

CLASH OF “HIGHER” AND “LOWER” SELVES SPLINTERS GROUP

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Fall 2022 • Issue #196

\$10 US / \$13 Canada

The Language of Community

If YOU WANT TO GO FAST, GO ALONE
If YOU WANT TO GO FAR, GO TOGETHER

A Language of Needs

Twin Oaks Crossword

Reviving Native Language

What the F Can Happen with Conflict

Working Effectively with Challenging Behaviors

Cohousing ABQ

WE NEEDED A VILLAGE SO WE'RE CREATING ONE

Construction Starting Fall 2022
Join us before the last units are spoken for!

Cohousing ABQ owns **4 acres** adjacent to the **Rio Grande in Albuquerque, NM**. The community already has **12 kids** and many aunts and grandparents who've created a **culture of trust, fun and care**. Construction begins this fall and **homes are going fast!**

Sign up to an info-session today by scanning the QR code to learn more about us.

Or visit CohousingABQ.org
Or call (505) 226-2802

SCAN ME



“Home is where the heart is. Place is where we dance.”

Homeplace Community Fund by Paul Freundlich

In a time of market volatility and exploitive economics, it’s still possible to do well while doing good. In 2017, Camp Timber Trails, a former Girl Scout camp in Western Massachusetts, was purchased by the members of two communities.

Dance New England, founded in 1980, and well into its third generation, and Unifier’s Heartbeat Collective are non-profits whose far-sighted individuals have raised over a million dollars in equity, donations and loans to establish a “Homeplace.”

CTT is meant as a center for the values we cherish – a learning, teaching, loving place to reach out and build a future worth dancing in. 417 wooded acres, a pristine, private pond, spacious ballroom, situated within easy driving distance of Boston and New York.



Already there are festivals, workshops, retreats and gatherings focused on creative and wholistic sustainability, cooperation, community and diversity.



Rather than finance our long-term development through a commercial loan, we have a syndicated mortgage with lenders who share an inclusive vision, building on a productive history, anchored by a full schedule of rentals, the value of the property, and involving a community of investors and donors.



If you are interested in learning more about us or our financial model, contact: pfreundlich@comcast.net.

The Homeplace Fund is a member of the Impact Assets family of over 1000 donor advised funds.



THE LANGUAGE OF COMMUNITY

4 Letter: The Vibe

Hugh Perry

The Vibe is the mortar that still binds our extended community together.

6 Notes in Passing: Trust and Talk

Paul Freundlich

In community, words matter less than trust. Silences and bursts of gab and action are just the externalities of a deeper flow.

8 A Language of Needs

Ted Rau (with Jerry Koch-Gonzalez)

The language of blame and disappointment divides us. By contrast, I see the needs language within NVC as the secret “code” that helps us understand about each other.

• **Some NVC Vocabulary**

10 The Language of Consensus

Robin Allison

Our guidelines around communication are aspirational; we don’t all get it right all the time, but we have agreed what is important to us collectively.

• **Coloured Cards Decision-making Process**
• **Earthsong Communication Agreements**

13 The Proper Way to “Anger”—A Marker of Belonging

Kristina Jansen

Being verbally vulnerable about emotional reactions, even violent rage, is very acceptable at Orinda as long as it’s done “the right way.”

• **An Orinda Lexicon**

16 The Language of Identity

Crystal Byrd Farmer

When we respect how someone wants to identify, we contribute to a world that values their dignity regardless of their behavior or our personal beliefs.

20 Language We Live

Generations of Magic Residents, adapted by Harper Hug

The languages we hear and speak, read and write, are defining qualities of our being. Changing how we use language can help us adapt to the exponentially growing challenges of our times.

26 garbage!, There’s a Place, remembering the Hopi Center for Human Services

Barry Peter, Water Wordsworth, and Chris Roth

My greatest teachers spoke few words, or none.

28 Language of Twin Oaks

Stephan Nashoba

Folks often call us a _____, but many prefer the term “intentional community.”

30 A Songaia Glossary

Sylvan Bonin

When guests, interns, and friends visit, we sometimes forget that not all our common words—e.g., Biogaians, BS Committee, Second Banana, Compost Shirt—make sense to them.



34 "Is That Community?"

Nick Shaver

Eating cake with guilt is never as good as eating cake without the guilt. Oh how much more could we have enjoyed that treat had we known it was indeed for community!

36 Clash of "Higher" and "Lower" Selves Splits Community into Two

Annette Pecker

To the "uppity" ones, this exaltation of the "high" at the expense of the "low" was a reflection and result of thousands of years of patriarchal thought, belief, and action.

40 Changing Our Language to Reflect Our Reality

Riana Good

Refining the false binaries in our language can diminish unintentional "other-ing" and support our togetherness.

44 The Types of Intentional Communities Common Terms Explained and What's in a Name?

Cynthia Tina

It can be confusing to navigate the IC world. Here are the most common terms for types of intentional communities and what they tend to mean, as well as examples and resources for further learning.

47 Confederation Releases New Communities Guidebook

Water Wordsworth

Featured articles include "Finding a Community Toaster that Toasts but Doesn't Burn" and "The Energy-Conservers Dilemma: What to Do when Someone Else's Lights Are On but Nobody's Home."

50 Esperanto: The Rise, Fall, and Rise of an Intentional Language Community

Jeremy Genovese

Our conversations take place on a much more equal playing field. This is why we call Esperanto, *la punta lingvo*, the bridge language, a language that includes rather than excludes.

52 What the F Can Happen with Conflict

Laird Schaub

Over the years I've come to realize that the range of responses to conflict is far wider than fight or flight.

53 Minding the "P"s for Cues

Laird Schaub

Does this plenitude of prickly P's provoke perturbation? Are these powerful permutations producing paroxysms of puzzlement and pique? Please put panic aside!

54 Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors, Part Three

Diana Leafe Christian

Boundaries are essential: we create them to protect what is important to us in our lives, to ensure that we will get what we want and need in our community, and to protect ourselves from what we don't want.

• **Narcissistic Attitudes and Behaviors**

60 REACH

64 Reviving Native Language (Review: *Flutes of Fire*)

Chris Roth

Despite a sobering history of language suppression and near-extinction, a tremendous amount of community has grown up around preserving and reviving native California languages—and they have much to teach us.

ON THE COVER



A fence alongside Eugene, Oregon's Riverbank Trail shares a proverb with pedestrians and cyclists. (Research suggests the saying originated in Burkina Faso, with equivalents in many languages across the

African continent, and now worldwide.) Photo by Chris Roth.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

EDITOR

Chris Roth (*Lost Valley/Meadowsong*)

ART DIRECTOR

Yulia Zarubina-Brill

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Joyce Bressler (*Community of Living Traditions*)

ACCOUNTANT

Kim Scheidt (*Red Earth Farms*)

WEBSITE/TECH SUPPORT

Orlando Balbas

BACK ISSUE FULFILLMENT

Chris Roth/Volunteers (*Lost Valley/Meadowsong*)

PUBLISHER LIAISONS

Diana Leafe Christian (*Earthaven*)

Keala Young (*Atlan*)

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

Crystal Farmer (*Charlotte Cohousing*)

Valerie Renwick (*Twin Oaks*)

Diana Leafe Christian (*Earthaven*)

Lois Arkin (*Los Angeles Eco-Village*)

Giovanni Ciarlo (*Huehucocoyotl*)

Daniel Greenberg (*Auroville*)

COMMUNITIES (ISSN 0199-9346) is published quarterly by the Global Ecovillage Network—United States (GEN-US) at 4712 W. 10th Ave, Denver CO 80204. Postmaster: Send address changes to Communities, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431. Indexed in the Alternative Press Index.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$30 US, \$40 outside US for four issues via periodical/surface mail. Supporters add \$10 per year; Sustainers add \$20 per year. Digital-only subscriptions cost \$10 less. Single copies are \$10 postpaid US, \$13 postpaid Canada, \$18 postpaid other international. All payments in US dollars. Available from Communities, c/o 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074; order@gen-us.net; 541-937-5221 for more info. (please leave message); gen-us.net/subscribe.

BACK ISSUES: Communities, c/o 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074; order@gen-us.net; 541-937-5221 for more info. (please leave message); gen-us.net/back-issues.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: Chris Roth, Editor, Communities, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431; editor@gen-us.net; 541-937-5221 (please leave message).

© 2022 by Global Ecovillage Network—United States (GEN-US) and individual authors. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. Opinions expressed by authors and correspondents are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK—UNITED STATES: GEN-US, attn.: Communities, 4712 W. 10th Ave, Denver CO 80204; admin@gen-us.net; 541-937-5221 (please leave message); gen-us.net.

REPRINT PERMISSION: Community groups may reprint with permission. Please contact Communities, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431; communities@gen-us.net; 541-937-5221 (please leave message).

ADVERTISING: Joyce Bressler, Communities Advertising Manager, ads@gen-us.net; 845-558-4492.

WEBSITE: gen-us.net/communities.

This magazine printed by Sundance Press, Tucson AZ.

Letters



Re: your “Language of Community” theme:

After sharing some stories with a group of families forming a community in Ontario, Canada, I learned that one word I used made no sense to anyone in the group, though it is a standard in our own community.

The word in question is “Vibe,” both as a noun and a verb; “The Vibe,” or “I’m Vibing.” How did that word impact our community? Why is it still so significant? And what is it?

Any time an idea is introduced, we treat it with heartfelt consideration, and it may bring out deep emotions in everyone. During heated discussions, the emotional exchanges are threads of energy passing from one person to the next person who shares, to the next who listens, as it weaves its way through the group. In the hours and days that follow, these threads of energy passing through us are similar to a string on a shoe bag being pulled tighter as it bring all the sides together. The Vibe is what emerges from this process.

In my community, the Vibe presented itself through heartfelt honest sharing, and with Love as a constant the energy grew. When the challenges were met, the Vibe gained strength, soon to become the group’s new language. That is how it was with us in our community and it remains strong still. It is a beautiful thing, and it feels real enough to be seen when making eye contact, in the holding of hands, in the intensity of a hug and is also witnessed by observers. It is the mortar that still binds our extended community together.

The term “Vibe” was used in many ways. For example, if you felt out of sorts you might be greeted with, “What’s up? Your vibe seems a little off? Do you want to talk?” On the other hand, if someone is unusually cheerful you might hear, “I’m high on the Vibe!” or “I’m riding the Vibe and I feel good!” Also it would not be unusual to be approached with, “I’m loving your Vibe! I could sure use a hug!”

There were also situations where the Vibe seemed to have left the group without notice. A terrible emptiness would linger until someone dared to draw our attention to its absence. “What’s going on? We’re not Vibing these days!” Only then would we become aware that our focus had drifted into details, leaving the group void of creative energetics. And what better way to bring the Vibe back than to have a dance party. It always worked.

When the Vibe was coursing through someone it could either attract or repel others depending on where they were emotionally. So due to its presence, the Vibe became our constant silent teacher, keeping us authentic with each other. That one word continues to impact my life and my connection with our community friends.

Hugh Perry

Belleville, Ontario, Canada

Subscribe to COMMUNITIES
at gen-us.net/subscribe

(to subscribe via mail, see SUBSCRIPTIONS info to left)

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS: PRINT + DIGITAL: \$30 in US, \$40 outside of US.

SUPPORTER: \$40 US, \$50 non-US. SUSTAINER: \$50 US, \$60 non-US.

DIGITAL-ONLY SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$20 per year anywhere in world.

DIGITAL ONLY, SUPPORTER: \$30. DIGITAL ONLY, SUSTAINER: \$40.



COMMON GROUND ECOVILLAGE

Repair. Reconnect. Regenerate.

An agrarian community in central North Carolina focusing on cooperative living with a deep commitment to environmental and social justice.

Join us as we build what comes next!

www.commonground.eco



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 articles that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues. We also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about “creating community where you are.”

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

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

Submissions Policy

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

Advertising Policy

Please check gen-us.net/communities or email ads@gen-us.net for advertising information.

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

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

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

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.



In community, words matter less than trust. Working and living in dynamic relationships, we are aware of each other's needs and preferences. Good times and bad, silences and bursts of gab and action are just the externalities of a deeper flow.

Words count because they can be parsed. Numbers stand at the top of the hierarchy. They are predictable and quantifiable. Except both words and numbers are nearly meaningless out of context. Past experience gives weight to words; numbers have to be weighed by a nuanced memory of what they stand for.

In a time that struggles with proclamations of fake news, the trustworthiness of sources lies in the eyes of the beholder. Betrayal of trust in the mainstream is almost expected. In community it is unacceptable.

Nevertheless, it's helpful to know what language is being spoken. One night a gang of us were at a dance in Boston. We'd shared a Contact Improvisation workshop, and were testing our new competence. Inevitably other dancers mixed in, and so when Margaret leaned into a momentary partner, trusting he would accept her weight, she wound up on the floor—while he danced away, oblivious to having missed her cue.

In our community of Dance New England, we faced a division about Covid vaccination. The temptation to demonize or disrespect those with differing opinions played against the store of positive experience that insisted we factor in the continuity of trust. Awareness of the social context means both there is less option for ignoring deeply held beliefs, and we accept responsibility for the risks which our actions might visit on others.

Zoom gave us a tool which, if short of transformational, mostly allowed us to restate our connections in often surprising ways. Facing isolation, we created virtual dances and virtual workshops which, as a regionally based community, finessed the distances we would otherwise have had to travel. In the midst of the pandemic, two of our most imaginative DJs held Sunday morning outdoor dances in a Northampton park where they passed out wireless headphones, and we danced the morning away, separate but equal, safely masked.

Several community members, including myself, hosted regular discussion groups. Some focused on specific subjects (race, values, books), others provided opportunity to counter the Covid isolation by sharing our struggles in sickness and health, children and parents, rising to concerns about the political challenges of dangerous times. If these groupings were a microcosm of the community, it's not too far-fetched to think we have deepened our understanding of each other as a whole community.

It surely didn't hurt our renewable cohesion that the 417 acre Camp Timber Trails we had bought in 2017 not only survived Covid restrictions, but as we continued to build program and improve the property, our thoughts as a community could legitimately turn to what the future might hold for our “Homeplace.” (To learn more, see p. 1.) 🐦

Paul Freundlich has been an active participant and creator in the development of cooperative, communitarian, and sustainable alternatives for 60 years. See exemplars.world and past issues of COMMUNITIES for more of his writing.



Join the conversation for an inside look at the **beautiful & messy** realities of creating and sustaining community.

Enjoy conversations with:

- Dave Henson
- Lee Warren
- Yana Ludwig
- Clifford Paulin
- Jonah Mesritz
- Diana Leafe Christian
- Sky Blue
- Laird Schaub
- Alyson Ewald



ic.org/podcast

@insidecommunitypodcast

WITH REBECCA MESRITZ



EXPERIENCE COOPERATIVE LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY



Established in 1980, we are a 60 person intentional community. We live in 7 comfortable, well-maintained houses, with gardens and a small swimming pool, on the north shore of Staten Island, a short walk from the free ferry to Manhattan.

Learn about collective decision making, problem solving, and community living. Share resources and shrink your carbon footprint. We have space available.

Monthly expenses are very affordable and include food, utilities, laundry facilities, toiletries, and wifi.

If you are interested, contact Susan at info@ganas.org

For more information see www.ganas.org



We'MOON 2023: SILVER LINING

This best-selling astrological moon calendar overflows with insight and beauty. Our day planner hosts over 30 informative articles, daily astrological info, moon phases and signs, along with brilliant art features, provocative poems and prose. The Waxing Crescent Moon offers a curl of promise to guide us through the coming year. Prepare to be surprised, delighted, shaken, challenged, inspired when you enter the pages of *We'Moon 2023*. Be ready.

Use code Unity23 for 15% off!

"The datebook takes you on a journey through the seasons of the year, guiding you along the path of deep soul connections and whispers from within."

—Brigit Esselmont Founder, Bidy Tarot



weorder@wemoon.ws • 1.877.693.6666

Discover what We'Moon has to offer at wemoon.ws!

A Language of Needs

By Ted Rau (with Jerry Koch-Gonzalez)

From time to time, someone leaves something in the Common House. A few dishes left over from a party. A stack of materials forgotten on a table. And then, sometimes, there's an email on the community listserv giving the message, in variations: *Clean up your mess!*

I remember one day, it was I who had forgotten a bunch of dessert dishes from a kids party. I saw the email, felt very embarrassed, and rushed to the common house. There, I saw a neighbor doing my dishes. I told him, "Oh no, these are my dishes, you don't have to do them." But he was adamant about doing them. And he told me this: doing someone else's dishes is a way to live his love for the community. Because he loves the Common House, and seeing it used is what it's all about, and a little bit of mess here and there just proves that it's being used.

My point in this story is not that we all should do a little extra. My point is that he was able to tell me in plain words what was going on for him. Doing the dishes is about love for the community. I understood that instantly!

Here's a plot twist though: the person who wrote the angry email on the listserv *also* cares about the community. I'm imagining that for that person, cleaning up after yourself is all about love and respect for the community and our shared resources. So how can these two people both care about the community and have such different perspectives?

In Nonviolent Communication (NVC), we call these deeper values or reasons *needs*. Needs—such as respect, love, mutuality, contribution, belonging, connection, to matter—organize our lives, yet we hardly ever talk about them. We talk about the mess, and the dishes, and about how angry we are. And with that, two things happen: (a) We miss the point. The person who got angry about the dishes wasn't angry about the dishes but angry about the lack of contribution or respect they associated with those unwashed dishes. (b) We miss each other. The language of blame and mess and disappointment divides us, and we miss talking about the love we feel for each other and the community. NVC, in short, teaches us how to think about our experiences while connecting them back to our needs. I see the needs language as the secret "code" that helps us understand about each other.

Instead of saying, "Clean up your mess, you disrespectful person," it could be, "I love when our shared spaces are inviting and beautiful." In that way, NVC is not about wrapping a statement in sugary words. It's about focusing on what's *really* going on for

ourselves and for others. It's actually about being more honest, while cutting out the blameful distractions that discharge our own dissatisfaction. Blaming others, in the long run, neither helps me feel better nor helps them. We have a choice: share our feelings and needs and be understood deeply, or stay in superficial language for instant gratification and throw more gasoline in the fire.

The language of feelings, needs, and requests also helps us see the many nuances and facets that live among us. For some, mess in the Common House is a sign of joyful community activity. For some, it's a sign of disrespect. For some, late-evening kids noise is a reminder that our community will live way into the future. For

NVC is not about wrapping a statement in sugary words.



Dima Tsatskin

others, that noise might be a disturbance that keeps them from getting the sleep they need to feel healthy. Hearing more about our feelings and needs help us to understand each other. Understanding each other brings us into connection and the possibilities of cooperation—why we chose to live in community in the first place! From that connection, creativity can emerge that paves the way for solutions that work for everyone. 🌊

Ted Rau is a trainer, consultant, and co-founder of the nonprofit movement support organization Sociocracy For All. His books include Many Voices One Song (sociocracyforall.org/many-voices-one-song) and Who Decides Who Decides: How to start a group so everyone can have a voice (sociocracyforall.org/who-decides-who-decides). He lives with his five children and 70 neighbors in a cohousing community in Massachusetts.

Jerry Koch-Gonzalez has been committed to nonviolent social change all his adult life. He has led trainings in anti-oppression, especially classism, and has shared sociocracy and NVC with dozens of communities in North America and abroad.

To experience NVC in a safe small-group setting with your community members, check out Sociocracy For All's NVC video course for groups (sociocracyforall.org/non-violent-communication-empowered-learning-circle-course).

Some NVC Vocabulary

Triggers: things that happen, interpreted as contributing to meeting or not meeting our needs.

Feelings: We experience feelings when needs are met or unmet.
Examples: sad, mad, angry, disappointed, excited, happy.

Needs: The underlying values we hold.
Examples: belonging, connection, to be seen, to be heard, contribution, learning.

Requests: The strategy guesses we make in attempts to meet needs. "Would you be willing to...?"
Examples: wash the dishes, go for a walk, talk to me about what happened yesterday, tell me what came up for you when I said X to you.

HOW TO START AFFORDABLE COHOUSING



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE WITH CHARLES DURRETT, ARCHITECT EMERITUS AIA

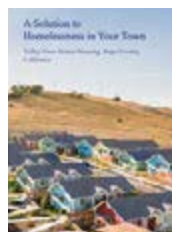
In this 4-week course, you'll learn from the leading architect and builder of cohousing communities globally. Durrett will impart his decades of experience so that you understand how to successfully design and develop a cohousing community from start to finish. Perfect for everyone who is interested in living in a cohousing community and high-functioning neighborhoods.

Continuing Education
 ARTDICH UNIVERSITY

4-PART ONLINE PROGRAM / \$250
TUESDAYS SEPT. 13 - OCT. 4, 2022
9:30-11:30 AM (PACIFIC) / 12:30-2:30 (EASTERN)



HOW TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR TOWN



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE WITH CHARLES DURRETT, ARCHITECT EMERITUS AIA

In this 4-week course, you'll learn from the leading architect and builder of cohousing communities globally. Durrett will impart his decades of experience so that you understand the dynamics of addressing homelessness in your community. This course is for legislators, municipal employees, architects, planners, designers, urban volunteers, and all good citizens.

Continuing Education
 ARTDICH UNIVERSITY

4-PART ONLINE PROGRAM / \$250
TUESDAYS OCT. 11 - NOV. 1, 2022
4:00-6:00 PM (PACIFIC) / 7:00-9:00 PM (EASTERN)



Looking for inspiration, skills, connection and community?
 Learning Adventures with Earthaven Ecovillage!

- In-person or virtual tours
- Online workshops
- In-person classes

See and experience:
 Food production in action
 Regenerative systems in practice
 Community living on a personal level

Earthaven Ecovillage's
SOIL
 School of Integrated Living.org

The Language of Consensus

By Robin Allison



Photos courtesy of Robin Allison

“I wasn’t living here when you voted on that rule, and I don’t agree with it (so it doesn’t apply to me).”

How many other communities have heard versions of this statement? It has caused various degrees of bafflement and frustration over the 27 years since Earthsong began. I see this as a clash of cultures—the culture of representative democracy where decisions are made by remote officials, and the culture of consensus that we are growing together in community. New people bring in the language they know before they fully understand the cultural differences in cohousing. That culture is reinforced by the language people use.

At Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood in Auckland, New Zealand, we use the coloured card system for consensus decision-making, and therefore we don’t “vote,” we “card” decisions, with a range of levels of agreement or reservation. Yet the default language in our society is to “vote,” which is often binary and is definitely a numbers game. There is a tendency towards polarity and division (there are only these two very different options, and if you are not a “yes” you must be a “no”). With the coloured cards there is a rainbow of options between black and white. We work hard to listen to the multitude of views, understand each other, and find a solution that all can live with. This is a cultural shift, and it feels important to remind members, when they describe a decision as having been made by voting, of the cultural shift to consensus.

Another word that has crept in with some at Earthsong is “rules.” Yes, we do have some rules in our legal home ownership documents, but every other decision we have made over time are better described as “agreements.” They were made by consensus of those who were in the group at the time, often with considerable effort spent in research, discussion, formulating a proposal, and carding a decision in the best interests of the community. Sometimes new people who weren’t part of that process regard these as rules, imposed by others. It is important to remember that those decisions were made by “us,” not imposed by an outside authority, even if new members were not part of “us” at the time they were made.

When new residents move into Earthsong, an important part of the membership process is that they understand and agree to our decision-making processes and all decisions made to date. Of course it is impossible to know of every prior decision immediately. It takes time to understand the huge number of agreements and systems we have evolved over 13 years of development and 14 years since all homes were completed. We all need reminding at times, and it is uncomfortable for a new member to trip over a (sometimes invisible) policy decision made years before. But those decisions were made with great care, effort, and occasional pain (the cat policy!) to respect all views and find a way forward. We have a process to review agreements if they are considered in need of an update or are no longer useful, but to disregard ex-

isting shared agreements is not conducive to community cohesion.

We have had significant change of residents over the last two years, and recently there has been reference to “rule-makers and rule-breakers” at Earthsong. I find this language particularly unhelpful; not only does it talk of rules, but it divides people into two categories and puts them at odds, ignoring the diversity and complexity of human beings trying to get along and work things out together.

Red Cards and Black Cards

In the coloured card system, the red card in decision-making mode is a “no” card. (See sidebar.) But what kind of “no” is it? How we describe, succinctly, the meaning of the cards is incredibly important. At Earthsong, the understanding of what is meant when someone uses a red card has changed over time, and we have tried to match this with the words we use. We currently find ourselves in something of a stalemate over the agreed meaning of the red card.

Originally, we described the red card as “I am entirely against the proposal and will block consensus.” In the context of the development phase of our cohousing project this was understood as a strong “no” statement, but not necessarily as a permanent block. Clearly there was strong objection, but we were all committed to progressing the project and the assumption was that we would continue to try to work it out together. As we used the cards over time, we devel-

Coloured Cards Decision-making Process

At Earthsong we use a powerful but simple tool using coloured cards for facilitating discussion and making decisions at our Full Group meetings. Every member has a set of six coloured cards which are used in meetings in two different ways:

Discussion Mode

An issue is presented by a working group, who have researched, discussed, and formulated a carefully worded proposal to the Full Group. At the meeting each person wishing to speak raises a card of the appropriate colour as below at any time during the discussion. The facilitator calls on people to speak according to the following priority:

Black - I have an interpersonal difficulty that is preventing my full participation

Red - I have a process observation

Orange - I wish to acknowledge someone or something

Yellow - I have a question, or need clarification

Green - I can provide information or clarification to that question

Blue - I have a comment or opinion

The black card has first priority, and the holder is asked to state their difficulty and how they would like the matter dealt with. The group then decides whether this should be processed within the meeting or between the individuals concerned outside of the meeting.

The red card has the next priority and is used to point out a process issue such as a breach of procedure, discussion going off-topic or over-time, or to make a group observation. Next, people holding up orange cards are called upon to deliver their acknowledgment(s).

After a question has been asked about the proposal using a yellow card, people raise green cards to provide information. Only after all questions have been answered does the facilitator call on those holding blue cards to state their comments and opinions.

