

FOUNDER'S SYNDROME • VILLAGE-BUILDING STUMBLES

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Fall 2019 • Issue #184

THE SHADOW SIDE OF COOPERATION



**Missed Opportunities
In the Shadow of the Guru
Challenges of Self-Organization
Raising Troubled Children in Cohousing
Consensus, Sociocracy, and
White Supremacy Culture**



CAMPHILL VILLAGE KIMBERTON HILLS

An intentional community of 100, including adults with developmental disabilities, on 430 bountiful hilltop acres outside Philadelphia



CAMPHILL VILLAGE COPAKE

North America's largest Camphill, with 230 people, including adults with developmental differences, on 615 acres 2 hours north of NYC

MEET 4 OF OUR COMMUNITIES



CAMPHILL VILLAGE MINNESOTA

An intentional community of 50, including adults with developmental disabilities, on 500 acres of rolling hills and prairie grasslands



TRIFORM CAMPHILL COMMUNITY

A community of 110, stewarding 500 acres in the Hudson River Valley and guiding young people with special needs into adulthood

The Camphill Experience Is Like A Degree in Intentional Communities... That Also Helps You Pay Off Your College Loans

Offering hands-on training in inclusive community building, biodynamic farming, and artisan trades, Camphill has built a worldwide network of over 100 egalitarian communities that trace their roots back to 1939.

www.camphill.org

Visit our website to discover the many ways a Camphill Experience expands your perspective.



This could be the last issue of COMMUNITIES magazine!

The Foundation for Intentional Community has reached a crossroads. Our financial situation is unsustainable, and unfortunately COMMUNITIES is a significant part of that. In order to ensure short-term survival, and while we engage in a systematic re-evaluation of the organization, we are pausing production of the magazine.

For more information and updates about our situation, please visit:

www.ic.org/findingapathforward.

We know this may come as a shock, and we deeply appreciate the authors and subscribers who have helped keep a print publication going for so long in a rapidly evolving media landscape. But the sad truth is that we don't have enough subscribers or sponsors to make the magazine not lose money, and the overall financial picture of the FIC means that we're no longer able to subsidize that loss. We've made numerous efforts over many years to increase subscriptions and sponsors, but we've run out of time.

We're in the middle of a process to solve the larger financial issues facing the FIC. It is certainly our hope that we will find a solution that allows us to resume production of the magazine.

Is there anything I can do to help?

Unfortunately this is not a problem a one-time subscription or fundraising drive will fix. On an ongoing basis the magazine would need to make an additional \$15,000 per year on top of an average income of about \$55,000 to remain viable. But the problem is also ongoing and bigger than just the magazine. Please go to the link above to read about our situation. If after reading that you have suggestions or offers of support, please contact our Executive Director, Sky Blue at sky@ic.org.

What about my subscription?

If you have a print subscription that still has issues left you should have received an email about the situation. If you didn't, please contact support@ic.org.

Thank you so much for your understanding, support, and participation in a movement that provides much-needed hope for the world.

Sky Blue
Executive Director
Foundation for Intentional Community

THE SHADOW SIDE OF COOPERATION

4 Letters

Readers reflect on sexual politics, naming names, and the case for “co” habituation.

6 Publisher's Note: Facing the Hard Things

Sky Blue

In order to create healthy, thriving communities that are replicable models for a cooperative, sustainable, and just human society, we need to talk about what hasn't worked.

8 Notes from the Editor: Exploring the Shadow Side

Chris Roth

A higher standard for interpersonal accountability and care makes the effect even more devastating when feelings of safety, security, and affection in community turn out to be based on illusion.

11 The Shadow Side of Community

Laura Matsue

The more friendliness we have towards difficult parts of ourselves and difficult aspects of living in community, the easier it will be to make the journey together.

13 Community Communication

Blake Wilson

“Can you put the gas in the truck, please?” A seemingly simple request provides a case study in the importance of precise, clear communication.

14 Village-Building Stumbles: A few of the things Earthaven Ecovillage has gotten wrong

Lee Warren

Those of us privileged enough to find ourselves in an intentional community often imagine that our environment will be free of the horrors and evils of the world. But alas, we bring it all with us.

19 The Expert

Joan McVilly

Wow! This woman has it all! She's the answer to so many of our current dilemmas! What could possibly go wrong? A lot.

21 What Rights Do Non-Members Have in Community?

Anonymous

Having written policies that anticipate human foibles and conform to local, state, and federal law is essential if you are to respect and uphold the rights of members, potential members, and guests.

24 Entrepreneurship and Long-Term Planning in an Income-Sharing Community: A Report from the Frontlines

Sumner Nichols

The pace of running a competitive multi-million-dollar business like East Wind Nut Butters can clash with the often slow and seemingly disinterested pace of the community at large.

27 Founder's Syndrome

Graham Ellis

The original founder, visionary, and main public point person for Bellyacres for over a quarter of a century laments that some members came to consider him “the root of all present, past, and future problems in the organization.”

- 32 Challenges of Self-Organization at Chambalabamba**
Mofwofoo (Tom Osher)
 Believing that meeting the daily needs of the community he founded needs to be a desire, not an obligation, its property owner decides to rescind the group's anarchical arrangement temporarily to remove anyone lacking a good community attitude.
- 34 Missed Opportunity at the Goat Ranch**
Philip Mirkin
 Ted and Sally were truthful when they said they had no idea what they were doing, either running the business or establishing a community. They didn't, much to the dismay of their departing managers and volunteers.
- 38 In the Shadow of the Guru**
Geoffrey Huckabay
 Referring to himself as "the biggest asshole" in the county, a group's spiritual teacher "told us if we could work with him and learn from him, we could deal with anyone in any situation."
- 41 Whatever Happened to the Renaissance Community?**
Daniel Brown
 Despite the lethal combination of power, ego, and spirituality that brought the Renaissance Community to an end, most of its ex-members cherish their time there as a growth experience that made them better people.
- 46 Loneliness in Community**
Mick Vogt
 We take ourselves with us wherever we go, and in doing so we also take with us our world, the embedded malice of our culture, our sense of isolation, our hope of rescue, our quest for oneness, our grail searches.
- 49 Raising Troubled Children in Cohousing**
Alicia J. George
 When the antisocial behavior of adopted boys at Takoma Village Cohousing begins to impact the larger community, their parents find open communication essential in identifying a path forward.
- 53 Culture Change or Same Old Society? Consensus, Sociocracy, and White Supremacy Culture**
Joe Cole, Hope Horton, and Maria Pini
 Many intentional communities reproduce elements of white supremacy culture, sometimes with consensus and sociocracy as unconscious accomplices. But the seeds of change toward greater racial equity are also present.
- 57 Conflict Resolution and Satisfaction in Today's Intentional Communities**
Zach Rubin, Yana Ludwig, and Don Willis
 Having techniques in place to deal with conflict when it inevitably arises is good, but the success of those appears to reflect the community's overall health as much as the effectiveness of any one technique.

- 61 On Community: A Graduated Series of Consequences and the "Community Eye"**
Diana Leaf Christian
 Just knowing the community has this process in place deters people from breaking agreements. People don't want to get a knock at the door by one fellow community member, much less three or four.
- 64 Review: *Communes in America, 1975-2000***
Deborah Altus
 In this engaging final volume of his trilogy, Tim Miller describes the end of the 20th century as bringing out a new communal generation with better organizational skills and greater focus on environmental concerns.
- 66 REACH**
- 76 Creating Cooperative Culture: Efficiency vs. Humanity**
Dan Schultz
 Attending to a member's disconnect rather than taking the most "efficient" path to a community decision represents a valuable, healing paradigm shift, reparation for our deranged western cultural values.

ONLINE ONLY

Do Communities Need Feminist Dissent? LK

In the midst of wider social movements in the areas of gender and sexuality, communities everywhere need a place for feminist dissent and a willingness to engage in difficult conversations. Dissent is part of how we build resilience together.

(Article available at www.ic.org/feministdissent.)

The Red Flag of Hypocrisy

Peter McGugan

The most troubling thing isn't when a charismatic leader uses gangster tactics, but when the people in his office, who sing the songs of love and community values, are complicit.

(Article available at www.ic.org/redflag.)

Does Community Heal Trauma, or Reproduce It?: Challenges for abuse survivors living in community

Matt Stannard

Survivors of traumatic abuse face many problems in trying to form and participate in community. Trauma-informed community commits to keeping the survivor safe in wide zones of ambiguity, as challenging as that might be.

(Article available at www.ic.org/trauma.)



ON THE COVER

Earth's moon blocks out the sun during two full minutes of total solar eclipse, as viewed by ex-community-mates visiting Aumsville, Oregon, August 21, 2017. Photo by Chris Roth.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

EDITOR

Chris Roth (*Lost Valley/Meadowsong*)

ART DIRECTOR

Yulia Zarubina-Brill

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Christopher Kindig

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Gigi Wahba

WEB SUPPORT

Pavan Rikhi (*Acorn*)

CIRCULATION MANAGER

McCune Porter (*Twin Oaks*)

SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORT

Cynthia Tina

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Kim Scheidt (*Red Earth Farms*)

Kim Kannev

Sky Blue

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

Marty Klaif (*Shannon Farm*)

Crystal Farmer (*Charlotte Cohousing*)

Valerie Renwick (*Twin Oaks*)

COMMUNITIES (ISSN 0199-9346) is published quarterly by the Foundation for Intentional Community at 1 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Box 23, Rutledge MO 63563. Postmaster: Send address changes to COMMUNITIES, 138 Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa VA 23093. Indexed in the Alternative Press Index.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$25 US, \$35 outside US for four issues via periodical/surface mail. Single copies are \$8 US, \$10 outside US. All payments in US dollars. Available from COMMUNITIES, 138 Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa VA 23093; order@ic.org; 800-462-8240; ic.org/subscribe.

BACK ISSUES: 1 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Box 23, Rutledge MO 63563; order@ic.org; 800-462-8240; ic.org/back-issues.

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

© 2019 by Foundation for Intentional Community. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. Opinions expressed by authors and correspondents are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

FOUNDATION FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY: 1 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Box 23, Rutledge MO 63563; order@ic.org; 800-462-8240; ic.org.

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

ADVERTISING: Gigi Wahba, COMMUNITIES Advertising Manager, Memphis, MO; 415-991-0541; ads@ic.org.

WEBSITE: ic.org/communities-magazine.

This magazine printed by Johnson Press of America, Pontiac, Illinois, USA.

Letters



Thank You for Sexual Politics Issue

Chris, thank you for another astonishingly good (deep; interesting; useful; self-, soul-, and world-healing) issue of COMMUNITIES. Although I had to read this one all at once (instead of at my usual enjoyment-stretching rate of an article per sitting) because the issue was so painful and triggering, I am honestly grateful for the chance.

First things first: The cover. I thought it was brave of you not to show people but to ask us to do the imaginative work of understanding why you chose the cover image you did, beyond simply its authorship. I LOVED IT. It meant all kinds of things to me related to the topic.

Next, I was moved by your editorial letter, most ringingly your evocation of the voices who remained, ultimately, silent in this issue. It was like a bell tolling remembrance, like the reading of the names at the NAMES quilt. I also appreciate Sky's affirming: this issue was inspired by #MeToo, *it's not just something happening outside communities*.

I loved Crystal Farmer's piece about New Culture; it clarified feelings I had had. I found it generous you allowed the sidebar in response and, where the sidebar responded to Farmer's clarity, I found it convincing; where it merely negated, more like Shakespeare's "protesting too much."

Generosity was an unanticipated theme throughout: I found authors generous toward those who had wronged and oppressed them, though not, happily, to a fault. I have been in and around sexual politics since the mid-1970s—earlier if I count having become aware of being abused by my father and mother as a child growing up in the 1960s. I am used to survivors and communities "forgiving" their abusers in ways that reproduce the abuse. Likewise, I have seen and participated in the false innocence of attachment to victim status that arises with demonization of abusers. There was so much self-awareness of the intricacy of complicity in harm, of societal and cultural norms interfering with our best selves and healing.

Finally, I had not guessed I could be at risk of being misperceived as a TERF by my demographics. I was glad to read a sister's pain, and grateful not to share it. Radical feminism for me is not only the ability to challenge society's received ideas, but my own, "our" own, and in so doing, change who we mean by "us." I think of Marge Piercy's lines from "The Low Road":

it starts when you say *We*
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean one more.

All lesbians were never my allies *automatically*; nor were all women. (I'm bi, but understood myself as a lesbian for years of my life.) It's easy to get attached to the safety of boundaries that were always fluid (trans people are found throughout human history), then forget what really keeps us safe. As others in this issue did, the author helped me clarify my own radical feminist embrace of difference.

Another teachingly dissonant note: in contrast to the articles I loved best, Diana Leafé Christian's piece felt fascinatingly "old-school" (on not leaping into a romance upon joining a community). The underlying assumptions she cautions we uphold included, for example, worrying about what other people think of us. That whole paradigm was delightfully superseded by the fresher and healthier worldview in articles that came before it in the issue.

Alexis Ziegler's piece was a breath of fresh air, pun intended. I remembered keenly how much I long to learn from him (without, I confess, reading his books). Alexis is a National Treasure.

Again, Chris, thank you. I know how important it is to hear from readers: we are out here, we are listening, we are learning, and we thank you.

Beth Raps
Eagle Rock, Virginia

Naming Names

You said issue #183 was inspired by the #MeToo movement. The strength of that movement was in naming names and thus inspiring other women to come forward and say “Yes, that same man did that to me too.” When enough women have said that, then maybe that man would have to quit his job or at least women would be warned to keep up their guard around him. Your first two articles described four men who seem to be sexual predators moving from one community to another, and yet you did not name names, so no one will know how many women they have harmed and women will not be warned about them.

Those of us who were sexually abused in childhood (28 percent of women and 17 percent of men) may need to rely more on external boundaries (such as separate living quarters, wedding rings, etc.) to ward off unwanted sexual advances, since we are more likely to freeze up in the moment when we want to be saying no (although anyone educated in true consent should be able to read our body language). Since intentional communities tend to weaken or dissolve those external boundaries, they do provide more opportunities for sexual predators to operate than in standard culture. Thus it is even more important that you name names and educate yourselves about consent and sexual assault.

I was distressed to read in the rape story that the community members who intervened questioned the victim about whether or not she had an orgasm. They obviously did not know enough about sexual assault or they would realize that such a question is not only irrelevant but it adds insult to injury. Our bodies can respond to touch whether we want them to or not, and this is a major cause of confusion and pain for survivors. In this case, the woman was asleep, and that means consent was not obtained, end of discussion. Men are not the only people who can have wet dreams.

If potential legal repercussions prevent the naming of names in this publication, I hope that community members will use social media or other methods to name the names and prevent these sexual predators from harming additional people.

Sharon Blick
Eugene, Oregon

The Case for “Co” Habituation

In her COMMUNITIES (#183, Summer 2019) article “The Pronoun Dilemma,” Murphy Robinson listed in a sidebar (page 53) a few options for gender-neutral pronouns used when avoiding or not knowing the gender, or preferred gender reference, for another person. A number of other such options can be found via an internet search, yet omitted from most such lists is a gender-inclusive pronoun which has been used to varying degrees over time by some people in the egalitarian communities.

Coined by New York City feminist writer Mary Orován in 1970 (see Wikipedia “Third-Person Pronoun”), the term “co” was adopted as a gender-neutral pronoun early on by members of Twin Oaks Community, and practiced on-and-off over the decades by people in communities associated with it. Short articles about the use of this term appeared in the 1971 and ’72 issues of the newsletter *Leaves of Twin Oaks*, probably written by Kat Kinkade, although she does not mention use of the term in either of her books about the community.

In *The Collected Leaves of Twin Oaks* (1987, vol. 2, p. 23) Kat explains that “co” is used

as the gender-neutral personal pronoun, while “cos” is used in place of the possessive pronouns his and hers. Kat goes on to explain the problem of people using the pronoun as a noun, saying that statements like “All of you good cos” is ungrammatical and considered to be Twin Oaks slang.

The use of “co” is particularly suited for use by people in the communities movement as a gender-neutral pronoun since it is also being used ever more frequently as a prefix for terms referring to different forms of intentional community, such as cohousing, coliving, cohousing, and cofamily. Of course “co” is also the first syllable in many related terms such as coequal, coexist, cohere, cohort, colleague, collective, combine, common, communal, commune, community, compassion, compersion, complicated, compromise, comrade, concert, conciliate, convoluted, cooperative...

Allen Butcher
Dry Gulch Ecovillage
Denver, Colorado

Omission: Bodies in Isolation

The listing for the following online-only article was inadvertently omitted from the Table of Contents in COMMUNITIES #183. We apologize for the error, and urge readers to check out the article at our website:

ONLINE ONLY
BODIES IN ISOLATION
Amanda Crowell

Being immersed in mainstream culture and isolated from supportive, body-positive communities can prevent choice and body-awareness exploration. But living in a supportive community can make alternative choices and attitudes easier to sustain.

(Article available at www.ic.org/bodiesinisolation.)

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

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

Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, 1 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Box 23, 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.

Advertising Policy

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

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

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

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

What is an “Intentional Community”?

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



Chris Roth

This is going to be hard to talk about. But there's no way around it. If we're going to figure out how to create healthy, thriving communities that are replicable models for a cooperative, sustainable, and just human society, we've got to talk about the hard stuff.

Intentional community is not something we automatically know how to do. We have a sense of what we want, of what's missing, or of what's wrong in society that we're trying to balance or correct. We have visions, ideals, and intentions. But for the most part community is contrary to what we've been taught in our hyper-individualistic, profit-driven, competitive, hierarchical, exploitative, and oppressive world. Stepping onto the property of an intentional community doesn't make all of that go away, and all of that was there when the community was formed in the first place. Individually and collectively we carry it all with us and it impacts everything we do. Intentional community isn't just about learning what we need to learn to make a better world, it's about unlearning too, as well as learning to see our biases and blind spots.

We're all traumatized. Some people are more impacted by the legacy and contemporary realities of slavery, genocide, colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and global capitalism, but they affect all of us. We can correct, repair, heal, but those of us alive today will always live with those traumas. You can't undo what's been done. The harm done by the systems that we live with today, and by us within those systems, is generational, and it will take generations to undo. But that doesn't mean we throw up our hands. This is the work there is for us to do, so that our children grow up with a little less trauma, and their children grow up with a little less.

It's hard to think in these terms because of the crisis we're in. We have to slow down, take the time to try to regain our wholeness as people, our ability to work together, our sense of belonging with each other and the natural world. We have to focus on relationships and how to relieve the stress and trauma that so many people are trying to survive every day. But does the pace of global warming allow us to slow down? On some level, no, but I would argue that we don't have time not to slow down, because we don't have time to not do it right.

But what does doing it right even look like? People like to talk about replicable models, but I don't think we know what they are. I think we'll know when there are models that start replicating. But again, this doesn't mean we give up. It means we keep trying things. And if we're going to get anywhere, we have to be able to talk about what didn't work.

Of course no one wants to be seen at their worst. On some level, intentional communities are about recreating a sense of belonging. But by their nature, intentional communities, with their property lines and membership processes, are also exclusionary, and we're all coming to this endeavor with trauma around rejection. We're all scared of being left out, ostracized. Most of us carry with us a sense that if you knew who I really am, warts and all, you wouldn't accept me.

This is why we have to be courageous enough to be vulnerable. Community is about sharing. Sharing takes trust. Trust takes intimacy. Intimacy takes vulnerability. We have to learn how to call in instead of call out. We have to be able to touch our own shadows and allow our shadows to be touched by others, because if something doesn't have a shadow, how do you know it's real? Getting real, together, is how we're going to find the path forward.

Don't get me wrong, we know a lot about what works in intentional community. I don't know if we've figured out the "best practices" but we've definitely figured out some good ones, and in many respects have a pretty good idea that we're on the right track. We're pretty good about sharing about this stuff too, but we could be better—celebration is also part of a healthy community. At the same time, it's not about getting mired in the muck, but we can't be afraid to get dirty, to step into the darkness.

Part of the fear is of being stereotyped, as intentional communities already are, and sensationalized, which also happens. But we need to help the rest of society be honest too. Sexual abuse and assault of adults and children, narcissistic egomaniacs who take advantage of people, racism, sexism, LGBTQ-phobia, classism, it's not as if these things don't exist in every community everywhere. Pretending that they don't isn't helping anyone.

I know it's hard to talk about, because so often, when something really bad happens, the community is divided about what happened and how they feel about it. The person some see as the perpetrator is seen as the victim by others, and in many cases it's impossible to know what really happened because the only people present have different stories, and people are forced to decide whom to believe. The martyrs and the slackers just complain amongst themselves about the others. The long-term members and the new members are frustrated with each other and can't figure out how to see each other's perspective.

And then there's the guy who owns the property and has lured a succession of people with the promise of being able to build their own little place, but it turns out he's a creep or a control freak. Or there are the people who simply don't have the skills or the wherewithal to do reasonable work, and don't realize that they're not doing reasonable work, which makes more work for others—and then whose job is it to tell them? What do you do when some people feel that community systems aren't working, but others feel there's nothing wrong and don't want to talk, and both perspectives have some validity?

We all have our baggage. We all react in ways we wish we didn't. We can all gain greater understanding by looking at the issues others have with us. And at the same time, we're all tired and stressed, trying to make ends meet, trying to make it all work, and sometimes we just don't have it in us to address the problem directly or constructively.

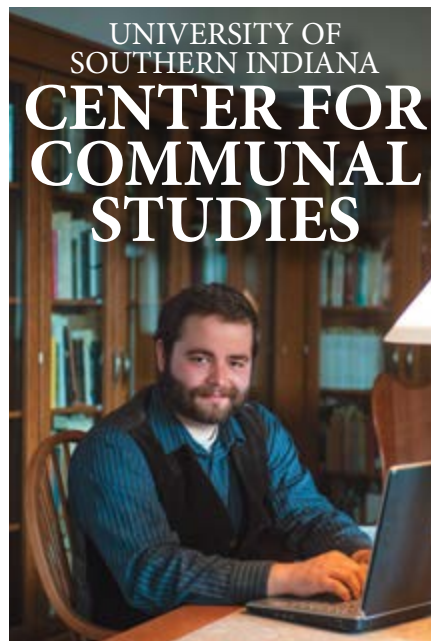
How do we reconcile our conflicting perspectives? How do we hold each other with compassion while still holding each other accountable? How do we come together to collectively hold responsibility for our communities? How do we appreciate each other for saying the hard things, acknowledge what's true, add what's missing, and also be true to ourselves and stand up against what we believe is false? We have to be willing to talk about things openly, without denial, without making each other wrong for what we say or how we say it as a way to avoid addressing what's being brought forward.

We know quite a bit about the practice of collective decision-making. But one of the classic pitfalls is jumping to a proposed solution before the group has had a chance to discuss the problem. You end up in a that-or-not-that argument. What we haven't developed as much is our practice of collective sense-making. How can you collectively decide what to do about a situation if you haven't collectively made sense of what's happening and how you got there?

Sense-making is what we need to do, as communities and as a movement of communities, about the things that went wrong, the terrible incidents we don't want to talk about. We have to be vulnerable to build the intimacy to build the trust to be able to share about the shadow side of cooperation. I know, it sounds like a catch-22, and it is, but we have to start somewhere. We have to commit ourselves to this work, knowing that we will make mistakes. It will be hard and uncomfortable, but if we're doing our work, willing to learn and grow, there's no need to feel guilty, ashamed, or embarrassed. All there is to do is acknowledge what's so, keep reaching for each other, look for how to reconcile and heal, and keep putting in the effort.

Deep breath. Strong and open-hearted. Here we go. 🐦

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



The Center for Communal Studies (CCS) is a clearinghouse for information and research on communal groups worldwide, past and present. Located on the campus of the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH COLLECTION

We invite researchers to use the Center's Collection of primary and secondary materials on more than 600 historic and contemporary communes. The Collection includes over 10,000 images and a reading room.

Visit: www.usi.edu/library/university-archives-and-special-collections.
Email the archivist: jagreene@usi.edu.

REGIONAL RESEARCH

The Center is part of a rich array of historic communal resources within a 30-mile radius of Evansville that includes the Harmonist and Owenite village of New Harmony, Indiana. The Center sponsors lectures, conferences and exhibits, and has an abundance of programming resources.

Visit: www.usi.edu/liberal-arts/communal-center

CENTER PRIZES AND RESEARCH TRAVEL GRANT

The Center annually awards cash prizes for the best student papers on historic or contemporary communal groups, intentional communities, and utopias. Deadline for submission is 1 March. The Center also annually awards a Research Travel Grant to fund research in our Collection. Applications are due by 1 May.

For information contact:
812-465-1656
or Casey Harison at charison@usi.edu



Exploring the Shadow Side

A multi-talented, charismatic community-seeker visits a cooperative rural group that is understaffed, joining them at the beginning of an unexpected weather emergency. He quickly makes himself useful, taking initiative in helping assure the group's basic physical needs are met, while befriending a number of residents. He ends up being hired, with very little vetting, into a major leadership position which the community's business has been striving somewhat desperately to fill. All seems to go well in the first few days, but issues soon start to surface, involving what some perceive to be an over-authoritative, controlling style, lack of humility, and consistent defensiveness in response to certain types of crucial feedback. After a lengthy interview/meeting a month after his arrival, he is denied residency, but not without some community members (both those against his residency, and those in favor of it) ending up feeling greatly alienated from their fellow communitarians.

The divisions within the community take some weeks to heal; fortunately, the experience provides motivation and opportunity to put in place new organizational structures and procedures to guard

against future recurrences of similar episodes. The group finds its own bonds ultimately strengthened, its members' respect for one another increased, through dealing with this challenge and its aftermath. But it was no fun when it was happening—either for the community or for the person trying to join it, whose wounds from this episode may outlast the group's.

• • •

Inspired by its founder's vision, a community develops a polyamorous "group marriage" structure in which each member becomes sexually involved with every other member. Things seem to go swimmingly for a time, but eventually, several newer members recognize that they no longer want to participate in the same way in the group marriage. Specifically, they no longer consent to sexual activity with some longer-term members. Unwilling to accept this change, the community's "old guard" moves to revoke their membership, ultimately provoking their departure. An exodus of other residents follows. Those who remain wonder: what happened to our group marriage, and the vision we've been working toward? Others wonder: is it legal for a group to require sexual activity as a condition of membership, or refusal of sex as grounds for disenfranchisement and eviction, especially when the land, facilities, and organization are held in the public trust, as a nonprofit? Everyone involved wonders: how exactly *does* one dissolve a group marriage, when so much is at stake?

In this case, too, idealism and naivete lead residents down a perilous path in which feelings of love—accompanied by passionate dedication to what they see as a necessary cultural revolution—turn into feelings of betrayal, heartbreak, and the breaking of the participants' spirits. For those who end up leaving, freedom of choice is the first threatened loss—followed, when that freedom is asserted, by loss of agency, community, home, and financial security. For those who stay, the feeling of family is shattered. This is not what was supposed to happen. Over time, the community's "remainers" and refugees alike work to pick up the pieces within their now separate spheres, but some of the wounds may not heal.



A large-ish intentional community cultivates a sense of extended family, with children roaming in apparent safety, allowed and encouraged to get to know others in the village. Many adults (not just their own parents) watch out for their well-being; many homes feel like some version of “home” to them. One day, to community members’ shock, police arrive to arrest a well-respected, long-term member on multiple counts of child sexual abuse, allegedly involving children within the community. The community’s world is turned upside down. How could this have happened? It is the most traumatic event many of them have ever experienced, and causes existential questions within the group.

After initial attempts to share the difficulty of this experience with their wider circles, they find their ability and willingness to talk about it publicly shutting down while they work to process it among themselves. Both the trauma of it and the discomfort caused by members’ differing responses (do they consider their member innocent until proven guilty? believe those reporting the violations? visit the alleged perpetrator in jail? focus energy instead on the families harmed by the alleged actions?) make it impossible to know what to say. And for the families most directly affected, the thought of talking about it in any way beyond what is absolutely necessary can seem traumatic in itself, an obstacle in the path to healing. Yet community members are also aware that patterns of abuse survive and are perpetuated in silence. The danger of other communities encountering the same kind of event because they were not fully aware of its potential persists, perhaps even grows, with each instance kept quiet. How can the cycle be broken?



Intentional community can engender a feeling of trust—an attitude that, unfortunately, can sometimes prove to be detrimental or perilous, whether placed on fellow community members or on outsiders who may not turn out to be so trustworthy.

On the other hand, intentional community can allow people to know each other better, and thus be more aware of potential dangers and pitfalls. It can create more safety and security among groups of people, who, through practical structures and design that encourage it, and through the natural growth of connections and intimacy, look out for one another and protect one another from harm coming from either without or within.

If anything, this higher standard for interpersonal accountability and care makes the effect even more devastating when those feelings of safety, security, and affection turn out to be based on illusion. When trust is betrayed, dreams turn into nightmares. Ultimately nightmares can be worked through in the light of day, but the worst ones may take years or decades to get over—and sometimes, full healing may not be possible in this lifetime.



Fortunately, most of the difficulties people encounter in cooperative settings are considerably less dramatic than the prototypical examples cited above. Sensational episodes are what garner the great majority of press coverage and attention from those who, with little context or understanding of intentional community life, may tend to paint with broad brush strokes in depicting something that is mostly *not* how they describe it. For this reason those within the communities movement may themselves be hesitant to draw attention to times when things go very wrong.

But not talking about something does not make it go away. We need to be able to share our stories and the wisdom we’ve gained from difficult lessons, even if it means admitting that cooperative living, like any other kind of choice, can bring frustration, pain, “failure,” and disillusionment at times. Harm, even trauma can happen—in the same way that they can happen anywhere.



In a three-dimensional world, light also casts shadow. This is as true in the world of intentional community as it is in any other realm. The most inspiring community models can have fatal flaws. Seemingly ideal, even heavenly living situations can turn into living hells. In the same way that community can bring out the best in individuals and groups, it can also bring out the worst. Unacknowledged shadows within individuals and within cultures can manifest in destructive ways, tearing apart communities rather than binding them together in shared humanity.

In response to this difficult reality (a reality reflected in one common attitude toward community living: that it can never work), sometimes *not* cooperating can seem like the most secure or only safe option—cutting ourselves off from community and all the dysfunction that can happen within it. Yet separating ourselves brings equal perils and does not diminish the presence of “problematic” elements within ourselves or in our experience of society—in fact, it may even increase their influence. The real challenge is to recognize the shadow side of cooperation and persist nonetheless; to endeavor to learn from the sometimes unwelcome lessons that cooperative endeavors bring, and to develop ways of preventing, responding to, and healing from the damage that unacknowledged or marginalized shadow sides of ourselves and our groups can inflict on us when we’re in denial.

