

THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND MENTAL HEALTH • RESILIENCE

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Fall 2025 • Issue #208

\$10 US / \$13 Canada

## FIRE & RAIN

Phoenix Rising

“Spongy” Neighbourhoods

Ashes, Afterbirth, and Evacuation

Recovering from Hurricane Helene

Finding Refuge in a Fractured World





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Chris Roth

In preparing this issue, I received this email from a longtime COMMUNITIES contributor who had proposed an article but then was unable to complete it (I'd let him know that submissions were initially slow to arrive; fortunately, they later picked up):

"I guess I wasn't the only one who couldn't come up with an article for Fire and Rain. Maybe we were all PTSD'd over what's happening nationally and internationally, and its impacts around us and right into our communities and our homes.

"It's great to share energy saving info, plans to raise food production, etc., but in the urgency of the moment it was hard for me to focus on material solutions when our problems aren't technical as much as social, moral, ethical. The technology is out there, it's the political will that is lacking.

"The most important thing in our communities is remaining calm as waves of psychic phenomena pass through the society as a whole and through our microcosms. The world needs a lot of adults in the room. We need examples of self-governance that works. Keeping harmony within the community and finding ways to work through the differences that inevitably arise as we mirror and reflect the common zeitgeist are the most important keys to sustainability. Good communication, not only within the community but with our neighbors, is another key to sustainability.

"I think a good theme for an issue might be 'What do you do to stay sane in an insane world?' (Pardon me if you have done this already and I missed it.)

"I've been doing a lot of gardening. It really helps me through, and produces some great food! (see attached photos)."

Reflecting on this message, I realize that, underneath whatever its putative focus is, almost every issue of COMMUNITIES is actually an attempt to answer the question, "What do you do to stay sane in an insane world?" We break that question down into manageable chunks (each issue's theme), and go into a lot of detail about how to carry out various alternatives-to-insanity within groups, based on hard-won experience. As social animals embedded in earth's larger communities of life, we can never undertake the venture of staying sane entirely on our own, even if some of our strategies seem to be "solo." Even solitary time in a garden involves a broad non-human living community, and is embedded in food systems where, at various scales, we are always feeding and being fed by one another.

In my case, I too stay sane (or try to) by gardening—most often with people these days—at every chance I can get amidst

various responsibilities. Editing this magazine plays an important role in helping me retain some semblance of mental equilibrium, but I wouldn't be able to manage that without many hours being around and working with plants, usually with others who love doing that too—and also spending lots of time on foot in natural areas (or as close to natural as exists, wherever I may be). These places and experiences collectively played at least as important a role in bringing this issue to fruition as any time spent on a computer screen.

Though every COMMUNITIES issue tackles the question in its own way, this Fall issue focuses more specifically on sanity-retention than most. The James Taylor song "Fire and Rain" (part of the soundtrack to many older readers' childhoods or young adulthoods) invoked those phenomena to represent inspiration and sadness, manic and depressive cycles, the songwriter's turbulent inner world, and the forces that, reaching psychic "catastrophe" level, drove a friend to suicide. Not coincidentally, the Fire and Rain of climate change shakes us up on a psychic level too, as we face the possibility that our species is wittingly or unwittingly courting self-extinction, and as individual human beings wonder whether their presence is, or is not, of benefit on this planet. On a more visceral level, anxiety, overwhelm, and despair from loss precipitated by climate change and other ecosystem erosion can lead to similar ideation, often amplified by physical hardship and even economic devastation to match the emotional devastation of what we seem to have wrought, much of which now appears irreversible.

It is too much to handle alone. But snuffing ourselves out, either literally or figuratively (by resigning ourselves to despair, forgetting that we each have influence in the world, and silencing our voices and needs) is no solution. The only way to handle it is together.

The articles in this issue, whether dealing with literal Fire or Rain or their manifestations within each of us, illustrate the power of community to address what none of us can confront as sole actors. We owe it to one another to hang in there and find our paths through the current messes, knowing that we are never alone and that crisis is not only a challenge but an opportunity to recognize the omnipresence and power of community. Even amidst the crushing climate-related stories that have often dominated the news in recent months and will likely continue to recur, it's clear that the only way through is together. 🍷

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*A longtime member of Lost Valley/Meadowsong (lostvalley.org), Chris Roth (editor@gen-us.net) edits COMMUNITIES.*

# FIRE AND RAIN

## 1 Notes from the Editor: Staying Sane, Together

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## ON THE COVER



Once seen as a climate refuge, the Pacific Northwest of the US has turned out not to be in recent years. On a larger scale, smoke from wildfires in the US and Canada has increasingly impacted people not only locally and regionally, but also thousands of miles away. Pictured: smoke from the Archie Creek Fire, which burned over 131,000 acres in southwestern

Oregon in September 2020. Photo from US Forest Service ([flickr.com/photos/forestservicenw/50380519881/in/album-72157715907119122](https://www.flickr.com/photos/forestservicenw/50380519881/in/album-72157715907119122)).

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Life in Cooperative Culture

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### COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

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### 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.

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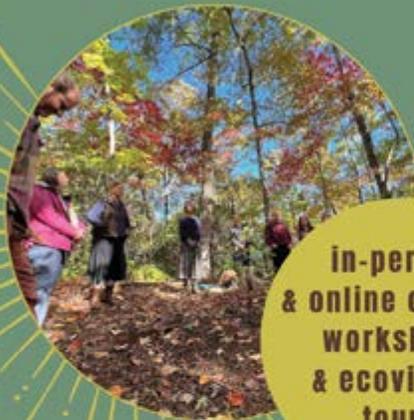


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# Fire and Mold

By Keenan Dakota



*Twin Oaks' warehouse and sawmill area before the fire....*



Photos courtesy of Twin Oaks

Climate change has not been slow or subtle. Here in the southeastern US, it has arrived at Twin Oaks (Louisa, Virginia) like a series of hammer blows, each strike reshaping our land, our culture, and our very way of life. The most recent and perhaps most devastating blow landed on March 20, 2024. A day that began like any other ended in catastrophe when low humidity and fierce winds turned a neighbor's small brush fire into an unstoppable wall of flames. In just hours, 220 acres were reduced to charred remains, 12 structures destroyed, including the heart of our industrial capacity—our warehouse and sawmill.

The hammocks business that sustained Twin Oaks for decades is gone. Tens of thousands of dollars in inventory, years of accumulated heavy equipment, a walk-in refrigerator, computer equipment, and vehicles—lost in an inferno. What took decades to build disappeared in a single day.

But this was not the first hammer blow. Three years ago, a microburst—a weather phenomenon I had never even heard of until my 30s—swept through our courtyard, toppling a dozen trees. Among them was the massive old oak after which Twin Oaks was named. That tree, a symbol of our community, came crashing down onto Llano, the farmhouse where it

all began. The damage was staggering. Industrial-grade kitchen equipment was smashed, including everything we used to make cheese and yogurt. Repairs have been slow, and some of the replacement equipment was being stored in the warehouse—yes, the one that just burned down.

We have always prided ourselves on sustainable living. Our buildings were designed to be naturally cool, with thick insulation, solar orientation, and airlocks on doors. We relied on trees to provide shade in the summer. But as the winds have grown stronger, branches have broken off, damaging roofs. Some holes went unnoticed until water seeped in, creating ideal conditions for a slow-moving disaster: mold.

For years, we fought against rising temperatures and humidity with fans, siestas, and swims in the pond. But the mold outpaced us. No matter how much we cleaned, we couldn't keep up. People started getting sick. And so, after much painful debate, Twin Oaks made a decision that shook our culture to its core: we committed to large-scale mold remediation. A million-dollar effort, this included replacing shingle roofs with metal, tearing out moldy insulation, demolishing parts of buildings, ripping up carpet, discarding rugs, replacing dozens of couches, cutting down shade trees, and—perhaps most shocking of all—

installing air conditioning.

For a community built on the ideal of low-impact living, this shift was heart-wrenching. But it was necessary. Mold doesn't care about ideology. It doesn't care that we lived sustainably. It only cares that it has the right conditions to grow, and it was winning.

Rebuilding after fire, remediating after mold—these things cost money. And money is something we have lost in great quantities. The fire took our business. Mold remediation is a financial black hole. Air conditioning, once an unthinkable luxury, is now a necessity that will demand resources for years to come. The long-range plan continues, but progress is slow. The hammer blows have left us reeling, but we are still standing.

Day-to-day life at Twin Oaks has changed in ways we never could have imagined. We used to hold onto materials, saving scraps that might one day be useful. But now, clutter is a liability. Mold loves clutter. Fire loves clutter. So we have become ruthless in discarding anything that might put us at risk. Leaves are raked, debris is cleared, anything combustible is kept far from our buildings. What once was a space of creative reuse and scavenged projects is now a model of vigilance.

Cleaning has become relentless. Where once we swore by vin-

egar and water, we now embrace bleach with grim determination. Sustainability, in its old form, has taken a backseat to survival.

These hammer blows have left scars, but they have also revealed our resilience. Twin Oaks is not what it once was, and it may never be again. But even as we struggle to recover, we know one thing for certain: climate change is not a distant threat. It is here. It is now. And we must adapt or be crushed beneath the next blow. 🍂

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*Keenan Dakota has been a member of Twin Oaks Community in Louisa, Virginia, since 1983. With a background in business management from George Mason University, he became disillusioned with capitalism and sought a more equitable lifestyle.*

*At Twin Oaks, Keenan has been instrumental in constructing several community buildings. Keenan and his wife, Kristen, raised two sons, Rowan and Arlo, within the community. Keenan's long-term commitment to Twin Oaks reflects his dedication to exploring alternative social structures and sustainable living practices.*

*For more on Twin Oaks, see [twinoaks.org](http://twinoaks.org). For the community's recent 33-minute documentary about the 2024 Fire, see [youtu.be/OYTa9lHbG8](https://youtu.be/OYTa9lHbG8).*



# We Recover from Hurricane Helene

## (And Seek Better Climate Resilience for the Future)

By Diana Leafé Christian and Grace Birch

*In midday after the wind and rain subsided, residents of Earthaven's Hut Hamlet neighborhood, who'd hastily moved all their cars and storage-shed items to higher ground, were now stranded; their whole neighborhood became "Hamlet Island."*



Carmen Lescher

At about 8:00 a.m. on the morning of Friday, September 27, the wind suddenly picked up. Bruce, Eric, and Zev, three Earthaven members from the Hut Hamlet neighborhood, wanted to check on their cars, and so made their way along a narrow trail in the trees uphill from the community's main road as the wind roared and rain pelted their faces. The forest rose steeply uphill to their right, and sloped down 50 feet or so to the main road. This was the third day of what they'd thought was just another rainstorm.

The night before, they'd parked their cars on the main road past our first bridge coming in, a low-water cement-and-culvert structure designed so the usual six to eight inches of flooded stream could flow easily over the bridge, and subside about an hour later. But that morning the wind picked up at an astonishing speed, tearing limbs off trees and hurling them through the air.

As they got about 150 feet along the trail, a huge uphill oak slowly tilted, groaned, and crashed onto the trail with a loud *thump!*, shaking the ground. Then another, and another heavy tree crashed across the trail.

"We need to get out of here!" Bruce yelled over the wind. "We could get killed!"

The three quickly made their way back along the trail, dodging flying branches and hearing and feeling tremendous thumps of more falling trees. "Huge red oaks were snapping like matchsticks," Bruce recalled. They finally reached their homes and safety, soaked through to the skin and abashed they hadn't realized the danger.

This was no ordinary storm, they now knew; this seemed far worse. "It felt like a freakin' hurricane," Bruce recalled. But hurricanes *never* swept this far inland. Did they?

"I'd never seen the creek like that," Bruce added. "It was like a river. The road coming down from the Village Terraces neighborhood was a river. Another Way was a river. The small creek to the east of the Hut Hamlet field was a river five or six feet deep. The nearby

Peace Garden was covered with water three to four feet deep. I couldn't believe it, I'd never seen anything like it."

This was the morning climate change suddenly arrived at our ecovillage.

### Our Mountain Setting— Beautiful, and Sometimes Dangerous

Earthaven is located in western North Carolina's rainy southern Appalachian Mountains about an hour from Asheville. If you viewed us from the air you'd see steep and gentle slopes and ridge tops, tiny valleys covered with forest, small fields and pastures, and many streams and springs. The main gravel road enters from the west, with one small cluster of houses by the entrance. Another neighborhood is on the main road shortly beyond, then a low-water bridge crossing one of our streams, then the Village Center less than a mile in. Here the gravel road converges with several other roads on either side of our larger, second bridge—each road curving uphill and

leading to other small neighborhoods.

Most neighborhoods are built on gentle south-facing slopes, and most have massive trees growing on steep slopes above. Our small neighborhoods are widely separated from each other and accessible only by gravel roads, foot trails, and bridges. For this reason we're unable to see everything all at once, and so walk, bicycle, or drive a few minutes to get from one place to another. Our main road in is also our only exit, leading uphill and out of the village through our immediate rural neighborhood to "the top of the road," where it joins in a T-intersection to another mountain road, one which leads in opposite directions to two small towns 30 minutes away.

Our Village Center includes a large lawn, our Village Green; a round community building, our Council Hall; a large outdoor dining pavilion; and a small kitchen building. The Village Center is powered by a nearby micro-hydro system. Each household or whole neighborhood generates electricity from its off-grid photovoltaic (PV) power systems too, so our community is hardly ever without power.

Because we live in the mountains we don't have cell service on most parts of our land, and few landlines, so most of us now use voice-over-internet phone service and a local internet "bounce" service.

Like most mountain areas in the temperate zone we're blessed with abundant springs and streams. The streams flow downhill mostly from west to east, converging in some places and branching out in others. One stream runs along our main road in two places. The main road crosses streams too, so we built bridges. The first bridge coming in is a concrete low-water bridge over small culverts; the second, just past the Village Center, is the "Crystal Bridge," arching over two large culverts, with low stone wall railings embedded with crystals. The third bridge shortly past that is a longer low-water bridge in the central Hut Hamlet neighborhood. Because of our wells and spring water, with power generated from our onsite PV and micro-hydro systems—we're hardly ever without water either.

Each time we have a multiple-day storm, especially after several days of rain followed by high winds, a few large trees usually fall. After the ground is saturated

by days of rain, tree roots become more loosely anchored in the ground. Wind gusting against branches and leaves is like wind pushing against a sail. If it blows for a long enough time and with enough force against loosened trees in rain-soaked ground, the trees can suddenly crash to the ground downhill. This is significant, as we build many of our homes on gentle slopes, saving our limited flat land for agriculture. But in these mountains gentle slopes almost always rise up to steep slopes with large trees. Our roads and parking lots are in areas surrounded by trees. Normal rain storms usually flood our first bridge temporarily, although not the two higher bridges further down the road.

With Hurricane Helene, our beautiful setting became a trap, as you'll see.

## Another Harrowing Expedition

About the same time that Bruce, Eric, and Zev were out on the trail, Greg, a certified public accountant, and Rachel, a farmer (one of our two Rachels), left the Village Terraces neighborhood to see if their cows were OK. They and other farmers kept cows and other livestock in the large pasture by the entrance gate. Greg and Rachel couldn't have contacted anyone who lived out by the pasture to check on the cows as the phones and internet were out, so they went to see for themselves. The wind and rain were intense. Because they couldn't use their flooded road, they cut across fields and short stretches of forest, dodging falling branches.

In the high wind and stinging rain, they hurried past the campground and turned towards the main road again where they'd emerge on the Village Center side of the first bridge, believing this part of the main road might be passable. But the bridge was now covered by a fast-moving current. The road just past the bridge next to the swollen stream was not flooded, held in check by the sandbag retaining wall Earthaven members had rushed to create years before to protect the road during a previous storm. But as Greg and Rachel watched with dismay, the swollen stream rose rapidly and spilled over onto the main road, demolishing and dispersing sandbags everywhere. To their amazement, the now-roaring stream immediately flooded the road, churned under and around a parked Prius, lifted it up, and carried it to a spot near the middle of the road. Just then a gigantic oak crashed across the flooded road the near side of the Prius, barely missing it, followed almost immediately by another oak splashing down on the far side.

They returned to the trees to cross the creek on an I-beam footbridge, but it too was now covered with five feet of water! Still determined to see their cows, they continued crossing fields and forest areas until they reached the pasture. But this smaller stream at the edge of the pasture was also too high and fast to cross. Realizing at that point there was no way to reach their cows while the storm raged, they turned back, dodging cracking and falling branches in dangerous forest areas, all senses on high alert. (We later learned their cows and all our other animals were OK.)



*Rushing floodwaters covered our Crystal Bridge in the Hut Hamlet.*

Courtesy of Diana Leafe Christian

*Our Council Hall was packed with Earthaven residents and neighbors in our first meeting after the storm, with some having to ford the new river road and clamber over fallen trees to get there.*



Dhyana Miller

When Greg and Rachel emerged from the field below their neighborhood, their flooded road looked about a foot deep, which Greg thought they could easily ford. But he misjudged the location of a drainage ditch, stepped in, and plunged into water up to his waist, where the swift current could have pulled him under. With effort he pulled himself out, drenched to the core and chilled by the wind. He and Rachel returned to Village Terraces, safe but shaken.

### The Storm Dies Down...We Look Around

The Persimmon Grove neighborhood is located before the first bridge with no nearby stream, so we can always get out during a storm. Trees on the slopes are too far above most of our houses to threaten them. However, that morning massive oaks fell from the slope just above two tiny houses at the east end of our neighborhood—a miracle neither was flattened! Fortunately neither resident was home: Rachel was out looking for cows with Greg; Tam, an attorney and farmer, was actually down at the barn milking those cows, braving the wild wind and rain to get there. About midday the wind and rain died down, although the creeks were still rivers. We could hear the sound of chainsaws in the distance and assumed people were out cutting up fallen trees to clear them off the roads. When Andy, an electrician and Persimmon Grove resident, decided to go out to see, he discovered the main road between the tiny-house homesites and the Village Center had about 50 to 80 downed trees strewn across the road like toothpicks, including the massive oaks that now lay either side of the flooded Prius. Crossing fields and stretches of forest, he reached the Council Hall and Village Center.

Andy saw the Hut Hamlet was now cut off by the rushing river road, with the only way out being the treacherous tree-strewn trail some had tried earlier. Hamlet residents were marooned on an island. The road coming down from Village Terraces, though no longer flooded, was now blocked with fallen trees.

Hamlet residents also went out to see what was going on. It was clear that without phone service or internet and with trees blocking almost every road, the immediate challenge was to find ways to communicate with each other to learn if everyone was all right. People from Village Terraces neighborhood with the same idea had come downhill to the river road cutting off Hamlet Island. It was an especially poignant moment, Bruce recalls, as Village Terraces members shouted greetings and waved across the rushing water to their friends on the other side.

Many of us had walkie talkies at home, used to communicate during community work days. We soon realized that, with the internet down and no cell service, we could use these to call people. Village Terrace residents rushed back uphill to get their walkie talkies; one threw a walkie talkie across the river road to the crowd of Hamlet

residents—the first step in getting reconnected. People returned to their neighborhoods and spread the word to get out their walkie talkies, and soon people were able to reach each other.

### We Rescue the Crystal Bridge

To get to the Hut Hamlet and Village Terraces neighborhoods, we cross the Crystal Bridge. But because its big culverts were now clogged with branches, rocks, and mud, water streamed over the bridge like a waterfall, damaging its stone railings. Scotty, skilled with earth-moving equipment, was intently hauling brush out of the culverts with an excavator, while 15-year-old Stone, immersed chest deep in the swift current, ducked under long enough to attach chains to logs and branches. Again and again Scotty drove the excavator forward, Stone plunged under the cold flood and hooked the chains to logs and branches, Scotty and the excavator heaved out the debris, and other Hamlet residents dragged them off the road. After about an hour of this strenuous work they'd cleared the culverts enough for the stream to first trickle and then rush through them again. The waterfall slowed down and stopped. Our beloved Crystal Bridge, though battered and bruised, was traversable again.

People were now coming down from all roads to see what was happening, and it soon became obvious to Andy we needed a community meeting to share news and learn if everyone was all right, assess the damage, and figure out what to do. So Andy called a meeting for 2:30 in the Council Hall, asking us to tell everyone we saw—"New Roots" (non-member residents) and neighbors outside the gate too. Word of the meeting spread fast over the next hour.

### We Gather at the Council Hall

"Just getting to and from the Council Hall that first day was an ordeal," Bruce recalls. People in the Hamlet had to ford the still-raging stream to get to the third bridge, which had been knocked off its foundations and now tilted upwards. Some took their clothes off and held them over their heads as they crossed. "It was deep, up to my chest, and the current was strong," he continued. After fording the stream Hamlet residents had to heave

themselves up out of current to climb onto the tilted bridge. Once across the stream they still had to jump over gullies in the road and clamber over and under fallen trees. "Trees were down everywhere you looked," Bruce said, "many tangled up in clumps, some sticking up at an angle eight or nine feet in the air."

By 2:30 word had spread throughout the village and about 60-70 people from all over the land and neighbors outside Earthaven converged at the Council Hall. "First we needed to know if everyone was accounted for, especially those in the more distant neighborhoods," Andy recalled. "Was anyone trapped by fallen trees? Did everyone have enough food and water?" We learned no one was injured and everyone was safe, though it was worrying to know one villager's daily pain medicine would run out in a week. A family of five had been so concerned the night before about potential mudslides from the cut bank uphill of their site they'd slept in the Council Hall.

At this first meeting people didn't so much express grief as confusion. Radios were out everywhere; there was no signal and we had no news of the outside world. "We were all stunned," Bruce remembers. "We were really happy to be alive and know everyone was OK, but we were also just...stunned."

After learning everyone was safe, we realized our first tasks were to clear pathways through tangles of fallen trees blocking roads and driveways and survey our damage. At that point we believed we'd be able to clear all the fallen trees in three or four days and be able to get out. However with no outside communication, and assuming that if this many trees were down here they'd also be blocking roads in the

wider area, we actually had no idea when we might be able to leave again. When could we next get food, medicine, and other supplies?

## Assessing the Damage

"Many of us were astonished at the damage," Bruce recalls. "Fallen and broken trees everywhere. Gullies in the roads two to three feet deep; one almost five feet deep."

Not only was the sandbag retaining wall now smashed apart, but a second retaining wall of massive cement barrier blocks was also demolished by the flood, the huge blocks tossed across the road like tinker toys. Streams were choked with trees and brush. The micro-hydro system for the Village Center was damaged but still functioning. Our Free Store, an old hunting cabin where we'd drop off and pick up giveaway items, was knocked off its foundations and tilting dangerously.

