Tiny Houses • Car Culture • Remembering Laird Schaub

Communities

Life in Cooperative Culture

Summer 2025 • Issue #207
$10 US / $13 Canada

Breaking the Spell

Catalysts, Not Bubbles
Navigating Polarization
Downstream of America
Community as Resistance
Restoring Ecological Resources

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Camphill Village COPAKE

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- **developing communication skills and a deeper sense of compassion**

Simmering, Boiling Over, and Spouting Off

Chris Roth

"Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?" The hooting of a barred owl is capable of breaking any spell.

So is a dark night sky, brilliant with thousands of stars, planets, galaxies, above a camas meadow that none in my community would be living next to on our own. Sharing a landbase makes it possible.

In a modern world aswirl with countless distractions from the essence of life, where alternative realities constructed via digital technology often obscure or even replace reality itself, in-person community offers grounding, a return to what makes us human—especially when that community consciously extends to our home ecosystems and to the whole earth.

Scrolling the internet or a social media feed can produce a profoundly lonely experience, despite the "connection" it promises to promote. Artificial intelligence reliably lives up to only one half of its name. We were already drowning in information, and thirsting for wisdom, before the latest wave of pseudo-data and misinformation stole even more attention from what and who are all around us.

Sitting in a circle together and letting the truth emerge from each of us breaks the spell of separation, cuts through illusion, allows us to confront difficult issues we may lack the strength to face on our own, and creates the opportunity to share celebration as well.

Harvesting and sharing food from the land, putting hands in the soil together, meeting our own and one another's basic needs as directly as possible, becoming familiar and friendly with what nourishes our lives, instills appreciation and connection in visceral ways impossible to convey in words to someone who has not experienced it. The 1970s community "Alternatives to Alienation" chose their name well.

Being blunt, funny, whimsical, poetic, paradoxical, and even Dylanesquely cryptic can all be ways of breaking a spell—for those ready to have it broken. Sowing seeds of spell-breaking may be more effective than attempting to transplant a half-grown spell-breaking tree into a landscape whose soil is not yet ready for it. In other cases, those half-grown trees may be just what an ecosystem needs for recovery, and its stewards may even welcome them. Change can happen slowly, or remarkably fast when the time for it is ripe.

Some imagine downloading our brains into computers or uploading them to the "cloud" as a means of achieving immortality, thus circumventing the inconvenience and challenges of physical life in human bodies altogether. If immortality of zeros and ones is the goal, this would be a means to it, assuming it were possible. But if aliveness, connection, full human experience, purpose, meaning, and/or wisdom are the goals, it seems a less-than-optimal idea.

Ideas get us only so far anyway. Many would consider the persistent, undeniable itch of a poison oak rash a distracting nuisance, something to avoid at all costs. But from another perspective, it is a hymn to embodiment on a planet green with life. I'm fresh off of such a rash during time spent in my home community, and I would not have traded that feeling of physical aliveness for any digital immortality or limitless access to information available. Nor would I have traded a single one of my conversations there for an online experience of any sort.

As some egregious examples attest, groups directly engaged with one another do not necessarily shed spells. Without conscious attention, they can even create or amplify them, especially if trained in that practice in the wider culture and/or dominated by a charismatic leader or fundamentalist ideology. Thankfully, willingness to flip any hierarchy (as the moment dictates), drop any convention, question any habit, commit oneself to being "real" even at the risk of rejection, can help snuff out even the most destructive spells or prevent them from taking hold in the first place.

All of this depends on engagement, on stepping out of our shells and into relationship with one another, with the wider world, with our own deeper, more expansive selves. And it requires seeing beyond the ready-made illusions and well-worn ruts that may lie more easily at hand. Do we serve one another a lunch buffet produced almost entirely by the industrial food system, because we've been trained to see it as "food"? Or share a dinner prepared with love from homegrown and responsibly raised ingredients? This is a metaphorical choice facing each of us in various forms every day—and also a real one, which is still answered in strikingly different ways even by well-intentioned communitarians.

Whether in community or out, the opportunity—and responsibility, for each of us unconvinced by dominant current illusions—to question, weaken, and hopefully help break spells, together, will not disappear soon.

• • •

This magazine issue has been one of my favorites to assemble, so abundant with submissions that they will overflow to Fall. I've found the contributors' stories and insights even more compelling than usual; and we may need them now more than ever before, in a time when spells affecting our world have been growing ever-larger. Thanks for joining the conversation; we welcome your responses.

Chris Roth (editor@gen-us.net) edits Communities.

Issue #207
Summer 2025

BREAKING THE SPELL

ON THE COVER

Breaking the spell through homegrown nutrition: residents and interns at Lost Valley Education Center/ Meadowsong Ecovillage, Dexter, Oregon, bring in the harvest and prepare to plant more, August 7, 2024. For more on Lost Valley/Meadowsong (lostvalley.org), see pages 1, 7, 16-19, and 30-31 in this issue.
Photo by Elizabeth Maragioglio.

COMMUNITIES
Life in Cooperative Culture

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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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This magazine printed by Sundance Press, Tucson AZ.

Twin Oaks Communities Conference and Convergence

How do you find an intentional community? You have scoured the ic.org directory, perhaps you have searched social media, but you know it is going to take meeting and connecting with the people who live there.

What if we could bring together a bunch of ICs which have vacancies, with a large group of community seekers? That's where the Twin Oaks Communities Conference and the Convergence of ICs come in.

Twin Oaks Communities Conference will host our annual Meet the Communities morning on Saturday, August 30th. About 50 different ICs seeking new members will present themselves to over 200 participants who will then get a chance to ask their own questions and introduce themselves.

This is just one of the activities at this kid-friendly, outdoor camping event, August 29 through September 1. There are dance parties, workshops, mud pits, river swims, and more—at one of the best-known intentional communities in North America. Workshops include evergreen content on intentional community living and this year's two themes: 1) **Resistance and Resilience**: Confronting Challenges, Cultivating Possibilities and 2) **Transforming Community Culture to support BIPOC Representation**, Empowerment, and Long-Term Retention. See **communitiesconference.org**.

Immediately after is the **Convergence of Intentional Communities**, September 1 through 4. Created by and for people who live in intentional communities, the convergence has two core goals: to build stronger relationships between intentional communities, and to guide the networks and organizations supporting ICs on how to best serve member communities.

The Convergence of ICs is more than a meeting—it's a launchpad for mutually beneficial initiatives that strengthen our collective impact. Together, we'll design an inter-community exchange program, establish a harm reduction and repair council, and form an alliance of communities and organizations to cross-promote, share resources, and uplift one another's missions.

We intend for this to be a regional gathering of the Global Ecovillage Network, helping us act in solidarity on a global scale while deepening our roots locally. If your community is ready to align, collaborate, and grow resilience through solidarity—this is the place to be. See **ic.org/convergence**.


Twin Oaks Communities Conference
FOUNDATION FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY
TWIN OAKS COMMUNITIES
CONFERENCE
August 29 - September 1 , 2025
&
CONVERGENCE
OF INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES
September 1 - 4, 2025
Join us for a week of
connecting, sharing and networking
Twin Oaks Community
Louisa, Virginia
Save 20% through June 30
Price per event
Adults - $160, Youth 6-17 - $60, Kids under 6 are free
Work Exchange and discounts available.
No one turned away for lack of funds!
Learn more and register at communitiesconference.org

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

Submissions Policy

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

Advertising Policy

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

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

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

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

What is an "Intentional Community"?

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

DEXTER, OREGON

THREE PATHWAYS TO TRANSFORMATION

COURSES

We educate youth and adults in the practical application of sustainable living. We take a holistic approach to sustainability. Our Permaculture Design Certificate, immersive Holistic Sustainability Semester, Social Forestry Course, youth learning adventures, and visitor education program offer participants a unique learning experience within our aspiring ecovillage. In collaboration with Nature's Mystery Awareness School, we also offer Eco-Resilience Leadership Training—an opportunity to become more consciously attuned to nature's support that surrounds and sustains us in every moment.

INTERNSHIPS

Lost Valley's internship is a 3-month immersive learning experience where participants have the opportunity to learn and work alongside some of the Pacific Northwest's finest systems thinkers. This is a great option for you if you are in a transitional period, and are looking to make like-minded friends, develop marketable skills, and experience living in community. Food and lodging are included.

RESIDENCY

Living in community teaches us to care for and respect one another, communicate compassionately, make decisions together, and see individual needs in the context of the whole. It also reduces resource use through sharing. Residents live in a variety of accommodations throughout our 87 acres. We offer several *Community Experience Weeks* throughout the year to give folks a chance to sample community living.

LOST VALLEY
EDUCATION CENTER

lostvalley.org

The Day the Storm Broke the Spell

By Marissa Percoco

Flooding was already happening in the lowlands on Wednesday, two days before the tropical storm was predicted to hit my area, near Asheville, North Carolina. Thursday, it continued raining consistently while the now upgraded hurricane continued gaining force as it drew closer to the mountains. By early Friday morning, the rivers were at capacity and creeping towards the tipping point, but holding to their familiar pathways. The ground was sodden from days of heavy rain after many weeks of drought, creating hydrophobic soil conditions, unable to absorb any more liquid.

Then Helene raged through. It was eerie when the eye of the storm passed over my little farmstead; so quiet and calm. Then came the howling winds that snapped millions of trees like matchsticks. And still the rain relentlessly fell. The river rose faster than we could track, two feet, 10 feet…20 feet! I watched with my heart breaking as my beehives slowly succumbed to the endless rising water; then the waters swamped my daughter's house. Then my entire road and neighborhood…swallowing everything in the pathway of that ancient river bed.

And just like that, the spell of separation was broken.

We are all collectively under the spell of separation: the belief that we are individuals, apart from everything else. Completely divided. This leads to low-level abandonment anxiety, and a nagging FEAR that we aren't enough. So we enter into the endless cycle of trying to prove ourselves and earn favor, which often leads to isolation, consumption, compromises of convenience, and the endless feeling that we don't fit in, even as we strive to be unique.

It was beautiful to witness the spell crumbling, as the community of earth-centered herbalists, naturalists, anarcho-primitivists, wildcrafters, back-to-the-landers and the like who now inhabit these hills, united with the older and often more conservative population of locals, generations of Appalachian knowledge-keepers. Everyone worked together, putting mutual aid into action to help each other stay alive until the bigger support systems arrived. Those who had heavy machinery and the ingenuity made roads out of rubble. Everyone began checking on each other, taking stock of who needed what, and who had what to give.

The first three days post-flood, I walked a half mile out on my washed-away road to the old fire station, where I watched as people from all walks of life were quick to respond, organizing meetings and specific task groups. A Mutual Aid and materials distribution center sprang up, like mushrooms after rain. A few days later, another one started a half mile in the other direction; this one had a lot of materials for farmers who—like myself—

Emma Robinson

Leah Swann

lost hay, cover crop, fencing, and more.

Soup, medicine, and supplies were offered daily, for free. Seeing how quickly our greater communities mobilized, with relief I decided that I could go home and focus on my heavily impacted farm, my daughter's flooded tiny house, and my immediate neighbors and live-in community members—like my 73-year-old neighbor, James, who's lived two doors down for years, and I never knew his name. His home was heavily flooded and he didn't have much food or water. After a couple of days of us bringing him supplies, he was waving and hollering, "I love you!" Michael, my landmate, saw his entire neighborhood mechanic shop and livelihood washed away, along with his family's home. Right away, folks started raising money for them.

We began to share our spring with folks who had no water because all power was out. Those whose homes and lives were safe journeyed out to share their strength and resources with those who were impacted, trauma-stricken, and in need. This is the heart of Mutual Aid: take what you need, give what you can.

All of this occurred in the midst of election season, a time especially fraught with division and emotion; but all of that seemed to wash down the river with the election signs and our ways of life. We became a bubble, insulated by our struggles to simply stabilize and survive such a cataclysmic event.

Much was lost that fateful day. Countless homes and businesses were washed down the river, along with far too many precious lives: friends and neighbors; relatives, partners…children, all beloved. The extent of the devastation hasn't yet settled in, like the fine silt suspended in our still-murky rivers.

Here in western North Carolina, we learned how to come together in spite of the dominant belief in the *other*; and how to put Mutual Aid practices and Earthskills into action and keep each other safe and alive in times of catastrophe. Collectively, we learned that there is no such thing as a climate refuge. No one will be left unscathed by the consequences of capitalism and greed spinning so far out of balance.

Something else I learned as I watched my specific neck of the woods become activated is that the community that I have chosen to be a part of—the legacy of Firefly Gathering folks and the greater southeastern resiliency and earthskills network—is wonky and flawed in many ways; human, in other words; but we are also incredibly resourced and resilient.

And I learned that there is hope. The spell of separation has been at least fractured, if not broken, as old patterns die hard. What I witnessed in the wake of Helene helped me understand that at the heart of it all, humans are mostly beautiful and loyal creatures, who will rise up and defend each other when threatened, in this case by nature. This gives me hope, because as recovery marches forward in Asheville, so does the political unrest in the US and the world. But I now know that we are still capable of banding together, overcoming our petty differences to unite for common good.

Catastrophe brings people together; but we must remember to learn to stay together, to not slip back under the powerful spell of separation. To live with the understanding that this planet and her gifts are actually enough, and that our greatest strengths lie not only in our threads of connection, but also in

Leah Swann

Sarah Tew

Emma Robinson

Emma Robinson

Sarah Tew

our willingness to rise together, even in the greatest of storms. Months after the flood, amidst unfathomable unrest in our country, it is sometimes difficult to stay connected. But there are practices and strategies to keep from backsliding, falling under new seductive spells of separation, isolation, and despair.

First of all, connection is crucial, both with nature and one's place within the great web; with Earth, and the fragility and resiliency of her systems; with other people whom we feel good being around. For many, this connection includes a spiritual component, bringing wonder and love. Also, connection to our work: how do we use our precious moments of life? How do we invest our energy and resources? Our dreams and visions? Our voices and money?

Helene forced the community to evaluate how we currently spend our time, compared with how we want to be spending it. She taught us to step into the moment of our fleeting lives; into our confidence; into our power—and that even our smallest actions can have tremendous ripples. She taught us to question what we've allowed ourselves to become connected to: warm-blooded human beings with stories, feelings, dreams, and struggles; or screens and scripts passed down by this oppressive American culture?

Strategy number two is self-care. We learned that self-care is community-care, because one cannot show up for others with not a drop left in their own cup. Eating well, staying hydrated, and resting when we're tired are all generous acts of community-care. The beauty of Mutual Aid is that we can relax a bit, knowing that we don't *have* to do it all on our own. So normalize asking for help. In my experience it feels really good to show up when I'm resourced, and even better to receive when I'm in need. I highly recommend this as a practice for surviving the times ahead and avoiding burnout.

Once you're connected and rested, you can organize and respond, rather than react. In emergency situations, we don't often get to these steps until things have somewhat stabilized; but once we're there, we can take time for self-care. Then we can respond to the demands of life with more clarity, compassion, and efficacy, organizing people into various response groups, empowered circles of thought and action.

Endless stories of kindness and perseverance echo through the hills of Appalachia in the wake of the humbling teacher, Helene; of people transcending religious and political borders, lending hands and hearts without asking affiliation. If we could experience this kind of unity and mutuality all of the time, we would be in a different nation…a different reality…we'd become like a different species; able to fully empathize once again.

When we let nature lead, we see a great deal of patience in the give and take of life and the abundance of our most benevolent host. But we also see power struggles, fighting, and death; the gentleness of a warm summer breeze, and the ferocity of the wind and the rain. And so once again, nature, our greatest teacher, shows us that sometimes we are to be the babbling brook, full of laughter and joy. And sometimes we are to be the storm, fierce and formidable; unstoppable. What does life call you to be today? Whatever it is, may it come from a place of love.

Marissa Percoco is a spiritual being wrapped in a vulnerable meat sack who loves reading, writing, and all things farm-steady! Also a mother to four grown kids, four Shetland sheep, three and a half cats, many, many bees, and some very happy chickens! She finds joy in the minutiae and mystery under every stone. As the Executive Director, she sees The Firefly Gathering as an opportunity to collectively listen, and explore an alternative and sustainable way of being with Earth.

Transplanted many years ago from the West, she is deeply rooted in anti-oppression work and now, these old Appalachian hills. Learning traditional foodways, building strong and resilient communities based on education and Mutual Aid, and tending the land are her loves—along with exploring lofty mountaintops, sandy beaches, arid deserts, healing hot springs, and epic ancient ruins. Working to topple hierarchies, nurture nature, and inspire a flood of fierce love, she can be found at fireflygathering.org, at The Firefly Gathering July 8-13, 2025, or scampering in a forest near you!

Sarah Tew

Apocalypse of the Familiar: Can Awareness Break the Spell?

By Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD

el gameyo no ve su korkova (the camel doesn't see his own hump)
—Proverb from Ladino (the language of my maternal and paternal families)

How can I possibly give up?

How can I possibly *not* give up?

In a rage of overwhelming parental impotency, I haphazardly layer on my winter gear and retreat from our Love Bus. In tears, past silhouettes of ancient junipers and deer traveling with moon shadow, I stumble through the night. Perched in what feels like the crest of our mesa—encircled by mountain ranges—I finally exhale. We live in an exceptionally unelectrified region—an officially designated Dark Skies area. The cosmos is saturated with swarms of starlight. Electrical pollution far below. I breathe in the wonder of the infinite.

Wait a minute. Don't those twinklings look oddly bright? And aren't they blinking unusually quickly? And aren't they way too consistent? And why are there so many of them? Why are they moving?

Who am I kidding? There is no escape. There is no *away*. Do I really think I can raise my now teenage son immersed in commitment to my ecological-social-justice values—my exquisite joys dictating what we naively take for granted? Big Brother's panopticon has thoroughly integrated into our quotidian, insinuating itself into our psycho-cellular make-up. We have voluntarily succumbed to what was once seen as an improbable science-fiction horror. Now, Artificial Everything is our everyday reality. So many of us seem to be quite content that our agency has become neutered.

If we succumb, industrial-waste civilization will continue to infuse our daily lives, and in particular parenting, with pre-programmed, technocratic, greenwashing "solutions"—lip service that includes renewable energies, carbon offsetting, emissions trading, climate-smart agriculture, and geo-engineering.

Do we care that we are seemingly powerless?

Not-giving-up is my only choice...embodying my deepest values while building my capacity to navigate the anguish of always swimming upstream.

We are stardust.

We are cosmic trash—kevlar and aluminum satellites traveling through the night sky. From Mine-golia (Mongolia's mines of copper, gold, and coal) to the Congo to Thacker Pass in Nevada, US, we are the critical minerals mined for these materials. We are space-junk showers. We are our supply chains.

We are suburban homes that poison our bodies with off-gassing carpets and furniture made by children in the Global South. We are traffic jams, backed-up sewage. We are the preconditioned pleasure, the ostensible ease and convenience afforded by such normalcies.

However, at whose expense?

Photos courtesy of Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD

Zazu, Sahar Alsahlani, and I at our performance of Zazu Dreams *during the exhibition/award for Zazu's grandmother, Micaeala Amateau Amato.*

Me breastfeeding Zazu (years before we weaned).

• • •

The system reproduces its existence because it goes unrecognized.
—Pierre Bourdieu

Every aspect of my life, as a mother, university professor, author, frontline community activist, and visual artist, has always intertwined the personal with the political, the individual with the collective. Living my parental environmental ethics as an antidote to petroleum parenting (what I identify as market-driven choices parents make that overwhelmingly contribute to both environmental destruction and body-phobic institutional practices) involves not only my practice of decolonizing economies through barter and shared resources, it is at the core of my intuitive commitment to live the personal as political, to live the apocalypse as spell-breaker.

And, these life-passion commitments are bulldozing my relationship with my son, Zazu.

Perhaps.

I thought I did the "right thing." I thought I was breaking the spell of fossil-fuel, cyber-addicted culture, of petroleum parenting.

• • •

Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out.
—Václav Havel

Conscious conception. I was pregnant while I taught prenatal Iyengar yoga—working intimately with my body in conjunction with my pregnant yoga students. Defying the medical establishment at every turn: despite my "advanced" age (I gave birth to Zazu unassisted at home on my 40th birthday), I chose no prenatal medical interventions (ultrasounds, cervical examinations, blood-tests, injections) and no pharmaceuticals in my body, or his—ever. I have raised my uncircumcised son on Ecovillages, living communally among other children deeply attuned to their bodies *in relation* to their local flora and fauna. I chose to sleep and bathe together, practice elimination communication (diaper-free as much as possible), never used disposable diapers or menstruation products, a pacifier or stroller, but wore Zazu on my body. I have never owned a smartphone, credit card, or a car (we bike, walk, or carpool everywhere).

As I weaned Zazu at four years old, I taught him, and continue to teach him, how to creatively interact with "resources" rather than seeing the world around us through a utilitarian lens. By integrating corporeal, local, and global interrelationships, every almost aspect of our family life transgresses ecocidal, industrialized standard-of-living normalizing infrastructures.

He constantly feels deprived of some kind of normalcy against which I strive—desperately. From the moment of his conception, through our gestation, and his birth, I have intuitively not followed the rules—in many cases, I didn't even realize my choices were going totally against the grain. Inadvertently, Zazu's entire life has become an eco-ethical manifesto.

• • •

I'm not dead.
—Zazu, my 13-year-old son responding to how he is faring following the horrors of Hurricane Helene

Did I prepare Zazu for this? Did my "extremism," our radically unconventional lifestyle prepare him to land unexpectedly smack in the middle of an "unprecedented tragedy" (Roy Cooper, North Carolina's governor), "the site of biblical devastation" (local emergency-services official)? And without me, his mom, without any family?

Across the walls of my husband's woodshop/community-maker's space, there are fiberglass panels that Wild will replace with reclaimed windows. For

now, finches tease the fiberglass strands from the reinforced thermoplastic web to build their offspring's nest; baby birds enveloped by a polymer matrix. I wonder, with horror, is this what I have inadvertently done to my baby bird, my Zazu? Not realizing of course, that he would be caught by the eye of the storm.

We have confused Apocalypse with Armageddon. Unlike Armageddon, a decisive (albeit illusory) battle between "good" and "evil," apocalypse refers to disclosure or revelation. "Apocalypse of the Familiar" is an ongoing *revealing* of what we take for granted in dominator-cultures. By revealing what is in front of us, what is all around us, can we transform it? How can we loosen the grip of our habituated obedience, that relentlessly, numbingly comfortable sense of what we think we know? Most people are so entrenched in the familiar, they will only hear what they want to hear, only see what they choose to see.

• • •

They hear it, they learn from it, they understand it, and they proceed to ignore it.

—Whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg speaking about the Vietnam War and President Nixon's "Pentagon Papers"

How does Zazu feel now as he is *living* Armageddon for which I have been preparing him, apocalypsing him for his whole life—revealing how to be resourceful and radically self-accountable? By demonstrating how Big Tech, Big Ag, Big Pharma, compulsory education, are at the core of carbon capitalism, *apocalyptic parenting* reflects and offers continual interplay between gratitude, grace, and grief; courage, creativity, and curiosity. *Apocalyptic parenting* isn't a paralyzing, disempowering child-rearing "method." It is a passionately committed release from the trappings of industrial-waste dominant culture.

Why, you may ask is Zazu, a young teen, in Asheville without me to begin with? He was there for the very reason the hurricane was tearing through the Southeastern United States. In my attempt to escape the malfeasant entrapment of digitally-addictive technologies, my child ended up smack in the middle of climate chaos—one of the many outcomes of modern civilization's technotopia/techno-euphoria. However, there is no escape when Western-industrial imperialism repeatedly demonstrates contempt for nature's boundaries. My response to raising a child in an era of inescapable self-destruction through ecological devastation has been to find community. And after 13 years of searching for a community that practices profound environmental consciousness in conjunction with racial equity, a diverse eco-social-child-focused intentional community, I give up.

