

STARHAWK: FRAMING CONFLICT • A PIE IN THE FACE • RESILIENCE

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Summer 2024 • Issue #203

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Conflict and Connection

Introverts Unite!

My Minority Report

Confronting Conflict

Challenges of the Mirror

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at Firefly Gathering 2023. (See article, pages 20-23.) For info on the 2024 Gathering, July 16-21 in Green Mountain, North Carolina, visit fireflygathering.org. Photo by Sarah Tew.

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

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

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

BACK ISSUE CONTENT: See complete back issue article index at gen-us.net/index, and index by community at gen-us.net/index-by-community. See back issue themes at gen-us.net/themes.

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

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

WEBSITE: gen-us.net/communities.

This magazine printed by Sundance Press, Tucson AZ.



Challenging Behaviors: Doing vs. Being

I'm dismayed to learn from readers' responses that my article series about "especially challenging behaviors" (see eighth and last article, pages 46-51 of this issue) has sometimes backfired, with people doing exactly what I *didn't* want them to do.

Apparently some community members are using the ideas in the series not to better understand and protect themselves and their communities from these behaviors, as suggested, but instead to

label and dismiss as "narcissists" or "bullies" other people whose behaviors they don't understand or don't like.

I apologize to **COMMUNITIES** readers if it seemed I advocated this.

I used the phrase "especially challenging *behaviors*" rather than "especially challenging *people*" for good reason, influenced by my understanding of Nonviolent Communication, which I mentioned in the series. I advocated that the ideas in the articles be used to see people as *doing* different things at different times through their words and actions (*verbs*—ever-changing discrete actions) and then a community setting limits and boundaries on the *behaviors*, rather than seeing people *being* an ongoing steady state. When labeling a person who frequently and consistently exhibits these challenging behaviors as "a narcissist," "a bully"—that is, as a continuous state of being—one can then dismiss them as not being valuable or worthy of courteous treatment, and use these terms for revenge: for name-calling, on email, in conversations, in community meetings. Ouch!

I also tried to emphasize that I don't believe any of us are qualified to assess another person's mental emotional state and "diagnose" them, since we're probably not a trained psychotherapist, or at least not that person's psychotherapist. However, I do believe laypeople can observe behaviors, and perhaps make inferences about the inner attitudes leading to those behaviors. Observing behaviors and inferring attitudes is quite different from arrogantly psychoanalyzing, diagnosing, and labeling a fellow community member! Doing so leads to even worse conflict, in my experience.

Labeling another person—"Aha! *Now* I know what you are!"—might make people feel better temporarily, but of course labeling and name-calling others usually makes others feel terrible and exacerbates the conflict, like throwing gasoline on a fire. I now believe I didn't emphasize this concept often enough. My mistake was believing that **COMMUNITIES** readers involved in community living would be familiar with and versed in Nonviolent Communication, so they'd naturally see others as *doing* different behaviors rather than always *being* something. This is a hard and painful lesson for me. In the book I plan to write on this topic, I won't make this mistake again, but will emphasize, far more clearly and more often, the concept of people doing different actions, not being a steady state of being—and the fact that we as communitarians are qualified only to observe behaviors, but not psychoanalyze them.

Diana Leafe Christian
Black Mountain, North Carolina

Communal Studies Association: An Invitation

Founded in 1973, the Communal Studies Association (CSA) includes scholars, interpreters at historic communal sites, people interested in these communities, contemporary communitarians, and ex-communitarians. Through the journal *Communal Societies*, a supplementary newsletter, and especially an annual fall conference, CSA members come together to share their knowledge of intentional communities past and present.

The CSA invites readers of COMMUNITIES to join us! Special membership rates apply to current communitarians. We also encourage you to consider attending our next conference: October 3-5, 2024, at Ephrata, Pennsylvania (see ad, below). We are open to hosting non-traditional panels and presentations as well as academic papers. Questions about options for presenting at the conference can be directed to program chair Cheryl Coulthard at cheryllcoulthard@gmail.com. **Special support is available to current communitarians to help offset the costs associated with attending the conference (travel, accommodations, and registration).** Please contact CSA Executive Director Kathy Fernandez (kathyfernandez@neo.rr.com) or CSA President Tom Guiler (tguiler@oneidacommunity.org) or visit the CSA website at communalstudies.org for more information or if you have questions. We hope to see you!

Twin Oaks Wildfire Recovery

In late March, Twin Oaks Community suffered a major loss when a wildfire destroyed the industrial center of their community. Infrastructure, equipment, and inventory of several of their main community businesses burned to the ground. If you would like to support the community to help with the costs of rebuilding, you can donate to their general fund using the following link:

**[tinyurl.com/
twinoaksfire](https://tinyurl.com/twinoaksfire)**



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**Communal
Studies Association**
invites you to their *51st Annual
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Oct. 3–Oct. 5 2024
at
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In Memoriam Liora Adler

1946-2024

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Co-Founder,
PINA Board Member,
former GEN Rep to the UN,
and much more

(remembrances coming
in COMMUNITIES #204;
please contact diana@ic.org
to share yours)

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

Submissions Policy

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

Advertising Policy

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

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

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

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

What is an “Intentional Community”?

An “intentional community” is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based; others are both. For all their variety, though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.

Mirrors and Windows



Chris Roth

Readers who were with us in the last millennium, or who've visited their online account to peruse the digital back issue archive, may recognize something that we didn't until we'd already announced this issue's theme: that it exactly duplicates that of COMMUNITIES #104, published in Fall 1999. This turns out to be both a coincidence, and no surprise to us. “Conflict and Connection” was as timely a theme 25 years ago as it is today and likely will be in 25 years.

We establish each new theme in response to what seems relevant in the present moment, rather than looking to past issues. In fact, in assembling this issue, I consciously decided NOT to delve into that past one at all, lest it compromise the organic unfolding of this one.

Nevertheless, it often seems that everything old is new again. With this issue's material complete, I've surveyed #104 and can safely say that while much has changed outwardly in the past 25 years, little has changed in the core experience of community as reported in our pages. Countless theme elements in this issue echo those addressed in that issue: Nonviolent Communication; other practices to address conflict head-on and increase community connection; experiences of loss of community when conflict wasn't handled well and/or when interpersonal connection was not prioritized; the idea (highlighted as a pull quote on page 48 of issue #104, then again by that issue's editor in a letter on page 4 of this one) that it's important to “Focus on ‘disruptive meeting behaviors’ rather than ‘disruptive people’”; and more.

The themes are old, but the stories are new. And fortunately, new territory is explored as well, and some old territory explored more deeply and/or from different angles. Yet surveying the two issues together gives the distinct impression of a single journey.

• • •

One of my greatest pleasures as editor is to receive stories that so closely match my own experiences—albeit with different characters and some different details—that I feel zero need to write anything original about those myself. (This is true of several stories in this issue.) In the same way, one of the greatest pleasures I feel in

community meetings is to notice that it is often not necessary for me to be the one to articulate a particular personal truth, viewpoint, impression, idea—someone has just said what I was going to say, and all that’s left is to concur and appreciate what they said. And sometimes it’s my turn to say the thing first, and discover that some others resonate too, or at least appreciate the contribution.

These phenomena provide a visceral experience of the connection that functional communities embody—the feeling of being part of an organism in which we all play our own roles but none are isolated, and in which we arrive where we’re going together, not apart. We are far more intertwined than the individualistic worldviews many of us have grown up with would lead us to believe. Finding our voices in one another, and in relation to one another, is just one way that interconnection manifests.

This helps recast the idea of “conflict” from a confrontation of distinct, opposing parties to one in which we are part of the same conversation, the same larger organism, trying to rebalance ourselves and to find a way forward, having encountered a bump in the road or perhaps a major washout. That conversation often brings us closer, revealing elements that may be buried most of the time in more superficial interactions. It may also, of course, reveal that it’s time to go our separate ways.

As numerous authors herein describe, conflict and connection are not opposites. The first, conflict, is inevitable—not only outwardly, in every group, but internally, within all but the rarest individual. The second, connection, is the outcome when the first is handled as a learning and growth opportunity—regarded as a gift (even if not one we’ve requested) that can lead us to better understanding, effectiveness, cohesion, boundaries, openness, and ultimately love.

• • •

Just as some of our themes are perennial, the insights they generate are perennial too—although their truth may be experienced more deeply as the years pass. As I contemplated some of the articles in this issue, I remembered a song written more than 30 years ago by a folksinger-songwriter then in her mid-20s, who had lived recently in an intentional community.

The printed page cannot convey the effects of the beautiful finger-picked guitar nor the melody—and this song, “The Reflection,” from Laura Kemp’s first album, “I Hope They Like the Rain,” was issued only on cassette tape. It’s a hidden gem currently existing only on frequent play in my mind, and in the collections of those few lucky enough to have it in recorded form. I share the lyrics here nonetheless, because they encapsulate universal truths also discovered in community when one pays attention:

So it seems I’ve been surrounded
By all these mirrors facing me
And every bone I thought I buried deep
Has surfaced to the ground for all to see

Every face is my reflection
Every criticism is of myself
Now is the time to learn acceptance
And lay down these judgments on the shelf

And as I come to know you
I’ll understand more and more about me
How I want to love you
And see a lightning storm through your eyes
And feel the rain approaching in the breeze

I was still a relative novice to intentional community living when I first heard “The Reflection.” Its lyrics mean so much more to me now than they did then, thanks to decades of experiencing that kind of mirroring in community, and finding that the ultimate result of our honesty in confronting head-on whatever comes up between or among us, rather than hiding from it, is a falling-in-love with one another that could never have happened if we’d stayed in our private, walled-off realities.

That kind of love often brings equally expansive, related feelings...a sense of wonder, a greater sensitivity to the world we are living in, even a deeper experience of the “ecological self.”

• • •

Of course, not every conflict is the result of people becoming mirrors (often uncomfortable) to one another. A conflict can arise from stimulation of past traumas, when behavior and attitudes unique to one party reactivate pain in the other. It can arise from present stimulation of pain or distress, with no past experience required. It can arise simply from the identification of “toxic” energy that will hobble the community without the establishment of good boundaries—even if we see nothing of ourselves in the person appearing to carry that energy. And it can arise from different, legitimate viewpoints, disagreements about strategy, diverging aesthetic tastes, and a host of other factors seemingly divorced from our personal relationships with one another or with ourselves.

But no matter the particulars, finding what connects us with one another allows us to deal with every conflict more easily. Coming from the other direction, healthy approaches to conflict also lead us into ever-deeper connection with one another, where our potential for love, wonder, and greater attunement to the wider-than-human world can be realized and celebrated.

In the words of one rather famous advocate of effective collectivism: in our attitudes and approaches toward conflict, many of us have nothing to lose but our chains. 🐦

COMMUNITIES editor Chris Roth is a long-time member of Lost Valley/Meadowsong outside Dexter, Oregon (lostvalley.org), and an even longer-time fan and friend of songwriter Laura Kemp (laurakemp.com), who did NOT put him up to this.

Framing Conflict

By Starhawk

Embracing Conflict

When any group of human beings come together around a project or goal, sooner or later there will be conflict. We have different ideas, needs, priorities, and values, and they may clash. According to Diana Leafe Christian, who has studied and written about intentional communities, 90 per cent of such communities fail, mostly because of conflict. That's a terrible toll in lost hopes and squandered resources. Learning to deal well with conflict is a vital skill for communities.

Conflict raises our level of distress, so it's a natural instinct to try to avoid it. But when we don't hold people accountable for their wrongdoing, when we ignore bothersome behaviors or allow the group to proceed in a wrong direction, we may end up hurt, angry, or overcome by disaster. Attempting to avoid conflict, we often exacerbate it. Conflict must be faced, and in reality it can be a healthy aspect of community. Disagreements are a sign that people care about community issues, that members are autonomous enough to have differing goals, desires, visions, and perspectives. When disputes arise, and we work through them with respect and integrity, when we embrace conflict and do it well, we deepen our level of community connection and trust.

Frames

Whether or not we can resolve a conflict often depends on how we frame it. A conceptual frame, like a picture frame, tells us not what the content is but how to see it in relationship to everything around it. Linguist and political theorist George Lakoff speaks of frames as overarching metaphors. We experience the world through sensation, and we understand abstract concepts through sensory imagery. We speak of the stock market "rising" or a politician's popularity "waning." We "stand" for a principle or "back down" under pressure.

Often outside of our conscious awareness, frames determine how we think about a subject and what we might decide to do about a situation. Consider for example a simple object like an N95 mask. We could frame wearing a mask as a sensible health precaution, or as a political statement, or as an attempt by the powers that be to control and separate us. Each frame will have a different impact on how we feel and what actions we take.

Imagine that you arrive to the common kitchen of your cohousing complex the morning after a big community dinner, and find a sink full of dirty dishes. You might frame this event as "The other people in this community are a bunch of selfish pigs!" Or "Sally left this to get back at me because I opposed her idea about the fundraiser!" Or "Wow, people must have been exhausted last night! I'm sure they plan to come in and clean up this morning. Maybe I'll give them a hand." Each frame contains within it assumptions that can lead to varying courses of action—some of which will be less conducive to community harmony than others.

There are three frames we often use in conflict which make it extremely difficult to resolve conflict: the win/lose frame, the good versus evil frame, and the frame of a test of moral purity. I'll look at each of these in turn and then consider how we might reframe them in a way that can helpfully resolve a conflict.

The Win/Lose Frame

Framing a conflict as winning versus losing inevitably creates a power struggle. If I win, you have to lose: it's a zero sum game. None of us enjoy losing. The very term

When disputes arise, and we work through them with respect and integrity, when we embrace conflict and do it well, we deepen our level of community connection and trust.

“loser” is an insult. Losing can trigger our deepest fears, threaten our sense of self-worth and intrinsic value, and leave us feeling powerless and shamed. Winning is seen as strength, losing as weakness, and who wants to be weak? We are surrounded by models in our politics and figures who cannot bear to lose, even to the point of lying and claiming they’ve won when they haven’t. No wonder we often fight desperately hard to win.

Yet if you’ve participated in team sports, if you’ve lived any kind of real and complex life, you know that we all lose sometimes. Being able to lose gracefully is a sign of strength, not weakness. Sometimes the strongest act a person can take is to give up and let go. I think of Simone Biles, withdrawing from competition under the glare of global publicity when she realized that to continue would endanger her life and health. That decision took enormous moral courage: a different kind of strength than the physical strength she so gracefully embodies. Fortunately, it allowed her to return another time to win even greater successes.

Our community conflicts are rarely at such a life-and-death level, but knowing when to give in gracefully can be a mark of leadership. If I insist on always having my ideas prevail, I prevail at the expense of other people’s sense of autonomy. I pay a cost in relationship for every battle I win. If others cannot express their creativity or take ownership of a project, over time they will leave. If we win on every issue, we may lose the organization.

But what if we could reframe our conflicts and see them, not as competing ideas, but as a palette of options, with our different perspectives and visions enriching us? Instead of making every disagreement a fight to the death, we can see opportunities to collaborate. We take the best of each idea, the most brilliant aspect of every vision, and synthesize something that is greater than its individual parts. Conflict can sharpen our focus and help us reach better decisions.

Conversely, in creative endeavors sometimes one person *does* have an overarching vision that needs the support of a group to carry it off. That can be an opportunity to offer help and support to one another, especially if we know that leadership will shift and change over time, that the same person will not always create the celebration or write the script for the play, that the star this time will play a supporting role another. True empowerment can mean amplifying and supporting someone else.

Good vs. Evil/Good vs. Good

One of the most common frames in the dominant culture is that of Good versus Evil. Conflict arises when we have different ideas, goals, and priorities, and increasingly, we see those disagreements framed as all or nothing, black or white, all-virtuous versus irreparably tainted.

Some conflicts in the larger world and the political realm really are issues where one side’s position is overwhelmingly

better than the other’s. Even in our voluntary groups and intentional communities, there are times when someone might do real harm. We are not immune from violence, theft, or abuse.

But even the most heated conflicts are generally more nuanced than can be expressed in a simple sound-bite. And most of our conflicts in community are not about actual harm. More often, they are disagreements about competing values that both sides actually hold.

For example, in Earth Activist Training, our permaculture organization that teaches regenerative design grounded in spirit and activism, we want our courses to be accessible, without money as a barrier. We also want to pay people fairly for their work, and for the organization to be sustainable. Each time we price our courses, we face this conflict between



values that are hard to reconcile in this world. But we find many more creative work-arounds when we recognize that this is a conflict of good vs. good, not a matter of right versus wrong.

There are many such conflicting needs and values that arise in community. For some people, privacy and quiet may be a strong value, for others, conviviality and community celebrations may be a high priority. Yet the most introverted loner probably enjoys some social occasions, and even the most avid party animal needs some quiet time. In a rural community where wildfire is a threat, one group works to get grants and pay for fuel reduction on the roadsides, another organizes local people to come out and volunteer to do the work. Both approaches are valuable and necessary—but conflicts can arise when one group feels devalued or disrespected by the other.

Framing our differences as good vs. good acknowledges that people on both sides of the issue have legitimate aims, concerns, and needs. We don't have to strive for absolute perfection: we can look for a solution that might be workable. Sociocracy uses the concept of "Safe enough to try, good enough for now." We might adopt different solutions in different situations. A community might balance needs for celebration and quiet by identifying times when noise is appropriate, and times when community spaces will remain quiet. In Earth Activist Training, we price our courses fairly to bring in the revenue that we need, which can make them expensive. To compensate we offer work-trade, and fundraise to offer diversity scholarships. At other times, we might offer a course on a pay-what-you-can basis for everyone.

When we do the work of recognizing and valuing one another's underlying needs, we deepen community connection.

The Frame of Moral Purity

People who are attracted to intentional communities tend to be people with strong values. We may hold high moral standards for ourselves and value integrity, always attempting to live up to our ideals. But if we frame every choice and decision as a test of our or others' moral values, high standards can become problematic when values clash or ideals come up against practical realities.

This becomes especially problematic when moral values clash with practical realities. Can we hire someone to do the housework in our community space? Or do we have a strong moral conviction that everyone should clean up after themselves? But what if community members have widely varying needs and outside time commitments? What if some are overwhelmed with caregiving responsibilities for children or elderly parents, and others are carefree? What if some community members simply don't do their share of the work, and that becomes a constant source of conflict?

Do we provide parking for community members? But aren't cars a major cause of climate change? How can we morally encourage or enable their use? Why not a bicycle parking lot instead? But what about those community members who can't ride a bike, or have demanding time commitments to jobs or children? Who makes these decisions?

Conflicts like this can become endemic and damage the ability of members to create practical systems that actually make community life possible and rewarding. But what if we could let go of the expectation that every choice must perfectly reflect each value that we hold, and acknowledge that life is full of compromises and trade-offs? Our goal might shift from perfection to doing as well as we can, and to viewing these issues as an opportunity for creative problem solving. We might shift to valuing cleaning up as honorable work that should be fairly rewarded, and offer options to either do the work or pay for it to get done. We might take a harm-reduction approach to cars, rather than insisting on abstinence, and provide the parking that some community members need, and also space for bicycles, a rideshare board, and ways to consolidate trips.

Questions for Discernment

How do we know when to step back and let go, and when to stand firm in a dispute? Here are a few questions to ask ourselves or one another to help us examine how we're framing a conflict:

- Why do I feel I need to win this argument? What's really at stake?
- Is this potentially an issue of safety or real harm?
- How strongly do I really feel about this? What's the worst that could happen?
- Are my opponents arguing for values that I actually also hold?
- What are the needs and concerns of the opposition? Can I acknowledge their validity?
- Am I supporting other people's visions and goals, as well as advocating for my own?
- What moral value is really at stake here? Is there a way to uphold it that can also recognize a spectrum of other needs and perspectives?

Reframing is one of many important approaches to addressing and resolving conflict, and communities do well to develop a full toolbox of communication and mediation skills. But there is one overarching frame that can help us engage creatively with conflict: instead of seeing it as something frightening to avoid, see it as something quintessentially human that enlivens our interactions, deepens our connections, and enriches our communities, something to joyfully and creatively embrace. 🌱

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Confronting Conflict

By Tracy Matfin

Last week I was having garden fresh mint tea with a visitor to our community. She was talking about her daughter, who was home with her dad, and asked me how my family group dealt with conflict with our daughter, Ai'ala, who was off 100 yards away with some friends. I thought about it and started talking, sharing examples. In doing so I realized there have been raised voices at times, and there have definitely been frustrations, but overall we are rather harmonious.

We have raised Ai'ala primarily through accepting and allowing emotional expression, communication, and love—the consistent choice to stay engaged in relationship. As I look deeper I am noticing this is also how we create a lot of harmony at La'akea Community. This community began three years before our daughter was born. She is 15 now, so they have kind of grown up together. Along the way we have learned a lot about conflict and confrontation.