This issue of COMMUNITIES is intended to help with that process—to share stories of community’s underbelly and offer suggestions on making that underbelly a little less grisly, giving it some air and light and inspiring us to lift up our own underbellies rather than keeping them submerged in the mud of shame and denial. As individuals and groups, we can and do learn to do things differently. We need to. Sharing our stories and perspectives is one way to make that happen. Thanks again for joining us. 🐦

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.

Hawaii Island's First Sustainable Agrihood

OCEANVIEW LOTS FOR SALE



- Independent / Self Sufficient Intentional Community
- Private road / Security gate / Water system • Wi-Fi service
- Off-grid renewable energy • Underground utilities
- County potable water (Indoor use) • Rain harvesting system (outdoor use)



www.kuwililani.com
info@kuwililani.com



The Valley of Light

A Community for Cultural Creatives

Seeking Farmers, Builders, Techies, Artists, and Activists

The Valley of Light is located along the New River in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. With over \$2 million invested, our 22-acre campus is debt-free and includes 3 homes, 8 building pads, vegetable garden, barn, chickens & goats, campground, trails, labyrinth, kiva, medicine wheel, and many other amenities. We share our campus with **The Oracle Institute**, an educational charity that operates a spirituality school, award-winning press, and peacebuilding practice.

Become a Founding Member of our Evolving Campus

One of our founders manages the **Peace Pentagon**, where we hold retreats and our community meetings. Another founder created **Manna**, an alternate currency for social good. We are seeking more social architects involved in progressive and cutting-edge movements!



www.TheOracleInstitute.org
www.PeacePentagon.net
www.Mannabase.com



88 Oracle Way
 Independence, VA 24348
 276-773-3308



Diana Leafe Christian

Consultations & Workshops

“The most rewarding workshop I’ve ever experienced.”

—Mark Lakeman, City Repair, Portland, OR

“Your workshop was fantastic! You are a master at taking complex Sociocracy material and making it simple.”

—Gaya Erlandson, Lotus Lodge, Asheville, North Carolina

“You’re a sparking trainer and a joy to work with. LA Eco-Village was energized for a year following your workshop.”

—Lois Arkin, Los Angeles Eco-Village

“I was riveted! You hit the fundamental, untold truths about cohousing and decision-making.”

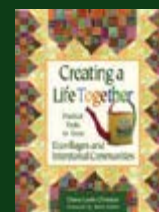
—Mark Westcombe, Forge Bank Cohousing, Lancaster, UK

“Quite simply the finest workshop I’ve ever attended. You quickly cut to the chase, providing hours of practical answers about Sociocracy.”

— Denis Gay, Champlain Valley Cohousing, VT

“I don’t think I ever learned so much in such a short time.”

—Susanna Michaelis, Pacific Gardens Cohousing, British Columbia



diana@ic.org
www.DianaLeafeChristian.org

The Shadow Side of Community

By *Laura Matsue*

Lately, as the volunteer coordinator at OUR Ecovillage (Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia), I have been telling new volunteers that I've noticed that "often people who come here come to learn about community and permaculture, but what they really end up learning about is themselves."

As someone who first stepped onto this land almost two years ago, I have gone through this process personally. I came here initially to learn how to "grow my own food," but eventually that morphed into so much more. As a travelling yoga and meditation teacher, I realized that my journey had been quite isolated for the past couple of years. I felt ungrounded. I could tell my next growth edge was learning about relationship, community, and putting everything that I learned from my spiritual practices and studies into real life experience.

Once I arrived, it took some time to really "land" into the experience of living in a community. I had to get used to being around people most of the day, working in teams, as well as learn the skills needed to live in a rural environment and on the land. I had to reassess what my true "needs" were as the distractions of living in the city were no longer there. And after a period of going through my own intense transformational process, my own shadows revealed themselves. I found out how I got triggered, I discovered more about my own personality, and I had vivid dreams bringing me messages on stuff deep in my unconscious which I needed to work on. It was uncomfortable, at first, as I learned how to manage my introversion within a community environment and I had to give up some of my privacy.

I also witnessed a similar pattern with others who arrive here fresh from their city life, looking to find their tribe and understand what community is all about. People come here to learn something in particular, but the personal process they go through to get there often takes them on a long, windy, internal journey. Living in a community not only demands that you do outer work to keep the community alive but even more so a profound amount of inner work is required. Whether or not someone is brave enough to face this process is where we find out who really is committed to this experience of living in a community.

I've noticed a couple of "warning signs" indicating types of people who will have a difficult time living in our community:

1. People who arrive with extensive fantasies and idealizations about how "living in an ecovillage" will be the solution to all their real-life problems.

I've noticed that a lot of people come here with the idea that living at an ecovil-

Many of us expect the world and the people around us to fit into our vision of how we want them to be, rather than just seeing them as they are.



Photo courtesy of Blake Wilson

lage will somehow be the solution to everything in their lives. It's a widespread millennial fantasy to want to give up your "matrix" job, buy some land, and learn how to grow your own organic food. They often come with an overly positive attitude (which is not always a bad thing to be around) and a serious vision of the world they want to live in. I've realized that this is a tricky thing to spot as a shadow projection, but in fact it is the lesser understood "positive shadow projection," where we project onto the world and the people around us an idealized image on how it should be rather than being able to see the truth of what is there.

People who come with these starry eyes often end up disappointed when the experience of living in this community is much more practical and gritty than what they imagined. Instead of doing yoga all day and harvesting magically growing perfect vegetables that land right onto their plate, there's lots of work that needs to be done to make this vision a reality, and working and living in a group of people which you are around 24/7 isn't the easiest for people who value "privacy." When reality doesn't match up with their projections, I have noticed a pattern in people like this where they get upset that the community didn't match up to their fantasy, and launch into criticism on "what needs to change" for them to be more "comfortable." These are often deep processes where they struggle with everyone in the community to try to make sense of their discomfort when the reality is that they are uncomfortable with this new situation and not allowing themselves to recognize that.

Often, these situations go out with a bang like an overblown romantic honeymoon that suddenly ends when two people realize that they married the wrong person. Sometimes, there are more simple transitions, where the person bids goodbye and then moves onto the "next thing," placing their idealizations on the subsequent idea they have, a new place they feel will be the paradise they are seeking. Sometimes, these people end up back here when they realize no such place exists.

This, I feel, is indicative of a larger societal pattern that we all engage in to a certain extent. Most people, when they get uncomfortable, tend to blame the world for their experience rather than go through the inner process so that they can manage whatever emotions are arising and make sense of them. And many of us expect the world and the people around us to fit into our vision of how we want the world and people to be, rather than just seeing them as they are. Not only that, we all must recognize our active part in not only managing our internal perceptions and emotions but also realizing that we must create these inner changes before we bring outer changes to the world, to ensure we are doing it from a space of integrity and love.

Another warning sign of a poor match with community living:

2. People who are not capable of taking self-responsibility for how they feel and their actions.

When I look for people to propose that we take onto our team, I look for emotional intelligence as well as practical skills which are necessary to navigate the difficult situations that can come up in the community from time to time. The more a person is able to see things outside of the lens of their own experience and consider things in the greater context, while also taking responsibility for their own personal part in it, the greater they can build up the collective.

There is a day-to-day process of self-inquiry and shadow work necessary to have a team who lives and works together harmoniously. If a person speaks to us in a certain way that we find upsetting, it is important to have the humility to reflect on our own emotional triggers that came up rather than moving right into "blame." Yes, someone can speak to us in hostility, and sometimes it's right to create proper boundaries...but an interesting thing to note (which I learned from a meditation teacher I work with) is that the body actually doesn't know boundaries. It will experience the energy, the action, the words of the people in its environment as part of its own direct experience and especially when we live and work together. So if someone is having a bad day, or wants to project their stuff on others, it will affect people around them.

When living in community, these boundaries are even more open considering the

fact we are living and working together. Therefore, especially in community, it's important to be able to recognize that we need to take responsibility for our reactions and actions to those around us as a part of developing the inner strength to not take on what isn't ours, and not take personally what may just be someone else's bad day.

• • •

I think the important thing to note is that "there are no perfect situations." A lot of people fantasize about leaving their busy urban lives and becoming self-sustainable by learning to grow their own food, but have no experience or idea of the amount of labour involved in farming, the time and work it takes to do this.

And it's important to approach any intentional community with curiosity, no expectations or fantasies, so we can allow the reality of "what it is" to emerge through our own direct experiences. We must be able to see that it's not just about growing food or living in community, but that the relationship we have with others BEGINS with the relationship we have with ourselves.

And rather than denying that these more difficult aspects in community exist, we need to approach them with softness, curiosity, and vulnerability. We surely live in challenging times and a lot will come up internally and externally as we heal our collective wound in how we relate to ourselves and the planet. But the more friendliness we have towards these more difficult parts of ourselves, and difficult parts of living in community, the easier it will be to make this journey together. 🌱

Laura Matsue is a certified Holistic Life Coach and Meditation Teacher and RYT (Registered Yoga Teacher). She currently lives with her partner in Los Angeles, where she has a private practice and hosts retreats. At the time of writing this article, she was living at OUR Ecovillage in Canada and regarded it as a life-changing and valuable experience. For more information visit www.ourecovillage.org and for more writing by Laura visit www.lauramatsue.com.

Community Communication

By Blake Wilson

In community, communication is key. Often what we are trying to express is not fully understood, and that can lead to destructive circumstances. I will share with you a story...

It was a farm-friendly, warm, dusty morning, with the sun shining bright into the azure sky, just above the trees in the swamp down east, and with the roosters sharing a morning call to all those who laboured on the farm. The goats were with oats, the sheep were out in the pasture, the chickens were scouring for scraps, and the cows were free to munch on grass. The day was moving with great resolution. I jumped into my tractor to make quick work of a pile of manure that had been shoveled near the paddock gate when I remembered that I had to take my pickup to my friend's farm a couple of kilometres away with some petrol that I had promised him for his backhoe.

Simon, from Germany, was crossing the gravel lot in front of the barn, and I shouted to him, "Can you put the gas in the truck, please?"

"Where is it?" he yelled back.

"Around back of the tool shed," I informed him.

"No problem, I'll get it done right away," and he ran off.

Satisfied that I had made myself clear, I went into the farmhouse to gather my tools for the trip.

After gathering my needs, I went back out to where my 4x4 diesel truck was parked, and looked for the gas can I had asked Simon to locate. It wasn't there. I went behind the tool shed to grab it myself and found it wasn't there either. Mystified, I

searched for Simon. Out in the garden I could see him and I yelled, "Did you put the gas in the truck?"

He, with his head confused, turned around and hollered back, "Yes, like you said, I put the gas in the truck."

"I don't see it. Did you put the gas in the truck?"

"Yes, I put it in the truck."

"Where did you put it, in the truck?"

"In the truck, like you asked."

"Could you be more specific?"

"I put it in the gas tank."

I was staggered. This diesel truck was my livelihood, and meant the world to me. I immediately ran over and drained the fuel tank, thankful that I was able to revive the vehicle. And this is when I learned that my method of communication is not always understood, and in a community one has to speak precisely and clearly.

In a community, communication is of utmost importance. 🐦

Blake Wilson recently moved from the vast territory of Nunavut, where he co-managed the local food centre that helped people build a relationship with food, and worked in the nonprofit field of food security. A graduate of UBC's Creative Writing program, he is very excited to be on Canada's largest western island, where he has quickly taken to a life of community and working a farm at OUR Ecovillage. He hopes one day to use his experience to aid others be food sustainable, while also writing the great Canadian novel. Contact him at sl2connect@ourecoovillage.org.

Photos courtesy of Blake Wilson



VILLAGE-BUILDING STUMBLES: A few of the things Earthaven Ecovillage has gotten wrong

By Lee Warren

I've been living in community for half my life. I started visiting and living in intentional communities and ecovillages all over the US in the mid-'90s, finally settling down at Earthaven Ecovillage in western North Carolina in 2001 when I was in my early 30s.

Those early years were marked with ambition, idealism, and a strong intention to contribute to the world. Now, a long time later, I am integrating and reflecting on my journey. Community life and all its various personal manifestations has been my vocation, my life's path, and my career. It has included sustainable agriculture, off-grid living, alternative relating, consensus-based governance, and a whole host of other engaging practices.

At age 51, I still live at Earthaven Ecovillage, have way more realistic expectations of what can be accomplished, and have a much clearer understanding of the shadow side and challenges. In fact, I could do a whole series of articles highlighting the shadow side of consensus, of rural community development, of permaculture, and of the notion that we can change the world.

For obvious reasons, the most poignant examples of "shadow" in community are personal, because they are lived and embodied experiences. Two such experiences during my time at Earthaven Ecovillage stand out as both the most challenging and the ones that embody the most shadow.

In 2009, I went through an extremely hard breakup of a long-term partnership. In relationship for eight years, we moved mountains together. We built a shared housing project from scratch including a 4,000+ square foot, multi-apartment, hand-built building with all the wood sourced from our land, and with off-grid utility systems (waste, water, power, and heat). In addition, we cleared many acres of forested land; designed, developed, and managed a five-acre homestead farm, which included running a dairy cow operation; ran our own businesses; participated in the creation of our community's governance systems; and contributed regularly to family and friends. We were burnt out and our intimacy had been suffering for years in the face of the immense tasks we undertook. I initiated the separation, which was quite hard for both of us, but over time we agreed to slowly disentangle and take some space. We both wanted the transition to be kind, thoughtful, and mutually respectful of each person's process and needs. We wanted to stay connected, continue to farm together, and live in the same neighborhood.

This conscious uncoupling worked for a while, but when my partner's attention turned to a 22-year-old intern, new to our community, things completely fell apart for us. I was no longer a priority and neither was our plan to ease out of our partnership into a supportive life together. My whole world came crashing down, with the accompanying agony, terror, rejection, aloneness, and trauma that can happen during a difficult divorce process. And, in community, it was worse. I could not get away from my recently separated partner who was now "coupled up" with someone 20 years my junior. They were everywhere, at community functions and gatherings, and even started to live together right next door to my home, which just a short time ago had been our home.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was in deep shock and grief for a very long time. And I was unable to metabolize the unfolding process over which I had so little control.

When my partner's attention turned to a 22-year-old intern, my whole world came crashing down, with the accompanying agony, terror, rejection, aloneness, and trauma that can happen during a difficult divorce process. And, in community, it was worse.

Community members who are not versed in this kind of emotional upheaval had little empathy. They thought I should be over a breakup I just wasn't over. The healing process was so slow because I was constantly triggered by seeing them together and not having any space that was just mine. At that time, my whole life (farm, work, relationships) was in community. I had no easy option to leave.

The second important and challenging event occurred when a few of us presented a much-needed, well-written agriculture plan to the community in 2009. We had been working and visioning together for years as colleagues and as a committee with the intention to “develop policies and guidelines for sustainable food production at Earthaven,” and all of us were farming for at least a part of our income.

Agricultural development had been slow at Earthaven for the first 10 years because the founders chose a completely forested piece of land. Clearing land for agricultural use at Earthaven cost \$10,000 per acre, with lots of hard and heavy work. The plan we put together would have

sped up the clearing of agricultural land, thus prioritizing economic viability for the community's farmers. We felt that with the strong core group of farmers at Earthaven, investing in these clearings would enable many things for the community: fruition of our mission; reduction of our ecological footprint; fulfillment of existing needs; provision of long-term village food security; creation of soil fertility faster and sooner; augmentation of long-term capital and operating income; development of employment opportunities; attraction of new members (particularly those with needed skills, tools, and aspirations); production of materials for use in community and homesite building projects; and growth of the demonstration we were trying to offer the outside world.

Those were all good things. So what could go wrong?

What actually happened with this agricultural plan was a series of community-wide meetings that got progressively worse. A contingent of community members were anti-agriculture, anti-development, and anti-forest clearing. They did not support the group of young and ambitious farmers proposing to clear more land and create viable economic models. They expressed fear of the fast transformation that we were proposing. At that time, Earthaven operated at 100 percent consensus, which means everyone must agree in order for a proposal to move forward. In such a governance system, the “No's” win out unless everyone can be convinced to be a “Yes.” After months of trying to build support for the agricultural plan, we got more and more demoralized and finally gave up. Some of the farmers moved away, others stopped farming, and to this day no more agricultural land has been cleared. The “play it safe and small” contingent won out and it was a huge loss for the development of the community and the economic viability of the farmers.

As I contemplate these events from years ago, here are the shadows that I can identify clearly. Still other shadows are not yet seen, given the infancy of our village creation and our inability to fully understand both the larger culture we swim in and the subculture we're slowly creating. I hope that elucidating these can help educate



Phoenix Bartalos



We often imagine that our environment will be free of the horrors and evils of the world—but alas, we bring it all with us.

other community builders as they navigate equally tricky terrains.

• **Lack of Relationship Skills:** Community often offers more opportunity to learn to relate in conscious ways than most environs. Many people who come to our village learn about nonviolent communication, restorative circles, heartshares, reevaluation or co-counseling, Enneagram for personal growth, and many other tools that facilitate skill-building in both intra- and interpersonal relating. Yet across the board, it's safe to say that very few of us are taught healthy relating and conflict resolution skills in our homes, schools, or work lives. And we're certainly not taught them through media of any kind. Even when we seek out these skills—which often doesn't happen until we find ourselves in the midst of complex adult relating, such as my divorce example—we generally don't

have enough experience or support to navigate through unscathed.

• **Unresolved Trauma and Group Dynamics:** I've heard it said that if you want to understand a person's relationship with their mother, look at their relationship with the group. This may be an oversimplified way of saying that the group brings up all our unresolved issues. And to be sure, we all come with a suitcase full of them. Our culture is pathological: rife with species extinction, mass incarceration, abysmal race relations, rampant misogyny, and no safety net for the most vulnerable, to name just a few of the problems. Anyone who has lived decades immersed in this insanity has a good amount of trauma. Those of us privileged enough to find ourselves in an intentional community often imagine that our environment will be free of the horrors and evils of the world. But alas, we bring it all with us. And what's more, we tend to bring it into our relationships and groups at full volume. Each person is psychologically integrated only to the extent they have done the work to unwind their issues. Groups push all our buttons at one time or another. In my example of the failed agricultural plan, so many factors were at play including an immature governance process, triggered people, and an inability to navigate towards whole systems thinking due to lack of skills and larger context.

• **Mental Illness:** One step beyond cultural trauma is the manifestation of mental illness. I've learned so much over my years in community about myriad forms of addiction, personality disorders, and neurosis that can present in people. No doubt there are deeply entrenched patterns, both biological and environmental, that lead people to struggle with these afflictions. Maybe it's a sane response to cultural insanity. Whatever the cause, the outcome is beyond disruptive and stressful.

• **Overwhelm:** As suburban and urban refugees immersed in a rural land-based project, most of us discovered that there is a long, slow learning curve to meeting our basic needs for food, water, and shelter—particularly because we were and are doing it all ourselves. Setting ambitious goals in a pioneering context is the perfect recipe for overwhelm. And those of us who have been successful in the outside world assume this success can translate to land-based living, even when we have no experience with it. This assumption is the epitome of arrogance. Several of my elders tried to convey to my 30-year-old self that village-building is a multigenerational project. But I didn't listen. I threw myself into every aspect of creating the alternative culture and forgot about pacing, rest, and recovery. Eventually, overwhelm leads to burnout. And sometimes there's no recovering from that.

• **Everybody's Business:** Martin Prechtel, author of *Secrets of the Talking Jaguar*, who lived for many years in a Mayan village, quips that “people in the village know

the color of your pee before you're done peeing." This is a perfect example of both the upside and the downside of community. Since all of our interactions deeply affect everyone, folks are acutely tuned in to the movements of all the players. For private and/or sensitive people, or those going through challenging circumstances, this can be especially problematic. During the depth of my grief and heartbreak, one community member felt very strongly that I should host a community-wide event to discuss my process and inform everyone of my strategies for healing. I found this suggestion beyond my capacity and the opposite of what I needed.

- **Classism:** Classism rears its head inside of community very much as it does outside of community. Class conflict in community sometimes shows up as "the talkers and the doers": the older and more financially resourced folks tend to be the talkers, while the younger and less-resourced folks tend to be the doers. Action requires conviction, strength, passion, intention, focus, and often considerable effort. According to one long-time communitarian, Angelo Eliades, "To sit back and talk takes little effort and a few thoughtless utterances of opinion, more often than not in criticism of the doers." This is a big mistake in a community that relies on young people to drive development and wants the hard work of agriculture in its midst. This is exactly what happened in our community, and we're still paying the price for these dynamics.

- **Fundamentalism:** Earthaven Ecovillage was founded largely on the principles of permaculture, the art and science of integrating humans and their lives into the natural world in a less harmful way. While there is much to gain from this practice, there's something about permaculture that seems to attract the metaphysical know-it-alls. Maybe it's that any new solution or formula for change can come with a certain religious conviction, in part because of the desperate need to believe that something, anything will save us. Yet these sort of purists can dampen creativity and lead to all-or-nothing, good-and-bad thinking, which is a death knell for progressive design. We've had our fair share of extremism at Earthaven. Many projects, people, and enthusiasms have taken their exit in the wake of the "that's-not-good-enough" and "that's-not-acceptable" refrains.

- **Structural Conflict:** Even though, on the spectrum of the world's population, Earthaven members are highly aligned with one another, we find plenty of things to dislike and distrust about each other. Like squabbling siblings, doomed to endless comparison and fear of unfairness, the more we share in common, the more we seem to move towards conflict and misunderstanding. The first time I heard the phrase

"Structural Conflict" it was from Diana Leafé Christian, an Earthaven member and internationally renowned author about Intentional Communities. It refers to conflict that is centered around different interpretations of the core mission and vision of a project. It can often appear as interpersonal conflict because passionate advocates on either side can vehemently argue their perspective, but it is born from a lack of shared reality on core purpose. Lois Arkin of LA EcoVillage speaks of it here: emerging-communities.com/tag/structural-conflict.

- **Ignorance:** Modern humans are awash with unrealistic notions on all manner of things related to land, life, food systems, children, governance, and the like. We know more corporate brand logos than we do wild plants and more

**The more we share
in common,
the more we seem
to move towards
conflict and
misunderstanding.**



Photos courtesy of Lee Warren

television commercial jingles than we do signs of coming weather. And so it is with each wave of new people joining Earthaven Ecovillage. In our community, this ignorance masquerades as sentimentality which can be seen by the enactor as some sort of purism or worse, activism. But it is often seen by those in the know as immense cluelessness. Examples include new members who hold the opinion that cutting down a single tree is akin to murder and deforestation. To those of us in forest management leadership, we have the context that our degraded forest system and very acidic soils need to be transformed to include more biodiversity and soil health. In this context, felling trees, selective logging, and even large-scale logging are a means to a much better and regenerative end. As you can imagine these different world views don't lead to harmony.

• **Separation from Traditional Ways of Knowing:** It's important to acknowledge that Earthaven Ecovillage currently inhabits what, for millennia, was Native Land. In more recent eons, it was Cherokee land. Because our project is comprised of mostly white people with significant racial advantage, we are not only disconnected from land-based people, but we are culturally and physically segregated from people of color who tend to be closer to the traditional ways of knowing. Given that people of color are oppressed worldwide, projects like ours exist without the benefit of their integrated ways of knowing, practices, and deep wisdom. Either our systems of oppression force these life-giving traits underground or worse, we appropriate and use them without context or reverence. Our world desperately needs the wisdom, mentoring, modeling, and presence of these traditional peoples and yet these peoples are often oppressed and traumatized by white people. We need to be working to resolve these injustices so that all people have equal access to land and resources. Only then will our community be able to access the old ways with respect and not through stealing.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. But it does highlight a few of the things we need to work through in order to be effective at building community. Given that we are all steeped in a patriarchal worldview by virtue of being raised in this toxic paradigm, and we all come with a bag full of wounds, we are likely to get more wrong than right for many generations to come. What we've inherited is a dying culture. What we're trying to build is a living system out of the scraps of that inheritance.

The upside is that we're in good company and we're living meaningful lives.

Ten years after these two devastating events in my life, I am happy to report that I am delightfully single, employed in sustainable agriculture, and more empowered than ever before. That breakup served to help me grow into an entirely new person, one that has come to question the pair-bond model and build an even richer version of community, both within the walls of Earthaven Ecovillage and without. My work in agriculture, which focuses on the Southern Appalachian organic growing community, has much broader impact than if I had stayed focused on the small-ish ecovillage agriculture plan. And while Earthaven's model still does not meet the criteria of

an economically viable agriculture plan, there are ongoing efforts on the part of some brave farmers to get there. It's happening more slowly than I could ever have imagined and I've come to accept that sometimes that's the way of things.


In addition, I'm slowly healing from burnout and overwhelm by living part-time outside of Earthaven, where I am cultivating the ease, peace, and distance that I need to rest, recover, and regain some of the nervous system function that I wore out over the past 25 years in community. I credit both the positive and the challenging experiences in making me who I am today: a more integrated and fully alive human.

There's no doubt that we will continue to stumble. I truly believe that village-building, whether rural or urban, large or small, is a worthwhile endeavor. We need to continue making mistakes and getting it wrong. How else are we going to build a repository of lived experiences that instruct us on how to commence this crucial task of village-building? 🍷

Lee Warren has been living in community since 1995 and at Earthaven Ecovillage in the southern Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina since 2001. She is a cofounder of Village Terraces CoHousing Neighborhood and Imani Farm, Executive Director of Organic Growers School, and a founding partner of the School of Integrated Living. Lee is also an herbalist, writer, teacher, and food and social justice activist, with an avid interest in rural wisdom, sustainable economics, and women's issues.



1. Read more about "Tyranny of the Minority" in Diana Leafe Christian's great article from COMMUNITIES #155, "Busting the Myth that Consensus-with-Unanimity Is Good for Communities," at www.ic.org/busting-the-myth-that-consensus-with-unanimity-is-good-for-communities and in *Wisdom of Communities* Volume 3.
2. Eliades, Angelo, "Science, Technology and Permaculture—How much do you really need to know?," permaculturenews.org/2016/12/16/science-technology-permaculture-much-really-need-know.



*Light and shadow both
play their part in beauty.*

Joan McVilly

The Expert

By Joan McVilly

Wow! This woman has it all! She's the answer to so many of our current dilemmas! This was the community's general (external) response when Jenny (a pseudonym) rocked up and announced her credentials. And those declared credentials were certainly impressive.

Here was a person with life experience, physically able, appreciative of communitarian ideals, looking to a longer-term commitment and what's more, researching the benefits of community living at a high academic level.

What could possibly go wrong? What was the problem?

To my knowledge the community has held no formal debriefing of Jenny's entrance and exit, as well as no formalized exit interview process, and so now I must speak only for me. This is especially so as I no longer live at that community. Was it my shadow—arguably my fear—that prevented me bringing into the light the orange flags fluttering in the shadow on the edges of my consciousness?

This is where community processes can support us, and

here lies the imperative that we are all clear about their purpose and supportive of them. Ultimately, though, I must take personal responsibility to shine the light of awareness into my own shadowy edges.

The fluttering for me was a chance meeting I'd had with Jenny at a friend's home years prior as well as comments from another friend who was in the same university department at the current time. I contacted both and canvassed their opinions about Jenny's suitability as a community member. They were both non-committal—"I have no experience of her in community"—and so aptly not relieving me of my decision-making responsibility!

For me, the fluttering remained but in the absence of any immediate red flags. I fell back on giving her "the benefit of the doubt." My fallback position was taught at my mother's knee and much of my life I had allowed it to override my intuition without the implied caution. It's through community living that I've learnt the necessity of not dismissing my

intuition so readily, and to lean into our collectively (cooperatively) designed processes more trustingly. I'm certainly still exploring and learning about that.

I'm reflecting now on the processes we had agreed on in community and had previously proved worthwhile. We had a 28-day waiting period until an application for membership could be submitted, allowing both community members and applicant to get to know each other a little. Most of us can maintain a particular persona for a month, so quite often the "benefit of the doubt" approach meant that the applicant or the community discovers after that the "fit" wasn't as neat as they'd hoped. Fortunately, in other cases, we had further processes in place that cushioned that.

Jenny spent the first month being true to her credentials, sharing with everyone the statistics and theories she'd gained from research, willingly jumping in to help with jobs that always need doing and being reasonably even-handed with her relationship-building. Interestingly, in retrospect she had a tendency to avoid deep conversations with longer-term community members.

With the confidence (not to mention wisdom) of hindsight that 28 days is a time for vigorous and clear-sighted enquiry, more than casual conversation, to take place with the intending community member. However, I think that my approach has always been to preference what I have perceived as good feelings for myself and others over uncomfortable insight, available in the shadow!

The next part of the process was that if a membership application was accepted the person could attend but not vote at community meetings for three months, with monthly review or so-called mutual feedback sessions. This time period was anticipated as being a time for the new member to observe and appreciate the current culture of the community prior to their own formalised input, ideas, and proposals being put into the community melting pot. The community's purpose for this time wasn't concurrent with Jenny's ideas though.

At this time she seemed to change gears in her conversations with various people outside of meetings and brought new energy and ideas into the mix. This was certainly welcome on one level. But I began to observe growing division in our small community between the "in" crowd and others, based on what was or wasn't being said or done. When the Jenny-led members overflowed into unapologetic impetuous action with no follow-through (use of inappropriate equipment for a non-urgent but big-impact task that resulted in an unfinished job and ruined equipment), the writing was on the wall. Most of

the Jenny-faction left within the next month, leaving a large hole in the community's energy, all within two months from Jenny's provisional membership being accepted.

The community did not recover from the impact of the sudden loss of energy and two years later it is folding.

This is not to lay the blame at one person's feet. If the community was not grounded enough to withstand that impact then there was a big dark shadow obscuring lots of other problems. I am considering the value of the whole experience for me, the dark and light.

During the 10-year life of the community, hundreds of lives have been touched by their encounters with it. Some stayed months or years (me), others came as visitors for a few days

or just for dinner. We have felt variously welcomed and warmed as well as challenged if not confronted by different ways of doing life. In my experience the biggest challenges and hence learnings are always in relationships, and in my community life I have had the opportunity for intensive training in this!

So when I have that fluttering feeling I have a choice. I can turn away from the discomfort of it or turn to face it and examine my fears. If I turn away, I need act no further and stay comfortable...for now. If I turn toward it I have a journey of self-discovery and even more choices to make! It seems my shadow contains possibilities for expansion and previously unexamined richness.