Homeschool did not work without a community. I did finally find one for him: Arthur Morgan School. A boarding school. I swallow my sadness, my shame. Barely a whisper can I say these words. Yet, when I move past how I have internalized nuclear-family, privatized norms of how we are *supposed to* raise our children, I realize that this is an extraordinary opportunity to practice: "It takes a village..." (Nigerian proverb, an ethic I have tried to live in ecovillages for decades).

What does it mean to protect our children? In *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era,* my intergenerational, cross-cultural, climate-justice book, I write: "Within the national debate about how to emotionally protect our children, many 'holistic-minded' parents conflate 'news' about terrorism, police brutality, school-shootings, etc. with ecological devastation—claiming all as taboo subjects. Contrary to such fears, we suggest parents and educators teach our very young children why ecologically-conscious values and accountable behaviors are both nourishing and necessary to repair our world (the Jewish tenet, *tikkun olam*)." This is apocalyptic parenting.

My son is good in crises: In his 13 years, beginning with blowback in response to our unassisted homebirth, Zazu has experienced firsthand how medical-industry protocol insidiously intersects with corporate profit. As an infant bound to my breast, Zazu was on the frontlines of the Oakland Occupy Movement. Through his toddler and post-toddler years, even as I made collective attempts at radical community, Zazu encountered the effects of human greed, witnessing hypocrisies of living in urban co-housing and rural ecovillages fraught with economic, race, and gender-skewed power

Occupy Oakland, 11/11/11.


Local resident struggling to help a driver and their car during Hurricane Helene.

Zazu with Dorothy Cotton—Martin Luther King Jr.'s dear friend and co-conspirator.

discrepancies. As a young boy at Earthaven Ecovillage, Zazu and I trudged waist-deep through a rising flood, trying to get to our Love Bus (I was convinced it would be carried downstream). We fled the west coast fires of 2021, and endured the terrifying, mighty winds whipping through Nederland, Colorado. Most recently, when Zazu was 11 years old, we navigated the self-perpetuating apocalypse of colonialist exploitation while visiting a Voodoo community in Ouidah, Benin.

• • •

Everything we need to know is already within us just waiting to be realized.
—Stephen Hawking (Hawking could very well be describing the fertility of apocalypse)

In her recent essay, "Peaches for The Apocalypse," my dearest friend and poet/prose author, Darrah Danielle, cites adrienne marie brown: "Things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered. We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil." However, I sense that nature is doing the "pulling." Nature is breaking the spell. For over 30 years I have written that the term "natural disaster" rarely applies to our condition of being vulnerable in the face of Mother Nature. Whether we label "natural disaster" nature's retaliation or simply common sense, dominant culture continues to create suffering *and* be in pain.

There may no longer be such a thing as a "natural disaster." Nature's mutiny, yes: trees fallen on powerlines—stomping out our power addictions, an illusory moratorium on our electricity-obsessed society; rains engulfing bridges and roads—preventing the seemingly seamless coming and going of car-dependent culture; rivers whisking downstream beer kegs, propane tanks, shipping containers—our pleasures, our conveniences absurdly inaccessible; winds whipping through homes—transforming them from cohesive entities to fragments once again. One nightmare leading to another. Ruthless quantities of trash create more trash. Remedies reinforce the cycle of self-destruction. Victorious corporations. Toxic effulgent. Entire communities erased.

Apocalypse is the shedding of conformity. Apocalypse invites freedom. Is an event still apocalyptic if you were expecting it? Or is it then simply a horrific confirmation? And how does a teenager's mind metabolize what had been "prepared" for?

Since he was in the womb, I have consciously and unconsciously shared with Zazu that it is our sacred duty—our humility for the gift of being radically alive on this earth—to resist falling blindly into the normalcy of carbon capitalism and its embedded carceral culture. And yet, I am riddled with self-doubt: How could I have separated myself from my child amid so many impending disasters? Ironically, I wasn't even aware that Asheville, North Carolina was touted as a "climate haven"—a safe home, a place where people could "escape" climate crisis. Inhabitants in the city of Asheville have been devastated by Hurricane Helene. A few years ago, Asheville was third on a list of the top 12 US cities most likely to economically benefit from climate migration. Just as there is no "away" when people misleadingly act as though they can throw "disposable" items "away," there is no *escape* from climate crisis. Our contemporary climate apocalypse is clearly demonstrating this inescapable fact.

The first few days after Hurricane Helene ravages Asheville and the surrounding mountain communities, I have little idea what is happening with Zazu. I do understand he is physically safe—temporarily in the home of a welcoming and generous family. His school is now completely inaccessible, the entire Celo community, the bridge over Toe River, swallowed...this school that has taken me 13 years to find; an excruciating compromise since I cannot live there and be with Zazu.

The nights before we part, before I leave Zazu for his first three months in his new outdoor education, Montessori school—his Rites of Passage outside of Asheville—Zazu and I read aloud to one another *Masters of Silence*, a remarkable story about Jewish refugee orphans hiding in a convent from the Nazis. (When my father was five to seven years old, he hid in a closet during the Holocaust.) The story tells the history of how Marcel Marceau, the mime artist (the Harriet Tubman of *La Resistance*) rescued hundreds of Jewish children in an underground railroad from Southern France to Switzerland. Zazu and I spend our final few days together in Asheville walking hour-after-hour along the foot and bike paths on either side of the French Broad River. Those paths, along with the majority of West Asheville's River Arts

District, are now submerged under water. Torrential downfall for three straight days produced 30 inches of rain leading to unprecedented utter destruction, 25-30 feet over riverbanks.

Satellite links are re-installed on some mountain ridges. When Zazu finally has cellphone service, I ask him how, aside from what he can directly see, he is finding out what is going on nearby. He tells me he was sitting in an electric car listening to the radio. But, he adds, the announcer was reading a script they didn't seem to know; reading it and then sounding surprised by what it said. What he does see is a "wasteland." Roads turned inside out and upside down. Zazu is on top of a hill when a military helicopter drops in so close, he can see inside. I ask if he can see the pilot's face. No, only reflections. The eerie scene compounds. The distinction between what is real, nightmare, dream continues to blur.

What happens when a mother's warnings become reality? When a profound respect for how we harvest water and food shifts into a *collective requirement* to ration water and food? Zazu has grown up living off-grid, essentially independent from the corporate-controlled systems most people in this country rely on: electricity, water, food.

In large part, he has deeply resented my choices to resist normalized-infrastructural relationships to acquisition rooted in environmental racism and ecological hell-making. He has vociferously criticized our off-grid world. For years, before Zazu left for Arthur Morgan School, our most heart-wrenching arguments were about his feelings of deprivation, being the only one of his peers living without electricity, without flush toilets, without Wi-Fi, without a phone. He drew and wrote about his confused feelings in "A Foot in Both Worlds."

We need community

I must highlight the ever-looming question: What are the costs of committing yourself to this practice alone? The cost of living in perpetual conflict with dominant societal norms can be devastating to one's own psyche, let alone one's relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. The isolating mother/teacher-child/student dynamic amplifies those tensions even more. Anyone who has attempted to live against the grain of societal norms, to live as much as possible in a practice of deep inquiry, knows how that can put you at odds with the same people and communities you are trying to encourage to evaluate their role in habituated infrastructures. In 1981 Toni Morrison declared, "We don't need any more writers as solitary heroes. We need a heroic writers' movement: assertive, militant, pugnacious." Scott Gilbert asserts the criticality of family-work (distinct from teamwork), the radical impact of symbiotic relationships. Tibetan Shambhala Buddhism asserts that to experience the depths of one's spiritual potential, one cannot go on a journey alone; one must practice within a community (even if that community consists of simply one other person—reminiscent of *chavruta* meaning "fellowship" in Hebrew).

Can we collectively break the spell?

As I ask this, Zazu is on an emergency flight returning home.

Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD, Professor of Transdisciplinary Collaboration, has published dozens of books and articles on climate justice, art, gender and sexuality, and ethnic studies, including the critically-acclaimed Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era *(Eifrig Berlin) and* Viscous Expectations: Justice, Vulnerability, The Ob-scene *(Penn State University Press). Alhadeff's forthcoming book,* Unlearning What We Think We Know *(Vernon Press), will be performed during the World Affairs Conference. Her photographs/performance-videos are in private and public collections including MoMASalzburg and SanFrancisco MoMA. Alongside Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Vandana Shiva, Alhadeff received the Random Kindness Community Resilience Leadership Award, 2020. Alhadeff's theoretical and visual work is the subject of documentaries for international public television. Former professor of Performance and Pedagogy at UC Santa Cruz and founder of Radical Art in Action, Alhadeff teaches, performs, and parents a creative-zero-waste life in her eco-art installation converted school bus. See carajudeaalhadeff.com.*

Links for More Information

Zazu Dreams (containing further information and reflections on many topics touched on in this article): carajudeaalhadeff.com/zazu-dreams
Love Bus: youtube.com/watch?v=0Z9-yigzEFk&t=8s
industrial waste civilization: pelicanweb.org/solisustv20n01page9.html
renewable energies: youtube.com/watch?v=5IjGQFOq5NI&t=2s
satellites: azom.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=12034
Mine-golia: npr.org/2012/05/21/152683549/mineral-rich-mongolia-rapidly-becoming-minegolia
space-junk showers: bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68719850
petroleum parenting: carajudeaalhadeff.com/petroleum-parenting
husband's woodshop/community-maker's space: menageriewoodworking.com
Daniel Ellsberg quotation: pelicanweb.org/solisustv17n01page2.html
apocalyptic parenting: carajudeaalhadeff.com/intergenerational-ecoliteracy-in-the-21st-century
Arthur Morgan School: arthurmorganschool.org
homebirth story: carajudeaalhadeff.com/petroleum-parenting/#birthstory
Zazu's Earthaven childhood: pelicanweb.org/solisustv17n06page2.html
west coast fires of 2021: pelicanweb.org/solisustv17n08page2.html
Voodoo community: carajudeaalhadeff.com/west-african-backfire
climate migration: citizen-times.com/story/news/nation/2023/05/23/best-cities-avoid-worst-climate-change-effects/70212382007
no escape from the climate crisis: thedailybeast.com/climate-haven-asheville-among-cities-most-devastated-by-hurricane-helene
Masters of Silence: kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/kathy-kacer/masters-of-silence
"A Foot in Both Worlds": pelicanweb.org/solisustv20n02page9.html

Catalysts, Not Bubbles: How Intentional Communities Enrich Society

By Savannah Fishel

Lost Valley residents gather on lodge lawn.

Mikayla Cagle

Early October, I found myself standing in a circle in the middle of a street in Los Angeles, outside the LA Ecovillage[1] buildings, holding hands with a group of residents. Together, we created a human chain—a form of nonviolent direct action against speeding traffic. We weren't blocking the road; cars could still drive past, but significantly slower.

This stretch of road runs through a high-traffic area, with a primary school just steps from the ecovillage. Children walk and play here, but cars often speed through. The human circle sends a powerful message: this is a shared and heavily populated space, please consider your speed.

Beyond their own walls—where they have been working on ecological, economic, and social sustainability for 30 years—residents of LA Ecovillage are fighting for a neighbourhood that is more connected, sustainable, and safe. As they negotiate with the City Council to make this small street a no-car zone—envisioning using the space for community activities such as zumba and shared meals—they have been busy planting macadamia nut trees, building permeable sidewalks to infiltrate rainwater, and creating a beautiful garden—"one of the few places in LA you can hear birds"—where locals can immerse themselves in nature and learn about ecology.

I often encounter stereotypes about intentional communities[2]: that they're insular bubbles, withdrawing from society to attempt private utopias. But my experience of visiting over 50 communal living models across the US and Australia[3]—many of which define as intentional communities—has been the opposite. These are not self-interested isolated enclaves—they're engines of change. Many are building resilience within their neighbourhoods as well as advocating for more socially, ecologically, and environmentally sustainable systems further afield. Increasingly, data[4] backs this up, for instance, the Cohousing Research Network's (CRN) annual survey which offers insight into positive ripple impacts of cohousing, which is a growing form of intentional community, particularly in the US.

Intentional communities as catalysts for change

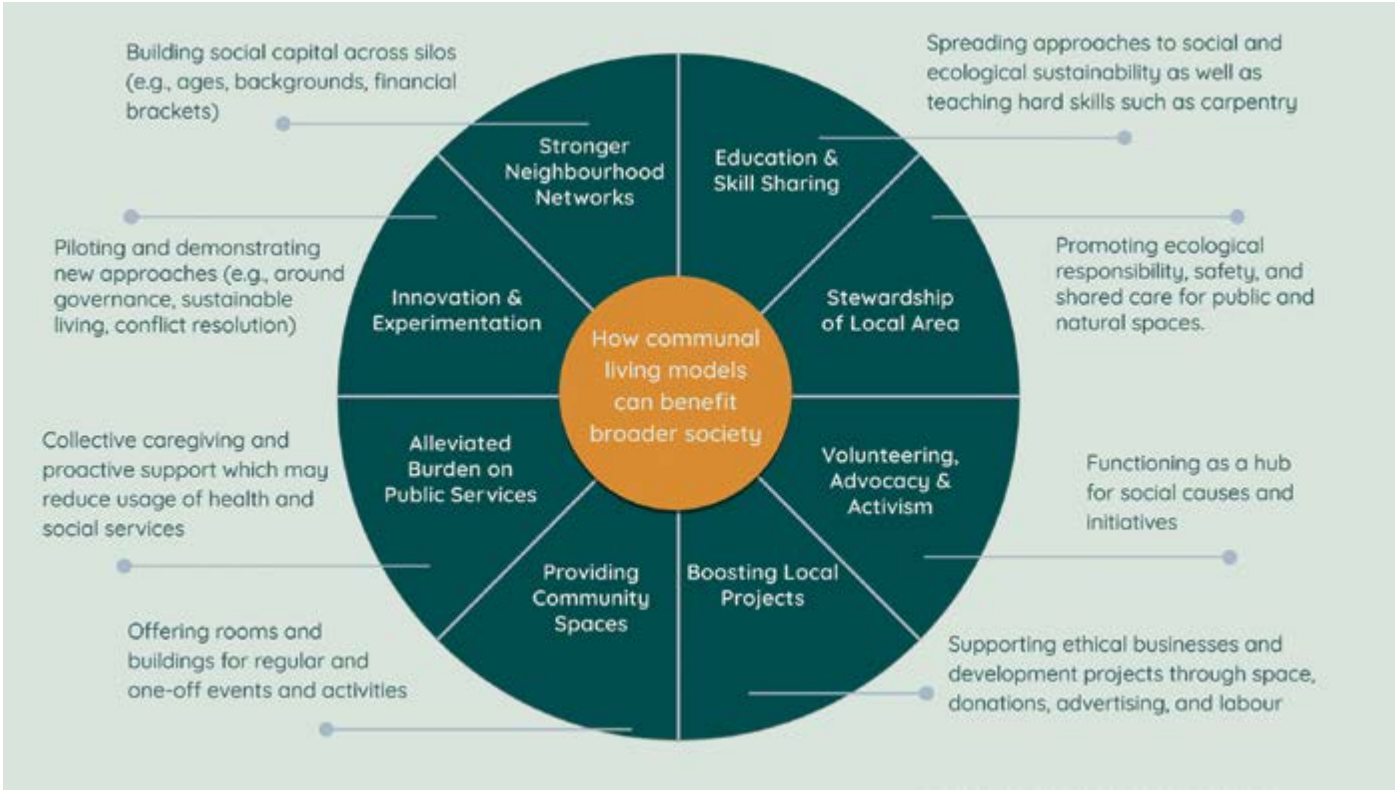

Diagram created by Savannah Fishel as part of her Churchill Fellowship output—see thinkitforward.net/communal-living for more information.

Below are just some of the ways these communities are making an impact far beyond benefits for residents:

1. Hubs for volunteering, activism, and stewardship

Attracting people committed to positive change, communities often serve as a base for grassroots organising. For example, over the lead-up to the election Berkeley Cohousing[5] in the Bay Area used their common space to host phone-banking events, during which volunteers from both inside and outside the community made calls to potential voters. One resident described this room as "a launch pad to do so many other things," from campaigning to baby showers.

Communities themselves are often established with a core ecological ethos; CRN's survey[6] on cohousers in the US revealed that 79.1 percent believe their community does more to reduce its carbon footprint, conserve resources, and live sustainably than nearby neighborhoods. Beyond this, many inspire and catalyse environmental action outside their walls, such as Murundaka[7] cohousing community in a Melbourne suburb. They first mapped local sustainability work, going on to support many of the initiatives such as vegetable planting (as part of the Transition Town movement[8]) which, according to a resident, has "flourished since [Murundaka] was established." Over in Adelaide Hills, Cennedyness, a small intentional community established on feminist principles in 1978, has built a "Kanga Palace" after rescuing various joeys whose mothers were killed in roadkill accidents. This has involved ensuring the land is safe, protected, and spacious for the kangaroos and nearby animals, as well as tirelessly feeding the babies throughout the night to ensure healthy growth.

At Canticle Farm[9]—an intentional community in Oakland—residents are dedicated to activism on issues such as climate change, systemic racism, and immigrant rights. Functioning through a gift economy, the community provides a secure and affordable base for those committed to social justice. Furthermore, three of the homeshares on the urban farm are reserved for people who have experienced systemic discrimination, namely indigenous people, families seeking asylum, and men of colour leaving incarceration.

2. Sharing spaces and resources

"Economies of scale"—the cost advantages from living more communally—mean a lot of communities have useful amenities such as large event rooms and tool sheds. Around 70 percent of respondents to the CRN annual survey[10] reported that outside organisations had used their community's common spaces before the Covid-19 pandemic. Common uses I have come across include fundraisers, exhibitions, concerts, educational workshops, activities such as dance, support groups such as Men's Sheds[11], civic meetings, upcycling, and group therapy.

Camphill California[12]—a homesharing community for people with and without disabilities—recently hosted over 80 people to celebrate a neighbour's life who used to visit for occasions such as Thanksgiving, as he did not have family close by. Also in California, a resident at Temescal Commons[13] cohousing community spoke to me about the value of providing "somewhere safe for the kids to come." Their community space is open to friends of resident teens, a refuge away from home, especially important for those with tumultuous family dynamics.

Canticle Farm.

Courtesy of Savannah Fishel

Author doing garden work with Magic resident.

Courtesy of Savannah Fishel

3. Education and skill sharing

Across communities in the US and Australia, residents are not strangers to running workshops and hosting tours. Communities tend to be passionate about spreading their approaches to social and ecological sustainability, with some offering free accommodation programmes to eager learners. Common topics include permaculture, conflict resolution, DIY, and carpentry.

For example Christie Walk[14], an urban ecological cohousing development in Adelaide, has welcomed 1,850 in the last two years alone. Interaction with locals sits at the cornerstone of Christie Walk's approach; one resident said, "we always said we didn't want to lock our community—we encourage people walking through."

4. Building social cohesion

At their core, these communities are about fostering connection—often bridging manufactured societal divides such as age, race, and socioeconomic status. Residents work to create inclusive spaces, addressing discrimination and interpersonal challenges head-on. This includes cocreating conflict resolution processes and hosting local events, such as potluck meals, clothes swaps, and community fairs. In Palo Alto, Magic[15]—an intentional community grounded in valuescience—cohosts neighbourhood gatherings for 100+ people to foster community bonds, providing entertainment through their own community band as well as leading set-up and clean-up.

My scope has been broad, including visits to community-oriented supported housing, such as HiFi Collective[16] in LA. Here, residents need stable housing and struggle with chronic physical and mental health issues, including loneliness. The community has a social focus, intentionally promoting relationships amongst residents, building a community of trust and support. One older resident struggled at first to accept her neighbours, but through a mix of gentle intervention by staff coupled with event programming designed to foster meaningful connection, she has developed a close bond with her younger Transgender neighbour, and they now share clothes and meals. As a resident at Canticle Farm put it, "It's about relationships. Proximity changes a lot—when you live together, stigma goes out the window."

The work of these communities to foster relationships both amongst members, and with neighbours outside of community, helps with longterm resilience as social connections organically lead to more mutual aid and support. A resident at LA Ecovillage shared how important this is for her as a single parent without family in the country; "residents of all ages have figured out so many thoughtful ways to connect with my daughter; she now has a web of caring people around her."

Setting an example: inspiration through existence

As well as the myriad tangible ways intentional communities can benefit society, through their very existence these places also play a pivotal role of providing hope, experimentation, and inspiration in a world where these can be sparse.

The UK, Australia, and the US are all societies which are increasingly disconnected while loneliness and mental ill health statistics soar[17], where pressures around consumerism are everywhere yet we face a climate crisis, and the nuclear family is constantly presented as the most legitimate way of living whilst there are more single-person households than ever[18].

Intentional communities can be seen as a form of "prefigurative politics"; instead of fighting unequal systems through forms such as protest (though many individual residents will do this) they create change through building and showing new solutions which embody values of egalitarianism and sustainability. According to CRN, nearly 90 percent of cohousing residents reported feeling that their community provides a model for positive social or environmental change[19]. At the Lost Valley Education Center[20], an intentional community in Oregon grounded in holistic permaculture and nonviolent communication, one member said to me "our version of activism is creating something new and better." A very different example is the Queen City Cooperative[21]

in Colorado, the US's first limited equity cooperative in a single home. They offer affordable housing during a housing crisis and a "family-like" community based on mutual aid, connection, and collaboration. The founders, who are bringing up a child in this house, fought to change state law around barriers to living together as unrelated adults.

Why this matters

Intentional communities address some of today's most pressing challenges, namely:

- Loneliness and isolation: through fostering deep social connections and support networks.
- Housing insecurity: while it is true that some are no cheaper than traditional housing options, many communities do provide affordable—or fully subsidised—living.
- Climate crisis: by demonstrating sustainable, low-impact lifestyles and catalysing important work such as regeneration.
- Social resilience: through bridging divides, fostering empathy, and functioning as inclusive community anchors.

Intentional communities provide live evidence beds for tackling some of society's most wicked problems, and they themselves can be catalysts for positive change. Through more showcasing of the vast opportunities presented through intentional communal housing models, I hope that interest, advocacy, and investment will increase, so that we can move toward a place where policy facilitates, instead of disincentivises, living more communally.

Visiting Australia and the US on a UK-funded Churchill Fellowship, Savannah Fishel has visited over 50 models of community-oriented housing, such as ecovillages, tiny home villages, and cohousing. Her blog, thinkitforward.net, explores how we can live together more collaboratively, compassionately, and sustainably. Both personally and professionally, she is interested in the power of intergenerational initiatives to tackle loneliness, bridge divides, and provide an alternative to an increasingly individualistic society. Her final Churchill Fellowship output will be posted at thinkitforward.net/communal-living and churchillfellowship.org/ideas-experts/fellows-directory/savannah-fishel by early July. Feel free to connect with her at savfishel1@gmail.com.

Courtesy of Savannah Fishel

Magic co-hosted community event.

Lost Valley garden work party.

