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COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Spring 2023 • Issue #198

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Building from the Ground Up

Starting and Stopping
an Ecovillage

A-Frames, Straw Bales,
Permaculture

Transitioning to a
Handcraft Economy

The Magic of Connection
and Co-Creation

What Needs to Be in a
Community's DNA?



CohoUS is a national nonprofit advancing cohousing and shifting culture. We envision a future where every home is surrounded by caring, collaborative neighbors who use less of the earth's resources while living an abundant life.

We support a more collaborative and sustainable society through:



EDUCATION

Using events, a learning platform, newsletters and social media to help people understand, build and support cohousing and its impacts.



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We advocate for cohousing through outreach, research, and publications.



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CohoUS is a hub for networking between past, current and future cohousers and our allies.



Cohousing.org

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What Readers Say about COMMUNITIES

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

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

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

the virtue of cooperation and the world-changing potential of coexistence.

—Christian Williams, Editor, *Utne Reader*

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

—Murphy Robinson, Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

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

—Chuck Durrett, The Cohousing Company

COMMUNITIES mentors me with real human stories and practical tools: networking, research, and decades of archives that nourish, support, and encourage evolving wholesome collaborations. The spirit and writings have helped guide me to recognize and contribute to quality community experiences wherever I am. The magazine is an irreplaceable resource and stimulus during the times when community disappears and isolation/withdrawal looms; and an inspiration and morale booster when I am once again engaged with intentional and committed group work.

—Shen Pauley, reader and author, Barre, Massachusetts

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gen-us.net/subscribe

Back Issue Sets Now Available at 30% Discount (US addresses)

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

Back Issue Set A: COMMUNITIES #s 143, 147, 148, 150, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157, 159, 160, 162, 163, 167, 168, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193 (37 issues total, from the years 2009-2021) – 15 sets available.

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





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Emergent Properties, Widening Circles



Chris Roth

“Emergent properties” (a modern term reflecting the insight that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”) permeate our lives in intentional community and in fact define the world as we know it. They are the phenomena that arise, often unexpectedly, when elements combine and have a chance to interact as, or within, a larger system.

Our personal experiences themselves are replete with emergent properties—unexpected ways in which we grow as individuals when we join with others in situations that are new to us; we often discover elements and capacities within ourselves that we hadn’t known before. Combine Individual A with Group B and then Phenomena C, D, E, and F, none of them necessarily anticipated at the outset, may well emerge. This has happened for me personally in every community I’ve joined; much as I thought I knew what I was “getting into,” the biggest lessons and areas of growth were unplanned, arising only when given a chance once I’d taken the plunge into this new combination of energies.

Similarly, the choices we make and the projects we pursue may have emergent properties. New projects, new relationships, new groups can come forth once we each take the single step that is in front of us that beckons us in the moment. Every project, every relationship, and every group I’ve been part of, traced back far enough, has come about in this way. And this process of emergence continues, everywhere. Speaking of which...

Our last issue presented several visions for expanding *COMMUNITIES*’ reach and impact, and appealed for support for realizing those visions. (See gen-us.net/visions.) We’re very happy to announce that, while the majority of those ambitious visions still await funding (for example, free worldwide digital access, and complimentary print subscriptions to several categories of high-impact US “hubs”), we have

received benefactor support for a first step in realizing these broader visions. **Thanks to an anonymous donor, 100 groups—mostly intentional communities—that have not been recent subscribers are receiving complimentary print-plus-digital subscriptions throughout 2023.**

Our new benefactor empowered us to choose these communities. At this point a new idea emerged: how about involving others in the selection of beneficiary groups? In fact, what if we could spread the benefits of this gift beyond simply the new readers, the magazine, and its publisher, GEN-US? With the subscriptions already paid for now, could other, allied organizations also benefit from this project? Could this be an opportunity for collaboration and mutual support among people and groups who have very compatible missions and shared visions of a world filled with exactly that: greater cooperation and more connection?

The answer was “Yes.” I contacted representatives of the Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) and the Cohousing Association of the United States (CohoUS), with both of whom the magazine and GEN-US have collaborated in the past (distributing magazines at events, publicizing activities and projects, sharing articles and resources). With members of a third allied group, the Communal Studies Association (CSA), providing vital material support for this project, we arranged with both FIC and CohoUS to offer many of these complimentary subscriptions as incentives for communities to support these organizations, which are so crucial for networking, support, and education within their respective spheres.

Every cohousing group has benefited from the work of CohoUS, whether or not they have chosen to support it financially; and every intentional community of any type has likely benefited in some way from the work of FIC, especially those that have chosen to be listed in its Directory or have used its other resources. All four organizations—FIC, CohoUS, CSA, and GEN-US—have benefited from one another’s efforts. The opportunity to use this gift to support all groups, not simply the magazine and GEN-US, seemed like a perfect example of how “zero-sum” thinking is myopic and limiting. Abundance is meant to be shared and passed on, not withheld. And in this case, the sharing depletes GEN-US and the magazine not at all, but instead helps foster a wider movement of interconnected efforts to achieve more functional, cooperative human society.

This kind of mutual aid seems as if it should be the default mode in our world, but unfortunately it isn’t always. Nonprofits may often feel themselves isolated, and even in competition with one another for limited resources. Even if their missions involve the advancement of a cooperative world, they can struggle to cooperate with one another. (The same can be true of individual members and subgroups within intentional communities, within activist and interest groups, and within networking organizations, including these nonprofits.) As almost anyone involved in any of these spheres can attest, ego, insecurity, and/or a scarcity mentality—all of them ultimately manifestations of fear—can stop many opportunities for collaboration in their tracks.

While I can’t announce that “scarcity” has been eliminated in the world, nor that attending to the real needs to keep our individual ships afloat can safely be forgotten in the interests of purely helping others, I can celebrate the “emergent property” that has arisen from this example of abundance flowing to one group in order for it to supply abundance to others. That abundance is now flowing further, and in more forms, than originally imagined or planned for.

Ultimately, we are all “in it together,” and every experience we have that reinforces the value and the joy of that connectedness makes it even more real. Such experiences also strengthen our muscles for sharing, for mutual support, and for cultivating an attitude of abundance rather than scarcity, appreciation rather than ingratitude—and ultimately, love rather than fear. That is the kind of world that many with communitarian aspirations have envisioned and even experienced since time immemorial, and

I believe it is worth cherishing when and where we can find it within our lives and with each other. It is not to be taken for granted, and certainly not inevitable, but it is a choice that we often have the power to make.

Any attempt to list those who have contributed to various aspects of this particular “emergent” event, and to additional efforts to help us manifest the visions we laid out in issue #197, will be woefully incomplete. Nevertheless it seems important to mention and celebrate the contributions of the following individuals, representing multiple groups, who played vital roles in this effort and in collaborations throughout this past year that laid the groundwork for it: Trish Becker-Hafnor (CohoUS), Neil Planchon (CohoUS and FIC), Crystal Farmer (FIC/COMMUNITIES), Kim Kanney (FIC), Kim Scheidt (FIC/GEN-US), Keala Young (GEN-US/GEN), Diana Leafé Christian (GEN-US), Paul Freundlich (Fair Trade Foundation/COMMUNITIES), Jeffrey Hook and David Schrom (Magic), and a host of other networkers and supporters including Dianne Brause, Jerry Russell, Tim Miller, Kathy Fernandez, Jon Andelson, and many more.

Whether you are from one of the groups newly receiving COMMUNITIES, or are a reader supporting the magazine through a regular subscription, thank you for joining us in this, the first issue in COMMUNITIES’ second half-century of publication—a continuing illustration, we hope, of the power of community to help cultivate a more hopeful, more inspiring world.

Postscript: As we prepared this issue for press, we received an additional grant that will allow us to start reaching out to allied international organizations to offer complimentary digital magazine subscriptions to some of their supporters and member groups. We’ll report more in future issues. If you can help us expand these efforts even further, please let us hear from you! 🍷

Chris Roth (editor@gen-us.net) has edited COMMUNITIES since 2008, first with FIC, and now with GEN-US.

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.



The Long Haul

I'm so moved by the current issue (#197)! Starting with Laird Schaub's homage to Caroline Estes, I remained absorbed to the core by Achim Ecker's offering, which touches to the bones very familiar issues and concerns I live with here at Earthaven, though we were never as revolutionary as ZEGG. I also watched the recent YouTube interview with him that is an absolute gift from his naked heart. Anton Marks' article is also so relevant to our experience.

Melanie Rios' intro (for me) to Aaron Johnson and the movement to upturn white supremacy from within our groups, rather than via pundits, provides important language and directions for me and my community to get more familiar with.

And Mike Foley's work on self-sufficient lifestyle is crucial, if not really new to so many of us. But his way of shaping and languaging the issues has got me ordering the book so I can be more conversant with how we at Earthaven might learn to do things more *a la tequio*.

My applause to the folks at GEN-US who are behind COMMUNITIES' efforts. Much more to read in this issue. Thanks so much!

Arjuna da Silva
Earthaven Ecovillage
Black Mountain, North Carolina

The Dawn of Everything and Today

Dear Chris,

Thanks so much for your excellent summary and reflections on the book *The Dawn of Everything* (“Coming Home to History,” COMMUNITIES #197). It is a forbiddingly large and intellectual book that I always felt I should read but never found time to do so.

Thanks also for pointing out that our ancestors found opportunities in difficult circumstances to try new ways of living and that it is even more imperative that we continue to do so now.

Andrew Moore
Vancouver Island, Canada

Being the Change

I read Diana Leafe Christian's latest article of the “Especially Challenging Behaviors” series in the Winter 2022 issue, and I think she, and the magazine, are brave to tell a painful, personal story. I could completely relate! It's really important that we call people on this kind of behavior. I appreciate the author for modeling “being the change you/we want to see in the world!”

Thank you for your courage! (I love that the root of the word “courage” is *cœur*: Heart!)

Denise Henrikson
ecothrivehousing.org
Seattle, Washington

Speak Up Before Fleeing

I eagerly look forward to each installment in Diana Leafe Christian's bold and helpful article series, "Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors."

In Part Four, the author says, "I've known decent, good-hearted, emotionally well people who choose to leave their community because someone like this was targeting them." As someone living in a small community (10-20 adults plus children), I had to respond.

At Heart-Culture Farm Community, we have experienced several residents over the past two decades who exhibit some version of the behaviors described in these articles. We have seen people leave because of these residents—not the person exhibiting the difficult behaviors, but people who we wanted to have stay. We have developed some strategies to prevent this from happening.

If you are a person who is struggling with one of your community-mates' behaviors, these are the steps we recommend at Heart-Culture:

1. Ask other residents for help. Especially ask long-term residents and those who are financially invested in the LLC that owns the community land. Owners hold a leadership role in helping resolve conflicts between residents.

2. Take time for self-reflection and personal healing. How can you increase your own resilience and develop responsive strategies that you may not already have in your toolbox?

3. Try addressing the issues directly with the person. If this does not work, try doing so with a third party present. If this does not work, we may ask for an all-community mediation. As Diana Leafe Christian has pointed out, these strategies don't work well for someone with the persistent difficult behaviors she describes. We still try them first. We need time as a community to find out if the person can heal or change.

4. The community, and especially the long-term residents and LLC owners, need two things before we can decide that a resident has persistent difficult behaviors: evidence and time. Time is required to try various community processes and note that they failed to help. Evidence also comes from residents talking about their struggles and the results of their attempts to resolve problems.

5. If you continue to struggle with a person with persistent difficult behaviors, and you have personally run out of time and resilience to respond to the situation, and you live in a community where it is impossible to reduce your emotional stress through avoiding the person: **TELL THE COMMUNITY'S LEADERS!**

This last point is the vital point that I needed to make after reading Diana Leafe Christian's advice to leave a small community in response to the presence of a person with persistent difficult behaviors. At Heart-Culture, we try all our skills to help someone have the container they need for personal growth and healing. We are not mental health professionals, and we do not diagnose people's emotional health. However, we are all engaged in personal healing of one kind or another, including participation in Narcotics Anonymous, Re-Evaluation Co-Counseling, shamanic healing practices, and other strategies that work for us.

If a resident who is functioning well in our community comes to the community's leaders and says, "I can't live with so-and-so any more. This is too hard for me. I'm considering moving out," that triggers a string of responses that we have developed over the years. Several times we have issued eviction notices to people with persistent difficult behaviors after a well-functioning resident reaches their breaking point.

Our thinking is: if we have the skills and resources onsite to continue living with a person with persistent difficult behaviors, we will do so. We make boundaries and give that person a chance to heal in the space inside those boundaries. However, if we do not have the skills and resources onsite to continue living with that person, as evidenced by community members who think they must leave as a result of the conflicts, we will protect the residency of those people who are functioning best in the community.

Sometimes we describe it like this: If you don't evict someone when you need to, you lose half your community because of unworkable conflicts. We value stability and relationships enough to try to prevent that from happening through the judicious use of evictions.



Diana Leafe Christian 10-Week Sociocracy Training

Next online training, Sundays, midday

May 7 – Jul 9, 2023

"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

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More Info:

**www.DianaLeafeChristian.org
To Register: diana@ic.org**



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



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WITH REBECCA MESRITZ



Letters

We are able to do this because our structure requires people to stay in the role of month-to-month renter until they have built enough social equity to warrant lifelong commitments with the other LLC owners. Other communities will have other financial and legal structures and different social agreements. But in any community, before you make your excuses and leave, please tell the community leaders why you are considering leaving. They may not realize that the issue has gotten so unworkable for you, and they may decide they would rather evict the other person and keep you.

Kara Huntermoon

Heart-Culture Farm Community
Eugene, Oregon

New Laws Incentivize Urban Community

I want to be sure COMMUNITIES readers are aware that innovative approaches to cohousing are now significantly easier in California due to a myriad of recently-passed bills addressing the state's housing shortage. Various new laws incentivize a small-scale approach to densification that does not require substantial investment and large-scale development.

One such senate bill allows the construction of two "accessory dwelling units" of up to 1,000 square feet each on multi-family properties. If a single house now sits on a property zoned for two houses, for example, this means that, in addition to building a second house, purchasers can construct and rent out two more homes. Two community-minded families pooling their resources to buy a site of this type can thus create the possibility of a four-house community which can expand as neighboring lots become available. Currently, University Cohousing is developing along this model in San Jose, with a historic Victorian being restored and three new homes being added on a property zoned for only two units. The design prioritizes community and move-in is targeted for 2024.

A number of other states and jurisdictions are also finally taking steps to mitigate the exclusionist history of single-family zoning. Various new laws favor those seeking to build community. Where traditional developers might see no benefit in developing two rental units whose ownership is tied by title to the "primary" dwellings, those seeking to build community can make it much more accessible by including two additional households in their community—households who might not be ready to or able to buy a home in today's housing market, but who are able to rent affordable units.

One recently passed California bill eliminates single-family zoning altogether, allowing the development of up to four homes on properties previously zoned for one. In many cases, denser development is now allowed in "single-family" zones than in areas zoned for duplexes or triplexes. This law also requires that the property owner live on site for the first three years after the property is developed. If you are seeking to create a community that you will be a part of, the new bill opens up a world of possibilities. A number of organized community-minded households can purchase multiple adjacent properties and build a community in a "single-family" neighborhood, provided those households each live in their new community for at least three years after construction is complete.

An incremental approach to community development is not a new thing. It has existed for years, with many thriving examples that have organically grown from a couple households to 10 or 20 over time. But that approach is now made much easier in places like California. While the ground-up construction of 30 or so homes intermingled among vast gardens is often seen as the holy grail of community design, such a tremendous undertaking can feel daunting to many. For busy, community-minded folks, a bite-sized approach can be accessible and has the potential to offer more immediate rewards.

Brad Gunkel

Founding Principal, Gunkel Architecture
Emeryville, California



Cathedral Park Cohousing

Hello from Portland Oregon's newest cohousing community! Looking to live in one of Portland's most vibrant and beautiful neighborhoods? Come learn about Cathedral Park Cohousing!

Imagine yourself stepping out your front door into a gorgeous, light-filled, exterior courtyard that opens to views of the Willamette River and one of the nation's largest urban forests on the other side. You walk a few blocks to the quaint Portland neighborhood of St Johns to meet a friend for coffee. You board Portland's award-winning public transit system and head downtown to your volunteer job at the world-class Portland Art Museum. After your shift you meet a friend at one of the city's James-Beard award-winning restaurants, or if the weather is particularly lovely, you grab a bite from one of the city's world-famous food cart pods and dine al-fresco in one of our many amazing parks. A quick Lyft, bike, or public transportation ride back and you're home at Cathedral Park Cohousing to visit with a neighbor while making dinner before heading to the common room for book club/art class/evening yoga.

This is what life could be like for you in Portland's newest cohousing community! We're creating a community of belonging, compassion, and curiosity—and we're a fun bunch to boot! We've purchased an urban hillside property with stunning views of Forest Park, the Willamette River, and the iconic St Johns Bridge. We are right next door to a large community garden and are building 35 Universally-Designed (no stairs!) studio to 3-bedroom homes. Our site has easy access to downtown Portland and many of the region's largest employers. We are within a few blocks of public transportation, multiple restaurants, coffee shops, churches, a public elementary school, grocery stores, services, a county library branch, movie theaters, microbrew pubs, and so much more. All of our condo homes have full kitchens, laundry hook-ups, and access to common-space amenities.

We have a strong, committed membership, and a successful, experienced professional development team. We are on track to start construction this year! Call our Outreach Coordinator, Alicia at **503-319-5003**, email us at **info@cathedralparkcohousing.com**, or sign up for one of our virtual information sessions at **<https://www.cathedralparkcohousing.com/category/learn-about-us/>**

Connect with us on FaceBook at **<https://www.facebook.com/CathedralParkCohousing>**

We look forward to meeting you!

A-Frames

By Carol Ladas Gaskin

Excerpted from Chapter 6 of *Life in the Wilderness: a gathering of friends (a memoir yet to be published)*.

One's destination is never a place but a new way of seeing things.

—Henry Miller

We began in the mid-'60s in Northern California, five friends wanting to live a simple life on the land and raise our children in a loving community. At 27, the youngest adult in the group, I was a single woman, divorced, with a young daughter. There were five of us adults, four teenagers, and three children. One of the group, Adair, would join us the next spring, having things to complete before leaving the States. We had spent a year developing our vision and commitments. We arrived in British Columbia in the summer of 1968, with the four adults—Eric and I, Daniel and Joanne—first renting a place north of the border along the Arrow Lakes. We were looking in all the valleys for land we could afford. It would be off the grid. The search seemed endless at the time but, by late summer, Arvid and Yvette had sold us 40 acres of forest up on the mountain.

After we bought the land, we packed everything up quickly. Within a week we had rented a little house in the valley near a river—an easy drive up the mountain to our own land. We knew we had only three months to build shelters, lay in a water line, cut firewood, gather food for winter, build a root cellar, and take care of everyday needs before snowfall. We had never lived off the grid at the end of a snowbound road.

“We can build temporary A-frames,” Eric said.

I was a complete novice to building. A-frame construction was great for me. The lodgepole pines we harvested from the property stood straight as arrows, and we had all the tools we needed. Joanne and I traded care of the house and children every other day so we could be part of the work on the land. Eric and Daniel had been builders in the past; they had knowledge about structures and could do the heavy work. My hammering skills were elementary. At least I knew from my brother, Harold, which end of the hammer to hold.

But one day, Daniel walked up to me as I was working. “It’ll work better if you hold the hammer at the very end; you’ll get better leverage.”

Already frustrated and embarrassed at my slow progress, I was so furious at his comment I couldn’t speak. He saw my face and wisely walked away. Later, I tried to grip the hammer farther away from the head, but I couldn’t lift it. My muscles were so weak.

I stood next to the newly cleared house site. Larger logs marked the perimeter of the A-frame waiting for its vertical structure. The lodgepole pines were stacked nearby. Since the bark of lodgepole pine decomposes over time and bugs live in it and eat it, the poles had to be peeled before assembling. My job was peeling. Supporting the poles horizontally on two sawhorses, I used the drawknife, a two-handed peeler, pulling it toward me as the long, dark peels of bark slid to the ground, revealing the slick, golden smoothness of the cambium layer beneath. The forest was peaceful; the space was filled with small bird sounds. The rhythm of the work took over—the kind of seamless Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes of in his book *Flow*: “The outcome of any action that is done with present moment awareness, propelled by a vision, sufficiently challenging, yet possible, leads one to flow.” I was learning the pleasures of being in my body not just my mind—a pathway to joy.

When the poles were peeled and ready to assemble, we selected pairs that matched in diameter and cut them at matching angles at one end, so they fit together perfectly.

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Eric nailed them at the angled point with big spikes, added a small crosspiece at the top for stabilization and then a longer mid-cross piece as well. After assembling the truss on the ground inside the foundation logs, the three of us pulled it into a vertical position. I held two ropes: one looped around the top crosspiece on one side, the other rope looped around the mid-cross beam on the other side. While Eric and Daniel maneuvered the “A” inside the foundation, I balanced it with the ropes until it was upright and plumb. I kept it balanced there until Eric and Daniel braced and nailed it against the foundation logs that marked the width of the A-frame.

One time, while I was holding the “A” in place, Daniel called out, “Time for tea, see you later, Carol.” Since I knew he wasn’t serious, it became a good joke between us.

As the days sped by, I began to feel strong and proud of myself. After several days, all the trusses of the A-frame stood free in the clearing, like skeletons enclosing the inner space without containing it. The six “A”s stood four feet apart, spiked to the foundation logs. The silky, blond cambium layer glowed in the sunlight against the background of the dark pines and hemlocks. I contemplated what was manifest before me: architecture—the first art. The bones of the house were standing. The bones needed their skin though so we could live inside and be warm—hopefully.

The next project was splitting shakes. These, fortunately, were made from straight-grained, easy-to-split, cedar bolts, three feet high and about a foot across at the outer edge. The bolts were lightweight and movable. The froe, a sharp horizontal blade attached to the bottom of a vertical wooden handle, was somewhat awkward for me to use at first. Fortunately, the cedar bolts balanced well on the ground. I set the sharp edge of the froe firmly in the middle of the top of the cedar bolt. With one swift whack of the birch mallet to the blunt side of the froe, the bolt opened with a deep crack, and the scent of cedar rose to my nostrils. Each time, I flipped the bolt over, so the shakes would be as even and thin as possible. My arms ached by the end of each day, but my confidence grew with the natural rhythm of the work. And the stacks

of shakes piled up beside me until I had enough.

Four-inch stringers about 12 inches apart crossed the A-frame poles, like a ladder that led to the top and extended across the entire length of the house. As I climbed up, I carried a bundle of shakes and a shingling ax with a notch on one side and a hammer on the other. The notch was for removing nails that obstinately went in crooked. On my belt hung a pouch filled with roofing nails. Poised in space, awkward and shaky, with hardly enough room to move, I was afraid, but determined. As the weeks went by, my fear subsided; I nailed the last shake in place on the main house, then completed work on another bedroom A-frame and the *banya* (a Russian wet sauna) with an attached shop on the other side.

By late fall, I climbed down off the roof for the last time. The essential structures now stood completed in the clearing. There was still a great deal for all of us to do. We had planned to build one more bedroom A-frame so everyone would have their own private bedroom,



Photos courtesy of Carol Ladas Gaskin



but that had to wait until the woodshed and root cellar were full and after the first snowfall. We were ready for the next project before snowfall.