What went wrong when Jenny arrived? She actually predicted the folding of the community if it did not change. Even now I can't bring to mind what she said was the biggest problem. I know it felt like a scattergun attack and probably it

was. But no doubt there were gems there that could have been extracted. So maybe Jenny's arrival was simply the catalyst for some change that would have happened anyway. Would there have been a different outcome two years down the line if we had creatively and cooperatively faced our fears at that time? Probably. So now wherever I land I am seeking to do just that, for myself and those I inevitably am in relationship with in my life. My journey continues! 🌈

**When the
Jenny-led members
overflowed into
unapologetic impetuous
action with no
follow-through, the
writing was on the wall.
Most left within
the next month;
two years later,
the community
is folding.**

Joan McVilly lives in South East Queensland, Australia and her abiding interest is in community—small "c"—and what makes it. Over four decades she has explored this through direct environmental action, membership in a religious group, an environmental education centre, and Intentional Community. She currently lives in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and can be reached at joan.mcvilly@gmail.com.

What Rights Do Non-Members Have in Community?

By Anonymous

Intentional community groups have been known to create long documents enumerating the rights of community members. Few take the time to consider the rights of non-member guests and visitors, much less codify them in a meaningful way. How can community members enjoy the rights and privileges of membership without inadvertently or deliberately ignoring the rights of non-members? Are those rights even articulated and understood?

No Dogs Allowed: A Case Study

Last fall, a community rejected my application for membership, because one person took issue with me and blocked their full consensus decision-making process. During a “mediation” with that person directly before I was rejected, to be absolutely clear, I deliberately asked her: “So, you are saying that you are uncomfortable with my religious beliefs and practices, right?”

She responded “Yes.”

I continued, “And this is an issue being considered to determine whether or not I may live here?” She responded, “Yes.”

“OK,” I said, “that’s actually illegal.”

The mediation kind of imploded at that point—I reminded the circle of people there of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, but they argued that I was wrong; it was ludicrous to them. And although her grievance had been stated that bluntly, which affirmed there was no real distinction in that woman’s own mind between “religion” and “spirituality,” they argued that spirituality is not the same as religion. I had tricked her and had turned it into a semantic game. The community has a right to spiritual concerns as a group; that’s not the same as religion. They have always considered spirituality very important in selection of community members, for decades. I was the one trying to limit their spiritual freedom. It was as if I had asked some uptight bakery to bake a gay wedding cake for my gay marriage. I told them I was sure that anyone who took the matter to court in that state would have no trouble winning a civil lawsuit against the community. I said, that’s why the IRS provides a religious exemption—if you have one, you can do this. If you don’t, you can’t. You can’t just exempt yourself from federal law by writing it into your bylaws or putting up a sign.

I was a non-member, there to consider whether or not I wanted to join them and come live there, make decisions with them, and become legally liable for whatever goes down there, maybe for the rest of my life. To me, the Fair Housing Act was a pretty big deal, and we should all get on the same page about that, no? Let’s look at the actual policy. Does the community have all its documented ducks in a row to remove the potential for this type of lawsuit?

We ran out of time, and agreed to meet



Photos by Chris Roth

again that Monday (it was a Friday) to continue and finish our mediation. I left the community and went home for the weekend, only to receive a flat rejection of my membership application, by email. Of the seven adult members of the community, six had indicated informally at a community meeting that they thought I should move on to the next step in their membership process and come live there as a provisional member. One member was incensed about that. They were supposed to discuss that in private! and she had issues. Hence we went to “mediation” together.

She brought a spreadsheet. She brought a three-page spreadsheet listing things I had done and said over the course of the entire summer, how that made her feel, and what I needed to do to solve those problems. She had been saving it up all summer without letting me know she had issues. That I had suggested we clear the poison ivy from the parking area and main pathways was on the list as something very disrespectful to the land and community at large. Basically, she was going to block

**Problem was,
it's against federal
law to do that one
thing in making a
housing decision.**

me when the time came by hook or by crook, bringing up everything from my comments on a parking area to the nature of my very soul. But in doing so, she actually broke the law, and the community's process enabled, acquiesced, and supported that.

All I can think is that the community must have heard the words “illegal,” “court,” and “lawsuit,” and panicked. They may even have sought advice from lawyers and friends, who may all have said, run. Run from the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

To add insult to injury, her concerns about my spirituality had been unfounded. The first day I arrived at the community, there happened to be a local spiritual gathering of friends at a nearby farm. They were going to have some kind of a “fire circle.” I knew the woman who owned the farm, a former community member, and asked if I could bring my dog. No, sorry, no dogs allowed. Excuse me if I decided it would be inappropriate to leave my dog unattended at my new hoped-for community, but I did not attend the fire circle. The member who blocked me pointed out that absence in mediation and was very concerned that I had no interest in “the tribe.” It was on her spreadsheet.

There was insulting and injurious icing on that cake as well. In my written application, I had described my “spirituality” as something I consider to be an intimately private matter that was no one's business but my own. I had said for that reason, I abhor proselytism and feel strongly that no one should advise or dictate how someone else experiences “spirituality.” I had also expressed in my application that I am passionate about human rights law. The community had invited me to continue in the membership process and come stay there for a while based on that application. It was exactly as though that one member had culled through my application and picked the one thing she knew would drive me away.

Problem was, it's against federal law to do that one thing in making a housing decision.

Seeking Solutions

I really wasn't the right person to boot out of that community. Here I am, still working hard to sort out and think through their legal issues and find solutions to their policy problems. Only now, it's not about my own membership, or my rights as an applicant. I am already flatly rejected. This is about protecting other people's rights now, not mine. Mine are already violated. But the rights of the next potential member who shows up there clearly need to be protected, agreed? This type of thing shouldn't happen to anyone, especially among friends.

Add to that, the community itself needs to be legally protected in its actions from random encounters that might land it in court and/or damage it financially or even put an end to it. I am not a litigious person. What about the next applicant? I am not the type of person who would hide an audio recorder in my pocket during meetings and “mediation.” But what about the next applicant? And by the way, why should fairness

work only for people who would do that type of thing? Do we really need to play hipster NSA just to make ourselves be fair?

Having written policies that anticipate human foibles and conform to local, state, and federal law is important. Even if your community has been muddling through without finished written policy for years, it's essential you complete your documents if you are to respect and uphold the rights of others: other members, and potential members or guests. It allows a community to say, it's not personal. It's not that we don't love you, But here. This. This is how we have all agreed to make our decisions.

Please, everyone, have a code.

I think some type of “Universal Community Bill of Rights” or “FIC Code of Ethics”



(non-binding, voluntary) with some attention paid to “hearing” and accountability, and/or an informal ranking of communities and how they match what they “say they are” and respect rights, are ideas worth considering. A “constitutional congress” of communitarians (which ought to include non-member representation IMHO) could be the best way to work out the details.

I suggest that a Community Bill of Rights for members and nonmember guests include:

- **personal, physical safety**
- **protection from bullying, civility code**
- **rights of the child (a model, voluntary code: www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx)**
- **rights of the elderly**
- **rights of “the elders”—seniority in community**
- **right to redress grievances**
- **transparency—the right to accessible, current, and accurate information**

Silicon Valley’s “fake it til you make it” approach to success is not actually appropriate for intentional community, or ethical for that matter. Your outreach materials—like your website, for example—are the “window to your soul” if you will, the door through which many if not all potential member applicants and visitors will first encounter you. Do the work of maintaining a current presentation. Be honest. If you used to have a thriving beekeeping operation on site, but the person who ran it left three years ago and took their operation with them, take the pictures and the description of your styling honey production down. Please, maintain accurate, current information. Every person in community has a right to the most relevant, accurate, and timely information they need in decision-making. I don’t care how busy you are and how easy it is to neglect your website and outreach materials. This is not about you. This is about other people’s right to an accurate picture. And the same goes for new member applicants: Be honest. Of all the competencies and skills a community is looking for in “hiring” for that “dream job” you’re seeking, be a rock star in telling the truth.

- **right to be heard**

No matter if a community has eight members, or 70 members, or 150, when a new person applies for membership, the community has the home-court advantage. Each community member is assessing their own list of criteria and compatibility in reference to one person. That one person is assessing and evaluating potentially dozens of other people. It can be overwhelming for the applicant, yet underwhelming for community members. Please make the process as important to you as it is to the “dreamer” who just showed up at your door and is asking for resident status.

They have disrupted their entire life for you, maybe taken time off a job and/or spent a lot of extra money to travel to your door. It is the most important thing happening in their lives, though not in yours, granted. Give them the time and attention they deserve if only in reading their application thoroughly and letting that person be “heard” in the ways you’ve agreed to as a community member. Remind yourselves that the further along you let them get in your evaluation process, the more sacrifices they have made in time off work, “vacation” type expenses, and time off from exploring other options. If you reject them, have policy in place so you can show them exactly why it isn’t personal, it’s policy. Do everything in your power to make sure they land in a safe place after you cut them off, even if that’s just handing them a card about the local food bank.

This is a big dream for the applicant, a “dream job” if you will, and they really hope you are going to “hire” them. If you are going to pass on them and continue in your “hiring search” process, make sure you have policy in place that guarantees as best you



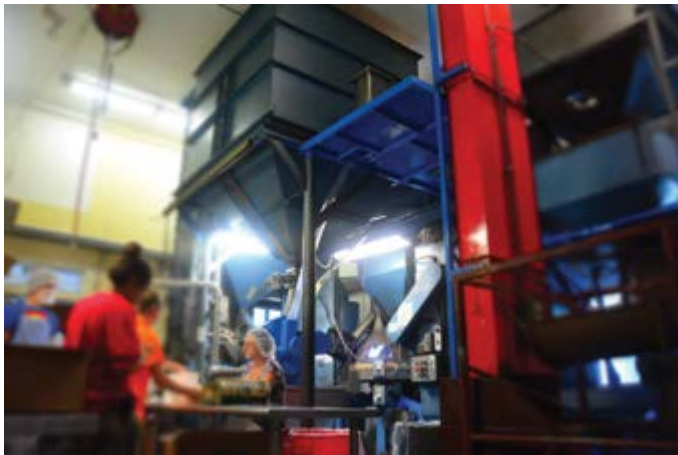
Please make the residency application process as important to you as it is to the “dreamer” who just showed up at your door.

can that your decision is perfectly fair and reasonable, and lawful. To you, “there are other communities to look into.” To them, it can be painful like a divorce. Be compassionate about that. They may even be grieving their separation from the land. Please take that as seriously as you take it in your own connection to the community. At least find out who they are, and follow through on any communication and mediation processes you’ve established by policy. It’s the only “hearing” your latest dreamer has in pursuing their dream. 🐦

Both author and community remain anonymous in this article, because of the difficulty of fact-checking the assertions made and the complexity of attempting to present a full and balanced view of the events described. We present this as the applicant’s version and viewpoint, hoping it will add to discussion of the issues raised, encountered by more than one intentional community.

Entrepreneurship and Long-Term Planning in an Income-Sharing Community: A Report from the Frontlines

By Sumner Nichols



I write this for all those interested in founding their own communes, and particularly, founding their own commune businesses.

Recently, I reread an article I wrote about my experiences with managing East Wind Nut Butters (based at East Wind Community, Tecumseh, Missouri) that was published in *COMMUNITIES* in 2017. I had been heavily involved in the office operations, upper management you might call it, for less than two years at the time. My travels along the learning curves of business management (amongst many other skills) have been exponentially expedited while living at East Wind. I return to the pen and keyboard once again to examine and attempt to understand the current situation. I am writing here specifically about entrepreneurship at East Wind. East Wind Nut Butters (EWNB) is one of a few decently sized companies that were founded decades ago and have become established within the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC). I do not have any experience starting up a company (especially in the income-sharing context). Perhaps in another couple years I will have something to share on that front. Now that I've made my focus explicit, let's see what we have learned.

When I came in, Nut Butters (NB) was ailing due to high turnover in important management positions. The Sales Manager position had been seriously neglected for years. This was my first position, soon adding General Manager and later, Purchasing Manager. Even with my lack of experience, I was trust-

ed with plenty and given the latitude to take risks and make mistakes. I was not omnipotent by any means. Other business managers and community members have the power to check manager decisions. Both the General and Sales Manager positions are elected (Purchasing Manager being appointed by the General Manager). However, when it comes to doing the Purchasing and Sales for a multi-million-dollar company, you can sign a contract or make a quick decision that can either earn or cost your business tens of thousands of dollars. No salaries, no commissions, no bonuses, hardly any oversight, and negligible (for the most part) penalties present a significant morale hazard that puts the business at risk (and potentially, the community, especially if that single business generates 95+ percent of the community's income, as is the case with East Wind).

In reality, the pace of running a competitive business of this scale doesn't match up with the often slow and disinterested pace of the community at large. General trust in the executive decision makers is required, as is the respect you garner from those you work with. Reputation changes over time and people's perceptions are important. How you communicate with others and what you choose to communicate; how you conduct your personal life...there are many factors and it can be incredibly taxing to maintain and build this trust in the face of consistent turnover.

Taking on the stresses of manager responsibilities in the 100 percent income-sharing framework requires a certain idealism

and sense of direction. My initial motivations revolved around believing that getting the business back on track and relieving the anxiety of financial strain for the community would lead to greater ability to make long-term plans and specifically, address major infrastructure concerns. I was able to take on increasing levels of responsibility as I learned and became more efficient in the office. I regularly worked 40- to 70-hour weeks (with at least half of these hours being directly related to my NB work). My sense of ownership developed in this time and my identity became closely attached to both East Wind Nut Butters and East Wind Community. Never in my two decades of formal education had I learned so much in such a short amount of time.

However, once I was no longer learning as much as I could in the business realm, some of the work became routine and could weigh on me, stress me. Largely, this stress was due to my own standards. In the world of sales, getting back to your customer within 15 minutes is a very different thing than getting back to them the next day. Timing is very important and in the food industry being responsive is an incredible competitive advantage. This is primarily how I built a new customer base for EWNB.

Over a period of years, ego crept back in and resentment soon followed. Having ideas is one thing; executing them is quite another thing. In the 100 percent income-sharing context with 40 equal owners, even if you are responsible for 50 percent of the income coming in, you still only have 2.5 percent of the vote guaranteed. You work to make the money, but you don't necessarily get to say how it is all spent. This doesn't give much

incentive to go above and beyond. The incentive to do that is a general sense of contentment with oneself and one's community—enough overlap of vision and intention allowing for a tolerance for differences.

I enjoyed the challenge of the responsibilities taken up, but I also had a general direction of improvement in mind for East Wind. As East Wind's financial position improved, some things lined up with this general direction: rebuilding the shower house, buying newer used vehicles from dealerships instead of gambling on lemons, paying a roofing contractor to work on a number of buildings. However, just about every budget and account was increased and I was frustrated with the distinct lack of interest in even discussing long-term planning, specifically in regards to investing in building infrastructure. Each year came with votes on the amount of personal profit-sharing to be disbursed among the members. Each year resulted in a vote that overrode existing legislation in order to give more money to individuals. The community's kitchen budget grew. Let there be no doubt that East Wind has the best food in the FEC. For someone like me, who originally came to East Wind to learn how to garden and live more seasonally, it is disheartening to see the community kitchen purchasing in-season produce that directly competes with the community garden. I am reminded of stories I've read of the consumption binges that some lottery winners pursue back to the point of origin: destitution.

The drive to work harder began to wane after years of holding these important NB positions. Publicly, I made it clear that



Photos courtesy of www.eastwind.org

I wanted to step down from these positions and was willing to train people to take over. Unfortunately, no members really wanted to step up until recently (imagine that). It is an ongoing process for me to pull back. The last member to attempt to train for the sales position burnt out and left the community after his girlfriend broke up with him. Reliability and competence are in short supply for the upper-level management positions. I am holding onto most of the sales position and currently training others to deal with purchasing and the various aspects of the general manager position. I now have more realistic hopes!

I recently read a magazine called *Entrepreneur*. In it, the CEO of Spanx advises to “fire faster” and “hire your weaknesses.” I think this is great advice for an entrepreneur in, say, Silicon Valley. Such powers are not easily manifested on a commune. Managers at East Wind do have the power to “fire” people. A manager can prevent someone from claiming hours in their labor area. This is an incredibly rare occurrence and not to be taken lightly. Labor done in the income-generating areas directly affects personal discretionary funds at East Wind.

Hiring is an entirely different story. Hiring outside contractors for specific things such as construction can be done, but not without the potential grievances aired of those who live at East Wind and think that “we can do it all ourselves.” I’m all for DIY. I love growing my own food, for example. However, I am also all for hiring help when we need it and especially if we are not capable of doing it properly ourselves. East Wind is a place of learning, but running such a complex operation requires outside help. We sure as hell are not growing all the peanuts, almonds, and cashews we use in our butters. We buy these things from those we trust.

Hire your weaknesses: this is why recently a lot of my time and energy has gone into making videos about East Wind for YouTube and trying to be supportive of newer members (whereas before I was in the “sink or swim” camp); working to get people to come here and want to stay. Unfortunately, my idea to offer a paid internship for office work was rejected. At this point in my membership at East Wind, my morale is heavily dependent on my perceptions of the newer members. Strategic use of the internet does seem to be improving the quality of incoming people. Coupling that with serious investment into our infrastructure (it is happening, but too slowly for my taste) would increase the chances of retaining desperately needed talent.

Getting away from predominantly ascribing monetary value to others can be a difficult thing. There are numerous decades-long members at East Wind who explicitly and openly judge other members based on what they contribute in terms of labor, and that usually is reduced to monetary value. I myself was hardline on this position for years and can still easily fall into this way of thinking. How productive are you? What would you be getting paid “out there”? How would the market judge you? Numbers don’t lie, as my millionaire uncle tells me. This

is a peculiar mindset and it surely isn’t healthy to be constantly caught up in it.

Finding a different accounting, a less narrow range of judgment, benefits healthy communal interactions. The cohesion and happiness of the group matters more to me now than it ever has. We are not equal. We are all different. Some of us are brutally efficient worker bees and some of us are the wonderfully caring social butterflies. Not everyone is management material. Not everyone is detail-oriented. Not everyone has the discipline and drive to change themselves. Accepting and embracing these differences facilitates the critical emergent properties of living communally. Achieving that mix that flows effortlessly takes time and critical decision making.

The “deadline” for this article is tomorrow. I have been working on writing a piece for over a month now. It may seem convoluted. There is much more to say on many matters, more to come in the Winter COMMUNITIES issue. I just got off the phone with an old friend. We spoke for over three hours about what we had been doing, what our lives have been for the past five years. We had been undergrads at the same large, top-10 state business school. He wanted out of the corporate finance rat race. He said he was replaced within the hour when he quit. Told

me I was “further along” than him, “woke” he says (that word makes me chuckle). He talked about how in college he just had the mindset of party, get that first job to make some money and then do his own thing. Now he is a digital nomad residing in Mexico for the moment, near the second largest reef in the world. He had been traveling many places, staying a month at a time. He is seeking a community. Can’t make friends out there. No new friends for five years, he tells me. A spiritual experience involving DMT has him probing for new direction in life.

This unexpected interaction bolstered my motivations for living in the communities movement. I’ve put down roots for four years at East Wind and now I have the travel bug, an itch to see who and what is out there. I’m pulling back from being completely invested in EWNB, seeing how the cards fall. It is just one business owned by one community. There are several communal spaces, communal businesses, and *potential* community ideas to engage with. I’ve come to the conclusion that co-creating a resilient network of communally minded **people** is the most important work I can be doing right now. 🐦

Sumner Ely Nichols III has lived at East Wind Community for four years. He is currently attempting to transition his role and identity in the community. A garden manager who makes videos for the four YouTube channels he started this year, Sumner enjoys birding and reading about Earth’s changing climate. Somewhat of a historian, he aspires to write a book about the East Wind experience. You can find his video content by searching for the “East Wind Community” channel on YouTube.

Some of us are brutally efficient worker bees and some of us are the wonderfully caring social butterflies.

Founder's Syndrome

By Graham Ellis

To live cohesively is almost a fantasy and we ought to know it starts with humbling our egos.
—Nahko Bear

Each individual in a group has a particular and unique personality style that has been shaped by the lifetime of their experience. There are driver types and quiet folk, expressives, analyticals, reserved, shy, reactive, and many others.

—The Foundation for Intentional Community website



Photos courtesy of Graham Ellis

I was the founder of a community that was established in 1987 and is still alive today. I was nicknamed the “Bulldozer” for my heavy-handed approach in pursuing my vision, sometimes stepping on people’s toes, speaking abruptly, or for being the task master and high standard setter: the person who got things done. During times of nagging criticism, I would reflect on Robin Sharma’s profound saying, “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, just criticize.” It was apparent to me that some people chose to not get engaged because they feared making mistakes and feared getting criticized, as I did. But I was a warrior attempting to win battles in a peaceful way.

I never thought of myself as someone perfect and willingly confessed in a letter to the group that, “I can be a serious pain at times. I am human and have my weaknesses—as well as my strengths—just like each and every one of you.” I hoped we could be tolerant with one another, accept our imperfections, trust in humanity, and believe that an increasingly harmonious future was possible.

My personal situation was compounded significantly because of the leadership position I was placed in by our membership and by the general public. Although never elected, or officially

appointed, I was the original founder, visionary, and main public point person for over a quarter of a century. I therefore carried the weight of responsibility for everything that happened at our community, even though I had set it up to operate by consensus. What I failed to see clearly enough was that I would be considered the root of all present, past, and future problems in the organization by some of the members. It’s a tough role and not one that I requested because I knew it would result in me having to deal with objective resistance, subjective rebellion, irrational judgments, overt and covert disrespect, and possibly the loss of connection to people I once considered to be friends. I later read books on the subject of “Founder’s Syndrome” and none of the outcome scenarios looked attractive to me.

According to Wikipedia, “Founder’s Syndrome” is a popular term for the difficulties faced by organizations where founders maintain disproportionate amounts of power and influence following the initial establishment of the project, leading to a wide range of problems for both the organization and those involved in it.

It took me about 20 years to learn that an organization still run by its founder has to deal with unique transition is-

Critics of my leadership had their own weaknesses, problems, and idiosyncrasies.

sues not faced by other groups. Where the founder is the personification of the organization, its vision, and mission, boards and members are usually reluctant to make the first move toward change. This was exactly the case with our transition though I eventually broke the mold and advocated passionately for stepping down gracefully and accepting the changes. Despite my well-meaning intentions, I failed in my duty to create a healthy transition to a competent new leader or management structure and I fully accept responsibility for that...but I know how hard I tried.

As the leader of two nonprofit organizations I always faced an uphill battle. I risked time, money, relationships, and my reputation to get our experimental community up and running and to keep it running for nearly three decades. Unlike most entrepreneurs, though, I had no financial upside to balance the risks I took. I told myself that my rewards were huge, just not in dollars—and my retirement nest egg was held in the sustainable lifestyle I lived. I later came to the realization that my plan was based upon an assumption of long-term community stability, which proved false.

Elizabeth Schmidt wrote in a 2013 article that it has become fashionable in nonprofit governance literature to assume that the disease called “Founder’s Syndrome” can explain every challenge that nonprofits face once their founders have done the heavy lifting. A common belief is that this is a psychological illness, and the blame for this illness falls squarely on the shoulders of the founder. She argues strongly that founders should not be automatically blamed and, instead of pointing fingers, mem-



bers should themselves address certain potential symptoms.

She believes that if the organization exists just to serve the founder’s ego or if there is poor management on the part of the founder or an inability to delegate or an unwavering dedication to the original vision of the organization, it must always be addressed from a mission-centric point of view. She believes that taking the approach of reviewing the future vision will lead to a better result for all involved. Learning this, and having felt it innately since inception, I repeatedly advocated for a vision review. If only we had been able to do this effectively, it might have prevented a lot of future pain and relationship damage.

Compounding this issue was the fact that our communitarians also failed to create a safe place for open and honest communication, which is universally accepted as a cornerstone of all effective community-building. There needs to be a place where criticism and self-criticism can happen calmly and respectfully, within a framework of trust and compassion. These words are easy to write, but were so hard to live day-by-day and became clearly incongruous with the behavior of certain members in my latter years with the experiment.

My personal perspective is that people are multifaceted and none of us are perfectly behaved all the time, especially in difficult situations. How we address this issue can be the determining factor in the maintenance of collective harmony or not. I always attempted to see and acknowledge my own role in any adversarial situation, although I admit that sometimes I failed.

Countless times over the years, I accepted responsibility and apologized to members for my lapses in reasonable behavior. I also suffered from the harsh words and negative emotions of certain fellow members many, many times—and I reminded them that “Just because I am a strong character, does not mean that I don’t get hurt too. I realize that my pain has had an influence on how I relate to others and I regret that I was often unable to bring issues up in the moment and that I act defensively when I get criticized.”

I wanted to avoid responding with “I did this but you did that” in a desperate effort to level the playing field. But the fact was that critics of my leadership had their own weaknesses, problems, and idiosyncrasies, which were also real and relevant to the situation. I was the person who introduced our group to the mediation process and even wrote it into our bylaws as our accepted method for resolving disputes. I always offered to process personal issues with anyone who came forward and continued with

that offer in good will, even though in latter years certain members that most needed to mediate with me, and with others, continuously refused.

It seems that insecure personalities will take every measure to avoid one-on-one mediation for fear of having to be vulnerable and compromise on their position. I learned that it can be a battle to change the norms of human communication and it seldom happens without conscious effort and professional assistance. The lack of commitment required to counterbalance our individualism with our commitment to reaching consensus created severe imbalance in our group.

Perhaps I was living in a state of denial for decades because it took me that long to realize and accept that we have basically had two polarities of thought in our group, with a few members moving between the two.

The vision I steadfastly expressed was for the creation of a utopian ecovillage community with total inclusivity integrating lots of kids and older folks with extensive outreach providing services to our neighboring community and an endless future based upon the conviction that all legal obstacles could be overcome.

The other extreme has been less articulated, but I believe envisions a cliquish and exclusive “old boys club” attitude, providing members a reclusive and private holiday home for their lifetime, with an inclination to not challenge the power of local government authorities or the whims of a few disgruntled neighbors for fear of their retaliation.

I learned that maintaining a sense of community can be extremely difficult in this modern world when trust is replaced by suspicion, gossip, and accusations, and courage gets replaced by fear as the predominant motivating force of the group. I learned the truth of Anna Jameson’s quote, “Fear, either as a principle or motive, is the beginning of all evil.” These negative factors played a significant role in our 2014 shift from what Scott Peck calls the “glory days of community” back to the “chaos phase,” with all its emphasis on rules and regulations and a lack of true consensus decision-making.

The process had started with a breakdown in my relationship with one of our members (FB) and our subsequent struggle to deal with Founder’s Syndrome.

Our community has some unusual quirks. We are an organization that’s never had a properly functioning board nor any means of making major decisions by consensus outside of our Annual General Meeting. Perhaps our most flagrant flaw is that our membership has never developed the ability to unify as communitarians. There was no better demonstration of this truth than the deteriorating relationship that grew between FB and myself.

As a student of sustainable community development, I was fully aware that deal-

ing with interpersonal relationships is a complex subject often given inadequate attention by communities. I had been aware of this when I wrote the original Bellyacres bylaws in 1989 and had included mediation as our ultimate tool for conflict resolution. Over the years, this process had been used numerous times successfully and so, in February 2014 when my interpersonal relationship with FB seemed to have hit an all-time low, I requested mediation with him. However, he constantly refused and I felt that any chance I had to live in peace was lost.

Our issues began way back in our history and exist because of our inherent personality style conflicts. One of the most common sources of conflict and angst in all types of intentional communities is the friction between the “doers” and the “talkers.” This dichotomy between task and process is very common and is often a source of conflict and frustration in community, as it also was between FB and myself.

A healthy community has a balance between task and process. My personality type is mostly focused on task and less on process. FB was the extreme opposite so he constantly criticized the process I used in fulfilling the tasks involved in running Bellyacres. We also were total opposites in our willingness to take risks. I would bulldoze ahead believing that we could find the solutions to all the problems that we might encounter. FB felt compelled to complete a thorough risk assessment covering every contingency that could possibly occur and then would not want to move forward at all because everything seemed too scary. Additionally, we had opposite viewpoints regarding compliance with government regulations, chil-

My personality type is mostly focused on task and less on process. FB was the extreme opposite.





dren, money, sustainability, community-building, and the overall vision of Bellyacres.

Our clashes had begun in 2005 when I hired FB to work on a major community festival project that I was producing and, after a bad experience, we mediated and agreed that we should never work together again due to our personality differences. At our 2006 A.G.M., FB renewed his confrontation with me by speaking about the “elephant in the room” and his difficulties working with me. He criticized my leadership style and personality and claimed that four members were not at the A.G.M. because of their own individual difficulties with me. He expressed concerns that there was “a pattern of behavior” which was driving members away, and wanted to bring the problem into the open. I agreed to contact the members he mentioned and stated I was willing to mediate with any members who felt a need to discuss their respective issues with me. This happened with FB and one other member, while all the others felt it wasn’t necessary.

For the next five years, FB went through a troublesome divorce, a new marriage, and immigration struggles which kept him occupied and he spent a lot of time in the UK. Before coming to live permanently at our community in 2011, he remained a very passive member, not participating at all on the land with any work projects, and we avoided any serious clashes. The following year, he instigated an assault on my character, my integrity, and my leadership, although he had no positive proposals to contribute.

Meanwhile, I was still left with responsibility for getting all the tasks done to keep Bellyacres afloat and I was getting tired of being criticized while others did nothing. There was a lot of angry talk at our meetings, but no action. I repeatedly proposed a list of tasks for specific resident members to take over from me but they constantly refused and I got frustrated because of the chaos that had been created. After quite a while, I persuaded FB to take on the job of bookkeeper but it proved to be a terrible mistake in terms of our relationship and had disastrous results by creating an opportunity for him to exercise unjustified control over the community administration under the guise of managing finances.

In December 2012 after repeated attempts to delegate responsibilities, I felt frustrated and wrote, “Days and weeks go by and the need for a business meeting increases. My list of agenda items is growing and I think it is best to share it so at least you know some of the subjects that need to be addressed. They include some critical issues like who is supervising our interns daily, what is the schedule, and what is the prioritized work list for them? When can I expect to get repaid for expenses I’ve incurred? Can we complete tasks already begun? Who will take over the horse duties

which I have covered for many months on a daily basis?”

In early 2013, criticism of my leadership became the hot topic on our email chat list prior to the A.G.M.. I was still waiting for resident members to step forward and agree to take over tasks and communicated this to our full membership with an email entitled, “Time for a Change—Where’s the love?”

It read, “Hey Partners, I’ve been reflecting a lot on the recent flurry of emails and I’m clear that this is a perfect time for me to reduce my workload and stress level. For most of the last 27 years, I’ve worked about 20 hours weekly for the benefit of our community and I’m happy to announce my partial retirement. I’d like to retire more fully, but am concerned about the effects on Bellyacres.