Elizabeth Maragioglio

1. laecovillage.org
2. Group of people who have chosen to live together or share resources on the basis of common values.–ic.org/foundation-for-intentional-community
3. A project funded by the Churchill Fellowship (see thinkitforward.net/communal-living).
4. Berggren, Heidi M., LaDona G Knigge, Chuck MacLane, Diane Margolis, Jane Nichols, Neil Planchon, and Angela Sanguinetti. "Antecedents and Effects of Cohousing: A Study of Cohousing Communities and Forming-Groups in the United States–Five-Year Annual Survey (2022-2026)," Cohousing Research Network (see cohousingresearchnetwork.org).
5. ebcoho.org/berkeley_cohousing
6. Berggren, Heidi M., LaDona G Knigge, Chuck MacLane, Diane Margolis, Jane Nichols, Neil Planchon, and Angela Sanguinetti. "Antecedents and Effects of Cohousing: A Study of Cohousing Communities and Forming-Groups in the United States–Five-Year Annual Survey (2022-2026)," Cohousing Research Network.
7. murundakacohousing.org.au
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10. Berggren, Heidi M., LaDona G Knigge, Chuck MacLane, Diane Margolis, Jane Nichols, Neil Planchon, and Angela Sanguinetti. "Antecedents and Effects of Cohousing: A Study of Cohousing Communities and Forming-Groups in the United States–Five-Year Annual Survey (2022-2026)," Cohousing Research Network.
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13. temescalcommons.org
14. urbanecology.org.au/eco-cities/christie-walk
15. ecomagic.org
16. linchousing.org/communities/hifi-collective
17. who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness
18. In Australia, more than one in four (26 percent) households are now occupied by one person–up from 24 percent in 2016 and 18 percent in 1981 [aifs.gov.au/media/households-shrink-more-people-living-alone]. In the US, single-person households have increased more than fivefold, from 6.9 million in 1960 to 38.1 million in 2022 [usafacts.org/articles/how-has-the-structure-of-american-households-changed-over-time]. In the UK, between 2013 and 2023 there has been an 8 percent increase in people living alone [ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2023#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20the].
19. Berggren, Heidi M., LaDona G Knigge, Chuck MacLane, Diane Margolis, Jane Nichols, Neil Planchon, and Angela Sanguinetti. "Antecedents and Effects of Cohousing: A Study of Cohousing Communities and Forming-Groups in the United States–Five-Year Annual Survey (2022-2026)," Cohousing Research Network.
20. lostvalley.org
21. queencitycooperative.org

Dancing Rabbit and US Car Culture

By Rachel Freifelder

If we find a community that is already doing the important things that we want Dancing Rabbit to do, we'll just join it.
—Dancing Rabbit founder, circa 1995

So what were the "important things that we want Dancing Rabbit to do" that we founders didn't find in other communities? The most critical issue was the private automobile. Rereading the DR covenants, 30 years after our first meetings, it is still critical. We visited many long-standing (and newer) communities to learn from their experience and models. With regard to cars, we found that the FEC (Federation of Egalitarian Communities) and other income-sharing communities held all automobiles in common, and that even without a specific ethic of reducing driving, that structure of sharing automatically reduced car miles, compared to spaces where everyone has their own automobile.

However, part of our vision was to maximize individual freedom within a structure that also minimized ecological footprint. Although we founders all felt comfortable with living in an income-sharing structure, we did not want to impose that structure on all future DR members. The key "important thing" that we didn't find was a pre-existing community that allowed members to have independent finances, but discouraged them from having private automobiles. That, above all, is a large part of why we felt the need to found a new project.

That fact often gets lost in conversations about "sustainable living" and thus I, as a grizzled old founder, feel the need to point it out and emphasize it.

When we began meeting in the early '90s, we founders were all under 30 and able-bodied. We all felt comfortable with bicycling as a primary mode of transportation. Our earliest vision was that DR would be car-free. Fortunately, Bobby joined the group; he was slightly older than the rest of us, but more importantly, less athletic. He liked taking public transit if the bike ride felt too long, and pointed out that not everyone was able to bicycle as far as some of us were. Since we were looking at rural sites that would most likely be far from any public transit, he suggested we think in terms of locating near small towns and resources we wanted residents to have access to. With Bobby's input, the group coined the phrase "Non-athletic biking distance" or NABD, which became an important concept in our planning. We also began discussing the idea of a shuttle or a car co-op.

We started thinking in terms of our own planning to make our community less dependent on cars. I recall looking at a piece of land for sale in the foothills of the Sierras. As three of us walked up the very steep, half mile of driveway, I said to the others, "I'm not sure I'll want to walk up this hill when I'm 60." (Now, with my 60th birthday less than two years away, I think I could still walk up that hill—if it's not too hot, and if I'm not carrying too much stuff.)

People told us we were "unrealistic" and some seemed offended by our ambitious vision. I remember an email exchange in 1994 with an "interested" person who seemed mainly interested in shooting down our vision. He seemed to be angry at us for wanting to free ourselves from the car culture. "When you grow up...have kids...get real jobs..." were part of his message.

"My kid likes her bike trailer just fine," responded the member who was a father of a

> We planned our needs around each other, a thing that many Americans are unwilling to do. Star needed to have oral surgery, and I needed to go to the optometrist, so we got appointments on the same day; Cecil made a Kirksville appointment that day too.

toddler. Looking back, I muse about why a person would be so invested in their own choice that they are angry at someone who wants to make a different choice. I think if I could solve that problem, I could solve a lot of human problems!

The rest of the world has public transit

In many places in the world, especially outside the US, living without a private car is not only possible, but normal. In rural Chiapas when I spent time there in the early 2000s, most people lived in villages, and if there was a road that passed near the village, there was public transit on that road that would take people to the nearest town, where they could connect to a larger transit network (called a "combi," it was usually a VW bus but sometimes another large motor vehicle, functioning as a private bus company). If the road was rough, the combi was slow, but it was well used. Most people in the village knew when it came and how long it would take them to walk to the pick-up site. My understanding is that this is still common in much of the world. And, since people have to walk to get most places, they don't think of it as a burden or as "taking too long"; it's just normal.

In the US, car-free, transit-dependent life is mainly observed in dense cities built before the advent of car culture. My brother lives in New York City and has barely driven a car in 15 years; he even let his driver's license lapse for a while. Like most New Yorkers, he uses the fast, reliable public transit and also walks a lot.

Public transit in other US cities is not always as fast or reliable as in New York or Beijing. In Portland, Oregon, where I live, there are publicly funded bus lines about every half mile, with stops every few blocks. I live five miles from downtown. The buses that I can walk to quickly (less than a mile) don't go downtown, and they run every 15 minutes, so I have to transfer if I'm going downtown, and may end up waiting 15 minutes between. Occasionally the bus is late. I can either plan my trip ahead of time by studying schedules, or budget 90 minutes for the trip. Or I can be flexible about when I arrive, as people are in rural Chiapas. I can bike downtown in 20-30 minutes (depending on my destination). And typically, I find that taking transit in Portland takes about twice as long as biking. It's rainy here, and sometimes cold, but there are only a few times a year that we have snow or ice that makes biking not so safe. So in town, biking is my transportation of choice.

Scotland County, Missouri

When the DR founding group moved to rural Missouri, or perhaps even before then, we began to realize that it's very difficult, perhaps impossible, to live completely car-free in the rural US. There was no combi trundling down Woerhle Road, or any of the roads in Scotland County, Missouri.

The nearest hardware store is nine miles away, which some of us young-un's found to be a fun bike ride, no matter the weather. The nearest dentist is 20 miles, and I did bike there, even rode home in a snowstorm with my face numb after getting a filling. The optometrist, oral surgeon, bike shop, and library are 35 miles, in Kirksville. I did in fact bike to Kirksville a few times, and home the same day. A few other members of DR rode there a few times, but not everyone was up for that.

Colectivo.

Horse and buggy.

Traffic congestion.

Combi VW bus.

Photos courtesy of Rachel Freifelder

DR with the trailer in Berkeley.

In 1997 we considered Sandhill Farm to be NABD at three miles away. Your average Chinese peasant or Danish college professor would probably agree, but an average American might not.

Dancing Rabbit Vehicle Co-op beginnings

Our first thought of a car-free community evolved into a recognition that living rurally in the US was going to engender some driving, but that we could minimize it by careful planning. Aaron and Halle' had joined us before we left Berkeley. They had a diesel van, and didn't want to be 100 percent car free, but were willing to have the van become DR's shared vehicle, and re-tool it to run on biodiesel.

So we began our car-sharing system with one van, eight adults, and a baby. (Jack didn't drive the van.)

We had a weekly meeting that included the Week In Preview, WIP (Rabbits love acronyms!) The WIP was for scheduling, especially off-farm outings, especially outings that might use the van. It combined DR business, such as visitors or hardware store errands, and personal errands, such as doctors' appointments. When a DR member went out of state to visit family, the nearest train station or airport was 70 miles away, so another member would pick them up and run a bunch of van errands on the way.

We planned our needs around each other, a thing that many Americans are unwilling to do. Sometimes the "WIP" looked more than a week out; Star needed to have oral surgery, and I needed to go to the optometrist, so we managed to get appointments on the same day, and Cecil made a Kirksville appointment that day too. In between our appointments there was plenty of "town stuff" to do: the university library, the vegetarian cafe run by queer people, town treats from the supermarket. There was at least one time that I biked to Kirksville in the morning for a meeting, met up with other Rabbits and the van later after their town errand (with no cell phones, we just made a plan and stuck to it) and threw my bike in the van for the trip home.

When we bought the land that is now Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, our founding principles were codified into covenants. And Halle' reminds me that at Jack's first birthday, Cecil blessed him with the wish that he will never HAVE to drive a car.

US car culture is pervasive

Sometimes I hear other Americans say that they "can't" (don't) take transit, or carpool, because they "have different schedules." Sometimes I see people who live, or work, less than a mile apart, in a city, arrive at an event 15 minutes apart, in two separate motor vehicles. Recently I attended a climate rally in a small plaza that was also a light rail bus stop. Every time the light rail stopped, the people getting off were suddenly at the climate rally, whether they had planned on it or not. Brilliant! So I was surprised and disappointed when I learned, one by one, how many of the rally attendees and organizers had gotten there by driving, from their urban neighborhood where bus lines run every half mile. Even though it was at a transit stop. And even though it was in a crowded downtown area where parking was hard to find.

Anything I could say to people making these choices would likely be hard to hear and not well received. For me, sometimes it is hard to watch.

Car habits are hard to break. When I visited DR for the 15th anniversary, I observed that there were people living there, or at least staying longer than a short visit, who had not given up their personal automobile. There were at least 30 cars in the parking lot that were not part of DRVC, though some were certainly party visitors. One afternoon there was a call to head to Sandhill for sorghum harvest. Remember how Sandhill was NABD? I, at 45, borrowed Rachel Katz's extra bike to ride over. But a person at least 15 years younger than me was announcing that they were driving to Sandhill if anyone wanted a ride.

Car Coops: How do they work?

Early on, a couple who seemed really great were interested in joining DR, but they were skeptical about sharing cars. One concern they named was "dirty cars"—who will make sure that when it's my turn to drive the car, it's not full of someone else's trash?

Small groups tend to rely on personal accountability to keep shared resources usable. We look for roommates who clean up after themselves. Larger groups need to rely on redundancy and structure: community kitchens at large intentional communities, like DR or Lost Valley Center, have people whose job it is to clean up after others (when those others don't clean up after themselves). Many communities give a member chore credit (or wages) for repairing shared equipment. Others hire an outside professional and share costs.

We settled on a structural solution: We quickly realized that Aaron needed to be compensated, not only for letting the rest of us put miles on the van, but for maintaining the van mechanically.

On my last visit to DR, I was picked up from Quincy, Illinois, 70 miles from DR, in a vehicle owned by the Dancing

Rabbit Vehicle Cooperative. As in the early days of DR, it took some planning and accommodation. Quincy's Amtrak station has no checked baggage service, so I couldn't bring a bike. And, now in my 50s, I can still bike 70 miles, but it's not as easy as it was back then. The train got in at 10 pm. A friend of DR who lives in Quincy picked me up (in their private vehicle) and I spent the night at their house. The next day, three members of the midwives' collective had a prenatal appointment with a client in Quincy. They picked me up. There was a fourth DR resident who had other business in Quincy and had chipped into the DRVC rental fee. All five of us, plus my travel backpack, fit cozily into a two-door VW Jetta powered by biodiesel. We had a fun time chatting on the 90 minute drive back to DR on a beautiful fall day.

If you're interested in the details of how DRVC currently functions, please read about it, and perhaps you'll be inspired to start your own!: dancingrabbit.org/ecovillage-life/eco-living/dancing-rabbit-vehicle-co-op.

There are lots of car co-ops around, ranging in scale from a group of friends sharing one vehicle to much larger systems. These days, there are even private businesses that facilitate car sharing. The rough model is:

• Car owner signs their vehicle up with business.

• Business rents car to people who want to use it, and covers extra insurance as well as schedule and location coordination.

• Car owner gets some of the rental fee.

These businesses must make a profit, or they wouldn't exist, proving that not only is it good for the planet, it also pencils out financially.

The word "ridesharing" has unfortunately been co-opted (not co-oped!) by the gig taxi companies Lyft and Uber; this can be confusing for people who are advocating for carpooling.

Car culture reinforces itself: a frightening trend

• Before the invention of the automobile and the bicycle, human or animal power were the only modes of transportation.

• There was a long post-industrial period in which public transit was widely available but private automobiles were not. When motorized vehicles began to be widely used for transportation, their use was mostly shared, as in trains, trolleys, or streetcars—which meant people still had to walk to get to public transit. Most people, regardless of socioeconomic status, were physically capable of walking as a mode of transportation, because they had to.

• The owners of General Motors and other nascent motor vehicle companies bought the trolley lines in Los Angeles, Oakland, and other cities and ripped them out.[1]

• As car culture became more entrenched in the US, car-free transport became perceived as a political statement for leftists, or a last resort for people too poor, old, or young to afford a car (in the US only).

• In the late 20th and turn of the 21st century, the left celebrated bike culture (and hopefully walking and transit too, but bikes are more fun!).

• With the advent of the SUV, cars became not just larger but also taller, reducing visibility and safety for anyone walking, cycling, or even driving a modestly sized car. This is the vicious cycle: more and larger cars make walking and biking more dangerous, so people protect their individual safety by driving more or getting bigger cars, so there are more/bigger cars on the road, so it's more dangerous to walk or bike, and so on.

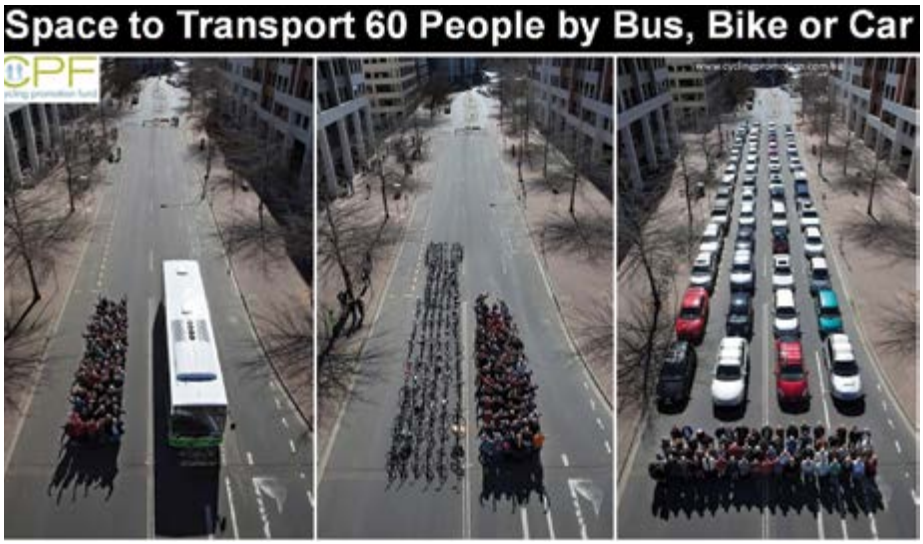
• Even many liberals and radicals in the US have adopted the car-default lifestyle.

• In the last few years I became aware that many younger US residents, even those on the radical left, take for granted that cars are the best or only way to get around. Some have never experienced getting around by any mode other than the private automobile. For them, car culture is so pervasive that they don't know those other modes are reasonable and, in urban areas, often easier. At those political demonstrations in downtown Portland, where I was so dismayed to learn how many of my comrades had gotten there by car, I kept hearing people apologizing for being late because of "traffic"/looking for parking.

• US car culture has begun to seep into other countries, and along with it, all the health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

We have been told that cars give us freedom. We have been told that they save time and get us places faster. A study[2] released in the '90s by the UC Davis Institute of

Family on cargo bike.



Transportation Studies found that if one considers all the time that a car owner spends tending to their car, maintenance, extra time worked to pay for extra costs, all of the costs that are externalized, the average speed of a car is five miles per hour.

The point has been made, many times and in many places, that the fault lies less in individual life choices, and more with the large powers of global capitalism and domination. I absolutely agree. And, the more those of us who can, resist our individual dependence on these powers, the more we will be able to resist their influence on our world.

Intentional communities are well positioned to model that independence. By depending more on each other, we dismantle the American exceptionalist myth of "independence" that is actually dependence on capitalism. We can resist this trend and lead in reversing it. Even in communities not specifically focused on ecology, or in those that are less hard-core than Dancing Rabbit, the economies of scale and sharing of resources reduce the footprint per capita.

Community helps reduce our footprint

Even in communities not specifically focused on ecology, the economies of scale and sharing of resources reduce the footprint per capita.

Many people turn to shared living out of economic necessity, rather than a quest for community, and accidentally find community's other benefits. They can't afford to rent their own apartment, so they find a roommate and share rent and utilities. The apartment has one stove and refrigerator for several people. The building has one washing machine for several apartments. Perhaps next they start sharing groceries, meals, even some luxuries that they couldn't afford on their own. They discover they enjoy each other's company (we hope), so they don't need to go to the movies. And so it goes, to the joy of unintentional community.

At N Street Cohousing, where I lived in the mid '90s before moving to Missouri, 35 adults in 12 houses shared two washing machines, one drier, a wood shop, a sauna, two hot tubs, and more.

In some intentional communities, members choose to carpool or share trips simply because it makes sense. Others have some formal sharing of vehicles.

People who don't necessarily want to live collectively can still find the benefits of sharing resources. Nearly any neighborhood, urban or rural, has some kind of mutually beneficial sharing, though it may be informal.

Once upon a time, this wasn't a "movement"—it was simply how people lived, because it made sense. Now, in the dystopia that capitalism built, some people need to see models to believe it's sensible—or possible.

Yes, it's possible. It's our job to be the best models we can. ❧

Rachel Freifelder was a founder of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage (www.dancingrabbit.org) and now lives at Blueberry (ic.org/directory/blueberry), an urban community on the unceded lands of the Multnomah, Chinook, Kalapuya, and many other peoples, commonly known as Portland, Oregon. She lived car-free for 20 years, and still conducts her landscaping business primarily car-free, carrying tools and plants on her touring bike. Find more about Rachel's work at handmadegardenspdx.com.

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1. Much has been written on the General Motors Streetcar Conspiracy; a good summary is at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Motors_streetcar_conspiracy.
2. Delucchi, Mark A. (1996) The Allocation of the Social Costs of Motor-Vehicle Use to Six Classes of Motor Vehicles: Report #10 in the series: The Annualized Social Cost of Motor-Vehicle Use in the United States, Based on 1990-1991 Data. Institute of Transportation Studies, University of California, Davis, Research Report UCD-ITS-RR-96-03(10).

A BUNCH OF DISCLAIMERS AND FURTHER NUANCE

• This article includes "A story" not "THE story" of Dancing Rabbit's early years and evolution. There are many stories–from other founders, current residents, and everyone in between. As Friends say, everyone has a piece of the truth. My description of events that happened over 25 years ago is to the best of my memory, and doesn't include any critique of my fellow cofounders. I contacted other cofounders to the best of my ability to get their consent for quotes I made. There is one with whom I have lost touch and who has a common name, so I was unable to contact him; I instead changed his name to talk about his significant contribution to our visioning process.

• The US is one of many countries in the Americas. Sometimes I make an effort to refer to the US as the US, rather than "America" and to those of us who live here as "US residents." But this article is about the culture of the US, and that culture is known, not just here, but I believe to many people in the rest of the world as "American." So I've used that word at times.

• Car use is a social justice issue. For many people living in the US, their economic survival depends on using private cars. This circumstance is more likely to befall those living with the intersecting oppressions of racism and poverty. People like myself, with the intersecting privileges of white skin, education, middle class upbringing, and body privilege, are more likely to be able to live near where they work, find work near where they live, access public transit, and commute by bicycle. This is in part because of regional and city planning guided by the normalization of the automobile, and in part due to other structural causes of inequity. Whole books have been written on this topic.

• Some motor vehicles do not burn fossil fuels. However, these vehicles contribute to all of the other kinds of harm that are inherent to the automobile, including rubber dust from tires, roadkill, increasing the paving of the earth, and encouraging the planning strategies that make people increasingly dependent on cars.

• I offered my proposal for this article in September of 2024, well before the US election. I wrote much of it in a dark and uncertain post-election November, and now more in the even darker and surreal days of February. I'm writing about the American myth of "freedom" at a time that our real freedoms may be taken away. By the time you read it, in Summer 2025, the world may already have changed. I hope that Communities, and other important information channels, will last at least that long.

• I'm imagining that many, if not all, readers of Communities have now heard of Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage. At this writing, my last visit to Dancing Rabbit was in 2012. For a more recent perspective on life at DR, see dancingrabbit.org.

–RF

Do You Really Need All That Space? Tiny Houses as Appropriate Technology

By Murphy Robinson

Photos courtesy of Murphy Robinson

The dominant American framework for thinking about housing seems to be that more space is always better, both as a financial investment and for comfort in daily living. I prefer to flip that expectation on its head: the comfort and security of my housing increases in inverse relationship to the resources required to acquire and maintain it. What could be more relaxing than an affordable tiny home that costs very little to maintain? And what could be more UNCOMFORTABLE than a 30-year mortgage?

Here at Hunter's Hollow, we live on a little slice of Vermont mountainside by a running brook. Each of the four residents here lives in their own self-built tiny house, mostly the kind built on a wheeled trailer so that the owner can take the house along with them if they decide to leave. While the land is still technically under sole ownership at this time, we follow a cost-sharing model: Each person pays $150/month in land dues, we use that to cover the shared expenses of property taxes, electricity, internet service, and a decolonization tithe. Whatever money is left over is subject to group consensus and spent in a manner that benefits all of us.

Our tiny houses are each unique, and range from 72 to 160 square feet of interior space. We have a utility shed with electric power and a wifi router, but most of our homes are simple structures without plumbing or electrical wiring. What we do have is good insulation and cozy woodstoves! The forest around us provides all our firewood for free, and since our spaces are so small, we don't need much of it. An electric chainsaw and a couple of axes are all we need to heat our homes. We may eventually put in a well, but hauling water in buckets from the stream works very well in the meantime. While we don't share all our food, our garden beds and baby orchard abundantly supplement our individual pantries.

I hear a lot of critiques of the tiny house movement, particularly that it is an unsustainable fad driven by YouTube influencers. I do see many people move into a tiny house only to revert to "normal sized" housing within a year or so, but others embrace it for a decade or more. A large portion of humanity has always lived tiny, and I've been very happy in my 72-square-foot home for 13 years and counting. Here are some mindset shifts that help lead to happy tiny living:

• Time-Freedom is the ultimate luxury. By bringing housing costs down to a bare minimum, you reduce your need for money and therefore your need to work for pay. You can support yourself with part-time employment or a small business venture that would not support a normal house but keeps your tiny life afloat just fine. And why does the average person desire more money? Mostly because they imagine it will give them more free time. Skip directly to the free time and you save a lot of hassle!

• Customize mindfully. A tiny house forces you to prioritize the available space for what you really care about: for example, my discretionary storage space is dedicated mostly to archery equipment, my dog's bed, and books. Design or adapt your tiny home to showcase the pastimes you love most, and let the rest go.

• Unheated storage is fine for most things. Very few of our belongings need to be in temperature-controlled space. Most tiny house dwellers end up with a shed or two for camping gear, tools, and off-season clothing. You save a lot of money on both your home construction and your ongoing utility costs if you are willing to store more of your things in unheated spaces.

• Embrace the sharing economy: Get your books from the library, borrow tools from your friends, attend a local clothing swap and donate some of your clothes too to rotate rather than accumulate clothing. Have a few well-chosen personal possessions that you cherish and use often, the rest you probably don't need to own yourself.

