Honoring Elders • Why Books Matter • FIC's 75th

Communities

Life in Cooperative Culture

Winter 2024 • Issue #205
$10 US / $13 Canada

Across the Generations

Confessions of a Coliving Entrepreneur
Long-Term Relationship Crucibles
The Farm's Spoiled Legacy
Generational Bonding
A Brother Lost

Rooted
NORTHWEST

There is another way…

Reserve a home in our intentional community in Arlington, WA — a rural cohousing village with 240 acres of regenerative farmland and forest. Construction begins Spring 2025!

Live Your Values

Invest in a stronger, more resilient future! Become part of a community built on shared values, daily interaction, permaculture principles, and participatory decision-making. Join our vision of rural development that preserves and supports local regenerative farms and small businesses.

2-, 3-, or 4-bedroom homes available, starting at $875k

Learn More +
Info Sessions:
rootednw.org

EVERGREENS



Photos by Chris Roth

These words, the first to appear in this issue, are being written last, on a rainy Oregon night on the eve of an election whose outcomes will certainly reverberate across the generations, into the indefinite future. Is it, or will it seem to be, "game over" or "game greatly imperiled" for US democracy, the climate, a livable planet, human decency, the cooperative future we all know is possible? Or is it "game on" in a much more clear, inspiring way? I pray it is the latter, but it cannot be known as I type this.

What can be known is that the tetris puzzle of this issue's layout is nearly complete, leaving room for these opening notes. As the material which follows developed, both predictable and surprising sub-themes emerged. Stories reflecting on community life "Across the Generations" inevitably involve both births and deaths; we mark two specific passings in this issue. The power of community and networking to support regeneration, and to help hard-earned wisdom endure and benefit others, is equally prominent here. Less expected by me were the multiple reflections, from different angles, on the tension between collective ownership and private property within cooperative endeavors as they play out over time. While one author sees an inevitable, largely benign one-way street, another offers a cautionary tale about the consequences of decollectivizing, and others offer examples that suggest that idealism, voluntarism, and radical sharing may end up being our most viable choices.

We want to thank all those whose donations, large and small, help this magazine continue—as well as all those who subscribe and help cover our basic costs. We were told more than five years ago that continuing to publish at a time when many magazines have closed shop would be simply "kicking the can [of our demise] down the road." We are happy to say that we have been vigorously kicking for five-plus years now, and with the encouragement and material support of fellow kickers are grateful to be part of this ongoing community of people for whom the value of COMMUNITIES is not in question. The generosity of some supporters has allowed us to not only endure but to embark upon programs to distribute more complimentary subscriptions and copies to various communities and readers who either cannot afford to pay or are just being introduced to the magazine. We also know that we are creating a lasting resource that will be accessible digitally (assuming the survival of free speech) as long as the internet is around, and that ultimately may become free for all to access (if we no longer rely on subscription and purchase income, for back as well as current issues, to help pay the bills).

Some of the articles in this issue strike me as evergreen—likely still to resonate 50 years from now, 100 years from now, even 1000 years from now if our species is lucky enough to be around then. That future is achieved day by day. We're happy to bring these stories to you and, as always, invite you to share yours too for possible inclusion in future issues (see gen-us.net/submit).

Thanks for joining us!

• • •

Community, Consensus, and Facilitation Book Project

Longtime former COMMUNITIES Publisher Laird Schaub, the magazine's most prolific author over its 52-year history, will soon have many of his writings assembled into book form. A book team (including the COMMUNITIES editor) has been meeting for the past year and, with Laird's blessing, working to bring some of his numerous articles, blog posts, and course handouts into longer-format publications that will reach even more readers and also be welcomed by the many people who've read his individual pieces or taken his courses and trainings related to community, consensus, and facilitation. With expert medical help, Laird has defied the odds and been successfully managing multiple myeloma for the past nine years—until now, when remaining treatment options are no longer working. This project, long envisioned, now has greater impetus to happen, to assure continued access to much of what Laird has learned and taught over the past decades, in a form that can outlive mortal human beings.

A GoFundMe page to support the work on this Community, Consensus, and Facilitation book series will be posted online by the time you read this. You can reach it through the "pretty link" at gen-us.net/ccf.

Contact COMMUNITIES *editor Chris Roth at editor@gen-us.net.*

Issue #205
Winter 2024

ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

ON THE COVER

Dianne Brause (right) reflects on her community's history as part of a 35th anniversary "old timers" panel during a gathering of current and former community members, family, and friends. See her article, page 8. Photo by Chris Roth.

Communities
Life in Cooperative Culture

EDITOR
Chris Roth *(Lost Valley/Meadowsong)*

ART DIRECTOR
Yulia Zarubina-Brill

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Joyce Bressler *(Community of Living Traditions)*

ACCOUNTANT
Kim Scheidt *(Red Earth Farms)*

BACK ISSUE ORDER FULFILMENT
Chris Roth/Volunteers *(Lost Valley/Meadowsong)*

PUBLISHER LIAISONS
Diana Leafe Christian *(Earthaven)*
Keala Young *(Atlan)*

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

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

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

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE: Chris Roth, Editor, Communities, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431; editor@gen-us.net; 541-937-5221 (please leave message).

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

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

WEBSITE: gen-us.net/communities.

This magazine printed by Sundance Press, Tucson AZ.

Insights and Head-Scratches

Just wanted to thank you for the latest issue [Communities #204, Fall 2024, "Politics"]. I read it with much interest. "Political Engagement for Introverts" was excellent. O.W.G.'s article felt a bit like "vaguebooking" and it left me bewildered. The responses by Diana Leafe Christian and Laird Schaub hit the spot as they were well-reasoned and thoughtful. Yana Ludwig's and Jahia LaSangoma's articles were also excellent. Shannon Kelly's article left me scratching my head as her take-down of Critical Race Theory felt more like something one would watch on Fox News instead of read of in Communities. I'd love to read an alternate viewpoint on CRT.

Marianne Merola
Oak Park, Illinois

Editor's Note: Thank you for the feedback. We solicited responses to both O.W.G.'s and Shannon Kelly's articles prior to publication, but the CRT element of Shannon's article, "Wounded Healers," remained unaddressed by press time. Fortunately, Jahia LaSangoma provides a different view of CRT in this issue (see next page).

We strive to present a range of viewpoints, not a single viewpoint on anything—to provoke reflection and discussion, rather than publishing only material with which the staff agrees. We see value in pieces that help bring awareness to challenges faced by communities and communitarians—even if the attitudes and/or actions of the person telling the story may be contributing to or even creating those challenges. As long as the author represents as accurately as possible their own experience of a situation, their own emotional truth, we trust readers to use their own discernment, find their own areas of agreement and disagreement, belief or skepticism about how accurately the author views what underlies the dynamics described in the story.

To me "Wounded Healers" (as it was written; anonymized pieces cannot be thoroughly fact-checked) was many things simultaneously:

- an honest expression of angst at the loss of a friendship, apparently at the hands of the (former) friend's decision that the author (Shannon) could not be trusted on the basis of her racial identity; and an example of the division and discord that can happen in any group when ideas and opinions seem to take precedence over interpersonal relationships and direct person-to-person communication;
- a depiction of the apparent misapplication of a way of looking at the world (Critical Race Theory) by someone (Bev) now seeing herself as a victim on the basis of a just-discovered small element of Black genetic heritage, after being considered by others and herself as white for most of her life, and usually holding the corresponding white privilege in addition to economic privilege not enjoyed by most others in her community;
- a textbook example of "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" on the author's own part, when in fact Critical Race Theory, when correctly applied and considered, rather than misused, has much of value to offer all of us.

Does the author's blanket rejection of CRT on the basis of her interactions with Bev also reveal that Bev's accusations about Shannon's racism, or her ignorance/denial about racism, have some element of truth, even if they are coming from an imperfect messenger? Does the story also reveal a common phenomenon, and help explain some of the polarization that has happened in recent years, as well as the resistance that some feel to considering new viewpoints or exploring issues in open-minded, more nuanced ways? Considering these questions may be as important as answering them.

In any case, if communitarians, communities, and members of the general public are to confront and heal any of these things, it will be by grappling with and addressing them, finding the value and insights to be gained even from those whose viewpoints we may disagree with and object to. What kind of pain is causing them to see things as they do? How can that pain be addressed? (Or can it?) What will allow change to happen, or spur it to happen?*

—Chris Roth

* I do not claim to be able to practice this philosophy in all cases; my tolerance and compassion are severely impeded when I encounter a red cap of any kind these days. Sometimes, indeed, there may be zero value in another viewpoint; but we can still hope to gain insights about whatever led someone to hold it.

Tolerance and compassion are easier to practice when everything one cares about does not seem to be under grave threat. This issue is going to press before election day in the US, but you will be reading it after the outcome is known (barring unforeseen but not unimaginable developments). I hope that at that point we will all be able to relax a little more, rediscover commonalities across differences, and feel more capable of extending the tolerance and compassion that may be much more difficult to access right now...and, whatever the situation, that we'll keep the long view in sight.

Critical Race Theory: Another Viewpoint

By Jahia LaSangoma

When sitting down to write this piece for Communities, which was requested as an "alternative viewpoint on Critical Race Theory (CRT)" to that of Shannon Kelly's article in Communities #204, I had to consider: **For whom am I writing this piece?** I agree with Marianne Merola's view that Shannon's article felt more like a Fox-News-esque commentary of CRT rather than something I would read in Communities. Much of it contained textbook examples of defensiveness from Robin DiAngelo's book *White Fragility.*

Am I writing it for the BIPOC people, like me, who read Shannon's piece and sighed over the classic knee-jerk reactions—Avoidance: "Can't we just call it equal?" Fear of being judged or having to take collective responsibility: "It was like a courtroom." Insecurity about being seen as "bad" or "in the wrong": "I want to be seen as a good, albeit flawed person." We can't talk about racism and make white people feel good about themselves at the same time—it's just not possible. Reading the article felt more like reading a headline that more or less said, "Talking about racism is the real cause of divisions among people!" or "CRT destroyed my friendship!"

Shannon's treatment of the topic neglects that racism is real and ongoing—not something from the distant past and not something which could thus be overcome by just "calling it equal" and not talking about it. I take issue with Shannon's article, and I have my own issues with CRT's stance as a "theory." My understanding of a theory is that it is something which has yet to be proven. I see systemic racism not as a theory, but as the lived reality of the globe's majority. I believe that racism does undercut every situation, in ways that are unique to that situation. That includes when we BIPOC people are amongst ourselves—I, like every Black person I know intimately, suffer in some way from internalized racism. What white people have been taught to think about BIPOC people, either subliminally through cultural messaging in media or overtly, we have also been taught to think about ourselves to a certain extent.

Or would I write it for white people who don't "get it" and would I drag out examples of trauma, massacre, and other horrible things that have been done in the name of white supremacy, European colonialism, American imperialism? Would I bring out statistics, links to horrifying photos from not-too long ago? Would I rile myself up and retraumatize myself in an effort to make people understand what could be learned if one only had the curiosity and the will to know what might make them uncomfortable, or ashamed of themselves?

Or would I speak to newbie activists like Shannon's portrait of Bev—or at least, how Shannon has painted Bev because I am sure there is more to the picture? Would I talk about the way some people have sought to find a ready-made identity and sense of self in the mainstreaming of social justice within the past five years? Would I speculate about what might be a complex history in Bev's family of "passing" as white, and refer readers to *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo, which contains a storyline about an older white woman who discovers through genetic testing that her biological mother was mixed-race? Would I nonetheless discuss how there is now a certain cultural currency around Blackness, and that a Black identity is not something to be shrugged on at will like a fashionable jacket? Would I say the same about an "activist" identity?

Perhaps.

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

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

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

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

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

Submissions Policy

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

Advertising Policy

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

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

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

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

What is an "Intentional Community"?

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

Or—

Perhaps, I would just say:

Racism is not theoretical. Racism is not a topic to be debated. The existence of structural racism cannot be a "political viewpoint," as it has been made out to be in recent years. It is real. This is part of my issue with the semantics of Critical Race Theory, especially when it is taken up for discussion by people from Shannon's standpoint. I've always conceived of a theory as something which must be "proven" before it can be considered "fact." I, personally, am exhausted of trying to prove the existence of racism to white people—or anyone who doubts its existence. Like Renni Eddo-Lodge, the author of *Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race,* I am no longer talking to white people about race—be they Nice White People who try overearnestly to connect with me as a Black woman by randomly bringing up their love of Beyonce, my white German relatives who are very aware of racism but still do live in a certain bubble of whiteness, or people like Shannon.

I appreciate CRT for its apparent value as a legal framework for retrying cases or as a defense strategy that could help many Black and Brown people trapped in the prison system get their lives back. If I understand the broadest definition of CRT correctly, it demonstrates the systemic nature of racism. To Shannon, CRT would be relevant in examining the minutiae of how, despite the intersectional workings of her own life journey, she has grown up in a world where, for example, she could go to likely any old store and find makeup that was in her skin tone, a hairbrush that she could use on her hair type, without thinking. Where the people in the advertisements and commercials styled as "the norm" looked more or less like her. Where to find a Barbie doll which looked like her, her parents did not have to place an order by phone months before Christmas or drive four hours away to the only store in state which stocked Black Barbie dolls as mine did.

I think one of the biggest benefits of racism for white people is the gift of not having to know about racism. CRT, as I understand it, does laudably go to the length of trying to crack open that protective eggshell of blissful ignorance and do the antiracist version of what feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed referred to as "being a feminist killjoy."[1] It is a bummer to think about racism, in all of its forms. Critically thinking about why things are the way they are is often depressing. There are times in which seeing new ways in which my privilege manifests makes me go, "Yikes." That is the price I pay to be in genuine relationship with others.

My 10 years in the American public school system—and my two years in an American private school—did not teach me to think critically. It did not teach me about racism. It did not teach me to have pride in myself as a Black person, or to question anything about the United States of America. It taught me that whiteness was normal, that America was always the hero, that the Revolutionary War was the greatest-story-ever-told, and how to say a Pledge of Allegiance which sounded in rhythm suspiciously like the prayer "Our Father Who Art in Heaven." Everything I knew growing up about Black Power, Red Power/the American Indian Movement (AIM), about Asian-American migrant struggles dating back to the construction of the railroads, about Black history, and Africa's precolonial history, and neocolonial present, I knew either from my two years of preschool in a Black Nationalist Freedom School founded by former Black Panthers or from the library of books at home I had courtesy of a Black Nationalist parent.

I think one of the biggest benefits of racism for white people is the gift of not having to know about racism.

Everything I learned about Critical Social Justice (CSJ)—which I, unlike Shannon, differentiate from CRT, because I see CRT as something people talk about and try to prove, and CSJ as something people do—I knew from my journey into independent activism in 2014, and my old university activist community where I first heard the term. It takes a long time, in my view, to become an activist with the credibility to speak or teach about social justice. After 10 years as an activist, I am just becoming comfortable to do so. The character of Bev, in some ways, reminds me of people I meet in antiracism circles who are very new to this work; they know a lot of jargon, have select phrases like "landlord" or "fascist" that they use *ad nauseum*, are very fired-up, but aren't who I would personally want to represent me or my beliefs.

This caricature of person, whom I've met in recent years coming in all races and from all walks of life, sees activism as participating in online debates or endless discussions, as taking a photo of themselves at a protest; they wear t-shirts with Malcolm X on them without ever having read or listened to his autobiography, or having watched any of his interviews still available on YouTube. They repeat much of what they hear or read online without thinking about what it means or developing their own viewpoint. They repost a photo of Assata Shakur without having read or listened to her autobiography. They too, often have a strong need to be considered "good," but some of them, unlike Shannon, have actively been told they are "bad" their entire lives due to the color of their skin/texture of their hair/shape of their nose or mouth. I meet people new to both activism and taking pride in their own identity from time to time in BIPOC organizational spaces, and they often talk the loudest (and the longest, to the detriment of those of us trying to have a productive meeting) but do the least work in actually moving the organization ahead or achieving tangible results. When I meet them, I tend to steer clear.

In my opinion, the energy of trying to convince white people, or anyone of any race, who doesn't believe in racism is best directed instead towards educating and empowering our own communities. Some people just won't get it, because they don't want to—or can't—"see the forest through the trees."[2] To continue the metaphor, it is even harder to see the forest if the person pointing it out to you, like the way Bev was depicted, has only recently learned what a tree is herself. There is also the caveat of Bev's white-passing-ness and previously held white identity. Yet there is an undercurrent of resistance and discomfort towards the entire topic of racism—towards the "cracking of the bubble"—that I felt when reading Shannon's piece.

