People of Color Sustainable Housing Network: A Herstory

Communities

Life in Cooperative Culture

Spring 2024 • Issue #202
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Finding Community

Neo-Nomad Communities

Taking the Long Way Home

Lost and Found in the Valley

Intentional Community Matchmaking

Welcome Home: Migrants in Cohousing

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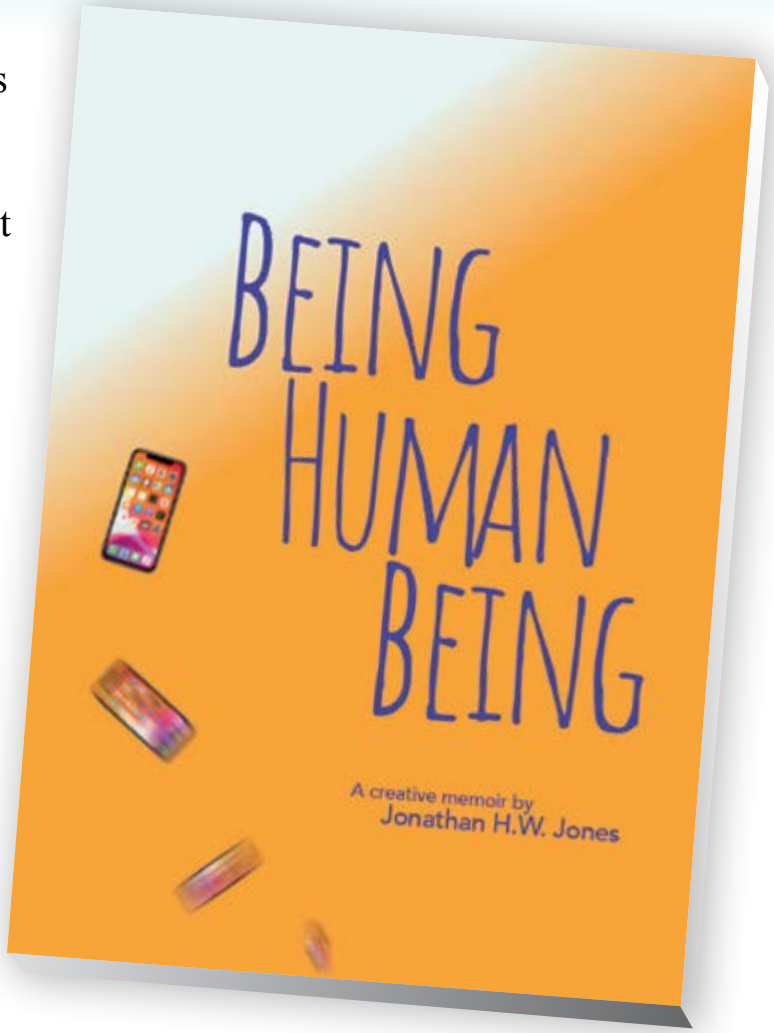
Are communities the wave of the future?

This unusual book weaves this question into a charming tale. Aspiring writer Jon Jones offers to help his new friend Niccole get over a troublesome cell-phone addiction. The adventure takes him into the world of intentional communities where he discovers a secret technology-questioning movement. To protect this admirable group, Jon has to use a pen name when he writes his book about them.

The book mirrors its themes. The author is Jonathan H. W. Jones—a pen name. And it is low-tech, a physical book, not electronic, sold only in bookstores, not on Amazon.



***Being Human Being*, by Jonathan H. W. Jones,**
paperback, 228 pages, price $15.00

Available at bookstores (Ingram distributed)
or directly from the publisher

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Founded 1975

Issue #202
Spring 2024

FINDING COMMUNITY

ON THE COVER

L-R: Tavi Baker (she/her), Cofounder, People of Color Sustainable Housing Network (POCSHN); Wangũi Hymes (she/they), Outreach and Engagement Manager, POCSHN; Deseree Fontenot (she/they), Founding Organizer, POCSHN, and Co-Director/ Collective Member, Movement Generation; Yu-Shuan Tarango-Sho (she/her), Founder, Sacred Roots Oakland; Lailan Sandra Huen (she/her), Cofounder, POCSHN. Photo courtesy of Tavi Baker. To donate: pochousingnetwork.com/support.

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Life in Cooperative Culture

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Blowing Our Tops over Cover Photo

We former denizens of the Communities front cover (two of us twice, if you count a portion of a leg) wish to protest, in the most strongly worded, satyr- and satyress-ical, not-entirely-written-by-us letter possible, the selection of the Crater Lake photo for issue #201's cover image.

As members of the Editor's inner circle, we were privy to the initial apparent first choice for the cover. We were deeply flummoxed, disappointed, and kissing-cousins-to enraged when informed that the beautiful Oregon coast sunset over roiling waves had been booted in favor of a snow-rimmed hole in the ground filled with water that has been essentially still for centuries.

Mount Mazama may have deserved a front cover spot when it was actually blowing up, 7,700 years ago. That would have been a sight, then. Now, the place can't hold a literal candle to the sun, which produces the equivalent of a trillion volcanoes' worth of brilliance every second. When it sets over the sea, which is being pulled every which way by the moon on an ongoing basis, it is quite beautiful.

We did not need to wrestle very long among ourselves (see photo) to come to our, er, unanimous cover preference.

Please, make this right!

Name Withheld, Amber Jones, and River Bousquet
Eugene, Oregon

Chris Roth

Illuminating *Sun House*

We received the following letter from Sun House *author David James Duncan. We've added the* [text in brackets] *to provide context to those who haven't read the book and/or its excerpt and review in* Communities *#201. Please see page 6 for the reviewer's response.*

Dear Chris,

Thanks x 100 for your wonderful review ["The Ecstatic Communion and Revelatory Foibles of *Sun House*," Communities #201, Winter 2023; gen-us.net/Sun House]. The photos, too, are astounding. And to quibble with your analysis of the terms "unintentional menagerie" and "intentional community" would feel like debating Dogen or Socrates or Meister Eckhart! I'd get drubbed.

Your knowledge of communities is both scholarly and experiential. It's your calling. After reading your analysis I would revise and soften Jamey's take [his negative associations with the term "intentional community"] if it were still possible—though his take did feel consistent with Jamey's character as I wrote it. I depict him as flawed, though the combination of [his dog] Romeo's death and Risa's love go a long way toward making him a better member of his community—as when he sees the importance of whisking Rosalia Dominguez off to Portland to imbibe the presence of Jervis and Ocean after she shares the terrible story of her mother's disappearance from her life [see the book excerpt "A Monkeywrencher in Our Midst," Communities #201]. I just do the best I can as the flawed being I am.

I do have two sincere complaints in reference to your own:

1. About the capital versus lower case pronoun quibble about male and female divinities: I used the Caps or lack thereof that the translators of Lao Tzu, The Wisdom of Solomon, Meister Eckhart, and others including the King James Bible, give me. Eckhart's lifelong insistence on lower case "he" and "him" when he speaks of his God, to me, has the effect of making God feel intimately, if fleetingly, present in my favorite Meister passages. Eckhart damns any kind of "thought-of" God because such gods disappear as fast as the thoughts. To add Caps to a thought-of God could more readily be seen as a valuable apophatic insult than as a sign that I think masculine gods are superior to feminine ones.

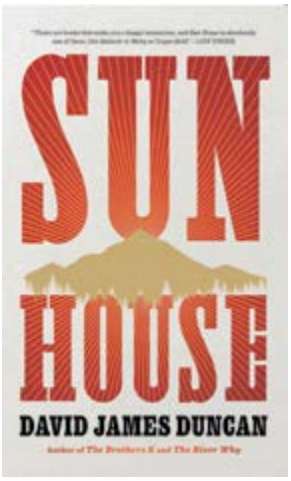
2. The way you describe the death of Lorilee at the end of the novel [the book "starts and ends with what some might see as senseless, premature deaths"] struck me as unrepresentative of the spirit of that passage. Almost everyone who made it to that chapter wept as they read it, and described their sorrow as interwoven with joy. "Sky Door" also portrays the entire community (not Jamey's menagerie) involved in an event we're all destined for, operating at a very high level of mutual support. It's a little ironic that you would suggest that this event might have been senseless!

Most readers who've written to, interviewed, or reviewed me considered Lore's death one of the most beautiful scenes they've read. The beauty of my mother's hospice death in April 2013, other beautiful deaths I've witnessed, the anecdotes of friends who, in staying fully present to their dying loved one, were stunned to find the loved one consoling his or her survivors, all influenced "Sky Door." So did a couple of friends who do hospice work professionally describing dying people consoling every mourner in the room, as Josef Cabrera, father of Demetria [the eight-year-old girl who dies near the beginning of the book], consoles the failed young Jesuit priest, TJ, and presents him with the trouble doll icons TJ cherishes.

With that complaint off my chest, Chris, allow me to end as I began, by thanking you x 100 for your analysis in general, your connecting *Sun House* to the Communal Studies Association [CSA reprinted the review in *Communal Societies Journal* Volume 42:2; see communalstudies.org], the wonderful art you've added, the work you've done for communities everywhere, for walking your talk, and so much more. You have been generosity personified to me, and to a book that's taught me more than all my others combined, and thanks to you is still teaching me.

David James Duncan
Missoula, Montana

Letters



[continued from page 5] *Chris Roth responded to the author at length. We lack room to reprint that message in its entirety; an abbreviated version follows:*

Thank you so much for your response. I appreciate all of it, and am glad that my review mostly landed well. To address a few points:

Jamey's statements do seem consistent with his character as you wrote it, and they certainly echo the words of many other people who are *not* fictional—so I understand where they came from. It seems very easy to translate difficult personal experiences into generalizations about the world (or a subset of the world, like "intentional communities"), as Jamey seems to be doing here; and also easy to take those generalizations at face value without looking for what is beneath them—to forget that words often say more about the speaker than about whatever is being spoken about. I did admire many aspects of Jamey's character as well.

I also realized that perhaps the upper/lower case distinction came directly from a translation. My main point in that footnote of "minor complaints" was that nothing created by human beings lacks "imperfections," even a book like this. The further background you give here, including the idea that the capitalized form could actually be considered the "insult," makes this whole thing even more interesting to me.

And most important: I'm sorry—I obviously didn't convey my intention clearly in the passage about the end of the novel. The ambiguity came from my phrase "what some might see as"—which unfortunately I did not explain further. The word "some" was not meant to be equivalent to "I." In actual fact, I too found the closing chapter of the book very beautiful—as beautiful a treatment as I can imagine, of a process that allowed everyone involved to experience as much sense, healing, and beauty in it as possible.

In that sentence I meant to say that *anytime* a person dies relatively young (as both Demetria and Lorilee did), leaving their loved ones behind, some could see it as premature, and even a cruel, senseless event. That kind of loss in the physical world (although it can also give so much on the spiritual level to individuals and, as here, to groups) could lead someone—especially in the absence of the kind of integrative, meaningful experience with death that the *Sun House* community had in the end—to conclude that "Nothing makes sense; why did this person have to die so young?"

I did not write more about Lore's departure partly because my review had already become so long, and partly because I could not have gotten into discussing Lorilee's death without reflecting on some of what it led me to think about and feel: not only being moved by what I was reading, but also grieving deaths (including some in my own life) that did not proceed in that same beautiful way. Exploring "Sky Door" in any depth at all would have added a potentially distracting layer to the article; and it would not have been an honest recounting of my experience of the book if I'd merely praised that chapter without acknowledging the other things that it tapped into in me.

I'm reminded of what I wrote near the beginning: "words often say more about the speaker than about whatever is being spoken about." In this case, my *lack* of words, my brief and not-well-explained mention of that part of the book, said more about me and my own recent and current experience outside of the novel than it did about *Sun House*. I know I will return to that closing section when the time is right; I'm sure it will help bring closure and healing when my own "goodbyes" are ready and able to be completed.

Thank you again so much for *Sun House*, a book like none other I've read.

Chris Roth
Dexter, Oregon / Oberlin, Ohio

LIVE IN A SUSTAINABLE AGRIHOOD

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Found by Community

Photos by Chris Roth

Do we find community, or does community find us?

Do we believe we know what's best for us, or are we open to discovering that we don't (yet) know?

Do we follow our hearts first, or follow what algorithms tell us?

Can we exercise discernment and rationality while *also* letting down our guards enough to fall in love with people, places, and situations in which we can thrive?

All of these questions are at play in this issue's theme. Unsurprisingly, individuals' ways of answering them—and of finding community—are as varied as people are themselves, and as diverse as the world of cooperative culture.

When someone is seeking out an intentional community to live in or engage with, intuition usually combines with rational analysis, "spirit" with "data," but proportions differ immensely among community seekers, and can even change over time for the same individual. Some may listen intently to an inner voice, and/or to various seemingly random outer signals and synchronicities, while eschewing anything smacking of "formulas" or "statistical matching" in their search. Others may trust only what pencils out well in columns of perceived pluses and minuses, or what the communitarian version of a "dating app" tells them is a good fit for them.

Likewise, some seekers may be most influenced by impressions gained from a community's self-description. Others may want as many *outside* perspectives on that community as they can get. Some may want to enter a new situation with as few preconceived notions and prejudices as possible, trusting that their own senses and experiences will reveal the true nature of what the community may be for them. Others may want to do as much research as possible even if it brings them to disillusioning (and quite possibly unfounded) rumors and sour grapes posted on social media or as online reviews.

Both trust and caution are necessary elements in any exploration. Taken to the extreme, each can lead to self-sabotage or paralysis, but when balanced, they can both be essential guides. A willingness and ability to trust others is crucial in establishing any relationship; discernment is also necessary to protect our own well-being.

• • •

Choosing what to focus on in looking for an intentional community, or for "community" in a broader sense, necessarily also entails choosing what *not* to focus on—what may be lower-priority or even just distracting "noise." The stories in this issue run the gamut. Some authors find their way through immersion and discovery, blocking out anything that may distance or prevent them from experiencing those things. Others find their way through very specific intentions and methodical research, and share some of the guidelines they've developed with readers. This issue is a mixture of personal stories and practical wisdom, inspiration and guidance.

Whatever your personal inclinations, whatever approaches to "finding community" you feel most align with your nature, we hope you find resonance in these pages and also encouragement to expand your boundaries. Those inclined to meticulous research may discover themselves a little more willing to embrace mystery, magic, and inner guidance; those familiar with relying solely on internal impulses or external metaphysical "signs" may find great benefit in also incorporating practical advice from people who've had experience melding the world of vision and the world of brass tacks.

My own journey has involved everything from obsessive reading of every community's self-description in 1980s-era special Directory issues of Communities, leading to a series of carefully planned visits, to discovering that a couple times, without any specific intention on my part, I'd wound up in an intentional community that fit my nature as a result of an educational program that had brought me there. I've often learned through direct experience what I really need in order to thrive, and what is actually important to me, rather than pre-judging those things too much, which could have led to a premature "no" to the experience. I have greatly benefited from **not** knowing everything there was to know, early in my community explorations, about internal dynamics and histories within groups before I arrived there. Many lessons would have remained unlearned by me personally if, for example, I'd read a bunch of negative reviews on social media (which didn't yet exist) about a particularly challenging but also particularly growthful situation, and been deterred because of them.

There is a danger in being protected too much, and not learning for ourselves—and also in concluding that what happened to others will necessarily happen to us, or that the past is the future. And at the same time, those lessons learned through direct experience can guide us through the rest of our lives—leading us to identify and heed, in advance, well-founded warnings and red flags about other groups and also to discern when they may be unfounded or an incomplete picture. Our own experiences can help us know what to take seriously among all that we might hear and read, and what to take with a grain of salt or be less certain about.

In any case (and ironically, given that this is a magazine, meant to be read), we will never learn all we need to know about the world of communities simply by reading about it. Nor, if we hold out for the "perfect," will we ever have any experiences at all, let alone have the chance to fall in love with the "imperfect" that we will inevitably find. That "imperfect" can be beautiful, exactly what we need, and much better than any of the alternatives.

Hope you enjoy this issue!

Chris Roth has lived for most of his adult life in intentional community, supplemented by stints on a Native American reservation, on a couple organic family farms, and caregiving a parent. From 1998-2006 he edited Talking Leaves *magazine (gen-us.net/TL), published by his longtime intentional community, Lost Valley/Meadowsong (lostvalley.org), and since 2008 has edited* Communities *(gen-us.net/communities).*

Journey To and Through Communities

By Riana Good

It was July of 2016, a damp, cool day in the foothills of the White Mountains. I poured a steaming mug of tea and nestled into a pale, overstuffed chair with fraying arms in the library above the main gathering space at World Fellowship Center[1] in Albany, New Hampshire, where I was spending the summer bartering work trade in the kitchen and garden. The small stack of books I wedged beside me featured *Finding Community*, and it was the first I had heard of author Diana Leafe Christian and of most of the communities profiled therein. I read the book cover to cover, almost in one extended breath, feeling exhilarated, confused, and overwhelmed. I could taste the anticipatory sweetness of living in a singing, liberation-minded, land-based community, though I couldn't envision myself methodically researching and visiting to find such a fit.

I have been non-methodically, mysteriously, and magically following the path of community-living ever since.

Growing up in a relatively isolated upper-middle-class home in the suburbs outside of Boston, Massachusetts, my first exposure to community was living at West House Vegetarian Food Co-op in college, and thereafter I lived in semi-communal homes for the rest of my adult life. Teaching in the Boston Public Schools provided summers off to do work exchange in various settings, living and learning near woods and freshwater. Over the years I worked on the land at WabiSabi on Shelter Island off of Juneau, Alaska, at the now-closed Kushi Institute for Natural Healing in Becket, Massachusetts, at World Fellowship Center, and elsewhere. Still, passing through for a couple of months at a time was just teasing my palate, and while there was an element of community at many of the places that I worked, they functioned primarily as retreat centers.

I am grateful to *Finding Community* for starting me on my path, though ultimately my own experience and others' invitations have been my best guide.

When I applied for a year sabbatical after 11 years of teaching, I started to put out more feelers. I was accepted for work exchange at Earthdance[2], though in the thick of administering final exams, just days before packing up my classroom and bedroom, I severely injured my left meniscus and couldn't walk. Uf! Well, though Earthdance no longer seemed to be in the cards, within a few days two friends independently invited me to a month-long "Living Laboratory" at Starseed Sanctuary[3] in the northern Berkshires of Massachusetts. On one of my visits to Isabella Freedman Center[4] (usually in a work exchange capacity), a friend encouraged me to head west and visit the Bay Area. After three rough months staying in Berkeley, California with a friend I had met on OKCupid, I was done. Feeling the call to the Southwest, with help from a friend from a 2007 Bread and Puppet[5] internship, I researched options ranging from supporting immigrants on the border to volunteering at Zen monasteries, and after a phone call interview, I made arrangements to work exchange at a vast Buddhist retreat center in Arizona. Where to stay for a few nights before they could pick me up? I posted on Facebook to ask for help and a friend from Earthdance put me in touch with Bruce at TerraSante Village Permaculture Laboratory[6]. In his ever-generous style, he swung by the Tucson airport to pick me up in his blue pickup truck after one of his 3x/weekly 12-hour nursing shifts. That night I slept on the couch in the common space, and three months later I was still living at TerraSante, though I had moved my sleep spot to a patch of sand surrounded by mesquite trees and cholla cacti, sleeping under the stars.

My days at TerraSante were glorious beyond compare! What a dream of intergen-

erational, class-diverse, beautiful though not-too-intentional community! Cold nights under the stars, cool mornings walking and meditating or working on the land, warm afternoons visiting and cooking and networking, evenings by a fire circle or reading Communities. What a magazine! I read just about every issue I could get my hands on, and noticed a plethora of articles written by members of Lost Valley/Meadowsong Ecovillage[7]. *What is that community all about?*, I wondered. I applied for a work exchange and was accepted for June and July. As the desert began to heat up in April and emerging scorpions, tarantulas, and rattlesnakes made sleeping out under the stars unwise, a friend from Massachusetts dance community came to visit and recommended that I get in touch with Rex at I-FLY Co-op near Yosemite National Park. So, I hitchhiked up there, which is a story for another time, and after a glorious month, I found myself connecting with others who were driving up to Meadow Farm[8] in Mendocino County of California, where for another month I worked and fell in love with the people and land. From there a traveling nurse drove me up to Lost Valley in Dexter, Oregon and after two months of deep satisfaction in community and an introduction to New Culture Summer Camp West, I returned to Massachusetts and to my connections at Sirius Community and Camp Timber Trails[9]. Sleeping out under the stars, working the land, and celebrating life with others, I was giddy with the delight of finding community in this non-methodical method.

