

SANDHILL FARM'S CHILDREN REMEMBER STAN HILDEBRAND

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Winter 2021 • Issue #193

A photograph of three children playing in a wooden structure, possibly a playhouse or fort, outdoors. A young girl with long brown hair is on the left, smiling and waving. A young boy in a blue hoodie is in the center, looking towards the camera. Another boy is visible in the background, wearing a green headband and a blue and orange shirt. The structure is made of weathered wood, and a red banner with the text 'HAMILTON REGIONAL YMCA BASKETBALL' is visible in the background.

## Children in Community

Being a “Commune Kid”

Children and Polyamory

Work and Play at Camphill Copake

Parenting in a Forming Community

Those Who Sow Together Grow Together



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“Up in the Playhouse”: children at Rocky Hill Cohousing, Northampton, Massachusetts. Photo by Richard Getler.

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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## Letters



## Sociocracy: Not How It Works

In “Consent: One Journey of Understanding,” issue #192, Fall 2021, the author, Anonymous (whom I’ll call A.), writes how in their community a small group of members control decision-making for their own personal benefit. A. uses terms like *hidden agendas, covert plans, maintaining control, special privilege, violating documents, refusal to address concerns, targeting, and bullying*. And A. says the community uses sociocracy!

Sociocracy is nothing like this! It’s based on principles and practices of equivalence of voice, transparency, and effectiveness, with checks and balances to prevent this kind of authoritarian abuse of power.

How did A.’s group get it so wrong? Did they start out using sociocracy effectively, but over time devolved into kind of partial-sociocracy? Or did they learn it inaccurately in the first place? Or was A. just mistaken?

The community neither had clear Aims for each committee nor included Feedback Questions in proposals—both of which are crucial in sociocracy. “Plans are shaped outside of open meetings, then announced,” A. writes. I’m not sure what A. meant by this, as it doesn’t seem wrong to me. In sociocracy proposals are created and decided in committees (called “circles”) by the circle members themselves, then announced in their meeting minutes. Sociocratic checks and balances are also in place if people have concerns about a circle’s decision.

The most serious breach of sociocracy A. described involved a whole-group meeting to elect a new Operations Leader for its General Circle, which is the central coordinating committee. An Operations Leader is one of two people who are members of two related circles and helps the flow of information between the two circles. The General Circle is not the “boss” of a community and an Operations Leader is not the “boss” of their circle, but unfortunately many communities seem to think so, as it seems A.’s community did.

In their whole-group meeting there was a proposal that whoever they elected as the new Operations Leader of their General Circle would immediately dissolve that circle and reconstitute it again with circle members he or she personally hand-picked. Apparently the community wanted to remove someone from their General Circle but didn’t know sociocracy’s four-step process for this, so just made up their own method.

The new Operations Leader they elected did disband the existing General Circle and immediately announced its new members. They were all the same people as before, except A., it turns out.

Again, this is *not* how sociocracy works. In asking someone to leave a circle, neither the Operations Leader nor any other circle member has this kind of power over others. Rather, the whole circle, excluding the person, must consent to a proposal to remove that person from their circle. If all the other circle members consent, the person leaves. If they don’t consent, the person remains.

*Why* would a circle ever ask someone to leave? In sociocracy, it’s *only* for specific, obvious-to-everyone reasons, such as the person frequently disrupted meetings or repeatedly tried to stop proposals the circle created they believed necessary to fulfill circle Aims. And *only* as the absolutely last resort. First the circle would have given the person feedback about these matters several times. If the feedback hadn’t motivated the person to change their ways, other options, especially in an intentional community, would probably include one or more mediations between the person and the circle.

A.’s description reminded me of a community I once visited that changed to sociocracy in order to stop damage to community morale by one of the members. This person had apparently triggered so much conflict, hurt feelings, demoralization, and outright fear and dread

that some members actually left the community. Others would no longer serve on committees with the person or participate in business meetings or community meals with them and would go out of their way to avoid them. No amount of one-on-one and whole-group mediations had made any difference.

Sociocracy also has a process for consenting to someone joining a circle. It's possible that in this community the person had tried to join various circles but wasn't able to. In any case, this community chose sociocracy because they hoped to restore the group's good will and morale by removing the effect of that person's attitudes and behaviors from community life. They removed the person from one of their significant circles. They apparently tried to use sociocracy's four-step process for this, but didn't do it correctly and the process ended up being so awkward and heavy-handed that the person felt deeply hurt and humiliated, and everyone else felt awful about how they handled it.

It's not uncommon when people don't want to work with a fellow community member anymore that the person doesn't recognize the role they themselves may have played in this. Rather, people in this situation often tend to see themselves not as perpetrators but as victims. (See my article on this subject, "Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors," pages 54-59 of this issue.) Sure enough, over the years the person in the community I visited described how they'd been targeted, harmed, and marginalized by the group. Most people in that community saw the person as a problem; the person saw the community itself as the problem.

I wish A.'s community and the one I visited had used sociocracy's process for asking someone to leave a circle. While I cover this in my sociocracy course, and the process for consenting to someone to join a circle, there's no room to describe these here. However, if you'd like to know more about these methods, please email me at [diana@ic.org](mailto:diana@ic.org) and I'll be happy to send handouts and video links.

Diana Leafé Christian  
[www.dianaleafechristian.org](http://www.dianaleafechristian.org)

## Linda Joseph

Due to an oversight, the following caption and photo credit did not appear on page 68 of issue #192 after the photo below, which accompanied the article, "Our Friend and Ecovillage Colleague Linda Joseph, 1952-2021."



*Left to right: Albert Bates, Lois Arkin, Linda Joseph, Liora Adler, Giovanni Ciarlo. At the United Nations General Assembly, on the morning of September 11, 2001 just minutes before the attack on the World Trade Center. Photo by Albert Bates, Creative Commons attribution, no derivatives.*

We regret the omission.

—the COMMUNITIES team



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### COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

### Submissions Policy

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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.

# A Context for Hope



Courtesy of Paul Freundlich

**W**e live in a civilization seemingly hell-bent on achieving its own termination, as we continue to decimate the forests, pollute the skies, and melt the ice caps, while lacking a serious commitment to mitigate the conditions we fear. If children face an uncertain future, is it any wonder that their depression is on the rise?

In these perilous times, is there a path that guides recent generations to reach a future worth navigating? Nothing works for everybody, but I've seen that the choice to prioritize community pays lifelong dividends.

**F**or children, the young of our species, a sense of their community might include stuffed animals and imaginary friends as well as parents and siblings. It has rules and patterns that are daily confirmed: the sun rises and sets; food tastes; people behave. Stories written, watched, told, or read stretch a child's imagination beyond the bounds of community or provide a perspective on it.

A friend developed a program in the NYC schools where the curriculum became elementary school children interviewing their grandparents, most of whom were immigrants. The kids brought the stories into the classroom, where they were shared and shaped into a literature. Neighboring classrooms might be chaotic and fraught, but in the program's classes there was a dominant buzz of curiosity, and carrying forward a sympathy which is a good start in creating community.

**H**alf a century ago, I was living communally with my soon-to-be ex-wife and our young son. The complexity of those three factors should have been overwhelming. Instead, they worked to our mutual advantage—the key element being a daycare and school in New Haven, Connecticut: the Morning Sun.

At its largest, Morning Sun had 50 kids in the daycare and the school, and about the same number of adult members. Educationally, Morning Sun's strong suit was giving kids enough space to find their own way in a warm and trustworthy environment. Often it seemed that the kids were controlling the school. Given that the adult lives seemed frequently out of control, that didn't seem such a bad idea.

Above all, the kids did just fine. Whatever the stress in their home life, Morning Sun rapidly became their world, their sanctuary. Different age groups and gender provided divisions, but often it was a big gang of fiercely loyal, playing, learning children—sort of a reversed “Lord of the Flies.”

Morning Sun was organized as a membership cooperative, with dues on a sliding scale, and work shifts fairly divided. Membership meetings often dragged on for hours, but we took the urgency as a sign of our commitment to the values-based society we



were creating, perhaps most successfully around patriarchy and gender roles. Equitable participation contributed to a sense of community: adults and kids all gave it our best.

In the larger community of which Morning Sun was a part, including our 5,000-member food co-op and dozens of communal houses, adults and children were learning and creating a culture together. Breaking down the usual silos that separate parents and their kids was liberating, but it could be confusing.

“Calling Morning Sun a school or day care is inaccurate,” I wrote back then. “A three-ring circus traveling through time, perhaps; a series of human environments shifting according to the needs of its participants. To stick Morning Sun in a compartment to be dealt with when convenient just doesn’t work. To be tolerable, it has to be part of our lives. But that shouldn’t be so hard to understand since we joined so that we wouldn’t have our kids growing up in compartments. In Morning Sun, we are less free to go our own ways. In Morning Sun, we are more free to be whole.” (Paul Freundlich, *COMEX, the Community Exchange*, December, 1973)

By the ’80s, both children and adult members of the Morning Sun were, ready or not, moving on. Many of the alternatives that seemed so promising were shuttered. Folks stepped back into careers. Kids were off to institutions of higher education, only some of which carried the values we had so fervently embraced.

So what remained?

First, from a community organizing perspective, children and adults had a decade-long experience in participation that was both empowering and instructive. We learned we could take care of business and create viable institutions even as we took care of each other.

Second, in ways that affected our own lives and beyond, we carried a new set of expectations into relationships, workplaces, and politics. Whether that resulted in frustration or inspiration was another story.

A few years into the ’80s, I was talking to Bud, a teacher at Hammonasset, the private, alternative high school that my son Tim attended after Morning Sun. Bud had known many of the ex-daycare, New Haven kids. I asked him if there were any significant differences he noticed between those kids and the others who came through.

Bud was thoughtful. “I guess that they had each other. They still went through hard times, but they tended to not to be so isolated. That makes a big difference in adolescence, having a trustworthy group. Also they seemed to be able to talk with their parents, which was quite rare.”

My housemate, later wife Margaret, who had continued to follow some of their exploits through Tim’s occasional updates, commented, “They were a great bunch of kids, but for such a smart, well-prepared crew, they don’t seem concerned to excel.”

“They seem happy,” Bud ventured.

“I think you’re both right,” I said. “After all, we presented to them an example of adults who seriously questioned the values of a driven, capitalist society. Maybe it’s only surprising they took us seriously.”

If the dangers we face as a species correlate with the susceptibility of children to depression, it’s also true that the tangibility and coherence of intentional community can act as an antidote. I have been vitally involved with two communities over my adult years, in New Haven and the 40+ years of Dance New England, raising two children, knowing many more. I’ve appreciated what community meant to their lives and what the continuity of generations means to mine.

To the extent we can co-create communities which live by values consistent with a healthy future, we give our children and ourselves a great gift: a context for hope. 🐣

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*Paul Freundlich has been an active participant and creator in the development of cooperative, communitarian, and sustainable alternatives for 60 years. See [exemplars.world](http://exemplars.world) and past issues of COMMUNITIES for more of his writing.*



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*Stan on Sandhill tractor with  
Skyler Wren Mund-Penniman,  
2005.*



Michal Penniman

# Sandhill Farm's Children\* Remember Stan \*(and moms)

*By Jo Sandhill, Ceilee Sandhill, Ann Shrader, Renay Friendshuh,  
Emma Allen-Landwehr, Jay Lotus Allen, and Gigi (Root) Wahba*

## *A Note from the Editor:*

**O**n August 30, 2021, the communities movement lost another elder. Stan Hildebrand was a mentor and friend to many of us. For me, that started in 1988 when I visited Sandhill Farm outside Rutledge, Missouri to help with the annual sorghum harvest; I later lived there in community with Stan for a total of about two years, and kept in touch off and on during many additional years, especially over the past decade. Stan's farming expertise, community spirit, grounded presence, and love for people and the land constituted much of the glue that held Sandhill Farm together for decades, and were a major reason I returned for a second stint at Sandhill 20 years after my first one.

Many words could be shared about Stan, from me and countless others, but in this issue, focused on Children in Community, we've chosen to feature the voices of some of the children he helped raise at Sandhill, as well as a few of their moms. Stan perfectly exemplifies the positive, lifelong impacts that someone who never becomes a biological parent can nevertheless have on community children by embracing a parenting role. Stan's caring, gentleness, dedication to his values and to his community, and love helped create a foundation, in those children and others, that will live on long beyond his passing. Thank you, Stan, for sharing your gifts and your spirit; and, by being yourself, changing so many lives for the better.

—Chris Roth

# Lasting Love and Lessons from a Community Parent

By Jo Sandhill

I was the third child to go from birth to leaving for college or boarding school in a community that was part of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (my brother, Ceilee, and Devon Sproule came before me). As a child in community I often went to Communities Conferences, Art Of Community events, and other networking and management events. The question I was inevitably asked was, “What’s it like growing up in community?”

This question comes from a place of understandable curiosity, but I always hated it. What do you say when someone asks you how your life is different from theirs? There are plenty of obvious answers—I have lots of freedom, many adult influences, and am exposed to a diversity of thoughts and ideas—but I sensed that the question was aimed at something deeper. Despite never living in a nuclear family I knew the two experiences were fundamentally different.

The older I get the more I realize that this is a question many struggle with. **What is the difference between our culture at large and the one in intentional communities, and how does that affect children?** I have had many years to think about this, from both within and outside of community (where I live now), and it’s still confusing. However, the recent passing of a loved one has caused me to revisit this question.

Stan Hildebrand came to Sandhill Farm in 1979, long before my parents had met. My father was the first person he met there. He originally was an unannounced visitor, then a summer intern, then a member, and by the time he left Sandhill in 2016 he was one of the longest-term members in its history.

Stan never had biological children but he was a parent to several of us throughout the years. My brother was born in 1981 and Stan was there for his entire childhood. In the mid ’80s our father, Laird, and Ceilee’s mother, Ann, separated romantically but remained as partners in parenting, farming, and living in community. Stan and Ann became a couple and Stan took on a role in Ceilee’s life as a co-parent. Many children live through their parents’ splitting and many get new people in their lives in parental roles (stepparents, partners, coaches, etc.) but that doesn’t usually happen in one household.

In 1987, I was born to Laird and Elke, but also to Sandhill. Ceilee and I were both given the family name of Sandhill, not our father’s last name of Schaub or either of our mothers’ last names. We were children of the community. Stan was a huge part of Sandhill. He helped raise us. He showed us his own approaches to living life to its fullest and I can easily say that we’re better for it.

Stan was a passionate person but also soft-spoken and gentle. He spent many long days driving our antique tractors and tending to our field crops and forested acreage. He was deeply passionate about sustainable agriculture. In addition to maintaining Sandhill’s land stewardship he engaged with the wider world through those principals, becoming an organic inspector for the OCIA and professor at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri. He would bring his students to Sandhill on field trips to show them what sustainable farming was. I imagine it was quite the field trip for them.

Sandhill is so much more than a sustainable farm. He also approached the land on a personal and spiritual level. He practiced biodynamics, often sitting in a corner of the front porch stirring a five-gallon ceramic crock of brown liquid, 100 times clockwise then 100 times counterclockwise, over and over. I used to love to watch the whirlpools as he sat peace-



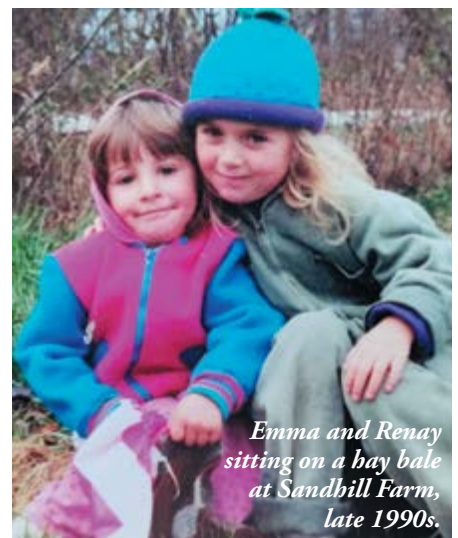
Stan and Ceilee Sandhill,  
mid 1980s.

Michal Penniman



Emma and Jo at  
Sandhill Farm,  
mid 1990s.

Jay Lotus Allen



Emma and Renay  
sitting on a hay bale  
at Sandhill Farm,  
late 1990s.

Jay Lotus Allen

fully stirring and would often engage with the process, asking to stir.

In retrospect, I am amazed that I so readily engaged in an activity so stilling and centering. As a child I was...energetic. I don't have any memories of doing that kind of activity with either of my biological parents unless it was bedtime-related. I was always at a different energy level than Stan but he found ways to cross that bridge and engage with me. You, as a reader of this article, probably don't know me but I can assure you that to this day not many people successfully engage with me in that manner.

When Stan was transitioning out of this life I called and spoke to him on speaker. He was not able to speak but we hoped he heard and understood us. On that call I briefly spoke to Gigi, Stan's current partner and mother of Renay, another child he was a parent to. She told me that Stan wasn't always sure how to engage with my energy, but he always loved me. Well, the more I think about that the more I see how he was able to not only adapt to that challenge but used it to my advantage. Because he took the time to be a parental figure in my life, I was given lessons that I can still learn from.

In so many ways, Stan is the perfect answer to the question I used to get all the time. He is an excellent example of what it was like growing up in community. Some people do get extra parents through step-parents or other conventional means but maybe one or two. I got Stan, and countless others—some only briefly, summer interns I became close to or a convention childcare person, others for longer, teachers at my boarding schools or community members who lived with us for a year or two and yet others who were parents to me.

**The true value of community in my childhood was the diversity of exposure to love.** It is much easier to be a better and more empathetic person if you are raised learning all the love languages and how they can mean such different things to people. The way children learn is to see something then emulate it. Well, I have several lifetimes worth of love to emulate.

Calculations show that the single most effective thing a human can do to reduce their carbon footprint is to not have children. It's first by orders of magnitude over second place (living car-free). Stan loved the Earth and fought hard to advocate for and help it his whole life. He didn't have children of his "own" (that's a weird term that speaks volumes about how we see children and value lineage), which aligns well with his principals, but he still found a way to positively influence and be present in the next generation. I find myself following in his footsteps. I have no biological children, nor do I want any, but that should not suggest that I can't love and care for members of the next generation.

Thank you Stan, for giving me so much and loving me simply because you wanted to. I will spend the rest of my life thankful for your gifts and paying them forward. 🌸

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*Jo Sandhill grew up between Sandhill Farm and Ganas (Staten Island, New York), spending summers at Twin Oaks (Louisa, Virginia) and visiting many other communities. She left home for boarding school at 12 when she attended first The Arthur Morgan School in Celo Community (Burnsville, North Carolina), then The Meeting School (Rindge, New Hampshire), fore-runner of the current South of Monadnock Community.*

*She now lives with her spouse, housemate, and two dogs in Las Vegas, Nevada where she works for a Fortune 200 company. In her role at work, she develops diversity and inclusion, bringing a new perspective to the corporate world. She also fosters local community, regularly hosting games and social gatherings among her vaccinated friends.*

# Remembering a Father

By Ceilee Sandhill



Stan and Ceilee, late 1980s.

Ann Shrader

**Ceilee sent this tribute to be read by his communal "little sister" Renay Friendshub at Stan's funeral at Sandhill Cemetery, Saturday, September 4, 2021:**

To me, Stan was a father even if I never called either man who raised me father or dad.

He taught me so much, was so loving and expected so little, always accepting me exactly as I am.

He was always loving, never bitter even when we drifted apart.

He was there at my birth and I was there at his death.

**Ceilee's mother Ann Shrader wrote the following tribute, also read at Stan's funeral:**

To me, Stan was the salt of the earth. He would pull out a carrot, rub it on his pants, and then eat it...just like his mother, Alma, had done.

To me, Stan was the father Ceilee ran to for comfort at three years old after falling and hurting himself.

To me, Stan was the one who made the coffee in the morning and exchanged foot rubs in the evening.

To me, Stan was the one who had adventures all over the world and enjoyed writing and telling stories about them.

To me, Stan was a man who wasn't afraid to wear a skirt or run a combine from Mexico to Manitoba.

To me, Stan was one with an open heart wanting to connect and help make this a better world.

Rest in peace, Stan. You are in my heart. 🌸

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*Ann Shrader, one of the founders of Sandhill Farm, was a member for 26 years, and now lives in a loose-knit intentional community on the Little River in Floyd, Virginia.*

*Stan, Renay, and others participate in sorghum planting party, 2008.*



Courtesy of Thea Schnase

*Renay and Stan in Peru, 2017.*



Gigi Wahba

# Grief and Love for a Mentor and Friend

*By Renay Friendshuh*

I grew up at Sandhill Farm, an intentional community tucked into the rolling hills, spring thunderstorms, and singing cicadas of rural Missouri. My Sandhill family is as strong as it is flexible, made up of members, interns, and visitors from all walks of life, constantly changing through the seasons and yet held together by shared values of egalitarianism, sustainability, nonviolent communication, and also the joys and silliness that are essential for vibrant community. We are threaded together by dances around the maypole and hours of sorghum transplanting and late-night storytellings on the front porch.

Our beloved Stan is in the heart of that tapestry, interwoven in every thread.

In the weeks since Stan's death, I have been compelled to define our relationship in a way that has never been asked of me before. Stan was my mom's life partner and my lifelong friend, mentor, confidant, and role model. His stories of travel inspired my own explorations and his innate trust in the goodness of people bolstered my own confidence. Stan listened deeply and with sincere curiosity. He modelled inclusivity and demonstrated the bravery of vulnerability. For me, Stan is unequivocally my family.

Now, as I drive a tractor past the wheat fields Stan and I walked across just months ago, I feel such gratitude for my communal upbringing and the texture it has created in my life. I am an only child with many siblings. I grew up with two parents but learned from countless caretakers. Amid the organic fluidity of my communal family, I experienced stability and deep-rooted love.

I work as a mental health counselor now. I listen to people's stories and try to channel Stan. I relayed his mantra to a client

recently, "Be here now, Be here now," without even noticing it cross my lips. Recently, I spoke to a man who lost his mom and was considering taking his own life. We talked about Grief and how she pains us and yet heals us through that pain. We spoke about Love as the cousin of Grief and how that immense sorrow is a reflection of our love for the person lost and their love for us. I love Stan mightily and I am struggling to accept the gift of sorrow which Grief now offers me, struggling to accept the pain of Love.

It is easier to imagine Stan at home, with my mom, whom he cherished. I picture them visiting with their honey bees, walking by the garden, sitting on our front porch once again. He calls, "Hey Nay-Nay, ready for supper?" and my mom and I rest our hands in his warm, soft ones, all seated around the dinner table. We talk of little moments in the day and it reminds him of a story from his travels of the world. I soak up his tales of adventure, hitchhiking through Guatemala, visiting with strangers in Southern Africa, hiking solo through rural China. Stan inspires me to see more of the world, to learn more stories and share them around more dinner tables.

Grief and Love sit beside me in these memories and their hands on my shoulders remind me of the ways Stan lives on through each of us, in all those he mentored, befriended, and loved. 🌱

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*Renay Friendshuh writes: "My childhood taught me that communal living expands our families and our hearts. In community, we learn to mutually respect and trust others in a way that frightens conventional society. Daring to be vulnerable is not easy and because of this there is no greater reward."*

# The World from Stan

By Emma Allen-Landwehr

I can remember our  
Leaving wine and bread  
Out for the dead  
On all hallows eve.  
How you taught me to do that  
To make friends with death.

I remember gathering eggs  
Out of the coop with you.  
When one of the chickens got sick  
And died,  
We carried it to a special hill,  
Buried it at sunset  
Under orange skies.

I remember making forts out of bedsheets and snow,  
You instilling in me  
There is always time  
In the day for play.

I remember the sweet rumble of your voice  
And holding your head in my hands  
As you showed me the world  
From your shoulders.

## Notes from Emma Allen-Landwehr and her mother, Jay Lotus Allen:

Emma moved to Sandhill Farm with her mother, Jay Lotus Allen, in 1995 when she was an infant. This followed a seven-year courtship period between Jay and the community and previous consent to become members prior to Emma's planned conception and birth. They lived there until 1998 and then moved to The Farm in Tennessee, where they were based until moving to California late 2006.

Stan loved babies and also valued and supported mothers. He was Emma's first community meta (caregiver) and a strong supportive friend and ally to Jay. The community eventually devised a rotating childcare system, in which all of the members cooperated and co-parented Emma, Renay, and other children in the community.