A large, deep, water-table pond had shimmered on the far side of the old garden when we arrived. According to Arvid and Yvette, the water rose slowly each spring and then slowly seeped away throughout the summer until all trace of it was gone by fall. So, except for spring and summer, we knew that the only water for our household, the animals, and eventually the garden would be piped down from the hillside from a spring about a quarter mile up a logging road. The difference in elevation would provide 40 pounds of pressure and give us running water in the kitchen.

Daniel and Eric dug a small reservoir at the spring. We bought long lengths of black plastic pipe in town and dragged them up the water line uncoiling and snaking the pipe down the dry stream bed around, over, and under the trees and fallen logs and through the rock-strewn hillside to the road, then across the garden-to-be and up the small knoll to the A-frame. That was just the beginning. Although we were Californians, we knew we had to protect the line from freezing over the winter. Fortunately, we had access to wood chips from the mill in Slocan. I recall days of us dragging bags of wood chips up to cover the waterline and finally raking leaves and forest debris over the thousand feet of waterline all the way to the main A-frame. Late October: water poured out of the faucet in the kitchen, and we all cheered.

By then the McClary wood stove—complete with a bread warmer above and the water closet to the right of the oven—stood in place ready to cook all our meals for years to come. It had a personality and would want to be fed with dry firewood. The sleeping loft above the kitchen would be warm all winter. The big oil drum furnace stood at the other end of the A-frame to heat the children's bedrooms up in the loft. The need for firewood in great supply became more apparent every day as the temperature dropped. The two teenage boys were cutting our firewood, which gave us concern. The roadcrew in the valley had told us they would not be plowing the road until spring. We were told by the old-timers that everything essential would have to be up the mountain by late October in preparation for a heavy snowfall. The Ford Van would sit at the bottom of the hill, and our jeep, Pogo, unlicensed, would ferry us up and

down the hill—if we were lucky.

We bought supplies in town: hundred-pound bags of wheat, rice, and beans, and a barrel of molasses, several buckets of honey. We were on a very strict budget, so our great fortune was the generous nature of the Russian Doukhobors who had befriended us. They shared their bountiful gardens, filling our root cellar with potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbages, beets, apples, jars of preserves, and pickles. They also taught us how to care for Bossy, our Guernsey cow, whom we bought from them. Over the winter we would learn how to milk her and make cottage cheese, butter, even hard cheeses, and their special kefir.

It was finally time for Daniel to walk Bossy up the steep hill beside the tumbling creek, past the abandoned pasture on crown land—where she would graze in the summer—then through the deep forest to our small barn where she would shelter until we had time to build her a big barn. We would buy a horse and stoke the fires and discover that we had not nearly enough firewood, but the water in the faucet ran clear and cold. We ground the hundred pounds of wheat berries for flour every morning—each person a hopper full—and the bread was heavenly, and the temperature dropped to 40 below zero and we survived to tell the story.

In that year, my life was irrevocably altered. Working and living in the forest, my body felt rooted for the first time. Today more than 50 years have passed. The A-frames are still standing. Though I've built other homes since then, traveled many places, and lived a meaningful, creative life, I celebrate our adventurous spirit and my ongoing commitment and presence on the land as both an opportunity and a resource. 🍄

Like "Water: Life in the Wilderness," (COMMUNITIES #194, pp. 8-9), which recounts a later adventure with the water line described in this story, this article is excerpted with permission from Carol Ladas Gaskin's memoir Life in the Wilderness, not yet published. Carol writes: "I have had years of experience in intentional community and have recently completed a memoir on my experience of forming and living in an intentional community in the woods of British Columbia from 1968-1986. Although the form of the community has changed, it is still alive and well 55 years later." Now living in Seattle, Washington, Carol is a counselor, teacher, writer, and artist. See carolladasgaskin.com and seattlehakomi.com.

Straw Bales, Permaculture, and Building with Heart

By Rikki Nitzkin

This article is adapted from the introductory sections of A Complete Guide to Straw Bale Building by Rikki Nitzkin and Maren Termens, Permanent Publications, 320 pages, 2020 (see permanentpublications.co.uk/port/a-complete-guide-to-straw-bale-building and chelseagreen.com/product/a-complete-guide-to-straw-bale-building).

I arrived in Spain from the US in 1996 when I was in my early 20s. Like so many other immigrants, I earned a living as a craftsperson and street vendor. First, I lived in a van, then in a rental in the Rioja region, and finally (in 2000) I bought myself a small plot of land in the foothills of the Catalan Pyrenees. At first, I lived in a tipi, but living in a big tent means living in a space with no insulation; it was great in spring and fall, but too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. I needed decent housing, but I didn't have enough money to pay someone to build my home. And anyway, I decided I wanted to build it myself, and in this way learn new skills which would allow me to be more capable of meeting my own needs without depending on others. I had first heard about straw bale building through Pilar, a woman I met at a gathering of the Association GEA (Asociacion de Estudios Geobiologicos—NGO dedicated to geobiology).

She sent me a photocopy of a book in English about building with straw. After reading it—and although I had absolutely no previous building experience—somehow I knew that if I were to ever build a house, it would be with straw. Random acts of kindness to strangers can really make a difference. Thank you Pilar!

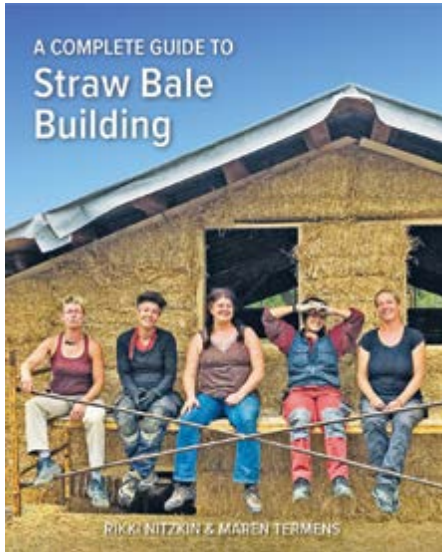
After reading a couple more books on the subject, I planned my future home. I made a design for a Post and Beam Structure, and took the design to be reviewed by Inaki Urkia, the only architect I had heard about in Spain who had worked already with straw. I was hoping for a little advice. He asked me if I was a carpenter (or had a good friend who was) or money to hire one. When I responded no to that, he asked me why I wanted to build the house with a wooden structure. Then he sat down with me and helped me design a simple, loadbearing (Nebraska style) straw bale house which I could build myself with minimal cost and skills. It is always a good idea to get professional advice before starting!

In the spring of 2002, I excavated the foundation with the help of some volunteers and a few picks and shovels. I found the volunteers through the European Straw Bale Network (ESBN) listserv (electronic mailing list software application) which was still up and running back then. I built a concrete stem wall (big mistake! I have since discovered that many better alternatives exist) with the help of two neighbours. In the summer of 2002, I gathered a group of volunteers to help me, and also to learn together how to build with straw.

I had read quite a lot, and asked tons of advice from the European network,

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but it was still the first straw bale house I had ever worked on. I didn't even have experience making custom bales, but what choice did I have? There were no courses or volunteer opportunities in Spain, and I had no money to travel and learn. I barely had enough money to buy the materials for my humble little home. Luckily, Inaki came for a few days, and so did a Dutch woman (thanks Jo!) who had some building experience. In three weeks, the roof was already on although there was still a lot to finish.

In October 2002 I started living in the home, even though it wasn't even plastered. I really recommend that you plaster before moving in, but I didn't want to wait until spring. An un-plastered straw bale house is still a lot warmer than a tipi. Living in the house, it took me years to finish, but it doesn't matter. Over the years, I have learned that the path is taken step-by-step; it's more important to enjoy the work and do it with love, than quickly. My house is a home.

After all of those experiences (of people I barely knew making an effort to help me achieve my dream), I felt so grateful for the help that I wanted to do some-

thing to compensate for it. I had met Maren Termens in a gathering of the European Straw Building Network (then ESBN, now ESBA) in Austria in 2001. After the experience of building my house (she came and helped), in 2005 we decided to inspire the founding of the Red de Construcción con Paja (Spanish Straw Building Network).

In 2006, after studying and learning more, with teachers like Barbara Jones (Straw Works) and Tom Rijven (Habitat Vegetal), we began to give workshops. In 2010 we coauthored the first edition of *Casas de Paja: Una guía para autoconstructores*, published in a second edition in 2016.

The book includes ecological and spiritual beliefs which influence my way of looking at building. I understand that many people (especially professional builders) may feel uncomfortable with this or not see or understand the relationship. I hope not to offend anyone with this attitude, which could be construed as unprofessional, but I am a grassroots professional and I like it that way.

The 2020 book, *A Complete Guide to Straw Bale Building*, originally started as my translation of the 2016 Spanish-language version. However, as I got into the writing I realised that my knowledge (and hopefully my capacity to express it) had evolved over the 10 years since the original book was written. By the time I was finished, the book had several new chapters, and dozens of new photographs, tips, techniques, and ideas. Additions included more information about building physics, jumbo bales, domes, vaults, prefabricated straw panels, finishes that don't require plasters, etc.—all intended to form a more complete picture of what can be done with straw, and the knowledge needed to do so intelligently.

One big change reflected a change in myself. I am no longer just a self-builder. My main job is teaching straw bale building and earthen plastering—both online and in practical workshops—as well as some building and consulting. But the level of my work is much improved. I used to prefer undulating walls—in part because I didn't know how to use a trowel—but now my finishes tend to be smooth and straight. I now feel the need to help professional (conventional) builders to apply straw to their projects, and to offer newer and better solutions to designers and architects.

Straw bale building is finally being recognised internationally and publicly for its many benefits. In France there are public straw bale schools of over 5000 square meters and an eight-storey apartment building which is Passive House certified. Get the idea that straw can only be used for single-family homes out of your head! It's time for all professionals to learn how to build and design responsibly, and now the technology and knowledge has advanced enough to make this achievable for a reasonable price. With intelligent design, straw bales can be applied to building in any climate or part of the world.

One of the foundations of permaculture is that each element in a system should support and be supported by several different parts of the system. This is the perspective from which I feel we should approach building. Although the straw bale is a practical, relevant building material, and can be taken as just that, it can be so much more if you let it. For self-builders, you not only get a healthy, worthy home, but you will grow in the process, opening new horizons with the abilities you develop. For professionals, you can learn to enjoy building again, as working with natural materials is rewarding in itself, at the same time that you are helping to mitigate climate change. If you embrace working collectively and in harmony with life, you will surely be more satisfied when you go to bed at night. I have learned that everything is related, and that building with "heart" is the way to create mutual support networks and sow seeds for a better world.

Warning! Straw bale building is addictive! 🐦

Rikki Nitzkin is a trainer and consultant with Taller Con Co (tallerconco.org), coordinator of the Spanish Straw Building Network (RCP), member of the Board of Directors of European Straw Building Network (ESBA), member of the Global Straw Building Network (GSBN), and coauthor, with Maren Termens, of A Complete Guide to Straw Bale Building (Permanent Publications, 2020), from which this article is adapted. See permanentpublications.co.uk/port/a-complete-guide-to-straw-bale-building and chelseagreen.com/product/a-complete-guide-to-straw-bale-building.

Why Build with Straw? Is Self-Building Really Possible?

"Straw-bale building is not a revolution, but it's a seed."

—Carlos Salazar

Many people have the belief that in order to have a sustainable, healthy home you need to spend an inordinate amount of money, and that it's impossible to do it for yourself. The success of straw bale building worldwide proves that this is not true. At first, it may seem like something taken out of a children's story, but after doing some research you will realise that it's an intelligent and practical building material. For the same price (or less) as a conventionally built home, you will have a better home: warmer in winter, cooler in summer, healthy and with obvious advantages in ecological, economic, and social terms.

It's especially suited for community-based projects, as using straw generates curiosity and enthusiasm in almost everyone who approaches it. Does your town need a new school or community centre? What better way to forge community bonds, than building together? Men, women, young and old, everyone can participate in the build and create together. You can apply all of your imagination and creativity to the process. Have you always wanted a home with curved walls, a window-seat, or some other "crazy" idea? Do it!

On top of everything else, we encourage you to share the process of building with others (especially strangers). As well as being more fun and interesting, you can meet many good people you never knew before.

12 Reasons to Build with Straw

1. Beauty and comfort
2. Easy to build
3. Low cost
4. Solid and long-lasting
5. Sustainable
6. Locally available
7. A healthy home
8. Energy efficiency
9. Thermal properties
10. Fire resistant
11. Earthquake resistant
12. Fun and inspiring!

In conventional construction (brick, cement, steel) it's difficult to find friends (and strangers) willing to volunteer help with building. This is not true for straw bale homes. And if you are a professional builder, I am sure you will enjoy working with natural materials more than fabricated ones. You feel more satisfied at the end of the day.

When it's wall-raising time, everyone has a great time and wants to come. The two parts of the build which are most labour-intensive are wall-raising and plastering; both of these phases are apt for calling a "work-party." There is always something for people of every age and physical condition to do; older people can cook and keep things clean. Kids can gather loose straw and bring water to the workers. Everyone is welcome, and working collectively generates a lot of energy and good "vibes."

In a survey of straw bale self-builders, the majority said that they would be willing to work with straw again. Many even had plans already to try new/different techniques in order to learn more and do better. We really doubt the same could be said of building a concrete or brick house!

—Rikki Nitzkin and Maren Termens

The Magic of Connection and Co-Creation

By *Elena Michel*



Twice-daily sharing circles allowed us to bring our individual experiences into our collective experience.

Sitting in a circle, we smell the smoke of the fire and feel the heat of the autumn sun above us. It is our fourth weekend of coming together to camp on this beautiful meadow orchard within Franconian Switzerland, a natural hilly landscape in southern Germany. We speak about what touched us this weekend and what we are thankful for. I hear Christina Ebisch, a young woman with a passion for ecological building who runs a YouTube channel on future-friendly living and architecture, saying how much she enjoyed the pureness of this place and the community that emerged through working together.

I look to the southern area of the meadow. There it stands: a small room, constructed from straw bales, timber, and clay—all natural materials, all obtained from as close as possible, shaped with our hands and feet. We worked together for four construction-weekend camps, which took place from May until September 2022, to build a straw bale room into an existing barn. The room shall serve the local community supported agriculture, which cultivates the apple orchard. It will double as a storage and tool room and as a place for environmental education.

I facilitate spaces in which people can learn and experience the magic of connection. I work as an academic researcher at the University of Bayreuth and explore the importance of community experience for local and regional transformation. In so-called living labs, I bring people and the urgent questions of our society together: how can we live in a grounded and sustainable way? In this living lab, straw bale building has combined with community experience and nature connection to leave profound impressions in the people involved.

Christina passes on the talking stick to the person next to her and the new person speaking continues: “I really enjoyed being such a diverse team. I am thankful that I, having no kids myself, had the chance to cooperate with so many great young people. At the same time, I really enjoyed working in the retiree-team. It was such a blissful mix of young and old forming a temporal community.” I agree with a warm heart and remember the shared moments with all the people involved in this project. I recall

our morning ritual: singing a song, time for stretching, silence, and then one-to-one conversations with deep listening—a method that I introduced based on my experience from nature mentoring and mindfulness practices.

The stick moves on to Tobi, my partner who organized the camps with me. He brought in the elements of nature connection, which were crucial for us to feel connected with each other. He established in each camp a sitting spot, which is a silent meditation practice sitting at a tree with open eyes observing the landscape. Through him, we also explored the meadow in various playful activities. While most of us were working, he was preparing the meals cooked over the bonfire. There was no electricity or running water in this natural idyll. We had to learn to live simply.

Not only live simply but also work simply. In the first construction camp, we created a foundation for the straw bale room. We built it from recycled natural stones and old wooden pallets. On the second weekend, we produced adobes. For this, we stepped in two ba-

sins of clay with our bare feet to bring it into the appropriate consistency. We mixed the clay with sand, water, and finely chopped straw and then pressed it in molds to form adobes. These dried in air for a few weeks. In the third weekend, a golden room was born. When the farmer Tom delivered the straw bales to the meadow, it was an exciting moment. We stacked the straw bales in the so-called Nebraska technique onto each other. Florian Hoppe and his architecture team consulted this process. The most difficult areas in the straw bale wall were the window lintel and the corners.

In this final weekend, we have plastered the walls with two layers of clay. It was a fun and intensive task to massage the loam rendering into the straw bale. We are content, thankful, and proud as we sit together on this sunny fall day for our closing circle in the meadow.

When the talking stick moves to me, it is my time to share. “I am thankful to have seen you all grow and expand into the field of community. It was a pleasure to meet all of you as colorful individuals, everyone unique, and yet to discover how there emerged a sense of being a ‘we.’ I think we really learned what it means to become community through building this straw bale room.” Even though we don’t live together in our daily lives, a community has formed. This community is rather a network that has strong roots in the ground because we truly got to know each other by co-creating from the ground up. 🌿

Elena Michel lives in a community project in Bayreuth, Germany, the “Laineck-Kollektiv.” It is a house-collective with 10 people, next door to another nine-person-household in a neighborhood cohousing. “In our house, we share our food provisioning, our evening meals when we come home from work or studying, our responsibility for maintaining and creating the garden and the space we live in, and our emotional well-being. This is where I directly learn about what I research, every day.” She has worked since 2018 at the University of Bayreuth as a transformative researcher—initiating and reflecting on local change developments.

Ingredients for Temporal Community Building

- Create a safe and clear space for everyone.
- Give tasks to do and time to spend alone, in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole.
- Create clear rituals that connect the heart (e.g., singing, silence, sharings).
- Include elements of nature connection.

–EM

Challenges We Faced

- Since the camp was remote, it was a challenge to bring all construction materials to the area.
- We were very dependent on the weather. In spring and autumn, we had to deal with rain showers, forcing our work to pause; and in summer, the heat was intense.
- Funding the project via a crowdfunding platform was a challenge of trust and letting go. All we could do was surrender and wait until we raised the sum.
- The mix of experts and laypersons required a lot of communication in the planning process to find a common language—for some, the process went too fast while for others it was too slow.
- For me, it took me a while to accept my leadership role for this project. I always wanted the others to be equally responsible and carry the spark. A book called *Work with Source* from Tom Nixon was crucial to fully step into my power and at the same time leave enough space for co-creativity.

–EM



The author.



When the window lintel was placed, a golden room made out of straw bales was born.



Preparing the clay for the adobe moldings required a lot of muscle power.

Photos by Lisa Würzebesser/Christina Ebisch

Lost, Found, and Reused: Adapting Historic Vernacular Farm Buildings at the Hermitage

By Johannes Zinzendorf

*The barn in bleak mid-winter.
The trailer in which we lived was
already inside.*



*The stable as we first saw it, with
a log cabin inside.*



*The completed first house,
built partly from the
log cabin, which
got us out of the
barn at last.*



*The summer
house as
we found it.*



When Bro. Christian and I first bought land for what has become the Hermitage, there was only a barn on the site. Considering our financial situation, we knew we could afford a house without land, or land without a house, so the choice was clear.

Thank goodness for the barn because that's where we spent the first 18 months, including a remarkably cold winter we survived only by moving an 11-foot camping trailer into the barn and heating it with a kerosene stove.

Our first building project was an outhouse; they're not called necessities for nothing and I'd already broken several ceramic chamber pots as I tried to chip out the you-know-what. While our goal was to re-establish an 18th-century Moravian community of Single Brothers, and we were adamant about not using modern tools or equipment, we, nonetheless, hired a backhoe to dig a pit for a septic tank that we still use. However we en-

closed the tank with its stainless steel throne inside our first structure, made from spare logs we had already begun gathering. As others might go into the fields collecting flowers, we collected architectural pieces from abandoned buildings that dotted our valley.

Our land was in the Mahantongo Valley of central Pennsylvania, settled in the late 18th century almost exclusively by Pennsylvania German Lutheran and Reform families, and we were surrounded by their descendants. Some farms have been in the original families for 200 years, so in that time many farm buildings were constructed and, while most had already been replaced by modern structures, there remained many log and timber-frame structures that were abandoned and neglected primarily because their owners had not gotten around to tearing them down. So when we offered to remove for free what the owners considered to be nothing more than outdated, useless

eyesores, many gladly accepted the offer.

These structures, dating primarily to the 19th century, were cornucopias of building material. In addition to logs and framing, there were doors, windows, interior board walls, baseboards, moldings such as cove ceiling boards, all of which were hand-made and, depending on the integrity of the roofs, were structurally sound. If there were certain pieces we particularly wanted, such as a staircase with its banisters, sometimes owners would let us just take what we wanted, especially if they already planned on taking down the building or, in some cases, were just leaving it alone to eventually rot away.

I imagine most parts of the country have farms or ranches that retain old, outdated farm buildings that no longer serve their original purpose, such as pig houses, granaries, smoke houses, summer houses, perhaps even intact farm or ranch houses, that can be a wonderful source of material even if the entire structure cannot always be saved.

The valley seemed to be an endless source of building material. We didn't realize then that we had come at the very last minute to save what we could, because now the current generation of farmers is quickly demolishing what old structures remain to rid their properties of what is often seen as unsightly blight. These places now look like something out of "Farm Beautiful," with old farm houses so drastically modernized that it is hard to tell an older structure is hidden inside them. And they

typically sit shorn of all the dozen or more original outbuildings that once surrounded them, oddly isolated on vast lawns, sometimes far from the new metal and frame farm buildings indicative of the modern economics of factory farming that require huge buildings—a 300-foot-long chicken house, for example—where, at one time, only a 10-by-15-foot hen house might suffice.

In our passionate hurry to get out of the barn and into our own place, we drove around the valley, up hollows and down dirt roads that sometimes led nowhere, looking for whatever we could find to reuse. One day, as we drove past a ramshackle, falling-down stable, I noticed what appeared to be a log wall where some siding had fallen away. "Stop! Drive back!" I told Bro. Christian, and we found that the stable actually consisted of two smaller structures linked by a shared roof: one side was later timber-frame, but the other was an earlier log cabin. The owner gave us permission to take down the entire structure in exchange for the cabin, which we dismantled and brought back to the Hermitage on a trailer. It was winter and we were cold but that stimulated us to reassemble the cabin as quickly as we could. We kept a fire going that attracted our small family of livestock to stand around the fire to warm themselves. Bathsheba, one of our first goats, was so enamored of the warmth that she practically laid in the fire and singed her hair.

We couldn't reuse the rafters from the stable as they were



The summer house roof is gone; now for the logs.



We used ramps to push the highest logs into place, feeling very ancient Egyptian.



The basic structure is up. Then came months of finish work.

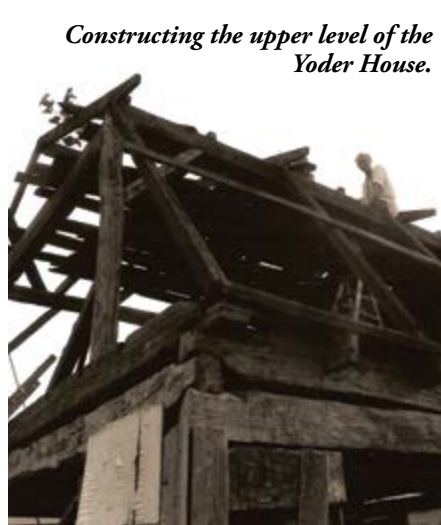


The Yoder House (which we named for its builder and first owner) at its original site.