For a few years I continued this seasonal rotation of living at TerraSante, I-FLY, Meadow Farm, Lost Valley, and various Massachusetts communities, and I imagined it continuing indefinitely. Then, five years after the rotation began, a friend I had met at a New Culture Summer Camp invited me to stay with him at his community of La'akea[10] in Hawaii. I had resisted past recommendations to visit Hawaii because I had concerns about being a white mainland US-er on this recently colonized land, about the jet fuel consumption, and about the potential escapism of living in "paradise." I again felt resistance, though after many signs reinforced a visit, I booked a one-way ticket, he picked me up at the Hilo Airport, and I stayed at La'akea for two months.

Five years after I began cycling among communities and eight years after I first read *Finding Community,* living at La'akea helped me to identify and articulate what I love about living in community and what elements contribute to my well-being. La'akea loves included:

• Learning skills from more seasoned community members, such as Michael's wise and gentle approach to teaching how to tend to plants and trees.

• Regular shared meals as an opportunity to cook together, use food harvested from the land, nourish each other, and gather together. Eating is something that we all generally do so it fits well into a regular schedule!

Lost Valley.

La'akea.

La'akea.

Meadow Farm.

Photos courtesy of Riana Good


TerraSante.

• Commitment to open communication, especially evidenced through the facilitation and modeling of Tracy, Biko, and Amara. Superstars!

• Opportunity to delve deep into hosted events like New Culture Camp, Sufi Dances of Universal Peace, and Zegg Forum Training.

Living at La'akea also presented challenges, heightened by my arrival during event season, which is also the very, very wet season. I often felt antsy during shared time involving sitting and talking, which helped me to learn that I thrive most when community members have regular opportunities to gather in ways that are nonverbal or involve movement, such as working together on a project, singing, or dancing. Also, I felt isolated from the "outside world" and learned that I desire more cross-pollination and opportunities to connect with the extended neighborhood and community. Lastly, as much as I enjoyed participating in the camps and workshops that we hosted, I also missed the regular flow of community. The whirl of set-up and clean-up pleased the workaholic in me, but also contributed to a more splintered dynamic among community members. I am grateful to have had this opportunity for discernment, as it introduced me to the epicly* (*why is this not a word?!) wonderful folks at La'akea and also helped me to find the community where I currently live, just a few miles down the road.

Living at La'akea and in other communities helped me to know what I was seeking and how to articulate it. I am grateful to *Finding Community* for starting me on my path, though ultimately my own experience and others' invitations have been my best guide.

The unknown awaits, and much is unknown and unfathomable as this journey of community unfolds. I am grateful to weave among communities and I am glad for both the porous and the stable elements of communities, as with all ecosystems. I feel indebted to Communities and to the dedicated communitarians, generous sleeping bag-lenders, soulful musicians, big-hearted lovers, wise facilitators, expansive visionaries, and kind hard-workers at each of the communities mentioned in this article. I celebrate you, I love you, I breathe the dream with you. Bless, bless, bless!

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. See her previous articles in Communities *#196, 197, and 201.*

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1. WFC is a secular, unaffiliated camp and conference center offering summer hospitality, educational social justice-related workshops, and lectures, outdoor recreation, and creative opportunities for all ages near the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire: worldfellowship.org/about-wfc.
2. Earthdance is an arts organization and retreat center hosting workshops, artist residencies, and community programming: earthdance.net.
3. Starseed is an interfaith healing sanctuary, holistic retreat center, and developing intentional community dedicated to personal and planetary transformation: starseedsanctuary.org.
4. See adamah.org/retreat-centers/isabella-freedman.
5. See breadandpuppet.org.
6. TerraSante Village is a nonprofit community dedicated to experiments in sustainable living in the challenging environment of the Arizona Sonoran desert: terrasante.org.
7. See lostvalley.org.
8. See meadowfarm.org.
9. See camptimbertrails.org.
10. La'akea is a small, family-style, egalitarian, intentional community on the big island of Hawaii: permaculture-hawaii.com.

Taking the Long Way Home—and What I Learned Along the Way

By Elizabeth Barr

My "hippie commune" story begins at my own beginning, in Texas. As a little girl playing with dolls, my Sunshine Family had a tiny cast iron wood stove, recycling bins, and Birkenstock-style sandals long before I had heard of such things. "Pictures or it doesn't count," you say? I have not just pictures, but the actual real dolls themselves, talismans still holding the vision in their plastic storage tub under the bed. I've learned that I knew who I was, and the life I wanted, by the time I was about eight years old.

I count myself fortunate that I was only 18 years old when I found this very same magazine, Communities, while attending college in Missouri. My dream of intentional community living was not a dream at all but instead was alive and well! Some people don't get this glimpse of hope until much later in life but when I saw an ad in the back of the magazine for Sandhill Farm, and realized I lived only five hours from them, I mailed a letter immediately to request a visit and was soon on my way. The store where I got off the bus had apparently stalled its remodeling in the 1800s, the truck that picked me up didn't have a hood, the (male) driver had long hair and offered me a cigarette, and the men wore skirts (at least sometimes). For me coming from comfortably middle class, deeply conservative east Texas, it was all quite a shock, frankly, but at the same time, it was the shock of drinking pure clear water after years of drought, and I drank deep into my soul the knowledge that it WAS possible to live a different way and not only that, some people were already doing it. I learned that the life I imagined was possible in reality.

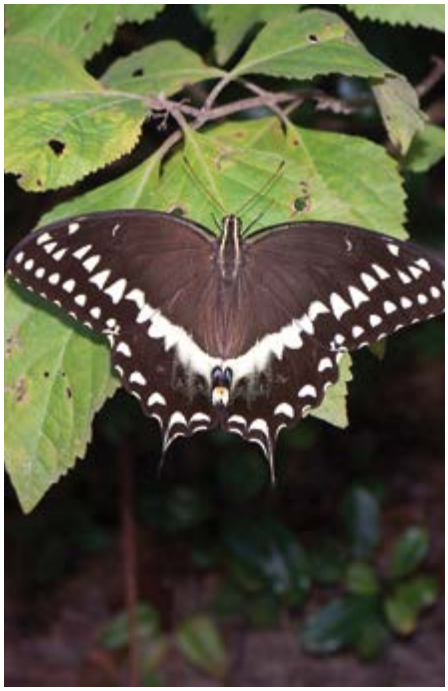
Next came a long hiatus while I completed the expected steps of college and finding a job. During this time, I lived full-time at a year-round camp facility in Iowa where I worked while I went to school. That was a great time for me and had so much of what I wanted—a steady core group of people who lived in close proximity on the same land and had clearly defined goals to work on together. It was not quite an intentional community, but it was intentional and there was a large extended community that supported the camp, although only a few of us could live on-site. Leaving this situation was tough, because it was so close to the life I imagined, but with college completed and job changes ahead, the time had come. I learned that I wanted to live as part of a slightly larger group, a village of 20-30 people, perhaps?

I quit the job, sold the car, broke up with the partner, and set off by bus.

In due course, I had soon achieved the so-called American Dream! I had the degree completed, a full-time job in my field of study, an apartment of my own, a car, a church family, friends, hobbies, a romantic partner, the whole package.

It left me cold.

I went through the list time and time again, mentally checking off all the boxes, because I could, and consistently at the end of the exercise, I would think, "Is



this it? There has got to be more to life than this." I yearned to be part of a group that was working together toward a clearly stated lofty vision to solve some big problems and change the world (or at least try). I learned that I needed a mission.

And so, along with new "baby co,"[1] I quit the job, sold the car, broke up with the partner, and set off by bus—"homeless and pregnant" as I was quick to say, both because it was true and because it felt important to be upfront about, on a planned tour of communities, starting with East Wind. It turned out that was the only stop that the Lord had planned, because there I met a soulmate, plus other friends who I still treasure to this day, and the new beginnings began.

We left East Wind together, welcomed our first child together, and later moved to Acorn (in Virginia), where I put down such roots that I distinctly remember on move-in day the feeling as if they were physically emerging from my feet and settling deep into the soil.

This was It, I truly believed in that moment, and five years began to be counted. Not all good, but not all bad, either, and overall, it was a time of many wonders and so much learning. I had been right all along, and this was the life for me.

Yet living in Virginia, the grandchildren (now two of them) and I were some 1200+ miles away from the rest of the family in Texas. The move back eventually became as necessary to my heart as it was difficult for my body to do, but the wrench was accomplished and back to Texas I went. I learned that I valued being around my original birth family far more than I had realized. I still wanted the community life for my family, definitely, but not at the expense of missing out on in-person relationships with grandparents and cousins.

The first year was the hardest and I almost returned to Virginia several times, but in the end, I've managed to stay. It's been a long 20 years, but worth it, and I don't regret the move. All my goals for myself and my children have been accomplished.

Except the one.

The search continued.

I tried, repeatedly, to help build a community-living approach to another year-

round camp in Texas, only to be rejected time and time again. I learned I'm bad at inspiring people to imagine a new vision, even when I really, ***really*** want to. I'm not the leader I thought I was.

I contacted a community that had my spirit animal in their name...to be dismayed by how intrusive their level of questioning was before they would even allow me to come for a brief tour. I learned I value my privacy (although I actually already knew that one!).

I went for a weekend visit with the children to a faith-based community in a different part of the state. The people were wonderful, and the place was nice, but I learned (or confirmed) how deeply I belong to the woods, and definitely not to the desert.

I asked some friends who I could imagine living on land with that fateful question, "What three things would you consider The Most Important if you were part of a group of people deciding to live together on the same piece of land?"... and was surprised by how unexpectedly different our core values are. I learned that a spiritual foundation is as important to me as I thought it was.

I had learned a lot over the years and thought I had a clear understanding of what I was looking for, but it seemed elusive. I wondered when, how, or if such a place would ever be part of my life again someday.

And then one day, when I wasn't looking, suddenly, there it was!

I was sitting around the table, chatting with friends after lunch, when they mentioned a place they were taking some donations to—The Village. To them, it was a trivial comment, a nothing, a casual aside.

To me, it was a life-changing moment.

They told me about a Village, deep in the woods, that is bringing new life to an abandoned residential campsite.

A place only 6.5 miles from my doorstep—I could literally walk to it, and it would not even take that long to get there.

A people with a spiritual foundation and an open, trusting attitude who welcomed me on a tour after one email and invited me to help with an on-site project during a second visit within a week.

A group with a clearly defined mission that is changing the world in visible immediate ways.

There's already a garden, pond, woodshop, yoga studio, art studio, ceramics, library, sheep, chickens, and a store to sell items made by group members. Much more is mapped out, funded, and in development.

And so, I'm back in Texas, back at a camp, back in the woods, back at church, and back near my family, but at last also taking real steps toward getting back to a small cooperative group of like-minded people living together on the same piece of land. Time, language, and I have all moved on past the classic "hippie commune" to newer words, and expanding models of ways to live together, but the end result is much the same.

The dream lives on and I'm headed home.

Elizabeth Barr recently completed her Master's degree in Applied Linguistics from Texas A & M University (Commerce) on the topic of foster youth participation in class action lawsuits against State foster care systems. She is embracing the process of building new relationships at the Village. For more about her writing and other projects, please visit www.BigThicketBooks.com.

Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Barr

1. The term "co," often used within Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC) groups, refers to "communitarian" and is used as a gender-neutral pronoun. In this case, the "baby co" was not yet born at the journey's outset.

Lost and Found in the Valley

By Emily Grubman

*The following is adapted from a blog entry titled "Letter *to* Lost Valley" posted September 11, 2023 at emilygrubman.substack.com/p/letter-to-lost-valley, on the "Farstruck" section of the author's "Pretty Random Fiesta" site. It follows up on the author's previous "Letter from Lost Valley," posted July 31, 2023 at emilygrubman.substack.com/p/letter-from-lost-valley, which described her first seven weeks at Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon (lostvalley.org). An extract from this latest post also appeared in the review of David James Duncan's* Sun House *in* Communities *#201, at gen-us.net/Sun House.*

As I've mentioned before, one of the main reasons I left New York last year was because I felt I had no community. (Of course, I had/have friends there, but I hadn't felt like I was part of something cohesive since quitting Red Antler at the end of 2018.) But instead of moving closer to anyone I knew, I decided it made more sense to travel alone to brand new places and just assume I'd magically fall in with a like-minded community of awesome people who would change my life.

It was kind of a ridiculous plan—if you can even call it that.

But it also worked.

Getting acquainted

I didn't know what an Intentional Community was before this year. The idea was briefly introduced during my Permaculture Design Course (taken in March 2023 at A Quinta da Lage in Portugal), but I was more interested in gardening and grey water than these "invisible structures." So when I googled "permaculture Oregon" and ultimately got accepted into Lost Valley's internship program, my feeling towards joining its intentional ecovillage was more of a "Sure, why not?"

That sentiment stemmed from knowing I'd only be at Lost Valley for three months. I figured I wouldn't have enough context to offer meaningful input on any decisions, and that I wouldn't be around long enough to be affected by them either. I assumed I'd be viewed as a temporary visitor (interloper?) more than a true community member. I felt separate, in service of. I was there to work and learn; if I was lucky, maybe I'd make a few friends.

This was mostly accurate for the first month. I worked my 20 hours/week (and squeezed in my remote work as a naming consultant around that), cooked and ate most meals by myself, attended some meetings as a silent observer, and powered through my social anxiety during potlucks and other gatherings. I enjoyed interacting with the community, but I was also exhausted from constantly being on First Impression Best Behavior every time I left my dorm room. I wasn't sure how well I fit in among all these hardcore hippies, and I didn't want to say/do the wrong thing.

This was one of the first times in recent memory where I felt like *I* was too mainstream. Considered the compost-loving, DIY-deodorant fReAk among my friends and family, here at Lost Valley I was suddenly the bald-armpitted, monogamous, city girl who doesn't even have Chacos or a breathwork practice! Compared to all these extra-crunchy societal renegades, I was worried I stuck out like a smooth, French-manicured thumb.

But as I gradually got to know more people, I realized that there's no single or "right" way to hippie and I wasn't falling

short at all. What makes Lost Valley so special and strong is not that everyone is the same, but that everyone is wildly and weirdly unique. As long as we can all agree to live by a shared vision and values, then our differences are respected and even celebrated, à la the permaculture principles of "use and value diversity" and "integrate rather than segregate." We all have a role to play, and it seemed my Type-A, horny-for-a-spreadsheet personality could be a boon rather than a liability.

Getting comfortable

On July 13, I texted some pals: "Ok it took a month but I think I'm finally forging friendships." I had recently been invited to "Jersey"—the abandoned basketball court and only communal space on campus where smoking is permitted. Getting stoned and cracking jokes? This Gemini Rising was in her element. The next day, I joined two other garden gals on a spontaneous trip to a nearby river. We swam and snacked and gossiped and giggled. Slowly but surely, small talk was giving way to real talk and I was getting to know people—and likewise allowing them to get to know me.

Aside from the obvious fact that *it just takes time to get to know people,* 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.

Getting sappy

I've never been anything less than champing-at-the-bit to get my cheeks to San Diego for my family's annual Labor Day reunion at the beach. But this year's countdown to arrival was bittersweet. For the first time ever, I wanted the calendar to slow down as I focused on savoring my final days at Lost Valley. I was just getting into the swing of community living, and I wasn't ready to say goodbye to my new friends, neighbors, and routines.

Not only did I make some really wonderful friends, but I'm also now convinced that living in community is the *only* way to live. There's always someone around, and there's always something going on. And if there isn't? Well, it's been easy enough to dust off my community-building, resident-advisor skills and organize my own fun, be it a shared meal or movie night. Of course, there are inherent challenges with community, but I think they're far outweighed by the many social, economic, and sustainability benefits. I know there have been, and will continue to be, many iterations of the Lost Valley community, but I feel lucky to have coexisted with this summer's particular assemblage of wonderful weirdos.

Since striking out on this somewhat-exhausting adventure in January, Lost Valley is the first place (and group of people) that I could actually see myself returning to for a good long while—and a big part of that is knowing I'd be welcomed back. To know that I'll be missed as much as I'll miss LV makes my heart swell to the size of one of those forgotten zucchinis in the Meadow Garden. If things don't work out with my European Dream, then Dexter, Oregon it is. (You almost make me hope I *don't* fall in love with a handsome European who owns a villa by the sea. Almost!)

It makes me wonder: Was the love of a community the love I've been seeking all along?

Thank you for everything: the potlucks, the work parties, the movie nights, the Jersey hangs, the carpools, the laughter, the gossip, the candor, the warmth, the lessons, the quacks, the guidance, the meals, the emails, the vegetal abundance, the green thumbs, and so much more. This summer was one of the greatest experiences of my life, and I hope to see you all again soon.

Emily Grubman is a writer, naming consultant, and permaculturist. You can find links to more of her writing at emilygrubman.com/writing. Her previous article "All Eyes on Us?" appeared in Communities *#201.*

Photos courtesy of Emily Grubman

Finding Community in a Lonely World

By Kristina Jansen

We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community.
—Dorothy Day

An antidote to loneliness

Loneliness, both a physical and mental affliction, has garnered attention from global health officials who have taken to calling it the "Epidemic of Loneliness."[1] Highlighting the loss of social infrastructure and collective traditions that once supported our basic need for connection, these officials note the vital role community can play in addressing the crisis.

Communities readers are more versed than most in the healing nature of cooperative life, a powerful motivator for many of us seeking different ways to live together. The incidental contact from living close to other people, sharing space and meals and chores, forces us to relate to one another, even when we'd rather not. If nothing else, this forces us to look outside of ourselves, and a smile or a hug goes a long way. In the best of times, we have friends to share good news with. In the worst of times, we have friends who we can cry with. If we're having a bad day (or week, or month), there are others around who will notice, and even intervene. That can sound overly invasive—and at times it can be. But when the alternative is a deepening spiral of illness or self-destruction or domestic abuse, social living can save lives.

I've been thinking a lot about this idea of loneliness, and how being well versed in the practice of community has affected my life. I call it a practice, because like anything that needs to be learned, living a life with other people requires practice. It requires the honing of social skills while, simultaneously, achieving a deepened sense of oneself. It's this push and pull of the collective will on the solitary consciousness that fascinates me. Growing up as I did within the context of an experimental community of friends, that I call "Orinda" in my writings, I recognize both the benefits and the challenges of community life.

I needed to break out of the community to figure out what was me, and what wasn't, who I was and who I wanted to be without the constant input from a hundred well-meaning friends.

A tradition of togetherness

I finished writing this essay over the long Thanksgiving weekend. Imbued with meaning and celebration and togetherness, our Orinda Thanksgiving tradition marks the passage of time, offers the joy of a collective project and many symbols of abundance shared. It has been my favorite holiday for as long as I can remember.

I was five years old when my parents took me to the first Thanksgiving gathering of the proto-community that evolved into Orinda. There was a rented hall out in Cambria, California, and the friends came together in a sort of potluck of coordinated chaos that included several baked turkeys, and loads of bread stuffing, mashed potatoes, green beans, and purple Jell-O. I think there was also dancing—as one of the participants was originally from Greece and knew how to lead us in the steps to traditional folk music.

By the time the next year rolled around, my parents, along with their friends, had sold their single-family homes or moved out of their other lodgings and collectively purchased an apartment complex that featured 16 units and a central courtyard. That was the first year that we shared the collectively cooked meal sitting at long folding

tables set up in that courtyard, which were later cleared away so that we could dance. At some point after that, some of the friends who played music formed a band together and a concert was added to the annual program.

Over time, the event has morphed into an almost professional gala. Now there are usually rented tents and tables and we serve more than a hundred people. This year, the headcount was in the 140s.

The practice of community

First, a few of the benefits I see in the practice of community.

It's a heady thing to live among friends. I think of shared laughter, of inside jokes, or being a part of an experience. To come down for coffee in the morning and run into someone unexpected—a friendly face that maybe you haven't seen for a few days, months, years, or maybe ever—and the chance to have a spontaneous conversation about a book you never heard of before or one that you both loved. The chance to talk about a beloved child, a common friend, a difficult lover, a health concern...and to share thoughts, gain insight, perspective, or even humility. The chance to do a kindness for someone else, and in that act of giving, to find the joy of connection.

Hugs. I love hugs, and in the year-plus of Covid-19 isolation and uncertainty, when I was forced by circumstance to live apart from my community of friends, with my partner and our relationship ups and downs, I missed hugs from friends maybe more than anything. One of the best parts of living in a community full of friends is getting to hug and be hugged by people I love.