Decision-Making Mode

When the group is ready to make a decision after a period of discussion, the proposal is read again by the minute taker, and each person chooses a card to indicate their level of support for the proposal as follows:

Green - I agree with the proposal as written

Blue - I am neutral or basically for it, with some slight reservation

Yellow - I have a question to be answered before I can make a decision

Orange - I have a serious reservation, but I am not willing to block consensus

Red - I will block consensus and I am willing to help find a collective solution

If orange or red cards are raised, people holding those cards are asked to voice their concerns if they have not already done so. Small amendments or clarifications may be made to the proposal to address concerns. A second show of cards then follows. On the second carding a proposal is passed unless red cards are still being raised. In the rare case when there are significant orange cards but no red cards, the proposal still passes, but is likely to be renegotiated by the group before too long.

If consensus is not reached on the first or second carding, the proposal is sent back to the appropriate focus group for more work. The focus group will consider the opinions and any new information that has arisen in the Full Group meeting. They may alter their proposal or bring it back unchanged to the Full Group. If consensus is still not reached at a subsequent Full Group meeting, and the proposal is considered both important and urgent, we can decide to go to a vote. A third meeting would be called and all members notified of the impending vote. At this meeting the decision can be made by a 75 percent majority vote of people eligible to take part in the decision-making.

The coloured card system encourages every member in the room to participate in discussion and decision-making. Dominant personalities find it harder to push their ideas through at the expense of less vocal members, and less confident members find it helpful to be given a space to talk, rather than finding their own gap in a robust discussion. The shades of meaning in the decision-making mode allow members to voice reservations while still allowing the proposal to proceed.

—RA

oped a deeper understanding that the red card was less about expressing a personal objection, and more about the needs of the whole project and community. The wording was understood (though never formalised) as “I believe this proposal is not in the best interests of the community and I will block consensus.”

Once construction was completed and residents changed over time, the red card began occasionally to be used as “I’m saying no and I don’t want to discuss this again.” Many of us felt this was effectively a veto, which has no place in consensus. To address this tendency, new wording was agreed as a trial: “I am blocking this proposal and I am willing to help find a collective solution.” Unfortunately, this change lapsed when

one or two people red-carded the proposal to make it permanent. We now have four somewhat different versions of what the red card means, and, while it hasn’t yet caused serious difficulty, it remains unresolved and will require serious collective intent to clarify and agree between us.

Earthsong added the black card to the deck in response to a conflict in the early group, to mean “I have an interpersonal difficulty that is preventing my full participation.” Though rarely used, the ability to acknowledge strong feelings arising in the meeting that could otherwise get in the way of consensus has been helpful. While sometimes used to express personal distress, the black card has also occasionally been used by a member offended by racist or sexist language. Being able to express this in the moment helps us all to learn, to understand each other better, and to build a more inclusive culture between us.

Communication

When you value diversity in your community, of age, gender, ethnicity, family background, and more, as Earthsong does, you also get diversity of communication styles. What might seem abrasive to some is seen as refreshingly clear and direct by others. What might look like willingness can be an inability to say no.

One of the most useful founding agreements for Earthsong was an agreed set of guidelines around communication. (See sidebar.) Consensus decision-making requires effective, respectful communication that builds trust and confidence and allows each to have a voice. Our commitment to “I” statements helps to counteract a tendency to speak for others without their invitation—an act we call “Wee-ing,” as in “We all think that...” Another phrase, though not formally incorporated into our Communication Agreements, has also been regularly cited and invariably helpful: “Assume good intent.”

Earthsong’s Communication Agreements are aspirational; we don’t all get it right all the time, but we have agreed what is important to us collectively and we can remind one another that this is the culture we value and aspire to.



In Aotearoa New Zealand, increasing use and knowledge of the indigenous language of Māori enriches our connection to this land and to each other. Many

Māori words are now in everyday use, and they bring with them a wider and deeper understanding of our interconnection than is usual with the English language. “Kaitiakitanga,” though generally translated as guardianship or stewardship, carries with it a far deeper sense of being rooted in the land and kin to all other species. “Whanau” means family, but its use implies a network of relationships and connection far wider than the English word. “Hui,” while used now to describe any sort of meeting or gathering, traditionally was the coming together of people to talk, listen, and decide a course of action between them.

Language is powerful, and the words we use shape the assumptions and understandings behind what we say and what we hear. In the crucible of community, we have an extraordinary opportunity to evolve and nurture language that reinforces the cultural shift towards a just and sustainable world for all. It’s an ongoing journey of learning and discovery. 🌿

Robin Allison was an architect before founding Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood, a 32-home cohousing development in suburban Auckland, New Zealand. Her seminars and workshops on community-led housing development, governance, eco-building, and sustainable urban design have since been a catalyst of the growing cohousing movement in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her book Cohousing for Life is both a handbook for cohousing and her personal story of the collective endeavour of developing Earthsong. (E-book is available from ic.org/community-bookstore/product/cohousing-for-life; hard copy from robinallison.co.nz.)

Earthsong Communication Agreements

I will use “I” statements and speak for myself, not others

I will speak succinctly (short and to the point)

I will take responsibility for owning and naming my own feelings

I will respect others’ rights to speak without interruption

I undertake to respect others’ privacy by not discussing, outside the group, other people’s personal issues which may arise within the group process

I undertake to value and respect different contributions and perspectives of all individuals

I undertake to keep relationships within the group clear by dealing with any problematic issues directly with the persons concerned

I recognise that we work best together when we remember to have fun!

—RA



The Proper Way to “Anger”— A Marker of Belonging

By Kristina Jansen



How we talk and how we act are communication strategies that are always central to how we arrange ourselves in our respective communities—whether they are intentional communities or signify other types of community identity. This includes word choice; for example, calling a soft warm covering a “sweater” versus a “jumper” signifies the speaker more likely hails from Santa Cruz, California than from Wellington, New Zealand. It also includes modes of behavior, ways of speaking, and even the kinds of clothes we wear (i.e., the Santa Cruz “sweater” is likely woven cotton in muted shades of blue or gray, while the Kiwi “jumper” would be woven from soft merino wool dyed a bright shade of teal). We know who belongs to our group, and who does not, from what words they use and the ways they use them. It can be subtle, or it can be overt, but we all know when we are with “our sort” of people because of how we communicate.

My community, which I’ve called Orinda in these pages, is based in California, and definitely shares a lot with the surrounding world. Our community is not distinctly separate from the society it is nestled within: we speak English; we hold jobs

alongside nonmember coworkers; some of us live in apartments or houses alongside nonmember neighbors or even housemates; and we wear jeans, t-shirts, lululemon, and whatever happens to be fashionable in our corner of the planet. But some ways that we communicate set us apart, and longtime members express themselves in some ways that feel mysterious to newcomers. As I sat down to think about what coded communication styles make Orinda most distinct, the topic of anger popped into my mind, which I can best illustrate by talking about my partner as he became a part of the Orinda community of friends.

Performative Outrage, Anger, and Love

My partner, Israel, is from Mexico City originally. When he first came around, and even now, 10 years on, his early training on how to rightly express anger and frustration were at odds with Orindian expectations, where outbursts of physical violence—even “non-serious” ones—are just not cool.

As a child, his oldest brother with support from their mother would find bigger kids from the neighborhood for him to fight. The goal, according to Israel, was to “toughen him up” and

stop his “sissy” ways. As the youngest of eight siblings, and a child drawn to art, fashion, and finer things, Israel took a good amount of abuse from his family.

By the time he was a teenager, his physical strength and fighting ability were an integrated part of his personality. He most identified with the ideal of protector: standing up for his sisters when their husbands hit them, standing up for his family’s good name when a neighbor implied less than perfection. He learned how to fight, and he did. A true man can fight, after all, and should fight for what belongs to him. In the face of injustice, disrespect, or even minor frustrations, macho rage was the manly way to be. Say little, but don a frightful glower and carry a big fist. That said, he never stopped wanting to dress well.

Earning a merit scholarship to a private religious school gave him a chance to be in a different world. But his family’s poverty meant he had only one set of clothes to wear, despite the place at the nice school. For a fashion-sensitive young man, hoping to impress his peers, this was humiliating. A wealthy classmate who was being bullied became an opportunity, and Israel traded his tough-guy brawn for new clothes. Thus began his life as a “fresa”—or one of the preppy set—bought by his skills as a fighter.

This was normal, accepted, and made perfect sense to Israel when I met him at a martial arts class we were both enrolled in. I was there to learn how to use my body for self-defense and also for endurance. Israel was there to improve his fighting skills and maybe learn control. I liked him because he seemed open, funny, and warm. He liked me because I looked into his eyes and smiled. We didn’t know it, but we were both in the perfect mental spaces to form a new attachment, and lo and behold, we found one! I was still in the process of breaking up with a longtime partner, the father to my son, but meeting Israel really sped that dissolution along, all to the good.

At first, when I introduced Israel to my Orindian friends, they liked his personal warmth and expressiveness, but felt put off by the undercurrent of macho hostility that came up in various settings. One story that Israel told, early in our days together, had to do with defending my honor to a coworker (Israel worked construction), who implied that I might be a “loose woman” if I were part of that “old commune.” He kicked the man in the shin and told him to shut the f— up or he’d make him drink the outhouse. When he told me and other friends about the incident a few days later, it did not go over that well. He was shocked, and had expected approval, gratitude, and appreciation; not only had he defended me, he had also defended the group against an unfair and ugly accusation. Instead, he got nervous looks, advice on walking away, and a few people who said they were angry at him for making that outburst.

“What the hell?” he asked me later on. “Who are these crazy people that don’t even appreciate how much I care about you? I was defending them too. What kind of sissy jerks are they?”

The particularly galling part of it for Israel, who knew and accepted that my former partner and I were still good friends, as he is also a part of Orinda, was Israel’s feeling that he was being incredibly open and tolerant about that close rival. The

implication that I—who still lived on the same property as my ex—didn’t appreciate how much Israel trusted me and how vigorously he defended my honor really irked him.

Getting Angry in the “Right Way”

It has been a journey for Israel to get comfortable with the socially preferred practice of embracing direct rivals as potential friends. The fact is, the people who want the same things as you do are often your kind of people. And since there is no limit to the amount of respect available, having a good competitor often brings out our own personal best. It’s been even more of a struggle to learn to let insults slide off his back without reacting with violence, though he would never act out like the kick incident again. He’s learned to call me, to vent and blow off steam in a more “Orindian” manner.

That’s because being verbally vulnerable about emotional reactions, even violent rage, is very acceptable at Orinda as long as it’s done “the right way.”

In specific formats, we encourage yelling, raging, screaming (sometimes alone, with one other person, or in a group setting) to express rage or frustration—to “get it out” and then be able to process it, work through it. We even have a “talk” dedicated to this type of practice—the “Anger Talk,” which meets once a week and has a small core of regular members, myself included, as well as a few others who drop in on occasion when they have something strong to get off their chest.

This is best done when the offending person is not actually in the room—allowing the rageful one to vent their feelings in a safe space, without the danger of hurting someone unnecessarily. Once the feelings have been given full forceful expression, the rage fully felt—but not acted out—there’s a moment of silence and coming back into the present moment to reflect on what’s just been said. The speaker will usually take a few breaths and remark on how they felt after that yelling—which is usually relieved, but sometimes sad. Then there’s perhaps a suggestion from one of the other people in the room to “answer back” or to go further with new feelings that have come up, to work through what might have sparked off such deep feeling.

While Israel has never actually attended an “anger talk,” I am a regular participant. It’s helped me figure out how to get in touch with my own anger, and how to turn it into productive action instead of letting it drown me in depression. This happened last March when I felt really pissed off after learning I had not received a grant I had applied for and had been short-listed to win. Or then there are the times when I’m angry at Israel for not being perfect, for having a chronic illness that also affects me. It won’t help to talk to him about these things that he can’t change, but it does help me go yell about them in a safe space around understanding friends. That way, I can come home to him, and be kind and loving without the drip, drip, drip of resentment getting in the way.

Israel and I sometimes have our own mini “anger talks” where I listen to him sound off about something—usually his boss, one of his siblings, or some crazy situation that feels terrible. It’s far more productive than kicking someone in the shin, and honestly letting it rip in a safe space is kind of fun.

An Orinda Lexicon

Here are a few words often used within the Orinda community that might not make sense to outsiders. Explaining these eight terms gives insight into the experience of living in Orinda, and into the unique richness of language around emotional states and self-awareness that comes with the territory.

• **Talk**—noun: a gathering together of friends, which can number from two to 50 people or even more, to discuss feelings, ideas, reactions to each other and events in the world, to offer personal reflections, feedback, and advice—although when a Talk devolves into an advice-giving session for someone who's brought up a challenging personal subject or who has become the topic of critical feedback, that's considered a less helpful experience, or a "bad talk." On the other hand, a talk full of authentic self-expression is usually seen as a "great" or "feelingful" talk. Often qualified with an adjective to explain what kind of "talk" it is, e.g., a "kids talk" is for younger folks, the "anger talk" is a place to deal with angry feelings, a "big talk" means it's open to all. Sentence: "We will be having a big talk at 9:00 am Sunday, and a big clean-up afterwards."

• **Feelingful**—adjective: evoking an emotional response, generally positive or poignant. Synonyms: touching; heartfelt; meaningful. Antonyms: cut-off; cynical; phony. Sentence: "You should see Kramer vs. Kramer. It's such a feelingful film."

• **Floater**—noun: a) Euphemism to describe a piece of feces floating in water (something we used to see often when anchored in a port without a highly developed infrastructure). b) Also used to describe a person who has no internal sense of self, who seems to have no inner drive, but rather is carried along by the crowd. Sentence: "Audry, what do you really think? Whenever we talk, you seem more like a floater than a full person!"

• **Voices**—noun, pl.: a way of labeling the self-critical thoughts everyone has that they may or may not be fully aware of. Understood to have origins in our childhoods—the incorporation of negative parental messages, spoken or unspoken—that are inevitable in the parent-child relationship. Also might develop from other close relationships like siblings, and often reinforced as we go into the wider world. In the singular, "the voice" is understood to be the personification of our inner critic, that often presents in a friendly way, but seeks to adversely impact our ability to stay vulnerable and close to other people, or to stay close to our most authentic self. In other words, it's a per-

sonification of our inner defense mechanisms. Sentence: "I'm having voices. If I were going to express them, they'd say 'You're such an idiot! Look at you always trying to put yourself out there. You look ridiculous and no one respects what you have to say. You should shut up and be glad they don't tell you to leave the room.'"

• **Answering back**—verb: the action of talking back to one's voices. Can be done with anger and rage, expressing a strong emotional defense of self after exploring what negative thoughts have been swirling around in one's subconscious. Can also be done with less emotional affect—a rational re-stating of reality that is less colored by the negative views of self and others that often leaves one feeling "less than," or cynical about the world. Sentence: "To answer back I'd say, 'You shut up! You know nothing about the situation. I have something to say and I am worthy of having my voice heard! Anyway, I know that I am appreciated, and my friends want to know what I think. It's not stupid to be loud and add my thoughts. It helps me feel seen.'"

• **Competitive**—noun: a state of being where one is aware of wanting what they observe another person has—which may be a relationship, a job, a characteristic, or some other quality or recognition that seems desirable. It is similar to outright jealousy, but usually has more of a friendly feeling behind it. It is understood that knowing what leads us to feel competitive can help guide us into what we want to achieve or pursue in our own lives. Sentence: "I felt so competitive when you got that raise. I hated you a little."

• **Connect**—verb (pejorative): to act in a way or speak about another person in a way that subsumes the fact that each person is a separate individual. Example: a mother talking about her daughter as if the daughter's accomplishments were a direct reflection of the mother's self-worth. In that case, the daughter might say, "Don't be so connecting! When you do, I feel weird." This is in opposition to authentic closeness ("to feel close"), when two individuals resonate in mutual emotional alignment.

• **Cut-off**—adjective: describing a state of being that is devoid of emotional awareness, as in being detached from inner awareness. Also used to describe an event or person lacking any authentic feeling or emotional awareness. Sentence: "I feel so cut-off right now. It's been a while since I thought about how I'm doing." Or: "Don't be such a cut-off asshole."

—KJ



The call for articles for this issue of COMMUNITIES reached me a few days after Will Smith slapped Chris Rock at the 2022 Oscar Awards ceremony. I mention this event because some might say Smith was just defending his wife against an unfair slur. In fact, some did say this, including at least one female Black actor in the audience that night.

The linguist John McWhorter, a *New York Times* columnist who also happens to be Black, pointed out that perhaps Smith had chosen a "vernacular," of sorts—being a "man" by defending his "woman," but that he got the setting wrong. McWhorter elaborated that the reaction might have played differently to a Black audience familiar with rules against standing for being disrespected, what he described as "beef" culture, than it would

to a mainstream America watching a stately ceremony that's supposed to be about glitz and glamour. It was a gaffe that will have lasting implications for Will Smith's reputation.

The parallels to my own account of mismatched styles around anger, belonging, and love should be obvious. In both instances, these men were trying to say, "I love you." In both instances, these men were trying to show they were part of a "we." They just got the words wrong. 🐦

Kristina Jansen lives in California with her friends and family, in the community she calls "Orinda" in her writings. She has a master's degree in psychological anthropology, and works as a writer, producer, editor, and executive director of a nonprofit. She is dedicated to making the world work better for more of us through positive storytelling and brilliant ideas.

The Language of Identity

By Crystal Byrd Farmer

“H omosexual” or “gay”? “Black” or “African American”? Today’s world has so many terms that have replaced the ones we grew up with. When you live in community, you want to be respectful of the words you use, not just to be “politically correct,” but to show respect for people and how they identify. But how do you know what term to use without asking? It’s important to respect how individuals within the community want to define themselves; there will be disagreements and nuances, but it’s your responsibility to know the broad strokes of what is acceptable and what is not.

In this article I will describe language associated with gender, sexuality, race, and disability based on my research as a diversity consultant. I will make recommendations based on my personal experience and opinion. You are free to disagree, especially if you are part of the group in question. At the end of the day, every individual has the right to decide how they refer to themselves. Don’t ever correct someone on their terminology if they are a part of that particular community.

LGBTQ+

Trigger warning: this section contains derogatory slurs related to LGBTQ+ community.

“LGBTQ+” is a set of identities based around gender and sexuality. The acronym that I use stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. You will see extensions of the acronym that include questioning, asexual, intersex, and even ally. The younger generations have largely abandoned this acronym for the catch-all term “queer,” which is a slur that has been reclaimed by the community—some people are comfortable using it, and others are not. Since the term queer encompasses so many types of identity, you may not know how exactly that person identifies. It’s better to let them broach the subject instead of you asking directly.

People have been bullied, kicked out of their homes, fired, and even killed when they come out or are suspected of being part of this community (this is especially true for the transgender community). It’s always appropriate to ask someone what their pronouns are, but avoid commenting on their gender presentation outside of basic compliments, and don’t mimic stereotypical gestures or phrases. Asking about what sex organs a person has or who they have sex with is inappropriate.

People romantically and sexually attracted to the same gender are “lesbian” or “gay” based on their gender identity. Many women and non-binary people call themselves gay even though the term was originally defined for men, and the Black community popularized the terms “women loving women” (“wlw”) and “men loving men” (“mlm”). The medical term “homosexual” is no longer acceptable, and slurs such as “dyke” or “faggot” should not be used by people outside the community. Words like “butch,” “masc,” and “femme” describe how people present their gender, but they do not usually indicate that someone is transgender.

People attracted to multiple genders usually identify as “bisexual” or “pansexual.” There is nuance between the two terms, but bisexual is often preferred by older generations who came out before the evolution of gender identity (discussed below). Being bi or pan does not indicate a person’s level of sexual activity, so don’t assume that any sexuality is more or less promiscuous than any others. People who do not identify with any of the above are called “straight” or “heterosexual.”

In the queer world, sexual attraction and romantic attraction are subsets of sexuality, and there are terms to describe the spectrum of both. The most common terms you will hear are “asexual” and “demisexual,” which refer to people who don’t experience or enjoy sexual activities in a typical way. Asexual people may be “sex-repulsed” or they may just

At the end of the day, every individual has the right to decide how they refer to themselves. Don’t ever correct someone on their terminology if they are a part of that particular community.

not consider sex to be an important part of a relationship. Demisexual people often describe their sexual attraction as contingent on their emotional connection to someone. There is also the “aromantic” spectrum for people who do not enjoy romantic activities.

Gender is a complex topic, and how people identify depends on their genitalia, internal perception, and the external expression of their gender. It is widely acknowledged that there are more genders than just male and female. The third (plus) category is usually called “non-binary,” but people in this category may consider themselves “agender,” “genderqueer,” “gender-fluid,” “gender-nonconforming,” or “two-spirit.” They may also consider themselves “transgender,” which historically has been used to describe people changing their gender identity from one to the other. Transgender people do not identify as their sex assigned at birth, and they may make changes to their genitalia, dress, body, name, and pronouns to indicate this. There is no single milestone to signal a transgender person’s new gender identity, so never ask people about their medical history or if they’ve had certain procedures. The terms “transsexual,” “transvestite,” and “tranny” are always inappropriate. People who identify with the sex assigned at birth are “cisgender.”

A small percentage of people are born “intersex,” which means their chromosomes and genitalia are not just “one or the other.” Intersex people usually have their gender chosen for them by well-meaning parents and doctors, and learning about their condition can be traumatic and life-changing. There is no way to tell if someone is intersex, even if you are in a sexual relationship with them. Do not broach this subject if you don’t have direct personal experience with it. Calling someone a “hermaphrodite” is unacceptable.

Non-White

You probably have heard by now that race is a social construct; however, it is a deeply significant identity for people. It is a true privilege to move through the world without being recognized as from “somewhere else.” When it comes to race, allow people to identify themselves before you bring it up. Compliments such as “your skin

is so pretty,” “I can tell you have Indian blood,” and anything related to hair are microaggressions that push people away rather than helping them feel comfortable in your community.

The term “Black” is usually reserved for people who have some ancestry on the African continent; some groups within specific countries (such as India) also consider themselves “black.” Black people in the US may have enslaved ancestors or those who immigrated voluntarily, and it includes people who also have white ancestors. Internalized racism and colorism is a problem within the Black community, where people who are lighter skinned have more privilege and may even “pass” as white. Blackness is a cultural identity as much as it is a historical identity, so never dispute someone’s self-identification, especially if they are mixed or biracial.

Older generations of Black people are used to a variety of terms including “Negro” and “colored,” but the current consensus is to use the word Black with a capital letter. The term “African-American” is preferred by some but strictly refers to people whose ancestors arrived genera-



Photo courtesy of Crystal Byrd Farmer

Claiming Indigenous ancestry has a problematic history.

tions ago and whose specific ancestry is lost to time. Recent immigrants usually refer to their specific country of origin, such as “Nigerian-American.” A new term for African-Americans has come from those seeking reparations: “American Descendants of Slavery.” Since this term is associated with a specific movement, I don’t recommend using it. Black people will use derogatory words to refer to each other, but this is not a privilege you should assume no matter how close you are to any particular Black person.

People whose ancestors were the original inhabitants of a place are called “Indigenous,” and in the US the terms “American Indian” (favored by some, and the broad category recognized by the federal government), “Native American” (favored by others, but less popular now than in the 1970s), and “Indigenous peoples of America” (favored by others) are all used as general terms, though they all employ the name given to the region after it was colonized. Most people prefer to name their specific tribe(s) of origin. Indigenous people are often confused with other races and may also pass as white with the associated privileges and/or disadvantages. Claiming Indigenous ancestry has a problematic history, so avoid telling people that you have an Indigenous ancestor even if you have documented evidence of their tribal membership. There’s nothing wrong with consciously exploring and eventually identifying with non-white ancestry, but using it to claim marginalized status or as a way to downplay your whiteness is disrespectful to those who have embodied their heritage from birth.

People who were born or have ancestry in Spanish-speaking countries are usually called “Hispanic,” and people with ancestry in Latin America are called “Latino.”

Most Americans use these terms interchangeably even though they are not equivalent. The contemporary trend is to use the term “Latinx” or “Latine” to include the multiplicity of genders, but these terms is not widely used outside of social justice and academic circles. Hispanic people within the US use a variety of terms such as “Chicano” and “Boricua” to indicate their specific heritage, so they may appreciate you asking how they identify. Asian-Americans similarly are made up of dozens of ethnicities and may be offended if you assume they are from a particular place. Hispanic and Latino people can be any race (including Asian), and their marginalization or privilege will depend on the situation in their particular country of origin. Many Hispanic people are mixed, which has its own difficulties described below.

It’s important to know that many Hispanic people in the US do not speak Spanish as a first or second language, either because they come from a country with a different language, or because their family discouraged the use of Spanish once they moved to the US. A common microaggression is to throw in random Spanish phrases or use a Spanish accent when talking to Hispanic people; this can be annoying or downright disrespectful.

People who have parents or grandparents of different races consider themselves “multiracial,” “biracial,” or “mixed.” It’s important to acknowledge a person’s self-identification even if they don’t “look” like a particular race. Multiracial people may have grown up in a healthy atmosphere of diversity or they may have been raised by a family that openly disparaged the other race. Like all non-white people, they are on a continual journey of recognizing and honoring their ancestry. Avoid using any term that is not from your cultural background such as “mestizo,” “hapa,” or “mulatto.” These words could trigger shame or disgust within people who already may feel like outsiders in their own community.

The entire group of non-white people is now referred to as “People of Color” (“POC”) or “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color” (“BIPOC”). Other terms are “Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic” (“BAME”), used in the UK, and “People of the Global Majority.” It’s important to understand that these are umbrella terms that are lexically convenient but don’t do much to recognize the diversity it represents. Most people prefer to use a more specific term when referring to their identity. Many people have told me they specifically hate the term BIPOC, which was recently invented to recognize the heavier burden that Black and Indigenous people have faced compared to other POC in the US. Nevertheless, calling people POC or BIPOC is generally acceptable.

Finally, there are people who do not think of themselves as white because their family has dark(er) skin or their ancestors are marginalized ethnicities in Europe. While I think it is important to recognize that these are unique cultures with their own history of oppression, I do not think these people should be considered anything other than white. I say this specifically for white Americans. Your ancestors may have experienced discrimination, and you yourself may be the subject of microaggressions and bias based on your religion or first language, but if you pass as white, you have the privilege associated with being white. White people in the US as a group are not passed over for jobs and promotions, have no trouble getting housing, and have an abundance of representation in the media. (To be clear, there are still hate crimes perpetrated against ethnic and religious minorities like Jewish people.) Marginalized people are more interested in having their current struggles acknowledged than engaging in a debate about history and semantics.

Disability

Trigger warning: this section contains slurs and outdated terminology related to certain disabilities.