Over the years, Emma and Jay kept in touch with Stan and members of Sandhill. They enjoyed many special visits gathered cozily around the woodstoves during the winter holiday season. Stan, thank you for all the wonderful life lessons. May you rest in peace. We miss you already! 🍷

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*Emma Allen-Landwehr is a queer visual artist, poet, activist, and student of sociology. She is currently working toward an M.A. at San Francisco State University and lives in Berkeley, California. Emma utilizes her multidisciplinary approach to artistic expression as a medium of storytelling and social reflection.*



Chris Roth

*Stan cooking sorghum,  
2010.*



Chris Roth

*Stan tending  
Sandhill bees,  
2010.*



Thea Schnase

*Stan in striped overalls,  
dwarfed by Thomas from  
Dancing Rabbit, 2008.*

# In Memoriam: Stan (Pooch) Hildebrand

February 20, 1946–August 30, 2021

By Gigi (Root) Wahba

*Stan viewing Oregon's Cascade Mountains from atop Mt. June, 2012.*



Chris Roth

mester was interrupted due to the civil war but the spirit for Africa stayed with Stan his whole life, and occasioned two return visits.

This program was associated with the University of Michigan so when Stan returned, he decided to pursue his education there. And that was 1965! so there was plenty more opportunity for thinking about societal structures and power dynamics. Stan studied European and African history and generally believed that things could be handled best from the ground up. He found value in connecting with your place, your community, and your inner world. Along with a few friends, he caravanned down to Guatemala to establish what became “Tierra del Ensueño” (Field of Dreams)—an intentional community high in the moun-

Stan was many things to many people and leaves a flood of memories in his wake.

He spent his whole life immersed in community. As a young child, he was nurtured by the rhythms of an extended Mennonite farming community in Manitoba, Canada, and he had an engaged education in a one-room schoolhouse. He went to Bible College in nearby Winnipeg but felt a restlessness to really understand the world beyond academics and theology. This led him to a junior year abroad program in Nigeria where he readily absorbed the local culture, visiting the homes and rural communities of his Nigerian friends. Exposure to community gatherings, celebrations, and pagan rituals had a profound effect on Stan, causing him to shed much of his earlier religious beliefs and find new meaning to the pursuit of right livelihood. His se-



*Stan and Gigi, 2010.*

Chris Roth

tains. While they had many visitors, including Stan's own family, the community was just too isolated and too small to get enough traction. And so, with his friend Sandy, he came back to the US and started looking at the communities movement here. They landed at Twin Oaks in Louisa, Virginia where Stan stayed on to help develop the agricultural program and made several lifelong friends.

Ultimately, though, Stan was more comfortable with a smaller community and so he visited Sandhill Farm in northeast Missouri, which offered the added benefit of being closer to his family (only 14 hours away). At Sandhill, Stan really blossomed while helping others realize their potential. In his element as a farmer, Stan took over and expanded the sorghum production business. He believed in small-scale farming and had a knack for getting others involved in the various stages of production. From starting sorghum seeds in hydroponic flats to transplanting with a four-seat tobacco transplanter to hoeing in the fields to organizing labor exchange groups for harvest, Stan made everyone feel welcome and valued for their contribution. With Stan's enthusiasm, sorghum season became known in the Federation of Egalitarian Communities as an opportunity to experience real communal farming.

Stan also expanded the field crops to include growing our own wheat, rye, beans, and garlic. Occasionally he obtained grants from the federal SARA research program for sustainable development. In 1995, Stan became an organic farm inspector. In this role, he helped many farmers navigate the National Organic Program and achieve certification. He personally met or knew of most of the leaders in the organic movement and he even did some organic inspection outside the US.

Stan also had a very playful side which reliably emerged at the end of the day when he would (literally) hang out in hammock chairs and visit with whoever was game for good conversation. When we had our weekly potlucks and other community gatherings, Stan often enjoyed wearing flamboyant costumes. It could be a colorful wig or a skimpy skirt or a famous pair of pink and white striped overalls that gave you the sense he was ready to relax and have fun. For many years Stan also took part in the annual Midwest Men's Festival which involved a week of camping, singing, preparing communal meals, doing pagan rituals, and lots of small and big group sharing. Often he would

bring home a friend or two and their sustained laughter would uplift the whole community.

Stan spent many hours on the tractor working the fields and in the shop repairing the equipment, and many hours traveling for the organic certification jobs and writing those reports, as well as visiting family and Men's Festival each year. Despite all these involvements, though, Stan always embraced the idea of egalitarian work. That is, men should do an equal share of the housework including cooking, cleaning, annoying office work, and yes, childcare. Stan had his signature food items that he would make from scratch: sourdough bread, chili, pancakes, homebrews, etc. He also really loved being with children.

At Sandhill we had what we called the "meta" system where anyone living on the farm would also do one or two three-hour childcare shifts per week with all children on the farm. Stan was there for the birth of several children including Ceilee and Renay. As a mom, I always enjoyed when Stan came to pick up my daughter. They often would talk for a while to decide what to do together and then merrily go about their plan. He had a lot of patience to push her on the swing ("more, more!"), take her for explorative walks in our woods, watch her swim in the pond long after he was done swimming, or engage her in some farm chore—feeding the chickens, floating sorghum trays, mending pants, etc. Stan sustained these relationships even after childcare was no longer needed. One of my favorite memories is of the two of them ice fishing.

Stan lived to be 75 years young and when he was 70, he decided he would try town life with me in nearby Memphis, Missouri. We had been together for nearly 20 years including several years with him at Sandhill, me 12 miles away. It was time to focus on each other, work a little less, have a little easier life. He took to town life really well. He enjoyed meeting the neighbors and riding his bike nearly daily. In the last five years he took some big trips—Peru, China, Kenya. He also devoted time to developing chapters of "ZBuk," his memoir of a truly fantastic life journey. We hope to publish that in the coming year. 🐦

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*Gigi (Root) Wahba lived with Stan for 18 years at Sandhill Farm and five years in Memphis, Missouri. He was her best friend, soul mate, mentor in the bee yard, playful companion, and fellow community builder.*



Chris Roth

*Stan tending a controlled field burn at Sandhill Farm, 2010.*



# Fifty Years of Children in COMMUNITIES

For more stories on this issue's theme, please check out these and other past editions of COMMUNITIES:



*Pictured above, left to right, top to bottom:*

*#4: Schools and Community #9: Children in Community #17: Family, Sex, and Marriage #31: Learning in Community  
 #41: Relationships/Family #61: Parenting, Childcare, and Education #76: Education in Community #84: Growing Up in Community  
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# Parenting in Los Angeles Eco-Village

By Jessica Ruvalcaba

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For me, as a mother of three children, the only reason it even makes the slightest bit of sense to live in Los Angeles is my community. Here I can be supported by friends who understand the struggle and are trying.

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Los Angeles is not an easy place to parent, have a career, and be an environmentally conscientious person, especially on a budget. Sometimes it feels as if at every turn she is betraying you; buses that don't run often enough, bike-share lanes with mean drivers, careers that demand your life and soul. For me, as a mother of three children, the only reason it even makes the slightest bit of sense to live in Los Angeles is my community. Here at least, in the walls of our Urban Soil/Tierra Urbana cooperative, I feel I can be supported by friends who understand the struggle and are trying. Currently seven children live in our cooperative of about 50 adults. The kids range from six months to 12 years old, and three of those are mine.

What is it like being a parent at US/TU co-op in the Los Angeles Eco-Village? Well for one thing it means that all of the kids except for the six-month-old have been biking together. It means getting emails on the listserv asking to clean up a mess the children have made. It means that even though we have different parenting styles, all of the parents trust each other with each other's children. It means taking care of each other when a new baby is born.

I moved in 2015 to Urban Soil/Tierra Urbana at six months pregnant. Devon and I had just married a few months earlier and we were excited to be a part of a community. There were five other families in our community with kids from ages two to five, and we were now among the parents. Many people in our community took care of us in different ways. We had a meal train that came by and brought us food every day for the first two weeks. One neighbor, Carol, did our laundry and made yogurt for us. I felt cared for. For my friends Adriana and Dani, my son Eli was the first newborn in their lives. I remember one day the three of us watched in joy and amazement as he turned over for the first time.

As a new mom I had many ideas about how parenting should be, theoretical of course, since I am an educator. With a certificate in Waldorf Education and some classes in RIE (a parenting style popular among parents today) and more than a few books in my library on parenting, I thought I was ready. Of course I wasn't! Parents at US/TU are lovely, although I saw some things I didn't like: to me it felt that the kids were an afterthought. Community meetings are at 7:30 pm on Mondays, a school night and bedtime. Sunday night potluck was on Sundays at 7:00 pm, also a school night, also bedtime for young children. The kids' toys outside looked like the leftovers nobody wanted. It saddened me a little; the impression I got at the time was that no one had planned for children—that life had happened and parents seemed to be doing their own thing.

That's the thing about urban ecovillages, and ours in particular. We each are free enough to do our own thing. Right now our five school-aged children go to four different schools. In this "ecovillage," four moms get into their cars and drive their children to different schools. Sometimes this feels like the antithesis to our commitment to live more sustainably. The fact that we don't choose this as an area in which we can come together is something that we just ignore as we try to focus on the places we can come together. We don't have the answers yet and they look different for each family.

Many parents have left US/TU as their children got older. Our ecovillage didn't seem to support families. Maybe our location in such an intensely urban place didn't feel safe. Our apartments don't help the situation; most of them are studios and some of the largest units have long-term residents who are not a part of our community. You have to be willing to live smaller and give up some of the luxuries of a nicer home to live here.

Some people have left US/TU to move into a house and live a more “traditional” family life.

Of the five families at US/TU, only two families’ children are here full-time; three families have split custody with another parent living in another part of Los Angeles. This makes planning a party for all the children to be present incredibly difficult. Many times we just form smaller groups with the oldest children and younger children having different events and the youngest children having their own things. We do, once in a while, come together, all the parents and all the kids, and make a special ride or dinner or movie night. When we do this, I can see the power we have to bring

joy into the lives of our children.

In March of 2020 something magical happened. For three months my family and my friend Carrie and her daughter Maeve started biking every day; Charlie, who was one-and-a-half, would ride with me on my bike. My four-year-old Eli and Carrie’s eight-year-old Maeve rode nine miles sometimes five days a week on the near-empty residential streets of Los Angeles. I saw how their confidence grew on their bikes. It was my light at the beginning of the pandemic, watching our children ride their bikes together. More families would join sometimes and we would have our own little CicLAvia<sup>1</sup>. The rides were for a brief time, a point when we joined together to do something special.

Those of us who are here now are forging a new direction in parenting. Covid changed everything for everyone and we are no different. Our children who were in school the year before were now home all the time. At first we thought that maybe we could do a homeschool program for our children. We had a couple meetings but quickly I realized that our needs were quite different. Still, we found ways to connect and support.

Family pods saved our children during Covid. We could not pod as a whole ecovillage; it was too dangerous given how freely some moved and how risk-averse others are. The families found times we could let our children be free with each other. We

1. See [www.ciclavia.org](http://www.ciclavia.org).



*Beandrea holding baby Adelina.*



*From left to right: Elya, Nelson, Maeve, Eli, Charlie, and Juliana.*



*From left to right: Eli, Maeve, Charlie, and Jessica.*



*Author’s youngest child, Adelina, with her neighbor Elya.*

Photos courtesy of Jessica Ruvalcaba



*Charlie, author's second son, Floppy the chicken in his arms, and Maeve.*



*From left to right: Nelson, Maeve, Eli, Elya, and Joaquin. Elya and Joaquin were both born at US/TU at Los Angeles Eco-Village.*

shared a lovely Christmas morning. After that morning two families tested positive for Covid. We isolated again, but also we stepped up and provided food and medicine for the sick. While other families we know from outside were completely isolated, our pods made the quarantine bearable.

In 2021 our whole retreat was online as we were still in a strong Covid wave. The question of children during the retreat was especially tricky. There was no way to provide childcare if the children were not playing together. At that point, given the severity of cases in Los Angeles and the recent outbreak at US/TU, we did not feel it was safe for them to pod. I took it upon myself to create activities for kids during our retreat. I found ways for them to participate a little, I made plans for crafting activities that they could do, and I invited them to share their art. And so they did, a little, on Zoom. The kids brought a much needed levity to our long Zoom hours.

On March 14 of this year at 11:07 pm, our third child was born. Our daughter was the third ecovillager to be born at US/TU. My partner and I had been planning to have a homebirth; for me this was a dream come true. Although I had been having contractions all day, I was sure the baby was coming the next day. When my mom came with my sons, I told her to go home to Riverside and get some rest. At 9:00 pm the contractions were getting closer together and my older son was asking me questions while my younger son climbed on my back and I just begged them to “hold on while I have a contraction!” My husband was filling up the birthing pool and I called my mom. It was too late for her to drive all the way back to us and then back to Riverside; could someone meet her half way? We called my neighbor Carrie: “Can the boys spend the night? It seems like Jess is going into labor and her mom can’t come back.”

“My husband is worried that he won’t be able to sleep with the boys here, sorry,” was her reply. Ok, not worried, we will find something for them soon. Finally my husband found a neighbor who could help us. Our friends Leslie and Beandrea would take turns watching the boys at our friend Autumn’s house. Autumn and her son Nelson were away

and let us use their apartment for the boys to play and mostly sleep in. The boys left in their pajamas to play in their favorite apartment and then labor really got going. Devon and I were alone. The contractions were close. He was filling the pool but the water was cold. Neither of us knew just how close we were.

Our doula came in and she was surprised at how calm things were considering how close I was to delivering. She stood next to me and my water broke. It was time to push. With a few loud noises our baby was out and then she cried. Anaisabel upstairs heard her cries and sent us our first congratulations. Our boys were asleep by the time she was born but they came in first thing the next day.

Again the food train brought us food, again there were people there to hold the baby. More importantly this time the parents really held space for my two sons; “We’ll take the boys” had become my moment of rest. Even Dwight, the elderly gentleman who’d had a tracheotomy and couldn’t speak, offered to buy my groceries after Adelina was born. He passed away a

couple months after that.

More ecovillagers here are wanting to become parents and more of us are making efforts to make that easier. We are looking to convert more units to bigger spaces that would make family living easier. When Devon and I first moved in, we had two studio apartments next to each other. Now, finally after five years, we began to renovate the space to make it one big unit instead of two. We hope that we can continue to find creative ways to live comfortably while living with fewer things.

For me, living at US/TU means a higher quality of life and the ability to live more

in line with our values. My kids have US/TU brothers, sisters, grandmas, godmothers, aunts, uncles, and uncles (my non-binary friend Dani coined this). My friend Rae loves to play and draw with Eli; Jess often takes Charlie to water plants; Beandrea held Adelina everyday for the first month after she was born; Carol looks after all the kids and their parents. These are just a few of the many ways adults without children interact with kids.

I think we enrich each other's lives by sharing in the act of raising children. We benefit from the support of our neighbors, the chance to grow, the affordable rent which makes being a stay-at-home mom possible, the all-hands-on-deck moments that bring us together. My children have a whole village of adults who love them and look after them. In this big city, Los Angeles, where everyone feels so far away, we have our little oasis with chickens and gardens and kids running through the hallways reminding us to stop taking ourselves so seriously. We have all walks of life and ages, births and deaths. 🌱

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*Jessica Fitzgerald Ruvalcaba has been living at US/TU at Los Angeles Eco-Village for six years with her husband Devon. She is an artist of many mediums, a Waldorf teacher, and a mother of three adorable children.*



*Various neighbors on one of the first Covid rides.*



*Anaisabel holding baby Adelina.*



*Rae and Eli on a break from Covid bike rides.*



*Nelson, Eli, and Charlie.*

# Children at Kibbutz Mishol

By Anton Marks

Here in Kibbutz Mishol, the number of kids overtook the number of adults already a couple of years ago. We are a 20-year-old full income-sharing urban kibbutz, and all 150 of us live under one roof in the Northern Israeli city of Nof HaGalil.

It wasn't always this way though. When we started out, most of us single and with no kids, it was clear to us that our main mission, affecting positive social change to the surrounding society, would be severely limited if we were to be "waylaid" with having kids and looking after them. It was one or the other—and we chose to build project after project through our NGO to work with disadvantaged populations in the city and its environs, rather than spending our time changing diapers and working shorter days.

We waited until we were in our 30s before starting to have kids, each couple coming to the conclusion that the time was right for them. As a kibbutz made up of living groups, each living group started the conversation about the meaning of having a kid in their midst. The older groups helped the younger groups through the process of change—understanding how it would impact our lives as a group, our lives as activists working for social change, our shared finances, our ability to be spontaneous, both partners' ability to work 16-hour days, expected gender roles as parents, etc., etc.

At first it was a trickle, but once the floodgates were opened, we embraced the change that we were experiencing. It wasn't long until we opened our first childcare framework for us to share in the upbringing of our kids. At first the kindergarten was only for our kids, but gradually we opened it up for the kids of the neighbourhood. It has since become recognized by the State, and families receive subsidized childcare according to their income. Actually, this week we are having a conversation as a kibbutz about our kindergarten. We are past the peak of having kids, and now that there are fewer and fewer of our kids in our kindergarten, we are asking ourselves about the future. Was our kindergarten just providing childcare and education for our kids, or is it one of our projects for social change in our neighbourhood?

Slowly our work days started to change. Because we are our own bosses, and thus have sovereignty over how and when we work, we had the ability to be flexible. It is important to us for at least one parent, and preferably two, to be as present as possible in the childrens' lives every afternoon. The educational frameworks that we run, both formal and informal, never go past 4 pm. We certainly have the ability to keep them going later—till 5 pm, till 6 pm—but we have repeatedly decided that the window between 4 pm and 8 pm is an important time to be with our kids—as families, as living groups, as a kibbutz. So our activist work stops at 4 pm to allow us to be with our kids. But at 8:30 pm/9 pm, our workday resumes. Because we live together in the same building, we are able to hold meetings in the evening while our kids are sleeping.

Today we also run the local neighbourhood elementary school, which for years had been threatened with closure. We live in one of the toughest neighbourhoods in the country, with all the challenges that entails. The school principal is from the kibbutz and around half of the staff of the school are also. The kids from the kibbutz are just one of the populations of the school, which includes all religions and ethnicities that make up the neighbourhood. We even built a cutting-edge educational greenhouse in the yard of the school, so the kids can benefit from experiential learning (as opposed to sitting in rows in a classroom).

Within the kibbutz, our physical spaces have transformed over time to reflect the growing number of kids. Our living spaces have more bedrooms, which have become smaller as we build dry walls to create more rooms for our kids. When that doesn't

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Some may say that we have made too many concessions for the sake of our kids, and we are not focused enough on changing the world. Others would say that bringing up kids this way is changing the world.

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suffice, families move to larger spaces to accommodate family growth, sometimes at the expense of communal spaces. We have kibbutz spaces for after-school activities and activities during the school holidays for our kids according to age group. Each age group has educators, both from the kibbutz and from outside, who work with the kids, helping them to both have fun, and process how they experience the world around them.

We also take health and safety much more seriously now than we did even a decade ago. We brought an inspector to go over the treehouses that we built outside, to make sure that they were safe for our kids to play on. Another agreement we have between us is that only kids over the age of six can wander inside and outside the kibbutz grounds without being accompanied by an adult—one of many agreements that have significant social implications.

You'd think that growing kids in com-

munity would get easier and easier as the years go by, but the questions keep on coming. Now the eldest kid is 18; he's being recruited into the army. When does he become a member of the kibbutz? Does he want to? Do we want him to? How? Is our kibbutz now multigenerational in the long term, or do we expect our kids to leave?

The eldest kids are learning to drive; are they are now automatically a part of our collective car pool? How do we pay for their driving lessons? Do we expect them to work to raise money specifically for this, or does the kibbutz provide everything for them, and therefore they need to work generally because work has an intrinsic value (and we could do with the money!)? Do the kids continue to go to the same schools together, or does each set of parents, or maybe parents of each age group, decide independently? How many after-school activities can each child attend? From what age? Does it matter what they cost? When do we give phones to our kids? When do they get smartphones? According to age?

Overall, we believe that a happy and healthy society includes children, and we have certainly made space for the children to be an integral part of who we are and what we do. Some may say that we have made too many concessions for the sake of our kids, and we are not focused enough on changing the world. Others would say that bringing up our kids as tolerant, caring, determined, and passionate young people is an act of changing the world in itself. 🌊

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*Anton Marks is Editor of Communities At Large Letter (C.A.L.L.) and a founder member of the largest urban kibbutz in Israel, Kibbutz Mishol. He has been an informal educator for the last 25 years and has a passion for kibbutz and intentional communities generally.*



Photo courtesy of Anton Marks

# Growing Up at Heart-Culture Farm Community

*By Myriad Huntermoon*

**G**rowing up in an intentional community was, for me, like growing up in a world near to Heaven. When I was very young, during the long winters, I fondly remember taking baths in the large murky puddles in the gravel driveway and prancing through the sparkling rain-soaked fields barefoot until I became tired. When I got cold I would run back inside, take a steamy shower, and warm myself next to the woodstove wrapped in a towel.

Though I was happy, I yearned for my own pet cat. Every day, wind or rain, throughout one winter when I was four years old, I would go outside and pray to the large redwood tree to give me a cat. Part of me didn't think it would work, but I remained dedicated, and one stormy night my whole family woke up to meowing on the roof outside our loft window. Thinking it was our community-mate's cat, Gizmo, my dad went through the window onto the roof and carefully dropped the large orange cat off the roof and back to the ground where his obsessive song wouldn't keep us awake all night.

The next morning during breakfast, I saw the same orange

cat outside our window near the kitchen, and immediately knew that this cat, though just as large and orange as Gizmo, was indeed a new cat. I brought him inside and fed him buttered parsnip (which he happily ate) and decided to name him Charlie Cat. Luckily for me, he was very gentle. I dressed him in doll clothes and put him to sleep in the laundry basket. My tolerant parents seemed happy to have a new family member.

In spring, I picked bouquets of daffodils and tulips, ornamental cherry and red deadnettle. I always loved the spring flowers and the smell of dew and fresh-turned soil. However, getting dirt and tiny splinters under my fingernails was very unpleasant for me. Despite this, during one particular spring when I was about eight years old, I dedicated myself completely to the restoration and cultivation of a large round daffodil bed near the front of the property. I spent hours weeding and turning the soil. I gently pulled out flower bulbs that were causing overcrowding and replanted them in other areas on the farm. People would stop by and offer to help sometimes, so I was also able to learn how to prune the ancient rose bush in the center of the bed.

Though some parents may disagree with the amount of freedom and choice I was offered as a child, I think it was the best childhood I could've asked for. My mom homeschooled me throughout kindergarten, teaching me about plants and animals that lived side by side with us in our ecosystem, and laying down the bedrock for my art passion now. Later on, during the long warm summers, I braided myself nests using the tall grass in the fields and sunbathed while I drew the wildlife I observed around me.

Of course, despite my tranquil peace of mind, I still noticed the adults' stress during the early years of the community. I remember playing on the sidelines during countless meetings and mediations. I became a spy, eavesdropping on other residents and reporting their transgressions to my mother. In my head, my mom was a goddess, flawed yet perfect for me. I was certain that if something needed to be fixed, my mother would address it. I never had a doubt in my mind that the farm and the community would always be my home. I know now that that's because I noticed all the hard work my parents and the other adults put into the place, learning and growing as the farm and community did.

The other people living at the community are also my family. I grew up surrounded by their love and laughter. I would often help take care of the younger children, and they became like my younger siblings. When my parents weren't around I always had an adult I knew and trusted I could turn to if I needed help. One woman in particular, one of the community's

*Myriad at the top of a tipi frame.*





founders, put so much love and heartfelt work into making her community vision a reality, that her strength of will and fierce drive shone out and inspired others. If not for her, my parents would not be owners today, and I would not have such a beautiful place to always call my home. I will always be grateful to her for all the fortitude and trust she placed in the community.

Because I was the oldest among the children on the farm, in middle school I was often alone and sometimes felt lonely. Most of my friends lived a half-hour drive from me in town. They had phones and talked about things in movies and on social media I had never heard of. I went to public high school, even though my mom offered to homeschool me, because I needed to be around other teenagers. Living in community had given me the skills to be able to talk to anyone. I reveled in my strengths as an extrovert.