A “conflict” is when two or more individuals have come together, *con*, to strike, *flict*, based on differing ideas or viewpoints. A contest ensues to see who can strike harder than the

other until a winner is determined. This follows the paradigm of winners and losers, in which there is a dominating force that subjugates another force. One way to move beyond this paradigm is through courageously choosing to meet and talk. Instead of pursuing conflict, they turn toward, or “confront,” the other—*con*, come together, *front*, face to face. This action creates opportunity for growth and vulnerability and the possibility for deeper connection and self-reflection.

The key ingredient is commitment—it is the choice to return to relationship in the face of adversity again and again.

When I first decided 25 years ago that I wanted to live in and possibly start an intentional community, a friend said to me, “Why bother? It will *never* work.” We were having tea on his porch in California.

Dumbfounded and a little crushed, I asked, “Why not?”

He replied: “Because it’s too easy to leave.”

Despite my discomfort with his response, I could see the profound truth in his words. Our modern-day culture is focused on individual independence. Though challenging, it is possible



Seed Exchange at
La'akea Community.

Photos by Tracy Matfin



Campfire dinner at La'akea Community.



Entrance to La'akea Community.



Lisa Hrbek singing on La'akea porch.

to get a job, have your own residence, drive your own car, etc. It is possible to live independently. The tribal culture so many are looking for did not have that freedom. The interdependence of a tribe was largely based on the need for survival. Unlike now, it was hard and dangerous to leave.

The commitment required today to create lasting relationships—to create tribe—is of a different nature. It requires a deep level of personal commitment so that when the going gets tough, the tough stay together rather than get going.

Whether in discovering how to stay in relationship with a child or with fellow community members, these four behaviors have helped us in our community and as parents:

- Listen actively with your entire being.
- Accept and allow for each individual's unique humanness.
- Communicate authentically with compassion.
- Share power while honoring rank.

Each is based on love and, together, they create a culture and environment that folks want to stay in.

Listen Actively with Your Entire Being

The first behavior—listening with your entire being—requires patience and practice. One tool we use in our community for this is Peer Counseling. In this practice individuals meet in pairs and take turns actively listening to each other. One of our members, Amara Karuna, has recently published a book about how to learn peer counseling ([amazon.com/Heart-Hand-Trade-Holistic-Counseling/dp/B0CH25LZFW](https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Hand-Trade-Holistic-Counseling/dp/B0CH25LZFW)). When actively listening to another you are not just paying attention to the words. The words matter the least. The most important part is maintaining a baseline of love and acceptance for the person sharing regardless of what is coming out of their mouth. You hold them in love, *Aloha*, with the respect and reverence for the life-force energy moving through them.

With 100 percent of your focus you observe their body language, listen to their intonation, notice the way they connect their words, and encourage emotion to move through them. As adults we trade equal amounts of time as the “counselor” and the “client.” However, when we work with children, the child is always the “client.” An easy example is when a child injures themselves and begins to cry. You let them cry. You sit beside them, possibly in physical connection or not, depending on their preference, and you listen with your whole body to the experience of their whole body. There is no soothing or distracting or telling them there is no need to cry. Just let them be as you hold your loving presence on them so they feel connected.

This also works well with adults. When Teo cut down JJ's favorite abiu fruit/shade tree, JJ was livid. JJ approached Teo and passionately shared her thoughts and feelings. Teo was able to stay fully present and listen; there were others present who also were able to listen—to “hold space.” As JJ's anger was accepted, the energy behind it moved on. She got her needs met to be heard and understood. Actively listening encourages vulnerable sharing by creating a safe container. This container builds connection. As an added bonus—the tree is growing back!

Accept and Allow for Each Individual's Unique Humanness

The second behavior, accepting and allowing for each individual's unique humanness, is practiced in Peer Counseling and in another tool we use, the “Forum,” as created by the ZEGG Community in Germany. We mostly learned this tool through Network for New Culture (new-culture.org). Practicing the Forum requires gathering together as a community to create a circle of listeners with one person sharing at a time. Those sharing are invited to share and express anything about what is alive for them as long as it is about them. This circle is facilitated

and works best with 10 or more individuals who are in regular contact with one another. The facilitator keeps the energy moving by directing the presenter out of story and into their body. In this practice the members of the audience create the container by listening actively but non-responsively, allowing each presenter's unique expression. The audience members keep in mind that what a presenter shares is only about the presenter and only for that moment.

Samantha entered the circle with a quickened step and adrenaline in her veins.

"Philip had lunch with Stacy today," she said as her eyes darted around the room and her pace slowed. "When I walked by they both ignored me." Sam continued to walk in the circle appearing to contract in on herself, growing silent.

At this moment the facilitator told Sam, "Samantha, exaggerate your motions: bow your head lower; cross your arms across your chest and slow down." Sam did this and the circle seemed to take a collective breath. We watched tears glide down Sam's face. "What are you experiencing right now?" the facilitator asked.

"My father's ignoring me. My sister's getting all the attention again! What do I have to do to matter? To be seen?" Fire came into Sam's eyes.

"Increase your pace Samantha. What do you want to tell your dad?"

"I'm amazing and I want to be seen!"

"Say that a few more times in a dance," came the instructions from the facilitator.

The community of space holders watched Samantha as she released into her body and moved around the inside of the circle with her own fluid motions. Like a community dream, everyone had their own interpretation and carried their own

piece from the work Sam was doing. "Let's bring you into the present," the facilitator said. "What do you want to tell Philip and Stacy?"

"Don't shut me out. Please see me."

The Forum creates a unique opportunity for a group to connect through listening, seeing aspects of themselves, and accepting—in this example, Samantha, in her challenge. The work also provides the practice of not taking on Samantha's situation. As she shares her feelings we also witness how rapidly feelings can change.

In a very different example, infants model transient emotions very well. One minute the world is going to end as they experience gas buildup, and the next it's all unicorns and rainbows. (Or conversely if you're the diaper changer.) When emotional energy is allowed to move and this movement is accepted, individuals' experiences are thus honored and valued.

Communicate Authentically with Compassion

The third behavior, communicating authentically with compassion, can be learned by studying NVC, Nonviolent Communication, as described by Marshal Rosenberg. This work encourages self-responsibility through self-reflection by identifying feelings and looking behind the feelings for the needs. In the above paragraph I mentioned three "needs": to be accepted, to be honored, and to be valued. When someone's needs are met they generally feel peaceful and happy. When someone has unmet needs they may feel uncomfortable with sadness, fear, or anger.

For example: Last Saturday night I went down to the main house to get some food. Monday through Friday the community eats together, but on the weekends you are on your own unless you self-organize with others. I found one of my partners



Altar at La'akea Community.

in the kitchen cleaning up their dishes. They had some Greek salad in a container on the counter.

“Hey! That looks yummy. Got any left over?” I asked.

“Nope. This is for Katie and me,” he replied.

I felt sad and mad. Luckily for both of us I kept my mouth shut on the nasty retort that came to mind. I noticed it and walked away.

Why was my first reaction to want to hurt him? When I looked behind my anger and sadness, I noticed I was hungry and I wanted to be included—neither of which was my partner’s responsibility. The most important thing at the moment was to feed myself to aid with self-regulation. Without an understanding of my needs it would have been easy to stay in blame for my uncomfortable emotions and point a finger outside of myself—“Hey, thanks for thinking about me,” said sarcastically—or point it inside at myself—“I could have been more pro-active, if only I’d...,” said with a wimpy whine.

Sometimes NVC gets a bad rap. When thinking about the formula—observation, feeling, need, request—remember that it is a tool that may be used as a hammer, effectively or violently. The element most relevant in NVC is understanding our roles in our emotional experience, learning to listen and speak with compassion (in what’s called “giraffe”), and being aware of judgments and blame (referred to as “the jackal”). Communicating authentically with compassion builds trust, a glue for relationship.

Share Power while Honoring Rank

One more key behavior, vitally critical to the choice to stay in relationship, is power sharing while honoring rank. At La’akea this is outwardly visible in our decision making and in our ownership structure. The land we live on is owned by an LLC. Once an individual completes our membership process they are added to the LLC as an equal member regardless of their Equity Buy-In status. Members participate in our weekly business meetings. Consensus works for our small group of 14 through respect, trust, and developing close connections over time.

Last year we added four new trial members all at once and our meetings s...l...o...w...e...d down. We did not get through the agenda in one meeting for months. As time went on, the meetings flowed more smoothly; empathy and understanding were increasing as we got to know each other better. Getting to know each other establishes rank. Who is more knowledgeable about trees? Who is better in the kitchen? Who specializes in human relations?

I felt rankled when I first heard the word “rank.” Many cells in my body wanted to rebel. With time I learned it did not mean hierarchy, it meant knowledge and experience combined with humbleness which allows for greater trust. Our five-year-old outranks me in imagination and creativity. When he says “Follow me into the ocean” as he walks down the path into our community garden, I listen and drop in with him. The flowers become sea stars, the kale becomes seaweed, and the butterflies are fish! It is fabulous to surrender to his games and his visions. When we reach the machetes and he reaches for one I use my rank in knowledge of safety and say, “The poisonous eels need to be left alone; we do not play with the

machetes as we like to avoid injuring ourselves.” Since we have had an exchange of rank we might easily move on. If not, we will pause as more feelings and needs may be discussed. This works because we have chosen to stay in relationship with each other.

All of the above comes together in creating a place where folks enjoy living and growing together. After living with us for six months, Lisa Hrbek wrote this song. You may listen to it on Soundcloud by looking for Lisacapella.

Wounded Joyful

Blemishes and battlescars

Can you show us who you are?

Can you sit through the urge to run?

Can you stay when your smile’s undone?

Together there is more we can face
Come as you are, we will hold an open space
Rest easy, for here it’s safe to be
Wounded, joyful, and free

It’s OK, you can name your doubt
Anger, fear, you can let it out
And when you have a shift in what’s alive
You can give a voice to what’s inside

And when you find you’re in an unfamiliar zone
Let us remind, you don’t have to go alone
Rest easy, for here it’s safe to be
Wounded, joyful, and free

We have a space for all your shades of grey
We have a place where your shadow can play
You can scream or laugh, you can cry or pray
You are welcome here in your fully honest way

Wounded and joyful are we
Come as you are, there’s nothing we can’t see
Rest easy, for here it’s safe to be
Wounded, joyful, and free
Come as you are

We have created a community and raised children where there is encouragement to be as you are; a place where individuals can be heard and accepted, share power, and communicate openly and honestly. It is not all a panacea, it is a lot of growth and self-responsibility, AND we have made it—next year it will be 20 years! Thank you Ai’ala, my daughter; all the members present and past at La’akea; and all the farm supporters and visitors who have woven their energies into the magic of this place! Aloha! 🌿

Tracy Matfin is a founder and resident of La’akea Community She teaches permaculture, self-love, and emotional sovereignty. If you want more info on the La’akea community, go to permaculture-hawaii.com.

Managing Conflict: What Really Matters

By Kara Huntermoon

After a long day of work pruning fruit trees, my husband and I had just an hour for a meal before we headed to the barn to milk the sheep. What a relief that we share community dinners! We strolled over to the Big House to join our people around a large table.

The counter in our spacious open kitchen/dining room overflowed with good food, a fire cozily warmed the scene, my favorite people were in the room—and two of our long-term community mates were arguing with heated voices.

“Did you think it was okay to go into my space without asking permission?” Bo demanded.

“You can go into my space at any time. No need to ask permission,” Diane defended herself. “This is a community. These are OUR spaces.”

I looked around the room. The majority of our co-residents were quietly filling their plates, studiously ignoring the tension. Our resident social worker drew up a chair and sat down to closely watch the disagreement. Bo and Diane gave her grateful glances and kept talking to each other.

“My shop has my personal tools in it, and you can’t just go in there to borrow something without asking me!” fumed Bo.

“I wasn’t snooping in your personal items! I knew where the hammer was and I knew you would let me use it!” countered Diane.

My husband took his plate of food and left the house. He preferred to eat at home where it was quiet.

“You aren’t hearing me. I have boundaries and I want respect,” insisted Bo.

“I do respect you. You don’t trust me. I don’t know why you don’t trust anybody after all these years,” Diane countered.



Photo courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

We must struggle to focus on what really matters: love and respect for each other, forgiveness, and a strong belief in everyone's ability to learn and grow over time. Community is a crucible in which to re-learn these human skills.

My 10-year-old daughter, raised in community, went upstairs to play with the other kids. I could imagine them up there whispering about the fight downstairs. The new kids would express some anxiety, and my daughter would say, "Oh, that's nothing. They're fine. Let's play!"

"I want you to tell me that you won't go in my space without asking," Bo persisted.

Diane capitulated—sort of. "I won't go into your spaces ever again. Can you trust that? Can you trust what I'm saying to you?"

"I'm done talking about this now," said Bo.

"Fine! Let's stop talking," agreed Diane.

The social worker, silent all this time, now spoke to the entire room. "I want to remind everybody that we don't need to be comfortable. Relationships take work. Comfort is not the goal."

Diane peered down at her dinner, on the verge of tears. Bo looked around the room, daring anyone to criticize his loud male voice, his rough working-class ways. I sat down next to him with my plate of food. "I'm glad you're here, Bo," I said warmly, referring to the fact that he only attends about one community meal per week. "I'm glad to see you."

I started a conversation about repairs needed on my car, much to the relief of Jeremy, a young adult male new resident who liked to work on cars—but who obviously wasn't comfortable with the open conflict. As he delivered a short speech, warming to his subject—the reliability of old Toyotas—Jeremy's mother came downstairs in her bathrobe. "Your little brother asked for more food, and you didn't hear him," she chastised her son. "I heard him from upstairs, but you didn't hear him." I winced at the scratchy sound of her voice, thick with a nasty cold that had been going around and from which I had just recovered.

The young man jumped up. "Sorry mom," he said, and rushed to get his brother more food. I wondered if Jeremy had agreed to parent his toddler sibling in order to allow his mom to rest. Clearly, I wasn't privy to all the details. Bo gave me a meaningful look. "This is real life, here," he said, implying, *I'm not the only one with conflict*.

More pleasant eating and conversation, and then: "Dad, when will you come home with me to see that thing?" asked 13-year-old Chloe.

"Later. I want to finish visiting with people," answered Tyler.

"But Daaaad! You've been promising to look at it all day, and it's really important to me!"

"I want to see it. I'm just going to finish visiting first."

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's a video of me jumping horses!" Chloe explained.

"I want to see that! Can you show me?" I requested.

"I thought we weren't allowed to use screens in the communal space," Tyler reminded me.

Diane spoke up, "If everyone agrees to an exception, we can use a screen here. Does everyone agree?"

Nobody said anything, partly because people were attending to other conversations. Chloe pulled out her phone. Tyler abruptly rose to his feet.

"You go ahead and show that to Diane and Kara. I'm leaving the room," he said.

"Daaaad!" Chloe whined.

"You know why I'm doing this," Tyler said. Chloe slipped her phone back in her pocket and stomped upstairs to search for kids.

I gave Tyler a questioning look.

"We're trying to limit screen use in our family, and she keeps pushing the boundaries," he explained. "It's hard for her to hear that it has to be later. I'm limiting my own screen use, too, by the way. I realized I couldn't expect her to stay off technology if I was on a screen all day."

The rest of the meal was peaceful. As I washed dishes with a couple of folks, Bo stood up to leave.

"Diane, I love you. You hear me?" he said, hovering in the half-open door.

“I love you, too, Bo,” Diane responded with a slightly defensive voice.

“No, I really mean it. I love you. Love is a tricky thing, but I’m learning that I love you,” said Bo.

“You’re going to make me cry!” Diane wailed, as tears streamed down her cheeks. Bo left the house, and the community social worker smiled. I corralled a couple of teenagers to help milk the sheep, and put my boots on to head for the barn.

• • •

Social scientists who study human happiness consistently find that relationships are the key to a satisfying life. But all relationships involve unresolvable conflict. How do we manage conflict in ways that maintain and strengthen our commitments to each other?

Right use of will means disciplining our minds. Many indigenous traditions, including my European Pagan religion, stress the importance of mental discipline. We receive a complex set of inputs, and we decide how we make sense of the information. The human condition is a unique one among animals: we actually have to make a choice about whether we interpret things in a good way, or in a destructive way. Our own minds can make us suffer if we don’t do this work.

For example, when butchering a duck, I could grumble about the half-hour finger-cramping feather plucking job. It’s repetitive and awkward. Wet feathers stick to my hands and bits of down fly up my nose. But then I would be missing the point. The duck died so I can eat! And I’m complaining about the work involved?

When I catch myself inwardly grumbling, I stop myself. I redirect my mind: “Thank you, duck, for giving your life so I can live.” I remember the holiness of the cycle of all life-death-birth-life. I remember that I will die one day. I hope that when I die, I am treated in an honorable way. I reach for the presence of the Goddess, for the larger reality that is all-that-is, and of which I am but a small, grateful part.

When relationships are new, we have to assess their safety. Unfortunately we live in a world full of domestic violence, sexual assault, child molestation, and drug abuse. There are real reasons why we shouldn’t trust strangers—and why we shouldn’t create institutional structures that give new residents in a community too much power, authority, or legal and financial commitment.

But once a relationship is long enough to have proven itself, we have a different kind of work. The question is no longer, “Am I safe?” The question becomes, “How do I honor this relationship?” How do we discipline our minds to notice what is good, and to forgive the human foibles and mistakes that are the irritating down up our noses?

Above all, how do we stay humble? Can we remember that we, ourselves, act in irritating ways and make mistakes? Can we observe that others forgive us and still want to be close? That we are, in fact, often wrong? And yet we are not abandoned by those who are loyal to us.

Couples therapist and researcher Dr. John Gottman describes the Four Horsemen of the Relationship Apocalypse: those qualities that indicate a relationship is in trouble and may be headed for divorce (see sidebar). Gottman found that the frequency and intensity of conflict in a relationship does not correlate with its success or failure. All marriages have unresolvable conflict. The key is how those conflicts are managed—not solved, but managed. Are you focusing on the down up your nose, or on the gift of life?

Though Gottman studies married couples, his findings are helpful to us in long-term community, where conflict is frequent and sometimes intense. It’s not whether you fight (you will) or how you fight (it might be messy!), it’s how you make repair and come back into relationship that matters. How you forgive. How you forget. How you discipline your mind to focus on what is working, and minimize the importance of the conflict within your own emotional system.

This is not about avoiding conflict or ignoring problems that need resolution. The work is to be discerning about which problems are tolerable and normal parts of

Dr. John Gottman’s Four Horsemen of Relationship Apocalypse (and their antidotes):

1. Criticism–Gentle Start-Up
2. Defensiveness–Appreciation
3. Contempt–Take Responsibility
4. Stonewalling–Self-Soothing

intimacy, and which are intolerable and require boundaries to be set.

Individualism has reduced our resiliency. We’ve forgotten how to shrug it off and move on when someone says something upsetting. The wider culture encourages retaliation in the name of “ending oppression” or “winning the culture war.” Nothing keeps you engaged in a social media argument like indignation and the conviction that you are RIGHT. This engagement makes tech companies a profit—and it changes our brain patterns to reward behaviors that separate us from other people.

We must struggle to focus on what really matters: love and respect for each other, forgiveness, and a strong belief in everyone’s ability to learn and grow over time. Community is a crucible in which to re-learn these human skills—if we are brave enough, persistent enough, and humble enough to try. Along the way, as our social worker reminds us, we will have to tolerate discomfort. Relationships are the most satisfying part of human life—and relationships take work. Comfort is not the goal. 🌿

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“You Spot It, You Got It” —Challenges of the Mirror

By Riana Good

Being in community with Liza¹ has sparked much learning and reflection in my life. Attraction and repulsion are both teachers, and from the framework of “You spot it, you got it,” surely a lot of what I find challenging about Liza is a direct mirror of my own challenges. So, why has life put us together?

Shortly after I arrived at Meadowlark, the first of three intentional communities we have in common, someone told me about Liza, a previous resident who still visited from time to time. “You two are so alike!,” the resident said. And, lo and behold, Liza and I are both independent, passionate, wild, eager, strong women in our 40s, without kids, toting identical dark blue JanSport backpacks. We are both likely to sleep in the

farthest sleep spot, close to the earth. In fact, I came across her former sleep spot in the woods before I even knew of her.

We both love to sing, dance, swim, bike, adventure, and play. We are both into books and theories and sensuality, with similar educational and class backgrounds. We are both a bit quirky and have more of an anxious attachment style, having internalized messages that we can be “too much.” Still, our communication styles are often quite different. I am softer and slower, she is more focused and driven.

