Remembering a Communal Childhood • Firefly Gathering

Communities

Life in Cooperative Culture
Summer 2023 • Issue #199
$10 US / $13 Canada

Freedom and Responsibility

A Tale of Two Communities

The Kids Are Talking: Pay Attention

Reimagining Superman's American Way

Work as Obligation, or Work as Choice?

How Living in Community Gives Me Freedom

cohousing

THE COHOUSING ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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.

ADVOCACY

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

NETWORKING

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

Cohousing.org

WELCOME NEW WORLDWIDE READERS

With this issue, we welcome yet more readers–many of them international, receiving the digital edition. Benefactor support has allowed us to offer several hundred complimentary digital subscriptions to new subscribers; to distribute those, we've partnered with a number of allied organizations around the world to encourage support for those groups as well.

These groups include:
• Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), the ecovillage movement's international hub: ecovillage.org

plus GEN's regional networks and nodes:
• GEN Africa: ecovillage.org/region/gen-africa
• GEN Europe: ecovillage.org/region/gen-europe
• CASA (Council of Sustainable Settlements of Latin America): ecovillage.org/region/casa
• GENOA (Global Ecovillage Network Oceania & Asia): ecovillage.org/region/genoa
• NextGEN (Youth Network): nextgen-ecovillage.org

plus another worldwide network:
• ICSA (International Communal Studies Association): icsacommunity.org

As mentioned in issue #198, we have also worked closely with US-based groups to distribute benefactor-supported print-plus-digital subscriptions to intentional communities in the United States; in particular:
• FIC (Foundation for Intentional Community): ic.org
• CohoUS (Cohousing Association of the United States): cohousing.org

And we've found allies in this work in another related group:
• CSA (Communal Studies Association): communalstudies.org

We hope to draw in not only more readers, but also more contributors, through these networks. If you're a first-time reader of COMMUNITIES, we encourage you to consider writing for the magazine as well (see **gen-us.net/submit** for details). COMMUNITIES fulfills its mission best when many, diverse voices share in its pages.

SEEKING AND FINDING

Every COMMUNITIES subscription includes complete current and back issue access, allowing online viewing and/or download of all issues in pdf form, spanning more than 50 years.

To find a specific article or author, readers can consult the magazine's comprehensive online index compiled by Lyman Tower Sargent (**gen-us.net/communities-index**), which lists author name, article title, issue of publication, and page range for every back issue article.

Two other online search resources have been added since the publication of our Spring 2023 issue:

An index-by-community-name compiled by Timothy Miller (**gen-us.net/index-by-community**) catalogs every intentional community ever described in COMMUNITIES, with the issue and starting page number of each appearance they've made in the magazine.

And a searchable theme list (**gen-us.net/back-issue-themes**) for our nearly 200 issues makes finding specific focused issues easier.

Thanks to all who have contributed to these efforts.

Communal Studies Association: An Invitation

Calling all current communitarians, former communitarians, and future communitarians! We'd like to tell you about an association that might complement your interest in community living, a group of like-minded individuals who come together to share their knowledge of intentional communities, past and present. We are the Communal Studies Association (CSA). We were founded in 1973 through the vision and efforts of Dr. Donald E. Pitzer, an historian, and initially the group's attention was directed mostly at historic intentional communities such as the Shakers, Oneida, Amana, Bishop Hill, and New Harmony, Don Pitzer's own special interest. Inevitably, some communities with a long history but still surviving, such as the Hutterites and the Kibbutzim, pulled the CSA in the direction of studying newer contemporary communities as well, such as Twin Oaks, Dancing Rabbit, and The Farm.

Our membership includes scholars (both with institutional affiliations and independent), interpreters at historic communal sites, people simply interested in these communities, contemporary communitarians, and people who formerly lived in community.

The CSA's hallmark event is an annual conference each fall at or near an historic or current community. During these weekends the CSA forms a temporary community that hosts pre-conference tours to nearby communal sites, presentations (by any of the aforementioned individuals), themed panel presentations, film screenings, an auction, and plenty of informal socializing. These conferences are more than just people giving papers—it is a time for folks from all aspects of the communal movement to come together to share ideas, perspectives, meals, and space for a weekend.

The CSA also publishes a journal, *Communal Societies,* which carries scholarly articles, book reviews, and more. A twice-a-year newsletter provides updates on the conferences, a calendar of events at communal sites, new publications about intentional communities, and more. Our website (communalstudies.org) offers a wealth of information related to the study of intentional communities.

The CSA would like to extend a warm invitation to readers of COMMUNITIES to check us out and consider becoming a member. Special membership rates apply to current communitarians. We also encourage you to consider attending one of our conferences. Our 50th Anniversary conference will be held October 5-7, 2023, at New Harmony, Indiana. **Special support is available to current communitarians to help offset the costs associated with attending the conference (travel, accommodations, and registration).** If you have questions or need more information, contact CSA Executive Director Kathy Fernandez (kathyfernandez@neo.rr.com) or CSA President Tom Guiler (tguiler@oneidacommunity.org) or visit the CSA website at communalstudies.org.

We believe that the lived experience of community and the study of community have tremendous potential for cross-pollination.

—CSA Membership Committee

Issue #199
Summer 2023

COMMUNITIES

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

ON THE COVER

The Firefly Gathering convenes more than 1,000 people every June near Asheville, North Carolina to learn and practice earthskills and experience community (see fireflygathering.org). Here, Emily Bell leads a broom-making workshop. She has written, "What if our most menial tasks become our most potent rituals?" (see gen-us.net/firefly).
Photo by Sarah Tew.

COMMUNITIES
Life in Cooperative Culture

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Notes from the Editor BY CHRIS ROTH

Matching Freedom with Responsibility

The idea for this issue's theme came from the late American Indian Movement activist-become-poet John Trudell. I'd seen him perform poetry set to music before, but this lecture at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, several decades ago, was "words only." Part of his talk reflected on the concepts of Freedom and Responsibility and the contrasting ways European settlers and North America's indigenous peoples approached those, and still do. The essence of what he said has been with me ever since.

In John's view, the white settlers who came to the "New World," and those who followed them and took over this continent, made Freedom their creed, elevating it above all other values. This version of "America" not only condones but encourages and celebrates lack of constraints on individual action. Anything that interferes with an anthropocentric, individualistic focus, anything that seems to threaten our Freedom—such as a sense of reciprocity with other parts of the living world, whether non-human or human, and a concern with the impacts of our own actions within that larger world—is a threat to who we are, our way of life, what defines us as Americans.

The people whose land the settlers moved onto, whose populations were often greatly depleted if not wiped out completely by settler-brought disease, conquest, relocation, and attempts at cultural extinction, had—and have—a very different attitude. The individual is not an entirely independent entity, but an interdependent entity. No action is taken without reference to the family, the tribe, the land. Or if it is, there is immediate pushback and correction. Tribes' traditional stories demonstrate the folly and warn against the consequences of embracing Freedom and myopic individual whim at the expense of one's relationships with other people, other living and spirit beings, one's local place, the wider world. By contrast, the settlers tell stories (still embodied in mass American commercial culture) that imply that the Self is independent, free of larger responsibility as we pursue our individual "destinies" and personal desires (often the accumulation of wealth, power, and status—"reaching the top" in a competitive society). To those existing within this paradigm, Freedom is the ultimate value, rather than a destructive illusion.

The creed of Freedom without Responsibility is a recipe for disaster—an ungrounded approach to living that ultimately disconnects us from everyone and everything around us. It sets our civilization and our species on a collision course with biology, physics, love, compassion, and beauty—in other words, reality.

It turns out, in fact, that the only way that either Freedom or Responsibility can thrive and be enjoyed in the long term is for them to coexist in equal measure. Living in a way that is truly responsible to our fellow creatures, human and non-human, as well as to ourselves, gives us an inner freedom of spirit, as well as freedom from the void left when those relationships are stripped away. We don't do "whatever we [divorced from the rest of the world] want"; instead we experience the freedom of being part of a much larger whole in which we play our unique role. Any Responsibility that attempts to contort our humanity, that is not truly responsive and responsible to the world around us, deprives us of that freedom and is not true Responsibility at all. Both Freedom and Responsibility, if conceived of alone and held up as an ultimate ideal, are in fact prisons, dead ends. Either one has the capacity to destroy the world. A minor example: nuclear arsenals and climate-altering manufacturing plants are built by people "doing their jobs" (being "responsible"), often not feeling "free" personally to make any other choice; ironically, they're collectively acting on the premise that one group of people inherently has the right and "freedom" to make choices that endanger everyone and everything else, since, among other justifications, "the American way of life is nonnegotiable." Neither true Freedom, nor true Responsibility, is involved here.

I've just used many words to say something that John Trudell expressed more eloquently in far fewer words, whose substance (though unfortunately not exact composition) I still recall today, and still resonates for me. I hope I have not misrepresented John's intention, and apologize to his memory if I have. I also encourage everyone to check out his work. He left behind many recordings and writings which are as relevant today as they were when first created.

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All of us who've grown up in American culture or its worldwide counterparts have likely swum in the myth of Freedom divorced from equal parts Responsibility—or, put another way, Independence rather than Interdependence—for as long as we've been conscious. Even those of us who wake up to the irresponsibility of the dominant culture and its ways of life, then rebel against it in order to do something different, still carry that myth with us. And in some ways, it's good that we do, because it allows us more easily to declare ourselves independent of whatever situations we may be in, and pursue other paths.

That's how I ended up, immediately after college, living in a tent on the Hopi Reservation, more than 2000 miles from my home town, surrounded by people I'd never known before, following a calling that, had I been listening too closely to anyone else, I might not have heard clearly. To be fair, remaining in my East Coast suburb with my family of birth after college would have been considered "failure to launch"—this pursuit of our individual paths and dreams was the expected outcome in the society in which I grew up. What wasn't expected was the path that I took—one that brought me into a world of Interdependence rather than imagined Independence.

In this new world (for which I'd been prepared by my final two, very unconventional years of college, a traveling experiential education program), I found myself continuously face-to-face with the elements: both the natural elements in the northern Arizona high desert, and the elements of basic human communication and relationship. I was a caregiver and volunteer with the developmentally disabled, many of whom were not far on one side or the other of the divide between speaking and not being able to speak. My role there required continuous responsiveness to the needs of others, while also putting me into a situation that was clearly of my own choosing and

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

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/lister 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.

constantly eye-opening—spiritually and emotionally rich. I lived outside, walking up and down a beautiful ancient canyon with people who would have needed to spend much more time inside otherwise; and, during my indoor work shifts, helping them with tasks that I'd come to take for granted, having forgotten that even those of us who achieve "independence" in bathing, dressing ourselves, eating, toileting, locomotion, etc., did not always have that independence, nor will we always have it.

All of the disabled I worked with were Hopi, and all my coworkers were either Hopi or Navajo/Dine. They had never left that world of combined Freedom and Responsibility that the society I came from, as described later by John Trudell, had so distorted. Just as their world was new to me, the one I came from was almost incomprehensible to them. In a friendly tone, but clearly puzzled, one of my Hopi coworkers asked a few questions that were no doubt on most of his colleagues' minds:

"Where is your family? Where are your parents and siblings? What do they think of your being 2000 miles away?"

My coworker was not trying to get rid of me, and in fact I felt more appreciated there than I've felt in other situations that were less of a good fit for my nature. He was genuinely curious about a culture in which grown children felt free to pick up and move across the continent, leaving their "responsibilities" to their home place and home people behind. What he, and they, did not fully understand, because thankfully they had never experienced it, was what it is like to grow up in a culture in which our places, and our people, are always "temporary"—where families are uprooted at the drop of a hat because of a corporate reassignment, a career change, or a better real estate investment, where "leaving home" is expected, and what we are often told to aspire to is all about us as individuals "getting ahead," "moving up," "fulfilling our dreams." I too was fulfilling a dream (albeit of a different sort) by leaving that world behind. What I hadn't understood was how foreign the world I came from was to traditional societies, even those that had entered the modern world of pickup trucks and electricity, as most of the Hopi had despite their retention of much of their ancestral culture as well.

Fortunately, I had been able to replace "Responsibility" toward my home community (which would have been impossible to fulfill anyway—my parents didn't need nor expect my physical presence, other relatives lived elsewhere, and most of the people I'd grown up with had also dispersed across the continent or across the world in pursuit of their own paths) with responsibility to my adopted community there.

• • •

That balance of Freedom and Responsibility has not been as easy to maintain in some subsequent situations. However, I've found intentional community to be a perfect laboratory to explore how best to achieve a balance. Responsibility can manifest as roles, both formal and informal, in which I am making helpful contributions to a group or project; its absence in my life can leave me with a feeling of emptiness, even meaninglessness, no matter how much "Freedom" I have. And likewise, a lack of adequate Freedom—often manifested as a lack of adequate agency, an inability to "be myself" or have a voice within a given situation—can leave me feeling oppressed and needing to escape. Achieving that balance for each of us, without allowing one to dominate the other for any of us, seems to be the work of community.

The pages which follow offer many stories exploring how those elements intersect in community. While I won't add yet more stories of my own in that realm, I will note the irony that many communities are inhabited by people who value Freedom highly enough that we take the steps necessary to set our own unconventional course; and that bringing together a bunch of "anti-authoritarian rebels" (to oversimplify, but perhaps barely in many cases) into a cooperative group does not guarantee that we will suddenly start flexing our cooperative muscles and stop rebelling, against each other this time. It takes real dedication to embrace true interdependence—fully-realized Responsibility—after having needed to assert such independence to even wind up in the atypical setting of cooperative society in the first place.

Finding the right balance of Freedom and Responsibility is also essential in the situation in which I spend much of my time now: caring for a nearly 95-year-old parent. While I often wish for more freedom in external details of my life during this stage—ability to spend more time in my home community, for example—I also feel an inner freedom learned over decades of balancing these elements in community.

Both in and out of formal community, I recognize that this kind of freedom emerges from responsibility, and is hollow without it, rather than being the opposite of it.

That inner mental freedom is certainly aided by editing COMMUNITIES and helping disperse its stories into the world. Ironically, technological developments also allow me, even at a great distance from my "home place," to stay involved in the workings of my community there. Varied responsibilities help make my life rich, especially because all of them are ones that, in one form or another, I have embraced as valuable. I am now, finally, doing what my Hopi coworker had in mind—prioritizing family—because it is actually needed now, even if not "expected" (unfortunately, institutionalizing elders is more common in our culture).

And I'm appreciating the enduring truth articulated by John Trudell and others: Freedom and Responsibility are perpetual dance partners, and we sideline either of them only at our peril. Either of them without the other is only a shell of its own self. Opportunities that bring them together—as serious explorations of community living do—are a gift, and have the capacity to transform our lives not just individually but collectively. The well-being of future generations and the rest of the living earth will depend on our choices to embrace—or reject—this unity. I am rooting for the former.

Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES. *Comments, objections, points, and counterpoints are welcome at editor@gen-us.net.*

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue, as well as letters of more general interest. Please send your comments to editor@gen-us.net or COMMUNITIES, c/o 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

How Living in Community Gives Me Freedom

By Rachel Freifelder

"Can you please put ducks in tonight?"

It's a text we send each other so often that my little pocket computer completes the sentence for me when I start to type it. But this time I'm receiving it from my intentional neighbor Anna. I'm pruning the kiwis, so I climb down from the ladder, type "yep!," and go back up.

An hour later, Anna's partner Alex walks over and asks, "Do you need duck food or anything? We're going to stop by Concentrates (the feed store across town) on our way to dinner at Anna's mom's." "Yes, a bag of feed would be great!" I answer. I give him money for the purchase and text my housemates: "Anna and Alex are going to Concentrates, do we need any soil amendments? Let them know."

My housemate Sarah comes out of the kitchen and says, "I'm making dinner tonight so I'm going to the co-op. I saw sunflower oil on the shopping list—do we need anything else?" I can't think of anything; I just did our monthly bulk order through our neighborhood buying club. She hops on her bike and zips off.

I pop into the kitchen for a brownie, baked last night by another housemate. Then I go back up on my ladder. When I'm done pruning, I put the dry prunings in the kindling pile and the green ones in the yard debris bin that our households share.

Over dinner we check in about our days, our joys and challenges. We clean up together; it's social and quick. I tell my housemates that I have a trip out of town planned next week. Between the three of them the ducks are covered for all but two nights, so we confirm that Anna can do those nights.

This kind of synergy is why I've lived in community for most of my adult life, with a few short breaks. I did have my own tiny apartment a few times, but I always thought of it as a break from collective living. And every time, I went back.

When I lived alone, if I needed something from the store, I had to do all the errands. For dinner, I either cooked it myself, called a friend to make plans, or went out to eat for money I couldn't really afford. If I wanted a sweet treat, same deal. I enjoy cooking, and making plans with friends, but it's so nice to have my time freed up for other things and know that someone else is cooking, several nights a week.

There was no way I could have lived alone in a house with a huge garden. Or ordered from a buying club. And livestock? I can't imagine having them without community to share the responsibilities. Ducks have to be closed in every night at dusk to protect them from predators, and unlike chickens, they don't go in automatically—they often need encouragement. So no automatic door closers—someone has to be here at dusk, every night.

Similarly, I don't have to do all the chores. I know that Sarah will clean the bathroom while I clean the kitchen, which, again, gives me more free time. Yes, it means "cleaning up someone else's mess." But even the tidiest folks are going to generate some kind of mess that needs to be cleaned up. And houses collect dust and cobwebs even without human help. In a mature community, some combination of compatibility, communication, and structure will conspire to divide the work equitably and efficiently.

Many people who have never lived in community (and many who have) think that it removes all our autonomy and privacy. I've heard the misconception that community life means constant engagement with others. I've also heard folks who are hoping to

> Many people are longing to escape from lives fully governed by capitalism, yet are fearful of the unfamiliar.

try it out express that to meet their needs for quiet/privacy/autonomy, they need their own full-featured 2000 s.f. house, their own acre, even their own five acres. (And yes, many intentional communities do offer that much individual space to members.) We are in a time (once again) where many people are longing to escape from lives fully governed by capitalism, yet are fearful of the unfamiliar.

Because I believe that community and the communities movement are keys to a better world, I felt moved to gently correct the misconceptions and allay the fears. I also think that to live sustainably, people in the US need to reconsider what size of building, and how much stuff, they truly need to be happy and healthy. Remember "Small is beautiful"? And that's why I'm writing this for you, dear reader.

Every situation and every person is different, of course. Part of living in community is finding a community model that fits your needs.

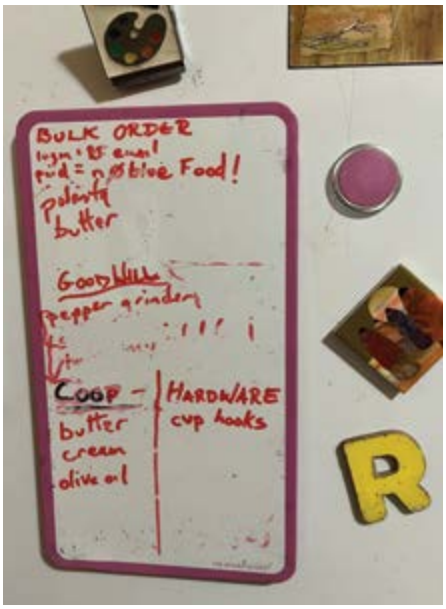
Community Size Builds Resiliency

A common misconception, when I talk with folks who are considering community but have not experienced it, is that the way to have more freedom is to keep the group size small, eight or fewer. My experience is the opposite.

When I've lived in or visited larger intentional communities, 20 people or more, I observe that the members have much more autonomy. Their interaction with their land mates is like mine with my neighbors. A smaller group, like my four-person household, tends to feel more like a family. Even in a co-living space this can be true. In college I lived in a 57-member student co-op in two large houses (more about it below). I had housemates whose names I barely knew, even though we shared a kitchen and dining room. At village-scale rural communities, or larger cohousing communities, people who are very different from each other can coexist, whereas in a four-person household, we need to be much more compatible in terms of diet, cleanliness, sleep schedules, noise, etc. Our four-person household currently has little explicit structure around chores; we simply step up to get them done. But that only works because our standards are very similar, and because we have lots of face-to-face communication.

In grad school I lived at N St., the first cohousing community in the US. Similar to my current life, I lived in a four-person co-living household within the organic cohousing neighborhood. I got to share community meals and community space with 30 people who were very different from me. The supportive environment helped me to survive the stress of grad school, and I was able to draw sharp boundaries around my time once I had completed my community obligations.

I currently live in a four-person co-living household that is part of a seven-house set of intentional neighbors (aka "organic cohousing") called Blueberry. My personal space, about 60 feet from the main house, is a 12x16 cabin which gives me plenty



Photos courtesy of Rachel Freifelder

of privacy and quiet when I need it. Meanwhile, being urban gives us social freedom that comes from our participation in the unintentional community of our neighborhood and of course our city. If we lived rurally, we would be much more dependent on each other.

Economies of Scale

Like most young people, I started living with roommates out of economic necessity when I moved out of my dad's house. Fortunately, I saw the benefits early on. The first place I lived on my own was with a friend from high school in a Society for Creative Anachronism theme house called Drachenheim. My rent was $150/month. We shared most of our groceries, shopping, and dinners. I was the only vegetarian, so we talked about whether to divide up the receipts equally, whether to exclude meat from the shared purchases, or if my consumption of cheese and peanut butter cost just as much as their consumption of chicken. The rest of them had been there for a while, so the house was set up, with kitchen equipment, stereo, record collection, sofa, etc. We shared a newspaper subscription, had parties, went places together.