One way I was different from the other high school students was that my mother would not let me get a cell phone. I saved money from working for one of my parents' friends, and bought an iPhone at Cell For Cash, a used phone store. Then I went to Verizon and set up service on the phone. When I told my mother I had done this, she walked me into the Verizon store to complain that they had signed a legal contract with a 14-year-old child without her parents' permission. Then she tried to return the phone, but Cell For Cash would only do exchanges, so I got to keep it. It was another seven months of arguments and agony before my parents agreed to resume service on my cell phone.

I'm 17 years old now, and my mom and I get along wonderfully. I know I can talk to her about anything. Unlike my friends' parents, my mom seems to know that I am my own person. I see a lot of my friends' parents acting like they don't want their children to grow up, controlling them in unhealthy ways. Part of the reason I respect my mom so much is that she realizes that I will do what is important to me, and she is willing to tell me when she thinks I am making mistakes—but she doesn't try to stop me from making them. She knows I am going to learn and grow from my experiences.

The community still feels like home, even though I don't spend most of my time there. I'm exploring who I am in the bigger world. When I need to go home, it's the people that I go home to. The farm is like the bowl around the milk—the milk (the people) is home, but the bowl is the container that keeps the liquid in one place.

Never give up. The dream and goal of creating an open, loving, and healthy environment is the most noble thing you can do for your family. If your community is struggling, that's okay. Without these struggles, without that strength and courage, the vision will not form into completion. This world is a dangerous place to navigate and, despite what you may believe, the children know this well. They will notice your efforts to make a sanctuary for them, even when you might think you are failing. 🐦

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*Myriad Huntermoon moved to Heart-Culture Farm Community at the age of three. Her parents became co-owners of the community land when she was nine. Now 17 years old, she is an artist specializing in murals and portraits.*



Photos courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

# RAISING KIDS IN A FORMING COMMUNITY: Myriad's Mom Responds

*By Kara Huntermoon*

*Kara and Myriad, age 14.*



When I became a mother, I had nothing. Twenty-three years old, homeless, and unemployed, I struggled with the impacts of sexual assault and domestic violence on my life. I didn't know how I was going to do this "mother thing." All I knew was that my baby deserved a chance at life.

It was not an easy beginning. My efforts to create safety for myself and my child were frustrated by an abuser who stalked me and used the baby as a way to get access to me. I persisted, reaching out for help wherever I could find it. Some of that help came from intentional community.

Fast forward three years. Successfully distant from my abuser, but still reeling from the emotional impacts of violence, I moved from my established intentional community into a newly forming one: Heart-Culture Farm.

I still didn't know how to do this "mother thing," but I had figured some things out. I knew how to listen to a crying child, how to comfort and nurture. I knew how to fend off well-meaning adults who wanted to stop the tantrums at whatever cost in order to avoid their own difficult emotions. I could advocate for my child, and be clear about my own needs. But one of our needs was stable community relationships. How could we make that happen?

Forming stable community relationships requires a lot of hard

work. As we learned how to do that work at Heart-Culture, we suffered six years of social chaos. I've written other articles published in this magazine about some of what we learned in response to that chaos. Structural changes and clear expectations led to a major reduction in conflict and increased long-term resident retention. But how did those six years of struggle impact my child?

I regret that we do not already live in a world where social structures are designed to support the healthy raising of children, where we think about our impact seven generations into the future. How do I relate to my neighbors in a way that benefits my children and grandchildren? How do I meet my daily needs in a way that increases the ecological diversity and resilience of life? Where can I plant trees to feed and shade my grandchildren? Who will love us as my child grows?

I had to ask all these questions as I helped create a community for myself and my child. I had to do the work of generations as quickly as possible. My child was growing up a bit more every day, and my vision for her support fell far behind the resources available to us.

But we did succeed in marvelous ways. We formed committed, lasting relationships with several community members, and legally recognized those commitments through land co-ownership. We created community expectations that encouraged

adults to contribute to the raising of all the children. We got in each other's faces and helped where we struggled, and asked for help from others when we knew we were about to blow up on our own kids. My child knew that if mom was losing it, she could walk out the door and find another adult for help. She could pick up the phone and call anyone on a list of people and insist that I talk to them.

We needed more than just the community on the land, of course. Twenty-five people may be a neighborhood, but it isn't the whole village needed to raise a child. I had to organize ways to access a larger community of like-minded people for Myriad to "graduate" into. In first grade, that was the Eugene Waldorf School. In eighth grade, it was wilderness rites of passage organizations. These groups nurtured Myriad's growth as she tried her wings outside the nest.

The difficulties didn't end when the community social dynamics stabilized, but they took on a different flavor. No longer were we creating our own chaos. Instead, life threw us curve-balls, and we helped each other cope and respond. By the time my child was 14 years old, our family had grown. We now had three committed parents in the household, and a younger sister (my second child). On the farm lived a committed grandparent-figure, and a surrogate uncle, among other less-committed but equally-loving adults. Then in December 2019, one of the parents in our household was killed in a car accident. Three months later, the coronavirus pandemic locked down the country.

Death is a life lesson that we are still struggling to learn. Yesterday I mused, "I wonder how long it will take before this intense grief eases." Myriad responded sympathetically, "Probably a long time, mom." We were in the car, and a minute later I avoided colliding with a driver who was not following the rules. I told Myriad about it, and she said, "Good thing you were paying attention, mom. Thanks for saving us." I thought, *Wow. I have raised a really cool human being. She's so good at conversing in a loving, empathetic way. How many moms have 17-year-old daughters who talk to them like this?*

In some ways I am grateful to the pandemic. It has given us time to stay home, be internal, and reflect. One lesson I witness Myriad learning is this: *there is no such thing as "normal."* This is an important understanding for a teenager raised in intentional community. The feeling of being different from everyone else is a developmental part of adolescence, even for those of us raised in such culturally normative places as white middle-class suburbs. For homeschooled kids, community-raised kids, and others who have "different" upbringings, that feeling can be magnified and take on a driving importance.

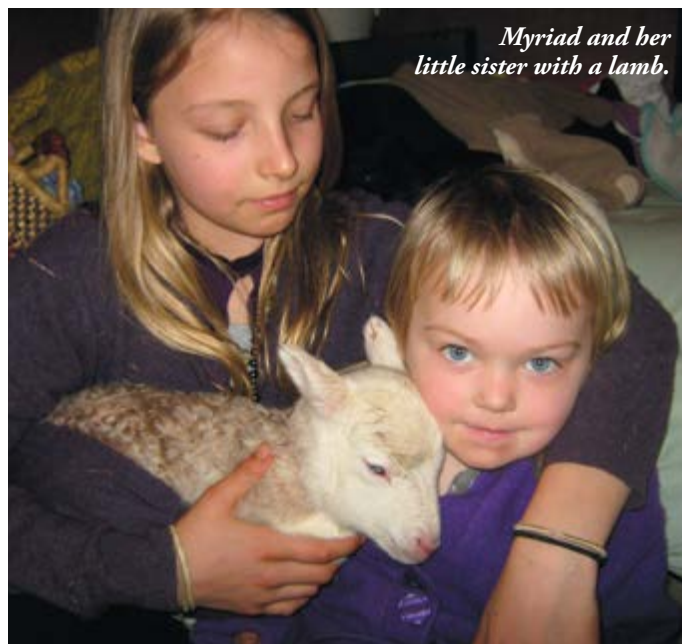
I have seen Myriad go through a phase of "wanting to be normal," and then relax and admit that nobody is normal. We are each human beings, doing our best, making our choices. What choices will Myriad make in the coming years? I'm proud to support her in whichever directions she wants to go.

It's lovely for me as a mom to have an eight-year-old daughter who was born in the stable center of a settled community. But when I look at the creative, vibrant, intelligent, loving human being that is my 17-year-old daughter, I feel proud of what we accomplished. Out of chaos, we created stability. Out of abuse, we created healing. Out of rape, we created love. A male friend once said to me, "That is the power of a woman. You can take violence and turn it into love."

Yes, that is what I did. I chose to keep a baby who was conceived by rape. I fought hard for us to move out of violence and into nurturing. I created community to help raise my child. I thought I was doing it for her, but as I look around me in wonder, I discover that I am home. Thank you, Myriad, for bringing me home. 🌸

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*Kara Huntermoon is a co-owner of the community land at Heart-Culture Farm Community, near Eugene, Oregon. She teaches Ecological Integration classes in the community's Permaculture landscape. Kara also founded Liberation Listening, an organization that teaches interpersonal practices designed to help end systems of oppression.*



*Myriad and her little sister with a lamb.*



*Myriad, age eight, watches the woodstove.*

Photos courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

# Work and Play at Camphill Copake

*By Emilie Papas*

I lean back in my chair and gaze across the water; the blue sky and towering stacks of white clouds tell me that summer has begun. The green of bushes and trees almost overwhelms my senses. It would be a peaceful scene but for the shouts and splashes of 12 children (ages three-12), my charges for the afternoon. In the course of the afternoon kayaks are tipped and children shriek with glee as they tumble into the water; they count “rounds” jumping off the tree that leans over the pond, swimming to the float, jumping off the float, swimming to shore, jumping off the dock, and swimming back to the tree. Children call to each other, “Watch my cannonball!”; “Watch my pencil dive!” My job is pretty easy: if a younger child gets tired, an older sibling or friend is there to help; when arguments arise, the children can usually work it out amongst themselves. I intervene only when this “community of children” suddenly does something thoughtless, throwing rocks, or pushing too much.

Often as I sit and watch these children throw each other into the water, yell, accuse, forgive, and forget about it, I see them as images of their parents. If only community meetings could involve so much splashing, decision-making and relationship-building might be easier.

Yesterday my three-year-old, Ellie, swam with a support vest on for the first time. Today as she comes out on the beach she calls to an 11-year-old friend, “I can swim!” “Wow!” comes the response, “Nice job! Want to swim to the float with me?” Soon Ellie is surrounded by friends eager to lend a helping hand and protect her from splashes as she makes her first swim across the pond.

From the swim pond I can look up the valley that holds Camphill Village, the community that has been my home for 15 years. As I sit and watch the children play, their parents and the other 240 people of “the Village” are busy: milking cows, weeding gardens, dipping candles, cooking, cleaning, doing paperwork, meeting, and perhaps even resting. Nearly 100 of those people are adults with developmental disabilities whose presence brings common purpose to our communal life, just as making sure Ellie makes it safely to the float and back has brought purpose to the children at the swim pond this afternoon.

I wonder if it is too presumptuous to suggest that the care for others that I see in these children comes from their growing up watching us all care for each other in community. Last fall, I sat with Ellie on my lap in the community’s Hall and watched a theatrical performance of the story of Parsifal, a story of knights and ladies put on by the oldest and youngest members of our community. In one of the first scenes a queen (played by an elderly woman with special needs) sat on stage flanked by three lovely maidens (ages seven and eight). The maidens carried the speaking part and when finished stood, and taking the queen’s hands, led her from the stage. This particular queen usually requires the cleverness and humor of a talented and dedicated adult to persuade her to move from place to place, so my heart swelled with astonished pride as I watched these earnest maidens gently lead her off the stage.

Later I watched as the three maidens sat at table with the king and queen while a page (age 10) walked briskly around pouring drinks and whispering cues to any who may have forgotten their next move. For me the climax of the scene came when the king, a man who is non-verbal, nearly blind, and seldom acknowledges those around

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I watch these children throw each other into the water, yell, accuse, forgive, and forget about it. If only community meetings could involve so much splashing, decision-making and relationship-building might be easier.

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him, at the prompting of the maidens lifted his glass and drank a toast to the assembled company.

However, life in a working community is not all plays and playing, and we want and need our children to make a substantial contribution to the work life as well. In the summer, when they do not have school, the children are expected to work, each in accordance with their interests, abilities, and attention span, up to half a day five days a week. The younger ones might help in the kitchen, cooking and food processing, the older ones can make a significant contribution weeding and planting in the gardens, stacking hay bales and putting up fences, making cheese, baking, or serving customers in our Coffee Shop and Co-op.

Last spring when shutdowns around the world affected supply chains, many people who had never planted gardens before felt the urge to do so and our seed company, Turtle Tree Seed, was unexpectedly swamped with orders. Much of the community came together to help fill seed packets and box up orders but none

were as enthusiastic as my 10-year-old son, Jonah. He spent every morning from after breakfast until lunch reading seed orders and pulling the corresponding packets from the shelves and shelves of seed varieties in the shop. His accuracy and pride in his work outstripped that of many of his coworkers. Of course, in the afternoons I had to make sure he had plenty of sledding and snowball fights to balance the intensity of his morning work.

Camphill Village runs on a system of shared finances, each of us contributing our time and work to the life of the community and each of us able to meet our needs from the common financial resources. This system is grounded on a philosophical ideal (coming from Anthroposophy) that our work in the world can be free only when it is not directly linked to wages. Some years ago, the question arose, probably not for the first time in the 60-year life of the community, “Should we pay the children for their work?”; a challenging question to face. On the one hand we want the children to experience the ideals that stand behind our life; on the other hand we know that most of them will grow up and leave the community and we want them to be prepared to meet a world where wage-earning is essential. The group of parents meeting at that time decided that at the end of the summer the community would gift each child with something that they requested. Thus it was that after six months of diligent work Jonah received a walking globe—a big heavy ball that he can stand on and do circus tricks—his heart’s desire for nearly a year.

Watching my children enjoy their working and playing in the midst of community life brings me great satisfaction, but not every day is like that. A longtime member of Camphill and mother of five children once told me that she always kept her suitcase handy and when her family saw it sitting by the door they knew it was one of those days; those days when the choice to live in community seems crazy—when the rent is too high, even if you don’t pay rent—and you’re ready to leave. More often than not, by next morning the suitcase had been put away and life would go on.



*Ian Walsh dashes off with rolls he collected from the table during a Michaelmas celebration.*

Christine Pizzuti

This story made me feel better about the many days that I questioned my chosen lifestyle and vocation and would gladly have packed my bags and left. Perhaps we all have those days; mine come most often because of my family. They come when Ellie is crying by the door as I rush off to yet another meeting. Or they come when three children are fighting and yelling around me as I'm trying to get them ready for bed and with all my heart I'm wishing that my husband would come and help but he's downstairs talking a housemate through yet another crisis situation and I know I must go on alone. Or they come when my seven-year-old, Francis, is hiding under the supper table, poking people's feet, and I'm mortified that the volunteer that moved into our house the day before is witnessing such poor behavior, and I crawl under the table and pull Francis out and when I take him to his room he says, "Mom, why do we have to live with all these people? Why can't we live by ourselves like our friends [outside community] do?" Then I want to tell him that I have those questions too, and sometimes I don't know how to answer them.

Once my family did leave, not knowing where we were going but really needing the space to reassess and face the plaguing questions of how to balance our commitments to children, to marriage, to community. Neither my husband nor I were sure that we could find such balance any more. After six months of soul searching, however, we decided to return to Camphill. For me that decision stood on the incredible mutual support that lives in the group of mothers/homemakers in this community, the joy and laughter that punctuates a day of living with people with special needs, and the satisfaction of knowing that my work to create a beautiful, thriving home benefits more than just my family.

The questions haven't disappeared in the four years since returning to community, but there are many days when the answers are clear. Like the one not too long ago

when at the end of a long day I sat down at the supper table wishing that for once I could eat alone and wondering where I was going to find the energy to facilitate yet another meaningful meal-time conversation amongst my housemates. Unexpectedly, Francis, the one I had pulled out from under the table the week before, piped up, "Sean, how was your day?"

"Good!" came the habitual one-word response followed by a blank stare into the middle distance.

Francis persisted, "What did you do in the garden today?"

As we waited for Sean's reply, Francis' bright eyes looked up into my wondering face.

"Mom," he whispered, "I'm helping." 🌱

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*Emilie Papas has lived for 15 years in Camphill Village in Copake, New York ([www.camphillvillage.org](http://www.camphillvillage.org)). She is a social therapist, homemaker, and homeschooling mother of three children. The names in this article have been changed to protect the privacy of those named.*



***The children of Camphill Village gather around the beginnings of the St. John's Day bonfire.***

# Those Who Sow Together Grow Together

By Kim Hunter



Photos courtesy of Kim Hunter

Play is the young child's work and is inspired by the adult's work.

When adults are engaged in real work, children become absorbed in active play.

Grasping this foundational pedagogical truth was transformational for my work with young children. Ideally the work we are doing is accessible for the children to join if they choose. Working alongside the adult at first, children naturally become more independent as their development and skill allow. "Real work," as I define it, is NOT on a screen or telephone. The work is a clear task with outcomes that are tangible for the child without us having to explain it at great length.

When I'm with children in a classroom setting, the work I'm engaged in is always directly related to the class experience, be it indoors or outside. Indoors we might be cutting vegetables for soup, baking, sweeping the floor, fixing toys, sewing, washing by hand; outside the work is tied closely to the seasons, chopping, stacking, and bringing in firewood, planting, weeding, harvesting, raking, building—ideally without power tools—and shovelling snow.

The stay-at-home mom of generations past typically maintained the home while the father worked. Now with both parents working outside the home it is more common than ever to buy prepared meals or dine out, to hire cleaning or gardening help, and to buy rather than make the things we need. We have to become conscious of what we are doing for the younger generation to support them to know how to make life work—how to prepare food, clean the home, grow food and flowers—we all need to know, experience, and participate in the real work that life

requires. Furthermore, working with others on shared outcomes fosters community. In our language this word literally calls us together. I see "community" as a call to us: Come unity!

Ideally, in the early years of life children have the opportunity to contribute in these "menial" tasks which offer outcomes that we all need in order to live comfortably. Children love to be a part of real work, to participate in useful tasks.

One can experience the value of work to the inspiration of play typical in childhood, especially up to the age of nine. In the early years play is naturally born out of imitation; this is changing, since in times past work was always being done by the adults in the child's environment. Now most children are in a formal setting like daycare, preschool, or kindergarten in which the caregivers' main task is to ensure that the children are safe and that their physical needs are taken care of. There is no other work that needs doing, and indeed, most early childhood educators do not understand the value of "real work"; this information isn't included in mainstream teacher preparation.

In my experience the most engaged play comes out of imitation of adult work—cooking, cleaning, holding, "nursing" or "feeding" their doll, building houses or forts out of cloths.

Most parents have experienced times when their young children are absorbed in play, often talking to themselves as they play. "Ah," says the adult to themselves, "a perfect moment to return that phone call from yesterday." Within a short time of the adult being on the phone there is often a meltdown in the play and the child is crying or if there is more than one child they are fighting...and the adult on the phone says, "I don't understand, she/he was playing so

well when I called you, I'm sorry, I'll have to call back later.”

What I see happening in these situations is that the child was feeling safe and comfortable in the environment and began to play. Part of the feeling of safety was because the adult's attention was in the child(ren)'s physical space. Perhaps the adult was washing up the dishes or making the bed. When the adult attention is moved to a device it is as though the adult is no longer present, a part of them has drifted out of the immediate environment. If the adult is on a phone, the conversation is often louder than it would be if both participants were in the room; further, it is one-sided and therefore makes no sense to the young child, which in and of itself can make them feel unsettled and insecure.

One way to increase children's feeling of safety is to be present and engaged in real work, saving the technology for times when the child is not in our care. This alone can contribute to a decrease in anxiousness, nervousness, difficulties with sleep and depression which pervade childhood today.

For culture to continue, the younger generation must know how the daily and seasonal work is carried; ideally they are given the opportunity to see and participate in real work in ways that have meaning and are appropriate to the child's age.

Although it can take longer to get a task done, if we are following these basic ideals at the child's pace, the benefits for the child are exponential. They get the adult attention they want and need, and depending on the task, the child may experience a sense of feeling of use, pride in their work, the capacity and active willingness to engage in work; there are many opportunities for learning outcomes. When the work is done in the right way, where the adult is both engaged and relaxed, the child enjoys the

process and each time that process is done again, they learn more about that particular task. Often a participated or observed task will come into children's play as they “hard-wire” what they have learned; they play it to practise it, to explore, to experience what they watched. For example a child who is helping to plant the seeds will develop their pincer grip and eye-hand coordination among other benefits, and they will be so excited to help to water and transplant, weed and harvest and eat what is being grown. The child may find some stones outside and begin to play at planting using the stones as seeds, covering them over with dirt, perhaps singing a simple song that was sung by the adult when they were planting in the garden.

The early years of life pass so quickly; engaging children in tasks that need doing (as examples, washing dishes, preparing food, setting the table, planting, watering, harvesting) is both educational and supports them to engage in communal work where their capacities to love their work are enhanced, nourished, and appreciated, in turn building self-confidence, competence, strength, and connection.

In short: *Those who sow together grow together.* 🌱

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*Kim Hunter home-educated her daughter while running a mixed-age kindergarten for 17 years out of her home on five acres of beautiful land on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada. In 2016 she received the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Early Childhood Education, and since then has been travelling, speaking at conferences, at post-secondary institutions, and to home-schooling adults. She also mentors in classroom settings. The trailer for her film can be seen and she can be reached at [timetoplayfilm.com](http://timetoplayfilm.com).*





# Intergenerational Ecoliteracy in the 21st Century

By Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD



Photos and images courtesy of Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD

As an eight-year old in 1979, I was confronted with an image that changed my world. It was on the back cover of a magazine in my dad's kitchen—a photograph taken in the late 1800s. Next to a 30-foot-in-diameter redwood tree, a logger, ax in hand, stood proudly with his foot propped up in a traditional masculine position of conquest. The caption read: "It took 2,000 years for this tree to grow and 20 minutes to be cut down." I remember the tightening in my throat, rush in my stomach. I felt awe and horror, utter confusion.

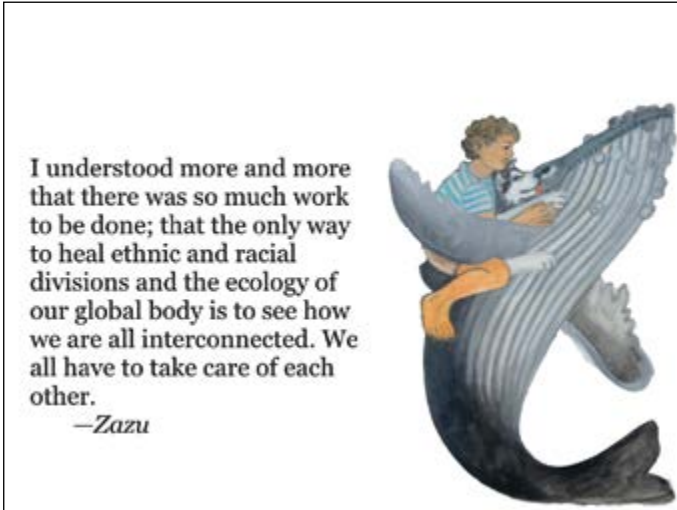
As a child who had not yet been inundated with messages of ecological destruction, I didn't know how to read this image. It felt like both a benediction for Progress and reprehension for its consequences. Today, we are all too familiar with these kinds of disorienting and demoralizing images, but rarely know how to decipher contradictory but seemingly inevitable implications. Too often, mainstream middle-class response is to consume our way "out" of our disorientation<sup>1</sup>—numbing ourselves through materialist addictions that then reinforce the very root of our crisis. Through neoliberal globalization, our world mirrors the Titanic cruise ship—the quintessential symbol of the Anthropocene: 1500 people died during the debacle of the Titanic because the ship executives had prioritized lounging space over lifeboats.

My discussion of climate justice education begins with intergenerational ecoliteracy in the realm of parenting. Parenting represents perhaps one of the most contradictory dilemmas of the 21st century, revealing both the possibility for freedom from and adaptation to consumer-waste convenience-culture. J. Krishnamurti's warning, "It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society," characterizes both our climate crisis and our potential for collective change as ecologically-conscious parents. How we raise our children is critical to environmental

education. The word *educate* means "to draw out." How can we educate ourselves and our children to take nothing for granted; to unlearn *what we think we know* while not only debating, but embodying differing perspectives? How can we embody an intergenerational ecoliteracy, not through individualized, privatized behaviors, but *in community*—generating collective action as a sustainable movement? How can we learn to *want* to change our daily habits?: "They hear it, they learn from it, they understand it, and they proceed to ignore it."<sup>2</sup>

Answering these questions begins with consumer responsibility and corporate accountability through ecoliteracy at *home*. This means parents must go *beyond* nature-based Early Childhood Education.<sup>3</sup> We must resist what I call "petroleum parenting": market-driven choices parents make that contribute to environmental destruction. Petroleum parenting includes how we give birth, how we participate in the medical establishment, how we negotiate circumcision-decisions, breastfeeding, transportation, sleeping, bathing, screen-technology-as-surrogate-parent, and how we choose to feed, diaper, entertain, and, of course, how we educate our infants, toddlers, and children.

