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Communities

Life in Cooperative Culture

Summer 2021 • Issue #191

Ecological Culture

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Speaking of Ecological Culture

Imagine a language in which the verb "to be" does not exist—because "being" is the underlying assumption, the preexisting "given" throughout the language. Instead, foundational verbs exist for "doing/making," "coming/becoming," "going," "seeing," "giving," and other actions, often combined with additional words to create other meanings.

In this world, "thinking" and "feeling" are indistinguishable, represented by a single word. No separation exists between those two functions. Nor is there a difference between "to want" and "to need."

The same verb is used for "living," "inhabiting" (a place), and having human kin; our relationships to place and to relatives are indistinguishable from our relationships to life and time.

"Masculine" and "feminine" are not differentiated either in third-person pronouns or in most nouns. Instead, "personhood" vs. "nonpersonhood" is the main available distinction, with personhood and volition granted to not only people but also other animals, plants, places, natural phenomena, anything with which one has an intimate connection.

In this world, past, present, and future are less important to distinguish—no verb tenses exist to limit the speaker or writer to one of those three choices, though other words are available to specify time when that is important. It often isn't.

Abstract concepts are given little attention in this language. Daily activities, natural phenomena, interrelationships, and the living world predominate.

The world just described is the one I stepped into last fall when I started studying Chinuk Wawa, the Native American trade language of the Pacific Northwest, via a highly interactive Zoom class. Since then, that class and creating this magazine have been my main outside activities while in a prolonged pandemic lockdown of sorts, with family but away from my home community.

Through this process I've come to appreciate both of these languages more than I had before. I appreciate Chinuk Wawa for all the reasons outlined above. It is simple, poetic, to the point, and seems a much more direct path to unencumbered wisdom, to "right relationship" within ourselves, with one another, within the world. It embodies insights and understandings that the English language by its very nature and habitual usage often stifles—unconsciously even when not consciously.

At the same time, English contains, by one estimate, one million words; in Chinuk Wawa, a few thousand (including combining forms) currently exist. The range of nuance, flavor, particularity, the tiny differences that a writer of English can create by switching even a single word for one of its many subtly-differing synonyms, or by fiddling with punctuation and word order in the ways an editor is wont to do, is, to put it plainly, amazing. If English is in some ways a prison because of the assumptions embedded in it by conventional usage in the nonindigenous societies which have created and employed it, it also contains within itself an abundance of tools with which to subvert it, to shake it and us out of that prison. The power of poetry often derives from this shaking-of-assumptions, a transcendence of prosaic reality made possible by the language's cornucopia of words (coming from many other languages) and the nearly endless ways in which to use them. In fact, my second-term Chinuk Wawa final project was translating 25 songs which used English precisely in this way—questioning prosaic cultural reality—into Chinuk Wawa. I found the translation surprisingly natural.

This magazine is full of words, almost all of them English. Yet I hope they, too, shake readers out of conventional assumptions, cause a questioning and rethinking of worldview and practice. Many readers are already well along this path—the suggestions and stories in these articles will not be strange or shocking. Yet I hope each story contains at least something that is new, inspiring, educational, insight-provoking, challenging, and/or affirming for every reader.

"Ecological Culture" has not been our dominant language. Yet many are learning to speak it, and hopefully live it once again—to the degree that is and will be possible. It needs to be a collective effort to have any chance of success.

As with our last issue, we received such an abundance of material for this issue that we created a digital supplement to the print edition—pages which also appear in the full digital version. We are offering free downloads[1] of that separate supplement to anyone, subscriber or not. We hope you'll help us spread word about it to others who would benefit from it and who may then want to seek out our full editions. Subscriptions[2] and donations[3] continue to be our main sources of funding; both are essential to our continued existence. Thank you to all who've contributed.

Another way you can support us is by supporting our advertisers and letting them know you heard about them from us. (I for one am a longtime satisfied customer of our back-cover advertiser, by far the most "green" roadside assistance service around—for bikes as well as cars—and was thrilled to learn they'd be doing a trial advertisement with us; you can keep them coming back by signing up too.) Likewise, other groups and individuals place ads with us because they know they'll find values-aligned readers here; please let them know that is the case!

Finally, thank you for joining us again. We always welcome feedback, as well as your own submissions[4] of articles, poetry, photography, artwork. ❧

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES.

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ON THE COVER

Students from our EcoVillage Ithaca's Eco-Gap program work with Ithaca College students in West Haven Farm's greenhouse, Fall 2018. Photo by Liz Walker.

COMMUNITIES
Life in Cooperative Culture

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Where a Dog Sniffs First

I enjoyed reading the new issue of COMMUNITIES. In "Testing the Faith: Notes to and from the Editor," I suffered with the writer as he approached the "aha" moment leading up to the 24-hour notice and a red flag.

As I look way back on my youthful courting days, it's not always clear who was the (perhaps) sexual harrasser and who was the harrassed, e.g., who was working the most fervently to get into the other's pants and who would get the most blame in front of the Amish Mennonite congregation should the event in the backseat of the buggy result in the production of still another Christian!

It's important to be kind to yourself and others. One time at about age five, six, or seven I called my cousin Jack an asshole in front of my Dad (Jack's uncle). Dad smiled at me and said, "Rogie, a dog always sniffs his own asshole first." "What's that mean, Dad?" It means: "It takes one to know one."

On the way toward getting my PhD in psychology I learned the concept of projection already well understood by my seventh-grade-educated Dad!! He also taught me to be careful when dealing with self-righteous folks.

Keep up the good work,

Roger Ulrich
Lake Village Homestead
Kalamazoo, Michigan

"Sharp Rocks" and Structural Conflict

The "Sharp Rocks" article by an anonymous author I'll call A. (COMMUNITIES #190, Spring 2021), about an urban community of shared group houses on adjacent lots, with some houses owned by community members and everyone else renting, illuminated two painful, exhausting examples of structural conflict when well-intentioned founders don't know much about community.

In *Creating a Life Together* I coined the term "structural conflict": conflict that *looks* like interpersonal conflict but arises because the founders don't include crucial aspects of successful community early on. These are: (1) a clear, unambiguous statement for the community's mission and purpose; (2) a clear, fair, participatory self-governance and decision-making method; (3) one or more legal entities for co-owning and/or co-controlling land and property and/or owning educational or other organizations; (4) effective communication and conflict-resolution skills; (5) enough "community glue" with shared, enjoyable activities; (6) fair, shared, equitable financial arrangements for owning or renting property; and (7) clear agreements in writing (with ways to help people stay accountable to them), *including when there are both owners and renters*.

The first egregious, totally preventable problem was when A.—with great difficulty, and asked to do so *by the community* for its long-term benefit—bought one of the houses. The group assumed that because they were a *community*, and because renters contributed funds

toward and hosted a fundraiser to pay the mortgage, *everyone in the community* owned the house, which of course wasn't true. The group's unwritten, nonspecific "agreement" about this meant one thing to A., who had a good deal of legal and financial savvy, and quite another to the well-meaning renters.

When A. asked renters and other owners to share the labor and financial responsibilities of home ownership in their "community" residence, they often refused, with a "How dare you ask this of us?!" attitude.

It's *so* easy for owners and renters in community to prevent this kind of awful conflict. They could have created a clear, legally viable agreement (ideally a notarized contract) which clearly spelled out the rights and responsibilities of A. as a homeowner (including rights and responsibilities A. explicitly *didn't* have), and rights and responsibilities of renters (and A. as owner explicitly *didn't* have).

In my article, "Reducing Conflict with a 'Rights of Renters and Owners Agreement'" (Communities #185, Winter 2019), I offered to send readers handouts on how to create this kind of agreement. I'm happy to send these again; just email diana@ic.org.

A.'s community gradually foundered on the "sharp rocks" of misunderstanding, suspicion, presuming one another's motives, harsh words, demoralization, and finally outright hatred, threats, and vengeance.

Which brings up A.'s responses to how the other members behaved. On one hand, the group suffered from the lack of realistic knowledge about the financial and legal realities of shared home-ownership, and the appallingly ignorant and magical-thinking aspects of the original arrangement. On the other hand, A. apparently felt so frustrated and crazed by the group's ignorance and lack of support that, A. wrote, "I could be sharp, dismissive, and arrogant." And, "I was easily frustrated at our ability to get things done as a group, and so occasionally would take unilateral action that gradually eroded other people's trust in me." For example, A. didn't check with everyone before evicting a renter with whom A. had had difficulty. When others learned about the planned eviction "they exploded in an uproar."

No wonder the others reacted with fear and hostility. A. flagrantly violated the community's agreement to first get everyone's explicit permission before doing anything that could negatively affect anyone else.

A.'s story demonstrates two crucial misconceptions about community. People didn't realize they needed fair, clear, written agreements, if not legal contracts. A. didn't realize that, when living in community, behaving arrogantly and unilaterally when extremely frustrated—*as one might reasonably do in mainstream culture*—essentially doesn't work in community and just adds fuel to the fire.

Everyone's misinformation triggered structural conflict, triggering inflammatory words and actions, leading to an impossible situation with near-irreversible conflict. So A. did the only thing they could have done and left the community.

I found A.'s "Sharp Rocks" article heartbreaking. And its conflict so preventable.

Diana Leafe Christian
Asheville, North Carolina

Diana is a trainer of sociocracy, a self-governance and decision-making method she recommends for communities, and author of Creating a Life Together*, which specifically addresses preventing structural conflict.*

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue,
as well as letters of more general interest.
Please send your comments to *editor@gen-us.net* or
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Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

Diana Leafe Christian
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—Chris Herndon, Life Coach, Irvine, California. Sociocracy webinar, Oct-Dec, 2020

"Learning sociocracy from Diana has easily been the biggest catalyst in helping our community thrive."
—Jordan Lindsay, Teal House, Calgary. Sociocracy Webinar, Jan-March, 2020

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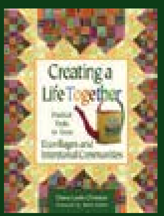

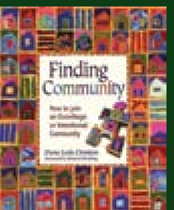

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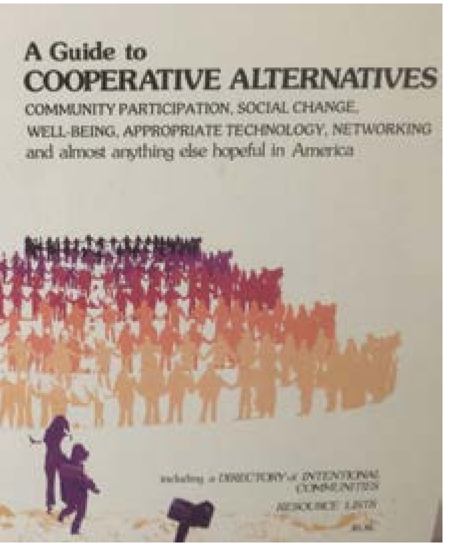
Views from Our Partners BY PAUL FREUNDLICH

Exploring Cooperative Futures



Four-plus decades ago, Mikki and Chip from Twin Oaks, Chris and I from New Haven, were the collaborative that published Communities. In 1979, we took a leap of imagination and created *A Guide to Cooperative Alternatives*. With 10,000 copies sold, an enthusiastic review in the *Washington Post* ("as you enter the '80s...a valuable resource"), and sections on housing, food, work, etc., we felt it did a decent job of presenting the state of the cooperative arts, and taking off from the *Whole Earth Catalog*, it presented resources available to greet the dawn of a new age.

Well, it didn't quite work out that way. The new day was shrouded in the mists of Reaganesque nostalgia, intent on rolling back the social gains of the New Deal, much less advancing a modern, progressive agenda. Nevertheless, a dedicated crew of activists and fellow travelers has persevered both in carving out a healthy way of life supported by a mix of creative institutions, and in challenging a status quo that is fundamentally unsustainable.

My own perspective on that process has been informed by three initiatives I helped found and lead in the '80s: Dance New England, Co-op America (renamed "Green America"), and the CERES Coalition. So many of our inventions have fallen by the wayside, perhaps there's something to be learned from those which, decades later, are still healthy and productive. If so, in this piece and others to follow I will be building on a base we recognized in '79 with our *Guide*, as well as a host of observations gathered with friends and colleagues.

A Middle Path

Many of us who identify as members of communities have been steering a middle course, maintaining connection with deeply flawed societies while maturing our own values in communities of choice. No easy task, but it has a two-way advantage worth exploring: In one direction, communities and their members have access through the wider society to an amazing variety of tools which enhance and lengthen lives. In the other direction, communities and their members offer the mainstream a set of provocative experiments, and at least the illusion of helping steer the ship in a more sustainable direction.

Is there hope? The evidence that we live in a creative universe is overwhelming. On at least this small planet, every living entity is inspired to reproduce. Mutations that improve the odds of survival become part of species and planetary DNA, providing a creativity that has taken many forms along an evolutionary road to consciousness and greater complexity.

Beyond the individual, there are interdependencies we take for granted—family, tribe, community. Sunlight nurtures plants whose composted leaves make the earth fertile. A shepherd dog helps the keeper mind the flock. Cooperation and its hand-

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 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.

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To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines; email editor@gen-us.net. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email layout@gen-us.net. Both are also available online at gen-us.net/communities.

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What is an "Intentional Community"?

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

maid, community, have served humanity well from the dawning of consciousness. It is native to life on this planet. Ants do it. Elephants do it. There is even evidence that cooperation gave Homo sapiens an organizing edge over Neanderthals.

A serious observer, God, if you prefer, might have noted the human species' adaptation of tools, fire to fend off the night and provide warmth, worship to placate the forces of nature, were artifacts of creativity which could be equally applied to cooperation or exploitation. Even now, the celestial music of Bach and Mozart is beaming outward to delight or mystify whoever might be listening, right along with images of racism and genocide.

The choice between exploitation and cooperation is as old as the hills, touches every human endeavor and relationship, and is often a matter of perspective. Does competition move us toward excellence? Is the food chain an example of planetary collaboration? One could say that "community" is one of the most misapplied words in the English language. Yet even in unlikely venues—*hosts* of bankers, *Chambers* of Commerce, *legions* of soldiers—it expresses a yearning for connection beyond a Darwinian slugfest for survival.

The assumption of competition as civilization's dominant operating mode in a global, free-market economy, driven by unlimited exploitation of natural resources and accepting of disparities, is in question. In the world we inhabit, as the glaciers melt and the forests burn, our tenure as the dominant species is at climate risk. In a movie, *The Happening*, trees, evidently tiring of human assaults on ecology, release a toxin that drives us to suicide. Who knows what universal motivation possessed adventurous microbes to unleash the latest killer disease? Is an angry Gaia bent on reducing human population to a sustainable norm?

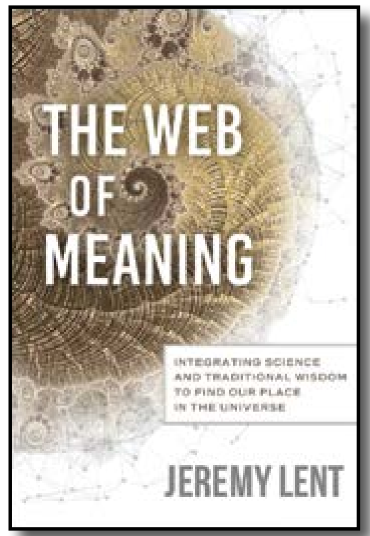
Carl Jung posited a sort of mass consciousness where repose the deepest fears and hopes of totemic humanity. Think of an entity composed of the collective unconscious, operating without personality, yet exerting its subtle force on our actions. In these chaotic and dangerous times, we need all the help we can get. I suggest there resides a collective and sometimes conscious conviction of our connection and united purpose. Even as earnest administrators search for pragmatic solutions, and prayers waft up to heaven, we could do worse than to tap the often buried mutual benefit that binds us together.

This can be a time for a better understanding of why community matters in our lives: *outreach* to show others what healthy cooperation can bring; *inreach* to better connect with our personal needs.

To confront the pandemic killing fields of COVID-19, the recognition of inherent disparities and injustice through Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, the rabid dysfunction of the recent presidency, and the seemingly inevitable march of climate catastrophes, there is both room and necessity to explore what can be applied from the experience of community, intentionality, and cooperation. ❧

Part Two (see pages 77-79 in this issue's digital edition, reproduced also in the digital supplement) shares specific examples that demonstrate what is possible as we reinvent and repurpose society to embody cooperative values.

Paul Freundlich has been an active participant and creator in the development of cooperative, communitarian, and sustainable alternatives for 60 years. Highlights include filmmaking around the world for the Peace Corps in the '60s; participating in the building of a network of alternative institutions in New Haven and editing of Communities *in the '70s; founding both Co-op America and Dance New England in the '80s; in the '90s, helping guide the CERES Coalition as a Board Member; in the 2000s, Chair of the Stakeholder Council of the Global Reporting Initiative; in the '10s, on the Managing Board of a long-term homeplace for communitarian ventures, and continuing on the Board of Green America as President Emeritus. Paul has authored dozens of films, videos, articles, and other writing. He lives in Connecticut with his wife, Margaret Flinter; both of them commune with a wide range of friends and colleagues via Zoom (for now).*



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Attending to "Essentials": Life at Suderbyn Ecovillage

By Abdul Otman

Since the beginning of October 2019, I have lived in Suderbyn, an ecovillage in Sweden. What follows is a snapshot of my first days here, adapted from a blog post (see *byrslf.co/a-story-about-the-community-essentials-fe9afe55f68d*).

On my first night at Suderbyn, I set out to my room to start unpacking and then getting to bed.

Little did I know that a new friend was waiting for me on the bedsheets—well, on my stuff actually. Me, I was happy to get some "company." Petting the cat, Tussebul, has become my evening ritual. I always leave my room open during the day, and as soon as I leave for breakfast, she sneaks into my room.

It's 7:30, and a few community members are already here. Kamu is preparing the Morning Porridge (MoPo). Laura is brewing some tea. Thia is making a fruit mix. Me, I hope that the shower is free. And yes it is! Nothing much to say, except that only 100 percent organic and biodegradable products are to be used since everything goes into the groundwater which is our drinking water source. It is treated through filters that are not made to process complex chemicals. As are many places here, the shower area is filled with small funny notes and tips. I always feel like going through a tutorial, or in a game where there's a wise voice guiding you, nudging you.

Breakfast time! It starts with a round table of sharing. How do you feel today? Are you full of energy or the opposite? Any feedback on yesterday? All of this while you can enjoy your hot MoPo (remember: Morning Porridge), fruit salad, and a lot of nice things. As we live closely together as a community, I find it a good way to express your status and your needs for today. Maybe you need space or support, maybe you are at 200 percent and eager to release some steam. All of this is useful to help each other and avoid unsaid things that can generate passive aggressivity. It also helps to know that when somebody is grumpy talking to you today, it's not personal. Stuff is going on and there's a need to figure it out. Usually, smiles and hugs are a go-to recipe.

Then it's the day planning. Everybody with an ongoing project shares his/her priorities for the day, the number of people needed. No skills are specified, as every activity is regarded as a sharing and teaching opportunity. So everything is open even for newbies. Everything is shared on the whiteboard in the dining room. It's concise, graphic even (especially for the Garden team!).

Mornings are dedicated to fields of activity:

• Practical Innovations and Building: ecological construction, maintenance and renovation, building with strawbale and earth, clay plastering, wood construction, drystone masonry, ecological painting, etc.

• Organic/Permaculture Gardening: garden planning, mulching, planting, forestry, harvesting, use and maintenance of garden tools, composting, greenhouse management, foraging, etc.

• Networking, Outreach, and External Project Management: this needs a full article. Have a look at www.suderbyn.se/relearns-projects.html.

• Office, Social Innovations, Administration, and Internal Project Management: our team-building events, the needed internal management of salaries and invoices, meetings and studies on our community.

• Social space: dedicated to meetings and various events (food policy, movie time, birthdays).

Besides those fields, there are "Essentials" domains—needed for the basic functioning of the community:

• MoPo (Morning Porridge! I won't repeat it anymore)

• Bread: we make our own bread

• Oatmilk: we soak oats in water for a long time, making our vegan milk. The

residue is called Okara, a basis for our biscuits and cakes.

• Toilet cleaning: we got two outdoors dry toilets for #1 and #2. Well, it's recommended to pee outside to close the loop. But far from our water supply. Poo is composted for one to two years before being used in the garden.

• Kitchen Angel: every day there's a team of Masterchefs. They prepare lunch for everybody during the morning. Yes. For 20+ people. So, of course, it's a little hard afterward to handle all the dishwashing and cleaning. That's where the Kitchen Angel comes in.

• Tommy's Feeding and Harvesting: Tommy is a ferocious pet. It eats all our leftovers, regardless of the quantity we give him. Tommy is a really good boy. So that's the feeding part. Harvesting Tommy is pretty easy: after he's done eating he's gonna fart and burp some methane that we harvest into a gas tank. This is then used for cooking. Another loop closed.

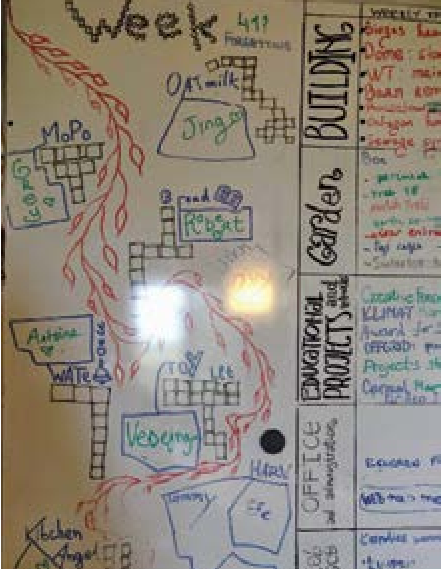
After going through all of today's actions, it's time for the task distribution. Another round table where everybody shares their day's schedule, where are they going to contribute. We can there detect where additional help is needed, what field is crowded, what are the interests of everybody. It's also a nice moment to propose a newcomer to do a task jointly, to gain expertise and ensure that teachings are correctly shared. Nothing is funnier than a Toilet Cleaning duo to keep our knowledge alive.

Exercise is good to warm up and tackle the cold. These first days we were pretty lucky: sunny days, not much wind. Then it's work until lunchtime, around 1 pm.

Lunchtiiiiiiime! The first bell rings 15 minutes before lunch, for everybody to get ready and finish their work. The lucky bellringer walks around the village bringing the happy news. Meanwhile, the Masterchefs finish their cuisine. Prepare the dining room, and welcome the most hungry ones by inviting them to a dishwashing workshop. Then it's time for the FOOOOOOD PRESENTATION! You can always expect the hungry ones screaming it to speed up the process. The chefs then present their dishes, the ingredients used, a little history of its background. And voilà!

The greatest thing is that most of what's cooked is fresh. When I say fresh I mean "It was harvested 10 minutes ago" fresh. You can't compete with that. I didn't see all of our resources at this particular meal but we have cabbages, onions, carrots, beetroots, potatoes, tomatoes, (Bruxelles)sprouts, cucumber, celery…

If somebody is away or knows that he or she will be late for lunch, they can always request a reserved plate so that they can eat later. That's why we find in the fridge plates stacked on one another with names written on them. Eating another's plate is analogous to a diplomatic incident. I haven't witnessed one yet though. But hearing about how close we came to WWIII when Sarah's plate *disappeared*, I think that's for the best. Really.



Photos courtesy of Abdul Otman

Afternoons encompass various activities from meetings to workshops, without forgetting naps. (I will write about these at another time.)

Essentials represent a key aspect of living in our Community, on different layers. First, they are the **vital basis of our healthy Community life**. Focusing on these pillars ensures that we can have a nice day without any specific constraint. As long as the work is done we can do whatever we want through the day. Work on projects, take time off for yourself, relax. Of course, I'm simplifying, as we still need project work to ensure garden health, administrative tasks, but you get the point.

Secondly, **Essentials anchor us more to our physical needs and their sustainability**. Let me tell you that when you cook lunch for 25–30 hungry people you understand the scale needed to sustain such a community. When I went to harvest something like 30 carrots, 15 onions, 30 tomatoes, several celeries, etc. it felt as if I was severely depleting the field. Nonetheless, we picked the ripest ones that would otherwise soon go bad, we harvested leaves in a way that ensured better growth for the plant, took the chance to free more fertile space for young sprouts. Mindful harvesting.

Furthermore, I started to wonder about the relationship between fertile surface, effective agricultural use, and their relationship to our volume of consumption. According to the Global Footprint Network (footprintnetwork.org) and their footprint analysis, we need on average 2.2 hectares of productive land to provide one person with food, water, energy, settlement. This number skyrockets to **8.1** for the US. I will study this challenge a little more and analyze our methods here at Suderbyn.

Then, of course, Essentials' work highlights an aspect of the regenerative cycle that we strive to build here. Building compost with toilet waste, generating biogas with our food waste, harvesting mindfully, cooking seasonal vegetables, etc.

Finally, it is a reminder that **Community life isn't magic**. Only focusing on physical needs (I'll write more on mental and spiritual ones), it already takes work and dedication from its members. It needs regular care in order to keep it healthy, alive, and welcoming. Then again, **it totally feels like magic**. At each Lunch presentation we are filled with gratitude towards our Masterchefs and their surprising dishes. Each slice of homemade bread is an example of a touching contribution.

Every morning MoPo is a reminder that someone woke up early especially to prepare our breakfast. And that ties us more together.

Community life is building something more than the sum of our parts. That's what I see through our Essentials' contributions and every opportunity to contribute.

Days go by, keeping us pretty busy throughout the day. So many activities to get involved in. And since I'm kind of a Yes-Man I tend to experience a lot of things in this short time. Because living in a community offers many opportunities to contribute, to have fun, and to know better our community members.

When the evening comes and I go back to my room, there's always that little fella waiting… ❧

Born in Libya, raised in France, Abdul Otman initially joined Suderbyn Ecovillage as a European Solidarity Corps Volunteer. He is now a committed resident working to be an agent of change. Recently elected chairperson of Baltic Ecovillage Network and Council Member of Global Ecovillage Network Europe, he holds an engineering degree in Digital Technologies and a Masters of Science in Information and Communication Technologies. He brings his IT background and extensive team-building experience to his work at Suderbyn. For one of his more recent blogposts related to our theme, see "More Green than Red, a Fair Christmas story" at byrslf.co/fair-christmas-fair-sustainability-workshops-8887e8c1f8aa.

The Greening of Heartwood Cohousing

By Richard Grossman

Our Vision: To create and live in a community that fosters harmony with each other, the larger community, and Nature.

One of our Values: **Stewardship.** We live gently on the Earth. We are thankful for Nature's resources, being conscious to take good care of them and use them efficiently.

The last time I felt sinking sadness about my community was when someone made a proposal at an early retreat that would help us become more in tune with our environment. Another member piped up, "But we're not an ecovillage!" I realized that I needed to tread lightly in trying to be more ecological.

Many years later we discussed changing the community's name from Heartwood Cohousing to...well, we didn't know what. There are many possibilities, but one that was discarded was "Heartwood Ecovillage." We still aren't willing to call ourselves that, although we are decreasing our use of Earth's resources. The very fact that someone suggested, and we considered, the word "ecovillage" suggests that we are making progress.

As with any group of people, members here have different areas of concern and different gifts. Some Heartwoodies are indifferent to the fields, while others spend hours tending crops. Some of us are frightened by the threat of climate chaos and overpopulation while others are less anxious. Unfortunately, we also have financial diversity so it is necessary to keep the homeowners' dues as low as possible.

My guess is that finances are the chief reason that people don't want to become more environmentally friendly. Or perhaps the chief reason is that many of us are over 50 and set in our ways, even though we realize the importance of decreasing our footprints. Making progress slowly has been important; so has doing it with voluntary funding.

People join intentional communities for different reasons. My reasons included that I wanted to live more efficiently, in a smaller, more energy-efficient home. I guess I have some hippie blood in me because I loved the land where Heartwood Cohousing would grow when I first walked on it.

Most of us living here grew up in cities and had no idea what to do to improve the barren fields below the irrigation ditch. The piñon-juniper and ponderosa pine forest would need a little care. However, what should have been the most fertile part of our property had been abandoned to weeds for so long that it was difficult to imagine lush hay fields and pasture there. It took a couple of people with knowledge and skill to make that transformation happen. And lots of labor and some money.

We had some help. A friend of Heartwood gave us a large dome greenhouse. The federal government gave us money for a high tunnel. Master scroungers found windows and doors to build a long, south-facing "growhole" seedling house. We ended up a productive farm with oodles of willing farm interns. Unfortunately, the county didn't like the housing arrangements for these volunteers, so recently the growers are mainly Heartwood members. Although Heartwood Farms shrank without the interns, it still prospered so we could still eat fresh produce from our land. Different years had different arrangements, but the Garden and Greenhouse Team and the Pasture Team always managed to be productive. Did I mention that, in addition to gardens, we have horses, beef cattle, and llamas, all owned by individuals, on the pastures? There are also 11 hens living in the "chicken palace," and sometimes pigs in their own pen, far from the homes. We get fruit from a small apple orchard.

And oh, I almost forgot the organic hemp plants that some members grow for their CBD oil.

What about our homes? They are all built to be environmentally friendly. Ten of our 24 homes are duplexes (semi-detached homes), which are more efficient than single family homes. Because we have two guest rooms in our large and beautiful common house, the homes can be smaller. How are they built? Ten of the homes use alternative building techniques, including strawbale and strawclay and even pumice-crete. The other 14 are very efficient "stick built," carefully sited for solar gain and designed for efficiency.

How can we have a smaller footprint? One member has kept a little store stocked with some staple foods so we don't have to run to town to buy a dozen eggs or a pound of butter. This store is also where members sell the produce that is grown just down the hill, on the irrigated land or in the high tunnel greenhouse.

We also grow much of our own energy. We have four privately owned solar-thermal arrays and four photovoltaic arrays. Our Renewable Energy Fund (REF) has paid for two large projects. This Fund collects voluntary contributions from Heartwood members who are encouraged to offset their carbon footprints with donations. Some people give on a monthly basis, but we requested and received special one-time donations for these big projects.

Although we live in the high desert near Durango, Colorado, and we're in a severe drought, we produce enough potable water to meet our needs from our five wells. We are fortunate to have a resident who is licensed to care for this valuable resource. In much of the American Southwest the rain isn't dependable enough to grow crops. Some places are able to use water that starts as snow in the mountains, is held in reservoirs, and is delivered through irrigation ditches.

Heartwood is fortunate to have a plentiful supply of irrigation water, although it takes lots of work to distribute it properly and it is available only for part of the growing season. In addition to irrigating the fields, we are able to use this water for the greenhouse and plantings in the housing cluster. The existence of this second source of water allows us to draw less on our wells. Irrigation water, and the residents' carefulness, make it possible for us to use much less potable water than the national average.

The first big project paid for by the REF is a stand-alone solar array to pump irrigation water. The pump itself is amazing because it operates efficiently on a huge range of voltages, so it works even when the panels aren't producing much power. The installation replaces a gas pump that was noisy and smelly. More recently we had a grid-tied array installed that generates more than four-fifths of the power used by our Common House and workshop. The inverter is oversized so we can add more panels when needed and as we can afford them. Our plan is to install an electric vehicle charging station in the spring. Although there are only two plug-in hybrids on our campus, we expect that there will be more EVs soon—driven both by residents and by visitors.

We recycle, of course. It used to be that each person would take their recycling to the nearest facility, in Durango, which is also where we do a lot of our shopping. That was inconvenient, so we jumped on board when a local company was started. They provide us with a huge container which they empty once a week. Unfortunately, the container fills up most weekends, before it is emptied on Monday. We have been slow to crush all cans and plastic to take up as little space as possible, but we're learning. We have also had discussions about the folly of recycling plastic, since so much of it just ends up in the landfill in many parts of the country. I was reassured when I contacted the company and received this reply: "All recycling that comes to Phoenix is hand sorted in our facility. It is then baled and stored at our facility until a buyer can be found. It will not be landfilled."

We have a lot of beautiful land. Our community owns over 200 acres in common. We have access to the adjacent 150 acres that will be used for Phase 2, an expansion of 14 homes. About 65 acres are irrigated and are used for growing, but much of the remainder is a large sage field or is wooded with ponderosa and piñon pines as well as junipers and oak brush. We chose to build our homes in a cluster partly so we would interact more, and partly so much of the land would continue to provide homes for wildlife. The pathways are reserved for walking and playing; vehicles are parked away from homes, and we use carts to bring in groceries. We have turkeys and hawks and eagles and bats, red fox and elk and coyotes and skunks and pumas and black bears and rabbits. In the winter we have mule deer everywhere—in our front yard and on our back porch; no wonder a friend calls them "forest rats."

Although many of us like to deny it, we are getting older. Who will take care of all this land in the future when we cannot? Should we sell off part of the lovely irrigated pasture? That would prevent it from going back to its weedy barrenness as we age? NO! We don't want a subdivision on our beautiful land. We recognize that our stewardship must extend to the future. With this in mind and to attract young families, we set up a fund to pay $1000 to any buyer with a child 12 years old or younger.

Several growers have looked at moving to Heartwood, but have been discouraged by the lack of appropriate housing. We dream of having a small home close to the farmland which would be owned by the community and rented to a farmer. Phase 2 is a higher priority, but we're keeping farmer housing in mind as we plan.

What is in store for Heartwood? As Mark Twain wrote, "predictions are difficult to make, particularly about the future." The next big step will be planning Phase 2, building it, then integrating the new people into the community. I have been delighted to meet some of the people who are exploring living in this expansion who are interested in living in harmony with our environment. What I have learned about trying to have our community become more ecological is that it is like everything else at Heartwood Cohousing: people have different levels of interest. Working gradually with people who are interested has been more successful than a more rapid, radical approach. In our 20 years of living at Heartwood, our community has become greener! ❧

Richard and Gail Grossman moved to Durango, Colorado in 1976 because it was the best place they knew to raise their two young sons. The boys are now grown, moved away, and have their own kids. Curiosity got Gail and Richard interested in Heartwood when it was a dream, in the late 1990s. In 2000 they moved in when it was finished, and love for the community has kept them there. Gail is a retired teacher and Richard retired from practicing obstetrics and gynecology in Durango after 40 years. Both are concerned about the human impact on the natural world. Richard also maintains a blog: www.population-matters.org.

Photos courtesy of www.heartwoodcohousing.com

First Blooming

Spring garden
seeded with small feet
in children's shoes,
warmed by inquisitive eyes
lit up from inside,
watered by splashing silvery cries
of fearless exploration, little
discoveries...

Between the green spears of joy
shooting skyward, swaying in place
along the gravel paths,
and the green sprays of delight
fluttering along the branches above,
anchored by firm-fingered roots
in the earth,
young minds open little by little
to their first blooming.

Bartering for Oxygen

Bartering carbon dioxide for oxygen,
breath by breath,
feasting on the fruits of photosynthesis,
digesting light from clear across the
solar system
gathered by legions of green leaves
and fused with minerals drawn up
from the dirt
to build proteins and sugars, I look up
through the lacework of branches
and sing my spirit's satisfaction to
the birds,
look down into the overflowing cups
of flowers
and hum my heart's fulfillment
to the honeybees.

Stephen Wing lives in Atlanta, where he hosts an "Earth Poetry" workshop each season to explore the city's many urban greenspaces. He is the author of three books of poems and serves on the boards of the Lake Claire Community Land Trust and Nuclear Watch South. Visit him at www.StephenWing.com.

Toward Nightfall

The mosquitos
must have known I was coming,
their greetings
impossible to ignore!

The okra stalks
reaching high over my head
into the sky

Through the fence,
fragrance of cut grass;
on this side
aroma of compost.

The collard leaves
catching the low breezes
close to the ground

Chickens cackling back
at the wild birds
in the trees, passing cars
answering the creek.

The strawberry vines
spilling over
their frame of weathered planks

Rumble and clatter
of a lawnmower,
burning long-extinct fossils
to tame the grass next door.

The chard
curling inward like huge,
half-closed hands

A little swath of silence
where water ripples over stones,
birds chirp, spreading branches
hide the sky.

The chili peppers
dangling from spiral vines
through their wire cage

The lawnmower abruptly quits.
The silence flows on
toward nightfall.

The honeybees
drifting to and fro,
stitching it all
together ❧

Photo courtesy of Liz Walker

A pre-Covid shot of Urban Outreach 4-H kids visiting Gourdlandia, a gourd-crafting workshop run by Graham Ottoson.