The disability community encompasses a large number of people and includes not only those with physical or visible disabilities, but those with neurological differences and disabilities that we have normalized (such as being nearsighted). Coming to terms with one’s disability can be a long and difficult journey, and Western societies tend to infantilize people with disabilities instead of giving them a voice and agency. There are also many disabilities that are still stigmatized and stereotyped, leading people to hide

their needs and struggle in silence. Intentional communities in particular expect all members to “function” at the same level, meaning being able to participate in verbal conversations, volunteer work hours regularly, and navigate conflicts in a typical way. There is plenty of room for greater understanding and accommodation for disabled people so that communities can be truly inclusive.

The first hurdle to talking about people with disabilities is how to differentiate between disabled and non-disabled people. Disability advocates generally use the word “typical” to describe a person who presents as non-disabled; another phrase, “able-bodied,” speaks to the lack of a physical or visible disability but leaves the impression that one is better than the other. People without disabilities including teachers, researchers, healthcare workers, and nonprofit organizations have come up with a variety of terms to describe disabled people: “special needs,” “exceptional needs,” “differently-abled,” “challenged,” “impaired,” etc. They may also use phrases such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” or (my favorite) “touched by” a particular disability. In my opinion these words are used to put a positive spin on disability and soften what for many people is a life-changing diagnosis. Disabled people themselves are relatively clear on how they want to be described: as “disabled.”

There are two ways to describe disabled people. Person-first language paints the disability as a characteristic the person has—for instance, a “person with autism” or a “person with paraplegia.” Identity-first language centers the disability as an immutable part of the person: “autistic,” “deaf,” “intellectually disabled.” Individuals will have their preferences; self-advocates within the neurodivergent movement are vocal about using identity-first language (autistic, “ADHDer”) but parents and community workers are often trained to use person-first language.

Feel free to use person-first or identity-first language, but it’s unlikely you ever need to refer to someone else’s disability in casual conversation. Pointing out a wheelchair user’s wheelchair is considered by many to be a microaggression; even if they bring it up, I wouldn’t ask intrusive questions like how they acquired their disability. It may be appropriate to ask if they need help with a specific task related to a current situation, but never assume someone needs help, and don’t touch or direct adults even when you see them struggling. A person with cerebral palsy may need a few extra seconds to pick up a fork; don’t let your impatience or discomfort cause you to interfere by doing it for them or cheering them on as you would a child.

The deaf and blind communities prefer identity-first language. Deaf people will use “deaf” to describe the condition and “Deaf” to describe being specifically a part of the community that uses American Sign Language. “Hard of hearing” is another acceptable term. The terms “hearing-impaired” and “visually impaired” have negative connotations and are generally not acceptable. The words “dumb” and “mute” should never be used. A person who doesn’t verbally communicate is called “nonverbal” or “non-speaking.” People with intellectual disabilities are exactly that—words like “slow,” “dim,” or “retarded” are offensive. Other terms from the medical establishment like “cripple” or “handicapped” are no longer acceptable, even when joking.

Words referring to psychiatric disorders are in transition. In general it’s appropriate to use person-first language such as a “person with depression.” For people addicted to substances, words like “alcoholic” and “drug user” are falling out of favor, and calling someone a “junkie” or “drunk” is always inappropriate. The community is moving toward person-first language such as a “person with a substance abuse disorder” or “someone in recovery.” Calling people “crazy,” “narcissistic,” “delusional,” or “schizo” is offensive and contributes to the stigmatization of personality disorders like Borderline Personality Disorder, schizophrenia, and OCD. I would avoid asking people how they identify with regards to their mental health. Just as with other disabilities, it’s inappropriate to discuss in general conversation. If their disability is causing a problem in your community, it is up to them to seek treatment when they are ready. The most important things you can do are treat them with compassion and establish firm boundaries. Getting personally involved could make things worse and take a toll on your own mental health.

Identity is complex and so is the language around it. When we respect how someone wants to identify, we contribute to a world that values their dignity regardless of their behavior or our personal beliefs. I hope this primer was useful for you to begin navigating the world of talking about gender, sexuality, race, and disability with compassion and respect for the people within those communities. If you have feedback, you are welcome to share it with me at crystalbyrdfarmer@gmail.com. 🐦

Resources

pflag.org/glossary

www.racialequitytools.org/glossary

www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html

Crystal Byrd Farmer is an engineer turned educator from Gastonia, North Carolina. She is founder of Gastonia Freedom School, an Agile Learning Center for children with disabilities. She also serves as a board member with the Foundation for Intentional Community, Co-President of the BIPOC Intentional Community Council, and is on the Editorial Review Board of COMMUNITIES. Her book The Token: Common Sense Ideas for Increasing Diversity in Your Organization was published in 2020. Crystal is passionate about encouraging people to change their perspectives on diversity, relationships, and the world.

When we respect
how someone
wants to identify,
we contribute to
a world that
values their
dignity regardless
of their behavior
or our personal
beliefs.

Language We Live

By generations of Magic Residents, adapted by Harper Hug

What do you think about human population increase, natural resource depletion, environmental pollution, and social ills? How successfully may we address these issues with technological innovation aimed at altering the material world, or with cultural evolution driven by governmental policy or “market forces”? Or are these “problems” and “solutions,” as well as many others, mutually reinforcing maladaptive behaviors? How may we shed light on such questions, and by what transformative process might we reach a vantage point from which to examine our circumstances and actions from fresh perspective?

The languages we hear and speak, read and write, are defining qualities of our being. We offer here a few ideas about the role of language in our lives, and about changes to language by which we at Magic, a valuescience-based residential service learning community in Palo Alto, California, are aiming to enhance our own and others’ capacity to adapt successfully to the rapidly proliferating and exponentially growing challenges of our times.

Importance of Word

Though many organisms communicate with others of the same species, humans are unique in extensiveness and complexity of word language. With each passing day, linguistic enterprise—hundreds of separate languages, thousands of dialects, wireless and fiber-optic networks, computers, phones, and high-speed presses, print and broadcast media, libraries and archives of books, periodicals, correspondence, electronic media, and more—is becoming more central to human existence.

Anyone reading these words likely experiences much less of nature directly than did most people in the past or do most humans today. We’ve stripped away darkness of night, cold of winter, heat of summer, force of wind, and wet of rain. What we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch—buildings, roads, machines, electronic devices, clothing, etc.—is increasingly already shaped by human endeavor.

Perhaps more importantly, we experience both nature and artifact through a remarkably pervasive and influential phenomenon of our own making: word. Increasingly, what we “know” is word representation of our own and others’ experience. We live awash in a sea of word.

Maps and Territories

We distinguish fire from the word “fire.” When we learn about fire by placing a hand in flame, we understand something different from what we learn by hearing another admonish, “Fire burns.”

Interacting directly with fire we experience it more fully. By continuing interaction we may test and refine our understanding.

Relying upon word, however, we distort and delete. Passing our words to others, or hearing theirs, we are often loosely coupled to the experiences behind them, and we commonly lack ready means to check how well we match word to experience. Many of us take great pleasure in the thought of learning from others’ mistakes. Yet by our reliance upon symbolic representation, we may more often learn their mistakes.

Though some tout “virtual reality” as a coming attraction, we live increasingly “virtual” existences from the moment we begin to acquire language. The world of word is but an approximation. Like mapmakers, we labor from imperfect knowledge with limited symbols. And like map users, we travel more safely when we remember that words are as distinct from what we represent with them as a menu is from food.

By learning to be more aware as we apprehend, construct, and disseminate language, we may gain capacity to develop more as we intend and to shape a world more to our liking.

Language as Mirror of Experience

Humans write and speak to communicate diverse messages: joy and sorrow, technique and purpose, memories and aspirations. In language we see reflected what those who speak and write today and those who spoke and wrote in the past deemed worthy of communicating. Just as anatomy and physiology reflect DNA-encoded information sufficient for ancestors to survive and reproduce, so does contemporary language evidence communication strategies adequate for us to reach the present moment. And just as with each act of reproduction we create new combinations of DNA that their bearers will test for fitness in an evolving environment, so with each new word and construction, and with every iteration of pre-existing vocabulary and grammar, do we create and recreate language to be put to this test. In an environment as quickly changing as ours, commensurate alteration of language may be essential to our well-being.

Experience as Mirror of Language

To the extent that we think and communicate verbally, we conform our thoughts and how we express them to the particular qualities, including vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, of whatever language we're using. Native tongue, second and subsequent languages, jargon, slang, dialect, and even personal preference for certain words and sentence structures are all factors in individual linguistic identity or idiolect. By linguistic habit we reveal and redefine self, shape listeners and readers, and lay a foundation for interaction with nature and artifact.

Benjamin Whorf, a pioneering linguist who lived during the first half of the 20th century, hypothesized that the language into which we're born and that we evolve over a lifetime serves as both a foundation for and a constraint upon how we view the world. Investigators have since confirmed this assertion at every scale from individual to linguistic communities comprising hundreds of millions.

By examining the place of words we read, write, hear, speak, and think in our lives, each of us may gain a better understanding of how person and idiolect, language community and social structures, become reciprocal images. By learning to be more aware as we apprehend, construct, and disseminate language, we may gain capacity to develop more as we intend and to shape a world more to our liking.

Freedom

Many of us both celebrate and seek personal freedom, defined as "exemption from necessity or restraint." By abandoning language of obligation and compulsion we may enhance our own and others' freedom.

Consider words like "must," "ought," "should," and "have to." Do you speak and think in these terms? Do you interpret them literally? If so, who's demanding what

of whom? What penalties do you imagine, and which do people actually pay for refusal to comply? How often are these outcomes as dire as we imply with imperatives? Perhaps you "automatically" understand these words as mere expression of preference. If so, with what language do you mean and understand real exigency?

With imperatives real and imagined we deny freedom. Why do we shrink from admitting our or others' self-determination? Consider the many examples of the kind, "I want to..., but I must...." What's truly at stake? What will be lost if we ignore what follows "must"?

How often do we employ imperatives to avoid reconsidering the justifications for our lives? Are we apprehensive that if we examine these closely we'll find them wanting, that if we pursue them far enough we'll threaten ideas of meaning and purpose at the foundation of our existence? How much freedom do we surrender by imagining we may escape adverse effects of fuzzy thinking by refusing to look at it?

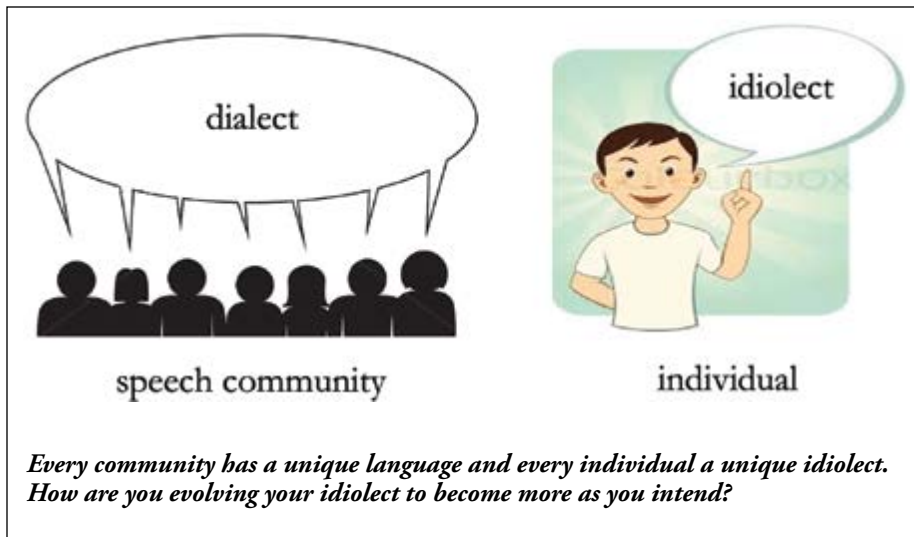
What about the occasions when we terminate interaction with others by saying, "I want to stay, but I have to go"? Do we really want to stay? If we really want to go, we may silently rationalize that we're protecting others' feelings. Might we instead be acting to forestall reciprocal future rejection by the person or people we're leaving?

Looking beyond how we erode our own freedom with imperatives, what do we achieve by telling others what they "should," "ought to," "must," or "have to" do or be? Who are we to claim to be cor-



Magicians converse over dinner about language, thought, and perception.

Photos/images courtesy of Magic



rect in such conclusive directives? How do we justify imposing on others what may be merely our personal preferences?

As we contemplate such questions, we can shed light by re-examining the underpinnings of what we portray as demands and necessities. Often these are just some of many possible lines of reasoning that we build upon only a very partial selection of available evidence, and often we'll be hard-pressed to prove or even convincingly argue their superiority to alternatives. When we see this, we may become better able to exercise broader choice and to support others in doing so.

If we forego imperatives, with what shall we replace them? We may gain by explaining evidence, including “gut” feelings and other emotions, and reasons for what we do or recommend. Rather than command, “You must tell the truth,” let’s confess, “I’ve lied and have rarely felt good doing so.”

With imperatives we divide. Someone commands and someone obeys. When we turn them inward with “I must” etc., we increase potential for internal conflict by dividing self into source and recipient of demand. When we issue or heed imperatives, we raise risk of external conflict. By relying more often upon understanding of consequences and communicating to grow our shared understanding, how much better will we cultivate harmony within and with others?

Guilt

For speakers of English, the verb form “should have” may be little but language of guilt. Consider, for example, “I should have been kinder to you.” With such words we express desire for something other than what we remember. To wish for a different past is futile. What’s done is done. We may be more satisfied if we accept the consequences of what we’ve done and been, affirm principle, admit error, and formulate a plan for remedial action without “should have.” For example, “I value kindness. I was inconsiderate to you. I apologize. I intend to be more thoughtful in the future.”

Many of us have felt guilty. Upon reflection perhaps you can imagine living guiltlessly. Rather than suffer today as we bemoan past behavior, can we concentrate upon being grateful for what we’ve learned and upon how we may apply it? Guilt may be more an obstacle than an aid to becoming more as we intend.

Regret

You may agree that “would have” and “could have,” though lacking the element of compulsion present in “should have,” are other words by which we may express desire to deny what is already done. Perhaps we may fairly label them a language of regret. For many, regret is as unpleasant—or nearly so—as guilt.

How will we change if we replace “would have” and “could have” with words of resolution: “Next time, I plan to...”? What burden will we lift from others by sparing them

criticism in terms of what they “would have” or “could have” been or done? How much more effectively will all of us cooperate if we fix our attention on what lies ahead and how we can apply lessons of the past to act for common good?

Generosity

Almost all of us recoil at the thought of being greedy. Yet few of us have mastered a language consistent with generosity, a language of expanded self, by which we unwaveringly express determination to find mutual satisfaction, rather than settle for gain achieved at others’ expense.

To what extent do we offer, and to what degree do we demand? How often in a day do we say, “I want?” and how often do we ask, “What may I offer you?”

In what circumstances might we beneficially intervene with, “How can we both come away from this interaction feeling good?” And when might we simply give quietly and anonymously, rather than draw attention to our giving and implicitly demand reciprocity?

Violence

Many, especially the males among us, liberally employ language of violence. We “whip” each other in sports, and “beat” our rivals to the market in business. As we move into an era when individual human futures are increasingly joined, and when we’re with myriad technologies growing capacity to harm each other, the circumstances in which violence among people is adaptive may be shrinking.

Might we benefit by more often emphasizing more peaceful and gentler aspects of life? “Both of us played well.” “Customers flocked to our new product.” Will we necessarily talk peacefully to live that way? What is a language of peace?

Adversarialism

Both at home and abroad, critics of the United States label us an overly-adversarial society. Some assert that we live with proportionately more laws, lawyers, and lawsuits than any other people. In recent years what was once a prudent admonition, “Read the fine print,” has become an impossible task as we’ve saddled ever more interactions with voluminous “terms and conditions.”

Collectively we devote enormous quantities of life to squabbling over words about blame and responsibility, often with little consideration for potential to improve all our lives by reallocating the same resources to learn more cooperative attitudes, and thus become better able to rely upon communicative styles less rigid. With the rise of (anti)social media, we've descended into our respective redoubts, reinforcing polarization with divisive invective.

Timidity

In a related development, many aspiring to conciliation are taking refuge in language of qualification, sometimes equivocal to the point of emptiness, and seemingly designed to protect us against later being held to any of a panoply of rigid doctrinaire standards. We are "willing" or "committed," and we "promote" and "encourage." With such language do we undermine capacity to achieve a measurable result? Perhaps if we're a bit less harsh in criticizing each other, a little more generous in shouldering responsibility for failure and sharing credit for success, more of us will be better able to express intention in definite terms, and to realize it.

Humility

"Politicians are crooks." "(Race, religion, nationality) are (adjective)." "Love is..." If we use the verb "to be" to establish our own private experience as "the" reality, we invite dispute. With bold, sweeping generalizations about good and evil we reveal misplaced confidence in what we know and become more vulnerable to ill-effects of acting while ignorant of our ignorance. If we're quick to judge, to assert views, and to defend ideas far beyond personal experience, we may be revealing a desire for control of that which lies without us. To what extent are such ambitions consistent with attaining peace within and with others?

Can we learn to enjoy a consciousness filled more with questions than with answers? Will we create a more healthful and adaptive social milieu by shaping a larger portion of thought as gentle interrogatives? Each of us is but a small portion of humankind. Perhaps we will become more satisfied if we think of ourselves as possessing only one eight-billionth or so of whatever truth is accessible to humankind.

Possessiveness

For at least several centuries, the architects of Euro-American culture have sought satisfaction and happiness by increasing environmental manipulation. Central to this process, some believe, have been ideas of ownership, which we've extended to human beings explicitly with slavery and implicitly in a surprising number of other relationships (e.g., my spouse, her child).

How do we further or limit achievement of our purposes by talking as if any person owns the Earth or some part of it, or as if some other person is "ours"? Can we develop a consciousness of stewardship towards the Earth and respect for each other by using less often the possessive, both the verbs "to have," "to own," etc. and the pronouns "my," "our," "your," etc.? How will relationships between parent and child be altered if we cease speaking of my son, daughter, father, mother? Can we denote these relationships simply as "son John," "mother"?

Integration

How commonly do we fragment self with word? Many refer to body, mind, spirit, soul, ego, id, conscience, as though we can separate these. Speakers of some languages (e.g., Balinese) are reported to find such talk nonsensical, responding with puzzlement to, "I feel physically fine but I'm terribly depressed," and similar statements.

What do you intend when you say, "I made myself do it," or "She forced herself to go?" Often we intend to communicate mixed feelings about something. Maybe by making this explicit we can become more comfortable with it. "With misgivings I did it," or "She went reluctantly"? May we feel less conflict if we eschew partial selves? Will we feel more relaxed and at ease when we live as "I" rather than as "I" and "myself"?

Subjectivity

As we shed the languages of obligation, guilt, and divided self, we can more clearly see how powerful we are. Instead of being passive objects—"I was stung by a bee," or "You make me angry"—we become more creators of our own experience: "I stepped on a bee," or "I'm fuming." Viewing the world this way, we're more likely to ascribe value to personal change. We're subjects acting, feeling, being. Rather than concentrating on external factors, we may turn more attention to choosing and acting wisely.

In some contexts, people with power over others have decreed the eradication of self in written communication by mandating depersonalized action and passive voice. We may see such edicts reflected in much contemporary "scientific" literature: "The material was processed...and it was observed..." Many within and without the scientific establishment assert that such language is intended to bolster claims to "objectivity," and thus enhance credibility of scientific findings. Yet competent scientists agree that sciencing is rooted in a combination of subjectivity and reproducibility of results. Those who represent science otherwise undermine its essence, making it less attractive and less accessible to many who might support, join, and benefit from it, and rendering it vulnerable to claims of authority that transcends subjectivity and are inimical to its essence.





Exchange

For millennia humans have been making measured and recorded exchange the basis for more and more interactions. Today we fill popular media with advice about “getting as much as we give” (or more) in such nominally unconditional relationships as marriage and parenting. We routinely talk of “exchanging gifts,” without considering whether this may be oxymoron.

How will we ever behave in a manner which evidences compassion for those whose needs exceed their resources, unless we de-emphasize the language of bookkeeping? How might we benefit by contemplating a world where gift is common, owing unknown? By what language might we support such a vision?

Negativity

How much negativity shall we entertain? Much that we portray negatively can be rephrased positively. How do you feel when you hear negativity? How do you feel when you speak it? Can you notice any difference if you speak in terms of being “ignorant,” rather than “not knowing,” of being “yet to do” rather than “not having done?” What ways can you discover to reduce negativity and how might you improve your and others’ lives by doing so?

Absolutes

“All...none...every...always...never...” With these short, simple words, we communicate powerful and extreme meaning. We live finite lives of finite experience. Rarely if ever will any of us enjoy knowledge so complete that we may accurately represent it with absolutes. By the simple act of adding a qualifier like “almost” or “nearly” we can remember and remind others of limits to what we know.

Superlatives

“Best...worst...most...least...biggest...” How readily in an age of advertising hyperbole do we utter these? But as with other absolutes, superlatives are generally beyond our ken. To pretend otherwise may be delusion. More consistent with what we actually experience are comparatives like “better...worse...more...less...bigger...”

Reification

One specific and common way in which many of us avoid the role of subject is by reification, giving lifelike qualities to abstractions. We say for example, “Her pragmatism paved the way to victory,” leaving us to wonder where we can find some of this substance to lay before us as we move towards personal goals. Are we better able to see a path to emulating another’s success if we say, “She was pragmatic and triumphed”?

Learning to think as subjects, we become less prone to reification. We more readily assume responsibility for the consequences of what we do. Instead of complaining, “The pollution is awful today,” we admit, “We are poisoning each other by fouling the air.” “Unemployment is up,” we translate to, “Larger numbers of people are failing to agree upon terms for sharing work and rewards.” Unless we enjoy surrendering agency and living at the effect of our surroundings, why reify?

Time

When before in history has time been so precisely and ubiquitously measured? Today in small villages around the globe we find cell phones keeping time with accuracy barely imaginable only a few decades ago. As we’ve made more precise, multiplied, more widely distributed, and synchronized timekeeping technologies, we’ve drawn nearly all of humanity into a megamachine operating to a single rhythm.

“Time is money!” is an expression with which most of us are familiar. We speak of time as invested, saved, wasted, spent, etc., evidencing the ubiquity of laboring for money. Do we abase self and others by pretending human life can be accurately measured by the monetary value we assign it? Can the net worth of the myriad beings and doings of any of us be captured by a single accounting of our monetary assets? How differently will we perceive the world when we replace “time” with “life”? How do investing, saving, wasting, spending translate in relation to “life”? How much more careful will we become to evidence, with all we are and do, the values we cherish?

Channels

Psychologists have determined that each of us relies upon a different mixture of sensory input. Some are tactile, some visual, some auditory, etc. For example, three different individuals might respond to the same presentation by saying, “I get what you mean,” “I see the point,” and “That’s music to my ears.” By learning to discern others’ preferred sensory modes, we may tailor what we say and write to them, and understand them better as well.

Cost and Price

Frequently we ask, “What did that cost?” and the person of whom we inquire responds with a dollar price. In a superficial sense, the communication between us has been successful, since often we ask in order to learn what we might expect to pay.

Implicit in the laws of nature are costs which we only partially reflected in the prices we generate from our own partial understandings of value. Examples include pollution, depletion of finite stocks of natural resources, climate destabilization, loss of biodiversity, and a host of other factors yet to be monetized adequately, or at all.

As humans operate more rapidly and on larger scales, we encounter more limits of natural systems. Thinking in terms of ecological costs, including “externalities,” we may see more clearly how to conform economic ideas of value to ecological ones so that we reflect true cost better with price.

Development

We frequently hear calls for “development” to improve the quality of human life. Those who advocate “development,” whether in the cities and rural areas of the US or in the rest of the world, usually mean conversion of nature to artifact (e.g., building, paving, and manufactured objects). The history of such activities is one of increasing burden for many and privilege for few. We’ve more buildings, roads, and manufactured objects on Earth today than ever before, yet more people starved or suffered debilitating disease in the past decade than in any prior.

Using “development” as code for the behaviors by which we’ve arrived at our current predicament begs the questions, “What words shall we use to describe what we now call development?” and “What kind of development will further common interests?” The first we can answer simply by describing what we’re doing: commanding resource from nature, converting it to our use, and returning it degraded to nature. Of course we do this in many specific ways. The second we can answer with reference to protecting qualities of nature with which we’ve co-evolved and on which we rely for well-being, and to evolving information, both genetic and learned, by which we can maintain a match with the world around us.

Conclusion

These are but a sampling of the changes that we at Magic are testing as we tailor language to serve our vision of healthy people shaping a cooperative society in an hospitable environment so that all may enjoy myriad satisfactions as we live and die well. If you search, you may discover a whole slew of other linguistic quirks and nuances more important to you than the examples offered here. 🌿

Harper Hug led others currently living at Magic in adapting for COMMUNITIES this writing, authored by Magicians over decades. Harper graduated from high school in June 2022, is enrolled at the National Personal Training Institute, and has begun studying psychology at Santa Barbara Community College. Harper lived his first 18 years at Magic (www.ecomagic.org) where he was regarded from childhood as community “glue” for his ability to bring people together in physical activities from hiking to resistance training and in Magic public service projects from feeding the hungry to habitat stewardship.



An enduring presence of Peace and Oneness

Non-residential intentional, multi-generational community offering monastic training for lay persons. Sharing values, promoting physical, mental and spiritual health through meditation, study, ceremony, and service.

Come and visit one of Southern California's original spiritual communities. Founded in 1973.

- Permaculture Gardens
- Retreats and Dharma Talks
- Comprehensive Metaphysical Libraries
- Yoga and Bhagavad Gita Study
- Spiritual Astrology
- Tara Visualization and Chanting
- Creative Expression through the Arts

Contact Ona at pranava242@gmail.com for more information or to schedule a visit.



Learn more at: ic.org/directory/morningland-monastery/

JOIN FORMING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

embracing the principles
of Voluntary Simplicity

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

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

garbage!

sometimes my mind feels like a garbage can

maybe it's metal, once raw elements of earth
formed in molten glory
fruit of the supernova
itself progeny of the Big Bang...
an illustrious past
now filled with trash

maybe it's plastic, once dinosaur flesh
towering ferns
and glorious ancestors of horsetails
keepsake of the abundance of a teeming planet...
now squandered
in our squandering

where can I empty it?
what's inside?