• Make chores fun, frequent, and brief. You won't enjoy tiny living very much if you let the dirty dishes pile up, always let yourself run out of firewood, or let your floors get terribly grimy. The kinds of messes that you can ignore for a while in a big house quickly take over your entire existence in a tiny home. Get in the habit of washing all the dishes immediately after the meal, bringing in a little firewood every day, and sweeping often. All these chores take very little time if you do them promptly and that habit will soon feel like second nature. Your tiny house will stay cleaner than a regular house because the chores go so quickly!

• Love the outdoors. Your small space will encourage you to spend more of your time outside in all seasons, which is great for improving mental health and getting enough exercise. I definitely consider this a feature, not a bug!

• Nurture your friendships. Sometimes you want to host a big dinner party or take a long hot bath. These activities can be beyond the capacity of most tiny houses, so this is where your friends come in! Plan to co-host that party at your buddy's house and offer to do a few household chores in exchange for hot showers. Always bring positive energy and a supportive presence to your visits to your "big house friends" and this sort of mutual aid will benefit everyone involved.

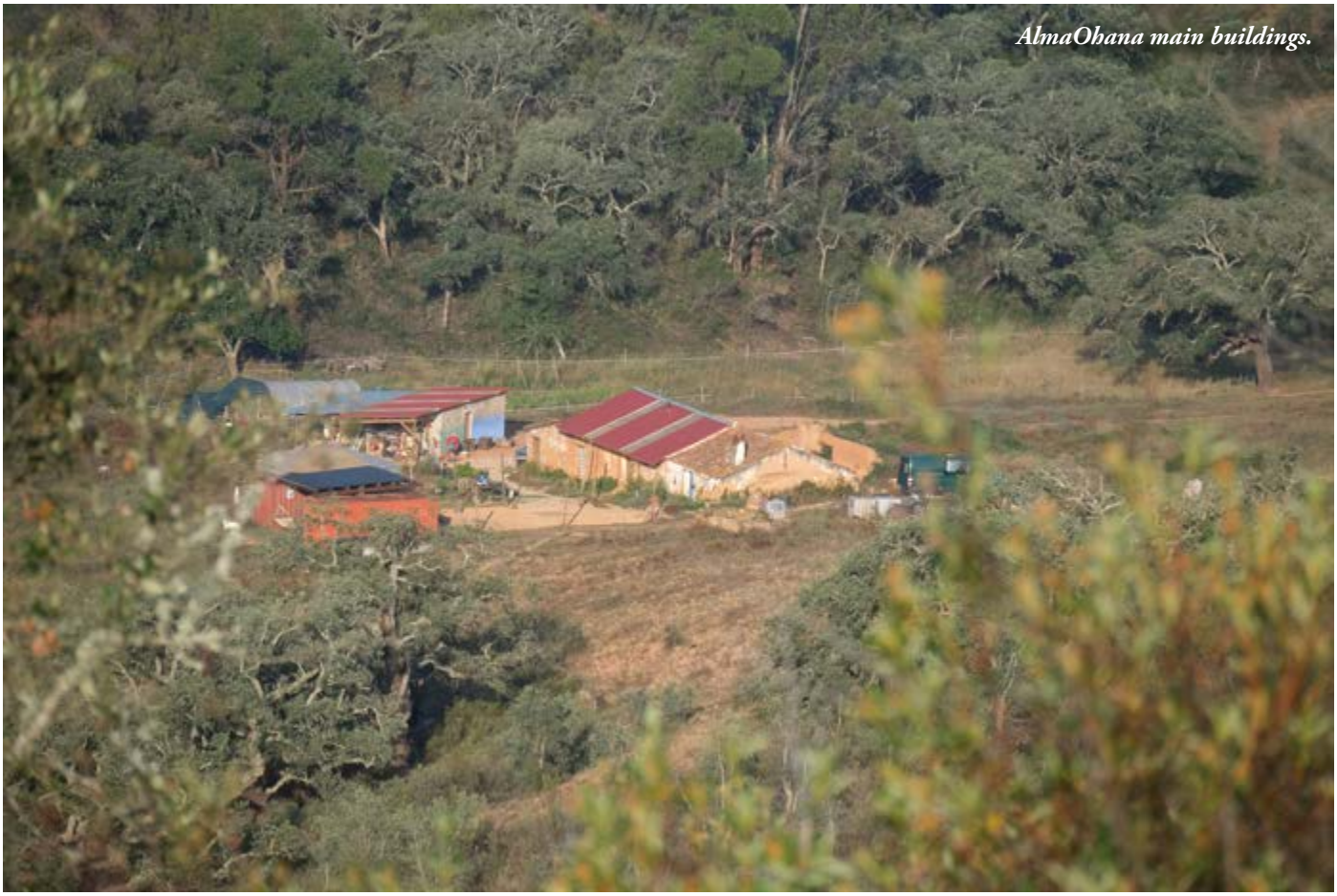
Tiny houses can be built to any level of luxury, and the price tags can get quite high. If you have any handy skills at all you can build your own pretty easily, particularly if you don't require plumbing or electrical wiring to be content. I built mine from mostly reclaimed components for $5,000 in 2012, with only about five hours of carpentry experience to my name when I started. Materials are much pricier now, but I've developed and built a simple 8ft.x20ft. design that's winter-worthy, spacious-feeling, and can be built for $20,000 in new materials, including the $5,000 trailer (2024 prices). If you are prepared to get creative and design your own house utilizing reclaimed windows and a second-hand trailer, you could do it for a bit less. I borrowed most of the tools I used to build my first tiny house, and people were delighted to support the project by lending what I needed. You can do most of the construction with nothing more than a good drill and a circular saw. I built my whole house using just two books for guidance: *The Small House Book* by Jay Shafer and *The Very Efficient Carpenter* by Larry Haun. *The Humanure Handbook* by Joseph Jenkins is also invaluable for setting up a very cheap, functional, and non-stinky composting toilet system.

Tiny Houses aren't for everyone, but they are a cozy and affordable solution for many of the one-to-two-person households who are feeling distressed by the costs and upkeep of other housing options. My landmates and I are now building tiny houses for other people in our larger community, and we love learning about how each person plans to customize their home to fit their own priorities. If the tiny life appeals to you, we encourage you to take the plunge! None of us have regretted it.

Murphy Robinson is a queer carpenter and former wilderness guide living in unceded Abenaki territory. They love cross-country skiing with their dog in the winter, processing firewood in the spring, growing organic vegetables in the summer, and hunting for local wild meat in the fall. You can learn more about their tiny house endeavors at dandelionhousingproject.com.

Noticing Our More-than-Human Worlds

By Clémentine Fraunié Mouillaud



AlmaOhana main buildings.

Photos by Jannek Löffler

There is a myth running in the modern era: that humans are unique beings. That their capacity for faith or ingenuity or purpose or morality makes them special. That a world with only them is at all possible, maybe even desirable. This spell of human uniqueness led them to build spaces and lifestyles based solely on their needs and greed, forgetting all lifeforms they could not subjugate, use, or destroy. Such spell is nevertheless quick to dismiss once we—the humans who want to embark on the adventure of authentic life—allow ourselves to leave the tightly controlled containers of concrete that came to host half of our world's population—cities.

As soon as we get out of these epicenters of human illusion of dominion, and into more rural, more "wild" places, unruly neighbors show up in all their majesty. Plants deploy their diversity of colors, shapes, and personalities. Critters pace up and down the ground where the earth lies uncovered, or fly uninterrupted in skies devoid of walls. Water flows out of the constraint of straightened paths, free to connect the parts as is its role. Birds fearlessly share their songs. The air breathes more easily.

When I arrived in the ecovillage AlmaOhana, in Southern Portugal, this is the vision of interconnectedness that the ecovillagers laid upon my eyes. From their many walks of life, the 12 people who composed the community in autumn 2023 had found their way to each other, attracted by this life of inclusion alongside non-human earthlings. Since 2018, the goal of their intentional project is the regeneration of their land-community-selves. "It is not about creating a more-than-human world," ecovillage core member Lucila told me. "That world is already there. Regeneration means coming to realize that humans have their place in it. Not above, not apart: within." Antonia, another core member and founder of AlmaOhana, adds: "What we are seeking is to do with Nature, instead of against her." In a healing biotope, Antonia explained to me, people (human and not) heal in relationship: humans humbly take on their role like all other creatures do, and try to do their best.

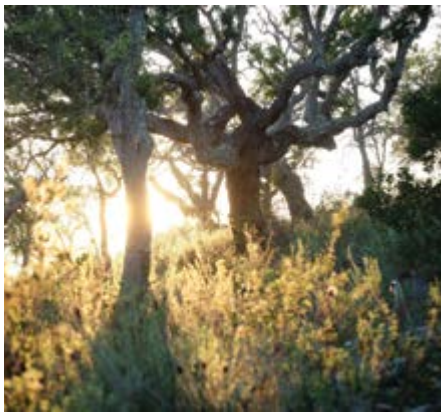
AlmaOhana people see their reconnection to other-than-human and more-than-human beings as a crucial step to regenerate. Without these beings, nei-

ther land nor community nor self are complete. How to feel at home in a land without knowing who inhabits it? How to forge an enduring belonging if it excludes the companion species who also support the community? How to develop an accurate sense of self when our bodies host and rely on more than human cells to exist? So, AlmaOhana ecovillagers developed a lifestyle adapted for more-than-human reconnection.

Buildings are small-sized and scattered on the land, so we have to walk a great deal in the open every day. The outdoor living facilitates noticing of weather and seasons—it is drier this November than last—and to wild encounters—an ant path crossing ours, a stonechat taking flight as we approach, a wild boar's vocalizations in the dark. Humans also intentionally bring other species onto the land-community: horses, sheep, chickens, and the plethora of herbs and vegetables growing in the garden. Such cohabiting makes us humans more receptive to fellow earthlings' worlds, as we get acquainted to their rhythms, needs, and preferences. Toads love to hunt by the compost at night. Swallows keep to the bottom of the valley, while chaffinches live everywhere. A chili's roots poking out of the pot indicate it is time for transplanting. As for our inner non-human creatures, microbiome and such, they are well-tended by the organic, healthy diet home-cooked daily.

Not only do we meet other beings more easily in AlmaOhana than in the city; we are also happier about it. I could observe in AlmaOhana how encounters with wildlife occupy a special place in people's hearts. We seek and love encounters with our fellow earthlings, so much so that they are remembered and shared as a cherished memory, like a precious stone stored somewhere and placed out in the light of the bonfire under the fullest of moons, because it deserves this special moment in space-time. In the awe-lit face and eyes of the teller, the encounter is passed on to us. According to our spiritual affinities, we see in it meaning and magic or luck and grace. The ecovillage life is prone to storytelling, with no digital distraction, to fill the collective moments only with direct human voices.

There is no doubt about it, AlmaOhana ecovillage reveres our more-than-human world. Yet it is not so easy to keep human supremacist tendencies at bay. The regenerative goal of AlmaOhana feeds directly into the desire to uphold, respect, and take part in our world. "But the hardest part," founding member Andreas confided to me, "is slowing down. Not being so much in the mind." In fact, we in AlmaOhana can be so eager to care for the land and its inhabitants—what to plant to reforest the area, how to retain water for the drought to come, what material do we need for the grey



water system, what legal regulations are we accountable for…—that it becomes easy to forget what caring starts with: noticing.

To notice, we need time.

Needing time means needing space.

Space in our brains to give our unruly neighbors a chance to interrupt us. To mess up even the most well-intentioned of our schemes. There is no greater gift to each other than our presence. Full, honest, benevolent, reciprocal.

Yes, our structures make it easier to meet our fellow-earthling neighbors. Yes, we love when these miraculous encounters happen. But how to integrate their presence not as a chance, not as an exception, but as the very condition of our own existence on Earth? How to bring our caring, busy minds back to the more-than-humanness of our world? In AlmaOhana, we started by rewriting the story.

It is the story of our land, that we retold in a workshop to integrate the many beings who contributed to shaping it. The humans who took part in this workshop momentarily assumed a double identity: their known self, and that of another—a being-yet-to-come, a bramble, a chicken, a tree, a raindrop… Altogether we described the flows and hopes and alterations of our characters throughout history, how they impacted the land we were sitting on: chickens' domestication, seeds' spreading, overgrazing and drought, boars' geomorphologic forcing, brambles' protection of wild spaces… We got to know the forces at play behind AlmaOhana's more-than-human coming to existence, a precious gentle reminder to be humble in a time, the Anthropocene, that carries our species' name.

A few weeks later, we deepened our exploration with a "painting." We gathered all that our eyes had seen and senses felt to create as complete a picture of the land-community's composition as we could. We sat around a table, after lunch, to list all the beings we saw as part of AlmaOhana. I had prepared prompts to encourage recollection of encounters and expansion of belonging. They were barely needed. My fellow ecovillagers were naturally drawn to their other-than-human counterparts. It is no big surprise considering that most people in ecovillages are biophilic, meaning they are attracted to Life and the living.

We ended up with a wide harvest of names in three languages ranging from wasps to nature spirits to cork oaks to humans to tomatoes. Interestingly, the beings most cited—most noticed—were the ones living closest to us humans. The flies constantly trespassing our boundaries, the fellow humans we shared our daily life with, the dogs who brightened our mood by their simple presence. Needless to say, we forgot many, as later conversations and wanderings on the land would reveal. Yet the point was made: for the span of two hours, by leaving our focus out of our practical tasks—slowed down, open—our awareness expanded in the richness of our community beyond its human dimension. For the span of two hours, the spell of human uniqueness was broken.

To tread mindfully in our more-than-human world is, however, not a sudden—nor lifelong—transformation. It is a fragile skill that requires assiduity in practice and tolerance in failure. Every time we use our noticing, it becomes a little bit more natural, a little bit more effortless to invite others in—in our senses, in our minds, in our hearts. I call upon each and all of us to reframe the stories so they include all the actors. I suggest getting to know the members of our communities, big and small, obvious and hidden, the gifts they have to share and the needs they must fulfill. With such awareness, with dedication, and with the willingness to lend it time and space, I have the hope that we can further realize the dream of AlmaOhana, one of common thriving across species. We humans have our rightful place in that dream, all of us. Isn't world-sharing a tremendous gift?

Clémentine Fraunié Mouillaud writes: "Born in France and moving across countries, I have always been a fervent defender of animal voices, which led me down the path of environmental activism. I recently explored the potential of ecovillages to solve our multi-dimensional crises and reconnect us to the living with ecovillage AlmaOhana (almaohana.pt). If you wish to learn more about my work or master's thesis, please contact me at clementine.frauniemouillaud@gmail.com."

Downstream of America

By Colin Doyle

Photos courtesy of Colin Doyle

Illusions in society affect alternative communities, even if they are very rural or try hard to stay away from mainstream patterns. To use a waterway metaphor, intentional communities are downstream of toxic beliefs, and without breaking the spell of those spreading the beliefs, groups will burn more time and emotional energy rectifying their effects case by case. The worse American culture gets, the more that spills into cooperative communities, and the harder they have to work to overcome this sorcery in new resident after new resident. Likewise, broader improvements are a boon to communities—though I believe positive trends are being outrun by negative ones right now.

The further the US gets down a path of dysfunction marked by surveillance, environmental degradation, hyperpoliticization in general and Trumpism in particular, bad schools, financial uncertainty, alarming stories of Jonestown and Rajneeshees, nuclear threat, digital control, celebrity culture, and wage slavery, the more challenges communities experience in having to address and transcend these triggers.

Examples from my community

Certain characteristics overflow from mainstream society into our quiet eddy. An example is residents having difficulty sharing (see my previous article "Overcoming Our Americanness," Communities #176) even though they purposely moved to an intentional community to share. This can be as simple as spending evening time together, not just retreating to separate cabins and apartments and tiny homes to watch Netflix solo (as became common in my Oregon community, Meadowsong Ecovillage, a.k.a. Lost Valley Educational Center, where I lived for 11 years). Or it can mean showing up for group gardening sessions, an appealing idea for almost all new residents, but a practice that few added as a consistent habit.

Another spell is accusing communities of being cults. Most residents and visitors to Meadowsong were past that easy attack, yet I was told about a recent resident (of two years) actually pondering whether our group was a cult. This was in a community of strident individuals who strongly value their freedom, will not bow down to anyone, and are certainly not handing over their car keys or bank account information. And the current resident of many years who told me about this conversation was *also* starting to actually chew on the idea as potentially true. The inherited messages and prejudices of the broader society can run so deeply...

The reverse effect

Dealing with holdovers from misled America was a challenge I sometimes experienced. Just as common was the *opposite,* with residents or students reacting against the broader society, and not realizing they were now in a very different context that didn't require pushing so hard.

A particular challenge I saw in the community was elements of reactivity that new folks came in with. I ran the three-month Holistic Sustainability Semester educational program there, which typically attracts students 18 to 35 years old. In a class about the sociocratic style of self-governance that is used at Meadowsong, we had students first throw out words that come to mind when thinking of "government." What they said were almost entirely scathingly negative things that make people in government look like manipulators, leeches, and ethically bankrupt rich warmongers. Yeesh—how toxic! The experience showed me how negative the view of self-directed young people in the US currently is toward their government—and the idea of any government in general. Such a dysfunctional pattern!

Yet some level of organization is necessary for a community, hence a need to transcend bitter scars to get productive together in a way that is both efficient and feels good. We went on to talk about concrete ways to self-organize a group of a few dozen people, as opposed to lording over millions—*governance* as opposed to *government.*

Dealing with inherited baggage around leadership makes sense given the situation, but is an additional tax on alternative communities, thanks to dysfunctions in the broader society.

Trusting power and process

Another reaction to societal patterns I witnessed was accusations of misuse of power directed toward our Executive Director. Taking on responsibility to direct the business side of a community with its complexities and stumblings, for part-time minimum wage and little recognition, is not a recipe for stroking one's ego or getting rich. It's a labor of love. Yet individuals in such roles often came in for deep criticism that I didn't see fitting—and I was well-placed to know, as I worked far closer with them than the criticizers did.

This knee-jerk anti-authoritarianism I saw as a reaction toward widespread injustice in the broader society that unconsciously carried over into our well-meaning (and impressively well-behaving) little community. This sometimes centered around money, namely the bookkeeper and the staff member in charge of collecting rent from residents. I take this to be due to wounds sustained in a rather cutthroat society. Abuse of power was almost entirely unseen by me in over a decade in the community/business, but I sympathize with people coming in who are always on guard against that (and therefore see it where it sometimes isn't) due to experiencing power injustices outside the community.

It was sad to witness this inappropriate vilification up close, and one reason I consciously chose to never fill any of those roles in the organization or join the Board of Directors. Unearned emotional flak is not for me.

A personal example of change I witnessed was in a student-turned-resident named Mary, a merry lady in her 50s. Scarred from years in the broader society, she had a very hard time trusting our community interview process, in which a new resident is presented with reflections on how they are showing up in the group in four specific areas, and told whether they can continue in residence or not. Pushing her edge, Mary's motto became "Trust the process," and I watched her relax into that mentality over about a year. From tense and wary, she exhaled to a state of comfort, as she discovered that the process was carried out with great intention and integrity, and no one was shown the door for anything approaching frivolous reasons. Mary broke a societal spell of fear that had been deeply placed in her.

In the river of life

Intentional community is an eddy off to the side of the mainstream, but is very much connected to it. Individuals have to paddle hard to get out of the strong current in the middle, but once in the calmer waters of a group they need to tone down their strokes, or else they crash into others or shoot out the back of the eddy. A person needs strong independence to *get* to the community, yet calm cooperation to *stay* in it. Having this combination of two very different traits is special and takes a level of discernment that not everyone has. Knowing when to do what (which to me is wisdom) flies in the face of one-sided responses that are often patterned into life in the US (for example, the idea that all communities are cults). Real life is dynamic, but illusions are flat and simple, paper tigers that seem fierce and realistic when seen only from the prescribed angle.

The closer the broader society gets to healthy ways of living—such as realistic expectations, self-generated food, digital autonomy, freedom from war, and a feeling of fellowship—the closer intentional communities get as well. The opposite is true too: as society goes sideways, so can communities. The flowing stream in which we live has a massive influence on the direction our groups take, and we are downstream of what surrounds us. In short, the bigger the gap between modern society's patterns and what actually works, the more junk we inherit to deal with, either echoing that wider culture or reacting too strongly against it. This will be the case until more of the illusions of society are broken and we evolve to a more functional way of being, dynamically *with* each other.

QUIZ: How many of the following statements do you agree with?

- Kids should be in school from age 5 to age 22.
- It's fine to be on a pharmaceutical drug every day forevermore.
- Individualism is king.
- Food designed in a laboratory and consisting of 20+ ingredients can be trusted.
- We should have confidence in Democrats, Republicans, or both.
- There is a technological solution for every problem.
- It's normal to live in a city of millions of people.
- Nuclear weapons are under the control of wise individuals and so aren't a threat.
- It's OK to create and use substances that may never break down, like plastic and styrofoam.
- The world should follow the example of the United States.
- Sports fanaticism is healthy fun.
- The US dollar is a stable currency and it's smart to hold lots of them.
- Our leaders in government and industry want what's best for us.

Add up how many yeses you have, counting "kind of" as half.
If you scored 8-13, welcome–you really need to be here.
If you scored 4-7, the spell is starting to wear off for you.
If you scored 1-3, you sound interesting and worth talking to.
If you scored 0, we're on the same team! But hmm–maybe we're under a *different* spell…

–CD

Colin Doyle lived at Meadowsong Ecovillage in Dexter, Oregon from 2010 to 2022. For most of that time he facilitated community meetings and directed educational programs for onsite Lost Valley Educational Center. He ran their events business for half that period also. In 2022 he was married onsite, then moved to Costa Rica. He and his wife have a farm and small holistic wellness center there—info is at fincamalama.com.

Community as Resistance

By Yana Ludwig

As we step into 2025, the struggle for justice and equity for marginalized communities demands our urgent and relentless attention. We are going to have to fight, and fight hard. Marginalized people continue to face systemic barriers that threaten their survival and dignity. The path to a more just world is neither inevitable nor easy. It will require fierce, unwavering advocacy and action to dismantle the inequities that persist and deepen suffering. If we are to honor our shared humanity, we must recognize that this fight is not optional; it is a moral imperative that will define our future. We are going to have to step up in ways that may be hard and uncomfortable. The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency is not just a political setback; it is an existential threat to the very fabric of our society. For those of us who live on the fringes—undocumented people, Black and Brown people, immigrants, trans people, incarcerated people, poor people—the next four years will demand more than just resistance. They will require a deep commitment to each other, solidarity, creativity, and our collective action.

—Ericka Williams Rodriguez[1]

I want to speak now to people already living in community, and especially people of privilege already living in community. I want to remind us of our own collective history.

Community has long been a tool for sanctuary and resistance. What exactly has been resisted depends on the times: who is most oppressed, most marginalized, most in need of simple breathing space in order to survive is a determining factor for what kinds of communities form when. In times of religious persecution, minority religious communities have formed. In times of targeting queer and gender queer people, LGBTQIA+ communities have formed. In times of deep sexism and limited options for women, women's land has served as both home and organizing space, and communities have formed.

Resistance to fascism has also taken the form of community. "With the rise of the Nazi state in Germany in 1933 the pacifist Rhon Bruderhof saved its young men and women from conscription into the military first by relocating to Liechtenstein, creating the Alm Bruderhof."[2] Safe haven has always been one of community's functions, whether as a movement or as a phenomenon.

We often think of our communities as being independent little bubbles of cooperative culture, fulfilling lifestyles, and/or collective action on our chosen topics. Many of our groups attempt to be apolitical, or to fly under the radar within our local communities, blending in. This is a moment, however, when I think we need to let go of some of that and lean more into the interdependence that is the heart of true community building. Lives are at stake.

