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Communities

Life in Cooperative Culture

Winter 2023 • Issue #201
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Privacy and Transparency

All Eyes on Us?

Silence Is Less than Golden

A Monkeywrencher in Our Midst

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This Winter 2023 edition of Communities is the final issue of those subscriptions. Fortunately, we have received funding to continue this program in 2024. However, the recipients will not all stay the same.

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We hope to hear from you!

Thanks again for being readers, and hope you've enjoyed this past year of Communities.

—Chris Roth, Editor

Issue #201
Winter 2023

COMMUNITIES

PRIVACY AND TRANSPARENCY

ON THE COVER

One can "hold it all in" for only so long. Approximately 7,700 years ago, the volcanic Mount Mazama in south-central Oregon let it all out, forming a caldera which now holds Crater Lake (*Giiwas* in Klamath), the deepest freshwater body in the United States. Photo (from five miles above) by Chris Roth.

Communities
Life in Cooperative Culture

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Date Rape, Apologies, and the Evolution of Consent

In his article in the summer issue ["Agreements and Individuality, The Farm's 'Multistery,' and My Shotgun Wedding," Communities #199], Martin Holsinger writes: "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." After making that statement, he never goes on to apologize to the women that he assaulted or raped. I found it offensive for him to blame his behavior on "the culture around me" when, in fact, he still remembered that his mother had told him "make sure your partner is having a good time," which is a pretty good definition of consent, for that era. Just because what he was doing might not have been called sexual assault or rape at that time doesn't mean it wasn't wrong and harmful to the women involved. The President of the Royal Spanish Football Federation has lost his job over a forced kiss. It sounds like Martin Holsinger has gotten away with much more. I call on Martin Holsinger to publish an apology in these pages to the women he assaulted or raped. I'm sure they have never forgotten.

Sharon Blick
Eugene, Oregon

Martin Holsinger responds:

Dear Ms. Blick,

Thank you for your concern. I'd like to begin by clarifying what I meant when I wrote "what we now call sexual assault and date rape." It has to do with the change in what is meant by "consent" over the last 55 years. In the '60s, "consent" meant "not saying no," while these days it means "explicitly saying yes." I think this is a great improvement in many ways. I should also make it clear that whenever I got a verbal or behavioral "no," I respected it, but, as we both are aware, sometimes people will not say "no," when they would like to. That was what I was referring to in my article. I certainly never forced anybody to kiss me, much less anything more intimate. After the intervention I described in my article, I reached out to as many of the women I felt I had been pushy with as I could find and apologized. They numbered about a half-dozen. I thought I made it clear from the rest of what I wrote that I repented, but I can't control what those who read my writings read into or fail to understand in them. I will say that, 55 years after these events, my memories of them are still wince-worthy. Perhaps I should have included all that in the article, but it was already long by Communities magazine standards.

I mentioned what my mother told me about sex. I didn't mention what my father told me about sex, because my father never told me anything about how to treat women or what it meant to be a man. Behind that lies the oft-remarked fact that our culture has no serious rites of passage into adulthood, as all "primitive" cultures do, and that we are spiritually impoverished by that lack.

You wrote: "I found it offensive for him [me] to blame his behavior on 'the culture around me.'"

Of course my attitudes were shaped by the culture I grew up in. Everybody's are. That's what makes a culture a culture. Even though I was perceptive enough to see that there was a great deal wrong with my culture, including its sexual mores, and to begin to understand that, as a member of it, I was warped in the same ways. There is a huge gap between having an intellectual understanding of one's cultural and family programming and having the confluence of auspicious circumstances and personal psycho-emotional strength to break one's bad habits, whether personal or cultural. The intervention I described, and the way the Caravan/Farm community around me supported my consequent determination to change, was a turning point in my life.

To respond from a somewhat different direction, "the culture around me" featured cartoons in mass circulation magazines in which bosses chasing their secretaries around their desks was considered humorous, rather than grounds for the boss's termination. The television shows and movies I watched reinforced a similar view of relations between the sexes. I distinctly recall surreptitiously reading a book in my mother's copious library: *Peyton Place,* by Grace Metalious. As I read it, the overall dynamic of the many explicit sex scenes was men initiating in-

timacy with hesitant/reluctant women who gradually warmed to the idea. OK, that's what a best-selling female author had to say about how women liked men to approach them. Who was I to disagree? I figured that was what a man had to do in order to "make sure his partner had a good time." Nothing necessarily incompatible there!

To ensure an accurate understanding of my mother, her library also contained the works of Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen, Mark Twain, Karl Marx, and T. S. Eliot, among others, which I also read, and which, I think, have served me better than Ms. Metalious. But they had nothing to say about the nitty-gritty of relationships and sex.

I've already gone on a good deal longer than Chris Roth suggested I should, and could include a good deal more in my response, because your letter raises some very worthwhile, but complex, issues, but I will briefly mention one other point: in the years since I was in my early 20s, science has discovered that the brain circuits that enable us to understand the long-term consequences of our actions do not fully mature until we are in our mid-20s. This affects all of us, and should be taken into account when considering the foolish decisions of so many young people our society considers fully responsible adults. For more on that, check out the work of Prof. Robert Sapolsky.

So, in closing, if anyone I have offended sexually and have yet to apologize to personally, or who would like more closure, happens to be reading this, please understand that I deeply regret my insensitivity. If you wish to contact me and express whatever you need to express, or if there is some way I can be of assistance to you by way of making up for what I did, please let me know.

Thanks again,

Martin Holsinger
Nashville, Tennessee

P.S. I think the issues you raised are so worth going into that I am going to use your letter (without your name) and this response as the basis for an in-depth essay at my Deep Green Perspective blog, brothermartin.wordpress.com. (See brothermartin.wordpress.com/2023/09/09/i-stand-accused-and-respond.) Thank you very much for the inspiration!

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

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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.

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cohousing

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$100 off National Cohousing Conference	✓	✓	✓	✓
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200+ recorded event sessions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Highlighted Directory listing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support for the cohousing movement, CohoUS, and the many services we offer	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free classified listings on website & eNews		Benefits extended to 3 members of company	✓	✓
Introduction + breakout at The Commons				✓
Dedicated social media post			Benefits extended to ALL members of community	✓
Featured story in eNews				✓

www.cohousing.org/membership

Privacy and Transparency at Pleasant River Community

By Dianne Brause

In response to the editor's request for more articles for this issue on Privacy and Transparency, I volunteered to write something from my experience of living in community over the course of almost 20 years. Many of you may recognize me and our community from the following story, but I will call our group Pleasant River Community, since I no longer live there, and what I am going to share may no longer be true for it today.

In the beginning, as our community was initially forming, we perhaps had the option of choosing between Privacy and Transparency. However, since the land was already known throughout the region and had a rather notorious and negative reputation left over from the previous occupants, it didn't seem prudent to attempt to go underground and try to operate without anyone noticing. Wherever we went, people would immediately ask us what we planned to do on the land. In return, we would ask them what they hoped/imagined we would do there. The answers we got ranged from "biting the heads off of chickens during wild initiation rites" to "a nudist colony would be nice," "a sedate meditation center," "a program teaching sustainable farming practices," "an encampment of hippie activists trying to stop all logging of the old growth forests," and more.

Obviously, people already held their own theories as to what might happen there, so our decision was to be quite overt in our actions, and to directly contact and involve the local authorities in our decision-making process—as it seemed that neither they nor we really understood what the recently-changed land-use regulations meant or how they would be upheld. At that point, it seemed like the law read that only five unrelated adults could reside on the 87 acres we had recently bought—unless we could prove a direct line of continuous nonconforming use from the previous owners to our occupancy.

We chose to invite the powers that be to a tour of the property, complete with a meal to talk about our thoughts and ideas for the future. Also, we attended the weekly Monday night potluck and volleyball game at the local recreation area. We were continually queried about our intentions by our neighbors who ranged from loggers about to lose their jobs because of "those dammed environmentalists" to "born-again" Christians who feared for the sacred virginity of their 17-year-old daughters, to Californian transplants who were searching for a more homegrown life. So, answering the question as to who we were and what we planned to do in their neighborhood was like walking a tightrope between truthfulness and half-truths! And since we weren't sure of the answer ourselves, we tended to be more or less honest. Fortunately, we seemed human enough to pass muster with most of them, and eventually, we did get a ruling akin to a nonconforming use status—at least until we wanted to build anything new and substantial, and then a new land-use plan would need to be presented and approved by the authorities (and our neighbors!).

So, we started out with an ethic of transparency, and that permeated into other areas of our life as a community.

One of the factors that very much pushed us into Transparency vs. Privacy as individuals—which then became the group norm—was a personal/spiritual growth workshop that a couple of our members brought to us from their previous lives.

This came at a time when we needed to break through certain blockages that had built up over time as we met the inevitable challenges of learning to live together cohesively as people whose growing-up years were predominately spent in nuclear families within middle-class, mostly white neighborhoods, where as children, we often had the privilege of getting our way when we wanted something. Many of us seemed to be frus-

One thing that differentiated this workshop from most personal growth or spiritual retreats was that we did not strictly adhere to the normal *"What is said and done in this room, stays in this room"* philosophy.

trated that our fantasies of finding perfect love and unity through joining a community actually took a lot of work, seemingly endless meetings, and that "our way" was not often seen as the perfect solution that we thought should be obvious to everyone else. Some of us were discovering that the patterns that worked so well at manipulating our parents, or bossing around our younger siblings, or convincing our grandparents to give us things we weren't usually allowed to have, because we were "so cute" or "so smart," were suddenly not working so well within the whole group.

The structure of this workshop included "platform work," where an individual offered to go up in front of the whole group of between 20 and 50 people and allow themselves to be "transparent and in the moment" with thoughts, feelings, and sometimes body movements. This person would be guided by a couple of instructors who would offer suggestions on how to go deeper and express oneself as fully and honestly as possible. Often, their coaching led to emotional catharsis of one kind or another—be it laughing, crying, hitting (something safe), singing, screaming, sharing traumatic childhood experiences, or having the courage to tell another participant that they loved them or that they "couldn't stand how they did so and so." Although this level of sharing openly might seem incredibly frightening and embarrassing, it seemed to "work" because there was great care given to creating a "safe space" for this depth of disclosure to occur.

Another technique used to further connections and honesty between people was called "milling," in which participants were asked to briefly come face-to-face with each other and do a "one-way" share—which might be a disclosure about themselves or a verbal or nonverbal communication with their partner. Sometimes, the directions were to tell the other what you admired about them or even something that irritated you that they had done or said. The other partner would simply say "thank you" and move on to a different partner for another several-minute interchange. Usually, there were several sets of pairings and sharings before the period ended. Obviously, this pattern of sharing was quite different from the American "norm" of meeting and greeting, and often brought up strong feelings within the individuals.

This process would often be followed by "triads"—where three persons would chose one another to work together for a period of time, divided equally between the three, where the focus would be on one of the triad to report out what was going on within themselves,

Photos by Chris Roth

with the full attention and support of the other two. This allowed each participant within the workshop the time and attention to process whatever was coming up for them at a level that they were willing to disclose. And, whenever the triad seemed to need further support, an "assistant" who had previously gone through the workshop was there to encourage, assist, and create safety for the person sharing and/or their partners.

As challenging as this workshop might sound, it became a near-instant success, not only with the members of Pleasant River, but also with the general public, who were invited to partake as well. Eventually, these workshops were held as often as once a month over the course of almost 10 years. The depth of sharing that went on during these experiences created a cadre of people who grew to love and support one another outside of the classroom as well as within it. Many of them chose to become assistants in the workshops and learn some of the skills of "holding safe space" for one another and "coaching" others in going deep and truthfully into one's feelings, while finding safe and appropriate ways to express those emotions.

Over the course of time, almost every member of the community chose to become a student in this workshop at least once and a number went through the process numerous times. Also, many chose to become assistants, helping by doing various tasks ranging from childcare and meal preparation, to setting up the room, to standing in the back of the room creating "safety," to sitting in on triads in support of the students processing their feelings. Since most of us had found meaning and positive clearing in our own lives through this process, we felt that our support as assistants would help our fellow community members, as well as new friends from outside the community, in their own journeys to greater clarity and personal growth. These people became our "family" of choice and increasingly were the people we wanted to hang out with or go to in our times of need. These were the people we respected and trusted with our inner secrets, our pain and despair, and our greatest joys.

One thing that differentiated this workshop from most personal growth or spiritual retreats was that we did not strictly adhere to the normal *"What is said and done in this room, stays in this room"* philosophy. Somehow, it always seemed so false (to me) to assume that after going deep with another human, you could/would/should suddenly forget everything you shared with them and pretend it never happened! Since many of us lived together 24/7: ate together, sang together, played together, went to endless meetings together, shared common bathrooms, etc., it seemed that what we had learned about one another might, just might, be affecting other aspects of our lives together. It seemed like a sacred trust to hold another's most personal memories in our hearts and minds, and we also "allowed" this information to be brought up on other occasions, not as gossip, but more like the four-way test that Rotary uses as guidance, before bringing it up privately or publicly. These questions are: "Is it the truth?," "Is it fair to all concerned?," "Will it build goodwill and better friendships?," and "Will it be beneficial to all concerned?"

Was the fact that we all knew that Glen had been beaten by his father, or Sally had been gang raped, or Owen had almost drowned as a child or been bitten by a rabid dog, or that Tom reminded Jane of her domineering older brother, something that never should be acknowledged again in real life? What if one or more of us saw behavior that seemed somehow related to these previous life events?

Was it kosher to stop a meeting when Glen went on verbal attack against Paul who seemed to be rationally proposing a certain new agreement for the community? In this case, someone might stop the action to ask Glen to consider what might be behind and below his rage at Paul. Perhaps a short break would be called for Glen and Paul, and usually a neutral third party chosen to sit down and see what they could discover. If, by the end of the break, Glen was still adamantly opposed to joining in consensus around the issue, we might table it for another week, with the encouragement for Glen to find loving supporters who could help him work through his feelings.

In this process, it would often be discovered that the basis of the strong emotions really had nothing to do with either Paul or the proposal at hand, but would be partially resolved as Glen worked through some of the leftover rage at his own father.

In another example of the community being willing to hear and honor a member's past experiences, Mary Anne was strongly reactive to a proposal from a group of men who wanted to rent out our entire space for a weekend—and they requested that all women be asked to leave the land during the time that they would be there. There was much discussion and most of us women thought it could be a great get-away vacation for all of us to go to the local hot springs or wherever and enjoy ourselves. The community would make good money, which we badly needed during that time, and most of us were in favor of this unusual request. However, we also knew that Mary Anne was newly dealing with her childhood memories of being sexually molested by a male family

member and just couldn't bring herself to say "Yes" to this proposal. So the community agreed to not take the contract, in order to make sure Mary Anne knew how much we loved and respected her in her time of healing from the past! In the meantime, several members offered to work with Mary Anne on her pain, frustration, and rage at what had been done to her in her growing-up years. Eventually, she was able to heal much of this early damage and become more open to men and their perceived needs.

In general, most members of the community tended to trust one another and genuinely want to support the others in their journey of personal and spiritual growth. At one point, one of the married men in the group, named Geoff, apparently had issues related to trusting his wife, Laura, to be faithful to him. Every few days he would accuse her of some indiscretion with any number of the other men in the community. Usually, he verbally attacked her, but sometimes he would also "go after" the "man of the hour" who usually had no idea what Geoff was talking about or couldn't remember any interaction with Laura that might have set off this strong reaction. Sometimes, it was as simple as he and Laura sitting side by side at the long dinner tables or that they had shared a joke. After a number of tirades by Geoff, community members were beginning to feel stressed as they waited for the next "shoe to drop" or the next accusation to be made. Most of us women generally felt sorry for Laura, who was "walking on eggshells" to not be seen doing anything that might set him off again.

Several times, this situation came up in our weekly "Well-Being" meetings and we tried to help Geoff see that there was something going on for him that must have come from somewhere in his past, because none of us saw Laura being inappropriate with other men in the community. Several suggested that he come to one of our workshops, which he had so far chosen not to do, but he declined. After more months went by, with more disruptions of a similar nature, Geoff and Laura and their two young children chose to leave the community and return to the place where they had grown up and had family. We never heard from them again, but hoped that somehow, Geoff had found the safety and support he needed to process his irrational jealousy which was stressing his marriage, his children, and everyone around him.

As a result of the group norm of intimate sharing, conversations at Pleasant River Community tended to be deeper than the cultural norm. If you asked someone "How are you?" at breakfast, you might get a more explicit answer than "Fine." You might hear about a disturbing dream the person had that morning, or a question about how you had dealt with your parents' response to your joining the community, or perhaps a strong reaction by that member to a recent speech by some political candidate. Sometimes these conversations brought up strong differences of opinion about some topic, but usually these were dealt with diplomatically, without the fear that because someone disagreed with you, it meant they no longer liked you.

Relationships tended to be more fluid than in the outside culture, but because there was little "hiding," the issues these brought up could be dealt with openly. Definitely, life was not dull at Pleasant River Community, but most members seemed to approve of the level of transparency we had evolved into over the years.

I, personally, still get quickly bored when conversations stay at the surface level of "Where are you from?," "Pretty hot, isn't it," "Do you have children?," or "Nice shirt!" I prefer to quickly go to questions like: "What was most meaningful to you on your recent vacation?" or "How is your body treating you as you grow older?" or "Which of your seven grandkids is most like you?" or "Do you still miss your ex-wife?" or "Do you know if your cancer is in recession still?" or even "Have you heard about the new cremation technique using liquids?" If these types of questions are asked and answered truthfully, you may find yourself creating a new friendship (or even love partner?). So I am an avid fan of Transparency vs. Privacy in the majority of my life interactions. Try it! You might like it!

To allow maximum transparency in describing community experience while also protecting individuals' privacy, all names in the stories above are pseudonyms.

Dianne Brause was the cofounder of the "Pleasant River Community" after serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer on a Caribbean island nation in the late '60s, where she learned the value and necessity of community—especially among people striving to meet their own needs with few resources and little government support. She later taught college, edited a nonprofit newsletter supporting intercultural interactions, and led several responsible tourism trips to various third-world countries. Her passions include the rights of Native Americans and African Americans, and the Palestinian people. Currently, her obsession is creating quilts that represent the legacy of family members and friends, using materials from their past and present lives.

A Monkeywrencher in Our Midst

By David James Duncan

Kimberly Low

Editor's Note: David James Duncan's new novel *Sun House* traces the journeys of an eclectic collection of spiritual seekers, land-lovers, cattle hands, and others who eventually converge on a 4000-acre ranch in Montana in an "unintentional menagerie" (resembling in all but moniker an "intentional community"—see pages 50-57 for more on this), the Elkmoon Beguine & Cattle Company, or E.B.&C.Co for short. The following excerpt, comprising the unaltered entirety of *"Wandering I: Schizm (October 2008),"* comes from Chapter X. ("Governance by Wandering Griefs and Joys") of the final section ("Last Telling: On Earth as It Isn't in Heaven") of Book Two ("Eastern Western") of this single, 784-page volume (pages 708-712).

Some context is in order. To introduce fully all the characters who follow, we would need to reprint all 700+ preceding pages of the book, clearly not plausible in a 64-page magazine where the type needs to be larger than microscopic to be readable.

So instead, the essentials: the narrator is a member of this menagerie, writing under the nickname "the Holy Goat." Rosalia, Eddie Dominguez' daughter, first arrived on the land as an eight-year-old, before E.B.&C.Co was founded. The beef consortium mentioned consists of both former employees of Valley Land & Beef Incorporated, and people who'd arrived from elsewhere and helped create this much more land- and people-friendly cooperative venture. By the time of the episode that follows, most of the participants had been working and living in close proximity for over a decade, including the previous six years as co-owners and stewards of E.B.&C.Co's acreage, reclaimed from corporate control.

While most modern intentional communities do not operate cattle ranches, anyone who's lived in a community where, for example, resident anti-wifi activists have surreptitiously disabled wireless routers and plummeted community members into an internet-less void, leading to group meetings called to sort things out, will be able to relate to the following story—and hopefully, in at least some cases, to its compassionate resolution as well.

In the mid-nineteenth century the stentorian Brooklynite Walt Whitman proclaimed, "Behind the tally of genius and morals stands the stomach, and gives a sort of casting vote."

In the late twentieth century the incorrigible Manhattanite Fran Lebowitz voted her stomach's preference when she de-

clared, "My favorite animal is steak."

In the early twenty-first century, six years into the existence of the E.B.&C.Co, our menagerie's own Rosalia Dominguez, at the age of nineteen, cast a very different vote when she decided that the raising and slaughtering of Scottish Highlands for income was a crime against every compassionate belief we hypocrites claimed to hold. To complicate matters, Rosa mentioned her feelings to no one so she could conduct a covert war against the beef consortium that TJ, Kale, Hub Punker, Doty Nolan, Max and Kira Bowler, Buford Raines, and Regina Cloud had turned into our most profitable early business. (Yes, Regina helps the consortium despite her veganism. She's become a skilled wrangler too. Her Romeo, Buford, manages the cattle operation, and "Love trumps diet," she gently insists. Buford says nothing to this, but grins as he crosses the same divide by devouring plate-loads of his Juliet's delicious vegan cuisine.)