I went through a few other "regular roommate" situations, though all with shared groceries and meals, until I found my way into the world of student co-ops. I remember being told once, by an FIC elder whom I love and respect, that "Student co-ops aren't intentional communities." I respectfully disagree. Lothlórien had open enrollment, meaning that current residents did not have veto power over new residents. But it absolutely had enormous shared intention. Loth is the vegetarian and environmental activist theme house of the University Students' Cooperative Association in Berkeley, organized by and for UC Berkeley students but without any formal relationship with the university. There I discovered the incredible benefits of shared living on a larger scale. More than just a newspaper subscription, our economies of scale included a hot tub, sauna, dance room, roof deck, basketball court… I paid $300/month for rent, utilities, food, and all other household expenses.

We had an elaborate chore system, administered by the work-shift manager. The kitchen got messy at times, but it was cleaned to commercial kitchen standards four times per day. My formal house chores were five hours per week; the rest of my time was my own. I could walk into the dining room at 6 pm, seven days a week, and find a delicious, abundant, home-cooked dinner, including dessert. I could make myself a snack from our well-stocked kitchen any time I liked. There were five-gallon buckets of fancy nut butters, high-quality bread, gourmet jam, ice cream in the freezer. Because there were so many of us, the "necessary" chores were covered, so some house chores were "unnecessary" things like baking fresh bread or pastries, making brunch, or gardening.

Another important part of my young adulthood was living in a series of punk houses that were part of a national network. We came together around shared values and political commitments, and often engaged together in activism. DIY culture, dumpster diving, cooking Food Not Bombs, and housing the community bike project were some of the activities that served our shared values around reducing both our ecological footprints and our dependency on money and capitalism. Few residents had 40-hour jobs. My rent was $175/month while people down the street were paying $600 for a one-bedroom apartment. We spent virtually nothing on food, between salvaging and gardening. We certainly didn't need to spend anything on entertainment; we made our own fun. Not everyone will agree that a punk house called the Bat Cave is an intentional community, but there was intention, there was community, and there was love.

What does this have to do with freedom? Well, living in community saves money, so we can spend less time working for money and be more free to do other things. Our basic survival costs are lower. And, some of the material benefits of community life are things we think of as "unnecessary" or luxuries, but we still want them. If we don't create them for ourselves, we often spend money on them. Most importantly, the joy, fulfillment, and fun that we gain from living in community reduce our need for purchased luxuries. And even though capitalism wants us to believe that selling our time and labor for money is the key to freedom, it's not necessarily so.

Economic Freedom

When we hear the phrase "economic freedom" or "financial independence," it usually means "lots of money." If you were raised in the US, you're probably familiar with the assumption that every adult should be engaged in income labor a minimum of 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year. It's framed as being the key to personal fulfillment for some, necessary for survival for all. Add to that the travel time to and from work, time devoted to household chores, cooking, grocery shopping, the bare minimum of health maintenance, and many people have no free time at all. If they love their paid job, they at least have some personal fulfillment; if they don't love it, they don't. Since the job time is non-negotiable, they may get some free time by sleeping less or never eating a home-cooked meal. I make money by gardening for other people. Some of them do love their paid work, but nearly all of them tell me they wish they had more time to be in their garden. One of my housemates is in the delivery business—he delivers documents and lunches to people who are so busy with their work that they can't leave the office for a lunch break. Is this the freedom that is preferable to community obligation?

In other countries, regular, non-countercultural people spend far less time at work than residents of the US. In some countries, long lunch breaks (two to three hours!) and long summer vacations are mandated by law.

In the US labor movements of the 1920s and 1930s, people fought for the 40-hour work week. And, this 40-hour week was not to be expected of every adult, for the sole survival of that single person. The intention was that the "head of household" would work that much, and that their wages would support a *second* adult as homemaker, *plus their children*, often five or six of them. A friend of mine makes the case that if we add gender equality to this equation, every adult should be able to survive *and support at least two children* while working for wages 20 hours per week.

Yet the mainstream ideal of paid work as defining adult identity disparages people who choose to spend less than 40 hours per week engaged in income labor. Even if they spend their unpaid time caring for loved ones, volunteering in their community, growing food to share with others, or working to build a better world, they're viewed as less adult. That preference for income labor especially challenges the masculinity of fathers who prioritize parenting over money-earning.

I have visited a few of the true communes of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, though I've never lived in one. In these communities, income is shared and all basic needs are covered by the common treasury, including food, medical care, and a small personal stipend. Other things vary from community to community; large ones like Twin Oaks have sent members to college and medical school. Some commune members choose to spend their lives on the land and never handle money at all. From the outside, it may look like members of these communities have very little autonomy. But they actually have a great deal. Members have a diversity of work-shifts, and much flexibility in roles and hours. The typical work week of community obligations is 30-40 hours and as much as 46 in some. But that includes cooking, house cleaning, shopping, and all the other things that a person in the "straight" world does on their "days off." So when an FEC resident has their "day off," it's really a day off.

But back to survival: in many places in the US, a person who lives alone, without any of the benefits of community, may struggle to survive even doing 40 hours per week of paid work, especially if they are also supporting a child. They may spend all their time either working at their minimum-wage job, navigating the challenges of our social services system, or both. The myth of American individualism tells them to rely on hard work and to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." So it's no wonder, in these times of crisis, that economic necessity is bringing people back to community.

So Many Ways to Try It Out

The larger, village-scale communities are the ones most able to absorb new members who have little experience with community living, giving a different kind of freedom. Some that are not income-sharing offer a diversity of ways to participate, with work-exchange programs and a range of styles and costs of housing. At Twin Oaks (income-sharing), Dancing Rabbit and Lost Valley (not income-sharing), a person can arrive with nothing but willing hands, and plug into a work opportunity. At DR and LVEC they can also arrive with a telecommuting job and rent a space for money. (This of course presumes making arrangements before arriving! Don't just show up.)

Many communities, especially the larger ones, have visitor programs that allow someone to try out community living on a break from their regular job. These typically range from a few days to a few weeks. Most also offer short tours for people who are in the area, and some also offer vacation rentals for people who want to visit without any work obligations. Visiting is the best way to overcome misconceptions and get an idea of whether a particular community is right for you. And of course the Directory (ic.org/directory) is a great way to get an overview of what's out there.

Building a Network...a Larger Vision

Our communities don't exist in isolation. (I'm mad at George Bush for co-opting the "thousand points of light" metaphor, because I liked it.) When I lived in a student co-op, we sent representatives to the annual meeting of NASCO (North American Students of Cooperation). One of my housemates at Loth arrived by bicycle from...Lothlórien, a student co-op in Madison, Wisconsin. When I was a young, ambitious cofounder of a large project that we called a "sustainable town," I learned of the FIC and the Directory of Intentional Communities, and we found that we were part of a movement.

In the punk scene, my friends would move from punk houses in Oakland to punk houses in Minneapolis, and traveling kids would wander from the freight yard in the middle of the night to crash on our floor. We went to a demonstration in Philadelphia and stayed at the Philly squats for a week, and kids from all over stayed at our house when Critical Resistance was in Berkeley.

In the FEC and related communes, many members move fluidly from one commune to another. There's an understanding that slight differences in group culture are good, because they allow each person to find their right fit. Now that's freedom!

Some people spend years or their lifetime traveling, whether by choice or because they can't find their right place. The existence of a network makes this possible, especially when a community has a need for extra hands. A dream I've heard expressed is for a network that could support people whose needs are too great for any one community. For example, most communities are unable to take on a person with serious mental health challenges. But in this vision, they would spend a week here, a week there, so that no group would be overburdened.

Blueberry has at times offered space to folks experiencing homelessness, with the understanding that we don't have the resources to house them beyond a short time. It is always difficult to send them on. Last winter, two of our households attempted to shelter and assist an unhoused couple who stated a desire to return to one of their family's homes. We committed to buy them bus tickets, and collected warm clothes, food, and other necessities for them. Sadly, while they were staying with us, they had a mental health crisis and disappeared, leaving a big mess and taking with them some expensive items including my housemate's car. The impact of this was great, but the learning was important. None of us are wealthy, but being in community gave us the resilience to be able to attempt this act of kindness, and also allowed us to recover when it went sideways. We believe that a stronger community network would make this work more possible. And we now place an ever higher value on community networks like Camphill and the Catholic Workers, whose missions are to serve those in great need of extra support.

The Freedom of Interdependence

At Blueberry, we have no illusions that we live free of capitalism. We have electricity and cell phones and eat every day from food that arrived in a truck. Most rural communities are still very dependent on these things as well. (There are no doubt ones that aren't, but we haven't heard of them, because they don't advertise!) Independence is itself an illusion. My ideal world would be one of interdependence of all living things, without dependence on the world of money. What we're pretty sure of is that by relying on each other, we have less need to rely on money and petroleum. And for us, that's freedom.

Sarah just rang the dinner bell, and I'm hungry. Thanks for listening.

Rachel Freifelder was a founder of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage (dancingrabbit.org) and now lives at Blueberry (ic.org/directory/blueberry), an urban community on the unceded lands of the Multnomah, Chinook, Kalapuya, and many other peoples, commonly known as Portland, Oregon. Some of the names of people mentioned in this article have been changed to protect their privacy.

A Tale of Two Communities: Contrasting Freedoms and Responsibilities

By Dena Smith Ellis

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

And so was the dichotomy of my experience of living in two very different communities—one by choice, the other by circumstance—on the same flank of one of the most active volcanoes in the world.

In January 2010, I gave birth to twins at home in a snowy suburb in western Pennsylvania. However, this final addition to our family felt like more like triplets as my husband and I were also birthing a new raw-vegan intentional community called Moana Ula in the Puna district of the Big Island of Hawaii. The gestation of the vision and formation of the community paralleled my pregnancy; however, due to the uncertainty that surrounds multiples, we were not able to move to Hawaii until two months after the babies were born.

Trading in our snow shovels for machetes, we sold many of our belongings, put the rest in storage, and headed to the steamy jungles of Puna. Having only visited the land briefly once before in January of 2008, I didn't fully realise the profound contrast that this move would have on our lives—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—but I learned very quickly.

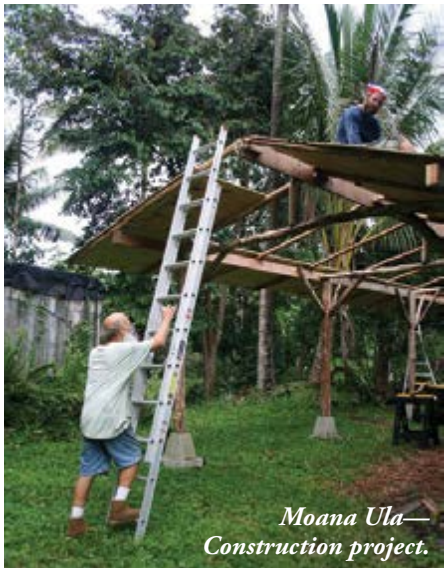
Weather aside, there was the fact that most of our living was done outdoors rather than indoors. And whilst this did have many pleasures and benefits, it also came with a lot of concern and challenges, especially in regards to raising young children. In my living room back in Pennsylvania, I never had concerns such as coconuts falling on my kids or whether something they put into their mouths

Moana Ula—Jungle Mama—Dena with twins.

Moana Ula—Neverending laundry for twins.

Photos courtesy of Dena Smith Ellis

Moana Ula—Chore time.



Moana Ula—Construction project.

Bailey.

Liberty.

Moana Ula—Community Thanksgiving, 2010.

might infect them with a deadly parasitic disease such as angiostrongyliasis (also known as "Rat Lung Worm"). There were also little fire ants, coqui frogs, cane spiders, centipedes, bee swarms, mosquitos, termites, giant cockroaches, rats, mongooses, and wild pigs to fend off and protect them from.

This took parenting to a whole new level.

As a mother of six by then—as well as bonus mom to another—"freedom" wasn't something that I experienced very often; rather, I was much more familiar with "responsibilities." Starting with the fact that I was breastfeeding and cloth-diapering (as well as using elimination communication) for not just one baby, but two—as well as homeschooling my five- and seven-year-old daughters—it didn't leave much down time for me, other than a rare quick shower. I had embraced the vision and adage of a "village raising a child" and therefore hoped that our new ecovillage would collaborate on childrearing. Thanks to the love and dedication of another family in our membership, I did get some much-needed help for awhile.

Fortunately, the previous community on the land (formerly known as "Pangaia") had many years of experience and wisdom that we inherited and benefitted from in the form of physical and social structures. In terms of responsibilities, we initially followed their system of daily and weekly "dances" (work parties) in the communal spaces and on the land, banking on the premise that "many hands make light work." This way, instead of one person working alone for eight hours, we could have eight people working together for one hour to get the chores done and then ostensibly everyone would have more time for personal freedom.

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This nirvana lasted for a few months in the honeymoon phase of our new community. We ate, drank, worked, laughed, danced, and played together. For those

first few months, it was relatively blissful as those joyous moments made all the challenges worth it. I really felt that we were living the dream and that our children would learn a new normal of simple living that the busyness of mainstream, mainland life had apparently lost.

However, the reality is that this system of cooperation heavily relies on honesty, integrity, and motivation and there were people on the land who couldn't uphold these expectations and agreements over time. That, of course, put more pressure on a smaller group of people, myself included. This in turn led to anger, frustration, and resentment on the part of those who were picking up the slack of others.

Despite our daily morning briefings and weekly deeper dives, personality conflicts and communication breakdowns started to arise. Dysfunctional behaviour patterns and family dynamics that weren't apparent during the new member vetting and orientation processes started to show through the zealous facades. Blame, shame, guilt, fear, projection, gaslighting, and passive-aggressive defensive tactics began to emerge. This caused many people to retreat, self-protect, and go into survival mode.

Those of us amongst the group seeking healing, reconciliation, and peace sought out and brought in local resources such as mediation, nonviolent communication (NVC) training, holistic peer counselling, and Hawaii's own famous modality of making things right: ho'oponopono. This helped those who were ready to do their inner work; unfortunately, the members that needed it the most often refused to participate in the offerings. This resulted in a ever-growing chasm between us, including between my husband and me.

The mounting stress, as well as my voracious appetite due to the fact that I was eating for three, ignited a hidden eating disorder in which I would sneak comfort foods in order to nourish and soothe myself. As driving to the closest town 30 minutes away to run errands with the twins during their nap time was one of the few contributions that I could offer the community, I would often take advantage of the opportunity to stop by the local health food store or farmers' market to get cooked food (remember ours was a raw vegan community so cooked food was considered contraband!). But rather than devouring sweets as one might imagine, my body was deeply craving natural foods such as brown rice, tofu, and broccoli. It's hard to imagine these foods as being illicit!

Although raw foods were something that I enjoyed and were a predominant part of my plant-based diet, I generally felt better when I had at least one cooked meal a day. Dietary restrictions were a huge point of contention in my marriage, especially considering that I was childbearing and I didn't feel that my physical and emotional needs were honoured. I eventually smuggled in an electric kettle that I would secretly use in the middle of the night to boil water for herbal tea and plain oatmeal packets (the aroma of the flavoured ones would likely attract attention so I had to avoid them).

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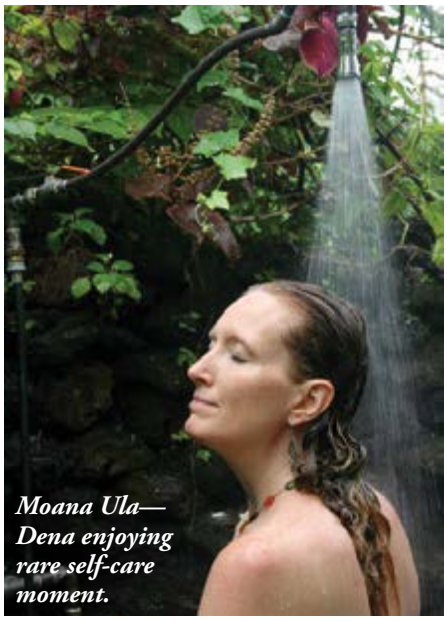
Everything came to a head for me in the month leading up to my 40th birthday in February 2011. It started with an episode of adrenal exhaustion as my nervous system was collapsing under the heavy load being placed on it. This led to an outbreak of shingles on the right side of my neck which—as if that weren't painful enough—led to all four of my youngest children contracting chickenpox at the same time. Then, to top it off, I got mastitis which made breastfeeding incredibly painful. My body and soul were crying out for help as our community—and my marriage—was in crisis.

The final straw for me was walking into the communal kitchen one morning to find an order slip for a tempeh reuben sandwich from the health food shop that had my name on the top that someone had evidently found in my belongings and left on display as an apparent public shaming attempt. I immediately knew who the person was who did it and also knew in that moment that I could no longer be in a commu-

Moana Ula—Play time, November 2010.



Moana Ula—Dena enjoying rare self-care moment.

nity—or a marriage—where I didn't feel safe or supported.

It took me several months to formulate an escape plan but, with the help and generosity of my local Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship that I was a member of, I was able to leave the community—and my marriage—and find a temporary safe haven with my children while I contemplated my next move.

A few weeks later, while I was at a local performance arts centre (SPACE—the Seaview Performing Arts Centre for Education) where my girls were attending a summer circus day camp, a fellow parent shared a rumour that there was a house for rent in the adjoining artistic ecovillage called the Village Green Society (VGS)—affectionately known to all as "Bellyacres." The news excited and intrigued me as I could envision my girls participating in weekly circus classes and giving us another chance for communal living.

I had met the founder of Bellacres—Graham Ellis—the year prior at a neighbourhood event next door to Moana Ula. He was well-known in the area for being the founding father of many other civic organisations, including the Hawaii Sustainable Community Alliance (HSCA), Hawaii's Volcano Circus (the organisation that manages SPACE), and the Hawaii Island Community Circus Unity Project (HICCUP Circus). After class that day, I inquired about the rental from Graham, who then gave me and the kids a tour of the community and offered us the house. It took a few more weeks for me to arrange funding but once everything was in place, we moved into our new home.

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Life at "the Belly" (as we fondly called it) was quite different from Moana Ula in a lot of ways. To start, the commonality amongst its members was based on most of them having a tie to the international juggling festivals that had been held in the area for over 15 years, starting back in the '80s, or due to being a performer of some kind. Other than that, they were about as diverse a group as one could imagine! By contrast, at Moana Ula, there was more of an amalgamated hive-mind that idealised a primal raw-vegan lifestyle which resulted in a fundamentalist dogma and felt suffocating at times. The colourful characters and liberal expressions of life at the Belly were a refreshing welcome.

Another difference was that there were more large dwellings at Bellyacres than at Moana Ula. Both had what we called "jungalows" (jungle bungalows which were simple single-wall cabins with screens instead of windows, common in rural Hawaii) but there were also five houses on the land. While both ecovillages had communal kitchens, Moana Ula only had one large kitchen; whereas, at Bellyacres, people living in houses (including the house I was renting) also had their own kitchen. This definitely changed mealtime dynamics. At Moana Ula, every night people ate in the kitchen together but at Bellyacres, there was only one optional—but heavily encouraged—communal potluck on Sunday evenings.

This also changed how members, residents, guests, interns, and work-traders at Bellyacres interacted and worked together. People staying in the jungalows saw each other much more frequently as they shared the kitchen, bathrooms, showers, and laundry areas; whereas those living in the houses didn't frequent those areas as much. To offset this, and to create more community connection and cohesion, there was a Thursday evening campfire meeting which everyone on the land was urged to attend, and most did for the first two years that I lived there.

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As a non-member resident at Bellyacres, I was always acutely aware that I did not have the same rights and privileges as a member. Unlike at Moana Ula where I was a cofounder, at the Belly I was at the mercy of the members and their decisions made at private members' meetings. This caste system created an undercurrent of anxiety for any

Bellyacres—Building project.

Bellyacres—Memorial at SPACE, 2011.

Bellyacres—
Graham with kids and horses.

Bellyacres—
Dena with all six kids,
Mother's Day 2013.

Bellyacres—
The Gypsy Wagon.

non-member residents as we knew that at any time a member could decide that they didn't like someone for any reason and the members had the right and the power to tell them to leave. And while this threat never consciously motivated my decision to participate and be helpful in the community, my primal mama bear archetype may have been subconsciously guiding me as I was navigating in survival mode quite a lot in that era.

When giving me a tour of my house before I moved in, Graham pointed out an airhorn in the kitchen and explained that it was there in the event of an emergency since I didn't have landline telephone service or cellular reception there. He also casually warned me not to expect any help or assistance with my kids from any other members as he explained that most didn't have any kids and many had expressed an aversion to them. I had found this odd and surprising since this land hosted the most popular children's circus in the Pacific. However, I brushed the warning aside as there were very few members on the land at that time; rather, there were mainly non-member residents like me, several with kids. I also felt that I didn't need help with parenting at that point but I was hoping for the support of the community around ME so I could have the strength to parent solo.

Something that I didn't anticipate was all four of my younger children coming down with whooping cough just as we moved into the house. Not only did this prove to be a huge challenge as a newly single mother, but it was also very isolating as we needed to quarantine ourselves for nearly two months due to the highly-contagious nature of pertussis. A very poignant memory for me of that time was sitting on the floor of the kitchen at 2:00 am with the twins on my lap and my girls sitting next to me—all four of them coughing—and all five of us crying. As I looked up at the airhorn sitting on the shelf, I wondered what the reaction would be if I used it. Would anyone come to help? And if they did, what could they actually do? As difficult as it was, I survived that night and that initiation.