Jim Bosjolie

We Are Rising Strong: 30 Years of Exploring Resilient Living

By Liz Walker

Showing up is our power.
Story is our way home. Truth is our song.
We are the brave and brokenhearted.
We are rising strong.
—Brene Brown

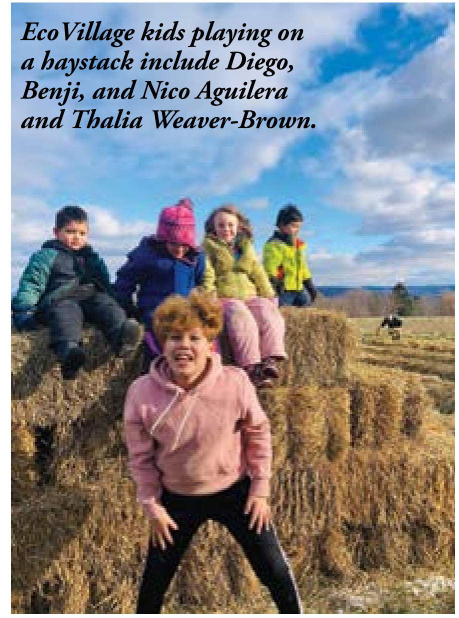
It's the day before Valentine's Day, 18 degrees with a bone-chilling wind, almost a year after the pandemic closed everything down. Our community, EcoVillage Ithaca, is determined to celebrate our annual arts festival anyway. **Sparkfest** takes place outside this year, and over Zoom, and despite the constraints, it is still magical. During the "Spectacle of Sparks" people stroll around the Village (with masks and socially distanced) to enjoy their neighbors' "culinary arts" such as creative hors d'ouevres, Valentine cookies, and hot spiced cider. There are quilts to admire, prayer flags made from colorful fabric scraps across the pedestrian walkways, sketches tied onto the branches of a tree, and a participatory chalk walk with prompts like "where do you want to travel when the pandemic is over?" I answer "New Zealand," in purple chalk.

It's freezing, but I'm especially thrilled to be out and about after a few unexpected days in the hospital. I'm so touched by friends and neighbors not only asking me how I am, but also following my email directions: *Please don't talk to me for long, because I don't have much energy*. People of all ages are enjoying the camaraderie. It's great to be social again!

My husband Jared, who dreamed up the original Sparkfest 10 years ago with a friend, convenes the Visual Arts section over Zoom. Each artist has just five minutes to share their latest work, to talk about what inspires them, and to answer questions. Three hours later, we have heard from about 30 people of all ages, and I'm in awe of the talent in our community. Steve, a professional stained glass artist, shares some of his favorite pieces. Tilden, age 13, is already getting requests for his soulful pet portraits. Diane, a college professor, has recently taken up weaving in her spare time. She demonstrates the warp and weft on her loom. Among the many fine photographers, Frank's nature photography is an outstanding tribute to the dawn light in the Finger Lakes. People have worked for weeks to finish their pieces in time, and there is a hum of excitement as each artist shares their work. People ask insightful questions. We see

A summer day, walking back from West Haven Farm CSA with bags of fresh veggies, past the FROG 50kW solar array.

Michele Foin


EcoVillage kids playing on a haystack include Diego, Benji, and Nico Aguilera and Thalia Weaver-Brown.

Lorena Mendoza

Four on-site organic farms now produce food for our region.

the inner artist, and encourage their blossoming. It takes courage to create, and to share one's creation.

There is time for a quick bowl of soup before the final event of the day, The Big Show. Once again held on Zoom, it's a chance for the performing artists to share their work. Thalia, age five, sings songs in Japanese with her mom, dad, and baby sister. Mac, who is celebrating his 80th birthday, sings an original blues song about lost love. Daniella, a newly-out transgender woman, shares some striking poems. There are stories, jokes, and more rousing songs. Three young men, Gabe, Connor, and Niall, who all grew up at EcoVillage, call in from the Utah ski resort where they currently work. We join them by GoPro video as they ski down thrilling slopes, in and out of spruce groves. At the end of the evening, I float off to bed on a buoyant wave of energy.

Over the following days, I muse about what makes this such a special event. To me, Sparkfest is the epitome of a homegrown "invented celebration." It nourishes the spirit of community and creativity. It is intergenerational, and inclusive. It celebrates all types of art: from food to photography to singing. Anyone can contribute. It is striking, at this deeply discordant time, to see how many people have turned to artwork to "just get through."

Anyone, anywhere, could create this kind of festival on their city block, at a school, in any sort of community. The success lies in the basic template: a platform for celebrating creativity in a supportive context. That leaves plenty of room for individuals to shine, bringing their own unique ideas. These multiple "sparks" create the spirit of magic that is larger than any of us, that draws us together with warmth and joy.

If Sparkfest is an example of a resilient cultural celebration (one that is also carbon-neutral), what are some other ways that we can become more resilient as a community in the face of climate change and profound cultural change?

Thirty years ago, EcoVillage Ithaca (EVI) was founded with the mission of creating an example of a more earth-friendly way to live, of creating a human habitat that "will demonstrate...a design that meets basic human needs such as shelter, food production, energy, social interaction, work and recreation while preserving natural ecosystems." We have made many choices that support this, including purchasing land just a couple miles away from Ithaca, New York, a small progressive city. This allows people to easily access jobs, schools, entertainment, and shopping, lessening the travel footprint.

This region is the homeland of the Gayogoho:no' (Cayuga) Nation, part of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, whose land was forcibly taken from them by George Washington's troops after the Revolutionary War. As our community learns more about indigenous history and knowledge, we aspire to many of the same values, such as making decisions based on future generations, honoring women's leadership, and creating a partnership with the natural world. A newly formed Indigenous Group at EVI is assisting educational and fundraising efforts to rematriate land for the traditional Cayuga community.

The land here is beautiful. We are on top of West Hill, a steep rise from the city of Ithaca, which lies at the foot of Cayuga Lake, the longest of the Finger Lakes. The views are gorgeous. From the beginning of EVI we chose to densely cluster the housing, leaving 90 percent of the 176 acres as land open for agriculture, wetlands, woods, and meadows. We now enjoy four on-site organic farms that produce food for our region, including West Haven Farm, a popular vegetable CSA; Kestrel Perch, a berry CSA; and the Groundswell Incubator Farm, which provides land, equipment, and mentoring for new farmers who experience systemic barriers, including people of color, immigrants, refugees, and women. Two years ago, three of our residents started a new farm based on regenerative agriculture practices. There are now over 3,000 nut trees planted on Three Story Farm, and massive earthworks of berms and swales that catch and direct the water.

Together, our farms provide vegetables, fruits, and berries for over 1,400 people a week during the growing season, as well as seven full-time-equivalent jobs.

In addition to careful use of the land, EVI has paid even more attention to the social aspects of community. Early on we chose the cohousing model, and with 100 homes clustered in three neighborhoods, nicknamed FROG, SONG, and TREE, we are one of the largest cohousing communities in the world. Our community of 223 people has 42 children, including two babies born during the pandemic!

Our homes use the latest green building technologies, including Passive House, which relies on foot-thick walls, super-insulation, and excellent ventilation. In our newest neighborhood, TREE, which was completed in 2015, a number of the homes perform at Net Zero Energy. These all-electric homes produce more energy from their solar panels than they consume for the whole year, including energy for heating, hot water, lighting, and appliances.

We also have a mission to share what we are learning, and it is deeply gratifying to work with university students from around the world, researchers, and the media. On our website it's possible to look up and read many of the 15 graduate studies of EVI. One of these, a 2014 dissertation written by Jesse Sherry for a PhD in Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University, studied our ecological footprint. He found that EVI residents had an ecological footprint that was 35 percent that of the average American. In other words, EVI residents were using close to two-thirds **less** ecosystem resources than most Americans. While this is surely something to celebrate, it also leaves a lot of room for improvement, as that level of consumption is still unsustainable for the planet.

Ongoing Challenges

As a community, while we have much in place, we still face plenty of challenges. We aspire to be diverse, but our demographics skew towards older, whiter, middle class residents. While there is an ongoing initiative to bring in younger families, and to become more racially and economically diverse, it is only partially successful. It's hard to swim against the strong currents of injustice in our society, in which young people, and people of color, especially African Americans, have far less capital than whites to invest in purchasing a home. Having some rental housing does help, however.

There have also been some creative experiments in affordable housing. When one young single mom with several kids faced having to leave the TREE neighborhood when she lost her job, several people stepped forward to purchase her home, then gave her a "rent to own" option. The investors came up with a clever acronym: TWIG (TREE working investment group). This worked so well that it was replicated several other times. The investors didn't expect to make much money, but they felt good about keeping several families in the neighborhood who otherwise could not afford to stay.

After 28 years of "leading the charge" of first developing the ecovillage, and then using it as a key educational opportunity for students and visitors, I retired at the end of 2019. I thought I was leaving our nonprofit project in good shape for the next Director, Nathan Scott. Then COVID-19 hit, and many of our popular programs were cancelled. Nathan valiantly helped the organization, renamed Thrive EcoVillage Education, to pivot to online workshops. But they don't bring in a lot of money, and he had to leave for another job within the year. Now it's time to yet again reinvent our educational programs. Somehow, this inflection point feels familiar. We've faced so many challenges over our history, and they often make us stronger. I'm grateful that we have a dedicated Thrive board of directors.

Resilience Task Force (RTF)

Now, in 2021, as EcoVillage Ithaca celebrates 30 years, how can we motivate ourselves to reach further, and higher? In the past year, we have been collectively

TWIG kept several families in the neighborhood who otherwise could not afford to stay.

Lorena, Carlos, and their boys check on spinach in the hoophouse.

Lorena Mendoza

TREE neighborhood Common House. It includes 15 apartments, each with its own balcony. Many of the apartments are performing at Net Zero Energy.

Photo courtesy of Liz Walker

inspired by two online weekend workshops on the climate emergency, offered by the Global Ecovillage Network.

Some residents, such as Pat Evans, saw this as an opportunity to build on prior work using Paul Hawken's book *Drawdown*. This book highlights extensive research showing that it is possible to reverse global warming. Pat, a retired teacher, partnered with Nathan and others to envision next steps to implement practical lifestyle solutions. A Resilience Task Force emerged, consisting of eight action groups and a coordinating team.

Mission: We strive to motivate EcoVillage residents to dramatically reduce our ecological footprints, so as to minimize ongoing damage to climate and ecosystems. We encourage discovery, sharing, and celebration of diverse ways to restore natural systems, and to become a more just, inclusive, and resilient community.

These are important and lofty goals, and, it turns out, they are not so easy to reach. In a January letter, Pat wrote: "As we look toward the New Year, won't you join us in the hope-filled work of transformation? … This is a critical decade. Humans must reduce our net greenhouse emissions by at least half by 2030 in order to avert collapse of the life support system for us and so many other species. To meet this goal, it will take all of us."

It can be hard to find time to join yet another committee, or to learn new eco-skills.

The good news: 44 residents responded to the call for engagement. The bad news: While the intention is there, in most cases it has yet to translate into sustained action. Most people at EcoVillage, like people everywhere, live busy lives, filled with work, raising kids, paying the mortgage, and perhaps some volunteer work on the side. It's hard to imagine having the time to be part of yet another committee, or to learn new eco-skills. On the flip side, people are usually great at taking part in hands-on projects, such as planting trees, cooking community meals, joining a celebration—anything that doesn't involve sitting in front of the computer!

Social Resilience

Arts and Celebration

Sparkfest is just one of the many colorful celebrations we host. One of my favorites is "Guys Baking Pies." Held in early August, the boys and men pick wild blackberries and bake marvelous pies for a dessert feast we all enjoy. There are also an annual EcoVillage Maypole dance, Strawberry Solstice parties, and an annual Ping-Pong Tournament for all ages (all games begin with Love, Love). There are spontaneous dance parties and concerts and fire circles. These moments of seasonal fun provide the icing on the cake of community life.

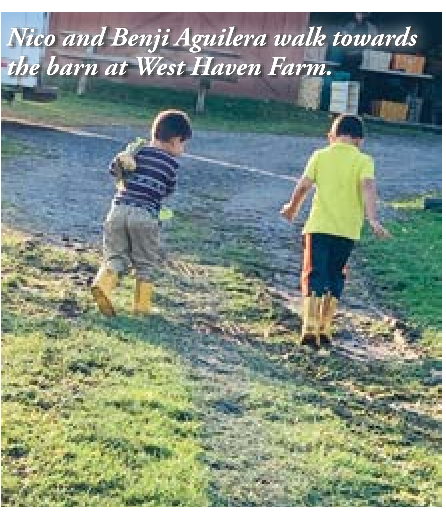
Community Connection and Care

Phebe Gustafson, the leader of this group, shared that the main goal is "to empower healthy, respectful relationships among our residents." This includes nonviolent communication. "We're also creating opportunities to have fun, go deep with each other, and help each other through life's challenges." One successful example has been the Cross-Village Connection groups, randomly chosen groups of about a dozen people from each of our three neighborhoods, who meet on Zoom once a month. At a recent meeting of my group, for instance, we spent an hour sharing poems that moved us. It was a great way to break through the isolation that each of us feels at times, especially during the pandemic, despite living in a close-knit community.

Of course, there are also big challenges, Phebe acknowledged. "It's basically looking at 100 households and asking, 'How can we create a healthy, optimally functioning community with maximum investment in a vision and mission?' It's very complex!" However, Phebe, who has lived at EVI for 19 years, appreciates the challenge. "This is the only work that makes sense to me, that gives meaning and purpose to my life. Being in a community where people are pouring their hearts into 'living the questions' (Rilke) for the surviving and thriving of all beings energizes me greatly."

Liz Walker gives tour to Akwesasne (Mohawk) leaders and students.

Nathan Scott.



Nico and Benji Aguilera walk towards the barn at West Haven Farm.

Lorena Mendoza

Nico Aguilera holding a harvest of edamame and beets.

Lorena Mendoza

Boys on raft, with FROG homes in the background.

Jim Bosjolie

Our community is especially good at helping people through challenging times. I experienced that personally after my recent health crisis: friends brought by delicious homemade soup, wrote thoughtful cards and emails, and one family of four came by in person to give me a beautiful red candle. There is almost always a "meal train" or other support offered for new parents or people who are sick. I think of it as our special form of "Social Security"—otherwise known as deep caring for each other. Today, I may make a special meal for a family in need. Tomorrow, you may show me special love and kindness. It is not a "gift economy"; it is simply the spirit of giving.

Social and Economic Justice

During the pandemic, we've ramped up our efforts to provide food for low-income people in Ithaca. Last summer I coordinated an "EcoVillage Food Hub." Residents donated 70 pounds a week of organic garden produce to a Latina-run free food pop-up. "People love the fresh produce!" volunteers told me each week.

In the colder months, a small group of dedicated residents has banded together to collect "winter-safe" food items (ones that won't be damaged by freezing) to give to nearby low-income housing developments. The donations of cash and food help to feed 350 of our low-income neighbors.

When West Haven Farm, a 10-acre CSA, made a generational shift of owners in 2019, many people helped the new farmers, Carlos Aguilera and Lorena Mendoza, a Mexican couple with three sons, to purchase a home at the EcoVillage with low- or no-interest loans and gifts. Without the community's generous support, it would not have been possible, as they could not get a bank loan. This economic creativity allowed a wonderful Mexican family to join the EcoVillage community, as well as providing skilled farmers to carry on the CSA tradition. As Lorena says, "To feed a community, you must first feed the soil."

Lowering Our Carbon Emissions

Conscious Consumption

Yvonne LaMontagne, the leader of this group, told me, "I feel in my bones the need to reorient ourselves to how we live on earth. We need to be working with natural systems rather than against them." This group promotes sustainable ways to consume, including what, where, and how we purchase, use, and maintain goods, and how we generate and dispose of waste. While it's relatively easy to raise awareness, it's harder to engage people in action. Yvonne shared, "I guess the biggest challenge overall is the economic and cultural matrix we are embedded in."

What can we do? "Reduce, reduce, reduce," Yvonne said, "then reuse, repurpose, reconsider. Then purchase without plastic or packaging [items that are] repairable and durable." She also emphasized composting, recycling, and keeping consumption very local.

One way that we already shine in this area is our robust use of the Re-Use Room in non-Covid times. Many of my best outfits have come from this little room in the basement of the FROG Common House, and I have probably donated dozens of boxes of clothes, too. It's all part of the fun and reciprocal cycle of living in community. It's not uncommon to spot a friend wearing a sweater that once was yours.

Energy Resilience

Pankaj Singh, the leader of this group, is a young engineer from India, whose experience of living in a Net Zero Energy house in TREE motivates him to figure out other ways that we can lower our carbon footprints. He laid out a clear path for the group to follow over the coming years:

• *Short-term goal: establish current energy consumption database*

• *Mid-term goal: research and propose strategies to lower energy consumption*

• *Long-term goal: lower the energy consumption per capita*

Pulling together the present energy

Students from our Eco-Gap program work with Ithaca College students in the greenhouse in pre-Covid times.

Liz Walker

Wild gorge next to EcoVillage Ithaca land.

Frank Muller

Carlos Aguilera and Lorena Mendoza (on right) with some of their crew at West Haven Farm.

Lorena Mendoza

We as a species desperately need to change our relationship to the earth and to each other.

consumption data is a time-consuming challenge. However, one neighborhood, FROG, has a district heating system and gets about half of its electricity from a 50kW solar array, so that information is already accessible. In the other neighborhoods, there has been some data collection in the past, but it will take more effort to enroll all homes at EcoVillage. Pankaj tells me that what keeps him going is "the spirit of the resilience task force," and the knowledge that small steps add up.

Transportation Resilience

When Jesse Sherry studied EVI a dozen years ago, one area in particular stood out. It turned out that EcoVillagers travel a lot, compared to the US population, and our air travel was a key spike in energy consumption—not an easy habit change!

Steve Gaarder, who leads the Transportation group, hopes to create a transportation system at EVI that lowers carbon emissions, reduces the amount of land and resources consumed by motor vehicles, and brings people together.

Over a decade ago, EcoVillagers helped to create Ithaca Carshare, our successful local nonprofit which serves Tompkins County. Ironically, it hasn't worked well at EVI, partly because we are two miles from the city (and can't easily access other Carshare cars), and partly because there is a lot of informal car-sharing here (can I borrow your keys?). However, there is renewed interest in an EVI model. Steve points out that "there are tremendous legal and financial complications" to car-sharing, and the "more brain-power we have, the more likely we are to succeed."

There is also a huge uptick in the number of electric plug-in and hybrid cars here. Thanks to a resident group, which applied for a grant, there are now multiple charging stations in each neighborhood.

Land Use and Connection

Pat and her husband Mark Piechota, a retired high school administrator, told me that this group is about mindful stewardship of the land. "This depleted farmland has lots of potential to act as a 'sink' for atmospheric carbon," Pat added. "My favorite [method] is planting trees."

Weekly meetings are either outdoor work projects or learning together by Zoom. Members love learning about nature—"all the flora and fauna that I have taken for granted, but never fully understood," in Mark's words. "It is exciting adopting a new sense of self not as separate from nature but rather as part of the natural world." They hope to draw more EcoVillagers into this learning and sharing. Frank (the photographer) has started introducing people to using the app i-Naturalist, which allows people to identify birds and plants and share their location with others.

Wren Anjali, an outdoor educator, says she loves working with this group on restoration projects. "That's what's going to help us survive as a species!" For Pat, the biggest challenge is time. "As the saying goes: the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago." Mark is energized by "our vision for the future, my love of my grandsons, and the commitment of my fellow action group members."

Food Resilience

Kat Caldwell, an Ithaca College professor of environmental psychology, leads this

group. She is very interested in what motivates people to adopt more sustainable habits and behaviors. Kat points out that the pandemic helped to ramp up the urgency around food access, and the disruption of supply chains. "We can't survive without food, and we can't survive very well if we don't change the way we engage with it." The effects of climate change, like the pandemic, require resiliency. We will need to rely as much as possible on local and regional foods, and to grow much of our own nourishment.

Like Kat, I'm on the Village cook team. Our team regularly puts on two or three meals a week for 30-50 residents. Before Covid we enjoyed the camaraderie of eating together. Now people line up, socially distanced and masked, to get take-out. We still socialize! While people eat many different kinds of diets, many of us cooks emphasize plant-based foods that are locally sourced from nearby farms. If meat is served, it is usually in small amounts, and also is sustainably sourced. We're not strict, but we love to buy local, organic, and seasonal foods. After all, they taste better, too!

Where Do We Go from Here?

At this critical time it's become clear that we as a species desperately need to change our relationship to the earth and to each other. I hope that our ongoing experiment in living more consciously can continue to have positive ripple effects.

Jesse Sherry recently joined our RTF meeting by Zoom. His life has changed a lot in the last eight years since he camped out at EVI, doing his research. He is now married, a dad, and works as a professor at a small college. He enthusiastically agreed to help us continue to build on his original research. He may even be able to assign students to help with data collection and analysis, as we find out our new baselines for consumption of food, energy, transportation, and generation of waste.

Nathan has also lined up some great Cornell students to work with EVI. Thrive has two ongoing interns, and students from a Moral Psychology class in the fall. In addition, a recent Cornell graduate in architecture has designed a beautiful pavilion that could serve the community and our visitors in many ways. The pavilion is based on a fascinating use of a whole tree (rather than just the trunk), and would be a community-build project, potentially supported by grant funding.

The Thrive board is looking at how to best serve as a conduit between the EcoVillage and the outside world, both introducing exciting new ideas and practices to the Village, as well as sharing the growing edge of what we're learning with others. The community itself seems to have a "buzz" of excitement about engaging with cutting-edge projects. It's fair to say that most people in this ecovillage have fascinating stories to tell when it comes to working for a better world.

As we move into an uncertain planetary future, we keep in mind the question raised by the Pachamama Alliance: How can we create a world that works for everyone: an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, socially just human presence on this planet?

Together with millions of people around the globe, we are rising strong. ❧

Liz Walker cofounded EcoVillage Ithaca 30 years ago, and dedicated her full-time work for the next three decades to bring this internationally acclaimed project from vision to reality. She's written two popular books, EcoVillage at Ithaca: Pioneering a Sustainable Culture *(2005, New Society Publishers) and* Choosing a Sustainable Future: Ideas and Inspiration from Ithaca, New York *(2010, New Society), which have been translated into several languages. Liz lives with her husband at EcoVillage Ithaca. Whenever she gets a chance, she loves to go biking, or hiking in the beautiful gorges in the Finger Lakes region of New York. She also loves to garden, and coordinates the EVI Food Hub, which donates excess garden produce to people in need.*

Tomato canning party for Common House meals last fall.

Liz Walker

Benji harvests apples with his dad Carlos.

Lorena Mendoza

Celebrating the installation of the 50kW solar array for the FROG neighborhood. This array provides about half of all the electricity needed by the neighborhood of 30 homes.

Jeff Gilmore

Alienated from the Ecovillage

By Anonymous

Editor's Note: *In the following anonymous piece, which does not identify the ecovillages it describes, we have not attempted to "fact-check" the author's version of events. Instead, we present it as one family's story—how they experienced their time in ecovillages.*

I want to share several "conversations" that illustrate some of the challenges of "Ecological Culture" that my family and I have encountered while living in various US ecovillages. I include quotes around the word "conversations" because in each case, I believe there was no actual dialogue, no exchange that deepened intimacy or self-inquiry.

We craved shared curiosity and mutual accountability; yet we found that status-quo and fear-of-difference, so bound to our larger US cultural norms, are at the foundation of many "alternative" communities. My partner and I were deeply saddened by the unconscious separation of mind and body, and the scant willingness to take emotional and structural risks when it came to acknowledging ethnic, racial, and economic differences in the face of climate chaos, especially for the children.

Our experiences showed us that obedience was essential to being included, while enthusiasm and a desire to share unconventional experiences, ideas, and feelings were an invitation for alienation and exile. Below are some examples that led to us being "frozen out" of an ecovillage:

Obedience was essential to being included, while enthusiasm and a desire to share unconventional experiences, ideas, and feelings were an invitation for alienation and exile.

• I am in our ecovillage's Racial Equity and Social Justice Guild listening to one of our community's white elders share about a book she has recently read addressing Mexican immigrant textile workers. When she bemoans the laborers' struggles, I ask her how she is integrating this new knowledge; how has the narrator's story influenced her buying habits. I am explicit that I am not trying to challenge her, and am very careful to position my question with compassion and curiosity so she does not feel threatened or defensive. Her reply is that what she buys makes no impact on these laborers' lives. She is surprised by the possible connection between her life and theirs, and makes it clear that she is definitely not interested in considering this relationship.

• Before we had moved in as membership-track residents, we met with one of the community's white elders. During the course of our conversation she questioned our lifestyle choices, our educational commitments, and our veracity in describing our ethnicities. It became clear that who we are and how we live our lives was under scrutiny. Perhaps we should we have heeded her explicit warning that our ideas and experiences were going to be considered "too radical," and that we shouldn't move to the ecovillage in which she lived.

• A new single-family home was being built in the ecovillage. My partner, who was integral to several new construction projects throughout our community, asked the lead builder why the supplies were standard lumber bought and delivered by Home Depot? The answer was that "it is too expensive to build with milled trees from the land." My partner was informed that the ecovillage had started an "on-the-land building enterprise" a decade or so ago, and following several "failed" projects, the community determined the enterprise was economically unsustainable. To this day, the majority of members/residents drive off the land to work on building projects or at

jobs at least 30-45 minutes away from the ecovillage. Is this economically sustainable (let alone ecologically sustainable)?

• While my family and I searched for ways to build without buying new products, we were told that most people at the ecovillage determined that the carbon footprint was bigger when reusing or repurposing materials and equipment. They believed that buying new from a giant national corporation had less environmental impact, because they didn't have to take the time to find the used materials or take the time to drive around picking them up. My partner countered that the lumber was trucked across the country from western states, and that industrial-size operations utilize massive energy-consuming and polluting machinery. Additionally, monoculture tree plantations are not a healthy alternative to locally harvested trees from sustainably locally-managed ecosystems. We know that an antidote to globalization is relocalization, and that recreating the Commons and ecological consciousness go hand-in-hand. At this point, there was no further discussion—their response was: "We tried that. It didn't work. This is the way it will be now." This response was also the case when we took steps toward a shared transportation infrastructure. In both building and transportation practices, privatized convenience-culture is the norm.

• My partner asked the head of the village woodshop if they could make a list of needed building materials and pick them up once a week from locally owned businesses. His response was that he prefers to go into the city (45 minutes away) four or five times a week to pick up supplies—once a week is not needed. In addition, it was made clear to my partner that the big box stores have better prices and that purchasing from them would continue without question. Additionally, he was told it is too much work to find used building materials, including used solar panels, batteries, charge controller, cords, etc. We know from direct experience that these used products are actually easily attainable.

• We toured many of the ecovillage's natural building projects completed more than a decade ago, and learned that most community members felt that type of building is "too funky." It was no longer supported by the majority of the community. My partner was excited to work on a tiny-house building project that involved a natural exterior. Unfortunately, instead of wood lath, giant plastic rolls of mesh were purchased to hold the natural plaster. It took several days to install using thousands of very expensive pneumatic staples. Even though these new, petroleum-based products cost so much more than repurposed and reused items (in terms of the environment and the wallet), economic rationale and supposed longevity were the recurring themes. Ironically, this particular ecovillage is internationally known for its natural building practices. Many, if not all of the new buildings being built and old ones being repaired had natural building facades, but internally, they were constructed using brand new petroleum-based products.

After living for two years in one ecovillage while practicing social ecological theories-in-action, we asked our community to reconsider different policies and procedures. As a result of our suggestions, we were put on a kind of surveillance-probation. Eventually, we were told that due to our politically "radical" positions, we were gradually being "frozen out" of the community. We were frequently told that because we asked too many questions, we did not fit into the community's "shared reality." And inevitably, when we questioned what were the roots of this reality and how was it maintained, it became clear firsthand that when a community becomes fixed in its norms and refuses collective spiritual, intellectual, and infrastructural growth, it becomes exclusionary and elitist. It ends up reproducing mainstream behavior and infrastructure—the very societal patterns it had originally attempted to subvert (or at least, escape). ❧

Kudzu and Consensus

By Michael Traugot

In 1996 some members of the land use committee became alarmed at the spread of kudzu in First Road Meadow. This leguminous perennial vine from Japan was introduced into the United States in 1876, and widely planted throughout the Southeast in the 1930s for erosion control on hillsides. It proceeded to take over whatever territory it found itself in. Today there are seven million acres of kudzu in the Southeast. Not much else can live in a kudzu patch. Its large-leaved vines grow over the top of everything else, even large trees, and shade them out. Kudzu will gather strength for years and then put on explosive growth. In some people's minds, kudzu has become the "plant from Hell."

Kudzu had been growing on The Farm for quite some time. It was probably here in limited quantities when we first arrived, but we didn't notice it. It took us a while to figure out what it was. By 1996 it had reached the "explosive growth" stage, starting to take over one end of First Road Meadow, even overwhelming a sizable tulip poplar tree. Some members of the Land Use Committee became alarmed and began working on it, cutting the climbing vines, digging up roots, and also reading the literature and consulting scientists about how to deal with it. The Land Use Committee scheduled a couple of "kudzu days," and asked the community to turn out and dig and hack the stuff back by hand. Not many showed up. Controlling it seemed like an overwhelming task to the few people who were trying to do something about it. So they resorted to what many have resorted to with far less reason: they decided to use Roundup.

The community was split, with one contingent wanting to use whatever methods were necessary to keep the kudzu from taking over habitat from native species, and another wanting to use whatever methods were necessary to avoid using herbicides.

Nobody on The Farm really likes using chemical poisons, and some are totally opposed, so when word got out, it became a hot topic. The community was split, with one contingent wanting to use whatever methods were necessary to keep the kudzu from taking over habitat from native species, and another wanting to use whatever methods were necessary to avoid using herbicides. The situation reached a crisis when a member of the Board of Directors had to go down to the kudzu patch and face off a person who was about to spray, telling him, "You can't do this, you don't have agreement." This did not seem like an issue that would be easily solved by a majority vote.

About this time, in November of 1996, the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) held its regional conference and national Board meeting at The Farm. A couple of the FIC's trained consensus facilitators—Laird Schaub and Betty Didcoct—volunteered to run an experimental consensus meeting for The Farm. The issue we chose for the meeting: what to do about the kudzu. The FIC meetings were also graced by the presence and participation of Caroline Estes, who, as one FIC Board member put it, is "one of the premier teachers of consensus on the planet." Caroline made consensus seem not very scary at all. Demanding, yes, but not scary.

The idea is not necessarily to achieve unanimity, but to achieve unity. It is not "unanimous voting," but seeks to get everyone behind a decision, or at least not against it. Everyone might not agree with a decision down to the last dotted "i" or crossed "t," but if everyone can go along with it and support it generally, the decision will be a powerful one. This means that everyone must feel that he or she has been really heard and listened to, that everyone's opinions and feelings will be taken into account. As the Quakers say, we "see the light of God in everyone," meaning we have respect for everyone and value everyone's opinion, regardless of whether we agree with it going in.

Consensus is different from majority voting, we were told, in that it takes disagreement and works with it, gets into the reasons for disagreement, works with the way that disagreement is held, to come up with creative solutions. Consensus is rarely a "yes or no" situation; there are usually a lot of concerns underneath each side. This

may frustrate people who just want to "get there," but the decisions are often wiser in the end. And once the group is in agreement, implementation is faster and more efficient. In majority voting, the disenfranchised minority slows implementation. Consensus may take more time and energy up front, but it's "pay now or pay later."

The Farm consensus session actually went on for three days: two evenings and all day Saturday. Many Farm people, up to 40 at a time, participated. The main part of the meeting was held on Friday evening. It was an emotional meeting; some people trembled as they spoke.

It was known from the start that there would be no consensus to use herbicide, but it was soon apparent that there was overwhelming consensus to control the kudzu. Even the person who had been about to spray said he would rather have the manpower and control it non-chemically. A few people were completely opposed to using herbicide, nobody was completely attached to using it, but a fair number said they would be for using it if no other method worked.

This turned out to be the most successful meeting that I had ever observed in my 29 years in the community, both in good feeling, and in achievement. Everyone felt like s/he had been heard and respected. Personal attacks were avoided. Both sides got their message across. Those opposed to using Roundup got to say, "You can't use a chemical herbicide on our land for the first time without consulting us first." The land use committee got to say, "We've got to do something or kudzu will take over a significant chunk of our meadow and forest, so if we don't want to use herbicide, we'd better get our butts in gear." In the end we decided that a crew of volunteers would go out and eradicate the patch by hand, and if that method did not work, after reevaluation, we would go ahead and use Roundup.

Kudzu is hard to eradicate. Every foot and a half or so, the vines put down shoots that enter the ground and become roots, and each root is an independent plant, capable of generating an entirely new colossal kudzu colony. Every last root would have to be dug up, and this would be at least a two-year project, including dedicated monitoring by a continuing "kudzu crew" to make sure no roots had been missed. Nonetheless we carried it out successfully, and by the time I first created a rough draft of this piece, 2012, The Farm was essentially kudzu-free. (Of course, by the end of the decade, it was *baaaack!* But today, it's not as abundant as it was before, and we are also less alarmed than we were when we knew less. Nowadays, we just hack back the vines, and haven't tried total eradication, instead just continuing to manage and monitor it.)

The kudzu meetings are an example that it "can be done." Si se puede! Even in highly emotional situations where opposing viewpoints seem irreconcilable, a working consensus can be reached, if people really want it to. ❧

Michael Traugot writes: "I was born in New York City in 1945 and grew up in New Jersey. At Harvard I was co-chair of the SDS chapter, but when the antiwar movement went violent, I knew we needed a more cultural and spiritual revolution, so I headed west to find it. In California I found Spirit and Sangha, or 'beloved community.' I am a founding member of The Farm and lived there from 1971 to 2000, and now again since 2018. I have a BA from Harvard, an MA from Fisk University, where I was the only white student, and a PhD from University of California, Davis. I have taught at five different colleges and universities, and currently teach sociology at Columbia State Community College. I am an avid lifelong gardener."

Photo courtesy of Michael Traugot

Circular Fertility Cycles in an Integrated Community Permaculture Farm

By Kara Huntermoon

On a sunny August day, I strap on my work belt and head for the garden. The sheep call from the barnyard, reminding me that hay is boring. Fortunately, the willow fences need pruning to open up the pathways.

In the Willamette Valley, we have adequate grass to feed sheep for most of the year. But during two different seasons, the grass is insufficient. In the winter, the days are so short that grass grows too slowly to provide sheep food, even though temperatures are usually above freezing. Our second season of supplementation is late summer. The temperate Mediterranean climate means no rain from June through September. Without water, the fields dry up by August, and the sheep are brought into the barnyard to be fed hay until the autumn rains make the grass grow.

I clip willow branches back to the permanent structure of the fence—living stems interwoven to create a barrier for ducks. When I have a large enough pile, I gather them up. The sheep call more insistently as the armload of leafy stems approaches. They rush to the gate where I spread the branches out for them to reach.

Not only do willow leaves give the sheep green nutrition, they contain medicinal compounds that reduce the flock's intestinal parasite load. That means I don't have to use deworming medications that would negatively impact the local dung beetle population. Other trees and shrubs also provide food and medicine for sheep: linden, cottonwood, blackberry, plum, apple, pear, black locust, alder, and mulberry are our most-frequently fed leaves. Each has its own benefits to give.

Trees and shrubs have big root systems that reach deeper water sources, keeping them green at the end of the dry season. Many of the trees on our farm are also within the irrigation zone. Some shrubs are downright pesky: Himalayan blackberries choke every edge area where the mower can't reach, and require frequent cutting and digging to keep them within the bounds of our acceptance. Fortunately, sheep love blackberry leaves, so before the thorny stems go on the burn pile, they are stripped clean of leaves by the flock. The sheep's need for food is a good incentive to chop away at the blackberries for 10 minutes every day.

Permaculture encourages us to think about every aspect of the farm as having multiple functions. When I needed a permanent fence to keep our ducks out of the annual vegetables, I chose a living willow fence. Unlike "dead" fences, living fences get stronger every year as they grow. They provide food and habitat for wildlife. Small wild birds particularly love perching on the willow fences and using the branches as protective screening. In the third year after planting, I watched Lorquin's Admiral butterfly larvae munching through willow leaves before pupating on the fence.

When I strap on that tool belt to prune shrubs to feed the sheep, I know I belong here. I am part of the circle, part of the ecosystem, part of Nature. I work to feed my human community in a flow that includes the generosity of Life.

Willows sequester carbon from the atmosphere, reducing the cause of global warming. They require a severe annual pruning in the winter in order to preserve their function as a fence (and not a hedge). This pruning encourages explosive regrowth in spring, which sequesters even more carbon than if the plants had been left uncut. The mature root systems underground fuel the regrowth. This kind of cutting is called "coppicing" or "pollarding." In general, managing our need for woody material through coppicing or pollarding sequesters more carbon per year

than killing trees and replanting them. The fences can also be cut twice per year: half the pruning done in late summer to feed the sheep, and half in winter to finish maintaining the fence.

Some of our willow fences are basket varieties, so the winter pruning chore also provides materials for crafting. Some, like *Salix viminalis* "Superba" and *Salix daphnoides*, make long straight thick stems, up to 12 feet long in a single season of growth. These are dried in the barn so they can be made into hurdles, moveable fence panels, and the borders of raised beds.