I want to get rid of all the metals and plastics first
recycle them so there's no need to extract more
let someone else use them, and more wisely this time
with more deliberation, more care, and more thankfulness
remembering they come from the same place
and are as alive and as dying as you or I

then I'll dispose of all the paper
tear it up into little shreds, let it be remade
more in the service of tree, vine, and herb this time
remembering that fiber aids the earth's digestion
I'll forget all the failures I've ever measured
and let the now be now without boxes of words

that will still leave some organic matter
which, without oxygen, can really start to stink
I'll layer it all in a compost pile
wet, dry, green, brown, air, and microbes together
I'll give it time to rot
to become fertile soil

then I'll grow another garden with it
keeping my mind both full and empty
metal, plastic, paper, and compost
beating with the pulse of life
lots of space between it all
just an instant after-before Cosmic end and beginning

I'll let the forms come and go
and everything old will be new again

Among Barry Peter's many favorite things at the time of writing were the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, bicycles, native fruit, and compost piles. Reprinted from Talking Leaves: A Journal of Our Evolving Ecological Culture, Volume 13, Numbers 3 & 4, Fall/Winter 2003/2004, "Voices of the Earth: People in Harmony"; see gen-us.net/talkingleaves.

There's a Place

There's a place
Where tape recorders don't work
Cameras turn out blank film
Digital information is all zeros
Computers freeze and crash
Magic is afoot

This place eludes all efforts to capture it
Well-protected by spirits,
It's where everything real resides
It's why dreaming can't be photographed
And loving can't be quantified
And truth can only be seen in pale representations
once it leaves the immediacy of experience

It's where newborn babies see visions
Musicians hear songs
Old farmers hang out and share stories
It's where the conversations happen that shape one's life
And connections are affirmed that give it substance
It's off the radar screen of all established media
It's the mad dreaming that is wiser and more real by far
than anything that can be purchased in a store, on the street,
or over the internet

It's more silent than silence, and more symphonic than a
symphony
It's darker than the darkest night, and brighter than the sun
It can't be compared to anything
And words can only hint at it
Yet now, and forever, it's the only place that is

From this moment on, I swear, I will dwell nowhere else
Forget all my previous directions, they were illusions, too
precise
I think Rumi had it right
There's a place, I'll meet you there

In the two decades since these previously misattributed verses first appeared, Water Wordsworth has emerged as the actual author. Reprinted from Talking Leaves: A Journal of Our Evolving Ecological Culture, Volume 12, Number 3, Fall 2002, "Eco-Shelter, Coming to Our Senses"; see gen-us.net/talkingleaves.

remembering the Hopi Center for Human Services

my greatest teachers spoke few words, or none
they were childlike, tempestuous, and wise
their smiles were immediate
their tears flowed without remorse
they needed our "help" to cope with a world in which they'd
never "grow up"
they lived so that the rest of us could live
I loved them like children, like brothers and sisters, like
elders
I loved them more than words could say

Willie, Terrel, Ike,
Ethel, Harold, Chris,
Meredith, Alvin, Elsa,
Bradley, John, Gregory,
Vincent...

their names still flood me with memories
they were strangers, and my closest relations
who can know this, who can understand?

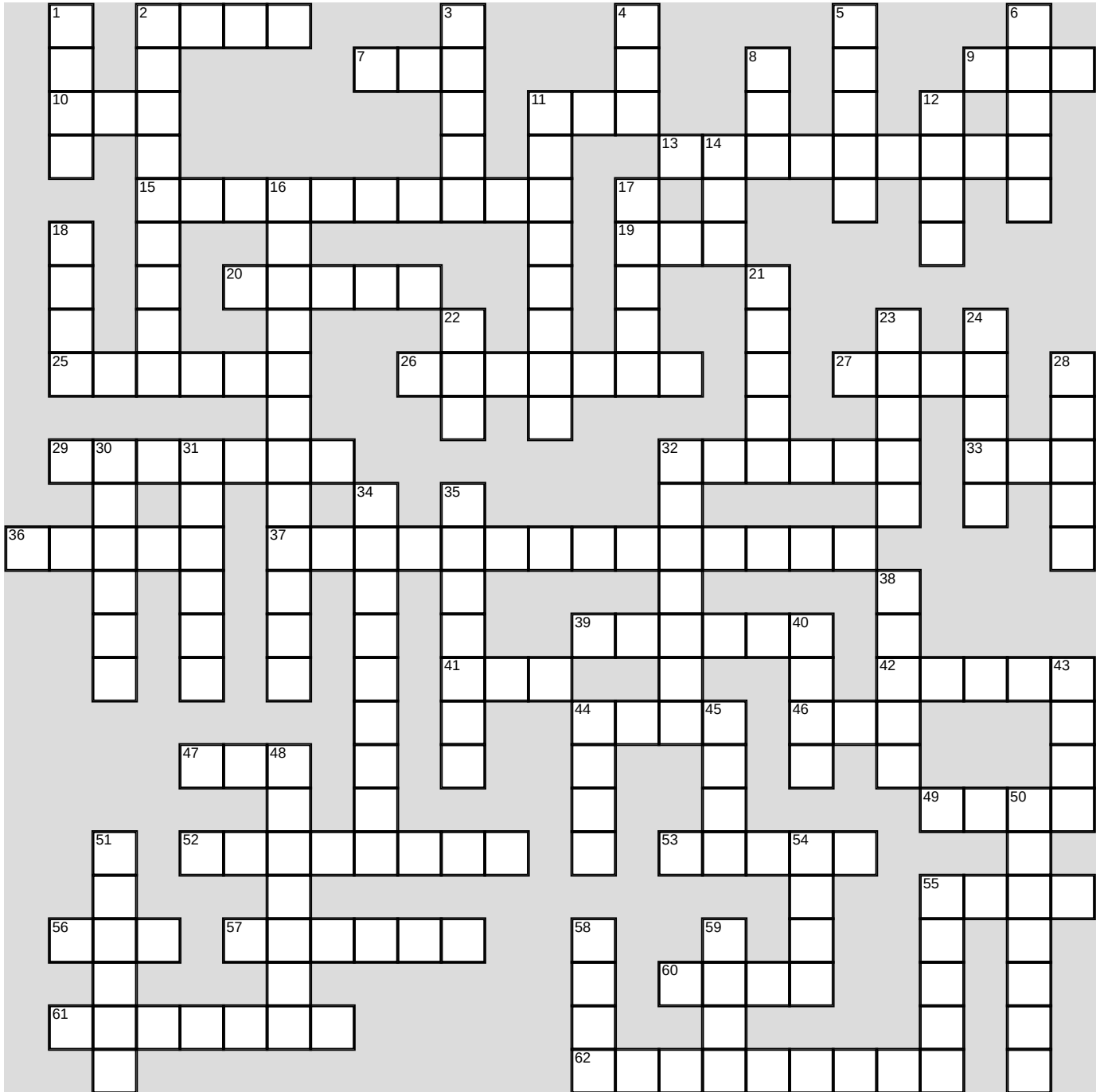
those days are gone
they are still locked in their perpetual childhoods
some of them have left the world in which "developmentally
disabled" could be shorthand for
"poisoned by uranium tailings, but what is to be done?"

I have moved on, too
to other adventures, not better

Chris Roth worked as direct-care staff at the Hopi Center for Human Services, a home for developmentally disabled Hopis in Keams Canyon, Arizona, in 1984-5. He later joined Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon, where he edited Talking Leaves for eight years and also wrote under several pseudonyms. Reprinted from Talking Leaves: A Journal of Our Evolving Ecological Culture, Volume 12, Number 2, Summer 2002, "Ecopyschology, Self and Place"; see gen-us.net/talkingleaves.

Language of Twin Oaks

Crossword clues by *Stephan Nashoba*
Layout by crosswordhobbyist.com



Twin Oaks Crossword: The Clues

Across

- 2 “We are not a ____” (no charismatic leader, folks are free to leave when they wish)
- 7 Our “__ to __” [same word in each blank] norm encourages getting consent before starting a potentially difficult conversation at an inopportune time
- 9 Many Oakers choose to use a menstrual ____ as an alternative to disposable period products
- 10 We have only one on the farm and it’s allowed to be used only for cow slaughter
- 11 When eating at the ____ table, you’re not allowed to talk about work :)
- 13 Where you want your golf ball to end up; or phrase describing when someone owes the community money or labor hours
- 15 Louisa, Virginia was the epicenter when a magnitude 5.8 occurred in 2011
- 19 Hours that Oakers can claim when going to health appointments, in brief
- 20 Our child:adult ____ is currently 1:5 in order to determine when we can invite visiting families and provide enough childcare resources
- 25 First the ____, then the revolution (a common cleanliness challenge in most communities)
- 26 An ordered series of events or actions; or a word referring to the bureaucratic means of engaging with the community
- 27 Processed soy product; or Twin Oaks’ current largest communal business
- 29 Name of the indigenous inhabitants of the land on which Twin Oaks now stands
- 32 Twin Oaks has a low-visibility norm around these mobile communication devices in order to encourage face-to-face interactions instead
- 33 Name of a free open-source software for enabling anonymous communication; or the form filled out to request items from the town “tripper,” in brief
- 36 ____ Gathering is the newest Twin Oaks conference, centering rural LGBTQ+ culture
- 37 Belief in human equality; or the founding principle of Twin Oaks’ labor and money systems
- 39 Our ____ balance policy strives to ensure that women and non-binary people feel comfortable living at Twin Oaks
- 41 Small creature that often signifies “work” and “cooperation”
- 42 We press our own ____ cider each fall from our orchard
- 44 We collectively own about 12 of these, as well as a couple of trucks and some vans, that members can sign out to use
- 46 We have a double-sized one for bathing with a friend (or several friends)
- 47 Community organization consisting of several income-sharing communities (including Acorn, East Wind, and more), in brief
- 49 Our current nudity policy calls for wearing both ____ and bottoms during communal meals
- 52 Popular pieces of outdoor rope leisure furniture; or Twin Oaks’ first major communal business
- 53 A delicious pinkish orange fuzzy fruit; or the name of the catastrophic health insurance policy held collectively by members of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities
- 55 Popular trendy green grown in our garden, delicious steamed, sauteed, or in “chip” form covered in nutritional yeast
- 56 Type of bean used to make our Twin Oaks Tofu
- 57 Piezoelectric crystal found in abundance around the woods of Twin Oaks
- 60 Irish dance tunes; or the structures our hammocks are made on in order to standardize measurements
- 61 Some people think communards are lazy ____, but we actually spend a lot of time working and organizing
- 62 You should do this often during the summertime to make sure Lyme-carrying bugs don’t suck

Stephan Nashoba has lived at Twin Oaks Community for about eight and a half years. Co currently manages Equipment Maintenance, Welding, Taxes, Archives, Labor, and the Twin Oaks Queer Gathering. Stephan also enjoys blacksmithing, rock climbing, DJing dance parties, being read to, and consuming a variety of potato products.

Down

- 1 Exercise class for the body and mind, led by Valerie every Friday afternoon
- 2 A decision-making style that involves everyone being mostly in agreement
- 3 Pulp consisting of insoluble parts of the soybean that remain after pureed soybeans are filtered to make tofu; we trade it to a local pig farmer as feed in exchange for pork
- 4 The US arm of this worldwide org is the current publisher of COMMUNITIES
- 5 A source of flowing water (nearest one to Twin Oaks is called “the South Anna”) and also the name of a long-term Twin Oaks member
- 6 ____ hours are generally from 10pm to 8am so that folks can sleep without interruption
- 8 We currently have a ____ limit of four dogs and eight cats
- 11 Cause of the terrible noise that occurs when speaker output is picked up through microphone and re-enters the speakers; or meeting that gets called when a person has violated community agreements
- 12 This multi-person relationship style is more common and accepted in community living than in the mainstream, in brief
- 14 Popular style of communication in the communities movement, in brief; includes using “I” statements and deep listening techniques
- 16 State of an object which allows light to pass through it; or a group which may meet to play structured “games” in order to learn more about themselves and others through this process
- 17 The “O & I” board (place to post proposals for comment) is thought to stand for “opinions and ____”
- 18 Popular watery locale for summertime childcare or wintertime saunas; clothing is optional when swimming here, so we often forget to pack swimsuits when going off the farm
- 21 An open grassy plain en espanol; or the name of Twin Oaks’ first building which still houses our office and communal kitchen
- 22 Our tax status with this federal org is 501(d), same as monasteries
- 23 Sliced bread browned by heat; or Twin Oaks’ academic speaking gigs, in brief
- 24 Our weekly labor requirement per person (usually around 42 hours), which includes labor credits for both income and domestic work
- 28 Twin Oaks’ property consists of about 500
- 30 Brand of tableware; or 19th century Perfectionist community; or the name of a Twin Oaks residential building
- 31 A beautiful lights show in the Northern sky; or the name of Twin Oaks’ visitor cabin
- 32 A daily organizational notebook; or one of the three “board members” who take an 18-month turn being in charge of the community as a whole
- 34 Book that Twin Oaks was originally based upon, written by B.F. Skinner
- 35 Last name of a famous “painter of light” who is known for mass-produced pieces featuring pastoral and idyllic subjects; or last name of a founding Twin Oaks member who wrote *A Walden Two Experiment* and *Is It Utopia Yet?*
- 38 You never know what you might find on the ____ table (place to swap your stuff for free with fellow communards)
- 40 Last name of the COMMUNITIES editor
- 43 We get dozens each day from our beautiful farm chickens
- 44 The publication you’re reading right now, in brief
- 45 The name of Acorn community’s seed business which Twin Oaks helps with, in brief
- 48 Folks often call us a ____, but many prefer the term “intentional community”
- 50 Supportive head accessories for Twin Oaks hammocks and hammock chairs
- 51 “It’s not ____, but I can see it from here!” (goal of many intentional communities trying to find a better way of living together)
- 54 Dutch Belted is our breed of choice for our herd of these
- 55 Oakers can borrow one to use on the pond or nearby river
- 58 Every guest at Twin Oaks needs one of these (a person who is responsible for orienting them to life in the community)
- 59 Hours that Oakers can claim when too ill to work

NOTE: The correct answers to this Twin Oaks crossword will appear in COMMUNITIES #197, Winter 2022. Meanwhile, you can send your completed puzzle to Stephan, Twin Oaks, 138 Twin Oaks Rd., Louisa, VA 23093 for a chance at a prize!

A Songaia Glossary

By Sylvan Bonin



When guests, interns, and friends come to Songaia Co-housing (in Bothell, Washington), we sometimes forget that not everything we say makes sense to them. We say these things so often that it feels natural. We forget to pause and explain. Here are a few things that we say that are specific to our community.

• “Songaia”

The name of our community is a portmanteau of “song” and “gaia.” It is pronounced with both of those words smooshed together. When the community was forming there was a gathering to decide on a name. “Song something or other” was one idea because we sing together all the time. We sing at the start of meals, the beginning and end of meetings, while working, when tension gets high and we need a breather. Gaia, the living spirit of Earth, was in the mix because we’ve always had strong ecovillage aspirations. It was one of the children who first put the two words together. The room fell silent in immediate recognition of the perfect fit. We define the word Songaia as “song of the living Earth.”

• Abundance Principle

Our list of shared values is not much different from those you’ll find in many other Intentional Communities. However, we also have a few “Principles”—practical ways of functioning—that I think set our culture apart. The Abundance Principle is a way of thinking that says, “There will be enough for what is needed.” It is also an alternative to the concept of “fairness.” Instead of asking, “Did we all get the same amount?,” we ask ourselves, “Do I have what I need?”

We start with the assumption that we can create abundance in all of our lives by living and sharing together. We don’t “count beans.” We take what we need and share our excess. We provide extra for those who need it. A prime example is our food pro-

gram: We buy in bulk and have an open pantry stocked with all the basics. We don’t mark how much we take. We all pay the same amount of money each month for food program membership. Some people eat almost entirely from the pantry and others do more shopping on their own. Growing boys eat more than little old ladies. If we feel that we have what we need and are getting good value, then it’s working!

Another example is capital improvements. We try not to agonize over budgets at the outset of a project. Instead we decide what we need and what our hearts desire. We set a goal, then figure out what it will cost. We trust the universe and each other to provide the Abundance we need. Synchronicity always seems to bring the people with the right skills, the windfall of money that someone decides to donate, the discounted or scrounged materials.

• Passion Principle

The Passion Principle is closely related to the Abundance Principle. People will do what they care about, and what no one cares strongly about can wait. We don’t have a required number of community service hours or a chore rotation system. Some people work full-time and squeeze in community work when they can. Others are retired and give most of their time to Songaia. Some people love to garden. Some people enjoy bookkeeping. I don’t think anyone really *loves* to clean but someone always cleans the bathroom because they have a strong desire to have it *be* clean. We serve on committees as we feel called and as our energy allows. When a special assessment is needed for a project, we first collect donations from people who care passionately about the project. Then if any funds are still needed the amount we have to assess is much smaller.

• Culture of Care

This Principle asks for awareness and gentleness for each other’s feelings. We try to assume good intentions. We check in on how

people are doing. We offer support to those who are injured or sick. We hold compassion for anyone who has different ideas than we do. We love each other first, and hold onto our relationships even when we argue. We prioritize our internal relationships very strongly at Songaia. We try to hold each other and ourselves in gentleness when we don't complete a task or live up to our goals. We slow down, notice the beauty, appreciate each other and our home, reside in patience.

• Harambee

Songaia was founded by a group of people who had done service work together in Kenya. The Kenyans they worked with shared a song and a concept: Harambee! They gave permission to our founders to use it. Harambee means “pulling together” in Kiswahili. It is the idea of a rope, made of many fragile strands, twined together so that the strength is more than the sum of its parts. Harambee is both a verb and a noun. We use the word Harambee more often than the American term “work party.”

• Round Table

A Round Table Discussion, or just “Round Table,” is a detailed conversation about a proposal or a thorny problem we are having in the community. It can be a Q&A, brainstorming, or outside-the-box problem solving. A Round Table may come up with ideas on how to address an issue but is not used for actual consensus decision making. Often a Round Table is held after a first draft of an idea is presented to the community, then the people who wrote it will take those new ideas and write a second draft. Not all proposals need Round Tables! Anyone can ask for or schedule a Round Table if they think a topic needs deep discussion. The Passion Principle applies to Round Tables: those who feel strongly about an issue or have ideas about it will go. Everyone else trusts that those who were there fully examined the possibilities. We believe that the right people are the ones who showed up!

• Decision Board

One of the problems with the way most groups practice consensus is that it doesn't work well for all people. Introverts, people whose strength isn't in verbal communication, people who want

to take time to slowly mull over an issue, people who are nervous speaking in large groups, anyone who has to work during the meeting time, those who are traveling...these people are at a disadvantage when consensus decisions are made during whole-community meetings.

Songaia uses a hybrid process where proposals are sent out via email, presented for questions and discussion during community meetings, discussed in detail at a Round Table if necessary, then posted to the Decision Board (usually for two weeks). This allows the most possibilities for everyone to engage with decision making. The Decision Board is not an *alternative* to a consensus process, it is a *tool* used in our consensus process. When a proposal is posted to the Decision Board (an actual physical bulletin board in the Common House) it is accompanied by a signature page. Everyone's name is listed. There are columns for initial for consent, needs more discussion, and “funding model needs discussion.” There is a column for comments.

Anyone who doesn't sign at all is saying that they consent and trust others with this decision. If someone initials “needs discussion” then the person proposing will contact them and see if their questions can be answered one-on-one. After discussion they may consent, the proposal may go back for another draft, or a Round Table might be scheduled. In-person discussion is crucial for good consensus. Almost all proposals (other than very routine small things) are discussed during our meetings *before* a signature is expected. (See the article “Consent-Based Decision Making at Songaia Cohousing” in COMMUNITIES #192 for an example of the Decision Board at work.)

• “Final decision rests with...”

We are a round peg in a square hole. We are a consensus-run cooperative culture in a legal system that expects hierarchy and voting. We are a homeowners association nested within a neighborhood association, trying to share power with members who rent, live in a van, don't live here at all, or bought a house next door to be part of this. Who is the “we” that makes a consensus decision? Here is our answer: *Everyone* can take part in a discussion, ask questions, offer ideas. This includes guests! The group with whom the “final decision rests” are the people who we actually need consensus with.



Photos courtesy of songaia.com

This can be tricky to figure out as the community is composed of four properties, owners of homes, two nonprofit organizations, associates who don't live here, renters who fully participate in the community (Level 2) and renters who just want a home but aren't really interested in the community (Level 1). Sometimes it takes several people to figure out what to put on the "final decision rests with" line of a proposal! In the end it rarely matters. It is an artifact of our legal system which would only be looked at if there were a legal issue. The reality is that all of us are needed for good consensus.

• Biogaians

Our largest committee, the Biogaians are responsible for the garden, the landscaping, the forest, the wetlands, overseeing privately owned farm animals, and most anything that grows. The name is pronounced bio-gaia-ns. (We often use the "song" or "gaia" part of the community name in the names of other groups or events.)

• Barn Swallows (aka BS Committee)

The subcommittee responsible for keeping the Magic Barn (aka Barn of Doom) relatively organized so that the space is usable. The Barn holds a woodshop, pottery studio, individual storage space for each home, electrical and plumbing shop for our facilities maintenance guy, a small lumber yard, a bike shed, storage for lawnmowers and wheelbarrows, a wall of tools such as shovels and rakes, the Biogaian storage and work area including an irrigation repair bench, two pantries, refrigerators and freezers leased by the nonprofit we share the land with, a large open space for construction projects/playing basketball/roller blading, space for people to place furniture they are giving away, space for both personal and community projects...it's a lot of chaos. The BS committee is the group that tries to keep that chaos from tipping over into utterly unusable entropy, or organizes clean-outs when it does.

Before you go buy anything, always check the Barn to see if we have what you need! Chances are good that it's there, but if you leave out the magic words you'll never find it. Turn in a circle with your finger extended and say "Magic Barn, Magic Barn, find me a..." Good luck!

• Director of Acquisitions

Doesn't every community have someone who brings home random things that might be useful? Who scrounges used fishing nets,

burlap bags, stainless steel sheets, old bricks, and free things no one can think of a use for? That's the Director of Acquisitions! Most of the time ours brings useful things home. Sometimes we have to send them back out into the world to find purpose elsewhere. When you need something strange but specific, or an expensive material outside your price range, put in a request and see what shows up! This is the man with connections, who knows how to find all the places that are giving things away because they just don't need them anymore.

• Community Action Plan (CAP)

If you spend much time at Songaia you'll hear us refer to "the CAP process" or CAP groups by number, such as CAP4. (We say it as one syllable, like a baseball cap.) The Community Action Plan was part of our 20-year anniversary (in the year 2020) "Hindsight is 20/20!" (The date marked 20 years from the houses being finished. We had owned and resided on the property much longer.) We took a hard look at what we liked about how our community functioned, what we wanted to keep, and what had room for improvement. We organized the things that needed work into six categories, CAP1 to CAP6. Each CAP group was/is a Disappearing Task Force (DTF) focused on improvements in areas such as raising children in community; improving trust, vulnerability, and communication; or power imbalances related to race, gender, or other issues. CAP groups have brought in speakers, started book groups, written proposals, shown movies, and planned for long-term resilience.

• Second Banana

...and Third Papaya. Around here, if someone says they need a Banana it's a good bet they aren't looking for fruit. The Second Banana is the assistant chef for our common meals. Sometimes it takes more than two people to cook a meal, in which case you might need a Third Papaya. I really don't know where this comes from. No one I've asked remembers. Just one more way in which silliness and play permeate our lives here.

• Yellow Meal

I like to invent holidays and celebrate non-traditional holidays. So does my community! Long ago, before I lived here, one of the children asked for something special to celebrate the last day of





school. There was a teacher who lived here with a wide creative streak. She came up with Yellow Meal to symbolize the school buses that were ending and the Summer sun that was beginning. Each year, on or around the last day of school, the cooks make a Community Meal that is all yellow foods. It's quirky and fun! We serve kid-friendly favorites such as banana pudding, baked macaroni and cheese, and lemon jello. We add more "adult" foods like paella or polenta wedges. We put Dandelions and Nasturtiums in the salad. If there's chicken, it's bound to be curried.

• Isthmus Day

This holiday comes from my own family and I'm still working on making it a community staple. My kiddo loves words! When he first heard the word "isthmus" he was eight or nine. He was entranced with the tongue-twister smoothness of it and how much it sounds like "Christmas." He wanted a holiday, about halfway around the year from Christmas, called Isthmus Day. He didn't know what it should celebrate but knew that it should involve things that are between and things that connect, like the land feature it is named after. Eventually I thought to look up the Panama Canal, the world's best known isthmus engineering project. It was officially opened on August 15th, 1914. Just about halfway around from Christmas! Each year on August 15th we take a picnic to the beach. We build sand castles and dig canals. We slow down and connect with our family. We set aside the busyness of life to enjoy the sunshine and sand. You, too, can enjoy this "connecting" holiday with sand and family and picnics and canals. Maybe we'll see you at the beach!

• Talent Optional Show

It's like a talent show, only sillier. Why limit performance to those with practiced skills? Short-circuit stage fright and judgment and elitist nonsense. We all can entertain! Don't write poetry? Read us some of your favorites by other authors! Show off your newest tool or toy and tell us how it works. Share your favorite websites and give a you-eyed tour of the internet. Play an instrument with whatever skill you have...or try to play an instrument you've never played before in your life. Teach us a skill. Tell a story about something that happened to you, or read one you wrote about something imagined. Whatever you bring, bring yourself and we will love it.

• The Compost Shirt

Compost! It's a dirty stinky job that no one actually looks forward to. Except that, sort of, we do. We look forward to the rich black soil full of fungus and microbes. We look forward to healthy produce full of nutrients, fresh from our garden. We get caught up in the microscopic drama of chemicals and bacteria. We care passionately about reducing our ecological impact. We carry out scientific enquiries. So there are always people who joyfully lend their hands to shredding, turning, layering, and mixing. (Remember the Passion Principle?) The Compost Shirt is a white T-Shirt that has been signed by all those willing to dig in to the stinkiest job. Biogaians, guests, and interns, all who have contributed to soil health and nutrient cycling, put their name on the Compost Shirt.