So how was Rosalia, operating alone, able to wage war against so many? *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes* lists some of the qualities needed:

> *Then there was brought to light this wily, cunning, night-watching, dream-bringing, cattle-driving bandit child.*

Imagine Buford riding out at dawn on his horse, Vegan (sincerely named in Regina's honor), arriving at the E.B.&C. Co's grazing land to move forty young Highlands onto their next electric-fenced twenty-acre quadrant—to find the entire herd has vanished. Imagine tracking hoofprints and cow pies through three strategically opened gates, down a mile and a half of dirt roads and old bulldozer tracks, at last spotting the cattle scattered across the steep, talus-strewn slopes of a towering North Whitetail ridge dense with browse from the 2003 fires. Imagine Buford calling Kale, and Kale ordering half his crew to saddle up horses to handle the treacherous terrain, while the other half rush to the ATVs to meet the cattle and drive them home once they arrive on safer ground—only to find the ATVs' spark plugs have all been removed.

Imagine Lou Roy having a fine morning supervising three high school girls as they whitewash the schoolhouse in exchange for cutting-horse lessons, when Ida Craig drives up with the news of the scattered herd. Imagine Lou hops in his Chevy Cheyenne to drive down to the A Barn, saddle up Grey, and help rescue cattle—only to hear the faithful old truck cough, sputter, and die for the first time in its life. Imagine fussing with the engine for half an hour to no avail, towing the truck ten miles to his E City mechanic, and learning after many expensive misdiagnoses that Karo corn syrup has been poured in his gas tank. Imagine replacing spark plugs, fuel filter, fuel lines, and gas tank and *still* the engine sounds like it's contracted whooping cough as it tries to make it up even a minor incline.

Imagine Buford, Regina, Doty, Max, and Kale combing the dangerous Whitetail talus slope for two days on horseback, then ATVs, to get the Highlands down into a fenced ten-acre enclosure adjacent to Aspen Swale, where our first twelve Eddie Dominguez kit cottages are under construction by six different Sapphire County contractors and crews. Imagine, the very night the Highlands are returned to the enclosure, hearing them loose again in the Swale, shitting on building materials, trampling wildflowers, browsing on young fruit trees, planter boxes of basil and tomatoes, and late-blooming perennials planted by our eager cottage owners. Imagine Kale remarking to Buford that these deeds could only have been done by someone with inside knowledge of the Highland operation and all the E.B.&C.Co roads and landscapes, possessed of very impressive cattle-driving skills as well. Imagine Lou Roy, with a sinking heart, gimping across Schoolhouse Bluff to Eddie and Rosalia's Airstream, to find Rosalia's Morgan mare penned up behind a storage shed for easy night access because, she told Eddie, she's doing a study of Buford's holistic grazing practices for school. Imagine Lou Roy finding, on the table under the already enormous willow he planted to shade Rosalia and Eddie's Airstream nine years

Wendy Altschuler

Justin Kauffman

ago, a weather-beaten paperback titled *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Imagine Lou taking the book home to find Edward Abbey advising readers that Karo corn syrup dumped in the gas tanks of developers will slow them down considerably.

Imagine the hurt inflicted when this child we love equates us with the developers we resisted, outsmarted, and outlasted. Imagine our entire populace having to drop everything to attend an emergency town hall meeting on Schoolhouse Bluff the night Rosalia's guilt is discovered. Imagine the several attendees who can't find last-minute babysitters so squalling infants and toddlers add teeth-grinding tension to the room. Imagine watching the famously gifted but infamously willful Rosalia take the floor and declare to all present, "I know what I've done the last few nights has caused a lot of trouble. That was my intention. I wanted us to gather so I could ask us all a serious question. Is there anything worse than raising animals who trust us from birth, shooting the males dead after two years, chopping them to pieces, and selling them to rich people in distant restaurants when there are countless less evolved forms of life to eat, and countless better ways for us to make a living?"

Imagine Kale the Pope replying with icy calm, "Yes, Rosalia, there are things much worse. One is watching a young woman we love and trust, driven by blind certainty, sabotage our livelihoods and endanger our lives, though we're raising and harvesting our cattle in the most Earth-beneficial way it's ever been done."

Imagine Rosalia retorting, "The best I can do for people who think a horrible wrong is Earth-beneficial is make it as hard as possible for them to keep doing it."

Imagine Eddie, who's worked his tail off for years to house us more elegantly and economically than we ever dreamed possible, saying with a tremor we've never heard in his calm voice, "Rosalia. I've never been so ashamed. To speak like this to Kale, who housed us when we were homeless and became a grandfather to you; to drive cattle into the Swale and trash our neighbors' yards and plantings before their cottages are even standing; to speak this way in front of Risa and Lorilee, who've mothered you, spitting on their kind and compassionate mothering; to ruin Lou Roy's truck, scatter our cattle, and create days so dangerous it could have killed one of our friends, are crimes. You're a criminal of a low order, and if anyone presses charges you'll do time in a detention facility that will expose you to dangers we can't protect you from. You owe a lot of people a lot of your college money once we tally the amounts. And, here and now, you owe every person in this room the most sincere apology you ever made."

"In other words," Rosalia said, trembling now far more than Eddie, "blame the one who calls you out, act like we have no say in how we make our livings, and go on doing something horribly wrong!" With which she stormed out of the schoolhouse, causing her "enemy," Buford, to ask Regina to please go find her and try to soothe her.

High-stress high-volume ugliness then filled the serene old schoolhouse as Hub, Doty, Max, and Kira agreed we should call the police and have Rosalia arrested, while Kale, Risa, Ida, and Buford urged we give her a second chance.

It was a surprise to all but Risa, who somehow sensed before he spoke that he'd detected an unseen thermal in the room, when Jamey rose to his feet wearing a gentle smile and said, "I propose a recess, during which everybody with kids or animals to tend can go home. I'll then propose, to a smaller, calmer group, what I feel is a graceful way out of this crisis, we'll discuss it, and we'll fill the rest of you in on how our discussion went in the morning."

When no one objected and many looked relieved, Jamey asked Hub, Doty, Max, Kira, Kale, Ida, Risa, Lou Roy, Buford, and Eddie to please join him in a seated circle, the room emptied by two-thirds, and the named parties moved their chairs accordingly.

"I've got no skin in this feud," he began, "except my friendship with all of you. Rosalia's hell-raising has shocked and angered us. But that girl's a loved friend to me too, and I strongly believe we can bring this thing to a close without calling the cops or giving her a criminal record. I was scheduled to go to Portland in four days, but if Eddie will let me take Rosalia with me, I'll leave tomorrow. Think of me as a parole officer who vows she will not be a repeat offender. But know too that I hope to help heal her of a wound I feel has caused this crisis, a wound she and I share. I lost my mother in a very cruel way

Robert Shea

Bernd Thaller

when I was five. Rosa lost hers just as cruelly when she was seven. Just sit quiet with that a minute."

You could have heard a pin drop. No one saw this coming. But when Eddie Dominguez, looking stunned and moved, slowly nodded his head, Kale and Risa nodded too.

"If you'll let her come with me tomorrow, Eddie, we'll compare our losses together. A glimpse of mine, to help the rest of you understand: when my mother died on my fifth birthday in the same hospital where I was born, I buried that cruel coincidence so deep you'd think I never had a mother. But every year, when our shared birthday-deathday rolled around, impotent rage burst out of me in ways as dangerous as what's been bursting out of Rosalia. This is where Portland comes in. I called TJ before our meeting tonight because his brother, Jervis, sees things most of us can't. On a long Ocean-walk in 1997, Jervis diagnosed my idiot refusal to grieve my mother, and assigned me a simple prayer. When I snarled that I didn't believe in prayer, Jervis, in his damaged, papery whisper, read me a riot act that reduced me to rubble. Long story short, he forced me to repeatedly say the prayer I didn't believe in, and I made stronger contact with my mother than I had since I lost her. My plan for Rosalia is simple: we'll talk mother loss en route to Portland, and the next day Jervis has agreed to take Rosalia Ocean-walking. After dozens of such walks with him, I fully believe he might help Rosalia in ways the rest of us can't. What do you say, folks?"

Max Bowler spoke up first. "Sounds nutty on the face of it, Jamey. But we can't leave Rosalia on the loose here. What's to lose if you think this is worth a try?"

Hub Punker turned red as a beet and blored, "*What's to lose!?* Cattle and cowboys, that's what! That girl needs to be *punished!*"

"I just changed my mind for two reasons," Kira Bowler said firmly. "One, we all owe TJ a ton, and Rosa holds a special place in his heart. Two, if we turn her over to the cops and they put her in Sapphire County Juvenile Detention, I know from former students there are dangers there we wouldn't wish on anyone. I couldn't live with myself if we jailed her and something awful happened. I'm all for the Jamey and Jervis plan."

When Hub sputtered, *"Turncoat!"* and Doty Nolan nodded, Ida Craig stared holes in them and said, "Name-calling? *Seriously?* I'm a hundred percent behind Jamey's plan."

"Makes two of us," Kale rumbled—and Hub and Doty went silent for the night.

Lou Roy then reached deep into the kindness he tries to hide and turned to Eddie. "I know you're upset about my truck. Don't be, Eddie. I was overdue for a new rig. It's my pal Rosalia I hope we repair fast, an' Jamey's tossed us an idea miles ahead o' anything else I heard this sorry night. Can we bag this nonsense an' let Jamey an' Jervis get to it?"

The instant Eddie nodded, Kale said, "Then we're good to go. Thanks, everybody, and extra thanks to you, Jamey and Eddie. Meeting adjourned."

David James Duncan is the author of the novels The River Why *and* The Brothers K, *the story collection* River Teeth, *and the nonfiction collections* My Story as Told by Water *and* God Laughs & Plays. *He lives on a trout stream in Missoula, Montana, in accord with his late friend Jim Harrison's advice to finish his life disguised as a creek.*

Memories of a Mental Nudist Colony

By Martin Holsinger

A Farm household with their mental clothes off.

Photos courtesy of Martin Holsinger

"The Farm is kind of like a mental nudist colony."
—Stephen Gaskin, community founder

I.

I took refuge in the mental nudist colony
Because I was terrible at wearing clothes.
Yes, my undies were often in a bunch
My shoelaces were always coming untied
My socks often mismatched
My pants, too long or too short,
And somehow my fly would always unzip itself
At the damnedest times.
When I buttoned my shirts, they always came out crooked,
and the buttons on cuffs? Fuggedaboutit!
I never could get the, um, hang of tying a tie
Somehow it always came out as a noose around my neck
Or at least that was how it felt.
Even when, for a brief moment, I would get it all together
It never felt right.
This not just a metaphor, though it is that, too.

I wanted to feel the sun
And the wind and rain on my skin,
Even the cold rain and snow.

I wanted to be with other people
Who reveled in their nudity
So we could groom each other like monkeys
And have nothing to hide.
So I lit out for the territory.

II.

We all wanted to know what each other really looked like
And be accepted for however our flesh hung on our bones
And at the same time we understood
There was always room for improvement
And our friends could see our bodies better than we could.

And so we lived happily together for many years.
We thought we would spend the rest of our lives together,
Naked and proud of it.

Let's drop the metaphor a bit.
Practicing mental nudity with each other
(And yes, it takes practice to not reflexively
Jump back into your mental clothes
When you bump into someone
In an unexpected and uncomfortable way)...
Where was I?—Yes, practicing mental nudity
Seemed like the cure for so much:
If you were quick to anger, you could learn to be calmer
If you had a hard time staying focused, you could
learn to concentrate
If you held grudges, you could learn to let them go
Got to control everything? You can learn to trust your friends
If you thought you were always right, the hottest, coolest
Person ever, your naked friends' sometimes fierce
But always loving laughter
Plus a little help from meditation and marijuana

Could show you the way to free yourself
From the bad habits you were so proud of.

Sometimes we meditated by sitting very quietly
Sometimes we meditated by steadily swinging a hoe,
Accurately swinging a hammer,
Gently swinging a child
Chopping onions
Sweeping the floor
Making a baby
Birthing a baby
Nursing a baby
Changing a baby.
"…..?"
Shit, yeah—I've done that practice
Enough to know.

It seemed like we had found something that worked.
We hoped to inspire people all over the world
To remove their mental clothing
And get real with each other.
(Bodily clothing? Not so much. Too many
Deeply conditioned reactions. Keep it simple!)

It wasn't always easy.
It wasn't always fun.
It wasn't always fair, in the moment
But we trusted that, ultimately,
The process would yield justice and sanity.

III.

What we didn't realize
Was that some of us were wearing clothing
That looked like skin.
Underneath it, they were doing silly things
Like smoking cigarettes
Or horrible things, like
Abusing children.
And our beloved founder seemed to have donned
Flesh-colored clothes you couldn't call him out for wearing.

Mostly what people hid under their skin/clothes
Was greed, and a longing to leave mental nudity behind
And live privately within the boundaries
Clothing creates.
Eventually enough of us felt that way
To end the mental nudist colony,
Depose our no-longer naked teacher,
And start wearing the latest fashions.

"That's how it's going to be," our newly-clothed
Community managers told us. "If you don't like it here,
Go somewhere else."

But there was no other homelike place.
Everywhere else
Everybody always wore mental clothes
Even when their bodies were naked.
And so I sighed, and put my ill-fitting pants back on,
As did we all.

IV.

Believe me, it took some getting used to.
At first, I would occasionally show up naked.
People just didn't know how to handle it,
And neither did I. That was just a phase.
It's weird to be naked around clothed people.
They're apt to think you're crazy.
And so I wear clothes—simple ones,
And as little as I can get away with.
For the most part,
These days, my underwear, shoelaces,
Socks, buttons, and zippers
Behave themselves.
But ties? If I have to wear a tie
To go there, I ain't going.

I'm grateful to have a partner
Who appreciates mental nudity,
But a partner is a long way from a colony.
How do you get from a dyad to a village?
We wish we knew. Lord knows, we've been trying.

Decades later, my nudist colony years
Seem like a dream I can barely recall:
I know that
We were all saying and doing
Wonderful, deeply insightful,
Deeply fulfilling things—
But what were they?

When it comes time for me to wake
From this dream of life
And this world we dream together,
If it turns out there's a next world
I hope a mental nudist colony
Is waiting there for me.
It was that good.

Martin Holsinger lived on The Farm near Summertown, Tennessee 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, 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 articles "Baptism," in Communities *#197, pages 26-28, and "Agreements and Individuality, The Farm's 'Multistery,' and My Shotgun Wedding," in* Communities *#199, pages 37-41.*

Preserving Privacy in Community

By Gabrielle Anctil

The following excerpt is translated from French (by Google Translate and Chris Roth) and adapted from pages 133-135 of Loger à la même adresse: Conjuguer nos forces face à la crise du logement, l'isolement et la pauvreté (The more we share: Joining forces in the face of the housing crisis, isolation and poverty) *by Gabrielle Anctil (XYZ Publishing, Montreal, Quebec, 2023, editionsxyz.com). For more information about the author's community, see "After the Nuclear Family," excerpted from the same book, in* Communities *#200, pages 35-39.*

One of the most stubborn sterotypes about community life is that it can lead to the disappearance of our privacy and our time alone.

With us at La Cafétéria, privacy is paramount. Respecting my roommates' needs for solitude is very high on the list of expectations. We think twice before knocking on a closed door. That caution is essential, because the majority of my roommates describe themselves as introverts.

Respect for private property is also essential. You'll find labels made of green masking tape, used when painting walls, on just about everything in our house. Each lunch will be identified with the initials of the person for whom it is intended. In the fridge, we will leave an item bearing initials to rot rather than throw it away: you never know.

We are not the only ones: "Sometimes I don't want to see anyone," says Louise Bourdages, one of the first members of Cohabitat Québec. "When my door and my curtains are closed, people know not to even come and knock."

Despite all efforts to balance the collective and the private, the fact remains that intentional community life still requires giving up some of our privacy. "People have to be willing to sacrifice time (all those meetings, the grounds maintenance) and the luxury of self-absorption (the small talk expected from those on their way to the mailroom)," writes journalist Judith Shulevitz. "Co-housing may consume emotional energy that would otherwise go to keeping other social circles—work colleagues, college buddies, fellow parents at our children's schools—spinning in the air."[1] These negative effects can even have repercussions on our health: one study reported that living in cohousing "increased the sense of community but could also be a source of struggle and fatigue to maintain it."[2] The smaller the community, the greater the feeling of confinement can become.

> The presence of introverts around me, a notorious extrovert, leads the community to adopt measures to preserve privacy that I would not have thought of on my own.

In addition to taking time away from other social circles, intentional community living can also be plagued by gossip. Although, in small doses, gossip can be good for group cohesion, in particular by allowing information to be shared about an individual who tries to evade the established rules, too much gossip can become harmful, even ostracizing an individual.[3] In the community of Twin Oaks, a rule prohibits saying anything negative about a third person who is not present.[4] Back home, several people have in the past expressed their fear of becoming the target of malicious gossip. It is true that we have not always been good at knowing when it was time to express a complaint to the person concerned rather than discussing it behind their back.

Despite these limitations, intentional communities aren't just for the most committed extroverts. On the contrary, as reported by one journalist studying the topic: "One unexpected comment came from Adrienne Torrey, a curly-haired middle-aged woman with a relaxed manner. 'Co-housing attracts a lot of introverts,' she said. That hadn't occurred to me, but inclined to introversion myself, I immediately saw the logic. Who

needs a community more than those who have a hard time spontaneously cobbling one together? … [A]s soon as you show up in co-housing, you are swept into a round robin of meals and festivities and cleanup days."[5]

It is perhaps for this reason that the majority of my roommates also claim to be introverted.

"In a mixed methods study conducted in a senior cohousing community," according to one article, "[65 percent of residents who answered] self-identified as 'inner-directed' or introverted. Interviews revealed that many respondents specifically chose cohousing because they feared becoming recluses if they remained in their prior housing. Shifting from being surrounded by people when working, to seeing no people when retired, was mentioned. The fact that the cohousing design generally makes it easy to socialize was a plus. The balance of social contact/privacy in cohousing was also viewed as an advantageous option for 'mixed' couples; the extroverted spouse could easily be with people while the introvert had some private time. While some respondents noted there was sometimes 'too much togetherness,' they considered it a worthwhile trade-off. Personality type, particularly introversion, and the opportunity to build mutual support, were key contributing factors in the decision to move to this community for many residents."[6]

The presence of introverts around me, a notorious extrovert, leads the community to adopt measures to preserve privacy that I would not have thought of on my own. These measures serve me too: they allow me to spend time just with myself, even if this need rarely arises.

The article above is adapted from pages 133-135 of Loger à la même adresse: Conjuguer nos forces face à la crise du logement, l'isolement et la pauvreté (The more we share: Joining forces in the face of the housing crisis, isolation and poverty) *by Gabrielle Anctil (XYZ Publishing, Montreal, Quebec, 2023, editionsxyz.com).*

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Photos courtesy of Gabrielle Anctil

NAVIGATING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND DISCRETION

Ways in Which Silence Is Less than Golden

By Laird Schaub

As a process consultant, I frequently get hired to work with groups bogged down in conflict—often intractable conflict, by which I mean the group has tried what it can think of doing on its own, and is still stuck in the swamp.

Aside from the challenge of inviting groups into the chaotic, yet potent world of emotional exploration (which is *always* an element of conflict), whenever a portion of my work is done on the side—in contrast with working a conflicted dynamic in the presence of the entire group—there arises a question about what, if anything, that gets disclosed in the examination is appropriate to share with the rest of the group.

Coming from the perspective of professional counseling and/or HR concerns, there is often a strong urge to shut it down, promising protagonists that nothing shared in the process of working through the conflict will be revealed to others. While well intended, *in the context of community,* I think this is a big mistake.

Better, I believe, is that the group offer support to members working through conflict with the understanding *from the outset* that a summary of what comes out in the exploration will be shared with the rest of the group. Mind you, a summary—not a court transcript or a Zoom recording.

Here's how I think it should be set up. Someone should be assigned to drafting a neutral summary ahead of time (so that they are doing the work of gathering the needed information from the get-go), and after it has been drafted it should then be reviewed by the protagonists for acceptability before it's disseminated to the group. I think it's fine that this information not be shared outside the community except with the express permission of the people involved.

To be clear, a good summary will include mention of people's emotional responses—that's part of the story. However, I know from experience (having personally crafted any number of these summaries) that you can adequately defang outbursts, such that you're accurately reporting the reactions, yet leaving out any name-calling or incendiary statements. This is not about voyeurism; it's about getting an overall sense of the full picture. Neglecting to mention that people are hopping mad (when in fact they are) doesn't help anyone understand what's truly happening.

Why do this? For a number of reasons:

• It's quite rare that no one in the group is aware of the tension being worked on, and in the absence of first-hand information about what's happening, people will speculate or make up stories to fill the void. A century ago, Mark Twain sagely observed, "A lie can travel around the world and back again while the truth is lacing up its boots." Better, I think, is supplying the truth with slip-on foot-

wear with good traction.

• Trust and good relationships are the lifeblood of community. Anything that impedes the flow of accurate information, however well-intentioned, degrades trust.