Sharing meals. For me, this means cooking, but for others it might mean setting up the tables and making it look beautiful or festive. It might mean the act of eating with friends, or the fun of the shared clean-ups afterwards. I love cooking for people, especially when it's a shared project, and making food that's nutritious and delicious. An ancient social art—feeding friends, family, strangers—it's a way of passing love and care and traditions and nutrients. I feel lucky to have grown up cooking for large

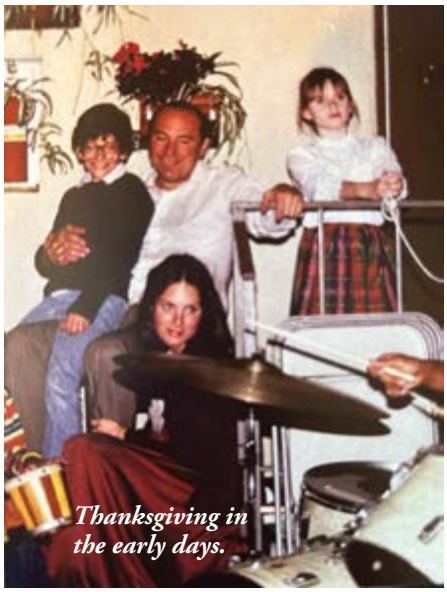
A place setting for Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving 2023. Kristina is on the right.

Gravy for 150.

Photos courtesy of Kristina Jansen

Thanksgiving 2023.



Thanksgiving in the early days.

Sandy Tubis

groups of people and knowing how to blend flavors and textures into wholesome meals. When I've been on my own in new settings, my skills in the kitchen have helped me make new friends, give back, and be useful.

Negotiating difficult personalities. While some may think that living with people you find difficult is a big downside in community life, I think it's a gift. First of all, everyone can be a "difficult" person for someone else. Learning to negotiate space, hurt feelings, different styles of communication or work, or even senses of humor with compassion and open-heartedness has led to some of my biggest insights. I imagine each person has edges and barbs that get exposed from time to time, myself included. Interactions with other people, especially in a culture of open communication, help us smooth out those edges, sheath those barbs, and learn how to heal where we're most sensitive.

Alone among many

Now for some of the downsides. I didn't always feel very connected to my community.

As a young teenager in particular, I felt quite alone and isolated—even in the center of all the hustle and bustle of Orinda's life. I was a reader and a thinker and needed more time alone than was popular among my peers or my elders. I didn't have my own physical space, nor a solid sense of personal boundaries, and community wisdom at that time was suspicious of too much isolation. Even while always encouraged by others to "be myself," I felt lost. "Being myself" felt like pressure, and I was always trying to figure out who I was supposed to be.

This may sound typical of adolescence, but in those earlier days of the community, a lack of sensitivity to young hearts and minds led me (and frankly many of my young peers) to feel neglected, inspected, insecure, and unsure. Personally, I escaped into books and secretive eating to establish an interior place that was just for me. I didn't realize this was a coping mechanism until I left the community to go to college, and suddenly I didn't need these habits as much.

When I left for school, I did so against the advice of many of my parent figures. My father had left the community by then, and my mother hadn't really taken care of me since I was five or six, so those parent figures held big sway in my mind.

I went anyway.

I left the bosom of my community family and made my way into the world, only returning home for Thanksgiving and an occasional week or two in the summer. I worked full-time through those first few years at community college, and then paid my way with student loans, part-time gigs, and teaching assistantships after I transferred to university and for my graduate school work. I eventually went to India to study joint families, modern mass media, and the practice of arranged marriage.

The practice of community, however, ran deep in me. I made fast friends in college and formed my own sort of friend group. I discovered yoga and meditation. I discovered an affinity for hosting parties and started a "play group" with my graduate school colleagues. I explored the world and found I felt more at home living in a multigenerational joint-family household in Rajasthan than I did sharing an apartment with a schoolmate in San Diego. At the end of the year I spent in India, I learned my father was dying, and I returned to California.

Finding your people and yourself

Things have evolved substantially at Orinda since those early days, and so have I. Ultimately, I resettled within the community, though on my own terms.

Being out in the world on my own gave me a new sense of myself—and also, a new appreciation for the friends and family I grew up with and around.

When I went away to school, I was seeking my own path, and trying to "be myself" even though it was scary, and I didn't get a ton of support. What I learned, however, was that I needed to break out of the community to figure out what was me, and what wasn't, who I was and who I wanted to be without the constant input from a hundred well-meaning friends.

I found my own group of friends, and my own inner compass. I found the inner strength essential for a successful community life.

This last August my own son, now 17, left to start his college adventure in a different state. He has my full support, and the support of many of our friends. It's been tremendous to watch him blossom, to see him make new friends, and seek new experiences. It was not a surprise to me that he joined a fraternity. He's on a path to finding his own community.

A social life

This year marked the 47th time that I've celebrated gratitude and thanksgiving with family, friends, and friends who have become family in the context of my community.

About 10 years ago, I took over managing the kitchen and the cooking teams for the event which now includes at least a dozen turkeys, massive pots of gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, and yams (an upgrade from the purple Jell-O if you ask me), as well as cakes and pies for dessert, a cocktail hour, and an evening concert.

It takes two or three days to do the food prep, and by the time we sit down to enjoy the fruits of our labors everyone has been a part of it—from the cooking to the setup to the cleanup to the breakdown. It's a community effort, reaffirming each year how much the coordinated chaos has become a shared symphony of life.

And though we work extra hard on this one holiday a year, a typical Saturday evening is not that much different, with only a few fewer friends and without the rented tents.

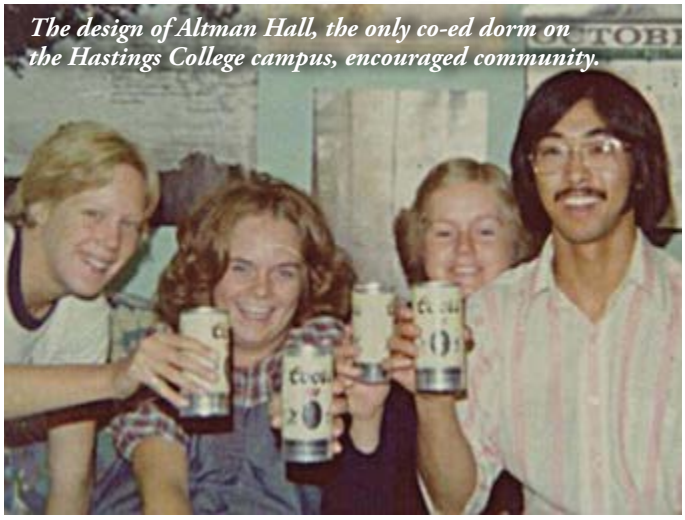
Kristina Jansen lives in California with her friends and family, in the community she calls Orinda in her writings. She has a master's degree in psychological anthropology, but now works in the renewable energy field. She enjoys writing, gardening, cooking, yoga, identifying climate solutions, and spending time with friends.

1. www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/nov/16/who-declares-loneliness-a-global-public-health-concern

A Life of Intentional Living

By Alan O'Hashi

Alan O'Hashi with Naropa University Students Brandon O'Hearn, Alix Zabin, and Allison Saltz.



The design of Altman Hall, the only co-ed dorm on the Hastings College campus, encouraged community.

Two neighbors and I lingered after a potluck dinner to enjoy the late summer evening in the courtyard of the Silver Sage Village senior cohousing community (Boulder, Colorado). One guy mentioned that he and his wife were spending Christmas with their daughter and her husband. Actually, they wanted to visit their new grandchild. My other neighbor, like me, is childless. He said that when he was growing up, his grandparents lived far away, and they occasionally visited.

I found the part-time grandparents thing to be odd.

"Both sets of my grandparents lived in the same town as me, as well as numerous uncles, aunts, and cousins. I was over at their places all the time," I said. "I always had at least two or three birthday parties, Thanksgivings, and Christmases."

What life circumstances or paths led me to seek or discover community in the first place? I now realize I'm more of an accidental communitarian. My evolutionary, collaborative living path began when I was born into it.

• • •

Recently, a Naropa University professor, Selina Giacinto, was teaching a Human Growth and Development class on the Buddhism-inspired campus in Boulder. She arranged for small groups of graduate students to visit with a dozen of my neighbors about their life journeys.

"I thought it would be interesting for the students to learn about lifespan development by talking with someone at retirement age or beyond to help them better understand their own lifespans," Professor Giacinto explained. "I see our society as lacking in intergenerational-relating and respect, so I took this platform I have, teaching, to create a small opportunity for intergenerational connection."

"It's fresh on my mind," I responded. "I was talking to a couple of my neighbors about our grandparents. Sign me up."

Professor Giacinto assigned me to visit with three students. They had a series of questions and touched on most of them. They all wondered how my experiences, as I have aged over the years, landed me in a cohousing community.

I had a huge extended family that was very stable. We were living in the post-World War II housing boom era. When my maternal and paternal grandparents were alive, my hometown, Cheyenne, Wyoming, was also the gathering place for Dad's 11 siblings and Mom's brother and sister. After their parents passed away, there was no longer any reason for family reunions, and my uncles, aunts, and 20 cousins scattered about the same time I went off to college.

Having family members around was a good support system. That fit in well with my early suburban lifestyle. When I was going into the first grade, the school district boundaries changed. My parents bought a house in the Cole Addition in East Cheyenne, so my sister and I could remain at Fairview Elementary School.

It was a typical Baby Boomer neighborhood. The parents knew each other because all my friends attended Fairview. Packs of kids raced through each other's homes after school. The common gatherings were frequent birthday parties, cookouts, and the Cole swimming pool during the summers, where numerous family-oriented events occurred.

"Building community, one neighborhood at a time," the cohousing mantra, wasn't theoretical to me.

Fairview was a feeder to Carey Junior High and East High schools, meaning I went through life with the same kids. Thanks to social media, I'm still in touch with people I've known since kindergarten.

• • •

My youth development had its ups and downs, but being around family and the same neighbors was a stabilizing

Alan and friends in his first accidental community, the Cole Addition in East Cheyenne.

segue to college life. A group of my Presbyterian Church friends and I decided to attend Hastings College in Nebraska. Three of us ended up living in Altman Hall, the "co-ed" dorm. Not only did I live in Altman for four years, but I stayed in the same room on the first floor next to the phone and the side entrance, closest to Bellevue House, the student union.

The physical configuration was as if the campus housing office predicted cohousing infrastructure. One end housed women, and men lived on the other side. A lobby with a lounge and mailboxes separated the two wings. The basement was shared and included a laundry, kitchen, TV room, and recreation area.

The culture was very intentional because the residents were governed by a committee that planned parties, implemented the college code of conduct, and resolved conflicts between students to avoid their being referred to the Student Judiciary Council. At Hastings, interventions by the Dean's office would raise red flags; compared to the other dorms, Altman had very few of them. It wasn't surprising because the Altmanians became a closely-knit community.

The main thing I learned growing up with a large family and living in the dorms was how to size people up and be a team player. There were always friends or family around. If there's anything I've observed over the years, some people may consider themselves collaborative, but only if the outcomes are self-beneficial. That isn't surprising considering the rugged individual American ideal.

• • •

I graduated from Hastings in 1975 with no job skills and sat out the post-Vietnam War recession in grad school at the University of Wyoming. I took every class that offered internships, including the Wyoming Human Services Project (WHSP). The coursework taught a multi-disciplinary, outside-the-box approach to problem-solving that ended with teams being placed in jobs. My group included a social worker, a recreation major, an artist, an attorney, and myself, a public administrator.

Each week my WHSP team worked a half-day with an agency and another half-day developing solutions to local problems that arose from rapid population growth in a rural city due to the coal mining boom that began in the late 1970s. One project that continues today is the Council of Community Services, an interagency collaborative coordinating assistance for low-income people and families.

Gillette would be my first job on the rolling prairie of Northeast Wyoming, where I bought my first house with two other guys. There was a housing shortage in Razor City. One of my new friends was a Vietnam War veteran who wanted to use his loan guarantee provided by the GI Bill.

We chipped in the down payment and purchased a new house with a two-car garage in a new development in town. Three single men living together, earning money for the first time, and no place to spend it was quite the experience. We dubbed our palace the "3003 Club, Where Mom's Never Home."

We shared everyday expenses like taxes, utilities, and some food. As for housekeeping and cooking, we each had different definitions of "clean" and "food." Those two tasks caused the most conflict among the two others who were strong-willed, and me. We preferred common meals that included hosting frequent dinners for our friends. An informal cooking rotation was developed.

The lifestyle was good because, despite our differences, we all got along. I was the second owner to move out when I took a job in Lander, nestled at the foot of the Wind River Mountains in the West Central part of Wyoming.

• • •

Life in Gillette moved at 100 mph, a big contrast to quiet and serene Lander. The National Outdoor Leadership School instructors who guided students into the nearby Shoshone National Forest were a big change from the coal miners in the Powder River Basin.

I spent much more time decompressing outdoors in Lander, the smallest place I'd lived.

Compared to Gillette, the town was stable and had a housing shortage. I ended up renting one of the Faust Apartments above the Ace Hardware Store. The halls were narrow, and there was plenty of interaction with my neighbors. Downstairs was a pocket park with a running creek. In the 1980s, living in the business district was considered a lower-class lifestyle compared to owning a single-family dwelling on a private lot.

I didn't drive for the first two years I lived in Lander. The bank was on one corner, an ice cream store next door, a drugstore on the opposite corner, and my office was across the street next to the Safeway. I became a mixed-use, urban rat before it became trendy.

My next move was to Boulder, Colorado. I worked for the Northern Arapaho Tribe in 1992 on a project I called The Cultural Conduit, which coincided with the anniversary of Columbus' intruding into the West five centuries earlier. I was the liaison with a Boulder nonprofit organization called The Next 500 Years (N5Y). N5Y arranged with art gallery owners on the Pearl Street Mall where Arapaho artists could hang their work. It turned out that one of the volunteers absconded with some of the group's assets, and the Conduit collapsed.

I liked Boulder, and a year later, I decided to stay. Besides, I was starved for Major League Baseball, and the Rockies would be

expanding to Denver. I sofa-surfed for the first few months I was in town, and it was time to find a permanent place. Housing was tight in Boulder. A colleague recommended me to a Buddhist-centered cooperative house. At the time, I didn't know what any of that meant. Later, I figured out there were house rules based on Buddhist values that governed the household to keep the peace among three men and two women who split the rent. After an interview with the residents, I was selected to join.

House decisions were made by consensus. We had a big common living room and kitchen. We weren't a very messy bunch since shoes weren't allowed in the house, and the members were minimalists. Each of us labeled our everyday food in the fridge and cabinets. We shared vegetarian dinners, even though most coop members were omnivores.

• • •

Fast forward to December 2010, my partner Diana and I sold a condominium we updated and eventually moved into the Silver Sage Village three years after its founding. I didn't know much about cohousing when we joined the community.

By this time, cooperative living came naturally to me based on my housing experience gestalt and the multi-disciplinary decision-making methods I continued to use throughout my professional life.

I got the hang of cohousing fairly quickly. Silver Sage Village was established in 2007 and was one of the first senior communities built. As would be expected, the founders had a steep learning curve about collaborative living. I was accustomed to diverse perspectives in consensus situations and dived into the routine. It was clear that new ideas and approaches weren't welcome from a youngster like me; I was 57 at the time. I backed off and watched. Since then, there's been quite a bit of turnover, and I'm no longer a newbie.

Over the years, I've had to adapt to the divergent quirks of my neighbors. Those at Silver Sage Village were no exception. I've been in town enough to have a full "off-campus" life. I ply my leadership skills and volunteer in my outside-of-cohousing world. I've learned that my place in the community is to do what's expected, which isn't much. Residents here choose to join one of the six teams and check the Common House at night every now and again.

In all of my accidental and intentional community experiences, my interpersonal bar is set pretty low. I only expect that my neighbors will be nice and do no harm. That became evident to me when I rose from my deathbed in 2013 from an exotic lung disease.

Maybe I was predestined to be alive and kicking at Silver Sage Village where I had 30 people around to provide neighborly support after my cause-and-effect housing adventures.

Cohousers can choose as much privacy or as much community as they want. Here it is, 10 years since my health scare, and I've still chosen to be more private than active. As my neighbors grow older—the average is 75ish—it will soon be my turn to take on more heavy lifting.

1. Editor's note: the students said more in the original article draft, but for the sake of continuity and space, it was edited out of this version.

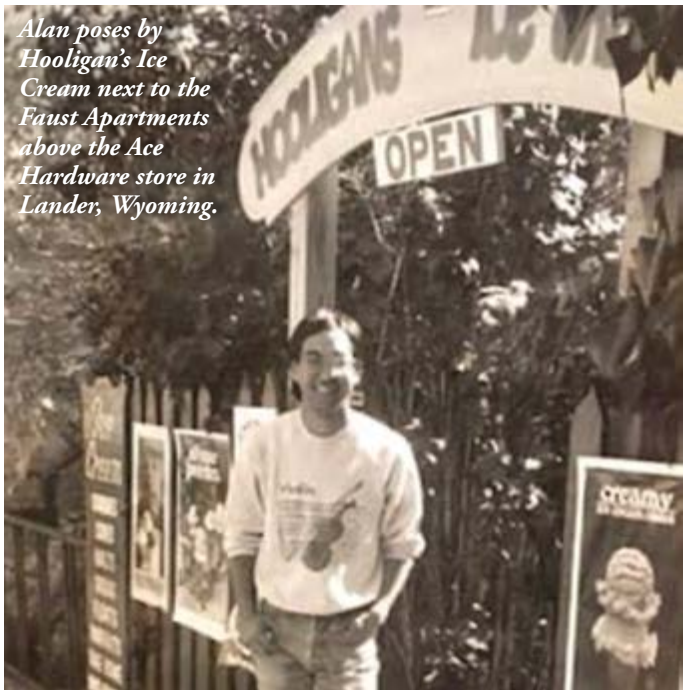
• • •

The Naropa focus group is what inspired this story. Seldom do I seek out Millennials for social or professional interactions. Yet, it was a fruitful exchange.

"While the words you shared in our discussion were key to my understanding more about you and your life, the emotions behind those words felt (to me) like they were laden with reflection, self-awareness, and something that resembles acceptance of your life experiences," one student, Alix Zabin, mentioned to me when we concluded. "When I am older, I want to look back on my life with similar feelings and a positive perspective."

Professor Giacinto went on to say, "My hope was that it would benefit both sides: Students gaining knowledge and wisdom from elders and elders experiencing younger people valuing what they had to say.[1] It went better than I could have hoped!"

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



Alan poses by Hooligan's Ice Cream next to the Faust Apartments above the Ace Hardware store in Lander, Wyoming.

At Silver Sage Village, Alan has chosen more privacy than community.

Photos courtesy of Alan O'Hashi

FREEDOM DREAMS: A Herstory of the People of Color Sustainable Housing Network

By Tavi Baker

yes,
each weekend like this
each gathering of us
is in between time
when we wake up to each other
share smiles and possibility
over black beans and corn fritters
dream deep beneath the stars
and repeat

we are each other's remedy
we are within reach
right now

This is part of a poem I wrote in 2016 at the West Coast Communities Conference, when Deseree Fontenot and I were invited as keynote speakers representing People of Color Sustainable Housing Network[1] (POCSHN—pronounced "potion"). POCSHN is a resource network for people of color building intentional, healthy, collective and affordable housing communities in the Bay Area and beyond, founded in response to rapid displacement, gentrification, and housing insecurity for communities of color. Our presentation was called "Moving Beyond Diversity to Collective Liberation: Engaging the Communities Movement in Racial and Economic Justice."[2] After our talk, participants donated $400, our first funds raised for our fledgling network.

In this article, I share my perspective as a woman of color cofounder. Reflecting back to 2015 and beyond, I trace POCSHN's and my intentional community origin story—a story of passion, persistence, and synergy. I describe what led me to seek community in the first place, POCSHN's impact on the San Francisco Bay Area, and lessons learned.

POCSHN was officially launched on my birthday, February 2, 2015 on Meetup, a social media platform for hosting and organizing activities and gatherings for people and communities with similar interests. I had resigned from my job in Oakland and had been asking myself the question, "What would I do with my time if I didn't have to worry about money?" The answer: build an intentional community for people of color. One Sunday at the end of a weekly BIPOC meditation gathering, I talked to Lailan Huen, a seasoned community organizer, about my idea. She suggested that we expand the focus from building one community to building an entire network. It sounded a bit intimidating, but I agreed and registered our group on Meetup. It was thrilling to put this idea out into the world and watch our virtual community grow, one member at a time. Eight years later, our Facebook network has over 5,000 members, and we recently launched a POCSHN Midwest monthly online event.

Our core organizing collective grew over the years to include seven women of color who shared a similar vision for community. We had all been longing for a space to nurture our dreams of community: Brandi Mack, who founded the Butterfly Movement[3] to uplift Black women and girls; Desi Fontenot, focused on liberating land and queering ecological education; Marissa Ashkar, who dreamt of an urban-rural community that supported child-raising collectively; Rona Fernandez, lifelong Bay Area resident and racial justice activist; Casey Bastiaans, former Oakland anti-displacement activist; Lina Buffington, social entrepreneur and the first director of East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative (EB PREC)[4] described below; and I, who sought an expansive intergenerational way to build extended family and community. Thanks to funding from the San Francisco Foundation, Wangũi H. joined us in 2021 as POCSHN's Outreach and Engagement Manager.