We have conflicted feelings about each other, though we’re not in conflict per se. We haven’t had a fight or a falling out or a breach of trust. And, though the challenge has revealed a lot about my own patterns and ways of being, I don’t always want to feel the discomfort that frequently arises with Liza: feelings of contraction, desire for distance, and sometimes even disgust or disdain. I don’t want to feel that way about myself or Liza or anyone or anything! It doesn’t feel good. So, I am practicing!

There are many opportunities to practice. Because we live in the same community and have many interests and routines in common, we are often in each other’s orbits. To add to the challenge, it was she who invited me to live at the community where we are both living now (though it was coincidental that I lived at two other communities at which she had also lived). I am so grateful to Liza for bringing me to our community, for sharing much of what she has learned about practicalities of living here, and for connections that she has in the greater neighborhood and community.

As a result, there are some big sister/little sister dynamics, wherein she is like the big sister who arrived first and sometimes wants to share and sometimes doesn’t. We are navigating that. If Liza arrived first, to what extent does she have first dibs on a



*Riana and Liza: mirrors
and community-mates.*

space or an event when she would prefer that I not be there? When do I give space and when do I assert with stubbornness? When is there enough space for us both? When do we actually benefit from and enjoy both being in the same space?

Part of the challenge of being in spaces together is a sense of competition that may stem from feelings of scarcity around attention, of sensitivity to inclusion and exclusion, and from not always knowing how and where we belong. I can feel embarrassed when I see our awkward attempts to relate to others or somewhat shameful when one of us speaks to the other with less than kindness.

And, Liza has asked me to show her my anger and frustration. This is a beautiful and generous opportunity because I, like so many, can be resistant to expressing my anger, having experienced anger expressed in blaming and frightening ways. I am doing my best to assert my anger, disappointment, or other “negative” emotions and I trust that it will increase our mutual trust.

We have made multiple attempts to do ongoing check-ins and playdates together, though we haven’t yet had success in regularity, in part because it can be a lot of emotional labor. We have patterns of countering, criticizing, or in some way making the other one wrong. As we feel more ease and neutrality in each other’s presence, staying in our centers and not getting activated, and reflecting back what we hear—whether or not we agree with it—we will increase our capacity for proximity. I want to put in the time and energy to increase our comfort and ease because: 1) We both want to continue to live and be in the same spaces; 2) There are learning opportunities and the potential for more connection; 3) Our relationship impacts others; 4) I want to expand my mind and heart.

I used to be even more like Liza, and so some of the questions that I have for her are ones that I have for myself, as well: What if you stayed still and waited for others to extend an invitation or initiate contact? People are inherently inconvenient and disappointing, but when is it still good to be with them? To what extent is it good to compromise our own preferences for the sake of being with others?



*Identical backpacks:
just the start of what we
have in common.*

Photos courtesy of Riana Good

How might others be right in their approach or thinking, too? How can we balance being authentic, kind, and tactful?

I have also made more specific asks around our relationship, with the influence of Nonviolent Communication. One challenging dynamic is that of encountering each other in common kitchen space because I often feel that our interactions focus more on a task or update than relating as human beings. I have made various asks around that, and Liza has acknowledged that it is an area of growth for her and has encouraged me to keep reminding her, which I appreciate. A compilation of my thoughts and feelings around that could be expressed as follows:

“I notice that when you approach, I often feel contracting in my body that I associate with fear or defensiveness. I have a need for attunement and I notice that I feel calmer when you approach without words and get a sense of my current state of being. That helps me to trust you more—and I am less likely to feel like I am submitting to your energy or desire. When I see you in a space, sometimes I anticipate wanting to have distance from you, and I anticipate discomfort—either if I ask for space or if I accept your presence even if it feels uncomfortable. I do not want to be harsh or seem like I am rejecting you. I am sensitive to feelings around rejection and don’t want to be on the giving or receiving end. I want to be authentic with you. Sometimes I feel at full capacity to lovingly receive you, and I can witness, appreciate, hold space for, and sometimes even marvel at and delight in you! At other times I don’t have the attentional resource, but I push myself to receive you, and I manage okay. There are also occasions where I don’t feel resourced, I push myself, and it feels like too much so I withdraw. And, there are times where I don’t have capacity and I show that.”

I am optimistic about our continued movements towards relating with ease and depth, and our capacity to check-in and clear when we miss the mark. I also imagine continued challenges ahead, because some relationships are just more complex than others, no matter the attention given to smoothing them out. 🐦

Riana Good has lived in intentional communities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Hawaii. See her previous articles in COMMUNITIES #196, #197, #201, and #202.

1. Names have been changed.



Photo courtesy of Marissa Percoco

Weaving Resilience through Conflict

By Marissa Percoco

My community is sometimes challenging to talk about, because it is amorphous; not just a place, but also people, plants—an entire biome and its history. When I think of it in botanical terms as a naturalist, the southeastern earthskills community would be my genus, with my species being the nonprofit organization and wider collective called The Firefly Gathering.

Yet community is not as clear-cut as basic taxonomy. We come from all classes, races, religions, ethnicities, and genders, each with a unique story and background. And there is a tremendous amount of overlap in our groups, blurring the lines even more between where one group stops and another begins. This ever-changing web of what we call community can make shared beliefs and values difficult to agree on. As the southeastern earthskills community continues to change over time, one of the things pressing in on us from all sides is the tactic of division. One of the most common things that becomes divisive is conflict.

Conflict is bound to happen, especially when we are in community together. Sharing regular events, spaces, and meals; raising kids together; creating ritual and rhythm—these are all beautiful notions. But in reality, people come with ideas of what

community is and isn't, and what it will and won't be like. Rarely do things play out as they are imagined, especially as our more internalized stories, such as those of money and wealth, or sex and power, begin to play out in our tight-knit interactions. Often, the idealism we come into community with can overshadow the importance of considering “what if” or worst-case scenarios, and how to respond. For this reason, it's important to ponder this “edge” as we navigate conflict in communities.

Everyone's background can bring specific layers of perspective and complexity to a community and its approach to

conflict. For those who come from privileged backgrounds, it may be challenging to have limited access, to compromise or not get one's way. For first-time parents in a communal setting, there may be a lack of awareness of the consequences of raising children without boundaries. Meanwhile, unhealed trauma can result in erratic or unpredictable behavior—especially when conflict arises. Whether consciously or not, our childhood experiences inform what we bring to the communal table.

I love earthskills because they unite us, remind us that first and foremost, we

have community in our DNA. We all have clans, tribes, bands—groups of people who depended on one another for survival in our lineage. These ancestors are not so far back in the branches of our family trees, from a deep-time perspective.

There's been an incredible surge in interest in the form of nature connection and community that earthskills gatherings provide, as we collectively realize that we can no longer live in separation from our beloved home called Earth, or in such disconnection from one another and our deepest selves. We find that we must return, humbled, and take up the oak and the willow—the original and the introduced—and learn to weave new baskets, new patterns of being together.

As communal housing springs up in a plethora of forms all around the world, it's as if our innermost selves are longing for what we knew for many hundreds of thousands of years in our collective experience. Our cellular memories know that the isolated nuclear family is a new construct, only a few thousand years old. That's nothing in the face of millions of years of experience stored in our DNA. We are highly social herd animals at heart, even veering into “pack mentality” at times. When isolated, herd



Austin Lottimer



Parker Michal-Boyce



Parker Michal-Boyce



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Parker Michal-Boyce



Photo courtesy of Marissa Percoco



animals' levels of cortisol increase and their behavior changes, often showing signs of despondency and depression. We are animals—humanimals, who need each other more than we realize.

Many are currently responding to this very real biological call, changing their lives, starting and joining communities, sometimes even relocating to live the dream. It can all be going along so beautifully and so smoothly...until there is conflict. People will often then turn against each other, choose sides, and even move. I've seen thriving communities ripped asunder and turn into ghost towns practically overnight because of conflict that erupts with no clear ways to contain and process it.

As conflict inevitably arises, a vital step of community building is to create clarity around the process of responding from the beginning. The approach to conflict needs to be flexible and strong, like the basket-weaving materials of all continents. This way, when conflict erupts, the group isn't simultaneously trying to find the solution. That process takes time and is much better done before the stress arises, preferably at the onset of the community; but if not, it's never too late.

An essential base for this process are clear agreements. Agreements allow for everyone in a community to be on the same page, and come with the articulated boundaries and actionable steps that will be taken when agreements are not upheld. Without clear agreements, consent is a challenge. Agreements also extend pathways for repair, as well as what I refer to simply as the edge; as in once you cross it, that's it. You are not welcome back. Every relationship has an edge, and defining your community's edge is essential.

Edges. Banishment. Exile. These are extreme tools that have been employed throughout time in communal and tribal living situations. Extreme because in the past, life *literally* depended on being in community. That's the defining piece that has changed for us today. We now have a choice; this choice has profound effects on how we handle ourselves and the conflicts that inevitably arise.

The fact that we can survive apart from community deeply impacts how we behave and conduct ourselves within communal spaces. Believing that we can do what we want, and simply move or find another community if things don't work out, is profoundly different from our ancestors. For them, banishment meant death; for they knew that it truly takes a village to exist. Here in the modern western world of rugged individualism and settler-colonial expansionism, we have been so socialized to isolate, that we've lost the profundity of the impact of communal living.

Today, because of this profound *choice* to live or not live in community, we have moved away from banishment and exile. Now we call it "canceling" and it's a very nuanced and hotly-debated subject. Some people argue for canceling cancel-culture

and helping people learn instead. Others say that's protecting the harm-doer rather than the person harmed, and where's the justice in that?

There seems to be a duality on how to move forward, a sense of extremes wildly vacillating between protecting the person who violates clear agreements and does harm, to blasting people on social media and denouncing and shaming them as evildoers, effectively socially banishing them. Somewhere in the middle lies compassion and clarity, with room to grow; but also with boundaries and an agreed-upon edge that is not crossed.

It's the work of each community to decide where those lines are, and to clearly articulate them. Each community's handbook will look completely different, depending on the perspectives and shared goals of that group. With these unique agreements, boundaries, and edges, the "What Next" question is where values get pressure-tested. Thinking these through with great care and diverse representatives of the community, and doing so *before* conflict arises, can make a huge difference in how flexible or fragile a group will be, and how it will weather the storms.

The greatest fault line I see in many communal "What next?" policies is the idea that if a person has a problem or experiences harm, they should go to the person that harmed them and talk to them and try to work it out. In some

low-conflict scenarios this makes sense, like if the neighbor's dog is barking all night or someone isn't doing their agreed-upon household chores, etc. But in many cases—especially where power dynamics are at play—this approach can easily perpetuate the very harmful behaviors a conflict protocol is intended to address.

On a community scale, I've personally experienced being silenced through bullying tactics for speaking out about repetitive harmful behavior and attempting to hold boundaries. I have been accused of "canceling" when upholding the need to address harm and felt the impacts of there being no clear pathway forward. In that case, the community responded with divisive tactics of gossip and side-taking. These unclear approaches to addressing harm can become a vicious cycle that protects harm-doers and prevents accountability by discouraging people from speaking out. When we look at this pattern societally, the results of this approach are clear.

One poignant example we see is that when a woman experiences sexual assault, she is often treated like a criminal; having to undergo invasive medical procedures, exams, and interrogations, often being asked what she was wearing and if she had been drinking...all implying that she is somehow at fault. This all subtly protects the harm-doer by making it so uncomfortable to report sexual assault that it is estimated half of women never do. These direct feedback systems often encourage people to avoid confronting

conflict for their own safety and mental health, while simultaneously protecting the harmful behaviors and the people doing them from community accountability or consequence.

Even as I write these words, we have been witness to a horrific genocide in Gaza, where the world has stood back and watched while tens of thousands of innocent civilians have been murdered, unable or unwilling to hold the harm-doers accountable; the ultimate example of how power dynamics can create conflict and undermine accountability and consequence.

When I consider approaches to conflict response, the truth is that I fear a world where the people who fight the hardest for power continually get to decide who is right, who is wrong, and who holds the power. Everywhere I look, I see humans struggling over this notion. I believe that when we can return balance to power, we will stop having the levels of conflict that are so rampant in our world today. Creating more clear and compassionate approaches on a small scale will help pave the way for us to practice this globally.

At a societal level, I believe the ripple effects of this recalibration would properly divert our country's resources into social wellness programs and renewable energy, rather than genocide and oil interests; provide the basic human needs for all people; and enact social justice programs involving LANDBACK and Black Reparations. Then, when our basic human needs are met, we can collectively move from the stress of just trying to get by, into a place of abundance and ease; once again tending the land and each other. I believe community plays a crucial role in returning this balance. It is within these conscious communal constructs that we can actively shed the rugged individualism that keeps us isolated from the whole, and begin to co-create something both flexible and strong. 🌱

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



Parker Michal-Boyce



Parker Michal-Boyce



Sarah Tew

My Minority Report

By Lev Bronstein

All names, including the author's, have been changed to protect anonymity.

Our community was communal no longer. By recommendation of our Board of Directors, and a lopsided but by no means unanimous vote of all resident members, we had flipped from a socioeconomic system in which we pooled our income in a common treasury, supporting everyone as equally as possible, into one in which everyone was obliged to find a way to support themselves and pay a flat tax into a common treasury that paid for only the common expenses of the community. (These common expenses included land tax, road and water maintenance, paying off the debts the *ancien regime* had run up, and modest salaries for the three or four people who would do the necessary office work.) Beyond that monthly fee, how much money you had and what you did with it were now your business.

This was easy for some and not so easy for others.

The Board of Directors also recommended, and the community approved by vote, a “Membership Committee,” whose purpose was to meet with community members who were not paying their fees and figure out what to do about them—give them time and space, make a payment plan, or threaten them with expulsion if it was clear they were not able, or just not willing, to go along with the new regime. The committee was also charged with screening potential new members, should anybody want to apply.

We held a community election to select the members of this committee. As someone who had not been in favor of our flip, and who was critical of the way it was working out in practice, I decided I wanted to be on that committee. I wanted to be a voice for tolerance, generosity, and compassion. After all, it didn't really cost us anything to allow the number of people who were not paying into the community treasury to stay. “No freeloaders” was the retort.

I was elected. There were 10 candidates for seven seats, and I came in seventh, giving me a one-year seat. The two big winners were Viktor and Felix, the heads of a couple of successful community businesses that, between them, employed a sizable number of the remaining community members. (A great many had left in the years leading up to the flip, and the exodus continued afterwards.) Another winning candidate was Jessica, a midwife, who had delivered many of the community's children, including mine. I was glad she was there, because I felt like we were on the same side. Viktor and Felix, on the other hand, had been champions of the drive to dump our communal way of life. Both were major cheerleaders for the “no freeloaders” approach.

Viktor, in particular, was a very forceful, persuasive speaker. After a membership committee meeting in which we had both clung to our conflicting viewpoints, he would sometimes offer to drive me home, although my home was an easy walk away. (That was another flip in our community. Before we flipped, people walked a lot. After the flip, most people drove everywhere.) In the few minutes we were in his car together, he would have me completely understanding his view, and nodding in understanding, which is not the same as agreement, but unfortunately looks the same and can even feel similar. When I got out of his truck, though, it was like having a fog around me dissipate. When I stepped away from him, his arguments fell apart. It must have been frustrating for him, as he probably kept thinking he had won me over, only to have me back in disagreement at the next meeting.

Viktor seemed to have a clear idea who he wanted to leave. He and Felix tended to dominate the discussions, to the point where I don't recall who the other three committee members were, just that they tended to agree with Viktor and Felix. Several of our

Such a display of disrespect, arrogance, and anger would once have been cause for Viktor's expulsion. Now it was how our new leadership class did business.

community's tax delinquents were founding members, which Viktor and Felix were not. The list included single adults and several families. They were people who had worked in humble positions maintaining our community infrastructure. Now that had vanished, and they were struggling. Why make their burden heavier? Why, I would ask, are we penalizing the kids in these families, separating them from lifelong companions and the place they had always thought of as home? Apart from Jessica, the rest of the committee didn't seem to care.

Viktor claimed to have heard through the grapevine that a couple of the tax delinquents had been violent with their wives, and saw that as a reason to eject them in addition to their "freeloading" on us. A year or two later, I would hear through the kid grapevine that he was a strong "spare the rod and spoil the child" believer, but meanwhile, he and Felix were whipping up maximum indignation about the alleged wife beaters. Solution? Make them move somewhere else. Makes total sense!

Things got pretty heated. At one of our meetings, Jessica was resisting Viktor's demands for one of these couples' expulsion, and he roared over the top of her plea, "DON'T BE SUCH A PUSSY!"

It is one of the great regrets of my life that, at this point, I did not roar back in Jessica's defense. Saying I was too stunned to respond is a very poor excuse. The way our community used to be, such a display of disrespect, arrogance, and anger would have been cause for Viktor's expulsion. Now it was how our new leadership class did business. The majority of the committee did their best to act as if Viktor hadn't just verbally bitch-slapped Jessica, and got on with our meeting. I felt horrid about my failure to make an issue of it. Perhaps I was not so courageous and outspoken as I liked to think.

One set of parents on Viktor's short list was a couple whose children had been molested by another community member who "just loved to babysit" for them. This had happened when we were still communal, and those in charge at the time expelled the child abuser without involving the police and decided not to bring in outside professional counseling for the victims, perhaps fearing the adverse publicity that such a move might generate. They decided, instead, to kick the can down the road, and "get professional help for these kids if it ever looks like they need it."

That had been a few years ago. The kids' teenage hormones were starting to set in, and they were clearly showing that they needed help, by behaving inappropriately around the community. The family had already been pushed off the property, but were living just down the road, so their kids were frequent visitors, coming to hang out with the kids they had grown up with. The old regime had at least promised help. All the help they got from the new regime was to be banned from visiting the community. In later years, as they grew up, some of them figured out how to integrate their molestation, and some did not.

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Things were coming to a head with Josip and Ilse. They were not only refusing to pay, but had engaged a lawyer with the object of suing the community over the legality of "the flip." Josip, who had done time for violent crimes before becoming part of the group that launched the community, was rumored to have a gun. Our procedures called for a community meeting to discuss expelling them, and so a date was set. Josip and Ilse, who disputed the legality of our whole community structure, said they would not be attending.

Since I, too, had questions about the degree to which "the flip" had been a flim-flam, I had more than a little sympathy with them, and I was not alone. A couple dozen other community members felt similarly, and we would get together for potlucks, sweat lodges, and movie nights, trying to maintain some sem-

blance of the community we used to be. We always made it clear that everybody who lived on the land that had once been our commune was welcome to our gatherings. We hoped that if we just hung in there, maybe those who had flipped along with the flip would flip back. Our numbers, however, were shrinking, as families decided that they'd rather go live somewhere where they weren't bucking a hostile, implacable local power structure.

We held several workshops, with outside speakers, on how groups can govern themselves by consensus. These, too, were open to the whole community, but only our minority faction attended them. The rest of the community tended to agree with Felix and Viktor, and they were not interested in accommodating our concerns. One Board of Directors member said, flat out, "If you don't like the way we're running things here, you're welcome to go somewhere else."

Our group put out an occasional 'zine of commentary on the community, and did our best to post it and leave copies where it would be seen and read, but, we grimly joked, "the ears have walls." We thought it would be fun to surreptitiously tape the community meeting over Josip and Ilse and publish a transcript, as Viktor was known for unleashing long tirades, and we liked the idea of having one to talk back to. I volunteered to do the taping.



Photos courtesy of Lev Bronstein



In those days, surreptitious taping was not that easy. The smallest tape recorders available were about the size of a big book. The meeting was held in a classroom at our community school, equipped with school desks that included a partially closed book shelf under the seat. I put my tape deck down there, and waited for everybody else to show up. By meeting time, there were about 30 people, many of them employees of Felix or Viktor. Nobody noticed my tape recorder.

The moderator of the meeting announced that, since a lot of people wanted to speak about the expulsion, speakers would be limited to three minutes. A couple of people didn't need all that time; a couple of people had to be told their time was up. Most of them wanted the couple to go. And then Viktor took the floor, and started talking, in his liveliest and most persuasive tones, about how dangerous it was for us to have this couple in our midst, and how we really had to remove them. He went on and on about this, but it wasn't at all boring. He seemed to know all the right emotional buttons to push in his audience, and the energy of the group rose like a Black church congregation when the preacher is right on and giving it all they've got. "Church congregation"? "Lynch mob" was more like it. The "moderator" made no attempt to interrupt him, though his speech far exceeded three minutes.