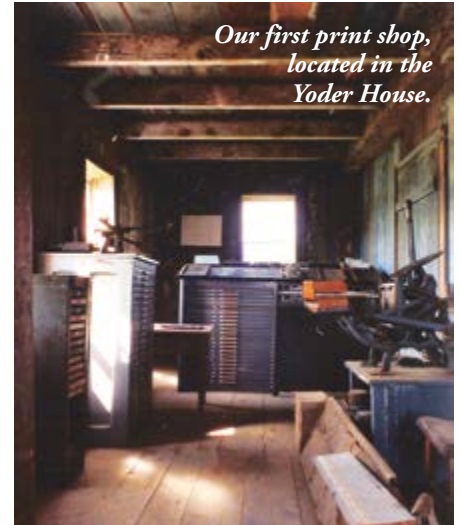
Photos courtesy of Johannes Zinzendorf



I learned how to hew logs to make replacements.



Constructing the upper level of the Yoder House.



Our first print shop, located in the Yoder House.



Raising a bent with a come-along, for the tractor shed. Originally it was a wagon shed; we just changed what we stored in it.



The tractor shed structure is assembled.



The finished building. The dragons, showing by then we had discovered the jig saw, were based on Danish models from Bro. Christian's Viking ancestry.

badly rotted so I drove around the valley looking for rafters. I passed two men taking down a pig house and were starting to burn it. I saw a pile of rafters on one side ready to go into the fire so I stopped and ended up getting them for free, always the right price. Amazingly, they fit surprisingly well on the cabin with little adjustment needed and gave the cabin a nice, old-fashioned peaky roof line.

And so began an odyssey that continued for years of driving around the valley looking for old structures as a source for reusable material even if we couldn't save the entire building.

We considered ourselves the first pioneers of what we confidently knew would become a cloister for up to 12 brothers living self-sufficiently on 63 acres, so we were building a community for the future. Yet we eventually realized we were actually hermits not meant for communal life, but that understanding took time, and heartbreak, to achieve. Still, the buildings remain, with maintenance now being the operative word.

Eventually the limitations of log construction, with the lengthy time required to move and restore these admittedly wonderful buildings, became apparent. We lacked time and help to complete these major projects, while we still needed structures for various workshops and other purposes. It became obvious that we needed to find structures easier to move, and the answer became clear when we went looking for a house for our first novitiate, which is how we acquired our first timber-frame building.

Timber framing uses vertical and horizontal structural beams, not entire logs, which are pegged together with mortises and tenons, with diagonal braces at the corners to provide strength by preventing the structure from shifting laterally, under strong

winds for example. This is particularly noticeable in the building we acquired and moved for our novitiate.

In our area, this kind of building method came from Germany where it was called *fachwerk*, or half-timbering, though English settlers in New England and Virginia, for example, also used it extensively. I find it structurally elegant, as its design accounts for the pressures a building experiences. In our area, houses and barns were more often made of timber-frame than log, and that is particularly true of smaller outbuildings, such as granaries and pig houses.

The smaller size of these structures, often 10 or 14 feet by 20 feet, for example, meant that they could relatively easily be lifted with a crane or between two bulldozers and placed on a flatbed trailer, then driven to the Hermitage to be unloaded the same way either onto a waiting foundation or, in some cases, to be put on temporary blocks while a foundation was constructed beneath them.

We had to remove the roofs to get them under power lines. Fortunately in our rural area no moving permits were required, and we simply pushed low-hanging wires out of the way with forked sticks. One of the buildings we used for an expanded print shop, while others became various workshops, a tractor shed (after we finally gave in and mechanized our farming; a tough but necessary choice), and the wash house.

For timber-frame buildings too large to be moved intact, we dismantled them down to their basic H-shaped structural components called bents, and loaded the bents onto a trailer so each trailer load was essentially a complete building kit just needing reassembly.

And small timber-frame structures can be incredibly adaptable.

You get a room that can be used as a cabin, a workshop, a library, almost any use one can desire; a true multi-purpose structure. For example we moved a large timber-frame stable that, at one time during the 1930s, also housed an illegal slot machine operation (conveniently located across the street from the local bar). We turned it into a blacksmithy and woodworking shop.

Another well-traveled and much adapted structure was a small (three-by-four-foot) smoke house we moved from an abandoned farm whose owner let us salvage what we could. We got a staircase and flooring from the main house, and loaded the smoke house onto a small trailer and hauled it with the van back to the Hermitage where we set it up as a *hoi und piff haus* (in Pennsylvania Dutch), or hay and straw house, adjacent to a small stable we built for our first sheep and goats.

Later, we moved it up by the garden to store tools, then, once more, we moved it down into the barnyard as a fuel shed. As the sign on the front door says, it is also a working fallout shelter using the instructions I learned from a teacher at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, who said that, in the event of a nuclear attack, we students were to sit at our desks, lean way over, and kiss our asses goodbye.

Since its original pine beams had been eaten by insects through the years, we rebuilt it almost from the ground up. Only one short beam remains of the original structure; everything else has been replaced. Considering the structure was probably 150 years old to begin with, it was time for a make-over.

We even moved two small stone structures: a smoke house and a 200-year-old brick and stone bake oven from a nearby farm. In these cases, we took the structures apart and then reassembled them at the Hermitage. The bake oven remains, but the smoke house eventually fell in as we ignored advice to paint around the stones with water-resistant lime, so water got between the stones and, following repeated freeze-and-thaw cycles, the stones eventually heaved and shoved apart to the point where the building was no longer stable, so down it came.

And that is how our community gained most of its buildings, by moving existing structures to the site and adaptively reusing them. Hopefully these examples will stimulate readers in other communities, and those thinking about building a community, to seek out abandoned structures in their own areas that can be moved and adaptively reused. We learned there is life in these old structures, just not at their original locations. 🌱

Johannes Zinzendorf cofounded the Hermitage, a Harmonist community in central Pennsylvania, with Christian Zinzendorf in 1988. The men have written extensively on crafts, buildings, and spirituality. Their first book, The Big Book of Flax, was published by Schiffer in 2011. Their forthcoming book, Vernacular Furniture of the Mahantongo, will be published by the Pennsylvania German Society in 2024. Johannes is engaged in an ongoing series of online discussions on alternative spirituality sponsored by Harvard Divinity School.



A clutch of structures waiting to be rehabbed.



The Creek House in transition from a granary to a cabin.



The newly rechristened Gingerbread House (formerly the Creek House).



The Hermitage as it looked in 2000, when most of the buildings mentioned in this article were in place.

Homestead Building in Hawaii

By Graham Ellis

We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us.—Winston Churchill

If you build it, they will come.—Field of Dreams



Today, homesteading in Hawaii is a rare reminder of the traditional development model that prevailed prior to the invasion and occupation of the sovereign nation by westerners. Until the 1850 Great Mahele, when land titles were first introduced in Hawaii, the rural population of Hawaiians lived in tiny villages and on small homesteads. They built homes and outbuildings where and how they wanted in order to accommodate an extended family of fluctuating size—with pigs, chickens, maybe a few hunting dogs and a fishing canoe.

Homesteading is the traditional model of a sustainable lifestyle in Hawaii and usually involves a high degree of self-sufficiency. From pre-occupation times Hawaiian homesteaders have grown, fished, or hunted their own foodstuffs and typically made crafts to meet or supplement their financial needs. In remote rural areas like ours, homesteaders lacked most government support systems and were expected to be self-reliant, independent, and largely self-determined. Hawaiians, and other ethnic groups that later moved in to become their neighbors, took great pride in being free from government interference and regulation, and preferred being left alone. This was especially true on the wild lava flows of lower Puna.

In 1950, the US government announced that Hawaii had, through annexation, become the 50th state of the Union. In the years since this illegal declaration, the state of Hawaii has imposed standard US building codes and zoning regulations and changed homestead land divisions into rural agricultural zones—which meant restrictions on permitted activities! We were all limited to a maximum of two houses, no matter their

size, on each lot, whether of two acres, 20 acres, or 200 acres, and all homestead building developments came under the jurisdiction of the county and state of Hawaii, and were administered by the local planning and building departments.

Residential building codes were only introduced into the US after fires in substandard houses spread to burn down neighboring townhouses. The program was designed and intended for densely populated urban centers, not remote agricultural areas on Pacific islands where homesteading was the predominant rural development model. In 1987, when we purchased Bellyacres, we were supposed to obey modern government regulation like building codes, food safety codes, zoning regulations, and restrictions on landscaping and animal keeping, but in our remote rural area they were very

rarely enforced. That came later after gentrification!

Bellyacres ecovillage is part of the Kehe-na-Keauohana-Keokea Homesteads land division on the Big Island. Our property and others around had remained in the hands of Hawaiian families for generations but most of them moved out when the 1955 lava flow, from Kilauea volcano, destroyed their homes, inundated their land, or cut off their access roads. For the next 40 years, the majority of the new residents moving into these barren lands were modern-style off-grid homesteaders, pioneering renewable energy options including solar electricity and wind power, planting and growing food crops, and raising livestock.

Just as we did at Bellyacres, these new rural homesteaders invariably lived first in a tent, sometimes a garage or a storage shack, and then eventually built and moved into their house that continued to be a work in progress. It was not uncommon for homesteaders' houses to be in the construction phase for generations because rooms got added as new children were born or grandparents moved in or when savings or income left enough cash for more supplies. Homestead structures are developed affordably without access to any mortgages. For most people living self-sufficiently with little reported income, it was impossible to get a mortgage—while for others it was simply not desirable because of high interest rates and the risk of foreclosure.

Homestead living always involves using the materials that you have at hand responsibly. At Bellyacres we were blessed with a subtropical rainforest covering much of our land. The trees—which included mango, lama, lauhala, avocado, guava, and ohia—were all sizes, from saplings to giants, and some had been there for 300-400 years. We determined from the start that we would not clearcut our trees and no way would we bulldoze pin-to-pin like most developments in our district. Instead, we honored each tree and very slowly and very carefully planned our roads, house sites, orchards, and open spaces to have the least impact, especially upon our majestic ohia and mango trees. Consequently, our roads meandered through the forest zig-zagging around significant trees, while structures were squeezed into tiny clearings shadowed by happily maturing giant trees.

There had to be some sacrifices but we salvaged each trunk of any tree we did cut, for use in construction. Most of the early clearing happened in 1990. I was able to walk alongside the bulldozer operator to guide him to carefully tip certain trees over. He worked only the weekends and I spent the rest of the week cutting, chaining, dragging out tree trunks with my pickup truck, and storing them carefully under cover so they could be used later in construction. The largest trees—too big dimensionally to be used as posts—were cut into eight ft. lengths, dried for about three years, and then milled.

When we needed to buy commercial lumber it was our custom—until around 1998—to use only untreated wood. This was fine when we used our own harvested ohia hardwoods, but untreated commercial lumber was like caviar for hungry tropical termites. The only available treated lumber at the time used chromated copper arsenate (CCA), recognized for the greenish tint it imparts to timber and its nasty toxic dangers. Environmentalists and organic back-to-the-landers' concerns about its health effects eventually led to its replacement with low-toxicity borate-treated wood. So all of our pre-1998 structures included some walls, floors, and roofs built with untreated lumber and were susceptible to the dreaded termite plagues which have been the demise of many a homesteader's house in Hawaii.

I've always believed that it should be the right of everyone to own their own home. I learned later the power of the primal satisfaction it gives. Late in 1996, after nine years in my yurt, I was ready to move into a more permanent space. My wife and I were able to muster a total of \$40k in savings and family loans, so that's what we had to work with. Homesteading was my only option to ever own a quality home since a mortgage-constructed house was never possible for someone on my subsistence income.

A longtime mate, Dean, who was attending architectural college, convinced me I could build something quite substantial with my scant amount of cash, the pile



Photos courtesy of Graham Ellis



of recycled materials I'd gathered, my extensive circle of friends, and my resourceful nature. Once he understood my needs, like a 15-ft.-high ceiling for juggling, an open plan family room with an accessible rooftop, he carefully designed the house. I got Val, a local draftsman friend, to draw up basic plans, and later walked them through all the required government departments to secure my own county building permit.

I was constantly searching for additional construction materials. First, I harvested ohia trees from our land and prepared some of them to be construction posts by debarking, drying, and eventually sanding them. A neighbor from Kapoho brought a portable sawmill onto our land and, from the largest ohia logs that I had cut down and dried, he produced a pile of odd-shaped pieces in trim and slab dimensions. These I took to my friend Clive where, using his planes and saws, I was able to convert them into usable-sized construction lumber. With the assistance of more good friends, I dismantled two 20-year-old tomato greenhouses and transported load after load of recycled 2x4s, 2x6s, 2x12s, and 4x4s back to Bellyacres in the circus van. It was well-matured, virtually free lumber and just needed to have nails removed and ends trimmed. I also sourced and bought recycled windows, doors, glass, hardware, and paint for a fraction of their original cost.

After preparing a materials list of additional milled lumber, siding, and roofing from Dean's drawings I shipped a full 40 ft. container load from Oregon for about \$16,000. Once I was ready for construction, my house site was leveled and cleared by our local bulldozer operator, and a neighborhood parent formed and poured my concrete slab in exchange for several years of circus classes I gave his kids. Throughout the process all the workers on my house were friends, locals, or strangers who became friends. Several of them also became competent jugglers during the course of construction and later joined the circus. My teaching never stopped and the fun continued.

A carpenter friend, Will, from Canada, plus Joe and Dan—two inexperienced young men fresh from adventures in Alaska—formed my affordable “keep it homey” building crew. I worked with them on a daily basis in between my responsibilities as the HICCUP circus director and Bellyacres land manager. Life got interesting when I learned that it was 14 years since my crew leader had done any house framing and had been building boats, mostly using fiberglass. This accounted for more than a few unique features in the early construction phase. That's homesteading style.

We were all amateurs and together we had to figure out official building plans and learn the lingo of construction as we went. We pushed and pulled, sweated and struggled as we framed wooden walls and then tore them down and put them back

up again. We broke tools and often used totally wrong techniques, but we did it, completing the basic shell in five months. We made modifications as we went along, not following any strict architectural plan but organically evolving the house to suit the functions I needed it to serve. We called it “a sculpture in the making.” I decided to name it the “Tea House” in recognition of over a thousand cups of strong English tea I served to fuel up my work crew.

My wife and I moved into our house before we even had running water or power. Everything we needed came on Hawaiian time. As the months and years passed, I sanded, painted, caulked, and added trim and other details. I was fortunate to have a load of local neighborhood friends with construction experience so I hired them to do my plumbing, electrical, and drywall. It was generally a fraction of what licensed contractors would have cost even if it did take longer and end up with a few quirks. It was worth it. I never called for any county inspections because I knew my house wouldn't pass and the required changes would cost far more than I could afford. Like so many in my neighborhood I didn't engage any further with building permit legalities and really didn't want to be a part of a system that I didn't support. We lived among renegade homestead builders. We were the norm.

Over the next 18 years, my electrical

friends, Wing and Noman, upgraded my solar system and we enjoyed a fair bit of socializing. I was able to improve it every few years as I accumulated enough money to buy more solar panels, two 12v inverters then a 24v inverter, four charge controllers, four new sets of deep-cycle batteries, and a complete rewiring.

A building cost that I was not able to trim was the legally-mandated cesspool which was dug by a licensed contractor to the rigid building standards. After my family and friends had used it well for 14 years, I had it inspected by a civil engineer and we discovered that it fully conformed to the regulation 12 ft. depth but only had accumulated three inches of sludge at the bottom. Apparently I could have saved a great deal of money with a perfectly adequate and healthy sanitation system just a few feet deep at a fraction of the cost. Very naïvely at that time, I believed that composting toilets weren't legal because the county administration never listed or suggested them as an option. It was much later I learned I could have legally installed four composting toilets for the price of one excessively overbuilt cesspool.

In 2003, my wife inherited a little cash and so we decided to remove our temporary plywood kitchen and bathroom counters and install bamboo laminate replacements built by a community member. In 2005, I hired another carpenter friend to upgrade my roof deck and a few other features to building code standards thinking that I might need to get it officially inspected. In 2007, I laid flooring in the ground floor rooms and had one

of my former circus kids install counters with beautiful mango wood slabs harvested from our land. The "Tea House" became much more than a home. It was testimony to how homestead building can bring together a community to support its members. The Hawaiians call it "Kokua."

Including the outdoor deck areas, the house expanded to over 2,200 sq. ft. I also added 3,600 sq. ft. of usable covered space with an almost flat roof/deck covering the carport with my first office that I used for the circus, Bellyacres, and community networking. Any deck is a great resource and I designed and constructed a tent to cover the whole surface so we could use it for weekly circus classes and summer and winter camps. For three years, it also served as a part-time educational facility for my daughter's homeschool program.

In 2015, under pressure from our new Bellyacres administration who wanted to bring more of our structures into code compliance, I spent another \$2,500 and upgraded my perfectly adequate and functioning plumbing system so that it could get its final county inspection. After 18 years, I had finished most of the house projects on my list but, as is the way with homesteading, the building still remains incomplete, waiting for the funds for the next improvement. It still has no electrical permit but that's just fine because as a homestead building it's always "a work in progress."

The "Tea House" was the realization of a dream that I'd held since founding Bellyacres and was much more than just a home for me. It was truly representative of a homesteader's project because it was built incrementally, board by board, with lots of help from my community family and not a dime was borrowed so I was never burdened by a mortgage or at risk of losing it to a bank by defaulting on payments. Homesteading enabled me to create a secure and safe home base from which I was able to help build community and create something of real value to pass on to any of my children who choose to live there in the future. 🌸

Graham Ellis cofounded a workers collective in Victoria, Canada and a community development project in St. Lucia, West Indies before moving to Hawaii. In 1987 he founded the Bellyacres ecovillage on a 10 acre jungle lot with a vision to experiment with sustainable community living practices. In 2010 he became the founding president of the Hawaii Sustainable Community Alliance after Bellyacres was issued a cease and desist order. He spent the next four years promoting county and state legislation to legalize sustainable living in Hawaii. In 2017 Graham was deported back to the UK, where he now lives with his wife and family seeking a return to the values and joys of sustainable communal living.

This article is an extract from Graham's book about his three decades living in a sustainable community experiment in Puna, Hawaii. It's called Juggling Fire in the Jungle and an ebook version can be purchased from the bookstore at ic.org.



Baptism

By *Martin Holsinger*

When I was a kid, my favorite kind of science fiction was the “Swiss Family Robinson” theme, of humans stranded on an Earth-like planet where there is no species comparable to us, who then learn to make do, not knowing if they will ever be rescued—and then, when they are, find that their experience of primitive life in community has given them a new, and less favorable, view of the high-tech culture from which they had temporarily, and inadvertently, escaped. I never thought that such a thing would ever happen to me, though.

And so, in the spring of 1971, I was thrilled to be part of a “caravan” of nearly a hundred school bus campers and other homemade live-in vehicles, loaded with San Francisco hippies, heading out of our California safe haven for the depths of the southeastern United States. This, I realized at some point, was as close as we could get to landing on another planet without leaving Earth or the United States. We landed in Nashville, Tennessee, in early spring, where the US Army Corps of Engineers was gracious enough to let us take over a public recreation area they maintained on The Cumberland River while we looked for land to buy. We sent out search parties, to no avail. Then a Nashville family invited us to move onto land they owned down in Summertown, about 90 miles south of Nashville, that they didn’t want to sell, but weren’t using for anything, and we were welcome to camp out on it until we found a permanent home. Tired of being in the spotlight in Nashville, we caravanned south to the property and created our “who knows how long?” temporary community in the beginning of May 1971. That’s quite a story, but not the one I’m going to tell.

In late June, a near neighbor offered us just what we were looking for: a thousand acres at the end of a deadend road, with around a hundred acres of farmable ridgetop pasture. The rest was a steeply ravined oak forest, with several springs and creeks that drained into each other to create a sizable stream by the time it left the property. The owner had erected a small house with a well, and a good-sized barn. There was one line-of-sight neighbor on the dead end road that led to our front gate, but apart from that, the rest of the property’s boundaries ran through the oak forest that stretched for miles in every direction. Our ridge was the highest point between the Great Lakes and the Gulf, just over 1100 feet. The owner wanted \$70 an acre for it. We had the cash, and we made the deal.

The next step was to create the infrastructure we would need to establish our village. There was an area of the land adjacent to the open part where “two track” dirt roads from several different ridges all converged and joined the dirt road that ran from this part of the land to the entrance, nearly half a mile away. We made this confluence the center of our community, since there was plenty of room up and down those logging roads to drive buses in and cut a slot in the woods for them to park. We needed to provide a source of water for this area, so a crew set to work capping and tapping a spring between two of the ridges and laying the pipe to bring it up to a thousand-gallon or so water tower that we had found that somebody wanted hauled away. The water pump would be powered by a gas engine. We made no plans to bring in electricity or phone service.

The other thing we would need was outhouses. That’s where I came in. We weren’t about to hire somebody with a backhoe to dig those holes. We had plenty of strong, young backs, and one of them was mine. I wanted to do something basic, so I had joined the outhouse digging crew which consisted of a half a dozen guys, and we set out to dig a couple of dozen outhouse holes, four feet wide, eight feet long, and eight feet deep, with picks, shovels, and a bucket (for when the hole got too deep to just throw the dirt out by shovel). Another crew took care of covering the hole and building the privy structure. How was all this organized? It was all extremely informal. We two-hundred-and-some adults all got together and talked about what needed to be

On our new land, we would need outhouses. We weren’t about to hire somebody with a backhoe to dig those holes. We had plenty of strong, young backs, and one of them was mine.

done, and people volunteered to do it.

I would wake up in the morning in the bus I shared with half a dozen or so other single people, about half-and-half men and women. There was a big platform in the back, covered in carpet scraps, on which we all slept, each in our own sleeping bag. We were a spiritual community—no monkeying around! Before we had even arrived in Tennessee, we had a couple of incidents of guys getting women pregnant and then not wanting to take responsibility for it. And so our hippie spiritual teacher had laid down the law: “If you’re balling, you’re engaged. If you’re pregnant, you’re married.”

One of the temporary structures we had erected on that loaned land was a community kitchen, where I and my busmates would eat breakfast, usually corn meal mush or oatmeal, plus biscuits or homemade bread. (Yes, we were vegan before vegan was cool.) No money exchanged hands for this. When we landed in Tennessee, we quickly realized that there was no labor market to speak of, and that the marijuana dealing that had

supported some of us was totally out of the question. Some of us had savings, some of us had inheritances, and some of us had nothing. I was one of those, with about three dollars and some change in my wallet. So, after consulting with his inner circle, Stephen announced that we were going to organize ourselves like the early Christians had, as described in *The Book of Acts*: “And all that believed held all things in common, and parted to each as they had need.” Or, as Karl Marx put it more recently, “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.” Yep, we were communists, though Stephen was careful not to use that word.

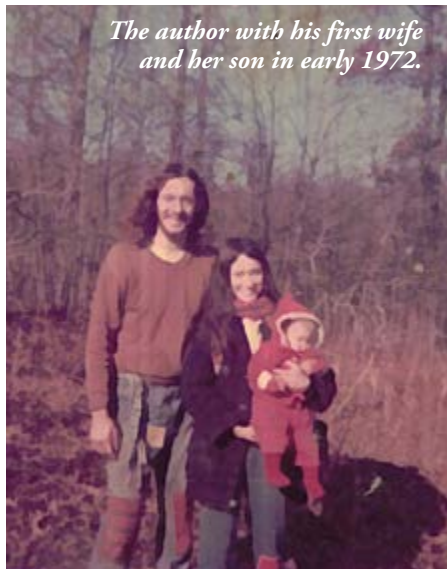
After breakfast, my outhouse crewmates and I would climb in the back of one of the pickup trucks that community members had brought with them and head to the newly-purchased property, known as “The Black Swan Ranch.” Being somewhat superstitious about the color black, we mostly referred to it as “The Swan Ranch.” Sometimes we got a truck ride all the way to our site, and sometimes my digging partner and I would have to shoulder our pick and shovel and walk a quarter-mile or so to our current project.