“While some members are questioning my integrity and my intentions and cannot tolerate my style of getting things done, I can no longer endure the attitude of disrespect, aggression, and lack of love that I have been subjected to these last two years. Let’s see some positive changes with new people stepping forward. Power to the People! I am happy to shift my personal priorities to focus on my own family, homeschooling my kids plus maintaining my own home and personal projects.

“I think it’s best if I don’t attend any Home Base Group meetings until I have resolved personal issues individually with FB and any others choosing to meet with me. We can do mediation or a chat over tea if that will work.”

At the A.G.M., the atmosphere was tense and I was subjected to some very strong criticism and passive-aggressive attacks which culminated in FB once again claiming that four of our members were staying away from Bellyacres because of their relationship with me. Immediately after the meeting ended, I wrote to them all simply asking if FB’s claims were true without mentioning his name.

The four replies included “NO. I am not staying away because of our relationship.” “My dear friend and comrade Graham. I am sorry that was told to you. It is absolutely BS and untrue.” “I first get to say that you have been one of my greatest teachers and inspiring leaders. There are

several reasons I do not visit Bellyacres often.” “Nope, there was some time when that was the case, but that time lies in the past.”

In addition to this fabricated altercation, FB was also using his role as bookkeeper to further antagonize me and I believed that this clash of personalities had gone far enough so I again requested mediation with FB, and some others, with a qualified mediator who offered his services. Regrettably, the response I received from these five members was that they were not willing to do individual mediation with me but wanted to meet as a group. I did accept that there are benefits to be had from group mediations; however, I felt very strongly that I had specific issues to resolve with FB, in particular, and that this required one-on-one mediation.

I remained firm on this request for individual mediation for a long time and I continued to refuse to attend our weekly meetings unless they hired an impartial facilitator. Feelings escalated to such a level that I did not trust any of the members had the ability to keep the meeting respectful.

Admittedly, this was probably not the most productive course of action; however, I had been insulted and disrespected so many times that I found it hard to stay centered and in my higher self when I was at meetings with these members. I wanted to defuse the bomb, not have the fuse and lighter waved in my face every time we met. I had reached the point where I was convinced that without mediation, our meetings would continue the spiral of declining respect and common courtesy. I was sick of being shouted at, and even being threatened with physical violence!

The standoff lasted throughout most of that year, which was most unfortunate because major significant issues had to be resolved and our discussions were divisive, which caused our group to split into factions. By November 2014, I decided to surrender my principals and agreed to group mediation with five resident members.

I took the meeting very seriously and came prepared with my thoughts carefully written out. I was the only one to do that. It was a somewhat surreal situation, more akin to a court martial than any mediation I've ever participated in. I began by establishing the background to the meeting and what I hoped to get out of it by saying, “We are all getting older, have known one another for many years, and shared great fun times. One of the lessons we all should have learned from friends that have recently passed on is that we can never be sure when will be our last meeting. I don't want the last meeting I have with any of you to be one of tension and stress, I want my relationship to each of you individually to be one where compassion and respect and a remembrance of good times shared is what dominates, not the energy that we have been exchanging in recent times.

“The breakdown in our relationship which began in fall of 2012 came from more members living permanently in our community, the effects of Founder's Syndrome, our lack of any clear agreed-upon vision, and the severe and aggressive disrespect shown to my wife from several members.”

Consequently my requests for the mediation were:

- a verbal statement from each person accepting responsibility for their personal role in the deterioration of relationships over the last two to three years;
- participation in individual mediation sessions with me—hopefully as a heartfelt show of good faith—but otherwise as an acceptance of our bylaws;
- an acknowledgement of responsibility from individuals who acted unfairly or unjustly towards my wife.

Unfortunately, I was granted none of my requests. Instead, as a sign of good faith, I chose to acquiesce fully to all the requests made of me which simply referred to future financial details and, surprisingly, an agreement to leave them some fruit on trees that I regularly harvested.

I have always understood the potential for intensely personal issues to arise and had written community ground rules in our bylaws. However, they only work if members willingly act as responsible communitarians. The fact that our community was largely comprised of unintentional communitarians hit me head-on. The outcome of this “court martial” was disastrous and did nothing to heal any wounds or promote us to

work together in harmony.

It was still a great shock and surprise to me that, within weeks of this meeting, I left my community after 27 years to start a totally new life adventure. This so-called mediation impacted my decision considerably and was the last straw that broke this camel's back. 🌱

The above is adapted from Graham Ellis' book Juggling Fire in the Jungle—my journey of thirty years in a sustainable community experiment, which is available as an e-book from the FIC Bookstore.

Graham Ellis was the founder of Bellyacres, the Village Green Society, Hawaii's Volcano Circus, and the Hawaii Sustainable Community Alliance. He also directed a renowned youth circus program that morphed into a uniquely crafted community center, hosting a school, a farmers' market, performance arts workshops and shows, neighborhood events, and even a church. He has been acknowledged by Hawaii's Governor plus state and county officials for being an innovative community builder and champion of sustainability. Graham was deported from the US in 2017 and now lives with his wife in the UK waiting to reunite their family.

The Importance of Mediation

After you have been working together for awhile, an attentive person with training will recognize members' personalities and styles and then use that understanding to predict how the group will react to different situations. As the group gets into conflicts, the elements of group dynamics and personality style need to be taken into account by the facilitators of the group. Having someone within the group who is trained in mediation skills, or hiring an outside trained mediator, can be very useful. The group will need to decide how mediation is to be handled and under what circumstances it will be used. Setting up conflict mediation early is important, so that a plan can be in place should a major conflict occur. Having an outside opinion can do wonders for a stuck process.

—ic.org

Challenges of Self-Organization at Chambalabamba

By Mofiwofoo (Tom Osher)



I am the founder of a mostly Latino, artist eco-community in Vilcabamba, Ecuador where the climate is spring-like all year around. December 2012 is when I moved into my tree-house by the drinkable river that runs all alongside the whole property of five and a half hectares (one hectare is 2.4 acres). The air we breathe comes from the sea, passes over jungles and the Andes mountains to get to us. It is always very fresh.

I had five years' experience living in an intentional community on the border of Germany and Holland before I moved to Vilcabamba to join a forming community (that never formed) which after a week I knew was not what I wanted. I spent 18 months looking for this land. The day after I moved in a family of three showed up from Ecuador and Argentina and I agreed that they could stay. Over time others came, unsolicited, and eventually stayed until we had about 12 adults and a number of children.

I financed the building of the community with the idea that eventually the community would find a way to finance itself and I would just become a regular member. No one had to pay to live here and eventually I agreed to pay up to \$5000 for each house for the members in the community, and if they should leave, the house would belong to the community. The first five houses were built for under \$5000 as we are experts with bioconstruction (building walls with soil, sand, and dry plant material). Even though the houses didn't cost much, they are beautiful and sturdy. Initially people lived in tents and teepees. A small swimming lake was made, and a maloka (round building without walls, 12 meter diameter) with a kitchen and no center pole. The roof was held up by a steel cable that was drawn tight around the wood columns and made it impossible for the pyramidal roof to collapse. In addition, we built a dormitory which eventually became our alternative school. I thought we would jam and play music in the maloka but the first time we had electrified music my neighbors who live some distance away called screaming about

the noise. The next day I started construction on a large outdoor stage with a roof and a recording studio, next to the swimming lake, facing the other direction (where there were no neighbors) and never played amplified music again in the maloka.

After three years I was able to buy two adjoining properties so that we could have more space and so that we could build a road down to the place. Before this we had a 15 minute hike to get here. On the far end of this property a large carpentry workshop was built and I bought many machines and tools so that we could make whatever we needed to. Some of the members are great carpenters, and others have other essential practical skills. The idea was that all the residents would have freedom, autonomy with responsibility. I set up a model of anarchy, being that I have been a longtime radical anarchist activist in San Francisco. I am not the "boss," everyone is equal, there is no "authority." Community decisions are made by 100 percent consensus. We have no rules, only agreements. We are self-organizing. Ahh, here is the rub. The community was initially quite informally run with a lot of trust, no accountability, no feedback, no transparency. Anarchy without organization is chaos.

After six and a half years it occurred to me that we were not organized enough to sufficiently run this community effectively. Many things were overlooked, neglected, and wasted. Most of the community members didn't seem to notice this, but I did. I realized that my "dream" was failing. We needed to be much better organized. I encountered resistance: "This is paradise, enjoy it." "Be happy, don't worry." "Don't be negative." "Stop complaining." The majority of the people were not willing to accept their responsibility for not managing the community well.

I had put all my resources, my energy (I work a lot here), my whole life into this place. This was to be my legacy, an example of how people could live together in the most wonderful way imaginable. I wasn't about to let this dream be thwarted by what I

would call “bad community attitude.” If I had to, I would revoke the anarchy style that I had created and expel anyone whose attitude wasn’t really good, who didn’t have a passion for contributing to the community to make it great. But that was the last thing that I wanted to do. So, I got the idea to implement “sociocracy,” a non-authoritative way to organize a community. It is now nine months later and we still haven’t fully implemented it though we keep progressing at a snail’s pace.

During this period I had the realization that the reason that most communities fail over time, that the communities movement has been so relatively stagnant for so many years, is not only because of the two main problems, money and relationships/conflict, but also because a community should only consist of people with noble character (humble, kind, honest, with dignity, reliable, and open-hearted, open-minded) and people with a good community attitude, which is a little harder to define.

One good reason to live in a community is because one realizes that by serving others one best serves oneself. That it is a spiritual path, doing acts of love, opening one’s heart, and this is done by serving the needs of the community on a daily basis. It helps break the illusion of separation and make the sense of “oneness” more real, more embodied. To meet the daily needs of the community needs to be a desire, not an obligation. All of this can be seen in the details, like picking up garbage on the land; keeping all shared spaces, the bathrooms, the kitchen in the maloka, the carpentry workshop, the recording studio, etc. clean and well cared for; fixing or getting fixed anything that is broken; participating in maintaining the land, the plants, the gardens, the fruit trees, the structures, the infrastructure (water, electricity, gas); being available for emergencies, e.g., a water leak, a cow on the land, etc.; all of these practical things. All of this makes for a good community attitude.

I lowered the boom and told people that those who don’t have a good community attitude would have to leave and as owner of the property I was going to rescind the anarchical arrangement temporarily to remove anyone lacking this. This was not easy, because our community is based on our connection, our relationships. We are like a large family and I love everyone in the community. It’s not personal, it’s about attitude. I preferred that everyone who didn’t have a good community attitude would wake up and change, rather than have to leave. But some people just didn’t want to change and accept the responsibility of having failed to live up to their side of the bargain, the

reciprocity, to organize and manage the community effectively and excellently. So, we came up with another agreement: after six weeks, the community would evaluate who has or doesn’t have a good community attitude and those who don’t, the community would ask them to leave and I wouldn’t have to suspend the anarchical arrangement that we had.

People are changing. We still have three weeks to go. It’s not clear what is going to happen. One person who was lacking the correct attitude, however, a fine fellow in many ways, has announced his departure in two weeks. It’s sad for him and for me, but it seems necessary. Maybe some day, he can return, when he understands what is necessary to live in community.

Footnote: Now it is July 18, 2019, and we are getting closer to our community evaluation date. A friend from Colombia agreed to come for a month just to help everyone complete their sociocratic tasks. People seem to be realizing slowly how operating in a poorly organized manner undermines community. I have hope. 🐦

For many more photos and videos, go to chambalabamba.org or the Facebook group [chambalabamba community](#) or the author’s Facebook page (Tom Osher). For a recent video that appeared in the New York Post, see nypost.com/video/how-i-sold-my-house-and-started-a-love-commune.

Mofwoofoo (Tom Osher) writes: “Now I am 74, but really I feel and seem much younger, the new 50. I have two grown kids in the states, each with a daughter. I have been a radical anarchist activist most of my life, having worked a number of years with Food Not Bombs in San Francisco, getting arrested for serving homeless people organic vegetarian food in front of the government buildings. I have been an artist, entrepreneur, and a creative movement teacher and for seven years worked at a regular job in an office (horrific). I finally started following and manifesting my dreams in 2000. My spiritual path began after experimenting with LSD in my hippie daze. It has led me believe in the power of love and to not identify with anything, to think of myself not as a thing or noun, but rather a verb, love. Now, I have embarked on another dream (there are many) to make a website to track all the major projects confronting climate change and to restore the planet: projectstostop-climatechange.org, so that everyone can know what is being done and where and how to engage and support. The website needs to be known by most everyone on the internet to succeed in its purpose.”



Photos courtesy of Mofwoofoo

Missed Opportunity at the Goat Ranch

By Philip Mirkin

Happiness is based on trust. In fact, in most nations “trust” is the number one ingredient to happiness. I’d learned this from reading the scientific literature of the Psychology of Happiness. Trust in the government, the police, your employers, family, and neighbors is the most important element for long-term happiness.

It’s perhaps even more important for intentional ecovillages, as we must fully rely upon each other in close quarters. Equity, shared labor, and shared meals are most important for success, as I concluded in my last article for COMMUNITIES (issue #181, The Culture of Intentional Community).

My most recent experience in community development demonstrates exactly how important all of this is. Without these basic building blocks, a community can’t get off the ground. And an emerging community can literally fall apart.

Here’s the story:

Last year I answered an ad in *Caretaker Gazette* to manage a lodge, campground, and potential permaculture village as part of a 100-acre ranch at a remote beach in a hamlet in Mexico. Our phone conversation was very involved and the owners begged us to join them and take it to the next step. They were very impressed by our experiences creating an ecovillage in a remote place (Fiji). Their ranch had solar power, local water treatment, was built mostly with Earth, and on permaculture principles. There was even a food forest plus Moringa trees. It sat above a truly gorgeous, quiet beach.

My partner Leslie and I enjoyed five days on the Mexican coast with the owners of the ranch. Over the subsequent days they offered us a 50 percent profit-sharing partnership in the business if we would run the Airbnb for the five lodge rooms and campground, as well as manage volunteers. They also asked us to look after their goats, dogs, donkeys, ducks, cats, and chickens, especially while they were gone.

Ted envisioned a community with about a dozen people since the facilities existed. Sally, his partner, wasn’t so sure. They seemed worn out from the back and forth to New England. Her attitude was of defeat, resignation, and quitting. She wanted to live in the city. They offered us up a blank canvas to create a working community based on permaculture principles and nature enjoyment. They relied on volunteers for the day-to-day management—they needed us. Ted and Sally both admitted that they couldn’t do the management themselves as they merely employed people in their fields of advertising and financial consulting. They had no experience in tourism or running an Airbnb.

Ted loved the idea of music around the campfires; however, they were not personable people. He wanted to see the existing facilities enjoyed.

I saw the vision. His wife was ready to sell the place. Leslie loved the opportunity.

We agreed to begin in December 2018. On arrival, I saw how the grounds and lodge had fallen into disrepair, looking abandoned, hardly maintained before my mid-December arrival. The first lodge guests were going to arrive and the place was far from ready. The house we were offered was barely functional: lights, toilet, and shower did not work properly, and the refrigerator had hundreds of dead maggots and flies in it. They made few preparations for our arrival. We were faced with a true challenge. We worked very hard before Christmas getting everything ready for the tourist season to commence.

The first two volunteers were sweet women from Germany and Alabama. The four

Ted envisioned a community with about a dozen people since the facilities existed. Sally, his partner, wasn’t so sure. They both seemed worn out.

of us hit it off with shared meals, solid work, and lots of laughter. We let them do their job as they saw it, offering gentle respect. In contrast, the owners were constantly rushing and had no time for us except for hurried meetings. We never relaxed together. Stressed-out, they often went up to Puerto Vallarta.

While the owners were gone over the New Year's holiday, nine baby goats were born. After being goat midwives, we lovingly raising the newborns. Strangely, the owners didn't thank us for that or for looking after their four dogs and three cats. In emails they demanded we do additional work, not agreed upon before.

Over the next six weeks, six more volunteers joined us from Korea, Oregon, Connecticut, Australia, and Canada. They were all lovely people. We worked like a well-oiled machine, at an even pace, with everyone respectfully trusting the other to do their volunteer jobs without our supervision or any disharmony. It was wonderful. We had fun. As managers we trusted each person to figure out how best to complete their own work, in contrast to Ted and Sally who called or texted often to micromanage.

We fed, milked, and raised goats, plus the whole menagerie. We dealt with scorpions nightly and built gorgeous curving adobe stairs, ran the water pumps, watched stunning sunsets. After our duties we savored many nights of bonfires, fishing, sitting in the

dipping pool; we played volleyball on the beach and swam in big waves. Together we served our lodge guests and included them in our feasts at the big outdoor kitchen. We did much, much more. In fact, Leslie and I were busy over 40 hours a week, not the 25 as was promised.

During rare appearances from their home up on the hill, the owners seemed increasingly mistrustful, unfriendly, fearful, and downright disrespectful. They had problems with an elder parent, alcohol, and former dealings in New England. Sadly, neither had anything nice to say about each other. This contrast strengthened my relationship with Leslie.

They rarely agreed on anything in our



Photos courtesy of Philip Mirkin



Sustainability is also about social and economic sustainability.



presence without first bickering. A few times, they openly fought in front of us, but not in front of the volunteers, as I learned later. Alone with me, Ted demeaned women, including his own wife and daughter. This bothered me greatly. Over the following weeks, they broke many promises, and asked us to do work on false pretenses. They seemed to have no respect, for each other or us. My loyalty faded.

The volunteers agreed that things were much better when the owners weren't around. We had a fun, welcoming little ecovillage despite Ted and Sally's visits. Our volunteers stayed happy and enjoyed the beauty of the beach and the nearly abandoned place we restored.

While the owners took a two-week trip to Mexico City, we hosted a magical dance and song retreat we offered with the dance leaders. Those five days with our 18 guests, two retreat leaders, the chef, and our six community members were truly idyllic: we laughed, sang, and ate together in paradise. As managers, Leslie and I were hosting from breakfast at 7 AM until the dances ended at 9:30 PM. We saw the community as imagined come alive. The peace and quiet there was ideal for the Dances of Universal Peace. Everyone there loved our community.

We stayed well within budget, making a decent profit; unfortunately we wouldn't see our half. The funds Ted and Sally promised did not materialize. After

they returned, Sally came up to our house. Rather than showing any gratitude for the extra 15 hours a week above our commitment, she complained about the earth-moving crew, and others, talking to us as if we were flunkies to them, not managers. They hadn't cared at all that I had sprained my ankle building stairs for them or carried on working over the retreat. Things changed for me after that. Leslie and I were very surprised at their demeanor, considering how fantastic the dance retreat went. We also had retained our hard-working, reliable team who loved the place even more.

I realized that there was no future for us there. The trust was gone. This was confirmed when we had time to mingle with people in the village. We discovered that the locals, both Mexican and Gringo, did not trust them, like them, or want them around. Some of the locals were former volunteers who had suffered similar treatment. Clearly, it was explained to us, they had a regular pattern of being friendly to their volunteers and then disposing of them.

We heard they sometimes told volunteers and paid guests to leave the ranch, often without one day's notice. Villagers confirmed they even threw out an eight-month pregnant woman on false pretenses. That pissed off the kind folks in the village and turned things sour for them. Even the bartender at the only local cantina there asked us to remind them their business wasn't welcome.

I could have done due diligence by contacting past volunteers before we began, yet the comments on their Airbnb page were great. Comments reflected the efforts of volunteers, the last volunteer manager, and the beautiful place itself.

What many people fail to understand, especially some Americans, is that sustainability is also about social and economic sustainability. Trust, egalitarianism, and fairness are key to most healthy endeavors, especially community building in remote locales. Ted and Sally were truthful when they said they had no idea what they were doing, either running the business or establishing a community. They didn't. We left the day after they presented doctored accounting and wouldn't pay us the real amount they owed us. That was the final straw. Our volunteers left soon after. The thrill was gone.

How sad that our little community completely disintegrated, abandoned again, after a good run. We couldn't have asked for harder-working or more cooperative teammates than the six who shared the potential ecovillage with us. We are so thankful for their efforts. What a truly missed opportunity. It could have worked. Our beloved volunteers wrote to me afterwards on what a wonderful atmosphere we created, light-hearted and fun. The Airbnb guests and retreatants gave us glowing appreciation for our efforts in the Guestbook. We did our part as managers. We loved the position.

Later we found out more details: the owners had been preparing to kick us out, as the house we were in had a deposit on it to be rented; they gave us no notice of that. Ted once spread a rumor that a neighbor was a drug dealer to try to ruin his reputation over a dispute about power tools. To me that's unconscionable. The owners sold off the adorable goats knowing they would become birria (goat stew), after promising vegetarian Leslie that they would never do that. We also found out that they would subdivide the ranch to be sold off so they could leave the country with a profit.

These were the ugliest Americans I had ever met in Mexico; they didn't fit in such a warm, friendly village. The ranch seemed tainted. It was on its way to being subdivided, just another investment property, not to be a community after all. Emotionally we let go and moved on to a much better caretaking gig.

The ranch was gorgeous and they did a decent job of developing it, but they abandoned it often while the place needed serious love and continual maintenance.

There was joy and trust while we ran the ranch. We learned valuable lessons and loved our time there. We also realized that the hard work, spirit, and friendships created were not enough. Gratitude is necessary.

• • •

Postscript

After I wrote this article I sent it to five of the volunteers who shared this time with us. It seems they had little idea what we were experiencing, as managers, with the owners. They were not exposed to the daily demands, via email and WhatsApp, nor the arguments. They experienced the beauty of the place as did we, but without the sour notes of rudeness and fear. I had to rewrite some of it due to their valuable input.

One of the volunteers who helped build the adobe stairs wrote a response to my article above. An excerpt:

"So it is clear that a paradise can't guarantee any peace of mind, let alone a heart which may have already gone sour. This leaves me with mixed emotions. It is sad since one bad apple could potentially ruin the community and create havoc with distrust. Then I also remember because of people like you and Leslie communities continue to thrive and are sustained. Thank you."

Our volunteers and lodge guests let us know in writing how greatly they appreciated all our efforts. After all, it's about the relationships made. One wrote: "It just wouldn't have been the same or as enjoyable without you friendly people." Our little community made

this remote permaculture place come alive.

Together we created so much happiness. Too bad the owners missed out on all that, still living hurried, American-style lives. What a wonderful experience living there, learning so many lessons. It strengthened our commitments to honesty and trust, and to building socially sustainable communities. Onwards. 🌱

Philip Mirkin is the founder and executive director of the Fiji Institute of Sustainable Habitats (www.SustainableFiji.org). He designs hurricane-resistant structures for the Ministries of Women, Children, and Poverty Alleviation; Education; and Native Affairs. He is coordinating Fijian Cabinet Secretaries, NGOs, and local leaders to empower women to build the first domed, Women's Resource Centre out of natural materials in Fiji. Author of The Hybrid Adobe Handbook, he also cofounded Fiji Organic Village. Philip has designed ecovillages in New Zealand, Fiji, and Puerto Rico, spoken at conferences, taught sustainable building in a wide range of settings and universities, and offered a free workshop series on natural Tiny House building for homeless mothers and veterans. Since 1981, Philip has led annual humanitarian aid/disaster relief programs and is currently supplying a clinic in Haiti and hospitals in Fiji. His new book Hurricane Lunch is available in 2020. Contact: philipmirkin@hotmail.com. WhatsApp: +52 415 185 8837.

**The hard work,
spirit, and
friendships created
were not enough.**



In the Shadow of the Guru

By Geoffrey Huckabay

Our community started with a purpose and a raw piece of land. Many of us went from barely being able to pick up and swing a hammer to building homes and a community off the grid in the middle of nowhere. We designed and planted our own farm and orchard, making our own soil using humus from the forest and compost from our food scraps, eventually growing seedlings from seeds saved the year before. This is the kind of empowerment that can come from intentional community.

Ours was a spiritual community, our teacher at its head. He called it a benevolent dictatorship. Gathering around the principles of yoga as shared by my teacher, we grew not only in our outer challenges, but the inward ones as well, Hatha Yoga opening our bodies, Janna Yoga, the yoga of wisdom, opening our mind and spirit, and meditation cleansing our thoughts. We ate an organic vegan diet from food we grew ourselves. We worked on our communication, our integrity, and our presence.

It was inspiring and terrifying. Our teacher could be a loving paternal figure and also a cruel master. His intent was to teach us how to live in the midst of chaos and find our center. He referred to himself as “the biggest asshole” in our county, and told us if we could work with him and learn from him, we could deal with anyone in any situation.

That was true in my experience. I eventually learned how to work with, stand up to, and grow around difficult people. My first true step in that lesson was walking away from him. And he was right, my life is easier, in a way, for those lessons. I also paid a very heavy price for them.

Like many stories resembling this one, there is a shadow, a dark side that comes with power. In the five years since I left my community, I struggled with this shadow. It is easy to forget the gifts when we feel like a victim, when we wake up to the fact we have given our power away to someone else and we are paying the price.

When I met my teacher I was in my early 20s, fresh out of college. Part of the reason I chose the college I had attended was because of the cooperative living association there. I worked cooperatively with other students, cleaning, cooking, arguing, partying, and eating our way through that experience together. When I graduated, I moved to the rural mountains of northern California to live with my girlfriend, hoping to find a community and a place to call home. This was the wild west. People grew their own food, built and repaired their homes, raised livestock, and of course, grew pot.

After living in this rural town for some time, I met my future teacher by taking his yoga class. He taught in a Buddhist center above a printing shop in the middle of a town whose population was around 1,000 people. I had never done yoga, and found it intriguing. In his mid 50s, he had long hair and beard and spoke with an east coast accent. He seemed to have answers to the questions I was asking.

My girlfriend at the time and I attended his Janna classes, where he shared about the wisdom path of yoga and how to relate to ordinary, everyday life. He helped me through a difficult experience with my girlfriend's father, and after that I was hooked.

I went to visit him in his little trailer on an organic farm in the middle of one of the largest wild blackberry patches in the world. We walked, and I shared with him that my father had died a year prior to my graduating and I was suffering. I had mental

There is a shadow, a dark side that comes with power. It is easy to forget the gifts when we feel like a victim, when we wake up to the fact we have given our power away to someone else and we are paying the price.

health issues before my father's death, and his dying had pushed me to try medication. He told me that he could teach me how to heal my pain and get off the medication.

I was scared, confused, vulnerable, and grieving the loss of my father. I had tried therapists and group support, but this was so different, and I gave myself to him and the path with abandon. I moved into a small apartment with no heat, got a job as a cook at the local hospital, and worked on myself. I got off the medications and started cleansing. I didn't have a car or friends. My girlfriend went back to school and we broke up. But I kept going, a long story for another time...

There were signs all along the way that my teacher was abusive and manipulative. He used to describe himself as Machiavellian, using tactics of the Italian political philosopher to manipulate us into being a better, more evolved version of ourselves. Because of my mental state at the time, I just assumed that he was harsh because I had work to do on myself, and if I worked harder, we would have a different relationship. This never happened.

As our lives became more entwined, he combined this harshness with something that was even more painful—withdrawing his attention from anyone he felt needed that level of shaming in order to bend you to his will. He treated us like children to scold when we did not meet his expectations and like heroes when we succeeded. He would say that he wanted us to be independent and think for ourselves, but used the power we gave him to keep us moving in the direction he wanted.

I remember one experience where I had done something that he thought was arrogant. He ordered me to get up on the stage of our yoga center at that time, naked, and proceeded to have me walk back and forth while he pointed out the arrogance in my body and gait. Now, we were a nudist group, so the nudity was not unusual. However, it made this form of shaming particularly potent. He had me stand there, bare in front of everyone, while he continued to lecture about my arrogance. At that point I had to do what he said, or I would lose everything I had built for myself, my home and community. I couldn't just walk out. He held all the power, and I had, ignorantly, given it to him. I truly felt ashamed for what he was pointing out, feeling like I had failed.

Ultimately, he held the power over my investment in the property that at one point he promised to leave me when he passed. He used this promise like a carrot to keep me in line: a power whose spell could only be broken by me eventually leaving, walking away from everything I had built, my community and friends, and my retirement, casting out into a world I had been sheltered from for almost two decades.

To be clear, this is how I remember it, and may not reflect the entirety of the ex-

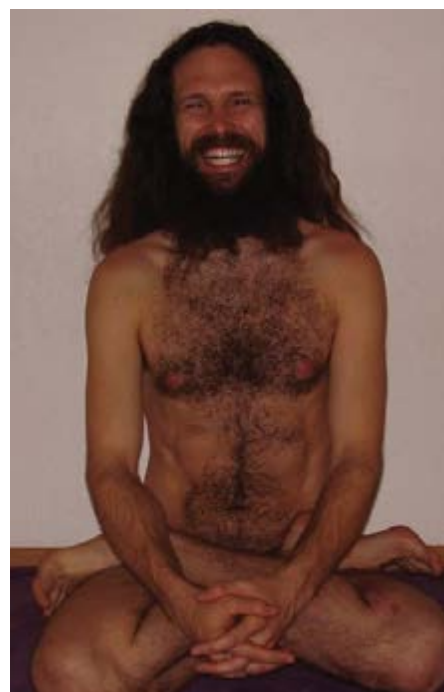
perience. That is the trick of the shadow. Lines are blurred, residing in our oldest patterns that often reflect the trauma of our childhood. We are attracted to a particular flavor of shadow, often because we are vulnerable to our own shadow's needs, needs that often lie deep below the surface of our conscious life. What I came to realize was that if I hadn't done this dance of the shadows with my teacher I probably would have done it with someone else.

I had some very painful lessons, and while I take responsibility for them, it doesn't let him off the hook. There are people out there who feed off those who don't feel valuable themselves. I was one of those people. It was very difficult to accept that I allowed this man to have so much power over my life for so long.

And yet, the dance of the shadows often ends where the journey of forgiveness begins. Forgiveness of all those who hurt us, but even more importantly, forgiveness of ourselves. It is always easy to have clear insight when we look back at our lives, but to do so without judgment is what allows us to set down the burdens that we allowed our shadows to pick up for us.

One of the lessons I am also learning is that forgiveness does not necessarily mean we forget. Once I left, I never spoke to my teacher again.

My shadow is still, and I expect will al-



Photos courtesy of Geoffrey Huckabay

ways be, present in my life. In my limited discovery, we are not meant to be rid of our shadows, but as a later mentor shared with me, to instead use them as a fulcrum around which we heal and grow.

Ultimately, it isn't my intention to warn people away from spiritual communities. It isn't even my intention to suggest you go into them eyes wide open. Truth is, I don't know what someone else needs. This dance of the guru and their shadow has been around forever. At the time I entered into a relationship of student with my teacher, no one could convince me otherwise, and people tried. I expect that some form of this relationship will continue on for as long as people interact with each other.

If I could say one thing to my younger self, or anyone in the position I was in, it is to get clear written agreements around financial matters, and have an independent third party review them before signing. If the person you are entering into an agreement with will not accept that, then there is something wrong with the deal. That said, I probably wouldn't have listened to that advice even if it had been given.