Then somebody noticed my tape recorder. The Viktor-inspired crowd was horrified. OK, I guess you are mostly supposed to ask people before taping them,

but this was investigative reporting, kind of like what people do these days with their cell phones when they see the cops being violent. In any case, I found myself surrounded by some of Viktor's employees, who told me to turn over the tape recorder "or else." I clutched the machine tightly to my chest. We had always been a nonviolent community, and the people trying to grapple the tape deck out of my hands were people I had known—and been friends with—for years, but they were quite insistent about achieving their objective of prying the tape deck away from me. They succeeded, removed the tape and destroyed it, and handed me back my tape deck. I did not get physically harmed in the process. Sure, it was the most nonviolent mob violence I could possibly have experienced—but it certainly wasn't fun, and I couldn't help but notice that no one had come to my defense. I felt hurt, angry, and humiliated.

As with the time Viktor had abused Jessica, we sort of collected ourselves, settled down, and finished the meeting. The vote, of course, was overwhelming for expelling Josip and Ilse, who decided maybe they'd rather not live in a community where so many people were willing to be so rude to them, and went elsewhere. Their lawsuit, on the other hand, went nowhere.

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I'll conclude with the stories of Bertrand and Elise. They're two different stories—the two scarcely knew each other, as far as I know—but they happened around the same time, and both point in the same direction.

Bertrand had come to the community because his sister lived there, and Bertrand was kind of at loose ends, and our community billed itself as a good place to land if you wanted to get yourself together. But he never quite got himself together. After the flip, he didn't have a steady job or much money, and was living with his several cats in a somewhat flaky house whose former occupants had left the community. His sister was long gone. He owed hundreds of dollars in community fees, which he would clearly never be able to pay. My sense was that he would probably be homeless if he had to leave. A couple of former community members had been spotted in the background of a TV report on homelessness in the nearest big city.

Thus, he was on our agenda. With the agreement of the three other members besides me and Jessica, and over our objections, Felix and Viktor took to visiting the guy daily, telling him he needed to be on his way. After a week or so of this, one of Bertrand's neighbors told me, in alarm, that Bertrand had strangled all his cats. I didn't feel I was in a position to drop everything and go check out what was up, so I didn't. The membership committee was not a paid position, and I had a family and a business of my own to attend to. Gotta have good boundaries, right?

The next day, when Felix and Viktor came to browbeat Bertrand, they found him hanging from a noose tied to the second-floor balcony. I heard about it soon after, before the police arrived, and went straight to Bertrand's house. I cried to see Bertrand's lifeless body hanging there. "I'm so sorry," I sobbed. He had been a simple, gentle soul, not without wisdom, fun to talk to, and now he was dead, and maybe if I'd gone to see him last night when I heard about his cats.... I left before the police arrived. I'm guessing Felix and Viktor, who had discovered him, were the ones who interacted with the police. That didn't lead to them questioning me, and I didn't reach out to them. My life experience has given me many good reasons to be reluctant about interacting with law enforcement.

At the next membership committee meeting, Felix and Viktor seemed completely unfazed by Bertrand's suicide. They made it clear that they felt no responsibility for his decision, that they saw no reason to examine their own behavior or the values that led to them harassing Bertrand to death. I was, and remain, shocked that they could be so callous.

I think a value conflict underlies all these horror stories. I put a lot of value on broad inclusion, on making sure everybody was reasonably taken care of, while Felix and Viktor, and the large faction of the community that was employed by them, had narrowed their "circles of inclusion" to their own families, and, to a lesser extent, their fellow em-

ployees and their families. “‘The community’ is just something I have to drive through to get to my home,” Viktor would say.

That is more than just a different definition of proper boundaries. It’s about whether we are communally-minded or selfish, out to make our community better off or out to make ourselves better off. Making the latter choice buys in to the value of competition, buys in to it being OK to have winners and losers, and the winners don’t have to concern themselves with the losers’ problems.

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Finally, the story of Elise, which was only indirectly a membership committee matter, really iced the cake for me.

Elise lived in a wheelchair. She needed help to function every day. When we were communal, there had been plenty of help for her, plenty of company, plenty of things to do. But those people and activities had all slipped away in the events around the flip, and she found herself with only two housemates—Felix and his wife. They lived in a very ramshackle building that was clearly past its prime.

Then a family that was leaving offered their much nicer house to Felix and his wife. They accepted it. The next day, Elise hung herself. Once again, for the second time in a month or so, the police were called to the community for a suicide. To the best of my knowledge, these were the only two suicides in the history of our community, including the years since the events I am recounting. We talked about it a day or two later at the membership committee meeting. Even though it was the second suicide around him in a couple of weeks, Felix did not seem particularly shook up by it, nor did Viktor seem at all perturbed.

“Did she leave a suicide note?” somebody asked Felix. “Yeah, I found a note, but she was just talking shit, so I tore it up and threw it in the trash.” “You what? Isn’t that illegal?” Was I too intimidated by that point to ask that question out loud? This happened a long time ago, and I don’t remember, but I do remember that Jessica and I seemed to be the only people who thought this was questionable behavior.

Going to the police, with the note long gone, and given Felix’s outstanding reputation as a business man of great integrity, seemed pointless. Am I being unfair to Felix to suspect that the note revealed that Elise had committed suicide because Felix and his wife had told her that no, she could not move into the new house with them? I have never had the courage (or perhaps the nosiness) to push for an answer to that question. As I said, I was finding out that I was not as courageous and outspoken as I liked to think, and that I still let myself down sometimes.

I asked myself, “Isn’t being so blasé about these suicides indicative that these guys are sociopaths?” But these sociopaths were, economically, politically, and socially, the new leadership of what had once been a revolutionary community, and the new majority was people who seemed only too happy to go along with whatever those signing their paychecks wanted to do. Such *good* Germans. Hey, now that the money they earned only supported them and not the three-ring circus we had once been, they were making a middle-class living, just as their TV sets told them they should. I didn’t watch much TV, finding real life far more interesting and rewarding, but I was unusual in the community.

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What was I going to do? I was only one member of our family, and my wife and our rapidly teening children had their own feelings, opinions, and needs. I could not stand the thought of leaving the land my children were born on, and in which one of them was already buried. I related more and more to the Japanese soldiers who didn’t get the word that World War Two was over, and held out for years in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The sociopaths were in charge for now, but we would wait them out. Another membership committee election was coming up. I ran for re-election, but this time I lost by a vote or two. Other residents still remained on Vik-

tor’s undesirable list, but somebody else would have to stick up for them, or maybe nobody would. However, even without being pushed, many of my friends were leaving the community. My wife and I felt increasingly isolated there, but didn’t really have anywhere to go. What did open up for us is another story.

All these events took place decades ago. The non-communal community is still there, though time has taken its toll of those who were the principals in this story. More recent, apparently more liberal, iterations of the membership committee have let in enough new people to create a present in the community that is scarcely aware of its past, so the dark deeds recounted in this story are not intended as a negative reflection on the current community.

However, in all those years, none of the protagonists in this tale have reached out to me to say, “Wow, that was some weird shit we went through back then, wasn’t it?” They know where to find me if they ever want to get together to reflect—to share confessions, maybe even laughs, forgiveness, and healing. 🌸

Lev Bronstein has, since his unfortunate murder in Mexico City in 1940, emanated as thousands of people all over the world, as whom we continue to do what we can to bring about a worldwide, psychologically deep, politically radical revolution. No one is free until everyone is free!



Starting a New Cohousing Group

By *Kate Nichols*

I had already enjoyed living in two other communities before I learned about cohousing. At the University of Minnesota, my children and I lived in family student housing where we had a spontaneous community of single moms. We helped each other with child care, shared meals and emotional support. We lived around a large circle of grass, so it was easy to watch the children running around outside, in and out of each other's houses. But after a year of working, raising two young children, and going to school full time, I was exhausted and dropped out of school. I had to leave the community. But I've never forgotten the camaraderie that I experienced there.

My time at the second community—Holden Village in upper Lake Chelan, Washington—happened after my children were grown. I volunteered there for room and board. I had several jobs, but over the long winter, I was not only head of laundry, but delighted to be the head of the craft department, where I warped looms, and taught knitting and weaving to guests. I loved working with all the creative people. We took turns washing the dishes after meals, worked on the garbage team, and sang together at worship services.

But sometimes when I'd walk into the dining room at the end of a long day, I'd look around at the 60 people sitting around the tables, chattering, and there wouldn't be anyone that I wanted to sit with. Although I especially enjoyed one family, there were times when they ate in their chalet rather than the dining room. And I knew their young children needed their parents' attention, and if I sat with them, their parents and I would catch up on our day, and the children felt ignored. One time the four-year-old even announced that she didn't want me to sit with them.

The remoteness of the location created real problems for some people. At the time, there was no internet or phone service. There was radio contact for emergencies only. When one man told us he wanted to commit suicide, the community didn't have an

experienced counselor to help him, so he left for several weeks to get the help he needed. After my year contract was up, I went home because I wanted to be more in touch with my children. But living in the mountains had always been a dream of mine, and I appreciated the opportunity to wake up every morning surrounded by mountain peaks and spend my days with the smiles of community members.

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When I first heard about cohousing some years later, I knew it was how I wanted to live with my young daughter. But I had no idea what I was getting into. Developing Bellingham Cohousing, in Washington, 25 years ago, was one of the most exhilarating and exhausting projects I've ever participated in. When I look back at the success of the project—much of it was serendipitous.

I learned of a site that had been part of a



Bellingham Cohousing construction site.

farm and it still had an old farmhouse on it. There was already a bid on the property, but the potential buyer wanted the price lowered. A couple of men from our cohousing group met with the owner, and agreed to the full asking price. When the original bidder withdrew his offer, the owner accepted ours. When I found out that the farmhouse on the property had been given away and would be moved off site, I tracked down its new owners. They told me their contract had expired, but they had finally found a barge to bring the house to Lopez Island. However, they would leave the house if we signed the final contract with the owner of the land. So I called the two members who had talked to the owner, and they made an agreement with the owner to put down \$80,000 toward the asking price of \$450,000 for the land. It was a two-year contract. My parents unexpectedly sent me a check for \$20,000, so I was one of four who agreed to put up \$20,000 toward the \$80,000, but I needed to live in the farmhouse because the money that I had received would price me out of my subsidized lower rent.

Six households ended up signing the contract. Looking back, it seems foolish that members of the group signed a contract without any legal agreement between us. After we signed the contract, I quickly found a lawyer that I trusted and created a limited liability company (LLC) for the group.

The house and over five acres of land were ours! My daughter and I, along with our house bunny, moved into the old farmhouse. The group excitedly talked about building cottages in a circle around the property. I enjoyed living in the farmhouse. I realize looking back at that time how lax we were about the future implications of the contract that we had signed. One of the members and I went to the Cohousing Conference in Seattle where we met Charles Durrett. We enjoyed meeting him and hired The Cohousing Company to help us with designs.

Durrett's partner, Katie McCamant, came for the site planning workshop. She read the engineering plans, which none of us had bothered to look at. The next morning, she laid out a scale drawing of our site on the table. Then she started throwing wooden house blocks on it and



The original six members with Katie McCamant in front of the farmhouse at Bellingham Cohousing.



The staff and volunteers that I lived with in Holden Village.

Photos courtesy of Kate Nichols

placed them next to each other. She explained that there were wetlands on the site, and we could build on only a little more than two acres. Now, it seems unbelievable that none of us had looked at the engineering plans. I'm not sure I was even aware that we had them. It forced me to understand the reality of the project: We had less than two years to get our funding together for the land, which would require a lot of marketing and organizing to get enough money together.

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Under the pressure of getting the project built, we ignored some of the problems within the community. Also, I had a hard time standing up for myself, especially with some of the confident lawyers in the group. One incident stands out. I had moved out of the farmhouse during construction. We were no longer supposed to be on the site. But one day I realized that I'd forgotten something in the farmhouse, and

since the construction crew wasn't there on Sundays, I thought it would be a good day to run in and grab it. Unfortunately, one of the new members saw me run out of the site. At the next meeting, he stood up and pointed at me. He said that I'd disobeyed the rules. He ranted a bit. No one said anything, no one asked him to sit down, no one told him he was behaving inappropriately. No one tried to mediate the situation. I left discouraged. One person did follow me out and said that she felt he was inappropriate, but she hadn't said anything in front of the group.

It was an amazing feat to get the project built but we did it, with the help of the cohousing professionals at The Cohousing Company and Jim Leach at Wonderland Hills. We were fortunate that Jim Leach stepped up and helped us with the construction loan, enabling us to pay off the contract for the land.

But after we moved in, it became apparent that in rushing to complete the buildings, we had failed to form a solid community, one where we cared about each other. Although we had had some training in consensus, members weren't always respectful to each other. The homes were built as condominiums and homeowner associations rules aren't as flexible as an LLC. We ended up with a board of directors where the board members took their positions to be ones of power. This was especially true for the head of the board, who was a lawyer, and occasional judge. He wanted to bring a proposal to the larger group to put a small gazebo in front of my house on a small piece of land that was shared by several other houses. I asked him to wait until a couple of the other homeowners could attend who would also be affected by the additional building. I told him I couldn't be at the meeting because I needed to leave for a few days to help my son. He wouldn't wait, and the proposal passed.

I didn't like the power struggles in the group and the disrespect. I didn't have support to make the changes that were needed to create a more equitable community. So, after four and a half years, I made the difficult decision to leave the community. Later, I learned that five of the original group of six had moved out. Recently, I asked Charles Durrett how other cohousing groups manage HOA boards. He said now they recommend that everyone be on the board.

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Recently, I've started a new effort to develop a cohousing community in Port Townsend, Washington. With the Housing Solutions Network, I planned for Charles Durrett to do a presentation to bring people together who were interested

in cohousing. About 35 people showed up. A few people came because they were interested in hearing Durrett's talk, but about 12 people seem serious about starting a new group.

I'm finding it difficult to balance all the requirements of developing a new cohousing community. We started by looking for a site, and members were keen on that task. We found a terrific site, but at the next meeting, members wanted to gather information about different architects and set up Zoom calls with them. The issue of professionals is complicated by more choices than when I helped develop cohousing 25 years ago. Are the architects experienced at facilitating a group making the decisions that will encourage a close community? Now that we are interested in a site, there hasn't been enough interest in marketing and financing the project. But financing the site is a big issue. The group quickly whittled down to five working-class people without a lot of money.

We've had no training in decision-making. Do we learn consensus? Or sociocracy, which is new to me? At this point, I don't want to learn a new form of decision-making. It's interesting to run into the same issue of wanting to find a site, design the buildings, but not being careful about how the group is going to work together, and how do we get to know each other? It takes time to build trust.

I'm not sure how to use my knowledge of cohousing in the best way for the group without dampening their enthusiasm for what they want to do rather than what needs to be done. Sometimes I wonder if I want to go through developing a cohousing community again. Is there a simpler way of having community? A friend suggested that I start an artist community where she lives; she even asked another friend of hers if she'd be interested, and she is. I will keep an open mind as to where I find community even as I work on this cohousing project. 🐦

Kate Nichols is a writer who enjoys hiking, cooking at the Recovery Cafe with friends, and being on the water. She is presently building a sailboat at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend.





A Pie in the Face

By Graham Ellis

Conflict can destroy a team, which hasn't spent time learning to deal with it.
—Thomas Isgar

Bravery is the choice to show up and listen to another person, be it a loved one or perceived foe, even when it is uncomfortable, painful, or the last thing you want to do.
—Alaric Hutchinson

It's been 37 years since our eclectic group joined together on a collective journey which continues today. Much has changed in this time. Within our membership there have been marriages and divorces, births and deaths, comings and goings, new careers and good fortune mixed with some serious bad luck. A very positive achievement is that internal conflicts have never yet led to legal action.

Our land has been transformed from raw jungle into a pristine estate with the number of residents rising to 40 in 2009 and now averaging about a dozen. There have also been dramatic changes in the occupancy levels and demographics of our adjoining subdivision which has gone from 10 homes in 1987 to over 300 presently.

Meanwhile, volcanic devastation to our East and to our West has destroyed over a thousand homes plus forests and farms and our favourite recreational spots. Ultimately at Bellyacres we live “on the edge”—down slope from the world's most active volcano—and there can be no expectation of permanence. Change can happen very quickly in Puna Makai, Hawaii.

Our early communal history was filled with fun and frivolity, lots of hard work and exuberance. But, as the changes came, we experienced more challenges and hence more conflicts. This escalated in 2012 when we were confronted with a handful of neighbors who attempted to get us shut down with the support of a receptive local Planning Department. Our bubble burst and internal conflict arose in its wake.

The protocols and practices we put into place to deal with interpersonal tensions and disputes seemed inadequate to the task. Hindsight suggests that we could have done a much better job dealing with division and conflict and some serious lessons have been learned.

I personally drafted our original set of bylaws that were adopted at our 1990 Annual General Meeting. They remained totally unchanged until 2000 and only

had minor alterations before 2017 when shifts occurred in the leadership of our organization.

Our bylaws were totally unique to our group, reflecting our informality and commitment to remaining true to our vaudevillian juggling origins. I believe that the fact that we very rarely needed to refer to them for our first, mostly harmonious 25 years indicates how closely they aligned with our true values and beliefs regarding justice and fairness.

While drafting the bylaws I anticipated that dealing with interpersonal relationships is a complex subject and attempted to address it. I researched the scant resources available at the time and found guidance on the Fellowship for Intentional Community website. As a result I included a commitment to using mediation services as our ultimate step in conflict resolution.

While not a trained mediator myself I was very familiar with the process, having several good friends who worked in mediation centres as administrators or volun-



teers. Regrettably, interest in learning about mediation was not shared by all, leading to unclarity among many about its methodology and practises. In our earliest, and successful, uses of mediation I was always chosen as the group representative and so others didn't gain experience in ways that mediation is handled and in what circumstances it's best used.

Dealing with conflict successfully requires practising good communication skills. Bellyacres has taught me that the most fundamental issue in the process of building a healthy community is the development of effective communication. This alone can make or break a community. In an age when most families are challenged to connect for a few moments a day or communicate without the aid of an electronic device—it takes training, determination, and commitment to practice effective communication, face-to-face and also remotely.

In over three decades our members have in my opinion lacked adequate engagement with community-building resources. This is a problem that, with good planning, can and should be avoided by every intentional community. Our community paid a heavy price by not having members educate themselves in good communication skills and processes. A handful of us participated in a weekend Nonviolent Communication (NVC) training but we had no formal facilitation or organizational workshops, and no education about conflict resolution or the meaning and practice of consensus decision-making. Admittedly, training options were limited back in the 1990s, but thankfully all these services are now available from several sources and every fledgling or established community can utilise them easily.

Communities are organised differently from most modern societies where there is a distinct separation of powers. The executive, legislative, and judicial branches in democratic societies are typically very separate entities. In a community this is not the case. We often find ourselves, individually or collectively, in the position of judge, jury, and executioner. Many times I experienced this extra burden of responsibility and the risk of conflict and criticism as a community member.

One particularly unique conflict resolution defuser that I had included in our original bylaws raised a few eyebrows and attracted critics, including long-term work-exchanger Paddy. In 2008 he wrote, "Bellyacres bylaws serve more as basic guidelines than as rules and they tend to be lenient. For example, a physical assault recently occurred in the com-

munal kitchen. A resident took another resident by his throat and pinned him in the corner between the stove and the sink while verbally threatening to kill him by tossing him off a nearby coastal cliff. I broke up the fight and Graham was called to preside on the fate of the perpetrator. The atmosphere was that of a public hanging as other residents trickled in through the woodwork in festive spirits. A timeless ritual was occurring...a ritual of authority. Once the assailant and the assaulted had been given a chance to tell their side of the story and face off, Graham announced the verdict: According to Bellyacres bylaws, the punishment for this kind of behavior is for both parties to stand facing one another and to publicly take turns throwing pies in one another's face. He also reminded everyone that Bellyacres was a continuing social experiment."

This turned out to be the first and last time we ever had to deal with physical violence at Bellyacres but it was not the only time people got pied as a form of public humiliation. It was not unlike the medieval stocks where rule breakers would have rotten fruit thrown at them. In 2017 sadly this bylaw was removed and recent conflicts have involved threats of legal action and worse. I yearn for the pie in the face solution!

The catalyst for this sad turn of events was a Cease and Desist order issued by the County added to threats of fines being imposed by the State after complaints were made about our community by disgruntled neighbors. While there was an amazing uprising of local support for our non-compliant school, farmers' market, and performance programs, a deep division developed inside our own Bellyacres membership. It was centred on laying blame but has since expanded to include differences in outlook regarding private/community ownership, parenting, prioritising sustainability/climate change actions, and political activism.