All these interactions were filled with lively conversations. As a spiritual community, we discouraged “trivial/small talk,” and had unplugged from the national news/sports cycle. We read only spiritual texts such as the Bible, *The Aquarian Gospel*, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, *The Emerald Tablets of Hermes*, *The Sutra of Hui-Neng*. Herman Hesse was pretty much the only novelist we tolerated. We promoted introspection, but also verbalizing our thoughts and feelings, and also practiced both admitting our own shortcomings, and “giving people feedback” on what seemed to be their shortcomings. When emotional hassles and disagreements arose, we strove to “sort them out” and learn from the transaction. And of course, when there’s nothing to say, say nothing!

My partner and I would take turns picking and shoveling. Over the course of a few days, we would get the hole down to eight feet. The soil was hard. In some places, it was very rocky; in others, it was just very tightly packed silt/clay. When rain came, as it



Photos by Clifford Chapell



The author with his first wife and her son in early 1972.



often did, the silt/clay holes would fill up with water, which took several days to drain.

One day, my digging partner wasn't able to join me, and I found myself alone, in the middle of nowhere, trying to make some progress through that tight, rocky soil. It was summer, it was tropically hot and humid, and I needed a break. We had scoped out our location enough to know that the dirt road we walked in on led down into a valley not far from where we were, and that the main creek on the property ran through that valley. My clothes were sweaty and dusty, so I took them off, but kept my shoes on, due to the sharp rocks, thorny vines, and poison ivy in the area, and, buck naked, headed down the road towards the creek I had heard about.

I also stepped away from my focus on getting that hole dug, and, as I walked down the road, the magnificence of being alone in that huge forest began to sink into me. By the time I reached the creek, maybe a five-minute walk, I was feeling pretty ecstatic. Where I found it, the creek was about five feet wide and ankle-deep, with a smooth rock bottom. I left my shoes on the bank and started walking down the creek. It wasn't long before a side creek nearly as large joined it, and the two formed quite an impressive pool, chest deep in places and plenty long enough to swim in. I lay down in the water and went under. This was, I suddenly realized, a baptism. The water washed away my identity as a rootless hippie in search of a home. I felt married to the creek, its watershed, and forest. Here, I believed, I would spend the rest of my life. I half-floated, half-rested on the bottom of a shallow spot.

Under other circumstances, I might have stayed there a lot longer, but I had a hole to dig. After a few minutes, it seemed like time to return to my work. The walk back up the hill was long enough to make me hot and sweaty again by the time I started swinging my pick. But it was all different, in a subtle way. Things have never been the same since. The profundity of that realization, of being a small animal in a vast wilderness, and the feeling of being one with that wilderness, has never left me, nor has my amazement at having gotten to experience something so much like one of my seemingly improbable childhood science fiction dreams. More than 50 years later, I'm still grateful for it every day.

I did not get to live the rest of my life there, in community with those people. That is a long, long story, a story to be told another time. To return to the "stranded space travelers" metaphor, our community's reintegration into mainstream culture was not as dramatic as spaceships landing. We were gradually sucked back in through financial pressure and our inability to resolve some of the grievances that arose in the course of evolving our society. The US government's COINTELPRO may have taken aim at us for our strong support of Akwesasne, The American Indian Movement, the indigenous people of Guatemala, Greenpeace (it was very radical in those days!), and other aspects of the anti-nuclear weapons/power movement. The government interfered with

all our friends. Would they leave us out? In addition, we were long-haired, pot-smoking communists, vocal advocates for living simply and sharing resources, who had created a full-immersion alternative to consumer society. That's bad for business!

The closest we came to spaceships landing was the day when our community Board of Directors ended the "all things in common" aspect of our community, which effectively stopped not just our communal support of AIM, Greenpeace, and all, but also the communitarian web of services we freely provided for each other, chiefly food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. Even without the spaceships, it was the equivalent of The Empire's "rescue" rocket landing and sucking us all back into its vast, impersonal system. Even those who managed to keep living on that land do so in the context of life in mainstream America, as do I, in the country home where I have lived for the last 20 years.

It's been almost 40 years since our communal experiment ended. But, as with some of those "rescued" from distant planets in the science fiction novels of my youth, I continue to take a dim view of the Empire's prescribed beliefs and lifestyles, which are now proving to be such a disaster. I know there's a better way. I've been baptized in it, and lived it, and that baptism has never worn off. I am not separate from this planet. I am not separate from the natural web that blooms here. I do the best I can to live my life in a way that sustains that web.

You never know what you'll walk into when you decide to take a quick break from work. 🌱

Martin Holsinger lived on The Farm from 1971 to 1990. Since then, he has been involved in two other communities, and now lives with his partner in the woods near Nashville, Tennessee, where they do what they can to foster the same values that underlay The Farm: community, voluntary simplicity, and experiential spirituality. He has written an unpublished critical history of the community, is working on his memoirs, can be found on MeWe and Facebook, and blogs at The Deep Green Perspective, brothermartin.wordpress.com, where he writes about current events and, occasionally, about The Farm.

Together on this Ground

By Kara Huntermoon

“Please help me! I don’t want to be a landlord—I want to live in community! I can’t financially support this whole project on my bus driver’s salary! You have to help me or we’ll lose the land!”

I stared at Reba with my mouth open. Twenty-eight years old, a single mother living on less than \$1,000 per month, I had experienced only two types of housing up to this point in my life: I was either a renter, or homeless. Now here was the community landowner begging me (and everyone else at our community meeting) to help her keep the land.

Fifteen years later, I am still here on this land. Reba is still here. Leo, who was my boyfriend and is now my husband, is still here. Kaseja, a close friend who moves in and out of the community, is still here. Our owners circle has grown to include several others with a commitment to our community. And dozens of people have lived here for shorter time periods.

I didn’t do any financial miracles. I had no savings to invest. I did decide to take leadership, as it is defined in the co-counseling community that I have been a part of for almost 20 years. Leadership: Doing everything within my capacity to help things go well in the group that I am a part of. That has meant many things over the years, including strategies for increasing community income.

Now that we have our community finances stabilized, I focus on increasing ecological resources on our 33-acre parcel. “Doing everything within my capacity” includes using my personal money to plant 150 trees each year for the past eight years. Many of those trees produce nuts, fruit, basket materials, medicine, or valuable craft, construction, or fire wood. All have ecological benefits like sequestering carbon, creating habitat for wildlife, and supporting pollinator populations. I don’t think of myself as growing a “personal” orchard. I think of myself as being a good ancestor.

A six-year-old child moved to the community this spring. She ran up to her mother and me while we worked in the orchard. “Kara, I have to show you something! I found the perfect place for a clubhouse!”

“Oh? Is it the willow fence playhouse?” I asked, referring to the place where the living willow fence includes a half-hidden circle of woven stems.

“No! I found a new place that nobody has ever seen before! Come see!” I allowed her to pull me by the hand to the willow fence playhouse. Moving aside some new growth, she stood directly in the center of the circle while she turned slowly around in awe. “Look!” she breathed, her eyes wide. “They grow in a perfect circle! It’s like the fairies planted it just for me!”

“The fairies” did plant it for you, I thought. I didn’t know you existed, but nonetheless I planted it for you.

I didn’t bother to tell her who planted the fence. Instead, I offered to help her clean it up. It was time for a pruning and mulching anyway, so we opened the doorway a bit and put a fresh carpet of wood chips in her new clubhouse.

I don’t think of myself as growing a “personal” orchard. I think of myself as being a good ancestor.



Sage (age six) admiring a Wolf River apple on a tree the author grafted.



Sage (age six) in the willow fence playhouse.

I knew civilization was collapsing in the 1990s, when I was a teenager. I went to tree sits, primitive skills gatherings, and mediation trainings so I could learn how to survive the changes. As I matured, I became grateful that “collapse” is a long process that historically takes about 300 years. We have a lot to learn if we are going to reclaim the lost skills and knowledge of our ancestors. I won’t learn it all in my lifetime.

We are in the midst of the period of collapse in which there is increasing instability, economic stress, corrupt leadership, violence, homelessness, ecological shocks, and migrations. Later, everyone will abandon the cities (as cities are an inherently unsustainable way of organizing ecological resources), and people will directly relate to the plants, animals, waters, and soils who are the basis of all wealth and survival. I have come to realize that this probably won’t happen in my lifetime. However, I can lay the groundwork for those who come after me. I can plant trees. I can teach classes about how to relate to those trees.

During an eight-month advanced Permaculture class that I teach about how to relate to willows, some students and I were harvesting stems for basketmaking. Pruners clip-clipped, little brown songbirds flitted about in the branches of nearby elderberry trees, and clouds slowly made their way from west to east across the sky. One of the students asked me if I ever worry about not having enough labor to care for the willows.

There are many ways I could have answered:

I have had to learn to teach (apprentices, work-traders, community-mates, and paying students) in order to avoid isolation as the “only one” caring for this community ecological commons.

Humans are not the only ones working here—the plants are working too, creating the conditions to support all life. Every tree I plant is another ally in the planet’s life-support system.

I am fortunate to be financially supported by my husband, who values the farming work that brings in non-financial wealth.

But here we were, in the middle of a pandemic, doing an outdoor class in which half the students insisted on wearing masks even outside. So I answered like this: “The amount of labor available can change in a day. We saw that when the pandemic started and everything shut down. But when we need to transition from capitalism to a handcraft economy, we cannot grow the willows in one day. It takes at least two years before they are producing basket materials. So even though I struggle along without enough human labor, I keep planting more willows. I have a community to

think about, and they are going to need this ecological wealth.”

As Starhawk says, climate chaos is not just carbon in the atmosphere; it is massive ecosystem degradation. And we can do a lot to help regenerate degraded ecosystems. We can learn from ecological science, from Permaculture, and from Indigenous land management and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. All of us have ancestors who related directly to the land.

My Irish ancestors made beautiful willow baskets. Before English colonization of Ireland, we had large areas of common land where people had the right to harvest willow and other materials for food, medicine, and handcrafts. Coppicing and pollarding, tree-pruning methods that sequester large amounts of carbon, were once common in Ireland and across the entire world as the basis of economic stability in a handcraft economy.

My English ancestors grew hedgerows. These living fences were maintained in a way that kept livestock contained in their pastures. The maintenance method, called “laying” or “pleaching,” had a lot of other benefits as well: increased carbon sequestration, the production of materials for handcrafts, medicine, and food, and habitat creation.

To our modern eyes, the severe pruning required for hedge laying may look brutal. However, ecologically speaking, this well-timed human impact typically results in an expansion of species diversity by a factor of five or more. In other words, the big changes humans make to an ecosystem can be done in ways that increase the diversity and abundance of all life.

The Kalapuya people are the ancestors of this land where Heart-Culture Farm Community now stands. They used frequent low-intensity fire to increase the soil’s fertility, decrease pest species in their food crops, and reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fire disasters. The resulting regeneration created straight shoots for basket-making and sequestered more carbon than an unburned landscape.

I want to learn to burn our North Field. The Army Corps of Engineers already burns areas on two sides of our North Field as they manage the wetlands wildlife preserve. Traditionally, the Kalapuya had burn leaders, whose job it was to organize

and make decisions about the burning. I don't really want to be the burn leader at Heart-Culture. I would like to join the team while someone else leads that part of maintaining our commons.

Our pond has been emptying completely every summer for the past three summers. Before that, there was surface water year-round. I have a three-part plan for responding to this climate-chaos impact:

1. Create a surface greywater treatment system, a constructed wetlands. Route the drain water from two main houses through this system. After treatment, the water would empty into the pond, thus keeping it more full in the summer.

2. Re-route the inlet of the pond so that it fills faster in the autumn by collecting water from the drainage ditches from our neighbor's fields.

3. Re-route the outlet of the pond so that it flows into a series of meanders or swales. Plant a wide riparian zone of native trees and shrubs around the meanders. Do wetlands restoration there. This will help water sink into the ground more (instead of flowing through drainage ditches and off our land), recharging the groundwater and protecting both our pond and our wells.

This plan will require about \$5,000 of money, and additional volunteer labor from community-mates, to be fully implemented. That is why I have not done it. I don't have \$5,000 of personal money available at any one time. (In fact, at 42 years old, I have never had \$5,000 in my personal bank account.)

Asking the community to spend collective funds on it leads to a long conversation about what is most urgent: water resilience, or repairing and maintaining buildings? Some people don't trust that I know what I am talking about: How can I be *sure* this expense will increase water security?

Yesterday I was sitting in our weekly community meeting. I told the group that I wanted to spend my own personal money and labor on building shelters in the sheep pastures. Summers are getting hotter; the sheep are at risk of heat stroke without shade. Rain is becoming more extreme; the sheep would benefit from shelter when it rains. Building shelters is a way to adapt to climate change. The

sheep are "mine," meaning that I am responsible for their care, or for organizing the delegation of their care.

A community-mate I'll call Elaine said she didn't want to approve the building of sheep shelters in the pastures. Her reason was that other things are not getting done. The plumbing needs repair in one of the houses. The storage shed roof is leaking. A downed internet line has not been replaced. What I hear her saying is, "Stop doing what you want to do to contribute, and do what I want you to do instead. I'm not going to do it, though, I'll just block your priorities until you finish my priorities."

I am frustrated by this response. It is an unexpected pitfall of my strategy of "taking leadership" by doing everything I can to make things go well. People now expect me to take care of almost everything that goes wrong. After 15 years of "doing" for Heart-Culture, these kinds of repairs have never been my job. There is always going to be more to do than one person is able to do.

I tell the group that it doesn't make sense to stop me from giving my own money and labor to improve things on the land. And I agree that Elaine's priority repairs need to get done. So who is going to step up to do them?

I look around at all the faces: open mouths, startled stares. It's starting to sink in. These are people who have never taken on responsibilities usually assigned by capitalism to landlords. They have never owned land. They have only been renters. Many have been homeless. Yet they are the "human resources" that will make this community work. What they have to give is actually enough. They just need to reach inside themselves and dare to give it. 🌱

Kara Huntermoon lives and works at Heart-Culture Farm Community near Eugene, Oregon. She teaches advanced Permaculture classes, including Liberation Listening, Willow Relationships, Sacred Butchering, and Apple Orcharding Skills. She also manages her community's 33-acre integrated farm, with poultry, ruminants, silvopasture, and an orchard.

Resources

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Photos courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

Transitioning to a Handcraft Economy

By Kara Huntermoon

Photos courtesy of Kara Huntermoon



Bull snake in the garden.



Making a willow basket.

My great-grandfather was a small-town community butcher. He owned his own shop where he provided his neighbors the service of processing their livestock into sausages, chops, bacon, and steaks. My grandfather wanted to be a butcher, too, but his father refused to teach him the craft. He said there was “no future in butchering.” At that time in history (the 1950s), with the industrialization of meat processing, my great-grandfather was right.

However, we are in a different time in history now. The few small butchering operations that still exist are overwhelmed by economic changes wrought by a collapsing economy. At the same time, more people are raising animals at home as the price of store-bought food goes up. The future is bright for those with small-scale butchering skills.

In September of 2020, I received a phone call from a stranger. “The butchers can’t come until April! What am I supposed to do, keep feeding these two pigs for another six months? They’re ready to go in the freezer now! My neighbor said to call you.”

I learned to butcher animals 15 years ago after a decade of vegetarianism. I have no interest in animal processing as a full-time job, but I have taught the craft at Primitive Skills Gatherings for 13 years. Because I also teach local people to butcher their backyard animals, I now have more work than I can handle. I get paid with a combination of cash and meat. My full freezer reassures me when I get sticker shock at the grocery store.

So what is different in 2022 compared to the 1950s? The middle of the 20th century was a time of explosive economic growth powered by fossil fuels. In 2022, we have already passed peak oil. Even without the need to stop burning fossil fuels (yesterday!) to reduce catastrophic climate change, the amount of work (profit) we can gain from fossilized energy is already decreasing.

(Look up “Energy Return on Investment” to learn more. Particularly interesting is the low EROI from such fuel sources as fracking. They wouldn’t bother to frack shale oil if they had more lucrative sources!)

The big picture is that we are in a multi-decade transition out of fossil-fuel-powered capitalism and back to a current-sunlight-pow-

ered economy. “Current sunlight” is the energy that comes to Earth from the sun. It provides our livelihoods in the form of plants, animals, water, and human craft labor (muscle and brain power). Until we discovered “ancient sunlight” stored underground in the form of fossil fuels (and used it to create industrialized empires), all of our human economies were fully powered by current sunlight. Soon (within four generations) that will be true again.

Collapse is not a slide; it is a staircase. We will go down, and then level off or even go up slightly as we “recover” from an economic recession—but we won’t go up to the level we enjoyed on the last stair. Then another shock hits the empire, and we will go down again. This is already happening as the much-touted “economic recoveries” fail to “trickle down” to the working classes.

My grandmother sighs as she tells me that she believes her generation got the best that America had to offer. (Since she is very close to her great-grandchildren, it must be hard for her to see their options diminishing as the world burns.)

How quickly we become accustomed to empty shelves at the grocery store! How easily we explain away the losses! Oh, we can’t buy canning jars for 18 months because of the pandemic! We can’t buy baby formula because of a problem with one factory. (Thank the Goddess I was able to breastfeed!) We just need to open more lithium mines in order to create the electronic devices we need! Technology can still save us!

These are normal human coping mechanisms. Do not allow them to make you lose sight of the big picture. Whether we like it or not, whether we plan for it or not, regardless of what we choose, the future will be powered by current sunlight. Fossilized energy will be a thing of the past, like a fairy tale of a genie in a bottle that was able to grant our every wish if we just said the magic words. (Perhaps one of those magic words is “Alexa.”)

Sadly, because of colonization and the theft of indigenous lands, because of industrialization and capitalism’s exploitation of “natural resources,” and because we have all lost touch with our ancestral right to have direct relationships with the ecological communities that support all life on this planet, we are now facing a massive economic change with a severe resource deficit. This deficit exists

in both human knowledge/skills, and in ecological resources.

Entire landscapes have been degraded through colonial land practices. Where forests of mature chestnut, hickory nut, hazelnut, pawpaw, and American persimmon once reached across the Eastern US, suburbs and pesticide-laced monocrops now impoverish the land. Those mature forests were planted and tended by Indigenous people planning to provide for seven generations into the future.

Most of us don't know how to grow food. Those who do know will have to change our methods in order to adjust to the end of fossil fuels. We will need to adapt to climate chaos by using more land and more human labor to grow less reliable crops. Tree crops are our best chance for simultaneous food production and ecosystem repair, because they can be grown in low-input diverse landscapes.

Ecosystem repair needs to be our highest priority in order to keep the Earth's life-support systems functional through climate chaos. But most city-dwellers have no idea how to lend their labor to effective ecosystem repair. Many rural residents are influenced by a tradition of destructive land practices, including tractor tilling and agricultural chemicals. Everyone needs to (re)learn how to create the conditions for increased abundance and diversity of life.

It's important for us to realize that we may not see "the collapse," certainly not in the way it is depicted on movie screens. But it's also important to remember that creating current-sunlight resources for the future takes a long time: decades to grow mature walnut trees, for example. If future generations are going to have ecological resources to support the coming handcraft economy, we need to get to work to provide them now.

Creating resources for this massive change means:

1. Restoring ecosystems.
2. Planting Permaculture landscapes rich in edible, medicinal, and craft plants.
3. Raising livestock in small-scale integrated systems.
4. Breeding landrace crops that can adapt to climate changes.
5. Reclaiming lost or almost-lost handcraft knowledge, including:
 - a. Growing and preparing fiber plants.
 - b. Preparing animal fibers for cloth production.
 - c. Spinning, weaving, knitting, and sewing.
 - d. Butchering and hide-tanning.
 - e. Building with round-wood.
 - f. Coppicing and pollarding as a woodlands management tool.
 - g. Managing landscapes with intentional fires.
 - h. Training and farming with draft animals (oxen, horses).
 - i. Blacksmithing.
 - j. Basket-making.
 - k. Making tools.
 - l. Growing, harvesting, and preparing herbal medicine.
 - m. Shoemaking.
 - n. Brick-making, tiling, and making and using mortars.
 - o. Passive solar heating and cooling building design methods.
 - p. And many more ancestral arts...

These activities are often still practiced as "hobbies," but within three generations they will be essential survival skills. No one person can learn them all. We need our communities to be actively engaged in reclaiming these ancestral skills.

We are in a sea change. How will you add to the viability of the coming handcraft economy? Will you cling to the old ways, to the

fossil-fuel-powered genies? Or will you increase the resources available to future generations?

If you don't know where to start, search for primitive/ancestral skills gatherings and take a few classes. Find out about your local fiber arts guild, basketmakers guild, or hunting club. Approach a craftsman that you admire, and ask if you can just hang around and watch (or help) while they work. Take a "citizen scientist" class to learn about your ecological community. Contact your local university extension service to see what resources they offer. Volunteer to do hands-on work for a habitat restoration organization. Attend a Permaculture Design Course. Explore until you find what you enjoy.

You most likely won't get paid for reclaiming these handcraft skills. But you will be making it possible for future generations to have viable work. You will be shoring up the foundations of all life on this planet.

Once you know something, teach it! Remember that you will likely die before the skills you have acquired become survival necessities. It is vital that these skills get passed down to younger people who will have need of them.

My grandfather was proud that I butchered animals. My grandmother likes to come to the community farm to watch the sheep shearing and to play with lambs. She often looks at me with wonder in her eyes. She is amazed that the kind of work her generation tried to get away from is now work that I am learning to do. She often says that she believes I can do anything. 🐾

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Desert Living at Sacred Earth Farm

By Earth, Kat Alvarius, and Candy Cantrell

When hearing the word “desert,” some may picture a barren wasteland. However, the Sonoran Desert is one of the world’s most lush and diverse ecosystems with nearly 500 known animal species, and over 2,000 types of plants all living in a delicate, interwoven balance. Here at Sacred Earth Farm, we are learning from this balance as we strive to achieve one of our core missions of living close to and in harmony with nature, including our fellow human beings. In forming our living community on these 40 acres, we are faced with a slew of challenges, ranging from the raw forces of nature to the complexities of humans raised in a disconnected and traumatized world.

Challenges Abound

Nature sets the cadence here, with a wide spectrum of intense weather phenomena. In addition to the southern Arizona heat, summer brings torrential monsoons and electrical storms accompanied by breathtaking 360-degree sunset light shows. In the winter it’s windy, big sky, balmy days, and near-freezing nights. We get a break in spring and autumn with warm days and idyllic nights perfect for projects, community gatherings, drum circles, and star gazing.

Flora and fauna also challenge and amaze us at every turn. We walk the land bare-foot with great care to avoid the unforgiving cholla (aka jumping cactus) thorns, and the sea of fingernail-sized baby toads hopping everywhere. We experience gratitude and awe while acknowledging the need for a safe distance with each rare sighting of the slow and elusive Gila monster, an endangered and venomous native lizard that can grow up to 22 inches long. We marvel at the night-blooming cereus and the 100+-year-old, 20-foot-tall saguaro cactus centered in our sacred ceremony space. We find amusement in the antics of the coyotes and roadrunners, at the same time as we confront the wily desert pack rats that invade any unfortified space. Pack rats slice through electrical wiring like professional car thieves and drag in piles of cholla glochids (bundles of nasty, barbed spines) to protect their nests. While we remain committed to nature preservation, we are also willing to growl and bare our teeth regarding these adorable bully varmints.

