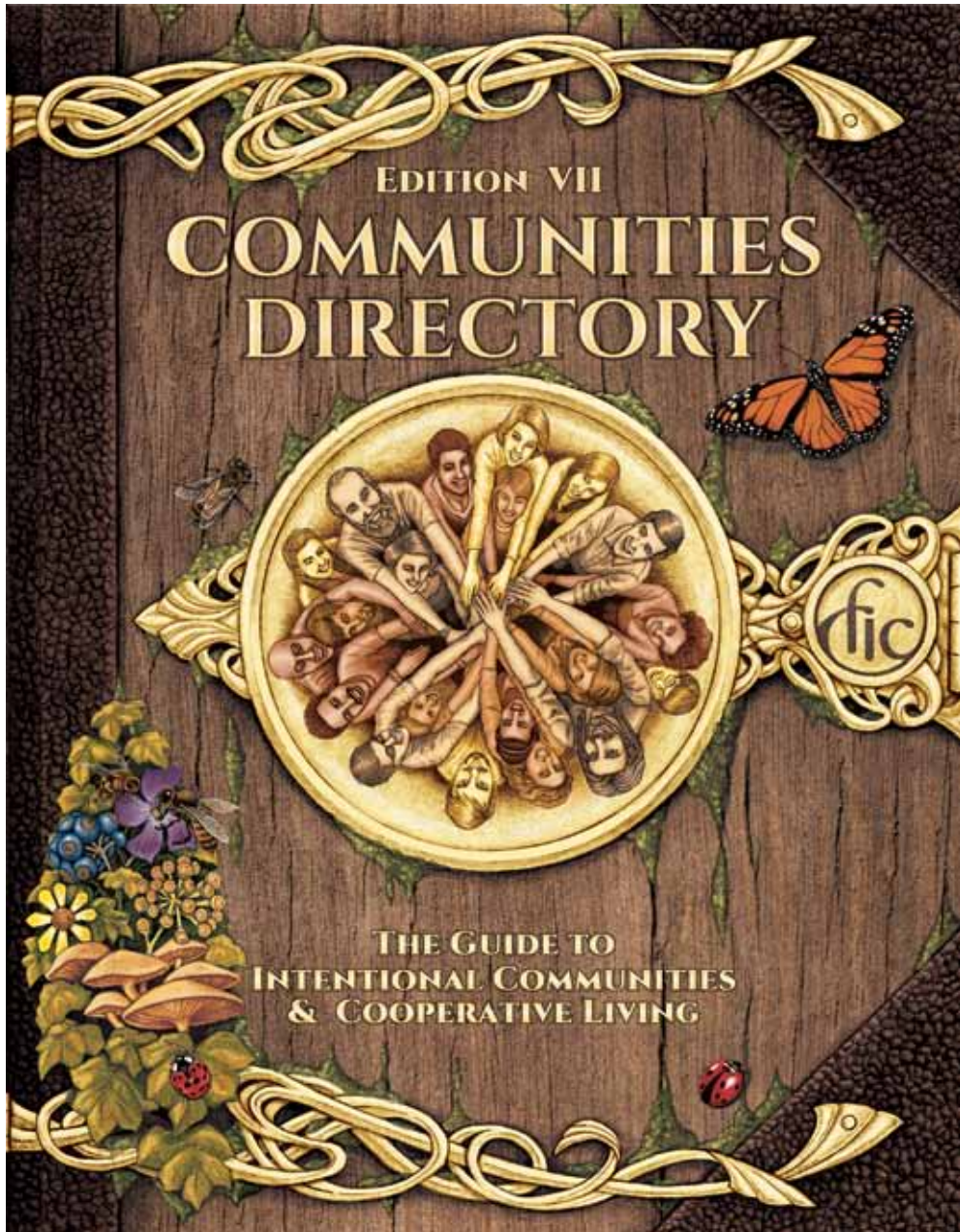
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