Something else about the house that Graham mentioned was that we would need to move out each year for the month of February while the owners came to participate in the membership's annual general meeting. Initially, this didn't seem like it would be a big deal as we didn't have much stuff; however, the reality was actually a huge challenge as a three-bedroom house with six kids can accumulate a lot in six months, at which point we had to move ALL of our belongings out except the furniture. Thankfully, we were able to stay at a nearby neighbour's house so we didn't have to move very far away. But the move was very disruptive to the lives of my young children, who were already struggling to feel grounded after leaving Moana Ula and witnessing their parents also going through a contentious divorce process.

By the time the second February rolled around, the relationship between Graham and me had deepened from friends to lovers to partners so the kids and I moved into the lower level of his house for the month. Thankfully, the owners of my rental house agreed to let me leave some of my belongings there that time—such as my book collection—which was a huge relief! Later that year, Graham invited us to permanently move in with him so thankfully we ended that exhausting annual routine!

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Graham led the intern and work-trader programs at Bellyacres so there was always a steady flow of workers on the land while I lived there, which helped to make up for either absentee members or those residents who opted not to participate on the land or at SPACE, which was on Bellyacres property and was the home of the

community youth circus, a weekly farmers' market, and a public charter school. The underBelly (pun intended) of this program was that it added another level to the social hierarchy and some members exploited their privileged status over the interns. However, on the whole, the interns and work-traders were the engine that made the Belly run smoothly and they brought a lot of light and warmth into the community. They were always quite eager to lend me a hand when needed.

Despite the fact that I already had a very full plate as a single mom of six kids and caregiver for my disabled father, I joyfully participated in communal responsibilities as much as I could by attending nearly every potluck and campfire meeting, as well as helping to care for the community's two horses and working on the land when possible. I was also granted the role of "Laundry Mama" as I was already spending a great deal of time at the communal laundry area for my own family so doing other people's laundry wasn't too much more of a stretch for me.

In addition, I helped organise a club for the kids on the land that we called the "Belly Beans," which met in a treehouse that Graham built for them, and I helped with their fundraising table at the weekly SPACE farmers' market. He and I also formed a homeschooling cooperative together where we alternated leadership and location in order to give each other time for work responsibilities. I joined the board of the HSCA as secretary to help advocate for the unique needs of intentional communities on Hawaii Island and throughout the state and I also frequently helped with the circus at SPACE while my girls were there.

For pay, I worked remotely part-time from home as a health and wellness coaching mentor and also administratively at SPACE through a work placement program. I eventually took on the roles of interim executive director and farmers' market manager at SPACE, which was quite challenging as their application for a special use permit was being opposed by a few neighbors and malicious individuals.

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The first two years of living at the Belly were challenging in many ways but oveall it seemed like a happier place than Moana Ula. This was likely due to the fact that my kids were much more engaged in fun activities and playing with other kids their age. It was more like the childhood that I had envisioned for them.

However, in 2014, the community began to crack and slowly implode. As challenges and stresses accrued at SPACE and Bellyacres, people panicked and pointed fingers, mostly at Graham, as he was the founder and public face of the organisation. He was the longest-term resident member on the land and therefore the default leader. Many years before, he had earned the nickname, "Bulldozer," partially because he was able to push his way through seemingly any challenge and get things done, but also partially because some people felt flattened in the process. The strength of his passion and charisma that led to the genesis of so many brilliant and dynamic projects over the years also became his kryptonite when he tried to hand over responsibilities to fellow members when they started to complain about his leadership style. These embers of factionalism eventually ignited into a full-blown inferno of founder's syndrome.

Looking back, I now realise that I had stepped out of the pan and into the fire. The community and people had changed but the human dynamics were the same.

The foreboding situation was similar to the latter days at Moana Ula but I could sense that there was a much bigger storm brewing this time and I found myself with Graham at the centre of it as his significant other. The villian-victim-rescuer drama triangulation patterns were forming and my sensitive nervous system was hyper-vigilant. As much as I tried to stand as an individual by his side, the lightning that struck Graham inevitably hit me as well due to my proximity to him. The "tsunami" of emotion from that metaphorical storm began to hit our family in early 2014 but, to this day, we are still reeling from the "storm surge" that followed as Graham and I decided to leave community life later that year and instead focus on building our life together as a family in a different area of the island.

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Despite our having a healthy diet and lifestyle, chronic stress was taking its toll on our bodies and it wasn't until several years later while studying trauma that I learned how "the body keeps the score," as described by Bessel van der Kolk in his book of that title. It's no wonder that Graham was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in April 2016 and I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma the following year. Self-care, mindfulness, and meditation became major priorities for both of us, especially as we continued to dodge more life obstacles in the years to come.

One of the greatest challenges has been how to gracefully and consciously untangle ourselves from the ties of the community, even many years after leaving it. Divorcing an intentional community feels 10 times harder than divorcing a person.

Despite all of the pain and anguish, we've found many beautiful blessings and nuggets of wisdom hidden in the rubble of the storm's aftermath. We've learned how to grieve, process, forgive, heal, regenerate, discern, establish boundaries, and find gratitude for all the ways that these experiences have shaped us.

For a time, living in community was heaven...and it was hell.

It felt like the best of times...and like the worst of times.

Similes and dichotomies.

Pain and pleasure.

The continuum of the human experience.

Rather than focus on the polarities, I'm learning to embrace the whole spectrum.

Dena Smith Ellis now lives in a single-family home in a quaint cinque port village on the southeastern coast of England with her husband, Graham Ellis, along with two cats and various members of their own familial tribe of seven who ebb and flow throughout the year like the lunar tides. When she is not mentoring health-and-wellness coaching students or guiding her own private clients, she can be found spending time in nature or playing games with her family, volunteering in the community, or working on her first book. She can be reached at denasmithellis@gmail.com.

The Firefly Gathering: Learning to Live Well with the Earth and One Another

By Marissa Percoco

Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.—bell hooks

Since childhood, I have been labeled as the "black sheep" in my family, having felt the pull to reach beyond the limits of "normal" from a very early age. As an only child, I remember having a little folding table in my room with a tablecloth that hung low, so it was my private hideout. I would sit under there for hours, pretending that I had a whole host of people around me. I even drew them on the two walls of the corner that the table was pushed into, so that when we moved, there was a mural of groups of people growing food, playing together, and sitting in circles; I like to think that four-year-old me was envisioning the community that 46-year-old me now inhabits.

I spent my college years exploring various community houses in northern Arizona and San Francisco. Then, in my mid 20s, I fell in love. Fighting the yearnings of my young heart, I got married, had a baby, and did my best to "settle down." This worked for a time, but even during my married life, my best friends bought the house next door, we planted a communal garden, had chickens and goats, and had a few more kids together; all in suburban Tennessee.

Finally, my soul could take it no more, and I cracked. I left my husband and walked away from a good investment as the housing bubble collapsed in 2008. My friends and I approached a local community that had a large land holding and proposed that they let us live on their north 40 for a year while we considered if we wanted to purchase the parcel. And so my goats, chickens, dogs, cats, and four kids under 10 moved to the country—without the husband. Thus began my adventures as a single mom in community.

I learned so much those first few years, and it was a very difficult time for me and my children, but also a very beautiful period of exploration and self-discovery as the 10 years of trying to fit into a lifestyle that didn't suit me fell away, and I rediscovered joy and connection to the natural world extending beyond a rural backyard farmstead.

However, this many-hundred-acre farmstead in rural Tennessee was not my long-term home, and so in the winter of 2010, I set off with a group of other outliers with kids on an epic hot springs tour that had us spend the winter winding through Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, and California, living in the wilderness along wild hot springs, and exploring various forms of community along the way. We landed in Oregon, where another strange community adventure began, this time all in a village of canvas tipis. One thing led to another, and my kids and I continued our explorations of community all around the west. We even spent a year on a farm in Hawaii involved with a circus-based com-

Basket making.

Parker Michels-Boyce

Sarah Tew

Class beneath canopy.

Sarah Tew

Staff at fundraiser gala.

munity, where I fell in love with the culture and the land; but ultimately the message from Pele, the goddess of volcanoes and fire, was that if I loved the Hawaiian people, the best thing that I could do was to go home and leave them their land.

Sitting on the warm beach, I realized then that in all my travels, I had not come across a group that I felt more resonance with than I do the earthskills community. So it was back to the southeast again, where I have finally planted roots in the Appalachian mountains of western North Carolina. My connection to this area began to deepen through my work as a leader and organizer in the earthskills movement. In this community-based effort, balancing the tension between freedom and responsibility rests at the heart of our progress.

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I now hold the role of Executive Director of The Firefly Gathering, a local nonprofit organization working to reconnect people to nature and build resilient communities through skill-sharing in workshops and gatherings as a sustainable path forward for our species. In this work, it is essential that we run our organization in a way that reflects the kind of empowerment and resilience we hope to inspire, both at the individual and community level. This can be tricky because our community and our livelihood are so interwoven. Toppling the hierarchical structure of leadership to run our business like the community that it is, while still existing within a corporate (albeit nonprofit) model, is an ongoing exploration for us.

Within the structure of Firefly, much like the natural patterns present in a permaculture map, this plays out in concentric circles. Each team member works autonomously as the authority in their department, receiving and offering support from other circles and seasoned staff members, and being clear in agreements of what falls within or outside their realm. We strive to make our work needs move around each other's personal lives, as we all work part time and live in different life configurations. This maximizes our autonomy and freedom, while still providing the security of steady work and cohesiveness as a community.

To avoid burnout and the sense of feeling isolated that can sometimes come with this flexible structure, we have monthly staff meetings, where we begin with personal check-ins and share gratitude, as well as what is happening in our private non-work lives. We share successes, and also what is hard for us. Often, our monthly staff meetings end with people in tears of relief for the deep connection we were able to share even on a Google Meet over the interwebs. Recently at the end of a staff meeting, one staff member said that she feels more included and at ease in our presence than she feels anywhere else. Because our dominant culture is so focused on productivity and output, this kind of working environment is unique. As the Director, I insist that my staff is addressing rest and self-care, knowing that folks really show up for the work when they have nourished themselves first. I cannot count how many times staff members have reflected that sometimes these moments are the most connective parts of their lives, and how rare it is to have a job that pays people to sit and share in this kind of way. But to me, this is what it means to run a relational business; we relate to each other and connect.

With our year-round staff of 15, an active Board of Directors of nine, a seasonal staff for the Annual Gathering of approximately 20 additional folks, plus advisory councils of Elders and our Equity Committee, decision-making can be complex! Inevitable frustrations arise, related to scheduling conflicts, style differences, different approaches and opinions. To navigate this, we work from a baseline of kind, compassionate communication, inspired by NVC. We work to take focus away from shame and blame when conflict arises, and try to name specifically what isn't working and offer solutions for moving

forward. We do not get everyone involved for every detail, but try to have the people who will be impacted by the decision present. We are also exploring the sociocratic method, utilizing rounds to reach consensus when that feels important. The few times tensions do run high, it is fairly easy to take a pause and come back to center, because we have made agreements to respect each other from the beginning.

From this internal foundation that we've co-created together, we move into the heart of our work, which is to expand the capacity of our communities to live well with one another and our beloved Earth. At the center of all our efforts is the Annual Firefly Gathering, June 20-25, 2023 at Deerfields, a 940-acre conservation and event site about 20 miles south of Asheville, North Carolina. With over 1,000 people converging from around the world over the span of five days, we create a microcosm of community centered around ways to co-create a sustainable future. In addition, our year-round workshops seek to offer the cyclical sharing of these skills to a wider community. Everything we do is steeped in community building, collaboration, and connection. As we intentionally gather people together, our organization explores how to nurture equitable and resilient communities on a larger scale.

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Each microcosm within the greater earthskills community has its own sticking points, or things that it absolutely will not tolerate. Each bubble is a little different. We might all agree on the need to move away from a tech-dependent reality, to live more simply with the land, and to connect with the natural world. But not everyone agrees on the importance of Equity work, appropriation awareness, and inclusion. That's why we have many communities within communities; concentric circles with many overlaps.

As we bring a multitude of diverse people together, clashing political perspectives have been a source of contention in our community, as they have been everywhere of late. While Firefly is prepared to lean into the sticky topics of appropriation, land acknowledgments, landback initiatives, equity work, and fighting classist oppression in general, not everyone in the earthskills community is on board with this agenda; and if they are, we don't always agree on the best ways to proceed. This often results in fractured communities, which is the goal of divisive government, let's not forget.

In light of this, Firefly is always looking to serve as a bridge between communities, to find our way forward together. However, when it comes to issues like racism, acknowledgment of this country's history, and seeking ways to respond effectively to the long effects of colonization, we hold a strong line. This results in hours of hard conversations, and sometimes we are left to grieve the folks in our community who walk away because they aren't open to building these bridges. That's ok; it's part of the dance between freedom and responsibility: people have the freedom to leave, and we have the responsibility to carry on. We stay compassionate, but committed to a world where all beings are seen as sacred.

Sexuality has also been an opportunity for growth in our community. We are committed to changing the current oppressive patriarchal capitalist paradigm, and for many, heteronormative culture doesn't work. We are collectively redefining family and love. As we navigate deep consent, some choose to explore consensual non-monogamy with clear agreements and in a secure attachment framework. We tread on very tender ground as we unpack our traumas. People can become very triggered, and this can be an opportunity for

Morning circle, Firefly Gathering 2022.

Sarah Tew

Evening by the fire.

Parker Michels-Boyce

growth as we support each other in moving through discomfort, potentially into a new, more integrated whole. Of course, one doesn't have to be non-monogamous! Some people eschew sexuality altogether; some have one partner their entire lives; it's not about rules, but about creating an open and authentic container to explore in, and taking away the shame and stigma around non-monogamy. Really, we are working to decolonize love—but that's another conversation!

In all things, personal autonomy is in the balance with the greatest good for the community. This is a tenuous position to hold because there are no absolute rules, or single right answers. We spend a lot of time sitting in circles, talking it out; finding where communication unraveled, and making those repairs. We are also learning to give the nonhuman world a seat at the table, and listening to the needs of those around us without voices, or whose voices are being silenced.

This does not work for everyone, and it is sad when fractures occur. We do our best to communicate through them and make repairs; but sometimes the disagreement is too great, and repair can not be made. Sometimes people change communities, or the community splits into smaller groups. Sometimes, we even have to tell people they are no longer welcome in our spaces. This is rare, but it happens, as we have agreed to certain boundaries.

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At the end of the rainbow, I am a member of the community of people with whom I share land and daily life; I am also a member of The Firefly Gathering community, with whom I interact and work on a daily basis to create change; I am also a member of the Barnardsville Community, a weird and eclectic group of folks coming back to the land in a plethora of ways; I am a member of the LGBTQIA+ community; and I am a member of the southeastern earthskills community, which is working in our own anarchistic, loose way to create opportunity for people throughout the southeast to reconnect with ancestral skills and our planet. I believe it is through connection that we will continue as a species, and community plays a crucial role.

One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone.—bell hooks

NOTE: you can join Marissa and The Firefly community June 20-25 at Deerfields just outside of Asheville, North Carolina. For details visit fireflygathering.org.

Marissa Percoco wears many hats: first and foremost, she is a devoted mother to her own four amazing (now mostly grown) children and is also "Mamarissa" to many! She is deeply grateful for her family and community, the abundance of our planet, and the opportunity each day to connect with the beauty and vibrance of nature. Sharing that connection is her life's work. Serving as the Executive and Creative Director of The Firefly Gathering (fireflygathering.org), as well as coordinating the Equity Fund for Earthskills Rendezvous, and teaching various classes throughout the southeast, all provide Marissa with ample opportunities to help shift the dominant paradigm. Now nesting on a little farmstead on the ancestral lands of the CWY or Tsalagi (Cherokee) people, currently known as Barnardsville, North Carolina, Marissa is deeply rooted in the Earthskills movement, anti-oppression work, her garden, and the old Appalachian soil, committed to co-creating a new culture within which we, our children, and all beings thrive.

The author at The Firefly Gathering.

Parker Michels-Boyce Photography

Reimagining Superman's American Way

By Alan O'Hashi

Remember the old 1950s TV show, *The Adventures of Superman*? The deep-voiced narrator told my friends and me every day after school to model Superman's can-do behavior because "he fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American Way."

Superman based his American Way on certain values and ideas: rugged individualism, winning is better than losing, cultural divides are narrowed by assimilation, and wealth is accumulated without limit. There isn't anything inherently wrong with Superman's American Way, but during these times of social and economic divides, what if it were reimagined as a collaborative way of life?

By definition, cohousing communities and their members are collaborative and do their best to put the "self" aside in favor of the good of the whole. Cohousers are theoretically inclusive and meet people where they are, share rather than hoard, and in many cases, have agreed upon a common "higher purpose." As cohousers, we have agreed to live together and maintain our common property. We are poised to reimagine Superman's American Way by becoming more aware of the socioeconomic characteristics of people different from ourselves.

Reaching out to others for help and the majority relenting to the minority aren't natural components of our cultural DNA. From the moment we glanced up from the hospital bassinet, society has pounded into our heads rugged individualism, a destiny to accumulate more wealth than the next person, and the desire to win votes by one.

Living with shared values in a consensus community where the many are obliged to listen to the few is antithetical to Superman's American Way. Becoming a cohouser isn't just a choice to live in a new home but also an unsettling rebirth and viewing the world through a different lens.

Reaching out to others for help and the majority relenting to the minority aren't natural components of our cultural DNA.

Our challenge is to figure out how to blend the collaborative secret sauce with sweet and sour ingredients. Whether you're a long-time cohouser or part of a forming group, have serious discussions with your neighbors about why each of you personally, as opposed to philosophically, want diverse neighbors in your community.

- Inclusion of marginalized people or no diversity?
- Lower-cost or market-priced homes?
- Gentle on the earth or a wasteful lifestyle?
- Value personal differences or monocultural?
- Multigenerational residents or only older members?

As you form your community or up-

https://picryl.com

Cultural Competency means understanding oneself and changing personal perspectives about others—getting to know people rather than assuming they are like you.

date your existing community shared values, get firm commitments about what all would be willing to relinquish to level the field for those who cannot otherwise afford to live there. It could be market-rate homeowners ceding their majority position on the governing team or "taxing" themselves to buy down monthly HOA dues.

Steps like these are necessary to close the social and economic gaps that widened because of exclusionary city zoning policies rooted in the Jim Crow South and neighborhood "red-lining" that began during the Great Depression. Those institutions limited people of color from accumulating wealth.

On a personal level, ask yourself whether you're willing to put in the work to examine your perspectives and change them if necessary. The transformation is hard work. You may lose friends because of your attitude changes, but you will gain new ones. Be aware that lower-priced housing also means demographic and social diversity.

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"We have diversity in our community. Three of our members drive blue, red, and green Subarus," is a joke around cohousing circles. "We have diversity here. All of us graduated from different Ivy League schools."

The typical cohouser is a liberal, highly educated, high-income-earning Caucasian Baby Boomer with a high perceived social class and 70 percent of the time a woman, according to the Cohousing Research Network (CRN). Based on these demographics, cohousers should be inclined to bridge cultural divides by reinventing Superman's American Way from the inside out. That is to say, most dominant-culture members who live in cohousing have agreed to change their perspectives about consumerism, competition, and cultural dominance.

CRN also found that among a sample of a rental cohousing community, residents were more likely to consist of more single parents, earn low-to-moderate incomes, and be a person of color. Marginalized group members who are forming communities could ask dominant-culture cohousers to join their efforts as residents and allies to bridge American cultural and economic divides.

How do we go about making this paradigm shift?

Cultural Competency means understanding oneself and changing personal perspectives about others. For my purposes, cultural competency is an evolving process during which people recall their experiences, reflect on them, and renew their perceptions of the world. A Google search reveals many iterations and definitions.

At any given moment, depending on past histories and experiences, individuals, groups, and communities possess various levels of cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to deal with other people who have had unique life experiences.

Remember the climax of the *Wizard of Oz* film (1939) when Dorothy gets herself back to Kansas? Glinda, Good Witch of the North, lets Dorothy in on the secret that she's always had the means to return home.

But along the way, Dorothy had to decide which Yellow Brick Road fork to take, evade flying monkeys, and liquidate the Wicked Witch of the West. Likewise, cultural competency takes work for each of us to realize that we possess the inherent abilities to understand ourselves and others but need a little help from our own Lion, Tin Man, and Scarecrow.

How is cultural competency different from learning about diversity? "I'm color blind and don't see racial differences" is a comment that I hear from Caucasian people. That statement seems like it's about social awareness, but observations like that discount everyone else's personal histories and experiences. Cultural competency is about getting to know people rather than assuming they are like you.

Diversity, on the other hand, is descriptive of various groups. Learning all aspects of a race or ethnicity is daunting since there are so many associated religions, languages, and traditions that the list is nearly endless. Knowing all of a group's specific characteristics and practices isn't practical—limited information results in stereotyping. Superman's American Way boils down terms like "high-density," "affordable," or "low-moderate income" to stereotypes about poor people with junk cars in the front yard that result in lower property values.

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Learning how to reimagine Superman's American Way in a collaborative community lifestyle requires intentionality. The collaborative secret sauce can be poured over any neighborhood regardless of your housing configuration.

Here's the reality.

My cohousing living experience hasn't been perfect. I'm Japanese-American and a raisin in the cohousing oatmeal. I've found myself, more times than not, on the outside, looking in and capitulating to the dominant culture that rules my community. When I first joined the community, I was usually one to help out. Early

on, it was clear that my ideas and assistance weren't welcome. To this day, my participation level is minimal. White people aren't exactly crazy about letting go of personal privilege, nor is there a need for them to do so.

Consider that America has a 334-year history of enslaving people (1526 to 1860), more than double the 163-year history since President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (1860 to 2023)—and that latter period itself has been fraught with the legacy of slavery, often manifested in other forms (see Ava DuVernay's *13th*).