• One of the ways that bullies control the narrative, and undercut attempts to hold them accountable for unacceptable behavior, is by isolating people and thereby dominating the story about what happened between themselves and others. It's their word against yours, and they'll make you pay for speaking out against them. (If you question whether people could really get away with such outrageous behavior, you need look no further than the popularity Donald Trump has enjoyed through outright lying, and then attacking anyone who dares to call him on it.) It's much harder for this approach to be successful when everyone is current on what's going down.

• It's not unusual for the parties involved in conflict to make agreements about doing things differently going forward, and these commitments tend to carry more gravitas when posted publicly (I'm not talking about printing minutes in the local newspaper; I'm talking about sharing summaries on the members-only community listserv).

• Agreements made in the dynamic moment may be abundantly clear, yet that clarity is susceptible to serious erosion if not captured in writing. People's memories tend to diverge over time and hard-earned agreements have a way of slipping away if you're not diligent about capturing them in the moment.

• There can be confusion about what the Conflict Support Team is doing if they never report on their activities. How can the community reasonably evaluate the performance of a team that operates in secrecy?

• When members work through tensions and repair relationship, that's a success. Rather than worry about everyone knowing details about how you may have messed up, think of the benefit of everyone knowing how you owned up to deleterious impact, and labored to put things right?

• There is a marked tendency for people to behave better when they know that everyone is watching, or will be told how they behaved in a session set up to work through conflict.

Photos by Yulia Zarubina

• It is not at all the same for people to witness others work authentically through a conflict, and to read a two-sentence statement that such a conversation took place. In the case of the former, they were along for the ride and can get a visceral feel for what occurred (and its impact on the players). Hopefully, their heart will be engaged. In the case of the latter, they have only been offered a bland tidbit with little seasoning or flavor. It's neither nourishing nor particularly insightful.

A community is not just a random group of strangers—it's an aggregation of people who have explicitly agreed to create a cooperative culture based on a known vision and common values. They have committed to healthy relationships with one another, and cleaning up missteps as they occur. As a result, there is a different standard of compassion, accountability, and engagement and I am basing my recommendations on what will best serve those goals. Burying dirt under the carpet will not get the job done. It only leads to lumpy floors, and poor footing going forward.

All of that said, you cannot expect group members to be of one mind about this without a conversation about its implications. That means you have to talk about how you want to handle this at the time you establish the Conflict Support Team, and *before* you need to apply it to a specific situation—when the discussion will tend to be seen through the lens of how to manage a particular person, rather than what's best as a standard for everyone.

The Intersection of Silence and Member Rights

While I'm on this topic, there is another way that silence surfaces in the field of community conflict and is often accompanied by confusion. In Western culture there is a well-established principle that people accused of misconduct have the right to be informed of the problem, and the opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings, or to effect restoration if any damage has occurred. Further, the accused has the right to hear directly from the people who claim to have been harmed by their actions.

Less clear is whether it's acceptable for groups to discuss the impact of a member's words or deeds not in their presence—not because the group is trying to abrogate that person's civil liberties, but because the member refuses to attend a meeting at which their behavior will be discussed. In effect, sometimes folks on the hot seat attempt to control what is discussed by being deliberately absent—under the mistaken belief that the group does not have the right to discuss them or their actions if they are not present.

I think this is nonsense. To be sure, people have the right to be told that some aspect

of their behavior is on the agenda for an upcoming meeting (so please attend), but the group has the right to have the conversation whether the person shows up or not. Note: I am assuming common sense here—don't schedule a meeting to discuss Alex when Alex is going on vacation.

Further, I believe the group should commit to providing Alex a prompt summary of what was said about them in a meeting where Alex's behavior was discussed and they weren't in attendance—of the same quality that I described above when reporting to the community about what came out in a conflict clearing.

This is not about isolating Alex, or coming to conclusions about culpability or consequences without Alex getting a full opportunity to respond; it's about not allowing Alex's obstinacy to control what's discussed.

Dynamics of the Bully Pulpit

Taking this last point another step, sometimes it's too difficult to attempt to clear the air about a swirl that gets churned up by the way a member operates. This is especially tricky when that member is active and generally productive. That is, they accomplish a good deal that the community benefits from, yet do so in such a way that people feel run over, pushed out of the way, condescended to, or otherwise disrespected. People don't enjoy working with this person, drop off teams that this person serves on, and are leery of bringing up their concerns—because previous attempts have gone poorly and dynamics have not improved.

In particular, when the group has called a meeting for the purpose of discussing dynamics with this person, it tends to break down in a number of possible ways, including:

- The bully attacks people who express criticism (making it less safe to speak up).
- They try to control the conversation by interrupting complainants in order to explain their good intent (as if good intent somehow justifies or excuses bad impact).
- They emphasize how poorly they're understood (and underappreciated for all their contributions to the community).
- They don't understand why they are respected for their work in the mainstream, but not here.
- They threaten to step down from all their responsibilities (or even leave the community) unless people back off, effectively holding the group hostage to their productivity.

It can take considerable courage for people to stand up to this kind of behavior, yet it's deeply demoralizing if no one does.

The Exception that Proves the Rule

One more point. Although I support a baseline understanding that nothing gets disseminated about what occurred in a conflict clearing without the people involved in the conflict signing off on the summary, there is a circumstance where I think protagonists should *not* be allowed to block the sharing of discovered information—when the facilitators learn that something happened (or is reasonably likely to have happened) that puts the community at serious risk.

I'm thinking about major financial exposure, illegal activity, compromised member safety, a direct violation of a member agreement...those kinds of things. While not everyday occurrences (thankfully), they certainly occur (or are perceived to have occurred), and there needs to be a clear path whereby the community is promptly informed about what has been learned, so that it can complete an investigation of events and determine the best course forward.

Note that if this manifests, the follow-up should be managed by a different configuration of people—*not* by the Conflict Support Team, as it would be outside its mandate.

This article is expanded from the June 4, 2023 blog entry at "Laird's Commentary on Community and Consensus"—see communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2023/06/navigating-boundary-between.html.

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ALL EYES ON US?
Pondering How to Balance Privacy and Transparency while Dating in Community

By Emily Grubman

Photos courtesy of Emily Grubman

This past summer, I had the pleasure of living in an intentional community for three months as a permaculture intern. One of the biggest takeaways from my time there was how honest and transparent people were at all times, no matter the situation or subject matter. I loved how open and willing everyone was to share their feelings and opinions—which, in my experience, is not typical of the outside world. It was extremely refreshing and encouraged me to be just as forthcoming.

Being the new (and single!) girl on the block, I was naturally curious about the relationship status and sexual orientation of everyone I met, whether they were a resident, intern, student, or visitor. Not wanting to come off as aggressively nosy, I opted for the strategy of quietly observing/eavesdropping while diligently completing my intern work—and that paid dividends. What the community lacked in eligible bachelors (sigh), it made up for in bountiful insights into the various intra-community romances. By merely keeping my eyes and ears open, I was able to piece together the apparent couples, triads, etc. At first, it was a bit hard to distinguish a lover's caress from the massage-as-currency culture, but patterns revealed themselves eventually—and if they didn't, people were surprisingly willing to share. Much to the delight of my inner gossip girl, I was soon well-apprised of the ups and downs of certain relationships. In fact, many work parties were spent swapping stories and lessons from our past and present relationships. But while I was now neighbors with some of the characters I was hearing about, the guys I mentioned remained anonymous to my new friends.

For the most part, I'm pretty transparent about my love life. Eight years ago, tired of repeatedly relaying the same dating stories to every individual friend, I put them all on a BCC email list and began efficiently blasting out updates as necessary. Whenever a new friend asked me if I was seeing anyone, I'd add them to the list. That list has since grown to about 150 "subscribers," now lives on Substack, and is still my main method of keeping my nearest and dearest abreast of the soap opera/rom-com (depending on the day) that is my love life. However, this

obvious transparency is balanced by a degree of privacy. Unless we partake in some offline girl talk, most of my "readers" aren't privy to the names or faces appearing in my stories because 1) every guy gets a pseudonym, and 2) I've historically met most of them on dating apps rather than through friends/work/real life. This semi-anonymity is what allows me to feel comfortable sharing so openly. (And for the really juicy or sensitive details, I keep that content behind a paywall and comp access to my closest pals.) Basically, I'm only as transparent as I am because I'm also able to control my and my lovers' privacy. So, as I made friends in the community, I naturally invited them to join my email list. Nothing update-worthy happened during my time there, but I definitely thought about how, if it did, I'd essentially be writing an email to community members *about* a fellow community member. And that seems weird!

So, let's say I join this (or another) community as a resident in the future. My dating newsletter is still my preferred method of communicating my romantic updates to friends, and I have no qualms about community-members-turned-friends becoming readers. But what happens if I start a courtship with someone in the community? Would I finally decide to keep my private life private and quit sending emails? (Ha!) Or would I continue to update my outside-world friends but remove my fellow community members from the list? Would that counteract the spirit of transparency I so appreciate about living in community? I'm just not sure how I'd fare in a situation where everyone around me knows my business. (For context, I'm a Scorpio who's only ever lived in big, anonymous cities before this.) I love community living, but is the lack of personal-life privacy just part of it? Is it "the price you pay" to live in community and reap the many benefits that come with it? Or is it actually an added benefit to know and be known so thoroughly? After all, I was amazed and impressed by how open other people were with their feelings, relationships, heartbreaks, and struggles. It made me want to be that unabashed, too.

At one point during my three-month stint, I was chatting (gossiping?) with a fellow Single Lady about the love triangles surrounding us, and we both expressed how uncomfortable it would feel to date within community. On one hand, everyone would be witness to, and perhaps even involved in, your relationship arc. Eek! On the other hand, if you broke up, you'd still have to see that person around all the time. Ack! These risks of dating within community sounded so high, even as we acknowledged that the rewards (like falling in love with someone who clearly shares your values and way of life) could presumably be worth it. We both agreed we'd prefer to "import" a partner—i.e., meet someone on the outside, date and build a relationship away from prying eyes, and then invite them to join the community once it feels serious. To us, that sounded like the "safe" or "easy" option. But reflecting on that now, who's to say that the relationship would remain private once the other party becomes part of the community, too? Regardless of how or where the relationship began, wouldn't we eventually become just another community couple, naturally sharing our life stories—romance and all—with the next crop of interns?

To be open and transparent with a romantic partner is one thing—and something I've been working on for the last few years—but to do that in front of an entire community feels like a challenge all its own. I'd be curious to hear if anyone reading has their own experiences (or maybe even pointers) to share.

Emily Grubman is a writer, naming consultant, and permaculturist. You can find links to more of her writing—including that dating newsletter—at www.emilygrubman.com/writing.

Surveillance and Fences: Safety and Separation

By Riana Good

Photos courtesy of Riana Good

Last winter I received a text from a friend who owns a property near our community in which he asked, "What were you doing with that flower pot last night?" Well, though it might've looked odd on his nightcam to see me setting a flower pot down by a fence post, I just so happened to be carrying a terracotta pot heater intended to warm a small RV during the often below-freezing Sonoran Desert nights, which I was setting down with the intent to pick up and deliver elsewhere the next day.[1] I was taken aback by his inquiry, because although my actions were not "private" in any way, I was just passing through and hadn't even stepped foot on the land that he owns. In another incident a few weeks later, I went to visit a friend renting an RV on a different abutting property and he reported that the landlords had seen me on film during a previous visit and had inquired about who I was and what I was doing there. In neither instance did I cross a stated boundary or break a law or guideline, and though I had nothing to hide, I felt vulnerable after finding out that I was being monitored. These two incidents sparked my curiosity around others' feelings of security and insecurity.

My intent in writing this article was to talk to landowners and other residents in our community about their feelings about fences and surveillance on the land, with the goals of shared understanding, healing, and connection. Cameras and fences—and the lack thereof—have created some rifts wanting to be mended.

We live at a community that I will call Desertlands to protect the privacy of the residents, on 160 acres divided into 14 parcels ranging in size from about two to 40 acres each. All parcel owners belong to Desertlands Community Neighborhood Association (DCNA) and the parcels have a range of uses: private ownership, residence with a business, community, aspiring community, and retreat-hosting. (The community parcel where I have lived is about 8.5 acres and ranges from about eight to 18 residents depending on the season.) In the past year the use of cameras and fences has greatly increased and more than one landowner has a drone. These changes are largely in response to a significant theft last summer—of a small trailer, solar panels, and some other items. Additionally, the previous year, an unwanted guest stayed on the land even after many had raised concerns about his behavior, and lo and behold he later made news nationwide for extreme violence. So, many would argue that some form of security measures are warranted.

Larger Context

This is all couched in a greater aura of surveillance due to Tucson's proximity to the border with Mexico, and there is a steady helicopter presence and many military planes in the sky above. The border patrol and local police helicopters may elicit a sense of present and proximate danger that can generate concern and increase one's desire for protection. Similarly, the militarization of the border with fences and local checkpoints may parallel the recent proliferation of fences on our land.

More universally, personal security cameras are proliferating along with the sense that when in public, we are tacitly agreeing to be surveilled—either by others on their phones, by personally owned cameras, or by business or government agencies. The separation between public and private is becoming all the more tenuous, and the increasingly close relationship between tech corporations and government agencies should spark serious reflection on our use of cameras. For example, although legislation requires the police to get permission from camera owners before viewing live footage, the police have been able to obtain Amazon Ring video recordings directly from Amazon. Yes, we are watching and being watched to increasing degrees.

On Our Land

The Desertlands Community Neighborhood Association (DCNA) was formed in 2012 when parcel owners came together with the purpose of "enhancing and protecting the value, sustainability, desirability, and attractiveness of the property in the Neigh-

borhood as a whole." They formed agreements around peaceful interactions, quiet and noise, clean air, avoidance of toxins, domestic animals, road and fence maintenance, nighttime light, beautiful views, target shooting, protection of well water, and alternative technologies. Each landholder agrees to contribute $100 per year for road and fence maintenance, with any additional funds being approved by DCNA.

The initial security breach of stolen solar panels and trailer in 2022 generated more unity across DCNA because it sparked the sense of a common threat from outside and a common goal of safety and watching out for each other. Interpersonal squabbles diminished, though later flared up again when the cameras themselves were used to fuel the friction among certain landowners, especially around dogs when they are roaming unsupervised. The same dog that is a source of safety and security for one person can diminish the sense of safety for another. Likewise, while fences and cameras may keep some people out, they can also keep neighbors out, thus decreasing informal in-person communication and observation of who's around and what they're up to.

At Desertlands, the use of security cameras has impacted where some community members feel comfortable walking, and has influenced the routes they take. One resident known for taking daily walks expressed, "It can feel invasive; I don't necessarily want to be observed or monitored. And, I don't want to disturb someone getting an alert on their phone when the camera is activated when I pass by." Another resident expressing discomfort said that they moved to the land as "a haven from elements of dominant society, free of pavement and telephone poles and 5G" and considers the cameras as an invasion of privacy, and would like to know what the cameras see and how far.

One of the landowners with security cameras explained that filming and watching "the local pets and wildlife is fun. Capturing the antics of the humans is, too." On a more serious note, "The cameras can remind guests that people live here and that the people here care about security. The realization sinks in that the people who live here have had a reason to put up the cameras and gates, that they have been made to be fearful. In response, they are standing up against such actions." It can help people to honor the space, to feel free inside this space, and to feel safe.

Connection and Separation

Most of us can attest that spending more informal time together, often with food, proves the adage: "more kitchen, less bitchin'." While DCNA meetings and text message threads can get gnarly, DCNA community-wide events have been overwhelmingly positive, increasing connections and thus trust and a sense of safety. Most of us who spend at least a bit of time on the land recognize each other's vehicles and can identify unknown visitors. Still, many are more private or reclusive, and some have mobility restrictions or other reasons for keeping to themselves. In seeking balance between the costs and benefits of surveillance, we must also consider that fences can unintentionally fence-in the landowner, as well.

And yet, when there are many friends-of-friends and visitors to the land and no single community or universal communication method for all residents, it is challenging to know who is coming to the land. One longtime resident who has lived at the first crossroads of DCNA for about 17 years is an informal gatekeeper of sorts, and he usually knows who's around and what they're up to. Another resident recommends approaching new vehicles or people with the greeting, "Hello, how may I help you?" as a means of increasing awareness about who is around and for what reason. For others, this approach is not feasible or seems inadequate, so they turn to other measures.

Though no one with whom I spoke at Desertlands expressed being targeted because of their race or other demographics, the potential for targeting can raise questions about the validity and efficacy of camera use. One landowner wondered, "How do we balance which identities and demographics raise fear for people? I guess I pay attention to certain demographics, too, and then I noticed that all the problems we've had have been with white people who do drugs like ketamine and meth."

If we have already generated a story about someone and their behaviors, then we often selectively observe or interpret their actions to reinforce that story. So, cameras may provide evidence to bolster our preexisting ideas, and the observer may filter what they expect to see. Security cameras may help to deter crime in some instances, though their monitoring is not without harm. And results of studies on their effectiveness vary widely based on the study—and the vested interests of who funded it. As noted in the Harvard Law Review, surveillance can be the basis for discrimination, coercion, and blackmail—particularly because of the discrepancy in power dynamic between the watcher and the watched.[2]

Members of DCNA hold a large variety of opinions as to whether the 160 acres, consisting of 14 different parcels, forms an overarching community. There is a discrepancy in landowners' underlying understanding of how DCNA functions as individual communities and a larger collective. There are no expectations or requirements to participate or engage, and while DCNA's mission statement implies some unity by virtue of being a "Neighborhood Association," we don't necessarily have much in common beyond being on this 160 acres of land together. The

question of determining who is welcome raises a variety of questions: To what extent is Desertlands a community, or just a happenstance assortment of land parcels? How much do we want to know about each other? How much do we deserve to know—or monitor? How do we decide who to invite in? How do we balance which identities and demographics raise fear for people?

Many see DCNA as both an opportunity for collective commitment and a burden. While some host weekly or monthly events to which all are invited, and some folks regularly walk along the paths and socialize with neighbors, others stick to themselves, know few folks by sight or name, and don't attend any events. Over time, it has been revealed that there are some subsets of Desertlands where landowners have a more aligned vision and collaborate on more open flow and connected identities.

Security and Insecurity

The 160 acres of Desertlands are informally considered a wildlife sanctuary and were first fenced with barbed wire in 2004 to keep out cattle that graze on the abutting State Land. Though the perimeter fence and cattle guard at the entrance initially went up to keep out cattle, now discussion is more focused on humans passing through, and some members of DCNA have proposed gating the entrance to have more control over who enters.

Having a gate at the entrance, proponents argue, would allow us to have fewer fences within the community and people would feel more free to walk. One landowner explained, "We want to keep each other in and keep potentially dangerous visitors out. The gate would allow us to be a community behind the gate. And we wouldn't all put up our own gates and fences, causing even more separation among us."

There are also financial interests at stake; as another landowner explained, "We would want to keep out anyone who might destroy the land by driving in areas that are not designated as roads, contributing to erosion and upkeep costs. We are paying for these unpaved roads and the upkeep, and people shouldn't just be able to come in and scope it out." During the heavy rains of the monsoon season, the roads wash out and require maintenance by heavy machinery, and the unmaintained roads are often impassable and increase wear and tear on cars.

Those who question the desirability and viability of a gated entrance do not wish to be part of a "gated community" and wonder about their efficacy, though the most vocal opponent already has a gate and fence around his land parcel. Others question how we can discern who should have access and how to grant them entry, especially with so many people coming and for a variety of reasons: as residents, volunteers, AirBNB and glamping guests, short-term visitors, event attendees, etc. Knowing who's around can be a complex undertaking, though most folks trust their neighbors to vet who comes to their property because they potentially have more to lose than anyone else.

"Regardless of the means," another resident stated, "we want to maintain the safe and calm energy of the land. We'll feel more comfortable knowing that someone on the land has been invited and will respect the land and its people." This is a goal to which all have agreed.

Acting from Fear, Love, and Hope

Dating back 2000-4000 years, hedges were not the green trimmed bushes we have today, but instead made of low, intertwined thorns that would grow around what needed to be protected, whether homes or gardens or livestock. To this day, some people pray for a "hedge of protection" for themselves or on others' behalf.[3]

Ultimately it is through relationships with others that we will be most safe and secure. Though, given that we cannot realistically be in relationship with all beings, and societal norms and expectations are sometimes violated, we often take other measures to create boundaries around our property and possessions.

If a hedge proves to be an insufficient barrier, a hedge may be ripped out in favor of a gated fence. If a stranger walks through a gate or hops the fence, measures may be increased: the gate gets a lock or barbed wire gets installed. Perhaps a no trespassing sign goes up, or a polite reminder such as, "By invitation only." If that proves insufficient, some property owners may resort to more extreme measures, such as signs threatening violence. While living in communities in California, Massachusetts, and Hawaii, I have seen the following signs on neighboring properties: "Due to the rising cost of ammunition, there will be no warning shot." "No mercy" (with a threatening gun-toting silhouette). "We don't call first" (with an image of an assault rifle). "If you're wondering if there's life after death, trespass here."