For many years, I thought and dreamt about him every day. I would be telling him in my dreams he wasn't allowed to be there, drawing boundaries. Boundaries are what many spiritual teachers try to break down, saying they are obstacles to your healing, labeling them as defenses and patterns that need to be dismantled and changed, ultimately with the goal of diminishing the ego's influence.

In the last few years there have been fewer dreams, and I am starting to remember things for which I am grateful. What I have found is that I recognize and acknowledge what I learned and how I grew from that experience. I am grateful to myself. I spent the last five years learning to draw healthy boundaries. At first it was so messy, but as I have grown, so too has my skillfulness.

Following leaving the ashram, I had some difficult challenges. I eventually moved to another intentional community with my wife. We lived there for a year before that community and the surrounding area were burned down in a huge wildfire. That wildfire pushed me out into the world, and I was forced to find my way. While I don't see that wildfire as a gift in and of itself, I received the lessons from it as a gift. The development that came from stepping out into the world and making my place in it became my journey, one in which I derive much growth and satisfaction.

My teacher died of a heart attack almost three years ago. After a couple of years, one of the women with whom I had lived on the ashram called and I went to visit her. She is living in a senior home park, and she had our cats with her. It meant a lot to see her and visit with my furry friends.

She mentioned to me that the woman who took over the ashram after my teacher's passing had given me permission to come

visit. I struggled with it for a day and decided against it. I wasn't ready. Or maybe I was just complete. I don't know, and I don't have to know. What I do know is that my life has moved on.

Currently, I live with a my loving wife and partner of over 15 years. I work with people who suffer from mental health conditions, using my experience to empathize and share compassion, but also to learn from them as well. I have friends and hobbies. My life feels full of blessings. And a day doesn't go by that I don't remember my experience and how it shaped me. It keeps things real, makes me more patient and understanding with myself and others.

I don't feel the need to enter into another agreement with an intentional community at this time, but I also have not ruled it out either. I don't think living with others is the problem. We have to do that. Intentional communities are a way to work being human, with all the confusion that comes with that.

For those who recognize my experience for themselves, you are not alone. I think people who end up in situations like the one I was in often feel ashamed. I sure did. For me, that shame was my doorway into accepting the pain of my life, my childhood, allowing myself to grieve and beginning the long journey of forgiveness. And that process is messy. Sometimes it's very messy, and I looked for and received help.

Asking for help from others when doing so has hurt you in the past is very challenging. For the most part, all I could do was trust my bullshit meter. If something someone said didn't feel right, I questioned it. If it still didn't feel right and we couldn't find a common ground, I moved on. Sometimes I did that abruptly. That was hard, but it also allowed me to improve at setting boundaries and standing up for myself. I went through many people until I started to find people that supported me in working things out for myself instead of having the answers for me.

Sharing this publicly isn't easy. While I still feel shame from time to time, more and more now I acknowledge and feel my growth as a human being. It allows me to experience more of others too, making for a richer life. I suppose the success in living in community is not just in whether the community is long-lived or its members are happy, but in whether they have learned and become more compassionate, understanding people—people who make the world a better place for everyone around them because they work on themselves. That, it seems, is the task we all bring to living in this world together. 🙌

Geoffrey Huckabay is a writer and artist from northern California. He and his wife Sama Morningstar have lived and been a part of intentional communities for most of their adult lives. Their most recent community was Harbin Hot Springs, where Sama is still a massage therapist and where Geoffrey unwinds from his day job as a recreational therapist in the mental health units of a local hospital.

I think people who end up in situations like the one I was in often feel ashamed. I sure did.

Whatever Happened to the Renaissance Community?

By Daniel Brown

The April/May 1982 issue of COMMUNITIES included a piece by Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson, founders of the Sirius Community in Shutesbury, Massachusetts, entitled “Heralds of the Dawn.” The somewhat grandiose title fit the mood of the fledgling New Age movement in which intentional spiritual communities would bring about a great positive change for humanity.

Included along with the Sirius Community, Abode of the Message, Ram Dass’s Lama Foundation, Ananda, and others was the Renaissance Community, the largest and longest-lasting commune in the Northeast. As each group was allowed several pages to describe itself, the Renaissance Community did so in the form of a photo essay, an appropriate choice considering its longstanding interest in creativity and the media.

According to the accompanying text, the community, located in Gill, a tiny hamlet in western Massachusetts, was populated by 100 adults and over 40 children and was in the process of building a self-sufficient village on its 80 acres of land. Plans abounded for orchards, fish farms, windmills, greenhouses, and homes heated by solar or wood hot water systems. At the time, Renaissance was involved in networking with other spiritual communities around the world and had established an exchange program with the venerable Findhorn Foundation in Scotland. Renaissance projected itself as an esoteric, yet grounded collective based on love, harmony, and cooperation. The article contained only one brief mention of the community’s mercurial founder, Michael Metelica (also known as Michael Rapunzel). Judging from the tone of the article, the future for the Renaissance Community looked bright and promising.

Within six years, it had fallen apart. What happened?

The Renaissance Community began as the most unintentional of intentional communities. In May 1968, inspired by the recent Summer of Love, the 18-year-old Metelica constructed a treehouse on a patch of countryside known as Blueberry Hill in his tiny home town of Leyden, Massachusetts. He hired himself out for work to local farmers and asked for nothing in return. “I wanted to live by the purest of spiritual values,” Metelica said in a later interview, “I desired a solitary, meditative existence and had no plans to form any kind of commune.”

Before long, Metelica became a local attraction, who garnered notice in the county newspaper as the idealistic mystic in the woods. His school chums gravitated to him and soon committed themselves to follow his vision. When one of them wanted to bring his heroin-addicted girlfriend on board in order to get her clean, he consented to a deliberate community and assumed the role of nominal leader. After arsonists burnt down the treehouse, the small group of 20 men and women wandered through the hill towns nestled in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains. Undeterred by their impoverished existence, the tiny tribe, now called the Brotherhood of the Spirit, explored their ideals of love and comradeship with a zeal that mirrored the era.

The Brotherhood finally settled onto a 40-acre property in the hinterlands of Warwick, Massachusetts in April 1970. Over



Michael Metelica, 1976.



Photos courtesy of Daniel Brown

the following summer, as young Americans engaged in a mass migration across the country, their membership tripled to 150. My sister Jenny was one who joined them. In her letters to me, she described her new abode as a place where “Everyone lived openly and honestly.” Her words reverberated as did the letter’s tone of near-mystical awe. In September 1970, I traveled to the Brotherhood to see her for a short overnight visit.

I left 14 years later.

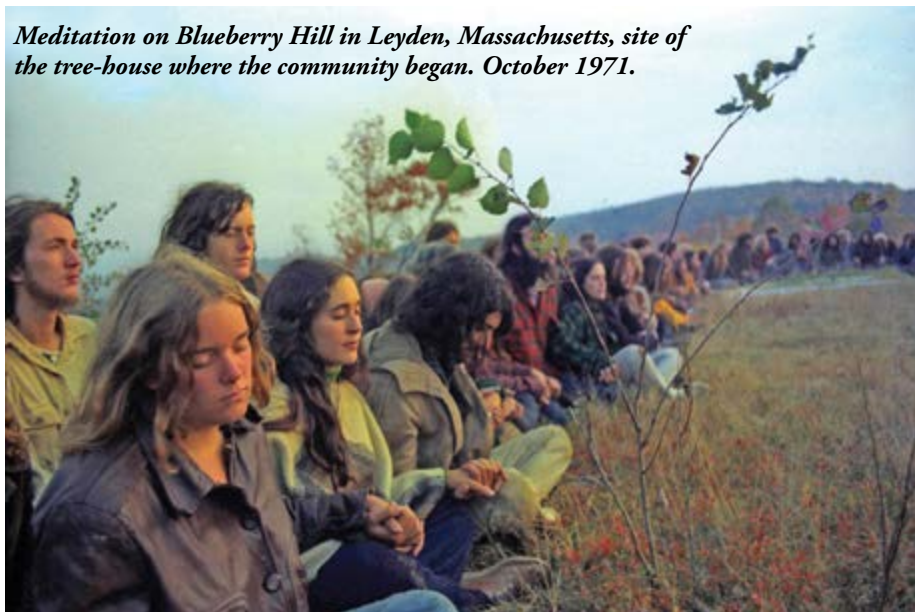
The Brotherhood initially struck me as one intense group of people. Everybody broadcasted high-intensity beams of energy and exchanged no small talk, only deep personal interactions. Drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes were forbidden. I discovered no radios, no television, no magazines or newspapers. Even records were banned as the community was bent on spreading its

spiritual credo through their house band, “Spirit in Flesh.” Cut off from worldly distractions, the Brotherhood was a perfect incubator for spiritual growth based on its philosophy that was a mix of Buddhism, Gnostic Christianity, and nascent New Age consciousness. Devotees accepted the precepts of karma and reincarnation, meditated often, and avidly read *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, published in 1907 by an Ohio preacher named Levi Dowling.

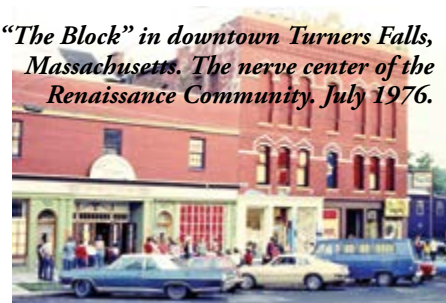
Metelica and the Brotherhood were also guided by Elwood Babbitt, a trance medium in the Edgar Cayce tradition who had fought across the Pacific with the Marines during World War II. Babbitt enjoyed an elderly following of his own but took the younger folk under his tutelage. According to Babbitt’s spiritual entities, cataclysmic “Earth Changes” would soon alter the planet and depopulate most of the human race for its negative behavior. Those who survived would flock to the Brotherhood for succor and wisdom. Before this happened, supposedly in 1972, Spirit in Flesh would prepare the way by selling millions of albums and become more famous than the Beatles. The Brotherhood faithful accepted these doctrines without an ounce of doubt.

I spent my first winter there logging in 10 degree weather, a radical departure from my upscale New York City upbringing. Surprisingly, I liked it. Outdoors, we cut down trees for the wood furnace, sang our repertoire of communal songs, and did whatever we could to “Raise the energy” and push beyond our physical limits. The average age was 19. For the next few years after, I helped print thousands of silkscreened posters of Spirit in Flesh. In an attempt to promote the band, we pasted them on every vertical surface

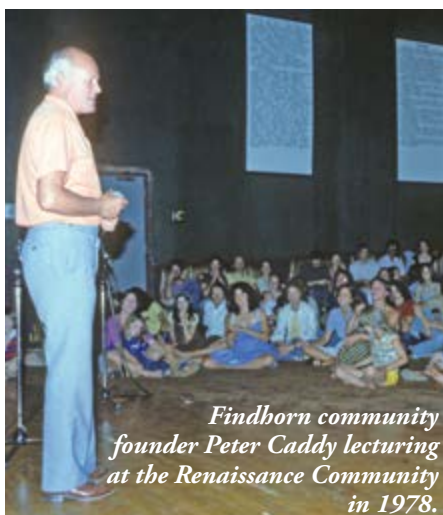
Meditation on Blueberry Hill in Leyden, Massachusetts, site of the tree-house where the community began. October 1971.



“The Block” in downtown Turners Falls, Massachusetts. The nerve center of the Renaissance Community. July 1976.



The “Treehouse Gang,” late 1968.



Findhorn community founder Peter Caddy lecturing at the Renaissance Community in 1978.



Brotherhood of the Spirit, July 1970. This is the two-page spread photo published in LOOK magazine in January 1971 about “The American Family.” Michael Metelica is in the center with the armbands.



Renaissance Community, October 1974.

Working on the land at "The 2001 Center." August 1982.



of New York City and across the nation. When the first album was released, it sold only 600 copies (but keeps popping up on eBay). About the same time, the Brotherhood published its own magazine, *The Free Spirit Press*. I drew artwork for it and sold copies out of our rainbow-painted school bus in shopping malls and college campuses across the Northeast. 1972 came and went without any global catastrophes. We shrugged our shoulders and continued our lives as before.

By mid-1973, the Brotherhood numbered 300 members and had appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Family Circle* magazines as well as televised segments on "60 Minutes" and "The David Frost Show." Nobody in the community knew it at the time but our secluded rustic idyll was about to come to an end.

The community was unique in its ability to radically shift gears to meet changing needs. These shifts were traceable to Michael Metelica, who enjoyed an exalted status among his followers. Seemingly without fear, he was never shy to set a course into the unknown like some Aquarian-Age Magellan. He did so in style in the summer of 1973 when he called a group meeting and announced the following.

"The community is in serious financial trouble," he said. "We're about to go under. So, I'm giving you a choice. Either you allow me to take over the complete management of the Brotherhood or..."—a dramatic pause for effect—"I'll leave and you can all take care of this problem yourselves."

A gasp rattled the rafters. We knew it was unthinkable for Metelica to leave. So did he. His was a clever, calculated move, a form of manipulative democracy. Metelica called for a vote, hands up if we wanted him to remain. Not that he had to. Every hand shot up, mine included.

As with everything Metelica did, things began to happen very fast. He immediately abolished the Brotherhood of the Spirit and formed a "media corporation" called the "Metelica Aquarian Concept" (MAC). Everyone in the former Brotherhood had to "apply" for membership by filling out a 20-page application. Metelica bought a block of downtown property in the decaying mill town of Turners Falls which became our new nerve center. He sent every member out to find a job and turn over their paychecks to a central office. With these funds, Metelica went on a shopping spree, unheard of during the austere Warwick days. Video cameras, cars, motorcycles, fancier clothing, and furniture seemingly dropped out of the sky. The group also purchased an airplane, three GMC motorhomes, and several more properties in downtown Turners Falls for residences and businesses. Spirit in Flesh—the harbinger of the impending worldwide spiritual renaissance—ceased to exist. Warwick was abandoned and forgotten. From then on, we were no longer ragged spiritual hippies but slick, media-savvy entrepreneurs.

Through this change, we entered what I called our "Cult Period." Insidiously, the

**The pronoun
used among us
became "He,"
not "We."**

focus began to shift away from the community and onto Metelica. The pronoun used among us became "He," not "We." Metelica promoted his own omnipotence and divided the community into a brittle hierarchy that assigned members to separate living quarters while wearing a particular sweater color to denote rank in the new order. In 1974, MAC became the Renaissance Community and the Renaissance Church, both legal bodies with Metelica as an ordained minister of the latter. As we gained more power and wealth, resistance from the mainstream society resulted in the murder of one of our members, a crime that was never solved. Metelica added fuel to the tension by having his followers stage somber marches in the local communities carrying signs that testified "I Found Metelica, a New Religion," "Invest in Metelica for a Brighter Future," and more threateningly, "Save Your Slander, It May Be All You've Got. I've Got Metelica." Metelica's rationale was that such a display of devotion would win us respect from the general public, but it most likely scared them into

50th Anniversary reunion of former members of the Renaissance Community. August 2018.



naissance in 1975 but unimpressed by our new materialistic identity, remarked, “The only reason you people still exist is because of the good karma you’ve earned from working at Belchertown.”

The cult-like atmosphere eventually receded as community members achieved autonomy through managing their own businesses and raising nuclear families. The hierarchy of sweaters disappeared. The community launched a series of free public dinners, concerts, and street festivals culminating in the “Renaissance Faire” that drew thousands of people to downtown Turners Falls. Such outreach lessened the public reaction against us. Likewise, we toned down our “world savior” rhetoric in order to be seen as no more threatening than the Shakers or the Amish.

Change struck again in late 1975, as Metelica

decided that it was time to get back to the land and create a self-sufficient village named “The 2001 Center.” Slowly, enterprises and personnel transferred out of Turners Falls to an 80-acre parcel in nearby Gill. Work on the alternative energy houses began immediately as by now, community members had amassed an impressive array of professional and technical skills. A mutual exchange program with Findhorn resulted in founders Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean giving a series of public lectures at Renaissance in 1978. Returning back to the land allowed us a brief period of harmony before our final slide into disintegration.

Unbeknownst to many of us, Metelica had descended into a deep cocaine and alcohol addiction. Those in his inner circle were the first to become alarmed but when they issued warnings and were subsequently ignored, they departed. This piecemeal migration continued as the community divided into two adversarial factions: one supporting and one challenging Metelica’s authority. In late 1980, about 60 core members, including the Renaissance Greeting Cards business, which handled the finances Metelica was draining with his cocaine use, decided to go their own way. It was a fracture from which Renaissance never recovered as our morale and people-power were severely diminished.

The remaining members closed ranks and soldiered on for a few years as the group continued construction of its self-sufficient village and to network with other like-minded communities in the Northeast. New members replaced the old although many were drawn merely for a free meal and roof over their heads. Alcoholism and periodic violence became new afflictions. Meanwhile, former members (who now outnumbered those who remained) created their own annual reunion network and newsletters in which they vented emotions which ranged from nostalgia to betrayal.

I supported Metelica during this period only because he had always been kind to me and offered advice at critical moments that changed my life for the better. I chose to tolerate his erratic behavior, assuming the mission statement of the community could override his depredations. I was wrong.

A year after I co-wrote the glowing piece for *COMMUNITIES*, I learned of Metelica’s plan to bring guns into The 2001 Center and set up a rifle range. For me, guns were the final boundary the community could not cross without losing whatever moral integrity that remained. On the first day we met years before, Metelica had told me, “Remember, Dan, standing up for the truth is more important than friendship.” I knew it was time to put that axiom into practice and confronted him at his apartment down by the tour bus garage.

I didn’t bother to knock on his door. Any hesitation would have caused me to lose my nerve. Metelica was seated at the kitchen table listening to a tape of AC-DC. Before he saw me, I shut off the player and shouted, “What the hell do we need guns for anyway?”

For me, guns were the final boundary the community could not cross.

thinking we were the latest manifestation of the Manson Family.

On the positive side, Renaissance improved its infrastructure and launched an explosion of creativity that allowed members to explore music, dance, art, photography, and video production with state-of-the-art equipment. It was during this time that I became a photographer, having high-end Canon SLR cameras and a darkroom at my disposal. Downtown Turners Falls, previously deserted, became a hive of activity as the storefronts filled with twelve Renaissance businesses—three of which, Renaissance Greeting Cards, Rockets Silver Train tour bus, and Silver Screen Design, would become national enterprises. A popular restaurant, The Noble Feast, offered a diverse menu and ornate décor that mimicked Carlsbad Caverns. At the same juncture, dozens of Renaissance personnel worked at Belchertown State School, an institution once described as “barbaric,” bringing a level of humanity to those who were incarcerated there. The founder of The Farm, Stephen Gaskin, visiting Re-

Metelica whirled around, his disheveled hair flying. He was dressed in a ragged T-shirt and faded jeans. His mouth dropped as if a cinderblock had begun to speak. In 14 years, he had rarely if ever heard me complete a phrase in his presence. He shook off his surprise, leapt up, and leaned over me. "Because Elwood said when the refugees come after Earth Changes, we'll have to shoot them to defend ourselves. Now, get out of here!" His breath stank of stale beer.

I left him feeling shocked, and the next day shared my doubts with our erstwhile guru Elwood Babbitt who, over the past years, had distanced himself from the community. He shook his head when I told him about the guns and told me that Metelica had spiraled down a negative path and wanted nothing more to do with him. As he spoke, his voice shook with loathing.

As I was not alone in my outrage over Metelica, the final exodus of long-term members departed with me in June 1984. Afterwards, Renaissance degenerated into physical squalor as the land itself visibly deteriorated and Metelica became more unstable. By 1988, even those who had enabled him to the bitter end had had enough. The remaining dozen members paid Metelica \$10,000 to leave the community and never return. He departed and resettled in upstate New York.

With him gone, the survivors began a long recovery process. The Renaissance Community rescinded its legal status and divided up the land into private ownership and rental apartments. Reunions of past and current members became biennial events and renewed the original feeling of camaraderie. A few residents in Gill established meditation and spiritual awareness classes on the property that attracted a dedicated local following.

Metelica, meanwhile, cleaned himself up at Alcoholics Anonymous and became a licensed EMT. In May 2002, he was diagnosed with terminal colon cancer. A month later, a "pre-funeral" gathering was held for him. Over a hundred Renaissance veterans attended, some connecting with Metelica for the first time since their bitter departure years before. Michael Metelica passed away in February 2003.

In 2006, a documentary film about the community, "Free Spirits, the Birth, Life and Loss of a New Age Dream" was released and played to a full house at the stately Academy of Music Theater in Northampton, Massachusetts. Nearly all the members of the Renaissance Community attended and gave the director/producer (and former Renaissance member) a standing ovation. Over the summer of 2018, the Renaissance Community held its 50th anniversary reunion, a weekend affair that drew former participants from all over the country.

Fifty-odd years after its creation, we of the Renaissance Community are still coming to terms with our shared experience but without a clear consensus. Some have rejected both communal living and a spiritual worldview as naïve experiments of their youth. Others believe that they were brainwashed from the beginning by a corrupt manipulator. Most of us, however, cherish our time in the community although we are honest as to why it failed. The lethal combination of power, ego, and spirituality has claimed its share of victims and the saga of the Renaissance Community is hardly unique. I find it ironic that when asked to relinquish power, Peter Caddy agreed and, thus, the Findhorn Foundation exists to this day. When given the same challenge to step down, Michael Metelica refused and destroyed his own creation.

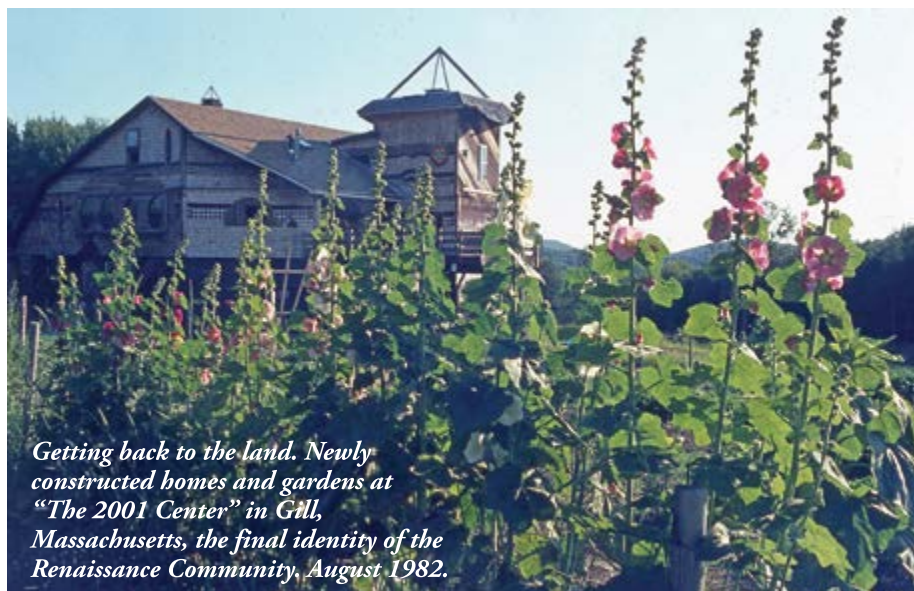
Myself, I still hold the spiritual principles of the Brotherhood to be valid and have since enjoyed a rich and multi-creative life. Among other attributes garnered from the community, having learned to adapt to a diversity of personalities has positively influ-

enced my career as a professional educator. The community was my "School of Life" and it was where I grew into adulthood.

In the end, those of us who chose this path cannot deny that without Michael Metelica and the Renaissance Community, the lives of all involved would have been radically different. Our association with it resulted in finding our best friends, not to mention life-partners, children, and livelihoods. In view of those connections, the Renaissance Community cannot be seen as a failure but as a growth experience that made us better people. 🌸

Daniel A. Brown was born in New York City in 1950. He lived at the Brotherhood of the Spirit/Renaissance Community from 1970-1984 and is one of its archivists-history keepers. Since leaving Renaissance, Brown has been a classroom teacher, general aviation pilot, drum circle leader, published author, and exhibition artist and photographer. He currently lives in Taos, New Mexico with his wife, Lisa and dog, Cody. Brown's artwork can be seen at www.intothewildblue.com.

**The community
was my "School
of Life" and it
was where I grew
into adulthood.**



Getting back to the land. Newly constructed homes and gardens at "The 2001 Center" in Gill, Massachusetts, the final identity of the Renaissance Community, August 1982.

Loneliness in Community

By Mick Vogt

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*
—Rumi

In my youth I traveled to a lot of intentional communities (mostly up and down the Shenandoah), out of curiosity and also, less obvious at the time, a desire to find a family that I never actually had. I had run across in my research a Canadian community that called itself “Alternatives to Alienation,” and I recall thinking that all of my problems would be solved could I simply sever ties, uproot my life in Baltimore, and just get there to find my own happily ever after. It never happened, and to this day I wonder how they fared. When I search that term on the internet I find no mention of a community, only books and articles written on that topic, and that in itself suggests that there is interest in assuaging our sense of separation and in making enduring connections.

That was all brought to mind again about a year ago when a long-term Heathcote member left the community. His relation-

ship with the community had never been smooth, and his anger and projection of personal need onto the community was interpreted by many as a demand for attention (that’s often exactly what it is) rather than a desire for a forthright connection of parity comprised of earned respect, good will, trust, and mutual affection. Guilt and resentments also made their appearance. It became a toxic community mix ensuring resistance, distrust, histrionics, and drama, and was a surefire way to get exactly what he did not want: isolation, marginalization, and avoidance. I am persuaded that he knew no other way to be, and that in itself is a sad commentary. When he left he stated that he had never felt more alone than when he was at Heathcote.

That sense of community experience was not a new revelation for me, although the context for getting there had normally been far less self-inflicted than the particulars of the Heathcote narrative.

I had lived and worked at another intentional community, Koinonia Foundation (actually a community and a spiritual center), for seven years way back when. I had watched people come in with that starry-eyed sense that their quest for fulfillment of deep longings had found a gateway to a coming home within themselves. As time elapsed I watched the light in their eyes dim, their bodies seem to slacken. At first unconsciously, then consciously, they began to realize that what they hoped to find was not at hand. The actual was merely a group of people living together who were also looking to ameliorate their own loneliness and whatever other empty feelings ruffled their psyches. I saw it all come down because I had gone through the same thing. I knew the tell-tale signs, understood the process. I had adjusted to a degree, but my romantic retrospective of that time can never fully obscure how painful it all was for me.

We take ourselves with us wherever we go, and in doing so we also take with us our world, the embedded malice of our culture, our sense of isolation, our hope of rescue, our quest for oneness, our grail searches. If that going involves landing in a community, what we often find is other people embodying the same traits, and having little sense or experience of how to go about finding or formulating cogent means to address their loneliness or ours. I suppose that over time I did come up with a sort of personal resolution that had never occurred to me early on. I could try to be the kind of person to others that I wanted them to be for me;



Photos courtesy of Mick Vogt

a sort of golden rule approach. Along with that came the realization that seeking a means to relieve loneliness was the wrong context by which to enter into a relationship with a community. I went from having expectations to expecting the unexpected, and the latter proved much more interesting and freeing in the long run, but that, all of that, was far from an overnight process.

At Koinonia I had met many luminaries of the age: Ram Dass, Pir Vilyat Khan, most of the start-up folks from Findhorn, William Irwin Thompson, Bill Mollison, Peace Pilgrim, Frederick Franck, and a wonderful therapist/author/sage named Sheldon Kopp, but the times I most remember were those when the little glimpses into our humanity presented themselves. The young man who had “chosen” psychological blindness although his eyesight was intact, the middle-aged woman who was dying and wanted to spend her time close to the land, the infirm, the bereft, people going through a crisis of faith or health, those mourning the death of loved ones, the newly separated or divorced, the broken-hearted, the struggling artists, the recovering addicts, the chronically abrasive, the marvelous eccentrics, the psychologically impaired, the God-hungry. It was a continual parade, and it was they who taught me the most. I was in my 20s and still probably as much boy as man, and it was an emotional education that had no correspondent in college.

I had the great fortune there of developing a deep friendship (one that feels as if it has lasted beyond her death) with Dorothea Blom, an elderly Quaker artist in residence. She had spent much of her youth in serious depression, and yet through her art and reflective writings had secured a foothold in her own life, and was able to share that journey with others as a very gifted teacher. In finding her I found a shared and resonant language of spirit as well. She would say “we are all islands but at our feet we touch,” and that gave me my first insight as to the means by which to interface with both loneliness and intimacy within community. She taught me that by virtue of living in a culture that placed no value upon educating emotions, we all carried a tremendous deficit into adulthood. Gradually I began to shift my viewpoint, shift my understanding of how to make a stand and make the most of what was really before me.

I began to see my own longing in the longing of others, saw all longing as a cry for a surcease from the pain of separation, felt a ripping and tearing away from the romanticized ideas I held about what life could and would give me. Strong feelings came up accompanied by the pervasive onset of a personal crisis. I gradually began to see those feelings as the unboxed voices of repressed children long abandoned within me, now free to speak and feel. They cried out from my experiences of what seemed never enough, and they cried out from the birthright of the human condition. They needed to be set free and heard, and I did the best that I could to allow that. It was as if I had opened the door of my heart to them, let them stay and speak as long as they wished to, and said to them “I will always open the door when you knock upon it.” I was, as I said, quite young then, and that was and is a process whereby I close those doors and then have to remember to reopen them.

(When I left Koinonia I felt depleted by all that I had witnessed over the years, and a yawning emptiness around the many

ephemeral relationships that I had made there that seemed to have little meaning for me outside of that context. I still carried some of the baggage of unfulfilled idealizations that I had arrived with as well. But through all that, I had begun to learn and see, and carried Dorothea’s sense with me that “western man has paid a high price for his intense outward focus.” I had the first strong intimations of seeing myself from the inside out, of seeing my disquiet as a call to focus within, and it all felt right to me.)

I can still get locked away from myself and others when I feel emotional unease, can still experience strong feelings as a curse, still say an unkind word in a reactive moment, and still hope for a better day that never comes when things seem awry, discordant, or falling apart, but I have learned to hold fast to gratitude, to use my own suffering and unrest as instinctive conduits into the hearts of others, and to be willing to see each moment in life as rife with potential meaning. I have also learned that hitting the reset button frequently is no sin. Having it all fall apart and then going about putting it back together is a rhythm of life.

In one of Keats’ last letters before his death, he shared that although he felt that he had left no great works behind him, he had “loved the principle of beauty in all things.” If we too can hold that conviction along with our sense of lack, hold it alongside of our unmet needs; if we can uphold the idea, the sense, of the sacred in all things, carry that chalice along with our burdens, then we will bring more balm than vexation to all that is.