Reimagining the American Way won't happen overnight.

The hardest part for me is confronting my predominantly white neighbors when they are dismissive or employ cronyism to make decisions out of the light. I have realized the futility of fighting all the fights. I've played the role of the "Model Minority" for so long that I've found it easier to "go along" but have ruffled a few feathers along the way.

Founding members are the only ones who "self-select" the type of residents they want to attract. Communities that start with diverse founders will have the best chance to reimagine the American Way.

The upshot?

Intentionality brings neighbors together to work through challenging issues, large and small. I'm still convinced that cohousing is a neighborhood configuration that enables conversation among divergent opinions.

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If valuing diversity is a shared value, forming community members should discuss what they would be willing to give up attitudinally and financially to include diverse members. In one of my training sessions, I met people from a forming community who were discussing inclusion. They decided to take some of the capital gains from their home sales to buy down housing prices in their forming community to make them more cost-efficient.

The need for checking rugged individualism at the common house front door, and for continuing personal introspection, doesn't end once all the houses are constructed and residents unpack their boxes. Over time, the community evolves as families move, people pass away, and new neighbors arrive. Residents need to keep unpacking and repacking their personal histories and values.

Reaching out to people different from yourself is challenging. Cultural brokers may need to be engaged. For example, in my workshops, attendees practice ways to look at their personal histories and make changes to become more inclusive instead of only believing inclusivity is a good idea.

Culturally competent founders and developers should use brokers to expand their markets by finding more accessible outreach paths into diverse communities. Why brokers? It's difficult for a Caucasian person to reach out directly to diverse communities without the appearance of tokenism. I find myself in the cultural broker role of making introductions among people wanting to meet others in communities other than their own. I'm always happy to introduce white people to diverse organizations or groups.

If forming cohousing communities have a shared value of diversity and inclusion, meeting such groups on their turf is essential. Work with the cultural broker to develop ways to make the introductions. There may be a meal or two involved. The meetings may happen at unexpected locations, such as a place of business in an unfamiliar neighborhood.

Diverse community opinion leaders may be the assistant manager at the local bodega or the youth director down at the neighborhood church. The effort will likely push you and your group into uncomfortable zones. There are simple steps you can take the moment you finish reading this story and put down Communities to get on the path of becoming a more culturally competent individual and collaborative community member.

- Who do you sit next to in church? Sit next to a stranger.
- Who do you call to go out for coffee? Ask someone you've wanted to get to know better.
- Do you stand up as an ally? Take a risk when you hear offensive comments in the grocery store line.

Whether or not you have the guts to reimagine Superman's American Way, it's when individuals collaborate and alter their behaviors that bridges are built that close social and cultural divides, one person and one community at a time.

C'mon, I dare you.

Alan O'Hashi is an author and filmmaker based in Boulder, Colorado. His book True Stories of an Aging Do-Gooder: How cohousing bridges cultural divides *is available in the FIC Bookstore (ic.org).*

The need for checking rugged individualism at the common house front door, and for continuing personal introspection, doesn't end once all the houses are constructed and residents unpack their boxes.

facebook.com/people/Lampa-Mountain-Community

My Way vs. Our Way: A New Take on Freedom

By Dirk Muller

Sara Donna writes: *When* Communities *called for articles about Freedom and Responsibility, my friends and I at Lampa Mountain Community were intrigued. What a great topic! Like everyone in community, each of us has grappled with these two apparently conflicting values.*

We are a small, close-knit community in southern Oregon. We started out many years ago with a dream: to live together as committed friends, who would explore how good friendship could get. We shared our dream and our friendship with the people we met, and over the years, a few of them took a leap of faith and moved in. All of us have been working on realizing our dream ever since, with lots of challenges, gratifying successes, and ah-ha's along the way. In the process, our understanding of freedom and responsibility has grown and deepened.

This issue's topic inspired us to write about some of our experiences and their lessons. For the full collection of 10 stories, please see ***gen-us.net/lampa****. One story, by community member Dirk, follows.*

Before I joined the community I had very little experience with practical life. I grew up in a city. I was good with computers (and online gaming), but never held a shovel. My first job when I arrived in the community was to dig up a hillside of thistles! I found that I thoroughly enjoyed it. Over the ensuing years I learned a lot of practical skills, and discovered I was pretty good at handling practical stuff. But even once I felt capable of finishing any project from beginning to end, it turned out there was a lot more for me to learn. I found that even with a lot of skill and experience, I was ineffective, and often created more disturbance than happiness in the community and in myself.

I am a member of our beekeeping team here, and one Saturday I got excited about the project of making a "bee bath"—basically a bowl of water with rocks in it so the bees have a dry place to stand while sipping water. We had some fist-sized rose quartz rocks a friend had given us, and I found a nice stone bowl that looked perfect for my project. I enthusiastically crushed up the rocks to a good size and found what I thought was a good place to put it. I spent several hours setting it up, and by the end of the afternoon I couldn't wait to show the rest of the team. Unfortunately, they didn't share my excitement….

While my team members could appreciate my creativity, they felt dismayed that they hadn't had any input in how it was designed, where it would be, and how it should be used. They explained that a lot of things were missing in my design, and it wouldn't work. My heart sank. I saw that I had gotten carried away with my own expression of freedom at the expense of the unitive feeling of our team. And after all my work, the bees still didn't have their bee bath.

This incident affected me deeply. I talked about what happened with elder members in our community, who had learned similar lessons themselves, and had helped other community members with this issue over the years. They showed me my reluctance to ask for input; I just wanted to do things my way. They hit the nail on the head. But learning that lesson and then implementing on it wasn't that easy for me.

After several more experiences of causing heartbreak and disturbance through my solitary approach to my projects, I started to apply myself seriously to consulting my friends about my inspirations. I discovered that I thoroughly enjoy the process of getting input from my friends, and that I derive a strong sense of purpose, connection, strength, and energy from knowing that the community supports me in doing something we all feel is worth my investing my energy into. Rather than a nagging feeling of insecurity from not knowing if people will appreciate what I'm doing or if it will work, I experience a solid sense of security that allows me to fully express my intelligence, creativity, and other proclivities, *within* what we all feel is the right approach to any given project. In other words, I experience the greatest freedom and happiness when doing things in a unified spirit with the community, rather than being so-called "free" to do whatever I want.

I discovered that the combined experiences, perspectives, and insights from everyone involved create a more intelligent and effective approach to any project than any one individual could achieve alone. This process requires me to take responsibility to not get too attached to my own viewpoints, so I can consider everyone's input objectively, and be willing to have my understanding or conclusions changed or adjusted. When everyone involved does that, I've seen that incredible things happen.

Dirk Muller has lived at Lampa Mountain Community (Myrtle Point, Oregon) since November 2011. When he's not working at the community's consulting business, he contributes in a wide variety of ways, including property maintenance, gardening and mushroom culture, path building, alternative energy, and graphic arts.

Work as Obligation, or Work as Choice?

By Sylvan Bonin

Should intentional communities have participation requirements?

This question is rarely even asked. The first question is usually: "What work requirements should we have?" Most consider the idea of NOT having them to be ludicrous and impossible, if they consider it all. Often it is just assumed. "The whole thing will fall apart!" "We have to make it fair!" "Nothing will get done!" "We don't want freeloaders!" What if we backed up to the previous question? What if we don't dictate how much people work and on what projects? What if we let our hearts lead us to decide how much to contribute, when, and on what to spend our energy?

Songaia Cohousing is either 23 years old or 32, depending on how you count it. We don't have required work hours or required participation from residents.[1] So far we haven't fallen apart! Everything works most of the time. We still love and respect each other, even when we disagree. The bathrooms get cleaned. The dishes get done. Things get taken to the dump. Not only have we maintained what we have, but each year brings new beauty and functionality to our home. We remodeled the kitchen. We built an outdoor patio and social area with a cob oven and a wood-heated bench. Old trees are removed and new ones planted. Intern housing and camping sites are created. We have nearly an acre of gardens, total, plus 50 rose bushes and 150 fruit trees! The bees, chickens, and goats get fed. So how does it all happen?

The Passion Principle! In a previous article ("A Songaia Glossary," Communities #196, pp. 30-33) I described this philosophy and how it underlies all of our decisions. Here I am going to compare and contrast the Passion Principle with systems in which communities have participation requirements.

Forms of Participation Requirements

I have seen all sorts of ways that communities assign duties! When I lived at Columbia Ecovillage it was eight hours per month of work on committee-approved projects plus participation in two committees. Some communities require everyone to serve a term in a leadership role such as as President, Vice President, or Secretary of some board or committee. Twin Oaks has a team that assigns work hours and jobs to each person, much like a manager at a large company. I've seen chore wheels that rotate less-desirable tasks, with each person performing them for a day, a week, or a month. Songaia's largest committee keeps trying a system where every person on the committee is on a list. When your name comes up, you must attend and facilitate. The following month, you are responsible for taking notes and the next person on the list facilitates. (This doesn't work very well since most of our other systems are so much more anarchist!) Most communities with common meals require that everyone take a turn cooking. A search of the FIC website for "participation requirements" yielded descriptions of communities that require attendance at meetings, communities that stipulate that in order

Photos courtesy of www.songaia.com

to have any garden space you must also provide labor in the common gardens, mandatory attendance at meditation or other spiritual activities, communities that limit the number of hours members may work outside the community so that it doesn't detract from community work, required or socially-pressured attendance at meals, and a slew of other conditions. And there are as many ways to enforce participation requirements as there are tasks to do! Since a required number of hours of community labor is the thing I see most often, I am using that as the standard against which to compare the Passion Principle.

Benefits of Labor Requirements

• Everyone knows what is expected of them. If there is pressure to do more, there is an agreement to fall back on and point to. No one has to nag or micro-manage because each person can track their own work.

• Things get done! It is easy to estimate how long a building project will take to complete. The gardens are consistently watered and weeded. Someone always takes the trash out.

• When something doesn't happen according to expectations, there is an agreement to point to. This is essentially a contract between each person and the community.

• It's easier to remember what you have to do. You put in your hours. You record them. You check that task off of your to-do list.

Drawbacks of Labor Requirements

• Little flexibility. It's difficult to plan for vacations, illness, or personal crisis.

• Everyone isn't actually the same. This system doesn't account for life stages. Elders might have a hard time contributing to physical tasks. People with chronic illness or mental health challenges have "off days." Parents of young children have restrictions on available hours, not to mention energy!

• It's discriminatory. People who have to work two jobs just to pay the bills have a harder time with required hours. Those people are overwhelmingly more likely to be people of color, women, and/or disabled people.

• It can be frustrating when people don't follow through on what they say they will do. This is really a different issue, separate from participation requirements. Lack of accountability should be dealt with on its own, and will impact any system.

• Resentment. I don't like being told what to do because of childhood parenting trauma. A lot of people don't like being told what to do! We get enough of that from our boss, our family, and the government.

Benefits of the Passion Principle

• Unexpected beauty. Given freedom to choose, people will make art, clean up an untidy corner, or plant flowers.

• Personal freedom. Without required hours, our time is easier to arrange. We travel, go to events, or simply sit and enjoy our community.

• Teaches healthy boundaries and negotiation. This is an intensive lesson in reflecting on your own capacity before offering to do work for the community, and in knowing when to withdraw from a project or committee.

• Less planning and administration overhead. No one has to assign tasks. No one has to be the "time bookkeeper," taking those recorded hours and making sure that everyone keeps a "positive account balance." You don't have to figure out timelines of new projects based on the available number of labor hours.

• Creating a better society means doing things differently. If we want a non-hierarchical utopia for the future of humankind, we have to start now.

• More gets done! This may surprise some readers, but when people aren't obligated to give preset things, they often give more.

• Blurring the line between work and play. Communities need to play together. Organizing a talent show is just as important as cleaning the gutters.

• Every single person has skills and joys to share. If we only require work on committee-approved projects we may not ever see the hidden gems that we all hold.

• We give what we are able, and do so with joy. Elders shelling beans on the porch is a cliche for a reason. There are good

jobs for children, parents, elders, teens, tall people, small people, carpenters, gardeners, artists, scientists, cooks, physical strength, not-so-much physical strength, math skills, compassion skills.

• No resentment about being "forced" to do things. If you are cranky about doing what you said you would, remember that you are the one who made this choice.

Drawbacks of the Passion Principle

• Things might not be as clean as some people desire. Even if a person has committed to cleaning the bathrooms "as needed," that means different things to different people.

• As is also true if you have Labor Requirements, it can be frustrating when people don't follow through on what they say they will do. This is really a different issue, separate from participation requirements. Lack of accountability should be dealt with on its own, and will impact any system.

• Some things get neglected. The bushes might not get trimmed every year. The steps might not get swept. The windows might not get washed. This can lead to a very mixed appearance/first impression, and opinions from visitors. There will be breathtaking beauty right beside dirt and neglect.

• Abandoned projects! It is important to have agreements in place that if someone starts a project and then loses interest, they are responsible for cleaning up whatever remains.

• You have to remember all the things you have said you will do. Some skill at "executive function" is helpful.

• It's easy to over-commit. When we love our community we want it to flourish. We want all the things to happen. It's easy to find ourselves promising to do 10 different things, then burning out and not wanting to do any of them

A note about complaining and standards: If you are the one who wants something done, maybe you should do it! The person who has the highest bar for bathroom cleanliness is the one who cleans the bathroom. If something isn't being done we encourage offers of help instead of complaints. For example: "Hey, I noticed you're signed up for bathroom cleaning. It looks like you might be having a hard time getting that done. I'm on mopping floors. Would you like to work together, each on our own chore, so that we have some company? We can help keep each other accountable." Complaining about how someone else contributes is discouraged.

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When any group of people lives together, work must get done. Most people desire some level of cleanliness, beauty, progress, service, meals, and safety. Different people expect different standards for all of these things. There are many different ways to best serve everyone's needs and desires. People can meet and discuss until they find a way to agree on how much each person in the group will contribute and in what ways (consensus). The people in charge can assign tasks, roles, or hours (management). At first I wasn't sure about the Passion Principle, what I would call mutuality or anarchy. Over the years it has grown on me.

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

1. There is a caveat on this. The community itself doesn't have participation requirements. You can live here and not participate at all. We have a food club that DOES have participation requirements. The food club is optional. If you choose to participate a monthly fee covers five meals/week, a pantry full of grocery staples, and garden produce. Everyone in the food club puts in about 0.8 shifts per week, on average. Members tell the job scheduler what types of jobs they are willing to do (e.g., shopping, inventory, cooking) and any dates they're not available. Even here we follow what we love. I love to cook but dislike shopping. Some people love the solitary nature of mopping the kitchen and dining room. Inventory, bookkeeping, and pantry organization are good jobs for management types.

Voluntary Community Participation?

A conversation among Ed Sutton, Kathleen Lowry, Joyce Cheney, Bonnie Fergusson, Anonymous, Lisa Kuntz, Liz Magill, Samantha Embrey, David Heimann, Sharon Villines, and Denise Tennen

Editor's Note: *The following is an edited transcript of a discussion that occurred on the cohousing-l listserv (see lists.cohousing.org/archives/cohousing-l) from Wednesday, January 4, 2023 through Saturday, January 14, 2023. Its connection to our "Freedom and Responsibility" theme will be self-evident.*

Eno Commons' founding principles include "voluntary participation," i.e., no one is required to participate in the work of caring for the community, and there is no penalty for non-participation.

Our low HOA dues were established with an assumption of a high level of resident care work. The small group of neighbors who are struggling to care for common property are questioning the wisdom of continuing this arrangement.

Are there any other cohousing communities successfully operating after 25 years of laissez-faire resident participation?

—**Ed Sutton**, Eno Commons, Durham, North Carolina

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Hi Ed and others:

I am a couples and family therapist who follows in part the work of Alfred Adler (equal in importance to Freud and Jung). Adler's emphasis was on community, families, and parenting. He said teaching cooperation and social interest is the primary parenting role, and these are primary predictors of mental health.

The Tacoma Village Cohousing workshop became much more useful to everyone when a new member took responsibility for managing the room and standards were set.

Adler also famously said: "There is harmony only among equals."

We aren't in my view born "sinful" but most of us have to be carefully taught by caregivers or others to cooperate and pitch in.

Equality of time and effort is considered essential to a happy partnership and healthy families—that is, equality of play time, self-care time, etc., and contribution time. For example, kids contribute by doing what they are capable of (by age four or younger they can load the clothes washer) and grandparents might contribute by representing the family as a reading tutor in a school setting.

Adler also said "spoiled children grow into angry adults" so even those not expected to contribute equally become resentful (and inevitably less respected) as well (very possibly not consciously).

This is rich ground for growth in couples and families.

For example, food co-ops have been good examples of the Little Red Hen philosophy (with hard work and personal initiative as primary values).

I'd love to hear what various communities are doing in regard to this sense of equality, and how it's working—how it affects the community spirit and experience of trust and joy in community.

—**Kathleen Lowry**

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The wonderful, dedicated idealists who started our community created a structure where work is not REQUIRED. They created a structure where work was not even EXPECTED in an "unwritten-rule way." Work participation WAS ASSUMED in the sense that everybody would just want to work

together—wouldn't they??

Twenty years later, we HOPE that people will work to support and be part of the community, but there's still no requirement or even expectation. We invite and encourage people to participate; that's it.

We understand that condo associations can't require work legally, but some of us (not all!) believe that not even having an expectation of work is a major flaw in our cohousing design. Among about 55 adult residents, the same 15 people do most everything. Several adults' participation is zero.

We read of some cohousing communities that require four to 10 hours of work per month—or hefty amounts of pay per hour ($35-40) for work not done—and wonder how they can do that legally, and wonder who the collection police are! Beyond those tough logistics, that sounds Fair.

Note: I am speaking for myself, not for the cohousing community in which I live. Our community move-in was 20 years ago; I've been here six.

—Joyce Cheney

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Joyce, thank you. Yes I wonder about pay rather than work creating a sense of a class system? That would certainly not be recommended for families—our time is equally important.

But it doesn't seem to bother you all that much? You who do contribute probably have some fun?

Enforcement—yes a problem. If it were me, I'd want people to commit to an agreement when coming in (not uncommon practice in couples therapy) but I imagine it would make membership recruitment harder.

—Kathleen Lowry

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We have specific work expectations that all residents need to participate in the work of maintaining and running the Community. These are spelled out in our "orientation for new residents" document, and include: a minimum of participation in at least four workdays a year (we have 10 scheduled workdays a year), cooking Common Dinner once per rotation (about once every five weeks), membership/participation in one or more of the Committees which run the community, and participation in the once-a-month HOA meeting where policies are decided by consensus. There are variations in participation, of course. Many folk are on multiple Committees while some are only on one; some make the minimum of four workdays a year while others come to every one. It all worked pretty well the first 20 years. In the pandemic our Common Meal program shut down for quite a while and has never fully recovered—partly out of Covid fears and partly because we had an influx of new people who never really committed to it. We now struggle to get the work done with five out of 20 households now absentee or absentee landlords. The renters they got are great but don't really have skin in the game in the same way. I miss the old days.

—Bonnie Fergusson, Swan's Market Cohousing, Oakland, California

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Bonnie, You say your community has specific work expectations—are these written down, is there a document that spells this out? I am asking because my community came up with a "policy" after many hours of discussion (and my attending several sessions at the CoHo conference in Portland a couple years ago and bringing that info to the discussion) and yet we could not agree/consent to the policy!! So now we "speak" the expectations but it does not result in participation. Any documentation you have would be helpful as we revisit this topic. Thanks!

—Anonymous

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I don't believe we have a document but the original group met for five years before move-in and were clear about the expectations by move-in day and we have taken pains to make those expectations clear to all prospective new buyers since then. These expectations are not legally enforceable; it's community culture that has kept them in place. It is much harder to establish these expectations after the fact; it works better to have clarity before move-in or sale so that people who can't commit to that level of participation weed themselves out.

—Bonnie Fergusson, Swan's Market Cohousing, Oakland, California

Managing compost requires more than tasks on workdays. Two Tacoma Village Cohousing members took responsibility for maintaining a sustainable system, including new compost bins.

Photos courtesy of Sharon Villines

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Participation is a fraught topic in almost every coho community, so workshops are offered at most National Coho Conferences.

The founding principle of "no one is required to work" sounds like an invitation to a free ride, not encouragement to actively engage and participate. If new members arrive with the expectation that participation is optional, they may not realize that their efforts have a monetary value as well as social value. They may not see the connection between enjoying low HOA fees and the voluntary participation that makes them possible. They may not be aware that a self-managed community requires an investment in the welfare of the community and that there are consequences for the physical and social structure of the community when they choose to not participate or engage.

In my community, which is very clear about the "rewards and responsibilities of living in cohousing," we have a core of members who work very hard to keep our community thriving at all levels. What we do about non-participation or minimal participation is a hot topic. We have a suggested range of volunteer hours; some of us give far more, some far too little. We are fortunate that wonderful new members are moving in who sought out cohousing, understand what it means to be in a self-managed community, and that the rewards and connections of cohousing are the outcome of active participation.

I look forward to other replies!

—**Lisa Kuntz, Daybreak** Cohousing, Portland, Oregon

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Thank you all for your openness about the issue of participation. I was in a Covid daily dinner pod that developed in an apartment complex for one-and-a-half years. Since a few of us were therapists we talked openly about participation with the whole group. Some examples of how people felt they contributed were "not complaining," "keeping to myself," "being funny," "having good ideas for food or movies," "having low expectations."

It became a problem for those who saw time and effort (acts of service in love language terms) as the important contribution.

What to do?

—**Kathleen** Lowry

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I'm pretty opinionated on this topic.

This problem has two components: the interpersonal and the systemic.