Through workshops, tours, and retreats, POCSHN has reached hundreds of people of color yearning for traditional ways of being and living in community. After a residential retreat we hosted in Ukiah, one participant said: "I cherish this opportunity to connect both with other people of color and parts of my inner self which didn't know what I was missing."

The seeds of my community dreams were originally planted in 1997 when I was introduced to University of California's Student Cooperative system in Berkeley. I was one of 21 Black students to move into the newly renovated African American Theme House or "Afro House," on Prospect Street, and two years later, I moved into the Rochdale Coop, also part of the student cooperative system. Then in 2009, I attended a cohous-

ing tour organized by East Bay Cohousing (EBCOHO)[5] and learned about Parker Street Cooperative, where I live now. I was grateful for the affordability of a limited equity cooperative, but still yearned for a diverse and intentional community.

As an alternative, I gathered a group of friends to explore buying a four-plex together. We met consistently for two years, but our efforts ended up fizzling out and we went our separate ways. However, one friend ended up moving into Parker Street Cooperative 10 years after I did.

I continued to attend numerous cooperative housing meetings, workshops, and trainings in the San Francisco Bay Area and was often one of the few people of color in attendance. The first community land trust in the United States, New Communities, was created in 1969 to support black farmers[6], but Black and Brown people were largely missing from the contemporary Bay Area cooperative housing scene. Guided by Jessica Gordon Nembhard's book, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice,* and Diana Leafe Christian's book, *Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities,* we at POCSHN were determined to recenter people of color in the intentional communities movement.

Looking back over the last eight years since POCSHN'S inception, we can measure our success in sparks of possibility, what Robin Kelley[7] calls freedom dreams. Three main sparks that resulted from POCSHN's foundational work include a real estate cooperative, a mixed-use cultural hub, and an education and training institute.

East Bay Permanent Real Estate Coop, Inc (EB PREC) was born out of a collaboration between POCSHN and the Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC)[8] to help BIPOC and allied communities to take properties permanently off the speculative market and create community controlled assets. Under the leadership of Noni Session, a third generation West Oaklander and grassroots organizer, EB PREC is now comprised of 740 member owners, with six properties under community control, including Esther's Orbit Room[9], a mixed-use historic Black Arts venue in West Oakland, and Pippin St, a 10-unit apartment complex in East Oakland serving long-term residents.

Liberated 23rd Ave[10] is a queer and trans people of color-centered mixed-use property in East Oakland, established in 2017. POCSHN helped broker relationships with the Oakland Community Land Trust and was part of a huge community effort to help residents and tenants purchase this building from their landlord. The hybrid residential-commercial cultural hub houses The Bikery, a Queer & Trans People Of Color collectively-run house and community garden (SOL—Sustaining Ourselves Locally), and Shaolin Life, a martial arts and a self-defense studio.

The Community Co-Ownership Initiative[11] is a partnership between POCSHN and the Northern California Land Trust, our fiscal sponsor, along with other members of the Bay Area CLT Consortium (BACCLT)[12], to diversify and expand access to shared ownership and resident controlled housing through leadership training, development of new financing tools, and technical support. Workshops offered over the past four years have included: Fair Housing for Collective Housing, History of Cooperatives and Community Land Trusts, and Conflict Resolution.

Early on, one community organizer said this about POCSHN:

Tavi Baker, Wangũi Hymes, Deseree Fontenot, Yu-Shuan Tarango-Sho, Lailan Sandra Huen (see page 3 "ON THE COVER" text for more info).

Photo courtesy of Tavi Baker

"The loving, justice-motivated, intentional, persistent imprint you have made in the last year in the Bay Area will ripple through community for years to come." Since then, POCSHN has impacted the lives of thousands of Bay Area residents with both short-term and long-term living solutions. Now, more than ever, collective, affordable housing and mutual aid are essential to navigating the climate crisis, continuing gentrification and displacement, and multiple pandemics.

Lessons Learned

As we move forward, we strive to integrate the principles that were identified by organizers at The Bay Area Land Justice Convening[13] in 2019. POCSHN staff helped convene 30 organizers from housing justice groups, indigenous-led organizations, and food and farm justice organizations to seed a 100-year vision for land justice. Held on the territory of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria at the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, the convening was co-organized by staff at POCSHN, Sogorea Te' Land Trust[14], The Cultural Conservancy[15], Movement Generation[16], and Sustainable Economies Law Center. The six principles and lessons learned from that gathering are listed below:

- **Following indigenous leadership**, particularly the leadership of those whose land we each dwell upon;
- **Healing together, building relationships:** prioritizing structures for collective healing across people, institutions, communities, sectors, issues, areas in the context of specific historical traumas;
- **Ending occupations:** Reparations and redistribution that prioritize Indigenous sovereignty and Black self-determination;
- **Sharing skills and knowledge** such as technical knowledge, policies, land, physical tools, food, medicine, and office space, etc. so everyone has access to means of production;
- **Building our own regenerative economies** and divestment from the current system;
- **Community governance** that follows indigenous leadership, builds regional alliances for movement power, and has the capacity to govern under rapidly changing conditions.

Recently, new and founding POCSHN organizers gathered at the new site of Movement Generation (MG), an ecological justice organization in the San Francisco Bay Area. Desi, now one of MG's dedicated land stewards, guided us on a tour and described their vision for the 43 acres purchased by Sogorea Te' Land Trust in 2022.

They plan to build The Justice and Ecology Center[17], the first of its kind in the Bay Area. It will offer a community space for retreats, workshops, and strategy sessions for a wide network of organizers, healers, artists, and earth workers to build capacity to guide their own communities toward a Just Transition from the extractive economy to regenerative local economies.

As we gathered on the land, I reflected on our original intentions, how far we've come, and how much further we have to go. I started this journey with a specific outcome in mind, a building and/or piece of land that could be a sanctuary for myself and other people of color. Eight years later, those freedom dreams are still unfolding. Questions still linger for some of the founding organizers who long for a formal intentional community. At meetings, we would often scrawl "Who is the we?" at the top of a flip chart. Although I dream of visiting BIPOC communities that have sprouted up across the country in recent years, my career aspirations and biological and chosen family have kept me rooted in the Bay Area, where cost of living, wildfires, and lack of generational wealth remain barriers to building intentional BIPOC communities. The BIPOC Intentional Community Council[18], for example, has funding to provide seed grants of only $4,000 each, which doesn't go very far.

However, I've been truly inspired by the collective land dreams of the broader "we" that have manifested and remind me of the original vision POCSHN crafted years ago: "We are committed to creating an entire ecosystem of POC-centered co-housing, cooperative housing, and intentional communities that are ecologically, emotionally, spiritually and culturally regenerative spaces."

Standing in the soil, surrounded by acres of possibility, I closed my eyes and remembered.

yes,
each weekend like this
each gathering of us
is in between time
when we wake up to each other
share smiles and possibility
dream deep beneath the stars
and imagine a different future.

Tavi Baker (she/her), MPH, is a cofounder of The People of Color Sustainable Housing Network (pochousingnetwork.com), which partnered with the Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC) in 2018 to create the East Bay Permanent Real Estate Coop (EB PREC). Her cooperative living experience includes the African American Theme House (Afro House), Rochdale Village, and Parker Street Coop. Tavi is a seeker and connector committed to cultivating spaces of joy, justice, and belonging within herself and communities of color.

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The Journey of an Intentional Community Matchmaker

By Cynthia Tina

The starry sky was filled with possibilities as a group of us staff and board members at the Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) made our way from the meeting room back to our lodgings.

Strolling along the dirt paths at Twin Oaks Community in Virginia, we shared about our personal community journeys. I reflected with the group about my decade of travel to more than 100 intentional communities globally. I also shared my recent discomfort with an increasing number of people asking me for advice for their own community journeys.

A casual question from a stranger on social media—like "Which communities should I visit on my trip to such and such?" or "Which community do you recommend for me to join?"—felt like a tremendous responsibility.

It would take serious attention to appropriately guide the individual to their suitable match. I also needed to think of the well-being of the referred communities, to shore up my own relationships with them and ensure I had a good understanding of their community needs. This all would take time and resources to make happen.

I was in the middle of complaining when FIC's Business Manager at the time turned to me, "Hey, you could be a community matchmaker! Someone who helps people find the intentional community that's right for them."

The term stuck. I decided to experiment with it while I was still Co-Director at FIC. I began using the phrase "community matchmaking" on my personal website as an option for people to book a consultation with me.

Fast forward several years, and I've now had matchmaking consultations with just shy of 300 community seekers.

I've created an entire organization, called Community Finders, offering a variety of programs to support people in finding their community fit. We are soon expanding to include programs to support people who want to start new communities—Community Founders, in addition to Finders. I'm even in the early days of developing a matchmaking software to serve even more people beyond what I can accomplish as an individual.

Cynthia getting ready for a matchmaking session.

My journey as community matchmaker has been personally transformative, opening me up to a wide diversity of humans to learn from and razor sharpening my listening skills. It has also solidified my belief that intentional community living is critical for the kind of personal and planetary transformation needed at this time. I'm grateful to have gained a unique lens on the intentional communities movement through my work, a deeper sense for the needs of communities, and ideas for how we can all find our way home.

Gathering at Findhorn community in Scotland.

Photos courtesy of Cynthia Tina

How the Matchmaking Process Works

The matchmaking process begins

Cynthia and kiddos at their Vermont community playing summer games.

when a new client submits an intake form answering basic questions about what they are seeking in community, followed by an hour-long conversation with me where I dig into what they are *really* looking for and answer any of their questions about life in community. I use this information, combined with a bit of personal intuition, to select options from my private database of intentional communities created for this purpose.

The custom list of recommendations is then sent to the client who may want to workshop it with me further before using it as a starting point for their own visits and travels to communities.

I can save people considerable time and misused energy, avoiding communities that aren't a fit, as well as revealing communities that a client wouldn't easily find out about on their own. I may also make introductions between the client and the community if I think it's an exceptional fit.

Then it's up to the individual to actually make contact, do their visits, and engage in the membership process with their chosen community. We have also developed a group coaching program, called the Finders Circle, to support them through this phase.

Many are just "community curious" and sit on their recommendations, while others go on to have life-transforming experiences, and some contact me months or years later to thank me for helping them find their forever home.

The Community Search and its Destination

Never could I have imagined the number of intimate conversations I've had with such a diversity of people around the globe—retirees, single mothers, elderly couples, fresh graduates, tech professionals, nomadic families, Buddhist monks, military veterans, healers, entrepreneurs, fundamentalists, activists, left-wing, right-wing—all seeking out this thing we call *intentional community.*

After hundreds of hours of dialogue and even more hours of deep contemplation regarding people's vision for community, I have come to the conclusion that what we all want—regardless of race, religion, or creed—is vastly more similar than it is different.

It's as if we are all walking towards the same destination from many different points of origin.

On the most basic level, we all want support, companionship, and assurance that we are living the best possible life we can and contributing to a world that will serve future generations.

I feel this even more strongly after being an intentional community matchmaker through the aftermath of the Covid pandemic.

Particularly when I'm speaking with a client who adamantly wants a pro- or anti-Covid vaccination community, I remind them of the universally humanizing power of intentional community living.

Within a healthy intentional community (and I do believe there's a difference between a healthy and unhealthy community) there's the ability to hear a diversity of viewpoints and adapt through challenging conversations.

In the case of Covid, at the time of this writing, most intentional communities have been through the most challenging part of their conversations and have more or less reached an agreement about their stance, even if it is a generally accepted culture to live and let live.

A client may say they want a pro- or anti- Covid vaccination community, but what they really want is neighbors who they feel comfortable enough with to express their need and trust that their needs will be respected (within reason).

This is something that the majority of intentional communities can offer.

Indeed, it is the very nature of a healthy intentional community to be able to listen, adapt, be vulnerable, set boundaries, engage in complex conversations, and uncover values. That is cooperative culture at work.

Making and Breaking the Community Wishlist

In my courses and resources, I teach about the Community Wishlist. It's a worksheet I've developed asking the community seeker a series of questions to help to determine what they want and don't want in the community, including those things they'd prefer but are flexible on.

I used an early version of the wishlist myself when I was researching communities in the Northeast to settle on one to call home.

The Community Wishlist has empowered seekers around the country and beyond to go to communities with a clear set of needs in mind. I've also gotten some pushback from the communities who receive these clear-sighted visitors with their lists of needs.

Community is not a list of items on your shopping list!

I've needed to start reminding people of this whenever I present the wishlist idea. It's a reference tool, but not a set of demands. And if you hold onto your list too tightly you may miss the greatest power of community—its ability to change YOU. To grow you as a more flexible, capable person, someone who can contribute to a community in the ways it may be missing, to fill out the edges and gaps with your gifts.

The Never-Ending Search

The other danger of holding onto the list too strongly is that your search may never end.

I brace myself when a client intake form comes through and they say they've been to dozens of communities or searching for decades. After a while multiple community experiences start to blur together, a general weariness settles in, and a picky-ness is established, like when a child has been in the candy store for too long and can't make a final choice despite lots of sampling.

At a certain point the serious community seeker must either make the leap into a community even if it's not 100 percent perfect, or set about starting a new community, which after years of considerable effort will also never be 100 percent perfect.

As frequent readers of Communities are well aware, community is never perfect, often messy, but generally rewarding.

People Over Place

"People over place" is another concept I've developed over the years in the matchmaker seat.

The community seeker who approaches me with a list of climatic, environmental, and geographical needs is actually pretty helpful in some ways. My work is made simple. It's easy to narrow down the list to a smaller number of options when the considerations of place come first. But I wonder if community is their main craving, or more of a side dish they'll add after getting the other things they want off the menu.

Alternatively, the community seeker who comes to me with their values and the culture they are seeking is sometimes the harder client to fetch recommendations for, but the one I think is ultimately going to be more satisfied by community life.

For example, the community where I live is on a north facing slope. It's less than ideal for maximum sun exposure during our long, cold Vermont winters. Is it the ideal place for me? No. Are the people ideal? Absolutely. I wouldn't trade this bunch of misfit, caring, and practical semi-homesteaders for anything.

For me, when it comes to community living, people trumps place.

Seekers Becoming Finders

In our Community Finders Circle and other programs, we try to avoid the term community "seeker" in favor of "finder."

I'm using community seeker liberally throughout this article because that's what is commonly used, but I fear it has a disempowering quality. One could go on seeking community endlessly.

A finder is assured that their community is out there and one way or another they will find it. It's an actionable term. We can see the steps in the path before us, and with enough flexibility, growth, and commitment, community living is within reach.

There's also the opening for those with significant intentional community experience to themselves become matchmakers and help others in the process to find community. Indeed, every person who has found a community after some search has a unique story and support they can offer others.

I can imagine a day when there are many formal matchmakers, like me, who can be called on to help others. I've tried to recruit other community matchmakers before. The trick is that it takes broad knowledge of communities in various places around the world, coupled with exceptional interpersonal kills and ability to coach people through major life decisions.

As I realized some years ago at that FIC meeting at Twin Oaks, this is a tremendous responsibility.

I'm focusing my efforts now on creating systems and softwares to better enable finders, founders, and communities with openings to connect with each other without the need for individual matchmakers.

My best case version of the future puts me out of a job!

Hopefully it also puts many more people into homes within supportive values-aligned communities.

That's my goal and I am always happy to collaborate with others to help make it happen. Feel free to be in touch with me by writing to cynthia@communityfinders.com.

Cynthia Tina is a coach and consultant in the field of intentional communities. She's the founder of CommunityFinders (communityfinders.com), offering programs to help people join and start values-driven residential communities. She's also the founder of Ecovillage Tours (ecovillagetours.com), bringing people on inspirational journeys to sustainable communities. She has visited more than 150 intentional communities around the world, including the Vermont ecovillage where she lives in her self-built passive solar home.

Cynthia on a recent visit at Cobb Hill Cohousing.

Six Steps to Find Your Home in an Intentional Community

By Cynthia Tina

Cynthia visiting Friland Ecovillage in Denmark.

If you want connection and support within a purposefully created community, then joining an existing community is much simpler than starting one from scratch. There are thousands of existing intentional communities, all over the planet, many with openings for new members. Your dream community could be out there waiting for you to knock on the door.

While being simpler and faster than starting a community, the path to joining can still feel overwhelming if you're new to this wide world of intentional communities. Joining a community is a multiple-step process that's different from buying or renting a home in the mainstream way. It's often equated more closely to the process of finding a life partner...only, instead of one person, you are building relationships with many people all at once! Much like the throes of a romantic relationship, a community relationship can involve flings, courtship, heartbreak, breakup, or lasting union.

There's no guarantee that your community fit exists, or has an opening for you right now, but the journey towards community can itself be a highly rewarding adventure of self-discovery. Even if you end up starting a new community one day, the odyssey through existing communities will serve you well in the endeavor.

Below are six key steps in the process to join a community that's a good fit for you.

1. Determine What You Want to Find in an Intentional Community

The first step to find an intentional community is to know what you want to find. Do you envision a group of back-to-the-landers enjoying the simple life with homegrown food and fresh air? Or are you looking to join a collective of urban activists striving to make the world a better place? Or how about a quiet neighborhood of caring friends and families where you can share in meals, games, and thoughtful conversation?

Much of the process of finding a community involves finding out about yourself. What's important to you and how would those values be reflected in your ideal community? Feel free to write, draw, or muse with a friend on your answer to that question. It's key to getting to where you want to go.

As an additional step, consider creating a Community Wishlist to fine-tune your vision. Here's a worksheet for how to create one: **communityfinders.com/wishlist**. Your Community Wishlist can serve as a personal compass as you go on to navigate the search process.

Whatever your community vision, getting clarity on exactly what you want will aid you tremendously later on. No guarantees that your exact vision exists! But at least you will know where the gaps are and where you have the willingness to compromise.

2. Know What Type of Intentional Community You Are Looking For

Intentional communities include a wide variety of types. There are ecovillages, agrihoods, housing co-ops, tiny house villages, cohousing, spiritual centers, co-living spaces, kibbutzim, homesteading communities...just to name a few. Each community is as unique as the individuals who make it up, but there are some defining characteristics depending on the broad category the community fits into.

At **communityfinders.com/quiz**, you can answer a few simple questions and the free quiz will point you in the direction of one of the five most common types of intentional communities. The quiz is a great starting point if you are new to intentional communities. Its questions are designed to tease out your values, your lifestyle, and what's important to you that would align with a specific type of community.

You can also dig deeper into the community types by reviewing the article "The Types of Intentional Communities: Common Terms Explained and What's in a Name?," published in Communities #196 (pp. 44-46). Types profiled include: Cohousing, Ecovillage, Housing Cooperative, Shared Housing, Coliving, Spiritual/Religious, Tiny House Village, Senior Community, Commune, Camphill Communities, Kibbutzim, Catholic Worker, Resident Owned Communities,

Community-led Initiatives, and More (a catch-all category listing nearly a dozen additional types, which, like the others, can overlap with other categories). These are the terms and phrases you will see if you spend time searching any online community directory, and it's helpful to understand what they mean.

If you want to fast-track the process of figuring out what categories may be a fit for you, you can also sign up for a Community Matchmaking Session at **communityfinders.com/matchmaking**. (After the session, you'll also get a custom list of recommended communities specific to your interests, ideal location, and ideal community vision; this is followed by ongoing support as you start to visit communities.)

3. Clarify Where You Want to Research, Visit, or Join an Intentional Community

There are intentional communities in nearly every US state and in most regions of the world. Getting a handle on where you want to live (or take your next road-trip) is an important factor in your search process. This is the search criteria that will most often limit or expand the options available to you.

For a small number of you, you'll say that the location truly doesn't matter. The values and vibe of the community are the most important. You can go anywhere. Enjoy your freedom, friends, and start roaming!

For the rest of us, it's important to consider these questions:

- What's my ideal climate? Are there climates I want to avoid? Cold, humidity, dryness?
- Do I want to be close to a city or way out in the country? Driving distance?
- Are there relatives or friends who I want to stay in proximity to? Or avoid??
- Do I need to be close to a specific place for employment or can I work from anywhere? How much will the community be the source of getting my needs met?
- Am I staying in the country where I'm already a citizen, or looking abroad? What's the travel or immigration process look like in another country?
- Is any of the above realistic...really?

If it helps, you can use the above questions to create a pros and cons list for some locations under consideration.

4. Use Online Intentional Community Directories and Search Tools

A variety of intentional community maps and directories are searchable online. Most people looking for communities in North America will use **ic.org/directory**, a database maintained by the Foundation for Intentional Community. Other popular community directories include **cohousing.org/directory** (for cohousing communities in the US) and **ecovillage.org/ecovillages/map** (for ecovillages around the world). For a more comprehensive list, check out the List of Intentional Community Directories and Maps at **communityfinders.com/community-directories**.