As Renni Eddo-Lodge writes: "This emotional disconnect is the conclusion of living a life oblivious to the fact that their skin colour is the norm and all others deviate from it. At best, white people have been taught not to mention that people of colour are 'different' in case it offends us. They truly believe that the experiences of their life as a result of their skin colour can and should be universal. I just can't engage with the bewilderment and the defensiveness as they try to grapple with the fact that not everyone experiences the world in the way that they do. They've never had to think about what it means, in power terms, to be white, so any time they're vaguely reminded of this fact, they interpret it as an affront…they need to let you know that you've got it wrong…Who really wants to be alerted to a structural system that benefits them at the expense of others?... if I express frustration, anger or exasperation at their refusal to understand, they will tap into their presubscribed racist tropes about angry black people who are a threat to them and their safety. It's very likely that they'll then paint me as a bully or an abuser."[3]

This is more or less how I read the flow of Shannon's piece.

To tell the truth, I often feel very exhausted doing, as Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw describes of CRT, the constant work of "seeing, attending to, accounting for, tracing and analyzing the ways that race is produced, the ways that racial inequality is facilitated, and the ways that our history has created these inequalities that now can be almost effortlessly reproduced unless we attend to the existence of these inequalities."[4] I wouldn't have described my way of doing this as CRT before doing more background research on CRT for this piece. Perhaps I still won't. I myself hadn't heard of CRT until approximately 2020, when I had already been an activist in racial justice for six years. But I understand what it means when states and municipalities try to ban CRT or any discussion of it. As an activist, I'm trying to get at something like the truth, something like justice, something very real that I and others in need could touch with our hands—that is who I am writing this piece for. If CRT is the way to get there, if the theoretical can become a tangible removal of inequality, then why be opposed? ❧

If CRT is the way to get there, if the theoretical can become a tangible removal of inequality, then why be opposed?

Jahia LaSangoma (she/her) is a land-based "artivist," writer, and scholar with roots in Berlin. She grew up in the United States, which is where she first encountered the world of intentional communities. She creates discussion and engagement about decolonization and spiritualism through public-facing content such as book chapters, performance pieces, research, visual art, and educational events. To connect, visit linktr.ee/lasangoma.

1. See feministkilljoys.com/about.
2. The generally accepted phrasing of this colloquialism is "see the forest for the trees," but "see the forest through the trees" is how it was taught to me by my caregiver.
3. See theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race.
4. See nytimes.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory.html.

Across the Generations in a Fluid Community: A Founder Reflects

By Dianne G. Brause

Several months ago, I was invited to return to my old community and to participate in a panel of "old-timers" to share with people who might want to know about the history of its first 20 years, as it approached its 35th anniversary.

While I hadn't visited the community in a number of years, and now live across the country, and it felt pretty distant from my current life, I realized that there really wasn't anyone besides me who had participated from the very inception up until the time I left. So I decided to accept and prepare for the adventure of seeing the old place one more time.

I wondered what "my old community" would look like, what was going on there these days, and could I remember some good stories that would fill in the empty spaces in peoples' minds?

I planned my trip with enough time not only to share during the panel, but also to go to the nearby town where I had lived for a while after leaving the community, and to reconnect with as many friends as possible—most of whom had left the community for a variety of reasons over the years.

I reached out to friends and decided to stay with a friend in town, who had lived in the community for only a short time, during a rocky period with her husband. She was curious about the community as well, and agreed to drive me the 18 miles out into the country where the community was located.

On the day of the panel, we pulled in and proceeded down the lane past the chicken coop and around the corner toward the old barn, which was to be the location of the panel. Upon arriving, I was happy to see several friends I knew from past times, plus my host and another community member who overlapped with my time there. Also, there were a number of younger people, who I assumed were a part of the three-month apprenticeship program that was currently going on.

As a means to break the ice and to get a little feeling for the crowd, I decided to ask for everyone's name and what particular questions they might have about the early days in the community.

The questions were the easy ones of who, what, when, and where, plus why did you leave, etc. So as the featured guest, I started in on my recollections from the early days—both the good ones and the extreme challenges we faced in regard to land issues as well as the ongoing need to educate new people coming onto the land. Most of these new arrivals had never lived "in community" nor had to break away from their cultural upbringing which usually involved a very "me centered" approach to sharing anything: toys, food, parents' favoritism, the family car, or where to go on summer vacation.

After I spoke, several of the other "oldsters" were invited to add their memories and it was fun for everyone to get glimpses into the community's past: the time we hosted a group of LGBTQ+ Native Americans and a neighbor later told us that she imagined people "biting the heads off of chickens" when she heard the drumbeats of the ceremonial dance circle, or the time in the midst of a Spring Equinox ritual when three men in suits and ties came up the walk to inform us that we didn't have the right to have more than "five unrelated adults" living together on our 87 acres—with our dorms and cabins being able to sleep 100+ and a commercial kitchen left over from our predecessors with a dining room set up for groups up to 96!

But the most precious story was told by the grown stepdaughter of one of the other panelists, who had come to the community with her single mother when she was two years old and stayed on through her early grade school years. I remembered her in her first weeks there, under the dining table having a screaming fit when her mother wanted her to do something! She was always a very high-spirited child whose emotions ran from total sweetness and light to the exact opposite. Now, I saw her as this beautiful Madonna, cradling her own young infant daughter whom she obviously loved along with a very attentive and devoted husband, who took the baby for a walk in the meadow while her mother was sharing.

And what she shared were her memories, which were of an almost magical and perfect childhood while in the community. She reminded us of the gaggle of kids (maybe a dozen at that time, between the ages of two and 11) who would run out onto the land, to the woods, the meadow, or the stream with its "Leprechaun National Forest Trail"—which the kids named and claimed as one of their special places—in the mornings after our shared breakfast. Or, after hours of playing with the fairies along the wooded path between the dining hall and the driveway, they would run back at the sound of the lunch bell to reconnect with parents and their other adult special friends. They would report to anyone who would listen about the new games they had invented, then quickly gulp down their meal and run out again for an afternoon of picking berries or splashing in the swimming hole near the bridge across the stream.

This young woman shared that since those younger days she

has had lots of opportunities and has taken advantage of them to learn about small business management with the step-father whom her mother had met as an intern when she was teaching Permaculture in the community, who now owned a local organic food distribution business. Then she became a consultant in the Silicon Valley corporate world for a time. She quipped that a friend had described her as "halfway between computer chips and crunchy granola!" Now she is a devoted mother, remembering her time in community as perfect and magical. Her recounting of her childhood there brought tears to many of the people listening. She had become the embodiment of a powerful, loving, wise, and compassionate person, and I was so moved and proud of her—and happy to know I had played at least a small part in her transformation.

Over the years, I had followed her on Facebook and was happy to see that her biological father and her step-father were teaming up to support her in learning the many skills she needed to totally construct her own tiny cabin on the property where her parents live. I saw her with hammer, saws, drills, and paint brush as she, step by step, learned such important life skills, while her doting fathers looked on with pride. She had obviously chosen to explore and learn a lot in very different areas of life. And just recently, I got an announcement from her, inviting people to join her training program using a process designed to help couples become better partners. She mentioned that this program had helped her and her partner become much more successful in their relationship and as new parents.

• • •

Later, during my time in town, I had the pleasure of seeing some of my adult friends from our old community days together—and that was wonderful in itself. In addition, I was also pleased to be able to interview several of the younger adults who were children back in the years when I was there.

Now, 15+ years later, these kids have grown up as indepen-

Beth.

Nathaniel.

Photos by Dianne Brause

Aki.

Karin and Dianne.

Bryna Livingston

Cob kiosk.

Bryna.

dent and responsible young adults. It was very inspiring to sit down with several of them and hear their stories.

One of them came to our community with his single father when he was quite young. He was proud as a three-to-six-year-old to be trusted to take off and play with the other community kids—doing things that the kids at school would never be allowed to do. His eyes twinkled as he recounted sneaking into the walk-in refrigerator with the other little boys to "steal" blueberries or other sweet things that they didn't think they got enough of. He also remembered the special times when the teenagers, who came for the program called True Colors, had finished their week-long program, and had some leftover candy bars which they shared with our kids. They had all brought extra candy which they had stashed in their brown bags, in case they could no longer be sustained on the organic vegetarian meals that the community served.

In reflecting on the positive aspects of growing up in the community, now that he is a young adult, he shared that he thought that one of the best parts for him was his current ability to easily relate to all kinds of people. He felt that without his community experience, he would not have been so comfortable at school and in other situations.

We had to cut short our "interview" because he, and several other of the previous community kids (a number of whom currently live in a small neighborhood close to each other) had planned to go out wildcrafting—to harvest a variety of herbs and plants that can be used to make medicinal tinctures, etc.

I talked to his dad as well, who told the story of coming to the community as a single father, with his son—in a bit of overwhelm at raising a young son alone. He reported that the community was hesitant to invite them to join, since there were already four little boys as a part of the gaggle of young children who seemed to run wild on the community land.

As it turned out, he found a partner in the community and definitely appreciated having her "mothering" energy being added to their family dynamics. Also, he found that the whole community was actually ready and willing to look after all the children, while also letting them run barefoot wherever and just listen for them as they explored the confines of our 87 acres.

In retrospect, it is pretty amazing that the parents and the community as a whole were comfortable in their trust of the kids to watch out and protect each other from harm, making sure the little ones didn't drown in the swimming hole, get lost in the woods, or whatever.

One of the stories I didn't tell, but remembered, was the day I watched one of the boys become empowered in his own right. Previously, he had been somewhat "clingy" with his mother, but one day, he and another little boy discovered a small duckpond that the previous owners had made. It had cracked cement in the bottom and the boys decided that they would dig down to "China." In order to get through the cement, they went to the shop and "borrowed" a sledge hammer. One boy would hold a rock as the other tried to break it apart with the sledge hammer. Unfortunately, the other didn't have great aim and the sledge hammer hit the thumb of this boy. He ran into the lodge and someone rushed him to the local health clinic where they washed him off and proceeded to sew him up with several small stitches and a big bandage. He came back to the community and everyone gave him kudos for having been so brave during the whole procedure. From that day on, I noticed that he had a new attitude on life: now, he would leave his yurt, and come over by himself to my yurt to ask to see my sword, a replica of an ancient Spanish Broad Sword forged in 2000 called "The Millennium Sword" which was almost as long as he was tall and definitely too heavy for him to lift! Now, he saw himself as a seasoned warrior, able to take on the world of adventure and danger with courage and strength!

• • •

As I look back on my time in the community, I see that in many respects it was more like I imagine life to have

been in the times and places where tribes or clans lived together rather than the average modern American city-dweller's or suburbanite family's life. In my current suburban life someone across the street or even in an adjacent house could have a baby, become seriously ill, or even die without her neighbor getting wind of the change. But in our community, these life changes were experienced intimately by everyone, even though they didn't necessarily share DNA.

In our community, we experienced many of the incidents that impact families through the generations. During my time there, many people came as singles or single parents and left with a new partner and perhaps another child or two. Other couples came with families and left with a different partner and perhaps new children in tow. If I remember correctly, we had four babies conceived and born on the property. The first one was a still-born, then buried in our small "cemetery" out in the regenerating clearcut forest, and the next three were hale and hearty. However, one of the mothers went into postpartum depression for a few weeks, while the whole community pitched in to provide food, care, and comfort to both mother and child.

One most memorable time was when we chose to provide a full wedding venue for two of our members who met and fell in love on the property. We spent weeks preparing the land and buildings for what was to be a spectacular wedding in the meadow, with a special wedding night boudoir in an alcove in the forest with fluttering silks and poster bed. The little girls were bedecked in flowing dresses and flower garlands and everyone had practiced the songs that were to be sung during the processional.

The parents of the groom arrived three days before by car from another state. They came in and dropped their bags and presents off with short introductions and hugs all around, before taking off again to visit the groom's sister in a nearby town. About 20 minutes later, we received a call that there had been an accident in which a woman driving from the opposite direction had become distracted by a flying insect in her car and lost control, running headlong into their car. The father, who had been driving, was killed instantly! Suddenly, life had changed completely, for everyone.

What would we do now? Amazingly, the groom's mother was brought back to the community and said, "We came for a happy wedding, and that is what we will have. We will deal with the funeral preparations later!" And so we had quite a beautiful summer wedding, complete with a sit-down dinner for 50+ on the front lawn under the tall trees. Later on during the day, we planted a tree in memory of the father with some simple words and songs.

And so, through the living and the dying, we learned to sing and dance, mourn and grieve, surrounded by people who knew each other in the deepest of intimacies. And now, decades and generations later, many of us remain in deep friendships, whether we live in the same households or across the country tending to our old and ailing parents.

• • •

As I heard the stories of the "kids," I was so proud to hear how well they were doing, some living together in the nearby county seat, while others were scattered around the world. One was finishing his college education in Spain. Another was working in the local college. One had one more course to complete for his degree and was looking forward to getting a job as a coach for a youth sports team. One lived in Hawaii and did a variety of construction and handyperson jobs. One had gone into the military to find his place in life and now is married with young children of his own.

You may be starting to think that every story about our community's now grown-up children is magical, wonderful, and involved only smooth sailing throughout their teen and young adult years. Of course, this has not been the case, and in every family, there tend to be hard times that take strong hearts and skills to negotiate with love, generosity, patience, and grace.

Fortunately, our community had a workshop offered to the

Malachite.

Chris and Marie.

public, monthly, for almost 10 years that focused on teaching and practicing these skills. For most of that time, every community member participated in the workshop at least once, and many went on to become assistants to help guide and support participants as they shared their particular life struggles. Topics that came up could include a parent whose child had gotten married to a person from another race or religion and had now cut off contact with their family. Or a child might seem to have no direction or ambition in life, going silent or leaving the scene if his/her parent tried to broach the topic. Or a young adult might share that they were afraid to let their parents know that they really did not want to go to college, and had failed their courses so they could follow their personal dream of becoming a freelance photographer.

Our parents and their children, like others across the globe, have faced these challenges, but more often than not, have gradually developed the courage and skills to confront them head-on and usually come out with more love and a deeper connection than before. I hope that these types of communication will carry on into the generations to come!

While the community was not too racially diverse, with members primarily with European-American backgrounds, plus a smattering of African-American and Asian DNA added in, it tended to exhibit more gender-fluidity than the larger population of the area. One family who arrived, consisting of a mother, father, and two six-year old boys, had actually started out as a lesbian couple, both wanting to experience childbirth. So they were both inseminated, impregnated, and gave birth to these sons whom they both breastfed. Then one of the women transitioned into the father of the family. It was always interesting to hear one son ask, "Is that when you were a girl?" to his dad. The other son declared early on that he was "neither a girl or a boy" and insisted on wearing skirts and dresses on many occasions. However, according to his brother, as a young adult he is now in a fairly steady relationship with a woman.

There was a fairly strong cultural current of "open marriage" during that era, and we hosted a group who were advocating the philosophy of "Polyamory"—defined in Wikipedia as: "the practice of, or desire for, romantic relationships with more than one partner at the same time, with consent and communication." So our kids were not shielded from the varieties of sexual relationships.

Fortunately, to my knowledge, there were no incidences of sexual predation from adults upon our children or youth. But, at one point, a beautiful, young, 15-year old girl applied for one of the internships, with the permission of her mother, who was apprised of the freedom she would have. Not long after her arrival, she came to some of us reporting that she had noticed that, whenever she went down to the skinny-dipping part of the stream, a certain adult male who was there to teach a course in the community would soon appear and join her and whoever else might be there cooling off on a hot day. She confessed that this made her suspicious and she felt a little unsafe, even though he never actually touched her or otherwise acted inappropriately. The man in question learned of her report and immediately packed his bags and moved out the next day—apparently not wanting to face the questioning by the whole community that he knew would be coming next!

For a period of time, we had a practice of encouraging each child to pick an adult "mentor" of their choice, with whom they would spend at least an hour a week doing something of the child's choosing. Sometimes this meant a trip into town for a movie or some ice cream, or maybe helping him/her construct a birdhouse, or learn about geology, or playing frisbee, or reading a novel together or, practicing Spanish, or… It proved to be a very good way of bonding one-on-one between adult and child and further threading the web of connections within the group.

So, in conclusion, from my interviews, observations, and third-party reports, I came away feeling that on the whole we had done a pretty decent job of raising our children, as a village, or tribe, or collective. It seems that the "kids" had become young adults who are wise, skilled, considerate, self-aware, and busy exploring the meaning of life, relationships, and their future impact on the planet.

When I compare these young people with others that I knew of the same ages, who have been raised in the "outside world," I feel glad to have provided a space of safety, freedom, fun, fantasy, and meaning to a goodly number of young people who are now contributing in a variety of meaningful ways within their societies of choice!

Dianne G. Brause's previous Communities *articles have appeared in issues #123, #149, #157, #159, and #201.*

Swimming hole.