On the interpersonal level individuals who are doing more than their fair share need to stop doing that. If an individual finds themselves feeling resentful, they need to do less work, or only do work they love, or ask individuals who appear to be doing less to do a task that they see needs to be done. The only person you can change is yourself.

On a systemic level a community can work to change their stated values from "work if you can" to "everyone contributes." Just know that the communities that have the value "everyone contributes" also struggle with unequal contributions. Fixing the system doesn't actually make non-contributors begin to take on tasks. Because the only person you can change is yourself.

I expect that what you need is enough of a crisis that your community can come to agreement that something must change. As long as individuals continue to over-function you won't have that crisis, and the under-functioning households won't even know that there is a problem.

We had enough of a crisis with building repairs that we agreed to hire a maintenance person and rework our building and grounds team. But not till the crisis affected a significant portion of the community.

I will note that when we went around and asked folk how they contribute, most people had something that they believed they were doing for the good of the community that others either didn't believe were real things needed, or didn't see that it was happening. The people who complained that others weren't engaging (I am in this group) really meant "be on teams/circles" and "do the work of teams/circles."

We don't/didn't count the things people do like being parent on duty for a neighbor's kids, opening the door for the neighbor's repair-person, or bulk-buying flour for the bread-making neighbors.

—**Liz (Elizabeth Mae Magill)**, elizabethmaemagill.com

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At Emerson Commons we started out assigning hours to jobs and requiring that people choose jobs adding up to a certain minimum number of hours. After two or three years, we weren't happy with that system for several reasons, and in 2022 we switched to a system in which our circles (committees) are responsible for finding the best way to accomplish their goals. Everyone is asked to join at least one circle and participate in the work of that circle.

In essence, we decided we would rather be happy than equal.

Here are the underlying premises of the system:

• Residents of Emerson Commons understand that the community's well-being and even its continuing existence as a cohousing community depend on their personal contributions of time, skill, and energy to its management and maintenance.

• Residents' participation in the management and maintenance of the community can and should strengthen their connection to the community.

• Each of us can contribute service to the community, but the extent of the feasible contribution varies from person to person and from time to time, depending on the circumstances of our lives. Rather than aiming for equal participation by everyone, we ask that residents contribute what is feasible given their circumstances.

• Ideally, everyone will participate in each of these three ways:

1. Membership in one or more circles or child-circles.

2. Regular work roles (dedicated responsibilities), as decided by the resident and circle.

3. Flexible work roles (labor pool), as needed by the community.

• Each circle will set priorities and delegate tasks to accomplish the necessary goals within their domain. A circle will ask for help from the community if it isn't able to accomplish those goals.

As leader of the Landscape Circle, which requires the largest number of work hours, I can say that the system generally works well and that, in any case, it works much better than our earlier system. The fact is that almost everyone contributes in a meaningful and substantial way to the community, and about three-quarters of the residents contributed to the work of the Landscape Circle in 2022, outside of a community workday. Not only did we get an amazing amount of work done, but I think more people now take pride in the landscape here.

—**Samantha Embrey**, Emerson Commons, Crozet, Virginia

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Hello Ed et al,

At Jamaica Plain Cohousing we have a work requirement of attending General Meetings, serving on at least one committee, and doing four hours of community work per month per adult member. There are four outdoor (ground) workdays per year, one indoor (building) workday per year, and one community life workday per year. In addition there are routine and episodic tasks than people can sign up to do (such as mowing the lawn or tidying up the living room). As long as all the work gets done we don't keep track of who works how many hours—we tried that our first couple of years, but then came to a decision that a light non-bureaucratic touch was better than fairness, and that has worked out since. If some one feels they are putting in more hours than others are and don't like the unfairness, they are free to devote fewer hours to make it fairer. If someone does not like results of a given task, they can talk with the person who has committed to do it, but if the task still isn't done to their satisfaction they can either live with it, take the task over from the person doing it (or if the task is not being done at all, take on the task themselves), or ask the committee in charge of the task to farm it out to an outside firm (and include the resulting costs in their budget).

Once in a great while (about once or twice in our 17-year history) a whole group of people have gotten burned out from doing a group of tasks and announces that they are all stepping back. In those few cases we wind up having a full-fledged community discussion on how to restructure the work so it will get done (either by reorganizing how the work gets done, by farming that group of tasks to an outside management firm, or a combination of both of these). It takes a lot of meeting time to do the restructuring and a lot of sharing of intense feelings, but in each case we have reached a new work plan that has then worked.

That's our mileage. Your mileage may vary (YMMV).

—**David Heimann**, Jamaica Plain Cohousing, Boston, Massachusetts

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Last year I did a presentation at the CohoUS Conference on cohousing over time. I talked about how my opinions and feelings had changed over 22 years of living in cohousing. Workshare was my #1 concern when I moved in and I designed and implemented every scheme I could think of to produce a fair distribution of work. I even objected to the use of the word "volunteers" when asking people to take on a job, as in "We need volunteers to set up chairs for Sunday's meeting," because members had signed on to share the work. Everyone was obligated. Calling residents "volunteers" made tasks seem optional. But on the other hand, I didn't like being "assigned" work any more than anyone else.

Over time, based on my experience and watching the work of others and how it contributed to the community, I formed an entirely different opinion. The two main changes were (1) recognizing that talking about work in terms of hours per month was self-defeating and the wrong attitude and (2) understanding that we needed creative people to take responsibility for ongoing tasks. Not to spend four half-hour periods a month watering plants in the common house but to take responsibility for them. Becoming our plant person for indoor plants. Watering, feeding, pruning, dusting, alternating, and making choices based on aesthetics and optimum lighting. To become an expert at a minimum or maximum level as the person desires. Forming a partnership with one or two other people to trade off tasks and share expertise.

Sometimes we do need an hour or a workday in which people just show up and do what's on the list, but more importantly, we need to encourage people to take charge and master the skills required. To describe the work of building a community in terms of four hours a month or six hours a month doesn't come close to conveying the kind of work that creates a neighborhood or a home.

After the workshop, I wrote out notes on the Zoom presentation and answers to questions that people raised that I didn't have time to address in the workshop. I posted them in my blog on Strong Neighborhoods at www.strongneighborhoods.info/changing-feelings-about-workshare.

—**Sharon Villines**, Takoma Village Cohousing, Washington, DC

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Sharon, I love the perspective you shared vis-à-vis your changing perspective on work participation by cohousing residents. I've been living at Monterey Cohousing in Minnesota for nearly 27 years and I fully resonate with what you are saying!

—**Denise Tennen**, Monterey Cohousing, Saint Louis Park, Minnesota

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Participation Is a Right and a Responsibility

By Graham Ellis

Democracy is not a spectator sport, it's a participatory event. If we don't participate in it, it ceases to be a democracy.—Michael Moore

My three decades living in community were inspired by half a year spent volunteering in an Israeli kibbutz. During visits in 1969 and 1973, I learned about the socialist concept, "From everyone according to their abilities, to everyone according to their needs," and it resonated with my humanitarian ideals.

Years later, as I brought together our collective of performers, I wish I'd done a better job factoring in the wisdom of a kibbutz founding member. She told me that, despite their egalitarian principles, when the annual elections of officers happened, the same 20 people were always nominated and elected, leaving the rest of the community content to have day-to-day decisions and long-term plans made for them.

I've since learned lots more about the huge range in participation that typically exists amongst community members. This difference in human design, as some writers have described it, is a fundamental challenge for those of us trying to establish egalitarian communities. A monstrous dichotomy is created when power becomes concentrated within an individual or a small group while the principles of equal rights and opportunities are universally accepted. Surely this proposition comes with an equal responsibility to participate to the best of our abilities—but does this happen? It takes a great deal of physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual work for a community to function in a healthy manner and if a member is able but constantly chooses not to participate there can be huge problems.

In 1987 we purchased the land for Bellyacres on the Big Island (see "Homestead Building in Hawaii," Communities #198, pp. 22-25). I was committed to the ideals of full participatory democracy in decision-making, but our membership mostly lived and worked away from Hawaii and less than a handful expressed any interest in helping to organise the fledgling collective. Up to that point, we had only experienced the euphoric feeling of community during three short festivals we organised and this gave us a fatally false sense of power-sharing.

While our festivals and performances continued for two decades to be the glue that held our group together, day-to-day decisions relating to our land, community development, building construction and maintenance were mostly made by me and sometimes an oligarchy with input from anyone else interested. For about 25 years most members were happy to accept this hierarchical structure with minimal power-sharing because it allowed them to focus on their careers, having a fun Hawaiian holiday, and partying with their friends.

Structure is important in any organization, but participation is what determines effectiveness and perhaps sustainability. Even though our original membership of 12 rapidly increased to 35, we've never had more than seven members living full-time on our land at any one time. Sometimes, I was the only resident member for months on end. This transient membership meant

that decisions had to be made by me or just a few individuals out of necessity. As the founder, I was always the public face of the organization, and having initially accepted responsibility for the legal, financial, and physical development of Bellyacres, much later I found it a very serious challenge to pass these duties over to other members.

In the euphoria of us forming our collective I was overly optimistic in assuming that members would take a serious interest in all the issues facing us, get involved, and be willing to attend meetings and share their views. Sadly, that was not always the case even though our bylaws specifically empowered and encouraged members' participation in "all activities...and to advise or join committees, to attend meetings and to vote on all decisions."

We floundered and paid a heavy price by not having members join in trainings that would educate them in the communication skills and processes we all needed in order to engage fully. We had no formal facilitation or organizational meeting workshops, and not even any education about the meaning and practice of consensus decision-making, which we adopted. We all accepted Bellyacres as some sort of a shared project but never studied what that meant or what personal skills we needed to develop so it would grow in a healthy manner. I am so happy today to see FIC offering a host of easily accessible training programs promoting healthy community practises.

Over the years, I participated in several state and county-level community leadership and business trainings, and along with a handful of our members attended a nonviolent communication (NVC) weekend workshop. But for the most part, community skills development was never considered a priority; everything we did was driven by our egos and on-the-job experience. There was a lot of trial and error which continues to this day.

Our early ecovillage meetings were hilarious and much more focused on partying than organizing community. People would drink, smoke, trade jokes, and get up to prepare food or make a phone call. Two founding members expressed their distaste for meetings by heckling randomly from outside through the mosquito screen window. In these circumstances, keeping conversations on track was crazy and sticking to an agenda virtually impossible.

For many years and numerous meetings, I struggled to serve as the de facto facilitator, and tried to introduce the concept of rotating facilitators, agendas, minute keeping, and motions. We were on a steep learning curve. It took many years for most members to fully accept the importance of attending weekly meetings and three decades later we still don't have responsible sharing of facilitation, meeting agendas, or minute-keeping, and our officers very rarely change.

My preference was always for three weekly meetings: one for business, one for personal communication and check ins, and one for food and fun, but this never happened. We've functioned best and had our highest morale when we've managed two weekly gatherings, and we regressed during periods when these connections lapsed.

Our potlucks have been our most successful participatory community-building tools—bringing together members, family, friends, neighbors, visitors, work exchangers, and renters. For many years, they were the major weekly event in our neighborhood. Eventually they grew too big and our minimalist community kitchen just couldn't handle the numbers attending. Following a very contentious meeting, it was decided that only residents on the land could attend, which meant that we had to turn away close friends, many of whom had relocated from the US mainland specifically to live near Bellyacres. Our sense of inclusivity and hospitality became shattered and sadly impacted the participation of our broader community and our relationships with neighbors.

As a geographically dispersed membership with only one full meeting annually, we had severe limitations on the possibilities for face-to-face involvement. All along our only approved process has been for decision-making authority to be divided between the Home Base Group and the members attending each annual general meeting. The average attendance at our A.G.M. has declined from 20 or so to around 10 members while membership of the Home Base Group has increased from just one to eight. These low numbers have had severe limitations on the possibilities for full membership participation in ongoing decision-making.

As is the custom in many egalitarian ecovillages, we originally committed to making decisions using a consensus (minus two) approach. In practice this can become a lengthy and arduous

Photos by Dena Smith Ellis

process, with the intention that everyone shares their opinions and is open to finding a solution so that when decisions are made we all move together as a group.

However, I discovered that without members' willing participation in training and education in the process, using consensus can be highly inefficient and misconceived. And, while I'm very proud of some significant achievements our group made using consensus, it did not always produce healthy outcomes. Too many times I witnessed members choosing to just go along with the majority or not being fully engaged. This eventually led to a build-up of regret and resentment because, through non-engagement, they had not fully committed to the decisions reached by consensus. Even after decades of muddling through using this process, I still witnessed many members reverting to the principles of majority rule simply because they refused to study the intricacies of using consensus decision-making.

Technological developments over the years have provided some possibilities for increasing participation from absentee members. Back in 1987, our only option for group communication was via mailed newsletters and phone calls and then faxes. I later proposed the option of attending A.G.M. meetings via telephone conference calls but sadly it was not approved. When discussion and decision-making via email became a possibility, we had discussions about implementing this method; however, once again an accepted process was never approved. For our 2023 A.G.M. I have proposed us using Zoom but this has not yet been accepted. So although technology exists for improving communication and participation in decision-making it has not yet been embraced.

Maintaining a unified vision is an essential element of a successful community and to be successful it requires everyone's buy-in. Starting in 2011 I proposed that as a community we all engage in a process to revisit our vision, hoping that this would lead to greater cohesion and commitment. But in the ensuing years my efforts in this direction went nowhere. At one point, feeling very frustrated about many members who hadn't contributed anything when their vision was requested, I wrote an email saying, "You give up your vision if you don't participate by sharing it clearly and in depth." Yet only 13 of our 33 members responded to vision questions established by our visions committee, and many of those gave only flippant or frivolous answers.

My assumption over the years was that the lack of participation by members reflected the trust that they placed in me as the president or de facto leader. Sadly, when the tide turned and I was placed under attack from a few members, their lack of involvement and control was claimed to be attributed to a distrust of my motives and my desire for autocratic rule not their unwillingness to participate. We had two very different points of view. (I told some of this story in the article "Founder's Syndrome," Communities #184, pp. 27-31.)

The Bellyacres experiment taught me early on that the kibbutz member was absolutely correct that it's a mistake to expect everyone to be equally involved or to contribute the same amount of work. This fact of community life is not easy to accept, yet it's a reality to be faced and there's more to it than just lack of interest or ability. Participation can sometimes get really unbalanced. It can create cruelly ironic and unjust situations where members who might be only peripherally involved and contribute very little in day-to-day grunt work may play a disproportionate and sometimes disruptive role in discussion and decision-making.

I've learned that finding a reasonable balance in participation that is tolerable for all involved has to become a crucial focus for all healthy communities. In my naïvety I helped create and preserve a very unbalanced system of participation at Bellyacres. It eventually brought about tensions that caused a major shift in my own involvement and my departure from a home that I cherished for 27 years.

In 1987 Graham Ellis founded the Bellyacres ecovillage on a 10 acre jungle lot in Puna, Hawaii, with a vision to experiment with sustainable community living practices. Graham's book about his three decades living there, Juggling Fire in the Jungle*, is available as an ebook from the bookstore at ic.org. See his previous* Communities *articles in issues #168, #176, #184, #187, #195, and #198. In 2017 he 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.*

Agreements and Individuality, The Farm's "Multistery," and My Shotgun Wedding

By Martin Holsinger

When we started The Farm, we went deep into the Tennessee woods because we wanted to get far enough out of American culture to start a culture of our own, a hippie-flavored society where we could practice voluntary simplicity, grow our own food, bring children into the world outside the hospital system and educate them outside the state-run school system, and in general create a kind of seed crystal for a culture that would be saner than the one from which we were withdrawing, and that would be a template for other people in other places to follow. We could clearly see, over 50 years ago, that the first-world standard of living was already way into overshoot, and that, in order for everybody on the planet to live graciously, Americans were going to have to live a lot more modestly, which meant a lot more communally. We were a nonviolent revolutionary movement that aimed to be non-threatening enough to the powers that be and so attractive to "honest squares," as well as other hippies, that maybe, just maybe, we could recast enough of America in our image to make a difference.

Here are some relevant quotes from Stephen Gaskin, the charismatic, 30-something visionary around whom we formed:

"You can live here with the mud and the wood stoves and the simple food, and make the world a better place, or you can go back to suburbia, to hot and cold running orange juice, and put your foot squarely on the neck of a peasant in the third world."

"We are our brothers' keeper, and our brothers are the entire population of the planet."

"This generation of Americans (the boomers) is the most spoiled generation in history."

"Americans need, in great numbers, to become voluntary peasants."

We had specific lifestyle and relationship agreements. We called them "agreements" because, at least initially, everybody understood the logic behind our preferred

Marriage at The Farm.

Photos courtesy of Martin Holsinger

Gate Services, March 1978.

Food will get you through times of no condoms better than condoms will get you through times of no food.

choices and agreed with that logic. An "agreement" among people is a form of vow. The phrase from the Declaration of Independence that reads "We pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor" was a quote we felt applied to our own declaration of independence. Later arrivals in the community sometimes saw these agreements as "rules," and "rules are made to be broken." But that's another story than the one I want to tell today.

The lifestyle agreements involved not cutting, shaving, or styling our body hair, except for braiding it, being vegan, not using leather, not wearing makeup, jewelry, or perfume. No "deodorants," either. We didn't use tobacco, alcohol, or coffee, although black tea and caffeinated sodas were OK, as were marijuana, peyote, and mushrooms, although the latter two were not common, and marijuana was frequently scarce, as well. We attired ourselves with items from America's vast reservoir of used clothing. Practicality, not style, was the object, but we rejected black clothing, on the grounds that black is the color of zero energy output, and bad for the vibe of the person wearing it.

My recollection of the results of this experiment in minimizing how people can express their individuality through their appearance is that we had no problem telling each other apart.

We also did not use barrier, surgical, or chemical birth control, which leads to our agreement around sexual relationships. In Mr. Gaskin's words, "If you're balling, you're engaged. If you're pregnant, you're married." There had been two or three instances of new couples getting pregnant and the guy involved not wanting to settle down and be a father and husband. I should mention that one of our agreements was to not have abortions. The life trajectory of the community member who seemed to be steering this decision (who was not Stephen) is quite a story in itself, but will have to wait for another time. It will have to suffice to say that they eventually left the community and became an evangelical Christian.

If this seems like a rather Puritan sexual standard, consider that we were living in the deep south of the United States, at a time before Roe v. Wade, and we were concerned that if we appeared to be too out of sync with local values, we would scare our fundamentalist, shotgun-toting neighbors into ridding themselves of us. Word gets around in small, close-knit communities, and if we were buying condoms wholesale, or arranging for or performing abortions, word would get around. At another level, since we were all in it together at the "and all that believed held all things in common, and parted to each as they had need" level, we each had an obligation to each other to avoid doing things that would burden the whole group, whether financially or karmically, such as two people making a baby when all they really wanted to do was go through the motions. On the other hand, we were committed to loving and taking good care of every baby born into the community. On a very practical level, we were chronically short of money, and food will get you through times of no condoms better than condoms will get you through times of no food.

I should also mention that our agreements did not include same-sex intimate relationships. Stephen expressed the now-discredited view that such attractions were "ego trips." I kind of wondered about this at the time, but figured we were just getting started, and there would be plenty of time to work out the details. Then, too, we were in a socially conservative part of the world, trying to appeal to "honest squares," and same-sex relationships would scare our neighbors even worse than heterosexual free love. It was the '70s. Things were really different back then.

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"If you're balling, you're engaged, etc." was just the beginning of our relationship agreements. We saw being in an intimate relationship with someone as a way to accelerate each other's psycho-spiritual evolution. We saw the couples relationship as the basic building block of our vision of an emotionally honest society in which people felt encouraged to work through their neuroses, bad habits, unhealthy attachments, and whatever else got in the way of us feeling our oneness with each other. For example, when people's interactions resulted in a negative emotional charge (aka "bad vibes"), we understood that the behavior of everyone involved contributed to that. Stephen urged us to "treat it like the post-game play-by-play," that is, to be dispassionate as we unraveled the evolution of the interaction we were examining, to take into account not just the points of view of those directly involved, but also how it looked to any eyewitnesses, or at least to an uninvolved third party. We called this process "sorting it out." Some community members were better at it than others. Stephen was considered the best, since he was our teacher, but there was plenty of other talent.

As our community evolved, many of those individuals, who were frequently married women, would become the main family in the group households that arose as our community evolved and grew. Many of those women also served as midwives. These households would number from 30-60 people, more or less. There would be several families with children, single mothers, a few single fathers (not generated internally—the community attracted quite a few), and single, childless adults. There were very few childless couples.

We had well-defined views of gender roles. It was a man's job to create a space in which his partner and their children could relax and feel comfortable, and it was a woman's job to let her partner know how well he was doing at that and, in general, groom his vibes. This was not "male superiority." Men were supposed to listen to their partners, and Stephen and the midwives were accorded the power to "bust" men who didn't by decreeing temporary separations so the man would have better appreciation for his wife's contribution to his life.

Sometimes "getting busted" happened in the course of childbirth. We viewed birthings as a kind of psychedelic occasion, a rite of passage for a couple that deepened their bond, but could blow them apart if they had "too much subconscious" (things they weren't saying to each other) and couldn't work it out in the course of the birthing. For most, it was an ecstatic, deeply bonding experience. That's certainly how it was in my marriage. For more on this, see Ina Mae Gaskin's *Spiritual Midwifery*, which is, I think, one of the most radical books ever written on the subject of the influence our minds can have on our bodies. (I recommend finding an older edition for the fullest effect.)