I feel a tickle of fear rise in my throat when I pass such signs, and I steer clear. I imagine that these threats of violence may imply what an owner is capable of, has imagined doing, has witnessed, or has done in the past. I interpret them to say, "Please abide by this warning: to protect you from what I might do to you, and to protect me from doing it or having to decide whether to restrain myself. I am fearful, probably for good reason, so I suggest that you be fearful, too." Good fences may make good neighbors, as the saying goes, though when living in community we have more avenues for developing good relationships—with good trust and good boundaries. Perhaps in seeking a balance between love and fear, even when our trust has been violated, we can rest in hope.

Riana Good has lived in communities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Oregon, and Massachusetts. Most recently she lives in a seven-year-old community in Hawaii.

1. Look up how to make your own clay pot heater for inexpensive, efficient, off-grid warmth!
2. See harvardlawreview.org/2013/05/the-dangers-of-surveillance.
3. See www.lockhaven.com/news/religion/2019/07/hedge-of-protection.

The Third Rail of Emotional Abuse

By Laird Schaub

The following is adapted from communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2023/04/the-third-rail-of-emotional-abuse.html, first published April 12, 2023.

I recently received this anonymous inquiry:

I'm very curious about emotional abuse. I'm concerned about a community member who has a history of trauma and is also a trauma therapist who is twisting the words of others to cause them to feel bad about themselves. It feels like emotional abuse. We're working toward mediation process but I'm wondering how a conflict resolution team would work with this type of pattern.

While I know no more details about this situation than what's contained in the paragraph above, I think it's a good topic.

At the outset, it's important to understand that I have no training in trauma response, per se, and do not consider myself an expert in that arena. That said, I do consider myself an expert on conflict in cooperative groups, and hold the view that it's imperative for cooperative groups to be able to work constructively with feelings (which are invariably in the room whether you have agreements about them or not, and undoubtedly are a central feature of trauma).

While it's up to each community to establish what protocols will serve the group best with respect to the emergence of conflict and non-trivial distress, here's how I would engage with the dynamic described by the inquirer:

Let's make this as messy as possible, and assume that there are at least three different perspectives on what was happening (where the same event was experienced first-hand by three different people, all of whom may be having a different response).

Let's say Pat is the trauma therapist, River is the person who has been made to feel bad about themselves, and Dale is someone upset observing this.

If I were facilitating when this dynamic emerged, I would step in to interrupt the dynamic as soon as I was conscious of someone being in noticeable distress (most likely cuing in to River or Dale, based on the scenario presented). Note that I would interrupt the exchanges as soon as I recognized distress or reactivity—I would *not* wait until I determined that abuse had occurred, which can be a more complex assessment.

When stepping in, I would try to engage the person I sensed was most in distress and then work my way around the room, until everyone in reaction had had a chance to say what was going on for them. In this instance, the fulminating tension may be between River and Pat, or it may be between Dale and Pat.

(For that matter, there could be tension between Dale and River: I recall how irritated my mother was when I would would criticize my father for going into a rant and belittling her—she told me in no uncertain terms to butt out; she didn't want me defending her.)

I would engage with each person long enough to establish what they are feeling, their version of what happened, and its impact on them. I would steer them away from labeling others, assigning motivation to others, or from analyzing the situation. I would simply be asking them to report what they've experienced and its meaning to them. After listening to their responses, I would reflect back the essence of what I heard, doing my best to match both their words and their energy. I would be trying to walk in their shoes.

Essential to this being effective is staying with it until the speaker reports feeling heard. Caution: It is often insufficient to simply assert, "I hear you" or to nod sympathetically. You have to be able to demonstrate *to the upset person's satisfaction* that you get what they've told you.

My thinking here is that people in distress often feel isolated and are not confident that others will be open to hearing about their experience, or to understand it even if they get to tell their story. With that in mind, the very first order of business is to establish connection, so that information can flow.

How It Might Look to Pat

This can have a very wide range, including the following possibilities:

- Pat may have been abusive yet have no consciousness of it.
- Pat may own that they were purposefully trying to hurt River (I don't run into this often, but it's a possibility).
- Pat may believe they engaged with River in ways that they felt were ethical and constructive.
- Pat may be oblivious to what they had done, or its impact on River.
- Pat may recognize that they had gone overboard (in some sense) and are in remorse about it.

Even if you stipulate that Pat is skilled as a trauma therapist, that doesn't preclude their having a blind spot about the ways in which they can trigger trauma in others, nor does it guarantee that they are always aware of when they have been triggered. Finally, therapists are likely to have a preferred method for working trauma, and there is no single approach that's 100 percent effective.

Thus, while it's reasonable to expect a trauma therapist to be sensitive to what will be triggering in others, and to be deft in picking up on cues that what they're doing is landing poorly, there are no certainties.

Pat might be completely at ease with what they did; they might be embarrassed; they might be curious (that Dale thinks they were abusive); they might also be in reaction themselves (to who knows what).

How It Might Look to River

The fact that Dale believes Pat was abusing River does not necessarily mean that River experienced Pat as abusive. It's important, I think, to not jump ahead, and to listen carefully to each player's story. There could well be three very disparate realities in play without anyone being "wrong."

While it seems unlikely that River enjoyed their interaction with Pat, discomfort or confusion is not necessarily abuse. Was the exchange embarrassing? Overwhelming? Unrelenting? Accusatory? Trauma-triggering (in ways that Pat might reasonably be expected to know or be sensitive to)? There is a wealth of possibilities here.

I can imagine that River might be in tears, shaking, or completely shut down. Or they might be outwardly calm, or even untouched by what Dale found intolerable.

Dale's description of Pat's interactions with River as "abusive" suggests that Pat—at least in Dale's eyes—placed River in an awkward (excruciating?) spot, without license to do so.

How It Might Look to Dale

It seems certain from the description that Dale had a definite negative reaction to what Pat was doing with River.

This could stem from any or all of the following:

- Outrage on behalf of the group (that River could be treated this way).
- Upset over the perception that Pat is acting out of integrity as a trauma therapist (misusing their license).
- Frustration with the group that Pat's behavior has been tolerated.
- Personal irritation with Pat that has its roots in prior unresolved issues.

How to Proceed

With all these moving parts, I'd need to make an in-the-moment assessment of where the major axis of tension ran and begin there. In condensed form, here is the sequence I'd follow:

- Interrupt the damaging or upsetting exchanges (stop the merry-go-round).
- Acknowledge the protagonists' experiences (noting where they are similar and where they diverge).
- Decide (interactively with the players and the group) whether to take it further in the moment, or set something up afterwards in another setting. If the former, I would work in dyads, starting with those most triggered or most in distress, attempting to repair relationship damage and to reopen channels of communication. Problem solving would follow that (commitments the two might make to each other about how to proceed differently in the future).

If the latter, I'd stay with it long enough to get a commitment from each party about a time and place to reconvene.

If the Facilitator Is Overwhelmed or Ineffective

This is where the Conflict Resolution Team might come into play, being on call to step in at need if the facilitator cannot answer the bell. While I strongly advocate that groups have such a team, there are three essential things that need to be in place for that hope to be realized:

- A general agreement to engage with strong feelings when they surface (permission).
- Clarity about how those feelings will be worked with (while there are a number of modalities for working with conflict, the group needs to bless at least one of them, so members know what they've signed up for).
- Sufficient skill in the community to be able to facilitate this work using the chosen modality.

It does no good to have a general agreement to work with conflict if there is no agreement about *how* to go about it, or no confidence in the group's ability to navigate it successfully.

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Yulia Zarubina

Working Effectively with Exceptionally Challenging Behaviors, Part Seven

By Diana Leafe Christian

Whole communities can address these behaviors and protect their community.

Otter John McBride

"Hello," Anna begins with trepidation. She's just knocked on the door of a community member I'll call Mavis, known in her community for sometimes being overbearing and harsh yet apparently unable to tolerate attempts to give her feedback (see the first article in the series, Communities #193). In a meeting the younger people once organized to ask her to behave more kindly and cooperatively with them, Mavis commandeered the meeting and threatened anyone who'd dare to give her critical feedback that night. So, no one did offer feedback, apparently so intimidated by her fierce admonitions that they could only look down at the floor and tear up their rapidly written lists of concerns.

"I'm here from the Community Care Team," Anna continues. "May I come in?"

"What's this about?" Mavis asks as Anna steps inside.

Anna takes a deep breath. "Well, first, the Care Team would like to ask you if you've been having any difficulties lately, and if you'd like any kind of support from the community."

Mavis is surprised, touched by their concern.

"And second," Anna continues nervously, "We'd like to ask you to please consider changing some of the ways you're relating with other community members lately. There isn't any easy way to say this, but some people have expressed their concerns to us about things you've said to them lately, and the way you've said them."

"What?!" exclaims Mavis. "*Who? Who* says this?!"

Anna gulps. "Just some people who talked to us; doesn't matter who. So you see we first wanted to ask you what's going on. Have some things been especially stressful lately? Do you need any kind of help? And we'd like to offer support in helping you perhaps phrase things differently; um...more respectfully, when you talk to people. We think maybe you might be under a lot of stress lately and it might come out this way towards others. Has it?"

Mavis scowls.

Anna takes another deep breath. "And we want to ask if we can help. And I've been asked to tell you, from the Care Team, this is the first consequence in our new 'Graduated Series of Consequences' process."[1]

Mavis is incensed. She feels defensive, blindsided. How dare Anna come to her door like this! How dare the Care Team focus on her! She never wanted the community to adopt the damn new graduated series feedback process in the first place. And here it is, with the first consequence in the new process being applied to her! To *her!*

Anna doesn't feel great either. She's not comfortable saying something to a friend or neighbor which she knows could upset them if they misinterpreted it as a personal attack. Yet if the community's Care Team *doesn't* take some action, if it doesn't set limits and boundaries for Mavis, she'll likely continue intimidating people and discouraging them from wanting to attend meetings and gatherings when she'll be present. Because, from Mavis's point of view, why *should* she change anything, given that she believes the way she communicates is perfectly acceptable? It's those other people who just need to be straightened out sometimes!

With no official feedback and request for change from the whole community, it's easy for Mavis and people with challenging behaviors like hers to ignore or even punish the individual community members who try to give feedback or request a behavior change, or who outright avoid her. So an official request from the community like this, with a multi-step process of ever-greater potential consequences that all community members know well, *could* induce someone like Mavis to change her ways

and become more cooperative.

Unfortunately this is only a simulated conversation; Mavis's community didn't actually approach her with any kind of Graduated Series of Consequences. However, this scenario can illustrate the Catch-22 dilemma a community can face when its members are brave enough to create a series of limits and boundaries for the Mavises in their midst.

The Catch-22 of Communities Dealing with These Behaviors

And it really is a dilemma. If a group doesn't use a method involving consequences like this, it's likely the person will continue their hurtful, disruptive behaviors, with community members feeling increasingly upset or fearful. Some won't want to attend meetings anymore and will try to avoid the person whenever they can. Some might even leave the community altogether—and this has happened in some groups. But if the community *does* use a process like some form of graduated consequences, there's a chance the person will comply. If so, community members can feel emotionally safe again and attend meetings and social gatherings again.

The Graduated Series of Consequences process is a series of respectful yet increasingly potent experiences of peer pressure on people who violate community agreements or exhibit especially challenging behaviors. It allows their actions and the community's consequences to be known by an ever-increasing number of community members. Most people want others to think well of them, so a series of consequences that increase the amount of *public* attention on them—which I call the "Community Eye"—tends to induce those who break agreements or exhibit these behaviors to again comply with community agreements and/or behave more cooperatively. This process is for members who *consistently* rather than occasionally break agreements, or who exhibit consistent, persistent behaviors that disrupt meetings or harm or demoralize other members or the group.

However, conveying each consequence to the person, even the relatively mild consequence of a first step as demonstrated in the scenario with Anna and Mavis, isn't always easy, since people with these behaviors typically cannot tolerate any kind of critical feedback. And the fiercer and more egregious someone's behaviors, the more difficult they are to challenge. It takes courage! Yet a method like this *is* an effective way for the community as a whole (as compared to individual members or groups of members) to protect itself and its members from someone who consistently and frequently says and does things that reduce community well-being.

What Are "Especially Challenging Behaviors"?

As described in previous articles, "especially challenging behaviors" are what psychologists call "narcissistic" attitudes and behaviors. These are not the occasional behaviors that many of us express sometimes, but behaviors that recur frequently, like those of Dwight: contemptuous and disdainful, lying, and behaving ruthlessly towards others (described in the first article); Griswald: self-focused, lacking empathy, and expressing rage, hostility, and even taking revenge in the group (second article); Eldred: resentful, easily outraged, and willing to nurse a grudge for years (third article); Andraste: hostile and contemptuous towards those she looked down on (fourth article); Hugo and Umberto: manipulative and passive-aggressive, and seeking out the most vulnerable, self-doubting fellow community members to become their loyal followers (fifth article); and Olive, aggressive in meetings while believing herself victimized, and demanding whole-group meetings to deal with her many upsets about community decisions (fourth and sixth articles). (See sidebar, "Especially Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors," p. 38.)

Because most community members *don't* exhibit these behaviors, it can be jarring and disorienting when we do see them in our group. However, when one or more of our fellow community members consistently and frequently act out these behaviors it can have a devastating effect on the rest of us, and on our whole group. These challenging behaviors can cause so much conflict, and dealing with them can consume so many hours of process time in meetings and in mediations, that they drain and exhaust the group. Our community can become so toxic, in fact, the less patient people—sometimes also the most responsible and competent people in the group—can stop participating in meetings, stop going to social events, and possibly even leave the group entirely.

This article series advocates that we learn to recognize this pattern of behaviors and learn as much as we can about them so that, if possible, we can not only feel understanding and compassion for someone who acts in these ways (while *lowering* our expectations that the person will change and become empathetic or interested in others), but also set clear limits and boundaries to protect ourselves.

Previous articles focused on what individual community members as well as groups of members can do to protect themselves and their communities (articles one through five). The sixth article and this one focus on and what whole communities can do to protect themselves.

A Graduated Series of Consequences

Adopting a "Graduated Series of Consequences" helps encourage accountability in the group—*not* by punitive measures or fines, or shaming or blaming—but through a series of fair,

The Graduated Series of Consequences method is how whole communities can set limits and boundaries on these behaviors.

Mikail Duran

Detail from Ivan Kramskroi, Portrait of an Unknown Woman

compassionate, incremental consequences, from mild to increasingly serious, which treat the person respectfully while also asking them to make changes and resolve the problem. It *is* possible to ask community members to follow agreements and say, "Please don't do that anymore," in ways that are direct, emotionally authentic, and respectful of the person's dignity. And if after the first several consequences are applied the person still doesn't comply, the last-resort consequence can be that the person is asked to leave the community. A Graduated Series of Consequences is essentially just a way to set limits and boundaries with the person.

A group could create its own kinds of consequences and a different number of steps as it saw fit. However, here's an example of one way a group could do this:

- **First Consequence:** One community member asks the person violating an agreement or behaving hurtfully to comply with the agreement again, or behave in a more cooperative manner.
- **Second Consequence:** If the person continues to break the agreement (or do undesirable behaviors), a small group, perhaps three or four people, visits them to request this again.
- **Third Consequence:** If this still doesn't resolve the problem, the community creates an informal written contract asking them a third time to stop the behavior. The contract outlines how in several steps over the next few months the person will resolve the issue, with periodic meetings with one or more other community members to help the person stay on track and abide with the contracted steps to resolve the issue.
- **Fourth Consequence:** If the issue is still not resolved, the group holds a community meeting about the issue. Each participant shares how the person's *not* keeping the agreement or behaving in challenging ways has affected them, and perhaps also shares the feelings their behaviors have triggered in them: dismay, confusion, anger, etc. The person can also tell the group what's been going on with them, if there have been circumstances that diminished their ability to keep agreements or if their life has been especially stressful lately. At this point the person is put on "membership probation": if they continue to not comply with the community agreement or they don't stop the undesirable behavior by a certain date (which could be in just a few days), the community will deliver the fifth consequence. If the person doesn't attend the meeting, it is still held for the benefit of everyone else, and the person is given written notes from or an audio or video recording of the meeting.
- **Fifth Consequence:** If the person still hasn't resolved the problem by the given date, then, in the final, "last resort" consequence, their community membership is revoked and they're asked to leave the group.[2] This is a drastic move; however, if the violation is severe enough or the conflict too wrenching, and if it's gone on long enough with no resolution, the group needs to get realistic. Sometimes increasingly public consequences are the only way to protect the community from the devastatingly low morale that can occur with serious violations of agreements or when someone exhibits especially challenging behaviors that they cannot or will not stop.

Because these requests are repeated, and everyone knows that the consequences—the "Community Eye"—will be increasingly public and unpleasant for the person, this method utilizes both a "carrot" (the consequences will stop if they change their behavior) and a "stick" (but the consequences will continue if the person doesn't change their ways), this definitely serves as limits and boundaries on the person's behavior.

Why This Works

You may believe this method is effective because each consequence in the series is more visible and impactful than the last, and people want to avoid the next, more potent consequence. But a more subtle reason this works is that this method simply *exists*. Knowing that their community has a Graduated Series of Consequences process can deter people from breaking agreements or treating others badly. People don't *want* to get a knock at the door from someone who'll ask them to change, much less find three or four people at their door. And they sure don't want a whole community meeting called about their behavior!

Strangely enough, after a community adopts a process like this they often don't ever have to use it. I think it's because everyone knowing these consequences exist tends to motivate people to keep their agreements and "step up" to better, "community-trained" behavior.

Or maybe the community only has to apply the first, relatively mild consequence, and perhaps with only one or two members, for everyone to behave better from then on. This has happened several times in my community. The knowledge that we now have a method of ever-increasing community visibility and peer pressure serves as an effective deterrent. After the first or at most two consequences are applied to someone, or to two or three members, amazingly, from then on almost everyone honors the group's agreements and behaves considerably more decently.

The Smart, Compassionate Way Heart-Culture Farm Deals with These Behaviors

"At Heart-Culture Farm Community (near Eugene, Oregon) we

> People with these behaviors typically cannot tolerate any kind of critical feedback.

have experienced several residents over the past two decades who exhibited some version of the behaviors described in these articles," observes Kara Huntermoon (Letters, Communities #198). Several community members—valued members of her group—left because they couldn't take the challenging behaviors anymore.

Unfortunately, one or more people with these kinds of behaviors can be so painful and difficult that beloved members flee the scene—prioritizing their own emotional safety and peace of mind more than sticking it out in a community that now feels toxic and painful. Community can be wonderful, but with behaviors like this in the group, it can become a living hell. No wonder people leave!

So Heart-Culture Farm members decided to face this problem head on, crafting a whole-community response when one or more individual community members call attention to someone consistently exhibiting behaviors like this. "Our community first tries all our skills to help someone have the container they need for personal growth and healing," Kara notes. And only if and when this doesn't work, do community members ask the community to take action to set limits and boundaries on the person with the behaviors, and this can include eventually asking them to leave the group.

Heart-Culture Farm's five-step method can be especially helpful when one or more members are being personally targeted by someone with these behaviors. "Targeting" is described in the third article, such as when Eldred targeted Joseph, and the fourth article, when Olive and Andraste each targeted me. Here is the guidance they came up with for those who are strongly impacted:

1. Ask other community residents for help. Especially ask full members and those who've lived there the longest, not only because they'll have more clout in the group than newer members but also they'll likely have a greater interest in maintaining community stability.

2. Take time for self-reflection and your own personal healing. This is similar to past articles' advice for those of us most affected by these behaviors, especially when we've been targeted, to get what I call "outside healing help" to shore up our own inner reserves of strength and emotional resilience. We can't change the person's behaviors, but we can certainly make ourselves less vulnerable to them.

3. Try addressing the issues with them directly. This is similar to the advice to set limits and boundaries with the person, described in the first through and fourth articles. You can set limits and boundaries by telling the whole group what you'll do if someone behaves in certain ways in meetings, the step Joseph took with Eldred, or telling the person directly what you do and don't want from them, as Rose did with Dwight and as Joseph later did with Eldred, or through the quiet (or "chicken") method of just quietly staying out of the person's way and out of their line of sight, as I did with Olive. You can also do it by creating Connection Contracts (see below). If setting limits and boundaries one-one-one doesn't work and the person continues the behaviors at Heart-Culture Farm, they suggest asking a third person to join the first person in asking again for change. If even that doesn't work, they suggest arranging an all-community meeting and mediation on the topic. As you may recall from previous articles, requests for change and mediations usually don't work with people who exhibit these behaviors. And while Heart-Culture members know this, they still give the person every benefit of the doubt and try these measures first. They want to give the person every chance to turn their behaviors around before they apply the next consequence.

> Just knowing these consequences exist tends to motivate people to keep their agreements and "step up" to better behavior.

4. Time, and Evidence. A community, and especially its founders and long-term members, says Kara, need both time and evidence before they can determine that a community member has persistent challenging behaviors. *Time* is required to try various community processes over the weeks and months and see whether they've made any difference or not. *Evidence* comes from community members sharing their struggles and what happened when they tried various ways to resolve the conflicts triggered by these members' challenging behaviors. Both are needed before the community may be ready to take the fifth and final step.