To start using the communities directory at **ic.org/directory**, type into the search bar above the map a keyword for the community type or location you want to find—for example, "homesteading" or "tiny house." A scrollable list view of results will appear. Or you can move around on the map and click on the icons to see individual communities.

You can also use the advanced search tool at **ic.org/directory/search**. ***However!,*** only put in or select a small number (two to four) criteria at a time. Don't fill in all the search parameters or nothing will come up. To watch a video showing how to use the search tools on ic.org and other useful features for finding a community, including the classified ads, go to **gen-us.net/ic.org.directory.video**.

And if you aren't good with tech or just like flipping through a book to learn about communities, there's also a print version of the Communities Directory available at **ic.org/community-bookstore/product/directory-book**. It's a little dated at this point, so you'll want to double check before contacting any communities found in the book. But there are useful charts and graphs that make the book worthwhile even if not fully up-to-date.

It's easy to get overwhelmed when researching the many intentional communities out there. None of the online search tools are very sophisticated, so find a way to save your searches. Community seekers will often create a document listing their favorites or even a spreadsheet to organize the communities with columns for things like location, what they like, don't like, and website or contact info.

5. Be Thoughtful and Prepared When Contacting and Visiting Intentional Communities

There is much to say about how to best plan your community visit, what to expect, how to be a great guest, what to pack, etc. Refer to the full guide on How to Visit Intentional Communities at **communityfinders.com/visiting-communities**. Most im-

Alegría Village in Costa Rica.

Photos courtesy of Cynthia Tina

Lebensgarten Community in Germany.

portant: always, ***always*** contact a community before visiting. Never just show up uninvited. Remember that these are people's private homes, not tourist destinations!

Most communities are open to visitors unless otherwise noted on their directory listing or website. Most larger and more established communities have specific programs for visitors, such as a monthly tour, experience week, volunteer programs, or other workshops and retreats. Their website will detail what opportunities are available. For smaller and newer communities, your visit will likely be arranged on a case-by-case basis. You'll need to work with them to find a mutually suitable time for your visit.

Some communities are not open to visitors or are open only during certain times of year, such as the warmer summer months. Some communities have overnight accommodations in the community; for some (especially cohousings) it's a guest room, while for others it is a campsite. Others have no overnight accommodations, but are open to day visitors.

When visiting a community: visit as you would someone's private home. Be respectful, follow the rules, bring a thank you gift, clean up after yourself, ask if it's okay to take photos or go in certain areas. Don't expect everyone to roll out the red carpet for you. Folks in community have busy lives too. During and after the visit, make space for quiet reflection on the experience. Make multiple return visits (if you can) to be sure you didn't just catch them on an off-day the first time.

When contacting a community: keep in mind that most communities receive many inquiries from people like you who are curious or want to visit. It could be someone's full-time job at a community just to respond to all the inquiries! But too often, this isn't someone's job. They are a volunteer who is trying to keep up with the communication while juggling whatever else is going on in their life and community. Be kind to them and keep your message brief. Keep it specific and friendly. You can find a Template for Contacting a Community at **communityfinders.com/contacting-an-intentional-community**. If you feel the need to share more about yourself, link to your website or social media account, or attach a separate document.

Sadly, you may never hear back from a community you were excited about. Wait a week and then try again, or try a different method. Call if you emailed them the first time. If there are still crickets after that, let it go and trust it wasn't meant to be.

There could be a whole variety of reasons why a community doesn't respond that have nothing to do with you and your message. There could be conflict in the group, changing of roles, closing to visitors, etc. But just in case, review

your email with a critical eye. Do you sound like someone who will bring value to their group? Does your language align with the kind of wording on their website? Are you being too eccentric off the bat? Adjust accordingly and try contacting another place. Never fear, there are more communities in the sea!

6. Evaluate Communities to Find Your Forever Home

As mentioned before, finding an intentional community can be equated to finding a life partner. In the early days of your search process it's important to go on many "dates." Go visit as many communities as you can, even the ones that aren't on the top of your list. Get a feel for what's out there. This way you will:

- Learn more about what you like and don't like in community.
- Have a better sense of comparison for when you do find the one for you.
- Gain community experience, which you can add to your resume.

Some people find that they love the journey of visiting communities so much that they just want to keep on visiting for the richness of it. For others their path veers into new directions based on all the life experience gained. A few find that nothing quite feels like a fit and they decide to try to start a community or go back to life outside formal communal living. Others find that the community they love has a waiting list, so patience is required. All could be possibilities for you.

And some people, after weeks or years of searching, feel as if they have found something worth investing more time into. They have found a relationship worth cultivating—a community to call home. Then the real adventure begins!

Deciding on a community to join is as much an art as a science. We all have different ways we go about making big decisions. Some of us like to jump in with two feet, others carefully analyze every nuance of the options, and others rely on long conversations with trusted friends. Be sure to return to your notes from your past community visits and ask the current residents as many questions as you need to feel comfortable with the decision. Keep in mind that they will be asking you questions too! This relationship is a two way street! You both will need to feel it is a fit.

Membership processes in intentional communities all look different, but the foundation (as with any relationship) should be transparency, trust, and crystal clear communication, especially when any money or housing is exchanged. Make sure you understand exactly how you join the community, expectations while living there, and how you leave.

Your Journey into Intentional Community

Of course, finding a community doesn't happen in six linear steps. The road is winding and sometimes we don't end up where we want to go. The secret is to enjoy the journey just as much as the destination.

And don't feel you need to go at it alone! Every day more and more people are done with life as usual and ready to try intentional living within community. The Community Finders Circle, at **communityfinders.com/finderscircle**, is one place to come together to share resources, compare notes, and support each other.

Making the move into communal life can be a big life transition. It may involve:

- selling your current home;
- hitting the road for weeks or months;
- changing careers or retiring;
- figuring out cooperative living skills;
- navigating all new relationships.

The process can be very exciting...and very stressful. The Finders Circle is designed to maximize each circle member's confidence and minimize stress, with a team of people supporting one another to get into a community that's the closest to each participant's ideal as possible. Weekly activities including group calls, sessions with community leaders, templates, guides, and more keep everyone on track with goals. If you have questions about the program or the one-to-one matchmaking service, they are welcome at **communityfinders.com/contact**.

Good luck and enjoy your community journey!

Cynthia Tina is a coach and consultant in the field of intentional communities. She's the founder of CommunityFinders (communityfinders.com), offering programs to help people join and start values-driven residential communities. She's also the founder of Ecovillage Tours (ecovillagetours.com), bringing people on inspirational journeys to sustainable communities. She has visited more than 150 intentional communities around the world, including the Vermont ecovillage where she lives in her self-built passive solar home.

Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina.

How Do You Find a Community to Join?

By Nivi Achanta

Loneliness is on the upswing. According to Google's N-Grams viewer, which shows the frequency of internet search terms, mentions of "loneliness" in books, newspapers, and other media have risen dramatically between the 1960s and 2019 (see graphic, page 35). The turn of the decade hasn't helped—2020's overlapping social, environmental, and public health crises have exacerbated a loneliness epidemic. According to renowned psychologist Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad, loneliness heightens our health risks[1] as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has made social isolation one of his top concerns while in office. The UK has even appointed[2] a Minister of Loneliness.

However, the infrastructure that defines our lives—whether it's housing, land use, transportation, media, *anything*, really—doesn't support an interdependent lifestyle. Finding community can be expensive and time-consuming and is undervalued by our current socioeconomic models. And perhaps, the biggest problem of all: **we are not trained, as individuals, to find community!**

How do we find a community that makes us feel like we truly belong? Especially in the age of information overload, where "community" is misleadingly tossed around everywhere (following an Instagram account! listening to a podcast! reading a book!), how do we find a group of people who make us feel seen, known, and at home?

My own journey to finding community

The definition of community I use is adapted from Tatiana Figuereido (who adapted it from bell hooks). Here's the definition I'm working with.

"A community is a group of people who come together to nurture every member's growth and belonging."

Filtering for ***growth*** and ***belonging*** has been critical in my own pursuit of community. It explains why simply ***existing*** in a group isn't enough. It explains why happy hours at work aren't enough to make you feel like you have a "work family," or why neighborhood block parties can feel superficial. On the flipside, it explains why some of the best communities I've been a part of have existed only on the internet—shocking!

Over the past few years, I've made space for two thoughts that can seem conflicting at first, but fit together perfectly in my journey:

1. The internet is a special place for creating belonging. Investing in online communities can be an extremely worthwhile use of time.
2. Geographical and local communities are crucial for well-being and resilience.

I want to share with you an example of each in my own life.

My life-changing internet community

When the pandemic started in 2020, I was invited to a weekly call titled "Let's Stay In Happy Hour" by a woman I'd met only once before in person. I almost didn't go, because I didn't consider internet connections to be "real" ***or*** necessary community building blocks at the time.

Three years later, our call is still going regularly. It's one of the most vulnerable and supportive communities I've ***ever had in my life.*** One of the women I've seen numerous times online—but only twice in person—even had the crucial role of Wedding Storyteller when I got married in August 2023.

My unparalleled local community

In the beginning of 2021, my partner and I moved to one of those typical mid-rise apartments in North Seattle. It's not a building you'd think of when you summon the image of a tight-knit community. It's not the type of place that's known for saying hi to your neighbors or sharing meals or relying on one another in times of crisis.

So, how to explain that in a world of tech bro individualistic culture, we made a group of new friends, all within walking distance, interested in coming together intentionally to build community structures for a better tomorrow?

I have some theories.

Finding an online community that feels real

Since loneliness is the default in many of our lives, it can be hard to recognize it as the water we are swimming in. When I first started scouring the internet in 2019 to "follow people" in the social and environmental justice space as I built my company Soapbox Project[3], I didn't realize I was actively searching for connection. I thought I just wanted resources that would help me out.

Like any good socially conscious millennial entrepreneur, I took to Twitter. That seemed to be The Place to have conversations on justice with other activists, founders, investors, and more. I went on a following rampage—after all, I didn't want to feel FOMO, right?

Months went by. Being on Twitter was cool and useful, but I didn't quite find myself having *conversations* with anyone. Yes, I self-righteously argued with a couple folks, but something was missing.

One day, one of the gazillion people I followed on Twitter posted something

about a social media audit. Three hours later, I was almost done unfollowing most of my "Following" list. I realized with genuine shock that I *truly had nothing in common* with 90 percent of the people I was following. No wonder I didn't make a single new friend!

It didn't even take *one month* after my Twitter cleanse to find people who would later become Soapbox Project's staunchest supporters and even my best friends. I realized that, with a few guiding principles, I could make profoundly deep connections on the internet.

Here are five things that helped me:

• Social media *can* equate to "real" community—if you use it right. Tools like Twitter/X, Meta, and LinkedIn *can* be fertile ground for deep connections, but YOU have to be clear on what you're seeking. It's far more powerful to make a handful of 1:1 connections than to shout into the void 300 times a year.

• Similarly, active membership in one to three communities is far more effective than passively lurking in 30 different online groups.

• Interest-based groups (usually hosted on platforms like Slack, Circle, Discord, Telegram, etc.) can be fantastic places to find "real" community online. Many of these groups have overtly articulated values, smaller meetups, and opportunities for non-transactional networking.

• Clear values are the best filter for if a community is for you. If an online community hasn't posted their values, that may be a sign that they're not proceeding with intention.

• A great community has opportunities for large group, small group, and 1:1 connection. When thinking of joining an online community, look for those three levels. Most importantly, commit to actually showing up. Joining a paid community is a great accountability mechanism to engage!

It can be as simple as this once you make these mindset shifts:

Step 1: Find community
Step 2: Show up
Step 3: Repeat

In-person community is trickier than it seems

I found an unparalleled sense of belonging in 2019 through my internet exploration, and I couldn't stop mulling over one missing puzzle piece: ***why wasn't I feeling the same sense of belonging in "real life"?***

Then, in March 2020, as the pandemic took hold, my musings turned into a full-blown quest.

I am lucky enough to be in the minority of one in five Americans[4] who reports having close friends. In the (literally) darkest times of the pandemic, as we approached winter, my partner and I were living with my best friend and her now-husband. We were having a fantastic time, all things considered.

But all around me, I could see only loneliness and heartbreak.

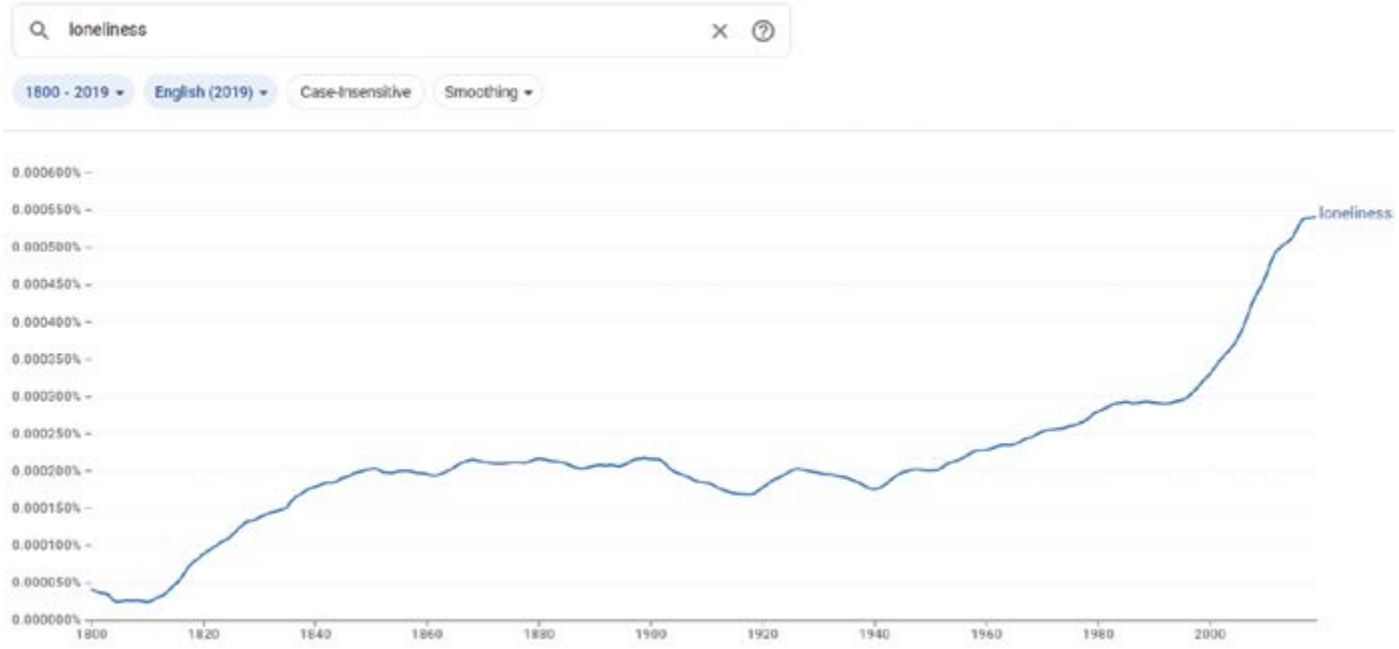
People didn't seem to have a clue how to make real friends online, nor did they seem equipped to have people in-person to go on socially distanced walks with, check in with, or anything else that resembled community.

In 2021, as restrictions lifted and vaccines rolled out...that loneliness didn't seem to go away.

In-person community is trickier than it seems.

According to Kat Vellos, author of *We Should Get Together,* proximity, frequency, compatibility, and commitment are all important seeds in a thriving garden of connection. In other words, where you live—having close friends in your neighborhood and seeing them often—really matters!

Many of us are not fortunate enough to see these seeds of connection planted at all. I am one of the lucky ones—from 2021 to 2023, I have somehow made



15+ new friends within a 10-minute walk from me. I had the privilege of proximity thanks to the walkable nature of Fremont, the Seattle neighborhood I live in. I took the initiative to ensure we had frequency, going on walks with new acquaintances until we became friends. I had luck on my side for compatibility—phew! And finally, my new friends and I shared a commitment to the hard work of keeping our friendship gardens healthy and thriving.

Some weeks we see each other every day. We go on bike rides in the summer and have cozy game nights in the winter. We go on spontaneous walks in the middle of the day and we can co-work at our local cafe whenever we feel like. We drop off medicine for each other when we're sick. We celebrate with each other. We grieve together.

Alas, this is rare. This kind of life—the kind that I believe every human deserves—takes hard work, luck, and lots of privilege.

Creating safe and connected neighborhoods when our society isn't set up for it

Society, and American society in particular, is not set up for safe and connected neighborhoods. Safety for certain groups comes at the direct expense and exploitation of others.

However, it is my belief that when we are privileged enough to have a safe, connected neighborhood, **we must claim this privilege.** We must learn from the profound joy this can bring and do everything we can to make our experience structural.

Here's my rough sketch of a roadmap to a connected, communal life. I hope we can build on this together!

1. Meet your neighbors.

Meeting your neighbors is an act of resistance against the mass-produced, low-quality American Dream that's handed to us—one where everybody lives behind their fences and outsources care of their kids and elders to the market economy. Meeting your neighbors takes courage. Someone needs to make the first move. I was featured in this *Washington Post* article about making friends in multifamily apartment buildings[5]. Perhaps that will help you.

2. Find a way to generate momentum with a few new friends. This will probably include some form of online community building.

Here's where the physical and digital world meet so beautifully. The reason I have my incredible community in Fremont is because one of the people who regularly read the Soapbox Project newsletter[6] (which I write weekly) reached out upon hearing I was moving to Seattle. We met up in November 2020 at a coffee shop in Fremont before I decided to move there. I took a chance on Sophie, who was almost a complete stranger, and moved to the building next to her. Three years later, she was a bridesmaid at my wedding. Thank you, internet!

Once you meet your neighbors, there are so many ways to stay in touch! Maybe you'll text someone to borrow sugar. Maybe you'll go on weekly walks! Maybe you'll meet even more neighbors on your apartment bulletin board and gather for monthly potlucks! Once you have 1:1 connections with a few people you care about, you will be an unstoppable friend-maker.

3. Brainstorm rituals that shift power back into communal structures.

At this point, you're probably experiencing how life-changing it is to have good friends in proximity. You have people to call if you're locked out. Your friends can water your plants when you're out of town. It's amazing. Now, it is up to you to use your newfound joy to ***create structural change.***

What are some *structures* you can put into place to increase interdependency? Maybe you go on grocery runs together and realize that life is more fun and less polluting when you share a car. Maybe you take turns cooking larger meals and you learn that you only have to cook twice a week while eating more fresh food. The possibilities are endless, and you have the power to spark change in other people's lives by sharing the stories of what you're doing.

4. Create a new culture for your in-person community.

In my Fremont friend group, asking for help is the default. Moving a couch is never a burden. It's just something we do together.

Thanks to the friends I've made here, activism is more fun and effective. We love our community structures so much and we know that we need this kind of thing to keep existing. So we advocate for affordable housing, equitable land use, green space, bike lanes, you name it. And because we've created a culture of local change, our voices are actually being heard.

5. Advocate actively for the world you want to live in.

My biggest nightmare is the American Dream. So when I met a woman who lived in multigenerational urban cohousing[7], I discovered a whole new world of possibilities!

Cohousing isn't feasible for me right now but I have my next step. I'm piloting a pop-up version of a community center in my Seattle neighborhood where people can make new friends and make a difference. This will be a space where people can come after work to connect, build community, and do something to actively improve the place we live. In other words, it'll be a (super duper fun) social space for social justice!

Everyone's advocacy looks different, but once you've embarked on your community journey, you can use your privilege as a tool for ***everyone*** to have safe communities where they live. That is such a special thing, and YOU can be here to chart this course.

Nivi Achanta is the founder and CEO of Soapbox Project, a community platform that helps busy professionals conquer their climate anxiety. Soapbox Project combines personal responsibility, collective action, and fun! Nivi works, speaks, and writes at the intersection of sustainability, corporate engagement, and community building. When she's not working on social change, you can find her in Seattle reading 100+ books a year, baking sourdough, and karaoke-ing with friends.

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We Found Our Neo-Nomad, Telepresence-Enabled Intentional Community

By Dr. Gus Lott

While using the advanced search feature in the Foundation for Intentional Community's directory (ic.org/directory), I discovered the search criteria "mobile" under the category Rural/Urban/Etc. Finding this mobile label started me thinking of our intentional community search experience. Later, participating in the FIC survey and interview by Dr. Zach Rubin on military service and intentional community living spurred me to author this article.

Our intentional community introduction was while visiting family members Jenny Upton and Dan Questenberry at the Shannon Farm Community.[1] Hearing Jenny and Dan talk about how Shannon works and what community means initiated our community quest that continues some 40 years later. We've been FIC members for many years.