• Gifts to the House

Many communities wrangle with gift-giving. Birthdays, Christmas, Chanukah...these are complicated subjects. We all come from different backgrounds. We bring emotional baggage from the broader culture and from our lives before we moved into a community. "Gifts to the House" is Songaia's solution. Instead of giving Christmas presents to each other as individuals we invite gifts to the *community*. On New Year's Day we gather to open presents. We squeeze the whole community into our little living room (much cozier than the big meeting space!). People take note throughout the year of things they think we need in the kitchen, the shop, the garden. Committees make a list of things that we could use. People give art, gift certificates to Home Depot, or little notes with gifts of their time. The gifts of time are my favorite! "I will sweep the steps of the Common House every month." "I will repaint the Guest Rooms." "I will mend that broken gate that keeps getting de-prioritized." No one notices or cares who has a gift or who doesn't. We celebrate each opened package with cheers, then try to guess the giver. 🐣

Sylvan Bonin lives at Songaia Cohousing, near Seattle, Washington (see songaia.com). She spends most of her time gardening, cooking for the community, putting up the abundance of the garden and orchards, building and fixing things, and teaching edible wild foods and mushroom foraging. Between "suburban homesteading" and building community, she makes as much time as possible for art and dancing.

"Is That Community?"

By Nick Shaver

The corner of our kitchen is a magical place that has a wide array and constantly changing food offerings. The food in that corner often begs the question, "Is that community?" (meaning, "Is that available for community consumption?"). Most of the time, the answer is yes, as it is the dropping-off place for extra food and sharing. Over the years it has contained day-old cake pops from a community member who used to work at Starbucks, misshapen Belgium Waffles from a culinary arts student, handmade pies left over from family gatherings, and lots and lots of high fructose corn syrup in the form of candy acquired from all the many holidays candy is given.

There can be so many sweets that every once in a while we need to have a conversation with our community at one of our bi-weekly meetings about limiting the amount of processed sugar that everyone is so generously giving away. Sometimes, a few of us take it upon ourselves to pretend to "eat" a few candies and instead throw them into the trash, justifying the waste by telling ourselves, well I COULD HAVE eaten it... but instead I am doing people a favor by limiting the processed sugar available; that's OK, right?

And every once in a while, there is something in the corner that seems too good to be true, an unopened container of dried figs, or a big bag of deliciously crunchy pistachios, that begs asking the question to folks as they enter the kitchen, "Is that community?" Often roommates shrug it off, "I don't know, I didn't put it there." One time in particular a whole untouched cake from Whole Foods appeared there, bringing the ethical dilemma of what to do next front and center. To eat, or not to eat, that was the question.

I mean, everyone who lives here KNOWS that's the community corner, right? I

mean, maybe that one person who moved in recently may not know, and may have left a delicious entire chocolate cake from Whole Foods there untouched by accident, or maybe it was a welcome gift to the house? So now, what to do; I was in the kitchen with the temptation, contemplating whether or not to eat it. I decided not to for now.

Later that evening, I returned to the kitchen and still saw the untouched cake and asked another community member who was in there, "Is that community?" Again, they shrugged it off, "I don't know, I didn't put it there." That made three of the 11 of us who live here unsure. A fourth roommate entered as we were discussing our situation about whether or not to

We figured someone would have definitely left a note if the cake were not up for grabs, right?



Melissa Shaver

eat the delicious, untouched, whole cake left in the community corner. We texted out to the house, “Is the cake community?”

No response. Ten minutes passed, still no response. We decided, rather shyly, to make the poor weak-willed choice by trying a small piece. It was so good, we each took a small second piece too. We figured someone would have definitely left a note if it were not up for grabs, right? We put it away and then left the kitchen feeling a little guilty for possibly ruining someone’s future celebration. But the temptation was too grand, and the three of us were too weak in our will. The next morning, we awoke to a friendly text from a roommate, “Yes, the cake was left over from a party, please enjoy!” Yes!! Except eating cake with guilt, no matter how good it was, is never as good as eating cake without the guilt. Oh how much more could we have enjoyed that treat had we known for sure it was indeed for community!

Sometimes though, rarely, people do leave a bag of chips from their lunch bag by accident, and then text out, “Has someone seen my bag of chips?” Uh oh...probably someone has, in fact I am sure someone has eaten it, they know they have, but come to think of it, we have never heard of someone fessing up to any of the community mistaken eatings over the last 12 years of living in this community house!

Sneaky Pilgrim

The first year of starting the community we played Secret Santa with a twist. After drawing names out of the hat, our objective of the game was to spend at most \$5 in the whole month to give weekly presents/kind acts of service at least once a week for the month of December with each person’s Secret Santa to be revealed at the end of the month.

We had a blast: dishes were being washed unexpectedly, doors were decorated with poems of affirmation, and little notes were left on our mail shelves. Then the reveal itself was exciting too. At one of our weekly meals, we all guessed which of our roommates we thought were the ones showering us with kindness. It was so fun, we wanted more, so that year we also played Sneaky Valentine for February and Sneaky Bunny in April that was loosely affiliated with Easter.

We took a summer hiatus and we came up with Sneaky Pilgrim to continue the gift giving in November instead of waiting for December. Then for some reason, of all the rest of our monthly gift givings, Sneaky Pilgrim became a tradition for the next 10+ years up until today! We considered a rebranding to Creepy Puritan, but that didn’t stick for obvious reasons. Our friend recently told us that our name was some “colonizer sh*t” so maybe we need a rebranding this year, maybe Tricky Turkey? As long as vegetarians and vegans support it!

When I started the community house 12 years ago with several friends, we were all young and single in our mid-20s. Now I am married with two kids, and last year for the first time when my daughter was five she joined the roommates in our gift-giving Sneaky Pilgrim celebration. What a blessing to be growing in a family in community and having special phrases and vocabulary such as “Is that community?” and Sneaky Pilgrim!


Other terms:

Snackmas: A made-up holiday in late December where we bring snacks and watch our favorite YouTube videos!


Mac Media Night: Biweekly meetings where we bring any media to share on topics we are passionate about.

The Mac House: The name of our community house, on McGregor Street, that has housed over 55 people in the last 12 years, all of whom are very familiar with “Is that community?” and Sneaky Pilgrim. 🍷

Nick Shaver writes: “I have lived in the McGregor House in Cincinnati, Ohio since it started 12 years ago. A couple of years after starting the house, I met my wife there and now live in the community house with her, our two kids, and seven other adults. More than 55 folks have passed through our doors and it has been special living with each of them.”



BEACON HILL FRIENDS HOUSE



A Quaker center for peace, justice, and community in downtown Boston.

Online programs that cultivate community, nurture personal and spiritual deepening, and empower collective action.

Opportunities to live in our intentional community.


Connect with us at bhfh.org

A VALUES-BASED
MULTIGENERATIONAL
SOCIOCRATIC COMMUNITY

JOIN US FOR AN INFO SESSION
MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE

UNDER CONSTRUCTION
ON ADAMS CREEK
EXPECTED MOVE-IN
LATE 2023

A LIFE
WELL
SHARED
IS A LIFE
WELL
LIVED



**Adams
Creek
Cohousing**

adamscreekcohousing.com
Hood River, Oregon

Clash of “Higher” and “Lower” Selves Splits Community into Two

By Annette Pecker

Editor’s Note: As many of this issue’s articles highlight, how we choose to use language can have powerful impacts in our own lives and in our communities. Close interaction with one another provides many opportunities to encounter and work through “language clashes,” as described in the satirical piece which follows.

Written 21 years ago and originally published in *Talking Leaves*, the magazine produced at Lost Valley Educational Center from 1998-2006 (see gen-us.net/talkingleaves), the story reflects actual conversations and events in the Lost Valley community. The terms “pyramiding,” “Spritely Singing Diva of Wayward Canyon,” “Diva of Transformation for Wayward Canyon and the Planet,” and “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” are stand-ins for the words actually used, which included “coning,” “Deva of Lost Valley,” “Deva of Transformation for Lost Valley and the Planet,” and “White Brotherhood Team.”

For obvious reasons, that last term eventually fell entirely out of favor and has not been uttered at community meetings for nearly two decades. And whereas “higher self” was the actual term used, accurately represented by this pseudonymous author, “whole self” rather than “lower self” was more commonly invoked as an alternative.

The outcome reported here (a split into two separate communities which occupied the same land but each had their own meetings) never happened, but many of the thoughts and frustrations depicted are more honestly described in this satirical piece than they could have been in any other form without causing unintended damage to relationships. If it’s true that “hunger is the best spice,” a little humor may sometimes be the best sauce to help us live with differences.

This article is excerpted from *Talking Leaves: A Journal of Our Evolving Ecological Culture*, Spring/Summer 2001, Volume 11, Number 1, “Tools for Sustainability / Eco-Humor,” pages 24-26.

After 12 years of challenge, struggle, and persistence in their efforts to maintain an ecologically conscious, spiritually eclectic, personally supportive intentional community and conference center, the residents of Wayward Canyon Educational Center have finally decided to split into two separate groups.

There’s no need to worry, however. Both groups will still be sharing the same land, buildings, water fountains, and bathrooms. Under terms of the mediated settlement, one group will simply be occupying a “higher plane” than the other; and the two groups will meet separately

The “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness”: in a word, trouble.



photo courtesy of Wayward Canyon Educational Center

Wayward Canyon lower selves celebrate liberation from higher selves.

from now on. Casual visitors, course participants, and conference guests previously unaware of the conflict are unlikely to notice any difference from the familiar Wayward Canyon community they know and love.

The division came to a head at a recent “wellness circle.” By long-established custom, each Wayward Canyon business meeting and wellness circle (wherein community members deal with personal and interpersonal matters—“feelings”) opens with a “pyramiding,” in which community members attempt to funnel cosmic energy through a psycho-spiritual “pyramid” formed by their own words. One community member will invoke guiding spirits or set an intention for the circle or pyramid, and each individual will bring their self “present.”

In the old days, the facilitator of the pyramiding would invite the “Spritely Singing Diva of Wayward Canyon,” the “Diva of Transformation for Wayward Canyon and the Planet,” and the “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” (which, alarmed newcomers to the circle were assured, had no connection to the Ku Klux Klan or the Aryan Nation), along with assorted gnomes, faeries, the spirit of the land, and whatever other guides or deities were deemed appropriate for the occasion. Each individual would then invite their “higher self” into the circle. The pyramidings proceeded this way without an apparent hitch for several years.

The trouble started when people started to question, think, give voice to their inner feelings, and develop a sense of humor. Whether consciously or simply through a slip of the tongue, some individuals combined the “Spritely Singing Diva of Wayward Canyon” and the “Diva of Transformation for Wayward Canyon and the Planet” into the “Spritely Singing Diva of Transformation for Wayward Canyon and the Planet.” From there it was only a short, slippery slope to the “Spritely Singing Diva of Transportation for Wayward Canyon and the Solar System,” the “Spiteful Stinging Deerfly of Transmigration for the Galaxy of Wayward Canyon,” and worse.

The “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” fared no better. To its advo-

cates, the term denoted a mystical cadre of beings who were not necessarily white either in coloration or in concepts of greatness—or, if they were, it was not because white was better than black or any other color. Similarly, these “fathers” were either not necessarily “male” or, if they happened to be male, it was not because male was better or holier than female or hermaphroditic. However, the words “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” were very important in invoking this group, because that was indeed their name, and unless it was used they would not know they were being called upon. The Holy Fathers enjoyed a long lineage tracing back to spiritual ancestors who cared deeply about us, and changing or dropping their name would be a betrayal to generations of our spiritual forebears.

The more “uppity” community members maintained that the “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” was inherently a racist, sexist concept, reminiscent of Nazi Germany, the Ku Klux Klan, apartheid, slavery, lynchings, and a long history of patriarchal oppression. If these spiritual helpers were not white nor male, why call them “fathers” or describe their greatness as “milky-white”? If they were truly mystical beings, why did they need to hear an inaccurate, easily misconstrued name to know they were being called? If most new participants in our circle were going to have a knee-jerk gut reaction against this Aryan-Nation-like term—feelings that needed to be assuaged by careful explanation that the “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” were not what they sounded like—why keep invoking it?

To many in the community, the term “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” was, at best, an embarrassment—and, at worst, an outrage. In one particularly heated meeting in 1998, the “Holy Fathers” issue seemed poised to split the community into two. But an uneasy, ambiguous compromise was reached, whereby calling in or recognizing the “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” was acknowledged as being strictly voluntary and freely abstained from by any individual. After that watershed event, as time passed, even the staunchest advocates of the “Holy Fathers” called on them less and less. Occasionally, the “Forces of Light” would be invited into the circle, raising hackles on those who believe that light and darkness are equally valid parts of reality, but as an alternative to the “Holy Fathers,” they were certainly an improvement.

It was the “higher self” question, which had gnawed at the community for years, which finally drove Wayward Canyon community irrevocably into two separate camps. While seen as more subtly oppressive than the “Milky-White Greatness” language, the “higher self” concept raised difficult questions for a significant proportion of community members. In the same way that male/female, white/black, and by extension light/dark dualisms served to create a value-laden split in reality—with



Higher selves laugh it up, safely insulated from the dirt and grime outside the classroom window. Notice, however, the insidious temptation to fall into lower-self behavior.



Photo by Sharon Dougherty

Residents at Wayward Canyon Educational Center wrack their brains for a lyrically-p.c. song.

New alternatives to “higher self” included “lower self,” “my intestinal flora,” and “Wiggly the tapeworm.”

“male,” “white,” and “light” being implicitly good, and “female,” “black,” and “darkness” being understood as bad—the “higher” and “lower” distinction carried huge amounts of cultural, philosophical, perceptual, spiritual, and moral baggage. In short, one’s “higher” self was conceived of as being one’s best, most noble self, with the other parts of one’s self implicitly less worthy of respect.

To the “uppity” ones (for now, we’ll refrain from examining the values inherent in that use of the up-down concept), this exaltation of the “high” at the expense of the “low” was nothing more than a replay of the victory of the Sky God over the Earth Mother in Western mythology, a reflection and result of thousands of years of patriarchal thought, belief, and action. In this conceptual framework, the earth

is dirty, evil, “base,” a sinful place where we “fallen” humans wallow in misery until redeemed by a Heavenly Father who will “lift us up.” Relationship with the earth is the domain of heathens, pagans, witches, wiccans, and the wicked—“low” people who are ruled by their bodies (especially their lower chakras) and the body of the Earth below them. The “elevated Masters” have learned to renounce these sinful lower realms in favor of their “higher selves,” floating unblemished above the muddy mess of the teeming earth. By calling on our own “higher selves,” we too can conquer our sinful lower beings and free ourselves from our bondage to the tempting, treacherous, dirty Earth Mother. Or at least, those are the assumptions the “uppity” ones heard every time someone in the circle invoked a “higher self” or “higher being.”

For their part, the “higher self” invokers didn’t see what all the fuss was about. “It just means my best self—what’s the problem?” was their general sentiment. “The problem is that you don’t see a problem,” was the “uppity” response.

Some of this struggle manifested itself along class or seniority lines. Most of those who arrived at Wayward Canyon before the “higher self” concept was ever called into question persisted in inviting their higher selves to every circle. But the great majority of newer arrivals, when presented with the alternatives developed around the time of the “Milky-White Greatness” crisis (alternatives which included “higher self,” “lower self,” “my intestinal flora,” and “Wiggly the tapeworm”) elected one of the less elevated phrases. Some, in fact, made a game of counting how many “lower selves” (or variations thereof) were present in the circle, as compared with how many “higher selves,” noticing with glee that “lower self” seemed to feel a lot better to most of those fresh to the controversy. In the same way that the words “Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness” caused confusion and indignation in most of those who hadn’t heard the phrase so often that it just slipped in one ear and out the other—in that same way, “higher self” apparently seemed like an equally patriarchal, antiquated concept to those free-thinking individuals newly joining the Wayward Canyon circle.

While, on the surface, the Big Compromise (including its palette of invocation alternatives) established an uneasy truce, the below-surface tensions continued to mount. When not entertaining themselves by counting higher selves vs. lower selves—or when the count came out unfavorably—some of the “lower self” invokers reverted into disbelief and disgust that patriarchy could still be possessing the minds and souls of so many of their co-communitarians. “Pious loyalists,” “milky-white-nosers,” and “holier-than-thou ethericists” were some of the more charitable thoughts that flitted through the lower-selves’ minds. “It’s no wonder that no one but us gardens or works on the land—these people really do consider themselves superior to it. How did

we ever end up in this all-talk, no-action, airy-fairy, earth-divorced, nature-denying place? Why are we growing food for people who think they're 'above' manual labor and the dirty, teeming earth? And why do we have so many thoughts out here in the garden even though we've rebelled against intellectual elitism?"

Meanwhile, the higher-selfers considered the lower-selfers low-down, fault-finding troublemakers with no respect for tradition or for their fellow community members, some of whom happened to like the way "Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness," "higher self," and "Spritely Singing Diva of Wayward Canyon" rolled off the tongue and into the ear. "It's just words—get a life!" was one higher-selfer's frustrated plea when yet another discussion of high/low dualism, the linguistic and psycho-spiritual legacy of patriarchy, and the imperative toward wholeness and balance threatened to engulf a seventh consecutive community meeting.

Finally, at a particularly fractious wellness circle, tempers flared and words were said that could not be taken back. "If you want to exist on a higher plane, why don't you?" shouted one lower-selfer. "No problem, we will!" retorted a higher-selfer. "And you can go on living in your low-down ways. I don't see any conflict."

The conflict was not, in fact, so easily resolved, and required extensive outside facilitation and mediation. However, a happy, win-win outcome was ultimately achieved. The two groups now meet separately. The higher-selfers continue to live at Wayward Canyon on a higher plane, honoring tradition, respecting one another's best

intentions, communing with etheric beings, and avoiding contamination from the lower soil essences. Meanwhile, the lower-selfers garden, sully themselves with abandon in the lower planes, fantasize about the end of patriarchy and its myriad manifestations, talk about their intestinal flora, respect Wiggly the tapeworm at least as much as they respect any human being, and know that they will never hear the words "higher self" or "Holy Fathers of Milky-White Greatness" in a community meeting again. 🐙

The accompanying author bio reported: "Annette Pecker lives, loves, struggles, laughs, cries, and rejoices at Wayward Canyon Educational Center with her partner, Water Wordsworth." Both were in fact pseudonyms for the magazine's editor.

Wayward Canyon Programs 2001

Leeks, Geeks, and Freaks: Organic Gardening in a "Unique" Community

Join Wayward Canyon's experienced gardeners for a season of exciting intellectual inquiry, intense interpersonal engagement, self-exploration, nonstop punning, and menial labor. Learn why vegetables and farming are on the bottom of everyone's list when it comes to choices of food and occupation, and why the agricultural revolution which started 10,000 years ago truly was a massive mistake. Learn how to distract yourself from the grind through swims in the creek, discussions of music, film, and politics, and emotional processing. Remember how it used to be before the Fall from Eden, and look forward to the time when you can once again be a "hunter-gatherer" of knowledge, wisdom, and experience, instead of a slave to the day-to-day reality of our domesticating, domineering agricultural paradigm. Learn why leeks, geeks, and freaks all seem to end up together in the Wayward Canyon garden; how they cope; and why they all eventually escape to become writers, teachers, consultants, massage therapists, musicians, or soup.

Daikons, not Dot.coms: Permaculture for Recovering Internet Investors

Has the stock market got you down? Do the platitudes of our culture and its "brain-damaged" version of economics leave you feeling empty? Do you suspect there is life beyond your computer screen? Did you listen to the wrong investment adviser? Did you have any lunch?

Wayward Canyon offers a course for those disillusioned with Wall Street and Virtual Society. Through actual hands-on experience, you will learn to identify, plant, harvest, and eat a multitude of unusual plants, many of them connected underground through nature's own mycorrhizal "internet." Daikon radishes, sea kale, bamboo shoots, and dandelion greens are among the literally half-dozens of vegetables you will acquire a taste for, or at least learn the names of. More important will be the lifelong lessons you learn about those romantic notions of "sustainability" and "the simple rural life" that provided your last hope of sanity when your financial



schemes fell apart around you and you signed up for this course. On the other hand, we can't think of a better area to take stock of and invest in than Permaculture, because its value has nowhere to go but up.

Changing Our Language to Reflect Our Reality

By Riana Good

Have you or others in your community said, “I’m feeling low,” or “I’m in a dark place,” or “I’m higher than ever!,” or “I’m full of love and light”? Our community members do. Quite a lot. The metaphors of low/high and dark/light are complex, and can unintentionally reinforce false binaries of good/bad and inclusion/exclusion.

Since our language creates our paradigm, we have been developing new language to refine our words to align with our beliefs, dismantling the false thoughts that our minds can unwittingly reinforce through certain speech patterns. As Starhawk declares in *Dreaming the Dark*, “Nothing *does* change, unless its form, its structure, its language also changes” (p. 26). Words are spells; in fact, “spells” and “spelling” derive from the same etymological roots. Here, I suggest alternative spells we can cast, and I invite you to explore them with me.

Refining Binary Language

Languages of love are based on curiosity and acceptance, on non-ranking and non-judgment of self and other, and often call for more nuance than we are used to. Ultimately, all is One. At the same time, that Oneness can be distilled into polarities such as yin/yang, masculine/feminine, spirit/matter—and language is useful for that! Some binaries exist in the physical world; for example, light and dark, along with the spectrum in between. Though our Western worldview has accustomed us to think in dualities, we can choose to navigate the Universe differently, and our language can reinforce that choice.

So much of English (and other Latin and Germanic languages) reinforces binaries and systems of ranking to the point of polarization. Binaries reinforce difference, separate-

ness, and opposition. Ranking reinforces scarcity and the idea that there is only so much room “at the top,” which results in resentment and jealousy of those “above” and mistreatment and violent oppression for those “below.”

Distinction and difference are key elements for our discernment and survival, though “different” does not necessarily imply “opposite.” Nor does it mean that the embodiment of that difference is somehow “against” us. What worldview are we choosing and reinforcing when we speak of children, elders, women, people with darker skin, and those who are more responsive to their bodies and to the earth as “lower” or “darker”?

The goal of community is to join where we are similar, to be in a collective experience. Refining the false binaries in our language can diminish unintentional “othering” and support that togetherness.

Light/Dark

Let’s take a closer look at the terms light and dark, which are useful to describe the presence or absence of visible light rays, though whose associated symbolism has muddled our thoughts. We often unintentionally reinforce the idea that light is good and dark is bad because darkness is often used to convey negativity: evil, death, or the unknown. Light is generally used to convey something positive: goodness, life, or hope. Light/dark as good/bad is not an inherent truth. It’s just a metaphor developed based on beliefs of fairly recent human history. The Bible has had a strong role in developing and reinforcing these associations of good/bad, when in fact both are necessary and valuable parts of existence.

Dark is often associated with inferiority because the earth, the body, darker skin, and females have been subjugated through oppression. Light, as associated with spirit, enlightenment of the mind,



Nathan Brescia

and brightness, has been seen as superior.

We can reclaim the dark without negating the light. Ultimately, one is not better or worse; they are parts of a whole, and both elements are needed for balance. Too much light can present as toxic positivity, being unanchored and out of touch with the sometimes devastating reality of existence. Yin energy, the dark of night, deep waters, and stillness can be very soothing. Experiencing grief or what we often call “dark emotions” is part of the human condition, and must be accepted to be transformed. “Shadow work” may refer to what we are challenged to look at, or what we don’t normally see or feel. In the practice of magic, for example, there is often a distinction between “light worker” and “dark magic,” though they are not actually separate.

So if someone were to say, “Feel the light,” or “I’m in a dark place,” we could ask them with calm curiosity, “What do you mean by that?” to further understand their experience and to help refine their language so it reflects their intentions. Depending on the circumstances, light may be intended to mean love (“Feel the light”) or reduction (“Lighten your load”), whereas dark may imply fear (“They’re acting from a dark place”) or despair (“The outlook is dark”).

We are not trying to flip the paradigm and make “dark” better; we are just bringing awareness to the paradigm that is currently in place. As it so happens, I absolutely love sun and light, and I have built my life around being in the sun almost all day, all year round.

When we have negative associations, the implicit bias impacts us against our wills. To free our minds and to help others to free theirs, we need to pause on using terms such as light and dark symbolically until we have done enough work to use and hear them without the implicit association of good/bad, and the racism, sexism, and other oppressive systems that this binary represents. The work we have to do is not only internal self-development to shift our perceptions; it is to help end oppression in the world. As we work with others toward this goal, the terms “light” and “dark” may come to mean something new.

This Is New; We’ll Make Mistakes

Awareness is often the grounds for change, and we do not need to judge ourselves or others for lack of awareness around our language use, either. Just as with any behavior pattern in our own lives, observation and awareness come before any change is made. To paraphrase Moshe Feldenkrais: You need to know what you are doing before you can change it.

The words we are exploring do exist, and the meaning of each word serves us in some way. We do not need to eliminate them from our vocabularies. We must, however, acknowledge how they frame our realities, and examine that impact. Let’s play with this idea, and stretch our minds to new places. Let’s laugh at ourselves if/when we get rigid in taking on new paradigms. We are not here to “language-police” or control others. We don’t want to be “too woke to have fun” and get scared to make mistakes. We are going to make mistakes. We are not to blame for mistakes after lifetimes of conditioning, though we are accountable for reflecting and adjusting our speech.

Seek to understand, and support the speaker in clarifying their intent and effect. We can ask, “What did you mean by ‘high vibration?’” “What did you mean by ‘dark thoughts?’” If they’re not sure, you could help them with some suggestions like: “High vibration as in...loving thoughts, or flexibility of mind, or open heart?” Similarly, we can ask, “What did you mean by ‘dark thoughts?’” “Oh, you mean thoughts originating from fear?” This process of clarifying language can help to identify meanings (whether intended or not) and to discern feelings and sensations, and that precision can in turn help the speaker to identify and transform their state of being. Our words are spells, and as we speak beautiful spells, we create more beauty.

More Binary Language to Examine

Just as references to light/dark are worth exploring and refining, so, too, can it be fun and interesting to explore the unintended impact of using other binary language...

High/Low: High/low is often used in the sense of numbers, such as rich/poor, high/low bank accounts, “high”/“low” social or economic class, and “high net worth” or “low in resources.” Sometimes it is presumed that this correlates to high/low value to society, as well.

In other settings, people refer to raising or lowering of high/low vibrations. Perhaps we intend to speak not of raising/lowering, but of calibrating or harmonizing

I LOVE THIS FEELING
OF BEING SO **LOW**
AND **GROUNDED**,
HELD BY THE **VELVETY**
DARK, AND OOOH
COULD I GO FOR SOME
AIRY, SILLY TIMES!