We practiced legal marriage for two reasons. The "outer reason" was PR—we wanted to send a clear message to our neighbors that we were a family-oriented community. The inner reason was that entering a legally binding marriage, formalized by standing up in front of the whole community on a Sunday morning and speaking wedding vows presided over by Stephen, our minister, solidified the commitment between a couple, part of that "creating a space in which a woman can relax" practice. Our midwives discovered early on that, sometimes, one of the reasons a woman might be having difficulty birthing a child was that she wasn't sure her partner would be there for her in the long run. In one of those instances, having the couple make a wedding vow to each other during labor seemed to be what kicked the labor into gear and got the baby out.

Women talking.

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So that's some of the "theoretical framework" of The Farm. Now I want to say something about what this meant for me at the time when my first wife and I became a couple. The whole tale of the relationship, and why she was my first wife and not my wife for life, is a much longer story than I have time to tell here.

When I was a teenager, in the early-mid-'60s, I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do when I grew up. Nothing really appealed to me. I gradually became aware of the beat subculture, whose members mostly worked menial,

Sometimes "getting busted" happened in the course of childbirth.

Kids' Christmas.

One of our agreements was to compensate for inappropriate behavior by "fasting" from it.

part-time jobs so they could devote more of their attention to non-paying literary, musical, and artistic endeavors. That held some appeal for me.

I graduated from high school in 1966. There was a military draft, and I certainly didn't want to go into the military, which my parents, both WWII veterans, had repeatedly warned me against. So I went to college—to the most unstructured college I could find, Goddard, in Plainfield, Vermont. There were no grades or required courses. Students designed their own programs, in consultation with faculty members, who also offered courses in their fields of expertise. I studied history, sociology, psychology, and religion in an effort to answer the question that had increasingly occupied me through my adolescence: why is society so crazy, and what could I do about it? It wasn't a study with a "career path," except the likelihood of grad school.

How I ended up at Stephen Gaskin's Monday Night Class in San Francisco in 1968 is a story in itself, but from the moment I heard him speak, I felt that I had found what I was looking for, even though Stephen was not, at that time, talking about starting a community. Over the next couple of years, Stephen and Monday Night Class became increasingly central to my life, even as I became increasingly anxious about how I would evade the draft/what I would do when I graduated from college. When I heard that Stephen and a core group of a couple hundred of his "students" were heading to Tennessee to start a rural community, I felt I finally had found what I wanted to do with my life. I had read Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf.* The door in the wall had appeared and opened for me, and I felt much safer and more at home in Stephen's "Magic Circus" (a term he never used for the community!) than I did anywhere else in the world. I dropped out of college in the last month of my senior year. Living my vision was vastly more appealing than merely studying that vision.

Another thing I couldn't figure out as a teenager was how relationships worked. My divorced parents offered little guidance, either verbally or by example. "Keep your weight on your knees and elbows and make sure your partner is having a good time," my mother advised, but she didn't advise me on how to get to the point where I needed to keep my weight on my knees and elbows. What I picked up from the culture around me was that women were initially reluctant and needed to be pressured a little, but once they "got turned on" they became enthusiastic. I didn't realize that I had bought into a belief system that increasingly resulted in my committing what we now call sexual assault and date rape. I began to notice that the quality of my sexual encounters was declining. I kind of understood why, but I didn't understand how to stop. When, while traveling on the "caravan" of Monday Night Class members that became The Farm, I got pushy with the young woman who was sleeping next to me (we were each in our own sleeping bag), she had the rest of the people on the bus to back her up and validate her outrage. I had enough self-awareness to appreciate that I had been caught acting out a very bad habit that I very much wanted to shed, and, as we said, "copped" to the total inappropriateness of my behavior, in tears and feeling great relief at finally being called out for what I was doing. It was the first step of my healing process.

In those days, one of our agreements was to compensate for inappropriate behavior by "fasting" from it. People who were too greedy about herb would go on pot fasts for a week or 10 days. People who talked too much would go on "word fasts," and be silent for a while, and people who were "into taste" and wanted to eat only the fanciest vegan dishes would vow to eat nothing but brown rice for 10 days. These "yogas" could be self-assigned, or mandated by Stephen, acting as abbot of our "multistery." ("Multistery" is a word he invented to describe us, because we were too diverse to be a "monastery.") I remember one case in which Stephen put somebody on "10 days brown rice," and the guy replied, "I'm already on 10 days brown rice." "OK, then, 10 days of Ding Dongs and Dr. Pepper," Stephen shot back. On another occasion, around Easter, he said he was "going to break out the Easter eggs" and we all wondered what he might mean. On Easter Sunday, he produced a large bag of candy "Easter

eggs" and tossed them out to us like somebody throwing rice at a wedding, with the instructions, "Loosen up! Y'all are way too conservative about food!" ("Conservative" in our language meant "being too picky," also "having higher standards for others' behavior than for one's own.")

In my case, a sex fast, a "vow of celibacy," seemed like the thing to do. I vowed to myself that I would abstain from trying to strike up relationships until somebody made it clear that they wanted to be in a relationship with me, and refrain from initiating a physical relationship until my potential partner made it clear that they were ready to take things to the next level.

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I made that vow in December of 1970, and kept it. About a year later, I was part of a "tent family" of eight single adults, men and women, who teamed up to share one of the 16x32 Army surplus squad tents we had discovered we could purchase for around $25 each. The Farm bought a couple dozen of them as a short-term solution to our need to get roofs over everybody's heads.

As we had in the "single folks buses" on the Caravan, we slept each in our own sleeping bags, but not segregated by sex, and thus it was that one night I was sleeping next to one of the women in our group, the single mother of a one-year-old. I dreamed that we were embracing and kissing, and, when I woke up, that's what we were doing. She said she had had the same dream. I questioned myself closely: had I violated my vow? I didn't think so. A couple of weeks of very earnest walking and talking followed, and she let me know that she was very interested in pairing up with me. I wasn't sure if this was "love," as I had never had a serious relationship, but I was willing to find out. We moved into a camper mounted on a Cadillac hearse that happened to be empty, and there we were.

A little over a month later we discovered that, when we had consummated our relationship, we had started a baby.

"If you're balling, you're engaged. If you're pregnant, you're married" was the way things worked, and once we were committed to marriage, the fun began. One of the things we discovered in our years of communal living on The Farm was that you can get along OK with just about anybody for a couple of weeks, but after that, issues will arise, and my wife-to-be and I were no exception. Let me tell you, we had problems with each other. I did not want to listen to the "feedback" she was giving me about the way I was treating her, and vice-versa. The community standard was clear—men needed to listen to the constructive criticism they received from the woman in their life. To reject what my partner was telling me, at this stage, would end the relationship, and I would have to leave the community. I was not going to do that. I took a deep breath and a big swallow, and did my best to listen to her and do my part to make her happy.

That was in January of 1972. In April, we stood up in front of the community on Sunday morning and recited our wedding vows, which led us into a marriage that was very happy until it wasn't any more, in the late '80s, at which time we made other arrangements. But that's another story. Our community's agreements, and my appreciation of them and willingness to follow them, even if—or especially when—they didn't serve my ego, have shaped my entire life, and I'm glad they did, and that I didn't insist on doing things my way. And, when I look back on that marriage now, I can say for certain, "yes, we were in love."

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. See also his article "Baptism" in Communities *#197, pages 26-28.*

To reject what my partner was telling me, at this stage, would end the relationship, and I would have to leave the community.

Talking it out.

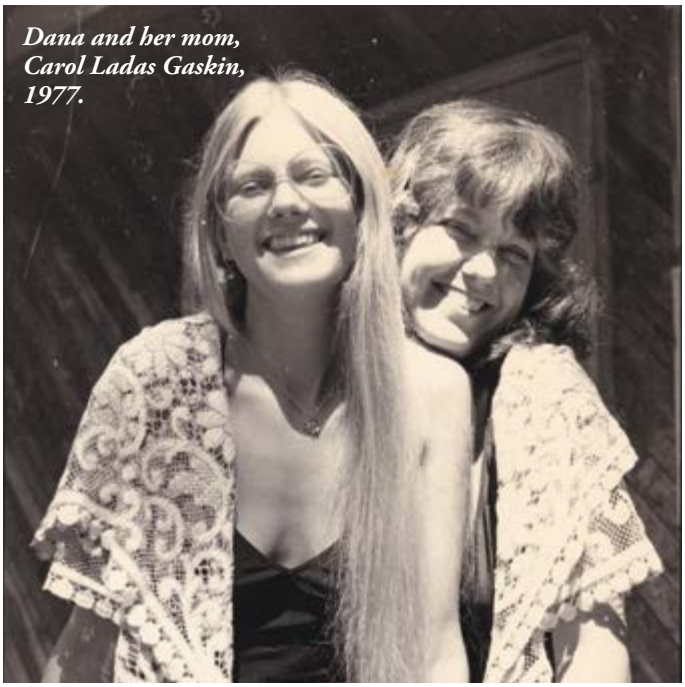
The Kids Are Talking: Pay Attention

Remembering a Communal Childhood

By Dana Gaskin Wenig

Courtesy of Dana Gaskin Wenig

Dana with her stuffed animals, 1969.



Dana and her mom, Carol Ladas Gaskin, 1977.

Permission of Carol Ladas Gaskin

I grew up going back and forth between two different intentional communities during the 1960s and 1970s, founded independently by my parents: Carol Ladas Gaskin and Stephen Gaskin. (My life split in two so decisively when they divorced that it's disorienting to see their names in the same sentence.) I don't have memories of us as a family, but I've seen the home movies. I'm quick to tell people that while both my parents created intentional communities, they did it in two different flavors: my mom and her friends in back-to-the-land; my father and his students in psychedelic hippie. (I'm imagining these as Ben & Jerry's flavors of ice cream.)

By the time I was eight, my mother and her closest friends had moved from northern California to inland British Columbia, Canada, where they bought 200 acres of lodgepole pine-covered land up a dirt road from a two-lane highway running through an unincorporated town. When I was 10, my father and his community bought a thousand acres in southern, middle Tennessee and started The Farm, arguably the largest intentional community in the US.

Living with my mom, watching her and other community members build the A-Frames pictured in her recent article, I breathed in the spirit of cooperation I witnessed, was inspired by my mother's can-do attitude, and even helped split cedar shakes for the exterior. (The floor was sawdust over dirt.) We lived entirely off the grid, using wood to cook our food and provide warmth, a wood-fired *banya* (sauna) for bathing, and a hand grinder to make flour for bread. As far as I know I am the only person still using the same recipe which is, in my memory, a central tenet of the community experience—each member grinding a hopper of wheat grains before breakfast to prepare the 12 cups of flour needed for the four loaves that would sustain us all for the coming week.

In the evening, there was no TV, so we listened to cassette tapes of Joan Baez, Judy Collins, James Taylor, or Carol King, or else to old episodes of the radio serial *Have Gun Will Travel*. Often one of the adults would bring out a guitar and the community songbook, leather-bound and tooled, and we'd sit around the wood-fueled furnace and sing late into the night. Some of the songs were gruesome—"Dona, Dona," in which "Calves are easily bound and slaughtered," another about a late-

night murder—but the feeling of togetherness is what stays with me. The adults took turns doing childcare each night, and when it was Eric's turn, he told us long, intricate, fantastical stories from the bottom of the loft ladder, stories that seemingly twirled up with the smoke from his pipe. You can find chapters of my mother's (as yet unpublished) memoir in Communities issues #194, "Water: Life in the Wilderness," and #198, "A-Frames."

When I lived with my dad, we were always someplace different. We lived in a Victorian in San Francisco, in a huge house across from the beach in Stinson Beach, in a Metro step van, and then in a renovated school bus painted white with two stripes around beneath the windows, one red and one blue. My stepmother arranged for dad to go on a speaking tour, so he and our extended family and about 250 of his students, in roughly 50 remodeled school buses and vans, went on a four-month-long Caravan (there's a book of that name about the trip and several Communities articles about it). A Madras-bedspread-topped double bed tucked behind the driver's seat, and a small, potbellied stove provided warmth. We left San Francisco in late 1970 along a northern route. Our bus had a full kitchen: sink, propane cooking stove (with oven), and a small refrigerator, meaning we were self-sufficient as we drove from state to state. I learned to bake Butterhorn Rolls as we rolled down the road.

When all the buses parked for the night, the kids would bundle out into the brisk air. I was the oldest, and whether I took it on myself or was told to (perhaps just once), I felt responsible for all the kids in our group escaping daylong confinement in a moving vehicle to run around the rest stop as if it were a playground. I worried about cars passing through, hoping they wouldn't hit any of us. And when it got dark (I was still frightened of the dark), I made sure everyone got back to the right bus safely.

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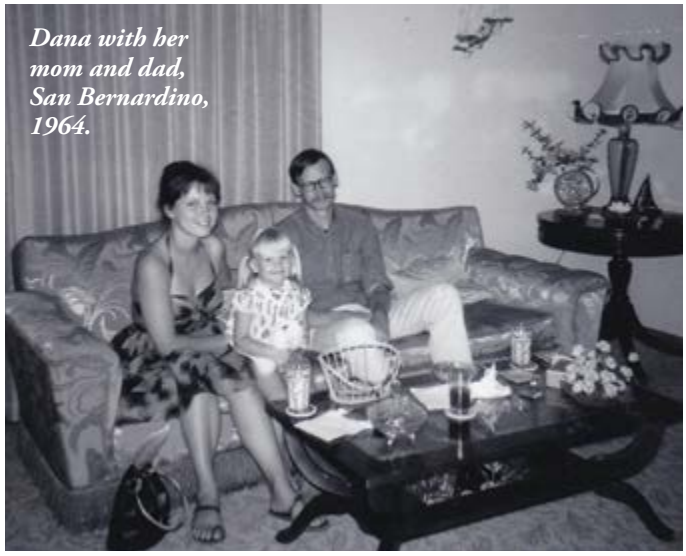
Because I went back and forth between my parents so often growing up, my memories are fragmented. I am a graduate of The Farm High, and while the teaching was sometimes uneven, I still count many of my high school teachers as friends. And I made friends my own age for the first time. I had grown up surrounded by adults and younger kids. I learned to work hard (for free) on the painting crew, at the clinic, cleaning the community showers, and rolling tortillas for a household of 40, all shoulder-to-shoulder with other people working just as hard. I loved living at The Adobe (my dad was often on tour), a large

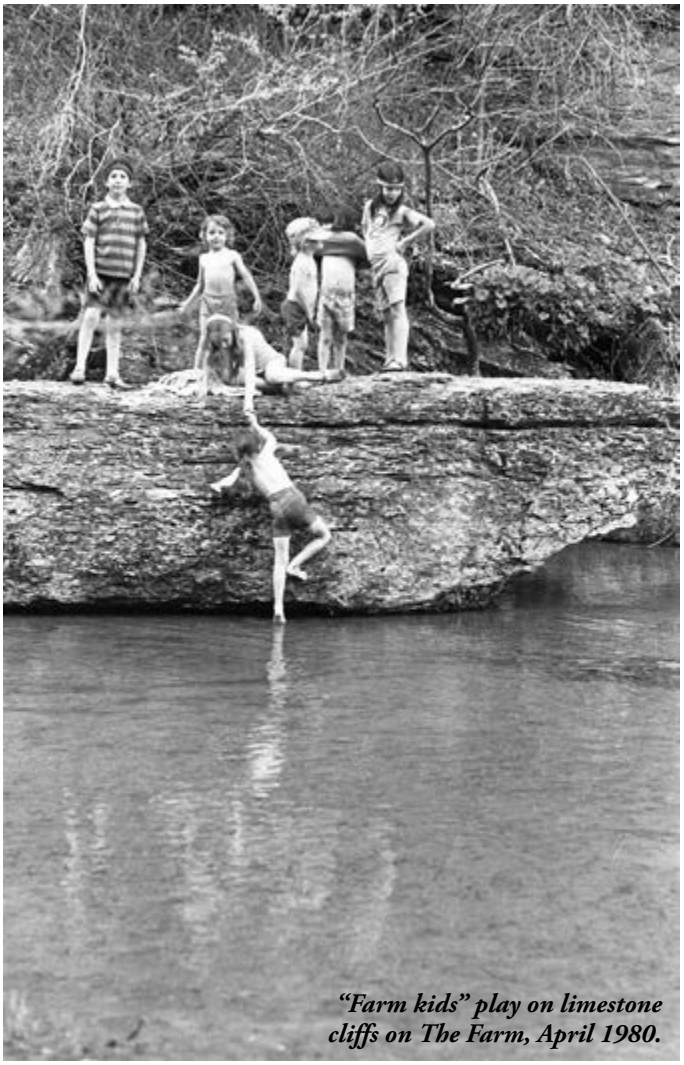


Dana with her mom and dad, San Bernardino, 1964.

Courtesy of Dana Gaskin Wenig

British Columbia: the big house.

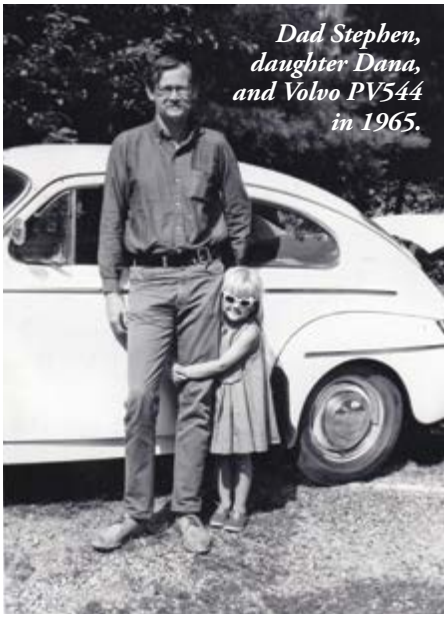
Permission of Carol Ladas Gaskin



"Farm kids" play on limestone cliffs on The Farm, April 1980.

Courtesy of Dana Gaskin Wenig

Dana's family's school bus home on The Farm, post-1971.



Dad Stephen, daughter Dana, and Volvo PV544 in 1965.

Courtesy of Dana Gaskin Wenig

house with a few families and a lot of teenagers like me, some of whom had run away to The Farm (they were required to call their parents and tell them where they were in order to stay).

One of the experiences I am most grateful for from my childhood is the opportunity to fall in love with and deeply connect to specific places: to land, trees, water. In British Columbia, I spent summers swimming in the warm water-table pond and in the cool river in the valley below. Tall, thin lodgepole pines painted the sky blue in summer, as the smell of sun hit pine duff. My feet felt secure in the knowledge of the cool, packed paths between our A-frames, and I had my own small patch in our huge, circular garden. Mom and I spent a lot of time together. She taught me the common and Latin names of native plants as we tramped through the woods collecting cuttings for the community's landscape nursery, always stopping for tea and lunch on a nice, mossy patch. And I discovered tiny worlds in the shaded places where lichen grew alongside wild orchids and ghost pipe. In winter, I remember snow everywhere, an unplowed road, the evergreen branches bowed with the weight. I walked up and down the three-mile road in rain boots the first winter, when it was 40 below zero and we got six feet of snow. In February, after the first melt, the snow crusted up so hard I could walk on top of it.

In Tennessee, oak trees covered hills and hollows, with only the rare evergreen interspersed. Spring brought the lightest hint of pale green to the branches of the oaks which turned quickly to dark green. The oaks made for good climbing. Later in the summer, sun dappled through dust-covered oak leaves and the main road grew thick with powdered-sugar dust I can still feel on my bare feet. In the hollows ran a cool, shallow creek for cooling off and exploring. The cicadas were so loud at night I could hardly hear myself think, and when glorious thunderstorms hit, I'd go out in it and take a shower. Fall meant bare trees, the forest loud with crunchy leaves, and back to school.

I worked at The Farm's Book Publishing Company in my senior year, learning typesetting, layout (by hand), and other publishing skills that continue to serve me. I also got to go to Guatemala with my dad and Farm carpenters and medical personnel twice in my teens after the 1976 earthquake there as part of the Farm's Plenty International relief work. One of our trips was in a renovated Scenic Cruiser bus filled with mattresses in the back and a kitchen in the front. (I have a piece online about this at rootsofplenty.org/stories/blessed-relief-a-love-story.) This trip left an indelible mark on my consciousness. I learned that life is not a meritocracy—that it is by accident of birth that I have what I have—and that even though The Farm lived below the poverty level (which was not great for the kids), we were rich in the eyes of the earthquake survivors we went to offer support. I'm told I still speak (rudimentary) Spanish in a Guatemalan accent.

I loved my dad very much and went on many road trips with him. I definitely wanted his undivided attention and his approval, but he was not a present parent. He was busy being a spiritual teacher and needing to be the center of attention. But he always picked me up from the airport on time, always gave me a $20 bill for "walking money," and he was always happy to see me. He was a strangely conservative dad for a hippie, and chary with acknowledgment or praise unless it was for how well I was taking care of him. I learned later he didn't want to give his children (or anyone else) a big head, so he purposely withheld praise—this is hard on people, especially kids.

I will always be grateful to my dad for giving me *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse, Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and *More Than Human* by Theodore Sturgeon before I was a teenager as if they existed in the same genre. I love that about him. I watched the documentary *"Sr."* last night, co-created by Robert Downey, Jr. and his father, Robert Downey, Sr., and was deeply moved by the relationship between parent and grown child as equals—as adults working together. My father and I were just entering that phase; it lasted only a few years, and then he started sliding into dementia.