5. Tell the community the behaviors have become so challenging you're thinking of leaving. Ask for their help. In this fifth step, the person who has initiated this series of steps tells Heart-Culture Farm's leadership that dealing with these behaviors over time and not seeing any change in the person or their behaviors no matter what they've tried has become so difficult for them, so intolerable, that they're considering leaving the community for good. "Telling the leadership" could mean telling everyone this and asking for help in a whole-group meeting—saying you don't *want* to leave the community and asking the group for help. Or, depending on the kind of governance structure your community has, you could tell the steering committee or administrative team, as members of my community did when asking our leadership team to *please do something* about Olive's behavior in meetings (fifth article). This last step can and perhaps *should* include asking the person with the challenging behaviors to leave the community.

While this may seem like a radical idea and "*not* community!" to some, for others it's a no-brainer. *Of course*, after first trying everything else, a community should ask anyone with these kinds of especially challenging behaviors to leave, rather than letting them drive many of *us* out of the community!

Your community and mine—all our communities—can create multi-step processes like Heart-Culture's five-step method to induce better behavior in our members. This is another form of a Graduated Series of Consequences. However, it includes the powerful message to the community that when the situation becomes so bad for you and perhaps others that you're considering leaving the community altogether, then you can legitimately ask the community to set limits and boundaries on the person's behavior, or even to ask them to leave.

The message—"It's gotten so bad I'm thinking of leaving"—*can* get your community's attention!

The message—"It's gotten so bad I'm thinking of leaving"—*can* get your community's attention!

Dr. Craig Malkin's "Connection Contracts"

Psychologist Dr. Craig Malkin, author of *Rethinking Narcissism,* suggests offering what he calls informal "Connection Contracts" to courteously yet effectively set limits and boundaries with people who exhibit these challenging behaviors, while attempting to elicit more cooperation from them.

Like most psychologists and others who counsel clients who are regularly in contact with people with these behaviors, Dr. Malkin recommends limiting contact with them when possible. But if the person is a family member or partner—or a fellow community member—you can't easily do this. So for him, working effectively with these behaviors requires managing how the person treats you and protecting yourself from their behaviors—*not* trying to induce more closeness and mutual cooperation them—while at the same time offering the person every opportunity to take the higher road.

Dr. Malkin created the Connection Contracts method for individuals to protect themselves. In a Connection Contract "you state clearly and simply what has to happen if the person wants you present," he writes. "It's a way of setting limits by providing rules and expectations." Here are examples of how an individual community member can offer a Connection Contract to someone they're interacting with in their community:

- "I'm not comfortable with yelling and criticism. If I hear either in our Finance Committee meeting today, I'll leave the meeting. I'd like to hear your thoughts about this Finance Committee project, but it'll be up to you whether or not I'm able to stay in our meeting as we planned."
- "We need to stay focused on planning our Fall Celebration. I'm happy to have our planning meeting tomorrow as you suggest, but if I hear accusations, blame, or other attacks, I'll take that to mean you're not able to have the conversation right then and we'll have to come back to it later."
- "We need to talk about the cleaning schedule for the shared kitchen. If our talk becomes a list of what you think are my problems, or what you see as wrong with me, that will show me that you're not ready to make the cleaning schedule yet and we'll set it aside and take it up again at another time."

"The goal of a Connection Contract is to explain which behaviors will end the conversation," Dr. Malkin writes. The emphasis is on what will keep you present in the meeting, or keep the community wanting the person present in a meeting, not what will make you or the community happy.

And while it can work well to offer a Connection Contract to an individual community member, it can also work well if the whole community offers a Connection Contract to an individual member. First the community would need to agree to use this method, which ideally would be conveyed by the facilitator of a committee meeting or a whole-community meeting, and ideally convey privately, before the meeting. Some examples:

- "Our Finance Committee is not comfortable with yelling and criticism. If we hear either, as today's meeting facilitator I'll ask you to leave the meeting. We'd like to hear your ideas about this project, but it'll be up to you whether or not you're able to stay in our meeting today."
- "We need to stay focused on planning the Fall Celebration in our community business meeting today. However, as today's meeting facilitator, if I hear accusations, blame, or other attacks, I'll take that to mean you're not able to participate in this discussion today, and I'll ask you to either not contribute to the conversation anymore or else leave the meeting. If that happens, we'll have to get your ideas for the Fall celebration later, outside the meeting."
- "We need to talk about the cleaning schedule for our community kitchen in today's business meeting. If in our discussion we hear a list of what you think are the problems of any other community members re. kitchen cleanliness, or what you see as being wrong with them, that will show me as meeting facilitator that you're not ready to help determine the cleaning schedule yet. If so I'll ask you to either not contribute to the conversation anymore or else leave the meeting. If that happens, you won't be able to contribute your ideas to the kitchen cleaning schedule today, but will be able to read about the new schedule in the minutes."

In these examples the individual person speaking, or the meeting facilitator, doesn't put down or criticize the other person; they simply state what they don't want to experience and what they'll do if it occurs. This is similar to how Rose told her whole community (first article) and Eldred told his (third article) what kinds of meeting behaviors they wouldn't tolerate in meetings and if these behaviors still occurred, they'd leave the meeting.

What research about narcissistic behaviors demonstrates, Dr. Malkin notes, is that people only move toward more cooperative behavior when they're reminded of the importance of their relationships, and for us, the importance of their relationship with their community and their fellow members. Change doesn't come from telling people off or accusing them of being too self-centered, ruthless, or manipulative, Dr. Malkin says. Change occurs "by showing them the benefits of collaboration and understanding." In the above examples, the benefits are to stay included in the conversation or to continue participating in the meeting.

Connection Contracts could of course be used with a Graduated Series of Consequences or another multi-step process like the one Heart-Culture Farm uses.

Switching from Consensus to Sociocracy to Reduce Challenging Behaviors

This is another way a community can reduce the effects of these behaviors on community. Socicocracy is an especially effective self-governance and decision-making method I now highly recommend for communities instead of traditional consensus.

We've seen how communities can change their decision-making method from classic consensus to a modified form of consensus as a way to help limit these behaviors in meetings, especially when the people exhibiting the behaviors are the community's most frequent blockers (sixth article). While Sociocracy can also help reduce hurtful or disruptive behaviors in meetings, it can help curb these behaviors in other contexts as well:

• People can't dominate meetings by speaking more often than others, because the facilitator calls on people in rounds. So no one can speak more often than anyone else, and no one is ignored either. Everyone gets a turn to speak.

• No one can derail meetings by initiating long discussions without first getting consent from everyone else in the meeting. Further, discussions are consented to for a certain pre-determined amount of time. The meeting facilitator literally times all agreed-upon discussions with a timer, and when the time's up the discussion stops. If people want to continue a discussion, they need consent from everyone else to extend the discussion, and again, for a certain, agreed-upon length of time. For this reason in Sociocracy people can't "hijack the meeting" or derail the agenda by generating unexpected discussions that go on and on.

• Group members can't join any committee they like, but must ask the committee's existing members if they can join. The committee can say "Yes" if they need more members at that time or if they'd like the person to join them, or "No, thank you" if they don't currently need more committee members. They can also decline someone's request to join their committee if the person has a history of behaviors that trigger conflict or otherwise disrupt meetings (like Olive, Griswald, Hugo, Umberto, Ethel, and others described in previous articles).

• Sociocracy has a method for fairly and transparently selecting people for roles in a committee or in the whole group, based solely on whether or not the person meets the requirements to perform the tasks and duties of the role, rather than on how popular they are.

• Each role has a specific term length, so no one can fill a role indefinitely. This means more people can fill more roles in a community. This can deter cliques from commandeering community leadership.

• Sociocracy has another process for helping people improve in how they perform their roles, with positive, good-will feedback about what's been working well during their time in the role, and what may need improvement, if anything.

• As a last resort, Sociocracy has a formal, step-by-step process for removing someone from a committee if they tend to trigger conflict in the committee or are disruptive in some way or otherwise hamper its ability to carry out its work. (This is only about removing someone from a committee, not evicting someone from the whole group.) I know of two communities who adopted Sociocracy solely so they could remove an egregiously disruptive member from various committees.

However, these Sociocracy processes only help curtail disruptive behaviors in *meetings;* they don't help deter challenging behaviors in shared meals or other social gatherings or when meeting the person in the community garden or the laundry room. But of course a community can always create a committee that specifically deals with conflicts in the group and which encourages community members to behave more cooperatively.

Using Partial, Modified, or "Sort of" Sociocracy Doesn't Work

However, from visiting and interviewing people in communities and member-led groups that use Sociocracy—or believe they're using it—I've learned that attempting to use Sociocracy doesn't always help.

When a group uses Sociocracy partially or uses it incorrectly, which many groups do, it not only doesn't curb these challenging behaviors but can result in confusion and conflict in the group. In my experience teaching Sociocracy to communities for many years now, *unless* the group fulfils what I call "the four necessary conditions" for using Sociocracy effectively they tend not to experience these benefits. The four conditions are: (1) the community members invest enough time and energy to learn Sociocracy accurately and use it effectively, (2) all community members, not just some, learn it, (3) they use it as it was designed, rather than combining it with various aspects of consensus or voting, and (4) they get periodic review trainings, or get help from their Sociocracy trainer when they have questions or run into problems, to stay on track and prevent "governance drift" back towards consensus or voting.

When communities use only a partial version of Sociocracy, or only some members understand it but not others, or if the group has significantly changed Sociocracy or combined it with consensus, in my experience it not only doesn't work well but actually can cause *more* conflict in the group. If so, the people who exhibit especially challenging behaviors can continue to disrupt meetings and get away with it.

Shifting from classic consensus to Sociocracy is like trying to learn another language. Just as one needs at least a minimum of understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to just be understood and talk with native speakers in even a rudimentary way, learning Sociocracy requires really learning all of what I call its "seven parts." Trying to use Sociocracy partially or with only half the group understanding it (or *mis*understanding it) can be so disruptive it makes everything worse. So if a group wants to help reduce especially challenging behaviors in meetings but isn't interested in investing enough time in learn-

Whether the Many Raindrops Make a Flood Method is used by whole communities or groups of community friends, it tends to work well.

Nick Nice

Narara Ecovillage, Sydney, Australia

Some communities switch to using Sociocratic self-governance to reduce these especially challenging behaviors in their meetings.

ing Sociocracy, I recommend using the N St. Method instead. This method (described in the sixth article) is much easier and far less time-consuming to learn and adopt if a group already knows consensus.

One way or another, replacing classic, traditional consensus with either Sociocracy or the N St. Method, or another version of modified consensus, can really help a group reduce the effects of challenging behaviors, at least in meetings.

The "Many Raindrops Make a Flood" Method

This is potentially the most controversial of these whole-community methods to reduce challenging behaviors in the group. It's controversial because people agree in advance to always give the person feedback soon after they're seen exhibiting these behaviors, and this can be misinterpreted as a manipulation or "ganging up on" someone. However, we could see this as the famous half-full glass of lemonade. Looked at in this light, the Many Raindrops method could be seen as an effective way to gently give the person many chances to improve their way of relating to others. A method this gentle, respectful, and repetitive might induce the person to change their ways. Or more likely—and this part can be seen as controversial also—employing the Many Raindrops method can feel like the last straw to the person, the straw that induces them to feel so frustrated by all the feedback and requests for change they just pack their bags and leave. (This actually can be a good thing.) The Many Raindrops method can be carried out by the whole community or by a group of friends in community acting together to try to protect themselves from someone acting in these ways, and can help the community, as we saw in the fifth article when groups of friends in community created support networks, alliances, or petitions.

Using the Many Raindrops technique offers feedback to someone with these behaviors that they cannot ignore or dismiss. The intention behind this method is to motivate people to change their behavior, and if possible, become more self-aware. However, as with the whole group using Connection Contracts, or any series of steps or consequences—or changing the whole governance system!—employing this method means agreeing to it as a group and planning a raindrops campaign ahead of time in the group.

Here's how it works. If you feel upset, or even just turned off by something a person with these behaviors recently did or said to you, or to another person, you briefly tell the person what they said or did that concerns you, and ideally, also how it affected you. If you feel up to it, you also request briefly that they not do this again. If you know Nonviolent Communication and can frame your comments in terms of your feelings and unmet needs, it will be easier for them to hear. And it won't just be you offering this feedback, but everyone who has agreed in advance to do this.

The behavior you comment on needs to be recent, not in the past, so the feedback will be specific and will occur fairly soon after the person did it. In giving the feedback, *don't* bring up past actions they may have done, at least not right then (save that for a community process circle). The encounter is purposely *brief*—just one gentle raindrop—not a long, convoluted explanation, justification, or rant. Each person offering their gentle raindrop of feedback says just a sentence or two, then lets it go. You're offering just one gentle raindrop, not pouring a bucket of water on their head.

Of course the person may be upset, or angry. They may say something to retaliate. "No, that's what *you* do!" "Well, that's only *your* opinion." "I'm sorry you *feel* that way!" (Do not add that other community members think so to.) Make the raindrop *only* from your point of view. Be vigilant against getting sucked into a long-winded, no-win conversation with the person, which can be like a black hole, like quicksand. Just say your piece and stop. Resist their efforts to instigate an unwanted conversation about your feedback. Be courteous, and leave the scene if you have to.

Some people offering the feedback may be so fed up with the person's behavior they can't bring themselves to speak respectfully, and so may use shaming or blaming. They may say things

> Change doesn't come from telling people off or accusing them of being too self-centered, ruthless, or manipulative, but by showing them the benefits of collaboration and understanding.

like, "You always do that; what's wrong with you!?" or "Damn it, you did it again, I can't stand it!" Ideally this won't happen; ideally the many raindrops of feedback will be courteous and respectful.

Whether or not all the comments are respectful, these many raindrops of feedback and requests falling on the person's psyche can start to feel like a flood after a while. Receiving a flood of feedback can help them see—in ways they simply cannot ignore—that they frequently and consistently do and say things other people don't enjoy. Ideally they also hear how these behaviors negatively affect other people, and what other people would like them to do differently. Community consultant Kavana Tree Bressen (*effective-collective.net*), who has also observed this dynamic in communities, once told me she believes it takes at least three different people offering the person this kind of feedback before it sinks in deeply enough so the person can really take it in. I've found this as well.

The person *may* merely feel dismayed, and regretful, and motivated to change. Their emotional discomfort *could* induce them to look more deeply at themselves, understand how other people feel when they act these ways, and decide to change—and even to get outside help to heal their issues and change behaviors. If so, both the person and the community will benefit enormously. The group can benefit from all of the person's positive qualities and contributions without also experiencing their hurtful or disruptive behaviors, or at least not as often.

But...given what we've learned about the beliefs and attitudes of most people with these behaviors, most of them will interpret the many raindrop-requests, no matter how gently they're offered, as hurtful and abusive, and as the community "ganging up on them." If you recall the description of the early emotional trauma experienced by people with these behaviors (second article), their inner distress and trauma is painfully triggered—their cage rattled—when someone even gently comments on their behavior or asks them to change. The person will probably experience the comments or requests as attacks. Because they don't realize that the pain they feel from these requests arises from their own suppressed emotional pain and fear, they tend to believe the person offering the raindrop is *causing* their inner emotional pain. Their emotional pain, triggered but not caused by the many instances of gentle feedback, can be so intolerable they can't bear it and flee.

I first saw this dynamic happen naturally and spontaneously when various people decided to offer feedback and request changes to someone in a nonprofit organization. Later I learned of or directly witnessed this method happening spontaneously in three different intentional communities, including mine. In each case the person left the group, and oddly enough, each time the person said almost verbatim the same angry, blaming phrase, "I'm not gonna *take* this sh** anymore!"

If, however, the person can tolerate the feedback, remains in the community, and becomes more helpful and cooperative, this is wonderful. Mission accomplished! But with these kinds of behaviors, it's more likely the person will just up and leave. Most people will probably feel *relieved,* with the group experiencing a sudden increase of harmony and good will.

Especially Challenging Attitudes and Behaviors

More Obvious, Overt, Extroverted Behaviors *(Grandiosity on the outside, insecurity on the inside)*	***Less Obvious, Covert, Introverted Behaviors:*** *(Insecurity on the outside, grandiosity on the inside)*
Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness	Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Entitlement	Impaired empathy
Impaired empathy	Relishing vengeance
Lying; exaggerating accomplishments	Manipulating others; using people
Rapidly escalating anger; sudden angry outbursts	Hypersensitivity to criticism
Grandiosity	Projecting their behaviors and attitudes onto others
Craving attention	"Gaslighting" others (telling someone what they directly observed didn't actually happen)
Criticizing others	Envying others; resenting others
Mocking or jeering at others	Limited self-awareness
Invalidating, demeaning, or belittling others	"Grooming" newer or less confident members to be their allies and support their version of reality
Bullying others	

Coming Up

In the next article, the eighth and last in the series, we'll learn why more communities don't take measures like these to set limits and boundaries on these behaviors—stopped by one or more members taking the "Rescuer" role in what's called the Karpman Drama Triangle...and what the group can do about it.

Diana Leafe Christian, author of Creating a Life Together *and* Finding Community, *speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops and online trainings on creating successful new communities, and on Sociocracy, an especially effective self-governance and decision-making method. See www.DianaLeafeChristian.org. Previous articles in this series included parts One (*Communities *#193, Winter 2021), Two (#194, Spring 2022), Three (#196, Fall 2022), Four (#197, Winter 2022), and Five (#198, Spring 2023).*

1. First described in "A Graduated Series of Consequences and 'The Community Eye,'" Communities #184.
2. Asking someone to leave the community is not possible or legal in US or Canadian communities in which people own and have deeds to their housing units, apartments, lots, or houses–such as in most cohousing communities–since property rights trump internal community agreements. An exception would be communities owned as housing co-ops, in which the group has the legal right to choose its members and, if desired, to ask them to leave.

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SÓLHEIMAR ECOVILLAGE: A Case Study for Neurological Diversity in Cohousing

By Charles Durrett

Sometimes, but not often, you witness something remarkable. I've spent my entire adult life imagining and designing living environments that allow people to truly be themselves and optimally reach their potential. I'm very familiar with cohousing (I coined the term and have designed over 55 communities) and sustainable living, but I marveled when I saw the community of Sólheimar outside of Reykjavik, Iceland for the first time.

This community was designed to set people with intellectual disabilities and neurological challenges up for success, and what was created has helped close to a thousand people with compromised neurological systems to reach their potential, whatever that might be. All that the residents want here is a place to have purpose; a social life; a place to be appreciated, respected, and engaged; and even to prosper—and for the most part they have all that.

> I've never seen people invoke love and appreciation for others so readily and predictably as here.

An hour east of the capital Reykjavik lies this little rural village in the south of Iceland called Sólheimar. With only 100 residents, it is a small but extraordinary place. Sólheimar is an ecovillage, one of hundreds of intentional communities around the world dedicated to social, ecological, and economic sustainability. At Sólheimar, you will find an emphasis on organic farming with multiple greenhouses and the only organic tree nursery in Iceland. It is powered with onsite thermal, wind, and solar energy. In the workshops, the residents use natural and recycled materials to create homemade, artisanal goods such as candles, ceramics, instruments, woodwork, rugs, and art sold locally. There's an organic restaurant and coffee roasting plant, herbal products and food processing including treats like jams, bread, cakes, chutneys, and soups. It even has the longest-running organic market in the Nordic countries.

Like other ecovillages around the world, Sólheimar offers a model for how we can live more harmoniously with our environment and live lighter on the planet. What makes Sólheimar truly unique, however, is that 45 of its residents have an intellectual or developmental disability.

Common lunch at Sólheimar.

Photos courtesy of Charles R. Durrett

An Empowering Community

Sólheimar, which translates to "Home of the Sun," was founded by a visionary young woman, Sesselja Hreindís Sigmundsdóttir, the first Icelander to study how to care for people with mental challenges. Sesselja spent six years in Denmark, Switzerland, and Germany studying pedagogy and the operations of children's homes. She also corresponded with other leaders in this space including Dr. Karl König, founder of the Camphill

Weaving, textile workshop.

Lots of handmade goods and crafts for sale.

Greenhouse harvesting and packing.

A shop sells reproductions of residents' art.

Movement in Britain. Taking inspiration from what she learned as well as Christian values and the pedagogical theories of anthroposophy created by Rudolph Steiner, she established Sólheimar in 1930 with a vision of creating an ecologically sustainable community that could be a home, not an institution, for individuals with developmental disabilities. The first 10 residents, all foster children, took up residence, and in the nine decades since, Sólheimar has welcomed and supported almost a thousand people with special needs.

While a commitment to sustainability is integral to the mission of the village, it is the empowering nature of the community to the individuals that makes Sólheimar such a remarkable place. The belief underlying the village's operations is that every person, no matter the challenges they face, can make valuable contributions to the community—and it works. Together, they garden; manage and upkeep facilities; work in the cafe, bakery, and store; shop for groceries; and cook and clean. Sólheimar welcomes people who are all-too-often labeled as helpless or hopeless and relegated to the margins of society. Here they are provided with a community in which they can have meaningful participation and agency over their days and their lives.

In the group's own words: "The heart of Sólheimar ideology is the same as it was in July 1930, to give individuals fair chance and maximize the potential of every person. Sólheimar creates the space and opportunities for each person to grow and develop, thus becoming an important and active participant in the community… Each person is unique with their own abilities, their own development and their own talents. We always look at the opportunities that live within each person, not the limitations."