One can carry a wound of incarnation, a wound of past experience, graciously, perhaps joyfully, and one can then choose to show that wound to others. That frees them to show their wound, and a fundamental depth of intimacy ensues. In the spirit of our humanity, in our ability to embrace what is, to love and honor the sacred, to love the principle of beauty in all things, we become



gathered in our loneliness, and in the sharing of that authenticity some of our loneliness is allayed. We can also then make that choice to try to become the person for others that we wish they would become for us, but it must be done without thought of a contractual reward, without anticipation of reciprocity. We desire to do so, to be that person, because it becomes part of our calling, our character.

Or one can reject all of that and go on with what feels familiar: our resentments and anger, our unrealistic expectations of others, our obsession with creating empire, our sealed and walled interiority, our wanton greed, our dormant empathy, our refusal to mourn. Out of that is born what we call our culture, and specifically its rampant consumerism, its spiritual isolation, its loss of the sense of the sacred, and the ongoing raping of the natural world. That is of course entirely destructive. We have to be able to have the courage to see it all differently if we want it to be different.

In the re-framing of my own experience within community, I often evoke what Keats termed “the holiness of the heart’s affections” as a foundation principle by which to relate to myself, to others, and to creation in general. He added “this is not a vale of tears, but a vale of soul-making,” and the latter involves growth, and growth brings the deep discomfort of being stretched, of having long dormant psychic muscles often feel engaged beyond comfort.

There is no finish line. That is not how life works. To quote T.S. Eliot, we “arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.” To get there necessitates the process of *via negativa*, the seeing of what not to do, and it can be very uncomfortable winnowing away familiar thoughts and behaviors that we find to be no longer in the service of our best interests. To be alert and attentive to our reactions, to see and discard damaging injunctions, to acknowledge shadow, to see and reject cultural hypnosis, now all come into play, and as that process unfolds what is left will be pretty much the beginning of right action and right thought. It had been there all the time; we just needed to put aside all that obfuscated it. In having looked with longing and bitterness at all that we feel has been withheld from us by others, by life, we find now only the reflections of that within us which had been long abandoned and manacled by the dark absence of love, and thus begins the process of seeing things as they are rather than as we are. If we can take that on, see it all unmasked, move beyond the psychic wound, embrace and give voice to all voices within us, then we can be released from a suffering greater than loneliness,

the suffering of being unable to love.

In joy and pain, suffering and elation, in bearing witness to beauty and pain, to the sacred mystery of all that is, we find a measure of our own authenticity, a self-discovery of meaning, and understand for the first time what it really means to be fully human. In seeing that, we see something else as well, something that is more than what is readily apparent.

As our strengths and weaknesses become known to ourselves and others, as that which seems curse, blessing, or at once both are allowed to surface, we begin to see the divine in one another. A Hopkins professor of mine used to say that when we can see in others that which is struggling to exceed the bounds of their finitude, we see God in them. To see that is not to then interpret it, to box it in, as a “spiritual” experience. Wishing to see all things in the grandeur of their light need not necessitate the commensurate wish to be liberated from the murky vales of interior shadow. Fully human means to hold in balance all that is mortal and immortal within us. The analogous allegory presenting itself here is that within the wide landscape of our interiority Jacob will always be wrestling with the Angel. That is the reality of our wholeness. Loneliness is finally just another visitor that we let in when it knocks, no longer a vagrant to be driven away. Our thoughts about these matters end up being of little value, and we are obliged at last to seek that which touches us, educates us, where thought cannot reach. We are immersed in both time and timelessness, and are fundamentally, like all of creation, an ineffable mystery. To embrace all that we are is to embrace that mystery as well. We deem it all holy, and in seeing the sacred light of beauty in all things we find the definitive virtue of true seeing. That is the new arrival, the restoration, the re-knowing of where we started, the new start. 🌱

Mick Vogt is a 72-year-old retired educator/environmentalist currently residing in Stewartstown, Pennsylvania. He has been a non-resident member of the Heathcote Community (in nearby Freeland, Maryland) for over 10 years, and knew and studied with the founder Mildred Loomis in the late '60s. He commutes to Heathcote almost daily and works hand in hand with the residents. He has been published in The Sun literary journal and other smaller periodicals. He is founder (1996) and chairperson of Oberon Associates, Inc., a non-profit which propagates and saves heirloom seed stocks and plants. Oberon has a flock of Welsh Harlequin ducks at Heathcote which supplies eggs for the community.



Raising Troubled Children in Cohousing

By Alicia J. George

Social workers brought my son, his bike, and all his worldly belongings to my home one February evening in 2004. He was almost 9, but he and I had never met.

Seven months later, my next-door neighbor returned from Ukraine with his sons, two brothers aged 7 and 9. My neighbor and his sons barely knew each other, having met for the first time the year before when children from the orphanage were brought to the US for a short visit.

This article focuses on the most significant ways our three adopted boys' behavior affected our cohousing community and how we worked jointly to deal with the impact.

Adoption at Takoma Village

Although our group didn't set this as an intention, adoption has figured prominently in the life of Takoma Village, a cohousing community of 43 households in Washington, DC. We've been a multigenerational community since the first members moved in during the fall of 2000, with residents ranging in age from infants to octogenarians. Usually, our numbers include around 65 adults and 15 children.

Eleven of the kids who've lived at Takoma Village over the years have been adoptees. Several were adopted as infants or toddlers and joined their families from China, India, and the US foster care system. Some—like a former resident's three boys, my son, and my neighbor's two boys—were older, adopted during their elementary-school years from foster care or Eastern Europe.

The three oldest boys moved away in 2007, when they were teens. During the years they lived at Takoma Village, they engaged in a variety of behaviors that were disruptive to the community, including fighting, lying, stealing, and bringing troublesome peers on site. Several years later, many of their experiences were echoed by my son and my neighbor's sons. At times, our own boys turned on each other with unrestrained aggression, engaged in destructive rages at home that sometimes spilled out into the community, and stole sweets and treats from the common house.

Despite our children's challenging behavior, my son and my neighbor's sons were friendly and helpful most of the time and participated regularly in events in the community. They joined in during cookouts and parties, worked alongside us and other adults on work days, and willingly carried packages or ran errands for neighbors. They engaged appropriately with other kids in the community and conversed comfortably with adults. As a result, there was a reservoir of goodwill toward our boys that helped the community weather the transgressions that occurred as they grew up.

Common House Challenges

In most cohousing communities, the common house is a



Photos courtesy of Alicia J. George



Decorating Christmas cookies at home (2005).



Nerf gun battle (2009).

Our children yearned for opportunities to escape mentally and numb themselves.

building that provides shared space for group meals, meetings, parties, watching TV, doing laundry, and a variety of other activities. At Takoma Village, the common house is viewed as an extension of our homes. As a result, it served as a convenient place for our kids to escape to. Many times, my son walked out of our house rather than face me being upset with him or the consequences of a mistake he'd made. The other boys did the same.

As frustrating as their avoidance was, we came to see that—most of the time—the common house provided a safe refuge where they could calm down before returning home. Far better for them to retreat to the community's common house than to roam the streets or run away from home.

On the other hand, the televisions and computer in the common house presented compelling temptations on many occasions. Our children struggled academically and socially. TV shows, video games, and YouTube had a hypnotic ef-

fect that allowed them to escape the constant stress they felt. They yearned for more access to these devices and the opportunity to escape mentally and numb themselves.

In middle school, my son started to skip school and hang out in the common house, watching TV in the living room or playing games on the office computer. Hoping to block his access to these resources, I sent an email asking the community to agree to keep specific rooms in the common house locked until the crisis passed.

There were strong objections from one member. In emails, she made clear that she wanted the living room doors unlocked so the common house would be open and inviting. She wrote that she objected to having to carry a key. Beyond her personal preferences for the common house to feel and be open, she raised thought-provoking questions about what lessons were being taught by locking the rooms and shared her belief that this approach was not “helpful for the socialization of children or the social life of the community.” She suggested that the adults who observed my son in the common house during school hours approach him about his behavior. Ultimately, she said, she didn't want to “live under the control of a recalcitrant child.”

Her perspective had merit, and had I not been the overwhelmed parent struggling with my child's truancy, academic struggles, and other problematic behaviors, I might have welcomed a philosophical back-and-forth about parenting approaches. One member sent an email noting that raising a child in a traditional community was not quite like raising a child in cohousing today. Most who responded agreed that the abundance of electronic devices available created a challenging environment for contemporary parents. Others wanted to avoid being in the position of confronting a child who was not their own. Support for locking the rooms was strong. Those who joined the email exchange wanted to defer to my request and provide the support I asked for.

The issue was not brought to a membership meeting, and no firm agreement was reached. Most people locked the rooms. My son, his school, and I eventually worked through the immediate crisis, and I emailed to let my neighbors know the common house could return to its previous state. Several years later, the father of adopted twins made the same request after his boys started skipping homework and disappearing from playdates to sit in front of the television. The same objections were raised, but most people locked the rooms until the boys began to follow their father's rules once again.

Home Break-ins and Thefts

The biggest challenge we faced in the community occurred over a period of several years. One boy's compulsion to view sexually explicit material prompted him to break into a number of homes within the community and steal keys, cell phones, iPads, and

laptop computers in order to have unfiltered access to the internet. He also picked the locks or pried open doors in the common house that led to rooms with televisions and computers inside.

Around puberty, the boy began trying to circumvent his father's restrictions on electronic devices in their home. Over the next couple of years, his efforts became increasingly sophisticated as he stole his father's keys, repeatedly broke into a locked file cabinet, and hacked into their home computers in order to bypass administrator passwords.

At age 14, the boy began entering neighbors' homes if he found the deadbolt unlocked or a window unsecured. Occasionally he took small amounts of cash, which he spent on candy and junk food. Often, he stole keys to the common house office, where he could access the computer there. But primarily, he entered others' homes so he could view online pornography on computers that had no parental controls set or stole cell phones or iPads for the same reason.

In some cases, residents and their children were in another part of the home when the boy entered without permission. If they encountered each other, the boy fled. The startled parties usually responded with a mixture of anger and fear. The home intrusions were traumatizing, creating a sense of violation and triggering anxieties about safety and security in neighbors' own homes.

After a series of break-ins, one community member emailed to urge the community's support for the family, despite the fact that her home had been entered. She wrote, "My heart goes out to [him]. Whatever experiences he had early in life continue to haunt him in ways that I can only imagine. My heart goes out to [his father]. How exhausting and disheartening this whole thing has been and continues to be."

To make sure everyone was aware of the risks, the boy's father spoke openly about the situation at membership meetings and shared information with the community in emails. He urged people not to set their phones, computers, and tablets down in common areas, even briefly, and to be sure they had strong passwords on their devices to prevent unauthorized use. Neighbors were reminded to secure their doors and windows, a precaution many ignored. He pledged to provide as much direct supervision as possible when the boy was home, but also asked for support in monitoring his son's whereabouts.

An effort was also made to engage the boy in a restorative justice circle designed to help him understand the impact of his behavior on his relationships and move toward a reconciliation. Trained facilitators worked to enable a dialogue between the boy and those who had been victimized, but it was too much for him to bear, and he fled the room. The facilitators then helped the adults air their concerns and identify reparations the boy later carried out, such as helping fold others' laundry.

The break-ins abated, but two years later a resurgence of home intrusions occurred. The boy's father decided that the boy—now 16 years old—needed to understand more directly the real-life consequences of his behaviors. At his urging, neighbors reluctantly called the police on several occasions over the next months. The police were unable to make an arrest because of insufficient evidence, but officers trained in dealing with troubled youth had serious conversations with the boy.

When an arrest was finally made, the boy's case was successfully diverted to a system designed for juveniles with mental health issues, and his arrest record was eventually expunged.

The Potential for Sexual Abuse

While the boy's interest in sexual material seemed age-appropriate, his willingness to go to such lengths to access it suggested more deep-seated psychological struggles. My next-door neighbor and I, both psychotherapists, recognized that

At the father's urging, neighbors reluctantly called the police on several occasions.



Carving pumpkins in the common house (2009).



Buried in a leaf pile at Takoma Village (2006).

children who've been traumatized sometimes have a compulsion to reenact the trauma in an effort to make sense of their experience. Both singly and jointly with other parents of adopted children, we urged the community to be mindful of the potential risk.

Through repeated emails and at membership meetings, we communicated our concerns. We noted that there were many things we didn't know about our boys' histories. It was obvious they had trouble managing their angry impulses as children, and we cautioned that they might also have trouble controlling their sexual impulses at puberty. For the well-being of all the kids in the community, we recommended that younger children of either gender not be left alone with our boys. When new residents moved into the community, I met with them personally to alert them to the risk and advise them of the precautions members were urged to take.

Conclusion

Any child can experience emotional and behavioral challenges, but such challenges are common for children adopted after infancy. Older kids who have been removed from their birth families have often experienced years of neglect and deprivation, witnessed and been subjected to violence and abuse, and learned maladaptive behaviors modeled by their caretakers.

Children's traumatic histories have a profound impact on their ability to trust and feel safe, communicate their feelings and needs, and manage their emotions. In addition, children from such backgrounds have often been exposed *in utero* to alcohol and other brain-altering substances, which can affect their ability to learn. They are often delayed in their emotional and social development, behaving in ways that belie their chronological age.

None of us fully realized what was ahead when we adopted older children. When the challenges manifested themselves, we sought out psychotherapy and other therapeutic resources, worked closely with our children's schools, and accessed other services to help our kids heal and thrive.

As much as possible in dealing with our children's actions, we

sought to avoid involving them in the juvenile justice system or having them placed outside of our homes in residential treatment facilities. Taking such steps is common among adoptive families without the extensive support network we had in our cohousing community. Although we explored these options at times, we believed those steps would have been traumatizing to our children and experienced as punishment for behaviors they often didn't understand themselves.

As one member noted in an email, "Only in cohousing would actions such as breaking into a unit and stealing receive so much compassion and understanding. In a typical condominium, the police would have been called and (possibly) a juvenile arrest made. Makes me grateful to live here. What amazes me is our community's ability to see far beyond behavior issues and reach out to help a troubled child."

When the boys' behavior began to impact the larger community, we found it was essential to communicate openly about it. Although it was embarrassing and opened up the possibility we would be judged or criticized, we realized neighbors needed to know what was going on, what efforts were being pursued to address the problematic behaviors, and what they could do to help if they were willing. Over the years we posted numerous emails, scheduled time for discussion in membership meetings, and participated in face-to-face conversations to share our struggles, hear from our neighbors, and identify a path forward.

Today our boys are young adults in their early 20s. All of them graduated from high school. My son works full-time in the hospitality industry. My neighbor's sons work in a retail store and at a break-dancing studio. Two of the boys are in long-term relationships and live with their partners. Like most adults, the boys struggle at times, but they are respectful and responsible young men who treat others with compassion and care. They are evidence that cohousing is a wonderful place to raise troubled children. 🐦

Alicia J. George is a single mom and a psychotherapist in private practice in Washington, DC. She has been a member of Takoma Village Cohousing since it was built nearly 20 years ago.



CULTURE CHANGE OR SAME OLD SOCIETY?

Consensus, Sociocracy, and White Supremacy Culture

By Joe Cole, Hope Horton, and Maria Pini

E*ditor's note:* The following is excerpted from a longer discussion, edited for relevance to our “Shadow Side of Cooperation” theme. The authors include two facilitators of consensus (Maria and Joe) and one of sociocracy (Hope), members of Hart’s Mill Ecovillage in central North Carolina. They write: “We work together on decision making and culture change as our community grows during the design and development phases. Far from finding consensus and sociocracy mutually exclusive, we have found these two systems to be mutually supportive; both provide crucial tools and practices to manifest the community’s vision of living in harmony with each other and the land.”

Maria, Hope, and Joe first discussed the importance of culture change as a focus for intentional communities and the connection of sustainability to culture change. They then addressed some of the challenges and “shadow sides” of consensus and sociocracy as tools for bringing about necessary culture change:

In your experiences, in what ways do collaborative governance systems like consensus and sociocracy support necessary culture change, and in what ways could these systems be simply reproducing the same old society?

Maria: Consensus and sociocracy seem to be containers where a different reality can be constructed. So they are almost like an invitation. What gets constructed in those containers depends on the ingredients that you put in there. So if what you put in there are the same types of behaviors, ways of communicating, and ways of relating that created the mainstream culture you’re trying to change, you won’t create something that’s fundamentally different just because the shape of your container has changed somehow. Maybe a better analogy is something you cook—after a while it tastes the same if you are using the same basic ingredients. I am wondering if it’s not so much the containers or the systems that are going to make culture change possible, but the humans who engage and how willing we are to transform ourselves. In that sense the governance systems of cooperation give us the possibility. But whether the change is possible or not will depend on how we show up.

Joe: I see consensus and sociocracy as close cousins that both create containers for extensive collaboration. However, as you point out, there are limits on how cooperative a group can be if it’s bringing old habits and practices from the dominant culture of competition. There are always many dimensions of power, rank, and privilege present in any human group, and it’s important to cultivate individual and group consciousness about these power differences, and have conversations about how to address them. Though sociocracy has some built-in hierarchy, both it and classic consensus strive to empower everyone in the group in decision-making on some level. Both systems may therefore entice participants into a false sense of “instant equality” without addressing the unequal power relations within the group, and that can

Both systems may entice participants into a false sense of “instant equality” without addressing the unequal power relations within the group, and that can lead to disillusionment and bitter conflict when our dreams of fair and equal cooperation come crashing down.

lead to disillusionment and bitter conflict when our dreams of fair and equal cooperation come crashing down. On the other hand, certain cooperative and anti-mainstream values are built into these governance systems, such as including all voices, deciding for the common good, listening to diverse perspectives, and working together to create the best solutions. But as Maria points out, these values can only go so far unless people really commit to practicing them together and replacing old habits of dominance and competition. There's got to be a commitment to inner transformation alongside the commitment to systemic transformation—a commitment to personal change in order for culture change to take root.

Hope: Collaborative governance is essential for culture change in community. But however you do it, the goals, processes, and roles need to be really clear and agreed-to by everyone. Hart's Mill started implementing sociocracy in March of 2013 when about 10 members total were involved (we now have about 65). We were attracted by sociocracy's core values—effectiveness, equivalence, and transparency—and it has proven to be an essential source of guidance for us as we grow. Sociocracy is an elegant system and I want to mention a few aspects which seem to promote culture change the most in our experience, as well as a few challenges.

Since we're still forming and there's so much to be done, we have a lot of policy meetings. We use rounds almost exclusively,

speaking in turn, offering our own feelings and views, and refraining from interrupting, arguing, or cross-talking. In a Circle meeting, everyone around the table no matter their role has an equal voice and an equal say in decisions that are made. I tend to forget how awkward doing rounds felt at first! But we've learned to listen carefully to each other and trust that wisdom will arise even when we feel most stuck. One of our members mentioned to me that this rounds practice has changed her because she's learned to listen much better in all aspects of her life. This is a good example about how a system can teach collaborative behavior when people are open to it.

A growing edge for us is giving and receiving feedback. Feedback loops are built in to all of the processes, but it can be very uncomfortable to say something in a group that others may find hard to hear. We've had nominations processes where objections came up about the candidates proposed. While we know that objections are a gift to the circle, it takes courage to speak up about such a concern and then attempt to resolve it as a group. But if the well-being of the whole is the most important group value, then holding back becomes detrimental.

As Maria and Joe have said, good governance is necessary but not sufficient to build a cooperative culture. We need to cultivate deeper awareness and vigilance about if and how we are expressing mainstream cultural practices and values within the sociocratic framework. Are we speaking for our circles or for ourselves? Expressing personal preferences or community values? Are we faithful to the radical nature of our experiment, or are we tempted to give in too easily to the "powers that be" in our planning?

And what about cultivating relationships? Our meetings are fast-moving, agenda-driven, and results-oriented. While there are great strengths in this approach, there are also great sacrifices if people don't feel there's time to express their voice, if people can't think or formulate feelings fast enough to contribute in a timely way, or if we minimize concerns and objections because we want to make "progress."

I'm impressed with how integrated sociocracy is as a system. But it takes a lot of rigor, awareness, insight, and diligence to implement well. It's been worth it because of how ingrained the practices have become, how much more open and accepting of feedback we've become, and how we've come to value the collective wisdom that arises when people really listen to each other and are willing to be flexible in the service of a common purpose.

We've worked very hard for a long time amidst a lot of uncertainty to design and develop our community, and we've still got a long way to go. I would like us to cultivate and express more appreciation and compassion for ourselves and others. Spread some love! We're doing a lot of things well while also being open to ways we can develop a more resilient, sustainable, and supportive community, and that's amazing.

Tema Okun wrote a very provocative article called "White Supremacy Culture," which maps out specific cultural tendencies, habits, and values in mainstream white culture. Some of the characteristics she identifies include perfectionism, urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, power hoarding, fear of conflict,



*Joe Cole, Maria Pini,
and Hope Horton.*

claims to objectivity, right to comfort, either/or thinking, individualism, one right way, and progress as bigger/more. From this list, what characteristics do you see most often being reproduced within intentional communities? And are consensus and sociocracy helping or hindering culture change when it comes to white supremacy culture?

Joe: Racism and white supremacy were created in the 1600s-1700s as a means of dividing and ruling the colonial population after a series of multi-ethnic uprisings that threatened the colonial elites. Today people of European descent are assimilated into white supremacy culture and taught these values and ways of thinking and living as normal, and it's difficult for white folks to begin to see that they do have a culture and that it is based in racial superiority and injustice. It's so painful to look at this history and the current realities of racism that many white people live in blindness and denial, even those who are trying to create alternatives to the dominant culture.

Unfortunately I see many intentional communities reproducing a lot of elements of white supremacy culture, especially the sense of urgency, paternalism, fear of conflict, worship of the written word, and quantity over quality. Consensus and sociocracy are often used in a way that unconsciously reproduces white supremacy culture (and patriarchal culture). What's worse, when participants perceive themselves as doing something different but don't recognize how they are continuing patterns of racial exclusion and dominance, then feedback and constructive criticism are less welcome and that's a problem. There seem to be challenges in both systems around valuing feelings and intuitive ways of knowing, and cultivating qualities of relationship and life that cannot be measured or priced. It's hard to shift from self-interest to working for the good of the whole. At the same time, consensus and sociocracy have some values built-in around collaboration and equity, as well as gathering face-to-face and listening to one another. So there can be a tension or a paradox in groups that are creating something new while reproducing elements of mainstream, patriarchal, white supremacy culture.

Hope: I think that the most vital work of intentional communities is for people to learn to cooperate, co-create, and collaborate; to forego personal preference for what's best for the whole; to expand comfort zones and be willing to be uncomfortable; to change and evolve. This is such a stretch that we need tools, structures, and pathways to move in that direction and to create a climate where changes of heart happen on a regular basis. This is mighty work and very challenging. It's alchemy when it happens, and it's heartbreaking when it doesn't.

At Hart's Mill, the tendencies I see showing up are mostly perfectionism, urgency, worship of the written word, fear of conflict, either/or thinking, and claims to objectivity.

Sociocracy has built-in methods of shifting some of these habits, and I'll name a few. Regarding perfectionism, there's a mantra: Good Enough for Now, Safe Enough to Try (GENSET). We know that at any stage we're doing the best we can and that decisions will be re-evaluated within a specific time period. And we need to have the time, tracking mechanisms, and the discipline to continually follow-up and evolve our decisions and

approaches. It's a part of the system and is powerful when applied. I've seen the GENSET principle help people to relax and be able to move forward.

Either/or thinking is the pits when it happens. When we polarize around proposals, things get tense and difficult. Sociocracy's Proposal Forming process helps us to understand issues better from the get-go, welcome wider perspectives, and consider all ideas so that we can craft proposals that are as both-and as possible. This way of operating requires time to gather input and to keep options open before circling to solutions too soon. When we do this well, we usually reach consent fairly easily.

Fear of conflict shows up a lot. People raised in American culture can carry a deep sense of unworthiness and self-criticism that can be easily activated in situations where there is conflict. I've seen people in meetings start out adamant in their views. I've seen them change their positions as they listen to others during the course of rounds. I've also seen conflict and division escalate. In those cases, good facilitation becomes key. Do we need to take a breath? Are there emotions that need to be expressed? Shall we go off-agenda and address the presence of conflict?

I experience sociocracy as an open system and don't think that it's the be-all-and-end-all for every situation. Sometimes other pathways are needed. Concerning interpersonal conflict or conflict around power, we are presently addressing these issues outside of business meetings, using processes that have



been developed by Joe and Maria. Our “Juicy Conversation” offerings are a way to start normalizing conflict and addressing it early. It’s all a big work in progress.

I think that sociocracy has a lot of potential to be a bridge to culture change. But again, it all comes down to how cognizant we are about what’s really driving us, inside and out, and how willing and able we are to do something about it. This is why we also offer ongoing cooperative skills training in our community. There is a never-ending imperative to grow in awareness and wisdom. May there come a day when collaborative culture is the norm and we don’t need sociocracy!

Maria: I want to disclaim that I have learned both consensus and sociocracy through oral traditions and direct experience, not through books. So what I know is the practice of consensus and sociocracy through my experiences as a student of facilitation, a community member, and a teacher of facilitation. And from my experience learning consensus facilitation with Laird Schaub, though it may not challenge every aspect of white supremacy, I see consensus, as taught by Laird, absolutely challenging the status quo of mainstream culture because for Laird, self-reflection, self-assessment, and self-awareness are key. I’m linking this with my previous answer that both consensus and sociocracy are potent tools for change if you use them with that intention. But they can also be potent tools of manipulation, potent tools of power over—it really depends on the intentions of the humans using them.

Now, from what I’ve seen, it seems that sociocracy is currently being marketed to intentional communities as a system that people can adopt without having to change—just implement the system and it will make cooperation easy. Sociocracy advocates are not saying this explicitly, but the unspoken message seems to be, “Do this and you don’t have to change.” By contrast I’ve been pushing Laird, and only half-jokingly, to market his consensus training as “All the ways in which you need to die to do consensus well.” No, I have not convinced him to adopt this marketing approach yet, but he definitely gets it—I’m curious about whether sociocracy advocates would appreciate the truth behind the joke.

What potential areas of improvement do you see for communities to better advance culture change and address the problems in white supremacy culture?

Maria: I have not seen a sharp awareness of white supremacy in either consensus or sociocracy—so the mere adoption and implementation of these governance systems is not going, in and of itself, to address the problems in white supremacy culture. I’ve only seen a few groups that try to add it on. The understanding, presentation, and practice of both systems need to step up their awareness and emphasis of white supremacy.

Hope: Sometimes I think it’s a problem that we’re using a system than can play well with the current culture. Consensus appears to be more of a break with mainstream culture because it attempts to bring everyone into the decision-making and community-creating process in one big group. In sociocracy, circles seek input widely but decisions are made in small groups. It may be easier to drift into old patterns and habits because in

some ways the circle structure seems more similar to traditional hierarchy. For example, our “highest” circle, the General Circle (GC), contains only two members from each Functional Circle, yet this group makes major decisions that affect the entire community. Even though we try to get as much input and feedback from as many members as possible, at the end of the day, not every voice is at the table.

We are fortunate to have a strong grounding in vision and values through our 36 Principles and Intentions. These P&Is guide our decisions as we seek to embed culture-shifting guidelines across all spectrums of sustainability into the steps we take. Just two years ago we added a statement about working towards racial equity and social and environmental justice. But our membership is still almost entirely white. We’re encouraging all members to do substantive training in white supremacy and racial equity, but for now it’s optional. It remains to be seen what adjustments we may need to make in our governance practices should we start attracting non-white members. But we definitely need to raise our awareness of the elements of white privilege and power now.

Joe: Communities who use sociocracy and consensus could benefit from making more space for relationship building, emotional expression and awareness, examining power dynamics, and addressing tensions and conflict. Typically packed agendas and the pressure and urgency of “getting things done” have led us to neglect some of these social dimensions of sustainability. To address these weaknesses in group meeting culture, I believe that it is important to create regular space and time in meetings to do emotional check-ins and preventative conflict and clearing-the-air work. This can help strengthen community bonds while also building capacity in the group to address more serious conflicts when they arise. To those ends, I think groups would benefit from adopting more formats to engage with cultivating greater emotional intelligence, self-awareness, listening, empathy, and understanding. And groups should reserve time to proactively address conflict and power dynamics before they become volatile and damaging. One idea is for new types of Rounds (the dominant format in sociocracy and a common format in consensus): Feelings Round; Reflective Listening Round; Values Round; and a Clearing the Air Round.

I’d like to see more white communities commit to addressing racism and working for racial equity instead of vague commitments to diversity. Even if a community is mostly white, it can network with social justice organizations and work for racial equity in its region. Communities need to make a deep commitment to acknowledging and addressing the racism in ourselves and in our groups, getting training, educating ourselves, and taking responsibility for living our values and creating a more just and sustainable world. 🌱

Maria Pini and Joe Cole are facilitators of consensus and Hope Horton is a facilitator of sociocracy. All three are members of Hart’s Mill Ecovillage in central North Carolina, slated to move onto 112 acres of rural community land in 2020 after 12 years of planning.

Conflict Resolution and Satisfaction in Today's Intentional Communities

By Zach Rubin, Yana Ludwig, and Don Willis

All communities experience conflict from time to time, and their happiness, survival, and prosperity are all dependent on their ability to work through it. Personal stories like the ones you'll find throughout this issue are the crux of understanding the impact that conflict and resolution can have on a community. But beyond each story also lie the trends that inform them and the social context from which they emerge.

This article uses data gathered from a survey of Foundation for Intentional Community member communities, which was conducted in 2017 as part of a larger project aimed at determining what aspects of communal living garner higher levels of satisfaction and which hinder it. In issue #176, we published some of the findings from the survey, in which we described how leadership styles affected communal satisfaction. Box 1 here reprises our "satisfaction scale" used in that article and this one.

Note that the scale is attuned to satisfaction in a given community's decision-making processes and not overall quality of life. This is for two reasons:

First, communitarian quality of life has been surveyed elsewhere (see, for example, Bjorn Grinde, Ragnhild Nes, and Ian McDonald's "Quality of Life in Intentional Communities" in the journal *Social Indicators Research*, which compares the quality of life of communitarians to other demographics). We thought the questions of "what predicts whether communities last a long time?" and "are communitarians happy?" have been asked and answered elsewhere. Instead, we sought to answer "do communitarians feel like they are succeeding in their community's mission?" and that was measured through the questions comprising the satisfaction scale.

Second, the survey results are household-level, which means that one person responded for the entire community. This is somewhat of a shortcoming, as different members of an intentional community are wont to disagree. But on decision-making processes there is likely to be far less disagreement than with quality of life. Note that the Satisfaction Scale, when added up, has a maximum of 130 points. No community scored themselves this high, and the average was an 87.