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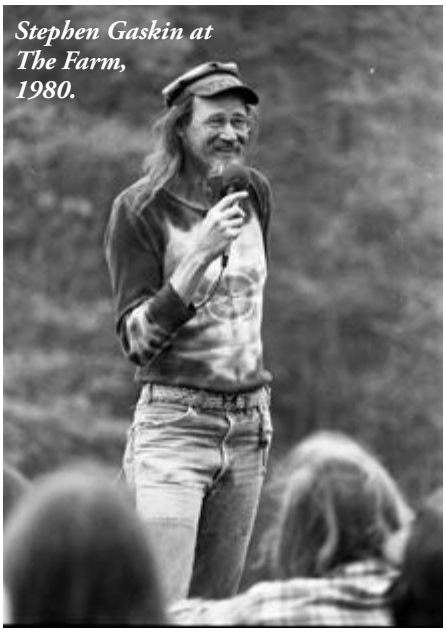
A quick search of the COMMUNITIES online index (gen-us.net/communities-index) shows over 20 articles about The Farm, most of which were written by people I know personally and saw as "the grownups" when I was a kid. Many of these authors are my friends, high school teachers, parents of my friends, and in some cases almost family. I know not everyone who lived on The Farm when I was a kid saw my dad as their spiritual teacher; some of the people who lived there called him friend, and others didn't feel they knew him at all. I will say it's awkward to be the preacher's daughter. The group that is just beginning to speak up in conversations about counterculture lifestyle are the children of community founders or those who were born on communities. All of this makes COMMUNITIES an interesting place to speak publicly about my childhood for the first time. But if my father taught me anything, it's that when someone hands you the microphone—if you have something to say, say it.

Of course, I have compared my childhood communities (and comparing divorced parents is almost obligatory), but at 62, with my dad gone almost 10 years now, and my mom and I living as close neighbors, I'm no longer interested in making one right and the other wrong: community or parent. It's been a relief to realize that it's not my job to explain, defend, or judge either of my parents, or either of the communities I grew up in. I learned so much from the unconventional childhood my parents chose for me. I also learned a lot from looking back on it with the help of therapy and from reading many memoirs on the topic. And I'm so grateful that my mom and I communicate openly about our experiences from those times, as I do with some family members and friends on The Farm also. And I've learned, from talking with hundreds of other children of the counterculture, that I'm not alone. There are hundreds of us, and we have a lot of the same experiences and concerns.

Living in counterculture community can have drawbacks for the children of the community. I was not at all prepared to live in the world when I left The Farm at 19, and a lot of my friends also struggled, still struggle, to live in the world as it is. It would have been helpful to be more prepared to thrive. I had learned to work as hard as I was able for no pay; I'm still unlearning that habit. I struggled in social situations because I didn't understand social mores. I avoided telling people where I was from, how I grew up, until I had known them for a long time. And I continued to put the needs of others first, something I learned primarily on The Farm. It is a burden to be taught that to be a good person, one should take care of everyone else before taking care of one's self.

Coming up the way I did, I couldn't help but raise my child differently from what the predominant culture expects. In my case that meant attachment/intuitive parenting, and collaboration rather than punitive discipline. I consciously chose to parent as differently from what I saw on The Farm as possible. One of the foundational principles The Farm espoused was nonviolence, yet I was witness to and have heard countless stories of parents practicing corporal punishment, gaslighting, and other coercive methods of control on their children, all of which cause lasting harm (see www.acestoohigh.com). My father and his wife practiced these methods and influenced other families to do so as well. The pain of this kind of treatment is multiplied by the hypocrisy, and leaves children, grown and small, wondering how bad they must be/have been to deserve this kind of treatment from people who say they abhor violence.

A willingness to embrace change and to examine life honestly is a key part of idealistic movements, but ironically, in many of the conversations I see between founding generations of community members and their children, either in person, on social media in closed community groups, or in families, when (grown) children speak about how their communities let them down or hurt them, "the grown-ups" often respond with silencing techniques now referred to as DARVO: "deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender."



Stephen Gaskin at The Farm, 1980.

The Adobe, house for families/teenagers on The Farm.

I know I'm speaking not just for myself in saying: when we who grew up in your experiment become brave enough and self-aware enough to speak about our pain, the least the grown-ups can do is listen. It's okay to have feelings about the fact that your ideals didn't fix everything, but then let those feelings be the beginning of a conversation between generations, not the end of it.

When the next generation (or the one after) begins to speak about what happened to them, please: pay attention. It's hard to talk about difficult experiences. When we do and someone we love, someone we see as an elder, attempts to silence us, it's crushing and infuriating and so, so disappointing. And it's harmful. In focusing on this aspect of community, I am speaking on behalf of perhaps hundreds of friends who grew up like me, who have worked hard to become as articulate and kind and clear as possible in order to speak to family, friends, and community members, and have met a wall.

Creating an alternative culture that counters the predominant culture is a valuable goal, but we each carry a hologram of the predominant culture inside our psyche that plays out whatever we have not healed from, and ultimately we still have to live in the world as it is. If we are really interested in changing the culture, we should listen to the children because they see in new ways and have different understandings. We need to learn from them in order to stay current. We can attempt to separate ourselves from the prevailing winds, yet still have the capacity to rain down abuse on those we love. I have learned to avoid organized spirituality and spiritual teachers, because I saw firsthand how the spiritual teacher/student dynamic created a trap that did not serve either side of the equation. And still I wouldn't trade any of it for a white picket fence.

Dana Gaskin Wenig is an editor, writer, artist, and teacher. She lives in Shoreline, Washington, with her husband of 30 years, two dogs, and an elderly cat. Her mom and step-dad live kitty-corner to the back. She is currently working on a memoir.

The woods in Tennessee, December 1980.

Aerial view of BC community.

Sunday Morning Services, The Farm, 1977.

Children of Utopia: Freedom's Toll

By Understanding Israel

"…for me having come from a culture where community was everything, the lack of community is especially noticeable and painful, where for others, who have lived their whole lives in the outside society, they might not know what they're missing."—Rachel Israel[1]

Photos courtesy of Understanding Israel

The photo to the right above was taken about 30 years ago. It is of a group of children that I helped to organize and form into a little drama troupe. Our community musicians wrote original songs; seamstresses made colorful regalia. A bus with a handcrafted interior and a handsome driver whisked us to intriguing and varied settings. As we women baked bread the pleasant sounds of troubadours singing in our manicured gardens wafted through our open windows. We thought we would be together for our lifetimes raising our children, growing organic food, helping each other. We were an attempt at a Utopian Community and famous, or infamous, depending upon the lens through which you viewed us. I viewed us from inside for 26 years.

Thirty years after that photo was taken, 41 percent of the children in the photo suffered from serious and disabling mental illness; among them, two committed suicide and one died from addiction-related illness. What happened? This article will provide a hard look at the possible toll our freedoms as adults may have taken upon our children's futures. It stands as a cautionary tale for those who know and dream and/or are building now the utopian communities we long for in our souls.

We were the ragtag remnants of the cultural wars of the '60s and '70s. Throwing away conventions like marriage, nine-to-five jobs, college educations, and nuclear families, we gathered in homes and on land collectively. We danced, sang, smoked pot, and experimented with psychedelics and sexual liberties. We embraced freedoms from what we felt our peers outside our world were accepting in a capitalistic, selfish world of exploiting the earth and each other. At one time our children numbered close to 150. We experienced a profound breakup when our dream fell apart through internal fighting, disillusionment with our powerful leader, drug abuse, and grudges over sexual outcomes and an unequal economy.

I stayed for another 15 years until the leader and his patriarchal followers gave me a final thumping and unglamorous exit. Through Facebook and personal connections, and as a mentor and former "Auntie" or mom, I stayed close to many of the children now adults. I almost completed a doctoral thesis on the mental and addiction devastation in adulthood I felt I saw later in many of the children. Here I simply list the three guidelines around freedom that my research and observation lead me to believe need to be addressed to create a healthy community environment in utopian societies.

1. Children (and also the vulnerable like the disabled and elderly) must be at the center of protections.

A community cannot be free from responsible attentive individual parenting responsibilities. Our charter was overly concerned with the discipline of children and not our responsibility to protect them. We allowed strangers in our homes, did not conduct background checks, and valued especially the service of men over the input of children as to who was "Creepy." Needless to say, some of these same adults, mostly men, sexually abused some of our children.

Some current research indicates that early sexual abuse prefaces and can lead to adult development of bipolar disorder.[2] One police officer I worked with to apprehend child sexual predators told me: "This is a predator's dream place be-

A government that does not give an equal voice to women shuts off the possibility of a balanced community.

cause you do not do background checks and you allow access of your children to anyone." As a chaplain now I have met and am aware of adults once children in our community who have bipolar disorder and were also sexually abused as young children.

So: Build safeguards into your community to protect your children from sexual abuse and thus also the possibility of adult onset bipolar disorder. Parents cannot be free from parental responsibilities by hoping the larger collective will raise their children.

2. Any use of adult substances that can lead to addiction must be separate from the day-to-day existence and raising of children.

We were careless in our use of psychedelics and experimental drugs and later also our homemade wines. In my many qualitative interviews with mentally ill or addicted adults once children in our community, I was surprised that only a few of them had actually been given substances by their parents. They instead made friends even at 10 years of age with the wandering nomads who brought and sold or traded a variety of mind-enhancing drugs into the community for the adults. Occasionally they carefully raided a parent's stash. Many as young as five learned from older children how to harvest and make teas with magic mushrooms that grew in the dung in a buffalo field nearby.

We as adults were too careless in our small yurts or crowded spaces to keep our use of these substances separate from our children's lives and to pay attention closely to what our children were collectively cooperating in. Unlike my Native American relatives who use items like peyote in separate ceremonies away from daily life, we integrated them into our daily lives, thus exposing our children's lungs to secondhand smoke and their eyes to what we did for enjoyment, spiritual enrichment, and/or relaxation. My research also indicates possible links in some cases between the early exposure to careless and excessive substance use, and later onset of depression and mental illness.

So: Keep any and ALL use of adult substances confined to ceremonies and/or at least away from the lives and eyes of children. Freedom to experience adult libations needs to be mindful of the impact on children's futures when they are carelessly or obsessively used.

3. Women need equal voice.

We were Patriarchal. Men were free to provide the governing decisions devoid or any real powerful influence from the women. A government that does not give an equal voice to women is a government that is one-sided and shuts off the possibility of a balanced community.

We saw "men as the head and women as the heart." As one observant visitor noted: "Men make all the real decisions and women just decide who is going to make the potato salad and watch the children." Enough said about that painful way of ruling. In fact it was the men's patriarchal council under a powerful leader that decided I was to be shunned and ejected from the community for my two sins: working with the police to rid the community of male children's sexual predators, and placing special-education-eligible children in the public schools so they could receive appropriate services.

So: In forming a utopian community make certain that the voices of women have equal powers of input and governing and creating policies.

• • •

I am sure there are other valuable aspects to incorporate in building a utopian community. However, I am choosing here to highlight these three. I personally saw over decades that their absence had negative impacts later on some of the children in our community. The children are your dreams, your hope for a future of peace and stability rather than outcomes of addiction and mental illness.

I still believe in utopian communities. I feel that many of our children now adults who remain close to their community "siblings" are successful adults and still benefit from the wondrous experience in a sadly demised but real utopian society we briefly and passionately built. Both the benefits and liabilities can be seen today in our progeny. For some of us, the songs are still sung in our diaspora; we meet in friendly and informal gatherings and traditional events tied to our historical traditions. We hold the new babies, encircle dying elders, catch up on each other's busy lives, and still dream and cling to the heart and center of our ties: our community.

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1. www.rachelisrael.net
2. journalbipolardisorders.springeropen.com/counter/pdf/10.1186/%20s40345-015-0042-0.pdf

Too Much of a Good Thing: Small-Group versus Large-Group Communal Childcare

By A. Allen Butcher

I joined communal society at age 20, partly due to looking for a culture in which to create a better lifestyle than the dysfunctional family in which I grew up. Eventually, the communal groups I joined, East Wind and Twin Oaks, evolved a family design which I call "cofamily," representing the current state-of-the-art of childraising in communal society. This is important because biological family and communal society do not always mix well. Like oil and water, the nuclear family and communalism tend to repel each other.

The social dynamic of family versus communalism is one of the main reasons I believe the dominant culture will always be private-property-based, with the common-property-based culture forever a counterculture. There is much to the story of biological family versus communal affinity-based family, which this article can only introduce. For more detail, examples, and discussion, see the 30-page document detailing the issues, with additional examples, free for download with the same title, here: www.Intentioneers.net.

When people contemplate having children, a natural concern is for support beyond the nuclear family for help with raising the kids. Creating a village for kids to grow up in provides for our children the traditional lifestyle that humans have enjoyed in the past. Today, the opportunity for raising children in a village is found in the various forms of intentional community or intentional neighborhood. Along with building a family, and a house, think also of building a community! The intention is that "For our young children, community is the closest they're ever going to get in this life to paradise!"[1]

Formerly, there were four primary forms of family: single-parent, nuclear (sometimes egalitarian), extended, and blended. In the School of Intentioneering a fifth form of family is added called the "cofamily," comprised of three-to-nine people with or without children, sharing affinities or commonalities, whether or not they are related by blood or marriage. "Co" in cofamily can refer to: cooperative, complicated, collective, communal, or similar adjectives. Cofamilies comprise about 40 percent of the 2010 *Communities Directory* (see ic.org/directory).

In at least Western Civilization people typically buy privacy as they become more affluent.[2] The result is the social pattern of the isolated nuclear family, requiring deliberate effort for "intentioneering" or recreating the lost social pattern of the village or neighborhood as a community-of-families. Several different forms of community are being built and enjoyed today; some are for-profit organizations like cohousing and class-harmony communities sharing privately-owned property, and some are nonprofit organizations like community land trusts and communal societies sharing commonly-owned property. In the School of Intentioneering (SoI) a cofamily found within any of those larger intentional communities is called a "nested cofamily."

In community I've observed that small-group communal childcare is a good thing, while large-group communal childcare can be too much of a good thing. In large-group communal childcare "the family," as lived outside of communal society in isolated, patriarchal, nuclear families, either does not exist or is barely recognizable. Large-group communal childcare becomes too much of a good thing when children are kept in a large group, and especially when they regularly sleep together in a children's house or dormitory. There may be some religious communities that still separate children from their parents at night in this way, yet generally "children's houses," in which children sleep at night with just one or two adults in the building as nighttime attendants, no longer exist as a common practice in at least the communal societies of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC) in

In large-group communal childcare programs the conflicts among caregivers around the myriad of issues involved in childraising simply become too repetitive for parents.

Photos courtesy of A. Allen Butcher

the US, and in the Israeli kibbutzim.

Most people are unaware of the transition in the design of communal society from children's houses to cofamilies. To avoid the continual reinvention of the square wheel of children's houses by new communal groups there is need to review the history and current best-practices of communal childcare.

In egalitarian communal societies in which there are no gender-roles, which is a result of all labor benefiting the community being considered equal, there is also no difference in reward or compensation between income-generating production work, and domestic or reproduction labor. This is the kind of gender-equal communal society which was idealized in the second stage of Marxist theory called the "worker's paradise," achieved in practice by skipping the first stage of Marxist communist theory of violent class-conflict to go straight into the voluntary, peaceful engagement in time-based, communal economics.

The irony is that when people turn away from the social design of the nuclear family to create a communal society, the primary lesson is that once most communalists have children they abandon communal sharing in favor of the possessive, competitive, nuclear-family lifestyle.

In the experience of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, particularly Twin Oaks and East Wind, many of those women who were most committed to the communal lifestyle as childless adults, generally made a 180-degree turn back to the nuclear family once they had a child of their own, subsequently leaving communal society with their child or children to set up their own isolated family household in the dominant culture. This has happened over and over again, such that two conclusions are discerned: first, this is why many communal societies have few or no children. Second, this is why the "outside world" is constructed of biological families, and therefore why the dominant culture is and I believe will likely always be based upon private property and competition rather than common property and communalism.

The focus of most writers of communal theory and history tends to be on questions of governance, leadership, economics, labor, and similar issues, disregarding the central issue of children. An exception is Timothy Miller, author of a series of books on American communitarianism, who wrote, "To put it simply, the children of communal founders, and others of the next generation in line, often are not interested in keeping the community going."[3]

Catholic Worker Family Community

To understand the essential dynamic of children in communal society, consider the experience of the Catholic Worker communities. In his book *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (1982), Mel Piehl quotes a long-time Catholic Worker community resident named Stanley Vishnewski who clearly explains the dynamic:

"Single persons under the influence of a powerful religious motive can live happily in a communal society where everything is shared in common. ... But we soon learned that marriage and our attempts at communal living were incompatible, for no matter how devoted to the work, the moment they married their relationship gradually and imperceptibly and then frankly and strongly veered away from the community to take care of their own. ... This fact, that the family seeks its own because it is a natural community, is the fundamental reason why a complete plan of communal living was bound to fail."[4]

In his first sentence, Vishnewski refers to only religious communities, yet the dynamic he then describes also exists in secular and multi-faith communal societies. Even if parents do raise their children in communal society, the children will likely choose to leave the lifestyle after growing up in it. This typically results in reluctance on the part of non-parents in communal society to support children. A good example is East Wind Community's 13-to-1 adult-child ratio (see www.theFEC.org).

Catholic monasticism solved the problem of children pulling their parents out of the communal society, and the threat of children's inheritances depleting Church wealth, by insisting upon the "vow of chastity," requiring all members to be celibate and therefore without children. In contrast, the Catholic Worker community response to the issue of children-in-communal-society, as Stanley Vishnewski explained, was to give up common-ownership communalism in favor of the sharing of privately-owned property in community.

Dan McKanan states in his book *The Catholic Worker After Dorothy* that "only [the Catholic Worker community] at Tivoli was truly communal." Vishnewski lived at Tivoli, up the Hudson River from New York City. McKanan goes on to explain the conflict between "the two vocations of parenting and hospitality" in the Catholic Worker movement, saying that "the presence of families as a central part of the movement is now widely recognized." Many, if not most Catholic Worker communities share the private property of a host family, called by the present author "class-harmony community" because there are two classes of members, those who own the land and those who reside on it as non-owners. Such communities may function communally, yet if they are not legal nonprofit organizations then they are sharing privately-owned property, not commonly-owned property.[5]

While the Catholic Worker movement has recognized that families with children choose the isolated nuclear family over large-group communal childcare, as Stanley Vishnewski explains, parents in Catholic Worker communities often practice small-group communal childcare. Sue Frankel-Streit of the Little Flower Catholic Worker activist farm near Charlottesville, Vir-

ginia states in her article "Life in a Resistance Community" in the year-2000 *Communities Directory* that "Communal...childcare can free up community members to spend time organizing, traveling to action sites, and doing support work."[6]

Like many Catholic Worker communities, Little Flower is comprised of a farm-family owning the property, joined by others for varying lengths of time, and so the community itself is a small group, which, when comprised of three-to-nine people, may be called a cofamily. If one or a few community members own the land while others rent or are residents, then Little Flower is a "class-harmony cofamily."

Israeli Kibbutzim: Abandoning Children's Houses in Favor of Family Apartments

As of the year 2000 there were 268 kibbutzim with over 115,000 people, or 2.4 percent of the Jewish population of Israel. By 2004 only about 15 percent of those groups remained communal, while most had devolved from communalism to cohousing-like communities on government land trusts.[7]

Many children who grew up in the kibbutzim's communal children's houses, and who did not subsequently leave the kibbutz, later wanted their own children to live with them in family apartments rather than have them sleep in the communal children's houses. So in the 1970s the great majority of the kibbutzim borrowed large amounts of money to expand their housing amenities such that children could live with their families in apartments.[8] Soon after, the financial recession in Israel of the 1980s reduced the income from kibbutz industries to the degree that many kibbutzim were forced by their lenders to privatize their economies in order to restructure their debt.[9]

Giving up large-group communal childcare in children's houses while adopting individual family apartments, and with the demise of shared domestic services such as laundry and food service, the kibbutz movement moved further from gender equality toward greater female domesticity. Michal Palgi states that "it is almost self-evident to say that when the kibbutz loses its unique characteristics, women will lose the advantages the old kibbutz bestowed upon them: economic equality, equivalent social security and legal equality."[10]

Amia Lieblich interviewed women on the kibbutz, asking them to comment on the changes. A woman named Yael reflected:

"For several years now we have been undergoing a gradual process of dismantling the kibbutz. … What sort of place shall we become? What is the red line we shouldn't cross? … The decisions are made by men, but the burden falls on women. Everything, everything is falling on women. … Now I hear people saying that they wish we could go back in time to have the kibbutz of 20 years ago. We want that old kibbutz! We lost many good things in the transition. Only after the changes were made did we realize how much we lost, the mistakes we made."[11]

Amia Lieblich explains in her article titled "Women and the Changing Israeli Kibbutz: A Preliminary Three-Stage Theory" that the changes in the kibbutzim occurred in three stages. From about 1910 to 1950 women worked primarily in kibbutz services such as food and laundry, and in communal children's houses or dormitories. In the second stage, from about 1950 to 1980, women led the change to family apartments, partly as a result of negative experiences they remembered as children growing up in the dormitories. Henry Near reported that from the early 1960s to 1992 all of the kibbutz movements' communal children's houses were gradually abolished.[12]

The kibbutzim's debt burden from the investment in new family apartments, followed by a time of economic recession in Israel, led to the third stage of kibbutz changes, from 1980 to the time of Lieblich's writing (i.e., 2002), in which many communal services were ended, including food and laundry services. Lieblich emphasizes that in this third stage of kibbutz evolution it was primarily the men who pushed their societies further down the slippery slope of privatization.[13]

In Daniel Gavron's book, *Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia,* the author describes the impacts of the various changes upon the kibbutz, saying that "whereas previous changes in the kibbutz way of life, such as increasing personal budgets and having the children sleep in their parents' homes, did not alter the fundamental character of the institution, the introduction of differential salaries indicated a sea change."[14]

Gavron's perspective provides a very significant point. The most critical aspect of the difference between communal time-based economics and that of the dominant culture's monetary economics is whether all labor that benefits the community is valued equally, or whether different types of labor are differently rewarded. Nothing else makes as clear a dividing line between communal society and the dominant culture as does the former's practice of valuing all labor equally that benefits the community, versus the latter's differential compensation for labor. This is the "red line" that Yael was looking for which divides communalism from private-property lifestyles.