The notion is that residents will benefit from these shared environments and that community, and a sense of pride and ownership, will develop. If one person knows how to use the bus or can be adequately trained to do so, that person will help and teach some others. If one person can shop, a couple of people can cook, and a couple of people can clean, then the need for caregivers and outside supervision will be reduced because everyone will be working as a team. The belief is that with this division of labor and communal spirit, anything is possible. If we cooperate, we're better off. Isn't that true for all of us? Many aspects of life in these kinds of environments are organized along these lines. Not only does this provide structure, it also provides a much more affordable framework and way of life than having folks live at home or in an institutional setting. What ensues is engagement, purpose, independence, and community.

Transformations and Challenges

It is no surprise that living at Sólheimar is a transformative experience for residents. Take Gunnar, a 34-year-old young man I spoke with when I visited Iceland. He loves Sólheimar because he feels accepted, appreciated, and respected there. "I have things to do here every day," he said, "I really like the people, and they like me." He never feels bullied, be it overtly or subtly. He spoke at length about finding purpose at Sólheimar and the gratification it gives him. Before joining the community, he had never held a job and his social life was extremely limited; on a good week, he spent two to three hours with peers, most of the time playing video games with one other person.

When he first moved in, he was extremely shy. He looked down at his shoes and held his hands together in front of him like a lot of new residents. Now he is markedly more outgoing and is usually smiling. He works 30 hours each week for the community, mostly scraping, priming, painting, and doing other maintenance jobs. In his free time, he enjoys a rich social life filled with sharing meals, gardening, and just hanging out with his peers (playing pool, etc.). Talking to him I gleaned that compared to the one to three hours per week of peer interaction that he had previously, he has closer to 25-35 hours weekly now. Since coming to Sólheimar, he relies significantly less on county services, and more importantly, he smiles a lot more than he used to—much, much more. He is tickled to be here; you can see it in his face.

Reynir and Gunnar. Reynir (83), on the left, has lived here since he was three.

Packing tomatoes.

Eiður and Judith manage the tree farm.

Morning meeting at Sólheimar.

The workshops: 80-year-old resident on the left, teacher on the right.

Halli Valli, left, hands his guitar to a child during the celebrations for Römpum upp Ísland / "Ramp-Up Iceland."

All new roofs are grass roofs.

Hoop houses.

Nursing care on-site for a dozen residents.

The workshops, which really amount to productive jobs that Sólheimar residents participate in, include candle making, gardening, tree planting, weaving, ceramics, photography, visual arts, wood working, and drama. Among the many other jobs necessary to manage Sólheimar are working in the store or post office, doing maintenance, planting and picking vegetables, and kitchen and janitorial duties.

For so many reasons, this place is a haven. The community and the love here are palpable. The staff and "clients" refer to each other as friends and say that "we are all equal," as a common refrain. It may seem like a small detail, but yes, in this case I do believe that the semantics ("friends") and gentle teaching make a huge difference. This starts with the 45 "clients" (for lack of a better term) who, with their families, are motivated to see themselves and their community mates have a better, more fulfilled life. I've never seen people, in this case social workers, invoke love and appreciation for others so readily and predictably as here. They have clearly embraced the notion that these are friends, and we are all equal.

Whether residents are sharing a meal, participating in a workshop, or socializing outside in the summer, laughter and joy permeate the air. Favorite activities include the plays they put on every year, which are widely attended by the broader community around Sólheimar. Frequent, meaningful interactions with others, of which most developmentally disabled individuals are deprived, allows for Sólheimar's residents to grow, learn, and connect with others. The results are clear: newer residents are often shy and awkward, whereas seasoned Sólheimars are more gregarious and open. And after the yearly public play, everyone has a lift in their step.

Many studies, as well as my own personal experiences, point to the fact that the biggest challenge for young adults with autism is a lack of social life—especially when they see others enjoying short-term and long-term relations. Many realize that social interaction is in fact their biggest challenge that they must overcome. And I've seen it over and over. A few years ago, I went over to a family's house to talk about a potential new cohousing community in their town for families with autistic adult children. They invited their autistic 25-year-old son out of his room to join us for our noon lunch. He spoke as if on script, perhaps unsure of how to ad lib. Sometimes too loud, usually unconscious of the fact that someone else wanted to speak, and never reading from others that they had heard enough—you know, the stuff everyone has to figure out. Then abruptly at the end of lunch the parents muted him and asked him to go back to his room so that we could continue our planning.

As a cohousing architect, I'm not used to people being invited to leave. I'm more used to people contributing what they can, but one of the most important things that you learn when you get involved with cohousing is when not to speak, when to become an active listener. In the time that I spent in Sólheimar, I never experienced any of these awkward moments. Speaking out of turn was the exception, rather than the rule. They had been having extremely prosocial experiences for years and years—in two cases, for nearly 80 years. They conversed, they contemplated, they listened, they spoke spontaneously. Occasionally, they spoke from a script: one of them who had hiked around Iceland on his own had a practiced four-minute elevator speech about what an adventure that was—but everyone does that when asked to describe something that you have described 100 times before. Everyone has a large set of abbreviated stories—so they seemed almost regular in that regard. And sometimes they did speak out of turn—but everyone does that. Maybe it was part of how and why they qualified to live here, but in any case, they communicated. Although rather reserved at first (a slight exaggeration of normal behavior), they soon, once comfortable, relaxed and told you their stories, and made up some new ones and thoughts along the way.

A Model for the Future

In telling this story, I want to be honest and clear because there is a lot to be proud of in Sólheimar, from the participation of the local governments to the people who live and work here. My hope is that this project will become a model and an inspiration for similar projects in the US, Canada, and the rest of the world. Too often there is too much humanity left on the table for those with neurological challenges, and as a result, people in need are literally wasting away. This place can teach us so much about how to create a better future.

Some argue that when the world falls apart, the only thing that can save us is strong, functioning local community. But for many, the world has already fallen apart. There's nothing like an extra chromosome or similar issues to create neurological havoc and to throw your life into chaos from the outset. Historically, too many of these folks have been cast adrift and lost. And their hopes and dreams are lost along with them—especially when all they want is to have what others have, to be accepted, to have purpose, and to reach their potential. By contrast, places like Sólheimar are an island of tolerance, engagement, and appreciation, true appreciation. Their residents have found a refuge.

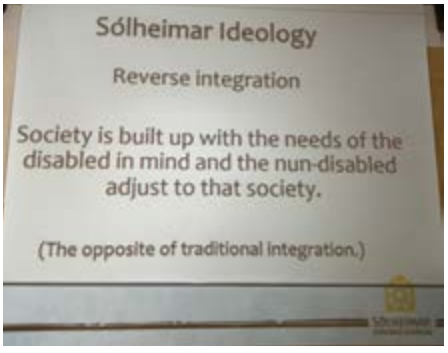
2023 marks the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, a key piece of legislation that has transformed accessibility for disabled individuals in our society. However, we are still failing to meet the needs of impaired individuals in many ways. We have built elevators and ramps to accommodate the physically disabled, but we need to build and elevate communities and systems that allow all disabled folks to reach their potential and truly achieve equal access. Sólheimar is evidence that we can create spaces that allow for the individuals with disabilities to live full, happy lives, and we have an obligation to give the population the community they deserve. After all, we only have one life: we should all be able to live it to the fullest.

On July 5, 2020 Sólheimar celebrated its 90th year anniversary; they have quietly been using community as a means of therapy for that long. There is still no good, comprehensive book on the topic to date other than a nostalgic history or two, and so I plan on flying back to Iceland to research and write more about this community. If we only accomplish one thing in the book, we want you to show how doable this is. We will delve into the details, but the core message that really matters is here. We won't write anything that could stifle this possibility by bogging it down with "all of the reasons that it won't work"—because it does, I have seen it. We have to start the way Sesselja Hreindís Sigmundsdóttir, the initiator of Sólheimar, did: with the attitude that it is possible, we can do it, and it's worth it. Of course, in the US we have to figure out the funding scenario, but they had to do that at Sólheimar as well. The only thing that is stopping us is a vision and a deliberate process. The actualization of a community will be a function of inspiration and of an inspired board of directors to take the lead. We can learn from Sesselja's visionary work, legacy, and the proven success of Sólheimar.

Finally, this book will not be an academic thesis—it is instead a practical guide and reassurance to see that this can be done. Like my first book *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* that introduced America to cohousing, it is a lifestyle story. The early books about cohousing in Denmark inspired Americans, and about 200 cohousing communities have been built by the end of 2022—about what *Time* magazine predicted in 1992.

We hope that hundreds of Sólheimars are built in North America by 2050.

Charles Durrett is Principal at The Cohousing Company (www.cohousingco.com). He is an architect, author, and advocate of affordable, socially responsible, and sustainable design. His most recent book is Cohousing Communities: Designing for High-Functioning Neighborhoods.



The author (on right) with resident, Gunnar.

REBIRTH OF THE KIBBUTZ?
Field Notes of a Journey through Israel's Urban Communes

By Jonathan Dawson

A quip that was doing the rounds when I lived in the venerable old Scottish ecovillage, Findhorn, was that it defied the laws of physics, in that the closer you got to it, the smaller it seemed to become. That is, while for admirers in far-flung places such as Tokyo and Rio de Janeiro Findhorn has iconic, mythic status, for many of the locals in the surrounding countryside it can often appear as little more than a glorified caravan park with some funky eco-features.

I had a similar experience when exploring Israel's urban kibbutzim, which took me on an independent research trip to Israel in early 2023.[1] Many of those I met while there had never heard of the phenomenon and among those who had, most were surprised that something they considered so peripheral should have drawn my attention to the degree that I was prepared to make an extended visit to study it.

Yet, the communal scene that I experienced in the peripheral corners of Israel's urban landscape is vibrant, dynamic, and fired with a visionary zeal that carries strong echoes of the initial flowering of the kibbutz movement in the early decades of the 20th century. In these urban communes, clearly drawn from the same ideological rootstock, though manifesting in totally different form, it may not be too fanciful to see the rebirth and second flowering of the kibbutz movement.

A little historical context is in order. The conventional kibbutz model is widely recognised. In brief summary, from the first couple of decades of the 20th century onwards, Jews began to make the journey from their homes in Russia and Eastern Europe (later also from Western Europe, the Americas, and Middle Eastern Muslim countries) to Palestine where they established radically communal kibbutzim. These were characterised by direct democracy, the equal sharing of income and resources, integration of clerical and manual labour, rotation of work tasks, and the collective raising of children. These communities flourished and played a critical role in the creation and defence of the Israeli state, with kibbutzniks disproportionately represented among the emerging nation's elite combat troops and parliamentarians.

In the words of Ran Abramitzky: "Unlike members of many other communally-based living arrangements, kibbutzniks were never at the margin of society. They have always interacted with the rest of the population and played an important role in Israeli society."[2] Noam Chomsky felt moved to suggest that the early kibbutz movement "came closer to the anarchist ideals than any other attempt that lasted for more than a very brief moment."[3]

From the early 1970s, however, the kibbutz star began to wane. The radical idealism of the early pioneers diluted as the boundaries of the state were secured, and a more individualistic zeitgeist emerged, reflected in the widespread abandonment of the collective upbringing of children. Additionally, while the kibbutz saw itself as a synthesis of Zionism and anarcho-socialism, as the friction between Jews and Arabs escalated, the Zionist task of the kibbutz tended to overshadow its role as a social experiment. (In fact, the economic model of one kibbutz, Sassa, remains heavily dependent on the manufacture of military combat and logistics equipment.) Moreover, the accession to power of the first right-wing government in Israel's history in 1977 and the ensuing shift to

neoliberal economic policies proved disastrous to the cooperative agricultural sector, including the kibbutzim.

By the early 1980s, the collective debt of the kibbutz movement was estimated to be between $5 and $6 billion, and growing, and the bailout agreed with the banks and government led a majority of kibbutzim to abandon most of their radically egalitarian and communal features. Kibbutzniks who had assumed that their needs would be met in perpetuity suddenly faced a future in which they had neither old-age pension nor social security, neither house nor property of any kind, neither rights of bequest nor in most cases very much to bequeath.[4] The social contract between the kibbutz and its inhabitants was shattered.

Today's rural kibbutzim, for the most part, have the feel of comfortable, suburban, gated communities—still of distinctive interest for their residual communal features, but no longer providing a model of radical social transformation. This is captured in microcosm by a conversation I had with the veteran curator of the exhibition that tells the story of one of the richest and most successful kibbutzim, Hazerim, in the northern Negev desert. I noted that he repeatedly made mention of the importance of the Jewish youth "organisations" that have acted as a feeder channel over the decades for idealistic youth recruits to the kibbutz. Intrigued by his use of the word *organisation* in place of the more commonly used *movements,* I asked him was there any significance in his choice of terminology.

Rather wistfully, he replied that yes, his choice of wording was conscious. Movements, he explained, are processes in motion, towards the achievement of a greater goal. Organisations are what happens in the consolidation phase; they are more managerial than visionary in nature. Within the rural kibbutz phenomenon today, he concluded, we are in a managerial phase.

There is, nonetheless, currently an uptick in interest in conventional rural kibbutzim, with a waiting list of around 500 prospective members, but the attraction for newcomers is generally more associated with lifestyle choice than ideology.

• • •

It is at this point that the model of the urban kibbutz enters the scene. These could scarcely be more different from their rural counterparts. They are, for the most part, embedded within marginalised urban communities and own few physical assets other than, occasionally, the residential properties that some of them have bought—which can be anything from a single apartment to a block of flats. Their work and associated income derives not from agriculture but from various activities linked to education, the arts, social empowerment, and other care-based services from which the neoliberal state has been retreating over the last 40 years.

The urban kibbutzim vary considerably in size but are generally significantly smaller than their rural equivalents. The movement comprises several thousand urban communards, organised into small groups of around 10 to 15 people (called kvutsot). Most kvutsot are, in turn, networked into larger structures, called urban kibbutzim. In addition, a small number of stand-alone communities also self-identify as urban kibbutzim.

These communities are remarkably heterogeneous, reflecting the urban communards' desire to break what they experienced as conformity and a stifling of innovation—or

Photos courtesy of Jonathan Dawson

as several interviewees described it, "majoritarian tyranny"—within the conventional, rural kibbutz. The urban kibbutz movement prioritizes autonomy over equality; the individual and the small group over the collective.

Consequently, in place of the mass democratic structures that prevail in the rural kibbutz, where decisions are made partly by professional managers and partly by majority voting of members in large general assemblies, the urban kibbutzim have developed a much more intimate and participatory governance model in which decisions emerge from discussions within and between the two scales of kibbutz and kvutsot. In principle, this is a strongly bottom-up model in which the position adopted by the kibbutz cannot be imposed on the kvutsot. The model is often referred to by urban kibbutzniks as "dialogic communalism," borrowing from the thinking of philosopher Martin Buber.

All of this results in a high degree of heterogeneity both within and between urban kibbutzim.

Perhaps the most obvious contrast here is between individual stand-alone kibbutzim such as Migvan and Tamuz and those belonging to wider networks. While the latter see themselves as movements with clear aspirations to grow—in terms of membership and geographical spread—and to create structures to enable viability beyond the current generation of kibbutzniks, the former are more inclined to self-define as "one-generation communities," consciously avoiding the danger of ossification (which they tend to see as being the fate of the conventional kibbutz).

There are also fluid differences in internal organisation and structures. In the Migvan community located in Sdoret, for example, three levels of participation have emerged among the 70 adult kibbutz members: all pay tithes to enable the maintenance of the community centre and take part in rituals to mark the Jewish calendar; 12 buy food collectively; and nine at the core of the initiative pool and share equally their incomes. At the other end of the spectrum, in many urban kibbutzim all members adhere to common-purse sharing of income, distributed on the basis of need or equal allocation for all members.

The residents of Mishol urban kibbutz in Nof HaGalil initially had a policy that all children would go to the same school (so as to avoid the emergence of cliques among the children), but then changed policy when it was recognised that different children had different educational needs. Some urban kibbutzim meet all their transport needs by way of carpools and discourage private ownership of vehicles, while others tolerate both private and communal ownership.

The urban kibbutzim feature a rich mosaic of structures, systems, and behaviours that defy neat categorisation. No policy is etched in stone and all are potentially subject to review and reform through conversation within multiple levels of community organisation.

Despite such sharp contrasts—in terms of history, scale, mission, income-generating strategies, and governance—the traditional rural and the emergent urban models of the kibbutz share a common lineage. For both, the Jewish youth movements (located both in Israel and the diaspora) have been a hugely important source of members. Many of those involved in the urban kibbutz movement consciously seek to address what they perceive as the weaknesses and failures of the conventional model and indeed, a good number of them were brought up in rural kibbutzim. Both models locate their mission with reference to the Jewish concept, *Tikkun Olam,* meaning "Repair the World." In the words of a manifesto created by one urban kibbutz, "Old model, new mission, with a modern pioneering zeal and a passion for social justice, young Israelis are re-imagining the kibbutz, planting scores of collectives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the country."[5]

In short, the urban kibbutz can be seen as a conscious evolutionary adaptation of the original model.

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The urban kibbutzim are already affecting the evolution of the wider Israeli society. Some cases in point:

Dror Israel emerged from one of the largest youth movements in the country, Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed (Working and Studying Youth). It includes 1,300 trained educators in 15 communities on the social and economic periphery. According to its website, Dror Israel activists "live in the neighborhoods we serve, bridging gaps, solving local problems. Through our youth movement, schools, and local and national programming, we better the lives of 150,000 people every year."[6]

When COVID-19 hit, Dror Israel responded by opening day-care centres for the children of doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers; keeping open its high schools for youth at risk; delivering groceries and medicines to homebound seniors and those in need; and providing online educational programmes for thou-

sands of teens.

The pedagogical dimension of Dror Israel's educational work is pleasingly innovative, drawing on various traditions including Montessori and Waldorf. This approach has been encapsulated in a course co-developed with and taught in the Beit Berl teacher training institute. The focus is on project-based learning with, in several of the urban kibbutzim visited (Mishol and Reshit), greenhouses at the heart of the learning space. Dror Israel has eight schools under its own name and additionally, Dror Israel teachers work in many state-owned schools, where they are generally welcomed due to their high levels of expertise and commitment.

By no means all of these educators and other social activists live together in communes. However, the 15 residential Dror Israel kibbutzim provide important hubs and focal points for the network's outreach work. All of the kibbutzniks I interviewed believed that the urban kibbutzim act as important catalysts for community activities including bridge-building between different ethnicities, organic and urban agriculture, beekeeping, and the inclusion in community activities of people with special needs. A number pointed to important informal alliances developing between urban kibbutzim and local municipalities. In one case, that of Haifa, the city council asked members of the Dror Israel youth group to form a kibbutz in a deprived neighbourhood in order to work with at-risk children.

Several of the urban kibbutzim I visited have spawned NGOs that have outgrown the kibbutz and now stand alone as independent organisations. The Gvanim Association for Education and Community Involvement, for example, emerged from the Migvan urban kibbutz as a vehicle for empowering and integrating into society people with physical, cognitive, and mental challenges. Today, over 35 ongoing Gvanim projects nationwide help over 2,000 participants become more fully active members of their communities. The model also includes sheltered housing where people with disabilities live alongside Gvanim staff members, rather along the lines of Camphill communities.[7] While the CEO is a member of the Migvan kibbutz, Gvanim now operates as an independent organisation.

Similarly, the Bustan initiative was born out of a desire by members of the Mishol urban kibbutz to promote dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity between Jews and Arabs in the northern city, Nof HaGalil. Bustan hosts courses in Hebrew and Arabic, counters racism including providing support to those who have been victims of racially motivated attacks, and organises trips into natural environments outside of the city. It is collaborating with the municipality to develop productive and leisure-based green spaces in the city.[8]

The Tarbut (in English, "culture") movement has grown from an original core group of six young graduates in the marginalised, multi-ethnic city of Afula to a network of around 300 artists: musicians, thespians, painters, and all manner of other artists scattered across various towns in the north of the country. Many of these artists choose to live communally, generally in groups (kvutsot) of five to 10 people, that tend to be federated into larger units (urban kibbutzim) of between 15 and 20 artists. There is a significant level of sharing both of incomes and resources; everything from art materials to costumes and studio spaces. A cofounder of the movement, Hadas Goldman, is in no doubt that the communal dimension of their lifestyle choice lends greater power and effectiveness to their work. At the most obvious level, income-sharing enables members to be supported in taking breaks between projects. The potential for creative collaboration between artists who might not otherwise interact is also enhanced.

Tarbut is active on multiple fronts including the creation of a theatre in Afula, co-creating a national coalition of cultural institutions, lobbying the government on cultural issues, and creating a poetry incubator to promote collaboration between writers in all the languages represented in Israel. Its most iconic project to date is the renovation as a community resource of the old market in Afula which had been a hotbed of drug abuse and crime.