In 2014 when we had to make a major decision quickly and there were several suggested different strategies, I invited four of the key resident members to attend a board meeting. I appealed, "So far, we have had no input from you regarding your views about which direction to take. In the interests of transparency, I hope that you will share your thoughts with the Bellyacres group publicly so that they can be considered and discussed before the meeting. It is no good to remain silent at this time and repress your thoughts. We are all in this canoe together."

Conflict resolution requires clear communication and I had been corresponding via our email group and received indications from several absentee members regarding preferences but I had no idea what the resident members wanted to do. Perhaps they didn't either, because they never came to the meeting or expressed their opinions.

We had some serious options to consider and a deadline by which to decide. Being geographically dispersed across three continents—with six time zones and an email decision-making process that had never been officially approved—we were testing ourselves to the max. The exchanges were numerous—emotionally heated and contentious because we'd never played with such high stakes before.

Our lawyers strongly urged me to attend the State of Hawaii meeting to defend our organization from the accusations but some Bellyacres members were adamantly opposed and no decision was reached. With a heavy heart, I submitted to the will of the majority, but have lived

to regret it to this day. Our non-attendance was taken as an admission of our absolute guilt and we received a \$55,000 fine and instructions to demolish 10 structures.

Following this we experienced additional conflict. Many members wanted us to immediately comply with the State ruling. It was the opinion of some others, including myself, that this had to be avoided at all costs because it would result in severe detrimental changes at Bellyacres that would mean the ending of our community as we knew it. There was never a consensus decision made but the demolitions took place. The effect of this was people taking sides—a serious division happened where none had existed before. I still maintain that it could have been avoided had we been united as in the good old days and not split into factions.

Where previously I had felt a cohesion that made us strong, I saw members grow weary and disillusioned about our chances of living in our community without future harassment from government agencies. When my relationship hit an all time low with one of these members I asked for a personal mediation with him.

Our issues began way back in our history and exist because of our inherent personality style conflicts. One of the most common sources of conflict and angst in all types of intentional communities is the friction between the "doers" and the "talkers." This dichotomy between task and process is very common and known to be a source of conflict and frustration in many communities, as it also was between this member and myself.

The member insisted that having a group mediation with me was the only option, rather than a more private one-to-one mediation. This was not my intention when writing the bylaws, not my understanding of how mediation worked best, and not my experience having been chosen to serve as the group representative in a number of one-to-one mediation sessions. A year later I finally acquiesced and attended a mediation facing five other members. I experienced it as more akin to a lynching than a mediation and I strongly discourage others from attempting this unbalanced approach to conflict resolution.

I was naive enough in 1989 to believe that peer group pressure and a community consciousness would be sufficient to keep our membership more or less in harmony. It turns out I was very wrong. Insufficient communication skills, a tendency toward blame or mistrust, or a reluctance to offer apologies or attend mediation sessions can all erode community cohesion and morale.

My advice to all intentional communities is clear. Without a well researched and enforceable policy to resolve conflicts, your community, like us at times, could become divided and weak with disharmony, distrust, and brutal criticism. Keep communicating respectfully and attend those conflict resolution workshops! 🍷

*In 1987 Graham Ellis founded the Bellyacres ecovillage on a 10 acre jungle lot in Puna, Hawaii, with a vision to experiment with sustainable community living practices. Graham's book about his three decades living there, *Juggling Fire in the Jungle*, is available as an ebook from the bookstore at ic.org. See his previous COMMUNITIES articles in issues #168, #176, #184, #187, #195, #198, and #199. In 2017 he was deported back to the UK, where he now lives with his wife and family seeking a return to the values and joys of sustainable communal living.*



Photos and illustration courtesy of Graham Ellis

Burnt Out and Resentful

By Andrew McLean

It's an all too common, and wearisome, tale. Have you ever noticed that our movement is littered with people who are burnt out, resentful, and feel ripped off?

"I gave so much to that community, and for what?"

"You will hear from my lawyers."

"No one appreciates the sacrifices I made for this community."

"I'm not going anywhere—this community is only possible because of me!"

Perhaps you have heard or said something along those lines? There is an even stronger possibility of your saying them if you are a founder, like me. I'm a cofounder of a community that recently transitioned to another model, against my original intention and will. There is a strong story in my family that could have become my own. My Irish-born grandfather died a bitter man because, among other things, he was written out of his parents' will because he married a German woman between the world wars. I have been busy over the course of my life re-writing this story—changing the outcome for me; yet this new chapter in the communities universe, the culmination of my life's work and passion, threatened once again to solidify this story of resentment into my soul.

But it's not only live-in communities that suffer "resentment-itis." Workplaces, families, and community groups also have the privilege. I'm involved in an alternative festival, and there is certainly no lack of contenders in this community as well. Someone puts a huge amount of work into their pet project, and either doesn't get the recognition that they "deserve," or the organisation is forced to accept their "gift," with a hefty side-serve of personal baggage that is ultimately too much for the community to bear.

Clearly, this poison of resentment is going to leach from that person to the rest of the community. Resentfulness is a cancer to community. We have all seen it, but how do we stop it?

When the cataclysm happened in my own community, and it was time for me to move on, the feelings of resentment were welling up inside of me, threatening to explode into a lawsuit or at least to prove that I was in the right. I have read such articles in this very magazine.

So where is the pressure valve? Let's talk a little context first. I have a huge capacity for work, and I love it. And I love the recognition it gives me, if I'm to be honest. And as a cofounder of a community, I'm the perfect candidate for the martyr complex. It's so easy to be working, sweat-upon-the-brow, and see someone reading a book under a tree and start cussing under my breath, noticing my pulse and resentment building.

What happens next is always the crucial bit, right?

Before we discuss this further, I just want to make a confession. When I started a community, I was completely looking forward to alternative building, community bonding, growing food, cooking, learning new skills, "bush regen," and building renewable energy and water systems. Obviously. These things are what many people get excited about. But I failed to see the most important thing—how to do the "getting on" part. I missed the most basic and most important part of community: **the personal work required in order for us to "get on."**

My personal work came in the form of learning from Rainbow Gathering, Nonviolent Communication (NVC), and Intentional Healing Therapy (details in the bio). So I got with the programme. Better late than never, right?

This was my journey to freedom.

1. When I start to get resentful, whose problem is it? It's clearly mine. I have to take responsibility for my own triggers.

2. If I feel like I'm giving too much, then I need to stop. Every time I feel resent-

The next evolutionary jump required for humanity is knowing our needs, taking responsibility for them, and engaging with others in healthy and lifegiving ways. In short—doing our personal work.

ful at someone resting under a tree with a book, I realise it's my time to rest under a tree with a book! Simple.

Does less get done in the community? Maybe. Maybe not—a community with residents who are not plagued by resentment surely, over time, will be more productive. But who cares, anyway? Aren't we moving towards a more balanced, less "masculine," action-orientated world? Isn't frenetic action what got our world into this mess, and do we really think that frenetic action will get us out of it? Getting on is the work of community—not building kingdoms.

3. Never give more time or energy than you choose to. When it was my time to leave the community, I hadn't given one drop of sweat, not one second of my time, and not one cent more than I wanted to. Can everyone in your community or organisation say that? This is the key to beating resentment. What I gave was MY choice. If I wasn't there, I would be somewhere else doing something else. It is time, my friends, to take hyper-responsibility for our actions. To see our gifts as true gifts. No strings attached. No reciprocation needed.

At our ecovillage we employ NVC. It's only a tool, but it is a good one. All humans are simply trying to meet our needs. A person who does well in community, Diana Leafe Christian once wrote, is someone who doesn't "need" it.¹ That bothered me. "I need community! What do you mean, Diana?" But now I understand. I joined community for it to magically meet my needs for shared worldview, connection, mattering, and belonging, but I realised that without my own **ongoing** personal work, meeting my own needs by dragging it out of others is never going to end well. When we powerfully meet our own needs, it's much easier for us to receive and be grateful for moments when our needs are met externally.

This is the utopia I know is possible.

If humans are going to last the next 200 years, we are going to have to learn how to get on together. Working together is our super-power; yet capitalism, neoliberalism, and individualism attack the very thing we needed to become successful as a species. Rutger Bregman reminds

us² that Neanderthals were another branch of humanoid. They had bigger brains and bigger bodies, so should have been successful, yet *Homo sapiens* were the most successful. Why? Because our superpower is working together. If you accept the "out of Africa" thesis, then all our predators and prey were bigger, faster, and stronger than us. We became successful through community, collaboration, and communication.

For getting on, the next evolutionary jump required for humanity is knowing our needs, taking responsibility for them, and engaging with others in healthy and life-giving ways. In short—doing our personal work. Getting on together **is** the work in community and one of the keys to "getting on" is to manage our resentment. Otherwise our beautiful movement, which has real possibilities to change the world, will be littered with burnt out, resentful, and powerless people. It is THAT existential. 🌱

Andrew McLean is the cofounder of Eco Villages Australia. Since leaving the ecovillage he cofounded, he travels around Australia to festivals and communities. The community he left welcomes him with open arms when passing through.

The start of his journey through resentment was at Rainbow Gatherings that he loves to attend. The balance of his journey was done through Intentional Healing Therapy, a new healing modality based on Kinesiology developed in the community he cofounded. Free phone sessions can be accessed through malenyhealing@gmail.com. They operate entirely on a non-transactional gift economy. NVC practitioners can be accessed almost anywhere.

Apart from personal growth and healing, he is also passionate about ecovillage structures as a way forward for healthy communities, believing that non-ownership land models such as the Collective Stewardship model of Eco Villages Australia is key to healthy communities. He believes that people should not stay a minute longer than they want to in a community and healthy communities facilitate this flow and movement. More about Collective Stewardship at www.ecovillages.au.

1. Diana Leafe Christian, *Finding Community: How to Join an Ecovillage or Intentional Community*, New Society Publishers, 2007, p. 97. In this chapter ("What Does It Take to Live in Community?") she goes on to write: "People who are fulfilled and effective in the world and doing well in their lives are more likely to thrive in community. ... Paradoxically, the more anxious or desperate a person is to find community, or the more difficult a person finds living outside community, the less likely it is he or she will be invited to join one, and the less likely he or she will do well or feel comfortable living in one."

2. *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, 2019 (Dutch version) and 2021 (English version, Little, Brown and Company).



Chris Roth

Community Is Messy —So Why Bother?

By Stephen Guesman

Jason is making a list—god we love lists. This list is a queue of folks that want to speak to the issue at hand—fixing the road. Not the road that we all use on a daily basis—that road through Common Ground Community is in great shape thanks to Ray and Edward. No, the road in question is not really a road, but a rough and tumble tractor path that could be a road if only.... But do we need it? Would anyone actually use it? These questions proliferate in the ensuing 30-minute discussion. We don't get close to consensus. The road doesn't get fixed, and another 30 minutes of our lives is gone.

For most of my life I've met with these folks around a dining room table, or in lawn chairs, or huddled on a pier, to discuss managing our life together. I've come to appreciate that all these meetings are not just about the subjects discussed—it's about the Work. For G.I. Gurdjieff the Work was the pursuit of self-mastery and it was life's only worthwhile pursuit. A big part of the Work involved other people striving together to achieve a common goal. To Gurdjieff, what the goal was was not as important as the collective effort to achieve it. That collective effort inevitably involves some strife which tests and tempers us. Like stones in a rock tumbler, it's the grit that does the polishing—no grit, no polish—no strife, no community. You gotta take the thorns to get to the berries.

Recognizing that our current culture is rapidly destroying the environment that sustains us all, the goal of many folks forming intentional communities is to learn to live more sustainably. And hopefully build lives with more joy and less stress. As you begin to consider tactics to live more sustainably, you may soon discover that it's not so much about self-sufficiency as it's about re-establishing the local interdependence that our ancestors depended on. That local interdependence involves a lot of cooperating, and the sum total of all that cooperating is community.

So we meet every month and work on the roads, or beat back the privet on the unoccupied portions of our 80 acres of Mother Earth, not that Mother Earth cares about roads or privet. But we help each other live more simple and sustainable lives than we could or would be living independently in townhouses or suburban homes. We share the simple joys of minor achievements that we achieved together. We look for opportunities to celebrate, and find plenty. And we have meetings, and guidelines, that supposedly help us to cooperate more effectively, or perhaps more smoothly. But all those meetings and guidelines can be hurdles that prevent some folks from participating in intentional communities.

The ability to cooperate is emerging as the principal attribute that allowed our species to thrive. We weren't the strongest or the fastest, and possibly not even the smartest, but we learned to tell stories.

And those stories knit us together into tribes that could cooperate to more successfully repel the myriad challenges of survival.

But cooperating comes with a cost. That cost comes in many guises—consenting but not agreeing, taking less than you really want, giving more than you feel you should have to, or just shutting up and going along. All variations on the basic theme of surrendering individual initiative for collective control, or subordinating

We help each other live more simple and sustainable lives than we would be living independently in townhouses or suburban homes.

self-interest for the common good.

It all comes down to how valuable you think the benefits are versus the costs of cooperating. That varies from person to person, but also from day to day. Some days I sure don't want to go to a meeting, but I go because Robert, or Susan, or Jason has something they want to talk about and I want them to come when I have something. If we weren't so interdependent in how we've chosen to live, I might not care about Robert or Susan or Jason. But we wouldn't have nearly as many opportunities to celebrate either.

We chose to be interdependent, and we've apparently decided that the benefits are worth the costs. But everyone's got to do that calculation for themselves. How much celebrating do you have time for? 🐦

Stephen Guesman is a founding member of Common Ground Community in rural north Alabama. Common Ground Community is 44 years old and still has six of its original members. Stephen lives off-the-grid with his wife and 16 goats, and has had careers in nonprofit organizing, publishing, and green building. Stephen welcomes inquiries about Community—he can be reached at GreenWorks.sg@gmail.com.



45th Annual CGC Celebration of Inter-dependence.



A family gathering, July 2006.



Eight of the original nine founders (and three neighbors) clearing the road after a storm, circa 2000.



Common Ground Community Retreat, 2020.

Photos courtesy of Stephen Guesman

Introverts Unite!

By Alan O'Hashi

I went into cohousing seclusion by cutting back on my Silver Sage Village participation level following a health scare in 2014. You can choose as much privacy or community as you like in cohousing, and I chose more privacy. It was hard enough to regain my strength and catch up with my life, let alone deal with the meetings and small talk at potluck dinners.

That was a simple transition, considering I had been out of the SSV loop for six weeks while flat on my back in the hospital, followed by two months of in-home therapy. I didn't get out much.

Part of my self-imposed isolation was health-related, but being an introvert, dropping out came naturally and was a welcomed break from the cohousing community hubbub. I wouldn't be missed since whatever work I abandoned would be completed by some of the over-participants.

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Why should introverts matter in cohousing? Author Susan Cain wrote a book called *Quiet* in 2012 that gives pretty good insight into how introverts are pushed aside in an extroverted world. She explains that extroverts solve problems spontaneously, prefer speed over accuracy, and move to another problem if frustrated or discouraged. Introverts tend to be more contemplative and accurate and think through a problem before trying to solve it.

The consensus-based and deliberate tenets of cohousing are more introverted in nature than extroverted. Statistically, 30 percent of the population self-identify as extroverts and 70 percent as introverts.

The data are sparse, but it's been estimated that introverts are overrepresented in cohousing, with 75 to 85 percent self-identifying as introverts. My theory about the disparity is that cohousing community social structures are highly organized and create an environment of forced acceptance. Residents have all agreed to include everyone through interactions at regular meetings, sharing planned dinners, and social gatherings.

Cohousing communities try to implement flat leadership structures but still have built-in hierarchies required by outside-world government-administered Homeowner Association (HOA) regulations, like HOA officers, a board of directors, and committees with leaders.

I saw an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* that said 96 percent of leaders and managers self-identify as extroverts. The few extroverts in cohousing communities can wedge themselves into traditional leadership roles, which can cause participation conflicts among the majority of community introverts.

Because of this divide, I suggest that communities, particularly those in the forming stages, get to know their potential neighbors more than on a superficial level.

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While there are many facets to a person, determining who are the introverts and extroverts can be eye-opening. Residents in established communities have learned their neighbors' good and bad habits through experience, and a personality exercise like one of those below may be too personal, but it's worth the exercise.

If you're considering plopping down your life savings to buy a house in a community with a bunch of strangers, you should at least go into it with knowledge about the quirks your potential neighbors may hold. They may wonder the same things about you.

A revealing and, at the same time, fun community-building activity is for all to take a simple personality test. Take into account your members' personal safety levels if you decide to do this. Be sure that all are okay with exposing their inner selves to others.

There are many measuring tools, including the Enneagram, and True Colors. I like the Myers-Briggs test, which I've administered at a variety of workshops. At least for me, the activity is low risk. The results give insight into how individuals may react interpersonally and when making decisions.

Isabel Myers-Briggs and her mother, Katherine Cook Briggs, developed the measurement tool based on Carl G. Jung's theory of psychological types.

- Source of personal energy:
 - Extroverted (E) vs. Introverted (I)
- How information is processed:
 - Sensing (S) vs. Intuition (N)
- Decision-making process:
 - Thinking (T) vs. Feeling (F)
- How our worlds are organized:
 - Judging (J) vs. Perceiving (P)

Myers-Briggs estimates where a person fits on the introvert to extrovert continuum. I'm an INFP on the introversion spectrum. It's a rare personality type. The Myers-Briggs interpretation says I tend to be quiet, nonjudgmental, and imaginative. I utilize a caring and creative approach in my life.

If you're curious, there are any number of websites that offer free versions of the test and interpretations of the various personality types. I use 16personalities.com.

While the four categories are general, they provide a framework that provides insight into members of any community, be it cohousing or your book club.

How people play with others is a function of their basic personalities. When I'm writing a book, I assign my characters with Myers-Briggs personality types and how they match up with one another. This gives me insight into how the characters interact as the story moves forward.

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In any community, no person is the same as any other. We are multidimensional beings and possess introvert and extrovert characteristics; these traits are not mutually exclusive.

Cohousers mirror the wider world and span the extroversion-introversion spectrum. The cooperative synthesis favors tendencies of introversion.

Uber Extroverted People are more aggressive and exemplify Superman's American Way: Winning is better than losing, bigger is better than smaller, as we fight a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American Way. They tend to:

- Take more from the community than they give back.
- Need power and control.
- Seek personal advantage to win.
- Use skills to dominate.
- Believe the loudest voice wins.
- Work alone as a rugged individual.
- Celebrate personal independence.
- Manipulate the system to benefit self-interests.

Uber Introverted People are more passive and less concerned about competition. They tend to:

- Play well with other introverts.
- Give more to the community than they take.
- Give up power and control.
- Seek attention as a way to connect.
- Give away skills for no gain.
- Move immediately to a compromise position.
- Value the group over the individual.
- Rely on over-dependent relationships.
- Self-sacrifice to the point of personal harm.

Balanced Cooperative People are the synthesis. Ideal cohousers set their passive and aggressive tendencies aside. They:

- Collaborate with those with broad-ranging points of view.
- Seek an understanding of collective action.
- Share skills for the common good.
- Know their role as a team player.

- Balance self and community interest.
- Balance independence and over-dependence.
- Honor differences to enhance collaboration.
- Balance service to others and personal needs.

Forming and established communities can evaluate where their members fall on the participation continuum and agree ahead of time about how the two extremes can lead to a collaborative balance.

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All it takes is a few Uber Extroverts to dominate and disrupt the consensus process, mainly because they will steamroll over Uber Introverts.

A few years ago, I was producing a documentary at a cohousing community. I had to cut my visit short because the community had hired an outside consultant to facilitate a conflict resolution between the community and a member who refused to let loose of a project.

If you're an introvert, think about a time you were dismissed or pushed aside by an aggressor and how you felt about that. Knowing the tendencies of aggressive people, how might you have handled it differently?

If you're an extrovert, what was an incident when you exerted your aggressive approach on a passive person? How would the outcome have been different if you were more collaborative?

Here it is, 10 years after my self-imposed isolation from community participation. More of my neighbors have moved or died during that decade, and new people have joined the community. Now that I'm no longer a newbie, I've found my voice after climbing out of my hole and have learned to hold myself and the Uber Extroverts more accountable. 🐦

Alan O'Hashi is an author and filmmaker based in Boulder, Colorado. This article is an adapted excerpt from his memoir True Stories of an Aging Do-gooder: How cohousing can bridge cultural divides (2020), available at the ic.org bookstore.