Riana holding a sign she painted for one of the many composting toilets that she has used and maintained over the years. Humanure is not human waste, but human resource!

our vibration—to be aligned with our true selves, with all beings, with love. When in balance, “high vibration” is ethereal, whereas out of balance it can be frenetic or even invisible. That’s why we say that folks are “spacey,” “untethered,” or “out of their minds.” In balance, “low vibration” could be solid and centered, whereas out of balance it can be sluggish or stuck. Rather than say, “I’m feeling low,” we can refine our language to say what we actually mean: “I’m feeling stagnant/stuck/despairing/....”

A “higher power” is not actually directionally above us, and could instead be referred to as a felt-sense of wise and loving guidance. Similarly, our “higher self” is non-directional, and could be replaced by our “true self,” referring to the place of wisdom and love from which we come when we remember our true selves.

Even our brain centers get ranked, with the idea of a “high brain” and a reptilian or “low brain” based on a progressive, evolutionary model of development, where body intelligence that responds instinctually is considered to be an inferior mode of processing. In fact, many of us aspire to attune more to our bodies and instincts, and we could instead refer to regions of our brain as “analytical brain” or “instinctual brain.” A “highly evolved” individual or culture or society implies that we are on a linear, progressive trajectory of evolution and that more reliance on the mind and less on the body is somehow preferable.

Above/Below: “It’s above your head.” “That’s below/beneath me.” It’s “superior” or “inferior.” “Subpar” has negative connotations, in the sense that it is not meeting standards, whereas, by contrast, “understanding” is attained with adequate foundation and a strong base of support.

Up/Down: Expressions like “uplifted” and “higher conscious-

ness” and “raise the vibration” have all associated “higher” with “better.” “Down in the dumps” or “getting in too deep” imply places of depression or overwhelm. Still, we acknowledge that you can be “too big” or “too high” with expressions like “get off your high horse,” “get off the soapbox,” or “inflated head.”

Ahead/Behind: Order preferences also reveal themselves in expressions like “getting ahead in life” and “feeling left behind.”

In/Out: There is no “out” or “away” because it is all part of the Universe. Insider/outsider language is patently false, and can be exclusionary and dehumanizing. We can be “out of our element,” an expression of discomfort; we are not centered within ourselves and our calling. Getting “out of our heads” isn’t about escape, but about freeness in our thoughts and about the perspective of seeing our individual selves in the scale of it All. But being “out of our minds” can be overwhelming. We can’t actually leave our minds, as tempting as it could be, and the over-usage of “crazy” and “insane” should be replaced by the intended meaning: unusual, unexpected, amazing, extreme—or any other variety of more descriptive, precise terms. “Mad Pride” and others in the movement for mental health liberation have helped us to draw attention to our language and to ways to reclaim “sanity” in all of its variations.

In a related vein, as adrienne marie brown points out in *Emergent Strategy*, nothing in nature is disposable. The metaphorical uses of **Trash/Junk/Throw Out/Toss Away/Disposable** can be transformed into **Compost**, to counter the idea of rejection. We may still say, “I’m going to throw out this empty disposable bottle,” but we can avoid “Let’s trash these crap ideas” or “Our team views this person as disposable.”

Even in the physical sense, the idea that we can throw something “out” or “away” begs the questions: Where is “out”? Where is “away”? The answer seems to align with the questions of who is out and who is away, wherein we send e-waste to China or plastic to the ocean because we associate disposable things with disposable beings because they are perceived as less-than, or more suitable to live near, with, or among trash.

Human Waste (urine/feces) is a **Resource** (see J.C. Jenkins’ *Humanure Handbook*). It is part of the miracle of life and part of the cycle of regeneration. Yes, it is potentially unhealthy if not treated properly, but not inherently gross or bad—that’s based on the fear of the body, the fear of death/microbes, and the way that we sometimes mistreat our bodies so that it becomes uncomfortable to excrete.

Positive/Negative: An amazing friend and philosopher and writer, Tucker Lieberman, points out in *Bad Fire: A Memoir of Disruption* that we need protons and electrons, we need the positive and negative ends of a battery; they are not inherently good or bad. They are necessary elements of balance and wholeness.

The framing of **Strengths/Weaknesses** implies that strength is more valued. Yet strength can also be overpowering. Once again, we are seeking balance, with ourselves as the point of comparison rather than some external “norm.”

Us/Them: We are all part of the whole, so we are all collaborators and we are all complicit. By accusing others and excusing ourselves, we are reinforcing binaries and avoiding accountability. If we feel compelled to separate groups, what if we were to refer instead to

“people with whom we feel [and do not feel] alignment”?

Good/Bad is particularly complex as we refer to people, behaviors, and bodies. Just as every body is a “bikini body” if it’s wearing a bikini, any body is a “good” body if one feels that way in it. Since body image is a better indicator of health than body size, we know that there is no “good butt” or “good nose.” Noses are meant to be an entrance to the respiratory tract and contain the olfactory glands, and their size or shape or color don’t make them “good” or “bad,” though plastic surgeons profit off of our belief to the contrary. Ironically, “bad” has come to mean “good” in many settings (see [dictionary.com/e/when-bad-really-means-good](https://www.dictionary.com/e/when-bad-really-means-good)).

Clear/Muddy: Is clarity always better? What is it like to be in the unknowing, the unknown? Can it be fun to be “lost in the sauce”? Where is mud soothing, relieving? Who decides what is clear, and when we have “found” it?

Always/Never: As we dream and speak our future into existence, it is helpful to avoid these generalizations. Does that mean we should never say “never”? Well, maybe we can say what’s never existed in the past (e.g., there’s never been a major online social media platform with no squabbling), but the future hasn’t been written yet, so we can never say “impossible”!

Active/Passive: We sometimes have positive/negative associations with ideas of active/passive and related terms such as forcing/waiting, producing/receiving, choosing/letting go, and discerning/not knowing. This dichotomy may raise questions such as, “Should you wait to find your muse, or should you write every day even when you’re not inspired?” Well, as heard in “Tales from the Trunk” ([talesfromthetrunk.com](https://www.talesfromthetrunk.com)), a podcast hosted by Hilary B. Bisenieks (twitter.com/hbbisenieks), there’s no permanent right/wrong answer. Either can be the right choice or a harmful choice. Therefore, it’s like a dance.

Some Other Words to Shake Up

Sorry: Sometimes, we infer our impact on others without actually knowing. We often apologize for ourselves, for our existence, for our bodies, and we reinforce feelings of discomfort when we say “sorry” unnecessarily. When we do something slightly embarrassing or rude, we can say, “Excuse me” or “Pardon me.” If we have done something truly wrong for which we feel regret or for which we need to take accountability, we can say, “I’m sorry” and/or “Please forgive me.”

Violent Language such as “aim to,” “strike,” “trigger” can be replaced with more neutral language such as “attempt to,” “resonate with,” “activate.”

Some Playful New Language Ideas; Invent Your Own, Too!

“I’m whelming”—I’m flowing and feeling just-right in the space I’m taking up and in the situation in which I find myself. I’m neither underwhelmed nor overwhelmed, nor underwhelming nor overwhelming others.

“Pineapple”—In response to someone who says “I’m sorry” unnecessarily. “Pineapple” is shorthand to mean: “No problem, I’m not bothered. We’ve been socialized to apologize for ourselves when it’s not necessary. I don’t mind/I didn’t notice/

Calling-In

With the framework of “calling-in,” our goal is to understand other perspectives and become closer to each other. When we hear something jarring or upsetting it can create distance from the speaker, and so “calling-in,” when practiced with love and calm curiosity, can bring us closer. If this is a situation where it’s hard to feel love and calm curiosity for the person, then perhaps it is more than you can take on in that moment without support. So seek support and/or wait until you are in a place to address it from a centered place. (See [whyevolutionistruer.com/2019/08/18/a-black-feminist-excoriates-call-out-culture.](https://www.whyevolutionistruer.com/2019/08/18/a-black-feminist-excoriates-call-out-culture/))

For bigger misunderstandings, you may want to check-in with, “What was going on for you when you said/did ____?” or “I felt ____ when _____. Did you mean it that way?” You might elaborate, “Was it just awkward for me because I have a big wound there in that area of my life/self so it’s really easy to get activated, OR are you intending to tell me something about how I impact you?”

—RG



You’re excused.” Pineapples can be problematic in their link to the slave trade and globalization, though are also a sign of warmth and abundance. Pineapples are also rich in bromelain, a digestive enzyme that helps our bodies to integrate protein—and experiences! 🍍

Riana Good writes snail mail, sleeps out under the stars, dances, and works on community projects at her homes in Arizona, California, Oregon, and Massachusetts. She taught Spanish in the Boston Public Schools for 12 years. You can write to her at rianagood@gmail.com with anything that this article has sparked for you.

THE TYPES OF INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Common Terms Explained and What's in a Name?

By Cynthia Tina



Photos by Cynthia Tina

If you have explored intentional communities you've probably noticed that these places use a wide range of terms to describe themselves—ecovillage, cohousing, co-op, senior community, commune, just to name a few.

It can be confusing to know what exactly is meant by some of these terms. For example, many people new to the movement assume that “cohousing” means that residents share a single home together, while this is actually the opposite of what cohousing typically means!

Below I have listed the most common terms for types of intentional communities and what they tend to mean, as well as examples and resources for further learning.

There are numerous ways someone could categorize the diversity of existing intentional communities. I have chosen to focus on the terms that most often show up in the Communities Directory (ic.org/directory) and those that have a sizable network identifying with them.

Since I most often work with individuals who are looking to join an existing intentional community through my work as a community matchmaker, that's the perspective from which I have created the following list.

But if you are setting about to start a new community, you may want to think about describing your community based on the driving motivation for your project. Yana Ludwig, FIC board member and instructor of the Starting a Community on-

line course, has created another system for categorizing communities that's based on motivation. Here's a shortened list of what her categories include:

- Cultural Preservation (such as Amish and Hutterite)
- Economic Security (such as cooperatives and communes)
- Service-based (such as Camphill and Catholic Worker)
- Identity-based Refuges (such as queer and war resistor)
- Quality of Life Enhancing (such as cohousing)

It's worth keeping in mind that it is up to each community to decide what it wants to call itself and not everyone uses these terms in the same ways. Sometimes a group may use more than one label, such as being both an ecovillage and cohousing, or a senior cohousing, or a tiny house ecovillage. Some communities dispense with labels altogether.

Don't hold onto these labels too tightly; and dig deeper to find out why a community calls itself what it does...or doesn't.

Note: The examples given for each community type below are mostly based in the US, but intentional communities of all kinds can be found in nearly all parts of the world.

Common Types of Intentional Communities

Cohousing

the fastest growing type of intentional community; model originally from Denmark; residents have their own housing units with many shared services and facilities

- **Community example:** Heartwood Cohousing, Colorado, US (heartwoodcohousing.com)
- **Network example:** Cohousing Association of the United States (cohousing.org)

Ecovillage

an intentional, traditional, or urban community that is consciously designed through local ownership and participatory processes to regenerate their social and natural environments

- **Community example:** Earthaven Ecovillage, North Carolina, US (earthaven.org)
- **Network example:** Global Ecovillage Network (ecovillage.org)

Housing Cooperative (co-op)

community members live in housing they own, and govern themselves; includes youth and student groups (see NASCO.coop)

- **Community example:** Madison Community Cooperative, a network of co-ops in the city of Madison, Wisconsin, US (madisoncommunity.coop)
- **Network example:** National Association of Housing Cooperatives (coophousing.org)

Shared Housing

unrelated people share housing for their mutual benefit; usually private bedrooms with shared kitchen and/or bath; sometimes called cohousing, homesharing, or commoning

- **Community example:** River City Housing Collective, Iowa, US (sites.google.com/site/rivercityhousingcollective/home)
- **Network example:** National Shared Housing Resource Center (nationalsharedhousing.org)

Coliving

recently developed type of community born out of the co-working movement; residents typically rent fully furnished, more affordable, community-oriented spaces in urban areas; often based on a membership model that allows for moving amongst locations

- **Community example:** Outsite Santa Cruz—Natural Bridges, California, US (www.outsite.co/locations/santa-cruz-natural-bridges)
- **Network example:** Embassy Network (embassynetwork.com)

Spiritual/Religious

communities organized around shared spiritual or religious beliefs; includes some of the oldest forms of intentional community, such as monasteries and ashrams

- **Community example:** Auroville, India (auroville.org)
- **Network example:** Bruderhof Communities Network (bruderhof.com)

Tiny House Village

communities that consist mainly of tiny houses or small homes, often with shared facilities; increasingly found in urban communities with a few tiny houses in the backyard or as affordable living project for the unhoused

- **Community example:** SquareOne Villages, a network of affordable tiny and small home communities in Eugene, Oregon, US (squareonevillages.org)
- **Network example:** Search Tiny House Villages (searchtinyhousevillages.com)

Senior Community

intentional communities with 50+ or other age restrictions for membership; often cohousing

- **Community example:** Village Hearth Cohousing, North Carolina, US (villagehearthcohousing.com)
- **Network example:** SAGE Senior Cohousing Advocates (sagecohoadvocates.org)

Commune

partial or full income-sharing communities, often with work required of members

- **Community example:** Twin Oaks Community, Virginia, US (twinoaks.org)
- **Network example:** Federation of Egalitarian Communities (thefec.org)

Camphill Communities

residential communities and schools designed for people with and without special needs, based on the principles of anthropology; L'Arche has a similar mission (larche.org)

- **Community example:** Camphill Village Copake, Upstate New York, US (camphillstore.com/pages/camphill-village-copake)





New Hampshire Community Gathering.

- **Network example:** The Camphill Association (camphill.org)

Kibbutzim

communities in Israel that were traditionally collectively run and based on agriculture, although many are now private and not primarily agricultural; plus growing number of Jewish kibbutz-inspired intentional communities

- **Community example:** Kibbutz Shoshana “Rose,” Israel (ic.org/directory/kibbutz-shoshana-rose)
- **Network example:** The Hakhel Network (hazon.org/hakhel/network)

Catholic Worker

communities committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer, and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry, and forsaken; inspired by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin

- **Community example:** White Rose Catholic Worker Farm, Missouri, US (ic.org/directory/white-rose-catholic-worker-farm)
- **Network example:** The Catholic Worker Movement (catholicworker.org)

Resident Owned Communities (ROC)

neighborhood of manufactured homes that’s owned by a cooperative of homeowners who live there as opposed to an outside landlord

- **Community example:** Sterling View Cooperative, Vermont, US (sterlingview.coop)
- **Network example:** ROC USA (rocusa.org)

Community-led Initiatives (CLI)

any form of action undertaken by self-organized groups to improve their social and environmental conditions; a term increasingly used in Europe to encompass a range of communities movements, including Transition Towns and countless neighborhoods fostering more intentionality

- **Community example:** Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Massachusetts, US (dsni.org)
- **Network example:** ECOLISE, European Network for Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ecolise.eu)

And More...

activist collectives, artist communities, agrihoods, retreat cen-

ters, ashrams, community land trusts, permaculture farms, pocket neighborhoods, veterans’ intentional communities, communities for the formerly incarcerated, reinhabited abandoned villages...the list goes on!

What ties together all the above community types is that the residents choose to live near each other on the basis of explicit values. They share resources, facilities, group agreements, regular communication, and often a deeply held common purpose.

Whatever shared terms or labels they may identify with, one thing is certain: no two communities are alike. Each has created a unique culture that is best experienced by spending time with the people and their place.

To continue your search into intentional communities, I suggest exploring the Communities Directory that’s available online (ic.org/directory) and as a book (ic.org/directory-book). The Directory is intended to be an umbrella resource including all types of intentional communities. However, you may find additional communities through the websites and maps of the networks associated with each of the types listed above.

People tend to be attracted to one or more community types based on their values and interests. It can be challenging to know what type is best for you if you are just getting started exploring the thousands of intentional communities out there. That’s why I’ve developed a community matchmaking service to help folks determine which types of communities are a good fit and recommend specific communities to visit or join.

Please be in touch if you think a major category of community is missing from the list. I’m looking forward to growing our collective knowledge of the movement with you.

Learn about my matchmaking service and contact me at cynthiatina.com. 🐦

Cynthia is the “community matchmaker.” She helps people join intentional communities, having visited and worked with hundreds around the globe. She is a speaker, educator, and co-director of the Foundation for Intentional Community (ic.org). Her mission is to bridge the gap between intentional living communities and the mainstream. After a decade of travel, Cynthia now lives at an ecovillage in Vermont where she’s building a passive solar home. She has a B.A. in Sustainability from Goddard College, as well as certifications in Ecovillage and Permaculture design. Learn more and book a community matchmaking session with Cynthia at www.cynthiatina.com.

Confederation Releases New Communities Guidebook

By Water Wordsworth

Editor's Note: Like "Clash of 'Higher' and 'Lower' Selves Splits Community into Two" (pp. 36-39), this satirical piece appeared 21 years ago in *Talking Leaves* (see gen-us.net/talking-leaves). It too reflects dominant cultural elements of life in a closely interlocked community—what members tended to talk about and deem important—though it is also more obviously dated. At that time the print *Communities Directory* had not yet been overtaken by the FIC's online *Directory* as the primary source consulted by most community-seekers, justifying the even more ambitious (and fictitious) project described herein.

More evidence of its age: technical malfunctions with telephone landlines still dominated attempts to receive and place phone calls at Wayward Canyon (Lost Valley), and had not yet been supplanted by temperamental cell phone service as the main headache. In fact, cell phones had not yet affected daily life in any significant way—they are mentioned nowhere in what follows. Instead, "Pokemon" is listed as a topic of discussion in child-rearing, along with the now-quaint-seeming concern, "Television/mass media exposure." Yet most of the issues referred to in this article still might seem relevant today in the kind of overambitious *Directory* envisioned here.

This "news" report is excerpted from *Talking Leaves: A Journal of Our Evolving Ecological Culture*, Spring/Summer 2001, Volume 11, Number 1, "Tools for Sustainability / Eco-Humor," pages 28-29.

One year after the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) published its landmark *Communities Directory 2000*, a rival group, the Associated Confederation of Intentional Communities (ACIC), is attempting to outdo that volume.

Sales of the FIC's 456-page *Directory* have been brisk, and the book's extensive maps, charts, community descriptions, and articles have guided many community-seekers and attracted the attention of major print and broadcast media. Nevertheless, ACIC insists, the *Directory* is not enough.

This Spring sees the release of *Intentional Communities Guide 2001*. At 1200 pages, it lends itself less easily to packing on a bicycle tour. However, say its creators, it is worth every ounce of its hefty 11-pound bulk.

"With all due respect," *Guide* editor Dirk Grasshopper Jones of Wayward Canyon Educational Center explained in a recent interview, "the *Directory* was a tremendous effort. Yet I discovered, as I perused it, that some of the most vital information I'd want when looking for a community was nowhere to be found."

What makes the new *Guide* different? "We surveyed every community about the truly essential issues in community life, as we saw them. Our cross-reference charts alone take up over 500 pages, because we wanted to include the information that really matters most in choosing a community home."

The charts reveal the "inside scoop" on a number of community phenomena, including:



- Ogres: the number of “ogres” who reside in the community
- Ogre factor: number of ogres expressed as percentage of community population
- Ogre financial investment: percentage financial stake those ogres hold in the community as a whole, and/or percentage of the community’s outstanding debts owed to those ogres
 - Ogre/founder index: percentage of ogres who are also original founders of the community
 - Dog discussion share: percentage of community meeting time in which discussions, debates, or conflicts involving dogs are the meeting’s primary focus
 - Cat/miscellaneous pet discussion share: a similar measurement, this time for the percentage of community meeting time dedicated to issues surrounding cats and other pets (excluding dogs and livestock)
 - Livestock discussion share: a broad category, covering percentage of community meeting time dedicated to chickens, ducks, goats, sheep, cows, and other animals kept or potentially kept by the community for their utility and/or as “farm” pets
 - Diet discussion share: percentage of meeting time dedicated to discussions, debates, or conflicts related to choice of food and food buying policies
 - Kitchen sanitation discussion share: percentage meeting time in which kitchen sanitation is the primary focus
 - Kitchen cleanliness factor: the average percentage of kitchen surfaces that are clean at any one time, plus the average percentage of community pots, pans, and cooking/serving utensils that are clean at any one time, divided by two
 - Dish cleanliness factor: the average percentage of the community’s eating utensils—plates, bowls, glasses, mugs, spoons, forks, knives, and chopsticks—that are clean at any one time
 - Days-to-compost: the average number of days compostable kitchen scraps sit in plastic containers in the kitchen or dining hall before being taken away
 - Children discussion share: percentage of community meeting time devoted to discussions, debates, or conflicts concerning appropriate numbers, roles, and guidelines for children and for adults engaged in child-rearing—broken down into subsets (each listed separately in the *Guide*) including:
 - Sugar and junk food issues
 - Toy weapons issues

- Television/mass media exposure issues
- Educational and child/parent counseling philosophies
- Pokemon
- Computers per resident: the total number of personal and community computers divided by the total number of human residents
 - Computer health index: the average percentage of computers, printers, scanners, and other computer accessories that are functional at any one time
 - Phones per resident: the number of telephone receivers divided by the number of human residents
 - Phone lines per resident: the number of separate outside phone lines divided by the number of human residents
 - Phone health index: the average percentage of phones and phone lines functional at any one time
 - Cars per resident: the number of motorized vehicles divided by the number of human residents



photo by Sharon Dougherty

In the new *Guide*, hundreds of intentional communities hang out their dirty, tie-died laundry for easy comparison.

• Car value index: the average blue book value of community and personal cars and other motorized vehicles

• Car health index: the percentage of community and personal motorized vehicles that are functional at any one time

The charts also feature check-marks indicating “yes, in-house,” “yes, out-of-house,” and “no” as answers to the question, “Does this community have access to a...?” in the following categories:

- Photocopier
- Fax machine
- Electrician
- Car mechanic
- Plumber
- Dentist
- Chiropractor
- Massage therapist
- Lawyer
- Mediator
- Tae Kwon Do instructor
- Karaoke bar
- Cash machine
- Stand-up comedian
- Stereo
- Newspaper

Sixty-five pages of maps, showing the location of every community listed, are specially designed to be useful to a broad range of community-seekers. Suggested hitch-hiking routes, “best RV routes,” and public and private airports and helicopter landing pads are all shown. Community descriptions for each group supplement the cross-reference charts by providing even more detailed information, including a week’s worth of typical breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus.

More than five dozen articles concern individuals’ experiences of searching for and living in intentional community, advice for current and prospective communitarians, and broader issues within the movement. Titles include “Finding a Community Toaster that Toasts but Doesn’t Burn,” “This Doesn’t Seem Like Kansas Anymore,” “Securing Your Private Coffee Stash,” “The Energy-Conservator’s Dilemma: What to Do when Someone Else’s Lights Are On but Nobody’s Home,” “My Family Lives in Another Conceptual Galaxy, but I’m OK with It,” “Dealing with the Peanut Gallery: Tips for Song-Leaders,” “Scapegoats and Sheep: Power Struggles and Interpersonal Dynamics in the Turn-of-the-Millennium Community,” “Relaying Phone Messages: Tales of Triumph and Disaster,” and “Listening to NPR: Stepping toward a More Peaceful, Just World, Stumbling into Co-optation, or Staggering into Cynicism?—A Community Discussion.”

A special section on “Detentional Communities,” written by ACIC’s paroled ex-treasurer Russ Reina, features his tips for “finding, living off of, and fleeing” community, complete with over 800 listings and escape routes. Editor Grasshopper Jones also contributes an autobiographical sketch detailing his personal evolution in relation to his dog, his family, his community, and the world, as well as an explanation of why the *Guide* seemed like such an essential project to him, despite the existence of the FIC’s *Directory*.

The ACIC’s *Intentional Communities Guide 2001* is available for \$89.95 plus \$17.95 shipping directly from the Associated Confederation of Intentional Communities, c/o Dirk Grasshopper Jones, Wayward Canyon Educational Center, 888 Wayward Canyon Lane, Ambush, OR 97999 (checks payable to Russ Reina). 🐛

The accompanying author bio reported: “Water Wordsworth’s abiding fascination with community gives him succor after arguments with his partner, Annette Pecker.” In fact, both Water and Annette were alter-egos of Talking Leaves’ editor.

Editor
Grasshopper
Jones also
contributes an
autobiographical
sketch detailing
his personal
evolution in
relation to his
dog, his family,
his community,
and the world,
as well as an
explanation of
why the *Guide*
seemed like
such an
essential
project to him,
despite the
existence of the
FIC’s Directory.

Esperanto: The Rise, Fall, and Rise of an Intentional Language Community

By Jeremy Genovese

I am a member of a most remarkable intentional community. It is not tied to any specific location; indeed, it encompasses people from every corner of the globe. It builds on a vision of an inclusive human future first presented to the world in 1887.

This place has a name: we call it *Esperantujo*, which means the worldwide collection of Esperanto speakers.

But perhaps you have never heard of Esperanto. I wouldn't be surprised. When I tell people I speak the language I am typically met with blank uncomprehending stares. Or if they have heard of it at all, they might ask, "Isn't that the made-up language that was supposed to bring about world peace, but failed?" Well, not quite.

Esperanto is a made-up language, or, more exactly, a planned language. It was invented by the Polish ophthalmologist and polyglot Ludoviko Lazaro Zamenhof. Zamenhof grew up in the city of Bialystok, then under the rule of the Czar. The people of Bialystok spoke a confusion of languages, including Polish, German, Yiddish, and Russian. Zamenhof was troubled by the persecution and ethnic strife he saw in his city, and believed that if people had a common second language it would facilitate communication and understanding between the disparate groups. This language would have to be easy to learn and would be politically and ethnically neutral. The goal was never to replace an existing language but to provide a tool that would facilitate communication.

Esperanto is that language. While it takes work to learn any language, Esperanto is substantially easier to learn than any natural language. For example, there are no irregular verbs in Esperanto. One can learn to conjugate all Esperanto verbs in a matter of minutes. Spelling and pronunciation are phonetic, and it does not have grammatical gender. In addition, Zamenhof created a system of affixes that dramatically reduces the amount of vocabulary that has to be memorized.