An older couple's Earthship home had been damaged and some of its solar panels cracked. A mudslide partially covered the construction site of the family of five. Our fundraiser Amy's Hobbit House was badly damaged, though fortunately she wasn't there at the time. This three-story structure has a cob and earth-brick first floor and stick-framed second and third floors. A huge oak had crushed half of the third floor, splitting and smashing its metal roof into shards and compressing the second floor so its doors could no longer open or close. Sections of the back wall of both floors were torn open, leaving the interior exposed to the elements.

The Hut Hamlet was the most badly damaged. Besides erosion of part the low stone wall railings of the Crystal Bridge and our third bridge knocked off its foundations, a narrow wooden footbridge leading into the neighborhood had washed away. The Hamlet's water system was damaged. Although the neighborhood's 10,000-gallon holding tank was full, no new water could flow in, so Hamlet residents would be on drought rationing soon. A cabin had damage to its roof and a retaining wall. High winds had forced rain sideways into and under the metal roof seams of Bruce's house and water streamed into the floor. A cabinet shop was flooded, mud inside everywhere.

However, neighborhoods where trees had been cleared uphill of the houses and with no roads adjacent to streams were relatively undamaged.

## Getting Organized

Unlike almost all neighbors in that part of southern Appalachia, Earthaven still had power and water: our PV and hydro systems still functioned. Our storm-damaged micro-hydro still worked, and neighborhood water tanks were all full. So we set out to clear roads and driveways.

Many members, men and women both, are skilled in operating chainsaws and tractors. "At that point we quickly organized into 'Go!' mode," Andy recalls. People with these skills went off to cut trees apart and drag them off the road inside Earthaven so we could get from one place to another. Farmer, an electrician and builder, and several others were intent on clearing the road leading out of Earthaven to learn if we could get out at all, and, if so, what was happening in the outside world. Andy volunteered to help organize daily morning and afternoon road-clearing crews.

Grace Birch



*On our main road, gravel washed away and eroded, with some gullies five feet deep; our beloved Crystal Bridge was damaged; and our Free Store cabin flooded out and was knocked off its foundations.*



Grace Birch

*That first afternoon our beautiful cooks—many who were also community leaders, farmers, or chainsaw-wielding road-crew workers—immediately began preparing dinner for us and our neighbors.*

Normally we have meals at home and share a community meal at a weekly cookout. However, we realized we'd be better off organizing lunches and dinners for everyone for a while, partly to save time by consolidating our food and meal preparation and share meals in one central place, and partly to connect every day for emotional support. Many of our members grew vegetables; some raised cows, pigs, sheep, or chickens on small agricultural sites leased from the community. Some had stores of dehydrated food, water-canned food, or frozen food. "Our family of five had three months of food and our neighbor Leon had a half-acre of sweet potatoes ready to dig up," recalls our other Rachel, a meeting facilitator and community governance leader. "We did the math at that meeting and figured we collectively had enough food on hand to feed ourselves for a month."

While other villagers went off to clear roads, Rachel and several other leader-facilitators gathered available food and assembled in the kitchen to prepare dinner for everyone, given what we expected would be an afternoon's grueling labor. Our nonprofit educational organization, School of Integrated Living (SOIL), had recently bought enough food to feed participants for an outdoor workshop, which we'd canceled three days earlier given the expected storm. Fortunately that food could feed everyone for an estimated two days. We decided to prepare daily community lunches and dinner for however long was needed, and invite our outside neighbors too, as we knew most of them couldn't cook without power or water and may not have much food on hand either. That evening our leader/facilitator cooks prepared a hearty dinner for everyone, knowing many would return in a few hours, hungry and exhausted.

### Clearing Roads in Water up to Our Knees

Many Earthaven members are adept at felling trees so they will land exactly where we want them—quite different from trees in rain-soaked ground hurled down by wind.



NikiAnne Feinberg



Grace Birch

*After our first Council meeting we immediately started cutting apart fallen trees and dragging logs and brush off our roads by hand and with our older tractor.*

Dozens of fallen trees had knocked into other trees, creating tangles of branches and trunks snaking out at crazy angles, and often in still-flooded roads.

We couldn't cut trunks into the eight- to 12-foot lengths we usually do to mill them locally into dimensional lumber. Our newer tractor, powerful enough to drag heavy trunks off the road, was still marooned on Hamlet Island, though we had access to our older, less powerful tractor. Because much of the road beyond the Crystal Bridge was still a small river, we could only start clearing roads up to the Hut Hamlet, though not in any neighborhoods beyond. Our work crews cut trunks into short lengths light enough for our older tractor to push or drag off the road.

Even with the tractor, skilled chainsaw operators, and enough people to drag trunks and branches, the job was quite dangerous at this point. First, tangled-up trunks and branches are often under tension and when cutting the branches releases the tension, they can suddenly twist and fly outwards and injure people.

"It was also dangerous to use chainsaws while trying to balance in chilly water up to our knees," Andy recalls. People could lose their footing in the strong current and fall in, risking losing control of their still-running chainsaws and sustaining severe injury. Trying to manage this precise and demanding task in fast-flowing streams was also uncomfortable. People became thoroughly chilled, many shaking with the effort of concentrating on safely cutting apart tangled trees while balancing knee-deep in cold rushing water.

### We Venture Beyond the Gate

Our road to the front gate was passable now, so Farmer and several others jumped

in a van with chainsaws and ropes. They spent hours clearing one tangle of trees and downed power lines after another, reaching the top of the road and the T-intersection about an hour before dark. Several neighbors joined them, and this larger group began clearing trees on the road leading to one of the towns.

Their work was also dangerous, partly from cutting into trees under tension, and partly because people dragging brush had to get close to workers with running chainsaws, so the latter could reach the next tangle of branches. And it was risky for inexperienced people to work so close together, as they could get in each other's way and get cut. Farmer was hyper-focused on clearing as many trees as he could while constantly looking around to make sure everyone was safe.

As they came around the first bend they were blocked by a mudslide—a chaotic mix of mud, trees, and construction debris from above—and beyond that, a brand new waterfall 15 feet wide and several feet deep rushing down the slope and eroding out the road below. An underground culvert must have clogged up, they thought. The rushing torrent was carving a channel down the slope, eating the asphalt on the outer edge of the road and undercutting the bank beneath, leaving only one lane barely wide enough to drive on. “Oh, my god; this is really it!” Farmer thought, shocked by the magnitude of the destruction. Assuming the road might be like this all the way to town, he wondered if we'd ever get out of Earthaven again. It was now full dark, so they stopped for the night.

## The Flood Recedes

By the next morning, Saturday, September 28, the stream by the main road had dropped enough that Hamlet residents could get out, though still with difficulty. Much of the road near the Hamlet was blocked by trees, covered with water ankle-deep, and pockmarked by divots and gullies, with all the gravel washed away.

At the 9:30 and 2:30 meetings even more people gathered in the Village Center. Three inside-the-property crews left to clear Earthaven's roads and driveways, each heading off in a different direction and working from the center out, as Farmer and the outside-the-property crew con-

tinued clearing the roads beyond the gate.

To backfill the eroded gullies on either side of the third bridge and Crystal Bridge, we needed to dump huge amounts of soil into the gullies and pack it down hard, which required liberating the beefier new tractor from the Hamlet. Andy drove the tractor to the lowest part of the still-high stream, while Scotty shouted instructions about when to throttle up or slow down, drive forward or back up. Andy charged the tractor full speed ahead through the rapid current, with water halfway up the wheels. Just as he made it most of the way to the other side the tractor plunged into deep mud, leaving it halfway in and halfway out of the stream. Finally one of our members in a truck hauled the tractor the rest of the way out.

To the distant buzz of chainsaws and chugging of tractor engines, and the new whop-whop-whop of helicopters flying low overhead, our cooks prepared the day's lunch and dinner. At each meal our crews reported their progress. We slowly understood how serious the storm had been from the outward crew, who told us how badly damaged the roads and many houses were outside Earthaven.

## Our First Council Meeting

That afternoon of the second day we held our first official business meeting, a “Council Meeting.” We'd realized we needed two kinds of meetings: Council Meetings to plan strategies and decide next steps, and informal morning and afternoon meetings to organize work crews.

We debated various strategies to repair the worst road damage between Persimmon Grove and the Hamlet, but by the time the meeting ended Scotty had already half-repaired it. Using the newly liberated tractor he'd packed dirt back into the gullies so the road was drivable again. Leon, a farmer neighbor just outside our gate, then used his excavator to drag many of the trunks, branches, and other brush out of the way in a nearby field.

While we were certainly making progress, we still had no internet, cell service, landlines, or radio signals. We communicated with each other only at meals or by walkie talkie. We still didn't know the extent of the storm damage.

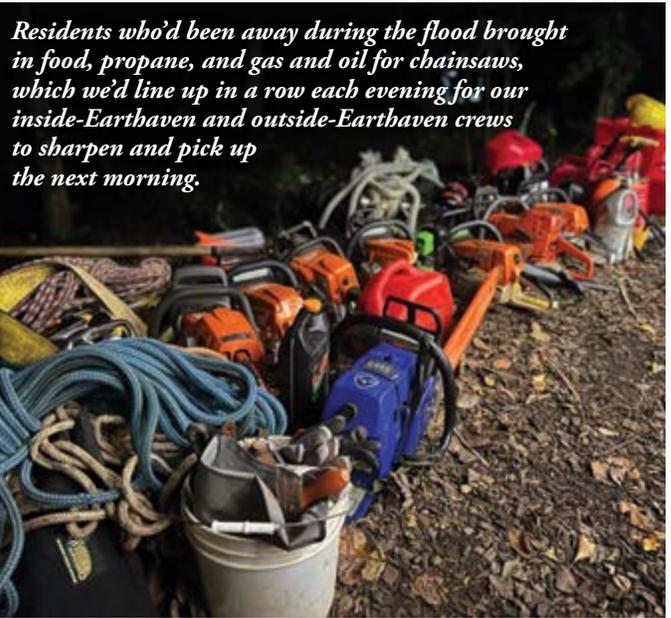
## We Get Internet Again...and Learn How Bad It Was

The third day, Sunday, our neighbor Allie loaned us her satellite dish, which we immediately set up near the Council Hall. Being able to connect with the outside world again was an immense relief—now we could let our friends and relatives know we were all right, and our telecommuters could resume their jobs. But it was also heartbreaking. We gradually learned over the next few days, to our increasing dismay and alarm—and for some, a dawning sense of horror—just how bad the destruction had been, and over a wider area than we'd realized. We learned many in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee were homeless, or trapped in their homes with trees blocking their driveways



*Sometimes when releasing downed trees under tension, chainsaw operators had to quickly leap out of the way as logs suddenly flew through the air.*

Griffin Abee



*Residents who'd been away during the flood brought in food, propane, and gas and oil for chainsaws, which we'd line up in a row each evening for our inside-Earthaven and outside-Earthaven crews to sharpen and pick up the next morning.*

and little to no water, food, or power. People had died, killed by drowning, falling trees, or mudslides. We realized the constant low-flying helicopters were rescuing stranded people and ferrying out the dead. Some of the nearby towns along rivers were badly damaged. One of our closest towns, Chimney Rock, a single row of houses and shops along a road hugging a river, was completely wiped out—the river had changed course, the road had vanished, the buildings now twisted, tangled wrecks.

## Emergency Supplies!

While one road leading to a nearby town was blocked, the other was passable, but dangerous. Saturated soil on steep slopes above and below the road could give way anytime with more falling trees, mudslides, and road washouts.

Fortunately, two of our members had been away during the storm. Liz, one of our farmers and governance leaders, was the first to return with a truckload of food and supplies—demonstrating to us we *could* still get in and out on one recently cleared road, though precariously.

Then Christian, a nonprofit administrator, arrived from Charlotte, a city two hours away where he worked during the week, with a truckload of rice, beans, and other bulk food items; chainsaw supplies; and 150 gallons of diesel fuel and gas. Taking a series of small back roads, he skirted mudslides and washouts and fallen trees. At one point where a mudslide covered the road, one man on an excavator, another on a bobcat, and members of a local church were working hard to clear the road. Christian grabbed his shovel and joined them, shoveling mud he sank into up to his knees. After about an hour they'd cleared the mudslide enough to drive around, and Christian finally reached Earthaven late that night. He continued bringing truckloads of supplies from Charlotte every week for the next few weeks.

## Our New Normal

Over the 10 days or so after the storm we settled into the same daily routine. Every morning we'd line up our chainsaws and gas cans at the end of the dining pavilion, and someone would sharpen the chains before the work crews headed out. Each crew had eight or 10 people and three to six chainsaws each, Andy recalls, with some people designated to cut up trees and others to drag branches and brush off the road. Our outside crew kept running into other people further along the roads out who were clearing stretches of the road too, and began to have hope that soon the entire road to our nearby towns would be cleared and we'd be able to get out after all.

After a few days a whole group of Earthaven residents converged on Amy's crushed

Hobbit House. They first cut off the largest branches of the fallen oak and tied a rope around the trunk. Then they'd yell, "One, Two, Three—heave!" and haul the massive weight with all their might, doing this over and over moving the tree a few inches or feet at a time, finally managing to haul it off the roof. Later, Earthaven carpenters crawled under the broken roof and pushed it back into place and straightened out the sharp pieces of metal roof, then built a temporary frame with a tarp to keep out the elements.

Due to the widespread damage to our region many villagers couldn't go to work, and didn't know if their jobs still existed. One member's house-cleaning service was based mostly in Chimney Rock—now completely wiped out. Bruce couldn't get to his teaching job in Asheville, but Asheville was so hard-hit the school was probably not open anyway. However, now that we had internet again, some could resume their jobs. Greg returned to his work as a CPA, Amy could now continue her work on Earthaven's Development Team and fundraising, and both managed to grab up chainsaws and join the road crews for part of the day.

Our local volunteer fire department was ordinarily *the* central communication hub and emergency supply depot for our local fire district, but it was now without power or water. They asked Farmer for help in restoring electricity so he and several of the outside crew drove to the district

*We met each morning in the Village Center to plan the day's road-clearing work, with the goal to cut up fallen trees and drag them off the road, using our chainsaws, dump truck, tractors, and excavator.*

Grace Birch



NikiAnne Feinberg

headquarters. The site was a disaster! The first floor had been five feet under water and was now inches deep in mud. Their back-up generator was damaged. They'd lost two vehicles and their propane tank had floated down the river.

Standing in mud up to his ankles in the utility room—now a mad jumble of muddy wires, plumbing hoses, and an old air compressor—Farmer began clearing mud out of the breaker panels, as others mucked out the first floor with shovels. People were coming in and going out of the building at all hours, desperate for help and seeking food, water, and supplies. Finally the fire department chief called a halt to all the visitors, and asked local churches in the area to become their own neighborhood supply depots, as it would be a long time before the fire department could help people again. Farmer got the fire department headquarters breaker panels working, and the nearby Stone Mountain Baptist Church became our local central supply depot, where villagers dropped off and picked up supplies

for neighbors in need.

Each afternoon we'd hold a Council Meeting to plan next steps. "During our first meetings, we were just one big circle of Earthaven residents and neighbors all making decisions together about whatever we needed to do," recalls Kaitlin, who had served as Earthaven's president, our "Firekeeper," several times. "But as the days went on we returned to the usual way we organize specialized work," she continued, "with different groups of people clearing roads and repairing structural damage, feeding people, handling communications inside the community and with the outside, addressing health and wellness issues, or managing finances and fundraising."

Our cooks prepared daily lunches and dinners for everyone, including many neighbors. Some were neighbors and friends who had been closely involved with Earthaven for years; others we hadn't met yet but needed help. The Council Hall became our information hub: every day we'd update our Roads Board, describing road conditions, and our Needs Board where people wrote what they needed and offers of help. Villagers and many neighbors converged at the Council Hall daily for news, water, food, internet, and the relief of seeing other people. "The Council Hall was like a beehive all the time," Bruce recalls.

### Our Healers Mobilize

Members of Earthaven's Care Team normally organize hot meals, rides to town, and other services for villagers and neighbors who are ill or having other difficulties. We also have many healers, offering modalities ranging from craniosacral therapy, nursing, and naturopathy, to acupuncture, Reiki, empathetic listening, and psychotherapy. Care Team members and many of our healers realized we also needed to provide medical help for anyone injured in the road-clearing work and comfort anyone with emotional distress or even trauma from what we'd all just been through, so they set up two healing tents on the Village Green—one to treat physical issues; the other to address emotional

*Our daily routine: repairing our damage and helping neighbors, meeting to plan our work, and sharing community meals. Our Council Hall became the news and communications hub for everyone.*



Grace Birch

*For 10 days after the flood we enjoyed connecting our friends and neighbors every day at lunches and dinners.*



Grace Birch

*Our healers prepared a table of herbal tinctures and first aid supplies, and set up healing tents with a daily schedule of healers for Earthaven residents and neighbors in need. We quickly organized into teams and roles.*



Grace Birch

Dhyana Miller

issues and trauma. Various healers and empathetic listeners were scheduled to help at different times of day with a sign-up sheet to reserve the help.

People’s emotional responses ranged from excitement about how quickly we were clearing roads and helping neighbors, to feeling devastated and depressed. One villager, for example, didn’t leave her house. When she finally emerged she seemed lost and barely able to speak. Another told us at first he’d felt stunned and demoralized. “Even though we were accomplishing so much, I still thought we all might die. I had no idea how long it might take to dig ourselves out, or how we’d survive without more food and supplies. If another storm washed out the only road out, how would we ever get out?”

Some were worried that FEMA would funnel emergency resources to cities first and rural areas last, leaving us vulnerable to running out of food or needing emergency medical supplies. Still others were grieving the widespread death and destruction in the towns around us—the constant low-flying helicopters reminding us every day. It was a poignant time. Many of us felt elated that we were doing so well that we now had energy, time, and skills to help ourselves and neighbors, but as we continued to learn of the widespread devastation, we wondered if we had the right to feel so good when others in the region were desperate for food and water or grieving the loss of loved ones.

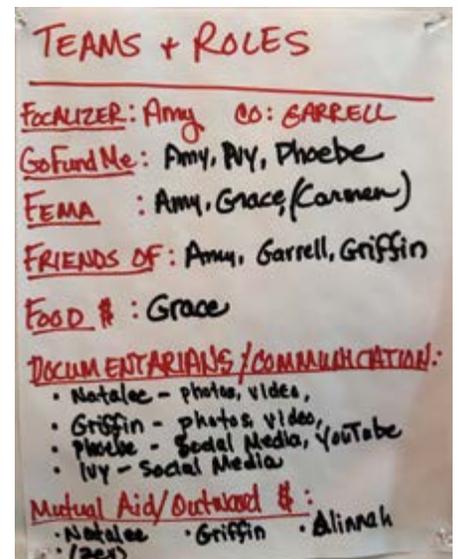
Two weeks into our recovery, facilitator and leader Rachel wrote in the Earthaven newsletter, “the intensity of the shock and devastation has worn off, the high of togetherness and the ‘We can do it!’ energy wanes, and we, as well as all of western North Carolina, are left with deep exhaustion looking at a long road ahead. We are slowing our pace, ending emergency protocols, and strategizing about how to move forward. We can do that because we have homes to rest in and power to cook with. So many do not. We are so fortunate and full of gratitude, while also grief-stricken at the state of the lives of our friends, neighbors, nearby towns, and the entire region.”

## Our Fundraisers Leap into Action

Now that we had internet, our fundraiser Amy and other members of the fundraising team contacted several large donors and started our first GoFundMe campaign, seeking funds to repair roads and bridges, purchase emergency food and other supplies, reimburse Liz and Christian for their expenses, and even pay Allie a little for the kind loan of her satellite dish.

Amy and her team figured out how the FEMA process worked and helped register Earthaven members for FEMA funds. The team took photos and videos to document our damage and recovery efforts, promoted our campaign on social media, thanked our donors, and reported on our progress in our daily Council Meetings.

The GoFundMe campaign took off right away, enabled, Amy believes, by national news coverage of the devastation in this area; the large base of support Earthaven has



Grace Birch

built over three decades from all our tours, classes, work exchange programs; and years of good will from family members and friends of Earthaven residents.

The team promoted the GoFundMe campaign on Earthaven’s Facebook and Instagram accounts and email list, and to Amy’s own network of donors from her past nonprofit work. She was already a part of hundreds of social media groups focused on environmental and community interests with the same kinds of values and goals as Earthaven, and she joined more. She and the team posted messages describing the impacts of the hurricane on Earthaven, what we’re raising money for, and asking people to donate if they felt moved to support us. They also asked Earthaven people to share posts from the Earthaven Facebook page on their own Facebook pages, and to

ask friends to share these also. They asked villagers to forward these posts to friends and family members. This worked well; the family of one close friend and neighbor donated several thousand dollars, and many others followed suit.

Over the next few weeks our first GoFundMe campaign raised almost \$120,000.

## We Gradually Restore Our Village

Over the next several weeks we continued clearing roads and repairing damage. We helped Leon harvest his sweet potatoes, and helped Adam and his family clear the mudslide off their new construction site. Bruce and Scotty located and fixed the problem in the Hut Hamlet water line and the Hamlet could fill their tank again. Andy and another electrician, Matt, repaired the micro-hydro system powering the Council Hall and Village Center. It wasn't badly damaged, but they still thoroughly cleaned every part and replaced its valves and bearings with new ones we had on hand. "We took this as an opportunity to make the hydro system much better able to handle future floods," Andy told us. "Many of us realized it's time we create more resilience for future storms."

We finally did get out to the two nearest towns, which required driving carefully on severely damaged roads, skirting partially cleared mudslides and stretches eroded to barely one lane and marked with traffic cones. The towns sustained heavy flood damage but at least they were there, and FEMA and the National Guard were distributing food, water, and other supplies. Some brave souls made it all the way to Asheville, which was equally devastated.

In later weeks Leon operated an excavator and Johnny helped on the ground to set the third bridge back on its foundations. We spent a morning at the Free Store, removing all its giveaway items and preparing it to later be torn down. Brandon, also skilled in earth-moving equipment, operated an excavator, and, with a ground crew, spent several days repairing gullies on either side of the Crystal Bridge and repositioning big rocks to stabilize its bank below. Brandon also spent days on the excavator building new earth-bermed retaining walls to protect the main road from future floods. Our Care Team continued visiting people in distress, our healers still offered help in the healing tents, and Amy and our fundraising team carried on promoting our GoFundMe campaign.

"We were able to accomplish so much," Kaitlin recalls, "because we already had years of experience managing our community. Learning all the needed physical labor tasks and relying on the self-governance process we've all done over all the years laid the foundation for how well we're able to handle emergencies—to know what's needed, and organize ourselves step-by-step. Having lived and worked together at Earthaven over many years made it possible for us to recover as well as we did."