The willows need fertilizer to support their explosive annual growth and carbon sequestration. The sheep help with that! All the manure and urine-soaked bedding in the barn gets cleaned out in spring and applied to the orchard, including the willow fences. We use a deep-bedding method in the barn, which means we don't remove manure daily. Instead, we cover dirty areas with fresh straw, junk hay, leaves, or sawdust and allow the floors to build up until we are ready to clean them out once per year. This is actually healthier for the animals, in addition to being easier for the farmers. And it allows the nitrogen-heavy manure to compost in place until we are ready to apply it directly to the garden.

So the sheep eat the willows, and the willows eat the sheep manure. That's a circular fertility cycle! At both ends, humans receive benefits: lamb meat, sheep milk and cheese, wool for spinning into yarn, and basketry materials. Ecological benefits also accumulate: carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and increased pasture health from a rotational cycle that avoids overgrazing.

Permaculture teaches us to live on a piece of land for a full year before making plans and impacting the ecology. I have lived on Heart-Culture Farm Community's land for 15 years, and I am still learning how to integrate our fertility cycles into circular systems. The sheep and willows are a notable success. When I strap on that tool belt to prune shrubs to feed the sheep, I know I belong here. I am a part of something important. I am part of the circle, part of the ecosystem, part of Nature. I can see the beneficial impact of the tasks I do to meet our human needs. I work to feed my human community in a flow that includes the generosity of Life, and the entire ecological community is enriched. ❧

Kara Huntermoon manages the integrated farm at Heart-Culture Farm Community, near Eugene, Oregon. She is a local expert in Willamette Valley wetlands Permaculture. Kara accepts apprentices, WWOOFers, and other students, and loves giving farm tours.

Photo courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

Kara holds a lamb named Salix, with two different species of willows in the fence: Salix daphnoides on the left, and Salix viminalis "Superba" on the right (the more yellow willow). The human children are Tegra and Grace.

Veganic Soil Fertility with Local Materials

By Llyn Peabody

Vegetables grow abundantly in a Sharing Gardens greenhouse.

Cofounder Chris Burns (second from left) and volunteers with an autumn harvest.

Here at the Sharing Gardens we've been growing food using organic methods (no herbicides or pesticides) for 12 years. We average a harvest of over 6,500 pounds of food per year on about one-third of an acre of garden space (including greenhouses). In the past two years we have transitioned to using no manure or commercial fertilizers. All our garden's fertility now comes from leaves, grass clippings, yard waste, kitchen scraps, wood ashes, and coffee grounds. This article outlines how we do it.

Formed in 2009 in Monroe, Oregon, the Sharing Gardens is a unique form of community garden. Instead of multiple plots rented by the families that use them, our gardens and orchards are shared by all. Volunteers typically come once/week during the growing season and help with everything from planting through harvesting, including seed-saving and hand-processing beans and grains for storage. Other members of our small-town, rural community contribute too (donating materials and free use of farm equipment, among other things), extending our garden's "community" beyond its physical borders.

The harvest is shared amongst those who have contributed in some way, through a small CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), and the surplus is donated to food charities (over 2,600 pounds in 2020). This method of maintaining a community garden is very productive as we're able to cluster crops with similar needs for watering, weeding, and harvesting. If we have a pest infestation (which has been rare) we can manage it without causing "our" pests to simply jump to neighbors' garden patches (as in a typical community garden).

A "sharing" garden is also conducive to seed-saving (we save over 80 percent of our own seeds) because we are able to physically isolate crops that might cross and rotate our seed-saving through the years without fear of cross-pollination. Growing food with our share-givers' help means we are able to process crops that might be overly tedious to do alone. Each year we grow enough blue- and polenta-corn and dried beans to feed me and my husband Chris for the year. In the past few years, we've begun to produce enough of these crops not only for our own use but to share with some of our volunteers as well. Another benefit of this model of growing food is that it's easily adapted to urban, rural, and intentional-community settings.

To read more extensively about the Sharing Gardens model, see our article in Communities #153, Winter 2011, pages 41-45.

"Veganic" method for creating soil fertility: It has been said that for every calorie harvested from a plot of land, it must be replaced with a calorie of inputs. To actually *improve* the land's fertility, farmers must add *extra* calories back to the soil they harvest from. Most farmers/gardeners replace these calories with manures, other animal byproducts (bone meal, fish meal, blood meal, feather meal, etc.) and commercial fertilizers which include minerals and other amendments which can have a devastating effect on the environments they are mined from. They also have a heavy transportation footprint as they are shipped around the world. Here at the Sharing Gardens, being vegetarians, committed to sourcing our food *locally*, and wanting to grow food in a way that aligns with our values, we became interested in developing and demonstrating ways of gardening that use *local materials, gathered in a sustainable way with a gentle impact on the environment*. Veganic agriculture has been our solution.

Veganic agriculture is defined as "an approach to growing plant-foods that encompasses a respect for animals, the envi-

ronment, and human health. This is a form of agriculture that goes further than organic standards, by eliminating the use of products that are derived from confined animals and by encouraging the presence of wild native animals on the farmland." (See "Introduction to Veganics," goveganic.net/article19.html.)

Our methods: Our methods require the use of a greenhouse with raised beds (we have 3,000 square feet of greenhouse space). We compost directly in the paths, creating habitat for worms and micro-organisms so that, over the course of the growing season, we generate (and then harvest) large amounts of fine, high-quality worm compost, using materials often considered "waste" products.

Note: This method can be adapted for use in the paths of raised beds *outside* a greenhouse too. The worm-castings just need to be harvested in the fall before the first rains come so they aren't too wet and muddy.

The need for raised beds: With this method, it is important that *paths* and *beds* be separated so one's garden soil doesn't mix with the materials in the paths. We have made many of our raised beds with recycled fence-boards or plywood ripped into six-inch strips and held in place with stakes driven into the ground.

Collecting yard "waste": We live in a very small town (population 700+) surrounded by small farmsteads and large tracts of commercial agricultural land. In the early days of weaning ourselves off commercial fertilizers and manures, we developed relationships with a few landowners nearby who had lots of deciduous trees. We helped with the raking and loading and they shared their dump-trailer for delivery. This was a real "win-win" as they received free yard clean-up and we received free composting materials.

Two years ago, we were approached by our town's city hall to arrange for our gardens to be a drop-off site for people's yard waste. Our town has no curbside pick-up service for these materials. Burn piles within the town's boundaries are discouraged and depositing yard waste in regular trash receptacles can be expensive. We were happy to cooperate. We put a notice in the town's monthly water bill with our contact info and the following guidelines:

"Please no animal waste or trash. No sticks, branches, holly or roses (too sharp), or black walnut leaves (they can kill plants). Just leaves and grass. Please don't make the bags too heavy or tie them too tightly."

We've noticed that kids who help grow the food are more interested in eating it!

This has been very successful.

Re-using plastic bags: As a way of giving back to the community, and to minimize plastic bag use, we set up a clothesline in our biggest greenhouse. We dry the donated bags and then roll them into bundles of six and make them available for free for anyone who can use them.

Grass-clippings: Fresh grass-clippings are high in nitrogen, beloved food of worms, and essential for creating a nutrient-rich end product. We invested in a riding mower with a catchment system to "harvest" grass off our three acres of "lawns" (these are a diverse mix of grass, weeds, and clover, adding to our mix's nutrient diversity). We also have grass clippings donated through our yard waste drop-off site.

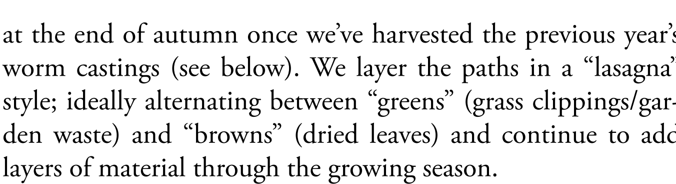
Coffee grounds: For some reason, worms *love* coffee grounds! We have a volunteer who has established a relationship with a local drive-through coffee shop and they save the grounds in garbage bags that John picks up on a weekly basis. Though technically not a "local" product (since coffee is grown in the tropics) coffee grounds are *available* locally and make an excellent, free resource to add to soil fertility. During the year, we sprinkle coffee grounds liberally in our paths (where we're making compost) to attract and feed the worms. We also apply it about one-third of an inch thick on all our garden beds and work it into the soil before planting.

Other materials: Along with grass and leaves, we often layer tomato-plant prunings and other yard waste into the paths as long as they are not too course. Snipping them into smaller pieces aids in the composting process. Weeds are fine too as long as we don't put plant material that is already going to seed.

Spreading and layering materials: We begin this process

A neighbor brings part of his autumn leaf harvest.

We alternate "browns" (leaves or straw) with "greens" (grass-clippings).



We set up a drop-off site for leaves and grass. Free, recycled bags are in the trash-can to reduce plastic-use.

at the end of autumn once we've harvested the previous year's worm castings (see below). We layer the paths in a "lasagna" style; ideally alternating between "greens" (grass clippings/garden waste) and "browns" (dried leaves) and continue to add layers of material through the growing season.

By watering and walking on the paths we help the worms and other "micro-livestock" break down the materials and turn them into soil. During the growing season, the worms and micro-organisms are "digesting" all this material from below. On tours of the greenhouses we often pull back the mulch to show people the thriving colonies of red wiggler worms that live in our paths. Many times, we have also been able to show them worm eggs and little tunnels the worms have formed down into the rich, black compost.

Note: We also maintain several large compost bins in which we layer the courser kitchen waste, garden waste, leaves, and grass. These piles get turned one or two times per year. This compost, being more course, is used to fertilize our garden beds where we are transplanting already-established "starts," or growing potatoes. Because it has not entirely composted, it is used as top-dressing and not mixed into the beds themselves.

Harvesting worm castings: We stop adding organic matter to the paths in the late summer so it has time to be consumed by the worms below. This means there is less material to move out of the way when it's time to harvest our worm compost. This "undigested" material is temporarily gathered in tubs, or piled in the dormant garden *beds* alongside the paths and then returned to the paths after the worm compost has been gathered.

We have tried different kinds of flat shovels and scoops. Our favorite tool is a small, metal shovel meant for scooping wood ashes out of the woodstove or fireplace. It's lightweight and its flat front edge and curved-up sides seem to be the most efficient tool for harvesting. We periodically switch hands to give our bodies a balanced workout. We scoop the material into used five-gallon buckets which are easy to carry and stack until we have time to sift the compost.

Sifting and storing worm compost: We set up sawhorses and sift out any large materials using hardware cloth with one-half-inch holes secured in a wooden frame. Anything too big to fit through the sifter is redistributed in the paths.

We **store** the sifted compost in recycled heavy-duty plastic bags (such as soil- or pellet-fuel-bags). When storing the compost, we put two to three cups of water in each bag to keep micro-organisms alive and multiplying, and close the bags with twine to keep things moist till we're ready to use them. (We often have baby worms hatching right in our potting mix in the spring!) It's important not to *over-water* your compost or it will get anaerobic and stinky. It should smell just like forest soil. Ideally the bags should be stored in a covered, shady place so they don't get too hot before you use them which can kill the micro-organisms inside.

Uses: This beautiful, rich compost has many uses. As a **soil amendment**, it can be dug directly into raised beds. This is one of the activities we do with our volunteers in our greenhouses during the winter season using small hand-forks. Later in the season we put it directly **into holes** where you're planting "starts," or potatoes. It is not a "hot" compost (high in nitrogen) so plants can be transplanted directly into it without danger of burning their roots. It can also be used to make an excellent **potting mix**. As a potting mix, we use it in conjunction with coconut coir, mushroom compost, perlite, or other relatively inert mediums to increase the soil's ability to retain water without getting too soggy. We also add about one-quarter cup of sifted wood ashes per five-gallon bucket (see below). It is important to mix all the materials evenly. We use a child's wading pool for this purpose. For our finest seed-starting mix we sift

it one more time through a sifter with one-quarter-inch holes.

Wood ash: Another very important part of our soil fertility comes from wood ash. It is extremely concentrated though and must be used with care. Though devoid of nitrogen and sulphur which are lost during the wood's combustion, wood ash contains all other minerals needed for plant growth. It is too alkaline for some plants and if applied too liberally can actually burn the skin of worms and deter the correct balance of microorganisms. For these reasons, *we don't put it in our greenhouse paths where we are making the worm compost*. We use a small amount in our potting mix (see above) and sprinkle it *lightly* (it is *very concentrated*) in garden beds where it is appropriate. We work it into the soil at least 10 days before planting our crops to give it time to mellow. (The only commonly grown vegetable that we know of that doesn't like wood ash is potatoes.)

Our wood ash comes from the wood we use to heat our house. We use firewood only from trees or lumber with no paint or other treatments. Nails and other metal are okay. We sift the ashes before putting them in the garden and remove any metal with a magnet.

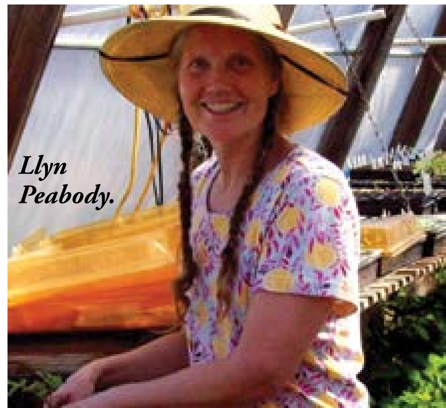
In summary: Plants grown without reliance on commercial fertilizers and animal byproducts will tend to grow slower but have less water-weight and so are more nutrient-dense. Because of this they are also more resistant to pests and disease. Healthier plants mean healthier people.

Whether you live in an intentional community and have access to lots of organic material from your own land, operate a community garden and can find donations of material from the town or city you're embedded in, or are a "community of two" in a single-family household, you can adapt these methods to your situation to grow food with a lighter footprint on the planet. ❧

Llyn Peabody is cofounder, with Chris Burns, of the Sharing Gardens in Monroe, Oregon. Their project offers a unique and viable model for establishing local food self-reliance and building stronger communities through the cultivation of mutual generosity (sharing). The Sharing Gardens coordinates volunteers to grow over three tons of food a year, a third of which is donated to food banks; provides wildlife habitat to bugs, birds, and other small critters; and promotes veganic/organic gardening practices worldwide through the award-winning website, www.TheSharingGardens.blogspot.com. You can contact Llyn and Chris at shareinjoy@gmail.com.

Chris spreads leaves and tomato prunings in greenhouse paths after harvesting worm castings.

Our produce is flavorful and nutrient-dense.


Llyn Peabody.

We layer grass-clippings with leaves in our compost bins and greenhouse paths and use them as mulch in garden beds.

By watering and walking on the paths during the growing season we help the worms and other "micro-livestock" decompose the materials and turn them into soil.

Humanure Composting (Yes, in the city!)

By Rachel Freifelder

Trigger warning: *this article discusses functions and products of the human body that some people don't want to think about, let alone discuss, see, or smell.*

The names of community members in this article are fictitious.

I. What is Humanure?

It's a word coined by Joseph Jenkins, author of *The Humanure Handbook*[1], to describe human feces, a.k.a. poop, crap, ka-ka, s**t, b.m., or "human waste." Jenkins created the word to make the point that human feces should be thought of as a resource, not a disposal problem, and if properly composted, can be a safe agricultural fertilizer, akin to chicken or cow manure.

A "humanure system" is, in short, a composting toilet system where the "toilet" is a bucket located for the user's convenience, often indoors, and the bucket gets carried periodically to be emptied into a dedicated compost pile. If you are considering adopting this system, I highly recommend you get a copy of the *Handbook* and also read the *Blue Green Systems* article[2] about Kailash Ecovillage's system. These sources also provide extensive scientific citations for all statements made here about pathogens and chemistry.

A. Why compost?

"Water-based sanitation (centralized sewer systems and decentralized septic tanks with drain fields) is the predominant paradigm in developed countries due to its user convenience and is often aspired to in developing countries…. However, these systems have many important shortcomings; they waste the valuable nutrient flow; are energy, capital, and potable water intensive, especially centralized systems with their extensive pipe network and often greatly backlogged service needs; usually require functional electric power or water supply; are subject to failure when overloaded, as during rain events when combined with storm sewers; often discharge pollutants, such as pathogens, nitrogen, minerals, pharmaceuticals, and heavy metals, into the environment; can require large land areas to infiltrate the treated water into the environment, although most is discharged into surface waters." —Ole Ersson[2]

In other words, we compost humanure to save water, power, space, and money; protect our rivers from pollution; and reclaim valuable nutrients for agriculture.

B. Overview of the humanure system

1. Point of use: Bucket toilet and bucket of high-carbon cover material.
2. Composting location: Compost bins, dry high-carbon cover material, cleaning tools.
3. Transport/cleaning: When bucket is one-half full, take it out to bin. Empty bucket into bin, clean, put all cleaning water into bin. Cover with cover material.
4. Storage: When compost pile has reached capacity, stop adding new material. Let sit for designated time.
5. Use: Utilize finished compost once it is thoroughly safe.

C. Comparison to other composting toilet systems

The choice of composting system should be based on preference of the users. (If you have space for a safely-sited outhouse or vault toilet, and prefer the simplicity of that system, great!)

For many people, the system described here has the following advantages:

1. The point of use can be in an indoor, heated space.
2. The point of use occupies minimal space, as compared to a self-contained vault toilet, so is a good fit for small houses. If added to an existing small house it requires no alterations to the house.
3. Any smells, flies, etc., associated with composting are outside of the living space and are not experienced at the point of use.
4. The number and location of point-of-use buckets can be changed easily, independently of the location of composting sites.
5. Necessary materials are generally inexpensive and easily available if not already on hand.
6. In a small or urban site, separating the point of use from the composting site creates privacy from nosy neighbors.

D. Is it safe?

This is the first thing most people want to know, and rightly so. Safety requires: proper cleaning of all tools including hands, and most importantly, proper composting to kill all pathogens. The safest composting relies on *time* rather than *heat*. Hot composting reliably kills all human pathogens. However, it's hard to guarantee that every cubic centimeter of a compost pile reaches the necessary temperature. You can reliably say that every bit of your pile has been sitting for the same amount of time.

All enteric bacteria (bacteria that grow inside the gut of an animal) will be dead after six months outside their preferred environment, and a year kills all amoebas. The *Handbook* contains extensive research on sanitation and the time/temperature

combination for each pathogen to die. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) code requires the compost to be aged for one year. Many users of this system store their piles for two years, starting the clock after the last bucket was added to the pile, before they consider their compost to be finished.

A compost bin that prevents animals from rooting through the compost pile is also an excellent idea. If you're in the city, you may want to rodent-proof your humanure bin, as well as your kitchen compost bin. More on this later.

E. Is it legal?

That depends on your location. Some locales have a code for home-built composting toilet systems. Some locations allow manufactured composting toilets but not owner-built. Some codes prohibit anything of the kind, and some areas have no codes at all. If you live at the end of a dirt road and are doing other things under the radar, you may be unconcerned with legality. Most code enforcement is complaint driven, so good neighbor relationships are your best insurance.

ANSI recently (2017 and 2018) developed two standards for compost toilet systems that may be adopted by local governments. The city of Portland, Oregon has permitted systems meeting both standards. Kailash Ecovillage, in Portland, has one of these permitted systems[2]. (The article cited includes design details as well as pathogen testing records for their finished compost.) Essential elements of legality include: rot-proof walls and floor; drain with leachate catchment; all leachate is returned to the pile.

II. Details of the process

A. Point of use/Indoors

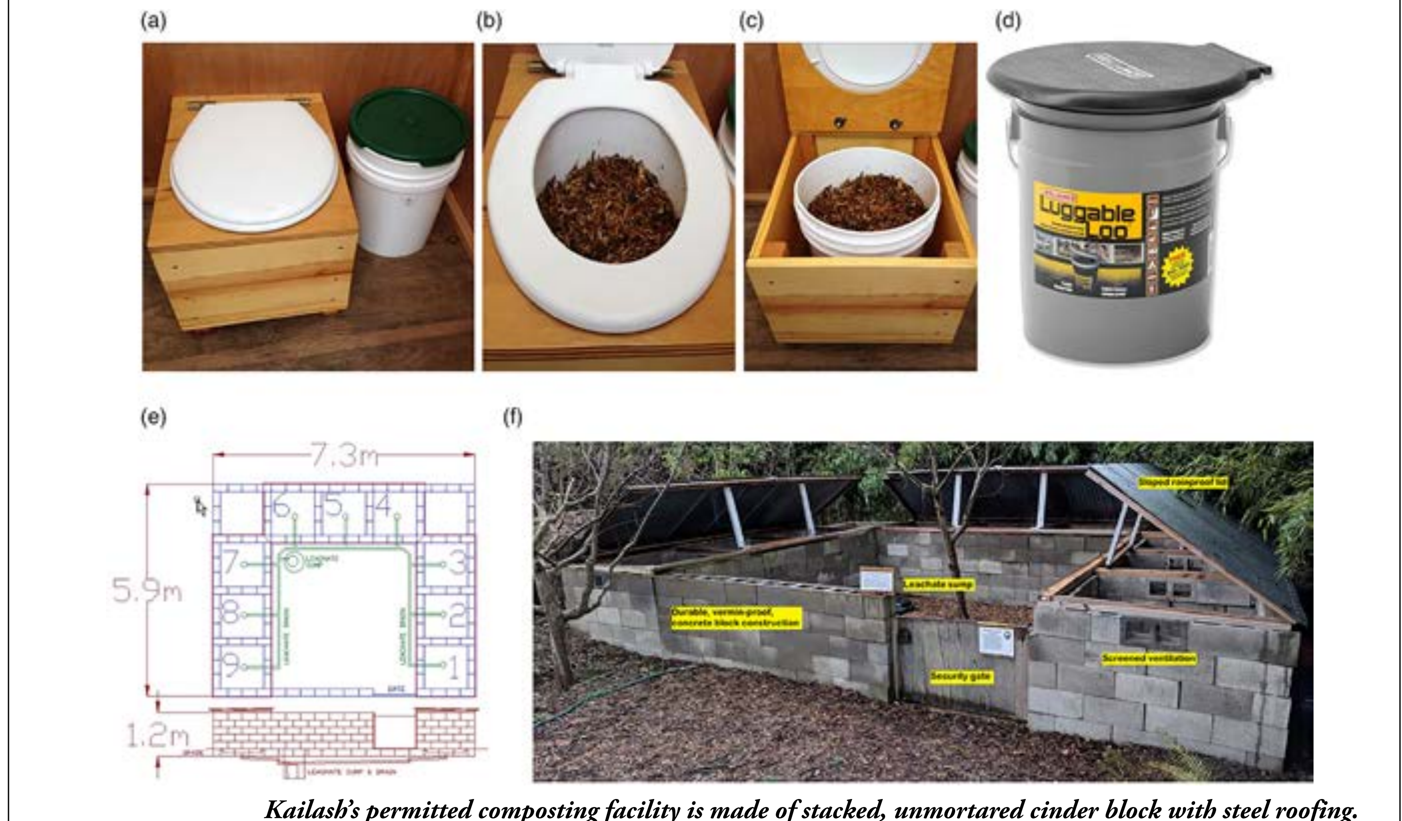
Many people like their "toilet" to be indoors, in the warm comfort of their living space. In this house, the water toilet was decommissioned, and the humanure toilet installed in its place. All the amenities of the bathroom are right there: sink with hot running water, towels, finished floor, etc. It's nice to have a toilet seat on top of the bucket, or to build a box to contain the bucket, with a toilet seat as part of it. This toilet follows the "Lovable Loo" plans in the *Handbook*. We'll refer to this as "the loo" for the rest of this article.

Toilet paper goes in the bucket to decompose with everything else. It can be considered to be part of the cover material.

Cover material should be high in carbon ("brown") to balance the high nitrogen level. Indoor cover materials should be fine-textured. Sawdust is ideal. Finely crumbled leaf mold works as well. In Portland, Oregon many people use coffee chaff, a waste product of a large industrial coffee roastery. The coffee aroma covers other smells effectively. Whatever your cover material is, it covers odors more effectively if it is slightly moist.

Any organic material will work in a pinch. Leaves, wood chips, paper all work. The bucket will fill up faster but that's not necessarily bad (see "Whose turn is it?"). Soil or ashes effectively suppress odors, but also suppress thermophilic composting.

1. Jenkins, J., 2019. *Humanure Handbook*, 4th edition, Grove City, Pennsylvania, humanurehandbook.com.
2. Ersson, O. and K. King, 2019. "The Kailash Ecovillage project converting human excreta into organic foodstuffs and sanitized compost using new international building codes for compost toilet and urine diversion systems." *Blue-Green Systems* (2019) 1 (1): 33–54, iwaponline.com/bgs/article/1/1/33/69034/The-Kailash-Ecovillage-project-converting-human.



Kailash's permitted composting facility is made of stacked, unmortared cinder block with steel roofing.

Bathroom wall sign.

Blueberry bathroom.

Photos courtesy of Rachel Freifelder

Humanure buckets should be labeled, so they don't accidentally get used for anything else. A big letter H drawn in permanent marker works well. Draw it on opposite sides so it's always visible.

The bucket for cover material isn't contaminated, so doesn't need to be labeled.

Urine separation

Separating the urine from the poop is not essential; however, if you don't, you will need to empty the bucket more often, will need more cover material to balance the large amount of liquid and nitrogen, and will end up with a much larger volume of material to compost and a need for more compost bins. In an urban site, this can lead to running out of space for the bins.

One solution: a separate "pee pot" stored in the same bathroom. This household uses an antique enameled chamber pot. People who urinate sitting can sit on the pot and people who prefer to stand pick the pot up and set it on the (closed) lid of the loo. Each person has a personal wash rag for post-urination personal cleaning (see "TP alternatives," this issue). Guests can use TP and toss it in the loo, and it's also OK if guests urinate in the loo.

There are manufactured urine-separating inserts for bucket toilets, so that people can sit on the loo to urinate.

Joe Jenkins advocates mixing urine, household food compost, garden weeds, and all other compost, with the humanure bin. He lives on 20 acres in rural Pennsylvania. Some rural folks choose this simple system. If outdoor space is limited it may be a better idea to separate these streams. The food/garden compost only needs to sit until it is fully composted, as little as a month, whereas the humanure compost should be composted for a longer time and treated as a biohazard until finished.

Another reason to separate: urine is typically safe to use directly in the garden without prior composting. The sooner it is used, the less smell there will be. Adding urine to food/garden compost piles helps the pile to heat up, killing the rare pathogens present in the urine as well as plant pathogens found in garden residues. Some urine in the humanure pile will help it to heat up as well. Urine can be added to garden beds as liquid fertilizer. Farmers call this "fertigation." It should be diluted and/or watered in (ideally with greywater) unless heavy rain is expected in the next day or two. If you live in a part of the world where schistosomiasis is common (primarily in the tropics), urine should be either composted or stored for six months. Warning: stored urine can have a strong smell.

Does humanure smell?

If properly covered, the humanure toilet should not smell like anything but the cover material. The bathroom may contain some airborne odors immediately after use, just like with a water toilet.

If a separate chamber pot is used for urine, it should be emptied daily into a compost pile and rinsed with greywater or rainwater. After cleaning, put a few inches of greywater in the bottom. The soap and organic matter in the greywater will react with the urine to minimize its smell.

Convenience: the personal bucket

Your buckets can be wherever you want. In some communities, people choose to have their own setup in their personal space. This typically means three small receptacles, one for humanure, one for cover materials, and one for urine. If you keep water in your room, you can wash your hands over the pee pot. If you're not using a toilet seat, be sure your bucket has a comfortable rounded edge. Plastic paint buckets work as pee pots; metal ones will corrode. Most paint buckets have a lip, ok for urine but hard to empty if used for humanure. If your community buys nut

butters in one-gallon buckets, those are ideal personal humanure buckets. Be sure to label them.

B. The compost site

The minimum requirement, as with a food composting system, is to have two designated locations for compost piles, with a store of cover materials and the necessary equipment for cleaning. In a small or urban site, bins (vertical walls) use space more efficiently than piles (sloping sides) and are possible to rodent-proof. You'll need at least two: one to add to while the other is resting. If you plan on resting your compost for two years, and you have only two bins, each one needs to be large enough that your community will take two years to fill it. A household of four people typically takes two years to fill a bin that is 4' square. This also means that a bin made of wood will need to last four years from the time you start adding material to the time you can remove finished compost.

Rodent-proof bins

Rats can get through a hole as small as 3/4" and mice as small as 3/8". A common strategy for rodent-proofing is to line the bin with hardware cloth, a.k.a. wire mesh, either 1/4" or 1/2" depending on whether you're concerned about mice or rats.

If you have a plastic batch composter, often known as a "Darth Vader head," they're much more useful for humanure composting than for kitchen food scraps. These are rodent-proof if the bottom plate is included. If the bottom plate is missing, set the bin on a sheet of hardware cloth.

Emptying and cleaning

Prevent emergencies by having at least two designated humanure buckets for each point of use.

When you install the empty/clean bucket in the loo, put a thin layer of your cover material at the bottom of the bucket. This will make cleaning easier next time.

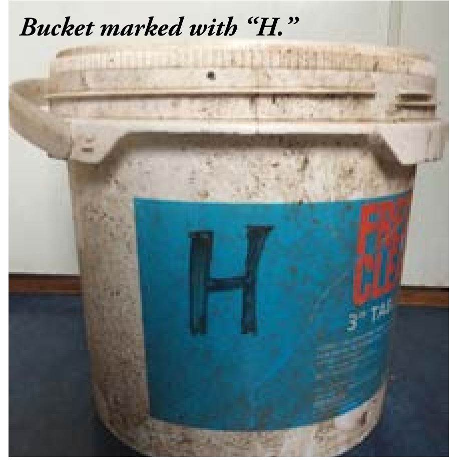
Some communities have designated tools for cleaning the buckets and managing the piles. These tools should be clearly labeled so that no one accidentally uses them elsewhere. A toilet brush for bucket cleaning and a fork for tidying the pile are some common choices. Other communities remove the risk of contaminated tools by using entirely biodegradable materials, all of which go into the pile after use.

Here's one system:

1. *Make space* in the pile: Using a stick at least 3/4" in diameter, spread the top of the pile out to form a shallow depression at the top. (If the stick breaks, leave it in the pile and get another one.) Poke the dirty end of the stick into the side of the pile to store.
2. *Empty* the bucket into the depression in the pile.
3. *Rinse;* a great use for greywater or rainwater. Pour rinse water into the pile.
4. *Scrub:* If any material is stuck to the inside of the bucket, use a stick, a handful of leaves, or other organic matter to loosen it. Avoid touching the inside of the bucket with your hands. Toss the stick/leaves/etc. into the pile.
5. *Repeat* steps 3 and 4 (rinse and scrub) until the bucket looks clean. Put bucket upside down on mulch near pile to drain.
6. *Cover:* Pick up cover material from the cover material pile, with your hands, and cover the new addition until no poop or toilet paper is visible.
7. *Sanitize* the bucket: Keep a spray bottle of vinegar, biodegradable soap, or other nontoxic sanitizer near the bin. Spritz the rim and inside of the bucket. This will help with accumulated odors in the plastic. *Dry* in the sun, if it's sunny out. Drying plus ultraviolet light will kill many pathogens, especially if it's a hot day.
8. *Touchless handwashing:* Go to the rain barrel, which has a lever-handle installed on the faucet and a pump-bottle of soap sitting at a convenient height. Turn on the water with your wrist, or ask your community mate to turn it on for you. Pump a squirt of soap into one hand with the other elbow or wrist. Scrub for 20 seconds. Rinse. (Yes, the soil next to the rain barrel may be very slightly contaminated with fecal coliforms. If the house was built before 1978, that soil is also contaminated with lead from the paint. Don't eat it.)

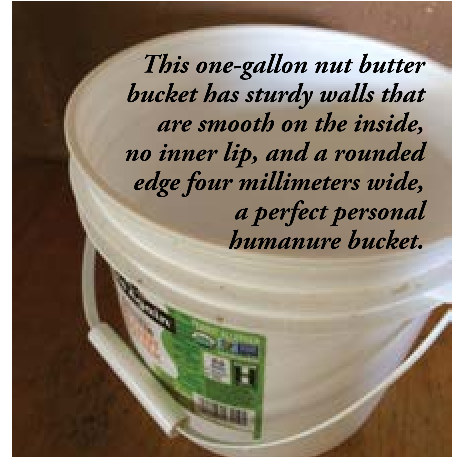
Whose turn is it?

A shared bucket in a community setting needs to be part of a chore system. In some communities it is part of "cleaning the bathroom." In a co-living community on five acres in New England, the humanure is a rotation separate from other chores. The community has a dozen residents and two bathrooms. In each bathroom, a chore wheel on the wall has a spot for each person's name. When it's Pat's turn to empty the bucket, they can do it any time. The longer they wait, the more full the bucket gets, so it's in their interest to do it sooner—half full is plenty. The trail from the house to the compost piles is somewhat steep and can



Bucket marked with "H."

Chamber pot.



This one-gallon nut butter bucket has sturdy walls that are smooth on the inside, no inner lip, and a rounded edge four millimeters wide, a perfect personal humanure bucket.

This home-built rodent-proof bin has plywood walls and floor made of salvaged cedar fence boards. Since it will take two years to fill and two years to compost, rats might chew through the floor. A hardware cloth liner is the next line of defense.

Touchless handwashing setup.

Seckel pears grown with composted humanure.

be slick in the winter. A person only has to slip on the ice once to be motivated to empty the bucket before it's too full!

After Pat empties and cleans the bucket, they reinstall it in the bathroom, wash their hands one more time, and then turn the humanure chore wheel to Chris, who's next.

One glitch in this system: Pat went out of town without telling Chris. The bucket got half full, then three-quarters full. When Chris realized Pat was out of town, it was really full, and the trail was covered with ice. Chris is 5'2" and weighs 100 pounds, and had to ask Robin, who is 6'2" and 250 lbs., for help. In exchange, Chris helped with Robin's dinner cook shift that week. Hooray for community!

C. Composting

At some point you must stop adding material to your bin so that the clock can start for your designated storage time. If you have a large community and multiple piles, you'll need a record-keeping system. One community that rests their piles for two years places a half-sheet of plywood in front of the bin and paints the date that the compost will be ready on the plywood.

Some people choose to turn the pile to encourage heating up. We prefer not to do this. It requires extra space (a second bin to turn the pile into), it generates contaminated tools, and it still doesn't guarantee that every last bit of the compost gets hot. With an appropriate balance of carbon and nitrogen, most of the pile heats up without turning. As discussed above, the safest composting relies on time rather than heat. So we'd rather just let the pile sit.

One year or two?

As noted, many people rest their humanure compost for two years after closing up, although the ANSI code requires only one year.

In cold soil or sewage sludge, the one human gut pathogen that may last more than one year is the cyst (egg) of the roundworm (*Ascaris sp.*). Roundworms are uncommon in temperate climates and more common in the tropics. The worms and their cysts begin disintegrating at 38° C (100.4° F). Kailash Ecovillage's monitoring of their system includes daily temperature checks of the compost pile at 10 centimeters (four inches) from the edge of the bin. They have found that temperatures in the active piles are consistently above 42° C at 10 cm from the edge and frequently 32°C (90° F) at the edge, even in October. So it is unlikely but not impossible that any roundworm eggs found at the edge of a humanure compost pile might survive a year of composting. If you live in a place where roundworms are common, you can either give it a second year, build a bin that is insulated to hold heat, or install a pane of glass over the top to encourage solar heating.

Using the compost

Code specifies that the finished compost can be used only on ornamental or fruit crops. However, proper composting results in a product that is safe to use on vegetable gardens, and many people do this without any problems. You're going to wash the lettuce before you eat it, right? If other animals, such as cats, rodents, or squirrels have access to your garden, there are already some pathogens present. Joe Jenkins resorts to having his own gut flora tested periodically, and affirms that no *Ascaris* or other unusual residents have been detected.

Final reflections

The COVID-10 pandemic has taught us many things. One is the need to keep our immune systems strong. Another is the instability and inequity of the economic systems that so many people have relied on. I'm writing this in February of 2021, just after the US passed half a million deaths attributed to COVID-19. When you receive this issue of Communities, I hope that the spread and the deaths have slowed. I hope that what *has* spread is the movement for justice, including food justice, environmental justice, and awareness of the finite nature of our soil and water. ❧

Rachel Freifelder has lived in community since 1986, in arrangements from student co-ops to punk houses to rural farms. She was a founder of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Rutledge, Missouri and of Blueberry in Portland, Oregon, where she currently lives. Like Dancing Rabbit's, Blueberry's mission is to present a model of a more sustainable way to live. Rachel has lived in and visited many communities that use some kind of composting toilet and feels sad when she has to poop in drinking water. *Thanks to Ole Ersson of Kailash Ecovillage for permission to use photos of Kailash's system.*

TP Alternatives (that work with the flush toilet too!)

Even if you shell out for 100 percent post-consumer recycled toilet paper, it still has a footprint (as does any manufactured material). All of the following alternatives have a smaller footprint than manufactured TP, you probably already have most of the materials, and next time there's a panic run on TP at the grocery store, you'll be sitting pretty. They are all compatible with water toilets as well as composting toilet systems.

If you are using a water toilet, these next two methods will reduce the load on your septic system, your town's sewers, or whatever other sewage treatment system you are connected to.