Community art.

Generational Bonding

By Kathryn H. Hug, PhD

In all our contacts it is probably the sense of being really needed and wanted which gives us the greatest satisfaction and creates the most lasting bond.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

As a grandmother, I have always sought opportunities to share experiences with my grandchildren. For many years that meant periodic visits, occasional travel, and long-distance communication. My twin granddaughters, my grandson, and I have created many memories, including trips to Costa Rica and US National Parks such as Joshua Tree, Grand Canyon, and Lassen Volcanic.

Opportunity took on a new meaning in 2018 when my daughter Hilary Hug, a longtime resident of Magic, an intentional community in Palo Alto, California, invited me to assist in homeschooling her son—my grandson, Harper Hug. She proposed that I move to Magic and become part of the team that would guide Harper through his high school years. After I accepted the invitation, Magic space was renovated for me, including a study center where Harper and I would spend countless hours from the summer of 2018 through his graduation in the spring of 2022.

After a long career in public education, including both teaching and administrative roles, I looked forward to the challenge of individualizing curriculum, strategies, and plans for my teenage grandson. Our work was monitored and certified through the Ocean Grove Charter School. While other adults in the Magic community tutored Harper in math, science, and Spanish, I assisted him with English, social studies, and elective courses. In addition, I helped him monitor his hours in physical education and community service. As we worked together, many unique and satisfying activities emerged.

Perhaps the project that Harper enjoyed most was a year-long undertaking in his World Geography course during his freshman year. He interviewed 51 people—current and past associates of Magic—about their home countries and states, exploring such topics as the impact of geography on work and leisure and critical environmental issues. The interviewees represented 28 foreign countries plus 12 states within the US. Harper shared his findings by creating and presenting a large bulletin board called "Viewing the World through People" with photos and comments from all the persons he interviewed.

At the beginning of his sophomore year, Harper asked Brian Cargille, a former Magic resident, to join us in reading the books that were selected for English classes. After finishing a book, Harper would draft a set of questions and lead Brian and me in a discussion. He tagged those sessions a "Book Club" and sustained them through graduation. Of the 30 books that Harper read during his high school years, he liked Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* the best. Reading books together began for Harper and me when he was a preschooler and continues

Harper (left) with vendor at California Avenue Farmers' Market, July 7, 2019.

Photos courtesy of Kathryn Hug

Kathy Hug (right) with grandson, Harper Hug, on his 20th birthday, April 13, 2024.

to be our favorite activity.

After Harper enjoyed a Visual Arts class in his junior year, he found a way to continue exploring the arts by including his own drawings, paintings, and photographs in a journal that he maintained during his senior year. For example, the entry for January 31, 2022 included a self-portrait in watercolor, "based...on a selfie that I took on an especially foggy morning as I was walking to pick up Hazel [a neighbor's dog] for our morning walk."

Harper's volunteer work in the Stanford foothills and at the California Avenue Farmers' Market, both projects of the Magic community, began when he was a toddler. During high school, he logged his hours and achievements at these sites each year for a Community Service course. Each Saturday morning in the foothills, he assisted with watering and planting trees and shrubs to sustain the habitat, eventually taking on a leadership role as new volunteers joined the crew. Each Sunday afternoon on California Avenue in Palo Alto, he helped gather excess food from the vendors—food that would be taken to the Mountain View Community Center for distribution to families in need. He often practiced his Spanish at the vending stations.

Doing high school together, Harper and I formed a bond that both of us treasure. From those daily contacts we have a trove of mutual memories. An unexpected advantage of the homeschooling relationship that we built came when the COVID pandemic impacted schools. We went on with our work without missing a beat. While many young people across the country suffered from broken links, Harper and I strengthened our bond.

Kathy Hug has been a resident of Magic, Inc., an intentional community in Palo Alto, California, since April 2018. She managed several aspects of her grandson's high-school education from 2018 to 2022. Since retirement from the Clarke County School District in Athens, Georgia, as the Associate Superintendent for Instruction, she has engaged in many volunteer efforts, including service with education and community foundations, hospitals, libraries, art museums, and community theaters. Kathy writes and edits.

Harper on watering truck in Stanford University foothills, April 5, 2020.

The Benefits of Multigenerationality at Narara Ecovillage

By Lyndall Parris

Indigenous painting.

Bronte, Rob L., and August.

Photos courtesy of Lyndall Parris

Narara Ecovillage, an hour north of Sydney, Australia is an Intentional Community of around 200 people, 120 of whom are living there and the rest currently designing and building their homes, having purchased their lot. I had dreamed of creating an ecovillage since 1996; we eventually purchased the land in 2012 and started Narara Ecovillage's development.

We are multigenerational with around 60 children, virtually nobody in their 20s (perhaps to be expected having other exploratory activities prioritised), and the balance in their 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and two people in their 80s. Because we are a community developing organically, time will tell how our members' phases-of-life ebb and flow.

Ultimately, our community is a human experiment, but we have in place a good, open, inclusive, transparent system of governance in Sociocracy, and combined with some other initiatives like our developing guide to living well together at Narara Ecovillage, I am hopeful that the "wisdom of the crowd" will prevail and continue to guide us well into our unknown future. I believe that the way we run things at our ecovillage "heads some conflict off at the pass"—that we don't even need to know about. We're not utopia, but we have strong foundations for living with one another in healthy ways.

To purchase and develop our site, it became obvious that a financial institution offering reasonable terms was not going to materialise for us—a blessing as it turns out, but a real, immediate challenge. Some older members were able to pay up-front installments for their lot, but others (generally younger folk) needed a bank loan for their lot purchase, which would not be issued by their provider until their lot was ready for sale, i.e., after roads, power, water, and other infrastructure elements were in place. It was here that the first real nod to our multigenerational aim arose. Older members with more financial resources paid the installments required for themselves and the younger, less cashed-up members, and at lot settlement, the latter were able to obtain bank loans and pay the former back with some interest. All were winners, and our multigenerational aim was met.

My husband and I never thought about the possibility that any of our three children would be interested in living in the ecovillage. They had been brought up in a solid family environment, with good aunt, uncle, cousin, and friend relationships but with no immersion in community, and while Dave and I were heavily engaged in the development phase, they were in their 20s, studying, traveling the world, looking for adventure, and generally exploring life.

Now, it is delightful for us that two of our children, with their partners and our grandchildren, are also living at Narara Ecovillage. We get to play with these grandkids, contribute dinners, and help out generally, and in return, we have advice, help with our own needs, and lots of easy, spontaneous fun times.

But we with these familial ties are not the only ones who benefit. I see a younger, stronger community member shoveling mulch for an elder, digging a hole, ascending a ladder, and an elder watching a child, or providing meals for busy families especially when they are home with a new baby. It is a gratifying, caring, and kind way of living.

The multigenerational aspect is also important for the ongoing evolution of our ecovillage. I note that provided a person has good health between around the ages of 55 and 70/80, with their own career and possibly family sorted, it is a good time to be in service to our community—to the world! The younger generation is busy, with career and often a family to nurture, so the elders can support them till they take their turn in their open service years.

I look forward to constantly broadening my horizons with the advantages, challenges, and learnings from living across the generations.

Lyndall Parris is founder of Narara Ecovillage, located on the Central Coast of New South Wales, Australia; see nararaecovillage.com.

A Brother Lost

By Renay Friendshuh

I found out this morning that my brother passed away. He was 43. His name was Ceilee Sandhill. We shared neither a last name nor biological parents and maybe it is selfish to call him my brother, but we were born to the same community, the same sorghum fields, the same swimming ponds, the same sweet mentor, Stan, who taught us both so much.

Ceilee was 15 years older than me, old enough to be off the farm by the time most of my memories could form. Old enough too that he became somewhat of a legend in my eyes and I held on tightly to the pieces of him I knew. I remember finding his martial arts trophies in the attic, boxed up alongside old canning jars and ice skates, inspiring me to practice karate. When I got to high school, I often leafed through the oversized class pictures in the hall until I got to the page from his year, when Ceilee graduated as class president, which I always left open. I felt really proud whenever someone made the connection between the two of us.

My memories of actually being with my brother are few and far between. I remember being included in late-night board games when he visited his dad, Laird, and how staying up late with them made me feel special. One summer, my mom, Stan, and I visited Ceilee and I met his two shy, beautiful children. He took us on his dune buggy in the sands outside of Vegas and we flew under the stars. His seemed such a different world than mine, in a big house in the big city.

It was only a couple years ago that I spent some real time with Ceilee. It was the death of our mutually beloved Stan that brought us together for a spell; Stan, who built forts with us and took us fishing and listened sincerely to our woes of growing up, albeit years apart. Driving to the hospital together on that terrible day was perhaps the first memory I have of just the two of us. Although the details are a blur of pain, I remember the comfort of Ceilee being there and the firm support of his embrace.

That spring, Ceilee came again for the celebration of Stan's life. He looked so at ease in the place we both grew up, so confident and strong. We drove back together from rural Missouri to the Denver International Airport and we talked the whole time. We shared what it was like to be born in community, to merge our hippie roots with our public-school friends in various ways, introducing them to skinny dipping or to holding hands before dinner.

We drove back together, sharing what it was like to be born in community, to merge our hippie roots with our public-school friends in various ways, introducing them to skinny dipping or to holding hands before dinner.

Ceilee seemed excited about his growing business and we talked of camping together in Utah with his kids, and maybe mine one day. I felt it was the beginning of a new era for the two of us, finally getting to know each other as adults. I dreamed of visiting him and our sister, Jo, making food together and playing board games again, late into the night. It felt so easy and natural to talk for those hours together. That was the last time I saw my brother.

I never knew the extent of the pain he had been holding for years. It is too fresh still to accept that these newly kindled dreams I had for us will never be realized. I hold his dad and our sister in my heart for all their own unrealized moments, his mother and sweet children, too, all the lives he touched. I believe for both of us, being born to community gave us so many avenues of curiosity, so many people to aspire towards and learn from.

Photo courtesy of Renay Friendshuh

Ceilee, you will always remain an inspiration to me. I am so grateful for the time we shared as siblings, too short though it was, and I feel so deeply sad to lose you.

With love,
your Sandhill littlest sister

Ceilee Sandhill and Renay Friendshuh both grew up at Sandhill Farm, Rutledge, Missouri. Find remembrances written by Ceilee's dad, Laird, at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2024/08/on-ceilee-dying-at-43.html and communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2024/08/remembering-ceilee.html.

Remembering Ceilee

Excerpted from his father Laird Schaub's blog at communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2024/08/remembering-ceilee.html.

One time, when Ceilee was eight, we were at an FIC board meeting at Shannon Farm in Afton, Virginia. He often chose to sit in on the meetings, even though he never spoke, nor was he expected to. People found it a bit unnerving that an eight-year-old had the discipline and attention span to pull that off, but there we were.

At the closing circle (after three days of meetings), we did a round of appreciation where each person took a turn saying something they appreciated about the person in the spotlight. As it happened, our host, Dan Questenberry, was sitting to Ceilee's left, and thus was the first to speak when it was Ceilee's turn to receive. Looking appreciatively at my son, Dan began, "Oh good, I get to start you off…"

Because of the rotation we used for this exercise, Dan wasn't in the spotlight until an hour later, right at the end, and Ceilee was the last person to speak. Turning to him, Ceilee began, "Oh good, I get to finish you off."

He'd been holding onto that rejoinder for an hour, waiting for the right moment. Dan's partner, Jenny, came up to me afterwards and observed, "Ceilee's a midget, right?" She couldn't imagine an eight-year-old with that kind of presence and sense of timing.

–LS

Please see communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2024/08/on-ceilee-dying-at-43.html and communityandconsensus.blogspot.com/2024/08/remembering-ceilee.html for more remembrances from Laird.

Long-Term Relationship Crucibles: A Model

By Kara Huntermoon

Literally hundreds of residents have come and gone in my 17 years at Heart-Culture Farm Community. A few stay for years or join us for life, but many others leave. Our community structure is set up to support and encourage long-term commitment, but personal factors play a huge role in individual outcomes. I'm developing a model to describe the crisis points that everyone seems to need to go through in order to stay and commit to a specific place and group of people.

Why does this matter? Many of the ills of society originate in or are exacerbated by our lack of commitment to each other and to a specific place.

Throughout most of our existence on this planet, we humans lived in intimate lifelong communities. We were born among a group of people, and we often died among the same group of people. The creeping loneliness that overwhelms most of us today is ancestral: we genetically expect the conditions our species evolved in, including stable communities. Today, many people are asking, Where do we belong? With whom?

Just as humans expect to be social with other humans, we also evolved in a context of daily relationships with plants, animals, rocks, waters, and other aspects of our ecosystems. Commitment to a single ecological community is a prerequisite for living sustainably.

Nature communicates slowly. We need to stay in one place and listen deeply in order to learn to live within her limits. It requires generations of rooted humans before we are able to create a culture that is responsive to the ecological realities of that watershed, simply because it can take that long to observe the impact of our actions. We need to be actively engaged in the work of listening, learning, and teaching what we've learned to those who are younger than us. If we commit to this process, we can participate beneficially in the intergenerational relationship between humans and our more-than-human kin.

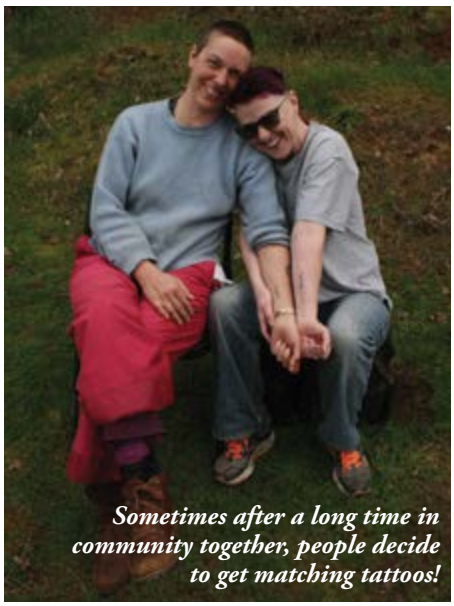
For those who wish to move towards sustainable living, we need to consider that "self-sufficiency" is a myth. Our goal should be ecologically-integrated community sufficiency. This will require us to commit to an imperfect place populated by imperfect people. Deep self-healing is both a prerequisite for and an outcome of this kind of commitment.

One caveat: Irritating behaviors are normal in every healthy relationship. Abusive behaviors are not. If the people with whom you are considering a commitment blame you for problems in the community, isolate you from forming relationships with other people, call you names, accuse you of things that you are not doing, and will not shift after listening to the impact this is having on you, get out. This pattern of behavior escalates in intimate relationships to sexual abuse and physical violence.

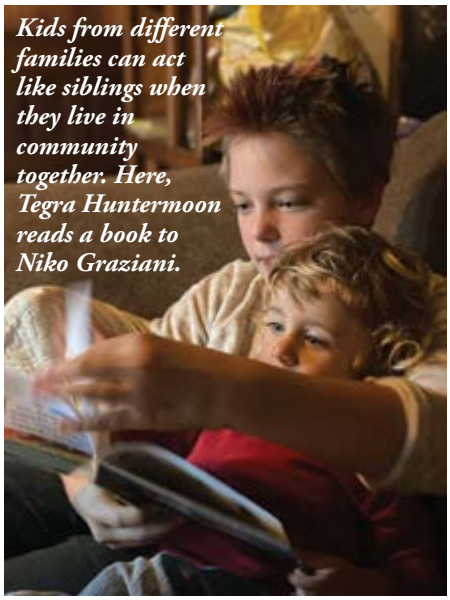
Be warned, however: we have a tendency to see abuse where it does not exist, because we are reacting to our emotions and projections. This is where outside observers are helpful. Ask your friends and family to come to your community for dinners and meetings. Make them frequent visitors so they will get to see the real dynamics at play. Then you can ask them if they think you need to heal and step up, or if they think you need to get out. A healthy community should welcome your outsiders' presence and perspective.

Here are the steps I've seen people go through as they seek to belong in a long-

Lupines in Heart-Culture's garden.



Sometimes after a long time in community together, people decide to get matching tattoos!



Kids from different families can act like siblings when they live in community together. Here, Tegra Huntermoon reads a book to Niko Graziani.

term community. I hope that by describing this pattern I can help normalize the crucibles that we have to suffer through in order to gain our goal. (I've written this model in a linear way, but we can easily repeat these phases as we cycle through different aspects of our own growth.)

Phase 1: New Relationship Energy (NRE)

When we fall in love with a new person or community, everything seems rosy. We feel flooded with hope and excitement. When we are in NRE, we instinctively participate in attachment behaviors that lubricate and deepen relationships. We smile, laugh, and make eye contact easily. We can think that we have finally found the people who understand us, those who are just like us.