Amy also remembers the days and weeks after the storm. "I was moved to tears by all the energy and love people put into all the work we had to do. People just 'threw down' from the moment they woke up in the morning until they dropped from exhaustion at night."



NikiAnne Feinberg

*Our excavator operator and a crew of helpers repaired our massive-block retaining wall.*

## Creating Resiliency in the Face of Climate Risk

When Earthaven was founded, climate change resilience was captured in the process that our early Permaculture designers followed: Design a human settlement that is attuned to our ecology and the dynamics of water, fire, wind, plants, and animals.

"Climate Change (as we know it today) may have not been an original design lens in 1995 when we were first laying out Earthaven," said Zev, founder of a local mutual-aid nonprofit, Cooperate Western North Carolina. "But what our founders were doing was designing resilient systems that provide for humans in all kinds of different circumstances, and attune to the actual ways that energy and materials flow in systems."

Examples of how we apply resilient systems at Earthaven include catching and distributing stormwater into landscapes, composting and creating topsoil that is less likely to erode, emphasizing plant diversity to prevent pests and disease—and of course using alternative sources of energy. Our strong social fabric as well as our existing social structure and community governance were also key to weathering challenges of the storm.

"Social systems are similar to ecological systems in the sense that the things that make a good community are also the things that make effective disaster response," Zev added. "Things that make effective ecological design also make effective climate resilience design. When disasters come they can shine an intense spotlight on where our weak points are, but a lot of people here have been talking about those weak points for a long time." (See "Earthaven Member Facilitates Mutual Aid in Hurricane Helene Territory," p. 20.)

Earthaven continues to explore ways to strengthen food systems on the land; support our village-scale economy, housing plans, energy independence, and care for our land; and expand our mission-based impact. Our roads hugging the streams were built 100 years ago. Why don't we move them to higher ground in this time of climate change? The storm sparked us to seek funding in a new GoFundMe campaign to reroute our roads out of the floodplain, rebuild damaged bridges in a

## Earthaven's GoFundMe Campaign to Develop More Climate Resilience

This crowdfunding campaign seeks funds to support Earthaven's readiness for future storms by moving the community's main road to higher ground, stabilizing creek banks, and improving riparian zones along creeks, as well as harvesting what we learn about climate adaptation to share with other communities. If you feel moved to support the community's efforts, please donate online at [www.gofundme.com/f/Earthaven-Climate-Resilience](http://www.gofundme.com/f/Earthaven-Climate-Resilience), call (828) 419-4460, or email [Amy@earthaveneducation.org](mailto:Amy@earthaveneducation.org).

If you'd like to contribute to helping repair Amy's damaged Hobbit House, here's the GoFundMe account: [www.gofundme.com/f/AmysHome](http://www.gofundme.com/f/AmysHome).

## Six Climate Resilience Tips for our Readers

Earthaven has been gathering what we're learning about climate resilience to share as part of our living laboratory model of social change. Download our offering, "Rooted in Resilience: 6 Simple Tips for Climate Resilience," from the Earthaven home page, [www.earthaven.org](http://www.earthaven.org).

—DLC

## Earthaven Member Facilitates Mutual Aid in Hurricane Helene Territory

Cooperate WNC, founded by Earthaven member Zev Friedman, is a nonprofit working since 2018 to develop a mutual aid network in western North Carolina, with relationships with individuals and groups in all 22 counties of western North Carolina. Cooperate WNC activities include purchasing and distributing bulk food throughout rural hubs, facilitating training work around transformational conflict systems, and assisting groups in forming savings pools with cooperative financing. The organization focuses on different scales of cooperation and resource-sharing to help make people's lives better in western North Carolina and create more collective power through its connective platforms and events. Upcoming initiatives include access to land for farming and focusing on affordable housing. Cooperate WNC: [cooperatewnc.org](http://cooperatewnc.org).

—GB

way that works with the natural flow of our streams and springs, restore our riparian zones, and look ahead to our longer-term resilience goals.

"When we shift to climate-adaptive approaches, we save time, energy, money, and possibly human lives down the line," said Amy. "The opportunity cost of rebuilding and fighting to maintain a home, road, or anything else that wasn't designed with nature in mind—only to see greater damage in the next storm—is too high. For our own well-being, for the land, and for our budgets, it makes more sense to work with nature than to fight against it.

"We've been raising funds through grants, donations, and loans for the expensive task of repairing our roads, bridges, and riparian zones, and clearing the immense tree fall before it becomes wildfire fodder.

"We want to do more than minimal recovery," she continued. "The world is being called to respond to climate change in an adaptive way. So we want to approach our recovery through a resiliency and adaptation lens. Rather than just fixing our roads and bridges, we want to stabilize our creek banks and do a better job of tending our riparian zones. And instead of continually repairing our main road after storms, the most climate-adaptive and ecologically sound approach is to surrender that part of the land back to the creek and move the road to higher ground." (See "Earthaven's GoFundMe Campaign to Develop More Climate Resilience," left.)

National Public Radio (NPR) visited Earthaven in April to highlight strengths and strategies ecovillages have to offer the world for greater climate resilience. (See "Six Climate Resilience Tips for our Readers," left.)

The contrast between Hurricane Helene's impacts on Earthaven and its impacts elsewhere in western North Carolina deeply underscored the decades of work we've done to create and strengthen our ecovillage as a living laboratory for a regenerative future. "Our resilience didn't come from last-minute efforts," observes our facilitator/leader Rachel. "It came from decades of designing and growing a community with ecologically and socially regenerative principles and lifestyles in mind." 🐦

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*Diana Leafe Christian and Grace Birch are friends and neighbors at Earthaven. Grace is a journalist and publicist with New Orleans roots and has over 20 years' experience in communications and hurricanes. Diana, author of *Creating a Life Together* and *Finding Community*, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops and online training on creating successful new communities, on working effectively with conflict in community, and on Sociocracy—an especially effective self-governance and decision-making method.*

*The authors thank Andy Bosley, Amy Belanger, Bruce Johnston, Chris Farmer, Greg Clark, Griffin Abee, Kaitlin Ilya Wolf, Rachel Fee, Zev Friedman, and many other villagers they spoke with for kindly sharing stories, and those who worked so valiantly to make sure everyone on the land and all the neighbors we could reach were safely housed, fed, and comforted in the devastating aftermath of the storm.*



*We aim to make our community more climate-resilient both now and for these Earthaven people, our future generations.*

Courtesy of Diana Leafe Christian

# Fire and Ice, Sorrow and Soil: Finding Refuge in a Fractured World

By Kristina Jansen



Photos courtesy of Kristina Jansen

## I. Fire, Loss, and the Question of Refuge

At the end of last October, we lost one of our founding community members. His death came slowly, tenderly, through the long decline of old age—but still it shook us. Not just because of who he was, but because of what he represented: he was a centripetal force for so much of what we did together, his presence woven into nearly every thread of the fabric of our daily lives. He was probably the most central person in our community's life, and losing him, despite the fact we had been preparing for it for years, felt like an emotional earthquake.

Just a week later, the political ground around us shifted violently with the 2024 presidential election and its sweeping reversals. What had felt like background noise suddenly roared forward: rights stripped, protections reversed, climate policy gutted. I'm a clean energy professional, closely linked to environmental justice campaigns and immigrants' rights questions, so this shift in the political winds, while not surprising, also hit me and my friends and colleagues hard. We were grieving one kind of loss while watching another take shape.

In reading the prompts for this issue of *COMMUNITIES*, my mind kept reaching back to the iconic Robert Frost poem that

opens with these lines: "Some say the world will end in fire, Some say in ice."

Lately, as I've watched the inner and outer turmoil between these losses—personal, professional, political—it's felt as if these two forces, fire and ice, are both raging around us. The fire of political chaos and social rage. The ice of numbness, fear, and creeping despair.

In the months since, I've reflected often on why living in community is so important to me, and why I've chosen to spend my life in close contact with other people. This essay is a short meditation on some of the things that have come up.

## II. Living Through Collapse

Professionally, I've been working on climate and energy issues for nearly two decades. In the nonprofit world, I organized resilience campaigns after catastrophic fires and mudslides. I led webinars on climate grief, convened leaders in the field of ecopsychology, and helped communities prepare for a future that was already arriving faster than we could process it. It was all done through the lens of optimism and a focus on solutions. Part of my time in the nonprofit world involved running a website and podcast *The Optimist Daily*, a solutions-focused



media platform. Each day we highlighted the people and ideas that rarely make it to the front page, but that are nevertheless always working towards a healthier, more resilient, more interconnected, sustainable world.

In the face of several massive forest fires that have plagued my part of Coastal California in the last few decades, and particularly in the last five years, and in multiple cases the floods and debris flows that have followed, my work turned often towards resilience and community support networks. Seeking solutions around giving psychological first aid, building resilient infrastructure, rebuilding with more sustainable methods, and moving our electric system away from carbon dependence.

Eventually, I transitioned back to the for-profit space, hoping to scale solutions. I joined a team building utility-scale renewable energy projects to help decarbonize the grid. I believed—still believe—in the power of practical optimism. With multiple levels of government and corporate leadership finally acknowledging the dire need to transition away from a carbon-based economy, my industry was a very exciting and meaningful place to be. But lately, even our work has come under attack. Political backlash, market sabotage, and misinformation campaigns threaten the very future we're trying to secure.

Eco-grief isn't a pathology. It's a rational response to watching the systems around you unravel while you're still expected to keep showing up for work, sending emails, and acting like normal life continues. And yet, even in that unraveling, there are threads of hope.

### III. A Conversation with the Next Generation

Not long ago, I was talking with one of my interns from *The Optimist Daily*. He was then a 21-year-old college student, curious, and brimming with energy. We were discussing the climate crisis, and he said something that struck me:

"I think a lot of young people are going to want to live in communities. Life is so much more rewarding when we acknowledge the interconnectedness of the world. Like, that include food forests, shared housing, ecological restoration...all that makes too much sense now. I think that's the future."

He was talking about a shift not just in housing, but in worldview. A turn away from the consumer-focused, individualistic,

extractive mentalities that built the current global system. I told him I agreed. In fact, I said, we'll either move back into community-based social systems with intention—or we'll do it by default, through societal collapse. Either way, we'll become communitarians again. The only question is whether we do it with care or chaos.

### IV. Rereading McLuhan: The Global Village Was Never Unified

Lately, I've been rereading Marshall McLuhan's 1989 book *The Global Village*, coauthored with Bruce R. Powers. I reached back to this text from my undergrad studies, because the world, and especially the way it's portrayed to me through modern mass media, seems so chaotic and confusing. How can we have all these different "truths" about what's happening? How can we balance the reality we can see and sense and feel in our day-to-day relational worlds and the terrifying narratives that inundate our news feeds? As McLuhan famously said, "the medium is the message." So, I reached back to his texts to try to make sense of it all.

McLuhan predicted a 21st century cultural shift from the linear, rational, industrial-era thinking he called "left-hemisphere" to a more holistic, pattern-driven, sensory mode of "right-hemisphere" perception—brought on by electronic media. He called this shift a form of "robotism," meaning a return to tribal, connected, emotionally intense modes of consciousness.

He was right, in many ways. We are living in a decentralized world, one where top-down authority is crumbling, and networks of meaning are constantly being reassembled. But the global village he envisioned isn't harmonious. It's fractured, chaotic, and emotionally raw.

And yet, amid the noise, community still emerges; in mutual aid networks, in shared gardens, in group chats and grief circles. The village was never about unity—it was about proximity and feedback. In the face of natural disasters this is where the community shines most brightly. I think about Rebecca Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*, and her description of how people came out to save each other in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, as well as other disasters, and how this has proven the case time and again. I think about also how close I feel to my fellow com-

munity members when we have an excuse to work together, especially in the face of disaster, natural or otherwise.

## V. Community as Refuge (Not Utopia)

In the center of our recent losses, something unexpected happened: our community of friends—our chosen family—doubled down on our commitment to each other. We renewed the small rituals of kindness and generosity that have sustained us for decades. We came together for big meals, and in our grief, we turned to the soil. What began as a work session became something sacred...spending weekends ripping up the old yard so that we could create a new garden. We planted a Japanese maple tree, and added a fountain encircled by a stone bench, creating a serene place for reflection. We added lights and an outdoor table, to share meals in nature's beauty. We told stories and took turns sitting with the sorrow. We remembered what it meant to belong, and why we've been sharing our lives for the past 40-plus years.

The death of our elder didn't fracture our community. It clarified it. We returned to each other not out of nostalgia, but necessity. We needed solace, and found it in the meals we cooked, the laughter we shared, the weeds and rocks we pulled from the soil.

We are not a perfect community. We have conflict. We get tired. But we have cultivated a culture of care—slowly, intentionally, and over time. It stands in stark contrast to the federal systems that seem designed to punish the vulnerable, to isolate the grieving, and to reward the cruel.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler imagined a world not far from ours—ravaged by climate chaos, corporate greed, and social decay. In it, the protagonist builds a new belief system: *Earthseed*. Its core truth? "God is Change." In times of fire and flood, only the adaptable survive—and the adaptable are rarely alone. They move in clusters. They hold each other up.

## VI. What Survives the Fire

This is what I know now: we are not meant to face collapse alone. The future will be forged in community—either chosen with intention or inherited through necessity. Our work now is to build the emotional infrastructure that can withstand ecological and political storms. To learn how to live through grief

and still plant seeds. To keep showing up.

Six months after our founding friend passed, we held a celebration of his life in the new memorial garden we had shed our sweat to create. In just this past month, we suffered another friend's passing, and the joyous birth of a new baby. Then last weekend, we gathered again—this time for a wedding—my wedding, in fact. And everyone my husband and I care about—from our closest community friends to our outside family, colleagues, and friends—most of them came. Funerals, marriages, births. Sorrows, joys, and celebration. The circle of life is turning. And we are finding a new path through it all together.

McLuhan's robotism is here, but it doesn't have to mean surrender. It can mean reintegration—of body, mind, earth, and neighbor. It can mean becoming human again, together.

And so, in the end, I return to Frost—not for prophecy, but for metaphor. Fire and ice may both come. But it is warmth, in all its forms, that we must fight to preserve. It will be our communities—flawed and messy and miraculous—that save us. 🌸

*The full text of Robert Frost's Poem:*

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

—Robert Frost<sup>1</sup>

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

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1. Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice" from *New Hampshire*. Copyright © 1923 by Robert Frost.



# The Sadness of the World

*By Yana Ludwig*

There are places  
open to the world  
where I keep parts of myself  
for display. I mark them  
carefully  
so there can be no mistakes.

I am feeling the sadness  
of the world today.

Today the truths  
I've collected  
like museum pieces  
have all gone greyscale.

Today I am not the crow  
collecting  
bright and beautiful things.

Today I will let  
this sad day  
be slow  
and itself.

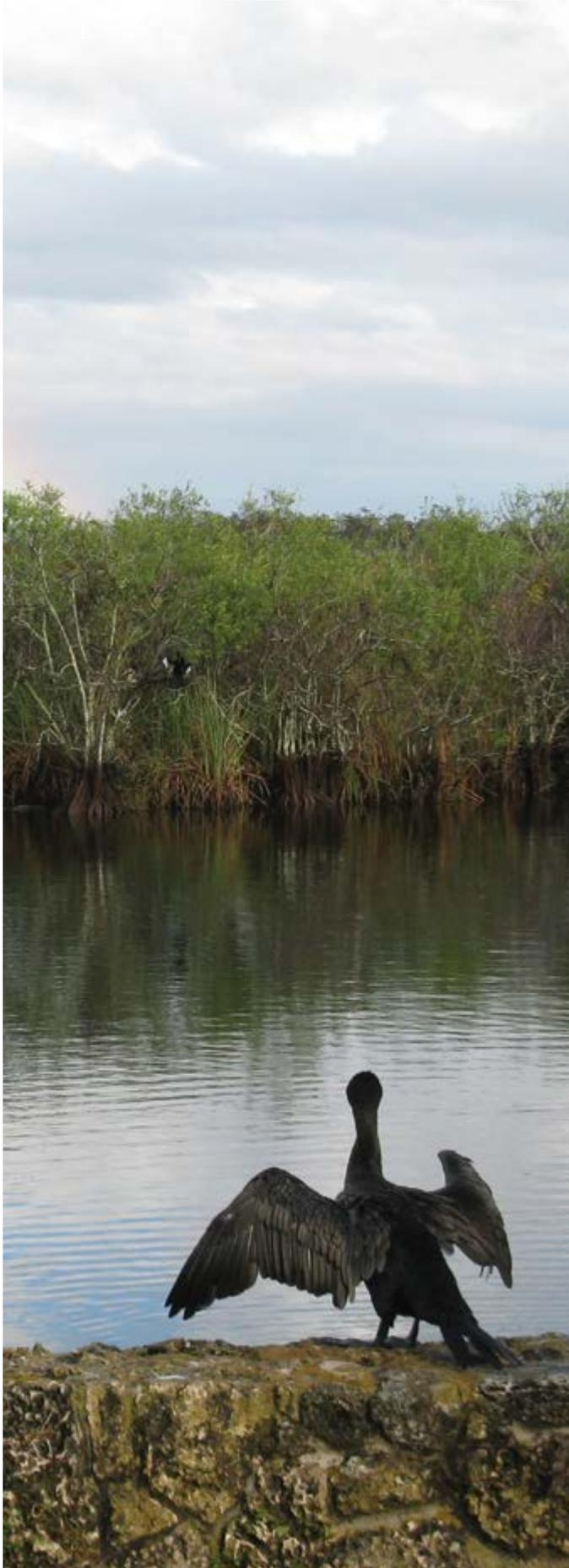
Today I will sit  
with sadness,  
and not ask  
questions.

Today I will witness  
my own empty hands  
and get curious  
about them again.

Today I will dare  
my hall of display  
to let things crumble.

Today I will not ask  
sadness to go anywhere  
without me.

*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—both within and outside the communities movement.*



Chris Roth

# “Spongy” Neighbourhoods Can Reduce City Flooding

By Robin Allison



*Planted swales and gardens at Earthsong help the land to absorb rainwater.*

Photos courtesy of Robin Allison

**M**y suburb of Ranui, west Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, was one of the worst affected when recent storms caused devastating floods, swamping houses, cars, and lives. Everywhere I look as I walk around Ranui I see blocks of six, eight, and 10 townhouses rising above concrete driveways, on sites that previously held single homes and gardens, and I fear the flooding problem will only get worse.

Just along the road from badly flooded areas, the medium density cohousing development called Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood, where I live, fared well in the storms. During the height of the flooding we had water flowing through the property in places we'd never seen before in 20 years, but the water flowed where it was designed to, into the overland stormwater swale system and harmlessly spilling over onto the paths down to the pond. No houses were flooded and the water quickly drained away.

Earthsong was planned 24 years ago to the highest practical standards of environmental sustainability at the time. We were committed to being “good neighbours” to each other and to the wider biosphere which supports us, and that included designing the site layout so that rainwater flowed, and was absorbed on our site, much as it would have before we built our houses. Our recent experience shows that these measures work, and they could (and should) be incorporated into other higher density housing as storms and floods become more frequent.

Earthsong has 32 homes and shared community facilities on 1.29 hectares, a density of one dwelling per 400 square meters, including the driveway and carparks. Not as dense as many new townhouse developments, but much denser than the older suburban model of single homes on sections of 600 or 800 square meters.

With shared open space, driveway, and carparks, the site design is optimised for

the benefit of all residents and for effective on-site management of stormwater. The relatively dense neighbourhood still feels spacious and relaxed, with pathways winding between homes and productive gardens, allowing children to play safely and neighbours to have a chat as they come and go from their houses.

Compared to the neighbouring 1960s suburban subdivision over the fence, Earthsong has nearly twice as many dwellings but a similar total combined building footprint. Earthsong carparks and driveway cover less than half the total paved area of the standard subdivision beside us, and our carparks have permeable paving, allowing stormwater from the driveway to soak into the ground.

We treat water as a gift and a resource rather than a waste problem. Rainwater is collected from roofs into water tanks that supply 60 percent of household water needs, while reducing the amount of rain flowing into the stormwater system.

## Resilience and Action

Design is important, but communities such as Earthsong can contribute so much more by modelling the sustainable societies we want to bring into existence. Environmental sustainability was only one of three commitments articulated in Earthsong's founding Vision Statement, along with social sustainability and education by demonstration. These three pillars guided our project throughout development and construction and continue to underpin everything we do.

But now, in 2025, is it still enough to be a sustainable community, doing things well for ourselves but as an island in an increasingly dysfunctional and desperate world? How do we value what we've got as well as look at how we can evolve? What more do we need to do?

For the last two years Earthsong has been part of the Global Ecovillage Network Resilience Project. This project is an exploration of how ecovillages can build capacity and community-led approaches to adaptation and regeneration in the context of extreme climate change and other polycrises that are increasingly impacting our lives.

As a relatively dense suburban neighbourhood surrounded by standard single homes in a diverse but socioeconomically disadvantaged suburb, Earthsong is not viable as a stand-alone ecovillage with our very small land area; our resilience is integrally dependent on the resilience of our wider neighbourhood.

We can share knowledge and skills about practical things; we can help our neighbours learn to grow food, to make and repair useful items, to reduce energy use and waste. But decades of struggling in the capitalist system have disempowered so many of our lower-income neighbours.

Through the Resilience Project we realised that one of the important contributions we can make to our wider neighbourhood, that underpins the valuing of those practical actions, is supporting and growing a sense of agency. We all have some influence and control in our lives. What we do and the choices we make matter, and we can exercise those choices to have richer, more connected lives, rather than waiting for "them" to fix it for us.

Being part of the GEN Resilience Project has helped us to face the likely future of traumatic change, to deeply consider what we care about as a community and to think together about where we need to put our attention, to both strengthen our own resilience and to contribute to the resilience of our wider neighbourhood. Earthsong is up for that journey.

—RA

Water is not channelled into pipes in the ground until it leaves the site. All surface rainwater flows into densely planted swales (wide shallow channels) beside the paths, running down the site to discharge into a pond at the northern end. This overland stormwater system acts like a sponge, allowing the water to soak naturally back into the ground, filtering sediments and nourishing plants, increasing biodiversity and reducing water runoff from the site.

Fittingly for land that was previously a commercial orchard, we have over 200 fruit trees at Earthsong and numerous native trees and shrubs. Vegetable gardens are tucked into small and larger areas around the site, and lawn areas are minimised, all of which contributes to water absorption on site.

All of these measures help to reduce and even out the flow of water into the council stormwater system to what would have flowed off the site in a medium storm when it was still an orchard. With 32 houses, common buildings, and associated driveway and carparks where only two houses stood before, this is a huge reduction in impact. These measures can be designed into other medium density subdivisions, even those much denser than Earthsong.