We are blessed to be surrounded on two sides by state land, and the other two sides by a series of community-minded mini-communities like ours. However, just as nature challenges us, so do our fellow humans. Off-land thieves have necessitated that we divert valuable resources to secure our quarter-mile parcel of land. While the new cameras, sensors, and automatic gates provide us a measure of peace of mind, the daily false alarms are a constant reminder that we cannot yet live our lives as carefree as we would like. Likewise, though we are grateful that our neighbors are significantly more aligned with our ideology than the larger “default world,” there are still stark differences that occasionally test us. Because our neighbors are more community-minded we get to/have to interact with them regularly. This has allowed us the opportunity to be more diplomatic at times, while also learning to set healthy boundaries. The fact that we regularly communicate is refreshing in a world dominated by automatic garage doors where one often does not even set eyes on their neighbors. One silver lining that has already materialized due to information provided by our neighborhood connections is the retrieval of an expensive trailer that had been stolen.

In addition to these external challenges, there are no shortages of internal challenges

We are inspired by works such as the “Co-Creator’s Agreements” and the 11 Burner Principles (from Burning Man culture). Our first rule has been “We resist creating a bunch of rules” and so we have only recently created our second rule.

to be overcome. Key to our vision for community is the notion that our far ancestors, due to necessity, lived in a closely connected and interdependent fashion. Before “civilization” with its systems of power concentration, command, and control, nature and survival mandated that we work together effectively as a tribe. To set the stage for our “un-gridding” return to nature we are designing our community to support this vision. One example of this is that our private living spaces will be comfortable but small, necessitating that we gather to eat, sing, dance, and play in common areas. We don’t include the words “work” or “labor” in our list of activities since we hope to deprecate those words which we see as relics of the patriarchy. Instead, we aim to use terms like contribution and support of community, or work-play to describe the activities that we happily do in support of the tribe. To further counter the deep generational cultural programming and selection process that humans have endured for millennia, we are raising our flag in alignment with the Inclusive Feminist movement. We see this movement as a strong, viable, and relevant force that aligns well with our mission and vision.

When it comes to the creation of “rules” for community we are inspired by works such as the “Co-Creator’s Agreements” and the 11 Burner Principles (from Burning Man culture). However, these documents do not directly address specific challenges that come up repeatedly. Our first rule has been “We resist creating a bunch of rules” and so as it happens we have only recently created our second rule. For some, it comes as a surprise, and for others not at all, that our second codified edict pertains to alcohol. Of all human ailments, this one has reared its ugly head first and repeatedly, so we have chosen to align ourselves with the Feminist Suffragettes of the past and we have declared our little piece of potential bliss to be alcohol-free. This is a heady subject that would necessitate its own article, but suffice it to say that the “spirit” that comes with alcohol is not something that we feel our budding community can or needs to contend with. One practical reason supporting our first rule is that these types of community decisions need to be fully vetted and thought out by a “community council.” Our full council is still assembling and as we form we are inspired by the book *The Fifth Sacred Thing* by Starhawk. This novel depicts the workings of a high-functioning, mature council system as well as an ethos of accountability and personal freedom that we find compelling.

Un-Grid Feminist Eco-Punk Life— Stepping out of the Default World

In reaching our goal to thrive, we know that the physical attributes of the land are only part of the equation for success. The most critical aspect of creating a successful

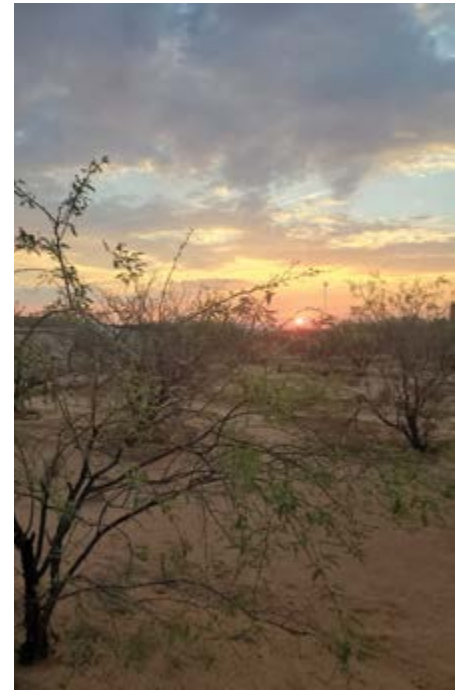
community is in gathering the right people together and supporting them. Our experiences with various communities have led us on a long quest to understand what works and what doesn’t. We believe that having a solid core philosophy goes a long way toward pulling aligned people together and this in turn allows people who are aligned to self-select themselves. We also know that just like starting a fire from tiny embers, this early stage of our growth is critical. Patience is our motto in this realm, so we resist the urge to accept new energies into our midst that don’t align with our values.

We see the default world out there as a natural, and likely inevitable, progression of a system that has a few powerful, privileged people controlling the masses. We recognize the benefits we’ve received from the “system,” but we fundamentally reject the notion that we must continue with this trajectory for another second. As a result, we have rallied ourselves around the label of “Inclusive Feminism” because we want to recognize and assert that this 49.6 percent of the world’s population deserves better. We also want to extend that assertion to other oppressed groups (LGBTQIA, People of Color, Indigenous Communities, etc.). For us, it’s time to change the game plan and accelerate that change. We, in fact, believe that this is our best hope for creating a thriving, vibrant, high-functioning, and blissful community.

While we seek a deep reset in our way



Photos courtesy of www.facebook.com/terrestrialrealms



of living, we do not shy away from the beneficial technologies that modern civilization has brought forth. Un-gridding and reprogramming ourselves does not preclude thriving, and being eco does not mean we abandon our spaces to the pack rats. Reflecting this attitude we have adopted another label of “Eco-Punk” to reflect the fact that though we are mindful of nature, we are also here to stay and that means we will take up space amongst the critters here. From solar technology to hydraulic presses to security sensors and special soil-stabilizing enzymes, we utilize technology wherever it makes sense.

As we form, our primary need for shelter is provided by RVs and travel trailers along with wooden structures that support our solar arrays and provide shade and rain cover. Our target living structures are easy to build and deploy mini “domiciles” built with the aid of a specialized press that makes quick work of building the framework, and a CNC machine (a Computer Numerical Control router, used to manufacture parts) that likewise makes quick work of creating the dome “skin” (partially from recycled coroplast left over from election campaign signage) that will cover the framework. These domes in turn will rest on foundations treated with a high-tech enzyme that transforms the native soil into a highly stable, erosion-resistant foundation.

Our current top priority is getting our own water source online. We are installing the water well pump ourselves so that we will have the skills necessary to deal with any water well issues in the future. Luckily the technology is readily available for us to DIY this endeavor of pumping water up from 420 feet below the surface using only the power of the sun to do the pumping.

Our starter village is complete and includes basic amenities like our compost toilet (a golden throne, with its own bidet and sink that lets us safely return our human resources back to the earth) and our prototype dome which we use as a bathhouse.

There’s No Place like Dome

Our land includes a large riparian zone, which is an officially (county) designated swath of land to be left untouched to act as corridors and sanctuaries for local wildlife. Along the outer edges of these corridors, we will develop our orchards. Tucked in and around our orchards will be our mini private living domes. These “dome-a-ciles” will be connected to other domes by meandering paths that all converge upon our common living space domes.

The dome structure is ideal because its shape is very stable by nature, and it requires a small amount of material, even compared to natural buildings. A dome built of all new materials can still use less new material than a fully finished natural home once the finishing touches such as roofing or cement for foundations are considered. Dome homes can be designed to create minimal waste and you can even incorporate reclaimed materials into the building, including the notoriously hard-to-recycle corrugated plastic.

Foremost in our starter village is our comfy bath dome. This is the proof-of-concept dome that showed us a viable build and covers a methodology that we feel we can fine-tune into our standard indoor living space. Based on that experience, we believe we can produce a fully covered, waterproof, windproof, extremely durable dome with only two people working for four days. The next official domes going up will be our community’s maker space dome(s). These structures will house our dome-building equipment including a CNC machine and our dome press.

For our living space foundations, we have decided to build platforms with native soil. In a biome that experiences torrential monsoons, making dirt platforms would normally be a fool’s errand. But once again, we are leaning on technology to aid us. We plan to utilize a newly developed, environmentally friendly, natural enzyme to mix into our soil so we can achieve drastically improved compaction; and in essence,

convert our soil platforms to caliche, a hardened natural cement.

On these foundations, we'll secure our quick-build, super-strong, minimal-material, and movable mini domes. Keeping the size small reduces cost; and more importantly, these mini domes will be simple to heat and cool via local solar microgrids because the volume of air to heat or cool these spaces is actually less than traditionally shaped homes. We will avoid building large domes since such large enclosed spaces inevitably come with technical challenges of scale. Instead, our larger gathering spaces will be outdoor spaces protected from wind and rain but not completely isolated from the outside. This we feel will keep us connected to nature while still having small, comfortable, and manageable spaces to create and play in.

For power, we rely on solar-powered microgrid stations. We are blessed with consistent sunshine which provides us ample power for our needs. Using local microgrids has the advantage of resilience. In the event of power issues in any microgrid, only that microgrid is affected and nearby grids can be used to temporarily cover any grid that is down. This also eliminates the need for thick, expensive, permanent power lines to distribute power across the land. We will use the same approach to water distribution. From the solar-powered well pump, we will distribute water via a low-pressure network of smaller pipes into water tanks distributed throughout the land. Each of these water tanks will independently provide pressurized water via solar-powered pressure pumps to the local area.

Looking Forward

As our establishing phase comes to an end we are poised to move forward with our Un-Grid, Inclusive Feminist, Eco-Punk Dome Village of the future. The weather is fine and this next year promises much forward motion. Once we have created our dome village, we plan on expanding to build dome villages for other communities as a cottage business. We also envision an educational center for people to tour and learn about a different way to live and thrive.

As we continue to form our desert community, we invite input, insight, curiosity, and collaboration! Our goal is to create a community that shares talents in many creative endeavors including building and DIY abilities, desert preservation techniques, food and herb cultivation, technology, arts and music, and so much more. We welcome people who aren't afraid to get their hands a little dirty in the process of innovat-

ing, learning, and growing together.

Our longer-term plans are based on continuing to gather community members that are in tune with nature, comfortable with a diverse variety of people, and willing to self-reflect and self-correct when necessary. Having a clear understanding of how privilege works, combined with a willingness and desire to *really listen* to new perspectives, creates the potential for growth from individual empathy to a thriving, vibrant, high-functioning, and blissful community. This is and will continue to be the foundation on which we build. 🌱

At Sacred Earth Farm, Earth is a Community Council Member and a Department of Public Works Lead. He is also a member of Wind Spirit Community and cofounder of Enchanted Forest Community, where he is a jack of all trades and a philanthropist. Kat Alvarius is a Panther at Large and Community Member of Sacred Earth Farm, as well as an artist and a friend of Nature. Candy Cantrell is a Community Council Member and Co-Creator at Sacred Earth Farm as well as an enthusiast of herbs, meditation, and frequency healing, communication advocate, community liaison, and feminist. Contact via email: SacredEarthCommunityEcoFarm@gmail.com.



From the Ground Up: Starting and Stopping an Ecovillage, Part One

By Dan Antonioli



*Whatever you dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.
Begin it now.*—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while,
waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living.*
—Joseph Campbell

Sort of. These oft-repeated quotes sound good when you're in the romance of a strong vision. Imagine living in a sustainable future, a community ecovillage with neighbors who feel like family, with beautiful organic buildings and gardens, consensus decision making, nonviolent communication, harmony. You're going to manifest a dream and it's meant to happen.

But what happens to these visions when you look into the nuts and bolts of buying land, building structures, and forming community from the ground up? Will the lack of money deter you or will the "laws of attraction" manifest your financial needs? Do you have the fortitude to overcome challenges and frustrations? If you fail the first two or three times will you try again? And just where is that "track that has been there all the while?"

In this series "Starting and Stopping and Ecovillage" I reflect on my years of living in intentional communities and my efforts to create not one, but two ecovillages, at the same time—from the ground up. As a founder with strong vision I learned a lot, created a lot, and made mistakes. I made assumptions about people's abil-

ity to go beyond interest into a willingness to build community. Not everyone is a pioneer, even if they think they are.

Boldness and Bliss

Let's start with the above quotes and look at boldness and bliss, two great things that go great together. When embarking on a life's journey or big change these are often the interior energies we tap into to move forward with the next phase of our life: going to college, starting a business, losing weight, leaving a bad relationship, quitting a job and traveling, etc. Harnessing these energies allows us to take steps and move forward.

But what happens to us when our dreams don't manifest? When the relationship fails? When we run out of money? When the perfect property we thought we were going to buy didn't work out and our ecovillage partners backed out at the last minute?

A little symbolism is instructive when we think of boldness and bliss. In the classic tarot there is a card called "Temperance," and it's a useful guide in helping us to temper our visions; and we often like to say "tempered with reality"! It's all fine and

good to be bold, dream big, and follow one's bliss, and when the rubber hits the road dreams are often changed, and boldness and bliss tempered. This is fertile psychological ground, a place where we do our inner work and make decisions that impact the directions of our lives. "Let's do this" is a great way to end a group meeting, and *how* we "do this" will largely determine the outcome.

When embarking on a journey to create an ecovillage or intentional community, and doing so as a founder and visionary, vision eventually finds its way down to earth, onto the ground where dreams and bliss manifest. Like any romance, this is the phase of a journey where love is tempered into a working relationship and you move forward into establishing a homestead where you can live in harmony with nature and neighbors.

In 2004 the economy was booming (and inflated), and money was easy. I had already started one community project, 611 Ecovillage in Oakland, California (active from 2000 to 2016). I started looking for a second homestead venture, this time rural, with the intention of creating an ecovillage in a legal development that had sustainability and community as the core features. Eventually I bought a 10 acre subdividable property in Laytonville and on July 31st of that year was handed the keys to the old house. When I got out to the property, keys in hand, escrow closed, I walked around, took a deep breathe...and wondered what I had done.

It didn't take long before I was faced with the fact that I had bit off too much, and eventually I ran out of two essential ingredients for success: time and money. Big vision, big mistake, big lesson. Temperance. Think big, start small. Think global, act local. Chill and work with what you have. This is analogous to what happens to beginning gardeners—it's easy to get excited and create a garden that's larger than we can maintain. And we often create big gardens.

Time, Energy, Money

How much time, energy, and money will it take to create a community? Ironically, had I known in advance what these big three dynamics would actually be I wouldn't have ventured into either my urban or rural journeys. Getting back to "bliss," perhaps a little "ignorance is bliss" is what allowed me to foolishly take steps in this direction. And like another card in the tarot, The Fool, I was happily walking off a cliff. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Hindsight is 20-20!

Now What?

"Buckle your seat belts. There's turbulence ahead!"

I was bold. I felt bliss. I was a founder, a visionary. I dreamed big dreams, and it was happening. I was well aware of the three-hour drive from my urban homestead to my rural homestead, but I was not prepared for the multiple trips I took over the course of 16 years...which left a carbon footprint hardly "sustainable" or "green." On many of my drives I often thought of metrics for "energy paybacks" used in renewable energy calculations. For a while our small rural town had its very own biodiesel station and between that and easy access to Bay Area biodiesel I figured I was at least reducing my footprint...but at the end of the day it still amounted to an excessive waste, and while biodiesel is not as harmful as regular diesel, it's still diesel. If the point of creating or living in an ecovillage and/or intentional community is to live a sustainable lifestyle then I was clearly off the mark.

The 2009 Economic Meltdown

As I moved into planning, designing, and navigating the county and state requirements for creating a legal subdivision (think "legalize sustainability"), I assumed that fellow visionaries would show up with interest, know-how, and the means of



Photos courtesy of Dan Antonioni



joining the project And up to 2009 there were a lot of people with know-how and financial means showing up with strong interest. At this juncture I really thought that five years of hard work and investment were going to pay off. The community was about to emerge.

Then the 2009 meltdown occurred and everyone fell into radio silence. One couple emailed me that they still had their house on the market but that their realtor told them to “sit tight until the market corrects itself.” Secured financing fell through. People lost jobs.

So we sat, tight, as all economic hell broke loose and I came close to losing both homesteads. I fought, struggled, and managed to survive by the skin of my teeth. In 2009 I hosted a two week permaculture design course (PDC), which is a life-changing wonderful experience, all the while knowing that Wall Street was preying on my properties. [Note—Be prepared for anything!]

Holding Space

If more people with vision, money, and willingness had come forth, things would have taken a path closer to what I envisioned. As word got out and people began showing up to explore the vision of living in an ecovillage, I often found myself holding space for people who were going through life transitions, both inwardly and outwardly. The desire to live rural, to create a community, and to find a peaceful happiness at home was strong, very strong. People are unhappy living the American lifestyle, in mainstream isolated communities, and they seek the natural comforts of home, nature, and community. Who can blame them for wanting to live in community, grow their own food, and have great neighbors!

As tours happened I fielded questions about how to build structures, the cost for septic systems, where power and water would come from, and how comfortable they would be in Winter. It soon became apparent that I was offering free consultations for people who had never thought through the practical details, and free therapy to discuss their needs for life changes. My aspiring ecovillage became a kind of crossroads for people embarking on lifestyle transitions and rites of passage.

[Note: in my experience, most people interested in ecovillages and intentional communities will not follow through. A typical

prospective buyer: “I’m a 63-year-old semi-retired public school teacher and will soon be getting my pension. I study nonviolent communication and have always wanted to live in community.”]

This eventually led to burnout. Super interesting people with backgrounds in permaculture would show up and I’d get excited. We’d correspond before they arrived and when they showed up we walked the land and more often than not their enthusiasm faded. You could see it on their faces when they started asking questions: “How much does a well cost and what happens if you drill and there’s no water?” Good questions and ones to address before embarking on a tour. If you’re seeking prospective members make sure you have these conversations before investing a lot of time. (And, yes, time really is money!)

After doing this for several years I stopped giving tours and got conservative with my time and energy. I asked up front if they had the money to invest and if they didn’t I requested that they get back to me when they did. I made sure they had a good sense of rural culture and understood they were no longer in an urban cosmopolitan environment. And I provided all of the practical information up front on my website and requested that they read it before coming up for a tour, or even having another conversation. I also enlisted a good realtor who shared my vision; in a sense I started treating the venture of creating an ecovillage as a business.

That might sound really weird. “It’s not about the money, it’s about the vision,” usually comes from people who had never homesteaded or who had financial privilege when creating their communities.

Establishing strong boundaries was one of the smartest things I did. I created a page for FAQ on my website and directed inquiries to it and overnight the number of inquiries dropped, and my availability for prospective buyers dropped along with it. In other words: conserve your energy! Or in permaculture language, take care of Zones 0 and 00. Few people are interested in purposely sapping your energy, but if you don’t have strong boundaries many people will take every drop you’re willing to give them. “And how much will a solar power system cost?,” and so on.

Build It and They Will Come

“One day we’re going to buy land in the country and build a house.”

This iconic *American Dream* fantasy resides in the cultural

psyche and it is a guiding light for many an ecovillager. And as a founder I believed in this dream, and still do (with tempered vision, of course!). But I no longer think it's a viable way to start a community. And with my rural community I made a hard decision to sell the first parcel with the house and eco-infrastructure. I discussed this shift with a number of friends and colleagues (notably Diana Leafe Christian), and made the move.

By the time I sold the first parcel at the Laytonville Ecovillage I was ready to let go and move on. A small piece of paradise is what attracted prospective buyers, and the accommodations and beauty that went with it is what drew people in. A two-unit, three-bedroom house with nice details, solar, EV charging station, reclaimed wood, and permaculture landscape. An outdoor kitchen with cob oven. An outdoor solar shower with restored clawfoot tubs. Established vegetable gardens, landscaping, two barns, greywater, spiritual symbols—the works. It was plug and play for anyone wanting to live in the country. And it's exactly what most people want at the end of the day, no matter how strong a fantasy of "one day buying land in the country."

People want some degree of basic accommodations whether they know it or not. A central community hub with water, power, and kitchen is a good solid anchor for community building. Fresh out of a Permaculture Design Course or Natural Building workshop you'd think that people who have a grip on what's in-

involved with this vision would be interested in diving into homesteading from the ground up, but from what I've seen nothing could be further from the truth. What most people want are *accommodations* to build from the ground up. Some people are comfortable living in tents for months on end; most are not.

There are many fine examples of communities that did everything right and had the time and money to hire architects and contractors, and to work through the socially engaging process of creating legal documents. While we admire these intentional communities they are not the global norm of how communities form.

In Part Two...

Unless you're rich, have a trust fund, win the lottery, or have some other financial means to start a community, money will most likely be your biggest obstacle... 🐦

Dan Antonioli is a sustainability and social justice activist currently residing in upstate New York. Founder of the once almighty Laytonville Ecovillage (laytonvilleecovillage.com), he focuses on integrating a deep shade of green with conventional development and enjoys fitting round pegs into square holes. Dan is available for consultations, networking, and supporting good causes. His website is going-green.co and he can be reached at solardan26@gmail.com.



Starting from Scratch, Yet Again

By Raven MoonRaven

I have helped start at least 10 different group living attempts. I've counted. And none of them are still around (although a few of them lasted over 10 years). Ironically, one of the most successful communities that I've lived in (and just left) came out of one of these attempts, but I wasn't responsible for helping to create it. In fact, I had previously left working with the founders just before the group we were attempting to form fell apart. More ironically, when I left them I said that I didn't think that they would be able to create a successful community—and after I left, they started over again and did. Of course, one of the major reasons it was successful was that the founders left after it started, and this gave the remaining communards a chance to grow the community beyond what the founders wanted. (More on founders and communities later.)

Thus, it's with a clear sense of the irony and craziness involved that I am beginning yet another attempt at starting community.

It certainly isn't that I don't know what I'm doing. It's also not that I don't know how to be a good community member. I've been a really good community member in a variety of communities. In fact, I am certainly a better community member than I am a community founder. If there were a community of the type I want somewhere easily reachable to Boston, where important family and friends live, I would be there. I would certainly rather join a community than start one. Starting a community is a lot of work.

It's important to note that starting a community is quite different from joining a community. Diana Leafé Christian has written two separate books, one on starting communities (*Creating a Life Together*) and one on how to join a community (*Finding Community*), highlighting how distinct these two processes are.

The skill set for founding a community is quite different from joining one. I often say that long-running communities are WYSIWYG (pronounced “Wizzy Wig”), a computer term that literally means “What You See Is What You Get.” If you visit an established community, in a short period of time you can get a pretty good sense of what's involved. But when you are creating a community, it's not always clear what is going to evolve.

Often people talk about Founder's Syndrome. Many communities evolve in ways the founders didn't expect. Sometimes the founders take charge and keep pushing it back to what they wanted. This often either kills the community or greatly stunts it. Other founders just decide that it's time to move on as the community changes. This was true of Kat Kinkade (one of the main founders of the Twin Oaks Community) and Mildred Gordon (one of the founders of the Ganas Community). Each of them left their community when they didn't like the way it changed and, ironically, both came back to their communities to die.