Unfortunately, a large part of NRE is projection. We have an image in our minds of what we are looking for, and when part of a new relationship resonates with that image, we assume that the rest will match as well. We simply don't know each other well enough to have found the difficulties. Everyone is on their best behavior—not deceptively, but as a result of the normal bonding dance that new relationships elicit in us.

Phase 2: Real Work

This is the phase where the shine of NRE wears off, and we are no longer doing the consistent attachment dance of a new relationship. The first hints of trouble show up. Experienced folks will say, "Good, finally we are getting real with each other." Usually, we are still excited enough about the new relationship that we feel capable of handling these difficulties.

Part of the hopefulness of this phase is the thought that once we understand each other more, things will get easier. Or, to put it another way, "I can change him!" We hope that our love, our consistency, our emotional work will change the other person into a closer approximation of our NRE projections.

Phase 3: Disillusionment

Now we realize that no matter what we do, the other person/people will never be the same as our NRE projections. Reality does not equal our imagination. We can clearly see that our community is deeply flawed, and no amount of work on our part will make it shape up into the beautiful vision we profoundly desire.

Phase 3 is a decision point. Many people leave intentional community when they get to this phase. They wander off to find a "better" community, or they give up on intentional community altogether. Ironically, instead of contributing to imperfect efforts towards a shared vision, they often go on to live a more mainstream, isolated, "normal" life. Our attachment to the unavailable "perfect" can stop us from accepting and enjoying the good (enough) that is actually waiting for us.

Disillusionment is also an invitation to integrate. An important part of emotional maturation is the ability to interact with what is actually in front of you, instead of with your fantasy projections of what you wish/hope/fear the world to be. The decision to stay requires us to examine our values and weigh our resources. We can learn more about ourselves as well as learning to accept the realities of the world we live in.

At one of the major crisis points in my community, I shopped around for other housing. A space was open in my previous community, but when I made my "pros" and "cons" list, the decision looked easy. Moving would mean paying more for a smaller home, where I could not bring my dog, nor could I install a composting toilet or keep farm animals. When I weighed this list of material "cons" against the emotional/relationship issues I was struggling with at Heart-Culture, I decided I could tolerate a temporary nonmaterial challenge in order to continue living in accordance with my family's values.

A "pros" and "cons" list can help you get everything on the table, not just the immediate issue that has caught your attention. You may find, as I did, that you gain a fuller picture of your current situation if you compare it to your other options. A good rule is to leave only if you find something that fits your values better. Don't leave because you are running away from something. Instead, find a way to contribute meaningfully to resolving the stressful situation in your community.

Some of our most loyal communitarians have four legs!

Community-mates weave willow check dams on a friend's property.

Photos courtesy of Kara Huntermoon

Phase 4: Grief

If we decide to stay in a relationship (or in a community) that is moderately healthy (but deeply imperfect) after disillusionment, we will have to grieve what we have lost. Our visions, hopes, and projections are still valuable to us. It's painful to let go of them. Give yourself time to feel all the feelings. It might take a year or more to get through this phase. Don't expect too much of yourself during this time—but also make a strong effort to not slop your feelings onto your community mates. Your process is not their problem.

About two months after my wedding, I cried hard for half an hour about how my actual experience of marriage was not the same as the fantasy version. (It turns out I married a real-life human being.) After that, I felt lighter, and more appreciative of the generous and kind man who was my husband. I am still grateful for his consistent love now, more than 15 years later.

Phase 5: Acceptance

Accepting the reality that is in front of us can actually be very empowering, but we have to go through phases 1-4 first. If you can't reach acceptance, you will likely be asked to leave your community.

People who get stuck in phases 2-3 are constantly trying to change everyone else around them. This can lead to coercive behaviors or unwarranted criticism, both of which encourage others to set boundaries with you. Phase 4 has pitfalls for folks who may feel embittered and disempowered and tempted to blame everyone else. If this is you, it won't be long before your community mates stop giving you feedback designed to support you through this phase, and start considering how to care for themselves by distancing from you.

You must make use of some kind of self-reflective or self-healing process in order to reach phases 5-6. Then you will stop focusing on what everyone else is doing and take more responsibility for your impact on others.

Phase 6: Self-Discipline

That's not to say that acceptance makes things easy. Reality is still in front of us, demanding things from us. People are imperfect and irritating (yes, this includes me!). Phase 6 asks us to practice daily self-discipline in all our relations. This includes small decisions like responding with patience when our community mate is grumpy, or helping an elder with a physical task. We are working to bring our actions into alignment with our values. This is a phase in which we don't ask others to change; instead, we expect ourselves to increase our capacity for kindness-in-action.

Obligation is not a popular word in the United States, but it is an apt one for the self-discipline phase. We do things for others because we know we should. We force ourselves to remember that this irritating person has helped us in tremendously important ways, and is still on our team and has our best interests at heart. We treat others as we wish to be treated, not because it's easy, but because it's good. We focus our minds on what we believe is right: patience, forgiveness, and grace. We may need prayer or a mantra in order to rise to the challenges of this phase.

Phase 7: Mature Love

Obligation (along with disillusionment, grief, and self-discipline) can bring incredible gifts. For many months I faced feelings of boredom and humiliation as I cleaned my grandmother's house once a week while her husband was dying. The situation was awkward for her, too. She needed help, but didn't like it. One day I told her, "Do you know what I think about when I have my face in your dirty toilet? I think, 'All those dirty toilets you cleaned for me when I was growing up, and I didn't even notice.'" My grandmother helped raise me, and I felt a sense of obligation to help her.

Today, several years later, I still visit her once a week. We sit and talk and laugh. After a couple of hours, she'll say, "Have we solved all the world's problems yet?" When I answer that we haven't, she replies, "Then we'd better keep talking!" We know we have each other, a bond forged in mutual caring that has been proven through action.

In my intentional community, a major breakthrough occurred for me after a year of grief. This long Phase 4 occurred about seven years after I moved to Heart-Culture, and two years after becoming a co-owner of the land. It was triggered by the "realization" that I would never have the "chosen family" I was seeking when I joined community. After moving from grief to self-discipline, I discovered that I already had what I was looking for. I couldn't see it before because I expected it to fit my fantasy.

In reality, "chosen family" is just as complicated and awkward as birth family. There's the generous aunt who gives you just what you need, but requires one-way attention in every conversation. There's the shy cousin who seems to have nothing on his mind, but when you get closer he shows his intelligence and kindness. The blustering uncle who drops F-bombs at every dinner party, and maintains the building infrastructure with such meticulous care. The people who populate your chosen family are, it turns out, just people: complex, difficult, baffling, and fully worthy of love.

When you commit to each other, the biggest gift is being loved in spite of your own difficulties. I can't count the number of times I blamed my husband for some challenge (quietly, inside myself), but then the conflict shifted as a result of my personal healing work, and I realized the problem was (at least partly) me. His consistent kindness, forbearance, and forgiveness during this process is an incredible blessing.

When we know each other deeply, we can laugh about the places where we still rub painfully against each other. It stops feeling like a personal affront, or a threat, and starts being something funny that we can tolerate. A community, a family, a home filled with laughter, smiles, and frequent eye contact—sounds like NRE, but it's grounded in reality after all this time. That's the paradox of this process: you feel like you are losing something when you give up on your fantasies, but you are actually opening yourself to success. You can't find true love until you relinquish the ideal and commit yourself to hard work and personal responsibility. ❧

Kara Huntermoon lives and works at Heart-Culture Farm Community near Eugene, Oregon. She teaches advanced Permaculture classes, including Liberation Listening, Willow Relationships, Sacred Butchering, and Orchard Skills. She also manages her community's 33-acre integrated farm, with poultry, ruminants, silvopasture, and an orchard.

Queer Elder

By Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales

I wanted to have a supportive Queer Elder role with the young people of my previous community. I was 46 and 47 when I lived there. They were mostly in their early 20s, trans and queer, getting together and breaking up with one another, and so emotional. I've been there!

The house we lived in was intergenerational and had 12 people. I enjoy a Den Mother role—I'm caring and pay attention. I was in the kitchen often, especially in the early mornings before sunrise. I enjoyed putting away the clean dishes that had been washed the night before, making tea, and making breakfast before almost anyone else was up.

kitchen

One early morning a housemate was downstairs before me, which was strange.

"Hey, good morning!" I said, happy to see her.

"Oh, Laura-Marie!" my housemate wailed. She was crying.

"Oh my God, what's wrong?" I asked.

"Can I hug you?" she asked.

I listened to her cry and explain how her best friend was in the hospital. The doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with the best friend. She had a terrible fever, and my housemate was afraid she would die.

We sat down, and we drank tea together. I listened, asked questions, and cried too. We're not the same religion—she's Christian, while I'm a witch. But we held hands and prayed for her best friend, then parted ways. She went upstairs and got ready for her day.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" was the sentence I heard from him the most.

transition

Another young housemate joined our community. I had helped him get accepted, so I felt responsible for him. We had been introduced months before, when I was new to town, to discuss the local psychiatric hospital, and we became intergenerational friends. He was a university student, and his lease was ending. I thought he might enjoy living with us in community, and I encouraged him to apply.

It was an exciting yet difficult transition. I learned so much about him from living with him that I would never have known as his friend. He's a curious person and would ask question after question, especially in the kitchen, getting closer and closer to my vulnerable places.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" was the sentence I heard from him the most.

"Sure!" I would say, flattered that

Drawing of community by a young friend.

Queer elder Laura-Marie .

someone was interested in my life. "I will let you know if I don't want to answer something."

"I've noticed that _____," he would say. "Have you experienced that too?"

"Yes, but in a slightly different way," is how I might reply, and then tell a story about my life and inner world.

Then he would ask follow-up questions until we were discussing huge feelings and even trauma when another housemate came in wanting to make coffee or wash their dishes.

Sometimes we'd eat our breakfasts together at the dining room table. We talked about our shared disabilities including autism, getting services, family pain, the friends we had in common. At some point he might get overwhelmed by the intensity of our conversation or from socializing beyond his capacity, then head upstairs to his room.

He wore a cologne that was difficult for me to endure. In fact, his strong cologne was one of the hardest adversities I experienced, living in that community. We shared a bathroom, and I saw his cologne on a shelf. I fantasized about stealing it to throw it away. But that would be wrong, and he would just get new cologne anyway. (I never brought it up with him because I blamed myself for my sensory sensitivity.)

firefighter

Another young housemate was a firefighter. She had multi-day shifts at the firestation in a nearby town; she was away a lot. Some mornings I would be working in the kitchen and hear her boots on the stairs as she clomped down to get ready for work. She would enter the kitchen wearing her dark uniform, and we had an easy way of talking.

She was married to another housemate though they were both very young women. They had a brightness together, and I enjoyed hearing them speak Spanish sometimes. If they said something pertaining to me, I would answer in English, which is my habit from youth. Hearing their Spanish comforted me and helped me feel at home.

I enjoyed asking my firefighter housemate if she had what she needed. One morning I offered her some hardboiled eggs. I had boiled more than I needed, and it seemed like this food would help her—she'd overslept that morning and was rushed to go. She took the eggs and thanked me. She seemed surprised that I would care for her in that way. Of course boiling eggs is simple, but even a small gesture of love moved her.

At a house meeting, she asked for love notes from housemates to put in her work locker, so I wrote a note on a pink index card, thanking her for caring for people at her firefighter job. I wrote that the house loved her and missed her when she was gone.

She appreciated my note and brought it up later, saying that no one else had written her a love note, not even her wife. She said she would see it in her locker and feel happy to have a home to come back to.

individual

I had good rapport and relationships with these young people of my community. These relationships gave my life meaning, and I felt less alone. I was fulfilling one of the main goals of my life: being real about needs and feelings. Probably no one else in that house was praying with crying people. (The best friend who was in the hospital survived.) The inquisitive question-asker asked questions of many, but I was the only other housemate out as autistic. I had a role.

But when the young people fell in love, broke up, formed a polycule, disbanded, and then when serious accusations flew concerning intimate partner violence between two housemates, stress came from the young people. I was giving significant support and not getting much in return. The young people valued me, especially individually, in private. But when they got busy, their relationships with me seemed the first to be forgotten. And when the young people were together at the table, joking and laughing, I was nearly invisible. I was not one of them.

I was a Queer Elder and could ask for help peeling and coring apples for a dessert I was baking, but the young people were not holding me through my big feelings as I sometimes held them in theirs. I was appreciated but easy to dismiss; my needs weren't their concern. I was seen as someone who knew what I was doing, even when I was clueless in new situations and flailing as much as they were.

It started to hurt my feelings, that my energy was flowing to the young people without much of theirs flowing to me. Each individual relationship was ok, but the imbalance with all of them was exhausting me. The situation with the young people combined with other frustrations of the house—the accusation conflict I mentioned, some injustice I felt with how

money was handled, and other power struggles—depleted me.

solutions

Ideally some community members my age or older could have mentored or supported me. As I poured into the cups of the young people, I wish elders would have poured into my cup.

I asked for support around dental appointments, Mother's Day, and other big stressors in my life and got little response. The housemates my age and older weren't in community to nurture and love. They were focused on their work, and enjoying the benefits of low rent, home-cooked meals, and a stable home.

I like being a Queer Elder den mother, but it's exhausting without reciprocity and acknowledgement. In a family an actual mother might be cherished and honored. I was not quite a mother. Things I did were appreciated, like the cornbread I baked, the ofrenda I made on the mantle for Day of the Dead, birthday cakes I baked and birthday cards I circulated for housemates to sign, the flowers I brought indoors from our garden and arranged on the table, and the popcorn cranberry garland-making I organized two years in a row, the two Christmases that my spouse and I lived there.

I'm proud of the work I did—cooking, baking, welcoming, emotional labor, ritual, and hearth-tending. But when my spouse and I decided to leave, I'm not sure anyone was crying about losing me. Two of the young people did move out right after my spouse and I left.

I don't know if others have taken on care work, or if the house is ok without care work.

exception

One young housemate did care for me and help me feel safe: the anarchist, nonbinary housemate who traveled so much, they were the least around. They saw me as a real person, and we formed a close bond. But when they moved out, and then my spouse and I moved out, I thought I might never see them again. They have a strong novelty drive and need to move around.

Fortunately, this housemate is now one of my closest friends, and we're clear about what we need from one another with good communication. Our intergenerational chosen family relationship is unusual. But I'm happy to do reciprocity, and we learn from each other every day.

community now

The community that my spouse and I live in now is a housing co-op, much larger, and we have individual units. I love that my spouse and I have our own bathroom and kitchen. It's a different life, less collaborative. The messes I clean up these days are only my own, physically and emotionally.

I learned in my previous community how I can't thrive with an empty cup, and that people live in community for all different reasons. During an interview process, what people say they value might have little to do with how they behave day to day.

I also learned that all ages of people need welcoming and care. If I'm ever at a table joking with my peers, I hope I'll always invite in people who have different demographics and cherish their perspective and diversity. I never want to make other people feel invisible like I felt when the young people were joking in a group, and the ones who would seek out my love in private acted as if I didn't matter.

Also I learned that I might be an outlier when it comes to emotional capacity. That means I need to be intentional and have great boundaries around what I'm willing to give. If I show up with love and community members accept it, the doesn't mean they'll necessarily choose to give back. They might assume my spouse is refilling my cup, or they might not think much about the value of what they've received.

These days I pay attention to who nurtures me and make a point to thank them, tell them I love them, and never take their work for granted.

Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales is a queer writer, artist, trike rider, ecstatic dancer, and community builder in Eugene, Oregon. You can find them at listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakessense.com.

Queer elder Ming Lai.

Photos courtesy of Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales

An Interview with Uncle Willi

By Riana Good

Please tell us a bit about yourself.

I use the pronouns we/us and am a red-blooded member of the Belly Button Tribe, which is the largest community on the planet. I am currently living on a 20 acre organic farm community on the Big Island of Hawaii, with residents aged six to 73.

As a communitarian, how have you been guided on your path? Are you carrying forward values or practices from previous generations who've influenced you?

I was first introduced to the idea of communities in the late 1960s, and have been greatly influenced by Thoreau's *Walden*, BF Skinner's *Walden Two*, and Aldous Huxley's *Island*. I am in an inquiry of how can we live with each other, have fun, accomplish common goals, and heal through the bullsh*t.

When I was a kid, I preferred to hang out with adults and to hear their stories and I was blessed to have several elders as mentors at different stages of my life. I am basically a lazy man and I always figured that if I could live and learn from someone else's mistakes, I could save a lot of time and energy. By asking the right questions, you can learn just about anything, and if nothing else, I got to hear a lot of stories.