Rethinking the design of housing and neighbourhoods is critical to addressing the environmental crises we are increasingly facing, not to mention the social crises of loneliness and isolation. It is possible to design attractive, neighbourly medium density environments, and still absorb much of the stormwater that the site would have coped with pre-development. 🌱

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*Robin Allison is cofounder of Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood and author of Cohousing for Life: A Practical and Personal Story of Earthsong Eco-Neighbourhood, Mary Egan Publishing, 2020. See [earthsong.org.nz](http://earthsong.org.nz) and [robinallison.co.nz](http://robinallison.co.nz).*



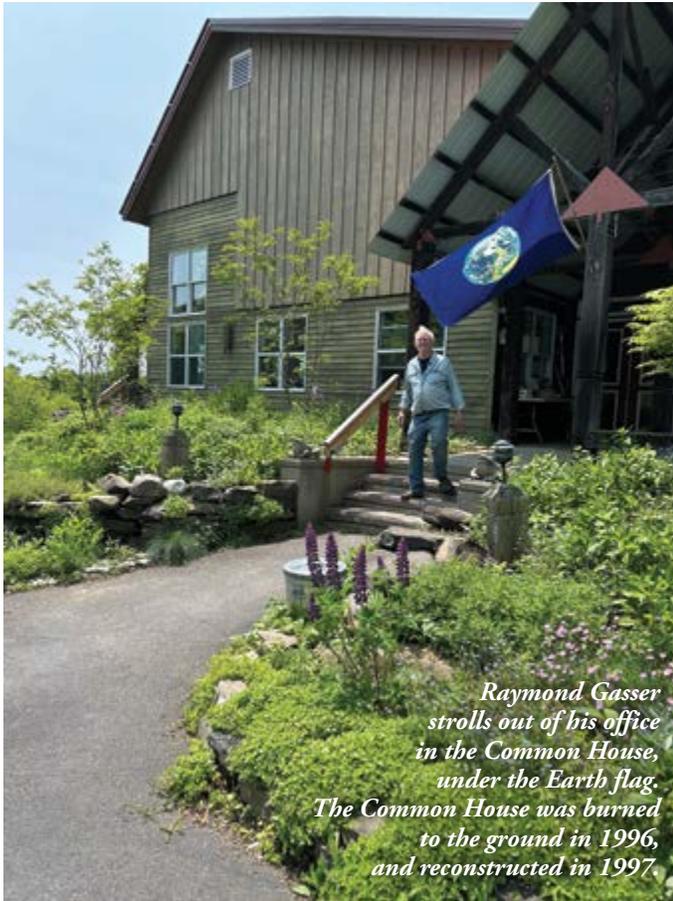
*The planted swales beside the paths lie ready to channel rainwater.*



*The same length of swale becomes a small river in the flood.*

# Phoenix Rising

By Liz Walker



*Raymond Gasser strolls out of his office in the Common House, under the Earth flag. The Common House was burned to the ground in 1996, and reconstructed in 1997.*

Liz Walker

especially important that we lend a hand to get the family into its new home.

The moving party went quickly, but I was tired, grubby, and still dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans when our first Open House visitors started arriving half an hour early. I served hot spiced cider and showed people our lovely passive solar home, then sent them on to tour several other homes. Before it got dark, over 120 eager visitors came to see what this crazy “ecovillage” was all about.

My partner, Jared, and I were hanging out in our living room with a handful of friends after the event. We were congratulating ourselves on how well it had gone when someone looked out the window and yelled, “Fire!” Orange flames burst out of the roof of a home under construction, just a hundred feet away. We called the fire department and raced to find buckets of water or hoses. But the fire had already spread out of control. I ran outside with the others and watched helplessly as 70-foot-high flames spread from duplex to duplex, then jumped the 40-foot gap to the Common House. Waves of heat pressed through my winter clothes, and my eyes streamed with smoke. How could this be happening?



*Neighborhood path showing area that was burned down 29 years ago.*

Liz Walker

Even though my back and arms were sore, I felt exhilarated as I stirred a huge pot of hot spiced cider on the stove. It was a cold but sunny morning in mid-November, 1996, with a hint of snow in the air outside. But inside it was toasty, and as I inhaled the sweet aroma of cloves and cinnamon, I felt triumphant. We had worked so hard for this moment!

After four and a half years of intensive planning, designing, and building, the very first families were moving into their new homes in EcoVillage Ithaca, New York’s first cohousing community. While half of the neighborhood was still being built, our family had recently joined seven others that had already settled in.

Now, just two weeks later, we were hosting an Open House. We had sent out press releases and invited the public to come and see this new “eco-housing.” But before the Open House got started, we organized a group to help our ninth family to move in.

Rod Lambert, Julia Morgan, and their children came to us from the province of Ontario, Canada. They had decided that it would be easier to join us than to start an ecovillage project there. Unfortunately, Julia fell sick with pneumonia, so it was

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## We were alive and well. People mattered most. Homes could always be rebuilt.

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Agonizing minutes passed before the first of eight volunteer fire departments started arriving. The fire spread as if it were a bonfire just getting started, feeding on the kindling of half-finished homes built of wood. I ran back to our house. I had no idea where Jared was.

There was a loud knock on the door. A large firefighter was silhouetted against the black sky with shooting red flames behind him. “Ma’am, you have five minutes to leave. Take your belongings with you.” I stood in disbelief in the middle of my new, beautiful home, built after so many years of work, trying to decide what to take. The photo albums of the kids! I raced upstairs, only to find all our unpacked boxes in a pile on the floor. I had no idea how to find the right ones. Instead, I grabbed my winter coat and boots, a toothbrush and deodorant, and rushed out the door. (Luckily the kids were downtown with their dad.)

As I ran to the parking lot, I dodged hand-sized burning cinders that were falling like huge, glowing, black snowflakes. Would my hair catch on fire? I jumped into my car, heart beating wildly, and escaped the burning chaos of the night. Once downtown, I joined a couple dozen other EcoVillagers who had gathered in one woman’s apartment, and to my relief, Jared showed up, too. We shared tidbits of news along with some hot soup. Thankfully, no one had been hurt.

At midnight we received an incredibly welcome call: The fire had been put out and we could all go home. Over 100 firefighters, including the mayor, had responded to the call and worked for hours to control the blaze—one of the largest ever seen in Ithaca. The Common House and eight homes under construction had burned to the ground. Another six had been damaged but were still standing. None of the occupied homes had been affected.

As we drove back, I felt an odd mix of shock and profound gratitude to be home. Jared and I picked our way through the debris, the acrid smell of burned wood searing our nostrils, to find our home completely intact. Later I would find out that our home, the next one in line after the eight burned ones, was within a minute or two of catching fire when the fire department managed to hook up to the fire hydrant by the pond.

Exhausted, we fell into bed. The next day, as the sun poured into our living room, we hosted a gathering to assess what to do. As I looked around at the large group, I was surprised and pleased to see so many smiling faces. We had just lived through a major crisis, and many people had lost their homes. But the overall feeling was one of huge gratitude: we were alive and

well. People mattered most. Homes could always be rebuilt.

From that profound lesson, generosity flowed. A single woman gave up her newly completed house to a family that had nowhere to go, since they had been planning to move in within a few weeks, and now their house was a charred mass. A couple graciously allowed another family to move into their home, since they could continue renting downtown for a while. A retired couple offered to open their home for potluck dinners and meetings until the Common House could be rebuilt. By the end of the gathering, I looked around to see joyful, beaming faces. We didn’t know how we would get through this uncertain time, but we knew we’d do it together.

In the following weeks we learned how the fire had started. One of the subcontractors used an old truck to blow cellulose insulation into the walls of our super-insulated homes. He discovered that the truck’s engine was smoldering. While he put out the fire promptly, apparently a spark had already flown into the insulation hopper and was inadvertently blown into the house. Twenty-four hours later, that second fire burst into flames in the attic of the locked house. It was a crazy fluke. Luckily, we received full compensation through our builder’s risk insurance policy and gradually rebuilt the neighborhood over the next 10 months.

Once all 30 households had finally moved in, we started enjoying the true benefits of cohousing: shared meals, shared celebrations, and an even stronger sense of community. We knew that if we could live through fire, we could live through anything. 🌸

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*EcoVillage Ithaca cofounder Liz Walker adapted and expanded this article from her first book, *EcoVillage at Ithaca: Pioneering a Sustainable Culture* (New Society Publishers, 2005). She is also author of *Choosing a Sustainable Future: Ideas and Inspiration from Ithaca, New York* (New Society Publishers, 2010). Liz lives with her husband at EcoVillage Ithaca. Whenever she gets a chance, she loves to go biking, or hiking in the beautiful gorges in the Finger Lakes region of New York. She also loves to garden, and coordinates the EVI Food Hub, which donates excess garden produce to people in need. See also “We Are Rising Strong: 30 Years of Exploring Resilient Living” in *COMMUNITIES #191, Summer 2021*.*



*Residents Marcy Little,  
her husband  
Chris White,  
and Liz Walker.*

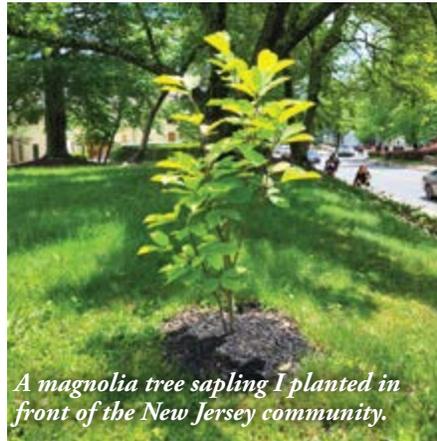
Chris White

# A Tale of Two Co-Ops

By Jasper Baton Lydon



*Shang at a pumpkin painting event at New Jersey community house.*



*A magnolia tree sapling I planted in front of the New Jersey community.*



*Two housemates' "cheers" at our San Francisco community house's tea party.*

Photos courtesy of Jasper Baton Lydon

I've co-led co-op houses in New Jersey and now California. Going between the two has taught me some unexpected lessons in disaster preparation.

In San Francisco, I bike everywhere and rarely worry about the weather. A few months ago, though, I was biking home from an hour away when a deluge struck. Within minutes, my clothes were dripping wet, I was squinting to keep my eyes open against the droplets hitting my face, and gusts of wind tried to push me off-course.

These kinds of downpours are becoming more common in San Francisco. My housemate Chase grew up just 20 minutes from where we now reside in our seven-person, three-pet community house. Chase recollects that growing up, they rarely ever saw significant rainfall during the daytime; it would only storm at night, when temperatures were cooler. Data from the California Public Utilities Commission confirms that climate change is causing more intense bouts of rainfall in the Bay Area, and the trend is expected to continue.

As I'm a native East Coaster, rain storms are nothing new to me. When organizing events for my New Jersey co-op, we would always need a rain contingency plan, bracing for any kind of weather. We always imagined that the big-scale natural disasters, though, were relegated to other regions—wildfires and earthquakes never crossed our mind as a possibility.

Just this past April, though, New Jersey faced its largest single wildfire in nearly 20 years, ravaging over 13,000 acres. And last fall, hundreds of wildfires popped up across the state in response to a period of severe drought.

Now, New Jerseyans are reckoning with fire, as Californians reckon with flood.

As I've been transitioning between the two regions, this flip-flop highlights to me the importance of cross-country co-ops learning from each other.

As climate patterns shift, regions are having to prepare for new types of disasters they haven't reckoned with before. For other regions and intentional communities, that type of disaster might be nothing new.

From my time in New Jersey, I've learned how to address flood risk in community—bracing structures against impact, grading the ground so stormwater can be absorbed by plants, and putting out rainwater catching buckets to collect water for the gardens.

In California, I'm learning wildfire safety techniques I can send back to my community in New Jersey—avoiding planting trees directly next to buildings, and replacing invasive species with more locally adapted native plants, for example.

In disaster preparation, cross-country connections can help strengthen our resilience, not just in expanding our support network, but also because we can gain concrete tips from each other to prepare for new types of disasters.

As climate change continues and our communities look to the future, we're going to need to brace ourselves against types of environmental risks we haven't faced before.

So why not call up a friend from another region, ask how they're planning for their region's major climate events, and see what concrete ideas they might have for your community? In this issue of COMMUNITIES, you may also gather ideas for how other regions are preparing against natural disasters, and find small steps that can safeguard your home against the unpredictable.

Plus, what a practical way to bond with distant communitarians over existential dread.

That night in the California rain, I ended up biking home safely. Though the storm was scary at times, the rain felt nice, and I couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of it all.

As the water soaked into my skin, I was reminded that even leagues away, nature keeps us all connected. Despite its ferocity, the rainstorm felt like a little slice of home. 🍷

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# Resilience in the Face of Chaos: Finding New Meaning Amid Despair

*By Jennifer Jaylyn Morgan*

Imagine waking up in the middle of the night with your heart racing and a tightness in your chest. The world outside is silent, but inside, a sense of impending doom looms. This foreboding sensation of standing on the edge of uncertainty—whether due to fear of the future, empathy for the suffering around us, or the pressure to make a difference—reminds us that we traverse a complex and chaotic world together, often in collective grief.

As someone who has navigated anxiety throughout my adult life, I want to share my experience of finding meaning amid despair and uncertainty. This article specifically focuses on eco-anxiety, which is particularly relevant for activists and those who are environmentally conscious. The emotional journey from inspiration and activism to feelings of inevitability and fear regarding ecosystem collapse is complicated, especially as the realities of climate change become increasingly evident and as many of us face more complex trauma.

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Activists and community organizers often start their journey with a strong sense of purpose and agency, believing in the power of collective action to counter environmental degradation and societal oppression. This inspiration drives us to organize in the community, promote regenerative practices, and advocate for systemic change, while finding comfort and inspiration in being part of a larger movement, where shared efforts contribute to meaningful progress.



However, as the impacts of climate change become more visible—through worsening weather events and alarming scientific reports—this inspiration can wane into despair. A growing awareness of the crisis's scale can lead to disappointment in collective action and a sense of helplessness when facing the complex reality of an inevitable disaster. Many experience disillusionment, realizing that despite their best efforts, the forces driving collapse are too powerful, and the political will to enact necessary changes is lacking. This realization can prompt some to withdraw from activism and advocacy, adopting a fatalistic view that collapse is unavoidable or warranted, leading to the belief that change is futile or unattainable.

The psychological impact of this shift can be profound as individuals grapple with the implications of a world facing ecological and societal disruptions while feeling helpless to enact meaningful change. Those of us who once believed in the possibility of mitigating the effects of climate change may now feel deep disappointment and grief over humanity's inaction.

Addressing eco-anxiety among socially and ecologically minded individuals requires a nuanced approach that recognizes the unique layers of identity and motivation tied to those engaged in collective change. They are often deeply committed to environmental and social issues, driven by values and a sense of responsibility toward future generations. This strong connection can intensify emotional responses to a sense of inaction, making individuals more susceptible to despair when faced with setbacks or a lack of progress.

When an individual's identity intertwines with their sense of purpose, their mental health can be significantly affected

by their ability to effect change. Acknowledging the gravity of the situation is vital. While cultivating internal resilience and promoting constructive action can help some of us navigate these emotional hurdles, engaging in new meaning-making might be necessary for others to reignite a sense of purpose.

The journey from inspiration and empowerment to despair and helplessness in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss reflects broader societal struggles. Recognizing and validating these feelings is crucial for integrating collective grief and finding renewed pathways to live purposefully. My personal story is one of refocusing my attention on resilience amid chaos and despair.

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In the early 1990s, I aligned with deep ecology principles, driven by a profound belief in the intrinsic value of the Earth, its animals, and ecosystems. I dedicated myself to environmental advocacy, often prioritizing nature over humanity and, inevitably, over myself. In my fervor, I developed strong anti-anthropocentrism, anti-technology, and anti-capitalist sentiments, believing human actions were detrimental to the planet.

As a youth leader in environmental initiatives, I struggled with the overwhelming immediacy of the environmental crisis. I directed this sense of urgency by advocating for radical yet practical changes in human behavior and societal structures to achieve ecological balance, seeking a more egalitarian relationship between humanity and nature.

Simultaneously, my early interests in yoga and Eastern philosophies guided me toward embracing compassion, softening my frustration, and allowing me to understand the interconnectedness between humans and nature. I began to see that cultivating genuine connections with people could inspire change more effectively than a judgment-based approach. This evolution led me to combine deep ecology with empathy, understanding, and care for human conditions.

Compassionate ecology felt holistic, recognizing our interconnectedness and emphasizing that we can't solve problems



Photos by Chris Roth

by removing human elements, as they are part of the system. This perspective added social justice and well-being to my focus. I began communicating my passion for the environment in ways that resonated with others, sharing my story to inspire engagement on their terms and building a sense of agency within my community. I understood that while action is vital, it must be pursued inclusively, allowing a broader range of voices to contribute to addressing social and ecological injustices.

I studied Permaculture, Agroforestry, Holistic Management, Naturopathy, and Eco-villages. These approaches were value-aligned and applicable. I founded the Center for Holistic Ecology in 2003, driven by a sense of necessity to shift culture toward regenerative practices. Each small victory contributed to a larger movement against climate change and ecosystem destruction. While I understood that aspects of collapse were inevitable, I still believed in potential mitigation and restabilization.

However, between 2012 and 2014, I realized the weight of this commitment was becoming too much to bear as the window for mitigating dire outcomes rapidly closed. The focus and intensity of my dedication took a toll on my mental and physical health, leading to burnout—a state that was neither healthy nor productive. I also recognized that my commitment and overwork were unrealistic models for others to follow. My audience sought inspiration and connection, not exhaustion, highlighting a critical realization that lasting change cannot be built on sacrifice. Simultaneously, the ticking clock of increasing chaos became louder around me.

By around 2016, I grappled with the harsh reality that climate change's detrimental effects were already upon us. The ecosystems I worked to respect and protect suffered exponentially increasing amounts of harm each year, and it felt too late to mitigate or reverse the damage. The inspiration that had motivated me for decades felt depleted and inadequate, slowly giving way to feelings of defeat, resignation, and increasing anxiety.

For me, eco-anxiety manifested as a shifting spectrum of fear, grief, apathy, and disassociation regarding current and future environmental disasters and a growing disappointment in humanity. It also brought about feelings of guilt regarding my newfound sense of inaction and helplessness, leading to moments of depression. I knew I wasn't alone in this struggle; multiple studies show that eco-anxiety has significantly increased in recent decades. Additionally, a 2021 survey by the Environmental Defense Fund noted that burnout was becoming more prevalent among climate activists, with 76 percent feeling overwhelmed by the crisis's scale.



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While recovering from burnout, I underwent a grieving process, mourning a lost future of ecological and social balance—a future I once dreamed of but now realized I would likely never witness. I also grieved my identity as a change agent as I felt disconnected from my sense of purpose, which had once felt like my birthright. I began to embrace the likely end of humanity as we know it, leading to a heavy acceptance of our current reality, including a growing awareness of my fragility as I aged.

This realization marked a pivotal shift in my journey, prompting me to seek an approach that emphasized my well-being alongside and often above the pressing need for collective action, a reversal of my former focus. My search for new meaning led me to revisit conscious evolutionary philosophies I had once occasionally critiqued for reinforcing anthropocentric worldviews. Transitioning from a mindset of self-sacrifice to one of self-care was challenging for me, as I had long held a belief that self-centric worldviews contributed to the planet's destruction.

Yet self-centeredness and self-care are not synonymous. Caring for yourself can be a powerful way to show up for others. While there are valid critiques of mindfulness teachings focusing excessively on self-improvement over societal issues, I recognize the valuable tools they offer, especially in this time when studies indicate that trauma is becoming more prevalent around the world. If we cannot care for our bodies and minds or integrate our trauma, we will struggle to care for the planet. Prioritizing well-being equips us to take action for the world around us, with greater empathy, resilience, and the ability to make a difference.

Unintegrated trauma has significant societal consequences, and studies indicate that its prevalence is rising globally. Although I have understood and taught the concepts of self-care and trauma integration for decades, it was not until 2019—when I faced a series of complex crises that affected me physically—that I truly grasped how trauma, compounded by burnout, impacts a person's ability to create change. Within just 12 months, I provided hospice care, confronted challenging career choices that influenced my professional identity and financial security, experienced the tragically violent deaths of two loved ones, lost my cat, endured a natural disaster as an EF3 tornado ravaged my city, and suffered a consequential injury that evolved into a health crisis.

Losing my ecosocial career focus and, with it, my sense of purpose as a change agent really dismantled my ability to cope with these other traumatic life events. I felt powerless and purposeless, with nowhere to meaningfully direct my energy. Despite my having prepared for catastrophic scenarios for decades, the pandemic struck when I felt most vulnerable. Since then, I have spent several years healing from and integrating that cumulative trauma while also striving to rediscover a sense of meaning and purpose in light of the world's current state.

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I began practicing mindfulness moment by moment. I focused on my internal landscape, recognizing the importance of self-care amid the vulnerability and anxiety I felt. Having studied and taught yoga and meditation in the mid-'90s, I began to re-explore practices that cultivate presence and acceptance in the face of uncertainty, prioritizing my mental and physical health while building resilience. Acknowledging my feelings, especially the common and valid experiences of anxiety, was crucial. Allowing myself to express these emotions—through journaling, confiding in friends, or therapy—helped lighten the burden I carried.

Embracing mindfulness and self-compassion became essential for understanding my new physical limitations. Practicing tuning into my nervous system helped me stay present. Grounding myself in the moment and nurturing my well-being cultivated a sense of calm that empowered me to navigate challenges.

Setting realistic goals played a significant role; I focused on small, achievable objectives on my off-grid homestead, like enjoying gardening and composting, which provided a manageable sense of purpose. Each minor victory reminded me that meaningful action was still possible, even if collapse and death were inevitable. I had to embrace and come to terms with the possibility that I might never be able to enact the change I hoped to see in the world. Grieving my identity was a humbling experience, compelling me to confront my original motivations and aspirations while accepting the uncertainty of both my impact and my physical condition. It became a journey of redefining my purpose and finding value in the smaller, yet meaningful daily choices I made, allowing me to nurture a sense of fulfillment.

To protect my mental health and counteract feelings of planetary despair, I limited my exposure to negative news. I avoided getting swept up in issues completely out of my control, while still seeking positive stories that highlighted progress, however minor, within ecosocial movements, alongside celebrating milestones in my healing.