Chris Roth

Three Flipping Points: Conflict into Connection

By Hugh Perry

During my nine years in community, with 200 others including 30 children, major disagreements were rare. Only twice did I get really upset and both occasions involved construction disagreements. However after following through with our method for resolving conflict we reestablished our friendship and remain friends today. The ingredients for this system, which I now realize is unique, came about due to all of us moving in together quickly, over the course of 16 months and in three different locations hours apart. We were a group of social and environmental activists deeply rooted in metaphysical practices. We couldn't build fast enough and so we purchased what and wherever was within our means. Within the first few months together three decisions were made which, unknown to us, would result in fewer disagreements than one would expect. Also our group's deep desire to build something uniquely special was likely a key contributor.

No Gossip

In our previous lives in the outside world, we disliked hearing people talk behind the backs of others. Due to our personal interests we were often victims of the damaging effects that gossip creates. So we agreed to try to refrain from complaining about each other's irritating ways. It was a great relief to step out of a system that feeds on gossip and into an alternate system that explores the opposite. That appreciation for no gossip led to zero tolerance when someone spoke behind another's back. We still spoke sportingly face-to-face about each other's idiosyncrasies but not in a degrading way.

It took time to retrain ourselves into this new habit, merely because it's rewarding to voice one's frustration, especially when there is an audience. As the weeks and months passed, the absence of gossip began showing its blessings. Off-handed complaints were replaced with more honest positive views of each other. Issues that provoked frustrations slowly diminished, because airing frustrations includes a high degree of judgment and a complete disregard of our own contributions to the frustration. No gossip left space for self-reflection. Of course if the situation involved harmful abuse then silence wasn't the solution. This only happened once and the person was asked to leave and did.

The absence of complaining was so pleasurable that if we did happen to vent our negative emotions we would surely hear someone say, "I don't want to hear about it!" or "Don't ruin my day!" If you've been on the receiving end of gossip you know what a downer it can be. As the years passed the responses became more abrupt like, "Don't lay your trip on me! You know what to do!" Which brings me to what actions we took, instead of complaining to others.

The Abwa Experiment

Most of us were really into the mystical stories of the lost civilization of Atlantis. According to these stories, they experimented with a conflict resolution model that eventually replaced what would be the equivalent of our criminal enforcement systems today. They began this experiment to allow children to resolve their own issues. The results spread through all levels of interactions in Atlantis. Our understanding of that method went like this:

When you had an issue with someone that emotionally could not be dealt with on your own, you were encouraged to approach that person and ask to speak with

them privately. It could be as insignificant as disliking how they washed dishes, or more significant moments of discomfort in their presence, or being deliberately interrupted by them. Approaching a person was no easy exercise but hearing about how well it was working for others was enough motivation to give it a try.

I remember getting into a disagreement with a woman about who was going to drive the car on a day-long trip. However, she held the keys so she won, but I had always driven so it stuck with me for a long time before I got up enough nerve to let her know how much I disliked her tough masculine attitude. She was one of the three people I approached for an Abwa and I believe I was only asked by three others. It turned out that she had raced sports cars and hadn't shared that with any of us. As a result she also couldn't tolerate how others drove. I should have figured that out on my own, by the way she handles those Quebec twisties. Hearing her story made my reactions humorously silly and we ended on a good note.

When approached like this by someone, it was agreed to give priority to the request and treat it with the respect it deserved, but that was also not easy for the one being asked. It is similar to your partner saying, "We need to talk, now!" You know you are going to either be called out on one of your bad habits or be told something you don't want to hear. And that is exactly what would occur.

The method included simply finding a quiet space, sitting opposite each other with knees touching and in eye contact. The disgruntled person would lay their feelings out on the line in a civil manner. The listener's challenge was to avoid becoming defensive, to provide space for whatever followed. This was not to be a bashing session. From that point on, the surprises would unfold.

The results were always remarkable. The Abwa talks were able to deal with all areas of conflict amongst those brave enough to go the distance. Generally the person being approached had no idea they were acting in a certain way and were grateful to be made aware of something no one had been brave enough to point out. More surprising was how the person with the grievance often discovered how the situation had hidden roots in their past and would walk away feeling relieved to finally be in the know. Instead of angry emotions being exchanged in these Abwas there were tears and hugs. Both had touched each other in ways that would not have occurred had they not been drawn into confrontation and resolution. The bad habits of one might continue but with less impact on the other. The community benefited by eliminating prolonged hard feelings and discomfort.

There were moments when spontaneous disagreement occurred, as I shared at the beginning; however, the embarrassment of losing one's temper in front of our communal peers would give a moment of pause long enough to reflect on our emotions. Expressing raw emotions has a place, especially with children, but maturity means not hiding emotions but dealing with their root causes. When we get upset with another person, it's never their fault, because we are the one who is reacting. Once emotions settle, then it is easier to talk eye-to-eye without getting defensive.

Promiscuity

I often tell people that living in a community was the best time of my life and the main contributing factor was the deep connections that were formed. In the very early days after getting together we made a unanimous agreement to not tolerate sexual activity between single members and couples. Beyond that the singles could do what they wanted. This one self-controlled agreement created space for deep connections, because honouring such trust allowed us to mingle freely in play, dance, massages, swimming nude, team projects, and one-on-one sharing.

This one guideline became the glue that held us together. In many ways it was an experiment and it gave evidence that

each of us can love more than one person deeply when mature adults rise above their sexual urges, simply because they can. It was through our continued exploration of each other that our individual and communal bonds became incredibly tight.

In general, community creates opportunities for shared closeness that rarely exist in the world at large. Most never get to experience such connections even with their own partner. You may know of communities where sex became as easy as a handshake. They failed to explore what lay beyond those natural tendencies, and in some cases, that led to their demise.

Obviously, not every couple is meant to be together forever so we had two break-ups. The first one really rocked the community, similar to how it impacts regular families and friends but on a larger scale. After the second split-up and switching partners, the trust between couples began to wane. Relationships that were less secure felt threatened and became more guarded in their sharing. Slowly the magic lessened, but by that stage everyone had experienced the uniqueness of deep connections. I mention that it was an experiment and it's one worth discussing with your group.

I suspect that the freedom we granted ourselves to love each other without crossing the sexual line was made possible by our non-conflict models. My conclusion is that strong relationships form strong communities and as those numbers grow, so is their positive influence felt widely. 🌱

*Anyone wanting to know more about any of the points above can contact Hugh Perry directly at hugh@livingbehindyourbreath.com. See also his previous articles in COMMUNITIES #196, #197, and #202. 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.*



Chris Roth

Avocado Conflict

By Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales



When I was a young adult in college, I was in love with an avocado rancher. His parents had grown up on two separate avocado ranches; his parents married in an avocado deal, joining two ranches together into one huge ranch. In that sense, my friend was a product of that fruit.

My homeland is good for much agriculture. My parents met working in the tomato fields of Lompoc, California as teenagers. Our neighbors when I was a kid had an avocado tree that hung over the fence. They had an orange tree too.

Avocados were one of my first foods, and I love them. I've been to the Carpinteria avocado festival, and I know several ways to make guacamole. My favorite is probably just perfectly ripe avocado mashed with fresh garlic and salt.

Then I moved to the Pacific Northwest, a different biome. I live in community, sharing a roof and food budget among 12 to 14 people. Avocados have helped me learn about community conflict.

ripeness and fruit hoarding

"Hey, if I like my avocados a day riper than everyone else, then I never get an avocado," I said to my housemate Morgan.

I had the experience many times of seeing beautiful avocados in the hanging basket, waiting for them to ripen, and anticipating a delicious treat.

"This one's almost ready," I would decide, holding it in my hand, and put it back in the basket.

Then the next day, the avocado was gone. I would look in the basket, feel sad, and write "avocado" on the refrigerator white board grocery list.

Morgan was standing in the kitchen in his robe. He listened to my complaint kindly. It was an early morning moment—he was making coffee.

"Some people will put a fruit in their room," he said. "That way, they have a chance."

"OK, I see," I said. "That feels wrong to me. Like stealing from community."

"There's that," he said. "Yes and no."

"Well, thank you for the idea," I said.

It's common for housemates to bring a banana or other snack to their room—I do that. And some housemates have personal stashes. I've seen housemates take salad ingredients and pour hemp hearts into a jar, to take to their room.

I have a stash of house olive oil with my shelf of personally bought snacks like gluten-free crackers and rice cakes. I like to eat a lot of fat, and having olive oil upstairs to drizzle on rice or hummus or soup can make my meal more substantial and nutritious.

This morning is the first time I took an avocado to my room, to let it ripen for another day or two. It feels weird, but if this is the way, I'm willing to try it. But it took me living here for more than a year.

what's luxury?

Emily, the housemate who handles the food budget, told me and my spouse Ming, "Buy fewer avocados." This was last year when Ming and I were newly grocery shopping for the house. I got the sense that a few of our choices were breaking the bank.

Were the avocados going bad? No, I think none was wasted.

Maybe she just hoped we would choose lower-cost foods. The house has a policy of organic foods; organic avocados are expensive.

What is luxury, and what's regular life? Ming loves fresh blueberries. I'm a fiend for fresh spinach. Yes, frozen spinach is a thing, but fresh is so good in salad and seems to have a different energy.

Once in house meeting I broke down and admitted that fresh spinach has so much chi. I was embarrassed to feel like a hippie cliché, to admit that. But it's true.

There was conflict over pecans, as I love pecans in pesto and desserts and to snack on. We talked about food budget, the relative cost of various nuts, whether overall nut consumption would stay the same, the great pistachio debacle, and whether it would be OK to go non-organic for nuts.

What's normal to one person can be a treat to another, depending on our backgrounds and what we think we deserve. It might or might not make sense. Guilt or shame can be part of the mix. Sometimes my housemates' food restrictiveness can look to me like eating disorder. Some people seem to hate themselves around food and pleasure.

As for me, I'm happy to be a hedonist. Life's too short to limit my consumption of avocados. But I understand we come together in community to consider everyone's needs, not just our own.

"Fewer" is an imprecise term. My spouse and I did cut back on avocado purchases, but unless I get a number, I can't be sure I'm buying an acceptable amount.

what's compost?

"I saw you throw a whole avocado in the compost that I would have eaten," my housemate Maya said.

"Oh! Oops!" I said. "Sorry about that."

"It's OK," she said.

In a previous community I had that experience also. My community member would eat avocados that I would not even touch. She ate avocados I considered rotten. Avocados can be the most delicious food in the world, buttery and rich. But bruised and overripe, they can be the most disgusting food in the world also.

In my lifetime, avocados have been abundant and sometimes free. So I can see how my housemate Maya might have eaten a fruit I spurned. I'm glad she brought up my difference in a gentle way.

almond butter

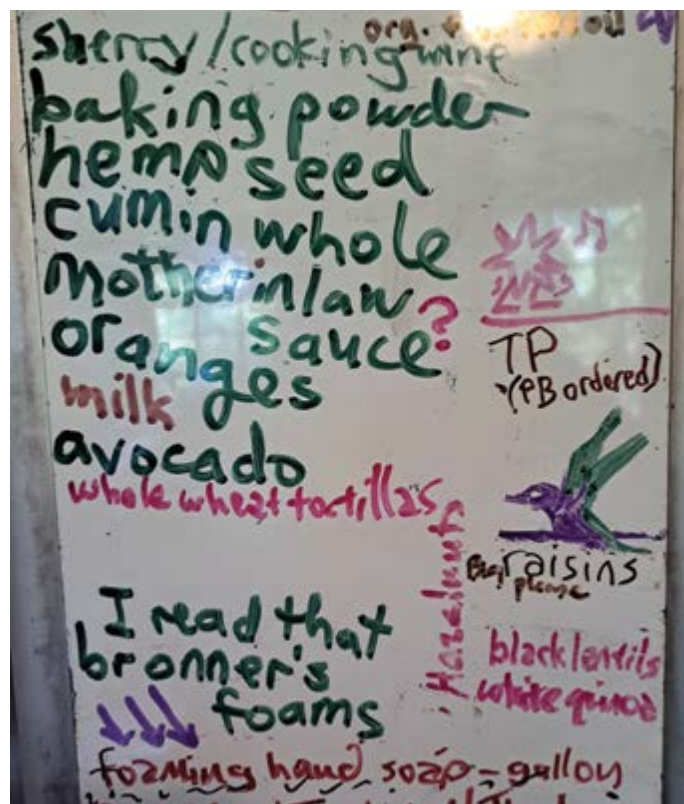
When I became friends with a few housemates and was invited to their rooms, I would smile when I noticed the jar of almond butter. Seemed like half the house had their personal stash of almond butter. So why didn't we put it on the house food list and buy it as a house?

Maybe bringing up almond butter in a meeting was too much work. Or maybe before Ming and I arrived here, that topic had already come and gone.

Almond butter could be a dense, caloric deliciousness we want to keep for ourselves. Maybe it symbolizes secret treasure. It's a great example of a need we all have but the house isn't meeting, probably because we don't want to do the work of bringing it up.

Fighting for what we need can be exhausting. I need avocados for my health and my joy of living. 🌿

Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales is a queer sun-worshipper, living in community in the Pacific Northwest. She dances disabledly, makes art and zines, and blogs at listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakessense.com.



Photos courtesy of Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales

The Wealth of Music-Making in a Multigenerational Cohousing Community

By Dan Parker



The gig at the bar last night was hell. The pub downtown was filled with raucous drinkers who couldn't care less about the music, nor about the folks trying to listen or the performers pouring their hearts out on stage. Late start and late finish. No children or teens were allowed, so my son and his friends couldn't attend. We had to schlep our gear there and back. Good grief, I only want to play shows in the atrium of the home I share with 25 other households!

Welcome to Pacific Gardens Cohousing Community in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada on the unceded territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. It's been around for 14 years, and my family has been here for the last six.

Three years ago, we had some discussions about how to generate revenue in our community in order to lower our condo fees. Let's rent some of our common spaces, like the conversation room or the art room? No, those community spaces are what make this place so unique. How about renting out our common dining hall and kitchen to a daycare provider? No, that's where we gather and share moments together. Well let's build and sell a couple of new units using some of our garden space? No, we want to make the most of our vegetable plots and preserve the local habitat. OK...could we do some concert fundraisers? Sure but...where will people park?!? Despite some initial concerns, we went ahead with concerts and it's been a great success, to the tune of thousands of Canadian loonies. That's what we call our one-dollar coin, by the way.

Concert fundraisers have been a real boon to our community. We raise funds, promote our community, collaborate and grow together each time...and the resident performers like myself are rewarded with ideal conditions to enjoy our time in the spotlight. At least, in comparison with the late night venue filled with obnoxious ignoramuses... Sorry, I'm writing this after that torturous gig last night. I'll do my best

here to harness and transform that negative energy so that I can extol the virtues of putting on concert fundraisers in an intentional community!

My band made some money last night at the bar, but really—split four or five ways that doesn't go very far. Personally, it feels better to see all that money go to a cause. Every time we've put on a show in our home, we've raised hundreds of dollars. Not bad for a group of neighbors that sometimes like to quibble endlessly in community budget meetings over a hundred-dollar expense! A good chunk of that concert income comes from the community members, and the higher amounts come in when the project is particularly inspiring.

We've fundraised for projects such as a raspberry patch, solar panels, sound equipment, a defibrillator, an EV charger for our local car share coop, and we've also donated to local causes like a grassroots group providing assistance to

LGBTQ+ refugees fleeing persecution. In our next show we'll be raising funds for Queer groups in the region. This "fun"-raising gets us to be creative about how we can generate revenue and moves us away from the scarcity model and towards an abundance model. Plus, the concert attendees from outside our community spend some of their money on—and time in—our home sweet home.

Thriving communities need to be constantly attracting potential community members or owners. What better way than through vibrant gatherings infused with harmonies and set to head-bopping rhythms? When I'm on stage, I always like to ask and see who in the crowd are first-time visitors. Bringing in new folks is vital so that they can spread the word about who we are and what we represent. Cohousing and intentional communities are often ignored or poorly understood... often people assume we're a seniors' home or a communal cult! Every show we usually have some photos and videos to post online and this also piques the interest from afar. Cohousing is a niche market that attracts folks from around the world. They're looking to find a home with a tight-knit neighborhood fabric included. The fact that we're multigenerational attracts families and elders alike, and this ethos is usually at its finest display during one of our concerts.

Children selling muffins, seniors taking money at the door, 40-year-old has-beens like myself becoming divas for a

couple of hours, 20 year-old up-and-coming artists honing their skills, teenagers stepping on stage for the first time...the whole community gets involved and even if there were no money collected, no audience—it'd still be worth the collective bonding that takes place.

Setting up the lighting and sound equipment, promoting the event, figuring out how to squeeze in all the cars in our parking lot without breaking any city bylaws... so many small but important tasks carried out by different neighbors are required to make the show a success. At the end of the night we feel the pride of achievement, and this feeling then inspires us as we go on to other projects. We learn to appreciate each other as a whole as well as individuals. But let's be real: one effect of this whole project is that everyone gives their undivided admiration to the stars of the show—including, in this case, moi!

Attention-seekers take note: you may use your ego for good! And really, the performance conditions are just so much more enjoyable for a 9-5 employed father who wants to sing every so often while being able to be in bed before the cycle-abiding body starts crankily revolting. When I finish my set, I can tell everyone good night—and mean it—because I'm walking straight to my bedroom. My neighbors get to be my roadies for one night and take down the equipment. It's just so much less hassle. But above all, oh sweet mercy: the crowd is attentive. They're respectful. They're not drinking alcohol or on drugs (at least not openly). That focus for me is just...pure bliss.

Upon further reflection, I have to say that I'm thankful to that loud crowd last night for reminding me how much I truly cherish these in-house shows I've been organizing here at Pacific Gardens. I feel richer when I see the money go to community causes. I love seeing 30-80 people in our atrium, many who are neighbors and friends but some who are getting to know our cohousing for the first time. Having our multigenerational collection of individuals band together for one night, becoming closer and enjoying the wealth of our building and our talents—it's a phenomenal experience. So while I'm now more convinced than ever that I've found my ideal venue here in these community fundraisers as a part-time early bedtime artist...I think I need to make sure to play in an unruly alcohol-driven venue once in a while just so that I can remember how truly privileged I am to play these shows under our glass roof. The contrast is truly sobering. 🍷🎸

Dan Parker is a Brazilian-Canadian high school teacher, singer, musician, strata president, and facilitator of community meetings at Pacific Gardens Cohousing Community in Nanaimo, BC, Canada. He lives and works on the unceded and treaty-protected territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.



Photos courtesy of Dan Parker

Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors, Part Eight

Why Most Communities Do Not—and *Cannot*—Deal Directly with these Behaviors (And What Your Community Can Do Instead)

When faced with these behaviors, why are so many communities apparently so passive and helpless?

By Diana Leafe Christian

“I don’t want Mavis *targeted!*” Ian exclaimed. “I don’t want this to turn into a witch hunt!”

I was sitting on the floor next to my friend Fiona in a small yurt in her and Mavis’s community. As Fiona’s guest, I was an observer at this impromptu yurt meeting which some had called to figure out what to do about Mavis—ideally to organize a meeting to share how her behaviors had affected them, and ask her to communicate more courteously in the future.

Ian had recently learned Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and advocated it passionately. He’d been invited to facilitate the meeting and to encourage people to express their concerns as feelings and needs, rather than blaming Mavis.

Instead of simply helping people speak more empathetically, however, Ian argued against any suggestions to share with Mavis how her behaviors had affected people, because, he said, she might feel upset and emotionally unsafe. She was doing the best she could, he said, and people sharing with her how she’d negatively affected them might hurt her feelings; she’d feel “ganged-up on.” Why couldn’t people just accept her as she is, he asked, and not create more community conflict by trying to talk to her about her behaviors? “You know how angry she gets,” he said.

All he wanted—all he wanted in the world—he said, pleading, was for *people to just get along*. He shared how as a child he’d been physically and verbally abused by family members and how he was sick, just sick, of conflict and discord and strife in this world. “I just want peace and kindness and understanding in our community,” he said. He began to cry silently, his shoulders shaking.

Fiona and I glanced at each other in dismay. What about the lack of emotional safety people felt when Mavis targeted *them* with hurtful behaviors? Shouldn’t they be allowed to give her feedback? As far as Fiona and I knew, NVC not only does not prohibit but *encourages* people to tell others how what they’ve said or done has affected them, and the feelings this triggered in them and the unmet needs that gave rise to those feelings. Many in the meeting had experienced unease and sometimes outright fear in Mavis’s presence; their encounters hadn’t met their basic needs for safety and respect. Why hadn’t Ian addressed this?

This chaotic meeting eventually led to a later meeting, already described in the first ar-

ticle in this series. I sat in on this later meeting, where, sadly, Mavis first berated and intimidated participants, many of whom looked down at the floor and tore up their lists of concerns. She received no useful feedback at all that night.