Our community search accelerated as we approached my retirement as a Naval cryptologist. Our family moved seven times in those 22 years. Following my retirement in 1998, our home-based teleworking model became the context from which we continued discovering community.

We eventually settled in the rural Texas Hill Country[2], splitting the difference between east and west coasts. We searched FIC directory-listed communities around us, but nothing seemed to fit our lifestyle. Most were student, religious, or rooted residential groups. Our finding-community dilemmas were these:

- How do you coalesce within a fixed-location, traditional intentional community if you are a frequent, even seasonal, traveler?
- How do you develop and maintain a community when on the road?

"FIC defines an intentional community as a group of people who have chosen to live together or share resources on the basis of common values."[3] In a broader view, Linda Woodrow's definition struck a chord with us: "Communities are groups of people who care enough about each other to constantly monitor each other's lives, find them interesting, want to know and help and support." Neither the FIC's nor Linda's definition require a fixed-place or continuous face-to-face monitoring.

Our intentional community definition became a hybrid of our landed sticks-and-bricks basecamp plus our frequent travel-based excursions. Our wheeled residence was a 2004, 30 ft. Airstream Classic travel trailer (232 sq. ft.). We traveled often, spending as much as 40 percent of our nights each year in our recreational vehicle (RV). We used our RV as home while working at a client's location. While transiting between our Texas basecamp and our job sites, we frequented national parks, national forests, other public lands, and private campgrounds.[4] We occasionally "mooch-docked" at relatives' and friends' homes.[5]

As we traveled, we encountered many different neo-nomad communities who spend partial or full time on the road. They shared interests, gathered frequently, provided mutual support and encouragement, and stayed in touch.

We encountered the snowbird intentional communities who amassed annually at warmer-climate RV parks.[6] Many snowbirds remain connected for decades. We met the traveling professional intentional communities of nurses, medical technicians, and doctors who roam the US filling vacancies via multi-month contracts.[7] We heard how these traveling pros stayed in touch, shared resources, and crossed paths, intentionally or otherwise.

We met many traveling families who live in their RV and form a nomadic teleworking or telecommuting community.[8] One example was a couple from Austin, Texas, who were living full-time in a 25 ft. Airstream International trailer with two large dogs. They were one of the

Table 1: FIC-Affiliated and Escapees/Xscapers Community Contrasts

FIC-Affiliated	Escapees/Xscapers
Land-static	Geo-fluid
Real estate asset based	Personal property asset based, minimalist enforced by limited space, weight, and power
Smaller group	Larger group with interest subgroups
Common ideology and economics	Diverse population with opportunities sharing
Longer-term, legally intertwined commitment	Dynamic association

dozen-or-so nomadic teleworkers present at an RV park in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Their plan was to spend winter near family in the area of Phoenix, Arizona. After that, they were sunbirding (relocating north) to spend summer with a community of fellow teleworkers.

There are full-timer communities that meet up and share teacher roles in road-schooling, the RVer's form of home schooling.[9] There are neo-nomadic communities similar to the FIC model that share a geo-dynamic lifestyle and common demographics, such as RVing Women[10], Sisters-on-the-Fly[11], and Rainbow RVers.[12]

The largest neo-nomad community gathering is the annual Quartzite convergence.[13] Each winter, the small community of Quartzite, Arizona swells from about 2200 population to several hundred thousand. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) campgrounds and dispersed camping areas become home to many communities.[14] One such gathering is the VanDweller community that assembles annually for the Rubber Tramp Rendezvous (RTR).[15]

Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century by American journalist Jessica Bruder describes another neo-nomadic community. Her nonfiction book is about the phenomenon of older Americans who, following the 2007-2009 Great Recession, adopted transient lifestyles traveling around the United States in search of seasonal work.[16] Ms. Bruder describes how these senior neo-nomads work together, struggle together, share knowledge and resources, and have genuine concern for each other's welfare—effectively creating an intentional community.[17, 18]

All these neo-nomadic communities are intentional. Is there an encompassing neo-nomad lifestyle infrastructure that supports an intentional community as Linda describes?

We think we found our answer in the 45-year-old Escapees RV Club community.[19] The Escapees is one of the largest recreational vehicle organizations, offering landed co-ops, RV parks, gatherings, care for those with medical needs, mail forwarding, discount programs, tailored education, and commercial partnerships. We've discovered that Escapees is a geo-diverse intentional community that otherwise spans nearly every category in the FIC directory.

Xscapers is a subset of the Escapees, who describe themselves as: "A community with a passion for an active and free-spirited life of travel and adventure. We seek to escape the traditional life pattern of a career, a house and accumulation of possessions in favor of a more minimalist and nomadic lifestyle that focuses on collecting experiences instead of things. Deciding to make this change now, rather than waiting for a 'someday' that may never come."[20]

On their website, the Xscapers describe methods of knowing, helping, and supporting this younger and working mobile family community. We've participated in the annual Bash, posted job offerings on the job board, taken RVing lifestyle courses, become active in "birds-of-a-feather" communities, and kept in touch with other members.

What have we found as common threads between FIC-associated communities and the Escapees and Xscapers communities? The primary linkage is as Linda describes: "people who care enough about each other to constantly monitor each other's lives, find them interesting, want to know and help and support." A neo-nomadic intentional community can develop and thrive with a supportive infrastructure such as Escapees.

What have we found as differences between FIC-affiliated, traditional ICs and the Escapees and Xscapers-affiliated intentional communities? Table 1 summarizes our top five contrasting characteristics.

As many seniors do, we've downsized. We now travel in our 19-foot Escape fiberglass travel trailer (105 sq. ft.). Combining that with our Sprinter van, we are

more agile travelers. Known as boondocking, our RV can function for weeks completely off-grid using solar panels and a non-liquid saturated (composting) toilet.[21] We maintain interconnectivity anywhere thanks to our cellular phone plan and StarLink Roam.[22]

Just like some ecovillages[23], we work hard to minimize our environmental impact. Escapees and Xscapers champion the Leave-No-Trace approach to the use of any lands, especially our shared public lands.[24] Our small trailer's environmental and climate footprint is lower compared to traditional travelers.[25] We can save money while adventuring compared to the traditional fly, drive, and hotel travel model.[26]

We find the Escapees community membership to be diverse. We agree with the Escapees code of conduct, offering an accepting, safe, and responsible community environment.[27]

We are learning more on how we can age adroitly in our hybrid community. We are following the FIC's Aging in Community movement. We learned a lot from FIC courses Examining Intentional Community Living for Elders Webinar; Starting an Intentional Community; Legal Basics for Forming Communities; and, Exploring Community for Aging Well.[28]

When will we need to come in from the road? Time will tell. As a relative told us, "Go when you can, because you don't know when you can't." Perhaps our evolving hybrid community will continue with our landed Texas basecamp and our RVing community while adding an Escapees co-op park and a senior assisted living intentional community.

The FIC should consider a closer alliance with the neo-nomadic intentional communities. An FIC directory text search for "recreational vehicle" provided 371 results, with many communities listing "RV" as a household type.[29] Escapees and Xscapers have more than 60,000 members, 100 employees, and thousands of volunteers.[30] We've found both communities share common core ideas and principles.

Younger families and retirees are finding the full-time nomadic lifestyle to be a solution to the high costs of landed living. Sharing landed community facilities with mobile residents may encourage the younger, teleworking families to join landed ICs when they leave the road. Providing mobile docking spaces can introduce traditional and mobile intentional communities to each other while providing an income source at the landed village.

While we don't live in a formal, land-static intentional community, we have found our neo-nomadic hybrid intentional community model. Overall, we see the FIC directory's "mobile" category to be an intentional community opportunity, a pot at the end of the rainbow, for everyone.

Dr. Gus Lott continues as an avid RVer, beginning in 1981 with the family's Volkswagen Vanagon Westfalia camper. He continues his second career as a licensed Professional Engineer via the engineering firm, YarCom® Inc. Gus earned a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, and he designs and builds renewable and sustainable energy systems for landed and mobile customers. He has been an FIC member for more than 20 years.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Gus Lott

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Growing a Garden of Friends

By Dena Smith Ellis

Gardening has always been an aspiration of mine. Maybe it is my Liverpudlian grandmother's blood coursing through my veins that influences my horticultural hankerings. Yet, the reality of having my own garden has always seemed a bit out of reach due to my busy life of work, family, and community commitments, as well as a lifetime of extensive traveling. The possibility of me putting down roots—literally or figuratively—has been containerised by circumstances and therefore I've had to make due with a collection of nomadic potted plants over the years, which would eventually get dispersed among friends as parting gifts when that time inevitably arose.

Ironically, I am quite passionate about sustainable community development and have been involved in it nearly everywhere that I've lived, especially on the Big Island of Hawaii (also known as Hawaii Island), which is where I lived for the eight years leading up to my move to the UK, and where I met and married my best friend, Graham Ellis, who happens to be a Brit from South London. We were both living in an "artistic ecovillage," a lively community of circus and theatrical performers that Graham founded 25 years prior to my arrival there.

Gardening in a tropical jungle on the slopes of the most active volcano in the world is a much different experience to that of gentile plots in rural England. It is raw, wild, and untamed. The 10-acre lot that we lived on had a thriving food forest that Graham had planted in the early years of the community's development which flourished and provided us with most of our daily nourishment: bananas, coconuts, pineapples, papaya, guava, passionfruit, breadfruit, soursop, citrus, avocados, Okinawan spinach, and other exotic fruits and vegetables. We also had an army of insectivorous chickens that assailed the plethora of tropical creepy-crawlies and produced the most high-quality eggs that tempted even me, a steadfast herbivore since the mid-'90s. This low-maintenance form of growing food suited us perfectly as our life was a circus in many ways.

Most importantly, Graham had grown an abundant "garden" of family and friends that had started with his seeds of passion for the circus arts, which he brought with him from his years of living in the Pacific Northwest of Canada, and sprouted into a children's social circus called HICCUP (Hawaii Island Community Circus Unity Project). As this garden grew, so did his love for ecological, sustainable, and simple living. This is where our paths converged. My children attended his blooming circus camps, I got involved in the Hawaii Sustainable Community Alliance (a nonprofit ecological advocacy organisation which Graham founded), and the rest is history (or herstory, in this case).

When circumstances arose several years ago that necessitated us to transplant ourselves to England, I was devastated at the loss of our island community that we left behind. Our lives were deeply rooted so the upheaval was jolting. The transglobal relocation was a delicate and laborious process which had a multidimensional effect on us: physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, economically, socially, and environmentally.

After our high-profile lives in Hawaii, where we were both involved in many community leadership projects and organisations, it felt a relief at first to slow down and anonymously coalesce into British culture. The holiday home we purchased in the Sussex seaside town of St. Leonard's—just a half mile from the care home where Graham's mother lived—was like a flowerpot that contained our lives of suspended animation while we contemplated our next steps and searched for the ideal community for us to put down our roots again.

When a suitable house became available in May 2021 in our

top choice of Rye—an ancient cinque port village—we were overjoyed as it also came with spacious gardens and the potential, at last, of growing our own food again. After taking a few months to get firmly planted, we were finally ready to explore the social opportunities in Rye. While walking home from town one evening, we happened upon a banner out front of the community centre around the corner from our house that advertised a weekly gathering of the Quakers. Although we didn't identify as such at the time, we each came from an eclectic liberal ideology which we found greatly aligned with the Quakers' inclusive nature. We decided to take a leap of faith and attend that Sunday.

As we walked into the meeting room, we were warmly greeted by a small circle of smiling faces like sunflowers turning towards the sun. As we took our seats, a feeling of serenity immediately embraced me, and over the next hour of silent contemplation, my heart was filled with gratitude for this new group of Friends. After the gathering, we were invited to the Rye Conservation Society's annual garden party later that day, where we met and chatted with many lovely people and sowed more seeds of friendship.

From that day, many lovely relationships have sprouted and bloomed. New friends referred us to their friends, as well as to various groups, clubs, events, and gatherings that have further added to our new vibrant social garden.

One of our favourite communal events is the weekly gathering and work party at the Rye Community Garden on Saturday mornings. It has provided us with so much nourishment: both whole foods and soul food. We both fell in love with the plants and the people so we found ourselves immersed back in community service again as I volunteered as chair of trustees for the garden and Graham's composting project blossomed into a new community interest company called "Community Compost Solutions."

A holistic approach to living is important to me and my family. Currently a board-certified health and wellness coach, I have spent nearly 30 years studying, teaching, and working in the field of natural and integrative lifestyle medicine.

Over the last two and a half years here in Rye, we've led many workshops and talks, including those held at a sustainability living forum that we cofounded that tackles questions such as "How can we live more simply so that others may simply live?" With climate change as such a hot topic and sobering reality, this group provides an opportunity for us to come together as a community to discuss our concerns, ideas, and suggestions so we can devise hopeful plans for our future.

I also led a one-day retreat entitled, "The Path of Most Resilience: Inspired Action for an Uncertain Future." Rather than continuing to take the path of least resistance of complaisance, this bold and inspiring workshop focused on ways that we can rise up together to pave a new path by building our resilience: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

At some point, I realized that I've actually been a gardener my whole life—in a metaphorical sense—in planting seeds of friendship, connection, and awareness everywhere that I've lived, a bit akin to the story of American pioneer Johnny Appleseed. As a native of Seattle in the state of Washington, which is the largest producer of apples in the United States, I guess it's quite an apropos metaphor for me.

"Love is the seed of all hope. It is the enticement to trust, to risk, to try, to go on."—Gloria Gaither

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Dena Smith Ellis has planted roots in the quaint cinque port village of Rye on the southeastern coast of England with her husband, Graham Ellis, along with their two cats and revolving door of family members and friends who come to visit. She's passionate about sowing seeds of awareness of the benefits of a healthy and conscious lifestyle, as well as cultivating connections through sustainable community development and networking. She can be reached at denasmithellis@gmail.com.

Photos courtesy of Dena Smith Ellis

"RAINBOW MAGIC"

Half a Century of Peace, Love, and Free Food in the Woods

By Stephen Wing

Fourth of July World Peace celebration, Colorado 2006.

Garrick Beck

So what's the point of belonging to something that includes everyone with a bellybutton?

Every summer several thousand folks converge on a National Forest somewhere in the United States to answer that question for themselves. At the end of an hour's hike into the woods, they find themselves in the midst of a working cooperative community—a diverse and colorful crowd encamped in buses, tipis, and tents, with dozens of open-air kitchens where anyone can volunteer and everyone eats for free. At dawn on the 4th of July the camp falls silent, thousands join hands in an open meadow to pray for world peace. On the 7th, a smaller circle sits down to talk, and to listen, until a consensus emerges for the approximate whereabouts of next year's encampment. A dedicated crew stays for a couple more weeks to recycle the trash and re-seed the trails, and like its namesake the Rainbow Family Gathering is gone.

Or is it?

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August 1994, the 25th anniversary of Woodstock: Through all the solemn professional reportage and smug sensationalism in the media coverage of "Woodstock II," you could sense an undertone of something else: the astonishment of a pack of cynical middle-aged reporters that the magic of Woodstock I was still alive and well. No matter how they tried to contain it, in story after story and photo after photo the enchantment kept leaking through.

What the press didn't know is that experienced Rainbow gatherers had a lot to do with keeping people healthy, fed, sanitary, and safe at both Woodstock II sites. The Bethel festival, once it was officially canceled, quickly turned into a medium-sized Rainbow gathering with a stage. Even the Saugerties festival, for all its commercialism, would have been a logistical disaster without the practical experience of over two decades of Rainbow gatherings.

That same month on the other end of the continent, when the extremely well-publicized and poorly-organized Global Drum Celebration at the Grand Canyon finally took place, it happened on a site where a large Rainbow contingent had set up camp after withdrawing from the initial confusion and chaos. A similar thing happened when the Great Peace March of 1986 dissolved in its first weeks, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, in Occupy camps across the country in 2011, and on any number of lesser-known occasions: Rainbow expertise at consensus

decision-making, creative problem-solving, passing the hat, living off the grid, making friends in local communities, spontaneous cooperation, and volunteer labor stepped in and found a way. In a word: *magic.*

You see, it wasn't Woodstock that created the magic in the first place; it was the magic that created Woodstock. The worldwide Rainbow Family of Living Light, though not directly inspired by Woodstock, has expanded the legacy of the legendary music festival into a vision of all-inclusive community and has carried that vision into the 21st century more or less intact.

More accurately, the vision has carried us; a leaderless non-organization like Rainbow could only have manifested 51 annual July 4th Gatherings and countless smaller regional and international gatherings by learning to channel the magic, as a lightning rod attracts lightning and safely channels it to the ground.

At the 1994 Wyoming Gathering, for instance, 2,000 people formed a bucket brigade and put out a nearby forest fire on the 3rd of July; on July 4th, they prayed for peace; on July 5th, it snowed. During the 1987 North Carolina Gathering, a lengthy drought in the Southern Appalachians auspiciously came to an end. The following year in Texas it happened again, and the mayor of Zavalla, Texas, personally came out to the Gathering to express his thanks. It happened a third time at the 1998 Arizona Gathering, which began during a Forest Service Fire Ban. This time, when it rained, it rained nowhere in Arizona except the Gathering site. And invariably each time with the rain came a rainbow.

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Why aren't the Rainbow Gatherings as widely known as the original Woodstock, or the Rainbow offshoot known as Burning Man? Maybe the magic has been protecting us. Oddly enough, we consistently get more coverage in the mainstream media than the alternative press, with the notable exception of Communities. Of course the usual media spin is, *Look at the picturesque, eccentric hippies! Haven't they heard the fad is over?* But that hackneyed image of leftover acid freaks and wannabe Indians serendipitously filters out everyone except the few who are attuned to the magic, and the even fewer who feel called to travel across the country and hike into the woods to see for themselves.

In the months and weeks before a Gathering, individual gathering enthusiasts do a lot of hard work entirely on their own initiative: studying topo maps and scouting a site; tapping a spring, running water lines, and installing filtration systems; building kitchens, bridges, ovens, a theater, a playground, even a library in the woods; holding an informational meeting in the nearest town; setting up infrastructure for parking, supply, sanitation, and more. But they do all this simply to create a space for folks to gather. The magic does the rest.

Of course the Rainbow Family has no monopoly on magic. Any gathering of the human tribe is magical, if you take away the profit and power motives (poof! nine-tenths of Western Civilization disappears)—because life itself is fundamentally *made* of magic, gathering is something we two-leggeds just naturally do, and if nothing gets in the way, then *presto!* Life happens, and it's magic.

It's the same magic that traditional cultures all over the world recognize and respect and have learned to channel in their ceremonial lives. The Rainbow Family, still rearing its third generation, has a long way to go. But over five decades, as we have practiced channeling and focusing the living magic sometimes called Spirit, we have gradually outgrown the '60s-centric label *counterculture* and become a viable culture in our own right. Or perhaps it's more accurate to call the Gathering an annual reunion of the broader countercultural movement that has been growing and deepening and maturing since the '60s to take its rightful place as a global alternative culture.

"Spirit" is a term that makes some people uncomfortable. But no one objects when we use the more inclusive term "love." Love

Fourth of July celebration, West Virginia 2005.

Joanee Freedom

Dinner circle, Wisconsin 2019.

Henry Fiddler

Fourth of July celebration, Nevada 1989.

Garrick Beck

Supper on the stove, Idaho 2001.

Grey Eagle

is the essence of every religion, but it pre-dates even the earliest human artifacts. Love is biology—our birthright as mammals, the thread that has connected generations of mothers and babies through the eons of evolution. Tribal societies are held together by love not just for their human families but for the wider community of life and land that nurtures them. Love is the heart of the intentional communities movement, prosaically but no less mysteriously known as *community glue.* Modern civilized folk have tragically neglected their innate ties to nature, but our love for our children is the only thing that can save us now as we hurtle headlong toward planetary catastrophe.

The Rainbow Gathering consists of countless acts of love disguised as sweaty labor, hot food, holding hands in a circle, singing and drumming around a campfire, herb walks, consensus process, medical care, sorting trash, freely offered expertise in yoga, permaculture, Sufi dancing, Tai Chi, massage, and other forms of healing...a chaotic chorus of what we call "heartsongs." It's the age-old dance of individuality in community, the deep fulfillment of playing a part in something greater than ourselves, whether tribe, watershed, or all of Creation. It's the bliss of service, giving and sharing, teaching and learning—love in all its many forms.

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Magic...Spirit...Love. No wonder the authorities are instinctively afraid of us! Why else would they declare the Gathering a "state of emergency" and spend millions on illegal roadblocks, armed patrols, and disinformation campaigns in the media? They can't seem to comprehend that free individuals can assemble peaceably and cooperatively without a hierarchical power structure like theirs. They too serve something greater than themselves, and in theory, it's the US Constitution. It seems to escape them that harassing a peaceful gathering violates the very definition of freedom enshrined in that document's First Amendment —freedom of assembly, association, worship, and expression.