And historically, it hasn't always been the case that we've avoided politics. Sometimes, community has been *about* politics. As one example, working-class radicals who had served in the French National Guard formed the Paris Commune, a multi-hub, very intentional, and deeply networked community. The Commune held power in Paris from March 18, 1871 and outright controlled parts of the city until May 28, 1871 in a critical moment of resistance.

Wikipedia sums up their most remembered activities like this: "The Commune governed Paris for two months, promoting policies that tended toward a progressive, anti-religious system of their own self-styled socialism, which was an eclectic mix of many 19th-century schools of thought. These policies included the separation of church and state, self-policing, the remission of rent, the abolition of child labor, and the right of employees to take over an enterprise deserted by its owner."[3]

Today, 154 years later, we still talk about the impact of an intentional community whose heyday lasted for just over two months. Ultimately, over 43,000 people were considered communards, and the Paris Commune influenced the ideas of Marx and Engels, leaving a very long legacy that still impacts political dialogue and organizing all over the world.

Closer to home and time, the roots of the Foundation for Intentional Community lie in resistance communities. We tend to picture the Vietnam and Korean wars when we think about protest against war, but World War II also had its dissenters, and there was far less popular support for their dissension. WWII was a "popular" war, and protestors, draft dodgers, resistors were even more deeply shunned than their later counterparts, with no popular counterculture to buoy them. If you were a young man, eligible for the draft in WWII, you needed to create your own safety. A network of intentional communities formed, and their inter-community communication systems eventually turned into a newsletter, and further along, eventually turned into the Fellowship for Intentional Community, which was renamed in 2019.

Following that legacy, we now have the Intentional Communities Directory, which currently lists 450 established and re-forming intentional communities in the United States. I think it is safe to assume that a handful of your communities are actively cheering on the Trump administration. But the rest of you: this is a moment where our network of communities has an important and unique role to play, even if you have not seen yourselves as being part of the resistance before now.

The majority of people living in the US right now are being targeted with political

and economic violence by our own government. Women, LGBTQIA+ and disabled folks, leftist political leaders, and immigrants are being directly targeted. Ecological and human rights activists (including a large swathe of the nonprofit sector, which has acted as a buffer against discrimination and oppression for decades) are also facing attacks via the withdrawal of critical funding, and the loss of government backing in the forms of data collection and dissemination.

Things are bad, and they are going to get much worse before this is over.

And here we are, a network of, let's conservatively say, at least 375 physical centers across the country who can't hide the fact that we exist from anyone with even the slightest internet savvy. We are already "out." Many people, especially people who have been public advocates in any one of the issues I've mentioned above, just got a lot less safe.

I'm proposing that each of our communities have a serious conversation about what sanctuary means right now. I'm hearing from a lot of folks who are already doing this, and I appreciate you more than you can know. I believe this needs to be a movement moment, where we are talking about how to provide support in ways that may be, as Ericka Williams Rodriguez says, "hard and uncomfortable."

Deportation and imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay is more than hard and uncomfortable.

Loss of gender affirming care is more than hard and uncomfortable.

Having your voting rights revoked is more than hard and uncomfortable.

Wildfires and floods fueled by climate disruption are more than hard and uncomfortable.

Losing your housing when you can't afford new housing is more than hard and uncomfortable.

I know that not all of our communities are financially stable. I know we have struggles, some of which are longstanding and embedded, with conflict and hard decision-making. I know sometimes we feel like we do not have enough to take care of our immediate members, whether that is enough space, enough labor, enough money. Those things are all real.

But right now, the majority of our country is in crisis, and intentional communities have so much to offer, even in spite of our internal and personal struggles. We have guest rooms that often sit empty, washing machines, space for camping, gardens and greenhouses. We have skills in listening and facilitation, common spaces for meetings and organizing, and networks (small or large) of people who have made a core life choice to cooperate and show up for other people.

I take inspiration from the Paris Commune: it gives me hope to know that people organizing in solidarity can have a huge impact. But I also take inspiration from the people I've seen quietly reaching out to their immigrant, LGBTQIA+, and disabled friends and simply saying: if you need a place, call me. I take inspiration from my community friends who are ordering extra seeds, knowing their local friends may need food this year and the food banks will have less funding to help. I take inspiration from the people who I see adopting a local nonprofit and committing to keep them afloat despite massive cuts in their funding. I take inspiration from other writers, like Ericka, who are taking this moment to speak more, write more, and show up more, who are refusing to be silenced. I take inspiration knowing that many of you are asking the same questions I am, and that your resistance is necessarily not going to be televised.

Returning for a moment to Ericka's brilliant blog post, she says, "(W)e—those of us who are fighting for justice—need those with land, wealth, and privilege to understand that they are not exempt from this fight. Historically, it is the marginalized, the oppressed, who have been called upon to resist." Established communities are absolutely pockets of privilege at this point, and I'm joining Ericka's call to action.

Resistance looks a lot of ways. Sometimes it is big, public, and direct, and sometimes it is small, subtle, neither public nor loud. And sometimes it is communal. This is the moment to think about this, my communard friends, to lean into our unique potential to contribute, and to intentionally decide what role you and your community will play.

Yana Ludwig uses words as her primary tool to catalyze and strengthen collective justice and belonging in the world, as a writer, teacher, speaker, and facilitator. Her work and community building center the needs of marginalized people and the resiliency of our ecological and social worlds, and she has spent 26 years living in community as one main manifestation of these goals. Her most recent book is Building Belonging: Your Guide to Starting a Residential Intentional Community.

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1. communelifeblog.wordpress.com/2025/01/13/the-fight-ahead-protecting-marginalized-people-in-the-era-of-trumps-return
2. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foundation_for_Intentional_Community
3. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Commune

Racial Equity Work in Communities

By Joe Cole

How deeply are intentional communities in the United States engaged in addressing and healing the ongoing reality of racism in our society, our neighborhoods, and our groups?

Historically, many intentional communities in the US have been predominantly white projects able to avoid difficult conversations around race, racism, and racial justice. Following the murder of George Floyd and widespread demands for racial justice in 2020, many intentional communities did in fact take a closer look at the relation between their projects and values of racial equity, justice, and inclusion. This shift was also reflected in the work of the Foundation for Intentional Community, whose mission and educational programming now more strongly emphasize diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Yet today, how many ecovillage, cohousing, and other intentional community members have genuinely committed to racial justice within their own community projects? In an attempt to find out, I interviewed 14 people who have lived in US-based intentional communities and have worked on racial justice and equity issues within their groups, in some cases for many years.

I interviewed eight men and six women, with ages ranging from their 20s to their 70s. Seven participants identified as white, two as white/Jewish, two as white/European, two as Asian-American, and one as Black. The participants lived in cohousing communities, ecovillages, housing cooperatives, and co-living situations. Out of the 12 community projects that participants were connected to, two of the communities included racial equity or racial justice in their community values and policies.

In the interviews, we explored the meaning, challenges, benefits, and successes of racial equity work in intentional communities.

> "If groups don't do racial equity work in community, they will miss the depth of human connection by living in a bubble. It can feel comfortable living in a bubble, but it's not real and it's not right."

Why Do Racial Equity Work in Community

One of my first questions for the participants was, "Why do racial equity work in community?" Nisha, an Asian-American woman of Indian heritage from Austin, Texas, replied, "It's important to me that the resources and community that we're able to provide to each other by living together are accessible to those of all ethnic backgrounds, especially to those from historically marginalized groups." Carol, a white woman from Virginia, expressed similar concerns. She said, "If we claim to live together in a cooperative way, and we don't work to understand each other across diverse cultures and experiences, groups are essentially excluding non-whites or the non-dominant culture or race."

Agatha, a white European woman from North Carolina, stated, "If groups don't do racial equity work in community, they will miss the depth of human connection by living in a bubble. It can feel comfortable living in a bubble, but it's not real and it's not right to live in a bubble and not address issues that impact people in our community and beyond our community." Other participants noted that the lack of serious equity and justice work in the community led to a superficial sense of mission and group purpose, while also resulting in a lack of depth and intimacy in relationships that left many members dissatisfied.

Multiple interview participants echoed Agatha's concerns about intentional communities becoming isolated from the larger community and society. Maya, a white woman from North Carolina, said, "It is a basic, central value that communities need to be fully representative of the world in which the community is embedded. If we think ecovillages are the ideal way to engage with the land and be in community, then they need to be open and welcome and available to everybody. If we want to break down the segregated worlds we live in, we need to live together."

According to Darryl, a white man from Seattle, Washington, racial equity work is part of "creating a community with integrity." In addition, Nisha believes that there are fundamental connections between sustainable community and racial justice: "Considering how environmental degradation disproportionately impacts people of color and marginalized groups and benefits white people in the US, sustainability necessarily includes racial justice. To be truly sustainable means addressing inequality so everyone has access to healthy food, a healthy environment, and healthy lives."

Challenges around Racial Equity in Community

I next asked participants what challenges they saw around racial equity in community. Sara, a white woman from Minnesota, responded, "It's hard enough getting along as a white group; we're not set up to properly welcome and support non-European people." Tina, a white woman from North Carolina, also recognizes that racial equity work "demands a certain level of vulnerability and trust that not everyone is willing or capable of engaging with." Tina also mentioned that racial equity efforts in her community have "turned some people off, causing discord and resistance" to the work.

Several of the participants in the interviews stated that their communities occasionally had conversations around "increasing diversity" in their project or neighborhood. For such conversations, the group typically focused on attracting a few token members who were Black, Latino, Asian, or Indigenous. However, participants in the interviews reported an ongoing attachment to comfort and complacency, and a lack of substantive engagement for deeper racial equity and justice work in their communities.

Participants who were long-term members of intentional communities observed that communities that start off predominantly white, typically remain predominantly white over the long term. Lawrence, an Asian-American man from New Mexico, says, "There is an equity deficit within cohousing. Communities want diversity but don't know how to go about it." He believes that for most members of cohousing communities, having diversity in the mission or values is as good as it gets. But he says, "For me, it's not good enough."

According to several of the interview participants, many community leaders and members viewed racial equity as an "out there" problem that is not connected to the central mission of the community project. Multiple participants reported that white members tended to resist joining dialogues around racism, and that whiteness was centered as the majority experience and cultural expectation in the community. Maya said, "People come into community with such a low threshold for understanding their own racism and systemic racism, and when there's an incident of prejudice, everyone is so surprised and stunned. Problem is that we're not expecting it."

In addition, nonwhite participants in the interviews mentioned that they felt pressure and the weight of community expectations on Black, Latino, Asian, and Indigenous members to educate white members around race and racism. Several participants also mentioned that when white people do initially show up with high energy for racial equity work (for example, in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd), they soon lose interest and their commitment for ongoing racial justice efforts quickly fades. One nonwhite participant also described their hurt and pain in experiencing white folks "breaking off relationships when the going gets tough" around issues of race and racism.

Several members shared sadness and grief from witnessing the negative impacts of racially harmful white behaviors and words on Black, Latino, Asian, and Indigenous community members. Participants also observed that most attention and resources go to other pressing challenges in community (for example, communication, decision-making, conflict, and sustainability). As a result, one participant expressed a concern that the project may "only be meeting the needs of people with wealth and privilege." Maya described an "ongoing presence of white privilege and white innocence" regarding race and racism in the group culture, even though white and male privilege continues to negatively impact the group's decision-making processes.

Lawrence observed, "Cohousing is good at meeting the needs of people with inherited or accumulated wealth." He also posited that racial equity in community would require economic equity, and/or majority diverse communities, and he added, "I don't think cohousing communities are ultimately that interested in ceding their

Photos courtesy of Joe Cole

power to marginalized groups."

Further thwarting efforts toward more diversity, often the rural setting of many US-based intentional communities is a major discouragement, increasing the potential isolation of non-white individuals, especially in MAGA country. As Darryl explains, "I hear pain from BIPOC friends and queer friends wanting community that is land-based, and yet not feeling comfortable moving out to rural areas with majority white groups." Several participants reported that a significant number of their neighbors were actively opposed and even hostile towards racial equity work within their intentional community.

Benefits and Successes in Racial Equity Work in Communities

I also asked interview participants about the benefits and successes they had observed or experienced in doing racial equity work in communities. T, a white man from California, responded, "Racial awareness and justice work is so nourishing and beautiful. The more I do this work the more it feeds me and the more I want to do it. As the momentum builds, the work is rewarding in the deepest part of me."

Other interview participants stated that racial equity work sparked more honest conversations within the community, and they also noticed gradually increasing skill when addressing racism in the group. Kyle from Virginia is a Black man with both European and Indigenous heritage. He believes the benefits of doing racial equity work in community include improving trust and creating deeper relationships and enriching social interactions with a more diverse set of people. Kyle has also experienced personal benefits as "a cis-gender man learning about male privilege." He observed that "recognizing and unlearning blind spots about [his] power as a man" has been a tremendous growth experience for him.

Other participants stated that it was helpful for their group to hire professional consultants and trainers to support racial equity work in the community. One participant also mentioned that it had been beneficial to have separate "caucuses" for different racial identities to create safe and supportive spaces to process the challenges that arise around racial dynamics in the community. One white interview participant noted the importance of addressing and countering shame in antiracism work, as well as celebrating progress around equity in the community.

Two members who live in the same community found success in creating a budget for racial equity and inclusion work, while also building racial equity into community values and agreements. They noted that these elements of their community were attracting new members willing to do both the inner and the outer work of racial equity.

Examples of Racial Equity Efforts in Communities

From my conversations with the interview participants, I harvested several specific examples of racial equity work in intentional communities that showed up in activities, culture, policies, and relationships:

- Regular racial awareness book study/film/dialogues
- Workshops and trainings on racial awareness and racial equity
- Developing strategies for addressing instances of racism and microaggressions in the group
- Embedding racial justice in mission, values, policies
- Reduced joining fees and/or dues for BIPOC members
- 1-2 hours of comp time counted as community work hours for BIPOC members who need self-care and recovery from micro-aggressions in the community
- Networking with local and regional antiracist organizations
- Native land acknowledgment
- Working group addressing white supremacy culture within the group
- Shifting/donating a percentage of income and resources to BIPOC organizations
- Organizing workdays to support BIPOC communities
- Reparations and land back: gifting land to BIPOC organizations or communities

While all of these examples can and do apply outside intentional communities, I found it inspiring to hear of this work happening within cohousing communities, ecovillages, and co-living groups around the country.

Levels of Racial Equity Work

Another fruit of these interviews was the opportunity to distinguish how racial equity and justice work is connected across different levels or scales, from the personal to the national and international levels. I find the following five levels useful for thinking about and planning racial equity work in communities:

- **Personal/Intrapersonal:** e.g., reading, reflection, individual racial equity training
- **Informal Interpersonal:** e.g., book and discussion groups, voluntary racial equity training among members
- **Group Culture:** e.g., vision/mission, policies, group communication tools and strategies, mandatory group racial equity training, resource allocation, events and celebrations
- **Local Networks and Institutions:** e.g., volunteer, service, networking, sharing and shifting resources, land back, political activism/institutional change, partnering with BIPOC-led organizations
- **Regional, National, and International:** e.g., service, networking, sharing and shifting resources, land back, political activism/policy change/systems change, partnering with BIPOC-led organizations

What's Next

The interviews revealed many challenges around racial equity efforts in community yet also highlighted that much work is being done to reimagine intentional communities based in racial justice. As Kyle said, "To make a better world, start from the ground up with justice and equity." A growing number of people in the intentional communities movement agree, and are committing themselves to this essential work of racial equity and justice in building collaborative and sustainable community.

Joe Cole is a facilitator and trainer who supports communities in developing cooperative skills, collaborative governance, and conflict transformation. Joe is Associate Professor of Restorative Justice in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University.

Breaking the Spell: Cohousing, Arts, and the Challenge of Consensus

By Alan O'Hashi

At the 2017 Women's March in Cheyenne, Wyoming: longtime friends Alan, former Secretary of State Kathy Karpan, and State Senator Rodger McDaniel.

Part of the 2018 Women's March wove from Ethete to Fort Waskakie on the Wind River Reservation in West Central Wyoming.

Photos courtesy of Alan O'Hashi

In an era where political divisions have infiltrated most aspects of our lives, even our intentional housing communities are not immune. The promise of a cohousing neighborhood—built on principles of collaboration, trust, and shared resources—can seem at odds with the escalating tensions in the broader world. For many, the hope is that a smaller, consensus-driven group can provide a sanctuary from the chaos beyond its borders. But what happens when the same cultural spells that fracture the outside world seep into our communal spaces?

No community exists in isolation. The broader societal narratives—self-interest versus collective well-being, psychological insecurity versus material security—inevitably weave into the fabric of our daily interactions. The spells cast by harmful cultural patterns can surface even in the most well-intentioned groups. A cohousing community aiming for consensus in decision-making may find itself ensnared in cycles of conflict or stagnation when individual fears collide with the needs of the whole. The very structure meant to promote harmony can deepen division.

Just as spells can be cast, they can also be broken. The first step is to recognize when we operate under illusions that no longer serve us. Whether on a societal level or within a small group, breaking free requires personal agency and collective effort. It demands that we stay vigilant, questioning assumptions that may feel comfortable but ultimately hinder growth. Community fosters spaces for honest dialogue, embracing discomfort as learning moments and remaining open to transformation as we untangle ourselves from destructive narratives.

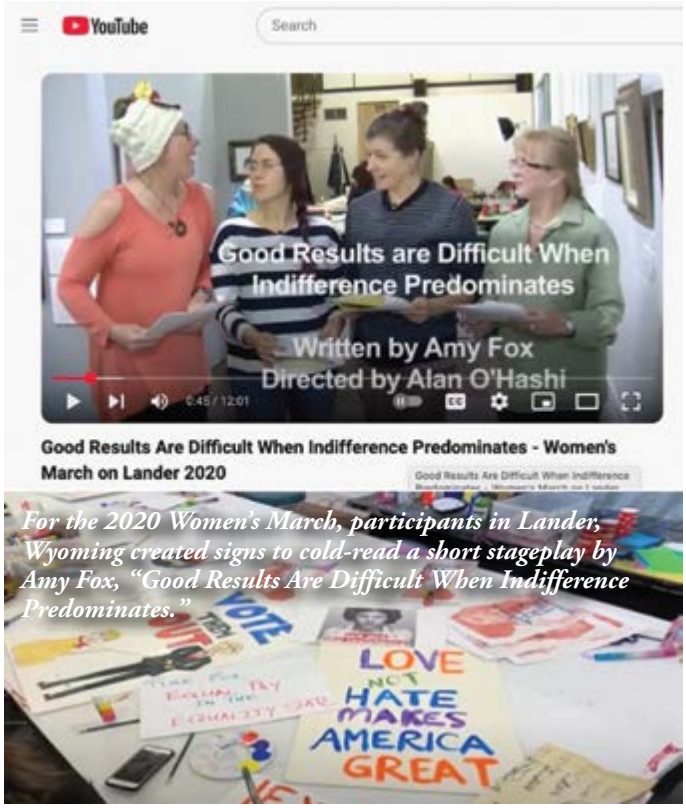
So, how do we stay awake? How can we avoid complacency? If 60 people can coordinate meals, chores, and meetings, they can also organize social justice through cultural action rooted in intentional engagement that holds up a mirror to the beliefs and narratives we tell ourselves. This potential for positive change manifests in conversations that challenge and expand our perspectives, in our readiness to revisit and refine our shared commitments. Perhaps most importantly, it manifests in recognizing that, despite the forces pulling us apart, we can still create something new: a culture of curiosity, resilience, and collective wisdom.

What spells are we under today? And more importantly, are we ready to break them?

Instead of becoming too myopic—focusing on why the sidewalk wasn't properly shoveled after the recent blizzard or why a neighbor hasn't unloaded the dishwasher after a community dinner—we ask broader questions: How can cohesive neighbors collectively harness their shared power to influence the larger community? What impact can we have beyond the limits of our own cohousing bubble?

The generally accepted spell that representative democracy casts over us revolves around First Amendment-based free speech. Mass protests have an undeniable energy. The chanting, the signs, the pulse of thousands—sometimes millions—of people marching for justice is exhilarating and empowering. It makes us feel seen. What happens after the speeches end, after the headlines fade?

Large movements shake the ground open, allowing smaller



For the 2020 Women's March, participants in Lander, Wyoming created signs to cold-read a short stageplay by Amy Fox, "Good Results Are Difficult When Indifference Predominates."

movements to incubate. They build relationships, change norms, and create a lasting impact. Real change isn't found in the next big march but in the quiet, persistent work that follows. The horrified citizenry is outraged by the various issues of the day. Protests erupt, voices amplify, and streets swell with people demanding change. For a moment, it feels like the world is finally listening.

On January 21, 2017, millions of citizens filled streets worldwide in one of the largest single-day demonstrations in history, the Women's March. The images were powerful, and the solidarity was palpable. Yet, eight years later, women still earn a third less than men. Women continue to face abuse, dismissal, and struggle for basic rights. The march represented a moment, but moments do not sustain movements.

Current events ignite sparks. The question now is whether we let them flicker out or use them to illuminate something bigger, something quieter, but something unstoppable. What if we exchanged mass mobilization for sustained, intentional influence? One person speaks to another, and they speak to another—not shouting but strategizing, not reacting but proactively reshaping the world around us.

Less than a year later, in 2018, following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, students resolved not to let their classmates' murders become just another statistic. They organized and voiced their opinions, leading March for Our Lives, a movement that brought millions to Washington and cities across the nation, demanding stricter gun laws. They confronted lawmakers, challenged corporate donors, and mobilized young voters.

Six years later, the news cycle moved onto new topics, gun violence continues, and policy advocacy lost energy. The nation had another passion-filled moment, but emotions alone weren't enough.

Societal norms evolve gradually. What if, instead of relying on spectacle, the new spell we cast is something lasting? Instead of waiting for another outrage, we commit ourselves every day to integrate violence-prevention into our personal and community lives. Movements that last happen in living rooms and in conversations where no cameras are present.

The Arts Breaking Spells

Protest marches fill the streets and make headlines. After the yelling quiets and the crowds disperse, what remains are stories, images, music, and ideas. The arts have historically been a protective factor that holds space for difficult conversations, creating connections in divided times and offering solutions when rhetoric fails.

Cohousing communities, which are based on consensus and collaboration, are uniquely positioned to harness the arts as a subtle yet powerful form of activism. Cohousing seeks outcomes that benefit all, not just the most, and knowing that this is achievable can carry over into how your community approaches the arts.

A book club can serve as a platform for in-depth dialogue, culminating in a public reading that engages a broader audience in the discussion. All activities are "challenge by choice," meaning that if the community picks a book to read and discuss, anyone is free not to participate.

The arts engage people in ways that traditional outreach cannot. Registering voters is one of the least exciting aspects of each election cycle. Elections are won or lost not by who votes but by those who do not. In the US, every day more than 10,000 people turn 18, and 89 million people did not vote in 2024.

Imagine age-appropriate and culturally relevant music performances, live mural painting, and spoken-word poetry that highlight the importance of civic engagement. Envision pop-up theater performances in public spaces that dramatize true stories of women's suffrage and the impact of elections on everyday lives. These would be engaging backdrops for voter registration events.

Casting spells that convey facts and figures must also evoke emotional resonance, transforming issues from abstract concepts into personal experiences. A photography project that documents first-time voters or a songwriting workshop focused on civic responsibility are methods that change voter registration from a chore into a meaningful, communal, and personal act.

Reimagined spells that incorporate the arts become more than just a form of expression—they act as a means of resistance, a bridge to understanding, and a pathway toward positive change. They allow us to hold space for complexity, nurture empathy, and engage those who might otherwise turn away.

We possess the tools to break our traditional spells, but are we willing to use them?