Rather than planning my life, I've allowed the creative intelligence of the Universe to guide me and show me where to go. I find that doors just magically open up that way.

How did you first encounter community?

My first experience living in communities was in the 1970s when all of the hippies were fleeing San Francisco for the mountains. I was always interested in ways that people could live harmoniously and cooperatively together. I spent time living at Harbin Hot Springs, Heartwood Institute, and was inspired by Gaskin and the Merry Pranksters, who were forerunners of the back-to-the-land cooperative homestead living.

My experiences with community continued while living on Native American Indian Reservations. I read the teachings of Don Juan in the 1970s, which began my search for the medicine. At the time, my partner and children and I were living in a small town in the Eastern Sierras and running a little store that sold used books and did video rentals and UPS drop-offs. One day a Southern Cheyenne man came in wanting to sell a painting. We took two or three paintings on consignment for him and when we got to talking I asked if he knew where anyone drummed. I had been running a sweat lodge and I got the message that I needed permission from one of the elders to run the sweat, and he took me out to meet Turtle. I got plopped right in at the source. His family goes back many generations in what is now Oklahoma, and his grandfather ran the first Native American Church meeting in 1918. I made up a sage smudge stick and a cedar smudge stick. I had never met any Indians before and then there I was, in a house surrounded by Indians. I offered him the smudge sticks and said, "I want to ask you permission as an elder to run a sweat down by the river." So, that opened that door.

A few days later Turtle showed up at my door with his nephew and drums and a rattle. My wife had just given birth a few days before. We ate sandwiches and drank coffee. He handed me the rattle and I handed it back to him. He said, "No, it's for you. I want you to learn to use this gourd and learn some songs." I had killed a deer earlier and I pulled out a hind quarter of venison to give him. Then I asked, "Do you eat flour?" "Yes," he said, "my wife makes fry bread," so I pulled out a 25lb bag of flour. "Do you eat oatmeal?" I asked, and then I pulled out a 25lb bag of oatmeal to give him, as well. Feeding people is an important source of connection.

At the time, it was me, my wife, our sons ages seven and nine and a few-day-old baby, and two school buses. Two or three months later, Turtle offered us a place to park our buses by a run-down cabin on the reservation, so we moved in, fixed up the cabin, and lived there for four years.

What do you hope to impart to future generations, and how?

As individuals and as humanity, the question that it all boils down to is: Do you learn to love? If you didn't get to answer that, you blew a good ride.

A message only gets passed on if there's an open receiver. Sometimes it makes me sad that I don't encounter more open receivers because folks might be missing out on something that could help them. Everybody has a life full of experiences, and I've been told that mine are more unusual, particularly because of the years that I was sitting in ceremony with Native Americans, looking at how they see both the celebrations and despair of life on the planet. Once I was sitting in a peyote meeting for a Native American woman and her three kids. She told the story of physical and mental abuse, assault, molestation, and she was asking the medicine and the medicine man to help her with that.

At one point the medicine man used tobacco as a key to unlock the Creator, to pray for the woman and her three children. He said, "Creator, I am praying for that man, too." One of the major keys to healing is forgiveness. To see that the perpetrator also came through hard experiences, we have to pray and forgive on all sides. This life is precious. It is so precious. We can be gone just like that—in

a moment. Young people think that they have all the time in the world. Looking out there, looking way over there for something. It's not over there. It's right here, right in front of you. It's right here with us in the Mother Earth. Getting close to Creation, to the elements, and going forth with those prayers.

As I've gotten older, into my 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, I'm seeing more clearly and deeply what my teachers were talking about. It frustrates and saddens me when we see ourselves getting so worked up over things that really aren't that big. They're just distractions and distractions are what you make of them. Get out of your own way.

How have you found the discipline to avoid the distractions?

Take all of the energy and transform it to the greatest good of all those involved. I practiced that for a long time. My sense of humor helps, too. Laughing at it is more fun than getting angry. When we were living on the reservation it was 28 degrees below zero and there I am with frozen fingers changing the starter in my bus. I could have been miserable, but it was also kind of amusing. People really get wrapped up taking themselves so seriously. Some people don't even like it if you don't take yourself seriously. You have to be careful with that one.

Any other stories to share?

I'll tell you about how I learned to catch a spear. The man who taught me how to make moccasins was also into aikido. He had a spear made out of a five foot pipe with a metal blade on the end. We were throwing the spear at a target in the bail of hay. "Okay, now throw the spear right at my heart." I was hesitant, but he said, "Go ahead." I launched it right at his heart and he turned and caught the spear. "Now I'm going to throw it at you." So, he threw it right at my heart and I turned and let it go right past me. If you catch the spear, you have to do something with it—either throw it back or stick it in the ground. Or, you can just turn and let it stick in the ground itself. Again, it's the lazy man's approach.

What practices and attitudes did you observe and participate in during your years on reservations that could extend our feeling of community and relationship here and now?

The generations know their place. The kids know how to treat their parents, uncles, and elders. They know when it's time to be active and when it's time to sit down and be quiet and pay attention. For us to practice that, we would be listening to each other more. Each generation has something to teach and something to learn. Each generation has an energy that they can contribute. The kids bring joy and happiness. The adults have more practical work to do. The elders have acquired wisdom. In the case of erecting a teepee on the reservation, the old man would turn his head and signal with his chin from time to time, and someone would go over and tend to whatever he was indicating. If grandma so much as lifts a finger, everyone is looking to see what grandma is about.

There's a certain amount of loneliness there. All of my life I've done and created and contributed, and if I can't do that, then I ask what I can do. That faces all of us as we age.

Uncle Willi is a certified Natural Health Educator, Massage Therapist, and Hypnotherapist. Uncle Willi has been running sweat lodges for 40 years and currently enjoys blowing bubbles with enormous bubble wands.

Riana Good has lived in intentional communities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Hawaii. See her previous articles in Communities *#196, #197, #201, #202, #203, and #204.*

Uncle Willi blows bubbles at his 71st birthday.

Uncle Willi blows bubbles at his 65th birthday.

Photos courtesy of Riana Good

A Generation Betrayed: The Spoiled Legacy of The Farm

By Martin Holsinger

These are edited excerpts from a longer piece that describes, in the author's words, "How a combination of circumstances, personalities, and changing cultural mores robbed The Farm's children (and many of its adults) of their rightful inheritance and their revolutionary pride." COMMUNITIES ***welcomes responses from others familiar with or involved in the situations described—please send to editor@gen-us.net. To read the full piece, visit brothermartin.wordpress.com. Martin also writes: "I regard this as an evolving work in progress, and welcome further input."***

In the early '80s, The Farm, an intentional community centered in Summertown, Tennessee, seemed to be on a roll. The income-sharing, vegan, politically active spiritual community, which styled itself "the flagship of the counterculture," had branches in multiple states and foreign countries, with well over 2000 people involved, most of us in the original community in Tennessee. Our community's lawyers had sued the Nuclear Regulatory Commission over its decision that it was OK for people to die due to the excess radiation released from the normal operation of nuclear power plants, and we were fronting out a rock band that called itself "The Nuclear Regulatory Commission." The group, featuring a vocalist strongly reminiscent of Lene Lovich, played in hazmat suits and featured punchy, political, new wave songs. They had gotten the attention of activist musicians like Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt, who used their connections to land gigs for the band at protest rallies, as well as a record contract with a major label.

By the mid-'80s, however, the band was no more, and the intentional community had been eviscerated. All the "satellite Farms" were gone, along with the commitment to communal living, and just a couple of hundred people remained living on the site, on an "every family takes care of themselves financially" basis. The community was roughly half adults and half children, both at its peak and as it shrank. The oldest of the children who had been born and raised in the community, just coming into their teenage years, along with many teenagers who had come to the community at a young age with their parents, suddenly faced the abrupt dissolution of the society they had been raised to carry on.

Now, 40 years later, Stephen Gaskin, and the community he intended to be a living demonstration of his teachings, are viewed with scorn and derision by many of those who grew up there, and by many of their parents, as well. In some Facebook posts, people refer to Stephen as "a sexual predator" and "a sociopath," and dismiss his expression of his highest ideals as just so much bait in his quest for sexual favors. The full story of this transformation is long and involved. This article sketches out one aspect of that history. As we used to say, "There are a million stories on 'The (metaphorically!) Naked Farm'"—and most of them have at least two sides. What follows is how it looks to me.

Two factors led to our failure to deliver to our children what we so wanted to give them. One is a relatively straightforward story of material limitations. The second is the complex interaction between Stephen Gaskin's inability to live up to his aspirations, and the community's loss of faith in his vision and integrity. That is a deeply nuanced subject, despite the stark way in which it is frequently portrayed, and I intend to put his personality, his actions, and his serious failures in a broader context than they are usually viewed, in hopes that this will help many people (including me, though I don't have nearly the burden to bear that some do) heal the hurt from our feelings

> Over the course of our first decade, the community produced several hundred children, fully trusting that we were bringing them into a culture and a community that would be there for them as they became adults.

of betrayal and enable us to access and appreciate the best of what he had to offer. So much of what Stephen saw, said, and tried to accomplish seems to me to be more urgent now than ever. "Rely on the teachings, not the personality of the teacher," Buddha said. I hope my efforts will help people find their way back to Stephen's essential message.

• • •

The most obvious factor that led to the end of the communal Farm was our financial condition, which was chronically—and increasingly—precarious. We arrived in Tennessee with no clear idea of how we were going to support ourselves. We had among us a few trust funders and people with large inheritances or cash from assets, such as the land or home they had sold when we settled in Tennessee. We moved from San Francisco, one of the wealthiest cities and states in the US, to one of the poorest counties in one of the poorest states in the country. Most of us had little in the way of practical skills, let alone marketable ones. We were, Stephen joked, "a bunch of English majors and grass dealers."

Some of us quickly picked up enough carpentry skills to become good carpenters, and that provided some income. Since the nearest large town didn't have a temporary employment agency, we started one, and did lots of unskilled labor for low wages. Our motto: "If you need help, call a hippie." At Stephen's suggestion, we tried growing and processing sorghum, a northern alternative to sugar cane, but found it was too labor- and energy-intensive for us to make money at it. We got the hang of growing enough food to feed ourselves, and then tried scaling it up to growing many acres of highly perishable vegetables to sell, with financially disastrous results that would, eventually, contribute to our demise. Our book publishing company, which mostly published transcripts of Stephen's spiritually/politically themed talks (he had a knack for combining the two), had a one-off hit with *The Big Dummy's Guide to CB Radio*, but what really kept us going was that, over the first decade of our existence, about half our income came from inheritances and people joining and donating their assets into the community treasury.

We were organized on the basis of a quote from The Book of Acts, "And all that believed held all things in common, and parted to each as they had need." The IRS classified us as a 501(d) religious/apostolic organization, a category they commonly grant to monasteries. Within the community, no money exchanged hands. We had no system of work credits, and any bartering that went on was strictly informal, as in, "I'll help you with what you're doing if you'll help me with what I'm doing." After 1980, however, the half of our income that came from inheritances and new members dried up, and we were unable to find a way to either make up the lost income or do without it. Our debt load swelled.

We did our best to live on as little cash income as possible. We grew most of what we ate, built our homes from lumber salvaged from nearby buildings we disassembled, or that we milled ourselves from local trees by helping a neighbor who ran a saw mill. For the first several years, many of us lived in 16'x32' Army surplus "squad tents" that could be had for as little as $25. Those who lived in the tents gradually improved them

Photos courtesy of Martin Holsinger

with simple foundations and wood floors, windows, solid walls, tin roofs, and additions, and our predominant living arrangement shifted from being families living by themselves and single people living in groups in those army tents (initially coed but, by demand of the women, eventually segregated) to multi-family communal households where a mix of families, single parents, and unmarried individuals shared kitchens, living rooms, and bathrooms, and the work of cooking, cleaning, child care, firewood provision, and building maintenance. We dressed ourselves from America's vast surplus of clothing, which sometimes came with unexpected benefits, as in the time when somebody tried on a winter coat that had arrived in a bundle from Chicago, noticed a lump in the pocket, and pulled out a nice fat bag of high-grade marijuana.

We did as much of our own medical care as we could. Somebody learned the basics of drilling and filling teeth, and we found we had a couple of former dental hygienists who knew how to do professional-level tooth cleaning. Dental equipment is generally upgraded long before it wears out, and no-longer-state-of-the-art dental tools and chairs were easy to find, so we saved tens of thousands of dollars in dental bills.

And we practiced midwifery, and learned it well, because we were having a lot of children. We didn't use any method of birth control except avoiding doing the act that gets a woman pregnant, an act every heterosexual person is genetically programmed to seek out, and most of us, being in our early 20s, hadn't got that far with de- and reprogramming ourselves. Putting our women to work making babies at a time when we needed all hands on deck to get baby-worthy roofs over our heads and floors for them to crawl on didn't make sense to me at the time, but my concerns were brushed aside by Stephen, the midwives, and my own wife. As a horny young man who wanted to please the woman I loved, I swallowed my concerns and trusted that the future would provide. Our first two children were born in the former school buses that we were living in. By the time our third child arrived, we were the last pregnant couple not living in a house, and so we and the other two families and single man who shared our three-bus-and-army-tent encampment were given a house that had unexpectedly become vacant, and moved in just in time to have our baby in a real, if unfinished, house.

Over the course of the first decade of The Farm, the community produced several hundred children, fully trusting that we were bringing them into a culture and a community that would be there for them as they became adults, that they would be eager to carry out the missions and carry on the traditions we were pursuing and gradually evolving, and that they, and the land we owned, were more likely to be there for us as we aged than the Social Security system.

One skill that was represented among us was teaching, and we started a school that taught the Three R's, history (with a pro-Native American, anti-colonialist slant to it—Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* became one of our high school textbooks as soon as it came out), and encouraged kids to think for themselves. The school day began with a short meditation period, Of course, you can't make anybody meditate, but you can make sure they have been given the basic instructions and given a chance to try them out.

We had originally acquired horses with an eye to lessening our dependence on automobiles, and used them throughout our history for both farming and hauling purposes, but our horses also became teachers for many young people who learned to ride, drive, and care for horses as part of their upbringing. "Every kid who wants a pony can have one" is sometimes said as a satire on campaign promises. We delivered on that promise.

We loved upbeat rock'n'roll—"Rock'n'Roll that's Good for the Soul," The Farm Band promised, and delivered. We encouraged our kids to learn to play electric guitars and basses, acquire drumming skills, form bands, learn to play the songs they liked, and write their own songs. Adults did the same. Ecstatic dancing was one form of communion in our highly informal church. We had a lively music scene, with weekly dance parties, and "teen bands" were frequently on the bill.

We did not particularly expect our kids to attend college. "A college education is as much of a bar to enlightenment as a naturally mean disposition" was one of Stephen's aphorisms. We intended that our kids would learn the skills we needed to make the community function, such as carpentry, mechanics, farming, food processing, and health care basics, and take their place beside us as adults.

We weren't just thinking of the material side of things, either. One of the books that enough of us had read to call it one of our "foundation texts" was Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, a tale of how several people with severe handicaps manage to merge their minds and become a kind of superbeing. Sturgeon coined the term "blesh" to describe what happened—a combina-

tion of blending and meshing in which the whole was more than the sum of its parts. We experienced our community as just such a blesh, within which were nested the "sub-bleshes" of households, work crews, and bands. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them," Jesus is reported to have said, and we regarded 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.

Behind that aspiration lay the reality that we had had to do a lot of "personal work" to attain our ability to function well together, and continued to have to work at it in spite of, as well as because of, our intention to agree with each other about everything important. We came from different backgrounds, and all had to "work it out" regularly to free ourselves from the alienated conditioning that growing up in mainstream society had instilled in all of us. Some of us had wrenching traumas in our childhood. Others were Vietnam veterans. Such experiences can make it difficult to be fully open and trusting with other people. One of the most important things Stephen taught was how to recognize and release that conditioning, and how a committed group of friends could work together to help free each other.

And now we were creating a generation of young people who were growing up immersed in the interpersonal skills and insights we had struggled to adopt as adults. Our children would enter their adult lives with a level of clear vision and feeling of connection with each other that far surpassed what we had been able to attain. We hoped that our children's "blesh" (while the concept was foundational, the word wasn't common in our vocabulary), hundreds strong, would spark a quantum leap upward in human consciousness that would pull many more people, and hopefully the whole world, out of the profit-driven, war-sparking, materialistic nose dive that we could all see happening, and that has only become more pronounced over the half-century since The Farm's heyday.