Unsurprisingly, in our past analysis the communities that had a consensus process or community council in place to make the community's decisions reported the highest level of satisfaction on our scale (they were also the most common type of leadership). Somewhat surprisingly, those processes didn't have to be functional for that satisfaction score to be high; just the structured promise of each individual getting equal buy-in to communal decisions was enough for communities to report satisfaction in achieving their stated mission. Consensus and community council as decision-making styles are fraught with difficulties and often hard to achieve, but just as many Americans feel a sense of patriotism or satisfaction with their country's democracy despite its obvious shortcomings, so too do modern communitarians using these alternatives to standard majority-rule democracy report having an attachment to the idea that they *can* work in a way that generates satisfaction.

Some other key findings from that article include: younger communities are more

Shame-based practices such as public denouncement, shunning, and gossip had notably lower satisfaction scores on average, while behavioral contracts and required community conflict resolution processes scored much higher on the satisfaction scale.

Box 1: Decision-Making Satisfaction Scale

Rate the following statement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (10). My community's decision-making process...

1. is functional
2. is complicated*
3. has served us well so far
4. is fair to all involved
5. reflects our common values
6. needs to change for the community to be successful*
7. excludes some voices*
8. is perfect
9. has more flaws than the decision-making processes of other communities*
10. involves everyone
11. has been the source of a lot of struggle in my community*
12. is easy to understand
13. generally has a high satisfaction rating from members

*these question scores were inverted in building the satisfaction scale.

Box 2: Does your community use any of the following styles of conflict resolution?

Conflict-Resolution Technique	# Communities Using It	Satisfaction Score
Co-Counseling	26	95.2
Matrix Tools	1	89.0
Full-Group Discussion	120	88.3
Nonviolent Communication	93	88.1
A Public Airing of Grievances	48	86.6
A Shared Spiritual Practice	20	86.4
Mediation	127	84.9
Restorative Circles	24	79.9

likely to report a higher satisfaction with governance processes; greater levels of income sharing in a community are related to greater satisfaction; and exclusivity in membership selection didn't seem to have any effect.

In that article, we also briefly touched on the relationship between conflict resolution and satisfaction, noting that the more strongly a community enforced conflict resolution norms (from having no process to a maximum of *required* formal conflict resolution) the greater satisfaction they reported in community decision making. Here we would like to expand on that aspect of the survey, using additional responses from the 90-question survey.

We examine two major aspects in this article: what conflict resolution techniques a community commonly uses, and what forms of punishment it commonly metes out when a member violates community norms or rules. We compare the average satisfaction scores for communities using each of these as a means of trying to answer whether any specific techniques for resolving conflict or exerting some form of social control over members are related to member satisfaction with community governance.

In other words, are any of the ways in which a community resolves internal conflicts among members or between the member and their community better or worse than others for how much members feel they have agency in the community? About 178 communities responded to the section of the survey on conflict resolution.

Box 2 describes one answer to this inquiry, by showing how different styles of conflict resolution affect a community's ranking on our satisfaction scale. Communities that used techniques like full-group discussion and nonviolent communication ranked slightly higher, meaning that the use of those techniques led to satisfaction in community decision making on average in those communities that used them. The tool with the greatest positive effect was co-counseling, which seems to have a dramatic average positive effect, and the tool with the greatest negative effect was restorative circles.

While these numbers might suggest

that one technique is better and the other worse, keep in mind that there may be other factors at play. Co-counseling is a newly popular technique for conflict resolutions, and newly formed communities tend to report greater satisfaction than older ones due to the excitement and optimism that comes with forming an intentional community. Likewise, it would be folly to state a case for using Matrix Tools since only one community reported using them. We would need more communities reporting in to say anything conclusive about that tool.

In Box 3, the responses attempt to answer that question of resolving conflict in another way, through the more punitive side of resolution. These measures are both formal and informal, as groups do tend to have both formal (i.e., laws) and informal (i.e., norms) means of enforcing the group's collective rules. In cases where there could be types of consequences to conflict, such as with a public airing of grievances, this was left undefined for the respondent to interpret as to whether it was germane to their community.

Some of these consequences of conflict were more common than others, and some yielded better results than others for those who used them. For example, communities that reported using membership probation scored higher than average and those who had revoked members scored lower than average, though few communities practiced these so we don't suggest drawing a strong conclusion from them. Instead, we could look to such shame-based practices as public denouncement, shunning, and gossip, which had notably lower satisfaction scores on average, or behavioral contracts and required community conflict resolution processes, which scored much higher on the satisfaction scale.

There are two ways to look at how the consequences of conflict affect community members, both equally valid. One is that certain consequences associated with a conflict will make community members feel that they have less buy-in to the community and less agency within it, while others will generate more feelings of buy-in and agency. Opposite of this dynamic is the proposition that communities where people *already feel* that they

Box 3: Which of the following methods are used when two people come into conflict in your community?

Consequence of Conflict	# Communities Using It	Satisfaction Score
Required Community Conflict Resolution Process	47	93.7
Probation of Membership	6	91.5
Behavioral Contracts	19	91.1
Loss of Access to Community Resources	4	90.3
Public Airing of Grievances	38	88.2
Revocation of Membership	12	83.1
Gossip	72	80.3
Public Denouncement	8	70.1
Shunning or Isolation	18	67.8

Box 4: Does your community have a designated conflict resolution team or committee?

Have Team?	# of Communities	Satisfaction Score
Yes	105	87.7
No	73	86.3

have less buy-in and agency are likely to suffer from worse consequence outcomes as a result. A community already in discord and disagreement may see their members using gossip, shunning, or public denouncement as a way of handling the community's problems—a negative feedback loop in a community already experiencing troubles.

This is also borne out in some of the written responses where people wrote that their conflict resolution processes were failing. The question set on consequences of conflict also came with an "other" option which allowed respondents to enter techniques we didn't list. Here's a sample of what some respondents said:

- "Encouragement to try to work it out between the two first, and if that doesn't work to bring in a community mediator or two. If that doesn't work, to bring in an outside mediator."
- "We encourage the parties to talk to each other. We encourage them to have a support person of their choosing to help them. If that does not work, Community Care will facilitate a more structured small group interaction to help solve the issue. Once we have had to hire a third-party mediator."
- "Frustration, hopelessness."
- "We haven't had any serious conflicts. We set aside times at the beginning of each meeting to discuss issues that are community-wide. For annoyances between two individuals, we encourage personal discussions to solve issues."
- "In the past person was requested to abstain from attending meetings. Upon reflection I think our group would never do this again."
- "The required process is found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 18."
- "Based on people's ability to let go and care more for community than opinion."

- “Conflict resolution is a complete failure.”
- “Encouraged to meet with a member of the Process (conflict resolution) Team.”
- “Many members of the community are community employees. If they have an issue with a superior they get fired. We have little leadership training and low knowledge of interpersonal skills. It’s a business. We try to work things out, and getting laid off is a last resort.”

Note some common refrains are of a failing in community conflict resolution altogether, or of lack of conflict “yet” in ostensibly newer communities. Or, that many communities relied on an outside mediator when they felt community resources were not enough to overcome the conflict. These items are not otherwise adequately captured by our other yes/no-style questions.

Based on the responses to both types of questions, we can see a pretty clear picture start to emerge showing communities struggling with a variety of issues when trying to resolve conflict, and that conflict resolution is strongly tied to other challenges a community will face. This, like many of our results, is not necessarily surprising but affirming of many individual experiences in community.

Finally, Box 4 shows the satisfaction scores of communities with and without a dedicated conflict resolution body. The results show very little difference, meaning that the mere presence of a conflict resolution team didn’t seem to make much of a difference.

It’s also worth noting that, as with all surveys and statistical data, these numbers are averages and trends. They do not predict, nor should they be used to predict, the success of any type of conflict resolution technique or consequence in a given community. But if you see something that correlates with a higher satisfaction score that your community doesn’t do, perhaps that’s worth exploring to expand your community’s toolbox for whenever conflict inevitably arises.

The ability of a community to navigate conflict adeptly plays a strong role in how members view the success and functioning of it. Sometimes conflicts are minor and easily overcome, while other times they can mean the downfall of an entire group. Ev-

ery communitarian will have a story—if not many stories—about the trials of overcoming conflict in their community. The best prescription for overcoming conflict is to listen to the mistakes others have made in order to not repeat them. Having techniques in place to deal with conflict when it inevitably arises is good, but the success of those appears to reflect the overall health of the community as much as it reflects the effectiveness of any one technique. 🌱

Zach Rubin is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology at Lander University and board member for the Communal Studies Association. His research is focused on intentional communities, their connections to social movement theory, and communal groups’ connections (or disconnections) to larger political structures and movements. In particular, his dissertation research entitled “My Year Pooping in a Bucket: Lifestyle, Cultural, and Social Movements in the ‘Node’ at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage” was based on eight months collecting ethnographic and interview data.

Don Willis is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Arkansas—Little Rock. He earned a B.A. in sociology from the University of Central Arkansas and a M.A. in sociology from the University of Arkansas—Fayetteville where he completed a thesis entitled “Resources and Relationships: Food Insecurity and Social Capital among Middle School Children” and a Ph.D. at the University of Missouri where his dissertation was entitled “Feeding the Student Body: Insecurity and Inequality Among College Students.” Broadly, his interests are in social inequality, health disparities, food insecurity, youth and the life course.

Yana Ludwig is a cooperative culture and intentional communities advocate, and an anti-oppression activist. She serves on the Foundation for Intentional Community board, and is a trainer and consultant for progressive projects. Her book, Together Resilient: Building Community in the Age of Climate Disruption, was the Communal Studies Association’s 2017 Book of the Year. She’s a podcast host on Solidarity House (advocating for cooperative culture and economics), a founder of Solidarity Collective, an income-sharing community in Wyoming, and a candidate for US Senate in 2020.



Chris Roth

A Graduated Series of Consequences and the “Community Eye”

K*nock knock!* There’s a sharp rap at the door. I open it to Larry, another community member. “It’s me, ‘Sharkey,’” he says in a fake tough-guy accent. “I’m heah ta let ya know ya owe \$84 on ya tractor bill. Ya gonna pay up o’ wat?” “Uh, hello... ‘Sharkey,’” I say, inviting Larry in. “I thought I paid it! I’ll write a check right now!”

Egads, how embarrassing. I’d arranged for some work on my driveway from a neighbor using the community tractor months before. And completely forgot to pay for it.

“We emailed ya,” Larry adds, staying in character as he came in and sat down. “But ya nevah paid it.

“I’m on da Accountability Team, see,” he continues, “and dis is da foist consequence—we visit ya an’ ask ya ta pay up.”

This was actually pretty funny. *I* was the one who’d suggested that our community adopt a “graduated series of consequences” process for accountability in the first place (I had learned about this process from a spiritually oriented community in Vancouver). We’d passed the proposal to do this just a month before. We created our own series of consequences to encourage some of our members to better comply with our agreements and obligations. Our first consequence was for one community member to talk with the person who broke the agreement. And...the very first time we applied the first consequence, it was to *me*. Hilarious. (Playing “Sharkey” with a gangster accent was Larry’s own creative touch.) I paid my overdue tractor bill and Sharkey and I had a laugh about it.

Why Does a Community Even Need Consequences?

As you know if you live in community, it’s especially painful when someone consistently doesn’t keep the group’s agreements, fulfill its obligations, or violates its basic behavioral norms even once, or refuses to make the changes the community repeatedly requests about their behavior or communication style. However, people new to community or who’ve never lived in one sometimes believe that bad habits, negative attitudes, or hurtful behaviors will somehow be left at the gate—since, many people new to community believe, if it’s *really* community everyone gets along well, keeps all community agreements, and fulfills all obligations. And these naïve, misinformed folks are usually the first to feel outraged when anyone suggests ways to help everyone keep the group’s agreements. Since in *community* everyone just *naturally* does the right thing. *Oops!*

The most common agreements and behavior norms people might violate concern parking, quiet hours, cleanliness of shared areas, or behavior of children or pets; not fulfilling required labor hours or paying community dues and fees; or indulging in abusive language or actions, various kinds of substance abuse, or harming the community in some way: legally, financially, in terms of its reputation, and so on.

When this happens and there is no remedy, the person can be perceived as a kind of “community aristocrat,” since clearly the agreements everyone else keeps don’t apply to *them*. If there is no recourse to deal with the rule-breakers, people who *do* keep the agreements can feel resentful and discouraged. If this goes on too long they can get so discouraged and demoralized—“Why did I even *join* a community?”—they often stop participating in the community and sometimes eventually leave it altogether.

It’s especially painful when someone consistently doesn’t keep the group’s agreements or refuses to make the changes the community repeatedly requests about their behavior or communication style.

A graduated series of consequences is intended to help people who *consistently* break the group's agreements (or do something awful), rather than those who break an agreement once in a while. The approach is designed to encourage accountability—not by punitive measures or fines, *not* by shaming or blaming—but through a series of fair, compassionate, incremental consequences, from mild to increasingly serious, which treat the person respectfully while also asking them to make necessary changes and resolve the problem. It is possible to say, “We *want* you to follow our agreements,” or, “We don't want you to do *that*,” in ways that are direct and emotionally authentic while honoring the person's dignity. And it's possible to do this even if the last-resort consequence when nothing changes after a series of consequences is being asked to leave the community.

When all else fails, this kind of respectful yet increasingly potent peer pressure can give the person the needed inducement to change.

Requests for Compliance, Offers of Help

In a graduated series of consequences one or more community representatives asks the person who has consistently broken agreements to comply with community agreements again. The representatives inquire whether the person needs help of some kind. Did they have a sudden unexpected expense or illness, painful difficulty in their family or at work, an illness or death of someone close to them? And if so, how could the community help? If the

broken agreement involves community labor or dues and fees and the person can't resolve the issue immediately, a date could be set in the near future by which the person should do the work or pay the money. People from the community's Care Team or Process Committee could do this, or the group could create an Accountability Team just for this purpose.

If the person complies with the agreement or stops the undesirable behavior, great! The method worked and no more action is taken. The person is *not* shamed or blamed and no one throws it up to them later by saying something like, “Hey, we had to get the first consequence after you!” That is *not* how the method is designed. Rather it's designed so that when a consequence resolves the problem the community forgives, forgets, and moves on.

What a Graduated Series of Consequences Can Look Like

Here is an example of the kinds of incremental consequences a community can create.

First Consequence: One community member asks the person not keeping the agreement to comply with it again. This is what Larry, as “Sharkey,” did with me.

If the person does comply (or stops doing an undesirable behavior), great! The first consequence was effective. No further action is taken.

Second Consequence: If the person continues to break the agreement (or do an undesirable behavior), a small group, perhaps three or four people, asks them to comply with it again or stop the behavior (like having three or four Sharkeys at the door).

Third Consequence: If this still doesn't resolve the problem, it *may* mean the person has a chronic difficulty in keeping agreements in general. Or it may simply mean they've had some unexpected challenging circumstances and it may not be a characteristic pattern at all.

In any case, the community still doesn't give up on them. The community creates an informal written contract with the member (“informal”—no lawyers needed) outlining how in several steps over the next few months the person will resolve the issue, with periodic meetings with one or more other community members to help the person stay on track and abide with the contracted steps to resolve the issue.

Fourth Consequence: If the issue is still not resolved, it *could* be that nothing will remedy the situation and the person has a serious problem. *Please* don't assume, as many community newcomers do, that with enough community support—heartshares, talking stick circles, mediations, or hugs—the person will heal their deep-seated patterns and change. I think this is unrealistic. The person needs effective outside professional help. And Yes, a community can suggest or request this, but...the person may not see why it's needed, feel dreadfully insulted, and not seek the help.

In the hope that the problem actually *can* be resolved though, in the fourth consequence the group holds a community meeting about the issue. Each participant shares how the person's

not keeping the agreement has affected them, and they might express any emotions this triggered in them. (While it would be ideal for people to use the neutral language of Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication and simply describe their feelings and which unmet values or needs gave rise to them, not every community member is skilled at this. Some people may be so annoyed they end up speaking forcefully or even harshly to the agreement-breaker.) The person also tells the group what's been going on with them, if there've been circumstances that diminished their ability to keep agreements.

At this meeting the group puts the person on “membership probation.” This means if the person doesn't keep the agreement or stop the undesirable behavior by a



certain date (which, given how much time has passed since the first consequence, may be just a few days), the fifth consequence occurs.

If the person doesn't attend the meeting, it is still held, for the benefit of everyone else, and the person is given notes from or an audio or video recording of the meeting.

Fifth Consequence: If the person still hasn't resolved the problem by the given date, then, in the final, "last resort" consequence, their community membership is revoked and they're asked to leave the group.¹

It is certainly drastic to put a member on probation status, which means if they don't resolve the problem they will be asked to leave. When the violation is severe enough or the conflict too wrenching, by a fourth or fifth consequence with no resolution, the group needs to get realistic. Sometimes increasingly public consequences are the only way to protect your community from the devastatingly low morale that can occur in this situation.

Again, this example shows how a community *could* create a series of consequences. The group could create fewer or more steps or different consequences.

The Secret Reason this Process Works

When I ask people in my workshops why they think this method is effective, most people say something like, "Because each consequence is more visible and impactful than the previous one, and people want to avoid the next one!"

True in principle, but a more subtle reason is at work here. It's not because a rule-breaker might get a knock at their door as I did. It's simply because the group's agreed-on series of consequences *exists*. Just knowing the community *has* this process *itself* deters people from breaking agreements. People don't want to get a knock at the door by one fellow community member, much less three or four. And they sure don't want to have a whole community meeting about it!

Do We Even Need to Apply this Process?

Strangely enough, after a community adopts a series of consequences they may never have to use them, since from then on people tend keep their agreements.

Or maybe they only have to apply the first, relatively mild consequence, like what I got; or maybe with only one or two members, if needed. The knowledge that we now have a method of ever-increasing community visibility and peer pressure has a remarkable deterrent effect. After the first or at most two consequences are applied to one or more community members, amazingly, from then on almost everyone honors the group's agreements.

The Community Eye—"As if all the world were watching..."

I think of a series of consequences as the practical application of what I call the "Community Eye"—each consequence gives increasing visibility to the person's transgressions and increasing numbers of fellow community members know about it. Broken agreements or violations of community norms that are kept hidden and secret by a well-meaning com-



munity often persist in the dark, sometimes for years. But shine the light of everyone knowing about and people suddenly behave better—significantly more likely to keep agreements, fulfill obligations, and become more collaborative community citizens. Most of us have a deep desire to be respected, trusted, and liked by our peers. When we know people are watching, as scientific research confirms,² we behave better.

Even Thomas Jefferson observed this, writing, "Whenever you do a thing, act as if all the world were watching." Over the last 15 years I've suggested the graduated series of consequences method (and shared a template for creating one) with communities all over the world. For as Thomas Jefferson, Sharkey, and I know first-hand, the "Community Eye" is a powerful motivator. 🐾

Diana Leafé Christian, author of Creating a Life Together and Finding Community, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops and webinars on creating successful new communities, and on Sociocracy, an effective self-governance and decision-making method. She has written on community accountability issues for COMMUNITIES magazine and in Creating a Life Together. She lives at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina.

1. Asking someone to leave the community is not possible or legal in US or Canadian communities in which people own and have deeds to their housing units, apartments, lots, or houses—such as in most cohousing communities—since property rights trump internal community agreements. An exception would be communities owned as housing co-ops, in which it is legal to choose one's members and, if needed, to ask them to leave.

2. For articles citing scientific research supporting this, see "How being watched changes you," by Jason G. Goldman, February 10, 2015, *BBC Future*, or "How the Illusion of Being Observed Can Make You a Better Person," Sander van der Linden, May 3, 2011, *Scientific American*.

Communes in America, 1975–2000

By Timothy Miller

Syracuse University Press, 2019, paperback, 247 pages

When Timothy Miller embarked upon the task of chronicling the entire 20th century of American intentional communities, he appeared to be taking on a fool's errand. How could anyone possibly hope to study such a sparsely documented, poorly-defined topic over such an enormous period? But here is Miller in 2019, turning in the final volume of his trilogy about American communal groups across the 20th century and completing a feat that few thought possible.

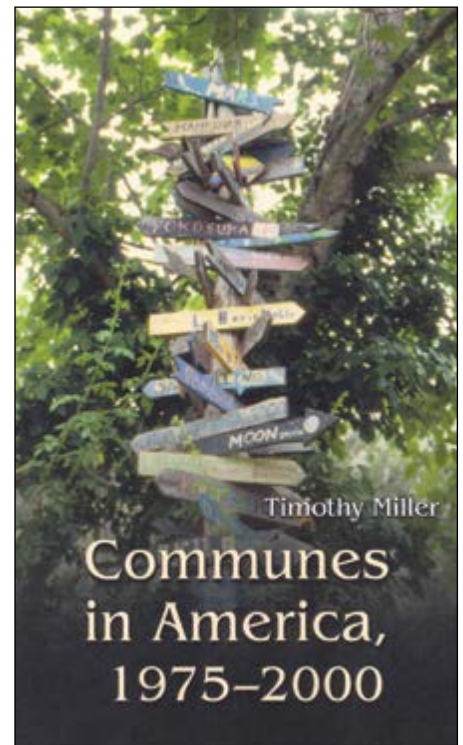
His first volume, which covers 1900–1960, describes a time in American history that is not typically associated with communal living. It reviews a period that saw the demise of the Shakers, the end of the communal period in Amana, the growth of the Hutterites, the emergence of student housing cooperatives and art colonies, and the forerunners of hippie-era communes. His second volume focuses on hippie communes of the 1960s and early '70s, while the third and final volume—the subject of this review—captures the final quarter of the 20th century.

Miller's book is full of interesting information presented in an engaging style. He devotes much time to the emergence of ecovillages and cohousing communities, two forms of intentional community that took off in the last quarter of the 20th century. Miller traces their beginnings, showing that they represent new terms rather than new forms of community. For example, Miller notes that Fruitlands, a transcendentalist community from the 1840s of which Bronson Alcott was a leader, was an early example of what we would today call an ecovillage with its focus on simple living, avoidance of animal products, harmony with the natural world, and social justice. Similarly, he points out that Camphill communities followed ecovillage principles long before the term was invented.

Miller writes that in an earlier volume, he mused that most American intentional communities see themselves as either arks (groups that band together to protect themselves from coming disaster) or lighthouses (groups that seek to model a better way of living) and he felt that these two orientations were mutually exclusive. But now he feels that ecovillages embody both types, in that they see environmental catastrophe on our doorstep but are nonetheless committed to devising sustainable ways of living. Whether arks or lighthouses, Miller concludes that ecovillages are “beacons of hope.”

Miller devotes two chapters to religious and spiritual communities, noting that the largest numbers of intentional communities in the last quarter of the century in the United States were Christian and that membership in Catholic communities in the 20th century (e.g., monasteries, convents) “probably outnumbered that of all other religious communities combined.” But Miller is careful to include other types of religious and spiritual groups, and provides interesting information on fundamentalist Mormon, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, American Indian, Pagan, and New Age communities. He concludes that “the impulse to pursue the spiritual search in a communal setting was alive and well as the 20th century moved toward its conclusion.”

A chapter on “Communities on Purpose” describes an enormous range of groups including service, arts, free love, LGBT, and White supremacist communities. The last of these perfectly sets up the next chapter, “Communities in the Media Spotlight: Crisis and Controversy,” with Miller suggesting that “inordinate public atten-



tion” has been focused on crises, giving the undeserved impression that most intentional communities are “disaster-prone, or even pathological.” In this chapter, he discusses well-known crises, such as those of Jonestown, Rajneeshpuram, MOVE, and the Branch Davidians, but he also includes problems befalling lesser-known groups such as the Lundgren LDS Community and Twelve Tribes communities. Miller concludes that intentional communities, by and large, do an excellent job of promoting peace and harmony, but they “seem unable to escape entirely the depredations of contemporary life.”

Perhaps the most interesting, and the most useful, parts of the book are the two appendices. In the first appendix, Miller tackles the question of whether communal activity in the United States has come in waves over the past 400 years. Scholars have asserted that communal activity is a cyclical phenomenon often associated with surges of millennialism and periods of economic depression, with particularly pronounced waves in the 1840s and 1960s. Miller notes, though, that this analysis focuses on the *founding* of intentional communities rather than the *presence* of intentional communities. When

the data are reanalyzed with the latter in mind using Miller's larger database, communal activity in America appears more stable than previously thought. But, Miller notes, its presence is also quite marginal. He compares the number of communities in each decade over the past 400 years to the total United States population and also provides a projection of the number of communards to the population over the same time period. While you do see increases in the ratio of communal groups to the population in the 1840s and 1960s, the numbers are nonetheless tiny (1 to 165,664 and 1 to 285,546 respectively).

In the second appendix, Miller includes his list of intentional communities active in the 20th century, starting with an enumeration of groups that were founded earlier but survived into the 20th century, followed by a list of groups that were founded between 1900 and 2000. Then he lists the Hutterites separately, broken down by the three branches. This list is a helpful resource to anyone interested in 20th century intentional communities, although Miller provides much more detailed information on these groups in his *Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities* (2nd ed., 2015, Richard W. Couper Press).

Miller is upfront that his study has limitations. Some may take issue with Miller's broad definition of intentional community, which puts small group houses and large communal societies under the same umbrella. To meet his definition a group must have a purpose or vision, a characteristic that he grants, arguably, to some groups (e.g., student housing cooperatives) but not to others (e.g., sororities and fraternities). Additionally, to keep his work manageable, he doesn't include the largest American communal movement—that of Catholic religious orders—in his database. Then there is the problem of how to count groups that have multiple sites or that move to multiple locations, for which Miller doesn't find a consistent answer. But limitations are inherent in the study of a topic where insufficient documentation makes it impossible to conduct a scientific analysis, and Miller has done a remarkable job with slippery,

incomplete subject matter.

Miller doesn't provide any earth-shattering conclusions to end his trilogy. But he does bust common public misconceptions, such as the myth that communal groups disappeared with the hippies. He describes the end of the 20th century as bringing out a new communal generation with better organizational skills, "leading to greater communal longevity and, in many cases, a more stable, even prosperous, financial base." And he describes a concurrent rise in secular communities with a much greater focus on environmental concerns.

As for the future, Miller believes that cohousing and ecovillages will be the prominent public face of intentional communities, with groups catering to older people increasing as the population ages. And while he believes that intentional communities are not "destined to become America's standard form of economic and residential organization," they are also not going away. 🌿

Deborah Altus lives, loves and plays in Lawrence, Kansas. She is a professor at Washburn University and a board member of the International Communal Studies Association.

Photo left: Fruitlands community farmhouse, now part of Fruitlands Museum, as it appeared in the 1990s. Fruitlands, founded in 1843, was a Transcendentalist community that lasted less than a year, but its influence continues through the museum and various writings. Professor Tim Miller suggests that Fruitlands might be viewed as the first ecovillage due to its focus on sustainability, health, ethical principles, and simple living.

Photo right: Drop City theatre dome as it appeared in the 1970s after the community dissolved. Drop City was founded in 1965 and lasted eight years (with the last two or three in decline), yet according to Professor Tim Miller, it inspired a generation of communes.



Photos by Timothy Miller

McCamant & Durrett Architects

The Cohousing Company



**McCamant & Durrett
Architects**
are committed to high
quality, sustainable,
community-oriented design.
We are most well-known for
our design of successful
Cohousing Communities.

We also offer pedestrian-
friendly town planning,
affordable housing and
mixed use design services,
and starting new cohousing
developments in your town.

Since 1987 the firm has
provided award-winning and
sustainable architectural
design services to a wide
range of clients.

charles.durrett@cohousingco.com
530.265.9980

www.cohousingco.com



REACH

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

You may contact our Advertising Manager, Gigi Wahba, to place a Reach ad. Email ads@ic.org, call 415-991-0541, or go to communities.ic.org/ads/ for more information or to submit your ad online.

THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #185 - Winter 2019 (out in December) is October 28, 2019.

The rate for Reach ads is... Up to 50 Words: \$25/issue or \$60/year; Up to 100 Words: \$50/issue or \$100/year; Up to 250 Words: \$75/issue or \$200/year. If you are an FIC Member you may take off an additional 10%.

You may pay using a credit card or PayPal by contacting Gigi online or over the phone using the contact information above. Or, you may mail a check or money order payable to Communities with your ad text, word count, and duration of the ad, plus your contact information, to: The Foundation for Intentional Community, 1 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Box 23, Rutledge, MO 63563.

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

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

HART'S MILL ECOVILLAGE AND FARM: Living in harmony with each other and the land. Seeking diverse ages, skills, cultures, family configurations to co-create compact green village with shared housing, while preserving 112 acres of pastures, woodlands, wetlands in Triangle area of NC. Community garden, sociocracy, limited equity housing cooperative. www.hartsmill.org

HAYSTACK HEIGHTS COHOUSING IS LOOKING FOR A FEW MORE MEMBERS. We are located in Spokane, Washington. Construction is scheduled to start spring of 2020, completion in 2021. We are building an inter-generational sustainable community near downtown Spokane. www.haystackheights.com or Spokane.cohousing@gmail.com or like us at [Facebook@spokanecohousing](https://www.facebook.com/spokanecohousing).

PRAIRIE HILL COHOUSING SEEKS NEW MEMBERS for its community of 36 green homes, a Common House, and gardens on 8 acres near downtown Iowa City and the University of Iowa. Our multigenerational community is family-friendly. New homes are under construction now. For information, see iowacitycohousing.org.

RAVENS' ROOST COHOUSING: ALASKA, THE LAST FRONTIER. Have you thought about intentional living, want beauty and nature right out your door? Ravens' Roost Cohousing in Anchorage AK, HAS 3 HOMES FOR SALE. EACH UNIT IS A PRIVATE HOME With southern exposure. Common amenities include a Common House with large kitchen and dining area, a library, kids play room, guest rooms; workshop; and gardens. The neighborhood is on 6 acres of green space, close to shopping, trails, hospitals and the University. Members overwhelmingly agree that the people and connections are the best part of life at Ravens' Roost. Check out our website: ravensroostcoho.org.

Alpenglow CoHousing
A Cohousing Community in Ridgway, Colorado
Living Simply • Nurturing Others • Enjoying Nature

Alpenglowcohousing.org
info@alpenglowcohousing.org • Call: Sara 970-318-6428

LOST VALLEY EDUCATION AND EVENT CENTER IS SEEKING someone to fill the role of Business Administrator at our sociocratically-run, permaculture- and NVC-oriented intentional community and aspiring ecovillage on 87 acres, 18 miles from Eugene, Oregon. Other new residential applicants also welcome. Please visit lostvalley.org; contact us at board@lostvalley.org or 541-937-3351.