In the 2004 documentary film, *The Corporation*, Noam Chomsky describes how profit-driven institutions begin to instill consumer-values at infancy; Ray Anderson, CEO of Interface, the world's largest commercial carpet manufacturer, calls corporate motivation a form of "intergenerational tyranny." Since indoctrination of children is at the root of escalating big business, shouldn't parents, educators, activists, academics, and those who oppose the monoculturalization of our minds<sup>4</sup> address children directly? Howard Zinn asks, "I wonder why some people think it is all right for adults to hear such a radical, critical point of view, but not teenagers or sub-teenagers? Do they think that young



people are not able to deal with such matters?”<sup>5</sup>

Branding and advertising recognize the potency of early indoctrination. Lucy Hughes, Vice President for Initiative Media and co-creator of The Nag Factor, proudly declares that Initiative spends \$12 billion of media time to encourage children to “nag” their parents into buying products, home videos, fast food and attending movies, theme parks, and “places like Chuck E Cheese.” Initiative Media is the “biggest buyer of advertising time and space in the US and in the world.” She goes on: “You can manipulate consumers into wanting and therefore buying your products—it’s a game... [today’s children are] tomorrow’s adult consumer so start talking with them now, build that relationship with them when they’re younger and you’ve got them as an adult.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, “eco-parenting” is equated with consumerism. When I researched eco-parenting online, 99.9 percent of what comes up is *what to buy*. Consumer-focused greenwashing becomes the default of making supposedly ethical parental choices. Greenwashing is a prime example of capitalism dictating the trajectory of our

alleged freedom. The “green-economy has come to mean...the wholesale privatization of nature.”<sup>7</sup> The sound-bite/aphorism fuels much of the US Green Movement’s misleading activism. There are unfortunately too many examples of this—ranging from federal energy policies to Ben and Jerry’s Buy-Ice-Cream=Save-the-Environment campaign to, of course, eco-parenting. Convenience-consumer culture frames the environment as a desirable product. In a recent Roper poll, 91 percent of new parents claim recycling is critical to their children’s futures. “Eco-parenting” is not about buying “green” products or recycling, which often eases consumer-guilt and gives them the impression they can buy and waste more. It is about intergenerational ecoliteracy.

Ecoliteracy begins at home; it begins with parenting; in every room of the house; in the classroom, in the media. In *The Truman Show*, Ed Harris’ character, the billionaire televisionary, exhorts: “We accept the reality of the world we are presented.” My son, Zazu, is part of the Gen Z (those born 1995-2015). Parents/caregivers are told that this generation is particularly “social and communicative” because they (not my son, and not most of his friends) are growing up with “high-powered communication tools” like Alexa. This is a phenomenally dangerous correlation. Teaching our kids to communicate “verbally” (to machines) does not mean we are teaching them to communicate empathically or relationally. The pernicious illusion that these digital information technologies (online education, “interactive” learning platforms, fully digital classes, Minecraft homeschooling) *increase sociality* misleads us to believe that using “language” is equal to developing social, emotional, and cooperation skills required for resiliency and collaboration.

In contrast with the empire of normalizing media that colonizes our relationships with our own bodies and our earth, *lived* ecoliteracy embodies a decolonizing, liberatory practice of cultivating dynamic interpersonal empathy. In the vein of Toni Morrison whose writings gave children “agency and soul,” this bridge between generations creates deep empathy and relevancy, encouraging children to learn all subjects from multiple perspectives—including activities about racial and health equity, ethnic, sexual, and cultural difference. In their book *Nurture Shock: New Thinking About Children*, Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman investigate the vital consequences of discussing race/ethnicity with children as young as two years old.<sup>8</sup>

What if we created entirely different models that mirror adulthood rooted in reciprocity, co-creativity, and equilibrium? Zinn exhorts, “I believe that history can help us imagine new possibilities for the future. ... Maybe our future can be found in the past’s moments of kindness and courage rather than its centuries of warfare.”

Within the national debate about how to *emotionally* protect our children, many socially-conscious parents conflate “news” about terrorism, mass starvation, police brutality, school shootings, etc. with environmental devastation/ecocide—claiming all as taboo subjects. Histrionic and inaccurate statistics are used to reify the climate of fear prevalent in bearing and raising children in the US. Divide-and-conquer techniques can be inflicted only when individuals do not experience themselves as relational beings. Contrary to such fears, I am suggesting that parents and educators teach our very young children *why* ecologically-conscious

values and behaviors are both nourishing and critical for us all.

Rather than compounding what eco-anxiety, eco-depression, climate grief, or what David Sobel calls “ecophobia” (“a helpless sense of dread about the future”), embodying intergenerational ecoliteracy means co-creating infrastructures in which all sectors of society feel empowered to act individually and collectively. This means redefining resiliency. Throughout the US, city commissions on community resiliency focus their citizen-education programs on *adaptation and preparedness* for climate chaos. We must shift that focus to *prevention* by questioning the *interrelational* roots of each crisis. Only then can we integrate profound, sustainable changes in individual behavior, community action, infrastructural design, corporate accountability, and policy reform.

It’s mid-summer, 2020. COVID-19 social regulation controls are shifting. Zazu is the same age I was when I witnessed the photograph of the logger and tree. My family travels north to visit my mother and stepfather. At a rest stop teeming with squirming, molting cicadas and their eerie precariously perched exoskeletons, Zazu is stunned to see a truck loaded with tires larger than our home. Out of the blue, he starts talking about advertising—as if he is confirming something to himself: “Advertising isn’t true. If you have to sell something you have to advertise. If you have to advertise, you have to exaggerate. Whether you are selling mac and cheese or gargantuan tires...” I respond: “Yeah, and we need to find out where the exaggeration ends and the truth begins.”

In the midst of megatires and the cicadas’ 17-year cycle, Zazu’s reflections on advertising demonstrate an ecoliterate mindset: the inspiration to draw connections as we make sense of our everyday lives. He is unraveling how we deceive ourselves—noting how our obsessive consumption of everything from commercials and free-ways to food, computers, and clothing is made to appear natural, inevitable, and incontestable. He distinguishes between want and need. Although the transportation of megatires from state to state appears to be equally as “real” as the cicadas and their gently clinging exoskeletons, my son is learning to not only decipher the differences among what we regard as normal, he is evolving an ecoliterate wisdom that challenges how consumption-dehumanization is bound to accelerated suffering of all life. No longer deluded by technotopia, we will collectively fulfill our humanity. 🐦

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*Dr. Cara Judea Albadeff 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, Albadeff 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](http://www.facebook.com/LoveBusFamily). See also [www.carajudea.com](http://www.carajudea.com), [www.zazudreams.com](http://www.zazudreams.com), and Menagerie Woodworking at [www.facebook.com/menagerie.woodworking](http://www.facebook.com/menagerie.woodworking).*



1. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. Bell Tower: New York, NY, 1990.
2. From the 2009 Vietnam War documentary film: *The Most Feared Man in America and The Pentagon Papers*: Daniel Ellsberg.
3. Across the US, nature and forest outdoor preschools recognize the extraordinary individual and community value of outdoor education; however, after the age of five, federal education state standards deny children these critical opportunities.
4. Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*. Zed Books: New York, NY, 1993.
5. Howard Zinn, *Young People’s History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror*. Seven Stories Press: New York, NY, 2009, 37.
6. Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan’s 2003 documentary film, *The Corporation*, cited in the Guide on how to read *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*. Eifrig Publishing: Berlin, 2017, 7.
7. Jeff Conant, “Going Against the Green,” *Yes! Magazine*. Fall 2012: 62-64.
8. Similarly, *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*, my intergenerational climate justice book, highlights our empathic capacities as communal, co-implicated beings. In the face of cultural extinction of ethnic minorities and global ecological extinction, *Zazu Dreams* explores the beauty of sharing our interconnectedness—the fertile intersections among cross-cultural and natural-world examples of symbiosis and interdependency. In contrast with how our society underestimates children’s aptitude for deep empathy and complex thought, at the root of this project is an understanding of children’s capacity (and adult’s) to harness multiple intelligences (cognitive, intuitive, emotional, corporeal, synesthetic, memory).

# “Being a Commune Kid”: Children at the Brotherhood of the Spirit/Renaissance Community

By Daniel A. Brown



*Heads in Northfield, Massachusetts were turned whenever our youthful tribe walked down to the local ice cream shop.*



*Some friendships made as children have carried on into adulthood.*

My three previous COMMUNITIES articles related the turbulent history of the Brotherhood of the Spirit/Renaissance Community, a large and long-lasting intentional entity in New England (1968-1988) and that of its mercurial founder and leader, Michael Metelica. Little was said of the children who grew up there, the majority of whom are now in their 40s and 50s. Their stories are as varied as the individuals themselves.

When the Brotherhood of the Spirit community was founded in 1968, its members weren't much older than children themselves. For the next few years as its membership expanded from a dozen to about 150, the average age was 19. Although the community was intentional, it never had any foundational game plan other than its grandiose vow to save the world by demonstrating an example of perfect loving equanimity.

The first child was born into the Brotherhood a year after its founding. After that, the children of the community fell into two main categories: those who were born into it and those who were brought there by their parents during the great counter-cultural migration from 1968 to 1971. Kids born into the group had an easier time as they grew up assimilated from day one into our unique culture. It was a shock for others to move from their private bedroom with their own books, stuffies, and toys and be plunked into a sprawling mass of strangers. There was even a sub-category of young teens who naturally disliked being ordered around by those who weren't much older than themselves. They orbited in and out of the community and most departed when they came of age.

For its first eight years, my community did not consider children to be a priority. Not that they were ignored, it's just that their needs were subordinated to our ambi-

tious mission spurred by the passion and naiveté of our own youthfulness. The kids were, thus, swept along by the tide of rapidly changing events which were confusing enough for their parents. In our austere early days, birthdays were quietly celebrated with whatever meager supplies mothers could scrounge but there was always the threat that they would be hijacked by a half-starved comrade.

The Brotherhood, however, was not like the kibbutzim of that time, where the children were taken from their parents and raised in a group facility. Nuclear families lived together in the same room. As in all societies, radical or traditional, there were nurturing parents who gave all to their kids, and there were those who were challenged by the responsibility of parenthood. Our community (renamed Renaissance in 1974) had both, and all families or single parents were welcome.

Day care was provided but for many

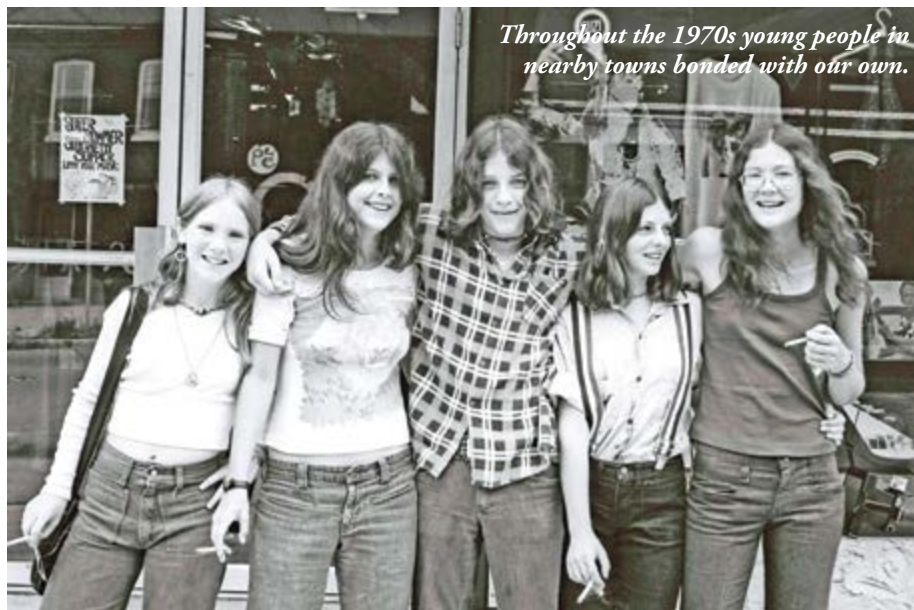
years, it was a secondary concern. A recording studio for our house band, Spirit in Flesh, which spread our spiritual philosophy in song, was constructed long before a nursery. There was never any set policy regarding children or their roles but such an attitude mirrored that of the community at large. We made it up as we went along and like our myriad adopted skills, learned communal child care by doing. As a result, our kids learned to be resilient and find ways to make their lives work for them outside of the adult sphere. As such, they created their own community within the community.

The trickle of kids became an explosion when Metelica made an offhand comment during a full-group meeting in 1976. He gazed around the room at the assembled adults and said, “Gee, wouldn’t it be nice to have a couple of kids around here?” Such was his influence that nine months later, our “Baby Boom” began and continued for years afterwards. When the community hit the peak of its upward growth in 1980, half its membership was under 15.

Once children flooded the community, they became more of a focus, both individually and collectively. Birthday parties became grand events. Adults like myself would routinely pile a bunch into our cars and go off for ice cream or other treats. It was rare to go to a movie with just your own children. Our day-care obtained its own house and became a quality and much respected institution staffed by dedicated women and men. Several of our tween girls recorded a wonderful album of children’s songs with noted Australian folk artist and former Findhorn Foundation resident Hans Poulsen. After Renaissance moved its headquarters in the mid-1970s to downtown Turners Falls, a low-income community, it set up a recreation center complete with pool ta-



*Men as well as women worked in our communal daycare.*



*Throughout the 1970s young people in nearby towns bonded with our own.*



*Renaissance students interacted more like siblings than friends, a trend that continues to this day.*



*Some Renaissance members have long since become grandparents.*

Photos courtesy of Daniel A. Brown

*It was a carefree lifestyle with a dozen moms and dads and brothers and sisters.*



*A field trip to nearby Northfield Mountain Recreational Center.*



bles, pinball machines, and snacks for the local teens who then intermingled with our own. They became a separate but vibrant tribe. Some of the town's young people worked in our many businesses and grew up to become lifelong friends.

As in all groups, there were various pods of friends and the kids were incorporated into them. Hence, my son, Ariel, had several specific adults who acted as surrogate parents mainly because their offspring were his friends. But living in such a unique environment created a subconscious bond that others noticed even if the youngsters did not. A teacher at the nearby elementary school our brood attended observed that his alternative students interacted more like siblings than friends with all the attending positive and challenging attributes. The community's final residence was on 80 rural acres in Gill, Massachusetts so Ariel and his friends created endless adventures with an abundance of nature (and frogs to catch) at their disposal.

Years ago, I wrote *The Renaissance Community Yearbook: 1968-1988 – A Book of Memories*. It was for members only and was designed to avoid the controversies that still tear communal veterans apart and just concentrate on the good memories we shared. I queried several of the children, now adults, to write about what it was like “Being a Commune Kid” as I titled their chapters. What follows are their recollections (names have been changed to initials to protect their privacy).

“The Lodge (our main structure in Gill) was filled with memories of the winters sledding down the best hills around and summer explorations of the land. Freedom

to roam as we pleased was readily available. Lots of fun times were had with my friends. Growing up as the ‘community kids’ in the public schools was interesting. Sometimes we were picked on for that but it was the bond and the love of my friends that helped me become independent, free-minded, and secure in who I was. They were what made the community experience well worth it all. Lifelong bonds are what I will always share and cherish with the friends that I’ve acquired through the community in my youth and for that I will always be grateful.”—TC

“At 14 years of age, my father sent me on a plane from Florida to stay with my sister, at this ‘hippy’ community in Massachusetts, for the summer. Instead of returning to my father, I chose to live in the community till I was 18. Along the way, I learned to be self-reliant, living among a couple hundred new people, on a beautiful piece of community property in the tiny town of Gill. Thinking back, I discovered I was resilient and open-minded enough to overcome unique challenges and experience unconventional opportunities while making my own decisions, and ultimately surviving in this alternative lifestyle (although I felt a lot of insecurity about myself and my future). For instance, often the ‘outside society’ didn’t understand ‘the community.’ My inner guidance and motivation fueled my instinct—despite the lack of adult guidance or supervision—to finish high school in the public school system even though I was perceived with suspicion and wasn’t really accepted by many of my peers at the school. Ultimately my positive outlook led to peace and true happiness. Over the years, I’ve kept in touch with many lifelong friends from the community who’ve shared much of that experience with me—some of which helps shape my happy life today. We had our first ‘Community Kids’ Reunion, and to say the least, it was very moving. I hope the ‘kid’ reunions continue, and I look forward to them for many more years to come!”—BJ

“I remember playing in the deserted psychedelic bus with our motley crew sporting corduroys and good vibes. I see some long-haired spiritual guru leading Buddhist chants and *Om* meditations in

the office. I think of the blue trailer in the New England woods where we lived without electricity or television. It was a carefree lifestyle with a dozen moms and dads and brothers and sisters. We were the children of the counterculture, the spawn of an alternative philosophy that flourished in the no-holds-barred '60s and '70s. It was a childhood that I would describe as growing up in a giant fort. I liked some aspects of being different, especially bringing my own alfalfa sandwiches and knowing what karma and pomegranates were. But all through high school, I stayed fairly normal—I was in the debate club, got good grades, and attended an odd pep rally and stuff like that. For a kid who grew up with some of Western Massachusetts' most eccentric characters, rebelling to the other extreme—suburban mediocrity—wasn't easy, so I overtly tried the more traditional avenues. The heritage I learned early on was that happiness has less to do with what you have than what you believe. As I have moved from a teenager to adulthood and eventual 30-something nomad, I have come to appreciate those tie-dyed years and my past as the ticket to my future. Growing up with a sense of community has left me with a legacy of freedom and love. Although I don't generally tell outsiders about myself, about being raised on a commune, people find it interesting, and it makes a great cocktail or herbal tea conversation. But to me, it was just my life."—FS

As noted in the previous articles, Renaissance's rise and fall revolved around Michael Metelica, whose charismatic leadership sparked both its creation and his downfall. As he degenerated further into drug and alcohol abuse, many families chose to leave in order to protect their children. But even before his collapse, members became less attached in their devotion to Metelica once kids came along. Others departed in order to return to a more stable and comfortable domestic life. At a certain point in one's family evolution, living in a house with 30 other people while sharing a kitchen and bathroom can become less desirable.

The next generation of the Brotherhood of the Spirit/Renaissance Community has come of age and many have

children of their own. Although none have chosen the structure of community as we did, there exist extended families of parents, children, grandchildren, cousins, and in-laws who share loving companionship and positive values, as do mini-communities of close friendships formed decades ago in the Brotherhood. While some individuals have expressed valid criticism of enduring a stressful lifestyle as a "Commune Kid," I've observed that most are happy and thriving. They have incorporated the challenges and rewards of their community experience to grow into exceptional adults who now spread love and light in their own special ways. 🐦

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



*Renaissance students developed family-like closeness that has endured over the decades since.*



*During the final years, children began to outnumber the adults.*

# Children and Polyamory: The Kids Are Alright

*By Art*

Back in 1981, as a freshman at Cornell, I remember many late nights with friends, eating pizza and smoking pot in each other's dorm rooms, discussing how we wanted to live our lives after we graduated and (presumably) got married and had kids. Perhaps it was our youthful idealism, but we kept coming back to the idea of raising our children together in community. It just felt right. For me, the idea stuck.

In 1989, to collect data for my doctoral thesis on children in community, my girlfriend Guin and I crisscrossed North America in a Westfalia camper van searching for utopia while visiting over 30 communes. It was great! We discovered the many uses of soybeans, I got the hang of wearing a skirt, and I learned more the first DAY I stepped foot in an actual community than the two previous years I spent studying and surveying them. It was like each community was singing a song or telling a story that I could hear only when immersed in it.

Guin and I were married in 1991 and in 1992 we moved to Findhorn, a new-age community in northern Scotland. A week after our arrival, Guin asked to open our marriage. After six months of struggles and long conversations, I finally agreed. Over time, I came to appreciate and even identify with polyamory and being open to multiple romantic relationships. It was another seven years before we became parents ourselves. Our daughters, Piper and Sage, are now 16 and 21. So I've thought quite a bit about this topic.

In our quest to understand communities, we learned that one of the most salient features of utopian writers and practitioners throughout history is their experimentation with the concept of the family. For example, in Plato's *Republic*, marriage was forbidden, wives were "communalized," and children were separated from their parents and considered orphans of the state. In *Utopia*, Thomas More suggested that children be redistributed among families so that none have too many or too few. And from the 1920s to 1997, many Israeli kibbutzim experimented with children's houses where kids lived and learned apart from their parents. The communal scholar, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, described all these new family forms as indications of a cultural shift toward what she called the "postbiological family."

• • •

So, what impacts do postbiological families, such as those found in intentional communities (and, more specifically, polyamorous families), have on children? It turns out, despite widespread fears that such families will lead to instability, confusion, unhealthy emotional development, attachment issues, and the erosion of "family values," there is absolutely no evidence that children are harmed by healthy postbiological families or polyamorous relationships.

On the contrary, having multiple, caring adults in children's lives—whether due to polyamory, communal lifestyles, or extended families—offers many benefits and generally means more available resources, such as experience, money, time, etc. For example...

- When children witness the love and joy (as well as the arguments, tears, and social faux pas) of multiple adult relationships, the grown-up world becomes more demystified and real for them. And since communarians and polyamorists tend to value emotional literacy and good communication, children in such families often have higher self-confidence, self-reliance, and interpersonal skills.

- More specifically, such children are often exposed to a lot of "social critique" and learn how to deconstruct and question cultural narratives—often from Disney movies—

such as "And they lived happily every after," "Someday, my prince will come," and "Was it really okay that the Evil Queen tried to kill Snow White simply because she was younger and prettier?"

- In cohabiting communal or polyamorous households where finances are pooled, there is typically more income which means kids can be better provided for.

- In non-cohabiting households, members or partners who live outside of the home provide child(ren) with other experiences that can stimulate their cultural awareness and development. For example, children might make new friends, sample different cuisines and entertainment, and have a different environment in which to explore their identities. The benefits are similar to having grandparents or other relatives that children can visit and develop relationships with.

- In cohabiting households, community members and lovers can act as additional caregivers who can step in whether it is to help with homework or shuttling kids to soccer practice. This allows parents to take more breaks so they can take better care of their children.

- In non-cohabiting households, other grown-ups provide much needed diversion, solace, and adult company for parents. Even very devoted parents need and enjoy occasional evenings out of the home with their friends (with benefits) or vacations away from their child(ren) (and spouse).

- These grown-ups also provide additional perspectives and sources of advice, consolation, and experiences that benefit parents.

- Children have access to a wider variety of role models and generally know who to confide in, who to ask for advice, and who will make them pancakes with chocolate chips and extra syrup for breakfast.

- On the other side, childless adults in communities or polyamorous households with kids have opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with these chil-



dren, which is otherwise difficult unless these adults are teachers or have close relatives or friends with children.

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It's not all puppies and sunshine, however. There are also potential downsides of such relationships.

- It is often unclear how much authority biological parents are willing to give up and how much authority non-biological parents are willing to take on, which can lead to a lot of confusion, miscommunication, and heartache.

- Children are more likely to experience the double bind of being told to do something by one adult, only to discover it has been forbidden by another. At other times, more than one adult may reprimand a child for the same violation of a rule or norm.

- In closeted polyamorous families, children may struggle with keeping their secret. Depending on the type of community they live in, children may experience criticism, ostracism, or even their polyamorous parent losing a custody battle, if they are "outed."

- If the parents' relationship or the community is unstable, introducing new partners or members can add more chaos, especially for children.

- Polyamorous parents with non-cohabiting partners may be away from home more often than they would be otherwise. If one partner is out having fun with their lover while the other one is at home, it may cause guilt in the former and resentment in the latter.

- The process of finding additional partners or community members and maintaining additional relationships may drain financial resources that would otherwise remain with the family.

- In shared households, some teenagers complain that having multiple adults around hinders their ability to sneak away or maintain a coherent lie. Of course, this can be seen as a benefit for the adults in the household...