• • •

What was our children's experience as they grew up? The Farm was all they knew, and mostly they seemed fine with the simple diet and crowded conditions—children didn't have individual rooms, nor did they share a bed or a room with their parents. Homes had "kid rooms" where several boys, or girls, not necessarily from the same family, had their individual beds. While we weren't much for private property, kids had their personal toys, just as adults had their personal musical instruments. For the first several years, we had no television—because we had no electricity—and then initially watched it very sparingly, so our kids, once past the age when constant supervision is necessary, entertained themselves as kids always have, playing together at home or out in the woods and figuring out how to function as a social unit. Some of that involves working out power relationships, which sometimes involves confrontations, fights, and sexual situations. This is how kids learn to respond appropriately to such challenges, including when to call for adult help, which was generally readily available. We were emphatically not "helicopter parents," however. We were too busy covering the basics. Kids were also expected to help around their homes in any way they could, as part of the path to learning adult skills.

Stephen's child-raising recommendations (a phrase which indicates how much we looked to him for advice) allowed for corporal punishment for kids only in situations where they harmed another kid or put themselves in danger by not listening to an adult. "Never spank a kid when you're angry," he cautioned. I think I was able to follow that precept, but I have heard reliable reports that he did not. Basically, all the kids had the same ground rules, and could feel at home in any household on The Farm.

When asked about dealing with a crying baby, Stephen (or perhaps it was Ina May) advised our troupe of new parents: first, make sure their physical status is OK—dry diaper, not hungry or otherwise uncomfortable. If it seems like a kid is hungry, let them know you are going to feed them, and do your best to get them to quiet down before you actually feed or nurse them. If you can't figure out why your kid is crying, maybe they're just "into the juice"—feeding off the attention they're getting from crying and annoying people—so it's OK to isolate them until they quiet down. As I review current advice to parents on the subject, I see that our way of doing things was pretty standard.

• • •

In recent years, our younger generation, now in their late 40s and 50s, has reported some dissatisfaction with all this. I think there are unstated underlying factors, which I will discuss a little later. Meanwhile, let's look at the nature of the complaints. They are unhappy with how poor we were. They did not like the practice of sending kids to stay with other families when their mother had a new baby. They say the poverty and close quarters traumatized them, that their parents were indifferent when kids complained to them about other kids' bad behavior. Examples: a teenager tried to coerce a pre-teen into a sex act. The younger child ran away as fast as they could. The kid told me that his parents wouldn't do anything about it. Knowing his parents as well as I do, I have a hard time believing the allegation. The older teen involved and their parents ended up leaving the community not long after that. Was it because there had been numerous complaints about the older kid? That's what some of those who knew of the teen's behavior said later. I don't recall hearing about it at the time. Perhaps those who knew what was going on felt that there was no point in broadcasting the dirty details to the community as a whole.

Another example of alleged trauma: one person who grew up on The Farm reported in a community forum that "I hated hearing the sound of my parents loudly making love in the room below the loft where I slept. And if I looked through a knothole in the floor, I could see them! It was awful!" They didn't say who or what made them look through the knothole, nor did they seem aware that children have been hearing, and seeing, their parents having loud sex for tens of thousands of years, and only recently has the idea that this is traumatic, rather than humorous, gained any credence, as therapists dedicated to helping people to adjust to the way things are have pathologized the routine experiences of living below the American standard of privacy. I'm going to have more to say about that shortly.

Another incident that has generated some complaints in recent years was when a pre-teenage boy who had forcibly finger-banged a younger girl was held upside down (by his ankles) above an open outhouse seat while being told to never, never, ever do that again. That, in my recollection, is about as extreme as we got apart from occasional spankings. No kid was ever dropped in an outhouse, or spanked with anything other than (almost invariably) their parent's bare hand—"because that way you know just how much energy you're putting in those spanks, and it hurts you as much as it hurts them," Mr. Gaskin said.

While most of the kids who joined The Farm with their parents came out of the counterculture, they also brought in a certain amount of discontent with their involuntary switch to The Farm's Spartan circumstances. Some, too, had been abused, which was not something well recognized or understood among us, and these kids' acting out as a result of their trauma created situations that were difficult for kids and communal households alike. We also took on a small, but steady, stream of "trippers," adults who were mentally ill to the point that it interfered with their ability to take care of themselves. Our trust that love, honesty, and drawing clear boundaries could cure just about everything was sorely tested, and sometimes came up wanting. If we reached the conclusion that we lacked what it took to be helpful to somebody, we would figure out someplace else for them to go. A few of the "trippers" we took on got it together. Most ended up leaving.

Due to the generally low level of privacy, there was not a lot of spousal abuse or sexual abuse of children among us, but there was definitely some. I think the fact that we did not have typical American boundaries about keeping our emotional upsets to ourselves both mitigated against abuse and amplified awareness of the incidents that did occur. In the case of child abuse, the perpetrators were ejected from the community, but not reported to the police, out of concern over negative publicity, and, partly because of publicity concerns, the kids who were damaged did not receive counseling, even from within the community.

"We'll deal with it when it becomes a problem" was, I am told, Stephen and Ina May's decision. This had terrible consequences for some of the kids involved, as the time when they began "acting out" their trauma came after the communal community no longer existed, and the privatized community recognized no obligation to help them, but simply considered them a nuisance, evicted the family from the community, banned the kids from coming to visit their friends on The Farm, and called the police when they did. That is one example of the way our community betrayed its children. I'll be describing more.

• • •

Farm children mostly had close, loving relations with their parents, and plenty of opportunities to form relations with a wide variety of adults who were not their parents. We viewed the time and attention we invested in raising them as an opportunity for us to cultivate insight, learn, and improve our life skills. We valued our children and did all we could to help them develop their skills. They could expect to be warm, dry, healthy, and well (if simply) fed. They did not live in fear of physical harm, hunger, or becoming unhoused, and never heard the sound of gunfire. I have a hard time accepting their claims that a Farm childhood was ipso facto traumatic, usually on the grounds of living in crowded conditions and being poor. I think this is historical revisionism of the worst sort. In my opinion, the biggest trauma in our children's lives was that, as one of them put it, "Having seen people trusting each other go so terribly wrong is hard to recover from." More on that a little later.

The gradual introduction of widespread television use in the community—initially on small, battery-powered, black and white screens—had the same effect it frequently has in third-world countries, providing a window into the wealthy, happy, albeit mostly fictional world of American consumerism, and sowing seeds of discontent among the "underprivileged" people watching it in considerably less posh environments—like The Farm. TV's spread was gradual—first the Watergate hearings, then pro sports, then Saturday Night Live and its cousin, "Fridays," and then more and more, to the point where some women in the community were getting into following the soap operas of the day. At first, we took care to turn the volume down during commercials, but that practice gradually waned as the drug, er, television, took hold, and planted in our minds seeds of desire for the life we had renounced with our community vow of voluntary simplicity, or "poverty," as it is technically defined by the IRS.

Somewhere along the way, many in my generation seem to have forgotten that "poverty" didn't mean we had to be destitute, it meant that we would live as simply as possible ourselves in order to have more resources to devote to the creation of the world-changing communal society we envisioned. That understanding was also lost by our kids, who seem to have by-and-large accepted living in mainstream America. Our failure to transmit the value of keeping your needs and wants simple in order to take on something bigger than just meeting those needs seems like one of the ways we betrayed our children.

One of the things Stephen liked to point out was that "the world-wide standard for 'middle class' is having a spigot with potable water in your front yard. Not running water in your house—not hot running water—just a spigot in your yard that's good enough to drink." While we started with a communal shower house and homes where water came out of five gallon buckets, all fed from our property's plentiful water table, it was not too many years until most homes had hot running water and showers.

• • •

As the '70s turned into the '80s, a rift grew in the community. Some of those who were bringing in the income that supported our political activism and our internal social experiment lost their enthusiasm for those endeavors. They did the math and figured out that, if they weren't paying the bills for a spiritual teacher/radical agitator and a social experiment, they would be in a good position to support themselves at a typical American level. But how to get rid of the rest of us? A new governance model, and our rising debts, gave them the leverage they needed.

"I'm your teacher, not your leader," Stephen frequently said. "If you lose your leader, you're lost. If you lose your teacher, they might have taught you enough so you can find your own way." While he had strong opinions about how the community ought to be, and expressed and enforced them, it was he who suggested that the business end of our community and the maintenance and governance of our village should be directed by elected representatives from the community. We already had a legal entity, called simply "The Foundation," to deal with our material obligations, and so The Foundation's Board of Directors, selected in an open election, became our town council. It was a kind of syndicalism, with different social and economic units of the community (clinic/midwives, carpenters, for example) represented, rather than neighborhoods, or points of view (a.k.a. political parties). Many of the Board members were also members of the informal group that wanted to end the spiritual community/politically active phase of The Farm. Some of them had expressed this openly, while

others agreed, but kept it to themselves. According to a trustworthy inside source, they hatched a plan. The essence of it was the same policy that the International Monetary Fund has used time and time again to rein in small, socialist countries that are saddled with big debts: austerity and privatization.

Those implementing this austerity framed it as perfectly logical, of course, although there are details that suggest that those in charge were out to make the collective nature of our community as unpopular as possible. For example, one woman who was bringing in income by working at a local hospital needed to travel for a family emergency. "The bank lady" (the person with the power to write checks and disburse cash was always a woman) told her we couldn't buy her a bus ticket, and suggested that she hitchhike. "The bank lady" just happened to be one of the privatizers.

Two major efforts on which we had pinned our hopes for income fell through. The NRC got offers from a major label, but was unable to finalize a deal. A community business that capitalized on our creation of the first soymilk-based "ice cream" was sold to a major corporation, but the deal was done for shares of stock in the company, which we had to hold for several years before selling, so it did us no good in the short run. It will come as no surprise that the ice bean business was rife with privatizers.

Somebody on the Board knew somebody who worked for USAID, and asked them to come check us out as if we were a country they were considering. The guy, of course, recommended that we quit growing our own food because the community's farmers could contribute more to the community by getting outside jobs and earning money to buy food. Advising countries to give up food sovereignty in favor of plantations for export is USAID boilerplate, and our Board bought it—except that, in one of the poorest counties in one of the poorest states in the Union, there weren't any jobs to speak of. We started sending work crews to camp out and plant pine trees on the land where America's timber and paper industries were bulldozing the Southeast's vast, diverse native hardwood forests and replacing them with monoculture pine trees. This brought in some income, but also disrupted the fabric of the community, as community services were cut back or shut down so that those working in them could go make money. Some people were pretty good at planting pine trees. I was not. I was horrified by the genocide of the Southeastern hardwood forest that I was witnessing. I felt like a member of the cleanup crew at Auschwitz.

Our debt load was another form of leverage for changing the community from "the flagship of the counterculture" to "a gated community for former hippies," as one waggish former community member observed. (Many of those pushing the changes began cutting their hair, shaving, and switching from herb to alcohol.) One of the banks that had always been willing to be easy on us about loan payments was taken over by the FDIC, which was not willing to be so flexible. Other banks we had loans with tightened up, too. Some years later, a community member FOIA'd the FBI, and discovered that they had visited all those banks and advised them to be stricter with us about our payments. Some of the banks we were doing business with may have been CIA fronts, as there is strong evidence that the CIA was using small Southern banks to launder its cocaine and weapons money. That's purely speculation at this point, but explains why they would give a ragtag bunch of hippies with no credit history, no collateral, and a very iffy repayment plan such large loans. There's "honey traps," and then there's "money traps." I wrote extensively about this in my "Edward Snowden and The Farm" series, available at my Deep Green Perspective blog (brothermartin.wordpress.com).

Our medical debts were another vulnerability that our Board seems to have intentionally inflamed. We did not accept welfare of any kind, on the grounds that since we weren't putting anything into the system, we shouldn't ask for anything out of it. That's reasonable enough, but medical charges are not so reasonable, and several severe accidents that had nearly cost community members their lives created enormous hospital bills that remained unpaid for years. Perhaps prodded by the FBI, the hospitals threatened to sue us, but offered to negotiate a settlement first. My inside source tells me that the community representative who showed up, who was part of the group seeking to privatize the community, was so inflexible that they left the hospital no alternative but a lawsuit seeking a lien on our land until we paid them what we owed them.

The pro-privatization faction on the Board capitalized (both literally and figuratively) on the trust we invested in them as they spread the word through the community that the banks and the hospital could take our land if we didn't pay them. My inside source, who is not without legal knowledge, says this was pure fearmongering—between the way our land ownership was structured, the details of bankruptcy law, and the huge wave of negative publicity that would swamp anyone who tried to repossess our land, there was no way this could

have happened. But, as often happens, the propaganda campaign and the fear it generated trumped the truth.

While the sum seemed large—the number was somewhere between half a million and a million dollars, depending on who you talked to—when you averaged it out among us, it was close to the average debt of the average American household. On the other hand, we did not have average American incomes.

The austerity, uncertainty, and disruption of our society produced the results the privatizers had hoped for: many people who had been solid members of the community for years left, and our population plunged from 1500 down to 500 over the course of the early '80s. Our most common social function became the farewell party.

By the summer of 1983, the Board, which, to survive an electoral challenge, had previously pledged their commitment to maintaining our communal structure, announced that they now recommended privatization, and set up a community vote for early October to ratify, or turn down, their proposal. Stampeded by austerity and fear of losing the land, the remaining community members voted strongly, but by no means unanimously, to drop "And all that believed, held all things in common, and parted to each as they had need" as the community's organizing principle and switch to a private system in which every individual or family was responsible for providing for their own needs, and for paying a flat tax to the community treasury to cover essential services like road maintenance and our water system, and to pay down the community's debts.

It is worth noting, at this point, that, once the community was privatized, a great many of the leading lights of that faction left the community. Some were offered corporate positions, others government positions, that enabled them to join the American upper-middle (or perhaps lower-upper) class. Several of those who stayed in the community found ways to multiply the opportunities and assets the dissolution of our communal structure had allotted them, and likewise became relatively wealthy.

• • •

There was a disconnect in this that few of us seemed to notice at the time. In order to pay down our debts, our Board of Directors told us we had to give up our communal economic buying/sharing power, and required everybody to buy their groceries retail, invest in their own automobile, a separate telephone (we had had our own, free, internal phone system), etc., while still needing to have enough money left over to pay "dues," as the flat tax was called. Now that individual families would be footing their own bills, our local electric utility was invited in, and our once-charming, winding, shady roads became hot, bright, straight, wide, ugly power line rights-of-way. Significantly, the Board did not see maintaining a community school as "necessary infrastructure."

When "the changeover" came, the community school, which had operated like a public school for the community, had to start charging tuition and paying its staff. Many parents, however, elected to send their children to the "local" public school, which was 20 miles away in Hohenwald, the county seat and (besides The Farm) the only sizable community in the county, which as one of the state's poorest counties had one of the worst school systems in a state that ranks low for the quality of its public schools. Culturally, The Farm School and Lewis County High School could hardly have been farther apart. The result was severe culture shock for the kids whose parents sent them to public school, some of whom tried to hide where they were from. They were suddenly under heavy peer pressure to dress like, and pass for, typical American kids, who knew the typical American social do's and don't's, after having grown up in a community that was dedicated to creating a more informal, communal, compassionate, honest society.

Many of the parents who did this were putting their kids in public school *not* because they couldn't afford to pay tuition at our own school—they could. They were the owners and employees of the businesses that constituted the privatization faction. They wouldn't admit it at the time, and probably still wouldn't, but they were using their children as pawns in an effort to shut down the school, which was a hotbed of people who still held on to the community's pre-changeover values, as best we could. (My wife taught there.) They weren't just betraying their own children by using them as political pawns. By tearing our second generation apart and denigrating the radical education provided at the community school, they were sabotaging our effort to create a deeply connected, spiritually-based, radically-inclined tribe of young people, steeped in common sense and practical skills, who would make a major difference in in the world.

"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.

There were some children who were critical of the community and welcomed the changes. This, I think, is a mark of our failure as a community to give our kids a personal understanding of what is dangerous about "mainstream American values."

The community's deteriorating living conditions were prompting many families to simply leave and reintegrate into American society, and their children were, obviously, even more culturally shocked than the children who came home from public school to the community.

Many sought help from therapists. Mostly, therapists are not revolutionaries. They are the priests and confessors of the First Church of American Secular Materialism. Their aim as therapists is to help people accept, and function more efficiently in, mainstream society. Millions of Americans take the communion wafer of psychiatric medication that they offer. In contrast, not just The Farm, but the whole movement towards community, is about reshaping society to better reflect, and accommodate, the reality of our human needs.

Thus, many 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." It is likely that many of those therapists pathologized the whole idea of "trying to create a better society" as some kind of mania, "Peter Pan syndrome," or oppositional deviant defiant disorder writ large. Our appreciation of cannabis as a tool for loosening everything from tight muscles to calcified behavior patterns was a red flag for the priests of the establishment religion. Drug-dependency! Unfit parents! Pot-addled hippies, seduced by a charlatan! "Following a guru," especially one as self-taught and uninhibited as Stephen, was viewed with horror as "joining a cult," and meant that anything the "cult leader" might advocate should automatically be discredited and discarded. Those who adopted this point of view didn't seem to realize that they were joining a genuinely dangerous cult—what you could call the Great American Cult of Moloch (see *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg).