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

Transformative Engagement: Navigating Polarization with Purpose

By Jennifer Jaylyn Morgan

Feeling unsure about how to engage and enact meaningful change during times of heightened chaos? Have you considered taking a break from media because it's impacting your mental health? As collective anxiety is increasing, media engagement is a relationship that warrants thoughtful design. For me, this began in late 2019 when I faced the tragic loss of a family member, and my nervous system frayed before the pandemic arrived. I felt an overwhelming sense of chaos as I attempted to navigate social media, prompting me to embark on a four-year fast, returning each winter to reflect on my experiences. I also designed intentional breaks from involuntary news consumption by deleting news apps.

These breaks enhance my self-awareness, accountability, and self-regulation by allowing me to focus on my well-being. They also enable me to gain perspective as I research issues that resonate with my priorities instead of scrolling mindlessly. Most importantly, these periods help me concentrate on my immediate spheres of influence—my interactions with family, friends, and community members—where I can make a meaningful impact. We all likely want to experience a sense of connection and agency, which are negatively impacted by growing civil unrest and political polarization.

In recent years, I've observed a troubling trend of radical polarization emerging from left- and right-leaning ideologies, straining relationships and communities and limiting people's sense of connection and agency. While concerns about societal issues are prevalent on both sides, disagreements over their causes deepen the divide.

A shift from division toward common ground and shared meaning is a much-needed transition. In my two decades of involvement with community organizing in rural Tennessee, along with my experience at Gaia University, several approaches have supported me in navigating division within the communities I've helped shape and in finding actionable strategies for nurturing connection and understanding while promoting civic engagement amidst increasing societal challenges.

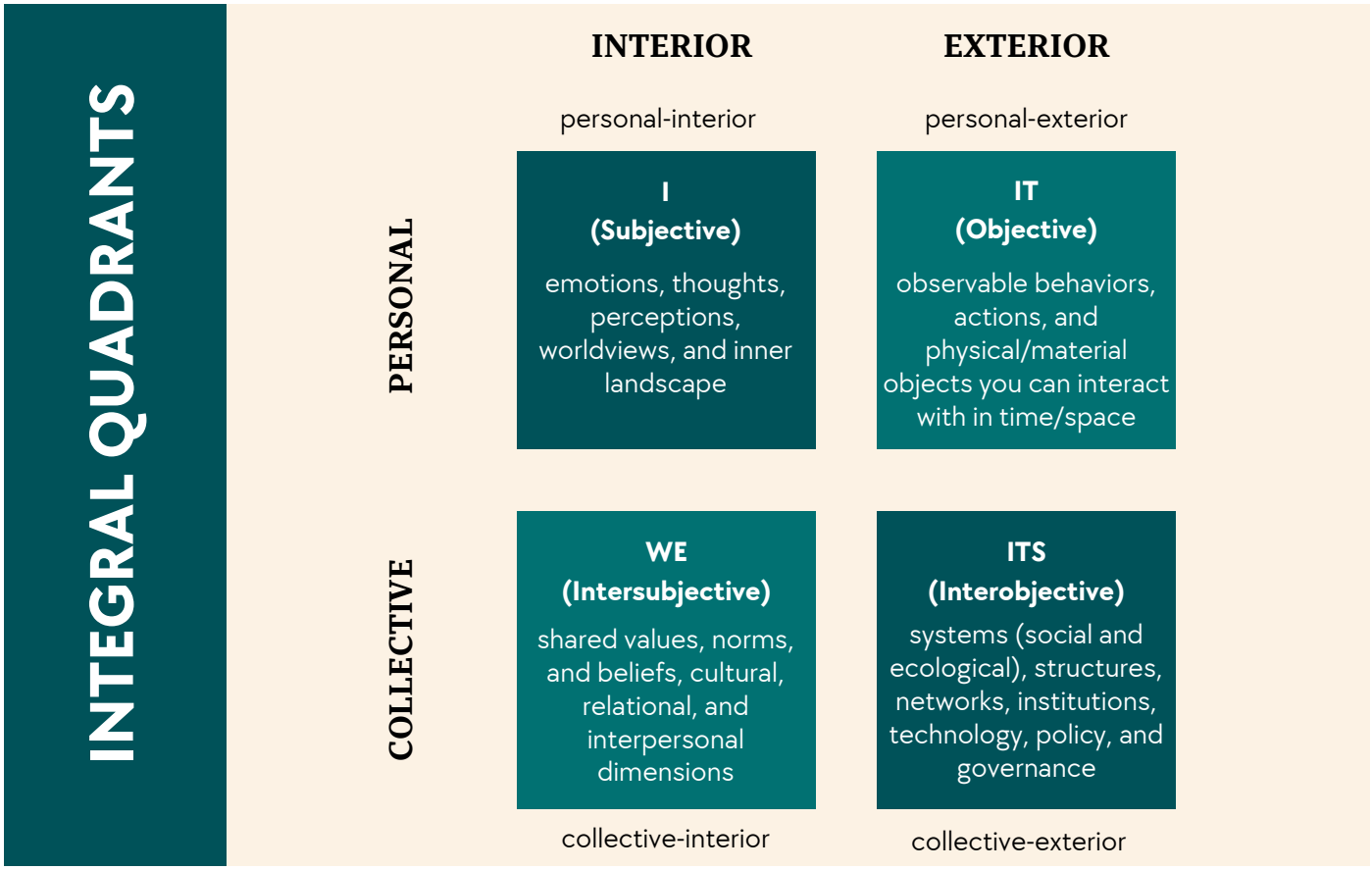
Civil Unrest, Polarization, and the Need for Transformative Education

Communities around the world have faced a troubling rise in civil unrest and political polarization, often fueled by deep-seated divisions in ideology, culture, identity, and outdated beliefs. These factors, alongside unintegrated trauma and systemic inequalities, create an environment ripe for conflict.

As technology permeates our lives, individuals navigate a landscape filled with misinformation and divisive discourse, leading to the potential for overwhelming anxiety. This instability affects personal well-being and can erode trust within communities. In this digital age, education becomes essential in addressing the societal dysfunctions exacerbated by social media and poor mental health awareness, as these challenges threaten individual and collective progress.

Education can be a powerful intervention. Cultivating emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving skills prepares individuals to engage constructively with their environments. At Gaia U, we adopt a whole-systems approach that integrates various spheres of influence, recognizing the interconnectedness of personal experiences, social behaviors, cultural narratives, and systemic structures. We incorporate educational models into our curriculum, outfitting students with the necessary tools to navigate complex societal issues. As

> By prioritizing dialogue over division, understanding over misunderstanding, and community over isolation, we can pave the way for genuine transformation.



a community of practice, we've applied these techniques in communities worldwide. The Integral Theory model and the concept of spheres of influence are particularly helpful to individuals and communities experiencing the strain associated with social upheaval.

Integral Theory offers a framework for understanding human experience through four quadrants: subjective experience (personal-interior), observable behaviors (personal-exterior), cultural context (collective-interior), and systems and structures (collective-exterior). This holistic perspective allows individuals to systematically analyze and address complex challenges, revealing how these dimensions influence one another and informing inclusive approaches to community engagement.

The concept of sphere of influence is particularly relevant for individuals who often feel powerless in the face of larger systemic issues. It highlights areas where they can effect change within personal, cultural, and system-wide contexts. Understanding the dynamic interactions among these Integral-quadrants empowers individuals to cultivate resilience and drive positive change in their communities.

Personal Experience: Integrating the Inner Landscape

In Integral Theory, the upper left quadrant reflects individuals' subjective experiences—thoughts, feelings, and inner dialogues. Our sphere of influence starts with ourselves, our mental/emotional landscapes, then ripples out, affecting those around us. By cultivating self-awareness, individuals can constructively manage their thoughts and feelings and thus positively impact their communities. In this quadrant, a person's sphere of influence is greatest, as their inner landscape is within their highest domain of control. Thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences shape perceptions and responses, guiding interactions and further influencing the collective mindset. Key tools for refining this layer of influence include mindfulness practices, self-regulation, and unlearning.

Self-awareness and mindfulness are foundational practices that enable individuals to recognize their emotions and reactions in real-time. Developing this awareness allows one to observe triggers without becoming overwhelmed or reactive. Mindfulness enriches nonjudgmental acceptance, allowing for reflection and compassion before reacting, which nurtures emotional intelligence and healthier interactions. In a politically charged climate, mindfulness helps maintain clarity and composure, reducing rash reactions.

Learning self-regulation is essential for managing emotional responses in challenging times. This skill integrates thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while noting when and why the nervous system becomes dysregulated. In times of unrest, where a feeling of distress may escalate into panic or aggression, self-regulation allows individuals to pause, assess feelings, and prioritize applying regulation techniques before even attempting to respond appropriately. Techniques such as deep breathing and grounding exercises enhance this capability. By paying close attention to the nervous system, applying self-regulation, and managing emotions effectively, individuals can increase a sense of calm within their communities.

Unlearning existing worldviews and social conditioning is vital for personal growth in a divided society. Many beliefs stem from cultural narratives and societal norms, or unintegrated trauma responses that may never have served us, or no longer do. By recognizing and unlearning these ingrained

perspectives and patterns or, in some cases, privileges, individuals open themselves to new ideas, cultivating curiosity, compassion, and a more nuanced understanding of complex social issues. This unlearning process and awareness can transform perceptions of self and others, encouraging empathy and constructive dialogue over divisive rhetoric.

This internal quadrant emphasizes the significance of personal experience in shaping our sphere of influence. We can all strive to take accountability. By cultivating self-awareness, individuals can more effectively navigate the anxiety and pressures associated with civil unrest and polarization.

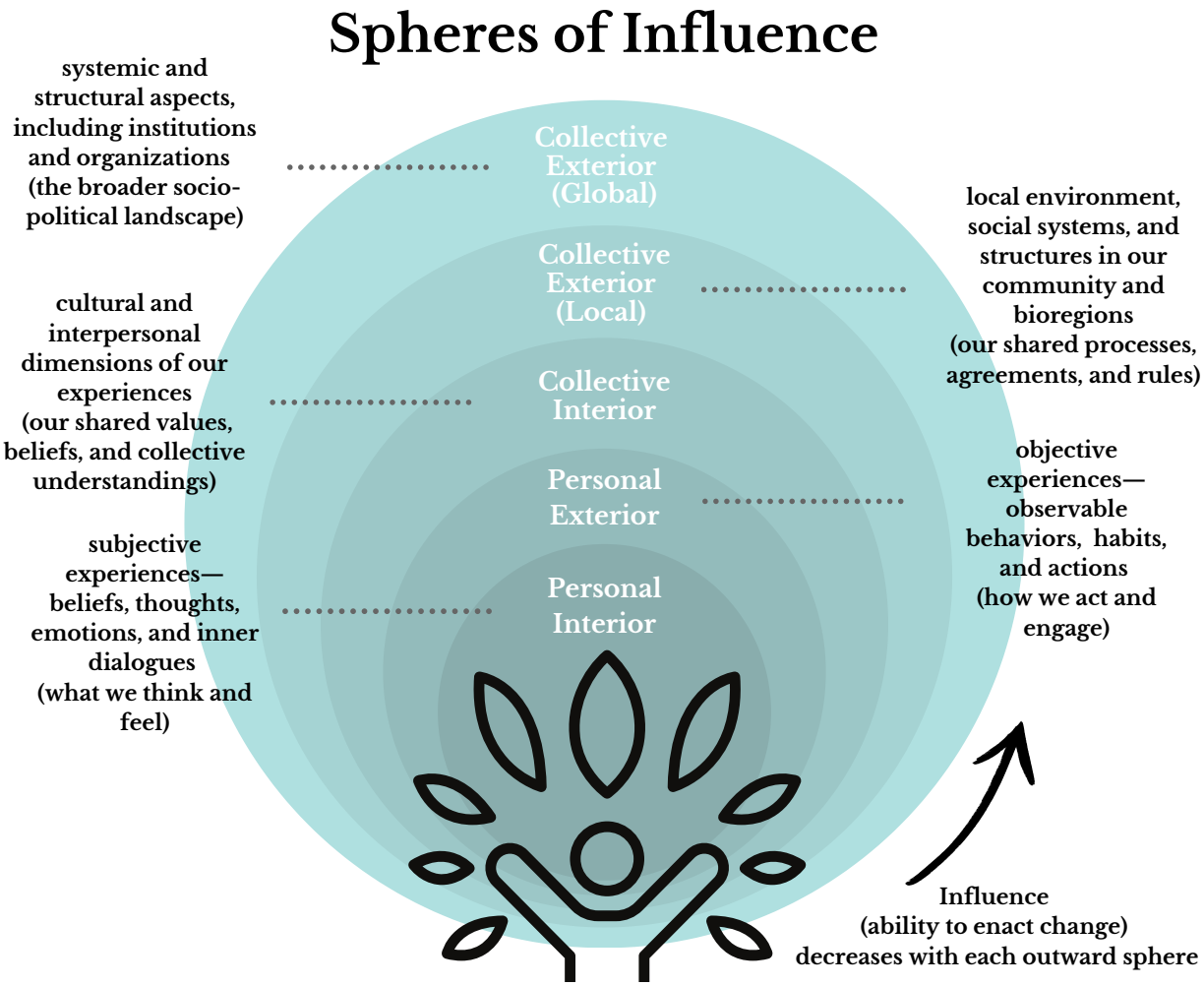
Behavioral Changes: Showing Up with Intention

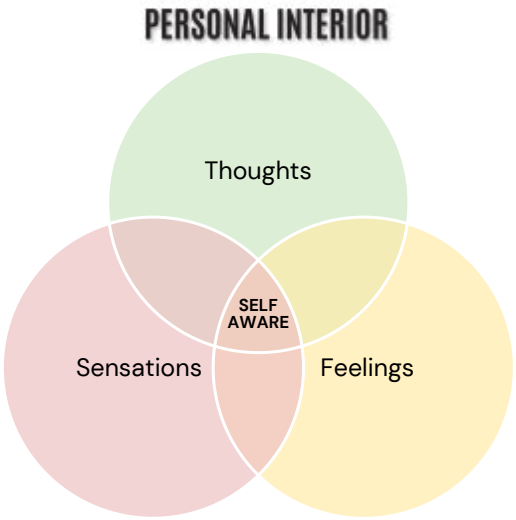
In Integral Theory, the upper right quadrant focuses on observable behaviors and actions. As our actions impact ourselves and those closest to us, a person's sphere of influence is substantial in this quadrant. Our behaviors directly affect us and the community. We can nurture a more constructive, less stress-inducing environment by intentionally redesigning our behaviors related to information consumption, utilizing critical thinking, and verifying information.

We can shift our engagement with news and social media to mitigate negative impacts, by taking BACK our focus. This change includes setting boundaries, such as limiting time on platforms and scheduling breaks. Incorporating awareness and accountability into our consumption habits is essential. Curating news sources to prioritize fact-based reporting over sensationalism also helps, as can adopting digital detox practices to remove constant notifications. Individuals reclaim mental space by cultivating knowledge on media literacy and a self-knowing relationship with information, enhancing emotional well-being.

Critical thinking is vital for navigating today's complex information landscape. The ArCEA model—Active reading, Critiquing, Expanding, and Acting—encourages deep engagement with information before forming opinions. This model, developed by Gaia U Founder Andrew Langford, promotes thorough examination by deconstructing and reconstructing concepts for clarity while reading, followed by critiquing the content for bias and accuracy. This process develops informed viewpoints. Expansion involves integrating personal insights and our best thinking before sharing and acting on the information. By applying the ArCEA model, individuals can better discern and articulate their well-considered opinions, essential for navigating political polarization and fostering thoughtful discourse.

The CRAAP test, created by librarian Sarah Blakeslee at Cal State, helps assess the credibility of sources. This practical framework evaluates Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose for verifying content credibility in an age rife with misinformation. Evaluating currency ensures information is up-to-date, while relevance assesses its applicability and logical consistency. Authority examines the source's credentials and influence on stakeholders,





Our self-awareness and self-care is where we can most enact change.

SELF-AWARENESS PROCESS:

STEP 1:
Observing and Accepting
- Using **MINDFULNESS** techniques, observe, name, and compassionately accept thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment.

STEP 2:
Sensing and Regulating
- Using **SELF-REGULATION** techniques, identify your system's dysregulation level and prioritize returning it to a calmer and safer state.

STEP 3:
Assessing and Reframing
- When regulated, use **UNLEARNING** techniques to assess triggers that cause dysregulation and identify helpful interventions.

and accuracy verifies truthfulness by comparing it to reliable sources and looking for assumptions or contradictions. Purpose uncovers potential biases, prompting readers to consider the intent behind the information (to inform, sell, persuade, entertain, educate, encourage action, or activate strong emotions) and the author's contextual point of view (perspective based on gender, class, age, sex, or other framing). Utilizing the CRAAP test empowers individuals to make informed decisions about what to believe and share, building a more informed approach less susceptible to manipulation and rash judgments.

This outward quadrant emphasizes the importance of observable behaviors in shaping our sphere of influence. By redesigning our relationships with information and our approaches to it, we can better navigate how we show up, what we share, and what we learn, all of which influence our beliefs and subsequently our behaviors.

Cultural Context: Collaborative Engagement

Within Integral Theory, the lower left quadrant emphasizes the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of our experiences, focusing on shared values, beliefs, and collective understandings. This quadrant highlights the importance of community dynamics and cultural narratives in shaping our interactions. The sphere of influence here extends to how we collectively understand our identities and relationships, providing pathways to bridge divides through shared experiences.

However, a person's influence in this quadrant is often limited, as cultural narratives and social norms operate collectively, making it challenging for individuals to shift entrenched values directly. Yet, each person's embodiment of their values shapes group identity and collective behavior, cultivating a shared sense of purpose, community cohesion, and potential for change-making. Proactive connection, acknowledging others, and implementing repair processes are three tools that empower engagement, increasing this quadrant's influence level.

In my experience creating a transition initiative in a rural area of the southern US in 2006-2016, we faced significant political and religious divides. To build connection and cohesion, we avoided discussions on contentious topics and focused on shared values, needs, and issues that mattered to us. This proactive approach helped identify common ground, allowing us to collaborate on community solutions that were a win for everyone participating. For example, we discussed agrotourism, local economic development, and energy conservation rather than charged topics like climate change or energy descent. By proactively prioritizing collective interests and cultivating a shared language on issues that mattered, we eliminated tension and created unity, enabling us to tackle pressing challenges without polarization.

Acknowledging others using active listening is essential. Tools like Nonviolent Communication (NVC) practice groups and empathy circles are crucial for nurturing understanding within communities. NVC provides a framework for expressing feelings and needs without judgment, inviting open dialogue. The approach includes taking personal accountability for thoughts and feelings, and learning to advocate for your needs, boundaries, and requests. NVC also teaches the concept of consent and learning to speak and hear authentic yes and no answers. Empathy circles enhance this process, allowing participants to actively listen and reflect on each other's experiences, promoting mutual respect and compassion. Engaging in these practices creates opportunities for healing and conscientious collaboration.

Community repair and restorative justice processes are essential for addressing conflict and prompting the integration of tense interpersonal dynamics. These approaches prioritize dialogue and accountability over punishment, allowing individuals to understand the impacts of their actions while working toward collective healing. By implementing community repair processes, individuals can express grievances, seek closure, request mediation, and promote reconciliation. Repair resolves immediate conflicts and strengthens community ties by establishing a culture of trust, understanding, and respectful collaboration. In times of civil unrest and polarization, these practices empower communities to navigate differences, creating a more cohesive and safe environment for community engagement.

This interpersonal quadrant emphasizes the significance of cultural context in shaping our sphere of influence. By proactively crafting healthier experiences we can effectively address rising tensions related to civil discord. These efforts cultivate a deeper sense of belonging, respect, and mutual understanding, contributing to a more resilient framework for participatory engagement and empowerment.

Systems and Structures: Empowering Change

Lastly, in Integral Theory, the lower right quadrant focuses on our environments' systemic and structural aspects, including

institutions, organizations, and the broader sociopolitical landscape. This quadrant underscores the significance of collective action and the systems that shape our experiences. Here, the sphere of influence is quite limited, as systemic structures can be rigid, rigged, and complex while also mired in systematic oppression, making it challenging for individuals to effect change without broader collective support. However, some tools, such as mentoring, action learning, and civic engagement, can increase influence.

Peer-to-peer engagement and mentoring are essential for fostering collaboration and support within communities. These approaches allow individuals to share knowledge, skills, and experiences in relatable ways, creating meaningful connections and supporting each other's growth by modeling behaviors and triangulating ideas. This type of interaction incorporates built-in feedback, strengthens individual capabilities, and enhances community cohesion. As people mentor one another, they cultivate a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, reinforcing a culture of continuous learning and mutual support.

Action learning and experiential methodologies can revolutionize community culture. These approaches emphasize intentional engagement through active learning. The process incorporates direct experience and reflection, allowing individuals to engage with real-world challenges while prioritizing attention to the learning process over forcing specific outcomes. Community members apply their knowledge in practical settings by participating in hands-on projects, applying critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and reflecting on their experiences as a team. This balanced cycle of doing, reflecting, thinking, designing, and more doing together enhances understanding and encourages thoughtful collaboration among diverse perspectives, breaking down barriers and promoting unity. As individuals conscientiously work together to address local issues, they develop a deeper sense of agency and empowerment.

Civic engagement at the community level is vital for increasing active participation within local systems. Engaging with community initiatives, attending meetings, and participating in volunteer activities empowers individuals to effect change where they can have the greatest impact. This localized approach contrasts with broader sociopolitical systems, where individuals often feel powerless. Community members can build relationships, influence decision-making, and contribute to meaningful change by focusing on civic engagement. Collaborating on local governance or advocating for policy reforms allows them to shape the systemic structures governing their lives, alleviating some of the anxiety about larger political issues and strengthening community bonds.

This final quadrant emphasizes the importance of engaging within our local sphere of influence. By creating opportunities for participation, we can effectively address our desire for meaningful connection and change. These efforts empower individuals to shape their environments and collectively influence larger systemic changes, building resilience and unity amidst complex sociopolitical challenges.

Embracing Transformation in Our Spheres of Influence

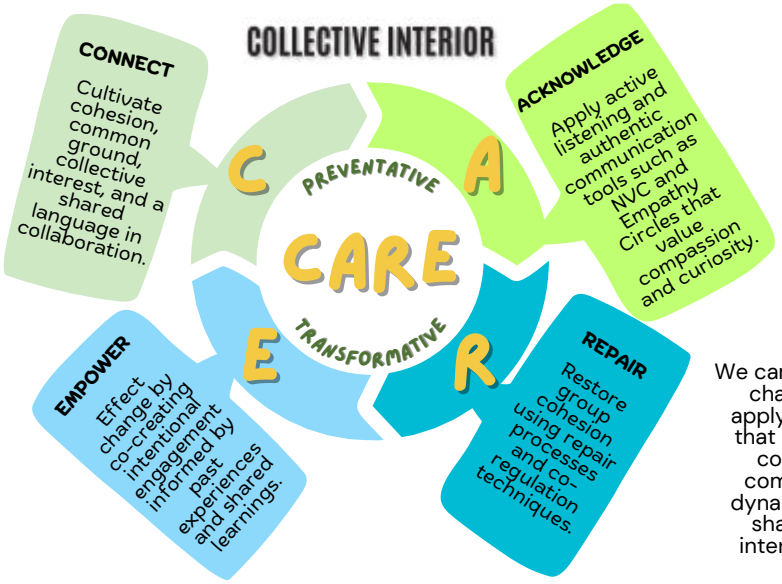
Navigating civil unrest and political polarization requires a holistic approach, with Integral Theory serving as a valuable framework for understanding these challenges. By examining the four quadrants—personal experience, observable behaviors, cultural context, and systemic structures—we can uncover how individuals can cultivate resilience and drive positive change within their communities.