In many ways, Kat Kinkade is one of my idols. She helped found three different communities (Twin Oaks, East Wind, and Acorn) and they are all still around—after 56, 50, and 30 years respectively as of 2023. As someone who has tried to help start many communities, none of which are now around, I often wonder what Kat Kinkade knew.

I do know a few things that she knew. One was to grow the communities fast—because small communities are brittle. Another is to leave and let go, when the community isn't going the way you want. (See above. Kat left Twin Oaks to start East Wind, left East Wind to live in Boston, returned to Twin Oaks, helped start Acorn nearby, then left Twin Oaks to live on her own, and came back to Twin Oaks to die.)

So what do I know about starting communities? I often joke that I know more

Folks may design the perfect community for themselves and then wonder why no one wants to join them. Collaborative community design is possible but it means giving up control and seeing what emerges.

about what not to do than what to do—much of this learned through hard lessons. Two things that I do know are that small communities are vulnerable and can fall apart simply by having three or four folks leave, and that what holds small communities (and even some large communities) together are relationships.

I've written a lot about building community on the Commune Life blog (communelifeblog.wordpress.com). Creating communities is something I believe in and something that I want to encourage folks to do (since I think the world needs more communities), but I often discourage folks from doing it as well (because it's a lot harder to do than it might seem).

And now I'm living in Boston and trying to gather folks for yet another community-building attempt, crazy as that may seem.

What kind of community? An income-sharing community that's within an easy bus or train ride to Boston. You want more details? Large or small? Urban or rural? Some kind of mission?

I don't have those details. That can wait. I am more interested in the community that we create together than trying to plan a whole community by myself.

I've looked at ic.org and I've noticed that many communities listed there have very detailed descriptions but only one or two people actually in them. I suspect these folks have designed the perfect community for themselves and now are wondering why no one wants to join them. Collaborative community design is possible (I just did a workshop on it at the Twin Oaks Communities Conference) but it means giving up control and seeing what emerges.

There are probably any number of ways to collectively design a community, but the format I came up with and presented at the Conference had everyone put out two or three bottom lines (deal breakers, non-negotiables) and then make sure that there aren't any conflicts between them. (If there are, it may be that you need to start different communities. At the least, this is good to know before you go any further.) Assuming these are all compatible, they would be listed all together as a foundation for the community.

We did this again for deep desires (list-

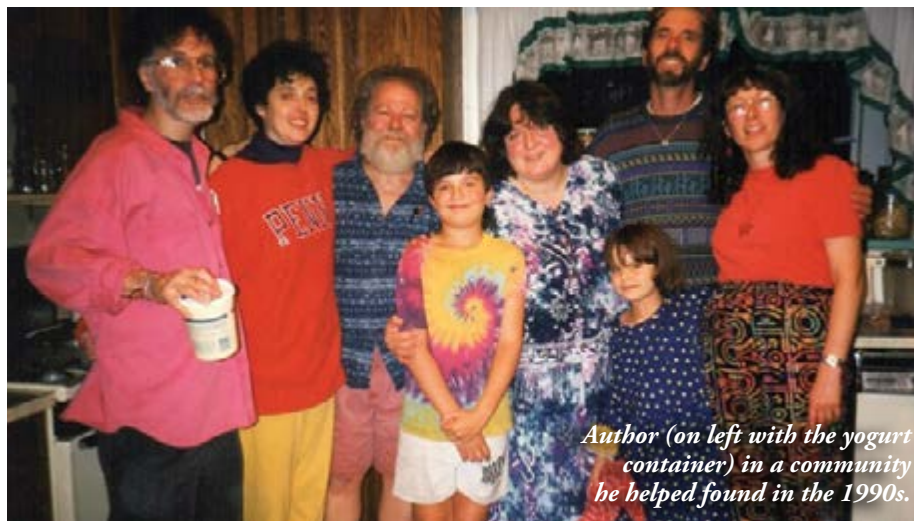
ing two or three things each person might really want in a community but could give up if necessary) and again, if there weren't conflicts, added them to the list. And finally we brainstormed a wishlist and anything that two or more folks checked off and no one had problems with got added to the list—thus developing a community description that was generated by the group rather than by a single person.

In my case, since I don't have others working with me yet, I am not interested in going beyond my bottom lines (income-sharing, easy to get to Boston). Instead, I'm interested in finding the right people and seeing what kind of community we can collectively come up with. I would encourage other would-be community designers to do likewise.

So, anyone want to help create an income-sharing community in New England? I guarantee it won't be easy, but if you are up for a challenge... 🐉

Raven MoonRaven has tried to start a lot of communities and lived in even more. He manages the Commune Life blog and Facebook feed and is fascinated by communities, relationships, and the systems perspective. He is the author of a previous COMMUNITIES article, "What Past and Present Communities Can Teach New Communities" (#176, Fall 2017). He is currently living in a co-op house in Boston while trying to find folks to create a new commune. Contact him at moonraven222@gmail.com.

Twin Oaks Community is located in Louisa, Virginia; Ganas Community in Staten Island, New York; East Wind Community in Tecumseh, Missouri, and Acorn Community in Mineral, Virginia. For more information on these and other communities check out the Communities Directory at ic.org/cmag.



Author (on left with the yogurt container) in a community he helped found in the 1990s.



Author (in the middle) with two folks he tried to build a commune with in Queens (2017-2019).

Photos courtesy of Raven MoonRaven

What Needs to Be in a Community's DNA to Form?

By Ted Rau

As a community, we want to be a collective, an interdependent being made up of individuals. Just like any organism, a community needs to be able to make decisions—to have governance.

But does a *forming* group need a governance system? Countless times, I have heard from forming groups that “we don’t want to define our governance, we want to do that when we have all the people.”

A Story

Let’s imagine how this would likely play out. This story is fictional—but made up of all the stories I’ve heard from communities I’ve worked with.

The first core group meets and falls in love with the project. Things look rosy, excitement runs high, and plans are made. Governance is put aside—*doing* is more important now.

More people join the group. Meetings have good attendance, but they also take longer. But that’s ok because people are enthusiastic.

Now there’s a small bump in the road. Maybe it’s the logo. Maybe it’s the question of who does the presentation at the info session. Maybe it’s who was told about the group outing to the cohousing conference. But the situation gets resolved because the founders—the core group—make a decision. For some (both inside and outside of the core group), how this got resolved leaves a bit of a sour taste. But we move on. After all, we have a community to dream of!

Soon after comes a bigger bump. Maybe it’s that someone found land that seems

perfect for the project but it’s not here but two towns over. Maybe it’s the question of whether the community would be a senior cohousing group or mixed-generation. Maybe it is the question of racial and income diversity. The opportunity gets discussed a few times with controversy but doesn’t move forward. The people who pushed for the topic get impatient. They want resolution to find out whether this community is going to work for them. Should they stay or move on? A member of the core group speaks passionately for one side of the discussion. Now the issue transforms into a power struggle. The newbies say, the core group has held the power for too long. The core group asks, do you know how many hours we’ve put into this project before you came?!

The story isn’t over yet. One of the members identifies that the main problem is that it’s unclear how decisions are made and they suggest looking at a governance system. They dive into exploration with renewed hope. Yet, the general meetings have grown to 30 people. Some find governance boring and stop attending meetings but they miss the social opportunity. Additionally, new exploring members drop in all the time and need to be filled in.

Do you recognize parts of the dynamics?

There is a slim chance our fictional group will be able to collaboratively work up a governance system. Outside of that, there are only less-than-ideal possible outcomes. Maybe the group falls apart; it would not be the first one to fall apart because of lack of clarity. Maybe the founders get their way, at the cost of inclusivity. Maybe one of them suggests a vote and a slim majority wins. The losers are frustrated. The wounds inflicted early can remain scars in the fabric of the community for a long time.



Illustrations courtesy of Ted Rau

Governance DNA

When we form a collective being, it needs a DNA just as a human cell has a DNA.

What absolutely needs to be part of the DNA of an organization? Its aim and its governance. The aim tells us what the desired “mature-state” shape of the organism is—what we’re growing towards. Governance gives us the processes that will help us grow and evolve. Without that, there’s structurelessness, and structurelessness benefits the assertive and powerful, not the collective.

Not only can’t we decide as a collective without governance, we also can’t decide *how* we will decide. It’s a bit like we need a key to the treasure box full of keys. Until that one decision is made, all other decisions are out of reach.

The aim and the governance, just as in a developing organism, become the *invitation* for other cells to join and form and be part of the collective.

Meetings Step by Step

What happens next? I wrote about this in the short book *Who Decides Who Decides* (2021) but here is a summary of what I suggest there as a roadmap of forming basic governance for an organization. After the aim and the basic decision-making method (consent) are approved, we can also (1) embrace rounds as a simple circle practice of speaking one by one so all voices can be heard and (2) determine the founding members so that we have clarity on how to move forward. All of this can be done in **one first meeting** (more details in the book).

In a **second meeting**, we can make agreements on how we communicate with each other and how to determine what we talk about in our meetings—a shared way to manage our attention and priorities as a group. We can already begin to make a list of topics that need discussion so we have a shared understanding of our trajectory. I also recommend getting to know each other more.

The **third meeting** sets us on a good path of working together. Subteams and roles can be formed if that’s useful, but we talk together about all the topics we decide to retain for everyone to talk about. Once the group has grown enough to make talking in one big group tedious, we empower subteams to make decisions so we can focus more and fill each other in in a structured way.

Now the DNA is complete and the organism is ready to grow. More details as well as skill-building need to be added over time. (See a list in *Who Decides and Decides*; the book also has a free resource page with recordings and templates: sociocracyforall.org/who-decides-who-decides-resource-page.)

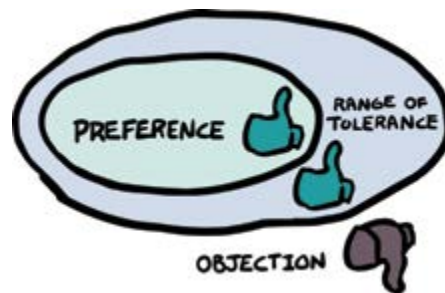
Review and Adapt

In short, do yourself and your group a favor and don’t put governance off. You don’t have to set *everything* in stone—starting lean with only the basic DNA is actually a good idea so we don’t overbuild and turn into a bureaucracy!

Your governance can grow alongside your group by *reviewing* your basic agreements and refining them from time to time, and that should include the new members that have joined in the meantime. That way, there is clarity from the beginning, and new members can have input and learn about the existing agreements together with the “old” members—a real co-development process.

Building from the ground up means to plant a seed that has what it needs to grow. It contains everything the group will need in the future—to empower, clarify, act, review, repair, and deepen. With soil, sun, nutrients, water, and a little magic, it can grow and flourish long-term. 🌱

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Making Agenda Decisions Together

The agenda in a sociocratic meeting is decided by consent. In my view, this is an innocent-looking step with huge importance. Please do not gloss over it or skip it.

How it’s done: present the agenda with enough detail so people understand and develop an informed opinion on whether the agenda will serve the group’s purpose. Encourage people to ask questions—show that you care whether they understand. Then ask whether they see any reason to change the agenda or whether it is good enough to get started. If no one speaks up, you’ve now made your first consent decision as a group.

Why is this so important? Because the agenda is the agreement on how we spend our time together. That is a decision we make together. That means that everyone in the group is co-responsible for sticking to their own agreement. If later, for example, one person talks for 10 minutes at a time repeatedly and causes the agenda to run over, and every person has consented to the original agreement, you now have something to hold them accountable to by reminding them that an agreement was made.

Consenting to the agenda together is crucial because you are not forcing an agenda onto the group. You are proposing, and the group is actively embracing it. Remember the see-saw? It’s a bit like all your guests are standing around the see-saw, and you are asking for permission from everyone so you could hold it in place for a moment so we can all put the first foot onto the see-saw. And this is where it all begins.

—TR

Creating Ideal Community Policies

By Sahmat

My article, “Creating the Ideal Community” (COMMUNITIES #195) promotes a particular kind of community I call a “Beloved Community Tribe,” whose purpose is to maintain the deep Sense of Community Martin Luther King Jr. called “Beloved Community.” This current article focuses instead on the set of “ideal” community policies any community must have in order to function in the best way. Many different types of intentional community exist, but they all face similar challenges in key areas of community policy. For this reason, the “ideal” policy in most policy areas is essentially the same for all communities. In what follows I will describe what I believe are ideal community policies in four of the six major policy areas.

How did I come to this idea that there are a set of ideal community policies? I was born in an intentional community, lived in a number of them during my childhood, and have lived in several more during adulthood. I have been involved in starting three of these communities. My father was interested in how communities could cooperate with each other in order to improve their functioning. This is why in 1948 he started the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, which has morphed into the modern Foundation for Intentional Community. My father thought that it was especially important for communities to improve their Consensus decision-making policy. So I got the idea of ideal community policies originally from my father. Subsequently, by studying the communities I lived in and visited, I fleshed out the details of what these ideal policies might look like.

What do I mean by a “community policy”? A policy is a set of principles, a process description, a set of rules, and a roles definition that covers a particular area of community activity. The six major community policy areas are Vision/Mission, Consensus, Membership, Conflict Resolution, Behavioral, and Organizational. Many communities do not have clearly developed policies in some of these essential areas, let alone having such policies that approach the ideal. The result is that they do not function in an ideal way and often are plagued by conflicts that are difficult to resolve.

These policies naturally arrange themselves in what I call the “Policy Pyramid” (see Figure 1). The Vision/Mission Policy is at the foundation of the pyramid because it’s about Why We’re Here and What We’re Going to Do About It. If there is not clear committed consensus on Vision/Mission, the community tends to founder in various ways because there’s no clear agreement on what’s important and what to do about it.

The next policy, Consensus, defines the Consensus decision-making process. The assumption here is that Consensus is the best way of making community decisions. The Consensus Policy depends directly on Vision/Mission because good Consensus process depends on a strongly shared Vision/Mission. Otherwise, many practical decisions are difficult because there is no consensus on basic values related to specific decisions.

The Membership Policy, next in the pyramid, depends on Vision/Mission (making sure new members are committed to the Vision/Mission) and Consensus.

The Conflict Resolution Policy comes next; it depends on the Vision/Mission Policy because a group with strong agreement on Vision/Mission will find Conflict Resolution much easier. It also depends on the Consensus Policy because good Conflict Resolution is a form of Consensus.

Next, the Behavioral Policy covers required behavior in the areas of sexual behavior, smoking, drug use, health, violence, etc.

Finally, the Organizational Policy defines the organizational structure of the commu-

“Community-first” actually also puts the welfare of every individual first because all are part of the community. But starting out with a me-first attitude does not benefit either the community or the individuals in it.

nity, including community meetings, committees, roles and responsibilities, etc.

The ideal policy in the first four of these policy areas (that I call “Foundational Policies”) is pretty much the same for all communities and is based on certain key principles that apply to all communities. The final two areas, Behavioral and Organizational Policies, may differ from community to community.

In what follows, I will discuss what I believe is ideal community policy in each of the four Foundational Policy areas.

The Vision/Mission Policy

The Vision/Mission Policy is foundational because it is about a common commitment to Why We’re Here (Vision) and How We’ll Realize Our Vision (Mission). The Vision and Mission each need to be expressed in a concise one-sentence statement, easily remembered and communicated. Many groups and communities mix up Vision and Mission in a single “vision statement.” However, for maximum clarity the two should be separated.

An ideal Vision/Mission Policy would be based on these Principles:

1. The Community Vision is expressed in a concise one-sentence statement that describes “Why We Are Here Together.”
2. The Community Mission is expressed in a concise one-sentence statement that describes “How We Will Realize Our Vision.”
3. The Vision/Mission statements and associated Values Statement (containing detailed description of values directly or indirectly referenced) are developed and periodically updated (at least annually) by Consensus of the whole community, in a process facilitated by members of the Community Policy Committee (described in the Community Organizational Policy).
4. The Vision/Mission statements are read out at the beginning of every community meeting and serve as the primary basis for all Consensus decisions, as well as the primary basis for Membership and Conflict Resolution policies.
5. All new Provisional or Full members must explicitly agree to commit to the Vision/Mission statements, as part of their initiation into membership.
6. It’s a good idea to append to the Vision/Mission statements a Values Statement that describes in more detail the values expressed in these general statements, as well as describing secondary values that may not appear in these statements.
7. Basing all the functioning of the community explicitly on the Vision/Mission statements promotes a Community-first attitude that helps the community function more effectively and harmoniously.

Here are the Vision/Mission Statements of a fictional community, the “Gaia Community”:

Vision: Our vision is to promote the realization that all Earth Life is part of a sacred Global Gaia Community.

Mission: Our mission is to promote this “Gaia Consciousness” by living cooperatively and harmoniously in a local community connected with Humanity and Nature, based on Consensus Principles.

Few communities have clear, concise Vision/Mission statements. As a result, new members come in with different ideas about why we’re here together and what we’re going to do about it. These different motivations are often me-first motivations, rather than the Community-first motivation that is encouraged by applying the above principles in an ideal Vision/Mission Policy.

The difference between me-first and Community-first motivations is illustrated

by an experience I had years ago when I sought to join a particular spiritual community. I was being interviewed by one of the community elders, who asked me, “Why do you want to join this community?” I replied that I thought I would benefit spiritually. She looked at me in silence for a minute and then said: “I always think of what JFK said: ‘Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.’”

Most people who join a community come with primarily a me-first motivation, asking, “What can this community do for me?” A Vision/Mission policy based on ideal principles is essential to make sure that instead people come with and continue with more of a Community-first motivation. It’s important to understand that “Community-first” actually also puts the welfare of every individual first because all are part of the community. But starting out with a me-first attitude does not benefit either the community or the individuals in it.

When a community does not have a deep Community-first dedication to a clear Vision and Mission, this often leads to difficulties in community decision-making and conflicts that are difficult to resolve. Several of the communities I’ve lived in and consulted with did not have clear, concise Vision/Mission statements. As a result, serious conflicts developed over community priorities that ultimately led to some leaving the community because they couldn’t stand the conflict. In one such instance I was the one who left because it was clear to me that most other





members were not on board with the original Vision/Mission of the community, which unfortunately had not been codified into concise Vision and Mission statements.

Some communities start out with a relatively clear Vision and Mission, which end up being watered down and forgotten because they are not used as a basis for Membership and Consensus and periodically updated. I once lived in a community that to begin with had a relatively clear Vision and Mission (though they were not formulated in concise statements). When I joined the community provisionally, this original Vision/Mission had clearly been lost. A friend once asked the original founder of the community why this had occurred. She said, “Well, in the early days we had little money and not enough labor to do the community work. Some young people came along who were interested in joining and were willing to work. We didn’t have the luxury of taking the time and trouble to make sure they were on board with the Vision. So the original Vision faded because many new members were not on board with it.”

This willingness to give up the original Vision (which has also occurred in other communities I’ve lived in for similar reasons) reflects a misunderstanding about what “community” really is. The real community is the people who make it up, along with the common Vision/Mission to which they are committed. A community is NOT a particular piece of land and the buildings on it. If it is not possible to physically sustain a particular set of land and buildings, the members can always take themselves and their Vision/Mission elsewhere and create a physical basis that they can sustain. To instead give up the Vision/Mission for immediate physical survival purposes is to give up the real community, and this is a disaster from which it’s essentially impossible to recover.

Consensus Policy

My community experience, as well as the experience of many community groups, has shown that Consensus is by far the best method of community decision-making. This is because an ideal Consensus process has several major advantages over any non-consensus form of decision-making:

1. Maintenance of a harmonious Sense of Community, with a minimization of conflict, as opposed to the conflicts created by not fully respecting minority viewpoints.
2. Decisions superior to those from non-consensus decision-making (because everyone’s creative contribution is included in the final decision).
3. Stronger buy-in and implementation because all have agreed to the decision, as opposed to repressed minorities resisting implementation.
4. Maximum honoring of each individual member, as opposed to dishonoring and repression of minorities.
5. Most of the time, once a group gets adept at Consensus, it takes less total community time than a non-consensus method that wastes time and energy in contentious discus-

sions, poor implementation, and conflict perpetuated by repressing minorities.

Consensus decision-making seeks unanimity on all major decisions, as opposed to majority voting and other forms of non-unanimity processes. Such unanimity-based decision-making has a long history in human society.

We know from the accounts of indigenous people and anthropologists that many if not most small indigenous tribes of the past three million years of human history used some form of Consensus decision-making, presumably because of the advantages listed above. In most cases, their Consensus policy was part of their oral tradition, was not written down, and was executed informally.

The other major incidence of Consensus in human history occurred among the Quakers, beginning with their inception in the 17th century in England. The central Quaker belief has always been that “There is that of the Divine in everyone.” In accordance with this, they believe that each individual in the group can be inspired in a unique way by the “Holy Spirit” within. The group facilitator (“Clerk of the Meeting”) could then lead a process of facilitating the synthesis of all of these “leadings of the Spirit” into a unanimous Community Truth called the “Sense of the Meeting.” It would be better called the “Sense of the Spirit” since in this approach it really is the Holy Spirit that makes the decision.

The Quakers have practiced this form of Consensus quite successfully for almost 400 years. I have seen groups of as many as 1000 Quakers reach a unanimous decision using this method. Particularly with such a larger group, unanimity depends on a foundational consensus on Vision and Mission, which the Quakers have always had.

The Ideal Consensus Policy I have developed is based on the past experience of indigenous tribes and the Quakers, as well as on the experience of many different communities. It is essentially a secular version of the Quaker process, and instead of being based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit it is based on the guidance of the “Spirit of Community.” What this means is up to each member of the community to determine for that person’s own self. For some, the Spirit of Community may

be a tangible personal presence connected with the “Higher Self” of the group. For others, it may represent the abstract principle of “Community-first,” that is, putting the welfare of the whole community first in all decisions.

An ideal Consensus Policy is based on these key principles:

1. Goal is to reach unanimity on what’s best for the community, while maintaining a strong Sense of Community.

2. The Community Truth is the decision that’s best for the community (guided by the Spirit of Community).

3. Everyone has a piece of the Community Truth.

4. Openness to other points of view.

5. The Community Truth is a unanimous synthesis of all points of view.

6. A proposal/concern offered now belongs only to the community, as a potential aspect of the Community Truth. A concern is either resolved unanimously, or the proposal is not approved.

7. A member not in unanimity may either stand aside (grant unanimity) or stand in a community concern (no unanimity).

8. Compassionate respect for all life.

9. Harmony with the community constitution is the only formal basis for a decision.

10. Work to resolve conflicts.

11. Primary decisions are by whole community, secondary delegated to committees.

12. Process is facilitated by a facilitator who makes sure all voices are heard and synthesized into unanimity.

13. An expulsion decision is unanimity-minus-one but the one must be fully heard.¹

14. All decisions are recorded by a recorder in the decisions book.

15. Ongoing evaluation and modification of the policy and process.

I’ve developed these principles through a lifetime of experiencing Consensus in different communities and groups, and many years of studying its various forms, starting with the Quaker experience and finishing with the writings of the main Consensus experts in the communities movement (Caroline Estes, C.T. Butler, and Tree Bressen).

If a community implements a Consensus Policy based on these Principles, it will experience the many advantages over non-consensus forms of decision-making that I have listed above.

Many communities and organizations use forms of Consensus that do not recognize all the above principles. For instance, some communities use a form of Consensus that allows an individual to “block” a community decision. This practice goes against the spirit of Consensus and contradicts some of the above principles, particularly the principle that once a concern is offered it belongs to the community, and no longer just to the individual. An individual does not have the power to decide what happens to a concern that now belongs to the whole community by “blocking” the decision; only the community as a whole has this power.