It is worth noting that virtually no one from The Farm formed, or even joined, other intentional communities, and very few took refuge in other spiritual teachers and their communities.

I speak from personal experience. I saw a therapist for several years, and, while their assistance was very helpful in sorting out some personal issues, once I saw where they were leading me, I cut them loose.

• • •

Not only was the society we had raised our children in and for no longer in existence, but their 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 majority vote of the community. When my oldest son turned 18, he applied—and was rejected. He had come to The Farm, or rather the Caravan that preceded it, when he was three months old. He had lived in the community longer than most of the people who voted to reject him. He moved off, but stayed nearby, since he had an "off-The-Farm" job he enjoyed and, in spite of how many people had left, The Farm was where his most of his friends were.

How could he have been rejected? Well, the community had shrunk to the point where the privatizers had a very solid majority of the votes, and they saw my son, maybe simply because he was my son and I was a vocal critic of the privatization, as "not one of us," and out he went.

To repeat a recent observation by one of his friends, "Having seen people trusting each other go so terribly wrong is hard to recover from."

So, that's another way the community betrayed its children and robbed them of their heritage. My son was fairly easy-going, but several of his friends who were more vocal in their defiance of the new order were assaulted by an organized, and apparently semi-official, gang of adults, mostly military veterans, who, while they didn't beat their victims, let them know very physically who was boss and that they'd better listen and obey. Some of the young people were intimidated enough to leave. Some were put on a Greyhound bus and sent to relatives in places where they were strangers. Some adjusted and got on with their lives. Some couldn't get over the culture shock and alienation and became "mental patients." Some committed suicide.

• • •

This is just one aspect of how we let our children down, and how they learned to scorn the ideals to which we had dedicated our lives. Much of the story of that betrayal involves the conduct, personality, and, as he might have put it, "the batting average" of the man who inspired us and brought us together: Stephen Gaskin, who sought to save the world, and failed, snared by his own shortcomings. Once the beloved teacher who inspired our band to rock out on hymns of praise (before they became "The NRC" I introduced at the beginning of this piece), he is now widely reviled for what his detractors consider very good reason. While I can understand their feelings, I think that what they accuse him of needs to be considered in a wider context, and with a more nuanced treatment.

The second section of this historical analysis, addressing Stephen's failings and virtues, is omitted here due to space constraints. You can find it along with the entire, uncondensed essay at brothermartin.wordpress.com.

Martin Holsinger lived on The Farm from 1971 to 1990. Since then, he has been involved in two other communities, and now lives with his partner in the woods near Nashville, where they do what they can to foster the same values that underlay The Farm: community, voluntary simplicity, and experiential spirituality. He has written an unpublished critical history of the community, is working on his memoirs, can be found on MeWe and Facebook, and blogs at The Deep Green Perspective, brothermartin.wordpress.com.

Confessions of a Coliving Entrepreneur

By Jay Standish

In July of 2013, my friend Ben and I pulled up in our U-Haul in front of a stately old Victorian in Berkeley near Telegraph Avenue. We were starting a community house, which we had rented for a year. We had just finished grad school, and wanted to gather companions to live together and explore new horizons as young adults.

We called it The Sandbox House, a place to explore and try out building things, prototyping and learning along the way. We had been inspired by a community house across the bridge in San Francisco called The Embassy SF. Embassy was the first place we had ever heard the term "coliving" and was drawing in a new crowd of scientists, technologists, economists. The Bay Area was booming, and it felt like Millennials were discovering our generation's flavor of community living, and the nation was watching.

A few months later, I was giving an interview to CNN in front of the house about our growing community. Our coliving experiment struck a chord. That first house snowballed into a business called OpenDoor Coliving (opendoor.io), which was one of the earliest of a new wave of commercially-driven coliving companies. Since then, that wave has largely crashed in the United States. I've had some time to reflect since we shut down OpenDoor in 2022, which at its height managed over 400 rental bedrooms in three states. I'd like to share the inside story of what we've learned in the last 10 years, and my honest thoughts on issues that I now feel free to discuss candidly.

Is Commercial Coliving Viable? Or Even Desirable?

I've had many questions from friends, investors, and community-living advocates since we wound down the company. Almost every other investor-backed coliving company in the US went out of business—mostly during the pandemic. Why did OpenDoor throw in the towel? What caused this wave of coliving to crash in the US? How would we do things differently if we did it again? What new approaches could nurture genuine community while enabling community living to grow beyond the usual suspects? Are business and community inherently at odds? How can social tensions be addressed reliably so that positive outcomes are the norm rather than the exception?

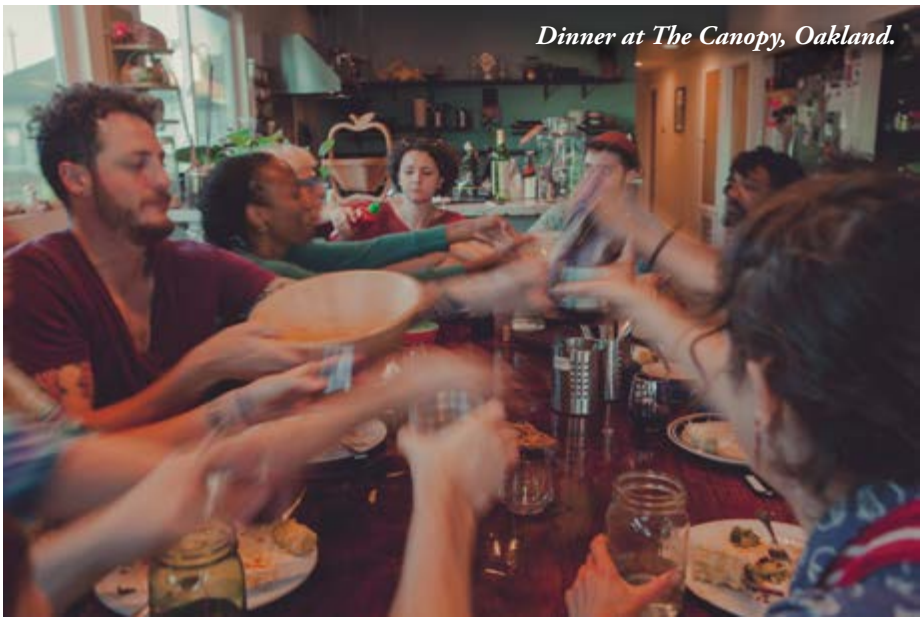
> If I were to do it all over again, I would structure things differently.

I'll be touching on some of these questions in this article, but also adding another layer: the potential of steward ownership and cooperative business models to make commercial coliving viable while maintaining authentic community values. Combining these elements could make community living available to many more people.

Shared ownership is a vision that we were never able to pursue at OpenDoor. We always wanted to move beyond a rental model, but as a startup, it's unwise

Freya Apartments aerial view, Seattle.

Photos courtesy of OpenDoor Coliving



Dinner at The Canopy, Oakland.

to innovate on too many things at a time. We had our hands full pitching investors to finance multimillion-dollar developments for an unproven housing type. So when I recently got the opportunity to coauthor a book on shared ownership, I was excited to dive in.

The book tells stories of people and projects using collaborative business models to forward shared ownership. It's called *Assets in Common* (sharedownership.us). It's full of solutions that we could have used at OpenDoor. In this article, I'll explore how a cooperative approach to business could address the stumbling blocks that hampered the wave of commercial coliving in the US between 2013 and 2022.

Steward Ownership Replaces Rental Investment

We spent an extraordinary amount of time raising real estate capital to buy or build coliving properties. At our height, we were managing buildings totaling around $70M in value. Given all the effort it took to raise this capital, if I were to do it all over again, I would structure things differently.

Steward ownership is when a company or a property is owned for a broader purpose than just private investment. Steward-owned companies have the mission baked into their legal documents, and most of the profits go to employees, philanthropic groups, and community stakeholders. While traditional companies and real estate holdings exist to maximize shareholder value, steward-owned companies exist to further a meaningful mission in the real world, and reinvest the value they create with those who had a hand in creating it. Groups like Common Trust (common-trust.com) are already hard at work converting small businesses into steward ownership.

If steward ownership were applied to an intentional community, residents would be beneficiaries of ownership while they lived there, and then when new residents moved in, they would become the new beneficiaries. The whole model of individual private property ownership is slightly adjusted, allowing a smooth on-ramp and off-ramp for residence and ownership.

One way this could happen would be to create a steward-owned real estate investment cooperative. It could be structured as a special type of trust, similar to how Patagonia is now owned. It could own multiple properties, and set up the right legal structures to collaborate with initial investors until they were paid back. Once the trust owns property outright and has paid back these startup investors, its members could choose to reinvest profits into transitioning other community properties into steward ownership, or they could return a dividend to members similar to how REI works. The trust could also choose to safeguard that none of its properties could ever be sold out to speculative investors.

Shared Services Cooperatives Replace Property Management

When multiple organizations split the cost of a shared function like HR or accounting, it's called a Shared Services Cooperative. An example of this is a group of independently-owned small businesses that are each too small on their own to afford, say, a full-time marketing team. Instead of hiring expensive part-time consultants, they could pool their scale together and create a shared marketing cooperative that they jointly own. This co-owned marketing team serves the needs of its members, and either operates as a break-even, or reimburses surplus back to members.

If someone were to do OpenDoor again, the day-to-day operations could be set up as a shared services cooperative. Resident involvement and small local teams on the ground are the best way to handle the details of what's happening in each community. The issue is, we were losing money because we were providing *too much* community support, which is required if you actually want people to have a genuine community experience. Our communities always did best when there was someone paying close attention so that they could come up with locally-relevant solutions. A shared services cooperative could provide larger-scale, professionally organized administration to serve many communities. Much smaller teams on the ground could collaborate with the shared services team to provide the hands-on community support that is required. A clear learning from OpenDoor is that there is a lot of social and cultural nuance and support required to sustain healthy relationships over the long term. This is not economically viable in a traditional rental housing business model. We were paying staff a living wage averaging $80k per person, plus healthcare. Many of these staff worked to deliver group psychology interventions and untangle very tricky interpersonal conflicts that, if left unresolved, could lead to a mass exodus. Traditional property managers are paid to administer building services, not provide nuanced mental health support and group coaching, and this additional care, although important, was very expensive.

Perhaps a shared services cooperative could address the misaligned incentives, and incentivize communities to collaborate together to lower property management costs, and reinvest savings into preventative cultural maintenance. That said, I do not see a way around a large portion of emotional work being unpaid. Part of the value of community is investing into relationships, and the unfortunate reality of the way our world is currently structured is that most domestic work and emotional work goes unpaid. By finding an intelligent way for operations workers and cultural workers to collaborate, a shared services cooperative is a fruitful approach for any budding community-builders to explore.

Investment, Zoning, and Subsidies: What Europe Is Getting Right

Although the first wave of commercial coliving has largely crashed in the US, coliving is alive and well in Europe. I've spoken with peers in Europe to understand why this is. Investors in Europe don't see community living as an oddball countercultural fad. They see it as a normal part of society, and an intelligent way to provide dense, affordable prosocial housing. Western Europe also simply subsidizes urban housing much more than we do in the States, making housing developments easier to pencil out, including coliving. Europe also doesn't have the zoning headwinds that we experienced in the US. In some US cities, arcane rules that were created to fight brothels are still on the books effectively outlawing coliving.

We faced massive barriers in devising creative, legally compliant ways of building and operating community living in each of the five expensive, liberal cities in which we operated. American cities would benefit from thinking beyond the single-family home and create legitimate pathways to design and build housing for single people, couples, empty-nesters, and elders. While the details are beyond the scope of this article, I would love to see a city take a proactive approach to actually incentivizing community living, rather than just looking the other way.

Social Cohesion: The Enduring Wildcard

The Achilles heel of all community living models is the looming threat of bad vibes. Negative social dynamics fester in unwashed dishes, unexpressed frustrations, and underlying tensions. We had the unique experience of both living in community ourselves, as well as launching and running over 20 unique communities. As with child rearing, you think you have parenting all figured out, and then you have a second kid who is totally different! Over time we did learn some reliable common threads, but the threat of cultural breakdown was always present. This issue is actually the biggest challenge to community living expanding to a larger presence in society. Many people lack experience in the kind of social skills required for enduring harmony. With nearly all our communities, there came a time when the community was considering asking someone to leave. This process is emotionally exhausting and legally dubious. We saw entire communities fall apart when someone who was at the center of conflict would not leave when asked. If community living were to mature in America, there would need to be housing policy updates that allow for a fair process that affords a community the right to a "social eviction."

While this may be the "stick" approach, we also need training wheels for not only community living, but social participation in general. We need places where people can experience a thriving, working community and internalize the social norms that enable its success. Readers of this publication are all too familiar with the deepening loneliness epidemic and the drop in community participation, and increasingly, the breakdown of the social contract and a lack of a hopeful future for the younger generations.

Community is now a scarcely available cure for a mass social malady. Whether it's in a living environment or just a social group, club, team, or group of friends, we need to relearn the art of and joy of existing within a group. Although our approach to scaling community at OpenDoor worked for only nine years, I still believe in the power of community to shape our society. I pen these words during a month-long stay at a Buddhist monastery. The daily practices and respectful collaboration at play here remind me that grace is possible in community. We may just have to go deeper, and put more of ourselves on the line.

Jay Standish cofounded OpenDoor Coliving, the longest-running commercial coliving operator in the US. He recently coauthored the book Assets in Common *on scalable approaches to shared ownership. Jay has an MBA in sustainability and over 250 nights of remote wilderness leadership training. Jay consults on impact-driven initiatives and can be contacted at www.jaystandish.com.*

The Canopy common room, Oakland.

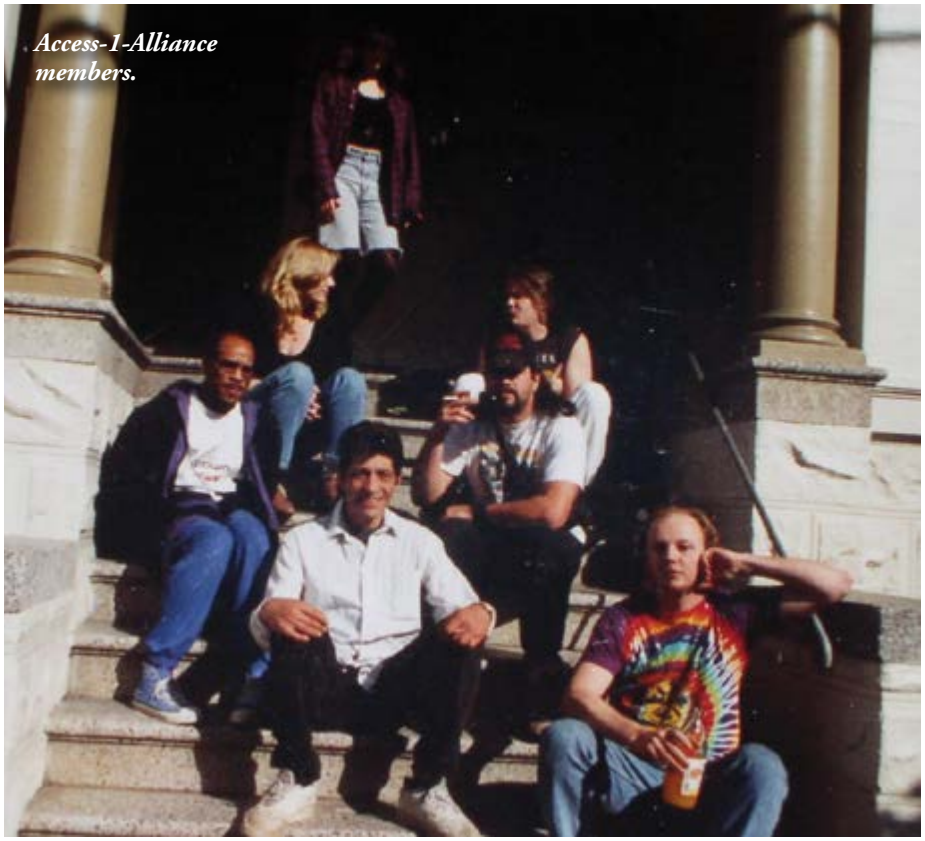
Access-1-Alliance: A Replicable Model to Make Things Better

By Craig Lombardi

If anything is blatantly obvious in today's community-to-individual relationship, it is the absence of a sense, or spirit, of shared interest, investment, and participation, in which each member of society experiences the sense of being an indispensable part of the larger whole—all of the same "family," regardless of our diverse origins, tastes, cultural and religious practices.