Personal irrigation

Instead of wiping, spritz with water until clean. In some countries a bidet is as normal a bathroom fixture as a flush toilet. The bidet uses a lot of water, which is an issue in many settings. But the principle of washing with a modest amount of water is that you are not generating any other contaminated material.

A condiment bottle is ideal if you find one. Otherwise, any empty squirt bottle would work, perhaps one that held shampoo. Some people use their hand for a cup to contain the water. You're going to wash your hands, right?

After washing, you'll want to dry with a designated personal towel. In some shared bathrooms, there isn't room for everyone to store their towel, but there is room for an array of cup hooks to hold each person's mini-towel, each hook labeled with a person's name. Use a washcloth or cloth napkin for your mini-towel, or cut up a larger towel.

The housemate who introduced me to this system said, "Once you stop rubbing dry paper on your delicate tissues, you'll never go back!"

Washable rags

Cut up soft cotton into 3"-6" pieces. (If your community has a culture of doing handwork in meetings, this is minimally distracting.) Old t-shirts, cotton sheets, flannel shirts, etc. work well. Next to the toilet, have an upper receptacle for "clean" and a lower one for "used." If you make a lot, you can have small receptacles in the bathroom and larger ones elsewhere for the whole backstock. The advantage of having a lot is that you can run a dedicated load through the washer, if you have a washer.

Cleaning is like washing cloth diapers—but the rags aren't nearly as dirty as a diaper! Pre-soaking will help to loosen solids before washing. Wash in the hottest water available or boil on the stove. If you like, add Bac-Out, Nature's Miracle, or other enzyme cleaner (follow package directions).

In one household, one of the designated humanure buckets was turned into the designated large storage and soaking bucket for used rags, as they are potentially contaminated in the same way. When the bucket is full, the community member in charge soaks, puts the soaking water in the humanure bin, and runs one dedicated small load through the washer.

Recycled paper

In a community where I lived, a member was trying to get us to stop subscribing to the local newspaper, which he called the "Boston Distraction." One day he cut up the paper into 3" squares and stacked them in the bathroom. You can do this with any unwanted paper. Fold your large sheet and cut though multiple layers to save time.

Pro tip: to soften crisp or shiny paper before using, crumple it in your hand, un-crumple, and repeat. This makes it both more comfortable and more absorbent. After use, it can be composted or flushed.

Leaves

We're sharing this with the caveat that not everyone will like it. Before TP became the norm, many humans used leaves, moss, or lichens. Consider it as a stopgap solution if you're in the woods and don't have other options. Some people are fully content with the right species of leaf, but you may want to keep other options open at home.

Not all leaves are comfortable. The softer the better, and a fuzzy texture may be more pleasant. Here's a few that can work: maple, mullein (a common weed), lamb's ears (a common ornamental), and if you live in the Pacific Northwest, thimbleberry (a native raspberry relative that is easy to grow in your yard). *Pro tip:* if you want to try out a new kind of leaf, test it on your forearm first and wait 24 hours to see if you have any skin irritation, before trying it out on your bum.

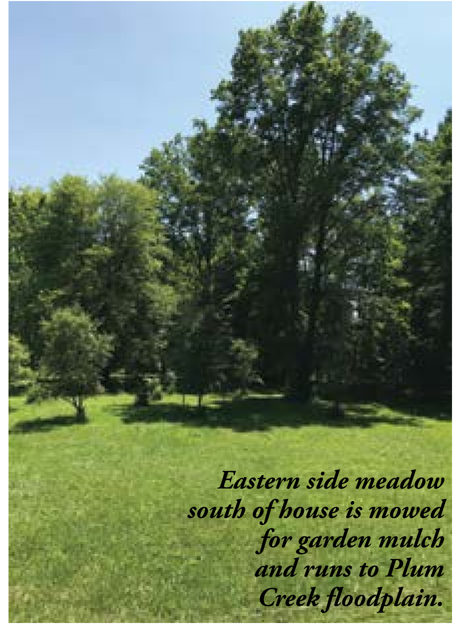
Leaves often crack, so layer them if you want to keep your hands cleaner. Most leaves are softer when fresh, so if you want to try it in your home bathroom, just bring a few handfuls in, enough to get your community through a day or two. Store them in a small basket near the toilet.

Leaves are generally more biodegradable than paper, if you're using a composting system. However, some large, fibrous leaves may clog a water toilet.

—RF

Creating a Twenty-First Century Landscape

By Carl N. McDaniel



Eastern side meadow south of house is mowed for garden mulch and runs to Plum Creek floodplain.

Tallgrass prairie south of house with big blue stem and forbes.

In December 2006, Mary and I decided to retire from our home in Troy, New York, where we had lived for 33 years, half our lifetimes. Our primary challenge was to fulfill a long-held desire to replicate Hilltop, the home of our close friends David and Harriet Borton that runs on sunshine. Trail Magic, our home in Oberlin, essentially copied the Borton's home to attain the same energy outcome. (See "Evidence and Beliefs: Lessons from Oberlin," COMMUNITIES #169, Winter 2015, pp. 45-47, 76.)

Because of our initial focus on powering our home entirely by solar energy, the landscape received minimal attention, except for keeping water from entering the dwelling, until after we were settled in our solar-powered home.

Our five acres, located on the south side of East College Street, slopes gently down to Plum Creek, a stream that flows through Oberlin and is our southern boundary.

We dug a 12-feet deep pond of 0.2 acres that would provide soil for raising the house site six feet, thereby permitting access to the city sewer. We created two swales that ran down the east and west sides of the house, with the west side swale putting water into the pond and the east side swale flowing down 840 feet to Plum Creek with a descent of 10 feet. The builder installed house footer drains that drained to daylight on the south side of the pond.

Our property was about half meadow and half forest harboring several dozen ash trees that were fated to succumb to the emerald ash borer that had not yet reached Oberlin—within a decade there were virtually no live ash trees in northeast Ohio. The east side of the property south of the house was a meadow that ended in the Plum Creek floodplain while the west side, south of the pond, was a savanna that ended in woods. A 40-foot-wide swale with invasive plants (multiflora rose and buckthorn that we've mostly removed from the property) was between the meadow and the savanna.

A row of Osage orange trees in the swale extended south to a huge sugar maple just before a stand of 70-foot-tall mature ash trees. We cleared the swale except for Osage orange, maple, and black walnut trees and filled it with wood chips over several years. We then broadcast tallgrass prairie seeds followed by planting dogwood, American sycamore, white pine, and spruce bare-rooted plants. We erected a four-foot fence around each plant to prevent deer from grazing the young seedlings in the first years and then to keep bucks from girdling the young trees when they rub-off antler felt in the fall.

We lumbered some 30 mature ash trees along with several mature red oaks and black walnuts to yield 10,400 board feet of finished lumber that became beams, floors, shelves, counter tops, and trim in the house and barn. We cut the treetops into three dozen cords of firewood that we used, gave away, bartered, or sold.

We reforested the area below the pond with mostly native trees including American sycamore, tamarack, dogwood, river birch, white pine, Norway and blue spruce. As in the swale, we placed a four-foot fence around each bare-rooted seedling. We planted in the front yard about 20 fenced trees—buckeye, dogwood, pawpaw, hawthorn, redbud, spruce, white oak, sugar and silver maple—to

create a wooded area that would require minimal mowing as the tree crowns grew to shade the yard. On the western side of the property above the pond we made a 6,000-square-foot garden with an eight-foot-high fence to keep out deer.

Creating this garden was far more challenging than making a garden in Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, or upstate New York where we used to live, because the soil is fine glacial clay that has zero perc—that is, put water in a hole and it stays there. I discovered this issue our first spring in Oberlin when I planted a dozen broccoli plants next to the barn and they did not grow; they were being drowned. We purchased several dumptruck-loads of sand and leaf-mulch soil to rototill into the clay to start making garden soil.

Our first-year carrots were about two inches long—the depth of the soil above the native clay. Over the next half dozen years we mulched with grass cuttings from our meadow and savanna fields and hauled with our Toyota pickup truck many loads of free leaf-mulch soil provided from where the city dumped the leaves it collected. By 2012 the garden was 6,000 square feet and the soil about half a foot deep. In the best years it yielded some 400,000 calories that would provide enough food to feed two people for about four months.

Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas, impressed me with the productivity of tallgrass prairies that made the dozen-foot-deep Iowa soil, among the best agricultural soil in the world. We purchased a mix of tallgrass prairie seeds and planted a 6,000-square-foot area in the backyard that after nine years has matured into a tallgrass prairie. Tall prairie grasses—big blue stem, switch grass, Indian grass—put roots down six feet that sequester carbon. Some 65 percent of the carbon they fix goes into the soil. When the prairie matures and its roots go deeper in the soil, the prairie absorbs more and more water.

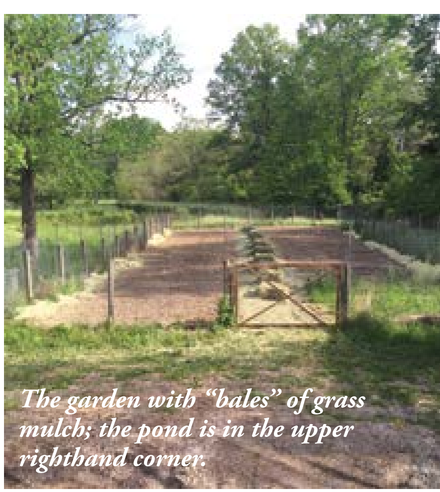
Thirty years ago, the goal for managing water was to get it onto your neighbor's property as quickly as possible. Today the goal is to keep all precipitation on your property. In order to achieve this goal, we designed our property to keep a 24-hour rainfall of three inches on our land. Our backyard tallgrass prairie was the first step to keep water on our property. The second step was to dam the trench in the bank of Plum Creek that allowed water from our land to flow into the creek. We had the dam constructed across the trench with an overflow pipe that would keep water on our property without putting water onto neighboring properties.

The forested areas of the landscape provide us with the annual cord of wood we use to heat Trail Magic. Yes, wood heating can produce pollutants unless done properly. We burn well-seasoned hardwoods, and we keep the stack temperature between 500° F and 900° F. We have heated with wood for 12 years and our chimney and cap have no build-up of creosote. Yes, some smoke is visible when lighting the fire, but the pollution is minimal. Beyond providing firewood, food, and sequestering carbon, our landscape provides habitat for myriad insects, small mammals, and food for a number of bird species, especially in the tallgrass prairie.

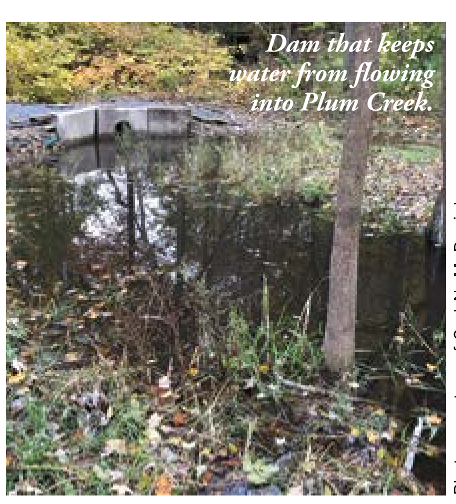
The house was designed for passive solar heating and lighting. Even on cloudy days one can read in the living-dining room, bedrooms, and kitchen without turning on a light. Even if all lights in the house are turned on, less than 50 W would flow, meaning in an hour only 0.05 kWh would be used. This would be one cent at a cost of $0.20 per kWh. The average two-person home in northeastern Ohio annually uses about 2,800 kWh for inside lighting while we use less than 50 kWh annually.

In summary, a landscape can reduce flooding, sequester carbon, provide food and energy (firewood), enhance biodiversity with its habitats and microclimates, allow for recreation, entertainment, and education, promote health with the exercise its maintenance requires, and deliver aesthetic satisfaction by its inherent beauty. ❧

Carl N. McDaniel is Visiting Professor of Environmental Studies at Oberlin College. He has published over 60 scientific articles on animal and plant development and ecological economics, numerous general audience pieces, and written five books: Paradise for Sale: A Parable of Nature*, coauthored with economist John M. Gowdy (California University Press, 2000);* Wisdom for a Livable Planet: The Visionary Work of Terri Swearingen, Dave Foreman, Wes Jackson, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Werner Fornos, Herman Daly, Stephen Schneider, and David Orr *(Trinity University Press, 2005);* Trail Magic: Creating a Positive Energy Home *(Sigel Press, 2012);* At the Mercy of Nature: Shackleton's Endurance Saga Gives Promise for Our Future *(Sigel Press, 2014); and* Beauty Won Me Over: A Scientist's Life *(Austin Mcauley, 2021). Contact him at carl.mcdaniel@oberlin.edu.*


The garden with "bales" of grass mulch; the pond is in the upper righthand corner.

Big blue stem, a tall grass.


Dam that keeps water from flowing into Plum Creek.

Photos courtesy of Carl N. McDaniel

Simple Living Close to Nature

By Kim Scheidt

"We live in a way that if everyone on the planet were living this way there would be enough for everyone." That's what I'd often tell people when asked to sum up the choices I make living here in our little pocket of the world (Red Earth Farms, part of the tri-communities cluster outside Rutledge, Missouri).

We certainly have what many would consider a rustic and austere lifestyle, and that is primarily because we value living lightly on the Earth and limiting our use of resources, both as a personal preference and as a demonstration project. However it really is a manner of living rich beyond compare when the metrics are such things as freedom over our own time, clean air to breathe, delicious water, food security, and the peacefulness that comes with taking in the vistas and sounds of nature as a regular daily occurrence.

Visitors often ask if we aim for self-sufficiency as a goal and for me personally that is not the case. Instead, what we ideally have will be a level of interconnectedness with the natural world and fellow humans in our parts who as a collective can provide for many of our needs and wants through sharing our gifts, talents, specialties, surpluses, and skills with one another to maximize the benefit for all members of our group. And certainly we still do rely on outside inputs for all kinds of things such as transportation, technology, and manufactured goods that are deemed useful and necessary, but the culture is one of doing our best to reduce our harmful human impact and increase the resiliency of the systems as time goes on.

For example, my sub-community home is on a plot of land where we've attempted over the years to provide our own vegetables in our organic no-till annual gardens. Typically we have enough to cover our own needs plus those of our friends with whom we often share meals in a group setting. That implies a willingness on everyone's part to eat seasonally what is fresh and available. In the winter we rely heavily on storage crops of dried beans, garlic, onions, turnips, sweet potatoes, and squash, as well as dehydrated, canned, and fermented summer veggies. Some of our best friends are neighbors who raise animals for dairy, eggs, and meat, and we share with one another—many people working cooperatively helping with one another's projects to decrease the burden and increase the enjoyment of everyday mundane tasks.

I've learned the art of slowing down and observing. I appreciate all the lessons in compassion, communication, growth, and connection with myself, my friends and neighbors, and the natural world that we help to steward.

I feel an especially deep relationship with seeds in the spring that I germinate by placing in a damp cloth inside a plastic bag or container, put in my pocket to keep warm, and even keep in bed with me at night. I take the seeds out several times a day to look at them and give them air and moisture as needed. With this method they often "pop" quite a bit sooner than if set out in soil to germinate instead. They get extra love and attention this way, it doesn't require any sort of external heating element, and it connects me with them in a very special way. And although it's true that "sometimes the best time to do something is when we have time to do something," we do our best to organize such things as planting and pruning, weeding and seeding in tune with the cycles of the moon when possible—noticing and honoring the pull of the celestial bodies and observing what can often be substantial effects on plant activity.

Every year it is our tradition that we plant more and more trees and other perennials on the property. These plantings will grow to provide fruit, nuts, and timber for

humans and wildlife, hopefully for many generations to come. It takes time to get plantings established and some won't begin to bear for quite a while yet. This is an aspect of what we stand for that is often lost in modern human society, which places so much importance on our short-term personal gain rather than on actions that have longer-term significance to people other than just ourselves. There's a little song I like to sing to the young seedlings as I put them in the ground: "Dear Tree, I hope you live, and I hope you grow up very BIG." It's just a silly little verse but for me it invokes intention for the tree to happily settle into its new home.

Life is complex and it's not always rosy. I myself have seen a lot of turmoil within myself and the lives of my close community mates over the past few years, not to mention all the craziness being felt in the wider world. But I take solace in the beauty of the nature and the inevitable changes of the seasons, in the sunrises and sunsets, the snow flakes and the sparkles on the water and the pitter patter of raindrops, the warmth of the summer sun and the cool of the pond. I cherish this life and am amazed at what it's brought me, though often not what I have expected. I've learned the art of slowing down and observing as well as the understanding that right timing can be so important. I appreciate all the lessons in compassion, communication, growth, and connection with myself, my friends and neighbors, and the natural world that we help to steward. ❧

Kim Scheidt lives at Red Earth Farms in northeast Missouri at the egalitarian sub-community homestead of Dandelion, which embraces the ideals of simple living, permaculture, feminism, and open communication. She loves gardening and orcharding, doing energetic healing work, cooking nutritious and delicious food, harvesting firewood, hanging out with friends, and playing ultimate frisbee. She works part-time doing accounting for the Foundation for Intentional Community and Communities *magazine.*

Photos courtesy of Kim Scheidt

Does Individual Action Matter?

By Rachel Freifelder

Lifestyle anarchist, n. Used disparagingly by some radical activists to suggest that another radical is overly concerned with their personal footprint and is not doing enough to work for larger structural change.

It's Monday morning. You're suited up in your rain gear to bike to work and there's only one problem. You've misplaced your insulated stainless steel to-go cup, and you really want to stop by your favorite lesbian-owned worker co-op cafe to grab an organic fair-trade vegan latte. And you really *don't* want to send another paper cup and plastic lid to the landfill. You express this dilemma to your housemate and ask if she's seen your cup. She looks up from her copy of *The Fifth Estate* and says, "Don't be such a lifestyle anarchist. You know individual action doesn't matter. We just need to smash the heteropatriarchal capitalist war machine."

So *does* individual action matter? (Answer: you get to decide for yourself.) For me, yes, the positive or negative effects of my individual actions matter. When I was five or six my mother read us the hilarious children's classic, *If Everybody Did*[1]. It asked things like "Squeeze the cat?," followed by the refrain, "This is what would happen if everybody did!" with an image of the effects of repeated cat-squeezing. Though some items in the book were confusing (what does "mash hash" even mean?) it made a big impression on me. I'm often painfully aware of every tiny fragment of trash I generate, every teaspoon of water that goes down the drain instead of being reused in the garden, every puff of smoke that comes from my chimney. So most of the time I make a serious effort to minimize those.

I also agree with that hypothetical roommate: It's not enough to keep my footprint small. I need to be working for that larger structural change, to create a future that is socially just and ecologically sound. More on that later.

What motivates us?

One thing that doesn't, usually: being hassled by self-righteous community mates. As a teenager I tried to influence other people's choices by acts that were neither gracious nor effective. I remember once chewing my mother out for buying a bottle of lemonade when there was a perfectly good drinking fountain nearby. What do you think—did I make that water more appealing, or did I just annoy her?

Gracious individual action is more likely to inspire others. We want to show that our low-footprint life is joyful and not actually that hard. I feel lucky that I genuinely prefer biking to driving, not just for the smaller impact but because it turns a necessary errand into a fun workout. Especially on a beautiful day, I hope that zipping through a traffic jam with a big smile might inspire those who have a bike languishing in their garage to want to ride more, and to shake the idea that driving is the fastest or easiest way to get to their job downtown.

Group action supports structural change

For many folks, it's easier to do something difficult or inconvenient if we believe we are part of a movement. Individual action matters more when many individuals do the same thing. Back to cycling: not everyone shares my joy if it's raining, cold, or dangerous. When I biked alone on the high-speed arteries of a city designed around the automobile, I didn't know if I was even visible enough for my own safety, let alone as a one-woman political statement. In contrast, when I joined the early Critical Mass rides in San Francisco in the 1990s, 7000 individuals on bikes, riding together, were much more visible (and I was much safer). That was serious joy. Three decades later, thanks in part to this movement, many cities have considered bikes seriously in their transportation planning, and invested in infrastructure that makes cycling safer and easier for that person who's not so sure about bike commuting.

Conversely, an individual action that does harm may seem unimportant because the individual amount of harm is small. One little candy wrapper in a giant dumpster? Maybe we need to see the floating island of trash in the ocean to realize how it all adds up. And then, refraining from doing it seems harder if it's normalized everywhere we look. While you were looking for your reusable to-go cup, did you have to step over a trash bag full of your roomie's single-use cups? Did you feel discouraged, or tempted to say, "Oh, screw it."?

Sharing: community makes individual action easier

Sharing is not normalized under capitalism. How many communitarians have heard, "I did that in my 20s, but it didn't work because…"? When I attend the West Coast Communities Conference, I'm reminded that my little urban collective is part of a movement. I return home with much more energy for my home community.

In 1993, when Dancing Rabbit was a group of eight people having meetings at a student co-op, some observers told us that our vision of a village without individual car ownership was "unrealistic" and seemed to be angry with us for wanting to do it. The founders persevered, and now

the Dancing Rabbit Vehicle Co-op's small number of vehicles are shared, and well-maintained, by a large group of people. The individual choice to not own a private car is easier when the structure of community provides an alternative. What's more, every time we tell the story of that car co-op, it seems more realistic for another community to try it.

Both/And

Besides engaging in individual or collective actions to shrink our footprint, we need to address the social structures, often imposed from above, that harm the least powerful and force them into individual choices that are less than ideal. A low-income single mother may long to drive less, but she can't afford the rent in a gentrified neighborhood near downtown. So she lives in an outlying neighborhood that lacks jobs, has few grocery stores, and is poorly served by public transit. She doesn't have the time or energy to commute long distances by bike, and she certainly can't afford a lower-emission hybrid car.

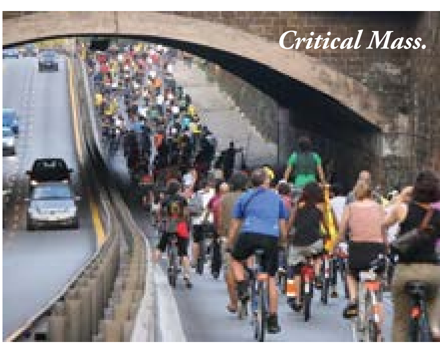
What's more, between working and commuting, she may not have time to cook whole-foods meals from scratch, and government commodity programs make low-nutrient processed foods cheaper and more available than fresh organic produce. And the store near her home doesn't carry fresh produce anyway. So good luck reducing her waste stream in the struggle to feed her kids.

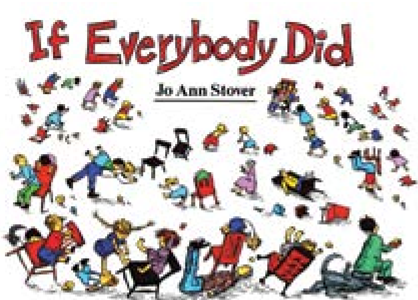
To help her drive less, we need to fight for affordable housing in the neighborhoods closer to economic centers, and better public transit and food justice in low-rent neighborhoods. Or a more radical vision: universal guaranteed income, housing, food, and health care that allows her to prioritize caring for her children over working to pay the bills.

We could say more about the just and peaceful world that we want to create, but that would be a whole other article. Instead let's end with this question: how do we work for that structural change? Why, by individual action, of course…many individuals, acting together. ❧

Rachel Freifelder has lived in community for 35 years, in arrangements from student co-ops to punk houses to rural farms. She was a founder of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Rutledge, Missouri and of Blueberry in Portland, Oregon, where she currently lives. She has been engaged in various kinds of political activism since 1976 and deeply involved with the Black Lives Matter movement since June 2020.

1. *If Everybody Did*, Jo Ann Stover. Bob Jones University Press, Greenville, South Carolina, 1960.


Critical Mass.



Stand in the street?

This is what would happen if everybody did!

Photos courtesy of Rachel Freifelder

Spiritual Intelligence: Embodied Energy and the End of Consumer-Waste Culture

By Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD

Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. ...Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.
—Abraham Joshua Heschel

Only by understanding how all forms of oppression are interconnected can we recognize that all forms of emancipation are equally interconnected.

In *The Reader,* Bernard Schlink's novel about love and dignity in the face of the Holocaust, there is a scene during which the main character confronts the idea of indifference as motivation for murder: human beings considered useless objects can be methodically disposed of. I am a child of a Holocaust survivor. Industrial civilization has harnessed apathy towards, and of course contempt of, difference. My ancestral memory, my cellular memory tells me we must reconsider intimacy in terms of waste. A pencil, a rubber band, a square of toilet paper—let alone an apple tree, a family pet, a human friend—or a stranger in a distant land.

I had met Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, Arun Gandhi, at Peaceweavers while my six-year-old son and I were living at EcoVillage Ithaca. Arun's book, *Be The Change: A Grandfather Gandhi's Story*, tells how Gandhi taught him as a young boy the connection between nonviolence and not wasting—even a worn-away pencil stub. His story is about recognizing and nurturing the sacred in everyday objects. This awareness—so beautiful and simple—had been the foundation of how I had lived since leaving home as a teenager to live on communes and organic farms throughout Europe and North Africa. Now, as an adult, I attempt to live, in every aspect of my daily life, Gandhi's philosophy of not wasting as a commitment to nonviolence.

Every day I ask myself: How can citizen-activists embody symbiotic traditional wisdoms as we transition from our hyper-industrialized petroleum-pharmaceutical-addicted techno-euphoric culture to an economics of solidarity? How can we mobilize collective eco-action among decolonized peoples? How can we—individually and collectively—teach and embody the intricacies of the social scientific concepts of true cost, life-cycle analysis, cradle-to-grave, and embodied energy (designating both the local and global cycles of extraction > transportation > manufacture > assembly > production > installation > representation > distribution > consumption > disassembly/deconstruction > disposal/decomposition/containment)?

Animating our embodied energy allows us to shift our relationship to consumer-waste culture's everyday violence—creating a bridge between infrastructural change and individual-collective accountability. For example, how we build our home, how we animate the embodied energy of each object and the space we

create by combining them, is a deliberate commitment to local and global nonviolence. I am happy to be in dialogue with others about this intimacy that deeply shifts our relationship to objects and people as disposable.

For the past three years, my family and I have lived in a biocentric art installation. Using only repurposed materials and equipment, we converted a school bus into our performance-based tiny home.

Our LoveBus is a spiritual commitment. It is rooted in the ancient Hebraic philosophy of *gilgulim*, to reanimate or reincarnate; a process of bringing new life to that which was considered dead—or landfill. "Trash," an object no longer valued thus deemed as waste, is rooted in Western concepts of Progress and Development. When we rethink taken-for-granted assumptions that perpetuate the fact that over "40 percent of the content of American landfills is construction waste" (Hawken 100), we can shift the underlying concept of development from neocolonialism to, as Paul Hawken urges, "reimagine development as a tool for restoring nature and communities" (109). Continual renewal implied in *gilgulim* echoes the First Law of Thermodynamics: the total amount of heat energy can never be altered; energy can never be created nor destroyed, instead it is transformed. Learning from cross-cultural wisdoms, we choose to embody this Law in how we live our home.

We have found that home is a dynamic and diverse *practice*, an ongoing unfolding to be reanimated each moment in relation to our needs, desires, values. Home is an action, a reflection of a constellation of our belief systems. Home is a living organism with a metabolism that continually transforms energy. Like the focus of Native American Pueblo architecture, ours is, as Barbara Kinsglover writes, "to build a structure the earth could embrace" (211). Compelled by biophilic, earth-loving motivations we seek an exchange, a reciprocal relationship with the environments around us—local and beyond.

I am reminded of *buen vivir* (good life), the Spanish translation of the Quechua *Sumak Kausay*. The normative standard of living in the US, the American Dream, presumes that the "good life" implies having more than we need. This Western idea of prosperity is rooted in "enforced consumption" (Ivan Illich)—a technocratic model of property ownership. "Private property" attempts to fix home as a static unity, stripped of relationality and only available to those who are deemed entitled to it.

"At its root, our economic crisis is a crisis in consciousness because we see ourselves as separate from our *environment*, when in reality, we're inextricably connected to all this is. As a result, we've deluded ourselves into thinking that land should be owned and then profited from by some at the expense of others. … Even the word *environment* points to this disconnection: It stems from the Old French ***environer***, 'to surround, enclose, encircle,' implying a subject that is separate from the objects it is surrounded by. … [Aldo Leopold warned us:] 'We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect'" (Adams 152, 43).

Unlike land privatization/ownership and property for individual profit, First Nations peoples who had territorial disputes fought over "the right of land *use*, never ownership, which is a concept foreign to most indigenous cultures" (Adams 44-45). As Eric Cheyfitz asserts in his *Disinformation Age:* "*Buen Vivir* is not geared toward 'having more' and does not see accumulation and growth, but rather a state of equilibrium as its goal" (Cheyfitz 412).

Wendell Berry shared similar sentiments: "'What I stand for is what I stand on'—reminding us that land must be measured not only in acres and dollars but in love and respect" (Hawken 86).

Within the framework of neoliberal globalization, that which cultivates and harvests apathy, the free market is a euphemism for economic terrorism, and the litany of our collusion with corporate forms of domination is nearly infinite. We institutionalize collective spiritual numbness as our industrial-waste consumer culture engineers our own demise.

Navigating our own extinction along with the collapse of the known world, we witness not only our fears and failures, but also the exhilarating potential to radically transform our Anthropogenic status quo that defines our species' hubris. Transitioning from our biocidal Anthropocene Era (human-induced ecological destruction due to advanced capitalism, rampant consumerism, international development, environmental racism) into a creative-waste biophilia requires embodied interdependency.

This intimacy-based movement is rooted in spiritual practices and everyday life choices. It resonates with geologian Thomas

Berry's concept of the Ecozoic—in which humans share mutually beneficial relationships with the world around them. Intellectually, structurally, and spiritually, we integrate with our natural environment, rather than compete with it. Renouncing the Anthropocene as we shift into the Ecozoic Era means that we honor the sentient abilities (electromagnetic cellular consciousness) of animals, plants, trees, and the organic intelligence of these non-humans, our kin. We *all* are by nature electrical beings—animated by our electromagnetic fields.

If we embrace *how* our non-human kin learn, we can develop a healthier, more equitable world through co-relational infrastructures. We can remember that we are bioelectrical systems that use electrochemical activity and electrochemical signals to move through time and space. Non-hierarchical electrical communication patterns in nature can become models for human interactions as we evolve toward ecological justice. We now know that plants' *nervous systems* are totally decentralized, that the plant functions as a total brain. In the same way, we can reconceptualize industrialized economics sustained by our Western-imperialist Descartian view of mind/body hierarchy—a false dichotomy that reifies body-phobia and ethnocentric destructive ecological choices.

Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era, my cross-cultural climate justice book, challenges cultural habits deeply embedded in our calamitous trajectory toward global ecological and cultural, ethnic collapse. It explores how we can rethink relationality; how we can, as Eduardo Kohn declares in his *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*, "decoloniz[e] our thinking" (224) in order to embody intersubjectivity. Unlearning ideologies of entitlement and waste can generate a cultural paradigm shift rooted in socio-spiritual economics.

Because disinformation campaigns spread by fossil fuel interests, Agribusiness, and Big Pharma deeply root us in assimilationist consumer-bred entitlement, we must be attentive to the ways in which we unconsciously embody the very hegemonies we seek to dislodge. We must be aware of the ecological and social costs of replacing one dominator culture with another. The characters in *Zazu Dreams* witness social and environmental costs of subjugating others through fossil-fuel-addictions and their ostensible "green" replacements. Both carbon-intensive economies are dependent on people and objects-reduced-to-"resources"-as-disposable.

Leah Sha'rabi, the Mizrahi mystic, declared that "Everything you see has a spark of holiness in it that is waiting to rise up. It wants to be free, like a person in prison who longs to be rescued" (Firestone 180). Rescuing an everyday object means that we release its inherent dignity. Although not directly identifying with Animism, Hinduism, or even the Kabbalah, Sha'rabi believed that everything has a soul, every object is sacred, the most menial tasks are sacred. When we embrace the sacred possibilities of mutual accountability we can begin to uproot our materialist society, eventually rebuilding in its place a "Living Democracy" (Frances Moore Lappé) that aligns our values with the natural world.

As all forms of climate crisis/climate chaos are interconnected, all forms of environmental justice are equally interconnected. A devotion to repurposing objects, to constructing co-beneficial, regenerative infrastructural support systems, is an antidote to industrialized convenience culture.

Although I am haunted by the horrors of our insidious and explicit techno-utopic race into a robotic 5G future, I cling to the possibility that we can shift our self-destructive complicity that sustains ravaging anthropogenic environmental racism. I am devoted to collective action that could generate the reciprocity of Ecozoic infrastructures.

I am always eager to collaborate with other activists, scholars, and artists. If you are interested, please contact me: photo@carajudea.com. ❧

Paintings by Micaela Amateau Amato from Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era.

Dr. Cara Judea Alhadeff has published dozens of books and essays on environmental justice, spirituality, philosophy, performance studies, and ethnic studies journals/anthologies. In numerous museum collections, her photographs/performances have been defended by freedom-of-speech organizations. Former professor at UC Santa Cruz and Global Center for Advanced Studies, Alhadeff teaches, performs, and parents a creative zero-waste life. She lives with her partner, Rob Mies, and their son, Zazu, in the Love Bus: a biocentric art installation/performance-based tiny home using only repurposed materials and equipment: www.facebook.com/LoveBusFamily. See also www.carajudea.com, www.zazudreams.com, and Menagerie Woodworking at www.facebook.com/menagerie.woodworking.5.

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1. "Reusing embodied energy" (Hawken 90) not only saves both energy and capital costs, it is also spiritually intelligent.

2. "Dominator civilizations are characterized by people who don't recognize that their own well-being depends upon the well-being of the communities in which they live. As a result of their sense of alienation, people within those civilizations seek to control and dominate others, usually through social structures that wield power from top to bottom" (Adams 77).

Wise Wording

By Looby Macnamara

This article is adapted with permission from the Looby Macnamara's most recent book, Cultural Emergence: A Toolkit for Transforming Ourselves and the World, *published by Permanent Publications, November 2020.*
See chelseagreen.com/product/cultural-emergence and shop.permaculture.co.uk/cultural-emergence.html.

Wise wording is the careful and thoughtful use of words to promote and enhance the feelings, mindsets, and behaviours we wish to cultivate.

Language influences culture and culture influences language. Beyond this are even deeper layers, where culture and language are actually defined by each other. Language is both a product of and a driver for worldviews, beliefs, attitudes, and values. Languages are part of the frames in which we view the world, others, and ourselves. Language is one of the ways in which we sense culture, observing the words as well as the tone and body language. These often evolve in relationship to place—for example, in the numerous words for snow that the Eskimos have. In many Asian languages there are many different words to describe rice through its life cycle, from seed sown, seedlings planted out, growing, harvested, dried, to finally being cooked and eaten.

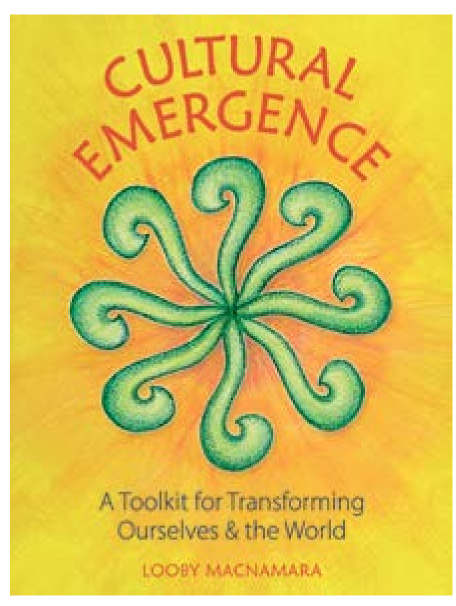
All words are made up; they do not exist in and of themselves like a plant or a rock does. They exist because we create them, attributing meaning and importance. The meaning we assign words is dependent on our worldview and priorities. Words can open up our minds and allow us to grasp ideas that otherwise would remain ambiguous. Language can also restrict and confine our thinking. Languages inherently contain certain ways of seeing the world that we learn and are conditioned with as we learn the language.

Some concepts are untranslatable across cultures. When there isn't a word or phrase it is hard to relate to the concepts or even plain impossible to place within the worldview created by our language. Different languages have concepts embedded within them, such as attitudes to time, past and future, nature connection or separation.

We are always communicating across cultures; even when we share some of the same macro and micro cultures, our personal cultures will be unique. Within the same language we each have different mental images, associations, and understandings of words. We are interpreting both the words and what we assume to be the subtext behind the words. Even with the best intentions and careful listening the potential for huge miscommunication still remains.

The practice of wise wording invites us not to be lazy with our language use, and to look below the surface at the thinking that it both arises from and contributes to. Wise wording can unlock new perspectives.