Personal reflection was vital in reigniting my sense of purpose, even when the

larger picture seemed bleak. As I shifted my focus to internal change, I recognized that cultivating presence, gratitude, and a connection to the immediacy of the natural world nurtured a more meaningful outlook. Spending time in the woods was a source of solace as I recuperated. Forgiveness and self-compassion were significant in my journey—learning to observe, allow, release, and focus on growth

My biggest lesson in dealing with anxiety has been the power of accepting uncertainty, while remaining committed to showing up. Embracing the unknown has been liberating; I cannot control most outcomes in life. I shifted my focus to what I could do in the present moment, encouraging an adaptive mindset essential for navigating feelings of anxiety and releasing what is out of my control in the world around me. Accepting my thoughts and feelings without judgment and shifting my internal stories became important practices. I learned to allow complex emotions to exist rather than trying to suppress or solve them. This acceptance helped me develop a more open-minded approach, enabling me to respond to life's challenges more calmly and with less attachment to the outcomes.

I can now acknowledge that the efforts I make in my daily life—whether through work, community engagement, advocacy, or personal actions at home—can still feel meaningful and purposeful while simultaneously recognizing that we have surpassed the tipping point of environmental stability. This contradiction highlights the shared struggle to find hope and purpose in our actions while grappling with the overwhelming challenges posed by a changing planet.

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Attachment to mitigating the destruction of the world around me turned out to be more of a burden than I could carry. Instead, I'm now motivated to first and foremost do my best to stay centered and value-aligned, and then to assist others in doing the same. To help people understand our shared plight and find peace amid our collective chaos. To face likely near-term extinction with open eyes and a loving heart. To help people learn to be present, regulate their nervous

systems, and prepare themselves, their families, and communities for inevitable change.

Other aspects of resilience remain vital, including advocacy for regenerative living and cultivating strong social networks to meet our needs for a fulfilling life and stay prepared for crises. Recognizing our ability to adapt is crucial—not just for mitigating collapse but for navigating realities. Agility allows us to respond effectively to changing circumstances and pivot strategies as needed, ensuring a proactive mindset in an evolving environment.

Educating ourselves about the various dimensions of crises—environmental, social, and economic—enables us to approach challenges with an informed mindset. Developing self-reliance skills is still critical for autonomy and local resiliency, while honing interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution enhances community collaboration and effective problem solving. Again, no matter the endgame or collapse scenario, these are all valuable and important skills to cultivate, share, and collectively practice to do our best at living in difficult and uncertain times.

Collaborating with local organizations on emergency response, food security, or mental health support leads to productive action in the here and now and can help us sustain ourselves during crises. Building networks with like-minded individuals generates a sense of belonging and enhances our capacity to face uncertainties.

Disaster preparedness is a foundational aspect of this work, emphasizing emergency plans and readiness training. These actions empower individuals and communities, equipping us to respond effectively to collapse-related events with a sense of security.

Through this winding path, I've come to understand that addressing eco-anxiety and burnout requires a holistic trauma-informed approach that intertwines personal growth with collective action. I've had to rethink my motivations and the ways I seek meaningful engagement. Your journey may mirror parts of mine or be entirely different. Regardless of how you experience eco-anxiety, I encourage you to share your story, engage in important conversations, and explore new relationships and approaches that can help you and your communities find meaning amid the collective trauma, grief, and despair many of us feel.

Together, we can still create change, even if it's just for this moment. That's enough reason for now. 🌱

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# The Climate Crisis and Mental Health

By Jen Myers

**T**oo early for snow, I looked out the window at the flakes falling from orange skies, ashen ghosts of ancient forests blanketing my garden. “This is a glimpse of her future,” I thought to myself. Concealing my tears, I slipped a facemask on my five-year-old to buffer her lungs—not from Covid, this time, but from wildfire smoke.

According to the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, intense winds on Labor Day 2020 fueled “five simultaneous ‘megafires,’” defined as fires larger than 100,000 acres. Over 1.2 million acres burned in Oregon that year, and at least nine people lost their lives. I write this with tears in my eyes nearly five years later as I verify the facts; headlines like “Cascadia Burning” top my search results. The names of the fires—Holiday Farm, Beachie Creek, Lionshead—are seared in my memory.

We lived in Corvallis, Oregon in September 2020, when kindergarten was online and our only respite from the pandemic was out in nature. My daughter and I camped beneath towering Doug fir trees at McKenzie Bridge just two days before the Holiday Farm fire tore through the region. So many of the places I love were burning: the McKenzie River Valley, Opal Creek, Breitenbush. We were among the lucky ones, sheltering evacuees at the county fairgrounds in our local community rather than fleeing our homes. And yet, even as my family was not in immediate danger, I was shaken to the core confronting the future I knew would be my daughter’s inheritance. It was the first time in my life climate change really felt proximal.<sup>1</sup>

In my professional life, I am a sustainability educator, and I think about climate change every day. I conduct research about community resilience, environmental identity, and place attachment. I teach students that the places they love matter and shape who they are, validating their sense of belonging in a culture that valorizes independence and mobility over connection and rootedness. In a Sustainable Communities course I taught for several years at Oregon State University, students wrote environmental autobiographies, sharing deeply personal stories about the ways their lives were shaped by the natural world. My heart broke for them, too, as the wild lands that made them who they are burned to the ground.

I am not alone in my experience of climate grief, anxiety, and outrage, of climate guilt, shame, and fear. Glenn Albrecht coined the term solastalgia to describe feelings associated

with environmental change as “a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home.’”<sup>2</sup> As the places we love are transformed by shifting weather patterns, intensifying storms, rising sea levels, wildfires, and other effects of climate, how do we cope with the emotional weight?

I believe that normalizing our emotional responses to climate change—and the myriad other challenges we face as part of the unfolding polycrisis—in community with others is an essential part of building the resilience we need to move through environmental distress into action. Mandy Füllilove writes that “community practices of love” bind us to places and each other, even in communities experiencing duress.<sup>3</sup> More and more, organizations and resources are emerging to support climate mental health and emotional well-being: The Good Grief Network,<sup>4</sup> the All We Can Save Project,<sup>5</sup> The Work that Reconnects,<sup>6</sup> The Week,<sup>7</sup> the Climate Psychology Alliance of North America,<sup>8</sup> and the Climate Mental Health Network<sup>9</sup> are just a few.

In my community at the EcoVillage at Ithaca (EVI), we are exploring ways to answer the critical questions posed by the Global Ecovillage Network’s (GEN) Resilience Project: “What happens when the aim no longer is to ‘just’ turn society around to avert climate disaster, but how to adapt to and mitigate it, while also striving for a more just, ecological, and meaningful future for all life? What does a regenerative and resilient ecovillage look like, today and in the next 20 years?”<sup>10</sup> EVI has joined the GEN’s Keystone Communities project,<sup>11</sup> working with ecovillages around the world to prepare for a 2.5 degree warming scenario. We are also leaning into relationships with local and regional communities, exploring ways we can support neighbors in our city, watershed, and foodshed.

When young changemakers look to ecovillages as living laboratories of sustainability, they need to see examples of communi-

*Lionshead Fire, September 2020.*



US Forest Service

A climate emotions mandala.



Jen Myers

Students painting climate emotions mandalas at the EcoVillage at Ithaca.



Sylvia Grant, SUNY Potsdam

ties navigating the emotional and relational impacts of the polycrisis. We cannot model climate resilience through green infrastructure and regenerative land use practices alone. At EVI, we are building partnerships with local colleges and universities to offer climate emotions workshops and experiential support groups. This spring, undergraduate students from an Environment and Society course came for a residential education program. We talked about the weight of the polycrisis at a time in their lives when they are imagining what their futures might be. We painted mandalas using the Climate Mental Health Network's climate emotions wheel.<sup>12</sup> Students often reflect on the power of simply sharing space with others who care.

I also believe communities should be thinking seriously about our roles supporting people who are displaced by climate change. As more people move to our communities in search of safe landing places, how will we honor their losses and attend to their needs?

Not long after the fires raged through Oregon in 2020, I realized a lifelong dream of living in an ecovillage. The move was, in part, driven by a desire to offer my daughter opportunities to learn skills in resource sharing, regenerative agriculture, conscious communication, and cooperative gover-

nance—skills that will be essential in her future. I don't identify as a climate refugee, but when I'm honest with myself, the grief and fear I experienced in 2020 played a large part in my decision to leave the Pacific Northwest for a place that will largely be buffered from the worst effects of climate change.

My first summer at the EcoVillage at Ithaca, smoke from Canadian wildfires swept across New York. I felt a familiar panic in my body, confronting the same stresses I had vaguely pretended I could leave behind in Oregon. Summer camps were canceled with no refunds. We attended outdoor concerts masked. A part of me wanted to protest: *this wasn't supposed to happen here*. Climate change wouldn't feel so visceral when we moved to New York, I had told myself. The distress was new for many of my neighbors; one told me that she'd lived in the region for 70 years and never experienced anything like this. A flurry of emails flew across the village about the best air filters for fine particulate matter.

I was teaching at Wells College that year. Sitting at my desk, I took a screen shot of the air quality index meter maxed out at the edge of the burgundy zone that indicates "hazardous" conditions. I snapped pictures of Cayuga Lake shrouded in smoke from my office window. In an emotional fog, I gathered evidence for future lectures to help climate change feel less theoretical, closer to home when students returned to campus in the fall. "I hate my job," I thought.

As climate scientist Kate Marvel<sup>13</sup> writes in *We Need Courage, Not Hope, to Face Climate Change*: "I have no hope that these changes can be reversed. We are inevitably sending our children to live on an unfamiliar planet. But the opposite of hope is not despair. It is grief. Even while resolving to limit the damage, we can mourn. And here, the sheer scale of the problem provides a perverse comfort: we are in this together. The swiftness of the change, its scale and inevitability, binds us into one, broken hearts trapped together under a warming atmosphere."<sup>14</sup>

The reality is, I love my job. It allows me to show up authentically. And to me, living authentically means we must grapple with the mental health impacts of the climate crisis. We need courage, and we need each other. 🌊

*Jen Myers, PhD is the director of the Thrive Ithaca EcoVillage Education Center in upstate New York, where she lives with her daughter. You can read more about Jen's work on climate emotions at [emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/eor-09-2023-0006/full/html](https://emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/eor-09-2023-0006/full/html).*

1. Environmental psychologists suggest that people are less likely to worry about threats that seem distant, either because they will happen in the future or because they happen far away. This lack of perceived threat impacts our response to climate change.

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3. Fullilove, M.T. (2016). *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, And What We Can Do About It*. New Village Press.

4. [goodgriefnetwork.org](https://goodgriefnetwork.org)

5. [allwecansave.earth/circles](https://allwecansave.earth/circles)

6. [workthatreconnects.org](https://workthatreconnects.org)

7. [theweek.ooo](https://theweek.ooo)—a film/discussion created by former EVI residents Helene Gerin and Frédéric Laloux

8. [climatepsychology.us](https://climatepsychology.us)

9. [climatementalhealth.net](https://climatementalhealth.net)

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13. [onbeing.org/author/kate-marvel](https://onbeing.org/author/kate-marvel)

14. [onbeing.org/blog/kate-marvel-we-need-courage-not-hope-to-face-climate-change](https://onbeing.org/blog/kate-marvel-we-need-courage-not-hope-to-face-climate-change)

# Ashes, Afterbirth, and Evacuation: A New Mother's Rising

By Corinne Weber, MSN

*Note: Names and identifying details have been changed throughout this story.*

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With the exception of having multiples or a baby born with health problems, every other risk factor for Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorder fit my description.

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July 15th, 2024—I stared at my three-week-old baby sleeping soundly on our sofa bed, perfectly undisturbed by the news of a brush fire that was burning less than five miles away. Our zone was placed under a Level 1 evacuation order, which means BE READY to evacuate and start to pack according to our state's three-level evacuation notification system.

As a former travel nurse, I was used to picking up and going from one place to the next, but never had to consider the needs of an infant before. I began making a mental list of what could all fit inside the diaper bag—water bottle, change of clothes, cans of sardines, birth certificate, a couple packs of newborn diapers... I sighed, thinking how much easier it would be to evacuate if our son were still nestled safely inside my womb.

Suddenly, I had a flashback from the winter six months prior. My partner Jon and I were living in a small rural town in the coast range, having just left the intentional community where we had met and fallen in love. We had been living in our trailer for about two weeks when a severe ice storm hit, leaving us without power for five days. It was 25 degrees Fahrenheit and dropping inside our trailer, and our propane furnace was failing to kick on.

Fortunately, a neighbor with a generator invited us into his home where Jon and I slept together on a twin size mattress, my 17-week bump barely allowing enough room for the three of us. Despite the stress we were under, I was relieved that our unborn child was comfortable *in utero* and not exposed to the extreme weather conditions we were experiencing.

My hand instinctively reached down to touch my belly, now soft and barren. Tears started to well as I watched my sweet babe lying outside of my body; an image I had dreamt of since learning of his presence, yet now felt foreign and borderline terrifying. No time to reminisce. I had to find that birth certificate and get to packing the rest.

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It was my second summer living on the West Coast. Being from southern Illinois, I was unfamiliar with the raging wildfires. I grew up with tornado watches and warnings, and I found it strange how



Chris Roth

**LEVEL 1**

**BE READY**

**PREPARE TO EVACUATE**  
BE AWARE OF DANGER IN THE AREA

- ✓ Stay informed.
- ✓ Have your plan & go-kit ready.
- ✓ Act early if you or your loved ones can't move quickly.

**LEVEL 2**

**BE SET**

**BE SET TO EVACUATE**  
AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE  
SIGNIFICANT DANGER IN THE AREA

- ⚠ Follow your evacuation plan & grab your go-kit.
- ⚠ Check news & radio for updates.
- ⚠ Conditions change rapidly. Leave if you feel unsafe.

**LEVEL 3**

**GO NOW!**

**LEAVE IMMEDIATELY!**  
EXTREME DANGER IN THE AREA

- 🏃 Leave without delay. It is unsafe to stay.
- 🏃 Do not stop to gather belongings or protect your home.
- 🏃 Do not return until officials announce the area is safe.

much it rained here but rarely thundered. Jon had moved out west from hurricane-ridden Florida in 2019 and witnessed the skies turning blood red during the historic 2020 wildfire season so he was less fazed than I. Mapped at an estimated 100 acres with evacuation notices lifted within 24 hours, the wildfire nearby was considered small-scale. Parts of a barn burnt but thankfully, no one was injured.

With both our families living so far away, we knew it would be difficult to raise our child without their support. We yearned for a safe village with kind people, although we were hesitant to join another intentional community after leaving a dysfunctional commune in the woods. When we heard about Quamash Acres, a farm community near the Columbia Gorge, we had higher hopes for a potentially better fit because it was advertised as a “family-oriented community.”

I was 37 weeks pregnant and exhausted by the time of our move into Quamash Acres. A friend helped park our trailer in

an RV site in front of a pond where I had felt a strong sense of synchronicity during our first tour. Things finally seemed to be falling into place as we were warmly welcomed by residents of the community upon our arrival. One mother made dinner plates for us while another offered me a hug. I felt optimistic we had found our home. Other than Jon and myself, there were 10 adults and seven children ages two to 17 years old. Sloan and her husband were two of three onsite owners living at Quamash Acres. Marge was the third, a woman in her early 70s and the last founding member to remain since the community’s establishment nearly three decades earlier. Several other owners lived offsite, invested at a distance.

“I can’t wait to hold your baby!” Marge said to me, excitement gleaming in her eyes. I didn’t know how to respond. I was hypervigilant, my nervous system and new maternal instincts assessing our environment for any possible signs of danger.

Although Jon and I felt led by Spirit to Quamash Acres, we were wary of how residents might act behind the curtain. Jon had his fair share of living with different personalities and process in an intentional community for the past four-and-a-half years. I had lived in the same community for a mere five months, and that was long enough to see how toxic behaviors from residents spread like the wildfires, destroying relationships and reputations alike. I didn’t want to assume this would be the culture at Quamash Acres as well. We wanted to raise our child in a peaceful environment free from chaos and hostility. I smiled politely and replied to Marge, “Me neither.”

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Our summer solstice son was born on June 20, 2024, the longest day of the year and what Jon and I would joke in sincerity as the longest day of our lives. Eigh-

teen hours of labor was well worth the wait—our baby boy was healthy, and we were in complete reverence of the sacredness of childbirth. Driving back from the birth center to Quamash Acres with our Gemini-Cancer cusp babe felt like a dream as bright city lights slowly faded behind us and country roads gently glowed ahead, illuminated by the Strawberry Moon. My outer world reflected the stillness I felt within, the encompassing love for our child already reshaping my perception of reality. I wanted to be present in that liminal space forever, but as entropy would have it, the suspension of time eventually collapsed into a disorienting blur of hormonal changes and sleep deprivation.

Once the placenta detaches from the uterine wall, there is a sharp decline in estrogen and progesterone that results in symptoms similar to perimenopause: mood swings, fatigue, brain fog, hot flashes, hair loss, weight fluctuations, pelvic floor changes, and insomnia. Pair these physiological changes with constantly meeting the needs of a totally dependent and temperamental being, and it's no surprise 85 percent of new mothers get the so-called "baby blues."<sup>1</sup>

If feelings of sadness or worry last longer than two weeks after birth, it could indicate a perinatal mood and anxiety disorder (PMAD) that may require treatment. Approximately one in five women experience a PMAD, which can occur at any point during pregnancy and the first year postpartum.<sup>2</sup> Certain risk factors increase the likelihood of developing a PMAD, such as a personal and/or family history of mental health conditions, recent stressful life events, having multiples (i.e., twins or triplets), a baby born with health problems, a limited support system, financial problems, relationship problems, and an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy.<sup>3</sup>

With the exception of having multiples or a baby born with health problems, every other PMAD risk factor fit my description. Moving to Quamash Acres was our third relocation in five months as we scrambled for improved housing and considerate neighbors before our baby's arrival. We were broke, having spent most of my savings on the trailer, and borrowing money from our families while we strove toward creating stability for ourselves. I had gotten a part-time job as a cook at a local tavern in the coast range where I worked for three weeks until the owner learned about my pregnancy and wrongfully terminated me. Jon's hippie lifestyle at an income-sharing commune left him without a credit score or any assets to his name. When Jon got hired as a framer working 40 hours a week in the city, we moved to a trailer park to shorten his commute and be closer to pregnancy resources. The noise of urban living was overstimulating and chaotic, and we yearned for nature's refuge. Outside city limits yet in proximity to Jon's workplace, Quamash Acres provided a meaningful balance.

We were enduring some of life's most stressful life events all at once—expecting a baby, financial insecurity, new job, and moving, amongst others. Although my pregnancy was unplanned, we both wanted to raise this child of ours together, despite the uncertainties. One thing was for certain, we needed far more support than what we could provide on our own.

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A couple weeks before our son was born, I shared my Postpartum Support Guide with the community so they could know what kind of support would benefit us the most. This document included cleaning tasks, providing meals, holding space for intense emotions, and a list of visitor agreements. One agreement was for visitors to not ask to hold our baby—rather, to please wait for me to offer this at my own pace and comfort level. I did not want anyone to pressure me to before I felt ready nor did I want to spend energy justifying my reasoning.

One day in late August, a resident named Lola came over for a visit. Lola worked as a licensed social worker outside Quamash Acres and utilized many of her skills in the community, including facilitation, mediation, and notetaking at our weekly meetings. She was also aware of how I was struggling with postpartum anxiety and my identity as a mother.



At this particular visit, Lola guided me through an intimate and challenging meditation, repeating the phrase, “I am a good enough mother,” until my voice resonated with the affirmation. I was extremely vulnerable, weeping as I held our precious child in my arms and trying hard to believe the words I was saying.

Just as I began to feel acceptance and self-compassion, Lola said to me, “It’s time to let Marge hold your baby. It’s time.” I immediately felt the gates to my opening heart slam shut, warning me about the shift in purpose of this grounding practice. It was no longer about empowering me in my new motherhood; it was about surrendering my two-month-old baby to the matriarch of Quamash Acres. Marge was someone I hardly knew nor felt known by, not to mention she was often in an altered mental state caused by either her frequent cannabis use, cognitive decline, or a combination of both. I was bewildered by Lola’s ill-timed remark. I looked nervously at Jon then back at Lola.

“I’m not ready for that,” I replied, my heart racing. For the next several nights, I had nightmares of our baby being forcefully taken away from me.

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It was undeniable that the community members at Quamash Acres catered to Marge’s needs, no matter how much this special treatment negatively impacted nonmember residents. Whenever a concern regarding Marge’s behavior was brought to Sloan’s attention, she would excuse it by saying Marge had worked a job in town for many years to pay the mortgage. This nepotism granted Marge permission to be an exception to the rules in the cohabitation agreement we all signed, including smoking inside the communal house where our family lived. In one instance, Marge was opposed to potential new residents because they were Catholic. The other owners were going to delay this decision for another week had I not pointed out Marge’s discrimination based on religion was illegal under the Fair Housing Act.

I did not understand why Marge continued to have authority in group deci-

# THREATENED BY WILDFIRE?

Local law enforcement orders evacuations, but there are steps you can take to prepare yourself and your family at each level of evacuation.

**LEVEL 1: GET READY**

Prepare yourself, monitor the situation, pack your important documents & valuables.



**LEVEL 2: GET SET**

Be set to evacuate at a moment's notice.



**LEVEL 3: GO!**

Leave immediately!



sions when everyone agreed she clearly had signs of impaired judgment and cognition. She was often confused, emotionally volatile, and forgetful of things she said and did. Nonetheless, Marge was backed by the other onsite owners. We soon realized the “family-oriented” aspect of Quamash Acres did not actually apply to us. It only pertained to long-term members of the community and those closest to them. There was a severe imbalance of honesty, trust, and bias from those in positions of power over tenants, and Marge was not the only one responsible for creating that.

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As summer transitioned to fall, my home nurse informed us about the significant rise of pertussis and RSV cases in our county. Both respiratory illnesses are highly contagious and pose serious risks for infants due to their immature immune systems, making it more likely for them to develop complications that can lead to death. Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, and RSV are primarily spread via airborne droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or breathes, as well as from contaminated surfaces and direct contact, like kissing.<sup>4</sup> Sloan and Lola had both recently kissed our baby on his head, and I wanted to address this concern with the community as a whole.

At the last communal meeting of October 2024, I made a request under the agenda item “Supporting Parents of Infants.” I asked people not to kiss our baby to prevent disease transmission. The next day, I received emails from Lola and Sloan requesting that we three get together and talk about my boundaries. I stated that I wanted Jon to be part of this conversation as well since he was also involved in our child’s care.

Some attempts were made to coordinate busy schedules between butchering at the farm and Jon having returned to work after taking paternity leave. Finally, a time and date was planned for: 10am on Friday, December 6th, 2024. We waited 20 minutes

for Sloan and Lola to show up, but they never did. Later, Lola would say there was nothing left unsaid on her part, a confusing conclusion given the fact that she hadn't said a word to me.