What confuses them most is this notion of "Rainbow Family." Within their legalistic frame of reference, anything with a name must be a legal entity that falls under one subsection or another of the regulatory universe. What they don't get is that "Family" denotes not an organization but an *idea*. The astounding logistical feat that is a Gathering is motivated not by loyalty to a particular subset of humanity, but by an ethic of service to the entire human family, pragmatically defined as "everyone who shows up." No one is excluded except those who *exclude themselves* by showing up under orders and on the clock, wearing weapons, defying the fundamental tenets of Rainbow: peaceful coexistence and the gift economy.

To outlaw this alarming outbreak of freedom, the government bureaucrats must contort the rule of law into a pretzel of paradox. Individuals who break the law are duly ticketed or arrested, but the act of gathering itself is perfectly legal until the 75th person arrives. At that point a special Forest Service regulation kicks in, created just for us. To make the Gathering legal, one gatherer has to sign a permit on behalf of the rest of us—clearly a fraudulent act unless the rest of us have given our consent. To sign or not to sign: either way we are breaking the law. Ever since a civil court ruling in New Mexico pointed that out, the permit regulation has taken a back seat to other modes of official harassment. But it has sent a dozen gatherers to prison over the years, and it's still on the books.

Meanwhile, the US Forest Rangers whose job is to safeguard the forest find us perfectly willing to work with them to protect endangered species and keep the Gathering healthy and safe. We consistently get high marks for post-gathering cleanup and site restoration from District Rangers wherever we gather.

Many fine initiatives of the Baby Boom generation have reached a critical impasse. Where, the aging founders are wondering, are the young people to carry it on? Oddly enough, at the Rainbow Gathering this is not an issue. Fifty years on, a host of energetic, enthusiastic young folk are flooding in to shoulder the heavy lifting—including literal "sherpa duty," helping their unsteady elders down

the trail. Instead of "Turn on, tune in, and drop out," it's "Show up, plug in, and follow through." Many of them are nomads, traveling together in retrofitted schoolbuses from regional to regional, forever homeless but everywhere at home. These are the kids who are smart enough to see through the neon glitter of "Babylon," the so-called "real world," a culture that is merely a predatory economy in disguise, offering graduate degrees and careers, but no future. They instinctively seek out Rainbow for the same reason people join an intentional community, and many will indeed graduate to year-round communal living.

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Not that the Gathering is a trouble-free backwoods utopia. Ego trippers, substance abusers, predators, thieves, psychiatric patients off their meds—true to its name, the Rainbow Family is a microcosm of humanity. Working "security" is a key function handled by some of the more dedicated volunteers, including many combat veterans who see the Gathering as an antidote to their experience of war. In fact, the original Rainbow vision sprang from a synergistic convergence of '60s peaceniks and the Vietnam vets with their military training in outdoor survival.

The truth is, a lot of us are still at the kindergarten stage of our spiritual path, and more will always be arriving for their first Gathering. But the purpose of a culture, unlike a counterculture, is to provide a common framework for the lifelong spiritual growth of each member of the community. Our "Gathering of the Tribes" is so diverse that it includes even diametrically opposed spiritual and political camps. So what common framework can we offer?

As a neo-tribal non-indigenous Nation, we have no official doctrine or dogma except "Welcome Home!," "Wash your hands!," and "Dogs out of the kitchen!" No shared scripture or tradition other than "Give peace a chance," "All you need is love," and "No money-changing in the temple." No unifying ritual or mythology beyond circling in silence every 4th of July to invoke the spirit of world peace, each in our own way. Together we weave our divergent spiritual wanderings into a single harmonious fabric, creating a rainbow-hued spiritual path we walk together, each in our own way.

And this itself may be the secret of "Rainbow magic": *each in our own way.* The National Forest belongs equally to us all. Everyone is invited. No one is in charge. No one pays and no one gets paid. Anyone who wants to be a "leader" is thereby disqualified. But each person contributes what they can, what they have, what they *are:* their deepest passion, their most inspired gift, their unique genius and ingenuity.

Idealism may be out of fashion, but we all know people who base their lives on their ideals. Rainbow has no monopoly on idealism, but in the midst of a society dedicated to heartless competition for power and possessions, the Gathering is a place for the idealists of the world to come together and build a temporary alternate universe founded on their ideals, an open invitation offered to all who have eyes to see. Like a mushroom, it's the visible manifestation of a vast mycelial network of idealists working in myriad ways around the world, often undercover, to reclaim diversity, reconnect with nature, and raise the banner of peace. The Rainbow Family Gathering offers practical, irrefutable proof that—as an obscure bumper sticker puts it—"Love is real. Money is make-believe."

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It's like summer camp for grownups...a village of spiritual warriors...a wild party in the woods...a nostalgia festival for the '60s...a New Age convention without the nametag or the pricetag...a hobo jamboree...an anarchist free-for-all...a Dead show parking lot with trees...a barter fair...a political demonstration...a spiritual carnival...a social experiment…

Whatever you've heard, don't believe it. Don't believe the media, don't believe the rumors. You have to experience a Rainbow Gathering yourself to understand. But there's a catch: every Gathering is different. And every person you meet there will have a different opinion of what's actually going on. From the moment you arrive, the Gathering is what you make it.

Welcome Home!

No one person or group can represent or speak for the shared vision known as "Rainbow Family" or any Gathering held under that name; Stephen Wing writes and speaks only for himself. In 2018, when the Gathering came to his home state of Georgia, he compiled his poems about past Gatherings into a crowdfunded book, Proof of the Miraculous*, and gave away 400 copies at the Gathering. You'll find an updated version on his website, StephenWing.com, where you can subscribe to his blog and read, view, hear, and download a variety of other writings. His newest poetry collection is* Washed in the Hurricane, *praise-songs for Mother Earth and a wake-up call to all who love her.*

Grey Eagle

Lovin' Ovens, Idaho 2001.

Homemade bridge, Pennsylvania 1999 (left standing after the Gathering at the Forest Service's request).

Rob Savoye

Natives of One Mother

By Stephen Wing

17th Rainbow Family Gathering
Angelina National Forest, Texas, 1988

"Woman,"
the dying messenger cried out,
"behold your son—"

We all came out of different high schools,
facing our cafeteria trays again,
jogging in a dream in the middle of the gym class,
searching the faces in the hall
for the one that looks, watching for something
in the look that shines
and vanishes—

This can't be real, this can't be
how you conjugate the verb
"to live"—a Hollywood fistfight
in the parking lot, padded gangs
brawling under floodlights every
Saturday night, polished cruisers out
racing the stoplights—

One by one we came
to the woods.
By random wandering
in the thousand lost directions we found
the real country we'd pledged our hearts to
all those years
while we covered our hearts with our hands

(Country so quiet
it needs no name, country only its
yearning exiles have learned to call
"Peace")

Step by misstep, leap
by suicidal leap
into the black cavern inside
we groped to a true divinity, the temple
they cut down to build the churches,
the light we meditated on
Sunday after Sunday through the colored glass—

(Temple so ancient
it blooms again each spring and makes fruit,
sanctuary only the wounded even need to call
"Healing")

We gather in the fold of the unchurched
We, tired of preaching
We gather up the unloved
as disciples gathered crumbs after the feast
so that none go wasted
We, natives of one Mother, natives
of one another

We gather on the ground of our common birth
(we eat, we love,
we disagree, we defecate)
and put up the flowering tents of our belief:
colors as many as the gazes
that turn toward a single sunset, each
an outpost of the daylight
shining on a while
into the dark

We gather
under the vast flag of stars
to chant the pulse and breathing of one body
dancing on a hundred thousand feet
We feed our fire with sticks
of incarnated light,
grasp hands in one more circle around the sun

The brokenhearted young man
and the grieving woman must have looked
a long time into one another's faces
before they understood his last
broken parable: "Behold
your mother—"

The last campfire will outlive
the final lightbulb,
the living skin of the drum
will outlast the radio tower

We have always been sitting here
content with the night
and our suppers, staring through
the last silent coals into something
invisible and vanishing

The east is glowing. We have work to do.

Stephen Wing lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where he hosts an "Earth Poetry" workshop each season to explore the city's many urban greenspaces. He is the author of four books of poems and serves on the boards of the Lake Claire Community Land Trust and Nuclear Watch South. Visit him at www.StephenWing.com.

Jean Claude Ngoy and two youngest sons with Rocky Hill Cohousing folks.

Photos by Richard Getler

Welcome Home: A Cohousing Experience with Migrants

By David Entin and Lena Entin; photos by Richard Getler

In these troubled and turbulent times, can cohousing communities reach out to the world and in at least a small way make a difference? Our experiences over the last seven years in Rocky Hill Cohousing and adjacent communities suggest that the answer is, fortunately, Yes.

The Beginning

April 9, 2017: Several of us from the Northampton Cohousing Circle of Care drove to the nearest airport to greet newly arriving Congolese refugees. They were two young men in their 20s. They were dressed in light clothes and flip-flops though we still had a few mounds of snow left on the ground here in New England. They each carried a small bag. The way out of the airport was down stairs and they did not want to try the escalator, a device they had never seen.

This was the start, or maybe we should say the end, of an improbable journey. The Ngoy brothers, Olivier and Guylain, had traveled halfway around the world, from Burundi, Africa, to Nairobi to Amsterdam to New York to Bradley Airport (Hartford) and were sleep-deprived. We took them to their temporary apartment in Northampton, Massachusetts in the early evening so they could get some sleep. We wondered how these brothers would adjust to life in America.

Their family had lived in Goma, the major city in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the largest countries in Africa. But violence from militias and warring tribal groups had caused many peaceful citizens to flee across the eastern borders to Rwanda and Burundi. The Ngoy family of six fled to a refugee camp in Burundi. In the nearly 14 years they lived in Burundi two more children were born. In the refugee camp the children played soccer and occasionally went to school. They studied in French. The United Nations kept records of the family and after more than a decade the family was vetted and approved for refugee resettlement in the United States.

After all those years the Ngoy family was assigned to Catholic Charities of Springfield, Massachusetts, an official refugee resettlement agency as part of the US State Department's refugee program. At a time when Donald Trump was running for President in 2016, several Republican governors declared that no refugees should be sent to their states. The Northampton City Council passed a resolution welcoming refugees to our community. The Director of Catholic Charities traveled to nearby Northamp-

Lydia's wedding at Rocky Hill Cohousing Common House.

ton to ask for help in resettling refugees. At a large community meeting she asked citizens and groups to form Circles of Care to assist resettling refugee families. Rocky Hill and adjacent Pathways cohousing communities formed a Circle of Care which was the first approved by Catholic Charities. Ten members quickly signed up to participate and 33 other cohousing residents volunteered to serve as back-up when needed. The two Ngoy brothers were assigned to the Cohousing Circle of Care.

On the Ngoys' first full day in the United States, we introduced them to downtown Northampton. We took them out for pizza. They had heard of pizza, but said in Burundi only the rich ate pizza. We went into a local store, and, upon learning these were new refugees, the proprietor immediately offered them some free chocolates. Two days later the Circle of Care helped the brothers settle into permanent housing, a two-bedroom apartment not far from downtown and next to the Smith College Equestrian Center. We helped find some additional household items to complement the basic furniture provided by Catholic Charities. Then our Circle held a "welcome home" party for the two brothers.

In ensuing weeks, various Circle members assisted the brothers in seeking employment, getting rides, offering conversational experience with English, and securing foodstuffs at the Survival Center. We took them to a local clothing closet to outfit them with free clothes, especially for the cold winter. Members helped the brothers open bank accounts, learn to use their cell phones, and how to pay bills.

The Circle of Care met weekly with the brothers to assess their needs, initially using as interpreters a few French speakers in our community. We invited them to our weekly common meal. We got them bicycles to get around and travel to work. Olivier at first had a rather dangerous and lonely job in a local factory for several months and, with the help of a cohousing member, obtained a better, permanent job in the University of Massachusetts dining halls. Guylain began working in the meat department of the newly opened River Valley Cooperative food market. The brothers responded well to the training they received on the job and became valued employees. Both Olivier and Guylain played in a local soccer league; they were so good that they were always placed on separate teams.

Edouard, a third adult Ngoy, in his early 20s, arrived in September, 2017, and joined his older brothers. Edouard began working in the food preparation department of the food coop. Members of the Cohousing Circle of Care continued to help the three brothers adjust to life in America. Along with a caseworker from Catholic Charities, we helped them negotiate various bureaucracies and institutions. After several tries they passed the tests for driver's licenses and, with their savings from work, purchased used cars. Edouard took on a second job at a local restaurant, and Guylain did some extra work for a local painting contractor.

In February 2018, the rest of the Ngoy family arrived: parents Jean Claude and Nefesa, sister Lydia, aged 19, brother Baruani, who entered high school, and brother Isaka, who began elementary school. These five were assigned to a different Circle of Care. Where could this large family find satisfactory housing? As a result of a conversation in a cohousing "Dinner by Sixes," the entire Ngoy family moved into a large four bedroom/two bath house at Rocky Hill Cohousing and paid rent to the resident owner, who moved into a small basement in-law apartment of his house. We shot hoops with the brothers at our basketball stanchion and continued to welcome them to our weekly common meal. They planted a few vegetables in a plot in our community's garden. Isaka enjoyed running around our community with other cohousing youth and joined the local boys soccer league. Helping the Ngoy family with English was a continuing effort.

Five Years Later: 2023

It's hard to believe it is now more than five years since the Ngoy family arrived from East Africa. The family has adjusted to life in America, but continued to be close and maintain their customs. A brief account of where they are now will show how their lives have developed. Lydia took classes at the Center for New America and completed the curriculum for Certified Nursing Assistant. A few years after arrival she became engaged to a Congolese refugee who lived in Minneapolis. Lydia's husband, Abdul, completed college in the US and works as a construction contract engineer. Their elaborate Muslim wedding ceremony took place in the Rocky Hill Cohousing Common House. They now reside in Minnesota and are the proud parents of a baby girl.

Edouard was the next to marry. His wife is a Congolese refugee who completed high school in nearby Hartford, Connecticut, where they now reside and work in a pharmacy owned by her uncle. Edouard has dreams of opening an African restaurant in our area. Guylain married a cousin of Edouard's wife and now also lives in Connecticut. Guylain left his job at the food coop and works at the

University of Massachusetts dining halls.

Jean Claude Ngoy, an educated man and father of the family, has been doing laundry at a nearby motel. His wife, who lacked a formal education, worked washing dishes at a local bakery. The dining halls at the University have had difficulty hiring enough employees, so Olivier convinced his supervisor to hire his mother, as well as his brother Guylain. These jobs have security and full benefits of state employment. Jean Claude and his wife Nefesa and their two youngest sons qualified for and moved into a nonprofit-sponsored newly built, nearby, affordable home in Northampton. They moved out of their cohousing house in August 2022, and now have flowers and a small garden outside their new home.

In 2022 it had been five years since the first two Ngoy brothers arrived in the United States. Olivier was particularly interested in becoming an American citizen, which is possible after five years of residency. First he needed to apply and then pass the two tests. I offered a short course in American history and civics and another member of the Circle of Care tutored him in English. Olivier passed both tests and the interview. In June 2023, half a dozen members of the Cohousing Circle of Care went to the citizenship ceremony in the Springfield Federal District Court. We were all moved when Olivier went proudly forward to receive his certificate of naturalization. Forty-three other immigrants from more than 20 countries were also at this ceremony.

In June 2023, Baruani graduated from Northampton High School, where he was a popular student and a star on the soccer team. In the fall he enrolled at Westfield State University and plays on their soccer team; he is the first in his family to attend college. The family hosted a graduation party for Baruani in the Rocky Hill Cohousing Common House.

Olivier began living with Tanika Douglas, a cook he met in the University Dining Halls. Tanika is an African-American whose family came from the Caribbean. They have a son, Zion, who is now three years old. In June 2023, Olivier and Tanika qualified for a mortgage and purchased an older four bedroom/two bath house in nearby South Hadley. At about the same time his sister Lydia became a citizen in Minneapolis. Catholic Charities asked Olivier to apply for a caseworker position working with new refugees. Olivier began working in his new position in September 2023. He is a real asset to Catholic Charities because he knows just what being a refugee is like and how to adjust to life in America.

This family history of arrival in the United States from war-torn eastern Africa and succeeding in transitioning to American life suggests that "the American dream" still holds promise. The members of this large family of Congolese origin have worked hard to earn their living, marry, have children, and buy cars and houses. The youngest family members are successfully going through the American education system. Working with and getting to know the Ngoy family has been a very rewarding experience for the cohousing members of the Circle of Care. Rocky Hill cohousing has been blessed by this opportunity for our community.

Next Phase: Asylum Seekers

In 2018 one young family in Rocky Hill Cohousing took in an asylum seeker from El Salvador. Juli, a teenager who had been through very hard experiences in her native country, walked and crossed the southern border carrying one of her infant twin daughters, Zoe, who had severe cerebral palsy and hydrocephalus. A cohousing family, whose wife and husband were bilingual and had worked in El Salvador, took in this traumatized young woman seeking asylum while her daughter was treated by the state. For three years they offered their love and the support of the entire cohousing community to Juli. She was helped with visits with her daughter, learning English, and rides to her job in a pizza restaurant.

In 2021 Juli's older sister, Tina, and her son, Axel, arrived. Another cohousing family took in these two asylum seekers for over a year. More recently, another sister, Yeni, crossed the border with Juli's other twin daughter. And shortly after came Axel's father, Erick, and Yeni's partner, Jose. Juli and her daughter, Maria Jose (twin sister of Zoe), are now living in a small basement rental apartment in our community, while our other Salvadoran neighbors are living in the large house where the Ngoy family had lived for five years.

Yeni gave birth to Janna in March 2023 in our local hospital. The community rallied to support this new arrival, providing meals and baby paraphernalia, rides for doctor's visits, and more. Erick and Jose have helped do some needed chores around the

The Ngoy family shortly after arrival at Rocky Hill Cohousing.

Barouni's graduation party at Common House with sister Lydia and her baby.

community and in individual homes. Zoe, the child with special needs, now resides in our cohousing community under the foster parentage of another couple in this community who are specialists in working with children with Zoe's needs. Zoe, Maria Jose, and Axel are all progressing well in local schools and quickly mastering English.

These new residents of Rocky Hill Cohousing have added such a beautiful new dimension to our community. Tina and Yeni cook pupusas for sale each week for interested families. Around 10 cohousing members took Spanish lessons this past summer so they could better communicate with our El Salvadoran neighbors, though I think they are learning English faster than we are learning Spanish. Juli passed her driver's test and purchased a car with her savings. Many adults have vied for holding and babysitting baby Janna. The children in the community play with their new friends and are exposed to Spanish language and Salvadoran customs. After Juli lived with Lena's family for three years, Lena's daughter tested into Spanish III when she entered high school. Our community and friends raised $16,000 to put two immigration lawyers on retainer to help our new residents in their asylum cases. Our Salvadoran neighbors have escaped abuse, violence, and threats in their home country, and have a very credible case for asylum in the United States. And, most recently, two sisters from Peru fleeing violence stayed in our community with their two sons, aged three and 12, while seeking more permanent arrangements.

Our immigrant neighbors have invigorated our community in many ways. For example:

- Erick and Jose, who are adept in carpentry and machinery, have joined in community efforts by rebuilding the tree house for children in the community, joining the plow team, and repairing decks and stairs.
- Each week during mango season, Jose brings mangos to Lena's family—who in turn invite Jose and family down for bagels on the porch together or dinner around an outdoor fire.
- Tina and Yeni love cooking for the community, and one of the most well-attended common meals features their scrumptious tamales.
- One cold Saturday morning, Lena rushed out to clear the snow off cars, and Jose gave her a boisterous "Salud, Lena!," waving his snow shovel. He and Erick had already cleared out half of the upper parking lot.

For those of us who have hosted Salvadorans in our home, this has also been an experience of extended family. After living together not only for three years, but through the global pandemic of 2020 and 2021, Lena's daughter Autumn found a beloved older sister in Juli. They would hole up in the attic, doing their best to communicate with a smattering of Spanglish, at a time when young people weren't allowed to play with others outside the household. Juli would apply Autumn's makeup for her dance performances, help her create her Halloween costumes, and share her dresses with Autumn for school dances. When Lena's brother and family come to visit, they all fall in quickly with the Salvadoran family, chasing the kids around the house, listening to Jose's wild stories of his times in the military in El Salvador, and snuggling on the couch with affectionate Juli.