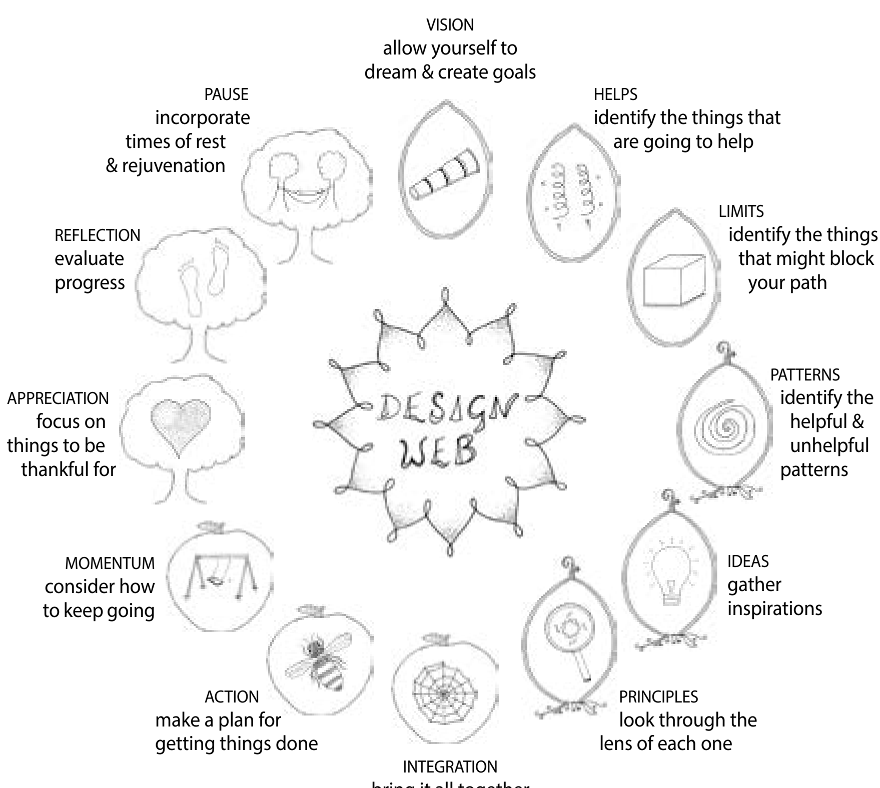
Words can open up our minds and allow us to grasp ideas that otherwise would remain ambiguous. Language can also restrict and confine our thinking.



Paradigms Reflected in Language

All language perpetuates certain paradigms, which may or may not be helpful. The destructive paradigms of power-over violence and nature/human separation are deeply embedded in many languages.

Patriarchy is reinforced through the numerous words that contribute to the invisibilisation of women, such as referring to man or mankind for the whole of humankind. The term "guys" is a modern equivalent of this; while this may seem harmless slang, it perpetuates the denial and underrepresentation of women's presence and contribution in the world. Let's take a look at this sentence: "The guys in the science lab



discovered a cure for cancer." The mental image this sentence conjures is most likely to be predominantly or solely male, maybe with the women in the background regardless of their contribution to the discovery. This is recorded time and time again where women are at best undervalued and at worse have their achievements totally stolen from them by men. This is just one example of many words that make women invisible: manager, chairman, craftsmanship, sportsmanship, masterful, masterpiece, manmade, master, manpower.

In German, Spanish, and other languages it only takes one man in the group to change the gendering language used for the entire group, even if there are hundreds of women to the one man. History is his-story—and her-stories often go unrecorded and forgotten. In our children's books, the main characters are predominately male. I heard about one mother who realised the prevalence of boys as heroes and wanted her daughter to have feminine role models and so went through all her daughter's books with a pen changing the he's to she's. Her daughter now writes her own stories with girl heroines.

The paradigms of otherness, separation, and hierarchies are reinforced by words. The media talk about "floods of migrants," dehumanising people and creating fear. What terms accurately describe the distributions across the globe: first and third world, majority, two-thirds, developing and developed world, global north and south? Each of these terms has connotations and inaccuracies and is misleading.

English is awash with violent, war, and militarised words and phrases: worth a shot, deadlines, gather the troops, quick march, loose cannon, AWOL, faced it like a trooper, etc. We can get trapped into thinking in terms of fighting and win/lose. We now refer to "fighting climate change," taking forward this concept of battling. This war-like thinking can be taken into our own healthcare; how many times have we heard, "she/he lost the battle with cancer"? The COVID-19 response has been full of war metaphors: frontline workers, invisible enemies, lockdown, confinement. There was a lot of hurt and anger around the use of the words "just" and "only," when the media were initially reporting on the virus affecting elderly and vulnerable people more.

The passive language used around sexual abuse takes the emphasis away from the perpetrators and places it on the victims. We might know that one in three women are abused, but how many men are rapists?

Embedding Connection in Our Language

Using words carefully and consciously can encourage and reinforce the paradigms that we wish to inhabit. Donella Meadows[1] recommends that speaking from the new paradigm helps to bring it into being. "You keep speaking and acting, loudly and with assurance, from the new one [paradigm]."

In her TED talk "How language shapes the way we think," Lera Boroditsky[2] shares about the Kuuk Thaayorre Aboriginal people in Australia. They don't use left or right; everything is relative to the cardinal directions of the compass. They might say there's an ant on your southwest leg, and then if you turn around that leg becomes your north-

east leg. They greet each other by asking which way are you going, and reply with answers such as "north, northwest for a long while." So every moment of the day they are oriented in the landscape. Their language has trained them to be oriented, and they have a higher level of orientation than many scientists thought possible for humans to have. Their bodies are located within their landscape at all times; they are not separate from the land. Their language builds an entirely different paradigm and experience of connection.

The terms "environment," "nature," and "natural world" perpetuate the mindset of nature outside of humans, and humans separate from the web of life. The term more-than-human world is expansive and more accurate. Elizabeth Saltouris identified that referring to "the" Earth implies Earth as an inanimate object rather than a living being. The Kalahari Bushmen don't have a word for wild—for them nature is their home, family, an extension of themselves.

Robin Wall Kimmerer[3] describes learning the Native American language of Potawatomi. Instead of assigning genders to nouns as many European languages do, Potawatomi divides nouns and verbs into animate and inanimate. "In Potawatomi, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories are all animate. Of apple, we must say *Who* is that being? and reply *Mshimin yawe*. Apple that being is. … English doesn't give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy. In English, you are either a human or a thing. Our grammar boxes us in by the choice of reducing a nonhuman being to an it, or it must be gendered, inappropriately, as a *he* or a *she*." In contrast Potawatomi "reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world."

Shifting Language

It takes time and awareness to change our language patterns. They are often unconscious and have been with us since we were small children; we are not usually even aware of learning them. It is an effort to reprogramme even when the willingness and intent are there. This is why it is important to not over-police others in their language use, unless they have asked for it. I have a "guyometer," which often works overtime in groups, but after pointing out and explaining my resistance to the term "guys," I then choose to let the word go most of the time without comment. Often the group will self-regulate. On one such occasion, with an all-women group who still said "guys" frequently, the term "Gaias" was introduced, which is an elegant way to catch the word "guy" slipping out and turn it into something beautiful.

Observing our own internal and external dialogue is a constructive way of surfacing and bringing to light our own belief structures and the paradigms we have been conditioned into.

As all words are at some point invented, this process of invention can and does continue. New words can be invented and introduced to define new culture and ways of being. Appreciating and celebrating progress supports us with making shifts. ❧

The article above is adapted with permission from Cultural Emergence: A Toolkit for Transforming Ourselves and the World*, published by Permanent Publications, November 2020. See chelseagreen.com/product/cultural-emergence and shop.permaculture.co.uk/cultural-emergence.html.*

Looby Macnamara is a respected international teacher, practitioner, and author. Her first book, People & Permaculture*, launched the social permaculture movement globally, expanding the focus of permaculture to People Care as well as Earth Care. In 2014, she authored* 7 Ways to Think Differently*. Since 2016 she has been working closely with Jon Young, founder of 8 Shields Institute, on the Cultural Emergence Project—finding new ways to facilitate cultural change. Looby runs Applewood Permaculture Centre with her partner, Chris Evans, in Herefordshire, UK. To learn more about Looby and her projects and courses, please visit www.cultural-emergence.com.*

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1. *Thinking in Systems—A Primer*; Donella H. Meadows; Chelsea Green, 2008 (p. 164).
2. www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think.
3. *Braiding Sweetgrass—Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*; Robin Wall Kimmerer; Milkweed Editions, 2013 (pp. 55 and 56).

Reframing Phrases

There are many gentle and subtle shifts in words that can have a profound effect on us, and reorient our thinking. When life is full I like to say I am productive and stretched, rather than busy and stressed. I think many people find decluttering challenging because of the terminology associated: clutter, rubbish, stuff, getting rid of, etc. My friend Emese turned up for a meeting with a bag full of colourful scarves, saying she wanted to circulate them with us. Reframing my decluttering into circulating and rehoming wonderful things has helped me gain momentum. Here are some of my favourite wise wording shifts:

must do > choose to do
either/or > both/and
deadlines > lifelines
stress > stretch
busy > productive
broken leg/arm/heart > healing leg/arm/heart
should > could
if > when
decluttering > circulating
but > and

Think of 10 words that you use frequently. Take a moment to repeat each one in turn several times. What feelings does each one bring? Are there any shifts you would like to make?

—LM

Foundational Language for Ecological Culture

By Jen Bayer and Hilary Hug

Magicians with surplus food they gathered at a farmers' market for local social service agency partners.

Jen (third from right) and twin sister Hilary (far right) celebrate their 21st birthday mid-COVID-19 with a Magicians-only dinner at the beach.

Photos courtesy of Jen Bayer and Hilary Hug

Words matter. From early life we learn to tie words to what we think, feel, and perceive. With this process we lay a foundation for, and build a fence around, much else that we are and do.

In George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, totalitarians contrived Newspeak to prevent their subjects from thinking and articulating subversive ideas. Today those who reap narrow personal gain from business-as-usual manipulate language to perpetuate the status quo. When they appropriate "green" and "sustainable" to promote "green consumerism" and "sustainable luxury," they drain away capacity for progressive thought and action.

For four decades nearly 200 people—one to two dozen at a time—have lived together as Magic, a residential service learning community founded to research and teach human ecology. We've hailed from dozens of US states and from 40 countries on five continents. We've been newborn to 80-something; millionaire to indigent; a panoply of sexual identities, races, and religions; and trained in everything from accounting to zoology.

We've taught ecological culture in schools, universities, and community settings in the United States and abroad. We've made it a foundation for public services ranging from hatha yoga instruction to mediation, neighborhood organizing to tree planting, advocating science-based resource policy to publishing *The Art and Practice of Loving*.

As we've made common cause with each other, and with tens of thousands of people from backgrounds even more varied than our own, we've become ever more aware that ecological culture is a product of diverse perspectives, skills, and aspirations. We're enthusiastic about making it a big tent where all of humankind can find a home, a realization of *e pluribus unum*: from many, one.

To that end we ground firmly in *ecology* what we mean and understand by ecological culture. We've discovered that when practitioners and proponents find common ground at this foundational level, we enjoy strength of unity as we protect ecological culture from ever-increasing efforts to dilute, corrupt, and co-opt it.

In 1866, just seven years after Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, in which he outlined biological evolution by natural selection, German naturalist Ernst Haeckel coined the word *oekologie* to denote "scientific study of interactions between life and environment." Haeckel made clear that for any of us, environment includes other people, other life, abiotic nature, and everything we shape from nature. Haeckel's ecology and Darwin's evolution are bedrock for ecological culture.

To show this we at Magic construct a very simple framework for human ecology with two words and a double-headed arrow signifying interaction. We add a key, a lock, and an open lock with the key inserted to capture the essence of Darwinian evolutionary success: organisms maintaining a match with the environment to survive and reproduce. (See Figure 1.)

As with any other species, so with ours: population size and information, and environmental resources and hazards are key factors in adaptation. Of these four factors, information is pre-eminent. We rely on it to reproduce, to tap resource, and to avoid hazard. (See Figure 1.)

Humans carry both genetic and experiential information. While we require generations to adapt genetically, we can adapt more quickly by learning from experience. Moreover, when we learn from each other, we can leverage individual experience to potentially even further enhance adaptivity.

In *The Evolution of Culture in Animals*, evolutionary biologist John Tyler Bonner characterizes learning from each other implicitly and explicitly, deliberately and accidentally as *culture*. With this definition he brings culture nearer shared meanings, "nurture" or "assist in growing," common

to "cultivate," "agriculture," and other words with the same root.

Bonner shines light on the overarching importance of culture to human adaptation. Contemporary changes to social and physical environments are without precedent in scale and speed. To sustain favorable interactions we alter information commensurately. Culture is essential to meet this challenge.

However, culture is a two-edged sword. Just as we may learn from others' mistakes, so may we learn their mistakes. Rapid cultural propagation of misinformation can impose a crushing burden. A person passing a defective gene degrades information of her or his descendants. Someone transmitting maladaptive culture can—as compellingly illustrated with (anti)social media—almost instantaneously poison the information of millions.

Humans realize the positive potential of culture and limit its hazards only to the extent that we use ecology to draw and share a map—our story—that is faithful to the territory—reality—so that we can more fully and accurately predict consequences of choosing one or another path. (See Figure 2.)

Haeckel included the word "scientific" in his definition of ecology. Revolutionary physicist Albert Einstein once remarked, "The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking." A large part of what he meant by "everyday thinking" is two questions, "What do I want?" and "How can I get it?" and our responses to them, from which we generate myriad daily behaviors.

Because fulfilling want or taking action to fulfill it necessarily involves the *future*, however near or distant, ideas about what we want and how to get it are *predictions*. Over our lifetimes we learn rules for predicting more accurately. Those rules are the essence of science, both its methods and everything we've learned with them.

Physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn introduced the phrase "paradigm shift" to denote how, in the face of new findings, we replace familiar models of reality—frameworks for our stories. Over the century and a half since Haeckel invented "*oikologie*," people have been demonstrating how ecology can be a new paradigm to redress increasingly evident fundamental flaws in widespread economic, political, religious, and philosophical stories.

We who've founded and sustained intentional communities have in many cases done so to create with our lives new stories of family, livelihood, society, and humanity's place in nature. In doing so we've evolved diverse aspects of culture: food, shelter, furnishings, dress, grooming, governance, religion, education, language, art, music, recreation, transportation, communication, and more. Consciously or subconsciously many of us have been relying upon, generating, and communicating by example ecological culture as we describe it here: learning from each other grounded in scientific study of interactions between life and environment.

While the perils of our era are many, and humans will almost certainly continue to destroy what we value, much remains to be protected so that we and those who follow may enjoy greater opportunity to live and die well. By embracing, developing, and disseminating culture rooted firmly in the science of ecology, we contribute to this end. ❧

Jen Bayer has grown up at Magic, and loves being outdoors enjoying and caring for nature. She and her twin sister Hilary initiated Silicon Valley Barcode of Life (svbol.org) in 2018 because they consider biodiversity essential to human well-being and they perceive current and projected losses an existential threat. Jen's other interests include music, visual art, writing, and speaking publicly to advocate science-based policy. She's previously published two articles in Communities*, and one in* Pacific Horticulture*, and letters to the editor in the* Palo Alto Weekly *and* Stanford *magazine.*

Hilary Hug is a life coach, fitness instructor, and mediator. She first came to Magic in 1988, promptly departed for a few years of volunteer work in Indonesia, returned and has remained. Hilary leads workshops on life-planning and community-building, teaches yoga and valuescience, and oversees Magic's residential service learning community. She's a mother to twin girls born in 1999 and to a boy born in 2004, and she enjoys outdoor activities, especially in natural settings, music, and good times with friends. Hilary earned a B.S. in Human Biology from Stanford University.

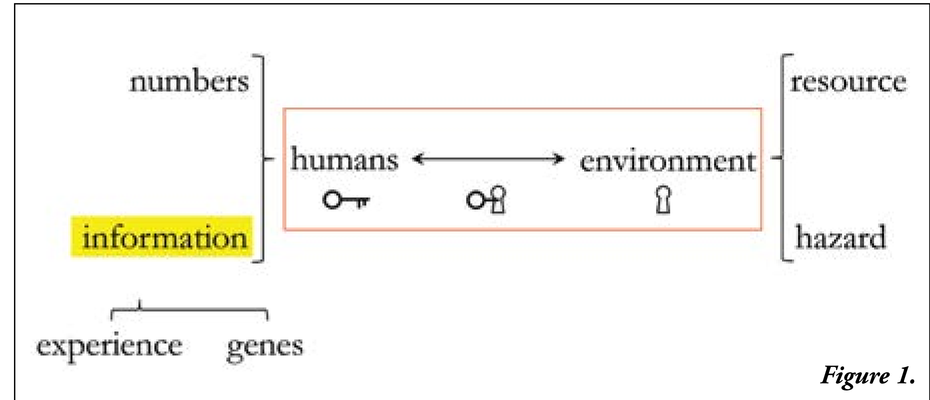

Figure 1.

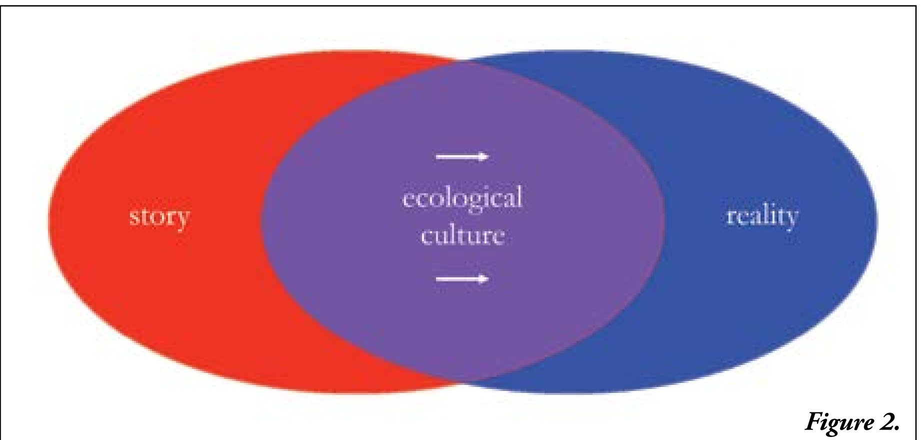

Figure 2.

The Challenging Dynamics of Community Businesses

By Laird Schaub

Let's talk about money, and why intentional communities are not particularly good at it.

Though the theme for this issue of Communities is Ecological Culture, I want to balance a focus on ecology with a close look at the other two aspects of the three-legged stool of sustainability: social and economic.

While it's important that all three be strong, it's not my sense that they are. In the context of sustainability and cooperative living—the world I've been immersed in the last 47 years—it's been my experience that the greater focus has been on the ecological and social components. The neglected child in this equation has been sustainable economics, and this article will attempt to explore why that's so and what can be done about it. In particular I want to examine the interplay between the economic and the social.

While others are examining this at the macro level (the Green New Deal, job creation in renewable energy to replace jobs lost in the fossil fuel industry, federal policy with respect to minimum wage and Covid financial assistance) I want to drill down on the micro level. Intentional communities are, at their best, attempts at creating nuggets of sustainable culture, and I am concerned about the stumbling blocks that get in the way of achieving that. I figure we need to develop a more integrated picture of economic sustainability at the grassroots level in order to turn the ship around.

On the surface of it, most acknowledge the necessity of having a robust economy to be sustainable. It makes little sense for everyone to rely solely on what they can create for themselves (or for their household) without exchange. While some of this may be accomplished through barter—which I am wholly in favor of—you can only take that so far, and it makes a lot of sense for people to do what they're good at, and market the surplus for other things through some kind of currency.

That's the theory.

Now let's look at economics through the lens of cooperative culture.

Mainstream culture is based on competition (it's the water most all of us grew up swimming in) and promotes consumption and material acquisition as the measures of success and security. This invariably produces waste, overconsumption, and inequality. Yuck.

There is terrific evidence that happiness does not increase with consumption past a certain basic level, and it is common for people attracted to community living to want to get off the merry-go-round—to live a life that emphasizes square meals (with friends and family) over square footage, and to value the security of quality relationships over the relative quantity of negotiable securities.

In getting off the treadmill people often come to community with a jaundiced eye toward anyone excited about business activity, seeing it as the fool's gold they just walked away from. Alternately, some are drawn to community because they were never comfortable with money or its pursuit and are hoping that community will provide an environment where "things" are valued less, and people are valued more.

Photos courtesy of Brinton Foy Reed

Stony Ground for Businesses

In consequence community is often not particularly fertile soil for business startups—because there are likely to be a number of members who feel that starting a new venture is like being asked to welcome the devil as a nextdoor neighbor.

The key questions are what are the profits going to be used for, and what values underlie the business (who's benefitting; what are the external costs; is anyone being exploited; is that product or service truly a need, or the result of demand manufactured by slick marketing)?

There is a world of difference when one's values are aligned with one's work, as it avoids the psychic drain of feeling that you're peddling your life force in order to make ends meet. When you get paid for work that sings in your heart, it doesn't feel so much like work—it's a day at a concert.

Distrust Between Entrepreneurs and the Risk Averse

In any typical group there will be a range of perspectives regarding where folks stand with respect to risk. In general, you'll find a few at the risk-tolerant end—which is where most entrepreneurs are located—and a larger clump at the risk-averse end—those for whom starting a business is about as attractive as wisdom tooth extraction without anesthesia.

One of the key challenges of group living (and collective decision-making) is understanding the various ways in which people's personalities, communication styles, attitudes, social customs, and values may diverge (if you moved in thinking everyone was going to be just like you, you're in for a bucket of ice-cold water). As differences are normal, groups must wrestle with creating a

culture in which expressing differences is normalized. It's exhausting fighting this reality, so you may as well learn how to live with it (or give up living in groups).

In this article I'm highlighting the spectrum with respect to risk tolerance, as it undergirds most community initiatives. That is, it's more or less constantly a factor in how groups respond to issues and proposals. As such, it's imperative that groups figure out how to recognize this and how to work with it so that the risk tolerant and the risk averse are not constantly at each other's throats. (If you think this dynamic comes into play only when money is a factor, think again. It's ubiquitous.)

With this in mind, one of the most exciting things about communities becoming more economically woke is that it provides a unique opportunity to bridge the gulf between the ends of the risk spectrum by supporting entrepreneurial activity within the community *to the point where it generates decent employment for the risk averse*.

Our* insight into this dynamic is that if communities partner with their entrepreneurs and encourage value-based job creation, it can not only help generate sufficient income for the entrepreneurs—it can help supply righteous income for those members who are never going to be interested in starting or running a business. They can become proud team members of a values-aligned success that honors their skills, and that allows them to do a shift by simply walking to work (or perhaps to their computer desk).

The Schizophrenia of Manager/Employee Dynamics among Members

Many communities are leery of hiring members to work for the community or a community-based business. And by extension, many business owners who live in community are cautious about hiring fellow members as employees in their business. Not because community members aren't qualified, or don't need the income, but because of the potential awkwardness of being manager/employee in one context, and then peers with the same person in another. It can get confusing in a hurry. Getting it right requires each party being circumspect about which hat they're each wearing in a given conversation. Rather than attempt to navigate this and suffer the consequences of misunderstanding, some groups prohibit it, and thereby forego the potential economic benefits. It's a baby-and-bath-water tragedy.

Doing Personal Work about Money

Given how confusing it can be to sort out the values and morality questions that swirl around money, it's hardly surprising that groups often steer clear of wading into economics more than they have to. Most non-income-sharing groups (about 90 percent of the field) leave those matters strictly up to individual households, so long as everyone is current on their HOA dues, and there's enough money in the reserve fund.

Yet it doesn't have to be that way. Groups could actively help their members explore what money means, and what it means to make money and use it with integrity. I think it's imperative that communities get actively involved in partnering with their members to strengthen that wobbly leg.

In most cases this means going back to the lessons absorbed in your family of origin, and starting there. If you do this work you'll discover that there is considerable variety in the way people have been raised, and that there is incredible diversity in the attitudes about money that members have brought with them into community living—all of which come into play when there is a financial component of a group issue. Wouldn't it be better to know what that range is, and how each member responds to financial topics?

I'm not saying this is easy work, but I think it's essential, and it's work that most communities have not been doing. What better time to turn that around than now?

As the late Paul Wellstone once said, "We all do better when we all do better," and that applies to cooperative economics, too. Yes, it may require some personal reconditioning and a fair number of group conversations, but isn't it worthwhile to build a sustainability stool that's sturdy? ❧

* I am part of the three-person Bluebird Project (*www.bluebird.community*) that focuses on the intersection of cooperative living and successful economic activity. Among other things we offer workshops in dealing with all of the challenges mentioned in this article. The principals are Terry O'Keefe, Brinton Reed, and myself.

Defining Sustainability

"Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony that permit fulfilling the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations."

—excerpted from the Brundtland Report at the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development

The "Non"trepreneurs

Here is a general profile of community members who do **not** identify as entrepreneurs—a subgroup that is seldom in the spotlight, yet comprises the bulk of the membership. Though their economic needs are rarely on their community's radar, we'd like to see that changed. They:

- have above-average communication skills
- want work that is aligned with their values—a product or service they believe in
- prefer to work at home (no commute, no costuming, and more flexibility around childcare)
- prefer to work part-time (with flexibility about hours)
- are open to job sharing
- are loyal, if treated well
- are willing to work for modest wages (in the $15-25/hour range) if the other conditions are met

—LS

Laird Schaub lived four decades at Sandhill Farm, an income-sharing rural community that he helped found in 1974. He served as the main administrator of the Foundation for Intentional Community for 28 years (1987-2015), during which time he was a regular contributor to this magazine. Since 1987 he has also been a consultant on cooperative group dynamics and a facilitation trainer, working with more than 100 communities across North America. In recent years his focus on the social side of sustainability has expanded to include an active interest in sustainable economics. Today he lives in Duluth, Minnesota, where he continues his teaching, consulting, and writing. His blog is communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

A Short History of Cooperatives

By Andrew Moore

One of life's big evolutionary questions has always been: Is the secret to survival for all living creatures, including humans, dependent on "the survival of the fittest," or is it "our ability to cooperate"? Hunter-gatherers lasted for many thousands of years as cooperative groups of family and friends. More recently our culture has reflected success as being the ability to fight interminable wars not just against each other but also against animals and nature, behavior which has brought us to the edge of extinction. What models should we adopt going forward that might save us from extinction and give nature and all sentient beings a chance to thrive again?

At the risk of seeing cooperatives as a panacea and a remedy for all our global difficulties, I do think it is a model worth exploring. A bit of history of how a concept became a model, now used across the globe by 12 percent of the world population, might help us to see their value and potential.

It all started with a group called The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. As Wikipedia explains: "They were a group of 28 that was formed in 1844. Around half were weavers in Rochdale, Lancashire, England. As the mechanisation of the Industrial Revolution was forcing more and more skilled workers into poverty, these tradesmen decided to band together to open their own store selling food items they could not otherwise afford. With lessons from prior failed attempts at cooperation in mind, they designed the now famous Rochdale Principles, and over a period of four months they struggled to pool 1 Pound (approx. $1.50) per person for a total of 28 Pounds of capital. On 21 December 1844, they opened their store with a very meagre selection of butter, sugar, flour, oatmeal and a few candles. Within three months, they expanded their selection to include tea and tobacco, and they were soon known for providing high quality, unadulterated goods."

The pioneers were not just interested in beating the corporations and factory owners at their own game but were interested in "system change." They wanted to understand the underlying economic, political, and social systems that held such a large proportion of the population in poverty. When the consumer cooperative store started to be very successful, instead of expanding the business to an upper floor of their building, they opened a library and invited speakers to talk about improving workers' conditions. Many of these speakers went on to form the Trade Union Movement and ultimately to start a new socialist political party in England, the Labour Party, which survives today.

By 1900, the British cooperative movement had grown to 1,439 cooperatives covering virtually every area of the UK. It did not take long before cooperatives of all kinds such as consumer, worker, financial cooperatives started appearing around the world, forming a truly global movement. The International Cooperative Alliance was formed and adapted and adopted the early Rochdale Principles in 1966 to be:

1. Open, voluntary membership.
2. Democratic governance.
3. Limited return on equity.
4. Surplus belongs to members.
5. Education of members and public in cooperative principles.
6. Cooperation between cooperatives.

A seventh principle was added at this time:

7. Concern for community.

In my opinion it is long overdue that an eighth principle should be added:

8. Concern for the environment.

A cooperative is now defined as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise." The movement now even has its own domain. When somebody sees a .coop email address, or a .coop website, they know they're talking to a cooperative. Today, in more than 100 countries around the world, thousands of cooperatives benefit from using a .coop domain. For more information about cooperatives try: International Cooperative Alliance, *www.ica.coop*; BC Co-op Association, *www.bcca.coop*. ❧

Editor's note: *In Andrew's article in* COMMUNITIES *#190, "My Life in Co-operatives," we retained the hyphen in all uses of the word "co-operative," partly because many names used in that article appear in publicly-available literature only with a hyphen. In this article, we opt instead to follow the guidance of our style sheet, which favors nonhyphenated forms. Consistency across our materials would be impossible in either case, and we recognize that, while "editing" types may be bothered by the results of this punctuational Catch-22, even worrying about this is a First World problem.*

Andrew Moore is an architect specialising in community development. Since 2007 he has been employed by T'Sou-ke First Nation working on their reserve in Canada, transforming their visions into reality including building the largest Indigenous solar project in the world. In 2020 he became a regular storyteller for a weekly International Indigenous Zoom Storytelling phenomenon connecting indigenous people across continents, and was also Executive Producer for a Canadian/African Indigenous film co-production which won several awards at the Red Nation International Indigenous Film Festival in Los Angeles.

How the Military Prepared Me to Live in Community

By Dave Booda

Long before I grew out my hair and became a professional musician, long before I hosted snuggle parties and went to Burning Man, and long before I found myself living in intentional communities—I was an officer in the United States Navy.

For a while, I thought I joined the Navy because of my rebellious spirit. I grew up in suburbia Massachusetts, where every parent's wet dream was for their kid to go to an Ivy League school, so the military was my way of differentiating myself.

But that wasn't it.

Then I thought, maybe it was a desire to be financially free from my parents. They would have been willing to support me through civilian college, so by attending the Naval Academy (where I ended up going to college), I'd have no need for their support, and would be free from their expectations (mostly internalized at this point). But that wasn't really it either.

It actually took me until my mid-30s to realize the real reason I joined the military—it was because I absolutely adore living in community.

To be clear, I didn't join the Navy because I was seeking community; I didn't even have a concept for it. There was just something about the military, and especially the Naval Academy, that drew me in and excited me.

It turns out the military is a wonderful example of intentional community. Now that I have a few years of experience living in one, I can see that many of the things I loved about being in the military are the same things I love now about living in community.

To be clear, the association I'm making here is of the lived experience of being in the military, not its mission, politics, or how people might view it from the outside.

I walked away from nine years in the military with a lot of great tools and skills that helped me integrate more easily into intentional communities.

Here are five things, learned in the military, that helped prepare me for living in community.

1. Be humble when you're new.

Folks in the Navy love to remind new people of how much they don't know, and it's an important part of the culture. I once had a Navy Chief tell me, "I've spent more time taking a shit than you've spent in the Navy."

While most people would pass off that comment as crude old-man talk, what's also true is he was saving me from the potential embarrassment of me opening my mouth when it should've stayed closed. He was inviting me to see that despite what I may think I know, I actually had very little experience, so I should consider that when it came time to share my opinion. This is especially important for new officers to understand.

A typical Navy ship is comprised of 90 to 95 percent enlisted sailors with only 5

A Navy Chief once told me, "I've spent more time taking a shit than you've spent in the Navy." While most would dismiss that as crude old-man talk, he was also saving me from the potential embarrassment of opening my mouth when it should've stayed closed.

to 10 percent officers. The officers outrank any enlisted folks (no matter how long they've been in) so as you can imagine, officers can quickly earn a bad reputation if they mistake their rank for authority. Humility, and waiting your turn to speak have been (and continue to be) important community skills that help people maintain good relations in any group, but especially in intentional communities.

2. You can't do it alone.

Everyone in the military goes through some kind of boot camp. If you ask what the purpose of boot camp is, most people would say it has something to do with teaching discipline. That's partially true, but there's something else going on that's just as important.

Boot camp roots out excess individualism and kills it.

You can't win a war with one soldier, despite what Rambo teaches us. The most effective unit is one where people put the needs of the unit above the needs of the individual.

At the Naval Academy, we had a saying—"ship, shipmate, self"—and it got drilled into our heads from day one. Selfless behavior is rewarded; selfish behavior is punished. No one got a Medal of Honor for saving their own ass.

This lesson is also important because it reminds us to lean on each other. When we come from an individualistic culture of "get yours first," we assume that we're going to have to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps if anything gets hard.

Needing each other is the glue that holds a group together, so when we can't ask for help because we think we have to be a superstar, the group gets weaker. Conversely, when we remember that we're not just an individual, but are part of a group that can't succeed without us succeeding, we naturally lean on others when we need it.

We succeed together, or we fail together.

3. Put aside your differences for cohesion.

Another piece of advice I heard as a young officer was "don't talk about religion or politics." Group cohesion is essential in the military, as it is in community, so there's wisdom in not engaging with topics that can divide us.

Yes, it's important for each of us to have personal beliefs and convictions, but when those convictions become more important than connection, we end up selfishly taking up space at the cost of potential group synergy.

There is a deeper wisdom here as well, which is that we don't have to agree to get along. If you dig deep enough with two people, there's always some topic that will have them disagree and even hate each other. Instead of needing everyone to believe the same thing on every topic (or pretend they do), we can simply accept that people are different and diversity of belief and opinion is normal and expected amongst any group of humans.

Photo courtesy of Dave Booda

4. Having a mission makes you stronger.

Just as folks in the military are encouraged to put aside their differences for the sake of cohesion, they are also encouraged to focus on the mission. This makes a group stronger, because our differences, disagreements, and squabbles become irrelevant when there is a bigger cause worth caring about.

This is most obvious in times of war. When the most relevant thing is an enemy soldier that wants to kill you, no one is haggling about haircut regulations, overdue paperwork, or what color to paint the admin office. A critical mission sharpens our focus.

This is why communities with a shared purpose often do better than ones without. When we don't have a common goal, we end up with antsy energy, and might create problems just so we can feel engaged.

What do we do about this? We need to start by accepting it, and redirecting the energy versus trying to suppress it. Team Rubicon is a great example of folks redirecting the "purpose" energy from the military. It's a nonprofit organization that sends veterans overseas to be first responders in health crisis situations.

5. People get things done, not paperwork.

I learned quickly that there were two ways to get things done on my ship.

The first was to fill out request forms and go through the proper channels and chain of command. The second was to go to a vending machine and buy a few Monster energy drinks. Then, take those drinks to the people who can help you, offer them as a gift, and ask politely if they could help you out.

Guess which method got better results?

Paperwork has its place, but at the end of the day, the military and intentional communities are made up of people and relationships. That's what gets things done. If you really want to be effective, try relying less on rules, emails, and meetings. Instead go shoot the shit, grease some palms, and treat people as

the emotional, not-so-rational beings that they are.

You can't have a high degree of group cohesion if everything is allowed and nothing is required. We're always exchanging conformity for togetherness, even if we aren't doing it consciously.

The Power of Culture

If you have a group of 10 people who all have each other's back, they will be more resilient, more skill diverse, and more adaptable than any one person could ever be (sorry Rambo).

This is the power of community, but to actualize that we must be willing to put the needs of the group before our own. We need to implement a culture of "service before self," as we used to say in the military.

Overemphasis on individualism, unhealthy competition, and zero-sum mindsets will erode the cohesion of any group that hopes to work together—yet that often takes years, sometimes generations of hard work, because it's counter to the beliefs many people hold, especially if they grew up in an affluent, capitalist, western culture.

Humans can be selfish, yes—but we're also tribal animals. When no one is hoarding resources, we relax and become generous. When the group rewards people who help others, we feel a natural desire to be of service to our neighbor.

Conversely, when the group is playing into a "keeping up with the Joneses" and "quid pro quo" culture, things like score-keeping, resources feeling scarce, and in-group fighting will occur.

The military understands this, and puts a huge emphasis on maintaining their culture. Participation is not optional—you either assimilate, or you're out.

Should intentional communities take that kind of hard-line approach? I don't know; certainly for some communities it would be uncomfortable, but there's a tangible benefit in everyone being on the same page, even if that means uniformity at the cost of imposing strict standards.

You Can't Have It All

If we can learn anything from the military, it's that you can't have it all.

You can't have a high degree of group cohesion if everything is allowed and nothing is required. We're always exchanging conformity for togetherness, even if we aren't doing it consciously. For a group to band together, there needs to be a degree of people being on the same page.

The military is strict, unwavering, and polarizing, and it has clear values that have been around for hundreds of years. It also enjoys a high level of group cohesion. Soldiers are literally willing to die for each other. Isn't that the kind of love and togetherness we all want?

And yet, this is such a difficult task. When this kind of forced sameness is taken too far, it can put us on the road to cult-ville. Preaching the doctrine of assimilation for the individual good is a tried and true method cult leaders use to wrangle new members. This is why understanding and practicing informed consent is so important; we need people to "opt-in" to anything before we require it of them. This is, of course, easier said than done.