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“Are we responsible for your anxiety?” Marge asked me during our nine-month review. The group waited in anticipation.

“No, I am, but I would hope people here would get to know what hurts me and choose not to do those things,” I answered.

Reviews at Quamash Acres occur after nine months and 18 months of residency and serve as opportunities to exchange mutual feedback between resident(s) and the community based on a flag system: yellow is not a big deal, orange could be a big deal if it doesn't change, and red means if it doesn't change, one might move out or be asked to leave. Marge had told us the owners of Quamash Acres never had to evict a tenant; instead, they would just “give them the hint.” It became obvious that this passive-aggressive method was being enacted upon us throughout our nine-month review. Divisive language, censorship of meeting minutes, and tone policing were all being used to control the narrative, which was that Jon was a good fit at Quamash Acres, but I was not. Naturally, groupthink sided with those in positions of highest influence.

Typically, these reviews are performed in a single weekly meeting. Ours lasted over the course of three weeks with paid outside facilitation. One facilitator suggested there be a separate mediation with only individuals who were directly involved in the conflict, but the owners chose not to pursue this recommendation.

Level 2 evacuation order instructs BE SET to evacuate as conditions can change rapidly. Leave if you feel unsafe. It appears as yellow highlighted areas on the map.

While Jon and I initially raised three yellow flag issues, the dismissive comments and deflections we encountered revealed a concealed set of red flags. Sloan referred to our review as a “rehashing” more than once and treated our concerns as if they were a burden. To say we were disappointed is an understatement. In the weeks to follow, vicious gossip, harassment, and scapegoating escalated until one day Jon reached his breaking point and told Marge to fuck off. Needless to say, bridges had been burned beyond repair.

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Forced intimacy is not connection, it's coercion. Trust is an essential component to creating peace, and it takes time to build. Sloan would often warn against new relationship energy (NRE) as a crucible in long-term relationships, and in the beginning months of our residency, she would tell us she liked the pace we had naturally established of getting to know each other. Apparently, her sentiments changed as I failed to meet trust milestones in the community according to their timeline.

Early cracks in a relationship's foundation can cause lasting damage if left neglected, especially in the long run. My rite of passage from maiden to mother was destabilized by crones in the community who projected their traumas and self-serving desires onto me and our child, then deemed me as “not a good fit” when I resisted to conform. All three women, who were mothers themselves, would not acknowledge their own proclivities for violating boundaries, thus, perpetuating family dysfunction—or perhaps had grown so used to it that they no longer

questioned it. It was much easier to accuse me, the new mother and new resident of the community, for not following communal coparenting suit, rather than challenge their love-harm behaviors they called “intimacy.”

After Jon's fallout with Marge, Sloan and one of the offsite owners asked us if we were planning to move out because if so, they needed to start looking for other tenants. There was no curiosity about the incident itself, only interest in how soon our space could be rented out once we left. The cold, detached prioritization of profit over people exemplifies late-stage capitalism at its most unforgiving, even within intentional communities.

Level 3 evacuation notice insists that people GO NOW! The area is no longer safe for them to stay. Emergency responders may not be able to help should they choose to stay.

We gave our 30-day notice to Quamash Acres before we had any idea of where we would live next. We refused to fall victim to the deeply ingrained habits within the community that enabled and defended harmful behaviors disguised as Love. We lived at Quamash Acres for nearly one year. In the vulnerable depths of my postpartum, the community we had prayed to be a place of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing was doing more harm than good. Leaving with our hearts damaged and home displaced, we had greater faith that we would be protected and provided for outside the community than if we chose to stay. For the sake of our child, we would make the same choices again without hesitation. 🐦

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*At the time of this writing, Corinne Weber, MSN, lives with her partner and their son in Eugene, Oregon. They are not currently residents of an intentional community. She can be reached at corinneweber1996@gmail.com. Despite this issue's theme, Corinne's favorite song by James Taylor is “Sweet Baby James.”*

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# Fire at the Fireplace Community

By Abby Rampone

The Fireplace Community is an intentional community on the south side of Chicago. We live in a brick mansion of 10 bedrooms with a chapel in the basement and a tree-ringed yard. The community's mission is "to bring together progressive Catholics and spiritual seekers for creativity, intentional community, and cooperative housing." It's an intergenerational, interracial, and interreligious community that is women-centered and LGBTQ-affirming.

I'm 30 years old and moved into the Fireplace Community three and a half years ago. I'd spent the previous half-decade in three intentional communities: three years in an interfaith women's community during seminary, and short stints at two Catholic Worker houses. My seminary education centered liberation theology, which involves deconstructing all of our assumptions about where—and who—God is. Intentional community felt like the right confluence of everything that mattered to me. For me, it became a vehicle to build radical, inclusive spaces where people could live in alignment with their values.

The Fireplace has changed a lot in the past year. In the last few months alone, one longtime resident moved out and three new residents moved in! Of the seven people in the house now, only two of us were part of the "founding group," the first five people who moved into the Fireplace in 2021. After a community conflict in 2024 and the departure of four residents, I wasn't sure if the community could survive. The remaining residents struggled to build a future for the house—and after many months, it's working.

This is a good time for the community to think about the fire in our name. What does it mean to us now?

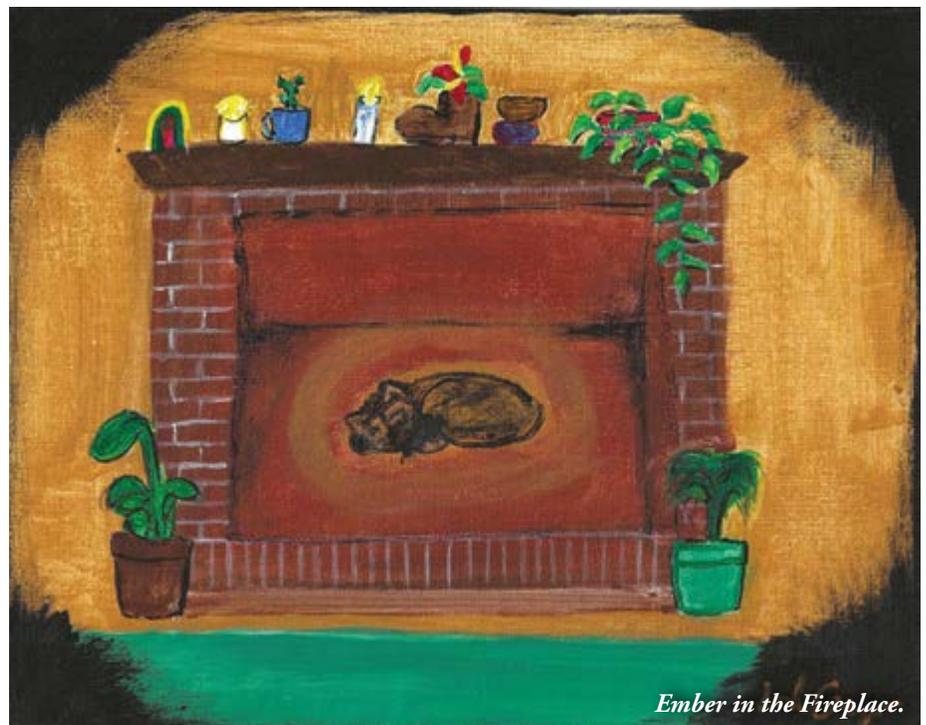
The first residents named us the Fireplace because of the two fireplaces in the

house. Fireplaces with elaborate wooden molding sit at the center of the main living room and the library/art room above it. Unfortunately, the chimney is crumbling and we lack a flue, but there's a fire pit in the yard. I love sitting around the fire until my hair smells like smoke.

"Fireplace" is an evocative name, so the associations grew over the years. For Christians, the name evokes the Holy Spirit, which is often depicted in the form of fire. The feast of Pentecost celebrates a story from the Acts of the Apostles, 50 days after Jesus's death and resurrection. The Spirit descended upon the disciples as a mighty wind before settling over their heads as tongues of flame. The fire gave them the gift of tongues and they started speaking in all the languages of the world. An awestruck crowd said they must be drunk! Afterward, these disciples devoted themselves to their new religion with new ardor. They began to gather, eat together, pray together, and sell their property to hold all goods in common.

Pentecost is the story of the earliest Christian community. I love it because the fire descends on all the people gathered. The Holy Spirit does not anoint a single leader: It empowers a whole community to live and share together. That's a strong metaphor for an intentional community like ours. Since 2022, the Fireplace has held yearly Pentecost Parties to celebrate the fire among us. Over the downstairs fireplace hangs an abstract painting of reds and oranges, light breaking through the canvas. My housemate says it's a painting of the Holy Spirit.

When a tortoiseshell cat moved into the Fireplace, we named her Ember. Ember has fiery orange streaks and an outsized personality. She likes to stick a paw in a candle flame and lick her burnt fur. Once she zoomed through the house, around the corner,



*Ember in the Fireplace.*

Leslie Carranza



Photos courtesy of Abby Rampone

and straight up the living room chimney. She didn't get very far, scrabbling and scratching against the brick, but she acted as if possessed by something we couldn't see.

Literal fireplaces are gathering places, where people can come in from the cold, sit together, and warm themselves. They're sites of community, family, solace, relief, and healing. The Fireplace attempts to offer such a space to ourselves and our guests. It reminds me of the Spanish word *bogar*, meaning both home and hearth. It evokes deep feeling and belonging. The Fireplace is a space to be together.

In mid-2024, amid the breakup of the previous community, a new friend came to the Fireplace to host fire rituals in the backyard. They are a communal healing practitioner who crafts sacred spaces around the turning of the moon and the seasons. That summer, I joined them around the fire at the new moon. At the invitation to make offerings to the fire, I grieved. I put all my grief and gratitude into the flames and watched the smoke rise among the familiar trees.

Every intentional community has given me something to carry with me. Strangely, perhaps, the Fireplace has taught me that fire is not enough. Or, perhaps, that fire will not descend upon us from the sky. We need to gather the kindling.

During a challenging time at the Fireplace, a facilitator commented that the community's *residents* were the logs in a fire. We were burning ourselves up—and out—for the sake of the community's mission. The community needed to make decisions about decision-making, governance, and finances, but we devoted a lot of energy to hosting events and guests. And crucially, most residents worked full-time jobs. We were trying to develop community structures, host a community space for non-residents, and build relationships with other residents. We couldn't handle it all. Residents blamed different people or dynamics, but I don't think anyone argued that we had made ourselves into kindling. We joked that the inverse of the Fireplace should be called the Firepit. In the "darkest timeline" of the multiverse, the community burned us up. No one wanted to live in the Firepit, but in the worst moments, it felt like the flames were licking at my skin.

The Fireplace is more religiously-diverse now than ever. Previously, six out of seven residents identified with Catholicism, and the seventh resident was a non-Catholic Christian. Our spiritual make-up isn't so easy to describe anymore. One person was raised Lutheran but goes to an Episcopal church; one is influenced by Zen Buddhism, Shamanism, and Christianity; one is pagan; and one is a seeker with Baptist roots and a scientific outlook. Pentecost isn't a feast day for all of us. Even for Christians, it's not one of the biggest holidays of the year.

But if the Fireplace is a place of fire, it can be a home for all of us. Fire is sacred to all humanity. We all recognize its awful (awe-filled) power, both positive and negative, extraordinary and quotidian. Everyone brings their selves and their histories to the fire. I think we understand that we are building the fire together, gathering loose sticks and thick logs and blowing on the coals. Maybe building community is like stacking the logs and blowing on the coals. You have to do it again and again. You have to coax it into being.

For some reason, many people have mixed up our name and called us the "Fireside Community." This gets under my skin, mostly because it happens a lot, but I can rationalize my objection. We are not a community beside the fire. The Fireplace is in the fire, amidst the fire, with the fire, and for the fire. 🐾

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*Abby Rampone holds an MDiv from Union Theological Seminary and works in ministry at DePaul University. She loves writing, cross-stitching, and cats. You can learn about the Fireplace Community at [thefireplacecommunity.org](http://thefireplacecommunity.org) and read Abby's work at [loveincommunity.substack.com](http://loveincommunity.substack.com).*

# Making an Ecovillage

By Belinda Rennie

Before we get started, dear village maker, please understand I am a novice “communitarian.” The only right I have to write this is the simple fact that I might bring a fresh lens to what it takes to make an ecovillage. Instead of the nuts and bolts—these can all be found in Diana Leafe Christian’s excellent book, *Creating a Life Together: practical tools to grow ecovillages and intentional communities*<sup>1</sup>—this is a deeply personal account of my experience so far of co-creating Jagera ecommunity.

I arrived in Autumn nearly a year ago, my tiny house and I like a snail leaving a silver trail, weaving its way slowly up the gravel road towards Foresthaven. I’d been asking myself some hard questions in the four years before the move, since the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-2020 that devastated 19 million hectares over large swathes of southern and eastern Australian states. How do I want to live in these times of increasing climate chaos? What do I want to live for? Who do I want to become in order to live these values and this life I desire? And with whom?

My tiny house is now happily nested into the forested hillside (with a fire buffer) as though it’s always been there, within “cooe!” distance of three other homes and walking distance to the township of Maclean in the Yamba hinterland, northern New South Wales. It is here in the little ecohamlet of Foresthaven we are co-creating the small urban ecommunity called “Jagera” next door.

Jagera is a Community Title development of 11 home lots and shared community land which will include landscaped open space, community facilities and infrastructure, over a five acre area on a flood-free north-facing hillside with views of Buirrinba, the mighty Clarence River.

Jagera ecommunity is a natural choice for me: small scale, lower entry costs, and joining with wise elders, more experienced communitarians than I, at a grassroots level. So far we number six people and I’ve arrived at a stage in its development where construction of the shared infrastructure for homesite lots and community buildings is imminent.

## Village Making as an Emergent Process

What stirs in me, and perhaps you too if you’re reading this, is that ecovillage-mak-

ing is not just a logistical, linear “how to” endeavor. At its core is an ongoing conversation with and daily practice of care; care for each other, the wider community, the land and unexpected forces that shape its trajectory. It is an emergent, relational process.<sup>2</sup>

We are participating in something larger than human design—a co-evolution with the land and the histories it carries. My question now that I’m living here is, “What if the village is also making us, just as we are making it?” Making us adaptive, humble, and open to being shaped by the land, its ancestral wisdom, and the changing climate that dictates how we inhabit it.

Here in Foresthaven and next door in Jagera, the land is sentient, ancient, and gestures to me in wild, wonderful ways; through the gushing waterways currently in full flow, pockets of rainforest, their leaves susurrating in the wind, and the wildlife that rustle and stomp, warble, trill, and sing through the cycles of the seasons. The earth’s crust is believed to be the thickest here and the songlines of the Yaegl matriarchs, who have given their blessing to Jagera in voice and smoking ceremonies, flow through this hidden valley.



Photos courtesy of Belinda Rennie

If making an ecovillage is not simply about returning to a utopian ideal, perhaps it could be an act of repair in response to colonisation. Many projects, workshops, and community events weave the wisdom, healing practices, and stories of the Yaegl elders, including the annual Power of Nature workshop and the Clarence River Guardians collaboration launching this month. Jagera is not just an ecocommunity being built on the land; it's embedded *within* Yaegl stories and songlines.

## Slowing and Deep Listening

Jagera is a brave, safe, welcoming place. Each day is an opportunity to live the “how, what, who” questions that brought me here. Each day, touching in with another—whether it is plant, animal, bird, tree, or human—is an invitation to practise *dadirri*—an indigenous word for deep listening. An invitation to bring my most present, vulnerable, authentic, and compassionate self forward. On some days, waking up to the idea of making an ecovillage I feel simultaneously exhilarated and terrified by the task ahead. It scares me, freaks me out, but equally, activates, replenishes, and awakens me to beauty.

Freaked out because as an idealistic optimist I have to ask myself whether the task is too big, too impossible for me. If not, then what? Where would I go? What would I do? It's a moot point because I've come to understand that it's about inhabiting my inner and outer landscapes. Perhaps idealism and its attendant inner emotional conflicts are an intelligent response to the groundlessness of our existence and maybe a necessary trait to create an ecocommunity?

Scared because the day I begin writing this, Cyclone Alfred is due to hit Brisbane as a Category 2 cyclone in just over 36 hours. Pete has re-dug stormwater trenches in the rain to direct flood waters, he has a pile of sandbags already deployed, and he's checking in with me and other folks regularly. If ever there was a refuge to live out a cyclone it would be in a disaster-prepared community like Foresthaven ark at the top of the hill.

Overwhelmed at times because I see the work it has taken the founders Pete Cumming, Eshana Bragg of Sustainable Futures Australia, and Mike Lowe from Initiatives of Change, to get Jagera this far with a decade's worth of blood, sweat, and tears.<sup>3</sup> Like the underground mycelium largely invisible to the visitor's eye, we are like emergent fungi bursting to break ground with the big exciting work of construction.

Afraid, because I have beliefs that community can be very idyllic. Yet my travels over two years researching and living for short periods in six different ecovillages, as well as living for six years above a very large ecovillage, have taught me that community, as well as being friendly and welcoming, can also be about hostile conflict. As a natu-

ral peacemaker, empath, and nurturer, I want to run from conflict.

Jagera stands out like a beacon of beauty in a world weighed down by conflict, war, separation, and inequity. The founders are experienced compassionate communicators, facilitators, and conflict navigators. Not just from the years of dogged determination in the face of endless challenges to receive all the council approvals and commencement, they are also wise elders in their professional and personal lives respected by their peers and the wider community.

I am learning conflict often reveals something we care about deeply, something that matters enough to fight for in ways that can connect and bring people together rather than flinging them apart. If we are willing to put the effort in we can find a deeper attunement to our shared existence. Disagreement may not be a breakdown but an expression of care—an opportunity to clarify and affirm what truly matters. It is not a failure of community—it's part of how it breathes.

What if ecovillages don't “fix” anything but rather teach us how to sit with uncertainty, contradiction, and difference? Can we create space for another's integrity and truth, seeing that opposing viewpoints can harmoniously coexist? Are we being asked to step up to something bigger than our own self-interest and ways of doing things, to rise up to something more important than protecting ideas of right or wrong, black or white, good or bad? Community is the ultimate act of unselfing.

Activated and awakened to beauty because community is a constant source of enlivening energy for me. Living together and breathing in radical hope and the common goal of regenerating ourselves and the land whilst breathing out despair, fear, anger, and overwhelm of climate destruction, seems to trigger faster than normal spiritual and emotional growth.<sup>4</sup> It's a rite of passage; shaking me awake out of complacency and handing me the weight of responsibility to create meaning. We traverse shifting edges into an unknown future together whilst being held steady in the loving arms of community.

Awakened to life because the only debt I have is the debt of gratitude.<sup>5</sup> The gift



economy, the constant flow of giving and receiving and random acts of kindness weave us more tightly into connection. The gift of community is the mirror that reflects back to me, that invites me to live into a bigger part of myself. In the spirit of regenerosity—giving back to the land and its people—we are building Jagera as an econeighbourhood that is both community-sufficient and by default self-sufficient. It is what humans have been doing for thousands of years. It makes ecological, economic and evolutionary sense. We evolved as communal animals and our brains and bodies are wired for connection and a sense of welcome and belonging.

Awakened because community calls me to recognise the shadow side of myself: the ways in which I can withdraw and shut down, be hard on myself, and project my wounded need to belong onto my new family. I draw on Christian again when she says “the crucible of community tends to magnify and reflect back to us our most destructive or alienating attitudes and behaviours.”<sup>6</sup> Through this process of reflection I’ve learnt to treasure my longing to belong as a gift and a superpower, not as the deep wound I was ashamed of in my family of origin. Jagera has shown me that I am never alone; I belong. I have always belonged. Everywhere and nowhere.<sup>7</sup>

Replenished because what I’ve shared so far are all the ingredients for care and love to thrive. Love flows when we are seen, heard, valued, and empowered to bring our personal gifts forward. Showing up to weekly meetings, we stay accountable, listening deeply even when our own inherent blind spots and difficulties threaten to get in the way. This kind of authentic relating helps me become aware of another’s inner weather without judgment or blame; it forms part of our community love mapping. We know when a member is in distress and can reach out to provide extra support and care.



Replenished because it is fuel for my creativity to blossom that spirals out to the wider Clarence Valley community through regular writing, organic networking, and helping to organise events—concerts, film nights, residential workshops, and other get-togethers—reaching out to and drawing community in.

*We must mend what has been torn apart, make justice imaginable again in a world so obviously unjust, give happiness a meaning once more... Naturally, it is a superhuman task. But superhuman is the term for tasks [we] take a long time to accomplish, that's all.*

—Albert Camus

### Postscript

As the enormity of Cyclone Alfred unfolds—and it could have been so much worse—I’m simultaneously grieving my planet and validated that I did in fact change my life. Living in an ecovillage is a privilege that needs to be extended to all humanity. It is a way of protecting Pacha Mama and building resilience, as these catastrophic climate-induced weather events increase in severity.

My thanks to the Global Ecovillage Network; it was through the GEN website ([ecovillage.org](http://ecovillage.org)) that I found Jagera. And it was at the Power of Nature deep ecology workshop in 2023 that I decided to take the leap to move to Jagera, feeling the land calling me, would catch me, and that these people would hold me in their orbit, their seismic gravity. The recent weekend workshop organised by the many voices of the Clarence River Guardians, weaving science, river stories, music, and art, was confirmation and visceral proof of all I had come here for; my place in a shared story. 🌿

*Belinda Rennie is a member of Jagera ecocommunity, [ecocommunity.org.au](http://ecocommunity.org.au). Belinda writes: “At the end of this year Jagera will celebrate its 10 years of inception. With only six private residential lots left for sale before we start construction in the second half of the year, we are seeking community-minded change makers to join us. If you feel afraid of what’s to come, freaked out by climate change, and equally activated, awakened, and willing to be shaped and replenished by community, then what better time is there than now to change your life?”*

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2. The Emergence Network. About Us. Retrieved from [emergencenetwork.org](http://emergencenetwork.org).

3. See Jagera timeline at [ecocommunity.org.au/timeline](http://ecocommunity.org.au/timeline).

4. Christian, Diana Leaf. *Creating a Life Together*, p. 201.

5. Veritasium. (2021, July 14). The illusion of truth [Charles Eisenstein Video], [youtube.com/watch?v=B\\_zSzOXT-Hk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_zSzOXT-Hk).