HUNDREDFOLD FARM IS A 14-HOME COHOUSING COMMUNITY NEAR GETTYSBURG, PA. Our custom designed energy efficient single family solar homes are surrounded by 80 acres of fields and forest. Community gardens and a greenhouse provide organic produce year-round. Four ready to build lots available. Come grow with us! www.hundredfoldfarm.org

SEATTLE QUAKER HOUSE/ UNIVERSITY FRIENDS MEETING, NE SEATTLE. Self-Service Overnight Accommodations. Parking/Wi-Fi/Microwave/Fridge. Near UW and buses. Suggested donation \$70-\$50 for two, \$60-\$40 for one per night; two twins or one double bed available. Contact quakerhouse.sea@gmail.com.

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 in Northeast Missouri, and welcome new members to join us in creating a vibrant community and cooperative culture! Together we're living abundant and fulfilling low-carbon lives. We use renewable energy, practice organic agriculture, share vehicles, utilize natural and green building techniques, share some common infrastructure, and make our own fun. Come live lightly with us, and be part of the solution! www.dancingrabbit.org or 660-883-5511 or dancingrabbit@ic.org.

THE VALLEY OF LIGHT is a community of cultural creatives that rests along the New River in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. With over \$2 million invested, our 22-acre campus is debt-free and includes 3 homes, 8 building pads, campground, barn, garden, "Peace Pentagon" conference and community center, and other amenities. We share our campus with The Oracle Institute, a charity that operates a spirituality school, award-winning press, and peace-building practice. We seek co-founding members in five Paths: Native (farmers and landscapers); Scientist (we love geeks!); Artisan (artists and builders); Peacemaker (teachers and activists); Oracle (spiritual students). Please visit www.TheOracleInstitute.org/about-our-community & PeacePentagon.net. Contact Katie@TheOracleInstitute.org.

DURHAM, NC 55+ COHOUSING VILLAGE HEARTH COHOUSING welcomes LGBTs, straight friends, and allies. Building 28 accessible, energy-efficient homes clustered on 15 beautiful acres. Only a few left. Construction started November 2018 in culturally vibrant progressive Durham for move-in late 2019. Join us now! www.VillageHearthCohousing.com



COME AND SEE KOINONIA FARM!







Since 1942, we have welcomed and shared with anyone and everyone regardless of race or anything else that divides people. We have a rich history, from the Jordans and the Englands founding the farm, to the bullets, bombs, and boycotts of the mid century, to the birth of Habitat for Humanity, and other ministries.

Want to join us for lunch and a tour, stay a few days for some rest, or work alongside the community during our busy season? Call or register at koinoniafarm.org/visit-koinonia/.

We also have three internship terms—spring, summer, and fall. Live, work, and learn alongside the Koinonia community. koinoniafarm.org/internship.

And don't forget to shop in our new online farm store—koinoniafarmstore.com. Biologically grown Pecans, Fair Trade Chocolate and plenty of great gifts!

KOINONIA FARM

1324 GA HWY 49 S | AMERICUS, GA 31719
KOINONIAFARM.ORG | KOINONIAFARMSTORE.COM
 229.924.0391 | INFO@KOINONIAFARM.ORG

**Y'ALL
COME!**



PACIFIC DOMES™
541-488-7737



Ecoliving Dwell Domes

Living Sustainably Close to Nature

Check out our Featured EcoVillages in Latest Dwell Dome News Blog! Manufactured in the USA by Pacific Domes, Ecoliving Dwell Domes have the geodesic-engineered strength to withstand the most extreme weather conditions - high winds, snow-loads, hurricanes and earthquakes. Freestanding Dwell Dome Kits are the preferred choice for off-grid and remote communities.

Cost-effective and easy to assemble, Dwell Dome shelter kits have many uses. Their energy-efficient Bio-geometry design embodies Nature's structure and harmonic flow!

Sales: (541) 488-7737

www.pacificdomes.com



The
Communal
Studies Association
invites you to their *44th Annual*
Conference
October 17-19 2019
in
Winterthur, Del.



Winterthur Museum

Learn from the past
Share your ideas and ideals
Engage with like-minded others
Special rates for community members

Find out more at our website:

www.communalstudies.org

ROCKY CORNER COHOUSING, THE FIRST IN CONNECTICUT! Here is what makes us unique: We are the first cohousing in southern New England, the closest to NYC. We are 5 miles from the small vibrant city of New Haven where political action and fine arts are thriving. We have been using sociocracy as our governance and decision-making model since 2012. We use permaculture principles to decide how to use our land. Neighbors can garden and farm together as much or as little as they want. We will own our individual energy-efficient homes and co-own organic farmland and a beautiful common house. Here are some of our values: We strive to create a neighborhood that is supportive and inspiring for individuals and families. We support people of all ages to enter, stay and participate in the community throughout their lives. We value our children as members of the community encouraging their participation and leadership. We work cooperatively for mutual benefit. The community promotes the physical and emotional health, safety and security of our members and guests. We make space in our lives for play and artistic expression. We encourage continual learning, skill sharing and teaching. We consider the Rocky Corner community, the wider human community and the health of the Earth when making decisions and choices. Does this speak to you? We have Affordable and market-rate homes for sale that will be ready to occupy in spring 2019. Construction has started. Come join us now! Find out more at www.rockycorner.org.

COWEETA HERITAGE CENTER AND TALKING ROCK FARM are located in the mountains of Western North Carolina in a beautiful and diverse temperate rainforest. CHC is looking for others who would like to join together to form an Intentional Community embracing the principles of Voluntary Simplicity and Healing the Earth and Each Other. Simply put, we wish "to live simply so that others may simply live." It is a recognition that nature provides us with valuable services and resources that we can use to enrich our lives. Utilizing local resources, appropriate technology, and working cooperatively, we can discover creative ways to meet our needs as "directly and simply as possible." Come join Coweeta and learn how to live lightly on the land and enjoy the Earth's bounty! Contact Coweeta for more info or to schedule a visit!! Contact Paul at coweeta@gmail.com.

COHOUSING A LA MEXICANA! Located near Ajijic Lake Chapala, 3 Acres are now being developed with new homes. We stand for Sustainability, Community, Multiversity and Aging in Place. We are seeking quality VISIONARY and ADVENTUROUS members/investors to embrace and help us manifest this shared dream. Contact Jaime Navarro at info@rancholasaludvillage.com or www.rancholasaludvillage.com

COMMUNITIES FORMING

RALSTON CREEK COHOUSING ARVADA CO - Imagine an energetic group of eclectic families who value treading lightly on the land. They come together near Old Town to design a vibrant common house and



Prairie Hill Cohousing, Iowa's first cohousing community, has new homes available and plans for more. We are a multigenerational community of kids, pets, and grownups who live in private homes clustered around a Common House on an 8-acre site near downtown Iowa City. Our shared green space includes gardens, orchards, and prairie. About half of our 36 homes are sold, and the Common House is complete with kitchen, guest rooms, and space for activities. You may own a cozy green flat in a fourplex, a one- or two-story duplex, or a single-level townhouse. All are built to meet Energy Star and LEED standards of energy-efficiency and sustainability.

Watch eagles from your kitchen window, deer from your patio, and miles of countryside from atop our hillside. We are situated in a walkable neighborhood close to parks, restaurants, schools, and bike trails. Prairie Hill hosts community sings, climate action meetings, Tuesday night suppers, frequent potlucks, movie nights, and all kinds of spontaneous events. It is a great place to raise a family and to live comfortably as a single.

Iowa City is a cosmopolitan community perennially listed as one of America's top-rated places to live. As the first North American UNESCO City of Literature and home to the University of Iowa, the city has a vibrant cultural scene and Big 10 athletics.

Learn more at iowacitycohousing.org. Come for a visit. Then join us!





FOUNDATION FOR
INTENTIONAL
COMMUNITY

GROW THE COOPERATIVE CULTURE MOVEMENT

You can help the Foundation for Intentional Community support & promote the development of intentional communities!

JOIN AS A MEMBER - Membership provides financial support for our core programs - Communities Directory, Magazine & Bookstore. Membership options for Individuals, Communities & Organizations. Benefits include access to all past magazine issues & discounts on advertising, subscriptions, & purchases!

MAKE A DONATION - Donations can be made anytime of the year & be any amount. Sign up for our recurring monthly donor program , Giving Hands, for as little as \$5/month to sustain FIC throughout the year!

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY - Name FIC as a beneficiary in your will to pass on your values of cooperation & sustainability. During or after your lifetime, give through investments, retirement accounts, trusts, or life insurance policies.

SHARE AND LEARN - FIC's mission is centered around the sharing of information & resources on cooperative living. Explore our worldwide communities directory & visit our bookstore!

Go to www.ic.org
to build the pathway to a more sustainable & just world.

For more information contact FIC at
development@ic.org or 800-462-8240.



FIC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.



Cohousing provides the
community we need to thrive while
ensuring the privacy we enjoy.

CohoUS is a national non-profit
raising awareness of the benefits
of cohousing and supporting the
development of cohousing
communities nationwide.

We link people with the resources
they need to create and nurture
cohousing communities while
helping them connect and share
with each other.

www.cohousing.org



FOR SALE BY OWNER \$875,000

Discover the most beautiful
100 acre Blue Zone farm.
Visit our website for videos and info.

SIMPLELIVINGBYDESIGN.COM

F FITCH ARCHITECTURE
& COMMUNITY DESIGN
home • community • planet

110 Pulpit Hill Road
Amherst, MA 01002, USA
413-549-5799

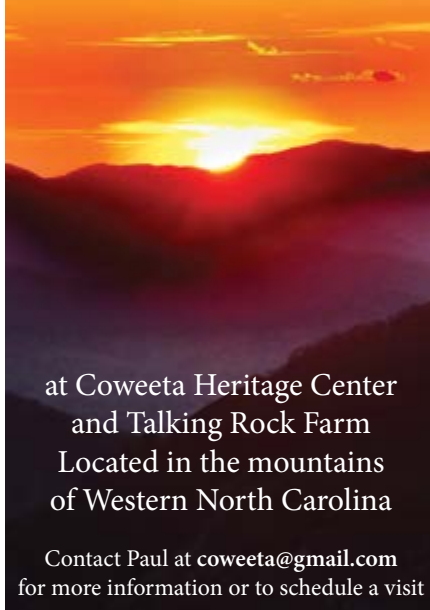
www.facdarchitects.com



ESTABLISHED COHOUSING &
SUSTAINABLE DESIGN PIONEERS
WITH A PROVEN PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

JOIN FORMING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

embracing the principles
of Voluntary Simplicity



at Coweeta Heritage Center
and Talking Rock Farm
Located in the mountains
of Western North Carolina

Contact Paul at coweeta@gmail.com
for more information or to schedule a visit

FIC

Communities Bookstore

Discounted Bundles



Cohousing Essentials
Bundle

\$45 (\$60 value)



Community Starter
Kit Bundle

\$40 (\$60 value)

Find more at
ic.org/bundles



Anchorage, Alaska
New Construction
Only 3 homes left for sale!
www.ravensroostcoho.org



Founded by cohousing development expert

Katie McCamant

Our Services

- Cohousing development consulting
- Guiding communities with Best Practices
- Recognizing each group's unique approach

We can assist you with:

- Site search and evaluation
- Workshops, such as "Getting It Built!"
- Marketing and community building
- Project management
- Budgeting and project financing
- Hiring the right professional consultants
- Finding a developer
- **Making Your Community a Reality!**

info@cohousing-solutions.com | 530.478.1970
www.cohousing-solutions.com

20 private dwellings. Envision a modern three story building with an outdoor courtyard in a rural setting with urban amenities. What if this whole urban village called Geos was powered by solar and ground source energy (net zero), had a community garden and a view of the mountains. Picture being near a creekside bike path with 300 days of sunshine. It heads to both the light rail and open space parks. You unplug your electric car, hop onto I-70 to ski and come home to relax with a glass of wine and dinner with friends. www.ralstoncreekcohousing.org

I HAVE 2.25 ACRES NEAR AMARILLO, TX. I would like to have other folks share my space and create a small community. I have a large mobile home and there is plenty of space for tiny houses, yurts or dome homes. Most of the property is fenced so dogs can run free. There is lots of stuff for art projects. Please email me if interested: barbann3@gmail.com

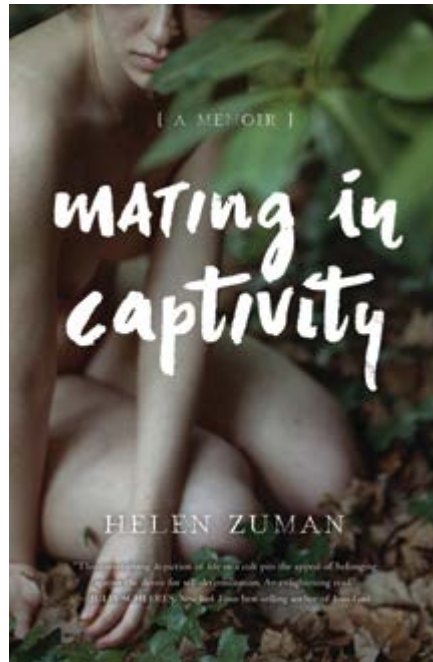
SEEKING COMMUNITY

I WOULD LIKE TO COMBINE RESOURCES WITH OTHER responsible people to acquire a green home, prefer southwest, rural USA location. I have large dogs, interested in yoga, gardening, sustainable lifestyle, spirituality. Contact Barbara, barbann3@gmail.com.

SERVICES/OPPORTUNITIES/ PRODUCTS

ECOLIVING DOMES - LIVING SUSTAINABLY CLOSE TO NATURE! Manufactured in the USA by Pacific Domes since 1980, Ecoliving Dwell Domes have the geodesic-engineered strength to withstand even the most extreme weather conditions -high winds, snow-loads, hurricanes and earthquakes. Their portability and ease-of-assembly makes DIY Dwell Dome shelter kits the preferred choice for off-grid and remote communities. Energy-efficient and cost-effective, free-standing Dwell Domes have many versatile uses. Creating a warm Zen-like ambiance, their Bio-geometric design mimics Nature's harmonic patterns. Be sure to check out our Featured EcoVillages in Dwell Dome News Blogs - kits go up just about anywhere on the planet! Phone: 541-488-7737 www.PacificDomes.com

FITCH ARCHITECTURE & COMMUNITY DESIGN is internationally recognized as one of the most experienced firms in cohousing programming and design. Working with over two dozen communities across North America, we have evolved an effective and enjoyable participatory process. Laura Fitch is a resident of Pioneer Valley Cohousing in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her experience as a member helps her to understand the issues facing other cohousing groups and gives her unique insight into the group dynamics that affect the design process. Laura served on the Cohousing Association of the US board for five years and regularly leads workshops at their conferences. Contact her at 413-549-5799 or www.facdarchitects.com.



“Zendik Farm has long been both mysterious and intriguing.

Helen Zuman has given us her wrenchingly personal and deeply insightful story of her time in this most unusual of communes. Others might see the group and their own experience differently, but few will provide a better-written or more probing account of Zendik.”

—Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*

“Zuman . . . retains her sense of agency (and humor) as she weighs Zendik’s weird creed and power plays against the sense of righteousness and belonging that drew her in.

Her whip-smart prose . . . conveys the squalid exuberance of Zendik’s blend of idealism and fraud [in this] engrossing and offbeat story of ideological bonds that chafe—and sometimes liberate.”

—Kirkus Reviews (*starred review*)

www.helenzuman.com/books



Caddis PC has been designing cohousing, cooperatives, and eco-village communities, both nationally and internationally, for more than a decade. We take a highly adaptive approach to strategy and design: catering our services to your needs.



We can help you with:

- Site selection
- Site planning & development
- Financial modeling
- Sustainability
- Cohousing workshops
- Community engagement
- Consulting
- Graphic design & marketing
- Conceptual design services
- Building great communities

1510 Zamia Ave #103 Boulder, CO 80304
hello@caddispc.com • 303.443.3629
www.caddispc.com

Meet your Eco-Conscious Partner on **green singles®**

www.GreenSingles.com

Give the gift of Community



Virtual Gift Cards
 personalize your message
 customize an image
 send as an email

Available at
ic.org/giftcard

THE ECOVILLAGE INSTITUTE - Want to learn about Organic Farming and Communities? We are offering Organic Farming Internships from May to October. All our programs take place at the heart of our community, La Cite Ecologique of New Hampshire. Learn more at www.citeecologiquenh.org or email info@citeecologiquenh.org.

LIVE-IN OPENINGS: THE LUKAS COMMUNITY seeks compassionate, hard working folks (with or without children) to live with and help care for developmentally challenged residents in extended-family homes and participate in therapeutic programs. Gardens, crafts, animals, expeditions, music, art. Send resume and cover letter to Kristen Stanton, lukas@lukascommunity.org.

MORNINGLAND COMMUNITY IS OFFERING a few Spring/Summer work/study opportunities for those interested in deepening their meditation practice to include contemplative service, puja + study of Bhagavad-Gita + spiritual astrology. Some co-housing available. Our community is offline, digitally unplugged, and a great place to catch your breath. Call 562.433.9906 for more information and to apply. "Simple living and high thinking" - Yogananda. 2600 E. 7th St, Long Beach, CA 90804.

INNISFREE VILLAGE IS SEEKING ONE-YEAR RESIDENTIAL CAREGIVERS to live, work and play in community with 40 adults with disabilities. Experience the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains on our 550-acre farm in Crozet, VA and build lifelong friendships and memories. Together we bake bread, weave scarves, raise chickens and lifeshare! For more information, visit www.innisfreevillage.org/volunteer or email nancy@innisfreevillage.org.

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS

WISDOM OF COMMUNITIES - SINCE 1972, Communities magazine has been collecting and disseminating the lessons learned, and now we've distilled

them into a four-volume book series on the following topics: Starting a Community, Finding a Community, Communication in Community, and Sustainability in Community. With over 300 pages each of hundreds of our best articles, this series is intended to aid community founders, seekers, current communarians, students, and researchers alike in their explorations. Available in print and digital format: www.ic.org/wisdom

BEST OF COMMUNITIES BOOKS - We've distilled the most insightful and helpful articles on the topics that you—our readers—have told us you care about most, and have organized them into 15 scintillating books. Learn about Starting or Visiting a Community, Consensus, Good Meetings, Making Agreements, Solving Conflicts, Cooperative Economics, and more! Available in print and digital format: www.ic.org/best-of-communities

SAGEWOMAN magazine, celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman, still going strong after 30 years. **WITCHES&PAGANS** magazine covers Pagan, Wiccan, Heathen and Polytheist people, places, and practice. 88 pages, print or digital (PDF). Mention this Communities ad for a free sample. 503-430-8817, P O Box 687, Forest Grove, OR, 97116. www.bbimedia.com.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA—Center for Communal Studies (CCS) -The Center for Communal Studies (CCS) was created in 1976 as a clearinghouse for information and a research resource on communal groups worldwide, past and present. Located on the campus of the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville, the Center encourages scholarship, meetings, public understanding and learning about historic and contemporary intentional communities. **ARCHIVAL RESEARCH COLLECTION:** We invite researchers to use the Center's Collection of primary and secondary materials on more than 500 historic and contemporary communes. Our Collection is housed at Rice Library and has over 10,000 images and a reading room with an extensive library. Online resources may be found at www.usi.edu/library/university-archives-and-special-collections. Email

Mountain Meadows
 COMMUNITY North of Downtown
 Green Homes • Healthy Lifestyles

Pavilion

Lots financed by owner
 Green • Organic • Sustainable

Call Bernie 828-230-0755
AshevilleMountainLots.com

the archivist at jagreene@usi.edu for information. REGIONAL RESEARCH: The CCS is part of a rich array of historic communal resources within a 30-mile radius of Evansville that includes the famous Harmonist and Owenite village of New Harmony. New Harmony's Workingmen's Institute Library and the State Museum collection also offer unique research opportunities. PROGRAMS: The CCS sponsors lectures, conferences and exhibits. The Center will sponsor a Communal Studies Minor in the USI College of Liberal Arts beginning fall 2019. WEBSITE: The CCS website (www.usi.edu/liberal-arts/communal-center) serves scholars, students and the interested public. CENTER PRIZES AND RESEARCH TRAVEL GRANT: The CCS annually awards a Prize of \$250 for the Best Undergraduate Student Paper and a Prize of \$500 for the Best Graduate Student Paper on historic or contemporary communal groups, intentional communities, and utopias. Deadline for submission is 1 March. The Center also annually awards a \$2,000 Research Travel Grant to fund research in the Communal Studies Collection. Applications are due by 1 May. LOCATION AND CONTACT: The CCS is located in Room 3022 of Rice Library at the University of Southern Indiana. Evansville has a regional airport with jet service from Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas and elsewhere. You may contact the Center by phone 812/465-1656 or email director Casey Harison at charison@usi.edu.

FREE GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES at Tree Bressen's website: www.treegroup.info. Topics include consensus, facilitation, conflict, community building, alternative meeting formats, etc. Workshop handouts, articles, exercises, and more!

FRIENDS JOURNAL is a monthly Quaker magazine for spiritual seekers. Our mission is to communicate the Quaker experience in order to deepen spiritual lives. Read Friends Journal in print and online. Watch short interviews with modern Friends at QuakerSpeak.com. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter and receive Quaker stories, inspiration, and news emailed every Monday. Thank you for reading!

GRIEF TO GRATITUDE

Uplifting resources that heal the suffering from traumatic losses.

griefftogratitude.net



Eugene's 1st Cohousing Community
Now Building!! Filling Up Fast!!

COME HOME TO EUGENE - The City of Arts & the Great Outdoors!



Eugene's ideal location offers:

- Biking & hiking along mountain, lake, or river trails, in town or beyond
- Exploration of the Oregon coast an hour away
- University of Oregon & community & private colleges
- Fantastic organic farms, wineries & breweries
- Enjoy the arts in venues large or small

Privately owned homes with shared gardens & common house in a multigenerational neighborhood with easy access to public transit.

www.oakleighmeadow.org • 541-357-8303



**STOP working for money.
Walk away from the rat race...
...and work for Love instead,
in a growing Christian community!**



Go to:
youtube.com/AVoiceInTheDesert
and search for:
Happily Homelives





Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage
Live lightly.



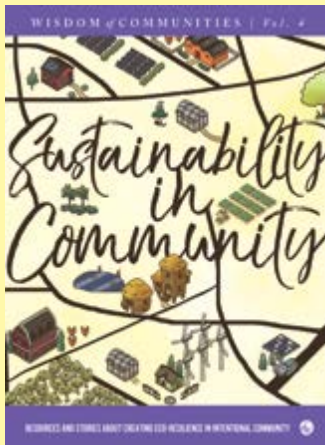
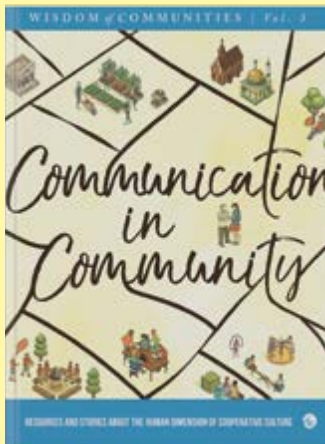
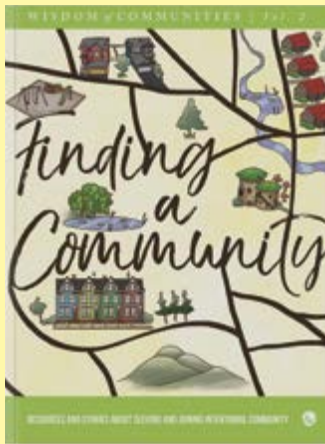
**COME LEARN HOW TO LIVE LIGHTLY,
AND BE PART OF THE SOLUTION!**

Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage is an intentional community and educational non-profit focused on living, researching, and demonstrating sustainable living possibilities.



Rutledge, Missouri • dancingrabbit@ic.org • 660-883-5511

www.DancingRabbit.org



A MAJOR NEW BOOK SERIES FROM THE
FOUNDATION FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY...

Wisdom of Communities

Each 8½"x11" book features between 300 and 400 pages of topical articles drawn mostly from COMMUNITIES magazine, intended to aid community founders, seekers, current communitarians, and students of intentional community in their explorations.

Volume 1, *Starting a Community: Resources and Stories about Creating and Exploring Intentional Community* includes both general articles and on-the-ground stories from intentional community founders and other catalysts of cooperative efforts.

Volume 2, *Finding a Community: Resources and Stories about Seeking and Joining Intentional Community* shares authors' experiences, tools, advice, and perspectives relevant to anyone searching for an intentional community to visit or to live in.

Volume 3, *Communication in Community: Resources and Stories about the Human Dimension of Cooperative Culture* includes articles about decision-making, governance, power, gender, class, race, relationships, intimacy, politics, and neighbor relations in cooperative group culture.

Volume 4, *Sustainability in Community: Resources and Stories about Creating Eco-Resilience in Intentional Community* focuses on food, water, permaculture, shelter, energy, ecological footprint, ecovillage design, eco-education, and resilience in cooperative culture.

Volumes 1 and 2 meet the need for one-stop collections of stories to help founders and seekers. Volumes 3 and 4 are primers on the variety of "soft" and "hard" skills and approaches that allow intentional communities and their members to endure, evolve, and thrive.

These books should broaden anyone's outlook on what is possible, how to pursue their dreams of community, and how to make their own lives and their communities models for a more cooperative, resilient culture—one that draws from the past while working toward a better future.

To order, please visit ic.org/wisdom



GIVING HANDS is a new monthly gift program to support the sharing and discovery of intentional living.



The Foundation for Intentional Community was awarded a challenge grant from the Fund for Democratic Communities as an incentive to build a recurring and sustaining donor program.

Why? This monthly giving circle of committed friends will provide financial stability and sustenance throughout the year so FIC can continue to be the world's #1 resource on cooperative culture, while providing affordable and flexible donation options.



Donate a monthly amount of \$5, \$10, \$25, or more to build a sound foundation and future for FIC!

Enroll in GIVING HANDS today!

Go to www.ic.org/giving-hands to enroll online. Email development@ic.org or call (800) 462-8240 to have an enrollment form sent to you.



The Foundation for Intentional Community is grateful for the 60 donors who enrolled in Giving Hands on June 1 to September 1, resulting in a \$6,000 grant from the Fund for Democratic Communities.

The Giving Hands monthly giving program accepts credit cards and is compatible with Paypal for withdrawals from checking or savings accounts. Enrollment is intended for 12 months or more; however, you can cancel your enrollment at anytime.

The Foundation for Intentional Community (formerly the Fellowship for Intentional Community) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.



FIC is grateful for the grant support of the:



Efficiency vs. Humanity

At Maitreya Mountain Village, we embrace the practice of a weekly meeting to check in with roles, tasks, community connection, and individual expression. It's called Heart Club. This, mostly, goes quite smoothly, yet...cooperative culture can have its snags, right?

For example, one evening we went around for about a half hour in regards to where the new compost bins should go. The debate was between one spot and another about eight feet away. The dialogue dragged on. And on. The conversation had transformed itself into one where a particular member "did not feel heard." After a half hour, I began losing patience. My toes tapped the floor. A little exasperated, I briefly thought to myself that we were here (at the meeting and project site in general) for rational and efficient coordinated decision making.

But maybe not?

I took a deep breath. One of our members was out of sorts, which was begging the question: what are we *really* here for? Hmm... Are someone's feelings more important than efficient business?

Yes.

This wasn't always (and, admittedly, sometimes still isn't) the case for me and I think my brain got wired, over decades, to communicate and manage life towards efficiency. But now I believe that re-prioritizing—by attending to a member's disconnect—is a valuable shift. It's a paradigm shift and a healing thing.

It heals because, I believe, it is a reparation for our deranged unnatural western cultural values. We were born into a world not conducive to healthy, happy people who feel secure and heard. Look around. I don't have to prove it with statistics, but I could.

Americans as a whole have little, if any, connection to the land, their food supply, nor any semblance of tribe. These connections are so fundamental to the human condition that without them, we are always lost, wandering, and vulnerable to distractions and drama of many kinds. It becomes quite easy to indoctrinate a human into loving stuff, money, business, and such trivial ideas as...efficiency.

For indigenous peoples (and land-based cultures), each person has an unshakably clear life-purpose; each person lives inseparably from the earth. They know it like a fish knows water. If you were to ask the tribesman about it, they might respond similarly to a fish asked about water. What water?

Maitreya Mountain Village exists to unlearn what we have learned and to relearn what we require to make sustainable living possible: the values of connection to plant, animal, and human—Life. And it starts with things like rethinking old priorities and listening to someone who doesn't feel heard.

Plato was probably right (from an efficiency perspective) that the best form of government is the benevolent dictator. Probably, usually, very efficient. In the final analysis, I'll take the sometimes frustrating drawbacks of the cooperative model. It's like what they say about democracy: it's the worst form of government—except for all the other kinds. 🐝

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



WORK EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES

Organic Farming Internship

Ready to get your hands dirty?
Passionate about organic farming?

Our farm will be delighted to guide newcomers in the discovery of organic farming or to share with more experienced fellows the joys and techniques of our work.

Interns at the farm will take part in our Organic Farming Program that gives the basics of organic agriculture and sustainable practices, suitable for aspiring future farmers, backyard gardeners or any person interested in learning about the subject.

(From May to October)

Visit our website or contact us
for more information



É la Cité
Ecologique
of New Hampshire
An Ecovillage since 2003

www.citeecologiquenh.org - info@citeecologiquenh.org



FOUNDATION FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY



COMMUNITIES:

Life in Cooperative Culture

1 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Box 23

Rutledge MO 63563

Subscriptions - 4 issues:

\$25 US, \$35 International

ic.org/communities



GROW THE COOPERATIVE CULTURE MOVEMENT

You can help the Foundation for Intentional Community support & promote the development of intentional communities!

JOIN AS A MEMBER - Membership provides financial support for our core programs - Communities Directory, Magazine, & Bookstore. Membership options for Individuals, Communities, & Organizations. Benefits include access to all past magazine issues & discounts on advertising, subscriptions, & purchases!

MAKE A DONATION - Donations can be made anytime of the year & be any amount. Sign up for our recurring monthly donor program , Giving Hands, for as little as \$5/month to sustain FIC throughout the year!

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY - Name FIC as a beneficiary in your will to pass on your values of cooperation & sustainability. During or after your lifetime, give through investments, retirement accounts, trusts, or life insurance policies.

SHARE AND LEARN - FIC's mission is centered around the sharing of information & resources on cooperative living. Explore our worldwide communities directory & visit our bookstore!

Go to www.ic.org to build the pathway to a more sustainable & just world.

For more information contact FIC at development@ic.org or 800-462-8240.



FIC is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