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Okay. Having said all that, what are some things to keep in mind if you

find yourself in a polyamorous family or a communal living situation? While writing this article, I interviewed both my daughters and will offer a few stories and advice in response to some common questions:

*Should all adults co-parent or should we leave it to the biological parents?*

- Of course, this depends greatly on the situation. Are the non-biologically-related adults living in the same house as the child(ren)? Are they inclined to develop a close relationship with the child(ren)? If so, it is very important to discuss issues such as how much authority parents are really willing to give up, what are considered appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for children and who should discipline children if/when they get out of line.

*How do I deal with teachers, doctors, and other professionals who care for my child(ren)?*

- You might try saying something like "Our family includes multiple adults: myself, my child's father, and <other adult(s)>. <Other adult(s)> may bring in our child(ren) in or pick them up from their appointments. What paperwork do we need to fill out so you can talk about our child's <other adult(s)>?"

*When should I tell my child(ren) I am polyamorous?*

- In general, if a child is old enough to understand monogamy and the concept of cheating, he or she is probably old enough to learn about polyamory. Kids are smart and will generally suss it out before you say anything. This happened with Piper, who was nine when it clicked that mom had a boyfriend. She assumed we were going to divorce because "that's how it works on TV."

*How can I tell my child(ren) without freaking them out?*

- When Piper finally asked Guin about her boyfriend, Guin told her that we had no intention of divorcing and that she felt lucky to have more people to love. It took Piper a while to adjust (she resonates a lot with '50s culture), but eventually realized "it's not that big a deal." She said, "I got used to Lance being a family member and stopped being mortified when friends realized my mom has a boyfriend." Children are generally more interested in their own affairs and are pretty adaptable to situations that may seem challenging to adults.

*How should I respond to my child(ren)'s questions about polyamory?*

- As with most questions from children, it is generally best to keep it simple and respond to their exact question and then shut up. It can be tempting to emotionally caretaker them or launch into a philosophical monologue, but that's often when the trouble starts. They'll ask if they want more information and if it isn't going to have a big impact on their



lives, they likely won't care.

*What should I ask my child(ren) to call my partner(s)?*

- Why not let them decide? It allows them some choice in a situation that can often feel out of their control.

*How should I introduce my partners to my child(ren)?*

- In general, there is no need to make a big deal of introducing our partners to our kids and it is best to act as we would when introducing a family friend or co-worker. Having said that, we did give Piper a lot of control over how to first meet Lance, who had been in a long-distance relationship with Guin for several months. It was interesting how Piper at first wanted to orchestrate the whole event, but then became more relaxed with each new "plan" and finally decided we should all meet for bubble tea and see how it goes.

*Should my child(ren) keep my polyamory a secret?*

- It depends a lot on the community you live in. Among wealthy, well educated, and progressive communities being out may not be a big deal. In more conservative communities being out could attract discrimination and criticism. In general I avoid the topic with acquaintances unless there is a need for them to know. That said, it's really not fair to ask younger kids (say under 10) to keep any secret and, if you do, don't be too shocked if you are outed. With older kids, it is important that they understand who knows and who doesn't so they can act appropriately. This was a problem when our daughters were visiting a relative, Adam, who didn't know about our polyamory and Sage didn't know he didn't know. She mentioned Lance casually in a conversation and had a mini-panic attack when Adam asked, "Who's Lance?" She dealt with it fine, but I felt awful that I put her in that awkward situation.

*Any suggestions on how to deal with grandparents?*

- Every grandparent is different so it is hard to generalize, but I can tell you our story. Years ago, my mother and mother-in-law were both planning to visit us while Guin had a live-in boyfriend, Jack, and neither grandmother knew we were poly. After a lot of debate, we decided to tell them and believed they would be accepting as they both were in slightly-out-of-the-main-

stream relationships—my mother with someone 20 years her younger and my Caucasian mother-in-law with a 6'5" African American. We were so wrong. They were so upset they refused to allow Jack in the house! And they kept lamenting, "What about the children?!" What really sucked is that our daughters were fine with Jack prior to our parents' visit, but they picked up on the tension in the house and started to fulfill their grandparents' expectations by being uncomfortable with the situation. Eventually, we had to tell our mothers that, while we love them deeply and want them to feel comfortable, in the end, this is OUR home and OUR lives to live as we see fit. So their choice is not whether Jack can be in the house, but whether they choose to visit. It's still not an easy topic with them, but it is getting better.

*What about my child(ren)'s friends?*

- Sage and Piper both decide which of their friends to tell and what to say to them. Sage told me some of her friends are initially taken aback, but after a few minutes of explanation, they generally accept the idea and even find it quite interesting. This may be because we have a lot of progressive friends, but I find that we all tend to overthink others' reactions with regards to polyamory. It's also okay to coach your kids in saying things like, "I'd rather not talk about my parents' personal lives" or "That's private" in response to prying questions.

*How do I support my child(ren) when a partner leaves?*

- It can help to give them some advance warning and reassure them that it won't change your relationship with them. Give them space to express their feelings and/or ask questions and, if possible, some control around whether or how they can stay in contact with your soon-to-be-ex-partner, if they choose.

*How will polyamory affect children's later relationships?*

- Time will tell, but if you will allow me to kvell for a moment, I really enjoyed two things Sage said when I asked her this question. First she said she is currently experimenting with serial monogamy (with both male and female partners) and that "it's just simpler and "sort of like putting on training wheels" with regards to developing romantic relationships. I thought this was quite wise. And second, she said it is all about creating relationships that work for you and your partner(s) rather than relying on labels and cultural rules and norms. In fact, she and her BFF have talked about living together platonically, but having other romantic relationships. I later learned this was actually common in the 19th and early 20th centuries and was called a "Boston Marriage." What I love is that Sage intends to consciously create her relationships!

*Do you encourage your children to develop bonds with your lovers? How?*

- Of course! My daughters have enjoyed cooking, eating, and even cleaning up together as well as playing games and taking trips. It gives our children opportunities to have more adults in their lives and to feel comfortable with our lifestyle.

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Children can add a lot of complexity in communal households and polyamorous relationships, but they also add a lot of meaning and opportunities to create new "stories" for ourselves and, hopefully, future generations. For me, polyamory and communal living are about breaking down barriers to intimacy and recognizing our fundamental interbeingness with each other and all life. If children within such households grow up with an expanded sense of family and love, then I think we are helping the world move towards greater abundance and compassion. 🌈

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*Art is a sustainability educator, serial social entrepreneur (you'd think he'd learn), ecovillage ring leader, on too many boards, holder of a Ph.D. in child psychology, mediocre guitar player, vegetarian for more than 35 years, and audiobook narrator. This article is adapted from a blog post published August 9, 2016 at [consciouspolyamory.org/?s=the+kids+are+alright](https://consciouspolyamory.org/?s=the+kids+are+alright).*

*Featured is a drawing that Piper did of our polyamorous family in December of 2015 (from left to right: Morgaine, Lance, Art, Guin, Piper, Sage).*

# “Come Play on Our Lawn”: Seniors-Only Communities and the Generation Gap

By Alan O’Hashi

Intentional communities point to intergenerational relationships among kids and elders as exemplary social assets. Plenty of research shows that having strong relationships with neighbors is a hedge against loneliness. Older adults with close connections with young people, either their relatives or neighbor kids, consistently have better physical health, indicate their memories are sharper, and generally experience happier lives.

If having children around is such a great thing, why do some seniors, including myself, seek out age-segregated living arrangements?

Maybe the “Generation Gap” doesn’t close with some people, especially when the gap spans two or three generations. Those gaps are defined as differences in opinions between kids and their parents and grandparents about cultural or political beliefs, or social mores. It’s an age-old conflict.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II wrote a musical called *The Flower Drum Song* that had a long Broadway run

starting in 1958. One of the songs is about what the traditional Chinese older generation is going to do about the rebellious kids assimilating into American society who speak a language that their elders can’t understand.

The generation gap was also the theme of *Bye Bye Birdie*, a musical that opened in 1960. One of the stodgy parents, Mr. MacAfee, laments that kids are corrupted by rock ’n’ roll music, turning them into disrespectful, loud, and lazy sluggards. He wonders why kids can’t be like he was, “perfect in every way.”

I was born smack dab into the Baby Boomer generation and the source of conflict for these two musicals. We all came into the world somewhere between 1946 and 1964. We’re now aging rebellious whippersnappers, comprise 30 percent of the population, and around 10,000 rock ’n’ rollers who turn 65 every day. I can’t speak for anyone else, but I don’t think I turned out to be as big of a deadbeat as I could have been. I did become fonder of Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass than of Elvis, for example.



Photos by Alan O’Hashi

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## It's always a benefit to me when I'm around the younger visitors. Their energy is an excellent addition that complements our day-to-day stodginess.

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Since people live longer, I'm sure there's a gap between two generations that exists today and is why there are senior-only housing configurations. I live in one that's a 16-unit cohousing community in Boulder, Colorado. Around 30 of us, mostly Baby Boomers, own our condos but have agreed on a set of values to create a neighborhood by sharing in the upkeep and maintenance of the common spaces like the courtyard gardens.

The Baby Boomer founders of my community had the time and money to invest in traditional cohousing. These communities take years to build at the cost of millions of dollars. This form of cohousing is unaffordable to most people. There's a national shortage of lower-cost housing.

Many seniors have the accumulated or inherited wealth that provides them more choices about where they want to live and have the luxury to pick places where there aren't kids around, at least all the time, to bug them. There's been massive growth in senior housing and a continually growing demand.

The founders of my place were all self-selected older people. If they had kids, they were off on their own. Some moved here to be closer to their families. Over time, there has been an 80 percent turnover. A few homes have been resold two or three times. All the new residents have continued to be over 60, and none have had children at home.

I don't have kids of my own, and the pluses and minuses of having kids around or not haven't crossed my mind. My kids were always other people's kids who weren't around all the time. Age restrictions are a mystery to me, and I don't understand why old people yell at youngsters to "Get off my lawn!"

Now that the average age here is 74 years, the community recently came to a consensus around changing the Home Owner Association (HOA) declarations to restrict the age of residents and qualify as a government-sanctioned "senior community" under the Housing for Older Persons Act (HOPA). Therefore we're now exempt from the Fair Housing Act prohibition against age discrimination based on familial status.

HOPA requires at least 80 percent of the homes to be occupied by at least one person 55 or older, eliminating most families with school-aged kids. In addition to the 20 percent of homes that can (but don't need to) have younger residents, other loopholes allow more youthful people and families to live here.

The only speculation I can make about why advocates want-

ed to formalize the age restrictions is about transparency. When owners put their condos up for sale, our place was called a "senior community," which technically and legally, it wasn't.

There have been younger people living here, including two strapping young high school-aged grandsons. They fit in pretty well by participating in day-to-day community life, mixed with occasional boisterous behavior. I'm not sure the degree to which neighbors help discipline other people's kids, but that's a discussion I imagine multi-generational communities have.

Some residents have grandkids who visit and have supervised run of the place. None have fallen down the stairs or stuck their hand on the stove, "Don't touch that. It's hot!" So far, there haven't been any young people around here who are as disruptive as I was when I was their age.

It's always a benefit to me when I'm around the younger visitors. The other day, two girls tried out their amazing card trick on several of the neighbors. Even if I don't have direct contact with any of them, their energy is an excellent addition that complements our day-to-day stodginess.

Cohousing often comes up in small talk. An interested person will ask me where I live. I don't reference the ages of the cohort members who reside here.

"Don't you live in a senior cohousing community?" people wonder.

"The average age here is 74, and I'm the fourth-youngest at 68," is my response. "We have an elevator for some of us who have a hard time with the stairs."

The curious get the picture.

My community includes six condos that are permanently affordable and deed-restricted by the City of Boulder's affordable housing program and sold to eligible applicants selected by lottery. Qualified applicants have their names in a hat, and a City staff member draws the lucky buyer's name. If the winner is under 55 years of age, that person could fall into the 20 percent who don't need to be over 55.

In the 11 years I've been in the community, no younger person or family has been interested in living here. When a condo goes on the market, the realtor organizes formal open house events. The HOA requires prospective buyers to go through an orientation process that explains resident expectations.

Prospective buyers learn "What is Cohousing," which includes how residents participate on teams that operate the day-to-day business, like gardening, monitoring the finances, changing lightbulbs, and washing the soiled dinner napkins. Prospective buyers get a hands-on feel for the community by attending a full community meeting and dining at a community meal.

We've had younger people and families show some interest but get a feel for the community when they have dinner with us. Do you know those TV ads about the consultant who teaches GenXers how not to be like their parents? We're the parents, "You know when I was your age ..."

Conversations around the dinner table at an intergenerational community are about diseases like chickenpox and pediatricians. At my place, we talk about shingles and geriatricians. We do draw the line when it comes to discussing diapers.

“You know, your menu has a typo in one of the listings,” I mentioned to the young waiter at a restaurant the other day when I caught myself being my mom.

Then there’s the sticker shock.

In this area, some older folks and young adults have more in common than they think. By some estimates, up to two-thirds of renters across the nation say they can’t afford to buy a home.

Since home prices are rising at a rate twice that of wage growth, saving up for that down payment is an even bigger challenge. Millennials and GenXers with high student debt are in this boat, as are some older folks who were unable to build any extra savings for one reason or another.

Multigenerational communities in the future may develop not because of life experience but forced together out of necessity. At least the evidence shows that everyone benefits from having neighbors of all ages, including kids, around.

In a sense, all cohousing communities are senior communities. Cohousing has been around long enough that kids are now grown and out on their own, leaving empty nesters. Unfortunately, for many young people, say, under 50, the prospects of aging aren’t on their radar screens.

It isn’t until the “Join AARP” membership cards start arriving in the mail and phone calls come from parents in the hospital announcing, “I fell down and can’t get up,” that they begin to take notice.

Now’s the time for multigenerational communities to start planning for the days when they become naturally occurring

senior communities. At my place, I’ve watched 12 of the original 16 founding households move out or pass away. One of our workgroups, the Community Enhancement Team, organizes annual “Next-Gen” parties.

This summer, we’ve had three of these family networking events. We all invite over our friends, kids, and grandkids, who may be our future caregivers. The idea is to introduce them to the community, so they can meet the residents and become aware of the neighborly support provided and how formal and informal caregiving intersects. While children won’t be here all the time, they will at least be familiar with the surroundings, and the neighbors and youngsters are welcome to play on our lawn.

I’ve updated my will and filled out the paperwork to let the community know about my emergency contacts should I keel over. I knew I was getting old, but I didn’t think it would happen this fast.

There may be a gap between a generation or two. Still, if senior communities plan to have kids and younger folks around at least part of the time, young people have a place with their elders and can share in the mutual benefits of each other’s company.

By the way, has anyone seen my keys? 🗝️

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*Alan O’Hashi is President of the board of directors of the Cohousing Association of the US. For more of his writings, please visit [alanohashi.wordpress.com](http://alanohashi.wordpress.com).*



# Intergenerational Community: My Bruderhof Experience

*By Maureen Swinger*



Stepping out of my apartment door was like hopping a riverboat on an angular, adventurous river, and as a six-year-old, I hopped it almost every evening. You might have too, if you lived on the fourth floor of what used to be Gorley's Lake Hotel, a gigantic old building that had seen its share of dazzling young flappers and stogie-puffing steel magnates in its 1920s ballroom days, but had since settled down to become school, offices, church, laundry, and dwellings for dozens of families and singles when the house and surrounding property became a Bruderhof community in 1957.

(It may help to interject that the Bruderhof is an Anabaptist community movement that began in Germany just over 100 years ago. There are about 30 communities on four continents; perhaps our most recognizable feature is that we live in communal villages, sharing income and material goods, much as described in the book of Acts in the New Testament.)

Our Lake Hotel, now prosaically called the Main House, still boasted an elegant old-world elevator which my brothers and I were not averse to trying out when no one more worthy needed it. But worthies there were; the fourth floor was home to many grandparents we claimed as our own. While my parents were busy tending to my brother Duane, who had profound special needs, the rest of us would go roaming.

First stop, Grace Rhoads, who was sorting through her pressed flowers and wanted to know what we'd been up to today. We didn't know her own story at the time. Born into an extremely wealthy Quaker family, she had majored in English literature at Bryn Mawr with a side of sports and poetry, graduated cum laude, and studied international relations in Geneva. She did relief work with the American Friends Service Committee, joined Pierre Ceresole's work camp movement, and was a secretary for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Somewhere in there, she learned how to fly a plane. But she was more interested in hearing about our adventures. A six-year-old doesn't always know that if they flip the question, they might get a real story.

Opposite Grace's door stood Hazel Brownson's; they were old friends. Hazel was tiny and frail, hardly taller than a child. But she could play Scott Joplin ragtime till even the piano wanted to dance. She told us she was orphaned at age seven, started piano at 11, and earned money for college by making music once a week for silent movies at the town hall, "changing rapidly from thunderstorms, to weddings, to news reports. I earned 50

cents a night."

Some evenings, our whole family would travel farther down the hall to visit Hermann Arnold, an elderly widower who was losing his memory. He would smile, offer the occasional scattered German words, and start small wind-up toys jumping in all directions from his huge carpenter's hands. We would jump gleefully after them, as my parents sat in companionable silence with Hermann. Then we'd circle up to sing a few goodnight songs, perhaps in our best practiced German, before whooshing out the door, and, like as not, whooshing back to return a wind-up frog that had somehow found its way into Brendan's pocket.

Hermann's father had been killed in World War I, shortly before his son was born. Hermann joined the Storm Troopers as a teenager, but while visiting Bruderhof relatives at age 18, he found something far greater to give his life to. Within a month, he had quit the Nazi Party and joined the Bruderhof, a decision that would get him thrown out of his homeland (along with the rest of the community) by Storm Troopers in the not-too-distant future. He later married Liesel, a young woman who had been adopted by a Bruderhof family as a child, and together they made

the sojourn to England, and then on to Paraguay, the only nation that would accept a mixed group of German, English, Jewish, and other nationalities who were determined to live out peaceful Christian community in the middle of a World War.

Still further down this hallway lived Werner Birchmeier, but he was almost never home. We were more likely to find him planting a tree and making the ground beautiful around it, always glancing up from under his off-kilter beret with a chuckle and commentary in a thick French accent. We sometimes tried to copy the accent, out of earshot—it sounded so exotic. He looked like he belonged in a painting. No, he looked like he was a painter. And perhaps he was, in his gentle way—a lifelong beautifier of the world. Werner was born in Bandol, France, on the Mediterranean, and trained as a gardener in Geneva. Speaking hardly a word

of German and no English, he joined a movement where very few people spoke French, trusting in love and service to translate where words fell short.

Johanna Vrijling's door had a pair of wooden shoes over it. The second daughter of a Dutch pacifist socialist, Johanna was born a two-pound preemie with cerebral palsy, and the doctor told her parents just to keep her comfortable till she died. Instead, her father put her in a shoe box with cotton wool and a hot water bottle, and fed her sugar water night and day for two straight weeks while her mother recovered from the difficult birth. Her family's fierce love and determination taught her to hold up her head, then crawl, then walk. "Papa said it was time to pack my chair in the attic. I learned to stand. I fell down a hundred times. My father knew a little about Judo self-defense, and he taught me how to fall safely, how to master myself, and keep myself in control."

By the time we knew her, in her 70s, indomitable Johanna was beginning to need a chair again. But her eyes flashed and her hands dive-bombed over our heads while we ducked and listened spellbound.

She described how when she was 12, her father lost his job and was forced to work for the German army "like slave labor," ferrying ammunition to key river ports. The family suffered much in the many months without him, so he decided to bring them all on board his barge; at least he could keep them together and fed. But some of their river routes in Germany led right through the war being waged in the sky. Johanna recalled when a plane was shot down overhead and came down in three sections—one in front of their barge, one behind, and one directly beside it.

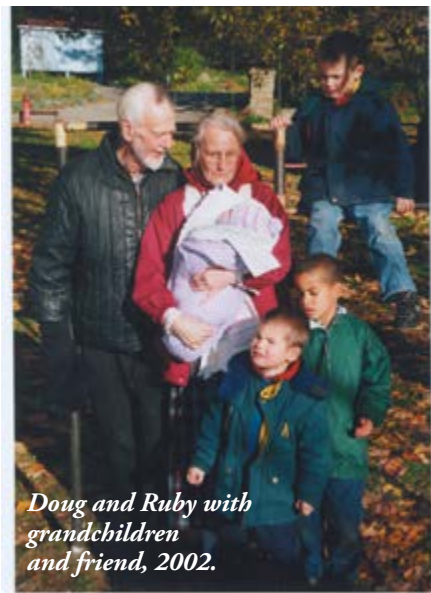
Finally they found a way to "put a spoke in Hitler's wheel"—on one journey, car-



*Hazel and friends, 1958.*



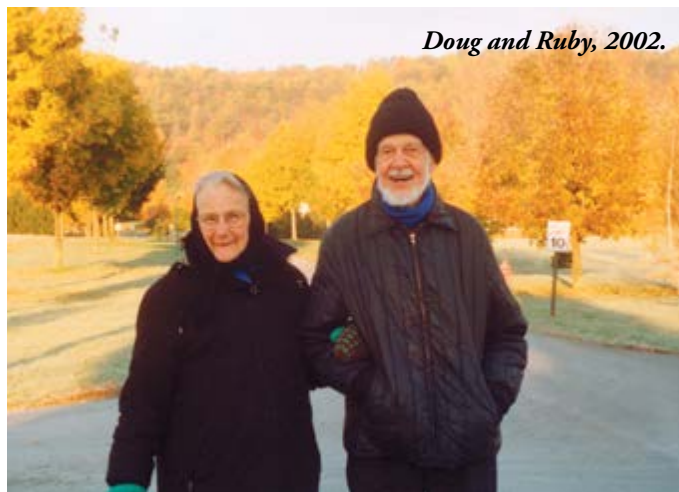
*Grace, 1938.*



*Doug and Ruby with grandchildren and friend, 2002.*



*Doug and Ruby, 1961.*



*Doug and Ruby, 2002.*



rying “a million marks’ worth of airplane machinery,” they poled their barge through a narrow canal to a small pond, where they anchored under the trees and camped without anyone noticing for almost a year. The aircraft parts never reached their destination. She ended that memory with a glorious guffaw: “The Germans must have thought we were lost or sunk or something.”

With such bedtime stories in my head, I didn’t go to sleep as soon as I might have. But as far as I was concerned, Johanna was a superhero. Judo shoulder-rolls! Living on a barge! Kidnapping Nazi aircraft parts! And what an amazing hero for a child to have.

All along this river-hallway, and among the other houses and pathways of a community village, lives cross and overlap in shorter or longer passages of time. On the way to and from school, as we work or play or worship or share a meal with 200 others—adopted relatives—the stories weave through each other. Joy and grief and daily frustrations become shared entities.

The framework of our community wouldn’t hold together if not for the faith at its center. Whatever drew each person with a unique story to this way of life, what keeps us here is what holds all of it together, Jesus’ central prayer, “May they all be one.” Much has been written about the inner core of this way of life (see [Brudershof.com/foundations](http://Brudershof.com/foundations) if interested), but as we’re considering intergenerational living, it must be said that the joys of community seem to shine most brightly at both ends

of the age spectrum: put kids and old people together and good things happen.

Annoying things can happen too, because if you have that many grandparents, they all have the right to tell you to slow down your bike before you knock somebody over; could you please hold the door for that group of 16 folks coming in to lunch, and oh, I saw you squabbling with your brother; is that how we are with each other? (The answer is not Yes. It’s not worth trying that.)

Teens may not appreciate it. How many teens want input from their parents, let alone other helpful people who have loved them since they were in diapers? As a teen, I used to moan to my mom about the amount of advice I got on how to live my life. But there comes a time when you look back and recognize all those tips and talks and corrections for what they are. Why do all these random people care about how I turn out?

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So far, this has been a little one-sided; a catalog of the blessings I received during my childhood in a uniquely international community. But surely the river that dumped me and my siblings and other young families into the living rooms of elderly residents gifted them as well. Grace, Hazel, Werner, Johanna—none of them had close relatives, or children of their own. We were their kids. We knocked over knick-knacks and spilled juice and said tactless things, but we also sang their favorite songs and listened to their stories, sometimes appreciating only much later what adversities lay behind the adventures. As we grew to be young adults, we had the opportunity to become caregivers to people we already knew and respected, becoming walk companions, breakfast chefs, errand runners, or wheelchair power, and learning to take on more care as each person needed or asked for it.