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# April Fools Bunny: Up in Smoke

By Nathaniel Nordin-Tuininga  
and Quinn Gerald



Photos in montage: etsy.com/listing/1335385834/easterbunny-mascot-costume-adult-mascot and Chris Roth

**O**n the morning of April 1, 2025, Nathaniel Nordin-Tuininga, Education Director at Lost Valley Educational Center/Meadowsong Eco-village (Dexter, Oregon), sent the following message to the community's residential email list:

Dear Friends,

Does anyone happen to know who was walking through the meadow in front of Glen's place last night around 11:30 in a giant bunny suit?

Didn't hear anything about a costume party so figured someone was just getting a little too excited about Easter. I was pretty sleepy so I didn't think much about it at the time, but woke up kinda creeped out this morning.

Anyone know who that was and what was going on so late at night?

Other sightings? Any further information?

*Responses ranged from "Holy smokes. What a ride!" to "Twisted Whiskers strikes again!" to "Well I'll be... I was opening my email, feeling a deep shame that my 4/1 had gone off like a normal day... And then I find this."*

*Finally, with afternoon arriving and the mystery still unsolved, intern Quinn Gerald stepped forward:*

It was me. Sorry.

For the past several months I've been

planning this charade. I've been studying the nighttime habits of the community members to determine when the best time to pull this off would be. I narrowed my scope down to just six people and studied their routines closely. Based on this data I collected, I thought my best chance would be between 11:13-11:49pm on March 31st.

The meadow trail seemed the obvious target for most ideal exposure. My plan was to walk from the eco-resource room, where I put the costume on, to the outdoor kitchen right on time. I couldn't have more than three people view me or the whole thing would be ruined.

I began my walk and realized I needed to use the restroom, delaying my start time by three minutes. I was so focused on calculating others' routines, I forgot to consider my own bodily rhythms. I walked as casually as I could towards the ODK. My mission was simple now, arrive at the ODK and sit on the couch for seven minutes before returning to the eco-resource room. My intuition told me no one had witnessed me by the time I arrived at the ODK.

I began to get nervous, the calculations pointed to a very high likelihood of being witnessed between one and three times, yet nothing so far. I had to ask myself, what's really going on here?

In that first moment of contemplation, a loud bang in the distance was set off and I

knew fate had rested in between my toes. It was time to make my return journey and I had to let go of all doubt. I walked. And I walked. And I walked. I thought to myself, when do the serviceberries begin to put out their leaves? A great uncertainty built as I approached the eco-resource room.

As I changed my clothes I knew what I had to do to be sure of the results. If I wasn't sure exactly what had occurred, I would lose many hours of sleep and be tired the next day. I went out to Jersey, 11:53pm. I lit the rabbit suit on fire in the middle of the basketball court, hanging on the pole. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the cigarette I pre-rolled spontaneously earlier that evening, I wasn't sure why. This was why.

I lit the cigarette in the flames of the burning rabbit suit. I took one drag and began walking mindfully around the fire. The first rule of pyromancy is patience, the second is presence. Divination by fire is a tool I've used to reach clarity at only the most crucial moments in my life. The flames waved in the majestic way that only fire can demonstrate. At once a great calm washed over me and I knew. I had a vision of Nathaniel sending this email in the morning, I knew I had succeeded. 🐰

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*Despite its central role in the community's history, this story does not appear on Lost Valley's website ([lostvalley.org](http://lostvalley.org)) and is published exclusively here.*

# Alone in the Village

By Charles Durrett

*A healthy social life is found only when, in the mirror of each soul, the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the whole community, the virtue of each one is living.*

—Rudolph Steiner

In the planning phase of cohousing—public hearings, financing, building—there is always something for people to do. Not everyone has to be gifted, but the aggregate sum of efforts must move things forward.

Not until they move in do you realize that social dynamics change for certain individuals. Some folks have autism, Down syndrome, ADHD, or one of the other 200 DSM diagnoses. To weave them into a functioning community, cohousing requires understanding, consciousness, empathy, and a technique to help everyone to plug in.

Weathering high seas and big storms and landing the metaphorical vessel of your cohousing dream project may feel like a battle you won together, as a group. Then everyone gets into their own individual boats and settles. That's when it gets tough on some folks, who worked hard like everyone else, but have a hard time fitting in. Apparently, when “can-do” was the order of the day, they did their share, but when it came to fitting in after the move, that was another question. They may be awkward conversationalists; they may be intimidated by those amazing conversationalists. That was probably why they shrank.

However, it is the larger community's responsibility to help them fit in by resonating with them at some level, and this requires willingness. They do not need your sympathy. But to make the community work, they do require your empathy. How do we work this out together? Cohousing desires inclusion, but inclusion as a conscious act. It won't happen as an accident.

In the context of writing my last book (*One Life, Live It!*), I read fascinating stories about people who are “left out,” even when “let in.” One young man with high-functioning autism wrote, “I never went to recess my entire elementary school, because it was too hard having such unique emotions that no one else related to or could even imagine relating to. My heart was racing with a feeling of not fitting in, self-consciousness, wrought anxiety, isolation, and loneliness—I couldn't stand it. So, I stayed in the classroom. Sometimes, I talked to the teacher or did homework. Sometimes, I read. Other times, I tried to escape to another world. I always perseverated and sometimes cried. You can imagine it was hard staying inside.”

Neurotypical people need to have patience with the neurodivergent, and vice versa. The two groups often express empathy



Photos courtesy of Charles Durrett



differently (for more, search for the “double empathy problem” online). You should invite to your meetings all those who are new, and those who are or have been marginalized at any level. Talk with them. Even at complicated committee meetings, such as finance or energy savings, you will be surprised how useful they can be sometimes. For example, Suzie volunteered to call rental companies to see what a three-yard refuse bin costs, for this weekend’s landscape clean-up!

There are two early essential ingredients to successfully being in the community: be on time, and be thoughtful of others. Both are easy to gauge and measure, whether you do them or not. If you are chronically late for meetings, stop everything and work on that specifically. The Danes would say that cohousing started and thrived in Denmark because they came to meetings on time and started meetings on time even if they were fooling themselves. That is, tell yourself that the meeting starts at 6:00 PM even when it actually starts at 6:15 PM. Community may not be for you, although it probably is. But what people usually say is, “I couldn’t do it earlier but now I live with people I respect, so I’m on time all the time.”

There are so many reasons to live in a village: the Winter Solstice spiral with candles, the day-to-day sense of care, the knowing, the Day of the Dead, the internal TED talks, common dinner with others, the star gazing in the hot tub, the singing, the strumming, the drumming, the dances, the support, the community, and hundreds more. All of these are, of course, voluntary, but most people come. More fun than they expected.

The highs are higher, and the lows are lower in cohousing because the more you know others, the more you care about them. Sometimes, as you walk by a stranger in the city, the only thing you think about is the level of threat. No perceived threat, no worry. Perceived threat means “keep an eye on them.” “The lows are lower in cohousing because you care, and the highs are higher, but I would not want to live anywhere else,” said a woman in cohousing.

There are so many high-functioning people in cohousing. I

am not going to say they can’t tolerate people with shortcomings. But I will say that they tend to overlook the couple of people with atypical behavior. Those lucky enough to live in cohousing need to consider those who struggle, but it’s a two-way street. I know from personal experience that those who struggle also need to assure that everyone is comfortable, the best that they can.

Neurotypical persons may need to be the ones trained to modify their behavior to live successfully with the neurodivergent. We know that it is doable. Solheimer Village, in Iceland, shows a compatibility of half neurodivergent, and half neurotypical (45 of each). They embrace gentle teaching, sacred economics, anthroposophy, and extremely human-centric approaches to life overall and to life with each other.

It is doable in cohousing, I’ve seen it; but it’s a conscious choice. It is no accident, and I don’t think it will ever be accomplished accidentally. It will be a result of conscious conditioning—“I choose to learn this.” Once all the various characters choose to accept one another, those differences can make it fun to live in that village.

*Side Note:* In the 25-year-running very popular show *Survivor* (my relatives all love it), a young woman confided in a teammate, “I have autism, and here’s what it looks like and what happens when I’m triggered.” She had a major meltdown in the live show completely off script, and the person she confided in comforted her and brought her back to earth. That is what an ally looks like. Many of us have it in us. The scene has gone viral. If it can happen among reality TV participants, it can certainly happen in cohousing. Let’s practice. 🌈

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*Charles Durrett is Principal at The Cohousing Company ([www.cohousingco.com](http://www.cohousingco.com)). He is an architect, author, and advocate of affordable, socially responsible, and sustainable design. His most recent books are *Cohousing Communities: Designing for High-Functioning Neighborhoods* and *One Life, Live It! Sólheimar Ecovillage and the Importance of Neuro-Inclusive Communities*.*

# The Global Ecovillage Movement

By Ross Jackson

## Cohousing and Ecovillages

The cohousing movement, representing the social dimension of sustainability, emerged as a necessary precursor to the ecovillage movement. Starting in Denmark and spreading from there, cohousing has its roots in events of the 1960s, which were characterized by the massive entry of women into the workforce and a redefinition of women's role in society. Women in the West were no longer willing to play the passive role of housewives, subservient to their spouse's interests. They wanted a life for themselves, including a career.

My wife, Hildur, was one such woman who was determined to do something about it. She, like many other women at the time, was not satisfied with the choice between having a career while the kids were in an institution during their formative years, and staying at home with the children while damaging her career potential. The third alternative, which we discussed with three other young couples in the late 1960s, was to create our own project, where we would help each other take care of the children, while maintaining the privacy of separate dwellings.

Thus, we founded one of the first cohousings ever—a small one with just six families, but with all the desired characteristics, which many years later became mainstream. This included peripheral parking to create a traffic-free space in the center for children, no hedges between houses, and a common house for meetings and common meals once or twice a week. Our place became a magnet for the neighborhood's youngsters, who came to our friendly space rather than playing in the streets.

In the early 1970s, awareness still lagged about mounting environmental problems such as pollution, species extinction, and climate change. Twenty more years passed before the foundation was laid for the next stage of the ecovillage movement, which would incorporate both the social and ecological dimensions.

Today in Denmark, cohousing is mainstream, with many communities actively encouraging new projects. Cohousings are much more numerous than ecovillages—10 times as many—and are particularly popular with seniors and young couples. Municipalities have discovered that the citizens who live in cohousings and ecovillages are active in the community, have good jobs—often with a higher education—and they pay their taxes. An interesting new development in Denmark is the gradual merging of the two movements, which now share a common website.

## The Beginnings of GEN

Until 1982, I was following a fairly conventional middle-class Western path of a businessman, living happily ever after in the suburbs with a loving wife and kids—the “American dream” of my

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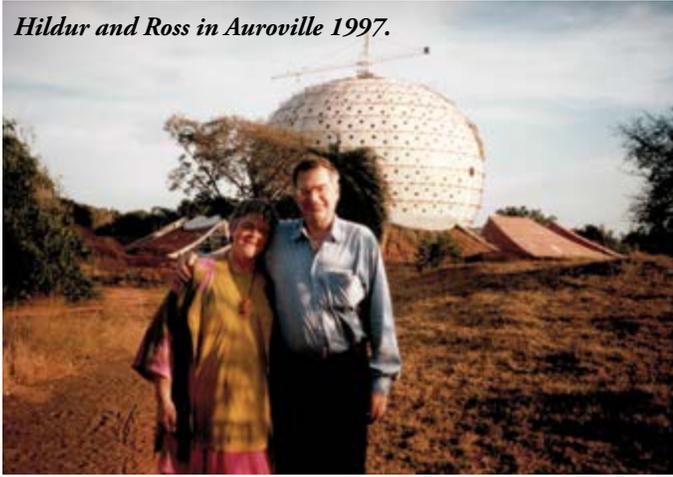
The strategy was simple—leading by example. If the projects were successful, they would be replicated.

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Photos courtesy of Ross Jackson

*Hildur and Ross in Auroville 1997.*



*GEN Founders at Findhorn 1995.*



youth. The only slightly unorthodox thing was that I was living in a cohousing community. That all changed that year when I had a powerful spiritual experience in India that opened up new horizons and a new worldview. I then realized that not only was I on the wrong path, but the whole of society was on the wrong path. The global picture was grim, with increasing pollution, species extinction, environmental destruction, and an unsustainable divide between rich and poor, while most citizens were living isolated lives in an apartment or house far removed from nature. I decided that if I were to live in harmony with my new spiritual insights, then I would have to try and do something to change society's disastrous path, but I did not quite know what.

At about that time, Hildur also began to develop a spiritual interest, following the global Sahaj Marg meditation movement. In 1987, I took the initiative, along with Hildur and a few friends, to found Gaia Trust, a Danish-based charity to support the transition to a more sustainable and spiritual world. We had no money, but I donated to Gaia Trust some lucrative software that I had developed for the foreign exchange market. At that time, we began to feel a little constricted in our cohousing, and felt that it would be more in keeping with our vision to live closer to nature, with some land and animals, so we decided to leave the cohousing for a farm in Western Denmark—Fjordvang—that had the potential to become a beautiful intentional community with a broader vision.

It was about at this time that we met Robert and Diane Gilman, who shared our values and were living in a cohousing in Seattle. They told us stories about international intentional communities, so we asked them to do a survey of what was out there for Gaia Trust, resulting in a comprehensive report. They decided to live with us at Fjordvang in the Spring of 1991 and work on a common vision for the future.

One of the first things we did together was to invite a dozen of our joint international contacts to a week of brainstorming at Fjordvang in September 1991, to discuss how best to use the funds that were beginning to flow into Gaia Trust. That historic meeting included a number of people who would later be key to the Global Ecovillage Network's evolution, including Declan and Margaret Kennedy from Lebensgarten, Germany, Albert Bates from The Farm, Tennessee, and Max Lindegger from Crystal Waters, Australia. Also present were a couple of visionary thinkers—Karl-Henrik Robért (*The Natural Step*) and David Korten (*When Corporations Rule the World*).

After many long debates and discussions, one general conclusion the group reached was that we know what the problems are, and we know what the solutions are; what we need is not more conferences or white papers, but implementation of what we already know. That led to the next question: who is actually doing something about it on the ground? Who is actually walking their talk? That question led us directly to the answer—intentional communities like Findhorn, Auroville, The Farm, Lebensgarten, Crystal Waters, and many more. The key was a change in lifestyle.

The name “ecovillage” was coined at that meeting to describe these communities. It was decided that Gaia Trust would focus on linking these dispersed communities

into a single global network, exchanging best practices and becoming a movement that had the potential to nudge society in a more sustainable and spiritual direction. The strategy was simple—leading by example. If the projects were successful, they would be replicated.

### Findhorn 1995; The Butterfly

In the period from the historic meeting of September 1991 until the Fall of 1995, a small group of us from that meeting, joined by a few more along the way, met several times at different locations to discuss how to concretize the idea of developing a global network of ecovillages. After some discussion, we agreed that a viable way forward would be to establish three regional offices: North and South America, based at The Farm Ecovillage in Tennessee, US, under the leadership of Albert Bates; Europe and Africa, based in Lebensgarten Ecovillage, Germany, under the leadership of Declan Kennedy; Asia/Oceania, based at Crystal Waters Ecovillage, Australia, under the leadership of Max Lindegger; with an international office in Denmark based at Fjordvang under the leadership of Hamish Stewart.

The first priority would be for the three regional secretaries to make contact with existing projects in their regions and form national networks, with coordinators for each national region. Gaia Trust agreed to finance operations for the first five years.

In October 1995, Findhorn Ecovillage was planning a conference on “Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities.” This seemed like an opportune time to

meet and present our plans, so we all went there. The topic had enormous appeal and several hundred people had to be turned away due to limited capacity. On the final day of the conference, I presented our plan to the participants at Universal Hall.

At one point in my presentation, I was using the story of the caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly as an analogy of my vision of the transformation of the planet from an exploitative civilization to a beautiful, flowering society, with the islands of ecovillages around the world corresponding to the imaginal cells of the chrysalis as they linked together and formed the foundation of something entirely new. Just at that point, a butterfly landed on my overhead projector to the great amusement of the audience—an amazing synchronicity. It felt almost as if we had divine support.

The next day, at the founding meeting of the Global Ecovillage Network, one of the women—I don't recall who—sketched a picture of a butterfly superimposed on a photo of the Earth from space, and after some refinements, this became the GEN logo, a powerful symbol of transformation.

### GEN-Italia

In 1998, Hildur and I were non-voting members of the board of GEN International, which was based on our farm, Fjordvang, in Denmark, at the time. Lucilla Borio had just been elected Secretary of GEN-Europe, and the office was moved from Lebensgarten in Germany under the first chairman, Declan Kennedy, to Torri Superiori in Italy. We were

invited along with a number of Italian ecovillagers to attend the GEN-Europe board meeting in Torri Superiori—a really unique project near Ventimiglia, not far from Nice. Lucilla and her friends had taken over an abandoned ancient village built directly into the mountainside with a fantastic view over the valley.

After the meeting, the Italians arranged a “mystery tour” where we all visited a number of budding Italian ecovillages in the area over three or four days, which was great fun. The Italians discussed what they should call their national network, and the most popular suggestion was “GEN-Italia.” I suggested, with tongue in cheek, that that did not work so well in English. Fortunately, they settled instead on RIVE, short for Rete Italiana Villaggi Ecologici (“rete” means “network”).

One thing that came up several times during the tour was mention of the large Damanhur community, north of Torino, which I had not heard of before. We heard stories of their strange religion, which turned off some people, and their underground temples. Should they be a member of RIVE? I asked. Several thought they were too big and would dominate the network. Others said they were not really an ecovillage. So, on the way home, Hildur and I decided to pay Damanhur a visit and see for ourselves.

We were fortunate to meet some of the leaders and had a very positive reception. They liked the idea of forming an ecovillage network. In fact, they were planning to establish such a network themselves, as they had extensive international contacts. Fortunately, they decided eventually to join GEN and not form a competitive network, which has worked well for everyone. Damanhur is the biggest GEN member in Europe and very inspiring with their world class artwork and beautiful temples.

### Gaia Education Is Born

It was always Hildur's dream to develop an educational program for sustainable living. Hildur argued for this back in the first brainstorming meeting of September 1991. The rest of us agreed, but felt that it would be necessary first to establish a global network of ecovillages. And this we did in the period 1992-1998, including GEN's formal founding in October 1995 at Findhorn.

In 1998, Hildur and I invited about 50 people from the ecovillage network, who were particularly interested in education, to join us at Fjordvang, Denmark for a week's discussion on how to go about establishing an education for sustainability. The group discussed the structure of such an education based on what later became the four dimensions of the education—social, ecological, economic and worldview. The first three were the way the United Nations organized education, while worldview was a new concept that included cultural and spiritual aspects, which we felt was critical in an international education that would embrace and respect the many diverse religions and cultures that would comprise our audience. We made a first draft of the modules that might be included in each dimension.

About 30 persons from this group agreed to continue meeting at different places



*Findhorn Community Center.*



*First GEN-Europe Council 1996.*



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## As people fled from the cities, many found relief and new homes in the 40 or so functioning Ukrainian ecovillages.

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over the next few years as we refined the concepts and the contents and practiced teaching the modules to each other to get critical feedback and improve the quality. At the final meeting in Hungary in 2005, the group unanimously agreed on the name Gaia Education for the project. It was discussed whether Gaia Education should be a part of GEN or a separate sister organisation. There were both pros and cons. It was noted that GEN was a network organisation, while Gaia Education would have a more centralized, hierarchical structure. In the event, we chose the latter, with May East as the first CEO of a Scottish charity and myself as the first chairman and primary funder.

We decided to found the new organisation at Findhorn on the 10th anniversary of GEN in 2005, which was also the occasion of the founding of NextGEN, a new under-30 youth organisation within GEN. May East suggested the goose as the logo of Gaia Education, symbolizing the principle of the flock flying together

with everyone taking turns as leader, and hence the acronym GEESE—Global Ecovillage Educators for a Sustainable Earth.

### The Future of GEN

Speaking at the final session of the historic Gaia Trust meeting of September 1991, I recalled a comment that I had heard at a Findhorn conference some years previously, to the effect that any project worthy of the name should take at least 40 years, and I was of the opinion that the project we were embarking upon was indeed very worthy. I said that this was because what we were trying to do with the ecovillage movement was basically to lay the foundation for a whole new civilisation based on principles radically different from the status quo. The GEN project was about a radically new lifestyle, and a new relationship with nature, and would probably take more than one generation to have any noticeable effect.

I mentioned also that I could see two ways that change might come about—either a gradual shift over several generations or a more rapid shift following a global collapse. Now, 34 years later, we can assess where things stand. What have we achieved and what lies ahead?

In *Occupy World Street* (2012), I wrote that the data suggested that our global civilization began collapsing in the mid 1970s due to our living off our natural capital. We now consume roughly 70 percent more than nature provides each year. This pattern can continue for a few more decades but not much longer. The ecovillage movement has grown slowly but surely, but is still very marginal. The entrenched mainstream lifestyle is very hard to affect. If we do ever succeed in shifting the mainstream lifestyle in our direction, a post-collapse scenario now seems more likely than a gradual shift.

In the event of a global collapse, I have always envisaged that ecovillages could be the stable places from which humanity could begin to rebuild with a new worldview. The Ukraine war illustrated this point on a small scale. As people fled from the cities, many found relief and new homes in the 40 or so functioning Ukrainian ecovillages. For many, this was a life-changing experience. Many discovered a more attractive way of life and decided to stay. Others were helped out of the country by a heroic initiative by GEN-Europe to organize pathways to new homes in European ecovillages and other safe havens.

Whatever the future may bring, the ecovillage movement will go on, because living in community and close to nature is so fundamental to our DNA and the very nature of the human condition. We are on the right side of history because we are doing the right thing, and we are here for as long as it takes, leading by example. 🐦

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*In 1987 Ross Jackson cofounded Gaia Trust, Denmark, to promote a more sustainable and spiritual world. Gaia Trust has since financed hundreds of sustainability projects in over 40 countries as well as several “green” start-ups, and has supported its two major international NGO initiatives—the Global Ecovillage Network ([ecovillage.org](http://ecovillage.org)) and Gaia Education ([gaiaeducation.org](http://gaiaeducation.org))—for over 30 years.*

*Ross has for many years been an innovative leader in both the business and NGO worlds. His business career has been as an independent management consultant and software designer, later specializing in international finance. He cofounded the European software firm SimCorp and the first exclusively currency-based hedge fund in the late 1980s. In 2012, he wrote *Occupy World Street*, A global roadmap for radical economic and political reform, dealing with geopolitics and global governance from an international perspective. His latest book, *The Bad News & The Good News* (2024), is a sequel to *Occupy World Street*, with a focus on what a post-collapse civilization that lives within nature’s limits might look like.*

*Ross’ PhD is in Operations Research, the science of problem solving with quantitative methods, from Case Western Reserve University in the US (1964). Born in Canada, he has since 1964 lived in Denmark, and became a Danish citizen in 1972. After the untimely passing of his wife Hildur in 2015, he met and married Heather. They live on a regenerative farm near Copenhagen.*

# The Farm's Legacy Continues: A Response to Martin Holsinger

By Michael Traugot



Photos courtesy of Michael Traugot

I read Martin Holsinger's article entitled "A Generation Betrayed: The Spoiled Legacy of The Farm" (COMMUNITIES #205, Winter 2024, pages 26-34). I agree with some of the points he is making, but I disagree with his overall story line. Martin's whole approach seems to be based on the assumption that there was some nefarious plot by a few individuals to take the whole property and infrastructure and "privatize" it for their own benefit, resulting in the "Changeover" from an income-sharing communal economy to a cooperative where individuals and families had to support themselves financially and contribute financially to the community. This line of reasoning doesn't ring true for me and doesn't line up with the facts.