Who gets to decide what values the community chooses to adopt? Even if everyone is at the meetings, it's an enormous challenge to ensure that everyone weighs in with their authentic contribution. Some people have more sway, and others may be left tacitly agreeing to something they aren't fully on board with.

But what are we left with if we can't decide who we are and who we aren't? What is the cost of not establishing clear boundaries and direction for your community?

This is truly the rub when it comes to intentional communities. To have a high quality of life, we must walk the thin line between the cold loneliness of individualism, and the cozy assimilation of a cult.

The community I'm a part of no doubt wrestles with this. We're an established community (celebrating our 10th anniversary in April) so we also have to face the fact that if we choose to go in a specific direction, it may exclude current residents and members. While one can hope that a unanimous decision can be made about community values, needing everyone to agree is also one way we collectively avoid the kind of specificity that has people feel like they are truly a part of something special.

The good news is that while there are more questions than answers, folks living in intentional communities are actively solving this problem, and the solution looks different for everyone. For some, following a rigid religious doctrine is the answer. For others it's a Burning Man ethos, and for some it's easier to allow everyone a high degree of autonomy, even if it means sacrificing some unity and intimacy.

You can't have it all, but maybe if we do the work to understand what our best life really looks like, we can consciously trade some of our freedoms for the prizes of fulfillment, joy, and chosen family. ❧

Dave Booda is a writer, musician and social entrepreneur. He's the cofounder of IntimacyFest (intimacyfest.com) and has led 250+ workshops in the San Diego area on connection, touch, and relationships. He has published over 200 essays for boodaism.com, and has been published in countless major online publications. As a singer/songwriter he has played over 1000 shows and not-so-discretely moonlights as his alter-ego Boodananda, a spiritually satirical Kirtan singer who travels the world performing high-vibration music for enlightened audiences. He lives at The Emerald Village, an intentional community in Vista, California.

Review BY JAMES COLLECTOR

SPACESHIP EARTH: Finding Interconnectedness within and without Biosphere 2

Spaceship Earth, the 2020 documentary by Matt Wolf, allows the participants and founders of Biosphere 2 to tell the story of the visionary experiment in their own words. For readers unfamiliar with the Arizona-based project, Biosphere 2 was originally conceived as a mission to demonstrate the viability of a closed ecological system which would support human life in outer space. Its founders, led by John Allen, had started out in Berkeley in 1967 as an experimental theatre group who later established an intentional community in New Mexico called Synergia as well as a research charity called the Institute of Ecotechnics. By 1987, when construction on Biosphere 2 began, the community had already built a ship and sailed around the world, giving performances on all seven continents.

The first half of *Spaceship Earth* is dedicated to telling this community's inspiring story—and it is inspiring. On one hand, Wolf's decision to let the Biospherians tell their own story enables audiences to draw our own conclusions. On the other, there is insufficient time left at the end of the film to reflect on the lessons learned from Biosphere 2. Wolf avoids making editorial statements; he lets the story and its characters speak for themselves. For this, some critics have called the film sympathetic.

However, to state that *Spaceship Earth* is sympathetic to the Biospherians and their community is to miss the point. It is the underlying idea of space colonization—Biosphere 2's core mission[1]—that Wolf allows to escape adequate critique. Thirty years after the experiment, a major opportunity for reflection has been missed. Community-focused and ecologically-minded citizens of a new generation watch these stories hungrily, hoping to glean some clues as to what our crises-riven societies might do next. From my own millennial perspective, there is little utility left in mythologizing the magic of the late 1960s and early 1990s. What Biosphere 2 might have to teach us is of crucial importance—today.

To articulate some of the lessons that Wolf's *Spaceship Earth* skimmed over, I want to look at Biosphere 2 through the lens of interconnectedness. The eight people inside were clearly interconnected; to say they relied on each other for food production, medical care, mechanical skill, scientific expertise, etc. would be to only scratch the surface. Beneath these overt roles, there was likely a level of trust that few citizens experience. As crew member Mark Nelson stated upon emergence after two years: "To live in a small world and be conscious of its controls, its beauty, its fragility, its bounty, and its limits, changes who you are."

Without a doubt, the eight people inside were also profoundly interconnected with the numerous people outside. Again, this interconnectedness involved more than just reliance on engineers, scientists, and financial personnel. They relied on outsiders for guidance, support, and comfort, as evinced by phone calls with their therapists, leaders, families, and friends. Interconnectedness extends beyond who makes the material components necessary for community—though we might dwell for a moment on the sheer volume of energy and funding required to build the glass, machinery, and other complex parts of Biosphere 2's architecture. Even the transport of plants and animals from around the globe represents an undertaking beyond the means of eight people. Interconnectedness is also cultural: knowing how to harvest, how to heal, how to care, how to collaborate. Everything that went into Biosphere 2 came from outside, so the idea of closed system, from a cultural standpoint, is somewhat absurd.

Part of what captured the public's interest about Biosphere 2 was how public relations and media coverage managed to impart a distinctly American theme into the narrative: the rugged individualists surviving in the wilderness—except this time the wilderness was the isolation of space. Whether the Biospherians consciously understood their mission as such is debatable—the media certainly latched onto it. I find it strange how mainstream fantasies of space colonization repeatedly claim that space colonists will achieve a level self-sufficiency which proves humans can flourish on the last remaining frontier: other planets. Biosphere 2 is 35 miles from Tucson, Arizona. At its closest Mars is 35 million miles from Earth. Logistics are only the beginning of the problem. Bringing bananas to space is certainly possible, but bringing rainforests—whose biotic, hydrological, and oxygen-generating capacity banana plants are interconnected with—is another matter entirely.

Space colonization has attracted increasing popularity in recent years, largely due to the efforts of billionaires who, like Biosphere 2's financier, Ed Bass, seem to surmise a profitable sweet spot between ecological advancement and space technology. Need I point out Elon Musk's SpaceX program or Jeff Bezos' pet project, Blue Origin? Both of which stood to gain from the \$25.2 billion[2] that NASA requested from Congress for 2021—a budget more than twice the EPA and National Park Service's combined.

What Biosphere 2 and today's billionaires share is an ambition to go beyond Earth. Thirty years later, the reasons behind this ambition remain so contradictory, so riddled with irony, that Wolf dares not bring

them up in his film. Surely, I will come off to many readers as a Luddite or a holier-than-thou environmentalist by criticizing these bold experiments which on their face seem like "great steps for mankind." But let me ask: Which projects do we prioritize? Space colonies to escape Earth's environmental crises? Or investments in solving those very crises that space colonies seek to escape? Resources are limited; investment in space sacrifices investment in the Earth. By sealing itself off from our atmosphere—and thus negating global interconnectedness—Biosphere 2 clearly put itself in the first category.

Once we do create equitable and ecological communities here on Earth—and I believe it's possible—I am all for space exploration. Until then, any claims that the answers to our problems at home reside off-world sound suspiciously to my ears like prospectors dressing up a gold-rush mining camp as utopia.

Which begs the question: is space colonization driven by motives to bring us together or to leave more of us behind? Consider the interconnectedness inherent in billionaire funding. Bass, Musk, and Bezos all claim to care about Earth's environment and, despite some glaring contradictions, some of their investments prove it (Bezos, for example, recently dedicated $10 billion[3] to address climate change). Their wealth, which is essentially an aggregation of the combined labor of millions of other people, demands to be spent wisely. Even billionaires cannot run away from the age-old challenges of building equitable communities and healthy environments. Money cannot buy a Planet B.

Unfortunately, this lesson seems to have gone unlearned. After all, Biosphere 2 was named as such because Biosphere 1 is the Earth itself. The experiment did not fail; it proved the point that humanity relies on planetary-scale support systems which cannot be engineered in a God-like fashion. Somehow today's billionaires missed the memo and continue to pour vast resources into what are basically attempts at Biosphere 3, 4, 5, etc. Wolf's film missed the chance to deliver an unequivocal blow to the type of naiveté which breeds grandiose projects wherein humans take on biblical endeavors without accounting for the complexities of nature or the chicanery of capitalism.

Many people living in community have realized that it is impossible to quarantine in a truly closed system. No matter how self-sufficient our communities, we all rely on external actors and forces—from neighbors to global supply chains. The core founders of Biosphere 2, who continue to live and work in community at Synergia Ranch, seem to have learned this lesson well. For John Allen, the experiment was always as much about theatre as it was about ecology. Today, the University of Arizona operates Biosphere 2 as a center for research, outreach, teaching, and lifelong learning about Earth, its living systems, and its place in the universe. Wolf's film will surely bring greater awareness to these ongoing efforts.

On Apple's streaming platform, viewers can review films and leave comments. One wrote the following about *Spaceship Earth*: "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." This idea (which is often attributed to the writer Anaïs Nin) encompasses the breadth of what Biosphere 2—and every community who dares to reach for a new way of life—continues to signify for humanity. Together, at every scale, we all must face the threat of climate change, the consequences of capitalism, the hardships of this pandemic, and the limitations of being human. Whether our communities are 35 miles from Tucson or 35 million miles from Earth, we will remain interconnected. The humility it takes to acknowledge this truth is a good place to start thinking about how we choose to live here on Biosphere 1—the original spaceship earth. ❧

James Collector is a writer, music producer, and ecological consultant living in San Francisco.

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1. www.encyclopedia.com/science-and-technology/biology-and-genetics/environmental-studies/biosphere-ii-project
2. www.cnbc.com/2020/02/11/nasa-space-budget-billions-to-spacex-blue-origin-maxar-and-more.html
3. www.nytimes.com/2020/02/17/technology/jeff-bezos-climate-change-earth-fund.html

Photo courtesy of IMDB

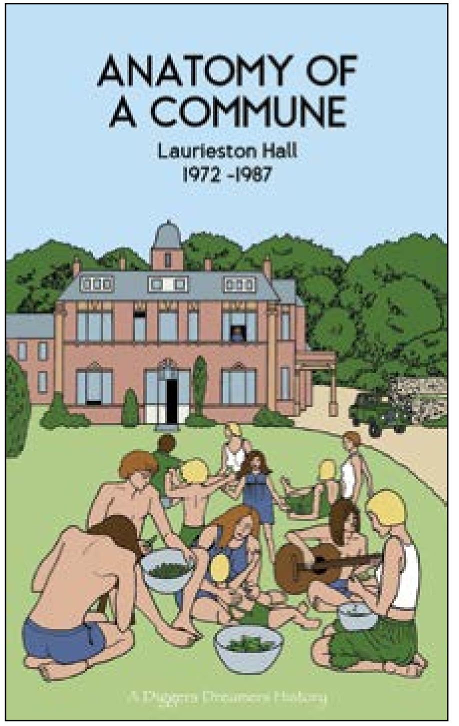
Photo courtesy of The City of Tucson's tourism center

Communal Memories

Anatomy of a Commune

Edited by Dave Treanor

Diggers and Dreamers, London, 2020, 361 pages, *www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/shop/anatomy-of-a-commune-laurieston-hall-1972-1987*



Situated near Castle Douglas in southwest Scotland, Laurieston Hall, the commune being anatomised in this book, started 49 years ago, and is now home to 23 people.

The main building was constructed in 1896-7 as a grand mansion with an estimated 65 rooms, including a massive kitchen, billiard room, etc. During WWII the building became a hospital, then a nursing home, before a group of would-be communards bought it in 1972. As well as the main building there is a large, walled-garden, stables and other farm buildings. One member, Penny, recalls, "The house is so well built and holds so much character in its fireplaces, windows, doors, taps, toilets and bathroom fittings." Hanna, however, remembers, "This nonsensical building housed huge echoing rooms laid out like dorms, and far flung so-called 'living spaces' joined together by cold, linoleum-lined corridors. … This ghastly, ghostly, oversized dwelling was to be our new home."

While in North America and Australasia, most contemporary intentional communities have been established on large blocks of rural land, in the United Kingdom it has been more common to repurpose grand old homes, often including farm land, walled gardens, and numerous outbuildings. The advantage of this is that people can move in straight away and start living communally because there will already be a huge kitchen, lounge and dining areas, plus many bedrooms. The disadvantage is that people are often thrown together, intensively, with little background or training in communalism, and often with inadequate social skills.

As well as Laurieston Hall, UK has many other "grand-house" intentional communities such as Beech Hill, Birchwood Hall, Bowden House, Braziers, Canon Frome Court, Crabapple, Dol-Llys Hall, Hengrave Hall, Manjushri Institute, Monkton Wyld, Newbold House, Old Hall, Postlip Hall, and Redfield. Of these, Laurieston Hall is one of the oldest, has arguably managed the best, and is almost certainly the best known and recorded. Preceding *Anatomy of a Commune*, in 2019 Mike Read published *Mix Café* also about Laurieston Hall, but limited to its truly communal phase of 1972-77.

Why do people write about their communal adventures? Is it to tell the world how wonderful—or dreadful—is communal living? Is it to tell their side, to justify their actions after a group is torn apart by conflict? There are many accounts of the ups and downs of communal living, but *Anatomy of a Commune* is one of the best.

Anatomy of a Commune consists of 37 short chapters, each written by a current or ex-member. Some are quite factual and objective while others are subjective; some are impressionistic, others descriptive; some are positive and celebratory, others are almost apologetic. Lesley found "it was hard to settle on who I was writing my contribution to this book for; for myself, for my children and grandchildren, for present and past residents, for the interested reader after publication?"

The advantage of having many people contribute to such a book is that all sides get presented, all aspects covered, all flavours sampled. The disadvantage is that there may be little overall narrative, and a reader, having finished, might know much about many small events but little about the macro, communal story. With *Anatomy of a Commune*, the editor manages to weave these disparate stories together to give the reader a reasonably clear, overall understanding.

Laurieston Hall began as a commune with full sharing of ownership, income, and expenses. Open relationships were common, childcare was shared, as was work and responsibility—with many attendant problems. Dave recalls, "we pooled our income and expenses into one big kitty. Nobody was paid or required to do anything they did not want to. … The revolution of everyday life meant every aspect of our lives was open to question, including the nuclear family. Traditional roles of breadwinner, cook, and homemaker were now shared within the com-

mune."

This idealistic, radical commune phase soon ran into problems of poor financial management, lack of clear governance, and the realisation that while everyone agreed to live as a commune, most did not appreciate the almost-inevitable problems, or agree how to make this a comfortable, or at least not unbearable, social reality.

One of the key issues in the formation of Laurieston Hall, as with many intentional communities, was the inherent contradiction between what I distinguish in my research as "in order to" and "because of" motivations. Briefly, "in order to" people are wanting to achieve some positive outcome, some pseudo-utopian ideal, while "because of" people are wanting to escape some problems or issues. For most "in order to" people, communal living is their very best option—for most "because of" people it is often the least bad of their options. Cheryl reflects this dichotomy: "I found living in a large communal group fraught with complex invisible tensions. … Some came to Laurieston to find a place to grow and to 'change,' while others came to escape society."

Stuart had idealistic, "in order to" motivations: "I had an idea…that we could change the world for the better by providing a self-sustainable and viable commercial enterprise within the consumer-capitalist system." Cheryl joined Laurieston Hall because it "appeared to be at the forefront of political change, feminism and community building."

A good example of "because of" motivation is Jonathan's memory: "We were refugees escaping persecution by the nuclear family and the consumer society and imperialism and the military-industrial complex and patriarchy, but we didn't know what we wanted except in a nebulous sense."

The Laurieston Hall children from the communal era recall: "growing up at Laurieston Hall was fantastic. … [It] allowed for idiosyncratic upbringing, shaped by each kid's own parental influences in the wider, open, encouraging atmosphere" (Joel); "You never really knew when your mum might surprise you with a lesbian encounter, or your mum's ex partner got into an awkward threesome" (Hannah); "In a sense we were raised not just by our parents, but also by the whole community" (Tam); "climbing on various adults who all seemed to love me, had time for me, were happy to tell me stories. … Childhood at the Hall felt so free, nurturing, fulfilling and multi-generational" (Josie).

By 1980, Laurieston Hall was in social disarray and serious financial straits and, in spite of their high ideals, communards were separating into smaller groups, some just to nuclear families. Rather than allow this social experiment of radical communalism to collapse, they decided to re-establish themselves as a housing cooperative in which every adult paid the same rent regardless of the space they occupied or how many children. It was at about this time when I first visited Laurieston Hall while doing research.

In this less-communal guise, Laurieston Hall continues to prosper in 2021, with 20 adults and three children.

There are many funny quotes such as Catriona's sad memory, "The only time I ever asked a visitor to sleep with me, he agreed but said that since he was in therapy, he was not supposed to have sex with anyone, and also, he needed his dog to stay with him. So, we went to sleep together, but nothing more—and the dog pissed on my bed. Kind of discouraging, that." One communal child, Maya, recalls, "we made friends with the local kids and sometimes even invited them back home. This could be quite tricky if it was a hot summer's day and there were naked communards podding peas on the lawn. Or if it was Gay Men's Week with 40 naked gay men sunbathing on the lawn." Yet another child, Hannah, recalls, "Lizzie's giant vagina painting on the first-floor landing is a comical and painful memory for me; particularly on one rare occasion when I brought home someone from school (never did that again!)."

Looking back from 2020, residents conclude: "I think Laurieston's biggest contribution has been in daring to believe in a positive view of human nature. … [It's] communities like Laurieston which aspire to the good in human nature that allow us the best chance of getting closer to that ideal" (Tam); "Laurieston Hall…was undeniably hard but I stayed and in the end I'm glad I did. It has been 45 years since we arrived in 1975, an extraordinary length of time. … Life continues to be full, interesting and challenging" (Lesley); "I can't imagine living alone as a family again. This feels far more natural, I'm sure we humans are meant to live in tribes" (Josie); "I feel I owe my fellow communards an apology for how difficult I must have been to live with" (Linda).

In conclusion, how do we assess Laurieston Hall's almost half century of existence? Do we regard them as *yet another* communal failure given that in spite of their high ideals of living as a fully-fledged commune, that phase lasted only a few years? Their attempts to escape "persecution by the nuclear family" seems to have morphed into a celebration of the nuclear family. If Laurieston Hall formed as "a struggle between radical commune versus the bourgeois nuclear family"—then the bourgeois nuclear family has clearly won.

If we measure Laurieston Hall in 2021 by the founders' aims—then fail it has!

On the other hand, we could see Laurieston Hall as having successfully navigated the model of Developmental Communalism as enunciated by Professor Don Pitzer in the 1980s. Perhaps we can best understand Laurieston Hall as being a great success because members have been able to adapt to changing conditions. Instead of collapsing when radical communalism failed, members developed other social forms and, 49 years later, this intentional community thrives.

So is Laurieston Hall a great success or a dramatic failure? I am unsure.

I suggest you read *Anatomy of a Commune* and decide. ❧

Dr. Bill Metcalf, of Griffith University and University of Queensland, Australia, has been involved in, and studying, intentional communities during his long academic career. He is the author of numerous scholarly and popular articles plus seven books about intentional communities. He is Past President of the International Communal Studies Association, on the Editorial Board of Communal Societies *journal, and has been* Communities *magazine's International correspondent for many years.*

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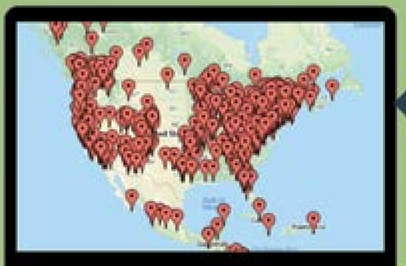

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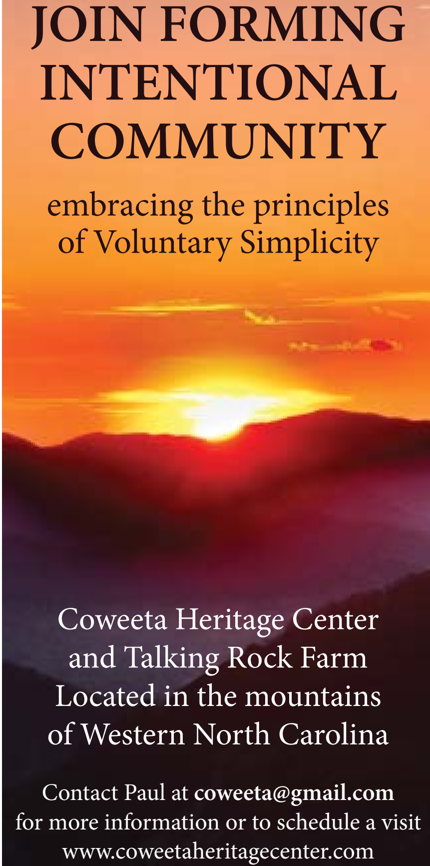

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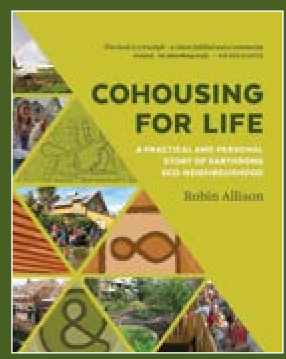

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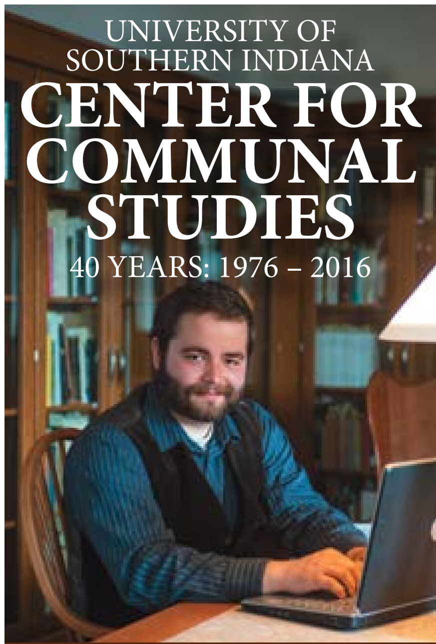

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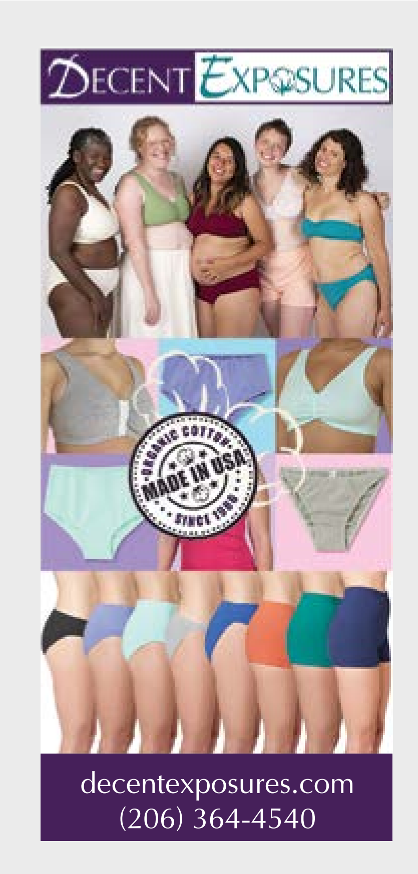
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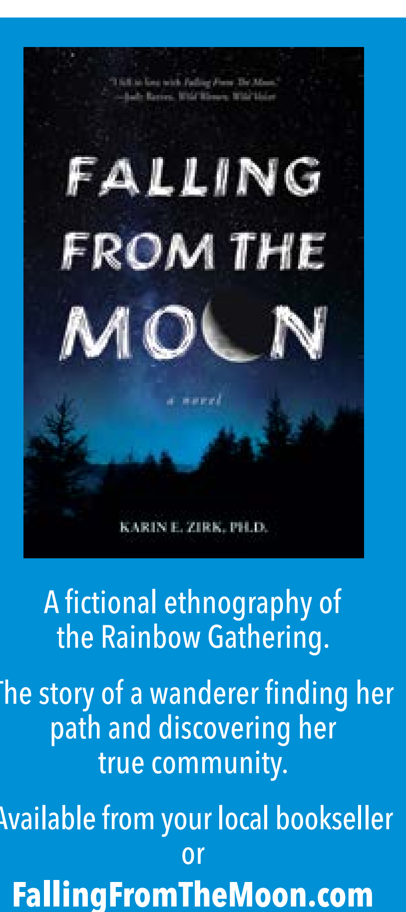
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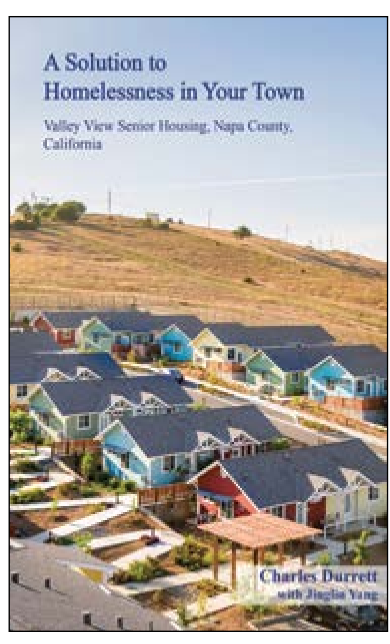
Review BY KATE NICHOLS



A Solution to Homelessness in Your Town:

Valley View Senior Housing, Napa County, California

By Charles Durrett

Oro Editions, San Francisco CA, 2021, 108 pages

The number of homeless people is a crisis in this country that is growing rapidly. Architect Charles Durrett, a passionate advocate for the homeless, has developed several projects to house the homeless. His newest book, *A Solution to Homelessness in Your Town: Valley View Senior Housing, Napa County, California* explains how it can be done. The book describes the process for developing a specific community of affordable housing for low-income and homeless seniors. Creating a community, or a village, rather than just housing, is the most important aspect of his housing projects. His background in developing over 50 cohousing communities gives him a solid foundation for how to help create communities.

The book is written from his perspective as an architect and how his work and ideas helped create housing and gathering spaces for this particular community. But its lessons can be applied by anyone developing housing for the homeless.

Durrett details how he created an accessible village that works for seniors on a hilly site. The site is further complicated with abandoned retaining walls leftover from a previous developer. The cost of removing them would be prohibitive so he incorporates them into his design. Accessibility was also an important consideration—he came up with the clever solution of a "Lombard" sidewalk, one like the San Francisco street that winds up a hill. This sidewalk zigzags back and forth up the hill at an angle wheelchair users can negotiate as they visit their neighbors.

The book describes what sustainable materials were used to create a green project as well some of the sacrifices they made to keep the project within budget. Valley View Senior Housing is certified as GreenPoint Platinum, the highest rating in California. He points out that the volunteers who helped with the building show that "People helping each other is just as real as the government doing the heavy lifting."

They built smaller homes at an average of 500 square feet in three styles so they could afford to build 70 homes. The houses can be smaller because households share common facilities, including a common house. The community members have access to a computer lab, a craft room, laundry facilities, and a larger kitchen. A lounge encourages people to gather to enjoy each other's company and provides a place to hold meetings.

Funding and constructing permanent housing can be time-consuming. But cheaper transitional housing can help get people off the streets into safe housing while developers create permanent housing. Durrett also talks about Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon where the tiny homes were built for only $8000 each. The community is self-governing and demonstrates what can be done inexpensively while providing decent housing for the homeless.

In America we have not provided for our homeless. People end up homeless for many reasons, even if they have a job, because we have an economy built on low-paying jobs. It is everyone's responsibility to help people have a home. The stories the homeless tell are heartbreaking—their roof leaked and they couldn't afford to fix it, they got sick and now can't afford a house, they lost their job so they couldn't afford their rent and were evicted.

According to the Veterans Administration, 11 percent of our veterans are homeless. In a speech at the grand opening of Valley View Senior Housing, new resident Matt said, "You know that freeway you guys drove in on? I was under that freeway for more than six years and I'm a Vietnam veteran and now I have a home."

The importance of giving the homeless a chance to rebuild their lives by housing them can't be underestimated. But helping them form communities where they feel safe and emotionally supported is even more helpful to their recovery. *A Solution to Homelessness in Your Town* shows a path forward. ❧

Kate Nichols was instrumental in developing Bellingham Cohousing. Recently, she moved to Port Townsend, Washington, where she is forming community with her neighbors and works in food bank gardens.

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ECOLOGICAL CULTURE: THE LONG HAUL

Marxist Ecology

A Place to Call Home

The Farm: The First 50 Years

Native Wildlife vs. Cats and Dogs

Restoring Ecosystems and Communities

A Place to Call Home

By Alexis Zeigler

This article is adapted from Chapter Three of the new book, Empowering Communities: A Practical Guide to Energy Self-Sufficiency and Stopping Climate Change*, available from conev.org.*

In pre-industrial Europe, peasants lived in cob cottages made of mud and straw. A fire without a chimney might be alight in the middle of the floor, smoke making its way up through the thatch. It was not luxurious by modern standards, but on a cold winter night, it offered some protection from the life-threatening elements.

The wealthier classes who could afford the private estates built their dwellings to convey status upon the homeowner. The early historic palaces were deadly cold, except next to the roaring fireplace that used tons of wood. These palaces were an environmental horror story, but as statues displaying the wealth of their owners, they were something others sought to emulate. In the centuries since that time, more and more people have sought to build houses that symbolize wealth and social status. That means maximizing size. Building housing based on the display of status, emulating the habits of the wealthy rather than building things that function well, is a major contributor to all of our social and environmental problems.

That problem is not addressed by simply adding solar panels to the roof. Housing that is inexpensive to build and operates with little energy input is actually easy and cheap from a material standpoint, if you are willing to break the Roman property code[1]. Few are. I have had hundreds of friends face the dilemma of trying to power American housing with renewable energy. None prevail. If you get more people involved, it's not hard at all. But you need to set different priorities than social status as measured by current standards.

I rebuilt a house some years ago. The house was originally built by working class women who came home after work and laid blocks with their own weathered hands. The family had lived there for a long time. For decades, they had struggled to rise above their economic poverty. The signs of their struggle were written, literally and figuratively, all over the dwelling itself.

I pulled down the paneling. Scraped through the layers of wallpaper, then more layers of paint, all accumulated over decades. Block walls have basically no insulation value, and these walls were block. The heaters, the woodstoves, all had been pouring heat into an uninsulated building over the course of decades, chains shackling the inhabitants to a string of bills they could not afford.

More than a century ago, farmers in Nebraska got their first hay balers. What they didn't get was good lumber. So they stacked up their bales and made houses, some of which are standing to this day. A strawbale house has, quite by accident in this case, an insulation value about four times as high as a modern, insulated house. Given the mathematical quirkiness of multiplying numbers nearing zero, we need not compare straw and cinder blocks.

1. Chapter One of *Empowering Communities* discusses how, in forming empire, the Romans privatized farms and broke down villages and tribes to create loyalty to the state. The Roman property code—separating dwellings from each other, surrounded by privately-held land whose extent conferred status—had devastating social and environmental consequences.

House stucco finished.

Photos courtesy of Alexis Zeigler

House with just straw.

This housing was superior in a social sense, and used a small fraction of the total energy normal Americans used.

I wrapped strawbales around the cinder block house. I put in solar heat (solar hot water collectors on the roof) with massive thermal storage in radiant floors—not solar electricity. I moved in some friends and made it a cooperative house. That means that in the evening, we played music, talked, had social events, instead of sitting home alone. We cooked dinner for each other every evening, though certainly not everyone attended every day. If you got sick, or felt bad, or needed help, there were people around. I have lived this way all of my life. I cannot imagine living alone. That seems terrible and threatening. I would make me mentally ill to do that.

The environmental impacts were unbelievable. I asked my friends around town who live in ordinary houses to give me their energy bills. I was looking at domestic energy use in the house, not transportation, food, or energy use outside the house. I standardized everything—electricity, natural gas, propane, firewood—to BTUs. (BTUs are a measure of energy, easily converted into kilowatts or joules.) These were all environmentally conscientious people. The results were surprising. Compared to the number of BTUs the average American used in their homes, the people I looked at used 80 to 140 percent, with the average around 120 percent. My environmentally conscientious friends were using more energy than the average American at home! How could that be? Well, the national average includes a lot of urban people living in apartments in big cities. It turns out a slob in an apartment uses less energy than a saint in a free-standing house. But the latter has a much higher resale value, a much higher worth as measured by the standards of the Roman property code.

I then looked at intentional communities, people who choose to live together. I again standardized the units to BTUs. That analysis was a bit more complex, because residential and commercial get all mixed together, and there is (sometimes) a lot of firewood involved. But I took the time to make the numbers as accurate as they could be. The results were stunning. The average energy use in intentional communities ranged from nine percent up to near 60 percent of the American average. I couldn't believe it. The two ranges of numbers didn't even overlap. The contrast between the far extremes of the two groups of people—from nine percent up to 140 percent—was staggering. In each of these groups, everyone was on-grid, using all of the hot water and electricity they chose. The winner—the group of people with nine percent energy use—inhabited none other than the strawbale house I had retrofitted. I just couldn't believe it.

The per-capita expense to build my strawbale retrofit was easy. I knew how much money I had spent. It was $14,500 per person. So for $14,500 per person, I built housing that was, by my estimation, superior in a social sense, and used a small fraction of the total energy normal Americans used. I was sure that all the people in the US who were concerned about environmental issues, or concerned about providing affordable housing, would be thrilled to hear these revelations.

That was 2007. I self-published a book called *Culture Change*. (Seven years later the book was picked up by a publisher, expanded and professionally edited, and retitled *Integrated Activism*. It is available through North Atlantic Publishers.) I printed some books and stuffed them in a backpack. I got a folding bicycle, and began a tour of the United States. I did loops, up in the northeast and south. Then a big loop north and west, down the west coast, across the southern part of the country. I carried a small computer and did a slideshow. I went on the radio and got articles in local media when I could.

Both books focus on the impact of ecology on economy, and economy on social values and politics. The upshot is that democracy—including most especially how our society treats women and racial minorities—is closely tied to economic changes. The bottom line is that a highly polarized economy is incompatible with democracy. Economically empowered communities could assure democracy into the indefinite future.

I had found it. The solution to climate change and environmental decline more generally, providing affordable housing, and building a foundation for a future democratic society, all lie in wrapping strawbales around cooperative homes, and building more resilient society with economically strong communities (using the word in the broader sense) as its foundation. The latter point is a large one, I know. But it is clear—we build democracy

from the ground up, not the top down. I sold enough books to buy the next bus ticket mostly. I enjoy public speaking.

Since that time, there has been no measurable impact from those efforts. My work has resulted in little that I can see, and the corporations continue to rise. Most of those little bookstores and community centers are gone now, eaten by Amazon. Those same liberals who came and heard my speeches get their boxes in the mail. Academic ideas are far more important in the mind of middle class people than the world that is built with your hands.

I couldn't travel forever. I don't enjoy the traveling part, though I do like to talk to people. I came home. I am a good organizer. I had organized some successful campaigns locally, sometimes against long odds. My friends were polite, but the arms-length social norms of mainstream America have always been foreign to me. It seems most people are either accustomed to an extremely truncated social network, or burn quite a lot of gasoline to drive all over. I tried to stay engaged, but I was increasingly alienated. I very much enjoy growing fruit. The half acre around my straw-bale house became a closely planted orchard.

I have tried to discuss the magic of cooperative housing based on conservationist design with my friends who work on affordable housing issues. To build housing at $14,500 per capita? That's crazy cheap by American standards. And it happens to achieve environmental goals that are supposed to be 50 years away. You would think they would notice.

Many cities in the United States have a "housing crisis" at this point, meaning simply that the average person working an ordinary job cannot afford "decent" housing. This point was brought home by a local hero around here, Barbara Ehrenreich. She is well educated, and morally concerned. She wrote a book, *Nickeled and Dimed*. The book was a report on a time in her life when she set aside her academic credentials, and went out and tried to earn a living working ordinary jobs. She waited tables and what not. She told her story, and the stories of the friends she made along the way. The book is well-written. She found that she could afford some of what she needed, but securing a place to live—an apartment or a house of her own—working for straight-up working class wages was nearly impossible. I read the book, and then I was thinking, since when is it a God-given right that everyone should have their own private house or private apartment? I know that Americans think it is, but God never said that.

Cooperative housing solves a whole lot of problems all at once. The catch is that if poor people do it, then rich people don't want to go near it. One can see that with bicycles. In some parts of the US, only poor people ride bicycles. Government agencies in those areas do not invest in bicycle infrastructure. Cyclists are harassed, pushed to the margins. In those areas where rich people ride bikes, then the public investment in bicycle infrastructure is quite the opposite. All the smiling people bike around happily.

Cooperative housing solves so many problems. The catch? If poor people do it, then the rich don't want to.

I think it is safe to say that cooperative housing is already stigmatized as something for poor people. The bottom line is that, under the Roman property code, *status as a respectable American is based on an inexorably ecologically destructive lifestyle*. That is not a separate "issue" from social justice. Renewable energy systems in the context of a society based on the Roman property code only make the level of destruction worse. We are heading toward a time when many people are going to die. Putting more people on the train of middle class aspirations instead of trying to stop it doesn't make sense when the train is headed for a cliff.