Ruby Moody, my seventh grade teacher (the one who told me I could write and had better get going and do so), reached back to her own Swedish childhood when she taught our class about the Santa Lucia tradition, where children with candles bring spiced rolls and a beautiful song into people’s houses one early morning a few days before Christmas. She must have taught the song to each of her classes over the decades. I remember balancing the candle crown on my head as she ushered our group around to all our houses to carol out the song and drop off our carefully baked cinnamon rolls.

Twenty years later, my husband and I, two months married, would be looking after Ruby and her husband Doug in their last months of life. They had professional medical care, but we were asked to be the live-in team that saw to their meals, errands, housecleaning, and so on. The so-on was the most important part: companionship, time.

Newlyweds and octogenarians—that was a new dance for both parties. We managed to step on each other’s toes a few times. We weren’t always where they needed us when



they needed us, or we miscalculated the amount of time it might take to get to a communal gathering at a considerate speed. Sometimes we planned out a good schedule together, but forgot to write it down. There were no great practical challenges; it was a matter of awareness, of putting their needs and concerns first.

Sometimes I wished for more time alone with my new husband. There were days when I asked myself, “Where did our newlywed time go?” And yet there were more evenings when I looked at Ruby and Doug sitting side by side, reading aloud to each other or quietly thinking and smiling together, needing not a word between them, when I thought, “Our newlywed time is right here, getting schooled by the pros.”

We started and ended our days together with a reading and a prayer; sometimes Doug had a pointer or two for us; sometimes Ruby and I talked books for an hour past bedtime.

She had trouble sleeping through the night, and once she spoke of the three babies she had lost to stillbirth with such a longing voice, as if she didn't feel far from them now. When she had a final stroke, and no longer spoke or turned her head, it still seemed as if she was listening quietly, waiting. Sitting by her bed and holding her hand, I wondered how many children owed her thanks not just for introducing them to the wonder of good words, but to good actions too, actions that brought light with them into dim rooms. Though it was a late May evening with the lilacs in full bloom, the Santa Lucia song was in my head, so I sang it.

*Night soon swift wing shall take o'er earth once darkened,*

*We to the words she spake in wonder harken.*

*Now shall another morn from rosy skies be born.*

*Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia!*

Night did take wing for Ruby. Her family came to gather around her bed and she died in her sleep around 11:00 that night.

Doug outlived her by a few months, growing more austere and turning inward. Even though he had family next door, he was unhappy if we were out in the evenings; it was like the breaking of a contract to read and pray together. So we stayed close, treasuring his trust. He often spoke about Ruby, of the many ways he knew he would miss her, and all the little things that still surprised him every day about her absence. He named all the others he had worked and served beside in common cause. We felt impossibly young and inadequate to find the right words to comfort him, yet honored to listen and wait with him until it was time to join them all. He grew weaker and more frail, until his time came in the season of Advent, just after Santa Lucia Day.

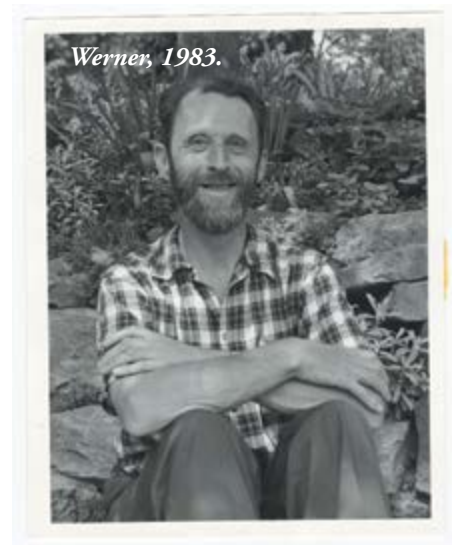
We were expecting our first child (she would be born in late May—lilac time) and again, I felt the river beneath us, carrying a daughter into our lives as it carried another

generation on.

I want my kids to have many grandparents who guide them and love them, and whom they can love and trust in return. We don't always know who our companions are going to be, or how long we get to travel together. But we're on the same river, and it's heading to the same sea. 🌊

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*Maureen Swinger is an editor at Plough Publishing House and Plough Quarterly Magazine, and lives at the Fox Hill Bruderhof in Walden, New York, with her husband, Jason, and their three children. (See [plough.com](http://plough.com), [plough.com/en/subscriptions/quarterly](http://plough.com/en/subscriptions/quarterly), and [bruderhof.com/en/where-we-are/united-states/fox-hill](http://bruderhof.com/en/where-we-are/united-states/fox-hill).)*



# A Culture of Song: Children and Music in Community

By Esther Keiderling

I cannot read music or sing within range of any specific note on command. Actually, my only musical gift is the unusual number of songs I've memorized. My repertoire goes beyond the Billboard Hot 100—even beyond "The Wheels on the Bus." I am lucky to be born into a culture of singing.

I live at the Fox Hill Bruderhof community and as on many other Bruderhofs, everyone in the community sings at least one song a day all together. We sing as a prayer to start communal lunch and our evening services usually end with six, eight, or even 10 songs. People yell out the titles or page numbers of songs they want to suggest. Then anyone can begin the song on any key they choose. Sometimes we have an accompanying piano, and sometimes we depend on our musical brothers and sisters.

Often, we don't even use a songbook, though we try to provide books for visitors who might feel as though they are left out of the in-group. For instance, at an evening gathering, the person who had been leading the service might say, "Let's end the meeting by singing 'The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended.'" Even with no words or music to look at, hundreds of people will start singing in harmony—all five verses of a hymn written in 1870.

On the Bruderhof, we know songs like this one only after thousands of repetitions. We've been hearing them since before we were born. There are several songbooks we use for different occasions. Some of these songbooks contain finger games, seasonal children's songs, and a variety of birthday songs besides the ubiquitous "Happy Birthday to You." We also have a whole book just for Easter songs and another book for Christmas.

Bruderhof families often sing together at the beginning or end of breakfast and family dinner. When I was a child, my family had a tradition of singing every day at 6 p.m. This was our time for gathering and settling down for the night. My oldest brother started learning guitar when he was eight and chord progression seemed to come naturally to him. He could sing and play at the same time and my other siblings and I would join in. There were certain songs we loved and sang many times. Often my parents tried teaching us a new song or two. The songs could be either folksy or religious and we usually based our approval on fun lyrics and whether or not we could stomp our feet in rhythm while singing, probably annoying our downstairs neighbors intensely.

Since my parents taught us to love singing, we were ready to embrace the communal singing whenever we encountered it. When I attended communal gatherings in my childhood I

would sometimes hear all the adults sing a song together during a service and I wouldn't know it. I would listen carefully and hum along to some words like "love" and "joy" that I could predict would show up in the song. Next time I heard the song I would know a few more of the words. That's how the oral tradition worked for me and why I can sing along to songs in "the blue book" (our standard book for all seasons) without being able to read music.

Communal singing is one way to integrate the smallest children in a community into worship. A little child probably won't understand a lengthy Bible passage or heartfelt commentary about faith, but singing is fun and can help illustrate important truths and imprint them onto children's memories. Since I was a child, I've always loved Christmas because the song repertoire is so much more upbeat and lively than the Easter songs. There are songs of celebration—lots of running shepherds, and cheerful tunes about Santa Claus and "the little baker man across the street." But one Christmas song would always make me cry: "O, Poor Little Jesus." The melody and lyrics combined to somehow help me understand that Jesus' birth did not happen in a hospital or even in a nice bed at the inn as it should have. There was no place to lay his head. Until I was in about fourth grade, by the second verse of that song I would usually have to leave the room.

O, poor little Jesus,  
This world's gonna break your heart.  
There'll be no place to lay your head, my Lord.  
O, poor little Jesus.

O, Mary, she the mother,  
O, Mary, she bow down and cry,  
For there's no place to lay his head, my Lord.  
O, poor little Jesus.

Come down, all you holy angels,  
Sing round him with your golden harps,  
For some day he will die to save this world.  
O, poor little Jesus.

—*African American Spiritual*

In my experience, singing has an emotional impact on almost everyone. I've actually met quite a few adults who have songs that make them cry. Often people cry about songs because of

an association to some event, but there are other songs that are so haunting and beautiful that they associate with something in their subconscious and they find themselves in tears without really knowing why.

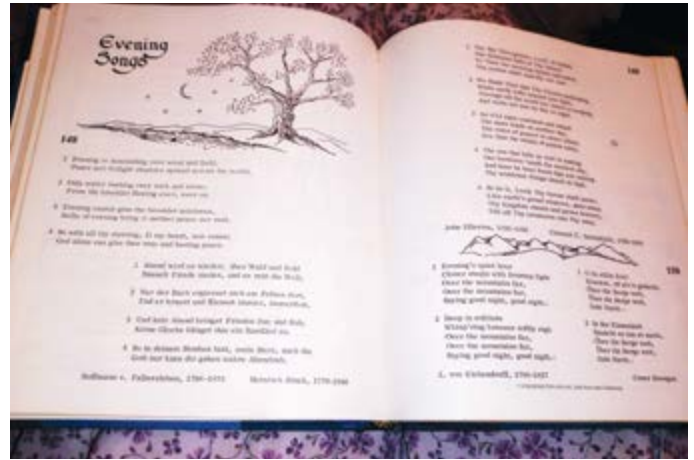
Of course, for me and most other people, joy, not tears is the objective of singing. I have often sung on my own to guide myself through dark places in life and somehow it always seems to uplift me. I wondered if it could be oxygen entering my brain and making me feel more alive. I'm not sure how or why singing makes me happy, but it does.

There are several studies about the benefits of singing—whether singing reduces cortisol and whether it releases endorphins. As with many concepts that get studied, the data about singing from some studies contradicts data from other studies. But even the widespread desire to study singing scientifically shows me that other people notice something exciting about it.

I don't think anyone really needs to collect saliva from singers and test for lowered cortisol levels. If anything would increase cortisol levels in people, it would be the knowledge that they were participating in a scientific study. The way all of us can measure the benefits of singing is to sing more, preferably in community with other people. 🐦

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Photos courtesy of Esther Keiderling

# Pioneering Community

By Chant Thomas



*University aquatic ecology class meets at Trillium Community Farm.*



*Orion Society Forgotten Language Tour.*

**Note:** In COMMUNITIES #187 (Summer 2020) Tomi Hazel and Megan Fehrman described how the Little Applegate and greater Applegate Valley in southwestern Oregon have evolved into strong communities, attracting many new younger people who have started organic farms, ranches, and formed intentional communities. In this article, longtime activist Chant Thomas describes how he and other communitarians first arrived in the Applegate in the mid-1970s to homestead and start several businesses and a conservation group to protect the environment and beautiful landscapes that would attract more liberal newcomers during the ensuing decades.

So, your collection of wannabe intentional community homesteaders has reached an enthusiastic critical mass for folks and funding, and now your question is, “Where do we purchase our Land?” For various reasons, you’ve decided not to live in an expensive rural area, closer to town; an area fast morphing into “rural-burbia” dotted with McMansions and gated estates. You decide to settle farther out, where there’s less traffic, cleaner air and water, more scenic landscapes; where Land is more affordable, not yet discovered by well-heeled retirees and digital nomads. But as you familiarize yourselves and search for the right Land in your chosen region, you realize that folks out there are pretty different, a conservative breed of longtime residents mostly working their Land as farmers, ranchers, loggers, and miners. Looks like you’re about to become rural pioneers in a somewhat foreign social culture.

As our group of a dozen new communitarians settled into our unprecedented life together on an old trout farm, surrounded by federal lands, way up a wilderness canyon in the Siskiyou Mountains, we hardly knew where to first focus our attention. This was 1976, and only a few pioneering counterculture homesteaders had landed in the Applegate Valley, a rural backwater in southwest Oregon, still populated primarily by ranching, logging, and mining families who had lived there for generations. Our newborn intentional community in the Little Applegate

River canyon quickly realized that we needed to meet and make however many friendships we could among the conservative people of the Land downstream, where the canyon opened up into an exquisitely petite pastoral valley, and the river flowed on to its confluence with the Upper Applegate River.

We soon discovered what a daunting challenge it would be to insert ourselves into the social fabric of standoffish old-timers wary of recent arrivals, especially people who looked like me with my long hair, massive beard, tie-dye shirts, and the edge of an eco-activist. Fortunately I had already earned the friendship of the old folks who sold us the locally revered Grandma’s Trout Farm, and financed it to boot, but only after I made many treks out to the canyon and apprenticed myself to “Uncle” Mike, learning the trade of raising trout, working an amazing locally famous sawmill he built from scratch, and mastering the complicated water systems and management of a dozen ponds. Mike provided essential advice regarding who to reach out to in the local community, and who to wait for a ripe opportunity or chance encounter. He also pointed out that we had good prospects of making local friends, because “most local rednecks love trout fishing and need logs sawed for lumber!”

The summer before, my spouse, brother, and I lived at an informal intentional community on the Upper Applegate River, while investigating our chosen region in detail. I joined a couple guys living there and two local friends in forming the Co-operative Forest Workers, an outfit that bid on and won reforestation contracts and other types of forest work. Pay was excellent for the hard labor in raw clearcuts, and recently arrived homesteaders found work through the co-op, earning enough money in a few months to purchase 10, 20, or even 40 acres of cutover timberland for \$50 to \$100 per acre. Our forest co-op continued to grow and the following year scores of new wannabe hipster homesteaders joined as we fielded over 100 workers on various tree planting, firebreak, trail maintenance, and other contracts. The social composition of our little conservative valley began to

change as more liberal newcomers purchased or leased Land and commenced to homestead, mostly in remote corners and canyons far from grid power, telephones, downstream populations, and the Man.

When our group of communitarians became stewards of Trillium Trout Farm on May Day 1976, most of us arrived that first day and walked around in a daze. That first night taught us that a big priority was to construct more housing. Other new homesteaders were looking for alternatives to buying new lumber and materials.

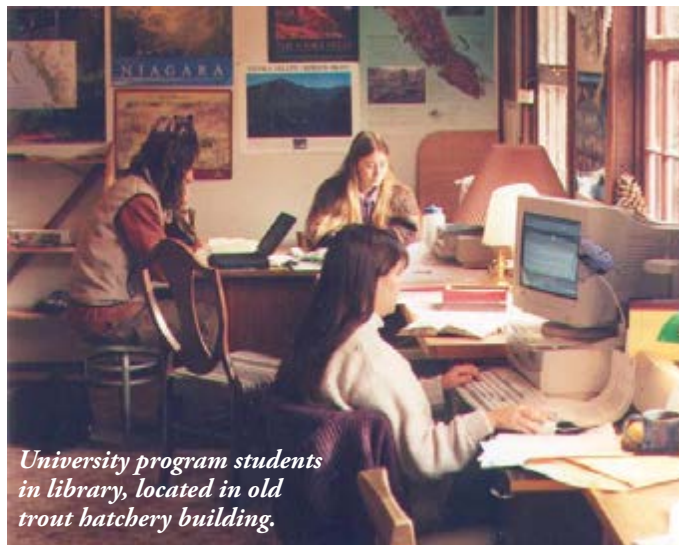
Within months of Trillium's birth, a community brother and I formed Karma Builders, a licensed contracting company that soon found a niche dismantling and salvaging residential and commercial buildings in the Rogue Valley. We upcycled the building materials and fixtures into new construction and remodels at Trillium, and sold even more materials to other new homesteaders to facilitate building their homes and out-buildings. Soon Karma Builders had contracts to dismantle many buildings, entire blocks, as downtown Medford razed neighborhoods of stately Victorians and Craftsman style houses lit by the torches of urban renewal. We began subbing out entire buildings to local homesteaders and friends from the cluster of intentional communities in Takilma, a hamlet along the Illinois River, a couple hours' drive away.

Southwestern Oregon was humming with this new underground economy of forest work, cheap Land, and upcycled building materials for making a home. In the Applegate, a community Help Build movement began to help families and older couples move into refurbished homesteads before cold weather set in. Over a weekend, trucks loaded with tools and supplies, lots of workers and family members would converge on a shabby rental. One crew would re-roof the house while another installed storm windows and another unloaded a couple cords of firewood while others cleaned the chimney and repaired the stove. Outside, some guys ran deer fence around a garden while others in the garden dug beds, planted fruit trees and roses. Meanwhile an enormous potluck banquet came together in the house and outside in a portable field kitchen. Still others ran herd on clusters of rampaging children, all jazzed by having so many in one place! Meanwhile, back at Trillium, I

eased into a seasonal flow of raising trout in the winter, spring forest work with the co-op, summers in scorching hot town tearing down buildings, and autumn harvests, celebrations, and long hikes through golden forests and prepping cross-country skis in anticipation of winter snows.

Working in those clearcuts and on forest timber stand-exam contracts was illuminating for me, casting my attention to the machinations of forest management on federal lands. The pace of clearcutting and subsequent aerial applications of toxic herbicides such as Agent Orange, left over from the Vietnam War, increased drastically in the 1970s. "Management" plans for our Little Applegate River Watershed included cutting most of the old-growth federal forests, drenching clearcuts with more herbicides, building a dam on the river (one on the Upper Applegate River was nearing completion), maximizing cattle allotments, and strip-mining the most beautiful mountain, the source of our river up on the Siskiyou Crest.

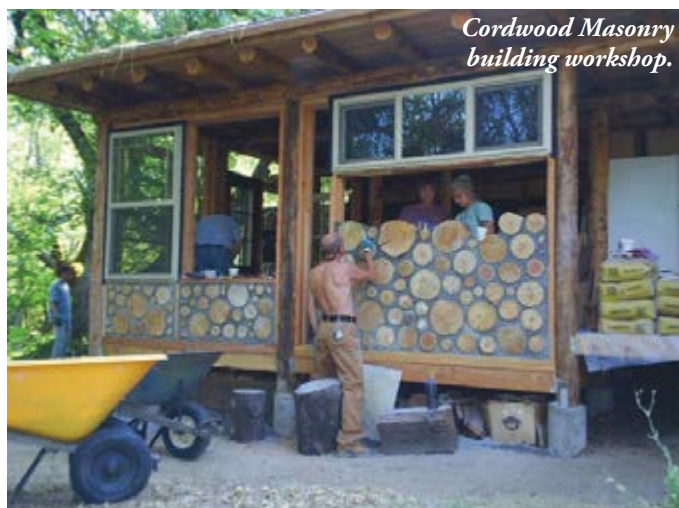
A few neighbors downstream, including author Richard Bach and his movie star wife Leslie Parrish, helped me form a grassroots watershed environmental activist group: Threatened and Endangered Little Applegate Valley (TELAV). None of us wanted to see our beloved Little Applegate turn into an industrial resource extraction sacrifice zone, as had happened to



*University program students in library, located in old trout hatchery building.*



*Students from Trillium's university program on a Litter Patrol service day.*



*Cordwood Masonry building workshop.*

Photos courtesy of Chant Thomas

*Adopting a road for Litter Patrol is an excellent way for a new community to establish some notoriety by doing something apolitical that most every local and visitor can support.*



so many once beautiful areas of southwestern Oregon. TELAV successfully challenged timber sales, stopped the dam, retired an enormous grazing allotment, and jump-started an effort to maintain and expand the wonderful trail system in our proposed Wilderness. At Trillium Trout Farm, we understood that the extended community we envisioned would more likely manifest if the mountains remained beautifully forested, the river clean and clear, and more recreation amenities were realized. We knew people like us, people who valued powerful wild Nature, would not want to homestead in an industrial sacrifice zone.

Yet, even with our forest co-op providing many seasonal jobs, we still lacked adequate social and economic infrastructure to bolster our extended community of newcomers. Many of the new families had children, but there were no local alternatives to public schools. We had to drive 60-90 minutes to Ashland, a liberal arts and college town, to buy good food at the food co-op, and find venues to socialize. A new arrival at Trillium Community Farm (we had stopped raising trout) was a Montessori teacher who began planning for us to host a school on our Land. We knew with a school, we would attract more families to Trillium, now under-populated after several original founding members had departed.

Still, we yearned for a central vortex here in the Applegate. One hot day on my way home from town, I stopped by the Outpost, a general store and gas station in Ruch, a tiny hamlet 13 miles downriver. Hot and sweaty, I purchased a cold beer for refreshment and took my place with locals as the only long-haired bearded man on the benches outside, a local social vortex. One of

the owners saw me there and called me over for a chat.

I was a familiar face as she and her family rented our Co-operative Forest Workers an old trailer behind the store to serve as our office. She explained to me that her family had decided that she, her husband, and children were going to move back to Los Angeles, where her husband was offered his old high-paying job in the oil industry. His parents would stay behind to manage the trailer park behind the store and the laundromat across the large parking lot.

She asked me if I would be interested in renting part of the Outpost complex: the store with its old-timey milkshake burger bar, the four-bedroom upstairs apartment, the gas station, the single bay auto mechanic space next to the store, another large building housing the valley's only machine shop and heavy equipment repair shop, and another office trailer next door. Surprised and flattered, I told her I was interested. She replied that her family had decided my business style and work ethic made me their first candidate, and she encouraged me to decide within a couple weeks before they would advertise the place for lease.

Whew! What an opportunity! Usually I would have been so busy with Karma Builders and the Forest Co-op that I would have become overwhelmed just thinking about this opportunity. But as it was I had only recently become mobile along the long road of recuperation from a compression fracture to my back. Not able to do any physical or heavy work, I had time on my hands. I checked in with my Trillium communitarians, who basically said, "Go for it!" By then I had already envisioned a natural food co-op with attached solar greenhouse, an organic deli in the store, a community center in the apartment upstairs, and a hippie mechanic in the shop. We would also operate the largest gas station in the Applegate, which stretched downstream into Josephine County.

I reached out to many different folks and soon had more than enough funds to take over the facility, buy insurance, pay a deposit and first three months of the lease, buy the first tanker truck of gasoline and diesel, and order the first truckload of organic natural food to sell in the store.

I figured to keep renting the big repair machine shop to the excellent tenant, making yet another connection with the local community, and with many of the ranchers, loggers, and miners whose equipment the shop serviced. I formed a nonprofit aptly named Common Ground to manage the Outpost, and invited a diverse group of locals to sit on the board.

Our Outpost General Store Co-op opened on September 1st and rapidly grew into a vortex of "common ground." The picnic table in the greenhouse we built would often simultaneously seat locals and newer arrivals munching and visiting while they did laundry, along with a couple camo-clad Vietnam War vets who grew pot way up a canyon, senior citizens from the trailer park visiting, and/or a few fundamentalist Christians studying their bibles. Several members of Trillium and other young homesteaders were hired to run the store and gas station. The burly dudes waiting for their heavy equipment to be ready at the shop would stroll into the store to assess how we had changed it, grumbling that we no longer sold cigarettes, had ejected the Coke machine, stocked only microbrew beers, and

no longer served burgers or frankfurters in the deli. We were likely the first natural food co-op in Oregon to have a liquor license, as required by the landlord family.

Ditto for the only co-op that operated a gas station! Lots of ranchers and logging outfits had charge accounts for gas and diesel. So we became quickly acquainted as I let them know we would continue the practice of offering them a monthly credit. We were successfully meeting the local yokels, and they were meeting us and many other hipster homesteaders who were moving into the area. We newcomers had taken over one of the largest businesses in the Applegate, and it was working out well! Everyone now rather affectionately called the Outpost “the hippie store,” and the lucrative gas station kept the store and other operations afloat.

By the mid-1980s, established cultural and economic infrastructure had lured many counterculture homesteaders into the Applegate: our Outpost Food Co-op and deli-cafe, gas station, community center, and laundromat; Trillium School and Trillium Midwifery attracted families; folks landed entry-level jobs with our Forest Workers Co-op, bought their upcycled building materials or a house to salvage from Karma Builders, and learned from TELAV how they could help keep the river clean and the forests still standing.

And that’s why so many new homesteaders, farmers, winemakers, and organic ranchers chose to move into the Little Applegate: it had become a liberal stronghold with the influx of new folks, while we older folks continued community-building. Starting in the late 1990s, several groups, including three intentional communities with sufficient resources, purchased prime ranches near the Crump town site at the end of the paved road and further up the river and tributary canyons. One community operates a large bakery, employing bakers and delivery drivers. The beautiful little valley around Crump would have been submerged under thousands of acre-feet of flood control if we had not stopped the dam. Fortunately the little valley is now a hub for new organic farms and ranches, and a brewery, bakery, and winery that also serve as music and gathering venues.