“Especially Challenging Behaviors”

Throughout this article series I’ve described individuals with “especially challenging behaviors” in community, including being disdainful and contemptuous, lying, and behaving heartlessly towards others; being overbearing, yet closed off to feedback; being self-centered, lacking empathy, and expressing rage, hostility, and vengeance toward the community; being resentful and holding a grudge for years; being aggressive and manipulative yet always feeling victimized; grooming vulnerable, socially unconfident community members to become loyal followers or “minions.”

Psychotherapists identify these as “narcissistic” attitudes and behaviors—not occasional harsh or hurtful acting-out, as many of us do sometimes, but chronic behaviors that occur frequently (see list, page 51). However, I prefer not to use a label like this for people, and I suggest others don’t use it

in a community setting. I prefer the Nonviolent Communication approach of not seeing people as some kind of steady state, as a particular *something*, like “narcissist,” but as people who act in different ways at different times, hence my term “especially challenging behaviors.” Most who exhibit these behaviors do only some but not all them, and usually only sometimes, and often only with certain people—their “targets.” People with these behaviors seem to have little to no self-awareness or empathy, and apparently do not respond to psychotherapy.

(Note: people with high-functioning autism, sometimes called Asperger Syndrome, may also seem to lack empathy and can make inappropriate and/or insulting comments. But this is considered a neurological wiring condition and not the same thing as narcissism at all. I recommend that community members learn about this neurological condition, so they can be compassionate and understanding—and know what to expect and not get insulted—by what their Asperger’s members might say and do.)

Most community members don’t exhibit especially challenging behaviors, so it can be disorienting and confusing when we see harsh behaviors in our own community. Nevertheless, these behaviors can demoralize a group, as Mavis did in her small community.

Protecting the Perpetrator

Once, years ago, a member of my community I’ll call Herman consistently, and seemingly compulsively, collected and stored savaged building materials haphazardly on his homesite and started building small buildings he never finished. His

homesite, clearly visible to everyone driving into the community, bristled with random stacks of building materials and small half-constructed sheds. After years of trying to persuade Herman to comply with our agreements about community aesthetics, we got fed up enough to propose ending Herman’s membership and asking him to leave.

But another member, whom I’ll call Bill, felt so loyal to Herman he threatened to block any such proposal, so we dropped it. Bill could stop us because back then we used classic, traditional consensus, so anyone could block a proposal and we had no recourse for blocking. Bill’s loyalty to Herman and his desire to protect him eclipsed his loyalty to our group and our agreements, so Bill single-handedly stopped us from taking action, and Herman’s ramshackle homesite remained. In communities using classic, traditional consensus instead of modified consensus or Sociocracy, it can take only one member like Bill protecting someone from the consequences of their actions to stop the whole group from setting any limits and boundaries on the actions.

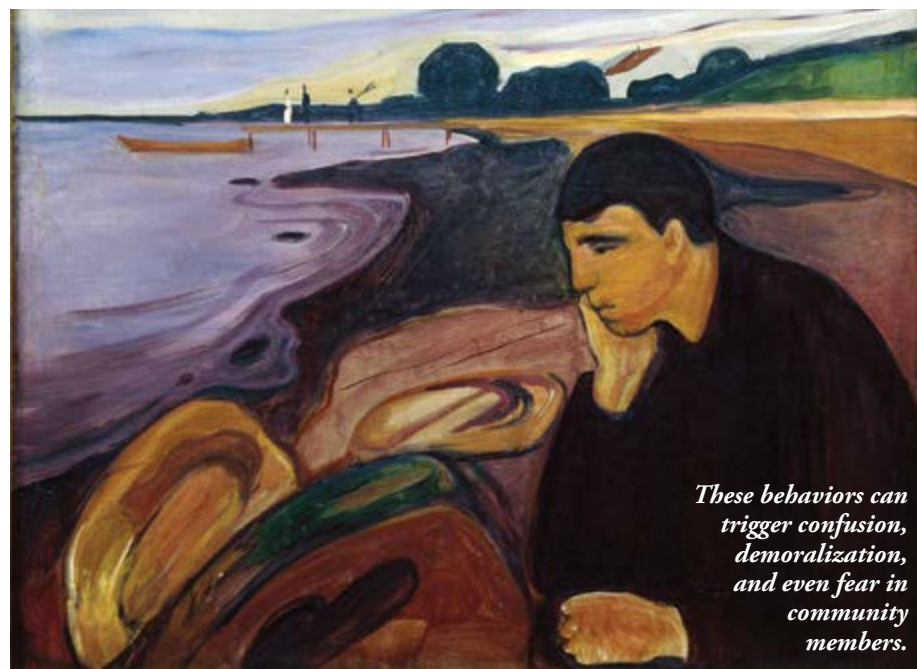
Another time, Olive, a member of my community with especially challenging behaviors (described in past articles), had been especially disruptive in recent business meetings. Our community president that year, whom I’ll call Arthur, suggested to his Advisory Team that they create a special “Consensus Mentor” for Olive. We’d ask Olive to not speak in the meetings herself, but to write down what she wanted to say, which the proposed Consensus Mentor would read and translate into courteous, respectful language for the rest of us. That way, Arthur suggested, we’d still benefit from Olive’s views and opinions about the issues but would no longer be subject to her harsh and often penetrating “poison darts” in meetings.

“Noooo,” pleaded an Advisory Team member, whom I’ll call Stacey. “I love Olive. And she’d hate this. It would make her feel terrible!” Stacey’s capacity for empathy, kindness, and love for Olive actually didn’t help. Her insistence that we not hurt Olive’s feelings by creating a Consensus Mentor stopped Arthur’s innovative “limits and boundaries” idea dead in its tracks.

Fed Up Enough—the “Two-Year Rule”

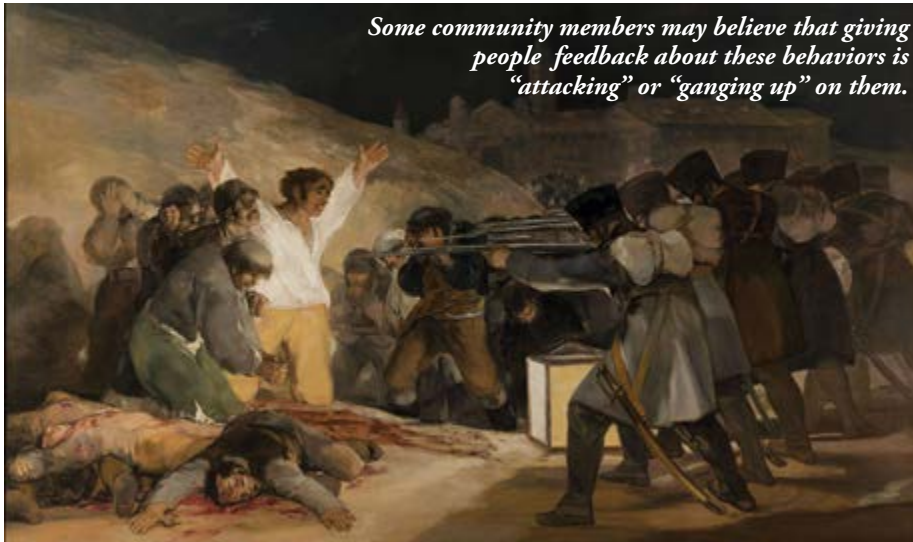
However...two years later and after Olive’s continued abusive behaviors in meetings, when Stacey had become our community president herself, with her own Advisory Team, a large group of members showed up at their meeting to protest Olive’s latest disruption. Finally, as described in the sixth article, the community took action; Stacey and her team sent Olive an official letter, stating that Olive could not attend our business meetings for the next year and asking her to get therapy for her emotional issues.

Her insistence that we not hurt Olive’s feelings stopped the “Consensus Mentor” idea dead in its tracks.



These behaviors can trigger confusion, demoralization, and even fear in community members.

Edvard Munch, *Melancholy*, 1894-96



Some community members may believe that giving people feedback about these behaviors is “attacking” or “ganging up” on them.

Two years earlier Stacey had adamantly stopped that year’s president and his team from creating a Consensus Mentor role which would have set limits and boundaries on Olive (and in fact it probably *would* have enraged her). But the cumulative weight of community pain had finally become too much even for Stacey. Now more realistic—and having had 10 distraught community members bear down on her—Stacey retired from her protector role. She and her team gave Olive real and necessary feedback, setting real and necessary limits and boundaries. A person taking on a fierce protector role like Ian, Bill, and Stacey *can* get off it...but, it may take two or more years of community suffering before enough people have the courage to extricate themselves from protecting the perpetrator and finally take effective action.

While some communities, such as Heart-Culture Farm and others described in past articles, do set limits and boundaries on members with challenging behaviors, I believe most communities *don’t* address these behaviors—especially when one or more members, like Ian, Bill, and Stacey, move into protector mode and insist their community do nothing.

What’s Going on Here?

In my experience, in spite of the success stories of communities setting limits and boundaries described in the last two articles, *most* community members seem very reluctant to set boundaries or give a fellow community member negative feedback. This is especially true with an often frightening member like Mavis (or like Dwight, Olive, Griswald, Eldred, Andraste, Hugo, or Umberto, described in previous articles).

Why wouldn’t a community member want to give someone feedback and ask them to change? And why do communities seem *especially* vulnerable to these behaviors? Why are many community members the most likely to get hurt by these behaviors?

- They may believe such behaviors and dysfunctions couldn’t happen in a *community*,

and certainly not in *their* community. So the idea of dealing directly these behaviors is seen as disruptive, “creating conflict,” and “not community.”

- And, related, many community members may have never invested time and energy learning about these kinds of especially challenging behaviors and so don’t understand them and are baffled by them. So when they encounter these behaviors and feel put off or scared, they may believe they are being “too sensitive,” and their discomfort or fear is actually *their* fault.

- They may hold the common belief that seeing behaviors like these in their community doesn’t mean that the person who does them has a serious emotional disturbance, but rather that they themselves *are having a conflict with the person*. And so they believe they are partly responsible for “contributing to the conflict,” partly responsible for how badly they feel. And, according to their community norms, they must now set up a mediation with the person “to resolve our conflict.” (But they don’t want to!)

- They may believe that giving feedback and asking for change is *simply not done* in a well-functioning community, as this might hurt the person’s feelings. Giving someone feedback and asking them to change might cause other community members to criticize *them* for being “uncooperative”! They may believe that giving feedback and asking for change implies they are “a bad community.”

- They don’t want to call attention to themselves. They don’t want to rock the boat. Worse, they’re afraid the person will retaliate and target them. (And they probably will!)

- Because of childhood trauma triggering denial and avoidance, they may now be

Bill’s loyalty to Herman and his desire to protect him stopped us from taking action.



Many community members don’t want to deal with these behaviors or even acknowledge that they happen in their community.

“Noooo,” wailed Stacey. “I love Olive. And I know she’d hate this. It would make her feel terrible!”

conflict-averse. Therefore they may believe that talking about these behaviors, offering feedback, and/or requesting change from people doing these behaviors *itself* creates conflict. As we’ve seen, when someone with these behaviors receives feedback or is asked to change their behavior they usually do get upset, if not furious, and other community members can perceive giving feedback and requesting change as “causing” more conflict. Conflict-averse folks absolutely don’t want to experience this! It’s better to just put up with it or avoid meetings and social gatherings if the person will be present.

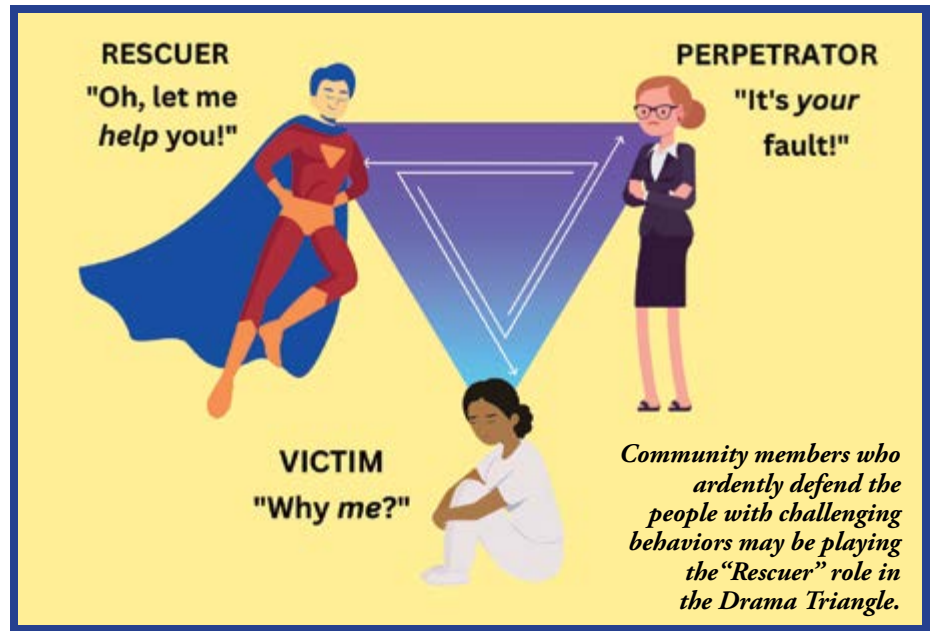
- Or perhaps they may be taking on the “Rescuer” role (“I’ll save you!”) in the Karpman Drama Triangle (see following sections), or operating from the Green stage in the Spiral Dynamics¹ model.

- Or maybe they simply have unrealistic expectations about community and human nature—no more than simple naiveté.

Childhood Trauma?

People who frequently try to protect others from consequences to their behaviors sometimes express the belief that placing limits and boundaries on someone is “ganging up” on them, as Ian put it in the yurt meeting. When I heard him say this and saw him cry, I wondered if he was actually trying to protect some inner traumatized part of *himself*. Did he experience people’s frustrated complaints about Mavis as painful darts and arrows piercing his *own* vulnerable psyche? Was this why he seemed to find it intolerable to hear people’s seemingly legitimate upsets and concerns about her?

As I eventually learned, Ian, Stacey, and Bill had each been bullied by family members or at school. Was it the case that each had wanted to prevent the person from



John Christian

potentially feeling what *they'd* once felt as a vulnerable child? Whatever the reason, because of their protective stance, their communities could set no limits and boundaries on members’ behaviors when needed, sadly held hostage by their community members’ own unhealed traumas.

“We Can’t Do That!”—The Rescuer in the Karpman Drama Triangle

Another possibility is from the Karpman Drama Triangle model. This is a model of unhealthy interactions between people embroiled in conflicts. Proposed by psychiatrist Stephen B. Karpman in the 1960s, the Drama Triangle model postulates that people engaged in conflict often play one of three roles—Perpetrator, Victim, or Rescuer—each of which expresses the person’s power-over or lack of power with others in a conflict. Those assuming a Persecutor or Rescuer roles have power over the person in the Victim role. *And* it helps them avoid feeling their own feelings. Karpman visually represented these roles in an inverted triangle (see graphic, above).

Someone taking on the Persecutor role (“It’s *your* fault!”), can be controlling, blaming, critical, authoritarian, angry, and superior, and not feel their inner emptiness: the more “overt” especially challenging behaviors of this series.

According to this model, people taking on a Victim role (“Poor me!”) may not necessarily actually be victimized. However, they may feel as if they are being victimized and portray themselves as unable to help themselves no matter how hard they try. Thus, Karpman suggested, they avoid making any real changes in their circumstances and can successfully avoid feeling their own inner anxiety. People in the Victim role experience themselves as persecuted, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, and ashamed. They seem unable to make decisions, solve problems, or achieve any self-awareness. They seek out people they imagine are persecuting them or who actually are persecuting them. They then seek help from people playing the role of Rescuer.

People taking on the Rescuer role (“Oh, let me *help* you!”) feel compelled to try to help, rescue, or enable people whom they see victims (even if they’re not), and they even feel guilty if they *don’t* try to rescue them. Yet their rescuing attempts can actually keep someone in the Victim role dependent on them, and can prevent the person playing Victim from experiencing and learning from their mistakes. The Rescuer feels good about themselves for having tried to help. And because they’re focusing on the Victim’s perceived needs rather than on their own, they also successfully avoid their own feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

The roles are malleable and shifting, according to the Drama model. People in the Persecutor role, when blamed by others, for example, can suddenly shift into defensive Victim

mode. As we've seen, Mavis and others described in this series can seem like fierce Persecutors who criticize and belittle others. Yet when encountering even the mildest of feedback they are suddenly vulnerable Victims, like how sea anemones immediately retract their tentacles when even lightly brushed by something larger than their usual tiny prey.

"That's just how community is."

Sadly, many community members are too intimidated by the intensity of these behaviors or perhaps too idealistic to imagine their group taking any action to curb the behaviors, believing "This is just how community is."

But community life doesn't *have* to be this way. Living in community doesn't have to include the suffering of individually targeted, abused members. Communities don't have to put up with dysfunctional, go-nowhere meetings or endure community-wide demoralization and people fleeing meetings or leaving the group. But communities often do suffer this way until enough people have finally realized they have a serious problem. One time a friend in a group experiencing dreadful conflict triggered by these behaviors asked me why, since his community had become so painful and unsafe, did the community leaders refuse to do anything, even though he and several others had repeatedly asked them to. "They haven't suffered enough yet," I said. "They aren't *fed up* yet, or fed up *enough*."

Communities Don't Have to Go Through This!

You and your community colleagues *can* understand, plan for, and prevent this kind of community demoralization.

Educate Yourselves. Encourage your community to learn all it can not only about these especially challenging behaviors so people will know what to expect, and will recognize the fallacies that "with enough hugs" and "with enough community life" people with these behaviors will change. Ideally, also learn about the Rescuer role in the Drama Triangle, and the Green and Yellow stages in Spiral Dynamics (which can provide another helpful lens on these phenomena). The more we know, the more empowered we'll be as a group, and potentially more able to work effectively with these challenging behaviors.

Consider these Community Successes and Field-Tested Techniques:

- Hugo's community creating the Two-Minute Rule.
- My community finally setting limits on Olive's behaviors in meetings.
- My community eventually switching to a modified form of consensus.
- Heart-Culture Farm's five-step process to address these behaviors.
- People in Umberto's community organizing a mutual support group.
- Community members who organize alliances and petitions.
- Communities that set up a Graduated Series of Consequences method.

But the cumulative weight of community pain had finally become too much even for Stacey. Now more realistic, she retired from her protector role.



Whole communities can change to modified consensus and adopt policies like Heart-Culture Farm's five-step process and a Graduated Series of Consequences to effectively set limits and boundaries on these behaviors.

Hannah Busing

bot” stage). In my community our NVC trainer member offered a series of free eight-week NVC classes on Tuesday nights. He offered them every few months for several years. At first one of our “especially challenging” members hated that many of us were learning NVC, believing that it suppressed emotions, instead of being a non-confrontational way to express them. Later this member joined the study group and became a fan, even admonishing other members for not using NVC.

Finally

I want to thank all of you who’ve read these articles for kindly considering these ideas about both the causes and typical effects of especially challenging behaviors in community—and for considering what we can do to work effectively with them, as individuals (articles one through four), as small groups of friends (fifth article), and as whole communities (sixth and seventh articles). I wish you and your community all the best in educating yourselves further about these behaviors, finding compassion and understanding for the people who do them, and setting effective limits and boundaries for more peace and harmony in your group. With this knowledge, and drawing on the experiences of the communities described in these articles, I believe your group, and all groups, *can* become more healthy, successful, and thriving, better achieve community goals, and experience the emotionally safe, warm, connected, and wonderful community life we long for. Let’s make it happen! 🐦

Diana Leafé Christian, author of Creating a Life Together and Finding Community, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops and online trainings on creating successful new communities, and on Sociocracy, an especially effective self-governance and decision-making method. See www.DianaLeaféChristian.org.

1. To learn more, I recommend the book *Spiral Dynamics* by social psychologist Don Beck and neuroscientist Christopher Cowan, the website spiraldynamicsintegral.nl/en, and YouTube videos on this topic by Max Saris and Actualized.org. Spiral Dynamics was developed by Beck and Cowan based on the work of developmental psychologist Clare Graves and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. Its concepts were later included in spiritual/New Age philosopher Ken Wilber’s Integral Theory.