It may be useful for me to share some of my experiences with Consensus decision-making. My first experience was in the community in which I spent most of my childhood. Most members of this community (like my parents) were Quakers, so they had a strong Vision and Mission in common based on Quaker principles, though they did not have formal Vision/Mission statements. They also used a secular form of the spiritually-based Quaker Consensus process, that required unanimity on major decisions. Most of the time (because of the common commitment to the same Vision/Mission), this community found it relatively easy to reach unanimity on important questions.

But there was one issue on which they found it difficult to reach unanimity. This community had been founded on land that had been a large farm. The big barn that was part of the farm still remained when my family joined the community. This barn was a great play area for us kids. At a certain point some of the parents felt that the barn was a dangerous place to play and should be torn down. An initial group discussion revealed that all but one community member was in favor of tearing down the barn. But one member (Frank) was adamant that he didn’t think it was very dangerous for the kids. He also felt strongly that it was an important cultural artifact that was a part of the community history that should be preserved.

Over a period of about 10 years, this barn issue came up again and again in community meetings. The result of every discussion was the same: Frank stood strongly in his concern and no unanimity was reached on the issue. As a result, the barn stood. So in all the years of my childhood that we lived there, the barn stood, we kids kept playing in it, and none of us was ever seriously hurt.

The final result was this: eventually Frank passed on, the community unanimously agreed to take down the barn, and it was demolished, leaving what felt to me like an unfortunate gaping wound. And as it turned out, no child was hurt by playing in the barn during all these years. So both sides of the disagreement got what they wanted: Frank got to enjoy the barn during the rest of his lifetime, and those concerned about kids’ safety ended up with safe kids. This is characteristic of the win/win nature of good Consensus process, which recognizes that “Everyone has a piece of the Truth.”

This experience illustrates several other things about unanimity-based consensus. First



Photos by Chris Roth



of all, it is a deliberately conservative process. In other words, the unanimity requirement means that it is sometimes difficult to change a past decision. This is actually a good thing because fundamental decisions should be difficult to change. This is why, for instance, it is difficult in the American governmental system to change the Constitution. However, most of the time (as in the community of my childhood) it's relatively easy to reach unanimity if there is a basic unanimity on Vision/Mission.

The second thing to notice about this Consensus experience is that it strongly honored Frank as an individual and his concern, whether others agreed with him or not. As a result, everyone else had a concrete experience of how their unique individuality would be honored in a situation in which they disagreed with the rest of the group. This sense of the whole group that each individual in the group was sacred greatly promoted a Sense of Community in the group.

Another key Consensus experience: I was involved for many years as the primary Coordinator for a Food Not Bombs group in Virginia. This group was not a live-in community but it is still a kind of relatively close-knit community. Food Not Bombs is a volunteer organization that receives donations of food from grocery stores, farmers' markets, etc. They then serve free meals and distribute donated food to food-needy people, usually in public parks. There are hundreds of FNB groups in different cities all over the world. Food Not Bombs volunteer groups have always made their decisions through a form of Consensus.

A few years back an issue arose in the group I was a part of: FNB had always been an organization committed to vegetarianism because of its many health, environmental, and animal rights advantages. What happened in this Virginia group was that we started getting non-vegetarian donations (meat, dairy, etc.). We asked our client group whether they would like us to donate this non-vegetarian items to them, and the answer was a definite "yes." As a result, we started donating these non-vegetarian items (though our free meals continued to be vegetarian).

After a few years, one of our main volunteers shared in a group meeting that he was not comfortable with this practice of donating non-vegetarian items to our clients. He felt that FNB had been totally vegetarian from the beginning for very good reasons. He therefore proposed that we stop donating non-vegetarian food. Many other volunteers strongly resisted this proposal. Some felt particularly strongly that the many families with children that we served needed good sources of protein for their kids, so it was important to provide them with meat and dairy as one of the best sources of protein. Over a period of several months we had three volunteers meetings in which we discussed this issue, with no unanimity being reached.

During the third meeting, which I was facilitating, I had an idea, which I proposed to the group. Here was the proposal: Those who want to distribute non-vegetarian food form a separate organization, which might be called "Protein for Kids." Any donations of non-vegetarian items to FNB would then be passed on to this separate organization, and they would decide when and where to distribute it. It turned out that everyone was immediately satisfied with this solution, so unanimity was reached.

When unanimity on this question was finally reached, I felt that a tangible Spirit of Community had somehow appeared in the group. Everyone was smiling and congratulating each other, and the tangible harmony created by reaching unanimity continued in the experience of the group thereafter.

This experience illustrates several things: First of all, it illustrates the key role of the facilitator in facilitating unanimity by synthesizing apparently opposing points of view. It also illustrates how reaching ultimate unanimity can greatly deepen the Sense of Community in the group.

Membership Policy

An ideal Membership Policy is based on these principles:

1. The primary criterion for membership should be a deep Community-first commitment to the Vision/Mission of the community.

2. A Community-first commitment to Vision/Mission should be formalized in an initiation ritual for new Provisional or Full Members. During this ritual, the new member would explicitly commit to the Vision/Mission and to all of the other existing policies in the Policy Pyramid.

3. Initial membership should be Provisional and last for long enough (probably at least six months) for existing members to judge whether the new member adequately works towards the Vision/Mission of the community and is able to cooperate harmoniously with others in doing so.

4. Conditions under which membership can be terminated need to be explicitly spelled out in the Policy. Termination decisions need to be "consensus minus one"—meaning in this case that the candidate for termination is excluded from the formal decision. However, the point of view of the candidate must be fully considered and this person should be given a second chance if possible.

5. Decisions on admitting new Provisional or Full members will follow the usual Consensus Policy.

Conflict Resolution Policy

An ideal Conflict Resolution Policy is based on these principles:

1. Conflict is inevitable and is to be embraced and treated as an opportunity for creating deeper harmony, rather than

something to be repressed.

2. A conflict between two people that cannot be informally resolved on the spot must be immediately reported to the Policy Committee, who will start a formal conflict resolution process (facilitated by a member of the Committee) as soon as possible, but within three days of the original occurrence of the conflict.

3. The Conflict Resolution Process will contain these sections, in sequence:

a. A common formal dedication to resolve the current conflict for the sake of promoting community harmony and the Vision/Mission of the community.

b. An attempted agreement on the objective facts of what occurred.

c. A Subjective Sharing session, with echoing (each person repeats what they heard or understood from the other).

d. An opportunity for voluntary apology/amends/resolves by each party.

e. An agreement on how to behave with each other in the future.

4. Optionally, the rest of the community other than the two main parties can sit in on the process as silent witnesses. There is also an option to have the observing community members make suggestions about the agreement for the two participants to function under in the future.

5. The facilitator will do at least one follow-up session with the two participants several weeks after the initial session, in order to evaluate how the new agreement and new relationship is functioning.

6. The community, lead by the Policy Committee, must periodically (at least annually) review and modify the Conflict Resolution Policy.

Many communities do not have a Conflict Resolution Policy at all, and I do not know of any community that has an adequate one. I once consulted with a community that had no such policy. The result was that a series of incidents had occurred in which one member disrespected another; the subsequent ongoing series of conflicts among certain members never got resolved. Increasingly bad feeling grew among certain members. Eventually this led to some members leaving the com-

munity because they couldn't stand the conflict. If they had had an adequate Conflict Resolution Policy based on the above principles, then the original conflicts could have been resolved, instead of festering and multiplying to the point where they blew the community apart.

The Policy Analysis Process

1. Startup Policy Analysis: When a community is in startup mode it's important for the initial members to go through a Startup Policy Analysis. This starts with establishing a Policy Committee of three or four people who will first agree on the essential Principles to be observed in each major policy area in the Policy Pyramid. Next—based on these Principles—the Committee will develop detailed policies (containing the major elements described above) in each policy area. Finally, the Committee will present the draft policies to the Membership Meeting for approval by Consensus. These policies are so important that they should be approved by the Membership in at least two sessions, with all members (or their proxies) required to be present at the last meeting.

2. Ongoing Policy Analysis: This ongoing process should happen annually. First, the Policy Committee will examine all current policies (and the Principles on which they are based) and evaluate their adequacy based on the community experience of the past year. Next, the Committee will develop a set of recommended changes to current policies, and present their recommendation to the Membership Meeting for approval by Consensus. As with the startup policy approval process, any changes should be approved by at least two sessions, with all members (or their proxies) required to be present at the last meeting. This annual process is essential because all communities go through changes in membership and in other respects over the years, and all major policies must be kept up to date based on these changes. This starts with an annual review of the Vision/Mission policy, which can help community members to renew their basic contract of Why We're Here and thus give a shot in the arm to the community.

Both in Startup and Ongoing Policy Analysis it can be very helpful for a community to engage the services of an experienced outside Policy Consultant who can guide the group through the process. The consulting process starts with a review of the Principles on which current policies are based, as well as a recording (for Ongoing Policy Analysis) of changes in the past year that may require changes in policy.

Summary

Any community can become much more effective and harmonious in their functioning by developing policies based on the principles I've listed in the four Foundational areas. The detailed policies based on these principles are best developed by a Policy Committee and then submitted to the entire community for approval by Consensus. If you are part of a forming community, it's particularly important to develop ideal policies to begin with so you can start off on the right foot. If your community (whether existing or forming) needs help in understanding the principles involved and/or in developing the detailed policies, or needs help with ongoing policy analysis, I (Sahmat) am available to consult and help in the process on a non-monetary gift-sharing basis. 🐦

Sahmat has lived in 15 different communities throughout his life, started three of them, and has visited and studied many more. He was originally trained as an ecologist, but has also been trained in computer science and quantum physics. He has taught all of these subjects. His training in the law-based sciences has spurred him to make a law-based science out of Community Building. He is the author of the book Saving the World Through Community. He offers workshops on how to create the type of ideal community described in his articles, either from scratch or by modifying an existing community. Reach Sahmat at yamatman@yahoo.com.

1. When the person being considered for expulsion from the community has a close sexual or other relationship with one or more members, the expulsion situation is complicated. Some communities have a "consensus-minus-two" rule here in relation to sexual partners, meaning that the sexual partner of the person in question must stand aside from the decision-making on expulsion. The problem is that a person may have more than one close sexual partner, and a person may have one or more community members that s/he is very close to in other respects. Do you exclude all persons in these two categories from the expulsion decision? It's a thorny problem, whose resolution is beyond the scope of this article.

Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors, Part Five

By Diana Leafe Christian



In the resentful, “fragile” version of these behaviors the person’s sense of entitlement and superiority “flows quietly under the surface...masked by an unhappy, sullen exterior.”

Detail from Fallen Angel, Alexandre Cabanel, 1847

A professor at the local university, Hugo was a member of a large community just outside a town famous for its medieval cathedral. When I first met him he seemed charming. I learned, however, that sometimes he communicated with such quiet grim intensity it could penetrate and unnerve even the most confident members of his community. His energy, I was told, seemed to strip people of their well-being, transforming their confidence into unease and disorientation. Unfortunately, this made him the most powerful person in the group.

Relentless, Vengeful, Victimized

And like my former community-mate Andraste (described in the Winter 2022 issue), Hugo was aggressive and relentless. In a quiet but menacing tone he’d argue with those who didn’t agree with him or who had different ideas than he had, insisting their view was wrong and advocating what the community should do instead. He did this in meetings, during shared meals, in the community laundry room. He’d be walking behind another community member on a path, hurry to catch up, then launch into arguments about why their solution for a community problem wouldn’t work. If the person was in a hurry and said they couldn’t talk then, he’d continue on as if they hadn’t spoken. During a community meal he’d join the table of someone he wanted to convince about something and forcefully argue his point, with the person feeling trapped like a deer in the headlights. Most people were afraid of him and tried to avoid him, but that wasn’t always easy or possible.

Like Griswald (Spring 2022 issue), when thwarted Hugo could be vengeful and destructive, retaliating when people disagreed with him or wanted the group to follow a different course. For instance, he’d been on the Board of a university-affiliated nonprofit. But when he and the director had different ideas for the group’s direction, he resigned in angry protest, writing scathing letters to anyone who’d ever donated to the organization, charging the director with incompetence and urging them to never donate again. Many believed him and stopped their annual donations, devastating the director and crippling the nonprofit for years.

At the same time—and seemingly incompatible with such intensity and aggression—like Olive (Winter 2021, Winter 2022 issues), Hugo also believed himself to be unfairly treated and not sufficiently respected by various individual members and by the community itself. He was especially upset when the group replaced their classic, traditional consensus with a modified version when he was out of town. Hugo and his close followers (see below) had often blocked proposals that most other members wanted, or disrupted business meetings with long harangues against various community policies, throwing the agenda so far off schedule the group couldn’t get to important issues they had to deal

with at that meeting. After the new consensus process was approved, no one had this power over the community anymore, as it required anyone who blocked and two or three who supported a proposal to draft a new proposal that addressed the same issue as the first one. If they couldn’t agree on a new version, the original proposal would return for a supermajority vote. With this change, the proposals that most people wanted *did* pass. Just as Griswald’s community was suddenly freed from his tyranny in meetings by a change in their decision-making method, now Hugo’s community was freed as well.

Hugo also attended most of the group’s committee meetings, especially when they’d made a decision he didn’t like. After insisting the committee hear his concerns, he’d argue relentlessly for what they should do instead, again throwing off their agenda and delaying their ability to address important committee issues. After the modified consensus was adopted, committees required non-committee members to limit their comments to two minutes at the start of the meeting, with facilitators using a timer to ensure they stopped at two minutes.

Now that he could no longer block proposals with impunity or hijack committee meetings, Hugo was certain the community was trying to oppress and silence him, believing the new modified consensus had been approved specifically to do this. (In fact, reducing Hugo’s dominance in meetings and curbing his consistent blocking

was one reason the group chose it.)

He would also send everyone long, convoluted, emotional emails describing the community's dysfunction, especially with the new consensus process, and arguing how policies like the two-minute rule had hurt the community and had harmed him personally.

These behaviors were demoralizing and intimidating for many community members, and for the whole community as well. Many stopped attending business meetings because they never knew when his piercing intensity and implacable opinions would disrupt the meeting. Some stopped participating in shared meals or other social gatherings, afraid they couldn't escape if he spotted them. Others used the community laundry room only when he was at work. Some people even left the group entirely, so intimidated and frightened that they developed physical symptoms like heart palpitations and even panic attacks—symptoms that abated only when they moved away.

Especially Challenging Behaviors

By “especially challenging behaviors” I mean what psychologists call “narcissistic” behaviors, exhibited by people they call “narcissists.” (See “Especially Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors,” p. 57.) However, recognizing this kind of dysfunction in community can be difficult. Most people with these characteristics exhibit some but not all of the behaviors. And each person's set of challenging behaviors differs from those of someone else. The person's behaviors can be different at different times, can come and go, and can “target” some community members but not others.

In spite of psychologists' terms for this, I strongly recommend *not* using these labels in community—not using labels or psychological terms at all. Not only is describing a fellow community member this way insulting and destructive to community well-being, but most of us aren't qualified to “diagnose” someone else's psychology anyway! Instead I urge us to simply focus on the person's behaviors, without labels of a psychological condition, and then learn all we can about these behaviors to help ourselves and our communities. (See “How We Can Learn More,” Spring 2022 issue, for recommended resources.)

As we've seen in accounts of these behaviors in previous articles, community members who act like this can have a profoundly negative impact on the group.

Scaring Off New Members

Sometimes initially enthusiastic potential members who interacted with Hugo decided not to join the community. For example, one time a well-liked young couple with many desirable community qualities was enthusiastic about joining. They planned to buy the house of an outgoing member, Claudia, and put their own home up for sale. Everyone was delighted: the membership committee as well as the whole community; Claudia, who was thrilled that such wonderful people were buying her house; and of course the couple themselves, who couldn't wait to join. A few weeks before they were scheduled to move in they stopped by the community to enjoy a community meal.

The next morning the community got a shock.

“We've decided not to join your community after all,” the couple wrote (per a community member's translation). “While this decision was devastating for us, we feel we cannot join the group, even though it means stopping the sale of our home, not buying Claudia's house, and canceling the moving van, losing money on each.

“We had no idea your community was so torn with conflict. We heard accusations last night from more than one member who each made vile accusations about how you mistreat your members—especially as your new consensus process cuts people off, not letting them speak. However, we want to be clear. We didn't necessarily believe everything we heard and there are two sides to every story. But if new incoming members like ourselves are subjected to painful descriptions of heartlessness and dysfunction—conflicts which you have clearly not resolved yet—your community is not a place we want to call home. We apologize if our decision is disappointing, and we especially apologize to Claudia. But the intensity and vitriol we heard last night leaves us no choice.”

This was devastating. People felt awful. You can probably guess what had happened. As soon as the couple sat down the night before, Hugo and his followers made a beeline for them. Hugo sat down across from them, his three community allies also sitting across from them and on either side, effectively cutting off access to the couple by others at the table. Thus surrounded, the couple got an earful, Hugo and his followers each topping each other in recounting how they'd been disrespected and humiliated, especially since the grossly unfair new consensus method was enacted. They told the couple all this, they said when asked why they'd done it, so the couple would know what they were really getting into!

This wasn't the first time Hugo and his followers drove away desirable new members.

“Minions”—Pals Who Provide Back-Up

Psychologists often use the term “flying monkeys” to characterize the allies or supporters of narcissists who help the person criticize, demean, and punish the people they target, as Hugo's supporters did when they drove the new couple away from the community. In my community someone called them “minions,” defined as “yes-men: servile, dependent fol-



Both men and women can express the resentful, victimized version of these especially challenging behaviors.



Detail from Portrait of a Young Man, Sandro Botticelli, about 1480-85 (left), and detail from Ritratto di Maria, Amadeo Modigliani, 1918 (right)

lowers.” But these terms seem demeaning, so I just say “supporters” or “followers.”

How does this work? Psychologists who specialize in narcissists say they find likely supporters among their target’s intimate partners, family members, and friends. Like Iago whispering in Othello’s ear, the narcissist uses innuendo and lies to convince each one the target is harming *them*, systematically stripping away from the target the very people who could offer the most understanding and support, leaving them feeling devastated, vulnerable, and alone. The most malleable and easily led people are usually those who are open and trusting, often with somewhat low self-confidence, and thus relatively easy to convert. Narcissists usually test their potential followers first to see if they can be controlled, gaining their trust with flattery and a pretense of interest and friendship. After finding potential followers they “groom” them, planting the seeds of doubt and distrust about their target. Once fully converted, and now seeing the narcissist as the victim of the target, the new followers offer their unwavering support, praising the narcissist to others and helping them abuse the narcissist’s target.

This can happen in intentional communities too, and the target is often the community itself. The community member with the challenging behaviors convinces their followers that the group routinely victimizes and humiliates them. Grateful for the attention and friendship offered by the person they see as a high-status community member, the followers are easily motivated to resent and distrust the community. Such was the case with Hugo’s followers, as we saw when they helped him rake their community over the coals to the new incoming members.

I saw this in my own community. Olive’s

This wasn’t the first time Hugo and his followers drove away new members.

followers (the people called “minions”) backed her up in meetings and hotly defended her to critics. When she blocked or threatened to block a proposal, they’d block or threaten to block the proposal too. Hugo’s followers did the same in his community.

Who Becomes a Follower?

What kinds of people become followers in community—the pawns of those with challenging behaviors? In my experience, it’s generally new members, often but not always women, especially older women (though I’ve seen men in this role too). Whatever the gender or age, however, the followers seem grateful to receive what they see as a warm welcome and the promise of friendship from an established community member.

I met one of Hugo’s followers, whom I’ll call Irma. Irma bitterly recounted how the community had treated her, especially after adopting its new consensus method, which routinely thwarted and humiliated Hugo, she said, and was equally abusive to her. I later helped facilitate the meeting of a committee about to decide a proposal that was considered controversial because Hugo and his supporters opposed it. Everyone was welcome to attend the meeting, including those who weren’t committee members. In the meeting I suggested people share their pros and cons about the proposal which my cofacilitator would list on a whiteboard so all the pros and cons could be seen. Irma’s con was that, since she was against the proposal, approving it would make her wretched—just one more example of the community making her life miserable.

Irma’s attitudes about the community and her fellow community members seemed to be the “covert,” “fragile,” or “vulnerable” version of challenging behaviors. (See “Especially Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors,” p. 57.) In my experience people exhibiting this version seem to emanate self-righteous indignation—like a continuous silent outrage—from being denied the recognition and acknowledgment they believe they deserve. At the same time they appear to enjoy a kind of low-level satisfaction in their misery and victimhood—feeling awful but also feeling good, like sucking on an all-day lollipop of oddly fulfilling misery and self-pity. A friend once called this odd satisfaction a “munchy yuck.”

In her book *“Don’t You Know Who I Am?”*, psychologist Dr. Ramani Durvasula calls this “a ‘stealth’ form of narcissism.” This covert version, she writes, is “less obvious than the egoistical and overbearing version...but equally difficult.”

“Covert,” “Fragile,” and “Vulnerable” Challenging Behaviors

I know I’m not actually qualified to distinguish between the overt and covert versions of these challenging behaviors. But Hugo, Irma, Olive, and Eldred (Fall 2022 issue) all certainly *seemed* to exhibit the “fragile” form of these behaviors. By the way, in my experience as a community consultant and in my own community, while I haven’t observed a gender distinction between what look like the overt and covert versions, I *have* seen a distinction in their impact. Although it may seem counterintuitive, the covert, fragile—resentful and victimized—version of these behaviors seems considerably more devastating to communities than the obvious, even bullying, overt version.

Dr. Ramani offers the following list of behaviors and attitudes typically characterizing the fragile version. I’ve noted which of these seem to especially characterize Hugo,



The person’s supporters and followers help them criticize, demean, and punish the community members (or the whole community!) they target.

Irma, Olive, and Eldred.

- Like people who display the obvious, overt version of these behaviors, these people feel especially entitled, but in this version the entitlement “flows quietly under the surface and is masked by an unhappy, sullen exterior,” Dr. Ramani writes. (Olive, Irma)

- They exhibit what she calls a “masked grandiosity,” believing other people don’t properly appreciate them or their special abilities. (Hugo, Irma, Olive)

- They maintain what Dr. Ramani calls “a brooding anger” about not having received the recognition they believe they deserve, often appearing “introverted, unhappy, glum, hangdog, and sullen.” (Irma, Eldred)

- They tend to interpret what other people say, even the most innocent comments, as expressing hostility toward *them*. (Hugo, Irma, Olive, Eldred)

- They are often hypersensitive to criticism and ruminate for days over even the most innocuous comments, which they interpret or “hear” as criticism. (Hugo, Irma, Olive, Eldred)

- They often feel inferior to others “because,” Dr. Ramani writes, “they regulate their self-esteem from the outside, and they do not perceive or actually receive sufficient validation and are immensely dissatisfied with their lives.” (Hugo, Irma, Olive)

- With a tendency for victim mentality “they perceive threats, harm, insults, and persecution on a regular basis,” she says. (Hugo, Irma, Olive)

- They tend to use aggressive, overintellectualized debate to advocate their position and “win.” (Hugo, Olive)

- They can have “dispositional contempt”—a tendency to look down on others whom they see as inferior to them in a contemptuous, sneering way, “holding venomous and cold opinions about them,” according to Dr. Ramani. (Olive)

While community members like Hugo and his followers can take a dreadful toll in their community, there *are* effective ways we can work with friends to protect ourselves and help everyone else too.