In 2009, some friends and I starting working on the idea of building a community that was 100 percent energy self-sufficient. In 2010, we were able to buy a bedraggled clearcut near a small town. Off we went. A couple of years later, a publisher picked up my book. That was the fulfillment of a lifetime ambition. The local book festival is well-known, attracting many famous authors. They wouldn't let me in when I self-published. Then when a publisher picked up my book, they did. I went up on stage with an academic on a two-person panel that was "facilitated" by the worst mediator I have ever seen in my life. A few of my friends came. More people came to see the academic. His thesis was narrow, uncreative, and completely futile, but it did fit a narrative of "if we just regulate the corporations more, everything will be fine." No mention of anything other than government action. The mediator tried to dominate the presentation. It was the fulfillment of a lifetime dream—to publish and be heard—and the biggest single disappointment of my life.

Academics need fluffy verbiage, telling us that the work done by ordinary people each and very day with their hands is of no

House stucco first and second coat.

consequence. The working class has been completely denied any sense of agency, any sense that what they do each and every day dominates our political future. They are deprived of agency because both the right and the educated left tells us each and every day that the ideas, policies, and attitudes of educated people matter, and the economic activity of working people does not. Everyone believes that ideas matter, and how we live in a material sense does not. If you study anthropology and history with open eyes, the truth is not hard to see. But truth seems to matter little. What matters is pretty clothing.

Under the Roman property code, the rules of dwelling function as the chains of slavery. In looking at that strawbale retrofit, I cannot help but be struck by the fact that the straw cost less than the paneling (that I took down). But straw—at least historically—breaks the rules we inherited from the Roman property code. It is something poor people use—lumpy walls made of organic materials. These decisions have nothing to do with cost or ease of construction, and everything to do with arbitrary symbols of social status. Heating and cooling buildings accounts for over 40 percent of climate change emissions. That could have been brought to near zero, for far lower costs than what we have spent to build the houses we have. The problem is the focus on symbols of social status takes overwhelming precedence over environmental impact.

Will that change now that climate change is getting so much attention? Not anytime soon. Tens of thousands of people have heard me talk about the extraordinary impacts of marrying cooperative living and renewable energy. The measurable impact has been near nil. Instead, our environmental movements continue to focus on industrial "renewable" energy systems—batteries, electric cars, adding solar decorations to existing, sparsely occupied structures. It would be hard to calculate the percentage of the global population who can or ever will afford an electric car. It is only a few percentage points, that is for sure. (I can't afford one.) If we define environmentalism as something only a few percentage points of humanity can afford, we have taken something good and made it into something evil.

The marriage of cooperative use and renewable energy is the only thing that stands between us and a complete ecological holocaust. That will never be embraced by the middle and upper classes because it challenges the basis of their wealth. They will also continue to reject the very basic understanding that democracy is built by the hands of working people in self-determined communities, not in marbled hallways. But you, the young who see through smokescreen, I can offer you here the practical advice about how and what to do. Living cooperatively is the key to our survival. But it requires skills many older people do not have and are not willing to learn. You must take up leadership. ❧

Alexis Zeigler was raised on a self-sufficient farm in Georgia. He has lived all of his adult life in intentional community. He has worked as a green builder, environmental activist, and author. His previous book, Integrated Activism*, explores the connections between ecological change, politics, and cultural evolution. This article is adapted from Chapter Three of his new book,* Empowering Communities: A Practical Guide to Energy Self-Sufficiency and Stopping Climate Change *(Ecodem Press, 2021), available from conev.org. The book is dedicated "to Greta Thunberg and the student protest movement. You have looked beyond the self-deceptions of your parents' generation. Now it is time to focus on a persistent and systematic effort to build a better world."*

Strawbale crew.

Marxist Ecology

By Yana Ludwig

I live in a community that has anti-capitalism as a main focus. Last year we did permaculture design for the property, and one of the interesting questions that someone posed at one point was, "How might a Marxist ecologist view our community?"

As socialists who are also communitarians, we ask several layers of questions on a regular basis. One layer is made up of all the same challenges and inquiries all communities have at some point: How do we resolve conflicts fairly and with compassion for each other's struggles? What projects do we prioritize? How do we deal with different food needs for common meals? How do we get the work done?

But what makes our situation somewhat unique is that each of these questions is also shot through with big political, socioeconomic, and interpersonal threads as well. We want to know why the oldest white guy feels such horrifying—and seemingly singular—pressure to be responsible for making the money work, and how much that patterning is embedded in both patriarchy and class oppression. We want to know what the best systems are to value our 21-year-old's labor as just as much as our 53-year-old's, and how to not default to what capitalism has taught us about competing constantly with everyone around us for both survival scraps and respect. And yes, we want to know how a Marxist ecologist would view both our relationships with each other and our relationship as a collective to the land.

That conversation during our permaculture planning yielded a few pieces that have continued to echo in our conversation. On the good side, we feel more grounded than ever in seeing our "ownership" of this property as a lever to move resources, labor, and attention out of the standard real estate market and build a safety net for working class and poor people (and in our case, people with disabilities) that results in real security. We also see permaculture primarily through the lens of labor-saving, and secondarily as a food-security practice. So being owners of property is, for us, owning the means of production and a potential step toward working-class liberation.

On the bad side, we are more sobered than ever about what it means to be a group of predominantly white people living on stolen land. Permaculture is an attempt to return us to a kind of deeply relational way of being on land…. But our people wiped out the people who didn't need workshops to embody that. How do we work with that legacy? Is doing permaculture on the land enough, or do we also need to be active politically to decolonize everything? And is true decolonization—not just mental exercises but genuinely returning power and land and integrity to indigenous people—even possible while still occupying this land?

Two of the traits of colonialism are a profound alienation from the land, and the dehumanization of others, which can often be expressed in what a Marxist might call abusive labor practices. We can take steps to dismantle both of these in community, but it needs to be done with intentionality and careful consideration, with planning and deep work for worldview shifts. The potential to use this house to gather people together for that work was one of the things we identified as a positive leverage point.

Seeing humans as *part of* the system (a value which both permaculture and indigenous frameworks hold strongly) is a big first step for us here. And it goes along with seeing both labor and land as communally held and shared resources, rather than individually held, controlled, or even "owned" at all. (See the companion article, "Sharing Resources Well," excerpted from *The Cooperative Culture Handbook*, for more exploration of this.)

Since we are white people trained in capitalism, I expect our attempts to implement this will be decidedly clunky. I'm grateful that the skills of observation and the ethic of making small changes and seeing what happens are core to permaculture. I suspect we will be doing a lot of both!

A Marxist ecologist, we decided, would see both the potential and the deep internal contradictions of our community.

They would also likely be amused and skeptical about our sense of urgency, which is another trait of colonial and white supremacist culture. Ecological time and political struggle time are both long games. Our impatience about things not yet working, and not yet being fully embodied after a mere three years on this land, is neither reasonable nor healthy, and if we had our imaginary Marxist ecologist at the dinner table with us, I imagine them saying, "Slow down. Breathe. This fight will take a while. These changes come through multiple cycles, not all at once."

I imagine they would bring us back to our bodies and urge us to focus on the material world as much as the social world that we are prone to getting caught up in. They would remind us to extend the solidarity in our community's name to solidarity with the bees and chickens and antelope, and to the water that rarely comes and the wind that rarely stops.

They would, again, say, "Breathe." ❧

Yana Ludwig is a founding member of the Solidarity Collective in Laramie Wyoming, and a member of Southeast Wyoming's Democratic Socialists of America. She is the author of Together Resilient: Building Community in the Age of Climate Disruption *and co-author of* The Cooperative Culture Handbook. *Yana serves on the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Intentional Community and is a longtime trainer and consultant for the movement.*

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1. See coco-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Coco-WhiteSupCulture-ENG4.pdf

Sharing Resources Well

By Yana Ludwig and Karen Gimnig

The following is an edited excerpt from The Cooperative Culture Handbook *by Yana Ludwig and Karen Gimnig; one of 26 "Keys" to developing sustainable, cooperative culture in our lives and our groups. Find it at ic.org/handbook (receive $5 discount with the code 5HANDBOOK).*

Sharing in Mainstream Culture

A surprising amount of American law exists simply to protect property rights and wealth. This makes sense in light of societal values and goals. Owning your own home is a classic sign of success. It never occurs to us that *access* to things could be achieved by anything other than ownership. This is a manifestation of the individualism that is so pervasive in our culture that most of us don't think to question it.

Thus, we are obsessed with *owning* everything we need or want. The value of individual ownership was amplified by a misleading but famous economic study articulating the "tragedy of the commons," which describes the way common property may be misused or exhausted without systems that ensure equitable distribution. We see a lot of that play out in companies polluting our collective environment without taking responsibility for that, and sometimes find ourselves as individuals needing to take more than we give because we are not paid enough to survive without doing so.

Our mainstream culture embodies a lot of the downfalls that *The Tragedy of the Commons* described. The push for personal ownership is in part an attempt to not have to deal with our perception of other people abusing the commons: if I am in sole control, I'm the only one who gets to decide how this thing will be used.

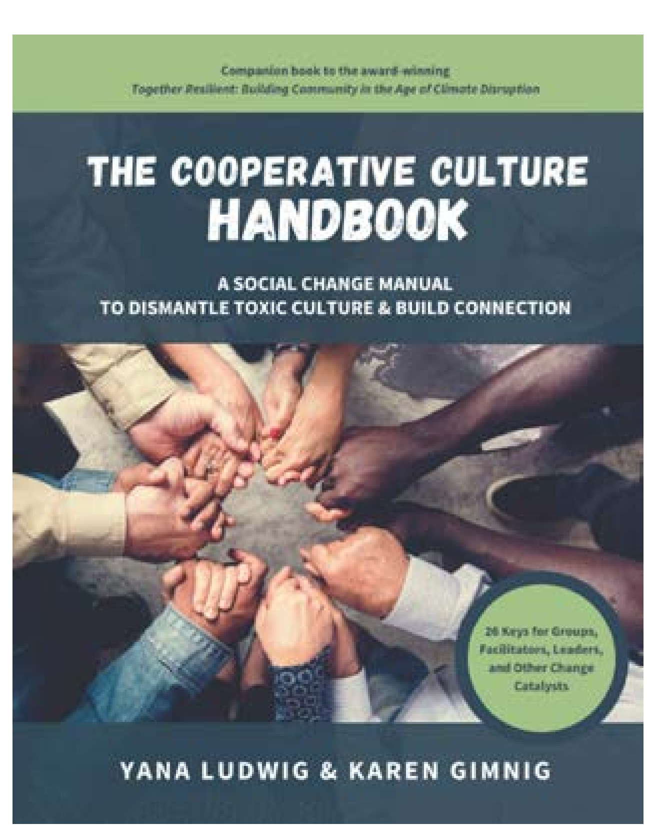
Capitalism encourages disregard for the commons, but that indifference is neither necessary nor inevitable.

Sharing in Counter Culture

The opposite extreme is sharing everything without customs or rules for equitable shared use, a practice of "anything goes." "Anything goes" leads to nothing going well for any of us. Unfortunately, we have seen real examples of this in counter culture spaces where people feel very nervous about being seen as controlling others. Rather than working through differences, everyone simply takes what they need when they need it and no one can count on shared resources still being there when someone else needs them. This isn't secure for anyone.

Sharing in Cooperative Culture

Fortunately for us, *The Tragedy of the Commons* was challenged by Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrum not too long after it came out. Ostrum added significant nuance to our understanding by finding a lot of examples where sharing did go well and resources were not depleted, and documenting what made it work. People are actually capable of sharing well with each other, within certain parameters. Capitalism encourages disregard for the commons, but that indifference is neither necessary nor inevitable. The key to sharing resources



well is clear agreements, boundaries, and accountability.

Sharing supports stronger relationships, and a sense of interdependence. Frequently a borrowed tool comes with great advice about how to use it. The interaction around the sharing is the kind of touchpoint that leads to increased knowing of one another, slowly building intimacy and safety and inviting vulnerability.

Sharing resources well is the cultural element that offers the most potential gain in terms of ecological sustainability. This is most easily seen in the context of ecovillages and income-sharing intentional communities that emphasize the sharing of common spaces, cars, food buying, meal preparation, and alternative energy equipment, among other things. The social skills needed for and built by sharing open the door for significant reduction in consumption of both energy and stuff, and at a cost of markedly less money and time. ❧

Yana Ludwig is a founding member of the Solidarity Collective in Laramie Wyoming, and a member of Southeast Wyoming's Democratic Socialists of America. She is the author of Together Resilient: Building Community in the Age of Climate Disruption *and co-author of* The Cooperative Culture Handbook. *Yana serves on the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Intentional Community and is a longtime trainer and consultant for the movement.*

Karen Gimnig walks with communities, organizations, and teams as facilitator and guide, and brought all of that to coauthoring The Cooperative Culture Handbook. *Her ability to hold space, foster hope, reflect clarity, and invite vulnerability enables groups to strengthen relationships and achieve mission. She lives in Anacortes, Washington amid family, beaches, and evergreen trees.*

Race, Class, and Sharing

There are important social justice considerations around sharing. It's easier to share when you have things in common with the group members. Differences like race and class bring up a lot of feelings around sharing property. Noticing who you are comfortable asking to borrow from or lending something to can reveal unchallenged biases. It can also be a lot easier to lend stuff out when you have a lot or have the money to replace things if something gets broken or lost. On the other hand, people with fewer resources are often much more used to sharing as a survival technique. In short: it's complicated. Sometimes you may need to have sticky, hard conversations about race and class in order to create sharing systems that truly work, or to understand why someone isn't interested in participating.

Self-Check

Am I attached to objects that I own? Do I feel uncomfortable borrowing or lending? Do I worry more about loss if someone misuses shared things than I think about the gain of more available resources? Do I have a bunch of stuff that I rarely use, particularly the same stuff my neighbor has and rarely uses? Does sharing happen most within subsets of the group, and if so, can I discern where the lines are between people who will and won't share with each other?

Exercise: Inventory of Sharing Potential

Often our sharing of resources is limited by lack of awareness or by systems that make sharing more difficult than it needs to be.

Instructions:

1. Make a list of resources that are commonly owned by your team or community, but rarely used or underused.

2. For each item determine why it is underused:
a. People don't know about it.
b. It's physically hard to access (locked up, on a high shelf, etc.).
c. It's systemically hard to access the thing (sign-up, it moves around, etc.).
d. There are too many of the thing, either commonly or privately owned.
e. The person or people who manage the thing are unpleasant to deal with.
f. The cost of using the thing is too high (cleaning, fees, etc.).
g. It's not really needed by our group.
h. Other.

3. Pick three to five things from your list and consider solutions that would result in more sharing, or better use of shared space. Consider in particular if another team or connected community might benefit from using it.

4. Pick one to three solutions to act on.

—YL and KG

Exploring Cooperative Futures, Part Two: WORK IS MORE THAN A JOB

By Paul Freundlich

There was a time when a peasant economy consumed what it grew or tended, and otherwise bartered. Life was hard for most people, and work was simply what family units did to survive.

Modern economic reality is primarily urban. It has depended on enough jobs, treating extraction like our personal pantry, with accumulation leading to expanding wealth. That expectation is increasingly unrealistic as the gap between wealth and poverty deepens.

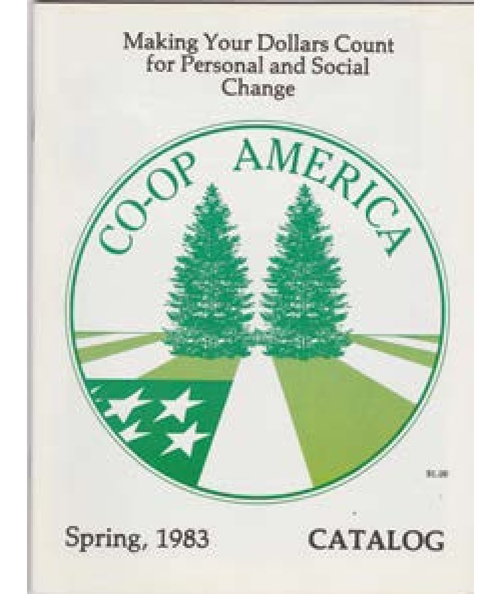
For whole classes of people, largely defined by race, ethnicity, and zip codes, the concept of meaningful work is an oxymoron subsumed in the hustle to find jobs that support survival. Yet, to the extent community exists, there is a virtually unlimited amount of meaningful work to be done: child care, elder care, infrastructure repair. If we are in a job and disparities crisis now, so were we in the Great Depression when the New Deal created the Civilian Conservation Corps.

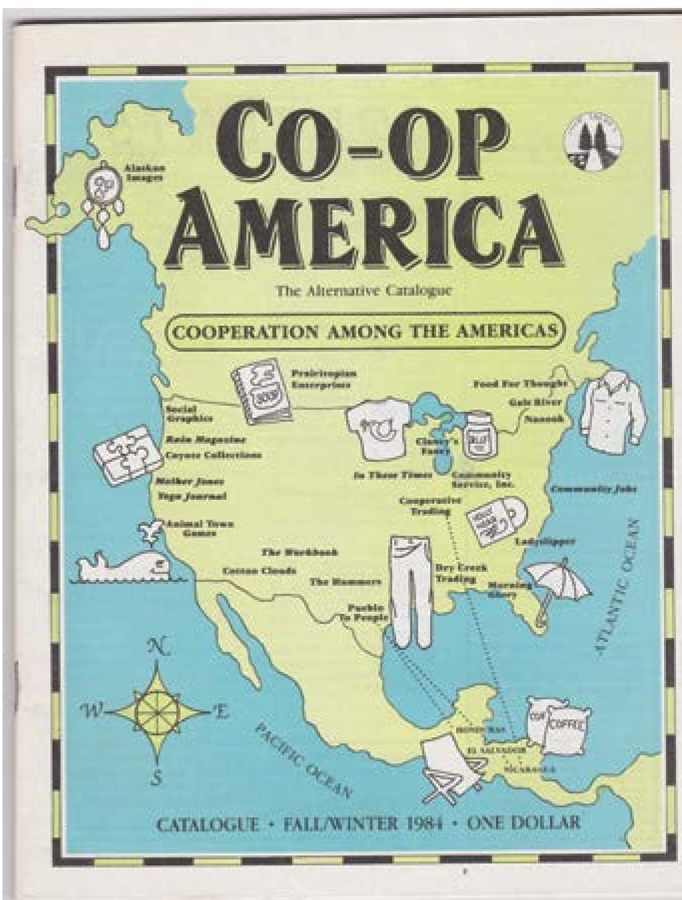
A friend from my Peace Corps days, Roger Landrum, was inspired by that experience, and spent most of his life promoting National Service, with some success: if we only had the political will, programs like AmeriCorps, Job Corps, Teacher Corps could be cobbled together with military service. A mandatory year or two of contributing citizenship would go a long way to establishing a society which speaks a common language of participation. I know that my Army experience as a draftee, while not something I embarked on with great enthusiasm, exposed me to a diversity of class, race, and ethnicity that made me a better citizen.

Top down or bottom up, plenty of tools are available. The summer of 1977, I crossed this great land via Greyhound bus, gathering material for an issue of Communities. My itinerary included cooperatives, right-livelihood businesses, and the New School for Democratic Management. At NSDM I would be teaching a class on *Burnout*, a subject familiar to the overworking and underpaid harbingers of social change who flocked to San Francisco for some answers that avoided the usual capitalist, hierarchical traps.

The best shorthand for NSDM's learning environment was the insight that in traditional business, worker compensation was booked as a cost, while in employee-owned operations, with profits/surplus going to the worker/owners, it was a benefit.

Photo courtesy of Paul Freundlich





Come then children of the marches
Veterans of tear gas and fallen arches
Co-op struggles across this land
Come to San Francisco with a notebook in your hand

Another faculty was my housemate, Lew Bowers, a recent graduate of Yale's School of Organization and Management, who put his education into practice at the New Haven Food Coop, with its 5,000 members and $1.5 million annual sales. Reading over Lew's and a colleague's article for Communities 40 years later, I'm impressed with how comprehensively they covered the issues that spell success or failure. Lew went on to head economic development for several medium-sized cities. In retirement, he had helped put together an attractive, successful housing co-op in Portland, Oregon, where he and his wife, Susan (another ex-housemate), reside, and so the beat goes on.

When my wife, Margaret, and I visited them a few years ago, the lapse of 40 years was mainly irrelevant. We knew each other with a confidence of shared experience and values. Susan and Margaret are both Nurse Practitioners, and it would be fair to say that the four of us represent the middle path of community, moving relatively smoothly between professional work that's consistent with our values, and a resilient part of communities that reassure us that life matters.

Looking back at our younger selves, although there would be many choices along the way, those that would fundamentally define us had already been made: you don't usually get into Ivy League grad schools by happenstance. As for the participants in the intense learning experience at NSDM, unlike many formal academic programs, there was not a wide distinction between teachers and students. Making a go of any small business is challenging. Throw in issues of political correctness and we were all on the edge of discovery and failure.

Consider that the modality of cooperatives is encapsulated in the mantra of equality: *one member, one vote*. Trouble is (gee wiz) that if the denial of hierarchy also deprioritizes wisdom gained through experience, and everyone is on the same level, every decision becomes a debate. Relying on everyone's good sense to balance a cultural norm against practical deadlines is dependent on coworkers with good sense.

For example, there was a restaurant I helped start, "Down to Earth," with a good menu and dedicated staff. They were open six days a week, and on the seventh they processed. Eventually, decisions on a widening range of dietary and procedural issues spread into the daily grind to the point where staff was huddling in the kitchen while impatient patrons waited to be served.

Looking ahead, the COVID-19 shutdown has been erratically devastating to an economy, and the impact of the pandemic on work life has been monumental, in ways that are likely to continue.

Yet the changes have been coming for a while: automation and cheap global sourcing in the manufacturing sector; artificial intelligence, computers, and the internet in white collar jobs. The redistribution of where people work has also affected how they feel about their work. In the wake of Covid, many more jobs will continue to be performed from home and much of routine shopping, service, and healthcare will be face-to-face-time on smartphones. Transportation and the primacy of automobiles, even oil-stingy hybrids and electrics, will be rethought.

The resistance to traditional workplaces had already supported the creation of collaborative workplaces which became a lively base for community and innovation. One of the most original and widespread (on all continents) were the *Impact Hubs* which felt like an ongoing, entrepreneurial jam session. Each of the over 40 autonomous sites had dozens to hundreds of members who showed up, plugged in their laptops, made plans, hung out till their ideas took off or fell flat.

As these small-scale, community-based initiatives were taking off, the sensationally over-leveraged (to the tune of billions) WeWork operation appropriated all the best practices and seized market share. If that competition wasn't enough, along came the necessary separations of COVID-19. Some variation will be back as folks need the stimulation of collaborative workspaces. I made a video about the Hubs, focused on San Francisco, Amsterdam, Seattle, and Madrid, which is available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tXKYl1FnfI (40-minute version) and www.youtube.com/watch?v=3drG_ioKbvg (10-minute version).

A more philosophical question remains: what do we consider work? So long as work and jobs were more or less synonymous, an assumed, parallel relationship existed between productivity and pay. But what happens when that agreement is obsolete? Even worse is the misdirection which equates productivity with profitability. The vast global financial system delivers to its players, while the rest of humanity is lucky to get fast food at the

drive-in.

The emerging service economy works only if we redefine productive work, something that communities and cooperatives are very good at. Take childcare, traditionally the unpaid domain of mothers. Take the Covid-inspired designation of "essential workers" which suddenly recognized that there was an entire class of poorly paid, but absolutely critical workers who made the wheels go round: not only physicians and nurse practitioners, but less compensated workers right down to minimum wage folks who daily risked their lives. That the least compensated jobs were usually defined by race, ethnicity, and gender made it even more shameful.

At intentional communities and cooperatives, there tends to be an equality of recognition for necessary work. When we set up Co-op America, it was as a worker cooperative. The differential in pay between the Executive Director and the newest hire was maxed at three-to-one. Half the Board of Directors was composed of worker-elected representatives, with the other half elected respectively by Business and Individual members. For 40 years we've been able to attract talented staff who contribute their skills and idealism.

Understanding that the widening gap in wealth is unsustainable in a democracy has never been the exclusive province of intellectuals, but the argument has become more sophisticated. The Union Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries fought for and won the right to organize against the exploitation of labor. There even was some truth to a de facto partnership with capital—for a while. The control, however, was always with ownership. Jobs migrated to parts of the world where exploitation of labor and resources resulted in cheap production and a competitive edge.

Relegating the exploitation of race and gender to the dust heap of history remains a dream deferred. Slavery of African Americans gave way to de facto enshrinement of economic prejudice. Pay and promotions for women still lag far behind. When China entered the game as the world's largest manufacturer of practically everything, the contradictions between short-term, competitive advantage and long-term consequences have been taken to a new level. Yet even China is aware that the environment is spiraling out of control.

Redesigning the definition and compensation of work will be a tussle for capitalism, but the Biden administration, prodded by the Warren/Sanders wing of the Dems, is slipping accommodations to fair distribution of wealth into stimulus legislation. Focusing on taxation and raising the minimum wage are worthy steps in the right direction—towards an economy where the work which allows us to cohere as an intuited community is fairly distributed and rewarded.

Valuing work which contributes to sustainability is a natural conclusion for most cooperative endeavors, and putting that value into practice is job one. ❧

The emerging service economy works only if we redefine productive work, something that communities and cooperatives are very good at.

Paul Freundlich has been an active participant and creator in the development of cooperative, communitarian, and sustainable alternatives for 60 years. Highlights include filmmaking around the world for the Peace Corps in the '60s; participating in the building of a network of alternative institutions in New Haven and editing of Communities *in the '70s; founding both Co-op America and Dance New England in the '80s; in the '90s, helping guide the CERES Coalition as a Board Member; in the 2000s, Chair of the Stakeholder Council of the Global Reporting Initiative; in the '10s, on the Managing Board of a long-term homeplace for communitarian ventures, and continuing on the Board of Green America as President Emeritus. Paul has authored dozens of films, videos, articles, and other writing. He lives in Connecticut with his wife, Margaret Flinter; both of them commune with a wide range of friends and colleagues via Zoom (for now).*

Restoring Ecosystems and Human Communities

By Susan Jennings

Photos courtesy of Susan Jennings

The UN has declared 2021-2030 the decade of ecosystem restoration in recognition of both the peril of degraded landscapes and the possibility of their regeneration. Degraded landscapes, which account for 75 percent of the planet's land areas, contribute to the development of novel viruses, disrupt water and climate cycles, and imperil human and ecosystem health. These planetary challenges call for a great transition, a new-old way of being in community with the natural world, and with one another. We are already seeing signs of this changing dynamic.

Our ever-increasing global practices of tree planting, rewilding, eco-restoration, and rejuvenation of waterways and wildlife passages are inspiring hope, replication, and a deepening understanding of the symbiotic nature of human and natural communities. And as our understanding of the interconnection between human life and the planet continues to grow, individuals and communities are exploring how the principles of restoration—

including diversity, collaboration, and working within natural boundaries—can likewise restore human communities.

Restoring and strengthening communities has been a focus of the Arthur Morgan Institute for Community Solutions (AMICS) since its founding, as Community Service, in 1940, on the eve of America's entrance into WWII. By that time, its founder, Arthur E. Morgan, had already engineered a flood control system for Dayton, Ohio, transformed Antioch College, served as the first chair of the Tennessee Valley Authority, informed Gandhi's rural education initiative, written several books, and founded an alternative currency. He saw Community Service as his culminating legacy, however, because he increasingly believed that the small community was the seedbed of cultural and democratic values. Though urbanization and globalization were in their infancy, he was remarkably prescient about what they might mean for human agency and community.

Morgan was a founder of the Community Land Trust movement, and his heirs were cofounders of North Carolina's Celo Community, Ohio's Raven Rocks community, and Yellow Springs' Vale Community. Bob Swann, who took a correspondence course that Morgan created for conscientious objectors who were imprisoned, later cofounded the Schumacher Center for a New Economics.

Over its 80 years, Community Solutions has explored, through conferences and writings, films and our online presence, the challenges of technology, the benefits of simplicity and cooperation, and the power and possibility of community. Community Solutions has also advocated for the environment through films produced by Pat Murphy and Faith Morgan about Passive House building and about Cuba's transition to sustainable agricultural practices, *The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil.*

I came to know Community Solutions through attending the organization's Peak Oil conferences in 2007 and 2008. They were seminal events for me. In my work as a university sustainability professional, I had often felt constrained by a definition of the work that ended at renewable energies and recycling. At Community Solutions' conferences, the conversations spurred by speakers like David Korten, Richard Heinberg, and Judy Wicks stirred me. For the first time, I recognized that my own visions of a sustainability platform that was nested in spiritual, historical, and political understandings were shared by an international community.

When I came to Yellow Springs in 2014 as its Executive Director, it was with the promise that I could bring these broader visions to my work here. In 2017, this promise manifested in the purchase at auction of 128 acres of conventional farmland on the outskirts of the village. We named the farm Agraria and established it as a Center for Regenerative Practice. As an evolution of the ideas of sustainability, regeneration implies a re-visioning of the many systems within which we operate. Everything we do

at Agraria is through the lens of regeneration: regenerating soil and biodiversity on our farm; regenerating food and economic systems in our bioregion; and regenerating communities through our education, media, and conferences.

Our four areas of practice include conservation, research, education, and local food systems. In each of these areas, we look to work across the traditional siloes of institutions and philosophies, seeking to evolve both practice and practitioners.

Like much of the land surrounding us, the fields we bought had been farmed conventionally for several decades and the soil was depleted and relatively devoid of life. Over the past four years we have built soil and biodiversity through transitioning to organic and regenerative practices, such as the use of compost and other amendments, covercropping, and diverse plantings, including the planting of perennials. Our regenerative farming and forestry practices also include the coppicing of locusts for fence posts, the development of a food forest, and bioswales created in collaboration with The Permaculture Institute. Later this year we plan to develop a silvopasture site for rotationally grazed sheep.

Our signature conservation project is a partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), their first project that combines agriculture and conservation. TNC is remeandering Jacoby Creek, which runs through Agraria, restoring wetlands, and replacing invasive species with native species. Fifty-five acres of Agraria are included in the restoration plan and a further 25 are included in an agricultural easement. Paths, signs, and seating areas will be incorporated throughout the site to educate visitors about our practices and why we have adopted them.

Concurrent with our restoration plans, we have partnered with several institutions on research, including The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. They sent us several slips of Silphium, a perennial sunflower that can be used as a pollinator resource and for forage, soil building, and oilseed production. We are investigating which ecotypes of Silphium perform best in this region, and in which kinds of soils, including wet soils, which will become increasingly problematic as the climate warms. We are also conducting research in glyphosate migration when used in honeysuckle eradication and, with our partner farmer, looking at the efficacy of various soil amendments. As with our other activities, a prime consideration is involving students of all ages in our research, including third graders who have explored soil health by recording insects in the soil of one of our fields, and seventh graders who investigated macroinvertebrates in Jacoby Creek.

Agraria is just down the road from the Yellow Springs High School and within driving distance of 13 institutions of higher education, including Central State University, a historically Black university (HBCU) and 1890 land grant institution with whom we have a comprehensive memorandum of understanding. As a result, we are uniquely positioned to support the inclusion of regenerative practices into K-12 and collegiate curricula, along with research and service opportunities. Our fields and wooded areas give children a chance to climb trees, dig in the dirt, build forts and fires, explore wildlife, and measure the diversity in water and soil. A 2019 Soils for Life grant from the Ohio EPA helped us

to train educators from 35 school districts and brought students from several districts to Agraria for field trips, before the Covid shutdowns halted them.

As with many of our colleagues, the months since the Covid shutdowns have been ones of challenge and reflection. It's clear that this time is one of quickening of collapse and transition, and that those of us who have been nurtured in the narratives of simplicity, diversity, and relocalization are called to bring our skillsets and understandings to bear in our own work and in our collaborations with others.

In 2020, our education team created the *Big Map Out* project to help homebound K-2 students get outside to map their backyards, neighborhood parks, and communities. We also created nature connection videos to encourage children to stay physically active and attend to seasonal changes even while cooped up. We've continued outside nature school offerings in small groups and are also collaborating with several universities to offer internships and classes.

As traditional education is increasingly challenged structurally and financially to provide meaningful experiences for students, we are committed to exploring the kinds of hands-on skill sets that empower students to have agency in their own and their community's life. Students of all ages at Agraria have learned the importance of regeneration through tending permaculture sites and bluebird boxes, how to partner with nature through research into renewable energy and water catchment systems, and the power and practice of seed saving. Agraria is also a demonstration and learning site for homesteaders and small-scale farmers.

Annual conferences have been a signature project of the organization throughout our history. We have sponsored over 100 conferences on issues as diverse as appropriate technology, the importance of elders in community, the economics of happiness, and soil, food, and plant medicine. Moving conferences and workshops online has paradoxically broadened our impact, with people from across the planet engaging in presentations, conversations, and skillsharing in artistic and hometending practices.

Last fall, we also hosted our first annual Black Farming conference, exploring the hidden history of Black Farming in Ohio, cooperative development, and the needs of Black farmers who have disproportionately suffered land and business losses over the last century. The conference led to the development of a Black Farming Network and newsletter and the institution this year of a regenerative farmer fellowship for area Black, Indigenous, and People of Color working primarily in community spaces. These

trainings and networks are also engaged in important conversations about the need for collaborative growing and food exchange outside of our monetary systems. In addition, we are exploring whether our land trust history can support the local and regional development of a Black Farming commons.

We further explored Black Farming in our new Grounded Hope podcast series, partially funded by the Ohio Humanities Council. Other recent podcasts include a focus on Regenerative Agriculture, Agroforestry, and animals in agriculture. These podcasts are also paired with resources for educators, available at groundedhope.org.

Our support of the regional food system has also expanded in reach and importance. Before the pandemic, many Americans thought of food insecurity as being the challenge of the very poor. But the Covid lockdowns brought the sight of millions of gallons of milk being dumped down the drain and thousands of pigs and chickens euthanized while demand at food banks was spiking. It was the first of many recent traumatic events waking us up to the fragility of all the systems on which we rely—food, health, economic, and political.

Southwest Ohio, which boasts some of the best water and farmland in the world, is covered with corn and soy monocultures—with much of that turned into biofuels or animal feed and shipped overseas. Agriculture is the state's number one industry, yet only eight percent of the food that's eaten here is grown locally. At Agraria, we have the opportunity to reflect on food systems from the very local through the international level. Locally we are working on the regenerative growing and sharing of food through a Generous Gardeners program, through support of farmers' markets, through the development of a new urban agriculture center in South Springfield, a nearby urban food desert, and through collaborating on a revisioning of a regional food system.

As our recent conference speakers and partners David Korten, Vandana Shiva, and Helena Norberg-Hodge have highlighted, there is a deep and symbiotic connection between the exodus of people from farm to city and the corporatization of the food system, decline of democracy, degradation of the environment, and loss of community agency. Food and seed sovereignty, development of local food and economic systems, and training people to grow their own food at multiple scales all rebuild our connection to the land and enhance not only individual but also community resilience.

Our June conference with Vandana Shiva and Dr. Drew Ramsay on Nourishing Life looks to broaden our understandings of health and especially the connection between human health and fresh food from healthy soil. Later this year, a retrospective on the work of Arthur Morgan will reflect on his legacy and the meaning of his work in this transformative time.

We will continue through our journals, videos, podcasts, and upcoming conferences to highlight the creativity arising across the planet as this great transition unfolds. The paths to two very divergent futures now present themselves more starkly than ever in our lifetimes—one toward increasing control and centralization and the other toward diversity, collaboration, and restoration. The health of the planet and all the beings who call it home depends on our collective ability to choose a path toward restoration, regeneration, and resilience. ❧

Susan Jennings became Executive Director of the Arthur Morgan Institute for Community Solutions (AMICS) in 2014. Since that time, she has partnered with the AMICS board to implement a new strategic plan oriented toward the support of resilient communities. She also led AMICS in the 2017 purchase of Agraria, a 128-acre farm on the outskirts of Yellow Springs which is being developed into a Center for Regenerative Practice. Susan serves as the Chair of the Greater Dayton Conservation Fund, and on the national Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching on behalf of Central State University. She also facilitates a Community Climate Resilience class for the University of Dayton's lifelong learning institute.

Native Wildlife vs. Cats and Dogs

By Briony Ryan

Photos courtesy of Michael Ney

This article first appeared in Eco Village Voice *Issue #1 at ecovillagevoice.com*.

"Dogs are the third-most-damaging mammal, placing dogs after cats and rodents as the world's most damaging invasive mammalian predators."[1]

Crystal Waters is a permaculture village that is home to an abundance of native wildlife. It is here on 640 acres that residents live in harmony with this nature. A "no dogs and cats" policy and bylaw means that kangaroos, wallabies, and echidnas freely and safely roam the land during the day, while tawny frogmouths, microbats, antechinus, and phascogales enjoy the stillness of the night.

It has been recorded that in the Sunshine Coast region there are over 700 species of native animals—with some of these species being found only on the Sunshine Coast. According to the Sunshine Coast Council, out of these 700 species of native animals, 198 have been classified as "significant" because they are threatened by extinction; are not found anywhere else in the world; are not found either north or south of the Coast; and/or have a specific cultural heritage.