After watching vineyards and wineries transform old cattle and hay ranches, ushering in another wave of new residents, the newly legal pot farms began arriving soon after legalization of marijuana. While several local organic farmers expanded into growing pot, downriver and especially in the “Big” Applegate, huge new operations appeared, owned by distant investors. Soon a new rush hour appeared as hundreds of hourly workers drove, often way too fast, over the mountain and into the Applegate to work in the new THC-CBD industry. Where this is headed is anybody’s guess, but it has changed the local ambiance.

So, if you’re looking to locate your soon-to-be-realized intentional community in a rural area of great natural beauty and more affordable properties, then do some thinking about how you can be a successful pioneer to become part of that conservative rural community. To attract more new liberal folks for extended camaraderie, there will need to be sources of employment, a wonderful entrepreneurial opportunity to start businesses. There will also need to be venues to serve as the kind of social vortex your group envisions, be it a food co-op, farm stand, coffee shop, solar system

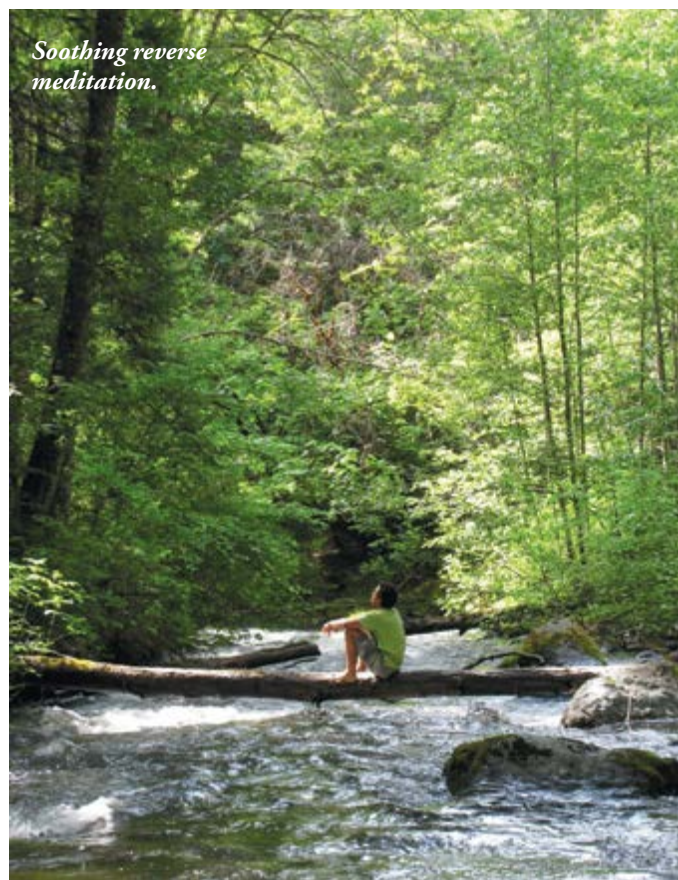
installation outfit, music venue, alternative school, or whatever great ideas you dream up, confident enough to work diligently to manifest some of your dreams.

You’ll also want to research what may be the greatest threats to the natural integrity of the ecosystems in the place you desire. Someone, or a few of you, will want to be proactive to research specific projects planned for your area and find out what you can do to make them less damaging or stop the worst ones altogether. Few people choose to live in a place that may likely become, or already is, an industrial resource extraction sacrifice zone.

Be a pioneer! Open the way to welcome more folks into where you want to be and grow and create community. 🐦

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*Chant Thomas has lived within, or connected to, intentional community since 1968, and cofounded Trillium Farm Community in remote SW Oregon in 1976, where he lived for 42 years. Chant supported his environmental activist career by working in natural and field sciences, university teaching, and 20 years as a wilderness guide using pack llamas. He has written widely and published in several journals, from the American Journal of Science to Siskiyou Journal, and COMMUNITIES, and in bioregional and travel anthologies. A publisher is presently reviewing his first book, Stalking the Spotted Owl: Searching for Elusive Owls and Sasquatch in the Siskiyou Mountains. Chant and his partner of 25 years, Susanna Bahaar, presently travel Baja in their vintage camper van for several months during winter. Stateside, they reside in a spiritual community deep in a wild canyon of the high Southwest desert the rest of the year.*



# Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors, Part One

By Diana Leafé Christian



*Certain kinds of challenging behaviors can be devastating and demoralizing for individual community members as well as for the whole community.*

Mario Purusic

At first Dwight seemed to have all the makings of a great new community member. He was industrious and engaging. People in the community were impressed by the young man's brilliance and energy. He rapidly learned the construction trade and soon joined an onsite building company. He made friends with some of the most respected community members. He joined several committees, where he took minutes or facilitated meetings, and even began facilitating the community's monthly whole-group business meetings.

Fast-tracked for membership, Dwight joined his community before completing the usual six-month provisional period. He was elected as an officer of the group's Homeowners Association, and in that role oversaw all physical infrastructure committees. He and another member I'll call Charlie became good friends, as close as brothers. They started their own new construction business and an onsite farm venture. Dwight was a young superstar. Everyone loved him.

Well, not *everyone*. Early on, it became clear that Dwight sought out only the more powerful, longtime community members for friendship, but ignored and seemed to dismiss newer or less active members. For example, the community became polarized about how quickly and in what ways it would develop

sustainable agriculture. The group's entrepreneurs, members who intended to be organic farmers, including Dwight, wanted to develop onsite agriculture more quickly, grow food and raise livestock, and have the freedom to try different farming methods. The passionate environmental activists and vegetarians wanted to proceed slowly, forbid livestock, and limit the methods farmers could use. Dwight could barely control his disdain for those who had views other than his own. He was sometimes outright rude to them or belittled them behind their backs.

The more influential Dwight became the more he seemed to exhibit this more difficult underlying persona. He had rather grandiose-sounding plans and life's mission. He seemed to expect deference, to feel entitled to special treatment.

My good friend Rose became especially close friends with Dwight and his girlfriend. But after a while, Dwight began cheating on his girlfriend and lying about it, which gradually became obvious to Rose, to her sorrow. She and others in their community began feeling baffled and even frustrated by Dwight's behaviors.

After a while, Dwight seemed to have little to no empathy anymore. He cut off former friends, sometimes studiously ignoring them as if they weren't in the room. Whenever he want-



ed something from them he'd simulate warmth and kindness again, but only until he got what he wanted.

At one point Charlie experienced a severe emotional shock involving a love relationship, feeling deep personal loss and insult. Devastated and reeling with turmoil, Charlie inadvertently wrecked several of the expensive components of a system he was installing on a job. He and his business partner Dwight were obligated to replace what he'd destroyed—a \$5000 cost.

Charlie felt not only wretched, but now also shame and pain for being so miserable and distracted that he caused their business an unexpected loss. That evening he poured out his heart to Dwight, his best friend, assuming he would understand and empathize. Dwight was not only *not* sympathetic but contemptuous, berating Charlie for allowing himself to be so emotionally affected and distracted that he made such an expensive mistake. Charlie was stunned—when had his best friend become this pitiless stranger?

Rose became increasingly concerned and asked Dwight several times to please stop treating people so badly. But nothing changed.

"It's as if he has ice in his heart," I told Rose, as I'd met Dwight many times too. It felt to me as if he had a kind of cold, remorseless rage at the core of his being.

Finally, when Dwight began lying to her too, Rose decided that for her own peace of mind and to no longer feel frustrated and helpless about his behaviors, she would limit her interactions with him.

"I don't understand you anymore," she emailed Dwight. "And I don't think you understand me either. I want us to stop having any personal interactions—to not talk on the phone or visit each other anymore. And from now on email each other only about community business."

Rose's message to Dwight was straightforward—setting clear, unambiguous limits and boundaries—but it did not at all demean, criticize, or otherwise put Dwight down (which "I've had it!" statements often do), nor did she put herself down. Her statement wasn't vague or mean-spirited. She did no diagnosis, armchair psychoanalysis, labeling, preaching, scolding, or rebuking. No further pleas for understanding; no more attempts to appeal to a sense of compassion.

Rose finally understood what would and would *not* work with Dwight and set clear limits and boundaries with him. She had wised up.

As you'll see in this series on especially challenging behaviors, I think we *all* need to wise up.

## Not Your Normal Bad Behaviors

What I mean by *especially challenging behaviors* are egregious, baffling behaviors and apparent attitudes like Dwight's that are frequent and persist over time, not the occasional garden-variety rudeness, touchiness, or outbursts of frustration that we all do sometimes. I'm referring to attitudes and behaviors that can confuse, intimidate, and overwhelm.

These can become so hurtful that other community members can become reluctant to join a committee or team with someone like this on it. People can dread participating in meetings

with the person, or attending shared meals or other community events because of who might be there. In my experience most people living in community are decent, congenial, and cooperative, but even just one community member with these characteristics can make a huge difference in the whole community's sense of peace, safety, and well-being.

## Mavis and the "One-Two Punch"

A community member I'll call Mavis seemed to function in two different modes, going by what I saw in her community and what people there told me. She could be generous and welcoming: hosting dinners at her home for new members, organizing study groups on various topics, and serving her community in various roles and on different committees over the years.

Yet she could also be highly critical of others, while hypersensitive to criticism herself. Sometimes she'd respond to feedback with "punishing behaviors" such as criticizing people in return, or imitating their voice in a mocking tone. After initial "I'm warning you" signs—scowling and a harder, heavier voice—she could escalate rapidly to what seemed like full-blown rage, sometimes threatening people with "You'll be sorry!" One person described her impact as "like being hit by a Sherman Tank." Many in her community were wary of her. Some called her "the community bully."

Several of the younger, newer people told me they were afraid to give Mavis feedback or ask her to change her behavior because of her "One-Two Punch." The first punch, they said, was the attitude: "I'll treat you any way I like!" The second was: "And don't you dare try to give me any feedback!"

Damned if you do; damned if you don't.

She also appeared unwilling to apologize. "I've never heard her apologize to the community or to any person here about anything, ever," one member told me.

This wasn't the whole story. Mavis didn't *always* exhibit sudden fierce anger, act entitled, or speak critically of others. She could be giving and kind. Sometimes she was open to feedback and *did* apologize. Her hurtful behaviors were things she did sometimes but not all the time.

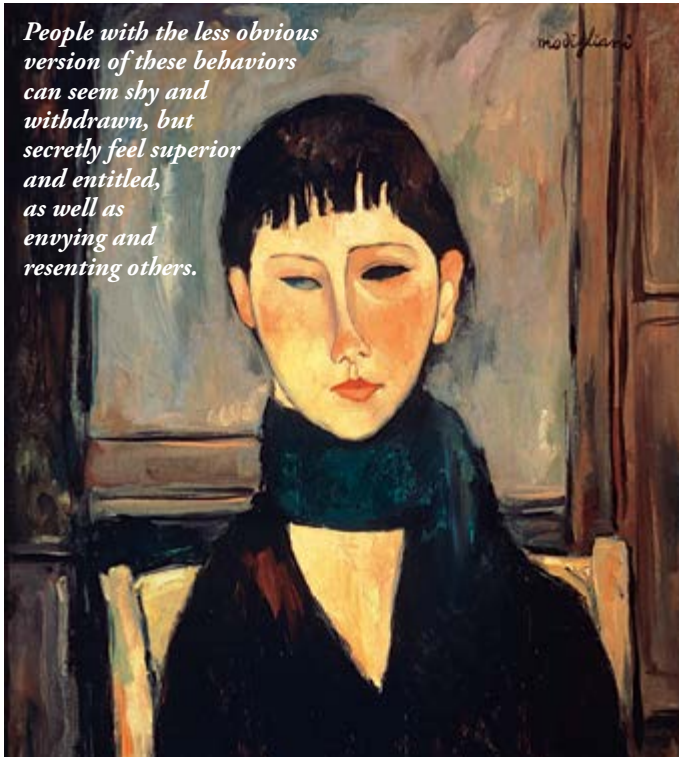
Once several younger, newer people organized a facilitated community meeting with Mavis. They thought a public forum

*The more obvious form of these behaviors are characterized in part by arrogance and a sense of entitlement.*



Detail from Ivan Kramskoi, Portrait of an Unknown Woman

*People with the less obvious version of these behaviors can seem shy and withdrawn, but secretly feel superior and entitled, as well as envying and resenting others.*



with many people present would be a safe enough space to share their experiences and ask that she treat them better. I got to sit in on and observe that meeting.

Knowing they'd be nervous that night, some of the young people wrote down what they wanted to say. I saw several of these notes, which for some reason were in tiny handwriting on small scraps of paper. (I wondered if such small notes helped them feel safer, as doing this would make them potentially smaller targets.)

That evening everyone sat in a circle, with some of the newer younger members holding their tiny lists of grievances. The facilitator had planned to invite each person to share what was relevant and important for them, what emotions this had brought up, and what they wanted Mavis to do differently. However, when Mavis arrived she basically took over the meeting. She declared emphatically she didn't want to hear from anyone about whatever they thought she'd done wrong. After warning everyone not to try to give her feedback that night, she described how challenging her life had been recently and asked people to be understanding of her difficulties rather than being critical. She was seeking understanding and compassion, she said, not condemnation. She declared meetings like this should be about coming from the heart, and if people just wanted to complain they shouldn't be there.

The facilitator remained silent.

I watched several young people fold up their tiny lists and stuff them back in their pockets, eyes on the floor.

Mavis received no feedback that night. The old One-Two Punch worked again.

## Olive as Aggressor, Olive as Victim

The challenging behaviors of a now-deceased member of my

own community whom I'll call Olive were so troubling some of us were actually afraid of her. She was fierce and adamant when expressing opinions. She seemed to see herself as entitled to special treatment, yet often expressed feeling victimized by others. She dominated most meetings, either insisting with piercing hostility on her view of an issue, or, when people disagreed, behaving as though she'd just been wronged and humiliated.

Darcy was one of Olive's work exchangers. One day Darcy's duties included moving a mattress. She couldn't lift it by herself and couldn't find anyone nearby to help. When Olive learned the mattress hadn't been moved, she was outraged, as if she'd been ill-treated and harmed. She berated Darcy fiercely. This went on for several minutes, while Darcy, used to a professional work environment, looked on in astonishment.

"You're *disobedient!*" Olive finally spit out.

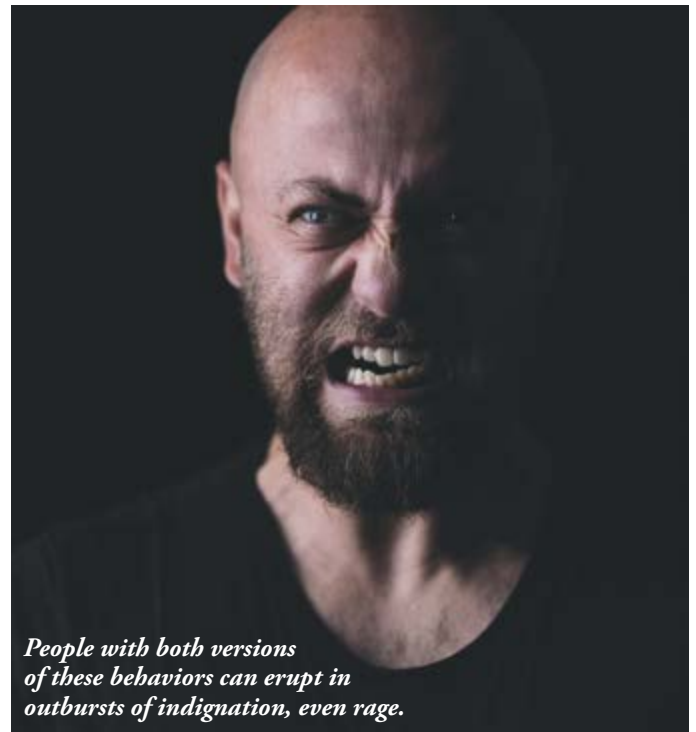
Olive had not only expected Darcy to do all her assigned tasks as a work exchanger—but, like a Marine Drill Sergeant, Olive felt entitled to immediate *obedience* as well.

## What's Going On Here?

When mental health professionals consider behaviors and attitudes like these—self-centeredness and presumed entitlement, little to no empathy for others, sudden bursts of outrage, and unrealistic, grandiose notions of oneself and one's abilities—they use the terms *narcissism* and *narcissist*.

However, this article series is about narcissistic *attitudes* and *behaviors*. Most of us aren't therapists and not qualified to diagnose anyone—and we certainly shouldn't "diagnose" fellow community members!—but we *are* qualified to observe behaviors and apparent attitudes that seem to trigger widespread hurt and confusion in the group.

While narcissism isn't considered a mental illness by mental



*People with both versions of these behaviors can erupt in outbursts of indignation, even rage.*

health professionals, when someone consistently exhibits five or more of certain narcissistic behaviors and attitudes professionals identify them with the diagnostic term *narcissistic personality disorder*, one of several “character disorders” in psychology.

It’s a *character* disorder, they say, because people who consistently do this experienced such severe trauma at such an early age that they were unable to properly develop their character. Given their trauma, they could not develop the basic moral characteristic of empathy, and therefore couldn’t grow into caring, decent human beings. In children who were this badly traumatized, professionals say, the capacity to develop empathy and decency was replaced by suppressed rage and an unconscious certainty that they are actually defective and worthless. They compensate for this with what is called a “false persona” of apparent superiority, self-centeredness, and entitlement (like Dwight’s initial “superstar” guise), to keep themselves from experiencing a desperate but suppressed fear that their real self—which they unconsciously believe is defective and worthless—will eventually be revealed to others. As his community knew well, Dwight had had a miserable, stressful childhood, with exacting parents who demanded he excel athletically and academically. No *wonder* he acted like that.

People with narcissistic behaviors can exhibit—not occasionally, like many of us, but frequently and consistently—one or more of the behaviors and attitudes in the lists below.

Mental health professionals categorize these in two ways. “Overt” narcissistic behaviors and attitudes seem arrogant and often self-aggrandizing, like those in the first list (think Dwight). “Covert,” “fragile,” or “vulnerable” narcissistic behaviors and attitudes include some of those in the second list, and secretly, many in the first, but expressed in far less obvious ways. People exhibiting covert narcissistic attitudes and behaviors may in fact



*People living in community are often more vulnerable to these behaviors than people in mainstream culture.*

Toa Heptiba

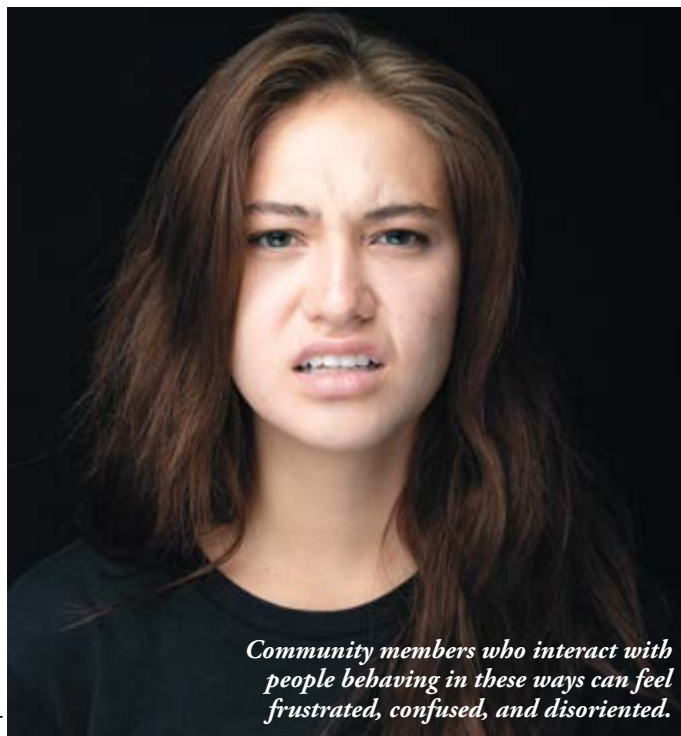
appear fragile and insecure, as if victimized by others, while also emanating a subtle but frightening air of vengeance (think Olive). Sometimes they seem to do both (think Mavis).

**More Obvious (called “overt” narcissism):**

- Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
- Entitlement
- Little to no empathy
- Lying
- Rapidly escalating anger; sudden outbursts
- Grandiosity
- Craving attention
- Criticizing others
- Mocking or imitating others
- Demeaning or belittling others; bullying
- Lying; exaggerating their accomplishments

**Less Obvious (called “covert” narcissism):**

- Seeing themselves victimized by others
- Seeking revenge
- Manipulating others; using people
- Hypersensitivity to criticism
- Projecting their behaviors and attitudes onto others
- “Gaslighting” others (telling someone what they directly observed didn’t actually happen)
- Envy others
- Limited self-awareness
- Recruiting and grooming newer or less confident group members to believe, reflect back, and support their version of reality



*Community members who interact with people behaving in these ways can feel frustrated, confused, and disoriented.*

Ospan Ali

In my experience researching and visiting communities and living in community for many years, I've seen the negative impact of such behaviors on individual community members, including on myself, as well as on whole communities. I've come to realize that these aren't the occasionally annoying or disruptive behaviors we often see in others or do ourselves, but something far more serious. These attitudes and behaviors are not usually successfully resolved by using Nonviolent Communication (NVC) language, conducting Talking Stick Circles, bringing in community consultants, or organizing mediations.

## Why People Who Live in Community Are Especially Vulnerable

And worse, cooperative, congenial, neighborly community members—particularly if they're empathetic and compassionate (like Rose and Charlie)—are the *most* vulnerable to these behaviors, and the most likely to get hurt.

I believe there are at least two reasons for this:

(1) The nature of community living itself is that we seek cohesiveness; we yearn to all be on the same page. We want to be happy; to feel like family. We aim for a high level of caring for everyone; we aim to resolve community conflicts with empathy. Most community members expect the best of people, and want to give everyone a second chance. Unfortunately, people like Dwight, Mavis, and Olive often take advantage of this forgiving community culture, which is a ripe environment for these behaviors to flourish and continue unchecked—a perfect storm.

Few of us like to set hard boundaries or place limits on people. Almost everyone would like to avoid this, especially in communities. So when these kinds of challenging behaviors occur in a community setting, most people either don't know what to do, or else assume that *just living in community itself*—with its camaraderie, shared enjoyable activities, and neighborly acts of good will—will eventually heal people of their harsh or hurtful behaviors.

(I call this the “With Enough Hugs You Can Heal Anything” fallacy.)

And if living in community doesn't heal them, then surely using Nonviolent Communication (NVC) will help these people feel seen, heard, and empathetically “gotten” enough to behave more responsibly and cooperatively.

(I call this the “With Enough NVC You Can Resolve Anything” fallacy.)

And...

(2) Many community members don't understand or even believe that these attitudes and behaviors could even occur in a *community*.

Or, they don't believe such behaviors and attitudes could actually exist in someone they know.

Or that such behaviors could exist at all.

Why do communitarians find it so hard to understand this? I think it's because many people who live in community not only feel natural empathy and compassion for others, and feel fine about themselves most of the time, but also mistakenly believe everyone else experiences life the way they do. So it's practically impossible for them to imagine the inner world of

people like Dwight, who have such a constant high level of suppressed anxiety and outrage that, while able to create the appearance of warmth and kindness for short periods, they don't actually feel (and *cannot* feel) empathy for anyone. They can only simulate it for so long before it becomes exhausting to keep pretending.

## What Doesn't Work

Let's say someone in your community frequently and consistently displays one or more of these narcissistic behaviors. Maybe at first you expected they'd “get it” about living in community sooner or later and then would start treating you and others courteously and fairly. When this didn't happen, you may have tried, like Rose, asking the person to please stop their hurtful behavior and treat people better. You may have tried using skilled NVC language in heartfelt conversations about feelings and needs, hoping to appeal to what you assumed is everyone's innate capacity for empathy, mutuality, and cooperation. When that didn't work you may have tried your community's version of Sharing Circles or even a formal mediation process such as Restorative Circles. You may have written long private or even public emails encouraging the person—or pleading with them—to please live up to the community's shared values and behavioral norms. These steps may have made a temporary difference in how the person behaved. But only for a little while, until they became exhausted by the effort and reverted to their usual behaviors again.

Or maybe each of these actions didn't make any difference at all. Like Rose, you may have been confused, disappointed, and frustrated. You may have eventually felt baffled and helpless.

The problem wasn't that you weren't skilled enough or didn't try hard enough. It's that the methods that normally reduce interpersonal tensions and resolve conflicts simply don't work with this pattern of behaviors.