Egalitarian Communalism: Abandoning Children's Houses in Favor of Cofamilies

It was the Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner's presentation in his utopian novel *Walden Two* of the "good life" being created through the experimental analysis of behavior that inspired Kathleen (Kat) Kinkade and others to cofound Twin Oaks Community in Virginia in 1967, and then East Wind Community in Mis-

souri in 1974. Acorn Community was started near Twin Oaks in 1993 by several long-term members of the two older communities, including Kinkade. East Wind, Twin Oaks, and a few smaller communal groups formed an association called the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC) at a meeting at East Wind in the autumn of 1976, after Kat returned from her visit to Israeli kibbutzim. During her trip Kat learned about the closing of the children's houses, their transition to family housing, and that the first kibbutz named "Degania Alef" founded in 1910 never did have a children's building. Ironically, the name "Degania" had been chosen for Twin Oaks' children's house built in 1973.

In her first book about Twin Oaks called *A Walden Two Experiment* Kat Kinkade wrote that "most of *Walden Two* was nearly sacred to us." *Walden Two* was written as a fictional communal society of a thousand people with children's houses and "psychologist kings," as Hilke Kuhlmann called the community organizers. While some members believed in this theory as much as did Kat, most did not.[15]

Twin Oaks and East Wind would strive to create and maintain communal childcare buildings as Skinner had included in *Walden Two,* with a "controlled environment" or "prepared environment" for the children. The intent was to develop a communal childcare program that would produce happy, intelligent, communal-acculturated children and young adults, using the processes of affection and positive reinforcement, the experimental analysis of behavior, behavior modification, and programmed instruction, called "behavioral engineering," as presented in Skinner's introduction to his *Walden Two* utopian fiction.[16]

The childcare environment was intended to encourage the children to live the ideals of the community. An anonymously written article in a 1974 issue of Communities explained that this resulted at Twin Oaks in the decision that "the children would be housed separately. … This plan seemed to work well in many Kibbutzim, and was, of course, also suggested in *Walden Two*. It means that the children have a place where they are free to wander about. ... [W]e hope that the separate building will help us to structure an environment which will encourage the behaviors we value, such as cooperation, curiosity, sensitivity, etc. (We are trying to structure the adult environment the same way, of course!) In addition, we felt that housing the children separately would help us avoid the possessive ties that often develop between parent and child."[17]

Twin Oaks' and East Wind's communal childcare programs were ended in the mid-1990s. In both cases the problem was parents who would not comply with Child Program decisions. While the communities continued to pay the financial costs for their members' children, the amount of labor contributed was much reduced. Parents now had to work together or find others in the community to help take care of their children. A circle of caregivers was then created by the parents around each child, which the present author is calling a "cofamily," each one embedded within the larger community as a "nested cofamily."

In large-group communal childcare programs the conflicts among caregivers around the myriad of issues involved in child-raising simply become too repetitive for parents. With the constant turnover or coming-and-going of parents and children in and out of the communal childcare program, causing the need to continually orient new parents and childcare givers to the prior decisions made, parents tend to burn out and withdraw from the community.

The larger the communal childcare system is, the more institutional rather than familial that childcare system becomes. Reading the writing on the wall, many young adults romantically attracted to communalism who meet a life-partner in community typically then quietly leave the communal society together to set up a nuclear family household in the dominant culture before having a child.

The Cofamily Collective Dream versus the Nuclear Family American Dream

The preference for the isolated nuclear family is presented in the School of Intentioneering as a primary reason why the dominant culture is based upon the private-property system, and communalism is a minor subculture. Yet many people want to live in community, so a form of cooperative living is needed that could be said to be "communal," while emphasizing privately-owned property. To meet this demand, classic cohousing was first conceived in Denmark to focus upon creating child-friendly villages, involving private dwellings built around common facilities, with a pedestrian rather than vehicle land-use design.

In the United States, after the Civil War and until the Great Depression in the early 20th century, social reformers took up the ideas of how architecture and spatial design affect the gender division of labor, creating what Dolores Hayden termed "material feminism." For six decades, roughly from the 1870s to the 1930s, ending with the beginning of WWII, the material feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the sisters Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Marie Stevens Howland, and others advocated and created neighborhood networks and united households in cities of the US for sharing domestic labor and services.[18]

Second Wave feminism in the United States began in the 1970s, primarily with the post-WWII Baby Boom generation. Dolores Hayden writes that while women's healthcare and political and economic rights were championed during the 1970s and subsequent feminist movements, the issues of material feminism, primarily how spatial design of the home reinforces the gender division of labor between men doing "production" work as the employed mort-

gage-holder and women doing domestic "reproduction," became a "lost intellectual tradition for most feminist activists."[19]

Amazingly, just a few years after Dolores Haden published *Redesigning the American Dream* in 1984, Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett published *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* in 1988, realizing every ideal and more in cohousing that material feminists had wanted in the previous era of feminist activism![20]

In the reoccurring waves of communalism through the centuries, generation after generation, young people continually seek to recreate communalism, only to have it abandoned by those who grow up in it. Centralized, large-group communal childcare in which children sleep away from their parents in children's houses can and has worked for long periods of time in various communal traditions, yet this cultural design pattern is usually eventually abandoned. The Israeli kibbutzim utilized children's houses for about 80 years, and perhaps a few still do, and of the FEC communities in the US, Twin Oaks carried on centralized, large-group communal childcare for about 25 years, and East Wind for about 15 years.

Centralized childcare programs that utilize a general manager or a small committee making most or all decisions for the children, rather than consensus of the caregivers, are able to carry on the centralized childcare system longer, as this model of child program management tends to emphasize experience and expertise in child development and care. Presumably, this is how the kibbutzim were able to carry on their children's houses for generations. The FEC groups sometimes used consensus-of-the-caregivers, and sometimes general managers.

Cofamilies with or without children, whether or not comprised of people related by blood or marriage, living as a small community or nested within a larger community, serve as community building blocks for the liberal, alternative, cooperative Collective Dream. This is similar to how nuclear families are the building blocks of the conservative, dominant, competitive culture of the American Dream. Just as the conservative culture of the religious right champions the nuclear family as the answer to abortion, the liberal culture of the religious left may champion the cofamily as the alternative, countercultural answer to abortion.

In the US and perhaps elsewhere, much like with monastic history, the common pattern is of communal societies choosing to have few or no children while around them various degrees of cooperative societies develop with a focus upon children and families or cofamilies. As advocated by the School of Intentioneering, privately-owned property groups and commonly-owned property groups within a local network of intentional communities are called a "regional commonwealth," with the concentration of communities around Twin Oaks constituting the "Louisa Commonwealth." This balance of different forms of property-sharing in a particular locality may be recognized as the state-of-the-art of countercultural community.

Effects of the Transitions of Communal Childcare Systems

I left Twin Oaks with my child a few years before the community ended its large-group communal childcare program. In 1988 Twin Oaks had conducted a "Child Program Process" facilitated by Caroline Estes of Alpha Farm and involving the entire community, to resolve the issues and conflicts around children. Yet I felt that bigger changes were needed than what came out of the Process. The decision was made that the younger age group of children should sleep at least four nights per week in Degania, which showed that there remained a strong preference for separating children and parents at night in Twin Oaks' large-group communal childcare program. I thought this would assure continual conflict in the Child Program, although I did not have a clear alternative to offer that did not favor the nuclear family. At the time, my best suggestion was to "give people choices," while I was gradually developing in my mind the idea of the small-group cofamily.

In 1989 I decided that rather than participate in what I saw as years of further Child Program conflict at Twin Oaks, I preferred to get involved in the new form of children-first community called "cohousing" that had just arrived in the US from Denmark.

Sometime in the early to mid-1990s Twin Oaks abandoned its children's house to leave childcare up to the parents to arrange for their children, resulting in small-group communal childcare. Shortly after that, Degania became the residence of a three-child nuclear family for a few years, an ironic mockery of the community's original intent for Degania of large-group communal childcare. Over the years, Degania has also been used for daycare, a preschool, and other functions.

Perhaps the most striking lesson of the transition from large-group to small-group childcare in communal societies is how the change does or does not affect the whole community or movement. Catholic Worker communities turned from the ideal of large-group, common-ownership communalism to favor small-group, class-harmony communities respecting the cohesiveness of nuclear families. The Israeli kibbutzim privatized their economies in order to accommodate nuclear families, by changing from large-group communalism to cohousing-like communities on government land trusts. The Federation of Egalitarian Communities, however, made no change in their economic design as a result of changing from large-group to small-group communal childcare. The reason for this would be that the change in how children were to be raised had no effect upon the groups' egalitarian labor systems using time-based economies, called in the SoI "vacation-credit, labor-sharing systems."

Mala, a Twin Oaks member, said it most succinctly to a maga-

zine reporter that "Our labor credit system is the glue that keeps this community together." Jon Wagner states further in his 1982 book *Sex Roles in Contemporary American Communes* that "the moral and sociological importance of the egalitarian communes cannot be denied…. These communities may be among the most nonsexist social systems in human history."[21]

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8. Near, p. 735.
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13. Lieblich, pp. 64-65.
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17. Anonymous, p. 10.
18. Hayden, 1981, pp. 55, 91, 98-99, 184; Hayden, 1986, pp. 54, 72-73.
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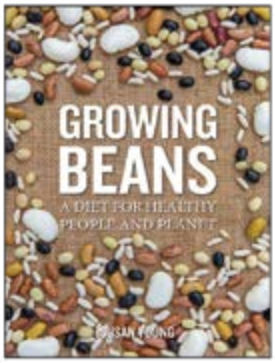

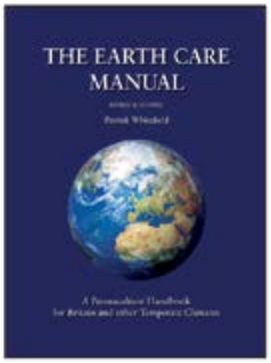

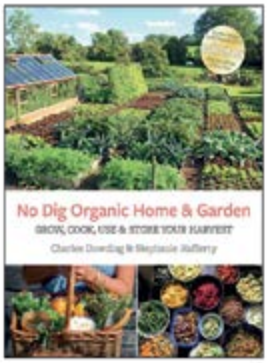

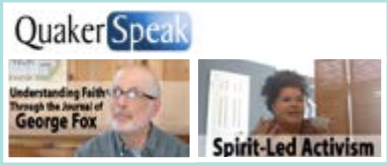

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tem can feel like it has a grip on you; in many cases it does, in fact, have a grip on you. And nothing can bring an intentional community to a stop faster than running out of money. Further, if your community fails for lack of money you might think that it was your fault. It's hard enough to manifest an ecovillage vision, but you don't need to add insult to injury!

Money and economics are huge topics. In this article I'll cover only some basics that relate to intentional community development. The topic is worthy of several books and based on my experience I believe it should be addressed more thoroughly in the communities movement.

Money and Perception

Do you have the financial means to make such a purchase outright and have enough funds left over to develop your dream? If not, how will you manifest your dream and what steps are you willing to take to secure it?

Before I embarked on my founding journey I lived in a number of communities: group houses, student cooperatives, permaculture sites, and aspiring ecovillages. In all I was struck by the financial privilege that gave those with money a different status in community and a different outlook on life compared to those with little money who struggled financially in the same environment. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" goes the phrase, and this is quite evident in community settings. As a starving student I envied those with enough financial support that allowed them to focus 100 percent of their time on their studies without having to hold down a part-time job. Why do some students get As in their courses and others get Bs? Could it have something to do with money?

But not everyone in positions of property ownership have an abundance of money or financial privilege. It might look like it from the outside, but on the inside a lot of owners are struggling to make ends meet and maintain a comfortable environment where dreams can manifest, creativity can flourish, and community can thrive. Maintaining a vision (business, health food store, etc.) often means a lot of work and dealing with "invisible structures" as many a founder can relate to. (And as noted by David Graber, they might even blame themselves for the lack of money.)

When people showed up at my urban and rural communities I was often perceived as the "owner" and "landlord" who had the financial means to create such a vision. And while these words have merit, there was also the reality of "debt," "mortgage," "deeds of trust," and expenses that had to be met. Just because someone "owns" land doesn't mean they are debt- and stress-free; in reality, most of the time it means that the bank owns the property and you have "title" to it. And if you get behind on your monthly mortgage payments the bank can take the property away. Many a time I had the experience of being in wonderful group settings, only to return to my office to figure out how to keep things afloat.

The vision of creating a permaculture-inspired ecovillage was the presentation: the stage upon which most activities occurred. And as with all stage productions there is a lot that goes into them before, during, and after the performance. During our 2009 Permaculture Design Course I was simultaneously having a deep permaculture experience but also busy in the background dealing with Wall Street fraud. Facing a potential complete loss of everything I had worked for I struggled as I learned the permaculture principle of "sharing equity" while fighting a corrupt financial system that preyed on vulnerable borrowers.

As my professional journey moved more and more into the role of being a "developer" I was faced with even more and more responsibilities and expenses (and status) that many people didn't understand. And since the word "developer" is a loaded term I had to tread lightly with those who were traumatized by it: White man + Developer = Evil, and worthy of verbal attack. Oh the joys….

Magic and Debt

"Manifesting" money comes easy when you already have it or have access to it in one way or another. "Calling my parents" is a truism that often resides in the shadows, sometimes in the unconscious. [Disclosure: I had some help from my dad, but I was in debt the entire time.]

As abundantly noted by David Graber, debt is a form of violence and there's no shortage of trauma around it. Few things can "trigger issues" more than money and our relationships to it. Our movement is filled with varied beliefs about money, abundance, manifestation, the laws of attraction, follow your bliss (and the money will follow), etc.—as well as many stories about the hardships faced under debt, often resulting in conflict with like-minded community members, and failure. My first glimpse of this was in student housing where every dollar mattered and partitioning food in the community refrigerator often resulted in high drama: this was a lesson for my future community experiences. "Who ate my Canadian Extra Sharp Cheddar?!"

Are you sharing community with people who have college degrees and no student loan debt? When you have to hold down a job you don't like but share community with someone who is traveling the world visiting ecovillages, seemingly debt-free, how does that shape your relationship with them?

The Protestant Work Ethic and Community

"We earned our ecovillage!"

Founding and maintaining a community requires work, and often a lot of it. But by and large the framing of success as the result of "work" is problematic when it is rooted in the Protestant Work Ethic, which is economic cultural baggage prevalent in our society. If you have financial means to create a community then "hard work" can pay off due to the privilege and stability you have with land, housing, and memberships. But if you're financially struggling then the social complications of creating an ecovillage can weigh heavily

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on you. As such, the phrase "we earned it" is worthy of reflection. "Earning" things is an underlying and often unconscious psycho-economic premise in many an alternative movement, and the "earning" often has everything to do with a host of other factors that worked in your favor to reach success: finances, location, timing, the state of the stock market, social status, etc.

Unlike the belief that the universe manifested your community because you harnessed the magic of it, "earning" your community assumes that "hard work" is the formula for success. As noted thoroughly in Diana Leafe Christian's book *Creating A Life Together,* it will take a lot more than hard work to create a successful community. But "work" is an economic assumption and relates to money. Marxist theory aside, it's a good idea to know how you relate to the concept of work and how you're going to apply it to your community.

Action Plans

A lot has been written about the economics of community and how to strategize money to create a vision. There are simple guidelines and resources that provide practical steps moving forward. Here's my short list:

First, address your beliefs about money and "work." (Two great things that go great together!) Take a deep dive into your economic self. Look at your personal finances, your history with money, etc. Most importantly, engage others (mainly potential community folks) in financial discussions and flesh out issues and concerns. Take all of the skeletons out of the closet. For example, maybe someone in your group is still reeling from the debt they dealt with when they owned a home, and is trigger-happy to share their issues with money. Put it all on the table and sort it out. For such you might even consider third-party meeting facilitation.

Second, figure out how you're going to do it. Talk to mortgage brokers, check your credit score, put together a budget, etc.—all the practical things anyone would do to make an investment, just like a consideration to buy a car. There are many financial advisers who can help, some of whom are grassroots and can help smooth out some of the rough spots. Resources are available.

Third, call your parents. There is simply no reason why you cannot take advantage of anyone who is willing to support you in your vision, be it a college education, purchasing a home, or founding an intentional community. If someone is willing to help, let them help. If you have a rich uncle, go for it. And in many cases if they loan you money you can feel good knowing that your monthly mortgage payments are supporting people who care about your vision as opposed to an impersonal corporate entity.

Finally, assess the numbers carefully and ask yourself if you want to go into debt for such a vision. And if you have partnerships in the works **make sure you have solid legal documents that everyone understands.** A great way to stop an ecovillage is to get into conflict with your partners and wind up in court. This is a stressful, time- and money-consuming prospect that you can avoid if you project worst-case scenarios and work backwards to your present state of beginning. Assume the worst and prepare for it. This is not "negative thinking" or a negative "law of attraction." It's a very practical reality to address, and if the time comes you'll be glad you did.

Financial Literacy

Develop some financial literacy and learn how to speak the language of money. Host focused workshops or meetings where financial transparency is established and financial terms are defined. Depending on what part of the country you're in, the difference between a "mortgage" and a "deed of trust" can be confusing. You should know the difference. I am a fan of the *Dummies* series and found *Mortgages For Dummies* and *Real Estate For Dummies* to be quite helpful.

Or perhaps your community is working with alternative financing, such as a Revolving Loan Fund. Regardless, learn some basics about money, terminology, interest rates, contracts, agreements, etc. Your vision might be to be "outside the system," but the system most likely is playing a key role in your journey. I suggest learning the system and beating it at its own game.

Those Without Money

The dynamic of the "haves" and the "have nots" is one that should be addressed up front. Those without money might feel disparaged or left out of important power dynamics, but it's often the case that they have an easier, freer time in community not straddled with debt. And when community members without money are not allowed to attend "owners' meetings" and can't participate in discussions about ownership, things can get weird.

Those with money should really think about how they function within community, and if they aren't willing to share financial information with the community as a whole they should refrain from comments such as "No, we can't do that. We guard the purse strings carefully." Statements like these often leave the community member insulted and condescended to. (Again, money trauma is a real thing.) Unless the ones with financial control share information and work on creating an egalitarian system, then there is no amount of smiling, hugging, group circles, or sexual persuasion that will change that dynamic.

Nuts and Bolts

Who is giving money to whom? Is the founder or committee in charge of delegating tasks, managing work trade, or collecting fees in a different economic position than the ones who are doing work-trade and/or making payments? This human-to-human economic anvil is where a lot of economic energy is. When you buy a cup of coffee you have an economic interaction with the person or place selling it; likewise the work-traders are interacting with the "managers" who are making sure the work-trade is done—and done accordingly.

Is the solution to this dynamic to create a consensus-based community? Practice NVC? Embrace anarchy and non-hierarchical models of community living? Get trained in sociocracy? Or will the cultural baggage and trauma of the larger system enter into these relationships?

This is a lot to consider. My multiple efforts to break down hierarchy and create a consensus-based roundtable usually failed. One person talked to me before a meeting about food-sharing and said I was expected to get the type of soy milk I like because I was the "owner." I explained that by creating a consensus-based group model I was giving up control and willing to accept not getting things I wanted.

He didn't believe it, even after he got the type of soy milk he wanted.

So now what? And how does it feel going into a meeting with the assumption that you have an economic and/or power advantage over someone else? Or a disadvantage?

From the Ground Up

Established communities can usually give a clear idea of what's involved, how much things are going to cost, and what it took to achieve where they are. But starting from scratch rarely offers this clarity. If you're going to embark on founding a community it behooves you to map out as many details as you have bandwidth for. Don't be shy to hire professionals to help you sort the pathway forward, figure out financing, and get your financial ducks in a row. And if you're going to assume debt be sure to unpack what it means and how you're going to navigate it. A good pair of financial binoculars will come in handy.

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.

THE BUCK STOPS WHERE?
Starting and Stopping an Ecovillage, Part Two: Money

By Dan Antonioli

If history shows anything, it is that there's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt—above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it's the victim who's doing something wrong.—David Graber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*

I appealed to the Universe for abundance. Then I called my parents.—Community member

Courtesy of Dan Antonioli

Of all the challenges I faced as an ecovillage founder (and member) money was by far the biggest. In the last article ("From the Ground Up," Communities #198) I noted that manifesting visions and following your bliss doesn't always work out, and one of the main reasons is lack of money. Plain and simple.

How will money impact your experience of "freedom"? Will it empower you to be free or tie you down with the burden of "responsibility"? You and your friends financed a community... now what?

Unless you join an existing community that doesn't require a financial investment, you are going to need money, and oftentimes that means going into debt. The purchase price, and your ability to make that purchase (and probability of debt) will set in motion the journey you'll be on for quite some time. Are you prepared to take on debt and the stress that often goes with it? Have you ever struggled with money? And how does debt affect you psychologically and the community around you? The above quote by David Graber might seem harsh but the intensity and cultural psychology of debt is deeply woven into the fabric of our culture, and joining an ecovillage and/or intentional community often brings that debt baggage with it. Facing this head-on is a good idea; otherwise you'll learn about it the hard way. Even if you have financial privilege to support your vision, a lot of things are going to come down to money.

Once you go into debt a lot of things can happen and the sys-

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

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—**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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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.

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