Many of the urban kibbutzniks interviewed were insistent that their activities are not to be understood as some form of Jewish philanthropy. Hadas Goldman at Tarbut sees their mission as being to move beyond "service delivery" to enter into partnership with local people in defining and responding to their needs. This echoes the strong orientation towards democratisation of social service design and provision evident in many progressive cities internationally under the banner of "co-production."[9] Goldman declared that "Artists have a social responsibility to shape the society they live in and to not disconnect from social problems." She sees the importance of creating the theatre in Afula in terms of shifting the current paradigm in which "culture is created in Tel Aviv and consumed in the rest of the country."[10]

A high degree of political awareness is evident and most urban kibbutzniks interpret their role as that of catalysts for the emergence of a more just and sustainable society. One kibbutznik in Tamuz declared: "If you want to change the world, make it your day job!"[11] Another said: "Tamuz is a new type of community. The freedom of man [*sic*] must be expressed in every moment of communal life."[12]

This solidarity and coherence of purpose is grounded in a deep study of ideological sources. In all of the urban kibbutzim visited, members allocate generous time to exploring group dynamics, governance, and the historical and philosophical roots of the movement. Strikingly, many of the same thinkers who inspired the original kibbutz pioneers a century ago—especially philosopher Martin Buber and anarchist theorist Gustav Landauar—are commonly referenced, as is the concept of *Tikkun Ollam.* In short, there is a distinctively Jewish flavour to the urban kibbutz model, even if for many secular Jewish kibbutzniks, the scriptural sources are not of central importance. One referred to "my own personal tikkun" (as opposed to that described in the Jewish scriptures) as a source of inspiration. The website of Tamuz urban kibbutz captures the role of the Jewish tradition well: "Judaism has always changed with the times, and as a secular Jewish community with a secular Jewish identity, we encourage the study and continued cultivation of Jewish 'tradition' to suit a changing and developing world."[13]

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Accelerating climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, and the brittleness and vulnerability of current systems—for the provision of food, energy, transport, housing, and so on—make the experience of radical experiments in decentralised, community-based governance and provisioning, such as the urban kibbutz, more relevant than ever. As globalised systems come under growing strain, the ability of communities, and of the bioregions within which they are embedded, to provide for their own needs and develop systems of self-governance is likely to become increasingly and urgently important. The urban kibbutz—characterised by groups of people simultaneously co-creating their own vibrant communities while acting as focal points for the empowerment of the disadvantaged communities within which they are embedded—embody what is needed in crucial ways.

Could this approach succeed elsewhere as well? Factors specific to the Israeli context have certainly helped the urban kibbutz model to flourish. Despite 40 years of neoliberal policies, Israel has a long and proud history of socialist thinking and organisational structures, with a very strong trade union movement and history of worker-owned industry. The kibbutz movement was central in the birth and defence of the nation, conferring a level of recognition and respect to kibbutzim in general, and normalising the commune as a culturally legitimate form of social organisation. Perhaps most important, young Israeli citizens often bond deeply through their experience in the youth groups and in military service, generating a depth of solidarity with cohorts that has led to the formation of many of the kvutsot.[14]

That said, echoes of the Israeli experience may be found in the broader intentional communities movement internationally. The nearest international equivalent to the kibbutz is the ecovillage and, while there are significant differences between the two models, both involve the creation of self-governing communities that seek to play an important role in innovating and educating about more community-oriented forms of social organisation. Several kibbutzim, notably Lotan in the Negev desert, are members of the Global Ecovillage Network, and the ecovillage and kibbutz families get together regularly for joint conferences and other activities.

As in the traditional kibbutz, there has been a progressive liberalisation of ecovillage norms in recent decades, with a dilution of many of the more egalitarian features such as income sharing and communal land ownership. In recent years many ecovillages have developed a greater outward and more socially engaged focus in their activities than they had at the outset. Recent decades have brought a deeper integration of ecovillages into their immediate hinterlands—a transition I described in a previous article as being from "islands" to "networks."[15] Where (with notable exceptions) ecovillages had previously tended to be primarily inwardly focused, they have increasingly become hubs for various activities relating to social and ecological justice. Today the areas surrounding ecovillages are often unusually rich in terms of sustainability-related initiatives and networks.

Intentional communities can function as transformative cells within wider community networks; with official support,

they may play this role even more powerfully. Michel Bauwens, founder of the P2P (peer-to-peer) Foundation, proposes one such vehicle in the form of what he calls public-commons partnerships (these stand in contrast to the public-private partnerships that have proliferated in the neoliberal decades as a mechanism for private sector investment in public infrastructure projects). "Commonification," argues Bauwens, "consists of democratization, bringing back elements of direct self-government and self-managing by the residents themselves of goods and services of general interest."[16]

Municipal authorities can enter into ongoing relationship with citizens' groups and social movements in the design and delivery of community-facing facilities and services. Building on a model initiated in Bologna, Italy (the Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons), this approach "starts by regarding the city as a collaborative social ecosystem. ... [T]he Bologna Regulation sees the city's residents as resourceful, imaginative agents in their own right. Citizen initiative and collaboration are regarded as under-leveraged energies that—with suitable government assistance—can be recognized and given space to work. Government is re-imagined as a hosting infrastructure for countless self-organized commons."[17]

In a context of progressively more serious disruption to urban systems, municipalities can benefit greatly by calling upon the accumulated experience and intelligence of communities and creating alliance with the organisations embedded within them.

I find it enormously cheering in an age characterised by high levels of cynicism, hedonism, and despair to come across, in the urban kibbutzim and beyond, such committed and cheerful engagement for the common good. However, beyond this we may also be seeing the emergence of cells of community-level self-organisation capable of generating networks of mutual aid of precisely the sort we are going to need.

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1. "Kibbutzim" (plural of kibbutz) is used to define the distinctive Israeli communes that emerged from the early decades of the 20th century. Kibbutzniks are those who live in them.
2. Abramitzky, R., *The Mystery of the Kibbutz: Egalitarian Principles in a Capitalist World*, Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 83.
3. Quoted in Horrox, J., *Living Revolution: Anarchism in the kibbutz movement*, AK Press, 2009, p. 87.
4. Gavron, D., *The Kibbutz: Awakening From Utopia*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, p. 11.
5. Kraft, D., "Kibbutz in the city? The healing mission of Israel's new communes," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2019.
6. See www.drorisrael.org.
7. See www.camphill.org.uk.
8. Segal, D., Kol He'Chalutz podcast, May 19, 2019.
9. Boyle, D. and M. Harris, *The Challenge of Co-production: How equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services,* New Economics Foundation, London, 2009.
10. Goldman, H., Kol He'Chalutz podcast, June19, 2019.
11. Personal interview, February15, 2023.
12. Personal interview, February15, 2023.
13. See radjew.wordpress.com/inspiring-pioneers-tamuz.
14. It needs, nonetheless, to be noted that for a good number of young Israelis, their experience in the army–or even the prospect of serving in the army in any capacity–is deeply alienating and sufficient for them to choose self-exile over remaining in the country.
15. Dawson, J., "From Islands to Networks: a history of the ecovillage movement," 2013.
16. Bauwens, M., "The Public–Commons Partnership and the Commonification of that which is 'Public,'" blog.p2pfoundation.net/the-public-commons-partnership-and-the-commonification-of-that-which-is-public/2012/08/14.
17. See wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Bologna_Regulation_for_the_Care_and_Regeneration_of_Urban_Commons. To date, the city of Bologna and citizens have entered into more than 90 different "pacts of collaboration"–formal contracts between citizen groups and the Bolognese municipal government that outline the scope of specific projects and everyone's responsibilities. The projects fall into three general categories–living together (collaborative services), growing together (co-ventures), and working together (co-production).

The Ecstatic Communion and Revelatory Foibles of *Sun House*

Sun House

David James Duncan

Little, Brown & Company,
2023, 784 pages.

I love this book. I rarely read, let alone recommend, 784-page novels. This one, coming from an author whose writings over the years have spoken to me personally to a degree I almost never encounter, I found powerful in ways I hadn't even anticipated.

It's a book that may help heal and bring sanity and hope to the denizens of a damaged world. It is a breath, many breaths, of fresh air. It's a delivery of sunshine as well as serious reckoning with darkness at a time when the tensions between climate-controlled insularity and climate chaos are rending civilization. And: parts of it drive me a little crazy.

As editor of a magazine named Communities, I feel it's my obligation to point out both where David James Duncan, his narrator "The Holy Goat," and the fictional inhabitants of this wildly creative spiritual epic-*cum*-comic novel get things gloriously right, and where things go ingloriously askew in one particular aspect of a book which I otherwise thoroughly enjoyed.

Allow me to explain.

First: the personal resonance. I've read every one of this author's published works, including his earlier novels *The River Why* (1983) and *The Brothers K* (1992), his memoir *My Story as Told by Water* (2002), and his essay/story collections *River Teeth* (1996) and *God Laughs and Plays: Churchless Sermons in Response to the Preachments of the Fundamentalist Right* (2006). Duncan's connection to the natural world and noninstitutional spiritual bent are among the many elements contributing to the affinity I feel with his writings. I'm not alone: he has what's often called a "cult following," particularly in the

American West and Pacific Northwest, whose land and people have been central in his life and feature heavily in his work. Many of us have been awaiting this next novel, 17 years in the making, for years, ever since we learned it was in the works. I had heard directly from the author that it would be about "a community," and answered some emailed questions during the research for it, based on my own experiences in community living. I was very curious what the outcome would be. And, like many good things, it took time to find out.

Photos by Chris Roth

What I discovered inside the long-anticipated pages of *Sun House* turned out to be different from what I expected, but no less intriguing. And even after nearly 800 pages, I, like some of the advance readers quoted on the jacket, did not want the story to end—it seemed like only the beginning, especially of the "community" aspect.

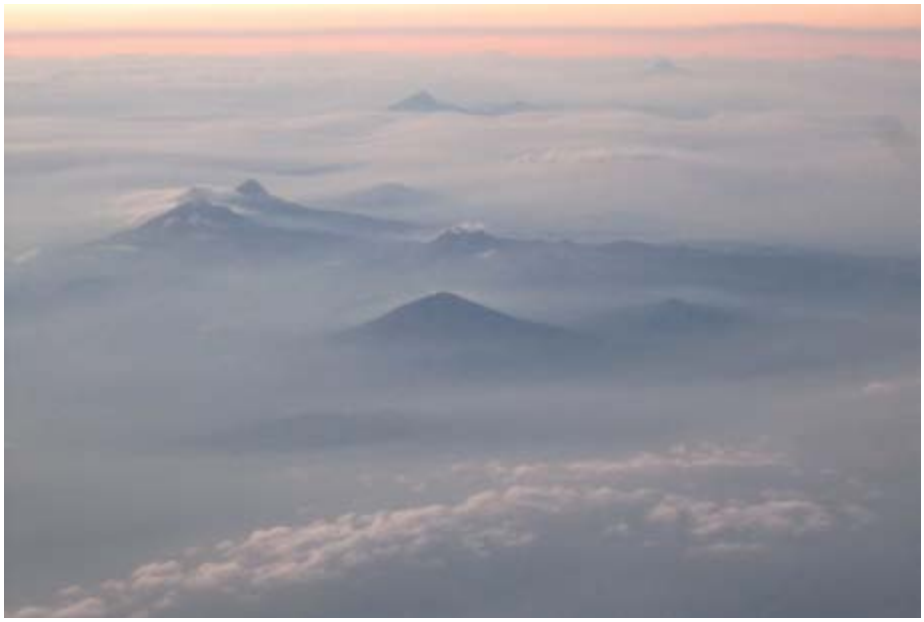
Those looking for a straightforward fictionalized account of an "intentional community" in action may be disappointed. Most of the book serves as preamble to the group's full formation. I found that preamble entirely worthwhile, and it also suggested to me a compelling question: what if *every* community had shared knowledge, documentation, eloquently told stories recorded, about the journeys that brought each member to the collective project they all now inhabit? What if we understood one another—our backgrounds, psychological characteristics, spiritual journeys—as deeply as I came to feel I understood the characters in *Sun House,* even before they came together for their joint venture in rural Montana? What if we made time in our busy current lives to delve into our backstories more? Of course, as many can attest, actual contemporaneous experiences with one another over a span of years can lead to understanding, familiarity, enduring feelings of kinship that simply listening to or reading formative tales cannot. But knowing those formative tales can also work wonders in bringing us closer to one another now; every group could benefit from having its own David James Duncan to render its members' interweaving lives into this kind of tapestry, even without the level of artistry to be found here.

While the characters in *Sun House* live in separate orbits for decades before they all coalesce, many of those orbits gradually overlap and join, such that some deep histories with one another already exist by the time the Elkmoon Beguine & Cattle Company is born in rural Montana. The group also benefits from having a passionate documentarian, the Holy Goat (who turns out to be one of the other main characters, something he briefly spills the beans about near the end), interviewing them, writing about them, encouraging them to record their own stories and share their journals and letters. As a compilation of revealing, intimate personal stories, shared by the fictional people who lived them, *Sun House* excels and suggests what may be possible in this genre (if, as I hope, it becomes a genre).

Sun House is also a spiritual epic. It resembles in its diversity and scope a cross between the world's classic works of wisdom literature and the complete *oeuvres* of William Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Bob Dylan, or any other authors or creative artists from whom one can draw a quotation to apply to nearly any occasion. It is, among other things, a less time-demanding alternative to attending an iconoclastic Divinity School (the 42-hour duration of the audio book reflects what it takes to get through the 360,000 words of *Sun House* at a comfortable "out-loud" pace; eyes typically move faster). It's a work that is significantly easier to read than The Bible (600,000 words), and not merely because *Sun House* is shorter; it also has far fewer internal contradictions and, to me, much more sensible theology on the whole, though I may be burned at the figurative stake for saying so.

Sun House is, among other things, a less time-demanding alternative to attending an iconoclastic Divinity School.

It's also likely an easier read than many of the other foundational religious texts which inform it to far greater degrees than the Bible does—most of which I have also never read thoroughly (with a few exceptions). Its main characters are all spiritual seekers, and thus we get deep (but never overbearing) dives into Vedic literature, Buddhism, marginalized mystical Christian traditions (most notably, the medieval Beguines, Catholic women who defied the Catholic establishment



Cynics, even countercultural cynics, may hate this book.

to practice a non-patriarchal, egalitarian faith based on service and community, earning them literal death sentences from the institutional Church), deep nature-based spirituality (including that of the mythical Lûmi), the creative arts through which "spirit" also flows (whether in music, words, theater, movement, graphic or physical arts), and even the more down-to-earth, practical spirituality of self-sustenance and working on the land. I recognized many of the sources of inspiration cited by these characters, and listed in an accompanying bibliography, partly because many of them were beloved by my Mother too (an Episcopal priest also wary of what patriarchal institutions had done to Christianity, and as sympathetic with "East" as "West" in terms of spiritual wisdom).

Other things that *Sun House* is: a hiking guide through a vividly depicted mountain landscape; a mental map of an only slightly fictionalized Portland, Oregon, 1970s to 1990s; an expression of existential angst and its transmutation into deeper connection with self, life, and death; a celebration of language and its limitations; a refreshing exercise in humor and satire that do not rely on cruelty or nihilistic irony; a cornucopia of styles. *Sun House* has room to contain multitudes—and it does.

Above all, amidst all the diversity of style, tone, and story, the book rests on an unambiguous underpinning: the author's unapologetic belief that, even in the face of all the reasons for doubt, life matters, and what we do with our lives matters, and there is a Great Spirit inherent in the cosmos, however we name or conceptualize it, and however it has been defiled and abused both by oppressive and hypocritical religions and by industrial civilization, capitalism, consumerism, empty materialism. As a result of this orientation, cynics, even countercultural cynics, as well as those heavily invested in the status quo, may hate (or at the very least dismiss) this book. Indeed, online searches reveal that some of them do. Fortunately, the world is not entirely composed of cynics, and many others recognize this book as a gift to those to whom it speaks.

It is not always a reassuring read. While it is richly entertaining, containing prose that is often exhilarating, it also describes a complex world in which believing in any benevolence or underlying sense or meaning in the order (or disorder) of things can often be difficult, given the traumas that nearly all of us encounter. One can either curse this complex state of affairs; remain agnostic/guarded/self-protected against it; or embrace it, celebrate it, find deeper truth, value, and connection in it. *Sun House* does the latter, even though it starts and ends with what some might see as senseless, premature deaths, and is propelled by suffering and trauma as well as the growth and healing that follow them.

Book One, "Moaning Is Connected with Hope," traces the individual, gradually intertwining journeys of the characters who eventually come together in Book Two, "Eastern Western." Without exception, the main characters are misfits in American society, seemingly allergic to artifice and superficiality. They are almost all unusually self-aware, articulate, interested in their own and others' inner lives as well as the outer conditions of the world—or they (at least those who don't fall away from the action) become so through the course of the book. They often seem to have taken a truth serum—getting right to the point of their own truths (even if these are not consensus truths), and abiding by the dictum that opens Chapter One in Book One, "Dead Mother's Son":

> Assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case. What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon? What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?—Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*[1]

That is, indeed, the philosophy followed by David James Duncan, and often the unstated philosophy behind the truth-telling of the main characters in this book. I found myself wondering at times if they might all be external self-projections of the hyper-intelligent, eloquent writer who presents them to us, imaginary creations rather than merely fictionalized representations of actual other people. Yet the Afterword ("Acknowledgments in Four Stories") makes clear that real individuals in the author's circle of acquaintances inspired them. They certainly reflect a rich interior life, one that attracts others of similar persuasions. The detailed accounts of immersion in the natural world, especially long mountain hikes and time spent "at elevation," can only

have come from similar first-hand experiences—and are no surprise to readers of Duncan's previous writings.

Everything in this multilayered, richly-sourced book feels as if it must be familiar to its author—whether the often intricate psychology underlying some of its characters' behaviors and motivations (especially in response to past trauma); or the many pieces of wisdom literature cited in the text or quoted, along with other sage observations from various writers, creative artists, elders, in the short passages that precede each chapter; or the specific times and places in which the action of *Sun House* occurs (years 1958 to present, locations most notably Portland, Seattle, Colorado, and rural Montana, with short spells in Mexico, Rhode Island, and Idaho). *Sun House* seems the culmination of a life's work, a deeply personal statement presented through engaging storytelling that is equal parts probing and entertaining.

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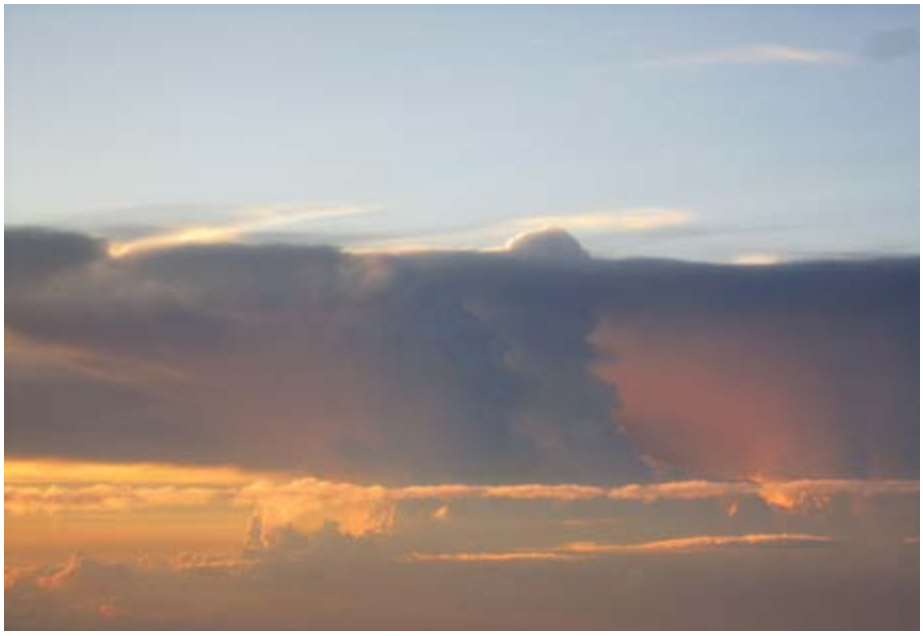
What about the "community"? Even in Book Two, much of the action is preamble, involving the events in the Elkmoon Valley and Elkmoon Mountains that precipitate the formation of the Elkmoon Beguine & Cattle Company after its land—once held but later mostly lost by the families of some of its members—is first protected then liberated from a rapacious corporation. Quite a bit of Book Two consists of Grady Haynes' fascinating "Elkmoon Mountain Journals," which document some of the personal explorations and connections among several key characters that contribute to E.B.&C.Co in its full flowering. I sense they they also reflect what may be the author's (and certainly the narrator's) own greater "comfort zone," spiritual communion found through land connection rather than through group connection *per se.* (However, we do gradually become aware that the Lûmi, who play a central role in these Journals, may be not just a myth but an ethereal "community" in their own right, consisting of decidedly non-anthropocentric individuals.) In the actual action of the novel, E.B.&C.Co forms fully only when it acquires its land in the chapter "Holy Purchase the Great," more than half way through the "Last Telling: On Earth as It Isn't In Heaven," less than 100 pages before the novel closes.