The protection of these native animals and their habitats is imperative, and here at Crystal Waters we are committed to supporting this cause.

How does the exclusion of dogs and cats help this cause? Research has shown that there is a definite impact on native fauna from domestic dogs and cats. In November 2017, the Tweed Council adopted a Wildlife Protection Area Policy where Council can prohibit cats and dogs from public lands declared a "Wildlife Protection Area." They state: "Council's high conservation reserves located close to urban areas are most at risk, with many residences adjoining urban bushland owning a cat and/or dog.

"Native fauna are impacted by cats due to mortality, injury, or disease spread as a result of cat hunting during the day and at night. Hunting behaviours of cats can also impact on fauna by causing disturbance to breeding, foraging, and roosting.

"Susceptible fauna groups include: small to medium sized birds, particularly ground-nesting birds; small to medium sized arboreal mammals (gliders, possums); bats (insectivorous and blossom/fruit bats); small to medium sized ground dwelling mammals (planigales, bandicoots) and frogs, lizards, snakes, and insects. Similarly, native fauna are impacted from dogs due to mortality, injury, or disease spread resulting from dog attack.

"Dogs can also cause disturbance to and induce stress in fauna, can crush or eat the eggs of ground nesting birds, and similarly to cats, can impact on fauna by causing disturbance to breeding, foraging, and roosting. Susceptible fauna groups

include: ground dwelling, roosting, and nesting birds; arboreal mammals that come to the ground to move between habitat areas (koalas, possums); ground dwelling mammals (bandicoots, echidnas, wallabies) and snakes and lizards."

A study done in the US by Benjamin Lenth et al., submitted to the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, "The Effects of Dogs on Wildlife Communities" (February, 2006), compared the activity levels of wildlife in areas that prohibited dogs with areas that allowed dogs. After measuring wildlife activity, researchers claim that "the presence of dogs along recreational trails correlated with altered patterns of habitat utilisation by several species."

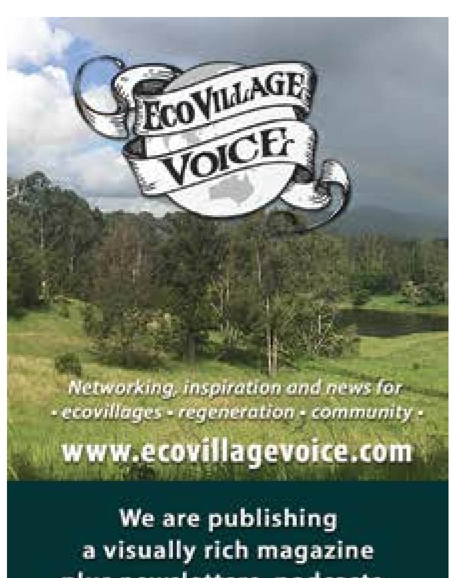
Crystal Waters Permaculture Village is home to many native birds and wildlife and undoubtedly a number of significant species. The IUCN Red List has the brush-tailed phascogale "near threatened" and considered "vulnerable," and was last assessed in December 2012.

As urbanisation increases throughout our country, it is important for communities such as Crystal Waters to continue to have policies and bylaws to protect our native wildlife and their habitat. The idea that introduced predatory animals should have priority over this, seems unthinkable. However, it is a continued trend throughout general society to give greater value to domestic dogs and cats, and sadly, this trend is bringing about a reduction in number of our native wildlife.

Other ecovillages in Queensland have adopted the same "no dogs and cats" policy: villages such as Kookaburra Park in Gin Gin and The Ecovillage at Currumbin on the Gold Coast, with The Ecovillage at Currumbin successfully managing to secure a covenant through their local council to support this cause.

As the number of ecovillages with a "no dogs and cats" policy increases throughout Australia, a better understanding of the significant impact that domestic dogs and cats have on our unique native wildlife will hopefully grow too. The fight for our right to keep our communities free from dogs and cats must continue, as the future of our vulnerable wildlife depends on it. ❧

After beginning her university studies in Media, Briony Ryan returned to her original love of creating, and began writing and illustrating children's books. She had her first book published in early 2020 and is working on more. Briony is a long-term resident at Crystal Waters Ecovillage in Australia, and originally wrote this article for Eco Village Voice *(see ecovillagevoice.com).*



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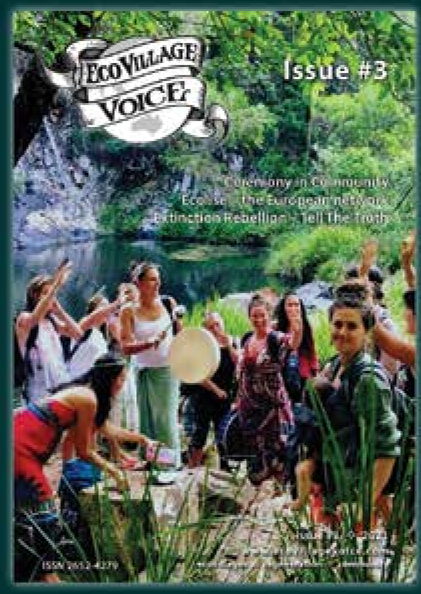

NEXT ISSUE
features a photo essay on "Ceremony in Community". We invite you to submit your story and photos too for following issues.

www.ecovillagevoice.com

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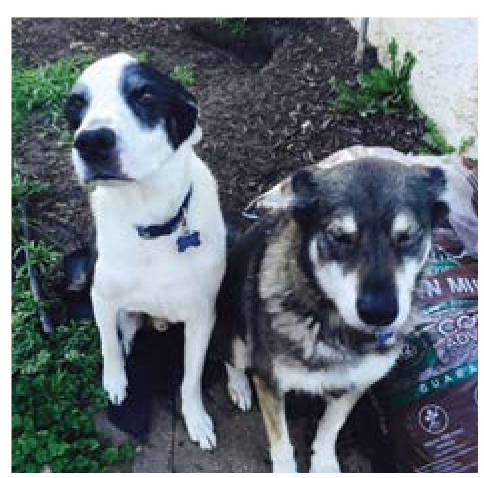
Canine Community and the Dog that Other Dogs Hate

By Sheryl Grassie

I often look at my life through the lens of having dogs. When I moved into my current house about a decade ago, a neighbor from across the alley came over to say "hello" and meet my two pups; he had a dog as well. "This is a very dog-friendly neighborhood," he told me, "but there is one dog down the alley that all the other dogs hate." I immediately envisioned a pit bull growling from behind a chain-link fence. The neighbor elaborated, "It's a really nice dog, a big gentle doodle variety," he continued, "but, mark my words, your dogs will hate him." I guess he wanted to warn me about the known hazard in the neighborhood.



"My dogs love all dogs," I said matter-of-factly, and in truth, I had often pondered getting a sign for my bigger dog Al that said, "I roll for cats," he was so in love with other creatures. My two pups, both mixed breed rescues, were overly friendly and overly submissive, especially the younger one Zoe. A to Z, as they were affectionately called by people in the neighborhood, were a happy duo.

My family, having bred dogs (Keeshonds) while I was growing up, engendered in me some solid knowledge about dogs, and I have prided myself on extremely well-behaved pets. I also know the importance of socializing dogs and had trotted both Al and Zoe off to the local vet for puppy socialization classes right off the bat. With a penchant for the well-behaved, well-socialized creature, I kept my eye out for the "dog that all other dogs hated." I was very curious.

In the meantime, we acclimated to our new neighborhood and made friends with both people and canines. A to Z would look forward to dogs walking past our house so they could greet and sniff, and people who would reach over the fence and pet them. However, there truly was one exception. Just as my neighbor had warned me, there was a dog that the other dogs seemingly detested, including mine. This poor creature, friendly as he appeared, elicited nothing but barks and snarls when he went past, and sadly did not seem to have a friend in the neighborhood.

I pondered this poor animal, who passed long ago and shall remain nameless. He was, as I believe all dogs are, essentially good and quite lovable. So why did all the other dogs dislike him so? Why was he shunned? This acrimony was well established when we moved in, and my dogs just seemed to follow suit. But dogs, like people, do not just automatically dislike others, something had to have caused the aversion. What had happened for so many neighborhood canines to turn on this one poor dog?

Slowly it dawned on me: he was not allowed by his owners to be friendly. He didn't come to the fence to sniff as other dogs did, and when out in the neighborhood his owners would not allow him to greet other dogs, nor did we ever see him at the off-leash park running around like so many of the other neighborhood canines. He didn't have a fenced yard from which to make connections and lived most of the time indoors. He had been turned into a social outcast by the very people who loved him most and I felt extremely sorry for him. He endured a life of daily growling from most of his peers.

Some people don't think dogs need other dogs, but I disagree. I was at a recent talk by renowned psychiatrist Dr. Henry Emmons who elaborated on the four pillars of good health: diet, exercise, sleep, and social connection, which all apply to dogs as well. Surprisingly, Dr. Emmons' research indicates that social connection is the strongest determinant of good health and a happy life. Sadly, this rejected dog in my neighborhood died having never known what is was like to be close to other canines. On an even sadder note, the family has gotten another dog and is instituting the same social isolation practices—no contact with other dogs.

I do not fully understand the need to isolate one's pet, or the rationale behind this kind of control. Dogs by nature are pack animals and very social creatures; most people understand this. Isolation lessens the quality of life for both the animal and those around it. I feel fortunate that my dogs have had not only each other, but a whole community of people and dogs that sniff, and lick, and pet them. They know they are loved. My neighbor was right when he told me, "This is a very dog-friendly neighborhood."

My older dog Al has been gone now for five years, and Zoe is well into her geriatric twilight, but they had good lives where they felt connected to others, both humans and canines. "The dog that other dogs hate" has been replaced by a younger version, and life goes on. Just as with humans, dogs need to feel part of a community and mine have been fortunate to live where they do.

Sheryl Grassie Ed.D. has maintained a private writing practice since 1997. She has taught writing and research at the graduate level and enjoys working with both authors and students on academic and nonfiction projects. She has a Bachelor's degree in psychology from Macalester College, a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Antioch University, and a Doctorate degree in Educational Leadership from the University of St. Thomas. She has authored, ghostwritten, and/or edited numerous books and articles related to a variety of topics. She resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota where she is the mother of three children, and an avocational potter.

The Farm: The First 50 Years

By Michael Traugot, Mary Ellen Bowen, Peter Schweitzer, with Pamela Hunt, Richard Schoenbrun, Carol Ann Nelson, Nancy Rhine Figallo, Michael O'Gorman, John Coate, Marilyn Friedlander, and David Frohman

Photos by David Frohman, Anita Whipple, Gerald Wheeler, Plenty International

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Founded as an intentional community 50 years ago near Summertown, Tennessee, The Farm now spans across three generations. The community became widely known around the world as a center for peace and reason, hard work, the spirit of cooperation, and outreach to people in need.

The Farm began in 1971 on 1,064 acres (which soon became 1,750 acres) with about 250 young adults, led by founder and hippie spiritual teacher Stephen Gaskin. We were motivated to apply the spiritual principles we were studying together in his classes in San Francisco to form a community based on peace and cooperation. We wanted to try to nudge the general society, then fractured and consumed by the Vietnam War and racism, in the direction of peace and justice. Our motto then was "Out to Save the World," or at least our portion of it.

In the ensuing years, the community expanded rapidly until at the peak around 1981 close to 1,500 people were living on the property, half of them children. The overloaded community got into large debt and then restructured, most of the residents leaving. About 200 adults, along with our children, stuck it out and paid off the debt in three years, 1984-87, thus assuring the continuation of the community. The population has now been steady for many years at about 200 adults, along with our children.

Today The Farm itself is an established and respected part of the surrounding community in southern middle Tennessee, and also the homeland and hub of a large network of Farm veterans, our families and associates, a community at large, dispersed around the country and around the world, many of whom are still activists working to have a positive influence in the world around them.

This article contains stories by long-time Farm veterans about the formation of the community and the lasting relationships

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formed among the group of young dreamers who became The Farm. A common thread running through these stories is how the community-building skills learned on The Farm helped them accomplish what they have been able to do since those early days of community development on The Farm.

This collection of stories and photos is a project of The Farm Archive Library.

• • •

Pamela Hunt has been involved with The Farm Community for more than 50 years. She has delivered babies and taught midwifery at The Farm for more than 40 years. She writes about her first meeting with Stephen Gaskin in 1967, when a community like The Farm was still just a dream.

I was hitchhiking home from college one day and a friend picked me up on his motorcycle. He said there were some students meeting at a teacher's house on Broderick Street. We went there, up three flights of stairs to the attic apartment, and met Stephen and Margaret Gaskin (Stephen's wife at the time), who were with six other students. We talked, smoking as we went. Margaret broke open a kilo and put it in the middle of a large round table and went to the kitchen area and put some brown rice on the stove to cook. She and I talked awhile about food and what you could do with brown rice. Lots.

Stephen talked about his class at San Francisco State Experimental College, "Experiments in Unified Field Theory." Psychedelics were a topic. Everyone there had taken some. I hadn't but was thinking about it. We talked about starting a commune out in the country. Stephen knew of a big house out at Stinson Beach and by the end of the evening four of the students, including myself, decided with Stephen and Margaret to move out there

into the oldest two-story house in that small beach town.

During our time at Stinson Beach, we decided to go to Haight Street once a week or so and see if there was anyone we could help. In 1966 and 1967, the streets were filled with beautiful innocent wide-eyed teenagers who had run away from home to see what was happening in San Francisco. The city and Haight Street were a rude awakening to many of them. They got there and had to figure out where to live and what to eat... and what not to eat. We'd drive down to the Haight-Ashbury and talk to one or two of them and ask them if they wanted to come home to our commune. We took them back to the Stinson Beach house, fed them, and told them to call home and tell their parents where they were and how they were doing. Some parents hadn't heard from their kids in some time.

In the class, we talked about E=mc2 and the speed of light and how telepathy was faster than that, and that if you are honest and clear with everyone in a group that the telepathy would happen instantaneously, all at once. That happened in our early meetings and it worked so well. There were times when we all knew something at the same time. It was totally awesome when it happened. Stephen led these conversations, and he was honest and real. Most everybody contributed to the conversation.

The class was about eight to 10 people at that time. We were meeting at the Gallery Lounge on the Quad at San Francisco State College. We felt like we were coming up with some good ideas of how to not only make things better in our lives and around us but also how to apply these energy rules on a greater level and make the world a better place for everybody. It was a big meeting room and we sat on the carpeted floor in the middle and the vision was crystal clear all over the room but especially in our small group.

Stephen was a good speaker and drew more people into the conversation. We were filling the Gallery Lounge and it became clear that we were going to need a larger place to meet. We moved to the Glide Memorial Church where Stephen connect-

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ed with the minister. Stephen and Margaret's plan was to go on a speaking tour around the country. It wasn't time yet, but they were talking about it.

Also, about this time our commune in Stinson broke up. We all moved back to the city. I moved into a small apartment with several students I'd met in class. The Stinson Beach House group had done its job and we all moved on to the next step!

• • •

Richard Schoenbrun, a National Guard vet, has been involved with the community almost as long as Pamela Hunt. Over time quite a few military veterans have passed through The Farm, seeking peace after the horrific violence they had experienced during war. Stephen Gaskin himself was a Korean War vet who had emerged from that conflict committed to working for a more peaceful world without war!

I was a Weekend Warrior and a grocery clerk in the San Fernando Valley. The Watts Riots on TV (August 1965) were only 30 miles away. On a Friday morning we got the call that we were activated. I had joined the Army Reserves right out of high school. In my last year of active service, I was suddenly part of a deployment of 4,000 Guardsman, marching into the streets of Watts shoulder to shoulder, with fixed bayonets. I was 21 years old.

The next five days changed my life forever. I became a combat veteran on American soil. There were dead bodies on the streets, burning buildings, empty shells of burnt buildings, and even more significantly, I saw for the first time that people lived in Third World conditions in my own city.

Seeking change, I tried marijuana and laughed so much it became my choice over alcohol. In 1967 I participated in the Great Peace March against the Vietnam War from downtown San Francisco into Haight-Ashbury and eventually decided to move into the district. I heard that Stephen Gaskin, a Korean War Vet and Creative Writing instructor, was holding meetings in a student lounge, tying people's psychedelic experiences to the ancient teachings of the world's religions. I started going to his classes. My most profound spiritual experience on LSD was on Mount Tamalpais communing with a cow, which left me a lifelong vegan. Stephen's following grew and he went on a national book tour with a large Caravan of rolling school bus homes. When it was obvious that the group had become a community, Stephen realized that we had to find land and Tennessee was a good place to look. Our bus, with two couples and two babies on board, was in.

After 23 years on The Farm my family relocated to California, where I discovered Sufi Dances of Universal Peace, now my spiritual practice. I continued as an RN, eventually doing Hospice Care and Geriatric Case Management. This enabled me to retire comfortably enough to travel and volunteer at free medical and dental events, the joy of my life in my mid-70s. I am living my hippie dream of service. I have recently returned to The Farm after reconnecting with my friends and the land, and in my house

at the end of the road, I feel like I am home for good!

• • •

Midwifery and home birth have long been a part of life on The Farm. In our community Birth is regarded as a Sacrament, a holy event. The Farm Midwives, led by Ina May Gaskin, Stephen's wife, helped revolutionize the birthing process in America, starting with birthing our own babies naturally and then offering services to women from around the country and sometimes the world.

Carol Ann Nelson has been involved with this program for more than 40 years, delivering babies in Wisconsin, Florida, and the South Bronx as well as in Tennessee. Carol helped start the South Florida School of Midwifery in Miami, Florida. She helped develop the Certified Professional Midwife (CPM) credential, now accepted in many states around the country. She and another Farm Midwife recently started College of Traditional Midwifery, a competency-based education program that offers an Associate Degree in the Applied Science of Midwifery. Carol lives on The Farm and currently serves the nearby Amish community, driving out to their farms to deliver their babies and healthcare at home.

I was working as a nurse in labor and delivery before I moved to The Farm in 1972. Ina May heard about me, and she called and asked if I wanted to go to a birth. Of course, I did. I hadn't ever been to a home birth and was looking forward to that. It was the mother's fifth baby. She was beautiful, peaceful, and pushed that baby out with such grace. Her husband was there at her side being so supportive. I was amazed at how beautiful and natural the whole process was. When the placenta came, the mother started to hemorrhage. Before Ina May could ask for Pitocin (a drug used to help control hemorrhage) I had already drawn it up into the syringe and was handing it to her. She and I were very telepathic from that time on. Ina May put me on the midwife crew and started training me right after that birth.

Birth at home made so much more sense to me. So peaceful and loving, the wonderful vibrations and beautiful visual color...it was such a spiritual experience. The awesome experience of seeing the changes a woman makes through the process of birth; seeing the Goddess come alive in every woman; seeing the new little spirits come into the world, so mind blown, so aware and absorbing of everything around them...made me fall in love. I was in love with birth.

• • •

Nonviolence and compassionate communication have always been cornerstone beliefs and practices of The Farm Community. The Caravan itself was a peace mission, reaching out to our parents' generation in turbulent times. From the very beginning there were no firearms allowed on The Farm, and that was part of the reason we were accepted by the people

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of Tennessee; we were not perceived as a threat. Internally, we were dedicated to resolving our disputes through conflict resolution, and we continue to do so. **Mary Ellen Bowen** has taken that dedication to a much greater level in Tennessee and then brought it back to the community 30 years later!

I came to The Farm with my three children, Susan, Lauren, and Steve, in March of 1976. I needed to get my kids out of the Chicago area to somewhere I could believe in, somewhere safe for the kids and in the country! Thanks to The Farm publication *Hey Beatnik*, I found out about The Farm Community that described itself as a "Family Monastery" and I immediately thought "that's for me and my kids!"

Upon arriving I right away got involved in the school and for several years I taught many grades. After the changeover, I and a few other teachers ran The Farm School for years so it would survive. I taught many subjects at all grade levels, and in music class I started a few kid rock 'n' roll bands.

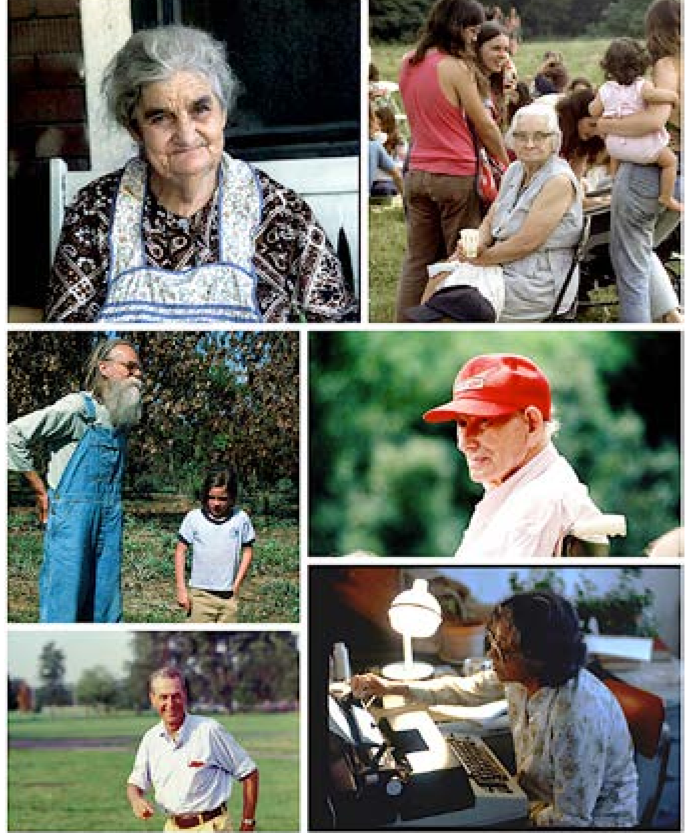
In 1986 I recreated Kids To The Country (KTC) in Tennessee. KTC was conceived in the South Bronx, New York, for urban at-risk kids to get out of the city and come to the countryside for nature study and conflict resolution education. Through grants and donations, we have served over 8,500 kids. Thirty-five years later, I am still running KTC and it remains a project of our nonprofit, Plenty International.

On The Farm, I lived in many households of 20 to 40-plus adults and at least that many children. We had regular house meetings in order to solve problems, plan projects, distribute the work, and most of all figure out about getting along better. We talked about keeping the "vibes" high because it made for a smoother-running household and was good for the kids. This was our organic form of conflict resolution, and it inspired me to continue in this field.

Since then, I have earned a masters degree, given and been through countless trainings, built two mediation programs in Nashville and locally that serve Tennessee general sessions and juvenile courts, taught conflict resolution classes to over 30,000 kids in seven Middle Tennessee county schools, trained over 1,300 mediators, and am still a Restorative Justice practitioner today. Although we on The Farm developed our conflict resolution process organically, it was wonderful to discover the many techniques that can be learned that really do help people resolve issues more effectively and kindly. Today we have our own Community Conflict Resolution Team on The Farm.

• • •

Helpful outreach was one of the original intentions of the community. We set out to actively apply the "Good Samaritan" principles that seemed to be important tenets of all religions and spiritual practices. From the very beginning we reached out to our near neighbors and helped them out in numerous ways, as they had helped us. Plenty International, our nonprofit 501(c)(3), was created to help protect and share the world's abundance and knowledge for the benefit of all. Plenty's



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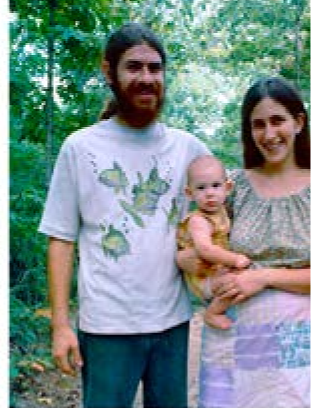

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underlying principle was that "if things were distributed more fairly in the world, there would be Plenty for everyone!" Plenty has been called the "Hippie Peace Corps," and it has carried out projects supporting economic self-sufficiency, cultural integrity, and environmental responsibility in the US, Central America, the Caribbean, East Asia, and Africa. Plenty is especially known for its work locally with children in the US, its work in Guatemala following a devastating earthquake in 1976, the Plenty Ambulance Service in the South Bronx, and for its ongoing work with the Oglala Lakota at Pine Ridge Reservation.

Plenty cannot be overtly political, but its mission and purpose have revolutionary potential, certainly at a cultural and spiritual level, seeking to balance out the inequities inherent in the way human society is organized today by empowering those who most need it and can use the resources. Its motto is "Because in all fairness, there is enough," meaning if we humans as a species quit hoarding and fighting and instead learn to share, life would be much better for all concerned. **Peter Schweitzer**, Plenty's Executive Director, has been involved with the community for 50 years. He has lived both on and off The Farm, and currently resides here in his home and office.

By 1974 The Farm had settled into a level of competence and near self-sufficiency, and at a Sunday Morning Service that spring, Stephen Gaskin proposed that we set up a way to reach out to our neighbors, both locally and around the world, and look for ways to be of some help. The community embraced the idea. At the time there were around 500 folks, mostly young adults with an expanding population of children on the Farm. Rooted in the spiritual explorations of Stephen Gaskin's Monday Night Class in San Francisco (1968-1970) and the Caravan tour of the US (1970-1971), The Farm Community has always sought to be helpfully engaged beyond the confines of The Farm Community itself. We've wanted to reach out and not just be focused on *our own* needs.

Being respectful, community-based hippies, looking to learn and help, has opened doors and made us accepted and welcomed by different communities of a wide spectrum of cultures. Since Plenty was founded, its projects promoting cultural and economic health, welfare, and sustainability have happened in 20 different countries. In the four years after meeting the Mayans in Guatemala following the earthquake in 1976, more than 200 Farm adults and children got to live for a time in Guatemala. We also brought over 100 Mayan friends, adults and children, to The Farm for short stays on H-3 visas. Some of our volunteers learned to speak Kaqchikel, and The Farm started wearing Mayan trajé.

We really felt like family with these people. They also opened our eyes and minds to the history and plight of indigenous people around the world and how much we had to learn from them and how much we owed them. As a result, working with indigenous people became central to our mission.

Our community was, by contrast, such a baby. Our culture was so young and untested whereas the Mayan culture was ancient and deeply rooted. The Mayan people today are among the economically poorest of the poor but culturally and spiritually very rich. Meeting the Mayans of Guatemala helped The Farm deal with our comparatively minor challenges of poverty and lack of resources—one difference being that we had chosen

to be poor, at least relative to the dominant American society, but we still had access to everything we needed in the way of the basics, food, potable water, health care, shelter, and land.

We saw clearly how well off we were in material things and access to resources, and that inspired us to try to figure out ways to be helpful to people who didn't have these advantages. It made us more generous with each other and kinder. It influenced and permeated every aspect of The Farm like our cottage industries and other nonprofits, all of which are linked by a common history and commitment to the idea and practice of "Right Livelihood."

We believe the hippies were right to rethink the overly materialistic American culture we grew up in and we're gratified to see young people today picking up the banners of nonviolence and taking better care of each other and the planet. As always, the challenges are daunting: global warming, systemic poverty, bigotry and inequality, war. Our message to them is, you will never lack for opportunities to do things for others. Finding and creating solutions in partnership with people of like mind and heart is where the action is, and the fun—and, it turns out, all you need is love. (For more about Plenty visit *plenty.org*.)

• • •

In 1981, members of the Akwesasne Mohawk community requested Plenty's help setting up a volunteer emergency medical service for the 6,000 residents of the reservation. Plenty sent a certified EMT instructor and paramedic from The Farm, the late Gary Rhine, assisted by his EMT-certified wife, Nancy, to teach an Emergency Care and Transport course, and administer the formal licensure exams. For almost two months, Gary, Nancy, and their three children became part of the community there and taught a team of dedicated Mohawk volunteers who formed the new ambulance service, "Akwesasne Emergency Team." **Nancy Rhine Figallo** reflects:

Living with the Mohawks, we learned first-hand about the tribe's strong respect for the entire family—children, mothers, fathers, elders. Our new friends there noticed, I think, our dedication to taking good care of our hippie children, babysitting some of their kids, and having our kids integrate into their kid scene. It was all very natural, but we were aware of being ambassadors for The Farm.

On our last evening at Akwesasne, the community prepared a big feast for us in the Community Center. We sat with the people—the chief, the elders, the clan mothers, the children—and celebrated the success of the new EMT graduates. Chief Tom Porter began to speak eloquently, giving thanks for the gathering, the project's completion, and Akwesasne's relationship with The Farm. Tom read to us a formal greeting from his people, which we were to deliver to our people. I was completely mesmerized, having goose bumps all over from the energy.

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**Chief Tom Porter (Kanatsiohareke)—
A Message from the Mohawk Nation:**

Tell the people that the Chiefs of the Mohawk Nation send regards and greetings to the Chiefs of The Farm,

and that the Clan Mothers of the Mohawk Nation send regards and greetings to the Clan Mothers of The Farm,

and that the Spiritual Faith-keepers of the Mohawk Nation send regards and greetings to the Spiritual Faith-keepers of The Farm,

and all the people who are the Backbone of the Mohawk Nation send regards and greetings to all the people who are the Backbone of The Farm,

and all the Children of the Mohawk Nation send regards and greetings to the Children of The Farm,

even the Youngest, Most Newborn of the Mohawk Nation sends regards and greetings to the Youngest, Most Newborn of The Farm.

What a great blessing we received from these original people and what a blessed opportunity it was to be with them.

• • •

Growing your own food was seen as a key to independence and security by many young people forming intentional communities in the 1960s and '70s, both "back to the land" rural communities and urban communities. Actually, producing the food turned out to be more challenging than many had thought.

At The Farm, it took a lot of big machinery, diesel fuel, muscle power, and ingenuity to turn an old cattle ranch into viable fields producing beans, grains, vegetables, and fruits to sustain and nourish the growing community. Within five years **Michael O'Gorman** and the farming crew had developed their operation to the point where they were supplying a large portion of The Farm's food needs. But the community's population was expanding so rapidly that the farming operation, in trying to step up to the growing needs, became overextended and wound up in debt.

At the changeover from commune to cooperative, the farming crew was dissolved, but left the community with well-tended and non-eroded fields, limed and fertilized for hay production, and an acre of blueberries that still produces copiously to this day. The farming crew was a learning experience for all concerned, painful at times, but in the first few years a bunch of mostly young suburbanites managed to put together a farming operation that was literally feeding its community a large portion of its vegetarian diet, thus demonstrating that it can be done at a community level.

Michael O'Gorman then grew food for Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo organic produce company in Baja California for many years. In 2007 he started the Farmer Veteran Coalition, which has helped thousands of military veterans in numerous ways and continues to help them find occupations in farming while

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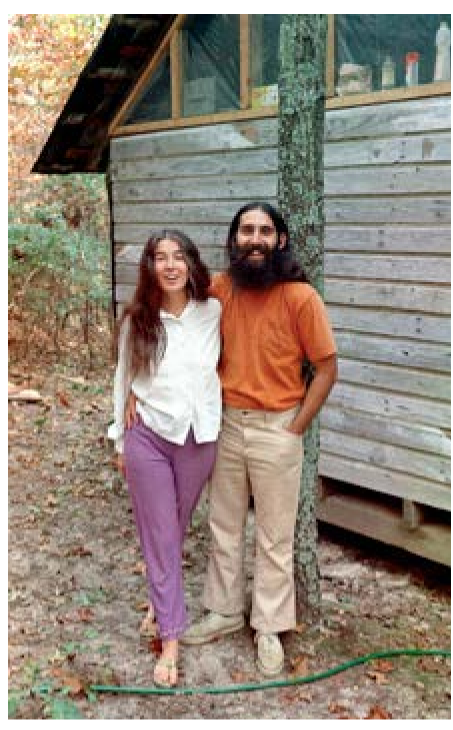

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rejuvenating the farming industry in America.

Being tasked with the job of feeding The Farm Community as a young man with relatively little farming experience was an enormous burden. As many as 1,500 people would most likely not have something to eat if we did not grow it, and that meant impacting my children and the children of my friends. But it was the community that made it happen; the 40 or 50 of us who became the farming crew working as a unit, each focusing where our individual talents were strongest, but sharing our common goals and enjoying the bonds of camaraderie and friendship as we pushed ourselves and each other. We treated each other well and it made all the difference.

After Tennessee, I was able to build three of the country's largest organic vegetable companies, by focusing on building that same sense of community for the employees. The workers had a deep sense of ownership and fidelity to the company because they were valued, empowered, and appreciated.

With the Farmer Veteran Coalition, building community was the key again. Veterans were returning from war to some of our most rural communities. We introduced them to each other, helped them cultivate friendships, and let them feel that once again they shared a sense of mission—this time one of PEACE!

• • •

John Coate has been involved with The Farm Community for 50 years in one way or another. After he left the community in 1983, he got to do some groundbreaking work in online community. He explains how his Farm experiences helped him in his ongoing career.

When I left The Farm for California with my young family in 1983, I knew I would not be moving back to The Farm, but I also knew I was not done with community. After three years fixing cars in Marin County, I ran into Matthew McClure, my close friend from Farm days. He was working with Stewart Brand at the Whole Earth Catalog/magazine and the newly begun online computer communication network, The WELL, and he offered me a job. I had never even sat in front of a computer, but I took the leap of faith that has defined my career ever since.

I worked there for five years with another of our Farm pals, Cliff Figallo. The WELL itself was, and is, an online destination where any number of people come and converse in words using a structured interface that lets you go in and out of any conversation on your own time. It allows conversing that is light, quick, long, or deep.

My title was Marketing Director, but as I watched the intelligent and well-spoken people interact with each other, I realized that they were striving for more than just an information exchange. This endeavor wasn't the computer business. It was the relationship business. And that is why I was hired. I had lived with about 200 different people on The Farm in about 15 different configurations—buses, tents, houses in the deep woods and the inner city. I learned how to listen to and get along with a very large number of people in my Farm days and so did Cliff. We had developed good habits along the way for getting along with all sorts of people. In early 1986, looking for a way to describe what The WELL was really about, I coined the term "online community."

The WELL never became that big or more than modestly profitable. But it was called "the world's most influential online community" by *Wired!* magazine in 1997 because we showed that there is no limit to how deep people can go with each other using networked computing and that it can be experienced by a group to the point that they self-identify as a community. The WELL continues today as a generator and sustainer of deep lasting relationships.

• • •

This last piece is from the late **Marilyn Friedlander**, a revered teacher at The Farm School from the early days till the changeover. Everyone who knew Marilyn remembers her fondly and a few years ago her husband, David, moved back to The Farm.

How to explain this...the connection that exists among all Farm folks, whether still there, just left, or long-gone, or whether long time or short time residents?

Above and beyond everything else, there is our religion. We were so earnest. We gathered together every Sunday morning to meditate with complete eagerness. There were no doubters (well maybe a few visitors) in our meditation group. So many of us had taken psychedelics and had our cultural conditioning blown away enough to experience a world of higher consciousness, to know with a certainty that could not be shaken, that Spirit exists and that we are all One. This was the incredible binder, a shared psychedelic vision. We were students of this religion together. Our lives were dedicated to our path.

The path we chose was to build a village...from scratch. So those experiences we shared creating our own little town still bind us together. They are absolutely unique, and they absolutely continue to keep that bond together.

We are like the Jews of the Bible, those of us who lived on The Farm and left. We created our own Diaspora. When our paths cross, we recognize each other with the kind of recognition that goes beyond mere sight. We may not have hung out or even liked each other all that much. We may not have too much to say to each other beyond initial "how are you?" But we have a shared past which creates a connection, the tie a friend referred to as a "**Farmie thing**." We are bound by religion, by language, by institutions, by land, by diet, by this unique experience called The Farm.

• • •

The Farm's Legacy

The Farm is alive and well after 50 years, but it is much more than just a place in Tennessee. The Farm itself is still the hub, the homeland, the Motherland of the members and their children, whether here or dispersed in various parts of the country and the world. The Farm has always been a school where all members are students and community is the teacher. The Farm is an at-large community and many of the original members and second-generation folks like to return for visits, and several have come back to stay. Increasingly we stay in touch through social media especially during this year of quarantine. Beyond that, the ripples of The Farm's influence and outreach are still being felt in the media and in the cultural imagination of our country.

Many in our generation, now in or approaching our 70s, were and are inspired to dedicate "the great pure effort" still to the causes of social, racial, and environmental justice. Many if not all of us underwent some kind of transformative experience that changed our lives. We are grateful to see some of the new younger generations around the planet stepping up to continue this work. Hopefully, The Farm Community will always be a positive influence in this regard. We are blessed and we believe in sharing blessings with the global society. ❧

This project of The Farm Archive Library was collaboratively produced by Michael Traugot, David Frohman, Mary Ellen Bowen, Peter Schweitzer, Pamela Hunt, Richard Schoenbrun, Carol Ann Nelson, Nancy Rhine Figallo, Michael O'Gorman, John Coate, Marilyn Friedlander, Anita Whipple, and Gerald Wheeler—all either current, former, and/or returned members of The Farm Community—to help mark The Farm's 50th anniversary. See www.thefarmcommunity.com.

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Communities has been important to me ever since I began researching intentional communities back in 1980.… The Editors have always been willing to include critical articles which challenge accepted norms.

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