## Three Crucial Steps

In my experience, we can take three steps to protect ourselves and feel more emotional peace and safety, while still feeling empathy and understanding for people with these behaviors:

(1) Empower ourselves by learning everything we can about patterns of narcissistic behavior...*so we'll be more realistic. So we'll know what to expect.*

The next article recommends books and videos specifically about these behaviors and how people can protect themselves, and suggests what people can do to feel safer and more peaceful and empowered in our relationships with community members who exhibit these behaviors.

(2) *Lower our expectations* that the person can respond to our requests for empathy, mutuality, and community cooperation. Having realistic expectations about people with these behaviors—what they can and can't respond to—makes us far less likely to be negatively affected by them, and so we don't keep throwing ourselves onto the jagged rocks of expectation that *this time* the person *will* care about others, and are able to change and will *want* to change.

(3) *Set limits and boundaries* with the person who does hurt-

ful things that affect you, as Rose did with Dwight. (More on this in the next article.)

Notice, these steps do *not* try to get the person to see the harm they're causing or change their behaviors. For people with these behaviors, this just doesn't work.

## Coming Up

In the next articles on this topic, we'll look more closely at lots of these behaviors, including covert behaviors; successful setting of limits and boundaries; and what else we can do—as individuals, small groups of members, or whole communities—to no longer feel frustrated, baffled, or scared, and no longer at the effect of people with narcissistic behaviors.

We *can* help ourselves and our friends feel safer, calmer, and more peaceful in community. 🐦

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*Diana Leafe Christian, author of Creating a Life Together and Finding Community, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops and online trainings on creating successful new communities, and on Sociocracy, an effective self-governance and decision-making method. She lives at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina. See [www.DianaLeafeChristian.org](http://www.DianaLeafeChristian.org).*

*Special thanks to communitarian and blogger Dave Booda for help with this article.*

## Empowering with Information, *NOT* Labeling or Diagnosing

Unfortunately, addressing this topic in COMMUNITIES can be misinterpreted as a way to label, dismiss, or "other" people with these behaviors, or as presuming to "diagnose" them as psychologically unfit. This is *not* my motive for writing this. Nor am I trying to provide ammunition with which to retaliate against any community members.

Rather, I want people who may be dealing with community members who do these things to become informed and educated about these behaviors, as this is the *first* step in empowering ourselves and no longer being so vulnerable to their effects.

In my experience it is possible to feel empathy and compassion for people with these behaviors—to *not* "other" them—while still learning enough to protect ourselves, but never using this information to label or diagnose others.

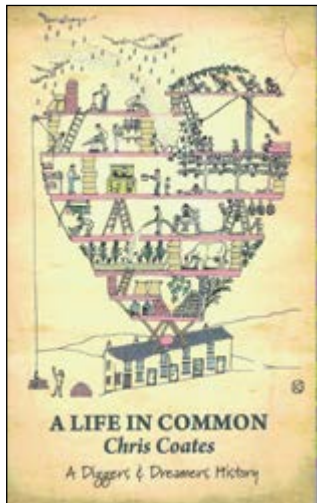
So *please* don't tell other community members you suspect that Jack "might have narcissism" or Jack "might be a narcissist." Describing these behaviors as narcissistic to people in your community *cannot* help the situation and will likely rebound on *you*, possibly giving you a reputation as someone who says awful things about people. There *are* effective ways to work with these challenging behaviors. Learning what you're dealing with is a good first step.

—DLC



*We can learn to deal effectively with these behaviors and feel safer, calmer, and more peaceful again.*

Levi Guzman



# People in Common: Coates' Tales

## A Life in Common

By *Chris Coates*

London: Diggers and Dreamers, 2021, 198 pages,  
[www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/shop-base](http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/shop-base).

People in Common, the intentional community that is the focus of this book, was established in 1974 in the small town of Burnley in the picturesque Pennine Hills of northern England, about 30 kms (20 miles) north of Manchester. Once prosperous with mines and industry, this area slowly wound down after WWII, with people moving out, leaving dying and impoverished villages and towns.

A small group of people, informed and enthused by books such as *The Magic of Findhorn*, *Blueprint for Survival*, and *Silent Spring*, started People in Common in order to create their ideal, communal life. One of them, almost by accident, found himself in Burnley and was amazed at the low prices for houses, many of which were deserted and all of which needed restoration. The group bought their first house for £50! As members moved in, they bought other dirt-cheap houses and made them comfortable.

These early communards, perhaps naively, saw themselves as a “fifth column within capitalism and hope that just as the ‘workers friendly societies’ could be said to be the forerunners of the welfare state, so the ‘workers cooperative living group’ could be the forerunner of a new social creation.” (181) They were wrong.

Author Chris Coates joined People in Common in the winter of 1977-8, after arriving as a guest worker, when “something in the setting of old industrial town set against spectacular moorland caught my attention...a virtual time warp.” (20)

He recalls “struggling to create new approaches to the way we live—collectively owned housing, shared childcare, co-operative work structures, pooled income” and Chris now realises that this struggle “helped us to change, as individuals, in a positive way.” (117)

They bought a nearby, abandoned stone mill (built in the mid 18th century), to restore as communal housing and workspace. Members raised money however they could to support renovations, and several, including Chris, became competent builders and project managers. In 1988, People in Common started moving from their restored row houses into their restored and adapted stone mill.

The communards saw themselves as “social entrepreneurs...pushing boundaries of what was possible in social organisation, consciously taking risks with each other’s lives and lifestyles...sometimes we hit on something that worked, sometimes we didn’t, and for most of the time we managed to get by.” (123) In spite of their radical zeal, in the mid 1990s members abandoned income-sharing simply because “we had a surplus over... what was needed to meet our basic needs and we failed to...agree how to spend it.” (132)

In recent years several members and ex-members of British intentional communities have written books about their communal experiences. These include Graham Meltzer’s *Findhorn Reflections*, Roger Sawtell’s *Under One Roof*, Tobias Jones’s *A Place of Refuge*, Dave Treanor’s *Anatomy of a Commune*, Mike Read’s *Mix Café*, and Hylda Sims and Freer Spreckley’s *Commune on the Moors*. Authors take different approaches, some quite positive and some rather negative. Having read all of these, as well as many other

“tell-all” intentional community histories and memoirs from around the world, I am curious about authors’ motivations—while delighted to see evermore personal accounts of communal history.

Chris Coates himself is one of the key drivers of the Diggers and Dreamers publishing collective, the author of the impressive, scholarly and well-respected two-volume history of British communalism, *Utopia Britannica* and *Communes Britannica*, covering the years 1325 to 2000. He was President of the International Communal Studies Association from 2013-16. In 2019, the Foundation for Intentional Community honoured Chris Coates and the Diggers and Dreamers collective with their Kozeny Communitarian Award.

As a student, Chris lived in urban communes, generally as a “squatter.” During that phase of his life he read widely and developed a deep yearning for an ideal way to live life ethically and to the fullest. At various times he has been, and perhaps remains, an actor, clown, musician, writer, publisher, project manager, historian, and carpenter.

When Chris joined People in Common it was relatively small with about a dozen adults, and they used “an informal consensus process” although they tried other options. He observes that “this could take a frustratingly long length of time...[and] make us lean towards going at the pace of the slowest, most risk averse member.” (37) Members shared work, childcare, income, and expenses and, of course, ate and socialised together.

In 1998, Chris and his partner, Catriona, left People in Common and moved to the city of Lancaster where, among other things, they helped create, and now live in, Forgebank Cohousing. Chris left People in Common after realising it was “never going to be the ideal community I had in my head...[and] I felt most other members didn’t really share my vision. ...I’m not sure I gave up on the dream—just decided that it wasn’t going to happen there and with those people.” (187-8) Leaving was personally challenging because he found he “had become alternatively institutionalised—it was ten years since I had actually paid a gas or electric bill.” (189)

He ponders, “what sort of success did

we achieve as an intentional community?” (192), and then goes on to try to answer that question. He addresses the critical question of how one can define “success” in any social activity, let alone an intentional community, and concludes that while falling short of their aspirations, they still achieved a great deal—and had a lot of fun in doing so.

People in Common continues as an intentional community, albeit with more modest expectations and, perhaps, more realistic dreams than those held by Chris Coates and friends. Only four families remain there, in what is more of a housing cooperative than a commune. Forgebank Cohousing, however, now has about 70 adults and children, many shared facilities, and is probably more communal than People in Common.

After moving to Lancaster, Chris became a City Councillor (Green Party), a position he held for 12 years. He writes, “my young, activist self back in the 1980s would never have believed that you could be paid by the council to in effect be a community activist.” (197) He is still very involved in local and green politics, still researches and publishes about historical and contemporary intentional communities, is still on the board of the International Communal Studies Association, still works with Diggers and Dreamers in publishing books and their *Guide to Communal Living and Directory of Intentional Communities*. And, as far as I can determine, he lives a great life as a wonderful human being.

This book, more memoir than simple history, is as much about Chris Coates as about People in Common, and is well worth reading. 🐦

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*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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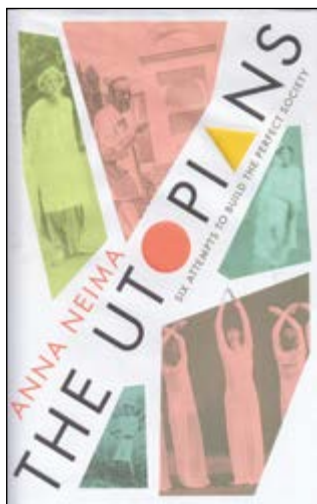
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# Practical Utopianism

## The Utopians: Six Attempts to Build the Perfect Society

By Anna Neima

London: Picador, 2021, 306 pages.

Over the last two centuries or so dozens, probably hundreds, of survey works have been published, books and articles that describe and discuss multiple intentional communities. Some cover only a handful of communities (to cite two recent examples, David Bramwell, *The No. 9 Bus to Utopia*, and Erik Reece, *Utopia Drive*; both provide chapter-length coverage of fewer than a dozen communities), while others are much more comprehensive (John Humphrey Noyes, in his *History of American Socialisms*, and William A. Hinds, in *American Communities and Cooperative Colonies*, both cover many dozens of them, and, if the reader will forgive this shameless bit of self-promotion, my own *Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities* provides brief accounts of some 3,000 communities in the past and present). Anna Neima's new book has chapters on only six communities, but its depth more than compensates for its lack of breadth, and it therefore is a marvelously useful contribution to the genre of communal surveys.

Each of Neima's case studies tells the story of a movement that tried to turn the utopian ideas of a visionary individual (or in one case a couple) into a functioning ideal society in the early decades of the 20th century. Most of Neima's communities will not be familiar to most readers of this magazine, so a quick rundown on her chosen subject matter is in order. She begins with Santiniketan-Sriniketan, an enactment of the utopian vision of Rabindranath Tagore in the Indian province of Bengal in the early 1920s. She then moves to Dartington Hall, led by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst, in the South of England. Next comes Atarashiki Mura, Mushanokoji Saneatsu's new village that blended traditional Japanese life and values with new 20th-century ideas. The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, located at Fontainebleau, outside Paris, led by the spiritual teacher G. I. Gurdjieff (whose Fourth Way philosophy defies any quick characterization), is next in line. Then comes the utopian project most likely to be familiar to COMMUNITIES readers, the Bruderhof of Eberhard Arnold, a Christian colony that was founded in Germany but moved several times, especially after the Nazis rose to power in their homeland (and is the only one of these utopian projects still surviving in something like its original form today). The book ends with Trabuco College, Gerald Heard's retreat center near Los Angeles; its participants sought to create a "superconsciousness" crafted from all of the world's religions plus modern psychology.

Should any reader want to know more about any of these attempts to enact a real-world utopia, Neima's book would be an excellent place to start. She has done exhaustive research and in each case comes to a deep understanding of the movement in question. She captures exceedingly well the tension between trying to enact the highest of ideals and the mundane reality of needing to house and feed community members and maintain the communal premises.

A short final chapter makes a ringing case for the importance of these experimen-

tal new societies. Retrospective accounts of communities often conclude that they have "failed," as if not surviving in perpetuity is failure. Neima argues, instead, that this kind of enacted utopianism is a powerful tool for meeting the challenges that human societies always face. Let me close with Neima's own words (p. 236) that are much more articulate than my own, and should be encouraging to the thousands who are still living out high visions in today's communities:

"Practical utopianism is fruitful in unpredictable ways. Utopians inspire because they refuse to accept the shortcomings of the world or the impossibility of change. They demand more—whether, like the interwar idealists in this book, it is more cooperation, more equality, more spiritual and creative meaning; or, like twenty-first century community-builders, a more egalitarian and sustainable deployment of the world's resources. Utopians identify the urgent problems of the day and devote their lives to finding solutions. It is hard not to admire that combination of idealism, optimism and practical dedication. Criticizing the status quo is rarely enough to create real change—whether that criticism comes in the form of marches, petitions, policy papers or satirical tweets. What we need are laboratories to devise, test and demonstrate new ideas and systems; concrete experiments that prove the viability of what otherwise would remain nothing more than an alluring set of ideas. While few practical utopias last for long, utopian living is extraordinarily generative. It creates openings in the fabric of society, inspires change, reminds us that it is possible to reach beyond the dominant assumptions of our day and discover radically different ways of being." 🐦

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*Tim Miller is a research professor of religious studies at the University of Kansas and a historian of American intentional communities, with a focus on the communities of the second half of the 20th century. His most recent book is Communes in America, 1975-2000, published by Syracuse University Press in 2019. An earlier volume in that series is The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond. Tim is also author of The Encyclopedic Guide to American Intentional Communities.*

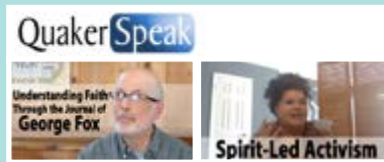


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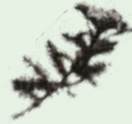
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**COWEETA HERITAGE CENTER AND TALKING ROCK FARM** are located in the mountains of Western North Carolina in a beautiful and diverse temperate rainforest. CHC is looking for others who would like to join together to form an Intentional Community embracing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

**MORNINGLAND COMMUNITY** is offering work/study opportunities for those interested in deepening their meditation practice to include contemplative service. Some co-housing available. Our community is offline, digitally unplugged, and a great place to catch your breath. Call 562.433.9906 for more information and to apply. “Simple living and high thinking” – Yogananda. 2600 E. 7th St, Long Beach, CA 90804

**RETIRE IN BELIZE** – This retirement Community could be a resource for placing persons in a village atmosphere at a reasonable cost. This is a village within a village. Riverside and Cuxlin Ha communities are Christian-based but represent many religions such as Baptists, Roman Catholic, Community of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, Salvation Army, House of Prayer and no religion. All are a child of God. All must learn to work together. It takes a lot of love, patience and forgiveness to grow self and community. Riverside Community provides the opportunity to enhance your life by giving and receiving your talents, time and love. We need you; you need us. Live the abundant life. Be creative and fulfilled. Don’t be lonely anymore. Live the good life in Southern Belize, in a village by a river that goes to the Caribbean Sea. Here you will find Security, Peace, and happiness at Riverside Retirement Village. Stable Government | Good water | English speaking. Average temperature 82 degrees. Part of our village is also retirement facilities for assisted-living and total-care. Houses or apartments are available. Lots are available to build your own house. Land is available from 5 acres to 300 acres. Also, you can live in Riverside Retirement Village for as little as US\$500 per month. This includes fine housing, food, electricity, and water or up to US\$5,000 depending on your needs and wants. Contact Email: [gayerscafe@gmail.com](mailto:gayerscafe@gmail.com) Phone: 501-607-6777

**HOMESTEAD IN VERMONT** – Good responsible people wanted to help build a small spiritually-oriented intentional community and homestead farm on beautiful 8 acres in southern Vermont, starting in late 2021. Open to people of all tolerant spiritual paths, who are focused on self-awareness and spiritual development, wanting to support others in their development, and with skills and experience in gardening, land maintenance, and sustainable living. Possibility of creating a spiritual retreat center on the land. Seeking kind, compassionate, caring, and emotionally mature people of integrity who are good at communicating, resolving conflict peacefully, and working together. Must be non-smokers, with minimal alcohol consumption, and mostly plant-based diet. And you love flowers! Land is a mix of open area and woods, large vegetable and flower gardens, fruits and berries, and a friendly flock of laying and non-laying hens. Current livable structures are a large house, apartment, and finished barn. Also, rustic spaces for personal retreats, including a treehouse. There’s space for portable living structures too. Friendly pets are welcome. Very important that you are interested in a long-term arrangement, shared responsibilities and co-management, and have the time and energy to make a true commitment. Contact Gary at [gshaprcr@sover.net](mailto:gshaprcr@sover.net) for more information.

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### SEEKING OR FORMING COMMUNITY

**SPIRITUAL ATHEISM:** I am seeking connections and/or Intentional Community around Spirituality that is untied to metaphysical beliefs. I find Spirituality in nature, and in helping people heal from emotional wounds. I have volunteered / interned at a suicide hotline, an addiction center, and a hospital chaplaincy. Don: [dsb2@bu.edu](mailto:dsb2@bu.edu).

**RALSTON CREEK COHOUSING ARVADA, CO** – Imagine an energetic group of eclectic families who value treading lightly on the land, with solar energy, a courtyard, parks, a community garden, and a view of the Rockies. We are a forming community using a pre-sold unit model to build a 3-story building with 12 one-story flats, "The Gatehouse." Already identified a builder and investors. Estimated cost \$460 / square foot for 12 flats sized between 500 and 1,250 sq feet. Seeking members to join us and deposit on a specific unit. While they build the Gatehouse, we create the community. [www.ralstoncreekcohousing.org](http://www.ralstoncreekcohousing.org).


**JOIN OUR AGRIROOTEDNW** - a newly-forming co-housing community on 240 acres of prime farmland in Snohomish County, WA, one hour from Seattle. Our mission is to help farmers thrive by combining the power of community and cooperation with the flexibility of individually owned agricultural enterprises following regenerative, permaculture principles. If you dream of living in a community that seeks to steward land for generations, then get in touch! We are seeking both farmers and non-farmers. Visit our website for more info ([rootednw.org](http://rootednw.org)), or email [rootedquestions@gmail.com](mailto:rootedquestions@gmail.com) to join an on-line info session or schedule a land tour.

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### SERVICES/OPPORTUNITIES/PRODUCTS

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

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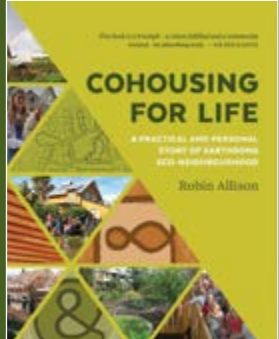
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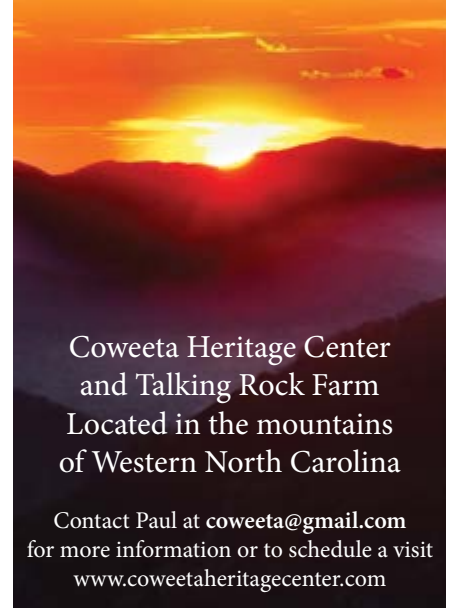
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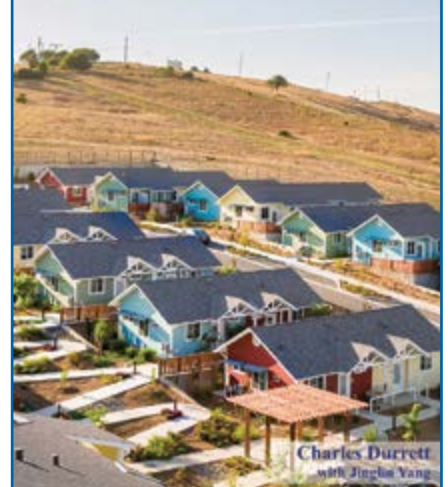


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To celebrate COMMUNITIES' 50th anniversary, we've compiled sets of all of our in-print back issues for which we have at least a dozen copies in stock. We are offering three entirely distinct sets. Two of them are available in very limited quantity because of low issue inventory, so if you're interested, please act soon.



**BACK ISSUE SET A:** COMMUNITIES #s 143, 147, 148, 150, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157, 159, 160, 162, 163, 167, 168, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193 (37 issues total, from the years 2009–2021) – 21 sets available.

**BACK ISSUE SET B:** *Communitas* 1, *Communitas* 2, COMMUNITIES #s 3, 8, 26, 28, 39, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 66, 67, 70, 71/72, 82, 83, 105, 117, 138, 139, 140, 142, 144, 145, 146, 148, 151, 161, 164 (32 issues total, from the years 1972–2014) – only 8 sets available.



**BACK ISSUE SET C:** COMMUNITIES #s 79, 80/81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 90, 92, 93, 94, 96, 97, 100, 101, 102, 110, 112, 115, 118, 124, 125, 126, 136, 137, 141 (25 issues total, from the years 1993–2008) – only 8 sets available.

**Individual sets**, packaged in medium flat rate priority mail boxes, are available for \$100 apiece (for A, B, or C) postpaid to US addresses, \$140 postpaid to Canadian addresses, \$170 postpaid to other international addresses where available. \$20 discount available for low-income readers.

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Please order at [gen-us.net/back-issue-sets](http://gen-us.net/back-issue-sets) (or via postal mail to Oberlin address).

## Your Support Is Essential

COMMUNITIES is far from a conventional magazine. This is fortunate, as many conventional magazines have gone out of business this millennium. We benefit from a steady influx of new readers, drawn to the search for and exploration of collective solutions. Even more, we benefit from having long-term, dedicated readers, who appreciate what a cohesive magazine issue offers—an experience not easily replicated through blog posts or other quick-consumption internet-mediated formats. COMMUNITIES is slow media, not quick media: six months go into the creation of every quarterly issue, and we hope it shows.

As long as COMMUNITIES has a role to play, we want it to endure. You—our readers—are the ones who make this possible. You provided the support we needed a few years ago to make the transition to a new publisher—GEN-US—and you continue to provide the support necessary to stay in publication. Many of you make the choice to subscribe at Supporter or Sustainer levels, and also give additional donations, sometimes three- or four-figure donations, because you believe in and appreciate what COMMUNITIES is and does.

It is a community, not a commercial undertaking, which is why we have been able to survive, continuing to reach everywhere from Ivy League libraries to backwoods off-the-grid homesteading collectives, from Communal Studies scholars to community-seekers, from long-term communitarians to brand-new intentional groups, from neighborhood activists to global networkers. Even though the numbers of international subscribers are modest, we reach every inhabited continent. And we not only produce new content every quarter, but also steward five decades' worth of material: close to 200 back issues which are available in digital form to anyone who becomes a subscriber and has access to the internet.

Please help keep COMMUNITIES alive through your subscriptions ([gen-us.net/subscribe](http://gen-us.net/subscribe)) and donations ([gen-us.net/donate/magazine](http://gen-us.net/donate/magazine)). All donations are fully tax-deductible. And please consider subscribing not only for yourself but for those you love who have interest in community, cooperation, and a livable planet.

In the next issue, we'll share more ways you can participate. Thanks again for joining us!

—Chris Roth



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## What Readers say about COMMUNITIES

I love COMMUNITIES magazine. Deciding to be communal is the best decision I've ever made in my life. COMMUNITIES has been there from the beginning.

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

COMMUNITIES has become one of our go-to sources for thought-provoking pieces about people opting out of the rat race and living life on their own terms.

—Christian Williams, Editor, Utne Reader

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

—Murphy Robinson,  
Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

Community has to be the future if we are to survive. COMMUNITIES plays such a critical role in moving this bit of necessary culture change along.

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

For more than 40 years COMMUNITIES has done an outstanding job of promoting the communitarian spirit as well as serving intentional communities and other groups coming together for the common good.

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

For many years we've been associated with and have strongly supported COMMUNITIES because we're convinced of its unique contribution to the communities movement in the United States and the world.

—Lisa and Belden Paulson, Ph.D.,  
cofounders of High Wind community

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.

—Dr. Bill Metcalf,  
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

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