Especially Challenging Behaviors

More Obvious, Overt, Extroverted Behaviors (Grandiosity on the outside, insecurity on the inside)

Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Entitlement
Impaired empathy
Lying; exaggerating accomplishments
Rapidly escalating anger; sudden angry outbursts
Grandiosity
Craving attention
Criticizing others
Mocking or jeering at others
Invalidating, demeaning, or belittling others
Bullying others
Usually cannot change or benefit from therapeutic help

Less Obvious, Covert, Introverted Behaviors: (Insecurity on the outside, grandiosity on the inside)

Delusions of superiority; self-centeredness
Impaired empathy
Relishing vengeance
Manipulating others; using people
Hypersensitivity to criticism
Projecting their behaviors and attitudes onto others
“Gaslighting” others (telling someone what they directly observed didn’t actually happen)
Envy others; resenting others
Limited self-awareness
“Grooming” newer or less confident members to be their allies and support their version of reality
Usually cannot change or benefit from therapeutic help

Can Community Consultants Help with Especially Challenging Behaviors?

In my experience community consultants don’t seem to understand and recognize that most people with these behaviors cannot develop self-awareness or empathy and so cannot change their ways. Or that they don’t respond well to therapy, sharing circles, mediation, or NVC and other forms of empathetic listening. Consultants don’t usually suggest how the group can set firm, courteous limits and boundaries with members with these behaviors. Usually consultants treat the conflict as if it were just ordinary interpersonal conflict among community members. The idea that the source of some community conflict may be one or more members with especially challenging behaviors seems not only unknown to them but probably also too “politically incorrect” to acknowledge.

The prevailing view among community professionals, as far as I know, is that with enough hours of the conflict-resolution mediation method the consultant offers, or NVC or other special communication methods, most community conflicts can be solved. (I call these the “With Enough Mediation” and “With Enough NVC” fallacies.) So, no, sadly, I don’t think calling in a community consultant or conflict and mediation specialists can usually offer much help with *these* kinds of behaviors.

–DLC

Six Things We Can Do to Protect Ourselves as Individuals

Here’s an overview of what we covered in articles #1-#5:

- 1. Learn** as much as we can about narcissistic behaviors to be more realistic and know what to expect (#1, #2).
- 2. Lower** our expectations that the person will be empathetic and cooperative (#2).
- 3. Set limits and boundaries** so these behaviors affect us far less (#3, #4).
- 4. Make all communications with the person “public”**—in emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings (#4).
- 5. Use the “Inner Ninja” technique** for self-protection (#3, #4, #5; email me at diana@ic.org for a handout.)
- 6. Get outside healing help** to become more emotionally resilient and less vulnerable to these behaviors (#4).

–DLC

Cooperation, Competition, and the Pursuit of Excellence

By Paul Freundlich

In a world of limited resources, it shouldn't be surprising that human beings as individuals, families, and tribes have sought to gain an edge on survival. From the earliest times, excepting those who were sold, captured, or born into slavery, there have been two main paths to escaping (or at least deferring) death, drudgery, and despair: **competition** (achieving a dominant position over others); and **cooperation** (joining with others to organize consistent access to resources). In both cases, the enhancement of **technology** (tools leveraging capacity) has had the capacity to change the game.

Competition is commonly seen as a driving force delivering progress in the form of the highest "standard of living" in history for a significant portion of the world's human population. The accompanying assumption that we should always be competing for a bigger slice of the pie is deeply ingrained in our cultures, economics, education. Meanwhile, consolidation of power and wealth creates vast disparities. Climate change sends populations from their homelands, glaciers melt, seas rise. Science agrees that worse is to come.

Cooperation and its handmaids, collaboration, communion, and community, have been around a lot longer than humanity, and if we insist on mucking up the planet, may outlast our demise. Add another C for *continuity*, and a Darwinian picture of evolution emerges: species selection via adaptive mutation choosing attributes that increase the odds of survival. All these Cs could be the *modus operandi* of an ecological perspective that prioritizes interdependence and factors in future implications, at least unto the seventh generation.

• • •

In the fall of 1962, I was a very small cog in a very large wheel rolling towards nuclear annihilation. Day by night, I met helicopters landing on the Pentagon roof, bearing photography of ships carrying Soviet missiles approaching Cuba, and rushed them to the War Room for analysis. I caught naps in our Army film unit's office, and along with hundreds of Pentagon-based soldiers and civilians, we played our part and awaited our fate.

During one of our breaks, our crew chief, Sergeant Kenny, sent me out to shoot some film looking down the Memorial Bridge to the Lincoln Memorial. His instructions were, "If there's a mushroom cloud over the Pentagon, pan the camera fast."

Macabre humor masked our helplessness. Meanwhile, across the river in the White House, and across the sea in the Kremlin, critical choices were made to step back from confrontation. Whatever the ideological differences, President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev achieved a mutual recognition of their collaborative responsibility. Eschewing the partisan posturing, they

left room to avoid embarrassing each other, and took the opportunity to institute a set of protocols that would reduce the likelihood of future crisis.

Less dramatic collaborations occur every day in the workplace, community, and home. Collaboration as an operational mode to resolve inevitable differences in style and content works best when there is mutual respect, but all it requires minimally is to listen and understand other positions. Even better, unlike compromise, which is a linear process to determine who gets or gives what, collaboration has the potential to create new amalgams.

• • •

It was 1979, and I was in Minneapolis, having lunch with the Editors of the Native American political magazine, *Akwesasne Notes*. They'd already had a good laugh when I'd stumbled over their designation. "Native American? Nah. Amongst ourselves, we're just Indians."

They were considering contributing a chapter on networking to a book I was co-editing for COMMUNITIES, *A Guide to Cooperative Alternatives*. There was some skepticism about participating in a gringo-led project, but as we jammed about networks and politically correct language, it became clear we were substantially speaking the same language, even as we recognized the historical, political, and cultural experiences that shaped us.

In my travels for the magazine and the book, I was quite aware we were doing more than pre-collecting articles. At best we were building a movement. Individuals, organizations, and communities were accepting an invitation to present themselves to an audience of newfound peers. Taken as a whole, the connections suggested alternatives and opportunities.

The completed book was also a wedge to reach into the mainstream. I had developed an excellent, collaborative relationship with the National Institute of Mental Health's Center for the Study of Metropolitan Problems. In the mid '70s, they had funded another of my projects, "Training for Urban Alternatives," and their continuing interest delivered a packed house at NIMH to hear how the common threads of a new paradigm could be woven into a productive and original tapestry: Participatory approaches to housing, healthcare, food, economics and work, energy and environment...or as the *Guide's* subhead grandly styled it, "Almost anything else hopeful in America."

One problem: the book was held up at the printer, and I missed its graphic tangibility. What I got instead was nervous skepticism from a room of well-meaning, but substantially burned-out bureaucrats.

One woman demanded, "What are you asking us for?"

I replied, "To support projects that help people organize cooperatively around their needs."

She shook her head. “But most of the populations we deal with are deeply fractured. The pre-condition of trust doesn’t exist.”

“Even in fractured environments there’s usually someplace to start—a church, a school, local government programs—but yes, trust’s a problem.”

“Thanks for sharing.”

At lunch afterwards, with the Metro Center staff, I turned to cooperatives as a more structured and perhaps accessible approach to the problems we mutually recognized. If the trajectory of my assault on the establishment’s picture of reality was less successful than I had hoped, there was still plenty to be done. The book would sell 10,000 copies, and the *Washington Post* featured it in their Style section.

• • •

The cooperative movement rests on the principle of equity through one member, one vote. Participation and ownership are synonymous. Scale ranges from local, rural food co-ops, credit unions, to the giant Mondragon Cooperative in the Basque region of Spain, encompassing housing, schools, banking, and manufacturing.

In the US, co-ops peaked in the ’70s, enlivened by natural foods that supermarkets were slow to carry. The annual conference of the Consumer Cooperative Alliance brought together hundreds of representatives of both the new wave of food co-ops and an earlier generation of housing cooperatives. Federal legislation encouraged employee stock ownership, and a National Consumer Co-op Bank was funded. COMMUNITIES explored the movement’s edges, and I founded Co-op America to link co-ops and thoughtful producers with sympathetic consumers. Could we really refashion the entrepreneurial drive of America and replace competition with excellence attained through cooperation as the goal? It all seemed very promising, signaling the advent of a multi-layered participatory economy.

Not so fast. Half a century before, greed had produced a great Depression. Protections had been established by the New Deal

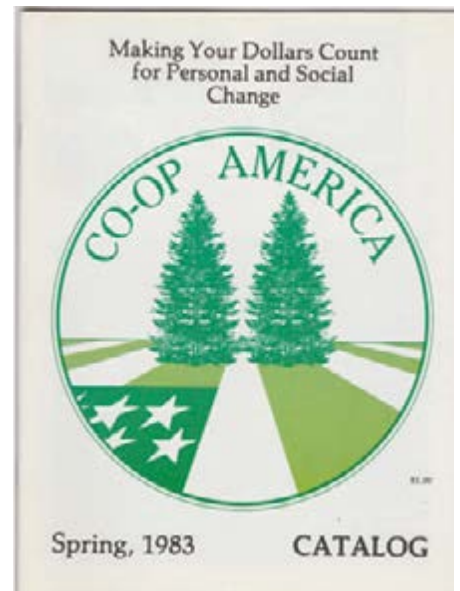
so that could never happen again, but never is a long time. Step by step, the Reagan Presidency and future administrations gutted the protocols, inviting the next bursting bubble. Justified by theories of trickle-down economics, tax codes were redirected to reward wealth. The upward mobility that had fashioned a middle-class economic miracle became an inevitable casualty. The greatest frustration was that like the game where players remove one block at a time from a construction, the eventual crash was so predictable. Yet the institutions committed to a participatory economy never ceased resistance, and made common cause with growing environmental concerns.

• • •

In 1989, as President of the Social Investment Forum, I helped my friend, Joan Bavaria, found CERES (the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies). Its purpose was to challenge Wall Street and Corporate America to embrace 10 environmental principles. In the wake of Bhopal and the Exxon Valdez oil spill, our strategy was the right of shareholders to identify environmental risks in corporate behavior that affected the portfolios of millions of Americans and billions of dollars—not lip service, rather specific reporting of impact, something companies and traditional investors furiously resisted.

The 23 years I served on the CERES Board, along with leaders of organizations like Sierra Club, National Wildlife, NRDC, New York and California pension funds, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, and organized labor were the most satisfying of all my activist adventures, both for the pleasure of collaboration and the challenge of changing accepted business practice at a level that mattered.

In 2001, as the new Bush administration took office, his VP, Dick Cheney, told auto industry leaders they could ignore with impunity past and pending environmental constraints. A week later, our entire CERES Coalition Board flew to Detroit. We met with Bill Ford and the General Motors CEO, delivering a message that the millions of customers and investors we represented would find





renewing on sustainability commitments unacceptable. That we could quickly arrange such meetings, much less obtain favorable results, built on a decade of frank dialog and growing mutual respect. Two decades later, a global, corporate push and public commitment for energy-renewable vehicles was so firmly in place that the Trump administration's lack of interest was irrelevant.

• • •

All these years, I was running two parallel tracks. Along with grand designs I shared with colleagues, there was always the grounding experience of community. From my travels for Peace Corps to New Haven and co-op organizing, leading to the four decades and counting of our Dance New England community, I've had a hand in co-creation and its rewards. That's not to say it's always been easy.

In 2020, we, who had learned to be close, were about to get a lesson in social distancing. During the recent pandemic, social distancing driven by Covid enforced isolation even in the most lively cities and towns. The internet and Zoom were innovations that helped sustain us. Zoom technology sparked hundreds of dances with global participation. The images of dancers on the screens were, with some grand exceptions, small, but intention held our attention.

Yet the obverse was also true. In a difficult time, with mortality seemingly around every corner, confidence in many relationships crumbled right along with confidence in social and political structures. In response, Zoom/chat groups emerged within the community to share the mortal challenges, including one I've hosted and facilitated Thursday evenings four years and counting. Talking for an hour, dancing for an hour seems about right for the half to two dozen folks who show up. Once communion is part of our lives, it is not relinquished lightly. It inspires our creativity and reinforces our community.

• • •

What distinguishes all communities is a kind of tribal identity; an *us* which is immediately recognizable.

In 2008, the India-4 Volunteers from my first Peace Corps film, "A Choice I Made," tracked me down and invited me to

their biannual reunion. As I questioned them about their own travels, one observation that resonated came from a FEMA administrator: "When I arrive at a disaster site, and start looking around at how to organize response, I can always tell the former Volunteers. They cut to the chase. They respect and share resources rather than compete."

The most intense form of cooperation is folks living together in community. Tripping over tightly held assumptions requires a sense of humor, a wide perspective, or a true affection.

In 1975, our communal house was facing a crisis. One of our members, and a good friend, had fallen in love with a new housemate who was driving the rest of us nuts. After several months of fruitless meetings, something had to give. As the longest-term housemate, I had seniority, and probably could have pulled rank. But forcing Steve to a choice between his lover and the house didn't feel right. Along with two other housemates we moved out temporarily to an apartment in town.

In retrospect, I think communion was the issue. Living together, at best, demands and delivers a "we feeling" that makes inevitable annoyances acceptable. Absent that feeling, life becomes transactionally challenged.

• • •

The drive to do better for oneself and one's community, right up to the society or planet, doesn't necessarily require competition. Incorporating an ecological goal of sustainability on whatever level of personal/political adds purpose. Finding collaborators who might productively share design and execution of mutually agreed-upon goals is worth the challenge. The communion achieved when communication works for a greater good is transcendent.

As we face political and social dysfunction in the short run, and climate catastrophe in the long, we will need every bit of community, collaboration, communion, and cooperation we can muster.

Good luck to us all. 🌱

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

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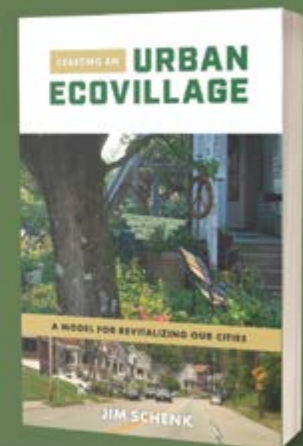
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THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #204 Fall 2024 (out in Sept.) is July 31, 2024. Rates: ≤50 words: \$25/issue; ≤100 words: \$50/issue; ≤150 words: \$75/issue. You may pay using a credit or debit card, bank transfer (contact the Advertising Manager), or via check or money order payable to Communities (include all ad info) mailed to Communities, 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074.

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LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE WANTED FOR AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY ON AN ORGANIC LAKEFRONT FARM IN THE WILDERNESS OF BC CANADA. More info: <https://www.canadianwildernessproperties.com>, Hans@canada-farm-ranch.com, or phone 001 250 694 3417.

GANAS COMMUNITY, a 65-person intentional community, in Staten Island NY, has space available for new members. We live in 8 houses with connected gardens, and are a short walk from the ferry to Manhattan. Monthly expenses are \$950 per month and include room, food, utilities, laundry facilities, toiletries, and wifi. Learn about collective decision making, problem solving and community living at Ganas. Share resources and shrink your carbon footprint. For more info go to www.ganas.org or contact Susan at info@ganas.org

PRAIRIE HILL COHOUSING AND ECOVILLAGE has a beautiful home (800 SF, 2 bdrm, 1 bath in a four-plex) available at \$345k in progressive, culturally rich Iowa City. There are many upgrades (flooring, cabinets, countertop, extended back porch). All appliances are included. This includes a share in the 3000 SF common house and 8 acres of land with an organic community garden, orchard and otherwise, covered in native grasses. A very coveted garage is also available for purchase at \$17k. Email me at gsharar@mac.com for photos and description or if viewing this electronically, go to: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ITZHHIUz8iCzHwnnL9VYJU4w5LRzbLoi3MzrTtHX4ig/edit?usp=sharing>

DURHAM COHOUSING Thriving established cohousing community has a large unit available, Fall 2024. Multigenerational, active members enjoy urban vibrancy in downtown and quiet peace in our gardens. We appreciate sharing weekly meals, working together, and having meaningful conversations, as neighbors and friends. Contact us: durhamcoho407@gmail.com Visit us: www.durhamcoho.com

YOUR COHOUSING DOLLARS GO FURTHER AT HEARTWOOD COMMONS - Tulsa. Heartwood Commons is a co-

housing community for proactive adults in Tulsa Oklahoma. Move-in begins in May 2024. Now is the time to check out our few remaining 2-bedroom homes. Known for its friendliness, low cost of living and four seasons, Tulsa has all the amenities of a larger city without all the hassles. Learn why people from across the country are joining Heartwood Commons at heartwoodcommonstulsa.com or contact community member Suzy at 918-519-5298.

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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.

SOWING SOLUTIONS PERMACULTURE DESIGN CERTIFICATE COURSE! An Informative & Inspiring Weekend Series Program, Shelburne Falls, MA. Design for abundance in your home landscape. Create resilience in our communities. Summer Program: July 18 - 22 and August 22 - 26. PRACTICE ecological design; VISIT inspiring permaculture sites; GATHER new skills. www.PermacultureSeries.org

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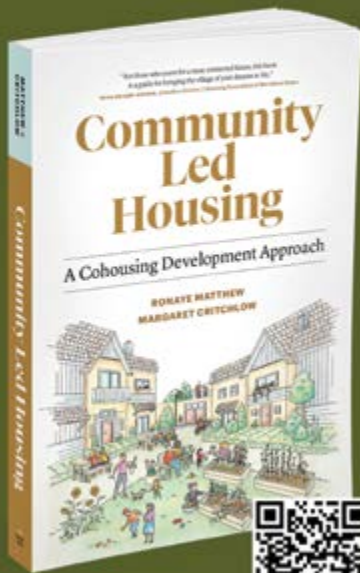


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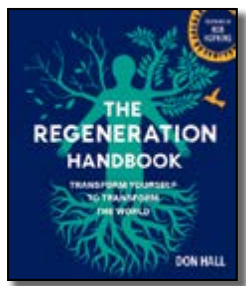
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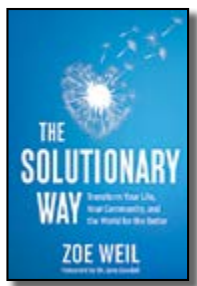
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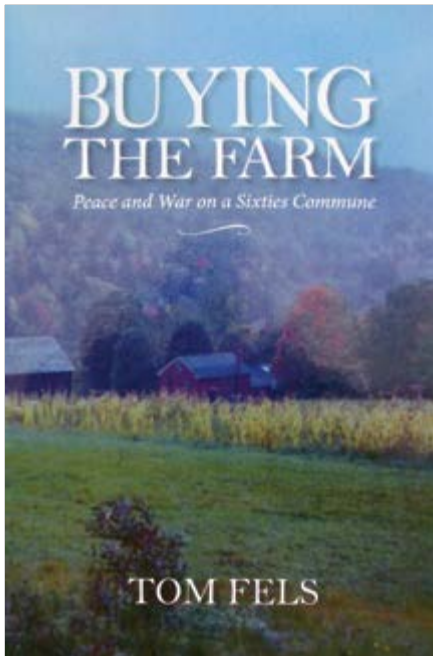
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Available from
University of Massachusetts Press



Farm family meeting, 25th anniversary of Montague Farm, 1993
Photographer: Emmanuel Dunand
Courtesy of Famous Long Ago archive, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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The Center's Collections hold primary and secondary materials on more than one hundred historic communes and several hundred collective, cooperative and co-housing communities founded since 1965. Noted communal scholars have donated their private collections and their extensive research notes and papers to the Center archives.

For more information, please contact Dr. Silvia Rode at sarode@usi.edu (812-465-7026), or consult <https://www.usi.edu/liberal-arts/communal-center>



Quintessential Commune Moments

Text by Valerie
Illustrations by Ratzoskull
Labour Credits by McCune

A Project of the Renmick-Porter Art Internship, Twin Oaks, August 2021



The moment you see someone wearing the item of clothing that you just donated to Commie Clothes



You're in a different circle than a person, you barely interact with them for months, you unexpectedly have a flare-up with them, and somehow it is later that exact same week you have a K-Shift with them



You hook up with someone at a party, and that first moment you see them the next day



The very person you were just animatedly bad-mouthing emerges from right around the corner where you are standing



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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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Diverse groups help to provide support, education, and networking for those interested in and/or living in ecovillages and other intentional communities worldwide, including:

- FIC (Foundation for Intentional Community): ic.org
- BIPOC ICC (BIPOC Intentional Communities Council): bipocicc.org
- CohoUS (Cohousing Association of the United States): cohousing.org
- CSA (Communal Studies Association): communalstudies.org
- ICSA (International CSA): icsacommunity.org
- GEN (Global Ecovillage Network): ecovillage.org and its regions:
ecovillage.org/region/gen-africa
ecovillage.org/region/gen-europe
ecovillage.org/region/casa
ecovillage.org/region/genoa
ecovillage.org/region/genna
- NextGEN (Youth Network): nextgen-ecovillage.org

We welcome stories and connections from throughout these and related networks, and hope to hear from you!

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