Various aspects of E.B.&C.Co are, however, described earlier in Book Two; the storytelling is not entirely chronological. Reflecting on E.B.&C.Co's genesis from a group of locals and non-locals brought together by common cause (first protecting the Elkmoon Valley, then making a better way of life together), local Kale Broussard tells the Holy Goat: "City mice and country mice began eating their stereotypes of each other for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Quicker than quick we began scheming and dreaming of a shared spread as easy on the Earth and free of Biggie Everything as could be. … And though I'll never understand it, a magic flared up. A kind of holiness, I want to say. Our dreaming held so steady that, six years in, fifteen of us defied our fears, laid our money on the table and our lives on the line, and purchased the four thousand acres that you're looking at."[2]

Is the result an intentional community? An ecovillage? It's hard to find any boxes which Kale's description does not check: "Sooner than expected we were cobbling together ways of life better than any we could have led in the Biggies' flailing nation-state. In a place where six cowboys had been doomed to extinction by a multinational, thirty folks of all ages and kinds, cowboys included, are doing better than just okay working for no one but our collective selves. Income has crept up on outlay to where we're turning small profits on several cottage industries and a small cattle biz. We now share eleven well-chosen vehicles instead of the forty or so wrecks and gas hogs we owned before. We're off the grid and green energied. We hunt, fish, bee-keep, ranch, farm, and forage 60 percent of our food. We've scraped some broken lives up off some cold city pavement and helped 'em rehab to where they're part of us now. We support...locals and their businesses and good causes...."[3]

The Holy Goat himself, a veteran of solo mountain ventures, has strong resistance to the idea of anything smacking of "community," and yet he finds his preconceptions melting: "the E.B.&C.Co, as the psalm has it, *restoreth my soul.* ...

> "What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?"



Though I was more impressed after each [of my early tours], I wasn't sufficiently impressed to shake off a strong aversion to communal living. But over the next few years the E.B.&C.Co folks eased me through a slow-motion conversion. For starters, despite its populace of thirty, the place didn't *feel* communal. Every one of the residents had more freedom to determine the contents of their days than anyone I knew working typical nation-state jobs. Even better, in an epoch of worldwide industrial devastation, the E.B.&C.Co residents were living lives of practical integrity and economic self-sufficiency, treating land, water, plants, animals, and one another with sensitivity, tolerance, humor, and something new and invaluable to me, … a wandering joy that spontaneously permeates the place...."[4]

The Holy Goat's relief that the place doesn't "feel" communal hints at the deeper prejudices that unfortunately form the major bones I have to pick with David James Duncan's otherwise enlightened work of inspirational fiction. "Freedom to determine the contents of their days," and to live by rather than betray their own values, is a motivating factor for many communitarians, who find the ability to do exactly those things by choosing to live communally. Joining together often provides the support for living differently that operating solo does not; in my experience, it is often the non-communitarian life that is more prone to conformity and a feeling of being trapped, and *communal* life that has the greatest capacity to be liberating. The "wandering joy that permeates the place" is no accident, nor anything that is strange to those who've discovered, even amidst challenges, that living in community naturally brings it to them; it is the result of finding oneself a part of a larger, more organic social organism that allows and supports self-expression and interconnection based on authenticity, and honors its greater-than-human context as well. Attempting on one's own to navigate "the global industrial juggernaut masquerading as 'civilization' [that] has trapped us in a greed-driven apocalypse"[5] without social support is generally a recipe for failure. We are social animals.

The Holy Goat's relief that the place doesn't "feel" communal hints at deeper prejudices.

My bones to pick become even more substantial and splintery when it comes to the words of Jamey Van Zandt, one of whose letters to the Holy Goat reflect some of the worst uninformed stereotypes and prejudices about intentional communities: "I've heard you marvel at how, all day every day, the E.B.&C.Co throws the Industrial Suicide Machine into reverse and drives the opposite direction. It's true. But it's not accomplished by cult leaders and laws. We are *not* an intentional community. We're an *unintentional menagerie* as unalike as Ona's beads, joined not by didactic intent but by hearts pierced by

unseen threads. It's an old, old magic."[6]

Cult leaders and laws? Anyone familiar with the vast array of communities, the great majority of which keep any kind of charismatic leadership or oppressive non-consensual "laws" in check—far better than mainstream America does, in fact—will either laugh or shudder in despair at how stereotypes drawn from the most spectacular cases of group dysfunction and scandal, comprising a tiny fraction of "communities" (a far smaller portion than that of dioceses within the Roman Catholic Church which have facilitated child sexual abuse, for example) still are accepted and perpetuated unquestioningly by people who otherwise seem intelligent and perceptive.

Later, Ona tells Jamey, "I believe you're the reason why people keep calling us 'an unintentional menagerie,' not 'an intentional community.' I'd like to understand why this is important to you."[7]

Jamey responds by digging his hole even deeper: "It's important, no offense anyone, because nearly all communes fail. … And strong human intentions are the main reason they do. *Intentionality* misses the mark as soon as it leads to *mental straining toward a fixed end.* Monsanto, the NRA, Ayn Rand's absurdly unimaginable fiction, Vatican edicts and so on, herd human lives into cold obedience to a manifesto with great *intentionality,* and look at the results. Sordid intention is so contagiously bad it's caused good intentions to become famous for paving the road to hell."[8]

The problems with this passage are manifold. It equates the term "commune" with "intentional community" in general. While some groups are legitimately "communes," usually meaning that income is shared and the community's property is held in common, most intentional communities are not. Cohousing groups, probably the fastest-growing form of intentional community today, are almost as distant from anyone's stereotype of a "commune" as one could imagine. The casual conflation of terms is one indicator of the lack of seriousness with which mainstream society has regarded various collective arrangements, a lack of discernment arising from ignorance and unfamiliarity which unfortunately bleeds over even into books like this one that envision "community."

> The "wandering joy that permeates the place" is no accident.

"Nearly all communes fail." It's true that, by many estimates, a clear majority of attempts to establish intentional communities do not result in long-lasting communities, if they even get off the ground at all. It's also true that most business startups "fail," probably in about the same proportion that envisioned community projects don't reach full manifestation or endure. Aside from the fact that "failure" is a subjective term, and a short-lived experiment can be a "success" in many ways other than longevity, another

The apparent allergy to simple descriptors like "community," "tribe," and "village" seems regrettable.

double standard surfaces. The Elkmoon Beguine & Cattle Company apparently has no hesitation to call itself a "company," even though most companies also fail. Again, the anti-"community" biases of our culture rear their ugly heads here.

For someone typically so self-aware, Jamey seems uncharacteristically hypocritical in this area, railing against "didactic intent" while indulging in what seems like didactic grandstanding. In fact, the whole conceit that "intention" is inherently problematic seems itself problematic and even hypocritical, in a group whose formation clearly required shared intention, whose land took shared intention to purchase, in a nearly 800-page book that took 17 years of intention and persistence to complete and publish. Intention and the kind of mystical "piercing" Jamey describes here are not mutually exclusive. One can remain open and receptive to the energies of the universe while at the same time maintaining and acting upon intention. True, it is possible to grip too tightly to intention; in fact, I suspect that these passages may be a case of transference on the part of the author, a response to episodes of writer's block brought about by fruitless attempts to "force" writing through exhausted willpower when inspiration was not present (or perhaps this speculation is an example of transference on my own part). Whatever their origin, Jamey's comments serve to further marginalize the term "intentional community," which, in the real (rather than fictional) world, is a very useful moniker to help people create and find the kinds of situations in which shared receptivity, "wandering joy," and inspiration, rather than preconceived, narrowly-held "intention" of the type Jamey doesn't like, can prevail.

Jamey has exhibited some questionable judgment at times throughout the book; but, with one exception whose name is Julian (a.k.a. "Mister Wrong"), Risa McKeig—more than anyone else the "magnet" that pulls the people who form E.B.&C. Co together—has not. So I found her words about what to call their collective project even more puzzling and disappointing: "'Community' is too *communal* a word, and 'tribe' and 'village' are too *tribal* and *villagey.* Let's just say 'a circle of people' who are of and for the living world and one another in ways the modern world subjugates and makes impossible."[9]

In a book which employs countless terms to attempt to describe the ineffable—from "Unseen Unborn Guileless Perfection" to "Ocean" (in the case of memorable holy fool/street preacher Jervis McGraff)—and in which, despite ideas it advances about the value of "spiritual secrecy," there's an attempt to put nearly everything into words (this is, after all, a book which would be blank without those words), the apparent allergy to simple descriptive terms like "community," "tribe," and "village," which refer to core aspects of the human experience, seems regrettable. Has our culture become so doubtful about those phenomena and those concepts, so deeply individualistic even when we are pulled toward collectivism in response to converging crises of both matter and spirit, that we can't even use those words?

Fortunately, many people can and do use those words, and "community" similar to that experienced at the E.B.&C.Co is the lived experience of a good number of them. A much smaller bone, one I'm inclined to kick around rather than pick, is this: the convergence of circumstances leading to the E.B.&C.Co's existence relies on so much seeming "magic" and synchronicity—including the "Nine Cool Unlikelihoods" described in one chapter, plus an unexpected large inheritance and other synchronistic events all contributing to everything going "right" in so many ways—that the reader may get the impression that something like this could happen only in fantasy. On top of this, the unusual (for mainstream America) dialogue among characters who cut right to the heart of whatever they're discussing may add to the impression that *Sun House* is a fever dream. And yet, on a deeper level, magic is happening all the time in the "real world," and the capacity for self-awareness and truthful communication is inherent in almost all of us (and practiced by many in community), and we can grow into them with one another's help. The world of *Sun House* is a fantasy only if we don't give it credence. Seen in a clearer light, it's an

analog to the reality depicted in wisdom traditions since the beginning of time, a reality that will outlast the current fever dream we are living through in late-stage industrial culture.[10]

One additional passage to contemplate, from a letter written by a community participant after a three-month stay: "a big part of what made me feel comfortable opening up was everyone's candor, sincerity, and total lack of judgment. (Honestly, nothing seems to phase these folks.) Having grown up accustomed to secrecy, ruthless teasing, and sweeping things under the rug, I've had to (and continue to) work really hard to eschew my people-pleasing tendencies and be voluntarily transparent with my thoughts and feelings. So I was constantly gobsmacked to witness my fellow communitarians' consistent vulnerability and honesty—whether during sociocratic decision-making meetings or simply in response to the quotidian question of 'how are you?' For the first time in my life, it appeared everyone around me was always telling the(ir) truth, even if it might be an unpopular opinion. Everyone seemed to share a commitment to curiosity and compassion, and I felt safe and encouraged to open up. No longer fretting over how to be the best, most polite guest, I settled into just being myself."

If you guessed this letter appears in *Sun House,* you'd be wrong. It's an online blog post about and addressed to the members of a contemporary intentional community—the one I'm happy to call home.[11]

What would a follow-up volume to *Sun House* contain? If I wrote it, it would highlight the particular spiritual approach that is less thoroughly described in this one: *community as spiritual practice.* This practice does not rely on ancient texts, or on any ideas at all, and, like connecting with the natural world or with an individual person we love, can emerge purely from experience. I've been reminded of it during recent spells spent in my home community, where member check-in circles, community decision-making meetings, garden work parties, and other chances to gather have at times left me feeling as grateful and connected to the whole of life as I do walking in an old-growth forest. I find: trees and people, being themselves without artifice, are

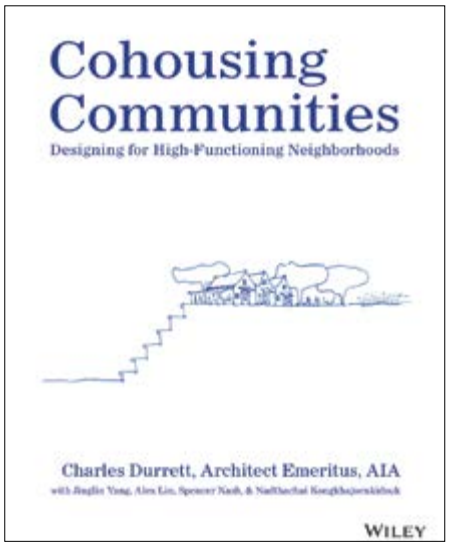
Community as spiritual practice does not rely on ancient texts, or on any ideas at all; like connecting with the natural world or with an individual person we love, it can emerge purely from experience.

inherently beautiful, worth living for, and worth working to preserve a viable planet for. And so too are books like *Sun House* and its literary and nonliterary predecessors and descendants. As David James Duncan observes in the final line of the bibliography, there are "more wonderful wisdom sources than could ever be listed for the same reason the number of pines in Montana's forest can never be known: Mother Earth is constantly creating wise humans and trees."[12]

A longtime member of Lost Valley community/Meadowsong Ecovillage (lostvalley.org), and current sojourner between Lane County, Oregon and Oberlin, Ohio, Chris Roth edits Communities *(editor@gen-us.net).*

1. *Sun House,* p. 5.
2. p. 490.
3. p. 490.
4. p. 488.
5. p. 488.
6. p. 495.
7. p. 693.
8. pp. 693-4.
9. pp. 541-2.
10. A few more small bones to pick, just to cover the bases: despite the radically different world it depicts, *Sun House* is still a product of American culture, with occasional possibly squirm-worthy body-objectification; it also contains a passage celebrating the equivalence of male and female divinity in which the male "He" is nevertheless capitalized and the female "she" is inexplicably not, one instance of confused chronology, and a few other proofs positive that imperfection is inherent in everything, even that which may inspire us to imagine much better ways of being.
11. See emilygrubman.substack.com/p/letter-to-lost-valley.
12. p. 776.

Designing Communities, Not Just Buildings



COHOUSING COMMUNITIES—Designing for High-Functioning Neighborhoods

Charles Durrett, Architect Emeritus, AIA with Jinglin Yang, Alex Lin, Spencer Nash, and Nadthachai Kongkhajornkidsuk

John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2022, 430 pages.

This informative book is a step-by-step guide for future residents to design and develop their own high-functioning neighborhood. The book describes the complete design process for two of the cohousing communities that Durrett worked with: Haystack Heights Cohousing in Spokane, Washington, and Quimper Village in Port Townsend, Washington.

Durrett chronicles both groups' development of their site plan, individual houses, and common house. The groups start the process by brainstorming their ideas, without discussion or judgment. The groups then discuss what goals they want, clarify the issues, and put forth proposals for the group to reach consensus on. Reading their goals gave me ideas about some the great possibilities that a community could offer that I hadn't thought of before.

The design workshops provide an incredible experience for those who participate in them. The social community forms during this development stage as participants make decisions about how they want to live.

Pam Clise, a member of the forming group at Quimper Village, said, "One of the best community building processes came through the design workshops. The workshops provided the foundation for a room of relative strangers to talk about what really mattered to them. In visualizing and discussing what we hoped to see in an intentional community, we learned about each other, heard different perspectives, and voiced ideas on what might be needed. By listening and compromising on what we each hoped for, a community began to form."

I was part of the group that developed Bellingham Cohousing, almost 25 years ago when McCamant and Durrett were just getting started. We did not have the benefit of such a thoroughly time-tested process. I don't think we even discussed our goals other than wanting to live in a community and eat meals together. I remember during one meeting watching Katie McCamant throwing more wood block houses than we had thought we needed onto the site plan drawing. She told us that because of the wetlands we needed a much denser plan than we had imagined. It was a transforming moment for me as I saw a different community than what I had imagined, but clustering the houses in this way did not bring the people themselves together. We ended up focusing more on getting the buildings built than building a community.

Durrett studies the climate and culture of the city that he is working with so they can be considered in the design. He brings that information to the group, so their house designs and the site plan provide the best features to offset the more difficult weather conditions and to take advantage of the favorable ones. For example, in Spokane, the freezing, thawing conditions were important to consider because people typically wouldn't be sitting around outside in the cold, but could gather in the common house. So that group chose features that would bring people to the common house. Some of the same considerations were needed for the cool, windy days in Port Townsend. The book features many ideas of how to work with various climate issues, something that is ever-more necessary in this age of accelerating climate change.

Another important issue to address in the designs is soundproofing, especially since many cohousing dwellings share walls. Durrett's drawings, with explanations, show how soundproofing can be done. Affordability is an important issue for most cohousing communities, and Durrett shares some solutions he has found in this area as well.

The Design Closure workshop takes place before the plans go to the city. Not many changes are made at this stage, but it gives the residents a chance to understand the design so they can help the process through the city planning department. Durrett believes that "often projects have a better chance when a group of people who want to live in a community present the ideas." I believe this is true; our group went to the Bellingham City Council with well thought-out scripts to ask for an ordinance that would allow cohousing in the city—and we got it.

This book is especially important for architects and designers who want to create a neighborhood with people desiring to form a community. But after my experience of focusing on building the buildings, and not the community, in Bellingham Cohousing, I am excited to use this book's ideas and careful planning guidelines as a better way of forming a community in my next cohousing project.

Kate Nichols is starting the process of developing a new cohousing community, Song Sparrow Cohousing in Port Townsend, Washington. She was instrumental in developing Bellingham Cohousing 25 years ago.

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PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS

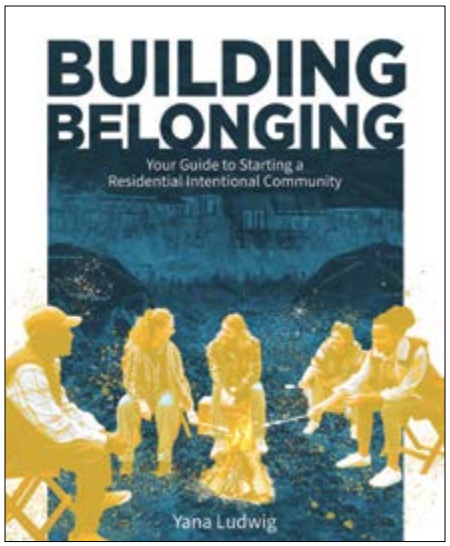
BEST-SELLING BOOK: Together We Decide, An Essential Guide for Good Group Decisions, by Craig Freshley. I'm a career meeting facilitator and I've lived in a cohousing community for 25 years. If you are reading this magazine, I wrote the book to help YOU and your group. Wherever books are sold.

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

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

Review BY RAVEN MOONRAVEN

How to Build Community: The Book



BUILDING BELONGING: Your Guide to Starting a Residential Intentional Community

Yana Ludwig

Foundation for Intentional Community, 2023, 220 pages, ic.org/building-belonging.

For the last five years, the most popular posts on my blog (communelifeblog.wordpress.com) have been "How to Start a Commune" and "Four Steps to Building a Commune" and Paxus's piece on "So you want to start a community." A lot of folks want to create communes and communities.

I've reviewed books written about how to create communities, most notably Diana Leafe Christian's *Creating a Life Together.* Yana Ludwig has also written a couple of books that talk about (among other things) community building, but the FIC just published her latest book, *Building Belonging,* which simply focuses on it and is an exceptional resource on how to build community.

This book's structure and guidance align very well with my own experience of the steps to effective community building. Chapter 2, "What Makes a Good Founder and Founding Group?," emphasizes that the process starts with the people. In Chapter 3, "Phases of Community Creation," the first phase is "Set the core patterns for this community" and mentions the following "pieces": "Vision and Values" (covered in Chapter 5), "Decision-making system" (covered in Chapter 7), "Membership processes'" (covered in Chapter 8), and "Economic structures" and "Labor structures" (both covered in Chapter 9). The second phase is "Property acquisition" (a lot of which is covered in Chapter 11). The four steps I've described on my blog are to find the people, work on vision and agreements together, figure out sources of income (more important in an income-sharing community, but as Yana points out, economic and labor structures are important for any community), and then look for a place. Yana's order and mine are basically the same.

When she gets to Part 2, Yana devotes the first chapter (Chapter 5) to "Visioning Your Community." As I've worked with and visited more and more communities, I have come to believe that everything flows from your (collective) community vision. This is why I've given a couple of workshops on "Collaborative Community Design." I think that this is the most important first thing (other than possibly deciding on your decision-making process) a new group can do. Yana writes, "This visioning work is often the first real chance to practice sharing power." In "Learning from my pain on visioning," she tells a story from her community building attempts where they didn't start by visioning together. And finally, she reprints six different mission statements from successful groups that she thinks are "really good."

She also has a bunch of exercises for groups wanting to start a community to do together, and refers to more from her *Cooperative Culture Handbook.* I could go on and on about why I think that the individual things in this book are absolutely key (she covers things like "Culture, Diversity, and Justice Work," "Power, Conflict, and Decision-making," "Some Basics of Community Design," and "Becoming a Good Community Member" among many other topics) but I just want to say that I have not encountered a better step-by-step book on creating community. If you are one of what seems to be many, many folks interested in starting a community of any type, this book is for you. This is especially true if you are interested in starting an income-sharing community. Where Diana Leafe Christian's *Creating a Life Together* has a bit of a bias against income-sharing communities, Yana Ludwig's book has a little bit of a bias toward it.

Building Belonging is published by the Foundation for Intentional Community and is available from ic.org/building-belonging. What more can I say? You want to build community? You want to read this book.

Raven MoonRaven has tried to start a lot of communities and lived in even more. He manages the Commune Life blog and Facebook feed, has written previous Communities *articles in issues #176 and #198, and is fascinated by communities, relationships, and the systems perspective. He is currently living in a very small income-sharing community in western Massachusetts. Contact him at moonraven222@gmail.com.*

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