Zamenhof never thought that Esperanto could by itself bring about world peace, but he did see it as a means to improve cross-national and cross-cultural understanding. In the decades after he first published his description of the language, Esperanto was widely discussed and even adopted. Famous Esperantists have included philosopher Rudolf Carnap, philanthropist George Soros (whose last name is the Esperanto word for "will soar"), chess grandmaster Susan Polgar, six Nobel Prize winners, and writers Leo Tolstoy, Jules Verne, and Harry Harrison. Harrison is most famous for his novel *Make Room, Make Room*, which was made into the dystopian film *Soylent Green*. In many of Harrison's science fiction novels Esperanto is the language used for interplanetary communication.

Esperanto was embraced by many reform-minded people including pacifists, suffragettes, socialists, anarchists, Theosophists, Tolstoyans, vegetarians, naturalists, and Chautauquans. It was endorsed by several religions, specifically, the Bahá'í Faith, the Oomoto religion of Japan, and Spiritism, a movement based largely in Brazil.

Esperanto was taught at the Georgist community of Arden in Delaware. Ebenezer Howard, the founder of the Garden City movement, was an enthusiastic Esperantist and used the language to promote his ideas.

In 1908 there was an effort to create an Esperanto-speaking state in continental Europe. A little-known consequence of the Napoleonic wars was the creation of a small neutral territory, about 3.5 square kilometers, called Neutral Moresnet. Under the leadership of a local physician, Wilhelm Molly, citizens of the region held a mass meeting and declared

the founding of the state Amikejo, which means place of friendship. Esperanto was to be the official language.

The new nation was to have no taxes, but would raise government revenues from Esperanto tourism and subscriptions. There was also a plan to build an Esperanto university. All these efforts fell apart when the territory was seized by the Germans at the beginning of the First World War.

This was not the last attempt to establish an Esperanto-speaking nation. In 1968, engineer Giorgio Rosa built a platform in international waters off the coast of Italy and declared it the Republic of Rose Island with Esperanto as its official language. The Italian government was not amused and demolished it in February of the next year. The film *Rose Island* presents a fictionalized version of these events.

Esperanto developed into a rich culture. Not only were important books, like Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards (Rigardante Malantaŭen)*, translated into the language, but novels, poems, songs, and other works have been created in Esperanto.

Despite a very encouraging start Esperanto suffered a severe setback in the years after World War I. While Esperanto claimed political neutrality it drew hostility from some quarters, especially from nationalists. Hitler specifically singled out Esperanto as a target. In *Mein Kampf*, he wrote: "As long as the Jew has not succeeded in mastering other peoples he is forced to speak their language whether he likes it or not. But the moment that the world would become the slave of the Jew it would have to learn some other language (Esperanto, for example) so that by this means the Jew could dominate all the more easily."

With the advance of Nazi power, Esperantists became objects of persecution. Although Zamenhof died in 1917, most

of his family perished in the Holocaust along with many other Esperantists. In addition, Esperantists also faced oppression in the Soviet Union. After the Russian Revolution, Esperanto flourished in the new nation, but with the rise of Stalin, and his embrace of Russian nationalism, Esperanto was suppressed.

In the late 20th century Esperanto survived as a more marginalized movement. There continued to be international meetings and Esperanto books and literature continued to be published. But if you lived in a city without an active Esperanto club, it was hard to stay involved with the movement. You could learn the language from books and free postal courses and it was possible to hear Esperanto broadcasts on shortwave radio, but, besides pen pals, there were really very few opportunities to use the language.

All that changed with the rise of the internet. Now Esperantists could communicate rapidly, first with message boards and email, later with Skype and social media. There are now internet platforms, such as Lernu.net and Duolingo, where one can learn the language. This process was vastly accelerated by the pandemic, when many Esperanto groups migrated to Zoom and similar online services. There is a website, eventaservo.org, which catalogs Esperanto meetings across the globe. Today it is estimated that there are over two million Esperanto speakers in the world.

These meetings are a wonder. I now have friends and acquaintances in places

like Brazil, Egypt, and India, whom I never would have met outside of the Esperanto community.

Some would ask, “Why bother with Esperanto, when English has become the international language?” There is no disputing the current dominance of English, but in the past other languages, such as French and Latin before that, served as lingua francas. History suggests that language hegemony tied to military or economic dominance is time-limited.

As a native English speaker I may enjoy an advantage over those who come to English as their second language. Except for a handful of people who learn Esperanto as young children, for the majority of Esperanto speakers it is our second language. Thus, our conversations take place on a much more equal playing field. This is why we call Esperanto, *la punta lingvo*, the bridge language, a language that includes rather than excludes. Esperantists call each other *samideanoj*, people with the same idea. Our anthem speaks of a time when “*la popoloj faros en konsento unu grandan rondon familian*”—“the people in agreement will make one great family circle.” This is a future worth hoping for. 🌱

Jeremy Genovese is Emeritus Associate Professor of Developmental and Educational Psychology at Cleveland State University. He has a long interest in intentional communities and currently serves as Great Lakes Coordinator for Esperanto-USA.



World Esperanto Congress, 2017.



L. L. Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto.



Poster for the World Esperanto Congress of 1913.

Photos courtesy of Jeremy Genovese

What the F Can Happen with Conflict

By Laird Schaub

Adapted from communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2022/05/what-f-can-happen-with-conflict.html, Saturday, May 7, 2022.

I've been conducting workshops and trainings that focus on conflict in cooperative groups for three decades. For many years I titled a 90-minute presentation on this topic, "Conflict: Fight, Flight, or Opportunity?"

Over the years I've come to realize that the range of responses to conflict is far wider than fight or flight, and today I want to delve more deeply into that richness—and at the same time indulge my fondness for alliteration.

Framing the Field

I define conflict as the dynamic where at least two people are in disagreement, and at least one is experiencing nontrivial distress. Thus, it isn't "conflict" unless emotional reactivity is a component. Largely because most of us weren't raised to acknowledge or work with feelings as a regular human response, most groups tend to struggle with how to respond when strong feelings arise. Often people are left on their own in such situations (that is, the group has never discussed how to handle those moments, there is no agreed-upon way to respond, nor is anyone authorized to enter that dynamic). The challenge is compounded by most of us having few (or no) examples of engaging with fulminating upset leading to anything but trauma and relationship damage. So engagement seems fraught with danger.

For some reason, it turns out that many of the ways that people respond when conflict emerges can be cleverly characterized by words beginning with the letter F. (Who knew?) Let me enumerate...

–Fight

When someone is in distress, one of the ways that can be expressed is with anger, or even rage. Triggered by something another person did or said, the person in reaction comes out swinging. Often, this will result in counterpunching in return, and an exchange of salvos ensues.

–Flight

Another common impulse when triggered is to run away—perhaps to get away from the event or the person that's the trigger; perhaps to avoid saying or doing something you might regret later. You may be uncomfortable in reaction (whether yours or others) and want to remove yourself from that dynamic posthaste. This may also be the response when another person is upset and you're afraid of being caught in their crosshairs. Sometimes the flight response is traceable to childhood efforts to escape the wrath of an abusive parent or guardian.

–Freeze

This is a deer-in-the-headlights response. Sometimes people will shut down when in reaction and glaze over. More commonly though, you'll see this as an attempt to be safe when someone else is upset and you're afraid of drawing their attention—because you might suddenly be the target of their invective. As with flight, this might be a coping mechanism arising from being raised in a family with an angry parent—perhaps one with a drinking problem.

When you feel unsafe, your amygdala takes over and you do whatever you believe nec-

essary to survive. While the situation may not truly be life-or-death, it may feel that way in the moment.

–Flail

While you don't see this response much, it's when someone ramps up their response, which may be either honest or strategic, in an attempt to distract the upset person, as well as the group. In essence, they become the center of attention in *their* distress, drawing the spotlight away from the person originally triggered. (Oh, woe is me.)

–Fawn

This is an attempt to placate the upset person—trying to calm them down through appeasement, in the theory that their fire (anger) will die back if deprived of fuel.

–Finesse

This has considerable subtlety. Fearing the aggressive things the upset person might do, you carefully frame what you say or do in language calculated to be less likely to feed the beast. It's more engaging than fawning, yet often fails because the upset person feels managed rather than heard, as if you're following a script rather than your heart.

–Fuggedaboutit

This is walking away—not running away (flight). It's deciding it's not worth it (or too scary) to engage with the upset, and acting is if nothing of significance has occurred energetically. (Let's not make a mountain out of a mole hill.)

–Feel into it

Ultimately, all of the choices above are forms of conflict avoidance or conflict management. What about conflict engagement? That, I believe, is where the money is.

My sense is that nothing works better

than turning toward the upset and acknowledging it—to the speaker's satisfaction—making sure to connect with their emotional experience, the trigger point, and its impact on that person. While not so easily done in the chaotic moment, the principles are not difficult to lay out. Just use plain words and speak from the heart. If you get it wrong, don't worry—the speaker will let you know.

Forewarnings

The three most common pitfalls when engaging with conflict are:

- Going into reaction yourself—it's not easy to stay centered or to focus on the speaker when you need help yourself.
- Giving a response instead of a reflection. The priority here is to make sure that the speaker feels heard before attempting anything else. There will be time for responses later.
- Offering a critique or reprimand about the speaker's delivery. If they are in reaction, this will most likely land as gas on the fire and won't be constructive. Even if their delivery was provocative or aggressive, you cannot reasonably ask an upset person to reflect on that while they're desperate to be heard. You may be able to speak with them about their poor choice of delivery later—but not at first.

Final Fillip

The bad news is that this work can be scary and there's no guarantee that it will go well. The good news is that it *can* be done well—and is urgently needed. My closing admonition is to take a deep breath and give conflict engagement—feeling into it—a try. What the F? It's unlikely to be worse than what you're getting with any other approach. 🐙

Former Executive Secretary of the Foundation for Intentional Community, and a member for four decades of Sandhill Farm (Rutledge, Missouri), which he cofounded in 1974, Laird Schaub moved to Duluth, Minnesota in 2016, where he lives today with his partner, Susan, and continues his work as a cooperative group consultant and teacher. Find his many past articles in COMMUNITIES listed at gen-us.net/communities-index, and his regular blog posts at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

Minding the "P"s for Cues

By Laird Schaub

Reprinted from COMMUNITIES #143 (Summer 2009), p. 74.

Plumbing for Patterns

As you'll recall, lead character Harold Hill focused on the dangers to community of a pool hall in Meredith Willson's hit musical, *The Music Man*. Just as Professor Hill made a big deal out of the fact that "pool" begins with the problematic letter "P" (*Oh, there's trouble my friends*), it's occurred to me over the years that intentional communities—not just mythical towns in Iowa—are plagued by the same letter.

Did you ever pick up on the plethora of challenges that start with the letter P? I have, and it's preposterous (not to mention pestilentially proliferating to the point of paralysis). As a pacifist and peripatetic process consultant, I'm always looking to give P's a chance—to help me pinpoint group predicaments and determine promptly which ones I'm in a position to prevent, and which poisonous potentialities I'm probably better placed to simply palliate. With that in mind, I hereby publish my prize profile of the most popular potholes in the pavement to paradise:

- Pets
- Progeny
- Parenting
- Power
- Parking
- Pesticides
- Prejudice
- Parties in public space
- Picking up after one another

The perspicacious will perceive that I'm only producing the plain ones here. (I've put aside such preeminent potboilers as philandering, polyamory, psychoactive drugs, pornographic pictures, and peeing in the pool.)

Partly persuaded? How about problem personalities—such as pushy, pokey, paranoid, petty, pigheaded, pretentious, profligate, parsimonious, patronizing, pernicious, platitudinous, or pusillanimous (never mind those peculiar persons with a pedantic penchant for polysyllabic aliteration posted parenthetically).

Plowing ahead, it's my premise that the most potent group polarities are also P-dominated:

- Process versus Product
- Public versus Private
- Policing versus Permissiveness
- Purity versus Plurality
- Privilege versus Parity
- Positive thinking versus Pessimism
- Passive versus Participatory
- Polite versus Potty-mouthed
- Passionate versus Phlegmatic
- Pausing versus Precipitous response
- Propriety versus Promiscuity
- Prepared versus Playful
- Past lessons versus Present needs

Does this plenitude of prickly P's provoke perturbation? Are these powerful permutations producing paroxysms of puzzlement and pique? Please put panic aside! Perhaps I can persuade you to persevere by pondering the predictability of problems with People—possibly the most perplexing P of all.

P.S. Pressured by press time (as opposed to any paucity of erudition or panache), I was prevented the pleasure of placing any of the following personal favorites in the primary portion of this piece: platypus, periwinkle, pachyderm, pecuniary, peccadillo, philately, posthumous, pomegranate, piñata, or puissant. Phew! Pray pardon my purple prose.

Parse particular past pieces at gen-us.net/communities and communityandconsensus.blogspot.com.

Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors, Part Three

By Diana Leafe Christian

My friend Joseph was now the community bad guy. A Certified Public Accountant, Joseph became a member of the Finance Team soon after he joined the community. In examining their books, he soon saw that the group had under-reported its earnings and expenses to the IRS for several years, and owed thousands in back taxes and potential fines. This shocked and appalled the group. Joseph was dismayed too, because while some in the group wanted to tell the IRS and pay what they owed, others didn't want to report their mistake but just keep going as they were. The community desperately needed the money, they argued; they needed the money to make long-planned repairs to their buildings.

In a series of tense community meetings Joseph tried to explain how filing taxes incorrectly and not paying enough each year was treated by the IRS. He explained how withholding information about this once they'd discovered their error would be viewed by the feds—and the potential consequences for the community if they did this. After much debate the group decided to report their error and request a payment plan.

While many community members understood why Joseph felt compelled to tell them about their mistake and urge them to report it, some older, more countercultural members couldn't let it go. They'd just as soon the community flew below the radar and never paid taxes at all. They thought Joseph should have left well enough alone. Why had they ever let a mainstream *bean counter* like him join the group?

In his quiet way Joseph did what he could. He invited these members to a meeting to further describe the legal issues and potential consequences to the community. Over the next few weeks most of them came to realize the IRS would have discovered the group's mistake anyway, and they were better off paying their back taxes sooner rather than later, so they gradually stopped feeling resentment and blame.

Except for an older member I'll call Eldred.

It stung.
It was character
assassination;
it was abusive.

Especially Challenging Behaviors

As described in Parts One and Two of this series (see gen-us.net/DLC), “especially challenging behaviors” in community are like those of Dwight, depicted in the first article: disdainful and contemptuous, lying, and behaving heartlessly towards his friends. And the behaviors of Mavis, often overbearing and harsh yet unable to tolerate attempts to give her feedback. And Olive, aggressive yet often seeing herself as victimized. And behaviors like those of Griswald in the second article: self-centeredness, lack of empathy, rage, hostility, and vengeance. Mental health professionals call these “narcissis-



It can be discouraging, demoralizing, or outright frightening when a fellow community member consistently behaves as if they're entitled to special treatment, displays little to no empathy, behaves contemptuously toward others, breaks community agreements with impunity, or flies into rages.

Boram Kim

One of the best ways we can protect ourselves is to learn considerably more about these behaviors through videos, books, and articles.



Seven Shooter

Narcissistic Attitudes and Behaviors

More Obvious, Overt, Extroverted Narcissistic Behaviors:

(Grandiosity on the outside, insecurity on the inside)

Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Entitlement
Impaired empathy
Lying; exaggerating accomplishments
Rapidly escalating anger; sudden angry outbursts
Grandiosity
Craving attention
Criticizing others
Mocking or jeering at others
Invalidating, demeaning, or belittling others
Bullying others

Less Obvious, Covert, Introverted Narcissistic Behaviors:

(Insecurity on the outside, grandiosity on the inside)

Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Relishing vengeance
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; resenting others
Limited self-awareness
Grooming newer or less confident members to be their allies and support their version of reality

tic” attitudes and behaviors. (See list, above.)

These aren’t occasional behaviors like many of us fall into on a bad day, but behaviors that are frequent and consistent. Yet people who exhibit them typically do only some of these behaviors—their particular cluster of behaviors—while other people do other clusters of behaviors. In various ways Eldred’s behaviors both resembled and differed from Dwight’s, Griswald’s, Olive’s, and Mavis’s, for example. Moreover, people with these behaviors often exhibit them only sometimes, and often only with certain people—whom mental health professionals call their “targets.” Dwight’s main targets were his girlfriend and his business partner; one of Olive’s targets was her work exchanger. And because of the tax issue, Eldred’s target was now Joseph.

Of course most community members *don’t* exhibit these behaviors, so it’s jarring and disorienting when we see them in our group. But when one or more fellow community members consistently and frequently act out these behaviors it can have a devastating effect on other community members, and on the whole group.

Joseph Takes Action

While Eldred had many admirable qualities, he also had a reputation for some of these behaviors: holding grudges, expressing visible resentment and sometimes outright hostility, criticizing people behind their backs or even to their faces, and outbursts of frustration or anger. Joseph became Eldred’s primary target. Eldred seemed unable to keep from giving him dirty looks and muttering about him under his breath in meetings, and several times outright publicly accused him of being dishonest.

It stung. It was character assassination; it was abusive. Joseph tried talking with Eldred in the presence of caring community members who wanted to help heal the rift, but nothing changed. Eldred engaged the community’s formal mediation process, but that didn’t work either. His resentment was implacable.

So Joseph set limits and boundaries.

“I just want to let everyone know,” he emailed the community, “I will no longer tolerate the following behaviors directed at me in meetings and other community gatherings: Making nasty comments about me, saying something to malign my character or question my honesty, or outright calling me names, giving me dirty looks or muttering under their breath about me. If someone does this I will publicly ask

them to stop. If they continue, I’ll leave the meeting or the gathering. If I leave a meeting or gathering, I want you to know it’s because I don’t allow anyone to treat me this way. Frankly, I don’t want any of us to treat each other like this!”

Setting limits and boundaries can mean taking one or more of these actions:

- Not engaging with the person when possible. Removing ourselves from the effects of these behaviors by no longer remaining in the person’s presence, when possible.
- Communicating to the person what we consider unacceptable behaviors in our presence.
- Communicating what we’ll do if that person, or anyone, behaves towards us in the unacceptable ways we describe.

Joseph communicated what he wouldn’t put up with in meetings and social interactions, and what he would do—remove himself from these gatherings—if the unacceptable behaviors continued.

Rose communicated her consequence directly to Dwight: that she would limit contact with him, as described in the first article in this series (COMMUNITIES #193). “I don’t understand you anymore,” she emailed him. “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

We learn that to deal effectively with these challenging behaviors we must lower our expectations and realize the person may never express much empathy or care about our feelings.

Marcelo Matarazzo



each other anymore. And from now on email each other only about community business.”

The limits and boundaries Joseph and Rose set were straightforward and clear. They didn’t demean, criticize, or put anyone down or put themselves down either. They didn’t target, label, scold, or rebuke anyone. Rose said what she wanted, and she could easily follow through and delete any emails from Dwight that weren’t about community business. Joseph stated what he didn’t want to experience and what he’d do if someone violated his boundaries for meeting behaviors, and that’s what he did.

Griswald’s community eventually set boundaries on his behavior too, when they finally had the courage to break his stalemate and use their voting fallback to get the furnace they’d needed for so long.

Setting limits and boundaries works. Eldred gradually stopped targeting Joseph with his hurtful behaviors in meetings. And in Rose’s community, while Dwight

continued treating most people badly, he accepted Rose’s boundaries and eventually stopped trying to engage her in any way other than emails about community business.

Joseph and Rose were gentle souls—but no one’s doormats!

Protecting Ourselves with Limits and Boundaries

“Always remember, these people are deeply insecure, they feel chronically threatened by the world and engage in grandiose or contemptuous shenanigans in response,” cautions psychologist Dr. Ramani Durvasula, in her book *Don’t You Know Who I Am?* “They cannot regulate or manage their feelings, especially frustration or bruises to their ego. They are hypersensitive to anything that smacks of criticism, and they lack empathy.” Her goal, she says, is to teach us how to protect ourselves, “to push back against the naïve assumption that narcissistic people will change in any substantial manner, that there will be...the ‘aha’ moment when they ‘get it’ and apologize for all the hurt they’ve caused.”

Her advice for dealing with people who do these behaviors: “Manage expectations, maintain boundaries, shore up your other supports, recognize that they will not change, take care of yourself, don’t engage, and get mental health assistance.”

(By “manage expectations” she means *lower* your expectations of the person—don’t expect empathy, understanding, or cooperation. By “get mental health assistance,” she means getting this assistance for *yourselves*, not for them.)

The second article in this series (COMMUNITIES #194), focused on learning about narcissistic attitudes and behaviors so we can become more realistic and know what to expect. (See Part Two, and Book Reviews, gen-us.net/DLC.) It also focused on lowering our expectations that people doing these behaviors will be able respond to our needs for empathy, reciprocity, and kindness. As Dr. Ramani

notes, having realistic—lower—expectations make us far less likely to feel stunned and baffled when we encounter these behaviors. With appropriately lowered expectations we won’t keep expecting the person to feel or extend empathy, care about our feelings, or act with self-awareness and extend basic courtesy toward others.

“When we don’t have boundaries,” writes Adelyn Birch in her book *Boundaries*, “we can neglect who we are and what we want.” As a result, she warns, we can see the skewed image of ourselves reflected in the behaviors of those who treat us badly. We can mistake these skewed images of ourselves for the truth about who we actually are. Joseph didn’t allow Eldred to define him to others or to distort his view of himself.

Birch, who counsels people in relationships with colleagues or partners who do these behaviors, suggests the following statements for boundary-setting:

- “I will not go against my personal values or rights in order to please someone else.”
- “I will not spend much time around anyone...
...who frequently or consistently does ____ or says ____.”
...who doesn’t treat me (or others) with respect.”
...who invalidates what I say, feel, or believe.”
...who is deceitful to me (or to others).”
...who lies to me (or to others).”
...who mistreats me (or others).”

In order to create limits and boundaries, we need to first speak up and tell the person what our boundaries are. This takes assertiveness, Birch says, which she defines as communicating to the person in a direct and honest way which behaviors are unacceptable to us, and sometimes also describing consequences: what we’ll do if the person’s behaviors persist. But being assertive—communicating directly and honestly—can be difficult for people who have habitually complied with and/or tried to

appease others, and who want to avoid what they fear will be a confrontation. When we encounter these behaviors a fear of rejection can kick in and silence us.

With practice, determination, and the emotional support of close friends—and it often takes practice, determination, and support!—people who find it hard to set limits and boundaries can become more emotionally resilient and confident in community.

“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves even when we risk disappointing others,” says Brené Brown, research professor at the University of Houston and presenter of her now-famous TEDx Talk, “The Power of Vulnerability.”

Recognizing We Even Have Boundaries

Often we don't know what our boundaries are *until* they are violated. Rose didn't know anyone could actually behave as badly as Dwight did towards his girlfriend and others in their community. Joseph had never met anyone who behaved with as much hostility as Eldred. Rose's and Joseph's experiences with unkind behaviors helped each of them learn what their own boundaries were.

This is why, for many of us, it can be difficult to even recognize when our boundaries are being violated. Like Joseph and Rose, we can be so unaware that such self-centered, hurtful, callous behaviors actually exist—especially in *our* community!—that we remain in a twilight zone of confusion and denial. After a while we can become so used to these behaviors we become habituated to them, a phenomenon observed by psychologists. And if we become habituated to these behaviors in fellow community members we often don't recognize that something is wrong—or that we have the power to set boundaries to protect ourselves.

Doesn't Setting Boundaries Violate Community Values and Ideals?

But doesn't setting boundaries violate the basic principles of community living? Aren't we *supposed* to accept all our fellow community members just as they are and do everything we can to resolve any issues between us? Aren't we *supposed* to do as community consultants advise and use conflict as an opportunity to deepen our relationships with others and learn more about ourselves?

Yes and No. Yes, in most cases most of the time. And No with community members who exhibit narcissistic behaviors consistently and frequently. As noted in previous articles in this series, people who exhibit these behaviors typically cannot access or simulate empathy for others for very long (or at all). They tend not to respond to Sharing Circles, Talking Stick Circles, Wisdom Circles, and so on. They aren't usually moved by heartfelt pleas for understanding and changed behaviors, to skilled expressions of Nonviolent Communication, or to in-house conflict resolution efforts or mediations or the help of an outside community consultant. According to mental health professionals who help clients affected by people who habitually do these behaviors, what they *do* respond to is boundaries.

Adelyn Birch notes that some people believe setting boundaries is wrong, as they mistakenly think setting boundaries creates barriers that keep people from experiencing close relationships and intimacy. The opposite is true. Barriers keep hurtful and abusive behaviors out, she notes, while letting *in* close relationships and intimacy with people we like and whose company we enjoy.

Fear of Rejection

Then there's fear of rejection. “Many of us find it hard to set boundaries and defend them because we fear doing so will cause rejection or abandonment,” Birch writes. We may feel guilty if we say No because we think saying No to requests or demands, no matter how courteously we say it, might hurt someone's feelings. We can fear that setting boundaries will keep us from being liked, or loved. “If we're afraid to have boundaries,” Birch writes, “it means we care more about what others think of us than what we think about ourselves. In doing so we lose respect for ourselves and our self-worth suffers. Others lose respect for us, too....”

“Having boundaries *doesn't* mean you're a selfish or unloving person,” she continues. “Selfishness is self-absorption, self-seeking behavior that either disregards the rights and needs of others or tramples them deliberately in favor of personal gain. In contrast, taking the time and care to attend to your own legitimate wants and needs while not

Joseph and Rose
were gentle souls
—but no one's
doormats!

We learn we must set limits and boundaries with people who behave in these ways. Sometimes we must also defend our boundaries.



Our boundaries need no one's approval.

inflicting harm on others—being assertive—is perfectly healthy and desirable.”