Los Compañeros to the Rescue

A man I’ll call Umberto with especially challenging behaviors so adversely affected his community in Latin America that a group of friends started a mutual support group they called *Los Compañeros* (although that’s a masculine term, the group included women too). Their purpose was not to curb Umberto’s behaviors or ask him to change, but to create more emotional safety for themselves and other community members.

They studied mutual support methods used by nonviolent activist groups and learned a way to help each other through physical contact. Whenever Umberto criticized or demeaned someone, they’d go stand silently, shoulder to shoulder, behind and to either side of the person, with those who were close enough placing a friendly hand on the person’s back or shoulder. Their support method wasn’t blaming or punishing; it simply offered physical support to the person, and showed Umberto the person had visible support from a group of people.

The *Compañeros* also learned Nonviolent Communication to offer each other what



One way you and your friends can support someone being demeaned or targeted is to stand near them silently and place a hand on their back or shoulder to offer simple physical contact.

Rosie Sun

some NVC trainers call “empathy first aid.” They wrote common feelings and needs on index cards and placed them on a coffee table. In their weekly meetings after a group member recounted a recent painful experience with Umberto, holding an empty tray in their lap, people would quietly choose index cards expressing the feelings and needs they guessed were relevant for the person during their encounter, then place the cards on the person’s tray. I was able to observe a meeting, and this way to offer empathy seemed enormously healing for each person who spoke. Sometimes they’d cry. Others would hold the person or stroke their back as they cried. People really seemed to feel better after receiving this gift of empathy from their friends. It was one of the kindest expressions of caring in community I’d seen.

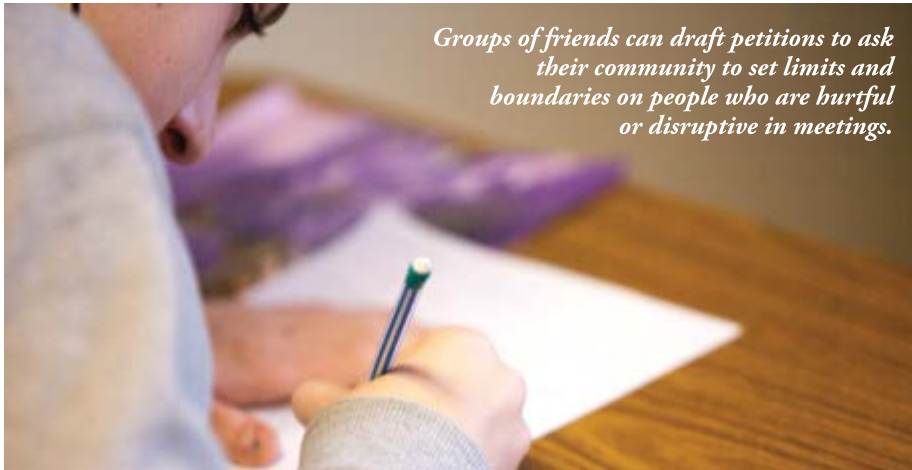
We can become each other’s *compañeros* and create a mutual support group too.

“Shields Up!”—Inner Ninja to the Rescue

One evening at the end of a social gathering Umberto strode over to me, glaring. As a community consultant I’d suggested various ways people could help their community, and he apparently saw this as a threat to his power. With a piercing intensity he started telling me off. I stepped back, alarmed.

Then two things happened. The small group I’d been talking with moved behind me and to either side, forming a tight group; I felt their warm hands touching my back and shoulders. I suddenly remembered the “Inner Ninja” technique I’d

We can become each other’s *compañeros* and create a mutual support group too.



Groups of friends can draft petitions to ask their community to set limits and boundaries on people who are hurtful or disruptive in meetings.

learned years before, which I immediately engaged for all I was worth! I immediately felt calm and invulnerable—the Starship Enterprise with shields up. Confronted by all of us standing together as a six-foot-wide clump of silent, supportive people (and also perhaps by my rock-like presence), Umberto stopped his tirade and left. (Why, oh why hadn't I remembered the Inner Ninja when confronted with Olive or Andraste?!)

The Inner Ninja (introduced in the Spring 2022 issue) is a simple physical technique that's easy to do, requires no spiritual or metaphysical prowess, and takes only half a second to put in place. It doesn't harm the person at all and they can't tell you're doing anything, yet it seems to immediately stop the negative effects of hurtful or manipulative words and energy. (Email me at diana@ic.org for my handout with pictures on how to do it.)

"I used the Inner Ninja recently when someone tried to push me around aggressively," a friend wrote, "and it *worked!* Her energy just flowed right around me; it didn't affect me at all. I was able to stay composed, set my limits, and stand my ground. Learning the Inner Ninja changed my life!"

As my friend learned, this really works. We can all use the Inner Ninja when confronted by the Hugos, Umbertos, Andrastes, and Olives in our lives.

Creating an Alliance

Years ago, three friends and I inadvertently created an alliance, then wrote a petition to advocate what we saw as a needed change in our community. It worked! Here's how. Each year my community elects a president whose role is to care for our group's emotional and spiritual well-being, and they choose a small group of advisors. The president that year, whom I'll call Angela, asked two older, longtime members, one a community founder, to be her advisors, and a relatively new resident, a young man I'll call Cornelius.

However, Cornelius was developing a reputation as being increasingly irresponsible. Behind in his community dues and labor requirements, he smoked weed in public places where children and visitors saw him. (He didn't seem to have any especially challenging behaviors; he just seemed flaky.) One woman, a younger member, emailed our new community president with her concerns about Cornelius and his level of responsibility, and asked Angela to remove him as an advisor unless he stopped breaking our rules (and breaking the law), and replace him with someone more responsible. When Angela didn't respond, another younger member and I also emailed her. She still didn't respond, so we and another concerned friend attended the next meeting of the advisory team to share our concerns in person. We asked Angela again to replace Cornelius and gave our reasons. This was awkward, as he was sitting right there. Instead of taking our concerns seriously (like any current-day president of our community would do), Angela and the other older members were just annoyed. We were way out of line, they said. Cornelius was a fine young man whom we were unfairly maligning. His presence on the advisory team was valuable for his young person's perspective, which they needed. "You're conducting a witch hunt!" they said. They asked us to leave their meeting. Cornelius smirked.

The problem seemed to be a cultural difference between our hippie founders and early

community members in their 60s and 70s—all somewhat suspicious of management, finance, legalities, and "bureaucracy"—and our younger members in their 30s and 40s (though not Cornelius) who understood management well, and cared about accountability.

Still undeterred by Angela's rebuff, we presented our concerns again at their next meeting. This time they were even more incensed—now calling us "dictators" and "Nazis." Again they asked us to leave.

Drafting a Petition

While we four members didn't formally call ourselves an alliance, we were certainly allied in our determination to resolve this. So I decided to start a petition, as I knew other members besides us were concerned too. I'd never heard of creating a petition in community, but it seemed like a good idea. Here's what it said:

"We who have signed below request Angela to remove Cornelius from her advisory team because of his irresponsible behaviors in the community, including breaking our agreements as well as breaking the law. He is increasingly behind in his dues and fees and community labor contributions. He smokes weed in public where other community members, children, and visitors can see him. We want you to replace Cornelius with a more responsible community member who better reflects our shared values. We believe anyone on our president's advisory team must model **responsible** citizenship; keeping our community agreements, not breaking them, and not breaking the law and putting the whole community at legal risk!"

I showed it to our small group and several others and asked whether this wording expressed their thoughts well enough for them to sign it. They said it did. Although I hadn't finished circulating the petition by the time we attended the team's next meeting, rumor of it had already reached them. So in our third meeting we saw they felt obligated to consider our concerns and those of other community members—presumably because they'd heard about the petition. Angela agreed to ask Cornelius to step off the team, and later did replace him with a more responsible young community member.

We'd induced change in our community by asking for it, courteously but persistent-

ly, and asking both verbally and (potentially) in writing. This taught us the power of allies and petitions (or almost-petitions) to induce change in a community.

Years later, another group in my community created a spontaneous alliance and asked that year's president (a different person) and her advisors to please *do something* about Olive, who'd disrupted yet another business meeting. This time our president and her team *did* respond, setting limits and boundaries on Olive's meeting participation—but I'll save that story for next time. (Nowadays most leaders in our community are younger people with great management skills.)

You and your friends could use any of these methods. You could organize a mutual support group like the *Compañeros* to offer empathy to each other and provide supportive physical contact when needed. If other attempts to get cooperation fail, you could create an alliance or draft a petition to ask your group's governing body to set limits and boundaries on people who are hurtful or disruptive in meetings. As individuals you could use the Inner Ninja when needed. And...you could do all of these at the same time.

What do you think?

Coming Up

In future articles we'll look at how alliances of friends can influence community members with especially challenging behaviors in a way they can't easily ignore or dismiss (the Many Raindrops Make a Flood method); how using Dr. Craig Malkin's Connection Contracts can help us effectively set limits and boundaries; how whole communities, as compared to individuals or groups of friends, can protect themselves from the effects of these behaviors—yet how these attempts are often stymied by those who play the Rescuer role in the Drama Triangle. 🐦

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

Especially Challenging 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)

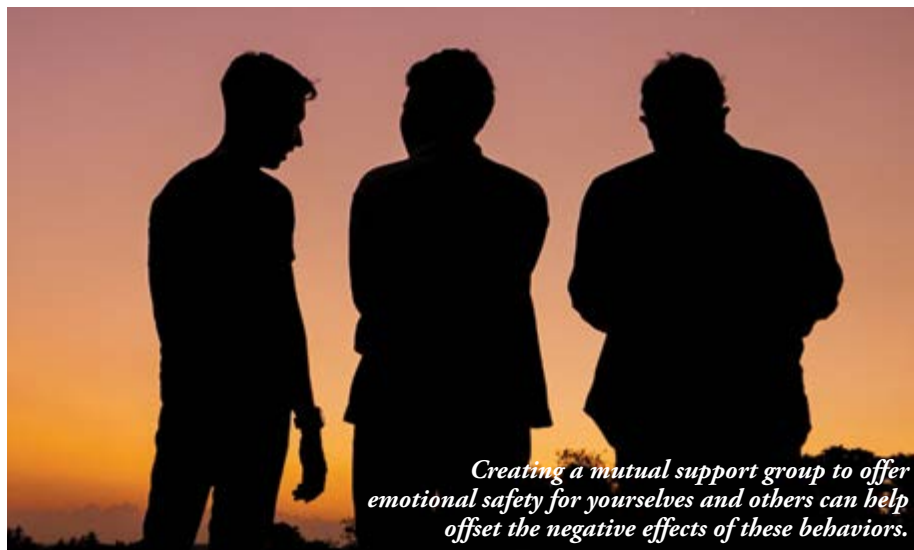
Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Relishing vengeance
Manipulating others; using people
Hypersensitivity to criticism
Projecting their behaviors and attitudes onto others
"Gaslighting" others (telling someone what they directly observed didn't actually happen)
Envy others; resenting others
Limited self-awareness
"Grooming" newer or less confident members to be their allies and support their version of reality

—DLC

Resources: The "Fragile" Version

- Videos by Dr. Ramani Durvasula, Craig Malkin, Ph.D., and Abdul Saad
- "Don't You Know Who I Am?" Ramani S. Durvasula, Ph.D., "the Covert/Vulnerable Narcissist," p. 88, Post Hill Press, New York/Nashville, 2019
- *Who's Pulling Your Strings? How to Break the Cycle of Manipulation and Gain Control of Your Life*, Harriet B. Braiker, Ph.D., McGraw Hill, New York, 2004
- *The Covert, Passive-Aggressive Narcissist*, Debbie Mizra, Place Publishing, Monument, CO, 2017
- *In Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People*, George Simon Jr., Ph.D., Parkhurst Brothers Publishers, Marion, MI, 1996
- *30 Covert Emotional Manipulation Techniques: How Manipulators Take Control in Personal Relationships*, Adelyn Birch, Columbia, SC, 2020

—DLC



Creating a mutual support group to offer emotional safety for yourselves and others can help offset the negative effects of these behaviors.

Meilisa Dwi Nurdiyanti



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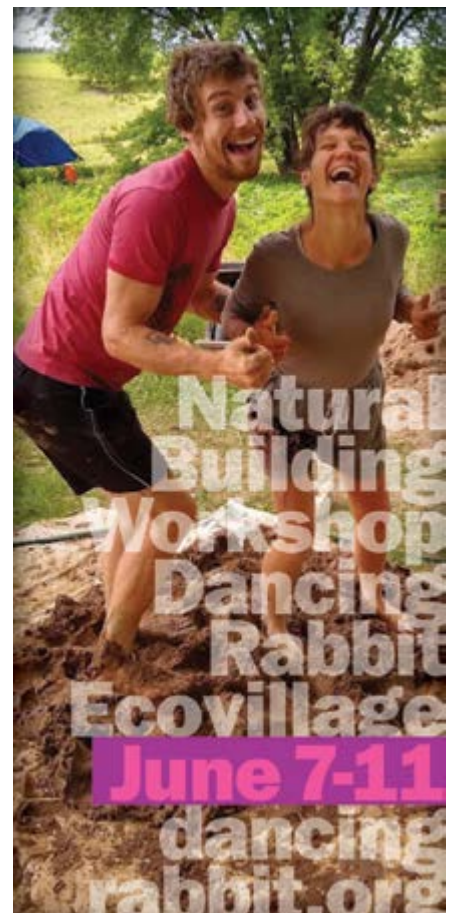
GROUP PROCESS RESOURCES AT WWW.EFFECTIVECOLLECTIVE.NET - Kavana Tree Bressen's site offers free handouts and articles on topics such as consensus, facilitation, communication skills, conflict, and more!

NEW BOOK: TOGETHER WE DECIDE, AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR GOOD GROUP DECISIONS, by Craig Freshley. I'm a professional meeting facilitator and I've lived in a cohousing community for 25 years. Please check out my book. If you are reading this magazine, I wrote it to help you and your group.

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Central Principles of the Quaker Tradition



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Quaker Speak



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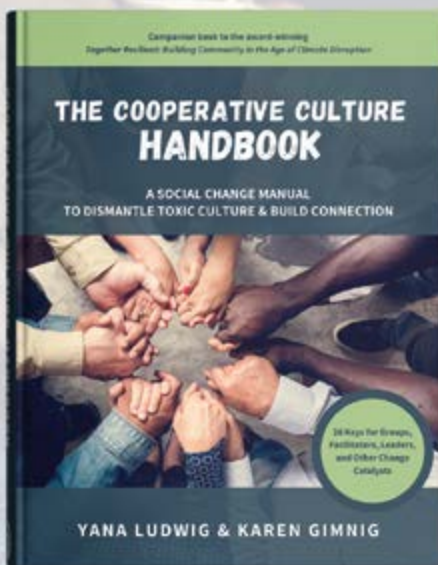
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ARCHIVAL RESEARCH COLLECTION

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

Visit: www.usi.edu/library/university-archives-and-special-collections.
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CENTER PRIZES AND RESEARCH TRAVEL GRANT

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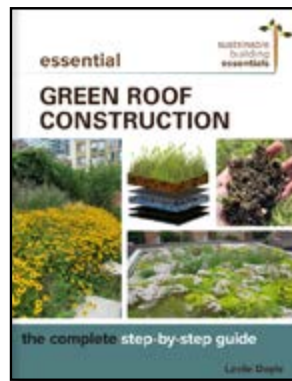
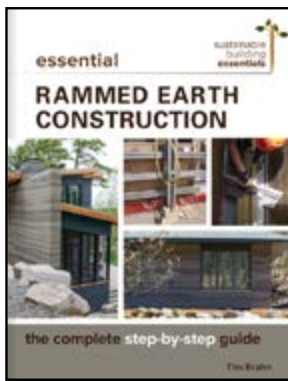
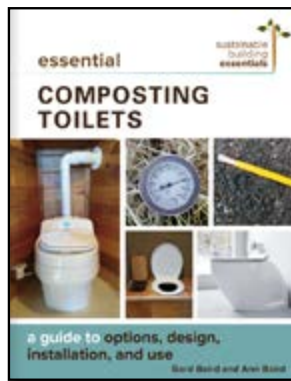
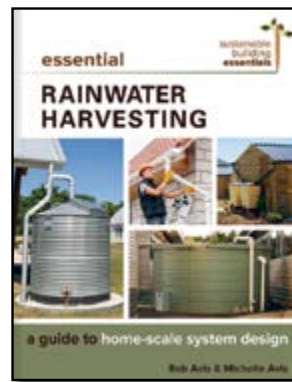
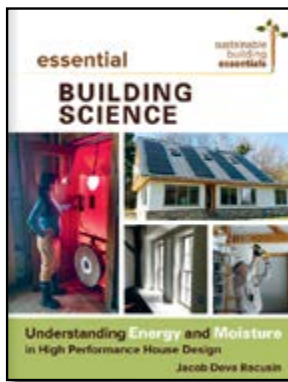
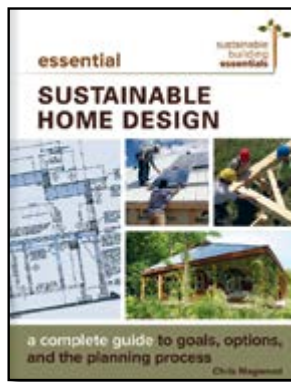
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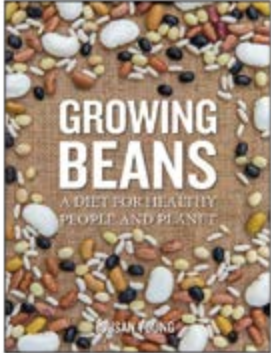
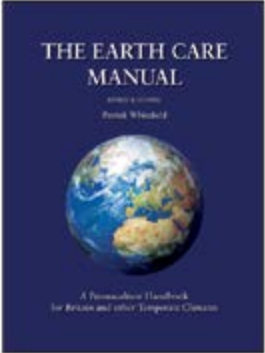
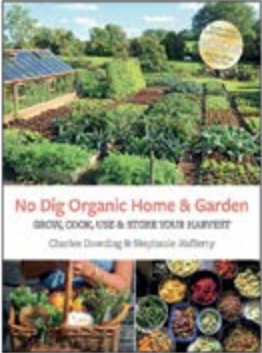
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 #2: Law, Communes, Land Trusts
 #3: Market Development
 #4: Schools
 #5: Personal & Social Change
 #6: Overseas Community
 #7: Directory 1974
 #8: Individuality & Intimacy
 #9: Children
 #10: Work
 #11: Land Reform
 #12: Directory 1975
 #13: Spiritual Life
 #14: Therapy
 #15: Research & Education
 #16: Planning
 #17: Family, Sex, & Marriage
 #18: Directory 1976
 #19: Urban Communities
 #20: Middle Class Communes
 #21: Kibbutzim & More
 #22: Networking in the Ozarks
 #23: Women & Work in the Kibbutz
 #24: Building Community
 #25: Don't Start a Commune in 1977!
 #26: Rebuilding the City
 #28: Seabrook & More
 #29: Democratic Management
 #30: Directory 1978
 #31: Learning
 #32: Future of Community
 #33: Women's Issue
 #34: West Coast Communal Movement
 #35: Consumer Co-op Bank
 #36: Circle of Gold, Kerista, & More
 #37/38: Guide to Cooperative Alternatives
 #39: Federation Women
 #40: Worker-Owned Businesses
 #41: Relationships
 #42: Regionalism
 #43: Health & Well-Being
 #44: Consumer Cooperative Alliance
 #45: Art Collectives
 #46: Directory 1981
 #47: Stories
 #48: Communities Worldwide
 #49: Tempeh Production
 #50: Dying
 #51: Political Paradigms
 #52: Barter Network
 #53: Spiritual Communities
 #54: Peace
 #55: Building Economic Democracy
 #56: Directory 1983
 #57: Women in Business
 #58: Co-op America
 #59: Computers
 #60: Gatherings 1983
 #61: Parenting, Childcare, & Education
 #62: Progressive Economics & Politics
 #63: Living in Community
 #64: Relationships
 #65: Greenham Women's Peace Camp

#66: Directory 1985
 #67: Technology
 #68: Historic Communal Societies
 #69: International Communities
 #70: Traveling
 #71/72: Model Communities
 #73: Federation of Egalitarian Communities
 #74: Urban Middle-Class Communes
 #75: Planetization
 #76: Education
 #77/78: Directory 1990
 #79: We're Back!
 #80/81: Vision & Leadership
 #82: Women, Yesterday & Today
 #83: Celebration of Community
 #84: Growing Up
 #85: Passages
 #86: Nurturing Our Potential
 #87: Love, Romance, & Sex
 #88: Cults
 #89: Growing Older
 #90: Diversity & Homogeneity
 #91: Ecovillages
 #92: Christian Communities
 #93: Celebrating Arts & Creativity
 #94: Making a Living
 #95: Sustainable Building & Design
 #96: Breaking Bread
 #97: 25th Anniversary Issue
 #98: Values, Vision, & Money
 #99: Sustainable Communities
 #100: Political Activism
 #101: The Millennium & Y2K
 #102: Health & Healing
 #103: Walden Two Communities
 #104: Conflict & Connection
 #105: Transition & Change
 #106: Cohousing
 #107: Song, Dance, & Celebration
 #108: Learning
 #109: Decision Making
 #110: Student Co-ops
 #111: Creating Magic Culture
 #112: Multigenerational Community
 #113: Communication & Process
 #114: What Children Learn
 #115: Heart of Sustainability
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 #117: Ecovillages
 #118: Lovers
 #119: Right Livelihood
 #120: Directory Update
 #121: Thriving
 #122: Seeker's Guide
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 #124: Spiritual Community
 #125: Life After Student Co-ops
 #126: The Arts
 #127: Cohousing in 2005
 #128: Resolving Conflict
 #129: Urban Communities & Ecovillages
 #130: Peak Oil & Sustainability
 #131: Good Works
 #132: Elder Years
 #133: Local Economy

#134: Temporary Community
 #135: Food
 #136: Beauty
 #137: Making a Difference
 #138: Women in Community
 #139: Green Building
 #140: Politics
 #141: Scarcity & Abundance
 #142: Festivals & Gatherings
 #143: Ecology
 #144: Hard Times
 #145: Health & Well-Being
 #146: Family
 #147: Education for Sustainability
 #148: Power & Empowerment
 #149: Elders
 #150: Mental Health
 #151: Intimacy
 #152: Right Livelihood
 #153: Permaculture
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 #155: Diversity
 #156: Ecovillages
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 #160: Youth
 #161: Renewable Energy
 #162: Gender Issues
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 #168: The Law
 #169: The Many Faces of Community
 #170: Finding or Starting a Community
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 #172: Service & Activism
 #173: Social Permaculture
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 #176: Learning from the Past
 #177: Urban Communities
 #178: Class, Race, & Privilege
 #179: Eco-Building
 #180: Networking
 #181: Community Culture
 #182: Land
 #183: Sexual Politics
 #184: The Shadow Side of Cooperation
 #185: Passing the Torch
 #186: Picking Up the Pieces
 #187: Climate Justice
 #188: Scaling Up, Scaling Down
 #189: The Age of Coronavirus
 #190: Faith in Community
 #191: Ecological Culture
 #192: Consent
 #193: Children
 #194: Looking Back, Looking Forward
 #195: Place & Planet
 #196: Language of Community
 #197: The Long Haul
 #198: Building from the Ground Up



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