The challenge for the community and the Circle of Care is how to lean into this work from a model of a redistribution of wealth and resources, and make this an opportunity to engage in the work of systemic change, rather than working through a model of charity. Our Congolese and Salvadoran neighbors do not need our charity, but rather this is an opportunity for us to share the abundant resources we have as a mostly white, middle-class community, and for us to live by what many of us know to be true: *I am not free until we are all free.* As we invite our neighbors from across borders to seek safety and find community among us, we are taking one step toward creating a world of safety and well-being for all.

Our relationships with our Salvadoran neighbors have given us the opportunity to engage in systemic change work. When there was a question on the ballot to make it legal for undocumented people to have a driver's license in Massachusetts, a number of neighbors, including Salvadoran and US citizens, joined together to knock on doors to get out the vote in favor of this ballot question. We all celebrated victory when the bill passed, and partnered together to assist three neighbors in getting US licenses. When a climate-change-induced hurricane hit El Salvador, Juli and Lena's niece led a meeting for the community on the impact of the hurricane in her country, and raised money for an organization doing systems-change work across borders. In the month leading up to Juli's sister, Yeni, and daughter,

Maria Jose, successfully crossing the border and arriving in her arms at the airport, Autumn and Lena spent sleepless nights dreaming of border crossings, and joined Juli and her family in crying with relief at the airport. While Autumn had the opportunity to learn firsthand about the impacts of our harsh and punishing immigration system, she also had the opportunity to join in wrapping Juli and her family in loving arms so they were not alone in their fight for this journey toward relative freedom and safety.

Our community is stronger and more united because of our new neighbors' engagement and participation in the community, and because of our deep relationships across differences in class, race, language, and immigration status. As we look to where we go from here, Rocky Hill Cohousing is now exploring making one large house permanently available as affordable for those in need of shelter. It has meant so much to our community to get to know, work with, and assist folks from around the world in need of a safe and supportive environment. We can feel that at least we are doing something to help the many millions of migrants in the world escaping violence and danger for safety and a new chance in life.

As an old person retired for several years, I (David) have found that this opportunity to work with migrants has provided personal meaning to my life. I feel it has added purpose and a sense that I am really helping others. These experiences have benefited our children, our local community, and our community's sense of purpose and mission. As one cohousing member, a father of a six-year-old boy, recently commented, "I feel that my life (and my family's) has been enriched by the presence of the entirety of the Canas-Reyes family."

We are grateful for these very rewarding opportunities that have come our way and encourage others to offer support to migrants to our shores and experience the resulting enrichment personally.

David Entin, his daughter Lena Entin, and photographer Richard Getler live with their families and friends in Rocky Hill Cohousing, Northampton, Massachusetts (rockyhillcohousing.org).

Sivan and Maria Jose playing outside at Rocky Hill Cohousing.

Our neighbors from Central and South America with the cohousing families they first lived with in Rocky Hill Cohousing family room.

Keys to the Journey of Forming a Community

By Hugh Perry

I have always found the enthusiasm generated in those early days of forming a community to be contagious. The ideas are abundant, people are keen, excited, and all outcomes are probable. Goals are diverse, with some wanting homeschooling, others self-sufficiency, or freedom from control, desires for connections, and many more fabulous goals.

Then comes the "how to implement" phase, and slowly the excitement wanes, momentum slows, and some drop out of the group. The reality of the challenges ahead sets in and only the sincere carry the dreams into fruition, and for them the path remains rich. So what to do next?

I have lived in a community, visited many, helped in the forming of some, written about the lifestyle, and given workshops on Building and Living Community. Here are five suggestions that I consider most important in making the journey more enjoyable:

I. Firms and Flexibles

We all have values that are close to our heart, whether or not we understand why or where they came from. Yet we sometimes resist examining them deeply for their source. Community life has a way of leading us to re-examine our core values, as distinguished from our likes and dislikes— making us richer for it.

• Create a personal list of your firm and flexible values. Firms are values and are often not negotiable. For example, animals will never be abused. A flexible example could be that if mice are a problem, then perhaps having a house cat is acceptable. In most cases, circumstances can shift Firms into Flexibles.

• **You** may like to have a clothes dryer, but the group is in favour of clothes lines, so on the premise of compromise, you abandon your dislike and become flexible.

• Compromise means that you are prepared to look more deeply at the roots of your values to ensure that they represent you and not your family's values or someone else's. The community has a way of bringing out the best version of ourselves, which makes it such a unique learning experience.

When you have established your common focus, you have created a shared projection that has the power to attract the missing ingredients to fulfill those dreams.

II. Common Focus

Common focus is the culmination of each person's practical dreams. Believing we can manifest them is what brought us to Community. So establishing a common focus is the primary necessity for success, because too many impractical dreams can deplete efforts to realize any of them. Once you have a common focus, it becomes a strong statement of who you are and where you are going.

Here are some questions that may seem inappropriate to mention but important in establishing a common foundation to continue building upon:

• Are we a community that wants people working outside the community while others work on the land and, if so, how do they contribute in maintaining fair levels of participation, workwise and economically?

• What is our position on people bringing in personal debts?

• How far will we take sustainability? Shall we provide all materials and methods or use conventional technologies, installed by local suppliers and contractors?

• Are we pet-free?

• Will foraging the natural bounty for food include both plants and wildlife?

• Are we going to prioritize vegetable-based diets and/or meat diets and, if so, how

might that look in our kitchens?

• Are diverse spiritual practices a consideration and, if so, how can that be accommodated?

• Should all children be homeschooled?

• What degree of outside social involvement is acceptable to all?

• Are we to be a retreat centre with regular visitors utilizing our space and, if so, how might that impact the community?

• Is having temporary members an option?

• Is it our intent to provide end-of-life care?

When you have established your common focus, you have created a shared projection that has, of its own, the power to attract the missing ingredients to fulfill those dreams, both in people and in other resources. During the process, some members may realize that this community is not for them—a realization which benefits everyone. By defining your agreed focus, you have established the primary body of your vision statement, making it known to others that your roots are well established, and the intention is clear. "Build it, and they will come." Many vision statements are streams of adjectives painting what could happen in a "perfect" world. However, communities are prototypes for how life can actually be better, making it important to capture realistic possibilities.

III. Emotional Consensus

In the beginning days of our community, we had Sunday evening Forums where we discussed what needed to change from the previous week, and it was a shit show in the beginning. But as our management system improved, heated discussions decreased. However, had we known the Maori way of consensus, things would have been even better. This Maori model places more importance on the dissatisfied individual than on the point of contention. In this way, that person is listened to completely, until the group totally gets the other person's point of view. The process evokes caring, which we all seek, and therefore aligns all parties to something very basic in each of us.

I have used this system on some of Canada's largest construction projects where hundreds of thousands of dollars were being negotiated among the biggest egos. The method worked 100 percent of the time because what we each want, more than anything, is to be heard and understood. Then something magical happens within the group. The energies from all sides of the debate soften and meld into an emerging solution. Suddenly, opposition dwindles and a satisfactory compromise appears. When there is opposition to an idea, allow the opinions to be listened to, because there is an important hidden clue wanting to be realized.

IV. Full Spectrum Governance

I have visited many communities and each shared the same frustration that we had experienced. It's called being stuck! It's those times when planned agendas aren't happening fast enough, when group enthusiasm reaches a low, and there is an unspoken discomfort floating about like a cloud. Individually, it feels like being in a fog.

We discovered that those unsatisfying moments were often the result of too many management rules and, more importantly, their being too seriously enforced. It wasn't so much that the rules were the problem but more that there wasn't enough freedom of expression to offset them. Strict adherence to rules can choke off the flow of ideas and enthusiasm. We found that the creation of an energetic event, like a good party, was the cure. That would dissolve the fog and get the creative juices flowing again. The next day, the seriousness around enforcing rules dissipated, as did the objections to them.

Full Spectrum Governance is a model I've recently begun promoting. It reveals many hidden gems for assisting both management and individuals. Briefly, it is based on an understanding of how the energy of a creative idea is transformed from an energetic realm into a manifest realm. There are only four stages and each person has an affinity with one of those stages. When there is an energetic match between a person and one of these energetic realms, then good things happen, like better choices and less conflict.

The example of "rules" relates to how they fit into one of the stages of how energy works, as "parties" fit into a different stage. When a community has members who are familiar with this model, as we had in our community, then it promotes harmony throughout the group.

V. Property

A group of us spent four years in three separate attempts to create a community without success and here is what went wrong. In each case, one of the members already had a parcel of land which they lived on, and they were willing to sell us the land LESS their share of ownership. That made things so much easier and the group became tight and enthusiastic, until the day to sign the contract. The owner could not do it, and it's understandable why.

At the last minute, they could not conceive of handing full control of property they loved to people they had known for only a few years. That would make them an observer instead of the full-time decision maker. It took three heartbreaking attempts before we realized that the group needed to find and obtain property as a group, rather than trying to transfer it from an individual group member.

Hope this helps your efforts. Enjoy the journey of forming, for you are already a Community.

Hugh Perry offered a virtual workshop on Full Spectrum Governance during the International Communal Studies Association conference in January. As well, his Intentional Community novel, Silent Partners, *is now free at www.livingbehindyourbreath.com along with sustainable homeowner tips and the 1970s wooden yurt how-to book.*

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

All Bodies Are Valid Bodies

By Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales

"Mentally ill people destroy communities," my friend said.

We were walking on a path by two fields. He was giving my spouse Ming and me a tour of his intentional community farm.

I was shocked as if cold water had been thrown in my face. It hurt. The friend knows I have diagnoses like "schizoaffective disorder, bipolar type" and autism, I hear voices, and other challenges.

It reminded me of when I was young and people would fat shame in my presence. Back then I still hated myself and mostly agreed that my body was bad. I could suck in my stomach and try to shrink my body, shrink my entire being to hide in a shadow. But my fatness remains.

disability is neutral

How do I hide my crazy? It's not possible. I could stop talking, but silence is read as crazy also. I could stop stimming. But stimming is great comfort as I process information. Everyone stims, but autistic people moreso.

If I stop stimming, I trade one harm for another—I harm myself by losing my emotional regulation. But stimming looks weird and can lead to alienation. Pick your poison! There's no good way to hide my crazy, autism, fatness, or age.

Mental illness is blamed for addiction, shooters, abusers, evil, destroying communities, and so many bad behaviors. It's sad how many people need to Other others and will use mental health as a way to differentiate.

Disability is neutral. Or it can be a gift, when we develop greater insight, compassion, and creativity in our problem solving. There is no ideal body—that's eugenics and wrong.

crazy in community

Many people have mental health diagnoses and issues, but we are more likely to be victims of violence than to perpetrate it. I have big moods and experience extreme states sometimes. But I'm not a violent person. In fact, my differences are part of my intelligence. I'm valuable, every day.

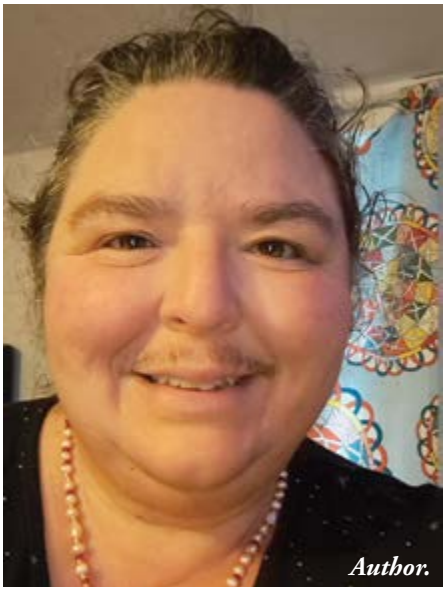
In intentional communities, deciding on new members is hard. Last year, my spouse and I were looking for a new community home. We traveled for four months, underhoused, and we were considered by three communities, including the one that eventually chose us.

We saw how people are scared of ending up with a messed up community member who does bad behaviors. Because of that fear, many communities look for people who are read as upstanding at a glance. Easy people.

My spouse Ming has narcolepsy and wears a disability ID bracelet. At one of the communities we applied to, I always felt that the metal chain around his wrist was the main factor in why we weren't chosen to live there. Would our outcome have been different, if we had hid our disabilities, to maintain abled privilege and appear more useful, for people who don't pay much attention?

The truth is so valuable. I would much rather be real. "It is kind to ask for help. The one who does not ask for help cannot be trusted," is a saying from the Nu-Chal-Nuth people of Vancouver Island. I see this truth everywhere in community. I need to live with people who ask for help when they need it, who allow me to ask for help, and who are willing to take a moment to consider nuance and dig deeper.

If I stop stimming, I harm myself by losing my emotional regulation. But stimming looks weird and can lead to alienation. Pick your poison! There's no good way to hide my crazy, autism, fatness, or age.



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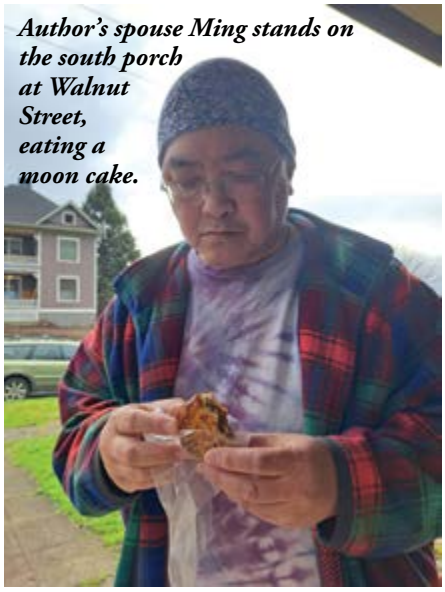


Author's spouse Ming stands on the south porch at Walnut Street, eating a moon cake.

This is the altar where I pray for courage to speak the truth in community and in all of my life.

honest and clear

Yes, the irony is that being honest and clear about disability, including mental health, means I'm less likely to become the horrible housemate. I have skills to talk about reality, including all the ways I nurture myself and interdepend with Ming to stay happy and functional.

That's how I've survived this far. I listen and care, and I have empathy for struggle. I love consent, and I nurture others in den mother ways. Actually I'm awesome to live with.

But people have been traumatized by community members from hell. Their fear cuts them off from connecting authentically enough to evaluate skillfully. Prejudice against anyone different is a shortcut mistake that many people make.

I assume that the people I encounter in intentional communities are compassionate and doing something different. But last year I learned that people living in community often have the same dysfunctions as the culture at large. Fat shaming, slut shaming, misunderstanding mental health, and incorrect notions about disability and age are so common and harmful.

I make a mistake by believing the best, attributing skills that are not really there. Then Ming and I suffer the consequences.

age

Being considered in community last year, I wondered how much Ming and I should downplay our ages. Youth is more valued, and being energetic and abled.

I could dye my graying hair back to brown, purchase wrinkle cream, and attempt a more youthful look? We could lie about Ming's age. He's Asian, and most people read him as 10 years younger than he is anyway.

But my graying hair is fine with me—I don't want to dye it. And lying is exhausting. I need to tell the truth for so many reasons.

So many things to do in this world, besides visiting a department store to buy wrinkle cream at the makeup island. I could watch a bee gather nectar from a flower, sleep, write a poem, make soup, do fat yoga, dance.

All bodies are valid bodies. All ages are valid ages. I don't want to hide that I'm in my mid-40s and Ming is in his mid-50s. I praise Mother God for my age—all these years of survival.

succession

Disabled Resilience Permaculture is a project Ming and I have been working on for years. It's a way to grow delicious foods, and a lens to view life through. Succession means planning your garden around how it is now, but also considering how it will be. I accept that the garden will change, want that, and account for it.

When we plant trees, we know they might grow big. We can prune them to moderate that. But we want them to mature. How will that affect the other plants nearby? Will those plants still be alive, when the tree is tall? Permaculture is long view.

Being realistic about what the garden will look like in five, 10, and 15 years is beneficial for the garden. Some things can't be predicted, like what the neighbors do, climate chaos, pesky pests, changes in our priorities as the years pass.

But it's similar with plants and with people. Aging should be part of the design, not an unexpected, undesirable change. Aged people are not less valuable, as disabled people are not less valuable. We just have different strengths.

There are so many things to do, to keep a farm going or a community. I can't lift a bale of hay. But neither can a baby

or young child, a pregnant person, a sick or dying person. We all have roles.

Capitalism says that our productivity for making money is our worth. We are in community partly because we know all people are sacred, and worth is so much more than making a buck.

values

How old are you now? How old would you like to be, when you die? I live in a culture that has so much denial, especially about health, mental health, and death. I love Disabled Resilience Permaculture as a way of helping us become more honest.

I'd like to spend the rest of my life in intentional community and eventually die in community. Community is my values. In groups we can share resources, love one another, and avoid the long loneliness, as I learned from Catholic Workers like Dorothy Day. Community shouldn't be blocked off for me or anyone, because of our differences. Ming and I enrich the group wherever we go.

community skills

Mentally ill people aren't the destroyers of communities. Anyone can have community skills, like communication, respect, generosity, creativity with problem solving, openness, information organization, care, meeting facilitation, cooking and baking, patience. These skills are found in any person, with or without mental health diagnoses.

Traits like selfishness, rigidity, violence, deception, racism, and theft can also be found in anyone, with or without mental health diagnoses.

Mentally ill people aren't the destroyers of communities. Or if so, that community needed to go. Pointing out that the emperor has no clothes is important sometimes. People are often given serious mental health diagnoses like mine for being visionaries and doing something different.

the world needs different

Why do you love community? Many of us live in community because we understand that business as usual is harming Parent Earth, harming all of us. The world needs different.

I'm happy that after four months of searching, Ming and I moved into a housing cooperative where activism is commonplace, and we've been here for a year. At Walnut Street Cooperative, we care for one another, and we're working toward a better world. Disabilities are addressed head on, and age isn't a problem or a surprise.

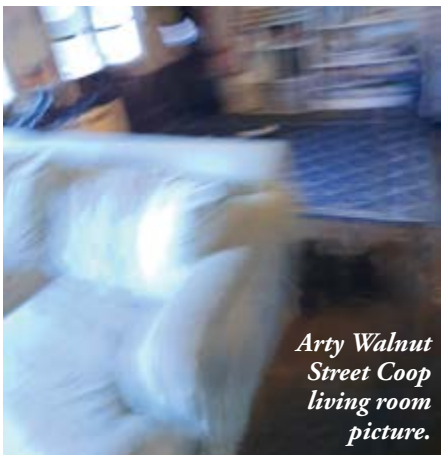
Mental health is not a spectrum from "totally even keeled and well" to "raving and out of touch with reality." There are no straight lines. There are so many ways to be crazy—thank goodness. I need people in my life who see new possibilities, are wildly creative, and who risk being too much.

I'm happy to connect with other disabled people. I love other voice hearers, autistics, fat people, chronic pained people, queer elders, and people who experience big moods like me.

Mental health is multidimensional and complicated. Someone can be typical with low community skills, or crazy like me with rich, abundant community skills.

There are so many ways to differ, and I love that. People vary. The variety is life.

Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales is a queer zinester artist, living in community in the Pacific Northwest. Find her at listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakessense.com.



Arty Walnut Street Coop living room picture.

The little free library outside Walnut Street Coop is often stuffed with media.

Photos by Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales

Ode to Walnut Hands

You of the blueberry picking hands.
You of the strong gardening hands,
you of the strong musician's hands,
you of the writing hands,
you of the strong praying hands,
you of the strong impact hands.
You of the brave fixing things hands,
you of the far, far traveling hands.
You of the dumpstering cooking baking hands,
you of the embroidering sewing hands,
kind tea making coffee making hands,
of the fluttering signing hands,
of the earth defending hands,
gender transgressing hands,
animal petting hands, healing, comforting,
washing sleeping person's dishes hands,
quietly coming home hands.

Morning after Passover Seder at Walnut Street

I drank the glass of wine
left all night for Elijah,
then dipped my fingers in the glass for Miriam
and blessed myself on the porch.
Felt like the parent who
eats cookies left out for Santa,
saucer with strategic crumbs.
The debut Tooth Fairy
disguising her handwriting
and wondering what's
the going rate for baby teeth.

Then I decorated River's birthday cake
with vegan chocolate buttercream frosting
and glowing indigo rosemary flowers.
Wrote him a card saying
thank you for your survival
signed, "all of Walnut St."

Later I took off my socks at the beach
and noticed long blue
hairs of my housemate Maya
stuck to the black synthetic sock material.
I thought how love never feels
how I expect it
or stays where I intend it,
but surprises me,
electric, when I'm looking for rest.

Love, come to me in a quiet moment
and fill my solitude with company
while I'm lucky to know these
charmers who exhaust my heart.

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

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What Readers Say about Communities

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

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

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

—**Christian Williams**, Editor, *Utne Reader*

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

—**Murphy Robinson**, Founder of Mountainsong Expeditions

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

—**Chuck Durrett**, The Cohousing Company

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

—**Shen Pauley**, reader and author, Barre, Massachusetts

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