The dynamic interplay between personal agency and collective impact begins with our intentional choices, creating ripples that demonstrate resilience and enable us to turn challenges into opportunities for growth and connection.

Education is central to this transformative process. At Gaia U, we advocate for a holistic approach that emphasizes the importance of personal agency and collective responsibility, illustrating that even small changes can lead to significant shifts within our communities and beyond.

In addressing the challenges of civil unrest and political polarization, we can adopt an inclusive approach centered on our influence and capacity for change-making. By prioritizing dialogue over division, understanding over misunderstanding, and community over isolation, we can pave the way for genuine transformation.

Jennifer Jaylyn Morgan resides in an intentional off-grid community in Tennessee, US. She is the newly appointed President and CEO of Gaia U International, which offers a holistic, interdisciplinary educational model that combines critical thinking, community engagement, and regenerative design. Gaia U empowers students to navigate complex issues by emphasizing mentorship and collaboration within communities. To enroll in Gaia U's programs, please contact info@gaiau.org.



We can influence change by applying tools that cultivate cohesive community dynamics and shape our interactions.

Without Conscious Fear, We Get Nowhere

By Ewa Szczepaniak

I hit the ground. I am in pain. I am in Fear, Sadness, and Rage. And I want a Change. For the last four months I have been living in New Zealand in a deep connection to Gaia. I am breathing with her, letting in her sounds to penetrate my body, to change me over and over again. I connect to the stars, rocks, and plants. I hear their noise and feel their profound presence shouting for more connection, space, and aliveness. I am not able to not notice what is happening. I am not able to close my eyes, ears, and other senses to the pain of Gaia. It is too loud.

A few days ago I was in conversation with Gaia, starting with gratitude for everything she is. And I started to sob when the awareness came to me that we may not exist here beyond this century. All the waves of clarity and information about the collapse of oil, the climate, and the environment, the mass extinction of animal species, cutting down the wild forest, hit me so much all at once that I didn't feel any more ground under my feet. This wave of energy of sadness, fear, and rage was so strong that it made a huge impact on my decisions, actions, plans, and generally the way I am.

And while I was in this process, suddenly from nowhere I started to hear the sound of huge machines cutting the trees on the land. I got even more scared. It became even more real. Half an hour later the big truck came to my tent, where almost no one ever ventures, as I live in an orchard on private land, and asked me if there were any wood chips here. The world gets desperate.

Later on when my son came back home, he suddenly said to me, pointing to the barely growing grass on the soil, "I want this grass to grow so big like a tree." In this moment I capitulated. I was not able to hold at bay what was happening in me. I had already received enough signs. Gaia is calling! Gaia is calling me and you to stand in our power as Human Beings and open up for the Archetypal forces that can flow through us to heal.

We can still stay numb to what is happening in the world, hoping that the leaders will find the answer. We can believe that what we hear is a description of what is *potentially* going to happen, but in fact it is already happening.

What would you do if you knew that we have 25 years left of living here on Earth? What if it is true? I do feel a lot of Fear about it—Fear that calls me to act.

We are in the moment of our existence where we need more than ever Magicians and Sorceresses with their technology and skills. We need You.

You can still think that you are not ready, you are not there yet, and wait to heal this and that. And the risk is that if you wait, it might be too late. It doesn't matter that you are not healed fully, that you still have wounds, that you don't communicate perfectly. The most important thing is what you create. The gift that you have is for us, for the entire planet, and we need it now.

"I feel no fear." When I hear this statement from another person, I start to worry. How is it possible for someone to feel no fear? How is it possible not to feel our feelings, what is an integral part of us, of being human, having a heart? It's like saying I don't feel hungry or I don't feel pain. Is this even possible? What level of numbness must someone have to not feel it?

All of this is understandable. We live in a culture and economic and management system that use fear to control us. Competing at school, climbing the professional ladder, buying on credit, following TV ads—all to avoid being left behind. We keep going, just like everyone else, until we realize that we have allowed ourselves to be dominated by crazy authorities and social pressure. And then, we distance ourselves from all activities. We go to another planet called "The system will not get me. I will not let them scare me." We meditate, do yoga, relax in nature, not really facing the reality.

The three main strategies we learn when fear enters our system are flight, fight, or freeze. And when we are able to control situations, predict what will happen, we can play with the rules given to us by modern culture with the attributes of power and money: we can run away or even fight. But when we face something that really scares us, we do not understand it, and we are afraid. Don't even think about what the consequences might be—the most effective method of survival is freezing. The question is for how long?

This is what some people point to when they say, "I don't want to live in fear." They look at the collapse of the environment, the economic and political madness, and they sense that if the situation is really that serious, there is no real way to fight it effectively, and there is no place to which they can escape for safety, and they rightly assume that freezing in the face of something that big probably won't work either. Our traditional responses to fear are breaking down, given the danger we are all facing.

But when we suppress fear, we unconsciously choose an automatic reaction over a creative response. We don't let fear and worry do their job, the job of alerting us not only that we are in danger, but also that this danger is huge and new and so terrible that our normal responses will not help us. Reacting instead of responding is living in fear. The reaction is always limited. Those who say, "I don't want to live in fear," already do. Fear-rejection is a fear-reaction to fear itself.

Rejecting fear has a price. We pay with the loss of the opportunity to say what is important to us, to do what is to be done,

to stand for our values, to create close, intimate relationships, to live on a planet full of resources and natural wealth. And on top of all this, we pay an additional cost in the form of energy that we spend on pretending that we don't feel, that we don't see what's going on, and to cover up everything that we have inside us.

What we haven't been taught that makes a fundamental difference is that fear is information. If we feel fear, it means we have something to say. This means that energy and information flow through us, which is a resource that we can bring into a space. Responding to fear means coming out with something new to create a different solution. This solution is needed for the here and now. If we feel fear, this is our contribution that we can make to create a new world.

As humans, we are able to experience high levels of fear and be OK with that. Our nervous system is the conductor of fear in our body, and using it skillfully increases our creative abilities. We notice, feel, respond, and create. Every transformation we can make is done using conscious fear. Increasing our body's capacity for fear increases our ability to create the world we want to live in. Our culture needs to evolve, and every person who feels conscious fear contributes to that evolution.

People who consciously choose to encounter their fear enter into it, experience it, and observe it. This doesn't mean they are no longer afraid. It means they faced their fears and found it more than just an enemy. This means that they have discovered their strength to respond even when they are afraid, which is the definition of courage. They're visible because they don't really have anywhere to hide, but they're not frozen. They respond fearfully, and intuitively, creating as they act.

Ewa Szczepaniak is an Edgeworker with a calling to create New Culture where people discover who they really are so that they can follow their life purpose. She believes that we are here for a reason and everything is connected. She offers various coachings and trainings; for details see ewaszczepaniak.org. She is also a mother of Leo (nearly four years old) and Mia (nearly two), and together with her partner is dedicated to a new culture of parenting.

Restoring Ecological Resources

By Kara Huntermoon

Coppiced willows resprout in April.

The Commons Willow Fence in July.

Sheep eat willow stems in August.

The Commons Willow Fence in January, after harvest (coppice).

Photos courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

Ewa Szczepaniak writes of the importance of fear as an impulse that can drive positive changes. I, too, balance intense emotions that can either goad me into action or flatten me in despair. All humans alive today perform our daily actions against a backdrop of climate change, political chaos, and a collapsing civilization that occasionally intrudes into our lives as tragic shocks that cannot be ignored.

This trifecta of large-scale horrors all have one thing in common: the degradation of resources that support human flourishing. The destruction of assets in North America began long ago, with the felling of massive chestnut forests and the intentional slaughter of millions of buffalo. Flocks of passenger pigeons which darkened the sky for days disappeared from the planet forever. Entire landscapes full of foods, medicines, and basket plants degraded as armed men enforced a ban on traditional fire-based land management practices.

Indigenous nations stewarded and built natural resources for centuries, using a "seventh generation" mindset that instructs us to judge our actions based on how they will impact seven generations into the future. European colonists could not rule this land without destroying the ecological wealth that allowed people to avoid participation in the industrial economy. Who needs a job in corporate America if you can live freely off the land?

This destruction wasn't just aimed at "civilizing the red man." European colonists and African slaves defected in droves to assimilate to indigenous culture, which was cleaner, kinder, and more wise to the ways of this land than the newly arrived migrants' habits. Destroying the lifeways of indigenous nations helped stop the loss of indentured servants and slaves, who no longer had the option of earning a place in an earth-based economy.

Fast forward to today: If we are going to survive the next 100 years, we need to increase the material resources that support life on this planet. Climate change is not just carbon in the atmosphere, it is degraded ecosystems—something you can see, touch, and directly impact. Human life is supported by ecological abundance: clean water and the landscapes that purify and store that water; plant resources and the animals who eat those plants.

If we cannot buy food in the grocery store, we will need to grow or forage it, butcher, preserve, and cook it. If we cannot buy industrially-made material objects, we will need to relearn how to partner with plants, soils, and rocks to make the things we need to cook, carry things, and build shelters. We need to focus on increasing the resources in our ecosystems so we have something on which to base our post-collapse economy.

The urgency is real—and building these resources takes time.

For example, if you want to make baskets from willows that you grow, you need four years from planting to basketmaking. You can't just find a willow tree and cut stems off it—you need types that work well for weaving. *Salix purpurea* varieties like "Dicky Meadows," "Irette," and "Bleu" have been used for this purpose for centuries. After their initial establishment period, and with appropriate management (coppicing), the same plants will produce basket material annually for many years.

First you plant the right varieties, and wait two years for them to root in. Then you cut them for the first time, but those first cuttings are shrubby and branched: unusable. The regrowth (year three), however, makes long straight stems. After this year of regrowth, you cut again, and you have basketmaking material. However, if you weave with freshly-cut willow, the stems will shrink as they dry, leaving your basket full of holes. So you have to dry them for another year before you soak them to make your basket.

This four-year lag time between planting and baskets assumes you have resources to begin with: access to appropriate varieties for propagation; land and water to plant and tend willows; tools to cut the withes; structures to dry, store, and soak the stems; and the knowledge of how to tend, harvest, handle the material, and make a basket.

We have a lot to reclaim, and there is room for folks to gain some of these skills even if they don't own land. Four friends of mine learned to make baskets, but they live in the city. They asked if they could plant willows at Heart-Culture Farm Community. With acres of seasonal wetlands perfect for willow production, it was easy to agree to their plan. The resulting living willow fence "belongs" to them, not to Heart-Culture, though it is planted here. They come out twice a year to maintain it: once in the summer to fertilize and mulch, and once in the winter to harvest.

I find this arrangement very satisfying. My Irish ancestors managed land with a "commons" system in which nobody owned the land, but families inherited different kinds of access. For example, one family had the right to graze sheep, another to harvest firewood, and a third to cut basket willows. Those families then traded with each other. Everyone had a responsibility to tend the land in ways which respected the others' uses, and maintained resources for future generations.

I love the way our "commons" willow fence recreates some aspects of this ancient system to fit the current conditions in which access to land is difficult to achieve.

The willows at Heart-Culture don't just provide basket materials and social glue; they also feed the livestock. The salicin-rich leaves have a medicinal quality that relieves pain, as well as tannins that reduce intestinal parasites. Sheep and goats are thrilled when I come with armloads of leafy willow stems to supplement their dry-season hay.

One of our land-management goals is to increase the diversity and abundance of all life. We will not kill insects where they do no harm. Even when they eat our gardens, the "pest" insects are providing links in the web of life. Instead of eradicating them, we focus on creating habitat to shelter the predatory insects who can help balance the "pest" populations.

Giant Willow Aphids love to suck willow sap, producing abundant sugary honeydew (aphid poop) in addition to fleshy naked high-protein bodies. Many predators like to eat aphids, including ladybugs. Others (for example, ants) enjoy consuming honeydew. Wasps like both the protein and the sugar.

When I harvest stems to feed the livestock, I move very slowly to avoid the wasps. I whisper prayers of gratitude for the role wasps play in pollinating flowers, reducing insect pests, and filling niches left by less-resilient insects who are disappearing. I accept the invitation to connect more fully to myself and to Spirit.

And I remember that I am not the only one working to create a livable future on this planet Earth. My allies are the willows, the fruit trees, the native shrubs, the aphids, the ladybugs, and, yes, the wasps—all of whom labor in their own ways to increase the resources available to support life.

Kara Huntermoon is a Permaculture Instructor and the Land Manager at Heart-Culture Farm Community (outside Eugene, Oregon), her home of 18 years. She is a fifth generation Oregonian and considers herself "hyper local," which means she focuses on deepening relationships with all beings in her watershed—including human neighbors who disagree with her politics.

September

I forget again and walk casually down the path
as if I have nothing to fear. A whisper
wakes my senses to the risk and suddenly
I stop swinging my arms, step slower, open
my ears.

The wasps are in the willows again
drunk on honeydew
gorged on the protein of aphid flesh
buzzing so you think you need to run.
No contented hum, this, of gentle
bumblebee. No,
this swarm is full of dive-bombers, meat-
stealers, mad hornets
who hide in soda cans to sting your tongue,
fly lazily along the ground in September to
stab your feet,
and prick your finger when you harvest
grapes because
they were there first, eating.

In the willows
an entire community suckles
at the aphid teat.
Female lineage birthing females pregnant
with females
nesting dolls of identical life-givers inside
each other,
reproduction their only defense
against predation.
We are going to get eaten. Make more.
Look closely. How many ladybugs do you see?
All twinned on top of each other,
confident that their alligator offspring will
feast on parthenogenetic protein.

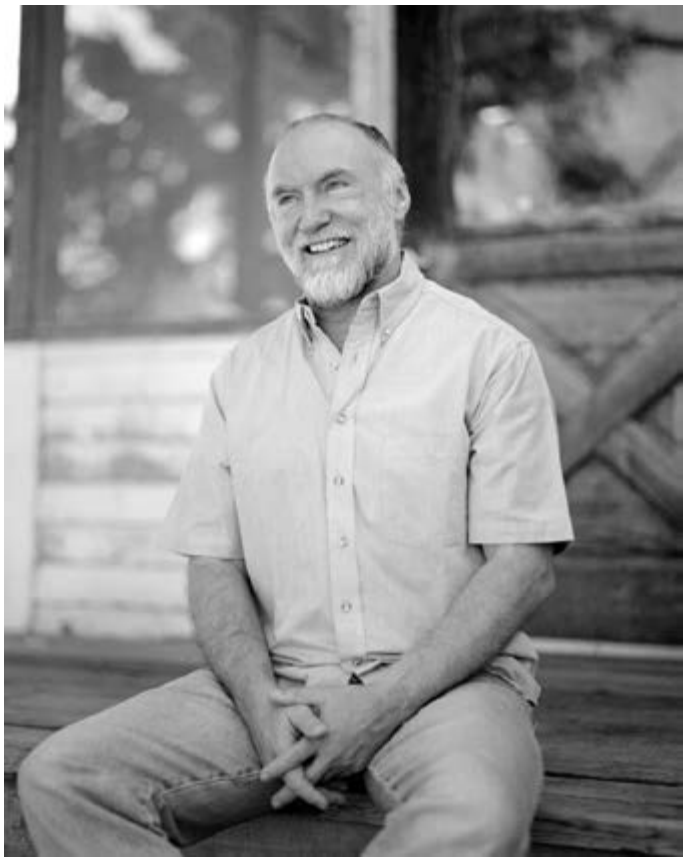
And wasps: yellowjackets,
bald-faced hornets,
paper wasps.
The willows are alive with them.
They glance my way
zoom past my face to make sure I notice their
stingers.
These aphids are mine!
I walk warily, buzzing, mindful.
Perfectly polite, says my friend, who likes to
meditate in the willow house
encircled by drunk wasps. *They never sting.*

Aphids must concentrate aspirin as well as
sugars, maybe the pain
is a little numbed, the suffering easier to bear,
the enraged late-summer fear of frost
avoidable in the easy feasting. I slow down,
reach carefully into the willows
to cut stems for the sheep. My lip trembles.
I can't understand why I am still alive.

–KH

Remembering Laird, Part Two

By Chris Roth, Lois Arkin, Becky Gooding Laskody, Mac Thomson, Joel Bartlett, Leslie O'Neil, Marty Maskall, Deborah Altus, Tim Miller, Brent Levin, Diana Leafe Christian, Ann Shrader, Marty Klaif, Carol Swann, Yana Ludwig, Penny Sirota, Harvey Baker, Jo Sandhill, Cynthia Tina, Daniel Greenberg, Kim Kanney



Our Spring 2025 issue, Communities #206, featured Part One of these remembrances: "Honoring Laird Schaub, 1949-2024" (p. 8, gen-us.net/laird), by Harvey Baker, Neil Planchon, and others, and the editor's own "Remembering Laird" (pp. 9-11, gen-us.net/laird-one).

Here (also posted online at gen-us.net/laird-two), we gather further memories of Laird, whose death on December 17, 2024 followed a lifetime of service to the communities movement that included: cofounder (in 1974) and member for 39 years of Sandhill Farm (Rutledge, Missouri); delegate for 21 years to the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (1980-2001); co-resuscitator of the FIC (now called the Foundation for Intentional Community) in 1987 and its main administrator until 2015; reviver of Communities, to which he contributed more than 130 articles, and its publisher from 1993-2015; prolific blogger (at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com); mediator, speaker, teacher, trainer, and consultant on group process, consensus, facilitation, conflict, and numerous other aspects of community living and cooperative work; and survivor for eight-plus years after a multiple myeloma diagnosis, during which he continued this work nearly unabated while also sharing, via his blog and a CaringBridge site, his journey with the disease.

The crowdfunded Community, Consensus, and Facilitation Book Project, started with Laird's encouragement in his final year, is gathering his writings into a series of books and welcomes donations toward that effort; you can find out more and contribute at gen-us.net/ccf or gofund.me/6e57fd23.

Assembling these remembrances has been deeply gratifying, and another reminder to me that together, we can be smarter and more perceptive—more nuanced and multidimensional in how we see and talk about the world (or any part of it, including a person)—than any of us can as a single individual. It took the contributions of everyone whose words follow to create the picture that emerges; no one person could have done it. Our personal experiences of Laird were tempered by who we each are, what brought us together with him and his work, his own circumstances at the time, and more, and yet each of these recollections unmistakably reflects the unique person we all knew—and may know even better now through one another's stories.

The synergy that led to what you are about to read is one of the aspects of group process, and of circles of equals, that I appreciate most, and that delighted Laird as well. In community, I've found again and again that group-level issues that would be daunting for any one person to grapple with on their own, let alone confidently make decisions about, bring out a collective wisdom when everyone offers their piece of the truth, however fragmentary it may be. Laird dedicated his life to helping people find this kind of collective wisdom together, and the world is a better place for it.

My wish is that Laird's example continues to inspire us to appreciate our own and one another's multifaceted selves—and the rich potentials within our communities unleashed when we overcome the various internal obstacles to cooperative thriving that he was so skilled at identifying and helping groups and individuals learn how transcend and remove. As his daughter, Jo, notes, in fitting resonance with this issue's theme, Laird "broke a lot of spells. Or maybe more accurately, he cracked a lot of spells and offered people his hand to step through the crack, each time widening it and weakening the spell."

—Chris Roth

I feel great sadness at Laird's passing. He was among the giants in the US intentional communities movement over the last 50 years. And he facilitated a Los Angeles Eco-Village retreat during one of our most troubling times as a community, some 20 or so years ago.

He also was a lender for Los Angeles Eco-Village at a crucial time in our history when he helped enable our all-cash purchase of our first multi-family building of 40 units in 1996. He reduced the verbose six-page loan agreement I had written at that time to a half page. We've been using that one ever since, having now borrowed over $2 million with it.

Laird's contributions to COMMUNITIES were as insightful as they were prolific. He was also a strong believer in and practitioner of addressing community conflict as a basis for creative change.

—Lois Arkin

I think I first met Laird in 2006 at the fifth National Cohousing Conference, held at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was selling books. His curiosity, experience, and joviality were magnetic. In 2009, my community, Arcadia Cohousing in Carrboro, North Carolina, hosted one of Laird's Integrative Facilitation Trainings for a weekend and that got me hooked on improving my facilitation skills to better serve my beloved community. Laird became a friend, mentor, game partner, and I his sous-chef in the kitchen.

Many in our community appreciated his insight into community dynamics, and over the next 13 years, Laird revisited Arcadia five or six times, with a class or as a consultant, or for a gathering of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) Board.

I joined his IFT program first as an auditor, then as a full-time student for two two-year training rounds and then again for another weekend training here and there.

Laird would end our two-year sessions by writing a limerick for each of us; and some years we did for him. Here's one he wrote for me:

Our Becky is a beacon of light
With community issues in sight.
With a hunger for process
That's never in recess
She pierces the Arcadian night.

I remain immensely appreciative of the wisdom Laird shared freely, and continue to hold him as my model for vibes-watching and fearless investigating of community members who keep holding personal preferences above community needs.

—Becky Gooding Laskody

Our community of communities has lost a great teacher. Laird taught me more about navigating the turbulent waters of community dynamics than anyone else.

Thank you Laird for your generosity and wisdom.

—Mac Thomson

Laird was one of our mentors. He led a three-day workshop with Altair EcoVillage folks, teaching us consensus and getting us closer together so we listened to one another more effectively. His facilitation style and various mantras formed a basis for our process. Later, he focused on the economic aspect of cohousing and opened our eyes to a broader picture of our purpose and our potential influence in the larger community. I personally could always call him if there was something I thought he could help with.

—Joel Bartlett

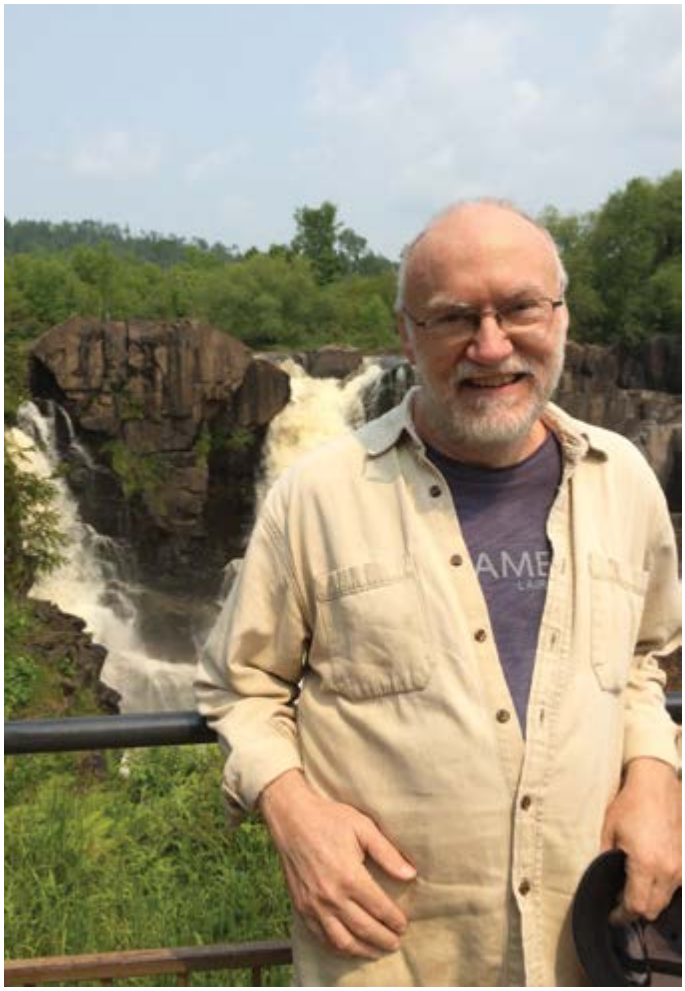
Brings tears to my eyes… Such a giving, committed person! Several of us took Laird's two-year Facilitation training class with other cohousing community residents at cohousing sites around Colorado and New Mexico in 2004-6.