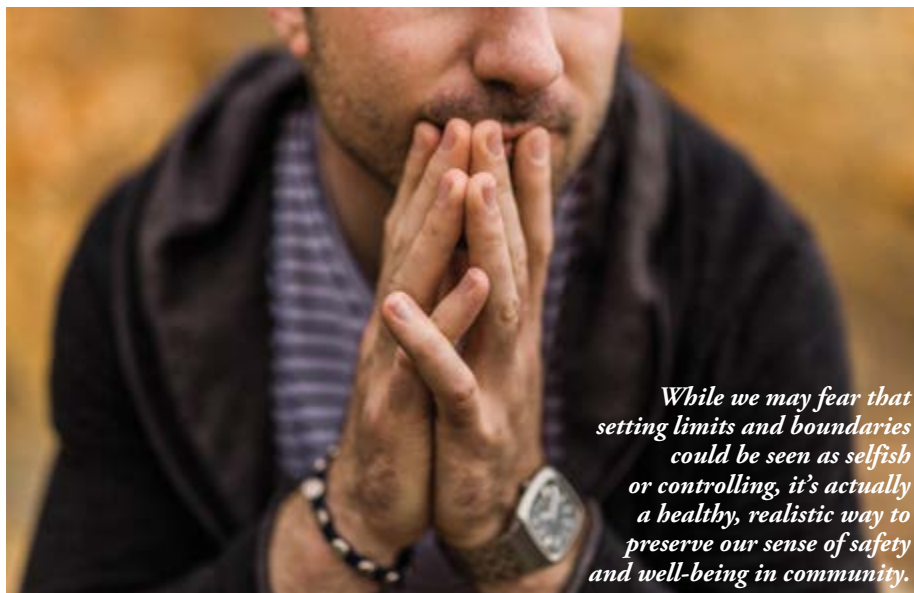
But Isn't Setting Boundaries Being "Controlling?"

No. While some may fear setting boundaries means they're acting in a controlling way or doing "power over" behaviors, there's quite a difference between being controlling and having boundaries. Controlling other people is about telling them what to do; setting boundaries is about saying what you do or do not want to experience. It's the difference between demanding your friend stop smoking, which would certainly be trying to control them, or reminding them to not smoke in your house, which is about defending your boundary about people smoking in your house.

In his book *In Sheep's Clothing*, clinical psychologist Dr. George Simon writes that we can't actually have power over other people's behaviors, things, or situations. "You have power over the decisions you make in *response* to those things," he writes. "It is your responsibility to exercise that power in your best interest."

Boundaries are about what we value; we create them to protect what is important to us in our lives, to ensure that we will get what we want and need in our community, and to protect ourselves from what we *don't* want. Thus our boundaries actually control our *own* experience. Our boundaries help us live life in our own community the way we want to live. According to Dr. Henry Cloud, psychologist and author of the New York Times best-seller, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*, "You get what you tolerate."

By creating boundaries when needed, Birch notes, we take a stand for ourselves and our lives. When we identify and state our boundaries and commit ourselves to honoring them, we'll know that *allowing*



Nathan Dumlao

While we may fear that setting limits and boundaries could be seen as selfish or controlling, it's actually a healthy, realistic way to preserve our sense of safety and well-being in community.

some people to violate our boundaries (perhaps because we're trying to placate them or get them to like us) means we're *not* taking a stand for our own life and well-being, but handing over our life and well-being to others.

Fellow community members who are truly interested in our well-being will respect our needs, values, and desires—and our boundaries—rather than trampling on them from indifference or their own unhealed personal issues.

Defending our Boundaries

What happens if someone violates our boundaries and we do nothing? If we ignore boundary violations and take no further action, Birch writes, we may feel disoriented and powerless. We may experience ourselves as misunderstood, disregarded, or victimized.

"Just because you define a boundary and even declare it, it doesn't mean others will respect it," writes George Shippey, Ph.D., contributor to the website, Counseling Resource. "Setting personal boundaries requires planning out exactly what to do should someone try to violate them.... Ultimately," he adds, "boundaries are only as good as our skills and resolve to define, declare, and defend them."

Thus, stating our boundaries is sometimes just the first step, Birch notes. We may also have to defend them, by reminding people of the boundaries we've set with them.

At first we may feel embarrassed, guilty, or selfish when we remind someone of our boundaries and let them know they are violating them. However, when we defend our boundaries by reminding people what they are, we reduce our own self-sabotaging behaviors, Birch says. These can include believing it's a good idea to give people with these behaviors many "second chances," or to spend our time and energy on people who don't feel good to be around or who even harm us.

If someone violates our boundaries, after first reminding them what our boundaries are, we may also need to create reasonable non-punitive consequences as Joseph did. We need to remind the person violating our boundaries that they are doing this, and let them know what we'll do if they continue.

Defending our boundaries by stating what we'll do if they're violated—our consequences—does not mean arguing about our boundaries or our consequences or explaining these to the person (which we might be tempted to do). We don't owe them or anyone an explanation. Our boundaries are our boundaries and they're ours and ours alone, Birch notes. Our boundaries need no one's approval.

And "consequences" need not be a dirty word. Consequences in an intentional community are not like the punitive fines and jail terms of mainstream culture. Consequences in community are what we tell people *we* will do if they cross our boundaries. If we don't follow through on our consequences then our boundaries mean nothing. Consequences are *not* threats made to control the other person. They are actions we sincerely intend to

take if a boundary is violated, as Joseph did when he stated what behaviors he would no longer put up with in meetings, and that if this wasn't honored he would leave the meeting.

Whole communities *also* need to set limits and boundaries and defend them, and sometimes with “a graduated series consequences,” to guard against the often devastating effects when one or more community members do these behaviors. (See “A Graduated Series of Consequences and “The Community Eye,” COMMUNITIES #184.)

When these behaviors go unchecked in community, they can not only make people's lives miserable, but can lower community morale, drive away potential new members, and, in worst-case scenarios, cause especially vulnerable members to stop attending meetings or participating in social events. Or just pack their bags and leave!

Joseph Sets More Boundaries

People with these behaviors “have a tendency to hold onto grievances and air them repeatedly,” Dr. Ramani writes. The more time that goes by, the more grievances can pile up. “The person will march out the things they think you did wrong months and even years ago.”

This is just what Eldred did. No matter that he rarely said abusive things to and about Joseph in meetings, for him the issue was still unresolved. The first mediation had changed nothing. They'd arranged a second mediation; same thing. Eldred had requested further mediations but Joseph always declined; believing that nothing he'd say or do would make a difference. He considered Eldred a troubled soul, and let go of attempting to have a normal relationship with him.

Over the years Eldred and Joseph didn't interact socially, but when community business called for it they communicated neutrally. Yet sometimes Eldred seemed unable to keep from shooting Joseph dirty looks, or sending occasional snarky emails about him.

Ten years later Eldred emailed to ask for another mediation. The problem had never been fully resolved, he said. Joseph had violated community agreements by stubbornly declining mediations. He hadn't adequately apologized for or explained why he felt compelled to meddle in the community's business re the IRS. He went on to insult Joseph's character and integrity. Every day he had to pass Joseph's blue Volvo in the parking lot, and seeing it every day triggered upset, he said, like an unhealed wound, because Joseph had never acknowledged just how badly he'd treated the community when he outed their tax issue.

Eldred's email struck Joseph and his friends as an expression of emotional pain that wasn't really about him. But still, enough was enough. He wrote:

“Eldred, I got your email. I send good wishes for your health and well-being as well as for an end to the burden that you've experienced over the years. I believe your in-

tentions all along have been for the best. I know mine have been.

“Your description of my character and my intentions don't match my reality. Because of what you said in this email, and other things you've said to and about me over the years, I'm increasing my boundaries with you. I'm choosing not to engage with you on email or in other ways from now on. Please respect this boundary and don't try to email me again or engage with me if we meet sometime in the community building or elsewhere.”

Like his first email setting boundaries about behaviors in meetings, and like Rose setting boundaries with Dwight, Joseph's reply to Eldred was compassionate, yet firm and clear. He didn't criticize or demean him. He didn't make him wrong and didn't make himself wrong either. He simply said he was setting another boundary about what he wanted and required from then on.

“Compassionate people ask for what they need,” writes Brené Brown. “They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They're compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment.”

Coming Next

The next article will focus on what else we can do to protect ourselves, including, if we're willing, getting healing help for ourselves from outside of the community: therapy, shamanic healing, a powerful spiritual practice, or other ways to strengthen our resilience and become far less vulnerable to the effects of these behaviors. Future articles will explore how small groups of friends can help each other protect themselves; and also how whole communities can set limits and boundaries, and defend those boundaries—such as through “a graduated series consequences” or even asking someone to stop attending community meetings for a while. 🐦

Diana Leaf 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 especially effective self-governance and decision-making method. See www.DianaLeafChristian.org.



Levi Guzman

We can still feel compassion for people who act in these ways, while protecting ourselves by lowering our expectations, setting limits and boundaries, and enjoying a happier life with friends in community.



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



We can help you with:

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

1521 Easy Rider Lane #102 Boulder, CO 80304
hello@caddispc.com • 303.443.3629
www.caddispc.com



REACH

REACH is our column for all your Classified needs: ads intended to match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, plus ads for events, land, internships, services, books, personals, and more. To place an ad, contact our Advertising Manager, Joyce Bressler, at ads@gen-us.net or 845-558-4492, or go to gen-us.net/communities for more information.

THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #197 - Winter 2022 (out in December) is Oct. 31, 2022. Rates: ≤50 words: \$25/issue; ≤100 words: \$50/issue; ≤250 words: \$75/issue. You may pay using a credit or debit card, bank transfer (contact the Advertising Manager), or via check or money order payable to Communities (include all ad info) mailed to Communities, 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

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. Visit Coweeta on the web at www.coweetaheritagecenter.com

COME HOME TO COHOUSING AT TOUCHSTONE IN ANN ARBOR - Join Touchstone to garden and work with your neighbors to maintain this multigenerational cohousing community. Call Jane 734-323-0019 for information on the new condos available. Quiet setting on the bus route, near health care, shopping, expressways and outstanding Ann Arbor Schools. Touchstonecohousing.org

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.

SINGLE? Ready for your last relationship? Meet your environmentally-conscious partner on Green Singles! No superficial swiping. In-depth profiles. Amazing members! www.GreenSingles.com

WHY PAY RENT/MORTGAGE PAYMENTS when you can live rent free? We publish 1,000+ property caretaking and house-sitting opportunities, worldwide, each year. We cover all 50 states and overseas. Online subscription: \$29.95/year. Postal subscription: \$34.95/year. Published since 1983. The Caretaker Gazette, 1205 E 31st Street, Austin TX 78722. (206) 462-1818; To learn more, please visit www.caretaker.org.

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS

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

GEN-US.NET/SUBSCRIBE



**FITCH
ARCHITECTURE
&
COMMUNITY DESIGN**

110 Pulpit Hill Road
Amherst, MA 01002, USA
413-549-5799
www.facdarchitects.com



photo credit: Terri Paul

**ESTABLISHED COHOUSING &
SUSTAINABLE DESIGN PIONEERS**
WITH A PROVEN PARTICIPATORY PROCESS



The
**Communal
 Studies Association**
 invites you to their *47th Annual
 Conference*
 Sept. 29—Oct. 1 2022
 at
Canterbury Shaker Village



Canterbury Shaker Village
 Near Concord, New Hampshire

Learn from the past
Share your ideas and ideals
Engage with like-minded others
Special rates for community members
 Find out more at our website: www.communalstudies.org
**Format and/or venue subject to change due to the Pandemic*



Diana Leaf Christian
 Basic & Advanced
 Sociocracy Trainings

“I love this course. Who knew governance could be so fun!”

—Jeff Conklin, Riversong Cohousing,
 Eugene, Oregon.

“I love how Diana presents her Sociocracy Course! She’s super-clear, organized, has incredibly thorough preparation, and she’s so down to earth, fun, engaging, and easy to connect with.”

—Phoenix Robbins, Aptos Beloved
 Community, California

“I highly recommend this course for effective, transparent, non-hierarchical governance and decision-making. In learning and using Sociocracy our group got a huge payoff — better decisions, a high level of engagement, and meetings that are both more productive AND fun!”

—S. Denise Henrikson, ecoTHRIVE
 Housing, Seattle, Washington

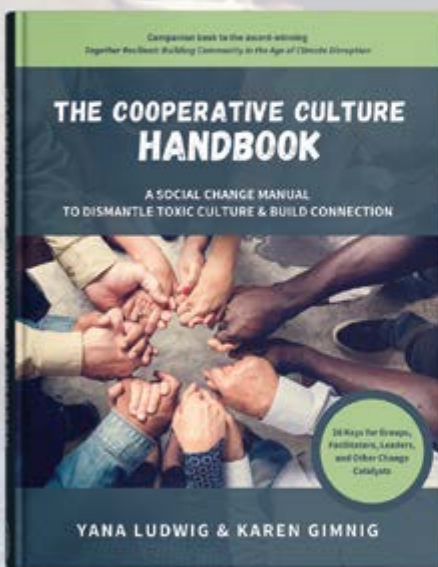
“Our group felt really inspired by your informative, empowering, and inspiring Sociocracy course. Much appreciation and gratitude to you and your wonderful Assistant Teachers.”

—Angela Faneuf, Blue Hill
 Cooperative EcoVillage, Maine



More Info: diana@ic.org

**ARE YOU READY TO CREATE
 COOPERATIVE CULTURE?**



**THIS IS THE HANDBOOK
 FOR GROUPS AND TEAMS
 WHO WANT TO ACHIEVE
 THEIR MISSION AND BUILD
 REAL COOPERATION.**

GET YOUR COPY!

ic.org/handbook

PLUS! Get \$5 off with the discount code SHANDBOOK



LOS ANGELES ECOVILLAGE INSTITUTE*

Re-inventing how we live
in the city since 1993

We are an intensely
urban sustainable
neighborhood-in-process
demonstrating higher quality living
at lower environmental impacts

education • training • research
workshops • public talks
tours • guest stays
revolving loan fund



www.laecovillage.org • lois@ic.org

*a project of CRSP, a 501.c.3 nonprofit organization
& developer of the Los Angeles Ecovillage

Do you know that there are nearly one thousand
intentional communities just in the United States?

Check out the online hub for intentional communities!

Explore our online directory, download free resources,
join virtual workshops and more.



Come visit us at

ic.org/cmag



University Cohousing, San Jose, CA

NATIONWIDE COHOUSING EXPERIENCE
COLLABORATIVE DESIGN
PARTNERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

GUNKEL ARCHITECTURE

WWW.GUNKELARCHITECTURE.COM



Mission Peak Village Cohousing, Fremont, CA

REVIVING NATIVE LANGUAGE

(continued from p. 64)

people's visual ways of counting—whether on a hand, on hands and feet together, with sticks placed between fingers, etc. And the words for counting different categories can vary within the same language—Yurok, for example, includes 15 different ways of counting to three, depending on what is being counted.

Relationships among individuals also influence how the language is spoken. The forms of words can change to reflect whether one is speaking to an elder, a child, a man, a woman, or a group of any of those, determined also by one's own relationship to that person(s) and the formality of the situation. Linguists have found that social structure and social difference find expression in every language, in ways distinctive to each culture. Speech in every language also apparently reflects the gender of the speaker, sometimes unconsciously (such as pitch of voice, with differences greater than would be predicted simply by physiology). Yet many native languages of California and elsewhere frequently avoid some gender binaries we are familiar with, not differentiating personal gender pronouns as English does, nor specifying different genders for objects as many Afro-Asiatic and Indo-European languages do.

Native California languages display great diversity, and most are mutually unintelligible despite the common threads that various groups of them share. And yet many peoples have found ways to communicate and understand one another across these differences, as well as to discover and affirm the common ground within their own groups. These often involve one or both of two key elements: song (sometimes wordless song) and humor (“coyote talk”). Countless songs are known and shared between tribes who cannot understand one another's spoken languages, and humorous stories involving animals (including often Old Man Coyote), often speaking in distinctive ways, are also a universal feature of these languages, with cross-cultural commonalities among stories.

All of this is eye-opening, especially for us Horatios (English speakers), suggesting different ways we can think about the world and perhaps adapt our own uses of language. Yet this insight into native California languages is only one element of the book, and the other elements are both considerably more sobering, and inspiring in their own ways.

The sobering aspects relate to the near-disappearance of most of these languages at the hands of settler culture. Euro-American incursion into the homelands stewarded for thousands of years by their native inhabitants drastically reduced tribes' populations, displaced them, and attempted to extinguish their cultures and the languages which helped preserve those cultures. It's a familiar story by now: native children kidnapped and taken to boarding schools, where they were punished for speaking their own languages. The strategy was so effective that by the time of Leanne Hinton's first edition, most of these languages were nearing extinction, with the prospect of no fluent speakers being left within a few decades.

The policy of forced assimilation which had prevailed throughout most of the 20th century (after the previous century's more blatant genocidal efforts throughout native California) started to be questioned with the growth of the Civil Rights Movement, resulting in advances for native language rights in the '60s and '70s, a backlash in the '80s, and ultimately the passage of the Native American Languages Act in 1990, which, almost too late, affirmed the value of Native American languages and of working for their preservation, incorporating them into education, and more. A second act two years later committed resources toward those projects. The '90s editions of *Flutes of Fire* reported some of the work emerging from that renaissance, as well as the exhaustive efforts of a famed linguist and others to document and preserve those languages earlier in the century. Yet most fluent speakers (if any remained at all) were nearing the end of their lives at time of publication, and the future of these languages, under assault ever since the arrival of Euro-Americans in California, was very much in doubt.

The inspiring counterbalances come from the dedicated work by many, both his-

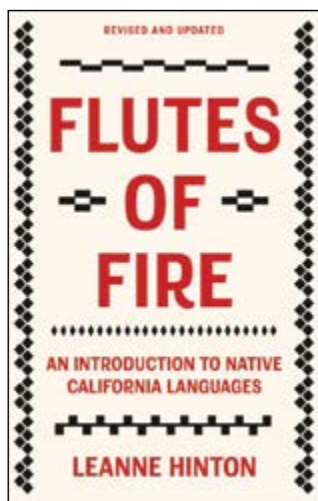
torically and in more recent times—especially since the previous edition—to not only preserve but also revive these languages, to not just save them but spread them. As with Chinuk Wawa (*dret masitəm nayka pus ayaq na chaku-kəmtəks ukuk*), the number of speakers of these languages is *growing*, no longer shrinking. Though only a few who grew up fluent in these languages remain alive, many people are learning them to supplement the language(s) they've known, and finding dimensions of culture and worldview that had often been buried in the forced shift to “settler” language. Both those with indigenous heritage in California, and those without it, are finding value in working on behalf of these languages, learning their lessons, making them part of their lives.

A new chapter on language reclamation profiles more than a dozen “language heroes,” along with new online resources, numerous conferences, and “tribes and schools doing it right.” The 2022 edition also includes for the first time 25 pages of writings *in* the languages of California.

If you've sometimes thought that the English language can be a pale shadow of languages that more fully embody community and connection to self, others, and place—and that even what we call “intentional community,” in its reinvention among the non-indigenous, can be a pale shadow of the kind of experience of deep community that persisted for thousands of years here on this continent, and everywhere on the planet, before non-indigenous culture interfered—then this book will not dissuade you, but instead get you thinking more.

The good news is that a tremendous amount of community has grown up around preserving and reviving native languages up and down the West Coast and in fact in many other places as well, and these efforts unite both indigenous and non-indigenous in common efforts to bring our languages and our lives back into better balance with our world. 🍷

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES; reach him at editor@gen-us.net.



Reviving Native Language

Flutes of Fire: An Introduction to Native California Languages

By *Leanne Hinton*

Heyday, Berkeley, California, Revised and Updated Edition, 2022, 304 pages

(See www.heydaybooks.com/catalog/flutes-of-fire-an-introduction-to-native-california-languages-revised-and-updated)

“Speaking of Ecological Culture” (COMMUNITIES #191, Summer 2021, p. 1) described my recent experiences studying Chinuk Wawa, the indigenous trade language of the Pacific Northwest, along with the insights it offered about the relationship of language to worldview and way of life. Soon afterwards, in a magazine produced in that language by Lane Community College’s second-year Chinuk Wawa students, I saw mention of the textbook for a previous indigenous language course at LCC: *Flutes of Fire*—not a language-learning guide, but an overview of the many native California languages—originally published in 1994 and revised two years later.

The title derives from a Maidu origin tale, in which Mouse is sitting on top of the assembly house, playing his flutes. Coals falling from his flutes through the smokehole bring fire to the people inside, and with the fire, language. But because Coyote interrupts Mouse part-way through his song, different people receive different amounts of fire depending on where they are seated in the house, causing all their languages to be different. Without Coyote’s intervention, all would share the same language.

I obtained a used copy of Leanne Hinton’s 1996 edition, and found it fascinating. It broadened my appreciation of the diversity of indigenous languages on this continent (especially California), as well as my understanding of the kinds of relationships (among language, lifeways, people, perception, and place) that I’d been seeing already through studying Chinuk Wawa. The book described many endangered languages whose last fluent elder speakers were in their latter years back in the mid-’90s, so I was very curious what had happened in the decades since. I was happy to learn that a new revised edition would be coming out in July 2022.

Heyday Books sent me a digital proof this spring, in time for me to write a review of the book in Chinuk Wawa for this year’s *Chinuk Wawa* magazine (see gen-us.net/cw). Though tempted to reprint *ikta na munk-t’səm yawa k’apa* “*t’ulit’uli uk palach paya: kakwa anqati uk shawash-tilixam las wawa k’apa californi-ili?i*” (*dret hush buk ukuk*), I decided to settle for writing in English here.

My main takeaway from *Flutes of Fire* is perhaps the most valuable conclusion one could draw from any book: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” (*pus wik mayka kəmtəks, wilyam t’ut’u-yulqat-stik-kalayt’an yaka munk-t’səm ukuk.*)

Not only are the native languages of California radically different from English in fundamental ways, they display great diversity among themselves. By some counts 104 such languages existed, coming from five major language families and several smaller groups. The book shows how these languages diverged from common origins, how words traveled between them, how they each reflected the unique conditions in which their corresponding tribes lived or live.

One example: the most important directional words differ from language to language, referring to upriver or downriver, uphill or downhill, where the sun (or dark

comes from or disappears, or other factors, depending on the dominant elements of the tribes’ landscapes. Rarely are North, South, East, and West the main markers of direction. Moreover, in many languages, “right-hand” and “left-hand” don’t exist at all, as directions are always given in relation to the landscape, not to the individual.

Some languages do not require distinguishing singular from plural as English generally does, reflecting an elevated awareness of the whole as opposed to the isolated individual. And yet individual sovereignty is also honored, in that possessive words are often much less common—meaning no one “belongs” to anyone else, and concepts about “ownership” are entirely different. These languages also express divergences in indigenous concepts of time, interrelationships, and knowledge. Some languages require speakers through their word construction to reveal not just *what* they have heard or “know,” but *where* they heard it—the source of the information. Similar fundamental linguistic and conceptual differences from English and the dominant western worldview abound.

In the lore of most of native California, four is the “pattern number”—not three, as it is in European-American stories and fairy tales. Nor do all tribes use decimal counting systems. In some languages, counting systems are based on the number five, or four, or six, or even 20. These counting systems often derive from a

(continued on p. 63)

Creating a More Regenerative Future



find out more!

LOST VALLEY

E D U C A T I O N C E N T E R

D E X T E R , O R E G O N

education | internships | residency

LEARN PERMACULTURE SKILLS



We educate youth and adults in the practical application of sustainable living. We take a holistic approach to sustainability, engaging students in ecological, social, and spiritual growth. Our Permaculture Design Certificate, immersive Holistic Sustainability Semester, Social Forestry Course, youth learning adventures, and visitor education program offer participants a unique learning experience within our aspiring Ecovillage.

WORK & GROW IN AN INTERNSHIP



Lost Valley's internship is a 3-month immersive learning experience where participants have the opportunity to learn and work alongside some of the Pacific Northwest's finest system thinkers. This is a great option for you if you are in a transitional or learning period and are looking to make like-minded friends, develop marketable skills, and experience living in a community. Food and lodging included.

LIVE INTENTIONALLY IN COMMUNITY



Community can teach us to care for and respect one another, communicate compassionately, make decisions together, and to see our individual needs in the context of the whole, while also reducing resource use through sharing. Staff and students live in community in apartments, cabins, yurts, and tiny homes. Sociocratic decision-making, shared meals, and activities happen every day at Lost Valley!

contact: admissions@lostvalley.org

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Deluxe Property for Sale

Originally built as a church retreat center, this incredible 6,500sf property offers unlimited opportunities to create something special: an intentional community, retreat center, multi-generational home, music/art studio, home-based business, or rent rooms for income. This spacious mansion includes 6 bedrooms, 4½ baths, and 3 kitchens. It sits atop a 1.2 acre south-facing gentle down-sloped lot on a quiet private cul-de-sac road with only 6 other houses. Surrounded by nature, waterways, and a State Park.



MAIN LEVEL

Features a grand entry foyer, spacious living room with bay windows, with abundant natural light. The huge open kitchen includes stone countertops, wood floors, breakfast nook, 2 full sinks and 4 ovens, plus a gigantic walk-in pantry and laundry room. The kitchen connects to the dining room with open beam vaulted ceilings and a wall of sliding glass that seamlessly connects to the deck overlooking a green valley and hills. There is a bedroom suite, a guest powder room, and wood-paneled library with a gorgeous wood burning fireplace.

UPPER LEVEL

Has 2 expansive 800sf two-room living suites with full baths, kitchenettes, wrap around decks, and majestic panoramic bay and mountain views.

LOWER LEVEL

Has an optional separate entrance, an additional kitchen, 3 large bedrooms each with huge sliding doors for indoor-outdoor access, and a full bathroom.

There is abundant storage, 2 car garage.

Countless Unique Features:

- Waterfall fountain.
- Mature flower gardens, and organic vegetable garden.
- Easily accommodates parties of 250 people, or 125 seated for events.
- Private auto-court accommodating up to 12 cars.

- Active tested water well delivers high quality water into a 3,000-gallon water tank for gardening.
- Well-functioning septic system, with option to tie into city sewer system.
- 3-roof solar panels produce plentiful electricity and lower electric bills.
- Three recently replaced furnaces provide natural gas heating and air conditioning.
- House is completely wired for Cat-5 computer network and has an electronic office phone system.
- Tool/utility room provides plentiful additional storage and workspace.
- Brick pathways wander through the property and lead to seating areas beneath trees.
- Huge hot tub accommodates up to 8 people.
- All new paint and carpet throughout.

Additional Benefits:

- Private cul-de-sac. Very quiet neighborhood!
- Walk to neighboring 1,640-acre China Camp State Park.
- Miles of hiking and biking trails, plus beaches and kayaking.
- The climate is coastal-temperate.
- Five minutes to freeway, twelve minutes to city center in San Rafael.
- Weekly organic farmer's market minutes away.
- Less than one hour to San Francisco and Oakland, and airports.
- Can sleep up to 12 guests.
- Lowest \$/ per sf and more space for the price than anything else on the market.
- **Asking price \$2,850,000**

For information contact the owner at: liongoodman@gmail.com