To start with, I think Martin seriously underestimates the degree of direness, the size and scope of the hole we had dug ourselves into by 1983. Right at the top of his article Martin says, "[I]n the early 1980s The Farm...seemed to be on a roll." (p. 26) Quite to the contrary, as this excerpt from a 1976 community bulletin from the then Board of Directors (BOD) demonstrates, we were already going underwater that early, and the then-BOD knew it and were trying to do something about it:

"As a community the Farm has a yearly cash flow that has grown from approximately \$125,000 in 1971 to approximately \$1,000,000 in 1975. At the same time our overall debt has grown to approximately \$600,000. Because of our increasing population over the same time, our taking on sanctuary cases, pregnant ladies, and couples to have babies, and our large overall expansion, we have reached a situation where our basic income is not large enough to meet our basic needs: food, phone, electric, gas, etc....our basic budget is running in the red— In order to change this situation...we need to have a real net earned income of \$10,000 per week."

The need was \$10,000 per week, and income was consistently between \$6,000 and \$8,000. Those in charge of the cash flow at the time say that only once in the entire span of years was the actual earned income of the Farm \$10,000 in one week. We were falling short by \$2000-4000 per week from that time till the Changeover was voted in late in 1983, and during much of that time the community population was still increasing.

In that context it seems almost miraculous that we were able to keep the community going seven more years in that format before the Changeover. Perhaps that was the period when Stephen tried to bring in other people with resources, i.e., "recruiting investors," that partly helped delay the transition. Martin writes, "[W]hat really kept us going was that...about half our income came from inheritances and people joining and donating their assets into the community treasury." (p. 27) I don't have the statistics to show that it was exactly half, but it is definitely true that several substantial donations by individuals who wanted to keep the experiment alive did help keep the ship afloat.

But the ship was also kept afloat by the hard work, I want to call it "heroic effort," by as many as 100 community members, a core of about 40-50 leaving the community every day to work as crews in the construction industry, plus a few doing other varied jobs (e.g., a couple worked as medical assistants at the local hospital). Farm construction crews built several subdivisions in the area, plus many other projects, and were noted for the quality of their work. We deployed tree planting crews all over the country, from Wisconsin to Florida to Texas, and sent a crew to Houma, Louisiana to work in the shipbuilding industry and send back money. People also worked hard doing necessary jobs in the community such as keeping the laundry machines run-



ning, pumping the outhouses, growing and repairing the water system, and growing food for the community. But there were far too many either underemployed or unemployed, not necessarily because they were lazy freeloaders (there were some), but because there were not enough paying jobs in the area.

At one point Stephen ordered all the satellite communities that had sprung up in different parts of the country to fold up and return to the home base. This may have brought in some resources and some very capable individuals and families, but the overall effect was to overcrowd us even more and cut off some successful programs that had been making it on their own and even thriving. This demonstrates the power that Stephen still had to determine the direction and fate of the community.

By 1980 the population of The Farm had reached somewhere between 1200 and 1500, the exact number still being debated. In retrospect, this configuration resembled a refugee camp, full of refugees from, as Martin put it, the “American mainstream,” rather than directly from war or famine, and we were fortunate at that, unlike our friends in Guatemala and many other parts of the world. Subsequently people started leaving, and after a still-celebrated showdown in 1981 in which, via the newly installed closed-circuit TV system, Stephen was openly challenged, a more massive exodus began. By the time of the meeting that led to the Changeover, autumn 1983, the population had shrunk to 800, of which half were children.

By 1983 this untenable situation had been going on for so long it was clear it was about to collapse. This was not some concerted plan to snatch the assets of the community for the benefit of the few. Rather than simply inheriting the land and infrastructure, those of us who remained inherited, or “took on,” the right to pay off the debt, if we could. That was not an easy task in 1984, in

one of the poorest counties in Tennessee and in the midst of the “Reagan Recession,” brought about by the Federal Reserve raising the interest rate to banks to *double digits*. In comparison, when the Fed raised the rate to five percent recently, that was considered very high. The 1980s rate hike virtually wiped out the construction industry nationally and locally, which had been the community’s largest source of gainful employment. The dues level necessary to make payments was more than twice what it is on today’s Farm.

The Changeover was widely seen as the last-ditch effort to save the small-F farm. It was overwhelmingly voted in by the membership after some weeks of discussion. At the start of the Changeover, January 1984, there were still about 400 adults living on The Farm. By the time the loans were paid off, three years later at the end of 1986, about 200 of those hardy pioneers, and their families, were left. These constituted the first of what would be called, in the Bylaws, the “Permanent Members.” Personally I voted for the Changeover, even though I knew it would be harder on my family than on many others (five children, no immediate money-earning job, no family money to fall back on) for one reason: I could count.

### Where Martin and I Agree

I agree with Martin that we saw “every meeting and every gathering of a household or of friends as a church meeting, and saw every job that needed to be done as an opportunity to meditate.” (p. 29) We were serious, most of us, about our spiritual practice, which is to carry on life full tilt while maintaining equanimity and openness and awareness throughout and recognizing the sacredness of life. After three years of Monday Night Class, in which all different religions were studied by a growing group of young seekers, on the Caravan we passed around copies of *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki, and other spiritual books. We valued Christian teachings highly, especially the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus taught his disciples, and millions of us thereafter, how to live life in the most positive way for all, and the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and other mystical Jewish masters.

“Personal work” was built into our agreements, the spiritual agreement that we would try to become better persons, get along better with each other, be more compassionate...and more honest and upfront...undo some of our conditioning, become more self-aware, as your fellow community members reflected you back on yourself...be willing to change. This was the “community as teacher.” Most of us in the current iteration of the community still ascribe to this goal and try to practice it.

I disagree with Martin’s assertion that very few Farm people kept up their spiritual practices after the Changeover. On the Farm today you will find people practicing Christianity, Judaism, several varieties of Buddhism, the Yogic tradition of the Yogananda lineage, the modern Sufi tradition of Dances of Universal Peace, Pagan rituals, plus many “free thinkers,” and often these overlap. In fact, I believe most of us are “free thinkers,” which does not preclude having a spiritual or religious practice. At this point plans are being drawn up and materials are being assembled for a meditation pavilion down in Second Road Meadow where the community used to meet every Sunday for meditation and a spiritual service/meeting.

My pledge and major purpose going in was to do what I/we can to make the world a better place for ourselves, our descendants, all humanity, and the planet. This involved doing whatever would be necessary to be effective in pursuing those goals. In the beginning of The Farm, the communal economy worked; it was the most effective way to build a community from scratch and involve thousands in its creation, most of whom did not stay but many of whom were inspired to go on and make their own contributions. After a while, that form was not working for us any longer. We can argue till the cows come home whose “fault” it was, but the fact is we did not manage the communal project very well and it almost cost us the entire farm. One of the Zen teachings that often came up in our discussions was “Don’t be attached to form.”

### “Betrayal of a Generation”?

I agree with Martin that the first wave of children born on The Farm and those who came here as young children “suddenly faced the abrupt dissolution of the society they had been raised to carry on.” (p. 26) This was a shock to many/most of them, including those who stayed, seeing many of their friends departing. This was especially hard on those who either came on the Caravan or were born in the first couple of years in the community, who grew up thinking this was theirs, their home, their family’s home, and now it wasn’t. No guarantees.

I agree that we didn’t necessarily think of our goal being that our kids got to go out and have individual careers, but rather that we would be so successful that others would try to replicate what we were doing. “We intended that our kids would learn the skills we needed to make the community function...and take their place beside us as adults.” (p. 28)

One of the most frequent criticisms of the early Farm coming from our children, our second generation, is that we did not prepare them adequately for individual success in the “rest of America.” I agree with this assessment, to varying degrees for individual cases. These issues are dealt with in the film *American Commune* by the Mundo sisters who grew up on The Farm (Prime Video or YouTube). One review of the film says “*American Commune* finds inspiration in failure, humor in deprivation and, most surprisingly, that communal values are alive and well in the next generation.” This indicates that, despite the criticisms one can find on Facebook and other online platforms, most of the children born on The Farm still believe in many of the values we were attempting to exemplify and live up to, and they almost universally are glad that the physical Farm still exists and has been developed to a solid and beautiful sanctuary. And many or most of them say they valued the freedom to roam and the closeness to nature, in the woods and fields, that they had as children.

I am grateful that Martin pointed out that the “Vow of Poverty” that we all individually signed was NOT a vow to remain living at a poverty level. More like a vow of “voluntary simplicity,” it was really a requirement of the IRS in order to obtain our religious 501(d) federal tax status, enabling us to distribute our income among all of us, rather than having the income of those who were bringing in regular wages taxed. If our total distributed income had reached the threshold where we each would have to pay taxes, then we would have. And many of us expected we would rise to this

level by continued “great pure effort.” Due to our lack of management skills, our total income never approached that level.

Part of the bargain with the IRS was that our income and assets (wealth) really had to be distributed equally, and that no individual(s) would be amassing large portions of that and be removing them from the collective. When the communal period and the 501(d) classification ended, there were a few attempts to claim some of the accumulated assets as personal wealth, but in the big picture, these have been relatively minor and only by a few people.

There is a certain bitterness in Martin’s writing. “But how to get rid of the rest of us?” (p. 31) The ice bean business was “rife with privatizers.” (p. 32) “We don’t want to throw out the baby with the bathwater,” the privatizers piously intoned, as they flushed our highest aspirations—and their own children—down the toilet into mainstream America.” (pp. 33-34) “[M]any of the former communards who trusted their minds to their therapists were, in a sense, turning themselves in to ‘the other side’ for ‘re-education.’” (p. 34) This latter argument robs those individuals of their agency, as if they were not capable of making their own informed decisions. Personally, I did not have the luxury of consulting with a therapist, but if I had, my goal would have been to make myself better able to continue promoting the values I had been working for. I suspect the same was true for those who did seek therapy.

I believe some of the bitterness Martin expresses is the result of his son being denied membership at a crucial time in his life. “[T]heir very right to live on the land where they were born was abrogated when the community’s new administration passed a rule—on a community vote—saying that kids had to apply for membership when they came of age, and be accepted by a majority vote of the community. When my oldest son turned 18, he applied—and was rejected.” (p. 34)



Martin's son was a very kind and gentle and helpful young man, not a problem in any way, but he got swept up in the conservative backlash against the excesses of the earlier era. The pendulum swung—fortunately in much milder form than it was swinging in other parts of the world, exemplified by Reagan turning loose all the right-wing death squads in Central and South America to go ahead and do their thing. But still swinging.

In any case, I think the way we treated that first wave of second-generation Farm kids, especially the young men, was a big mistake. A few had serious problems, but for the most part these were fairly normal for American teenagers, energetic, rebellious, with thousands of acres to roam... They were upset at the changes and acting out. A group of adult males decided to control the young men by intimidation, showing them who was boss, and this resulted in some butting heads and a very few physical scuffles. But for the most part this was a much more nonviolent iteration of the intergenerational male shuffle than goes on in many parts of the world. The community adjusted after a while and lowered the dues for young adults, but there is still some negative feeling among that first wave of Farm teenagers becoming adults at that time. Today on The Farm, when a young person turns 18, they start paying half dues, which is \$57/month, but waivers are available if the person is still in high school, going to college, or has a disability.

Martin's son died of cancer shortly before his 30th birthday and is buried in The Farm Cemetery. He was and always will be one of us, and all who knew him would agree about that today.

## Moving Forward

I believe The Farm today is considerably healthier than one might conclude from the title of Martin's article. And while it is hard to speculate many years into the future, in ordinary times one might think there is a good chance The Farm will still exist as a distinct community and a positive influence in the surrounding area another 50 years down the line.

But these are not "ordinary times." In fact, "ordinary times" may not exist anymore. Global warming continues to make life more dangerous for everyone, and the threat of nuclear war hangs over us like the sword of Damocles, while "conventional" warfare continues to pollute the world, destroying human assets and human lives, wasting huge reserves of materials and energy, flushing our collective wealth down the proverbial toilet while people are hungry and sick. Nations large and small are competing to control markets and arming up for projected wars, modernizing their nuclear arsenals, and here in the United States of America our elected Congress often can't even come to enough agreement among themselves to pay our debts and keep the country going.

Social media penetrate the far corners of the globe, uniting us in a way, but also dividing us because of the polarizing and hateful content and misinformation easily distributed throughout the eight billion human souls populating the planet. And now AI will make deception even easier, making it even harder to determine what is true and what is not. On top of this, the recently elected national administration seems to be doing their best to eliminate any real democracy in our country and substitute an up-front

oligarchy, control over the nation's functioning by a very few powerful individuals. These times are going to require more clear communication, more unity, more networking with others who see the direction things are headed, continued "great pure effort" by all of us who want a peaceful and abundant world.

Whatever our ongoing legacy will be, I wish Martin hadn't called it a "spoiled legacy." Our legacy is what it is. There is no such thing as a perfect legacy. We had our ups and downs, made our mistakes, and did the best we could given the contexts we were in: the Vietnam War, Nixon and Reagan, the "Reagan Recession" in the early 1980s, the whole militarist and consumerist society surrounding us. The only legacy that could be considered "spoiled," in my opinion, would be a conceptual legacy, the "failure" to achieve the ideal that we visualized and were aiming towards when we started the community.

We always knew, and talked about it, that we were an "experimental" community, and experiments don't "fail" unless we don't gain any insights from trying them. I like a quote I've seen attributed to Nelson Mandela: "I never lose; either I win, or I learn." I hope we can continue learning. Life goes on and is continually changing and we need to change with it and adapt. I am grateful to have been and continue to be a part of this process of human cultural and social evolution. Om shanti shanti shanti. Peace, peace, peace.

I also want to honor Martin Holsinger as a Farm veteran and founding member, arriving on the Caravan in 1971 and living there till 1990. Among other contributions, he spearheaded the planting of an acre of blueberries in 1980 that are still very productive 45 years later and are considered a treasure by those lucky folks who get to pick them every year. (Note: We work really hard at keeping that treasure productive.) So he definitely has a perspective. He has obviously put a lot of thought into the article, and I am grateful to him for that. 🌱

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*Michael Traugot writes: "I was born in NYC in 1945, grew up in New Jersey, went sequentially to Harvard, SDS, SF, LSD, The Farm, UC Davis, Sonoma County, and now back to The Farm. I have degrees from Harvard, Fisk University, and UC Davis, and currently teach sociology at Columbia State Community College.*

*"I continue to try to understand how our planetary society really works, is actually working, and what we can do to nudge it in better directions. First step from a spiritual perspective is to accept the present as it is and deal with it in the best way we know how. The more clear-eyed and informed we can become, the more effective our actions will be. I value our exchange of ideas and experiences and hope it can continue."*

**Notes:** *Martin Holsinger's article in COMMUNITIES #205, "A Generation Betrayed: The Spoiled Legacy of The Farm," was an adapted, edited excerpt from Part One, "Money Worries," of a much longer piece of the same title that is now posted at [brothermartin.wordpress.com/a-generation-betrayed](http://brothermartin.wordpress.com/a-generation-betrayed). Part Two, "Wherever He Goes the People All Complain," focuses more specifically on Stephen Gaskin's role in The Farm's story, and supplies some pieces of the picture missing from Part One. See previous two pages for photos of the blueberry patch Martin planted at The Farm 45 years ago—still thriving today.*



## Pray Heed My Plea

Where oh where are the schlepping  
carts?  
Oh where oh where did they go?  
They're supposed to be in the bike shed  
All standing in a row.

This morning I couldn't find one  
Though I looked in everyone's yard  
How will I get to the dumpster  
With the stuff I have to discard?

Did they go on vacation?  
Perhaps they are swimming in the lake  
Still it pisses me off I can't find one  
And I'm damn near ready to shake

The carts are part of the common  
We have them for everyone's use  
So when you hoard and you hide them  
It constitutes a kind of abuse

So please return the carts to the bike  
shed  
Or at least park them out in full view  
So folks can find and use them  
And won't be cussing at you.

*Jon Swanson is a cranky, old, and retired  
social worker/anthropologist who has lived  
at Sunward Cohousing just outside of Ann  
Arbor, Michigan for over a decade.*



Photos by Chris Roth



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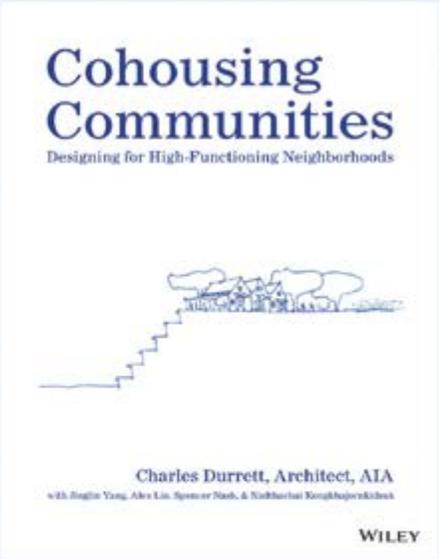


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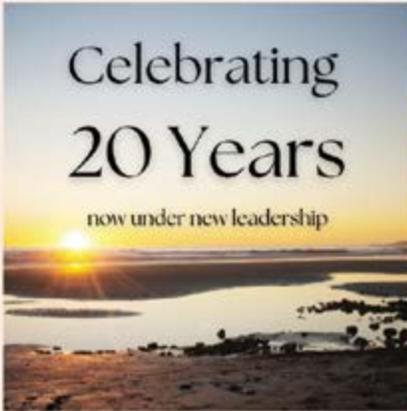
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The Community Peacebuilding and Cultural  
Sustainability (CPCS) Initiative (Stefan Pasti, Founder)  
"Building Bridges into a New Peaceful Era"  
All Documents, Resources at [www.cpcsi.org](http://www.cpcsi.org) are Free

Thesis: **"To achieve higher levels of Honesty and Responsibility, we need smaller habitats, and less complex cultures"** \*strongly supported\* in **"Right Livelihood in the Multiple Emergencies Era"** (1285 pages; May, 2025)  
Includes 652 page Risk Assessment (16 topics); Topics for Relocalization (39)

During our \*current Multiple Emergencies\*, we need local Community Education to call forth all possible resources (Exs <https://www.cpcsi.org/constellations-of-initiatives-approach> and <https://www.cpcsi.org/231-positive-tipping-point-orgs-and-insti> )--and make best use of our time, energy, money (our personal energy "votes") to "dry up" supply chains which support wars, moral decay, environmental degradation, etc., and grow NetZero GHG and SRI supply chains which regenerate Permaculture Resilient Ecosystems and Peaceful Sanctuaries

**"Getting Together on Supply Chains"** (7 pages)  
**"Growing Wisdom and Compassion in Small Communities"** (78p)  
2040 is \*way too late\* for #NetZero Greenhouse Gas Emissions-- unless there is Divine Intervention--hence **"An Arrangement of Quotations from 'Sathya Sai Speaks' (Volumes 1-15)"** [[301 pages; 1997; 2006], with new comments in "A Note to Readers" (2025)]



Altair EcoVillage  
Cohousing forming in PA



We invite you to support Altair EcoVillage, a 55+ environmentally-friendly neighborhood of 29 homes to be built in 2026. Using the social model of Cohousing, which promotes sharing resources and participatory community management, Altair will have low energy bills, a ride-share program, and community gardens.

Invest \$50,000 or more and receive 7.5% APR applied to your two-story townhouse or flat, or up to 5% APR return on investment at the end of the project. Join 6 future residents and 11 investor/home owners who have purchased 9 acres in the historic rural center at Kimberton and helped shepherd the zoning, design, and approvals to realize our vision. The site is two miles west of the bustling town of Phoenixville and 30 miles northwest of Philadelphia.

Contact Us:  
[altairecovillage@gmail.com](mailto:altairecovillage@gmail.com)  
[www.AltairEcoVillage.org](http://www.AltairEcoVillage.org)



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## EXPERIENCE COOPERATIVE LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY



**Established in 1980**, we are a 60 person intentional community. We live in 7 comfortable, well-maintained houses, with gardens and a small swimming pool, on the north shore of Staten Island, a short walk from the free ferry to Manhattan.

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**Monthly expenses** are very affordable and include food, utilities, laundry facilities, toiletries, and wifi.

If you are interested, contact Susan at [info@ganas.org](mailto:info@ganas.org)

For more information see [www.ganas.org](http://www.ganas.org)





# WORLDWIDE COMMUNITIES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

What does it mean to be in community in these times?

The **Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)** and the **Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC)** have been working for decades to support, strengthen, and grow sustainable communities worldwide.

As we consider what it means to be in community today, a simple yet profound answer emerges: **collaboration is the key to the future we want to live in.**

As a result, GEN and FIC are taking meaningful steps forward, *together*. We have paired up to merge our maps, creating richer and more unified data across continents.

On both our websites, you will get:

- A more accurate picture of the global movement
- Continuity in filtering information about communities anywhere
- New features allowing you to interact with the communities movement like never before
- Create a personal profile to share your values, needs, and aspirations
- Access to a matchmaking tool considering the best community fits for your profile

New features are in development and will be announced soon. Thank you for being a part of this pivotal moment and for building with us the future we know is possible.

[Visit ic.org](https://ic.org) & [ecovillage.org](https://ecovillage.org) for more updates



📍 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.



[lostvalley.org](https://lostvalley.org)

# Subscribe to COMMUNITIES!

## PLEASE EXPLORE OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS!



### 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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**Bonus:** every subscription, print + digital or digital only, also includes **access to all digital back and current issues** for online viewing and/or download.

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

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

### MORE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

- Donate to COMMUNITIES: [gen-us.net/donate/magazine](https://gen-us.net/donate/magazine)
- Become a Benefactor: [gen-us.net/visions](https://gen-us.net/visions) and [gen-us.net/reach](https://gen-us.net/reach)
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