We learned a lot!!! Especially how to savor the joy, spontaneity, talents, differences, willingness and love of our neighbours as well as how to handle diverse opinions, conflict, difficult people, and not to take things personally.

What a journey it has been for all of us!

Let all us CasaVerdians keep the joy in the journey continuing!

—Leslie O'Neil



Photos courtesy of Susan Anderson, Jo Sandhill, and other family and friends of Laird

I was blessed to be able to attend Laird Schaub's eight-weekend Facilitation Course between April 2011 and June 2013 in Northern California.

The eight weekends were: 1. Working Content, 2. Formats, 3. Conflict, 4. Consensus, 5. Power Dynamics/Leadership, 6. Challenging Personalities, 7. Delegation, and 8. Organizational Structure Recommendations.

Laird was a patient and caring teacher. He dedicated his life to making communities function more smoothly.

For one of the weekends, he flew to Sacramento. I met his plane, and we drove to Monan's Rill together.

I followed Laird's nine-year cancer journey with trepidation, and I was very sad when he had to leave us.

I feel privileged to have had him as my teacher and my friend.

I hope someone will turn his teachings into a book. I will certainly buy it.

—Marty Maskall

Among other things, Laird's work was of great help to researchers of intentional communities. He was always willing to answer questions and provide resources and referrals. He spoke at many events, including Communal Studies Association (CSA) and International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) conferences, and was among the recipients of CSA's Distinguished Service Award in 1997 (given to FIC) and 2011 (given to Communities magazine).

I also recall how helpful Laird was in my work with him on FIC's Editorial Review Board and the Kozeny Award Committee. I first met Laird in the 1980s at a consensus workshop he was giving at East Wind Community. In our committee work together, he was the consummate professional—hard working, competent, reliable, and productive. I feel deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to work with him.

—Deborah Altus

Laird provided essential help to me by recommending contacts for the 60s Communes Project, culminating in the book, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (1999), based on more than 500 interviews, many of which involved those contacts. Laird had an amazing ability to connect with people—communitarians, academic scholars, public officials, people seeking community, and more. Everything he did embodied his total life commitment to human community. What a communal powerhouse!

—Tim Miller

Laird was a very important mentor in my life and in my desire to be of service to the world and collaborative culture. He modeled living by one's values even when those were inconvenient or uncomfortable. And he did so joyfully, making traveling long distances by train or sleeping on a couch or small space part of the adventure of living a full life dedicated to his values. He laughed and smiled freely quoting "Rather than curse the darkness, I strive to light a candle." Laird worked to teach others to light their candles as well.

—Brent Levin

Laird was a giant in our movement—which got re-started in organized form when he helped revive the FIC in the 1980s. Just imagine if he hadn't and if he hadn't existed. I doubt if many of us would be doing what we're doing today without Laird's getting the ball rolling back then, and all he and FIC have done since.

I first met Laird at the Celebration of Community the FIC held in 1993. He was my first mentor in the communities movement and helped me so much when I became new editor of Communities. More recently, in the spring of 2024, I took his online conflict class for FIC and it was really good; he was in top form.

What a mountain—a mountain range!—of good work Laird has contributed to the world.

—Diana Leafe Christian

Laird and I met playing coed volleyball my freshman year in college and went on from there...whitewater canoeing on the Coppermine River in the Northwest Territories ending up inside the Arctic Circle, cofounding Sandhill Farm, and coparenting a son, Ceilee, to name just a few of our adventures.

Laird was energetic, innovative, smart, fun, enduring, and so much more. He will be missed by so many.

—Ann Shrader

I do not, as a rule, celebrate birthdays, but for each of my past three decade birthdays I have done something "special." This last time I thought it would be interesting to invite significant people from various stages of my life with whom I had close relationships to gather together for a couple of days. Laird was one of those people, as for most of the previous 25 years we had been colleagues in the leadership group of the FIC, and our relationship persisted following his formal separation from the organization, focused on mutual interest in group process, consensus, the San Francisco Giants, etc.

Laird accepted the invitation immediately. It was clear his motivation was centered not on vocational or avocational commonality, but on the most important, and holistic, aspect of meaningful relationship—friendship.

Late last year after Laird stopped receiving any treatment, I reached out to ask of the possibility of a short visit. It turned out that he had stopped receiving visitors other than local folks and relatives. However, he and Susan (who I met at my birthday gathering) invited me to stay with them for a couple of nights. Amid the conversations centered on current events, media, group process, and reminiscences, I became aware that I, coincidentally, was present for his last birthday.

Those were the last two times I saw Laird and I now reflect on and appreciate that element so critical to quality of life—friendship.

—Marty Klaif

Laird was all of the things that most people have written and spoken so eloquently to. As one of Laird's shorter-term intimate partners on his life journey, I want to add that not only was his passion for life on full throttle but he somehow managed to be able to stay connected to so many meaningful relationships all at once. This could be a struggle at times in our relationship, as time was so precious (and I lived in Berkeley, California, and he was living at Sandhill Farm) and yet, the many parts of him lived in so many of his different kinds of friendships. At conferences he would stay up late at night playing bridge, cards, or totally enjoy guzzling down the beer while engaged in uproarious dialogues! Of course we all know, as he choo-chooed across country on the endless train trips to facilitate at various communities and attend meetings, he was always stopping off at friends' homes to stay connected and keep the conversations moving.

I was with Laird at the beginning of what would be one of his greatest callings, to train facilitators in consensus and conflict. I was in the first official training with the first curriculum. It was very exciting to me as I had grown up in a political community that used consensus as its decision-making model. (My parents' lifelong commitment to social justice through nonviolence had led to founding the New England Committee for Non-violent Action, CNVA, in 1960 on a 50-acre farm in rural Connecticut.) As an adult, I myself was now engaged in process and conflict facilitation.

Working together was both exciting and exasperating as some of you may know, because as egalitarian as Laird was, he had a very competitive side! And he was fast cognitively and super articulate. The feminist in me was at times super frustrated and at the same time, super appreciative of his confidence (as he especially loved facilitating conflict and was comfortable with it). Witnessing the many years that he developed this training, I was also impressed that he was always open to feedback and learning. I noticed in the later years he became more and more conscious of needing to recognize his lesser-examined white male privilege not only from a sexist perspective (which he had been challenged to do early on) but also as a white man in the context of racism and how racism is a pervasive issue in alternative communities (as it is in widespread culture). He also wrote about this on his blog and in Communities.

In the last eight years of our friendship, we were in less and less contact (given he was struggling with illness and he came less and less to the Bay Area) but he was always available to be reached for conversations, brainstorming on facilitation, and interested in my own experiences with my work. I am eternally grateful for our brief two-year relationship, the lasting friendship that blossomed from it, and all that he brought to so many of us, and left with us in his teaching and writing on so many essential issues in communities and group dynamics. I will never forget how he wrote all that he did with two fingers on the computer!

—Carol Swann

First, I need to tell you that Laird hated these things. He often complained that when someone dies, everyone rallies around a fairly one-dimensional version of who someone was, and he thought that was disingenuous, because everyone is more than that. Laird was a lot of things to me in the three decades we knew each other—friend, lover, husband, mentor, teacher, colleague—and all of those relationships were complicated.

Through it all, his absolute commitment to never bullshitting was a theme. The good side of this was that when Laird complimented you, celebrated you, said he loved you, you were 100 percent sure that he meant it. The hard side was that he had incredibly high standards, and the accolades were few and far between. Students and colleagues needed to get "good" and justify their choices, and exactly when you crossed the line into compliment-worthy was very much based on Laird's concepts of what "good" meant, which were often subjective and flawed. In that, he was no different than most of us; he was just a lot more honest about it. Laird pushed many people to be better (including me), and you can read the many testimonies to how the world is better for it, and how his legacy genuinely runs deep. He also pushed a lot of people out of his life, his community, and movement work with an often harsh expression of exacting standards.

It also led to deep-felt loneliness at various points in his life. I knew Laird as well as anyone, and was one of the few who got to witness the private pain of a man who was a giant in the communities world, and had a big public persona. The same things that drew people to Laird often made it hard to get really close: that honesty that could burn, the intensity, the brilliance and clarity that could be turned on you too. As I am going through my own mourning process, I'm also remembering those private moments when he felt his separation from people, when coming on strong didn't leave a lot of space for people to see him at his more vulnerable and fragile, and how much he cherished the relationships that let him be a whole person. Laird had a love-hate relationship with the pedestal he often found himself on, and for a little over a decade, I was right next to him. I learned a lot from him about how power complicates relationships. For me, that's one of the most lasting legacies of our time together.

—Yana Ludwig

Laird was a wonderful, maddening, surprising combination of paradoxes in one human being. We first met 20 years ago when he came to my community to help us through a particular rough patch. He was the quietest house guest we ever had—barely dirtied a towel or made a peep. All he really needed was one strong cup of coffee in the morning and a good beer

near the end of the weekend. For someone who championed cooperative life, he loved a good competitive game and could get kinda snarky if anyone was dragging down the tempo of the game! He was a huge commanding presence in the front of a circle, and quite shy and humble as a friend. He really didn't like being the focus of attention.

Nothing got past his sharp observation of the complex interactions at play in a group. He was fearless in the face of conflict and knew you cannot shy away from the hard thing that needs to be said. Time after time, he showed me that the group heals only after things get out in the open. Then things could shift. Sometimes that means things fall apart. He made me more courageous too.

He was no saint. He regularly pissed people off with his big commanding presence that tended to light up perceptions of patriarchy or sound too much like mansplaining. He made blunders. He got frustrated and impatient. But he was also willing to listen to the feedback and work with it. He got softer and wiser as he aged.

He was smart and articulate. After 15 years of working alongside him, I could never hold a candle to his quick insight into a complex situation—or master his three-color pen system of taking detailed notes. (Blue for themes, Red for energy, and Black for ?) He had energy and endurance. Even while multiple myeloma raged through his bone marrow, he could stay focused and sharp for eight hours of Zoom meetings and be ready for more.

He was thinking deeply about collective life right up till the very end. He was creating a complex metaphor about our collective lives being like a house where each room holds a different type of capacity, or intelligence. One room would be our rational selves, getting stuff done and being efficient. Another room, our emotional selves, full of depth and vitality. Another room, our sexuality. But the room that he was most intrigued with, at the very end of his life, was the one that holds our intuition.

He talked about an experience of working with a group in a remote area of Alaska for 10 days. They were dealing with years of harm, and it wasn't at all clear if they could continue. Laird would go to bed each night without a clue about how to proceed. Somehow, in the night, his intuitive capacity integrated the experiences from the day before. He would wake up with a clear sense of what the group needed next.

Laird was refining his craft right up till his very last breath. He was clear-eyed about his approaching death—but still he wanted to work out this house metaphor. "I wish I had more time to fill out the rooms with stories," he said.

Now it's up to us to continue the work of learning how to live together. He left lots of notes and stories and clues to help us find our way. "I'd rather be a light rather than rail against the dark," he quoted near the end of his days. And he was.

Thanks to you, Laird, we have more light in dark corners of our houses, and more rooms to explore.

—Penny Sirota

I first met Laird at the revitalized FIC's second board meeting, held at East Wind in the Fall of 1987. As FIC secretary, he had a prominent role in the meeting. We both attended the Spring 1988 board meeting at Green Pastures in New Hampshire. When it came time for the election of new board members, Caroline Estes of Alpha Farm recommended that the FIC include more women on its board for better balance. A board member from a patriarchal community replied that we should just take the best people for the limited number of positions. I had been nominated for the board, and in support of Caroline, I withdrew my nomination in support of hers. At that point, Laird withdrew his name from board nomination in support of mine, saying that as secretary, he would be at the meetings anyway. Caroline and I were both added to the board, and we three worked in the FIC as friends and collaborators for many years.

Laird and I took two trips to the West Coast together in my old station wagon. I picked him up at Sandhill, along with boxes and boxes of *Communities Directories* and COMMUNITIES magazines heading to the West Coast. The first time we drove all night from Sandhill to Betty Didcoct's house in northern Idaho, staying awake through the night by listening to Harry Potter on cassette tape. The second time we "took it easy," stopping for five hours of sleep in a motel. On the long drives, Laird had the advantage of enjoying strong coffee!

Laird and I attended countless FIC meetings and communities conferences. Lots of agenda prep, meeting facilitation, "Later Committee" clean-up of the leftover details from the plenary. Lots of schlepping boxes of books for the Community Bookshelf table at events, giving out FIC information, running fundraising auctions (Laird was my best, most energetic ring man ever!). At an auction at Earthaven, he held up a donated pink cocktail dress. Someone said, "Put it on!" He replied, "For $50 I'll wear it the rest of the evening!" The money appeared in seconds, and Laird wore the dress, which fit him perfectly.

Although he was a very public figure at conferences and meetings, he also did a lot in the background to keep the FIC running smoothly. He was aware of the distortions in relationships that fame and power can create, and tried to limit any "cult of personality" arising around him. His energy and passion for life and community will be greatly missed.

—Harvey Baker

My father was a lot of things to a lot of people. Writing this has been hard because how do you encapsulate such a large life into small words? The theme of this edition is "Breaking the Spell" and while I know this section of remembrance is not held to that theme, I found it fitting. Laird's life was wholeheartedly and unapologetically dedicated to the betterment of humanity, as he saw it. He broke a lot of spells. Or maybe more accurately, he cracked a lot of spells and offered people his hand to step through the crack, each time widening it and weakening the spell.

Laird grew up in middle-class Chicago suburbia, got good grades, was athletic, had friends, and went to a good school for college where he graduated with a degree in mathematics which he used to get a job working for the US government in Washington, DC. Everything was according to the expectations of society. Then, the seeds of dissent that were planted in college and grew during the late '60s bloomed and he quit his job after two years, bought land in rural Missouri with three friends, and never worked another "regular" job again.

Ever since Sandhill Farm was founded in '74 it has slowly changed things around it. It is now part of a three-community cluster in Northeast Missouri and every one of the 4,676 residents of Scotland County is at least aware of the influence of intentional communities, despite being in an unlikely place for planting new seeds of cultural revolution.

My brother was born in 1980 to Laird and Ann at Sandhill and Laird chose to give him the surname of Sandhill instead of Schaub. This was likely one of the most profound acts of cultural rebellion, in his father's eyes. He had a long and contentious relationship with him which was one of the more profound ways Laird personally paid the price for his spell breaking. He doubled down on this when I was born and named in the same way.

I have always loved my family name as I feel that it affords me the rare privilege of having an actual personal connection to it. I have climbed the sand hills I'm named after. They were left there after the glaciers ground down the Northern part of the mid-continent and deposited sand where it is not otherwise found, 2.5 million years ago. The earth in Northern Missouri is mostly red clay and the sand helped create a much better mix for growth, so a town was founded on that location as the Midwest was settled. Then the railroads came and the town moved and combined with another small town to be on the tracks. That left behind a ghost town, which Laird and the other founders of Sandhill Farm bought and named the community after. The sand I'm named after has created growth for centuries, and since '74 in more ways than one.

I remember my father tossing bales of hay onto the wagon as we collected winter feed for the cows, I remember him leading meetings, trying to find a good marker for the flip charts to take notes, I remember him cooking huge feasts with veggies from our amazing gardens, I remember him waking up early to start a fire and tending it all day so we could have a sweat lodge that night to celebrate Beltane, I remember him canning endless tomatoes, I remember him running a booth to sell our farm products at a fair in historical clothes, I remember him auctioning off a dress and when it didn't sell, he auctioned off him putting it on, then he bought the dress and auctioned off putting it on again, at his 400-person four-day-long wedding, I remember him working late into the sweaty summer nights in a run-down trailer with no plumbing or air conditioning that was the FIC headquarters for many years so he could spend the daylight hours farming, I remember him in a myriad of ways and I'll spend the rest of my life remembering and realizing new ways he took action towards the better version of humanity he believed in. He helped lots of little cracks in people's assumptions about themselves and other people grow bigger and let in a new light. He wanted nothing more than cooperation in fellow humans. He led by example, embracing his own flaws and showing that an imperfect person could still make a difference, and break some spells.

—Jo Sandhill

I met Laird when I was 19, at one of my first intentional community gatherings—a meeting of community networks at Whole Village in Ontario, Canada. I was there with the youth group, NextGEN North America. Laird took the time to sit with our group of youngsters, weaving bits of wisdom into our conversation. One piece of advice stuck with me:

"Find out what gets you fired up, what makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning. For me, that's the intentional communities movement. If that's true for you too, you'll never run out of work or opportunities to make a difference for the rest of your life."

So far, his words have proven true. I'm deeply grateful for Laird and all the leaders who have sparked a flame in younger generations, ensuring the movement he so passionately championed continues to thrive.

—Cynthia Tina

Over the years, many of us received "Laird Finder" emails where he outlined his packed travel itinerary and days he was "on the choo choo." Now, looking back, I feel Laird *was* the choo choo. He was the little engine that could. He just kept chugging along, through rain and fog, always staying on track and steadily determined to bring more "intentional community" into the world.

I remember, in 2016, asking Laird's advice on a new venture I was working on to develop Custom Academic Programs in Ecovillages (a.k.a. "CAPE Consulting"). He went above and beyond and responded with 28 detailed points for me to consider. Who does that???

Also, around that time, many of us were meeting frequently to figure out how to develop more collaborative relationships amongst various networks (i.e., GENNA, GEN-US, GEN Canada, and the FIC). There were some strong personalities in the room and I was always impressed by how Laird stuck with the process, even when it felt hopeless.

I know some of Laird's hopeful tenacity rubbed off on me as I'm sure it has on hundreds, perhaps thousands of others. In this and many other ways, he continues to play a pivotal role in humanity's Great Turning towards a more cooperative and regenerative future. Thank you Laird!

—Daniel Greenberg

It's a strange sensation to know you have unintentionally walked a life path one person had a heavy hand in preparing. This kind of path-walking didn't come about through a familial tie or even a spoken agreement. It just happened. I have been on the staff of FIC for over a decade and now function as the Executive Director. Laird hired me in 2014 to ship books from a trailer at Sandhill Farm.

Five years later I became a member of Sandhill Farm. I would not be exaggerating to say my home there and my work with FIC have been significant parts of my life and they wouldn't have existed without Laird.

As a result, I have often felt his presence: in the soil, in the story beads we hold at FIC, in our infrastructure (both physical and organizational), and sometimes in the tidying of messes left behind. That happens too. I have the fortunate vantage point to witness the long, robust thread that weaves through so many hearts he has touched.

The last time I spoke to Laird in person was at the Cohousing Conference 2022 in Madison, Wisconsin. We were sure to sit down together, just the two of us, and speak about both FIC and Sandhill Farm. It felt like a silent handshake—an unspoken request from him that I assure him his hard work is still handled with care. I did assure him.

I'm not sure if the FIC or Sandhill Farm of today is what Laird had in mind—for better or for worse—but I can say with certainty that we are doing our best to continue to serve the movement, heal our planet, gather our humanity, and respond to the world we live in. *That* I am sure he would be proud of.

—Kim Kanney

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REACH

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THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #208 Fall 2025 (out in September) is July 31, 2025. 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.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

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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 $1000 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

2 Bd, 1.5 Bath house in Prescott Arizona's **MANZANITA VILLAGE COHOUSING** w/common house hot-tub & weekly meals. Furnished with AC, TV, piano, doggy-door & enclosed garden-patio. June & July rental $1,500/mo. Also available for 1-3 years rent (TBD) furnished or partial. Walking distance from downtown and Yavapai College. (a.saturnwind@gmail.com)

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PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS, EVENTS

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.

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2025 CohoUS Membership

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Memberships are tailored to each of our valued community members, including individual seekers, forming and existing communities and cohousing professionals.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS	INDIVIDUAL $150/year	PROFESSIONAL $500/year	COMMUNITY $750/year	COMMUNITY LAUNCH $1500/year
Free access to all online events	✓	✓	✓	✓
25% off trainings and coaching through The Cohousing Institute	✓	✓	✓	✓
200+ recorded event sessions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Highlighted directory listing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support for the cohousing movement, CohoUS, and the many services we offer	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free classified listings on website & eNews		✓	✓	✓
Introduction + breakout at The Commons		Benefits extended to 3 members of company		✓
Dedicated social media post/amplification			Benefits extended to ALL members of community	✓
Featured story in eNews (1x per year)				✓

www.cohousing.org/membership

FOUNDATION FOR INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

News from the FIC

At the Foundation for Intentional Community, we understand we have the unique opportunity to serve as a resource hub for the intentional communities movement. We strive to build stronger relationships, create a space for everyone to deeply engage, and make our tools and resources more accessible. Reaching thousands every day, we understand that community and connection are essential for us all, even when they feel difficult to find.

As a result, we are making major improvements to our website that will have a direct impact on your ability to find the resources and the intentional communities you are looking for. Here are a few things you can look forward to:

New directory collaboration with GEN

The FIC and Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) have paired up to collaborate on a new, global map of intentional communities. Our directories will have advanced, innovative features for matching aligned communities with interested seekers and will merge our data so that you can discover communities on every continent and belong to a collaborative global community. We aim to launch our new directories later this year.

Search our Learning Resources

The FIC has gathered our educational resources into one place with new search functionalities based on topics (e.g., governance structures versus membership process) and where you are on your journey (e.g., starting a community versus living in a community). You can find books, webinars, and courses all in one place and search with greater ease. Go explore our Learning Resources page at **ic.org/learning-resources**.

Website overhaul

The above features are part of a larger overhaul of the ic.org platform in which all aspects of our website will better serve your needs on your community journey. Our new website will combine our desires to be a living resource hub and a gathering space for you to find tools, connection, functionality, and growth. If you've been following us, you know this is a dream we have been eager to achieve for a very long time!

This big leap was catalyzed by the incredible financial support we received at the end of 2024. Your ongoing support will ensure our momentum continues to serve you and our vision of a just, resilient, and cooperative world where everyone has the opportunity to thrive in community. To contribute to our project, make a one-time or monthly donation to **donorbox.org/website-directory-rebuild**. And be sure to subscribe to our newsletter for updates on these projects.

Global Ecovillage Network Celebrates 30 Years of Regeneration

Since 1995, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) has connected thousands of ecovillages and regenerative projects worldwide. This year we celebrate our 30th anniversary of catalyzing communities for sustainable living and resilience all over the world.

From grassroots efforts to global policy, GEN has worked tirelessly to prove that ecovillages are models for a regenerative future.

We are grateful to build on 30 years of wisdom and innovation, and together we are focused on bringing GEN into the future.

To celebrate this milestone, GEN is launching a year-long series of events, including the European Ecovillage Gathering in Hungary (August 2025) and a global virtual celebration in October. GEN will support regional network members to attend the Gathering, tending to our cross-continental connections.

This year we are focused on completely redesigning our platform and directory of ecovillages to create a space for an online community of community-builders and continue to offer the ecovillage movement the tools it needs to flourish. We are teaming up with the Foundation for Intentional Community on this project, rejecting competition in favor of collaboration.

The anniversary also coincides with 20 years of Gaia Education, a leader in ecovillage-based sustainability education, founded by many of the same leaders who founded GEN. Together, GEN and Gaia Education continue to equip communities with the tools to design regenerative societies.

With GEN's 30th anniversary we celebrate and recommit to our mission. As we dance forward, we invite individuals and organizations to engage, collaborate, and build a world where ecovillage principles shape mainstream society.

For details on GEN's anniversary events, visit **www.ecovillage.org/anniversary**.

GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

Live and volunteer in Camphill Village Copake

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- **health insurance**
- **organic and biodynamic food every day**
- **honing new skills in craft studios and households**
- **lasting friendships with people from six continents**
- **developing communication skills and a deeper sense of compassion**

Subscribe to COMMUNITIES!

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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PLEASE EXPLORE OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS!

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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