Following the break-up of the Kerista Commune in 1992—of which I was either a member or peripheral adjunct for years—I formed another, quite different community of sorts. Gaining control of one of the many Haight-Ashbury flats Kerista released upon dissolution, I hand-picked a number of select individuals to share with myself a dream I'd had of an ideal charitable association: a membership that could visibly enhance the lives of its participants while, with financial contributions of aid and assistance, improve conditions for other less fortunate persons in San Francisco.

We named our club Access-1-Alliance. It began with friends reaching out to friends of friends. While our organization gradually increased in size, we adhered to a number of significant principles and practices—those by which we could interact in mutual support that would also have a positive effect on our immediate surroundings. We agreed to:



Access-1-Alliance members.

- Each donate as dues $20 per month to the Alliance;
- Meet on one day every month at a dinner/social event financed by half the collected dues;
- Seek out honest viable local charities, discuss and select one worthy cause each month for a contribution of funds (from the same dues);
- Participate in nonviolent intelligent conversation with betterment of society as the motivating factor;
- Enjoy a social environment whereby one feels a part of something bigger while doing visible good;
- Publish a monthly newsletter documenting our growth in membership and to whom our contribution went in aid;
- Overcome isolation, disenfranchisement, and alienation, resulting in an attitude of hope, achievement, a sense of accomplishment and belonging;
- Take pride in our city, our community, and our good works, knowing we can improve things;
- Volunteer thought, energy, and effort, when possible, to the Alliance project.

Each member received a signed, sealed, laminated identification card necessary to enjoy Alliance benefits. Dances, parties, raves, picnics were held where members could invite guests, socialize, and meet new pros-

pects. Events might include: have Chinese cuisine and go bowling; get pizza and shoot pool; and so on.

We reached 20 members paying $20 each, which came to $400 every month. We would spend $200 on a dinner and social event. At the events, the membership discussed and voted on which charities should receive our remaining $200. For example, we donated to Make-a-Wish Foundation; to a Catholic School whose budget couldn't afford art supplies for its third-grade students; to Project Open Hand, feeding the homeless; and to numerous other worthy causes. We relished the knowledge that we were "doing something," instead of feeling impotent, alienated, and hopeless.

We began discussing consumer co-op programs; purchasing in bulk; growing to the point where someday we might dictate terms to corporate entities. "Don't exploit your workers; don't harm the environment; don't discriminate; etc." We designed a "Vendor Discount Program," going to various stores, shops, restaurants, clothing outlets, etc. We'd find out what percentage of their gross went to advertising budget. Then we'd ask, "If an Alliance member graces your business, shows the card, will you give the same percentage in discount?" No monies exchanged hands and each seller was listed in the newsletter. Members let us know which enterprises they frequented…we'd go out and pitch the deal to them as well as other businesses and professional services. It was very successful.

Our organization was leaderless. No bosses; no gurus; no prophets; no superior beings with followers! A program such as Access-1-Alliance operates from the inside out, its members serious and dedicated to social change in a lasting, growing, expansive sense. There is an inherent maturity that is absolutely essential to the survival and thriving of such an enterprise.

We kept the thing going for a year, 1992-3, but it was a period of great temptation and social upheaval. The World Wide Web was emerging as an incredible force of influence. We were invaded by greed and individual self-interest. Silicon Valley was promising the learning of HTML would lead to great opportunity, ease of operation, indiscriminate sex, and untold riches. After a year or so, that myth was dispelled, leaving its unwitting victims in a hapless state of unemployment, inertia, apathy, impotence, depression, and ultimate increasing insanity. It appears to be today's profile…exaggerated, of course. But I predict this condition, or trend, shall not last and will again reverse itself.

During '60s-'70s, a communal renaissance of interactive appreciation temporarily surpassed the hollow fulfillment of technological futility in the theater of human relations. In its pendular swing, humanity will regain faith in itself, leaving machines, AI, etc. to attend to their own. If the general population ever has its awakening and prayerful epiphany, an idea like this might revolutionize the hollow "greed is good" illusory image of success and false idolatry of "rich and famous" celebrity.

Access-1-Alliance monthly meet/dinner.

Photos courtesy of Craig Lombardi

Craig Rory Lombardi is a musician, painter (oil on canvas), writer of novels, short stories, essays, satirical pieces; horse, dog, cat owner; and partner with the same person for the past 32 years. Born in the South Bronx, he moved to Haight-Ashbury in '69, joined Kerista in '70 for four years and again in '87 for five, and has also lived and worked in West Hollywood, Manhattan, Santa Fe, Pensacola, and currently Pittsburgh.

On the Occasion of the FIC's 75th Anniversary

By A. Allen Butcher

Note: The author writes as an unaffiliated, independent scholar, not on behalf of any of the organizations described.

The Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC), celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2024, has been experiencing some important transitions. It has always relied on a lot of volunteers and donations (even now, nearly half of its income continues to be from membership, sponsors, and donors)—but in recent years it has become more staff-led instead of Director-led, and has also been paying staff a living wage dollar per hour, while increasing its income from online movement services. The Mutual-Aid Networks have also been making good use of free internet platforms and smart-phone apps for developing, since the pandemic years, online labor exchanges and barter programs. Congratulations to both these movements for taking advantage of emerging opportunities during times of crisis, and especially to all the communitarians for their decades of dedication to the intentional communities movement!

There has been a reluctance to recognize the trend away from communal commonly-owned property toward the sharing of private property. I have seen that denial in my own attitude toward the movement, having dedicated 12 years of my life to communal society.

From Fellowship to Convergence

The original Fellowship of Intentional Communities, founded 75 years ago this year (i.e., 1949) by Arthur Morgan at Community Service in Yellow Springs, Ohio (now Community Solutions), was intended to serve as a convergence of intentional communities, with the hope that mutually-beneficial programs would develop. One of the organizers, Alfred Andersen, later wrote that the 1950s FIC soon found that their most appreciated function was the "fellowship" of people coming together and meeting each other at annual FIC meetings, hosted at communities around the country.

FIC has often relied upon affinity networks of like-minded communities as sponsors and supporting organizations, though its recent efforts have generally been in the direction of becoming more self-supporting. Originally, the first Fellowship was largely supported by various Quaker communities, while Arthur Morgan was Unitarian. Other Christian communities were also involved. When controversy erupted among these groups the FIC went into a dormant period. For historical details see the Wikipedia.org FIC entry.

The torch was passed to the next generation of community movements in 1986 with the founding of the second Fellowship, which was largely supported by the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (i.e., FEC, involving Twin Oaks, et al.) as the new FIC affinity-group sponsor. Awakening from its dormant period, the second Fellowship renewed the practice of holding Fellowship events at communities around the country.

The FIC name-change in 2019 to the "Foundation," accompanied by rising

internet-service revenue, enabled the FIC to reduce its dependence upon affinity networks. At that time the FIC movement torch was passed a second time to a succeeding generation of communitarian activists.

During the COVID pandemic years the FIC held no gatherings of communities. About this time or sometime earlier the most active regional association of communities, NICA in the Northwest, stopped hosting meetings, which left the Twin Oaks Communities Conference as the only gathering of communities on the continent (as far as I know), other than the cohousing conferences and the academic organizations, such as the annual Communal Studies Association (CSA) conference and the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) conference when it meets in North America. Now the FIC has renewed its emphasis upon gatherings of various forms of intentional community with its first Convergence of Communities held at Twin Oaks, September 2024.

Regional Community Networks and Community Affinity Groups

The Foundation is reforging its movement connections by returning to aspects of its original "fellowship" orientation with its "convergence" initiative, while the FIC staff works to balance the different energies of volunteerism and of nonprofit-career motivations. In returning to its roots with the beginning of its Community Convergence initiative, it may be helpful to consider that not only may the Foundation focus upon its individual community support and regional community network projects, yet also upon its connections and engagements with the various affinity networks of communities.

The FIC Directory has a list of types of intentional communities, which each group is asked to use to characterize itself. Many if not all of those types of communities could be developed as an affinity group. The FIC may do well to consider nurturing those affinity groups into their own movements, as both a way for communities to relate to similar groups for mutual-aid, and also as a way for the Foundation to shore up its foundation with a tried-and-true method of movement-building through the future.

Regional associations of intentional communities tend to go through relatively short life-cycles, with the original 1960s-'70s Inter-Communities of Virginia (I-CV) now having gone through at least three iterations in 60 years of active-dormant cycles.

Today, the FIC's reforging of its movement connections includes the idea of encouraging regional or bioregional associations, yet the weakness in such organizations seems to be the diversity of groups in any given region. For a while, people in different types of communities appreciate learning about each other, yet that motivation fades with time in favor of a focus upon affinity-network connections. That happened in the past when member groups of the first I-CV dropped that organization to form the Federation communities (see: theFEC.org).

The suggestion is that the FIC may do well to develop programs for supporting both regional and affinity group networks of intentional communities, while maintaining its services for individual groups. By actively recognizing and serving both affinity networks and regional associations, as well as individual communities, the Foundation may enhance its mission as a movement of gifting-and-sharing-lifestyle communities.

The Communities Movement Trend Toward Sharing Private Property

A related awareness that may aid the Foundation in its new incarnation is the recognition of a primary dichotomy in the communities movement between those groups organized primarily through the sharing of commonly-owned property, in contrast with those groups organized primarily for the sharing of privately-owned property. Each of the types of intentional community recognized in the FIC Directory is found in one or the other of these two primary economic classifications, with some types of community being a combination of these two classes, such as community land trusts and the various forms of limited-equity community.

I've been watching the evolution of the communities movement, even a transformation of the movement, which one may call a "sea change," as Daniel Gavron wrote in his book published in 2000 (p. 9), *Kibbutz: Awakening from Utopia.* The author describes the impacts of the various changes upon the kibbutz, saying that "whereas previous changes in the kibbutz way of life, such as increasing personal budgets and having the children sleep in their parents' homes, did not alter the fundamental character of the institution, the introduction of differential salaries indicated a sea change." The privatization of the previously communal kibbutz economies as well as the history of many communal societies in the US and around the world giving up communal property for the sharing of private property, and the growth of cohousing and of equity-sharing communities, are all aspects of the trend toward the privatization of the communities movement. (For more on the kibbutz sea change, see: "Too Much of a Good Thing," Communities #199, Summer 2023, p. 51; and the much longer article version at www.Intentioneers.net.)

There has been a reluctance to recognize the trend away from communal commonly-owned property toward the sharing of private property. I have seen that denial in my own attitude toward the movement, having dedicated 12 years of my life to communal society. I have chafed at the tendency of people to call cohousing and even coliving "communal," saying that is not right, while of course the term can be used in both specific and general contexts. For my own communitarian odyssey, I now own a class-harmony community I've named Dry Gulch Ecovillage (see: "Class-Harmony Community," Communities #178, Spring 2018).

I never used to think that communities in which the land, buildings, equipment, and all else was owned by one person was much of a community, yet I've had to recognize that such communities have always existed, even though there has never been a name for that type of community. So, I coined the term "class-harmony community" for the type of community in which there is an owner-member class and a renter-member class. Ganas Community on Staten Island, New York is the largest US example of class-harmony community. Other forms of class-harmony community are many of the Catholic Worker communities, and any other group which may or may not function communally while having an individual or a host couple who own or owns the property.

Adding the class-harmony form of sharing-private-property-community, to the equity-sharing form of private-property-community including housing cooperatives, cohousing, and land co-ops, accounts for at least one half of the listings in the FIC's directory of intentional communities.

In my statistical analysis of the printed *Communities Directories* I found that 20 percent of the listings state that their land is owned by one person or a small group of people, so this class-harmony type of community is a large part of the sharing-private-property form of community. Another type of sharing-private-property community is cohousing community using the condominium legal form.

The number of cohousing communities in the US and elsewhere has continually grown since the 1990 directory. Those who have analyzed the directories have reported that about a third of the listings are of groups claiming to be "cohousing," although many groups other than "classic cohousing" groups use that term to describe themselves. Housing cooperatives were always a form of private-property sharing, and now in the early 21st century there is a new form called the real estate investment cooperative (REIC) or land co-op. Whether or not these are limited-equity cooperatives, these groups are sharing at least some portion of their private property, as in co-ownership of a living room, kitchen, etc. via joint tenancy or tenancy-in-common, and in cohousing condominiums sharing a shop, greenhouse, or common house, through the legal convention termed "undivided interest."

Real estate is one of the biggest games in capitalism, as expressed in the adage "location, location, location," and the intentional communities movement now has, via the land co-op or REIC, a second effective means, after the cohousing condominium, for bending the capitalist monetary system away from the destruction of community toward the support of community. Unlike land trusts which take land and community out of the dominant culture of capitalist economics into common ownership, land co-ops, housing cooperatives, and cohousing take the private-property dragon by its horns and direct it into forms of the solidarity economy.

The Foundation for Intentional Community may find it helpful to present the privatization trend in the communities movement, from common-property-sharing to private-property-sharing, in its Convergence and other initiatives, as this dichotomy likely is one of the factors that makes it difficult for regional associations of communities to endure, while affinity networks of communities are more long-lived. It is this dynamic of private-versus-common property in community that is to become one of the primary areas of focus for my development of the School of Intentioneering, celebrating its opening on the occasion of the 75th year of the FIC.

A. Allen Butcher is founder of Dry Gulch Ecovillage in Denver, Colorado, and of the School of Intentioneering. See intentioneers.net.

Diggers and Dreamers: Networking to build communities in the UK

By Kirsten Stevens-Wood

For those who haven't heard of them, Diggers and Dreamers first appeared in the world in 1985, founded by a group of British communards picking up on the legacy of the recently expired Communes Network. Formed in 1972, the Communes Network had been the main conduit between different types of "alternative communities" in the United Kingdom and those wishing to join them, as well as a means of sharing and communication between communities. Pre-dating the internet, it's hard to imagine now the process of creating, printing, and distributing copies of their monthly newsletter across various venues such as wholefood shops and alternative bookstores.

At a Communities Volleyball gathering at Redfield Community in 1985, a decision was made to wind up the Network. When Communes Network came to an end, it left a big hole. Diggers and Dreamers took over some of the roles that the Network had fulfilled and the first Diggers and Dreamers publication (the now well-recognised *Guide to Communal Living*) found its first edition in 1989.

The Diggers and Dreamers "collective" has varied over time with two of the key founding members (who remain to this day) being Chris Coates and Jonathan How. Chris is the author of several books plotting the history of communal living; he also founded and now lives in Forgebank Cohousing, Lancaster. His magnum opus, *Communes Britannica*, documents the development and changes in communal living from the 1930s to 2000s. Jonathan was a member at Redfield Community in Buckinghamshire for over a decade and the author of the popular *Places to Be,* a guide to alternative venues in Britain. He now lives in Cornwall where he manages the Diggers and Dreamers website and was, for a time, the Mayor of Penzance.

What do we do?

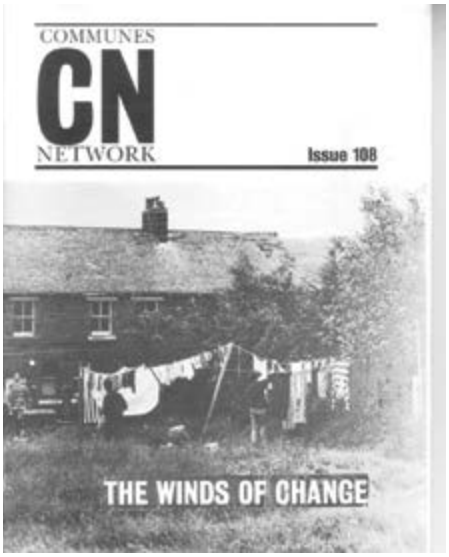
At a recent Diggers and Dreamers meeting we had a go at defining our current understanding of what we do. Interestingly, this was more difficult than we expected, in part because as a collective, Diggers and Dreamers changes with the people who are in the group along with the external "climate" of communal living. The general consensus was that Diggers and Dreamers is a UK-based platform that provides an interface between communities (forming and established) and those seeking to find out more about communal living. This sounds simple, but it encompasses a number of very different functions.

Publications

One of the principal activities for Diggers and Dreamers is the writing and publication of books on communal living. A central pillar to this is the *Guide to Intentional Community in Britain*, published every five years or so, which contains articles written by those living in and researching communal living. Over the years it has also become a form of historical record with accounts of forming communities that are now well established, and others that have sadly disbanded. As well as a directory of the communities themselves we have welcomed articles from British anarchist and writer Colin Ward, academics such as Findhorn Fellow Bill Metcalf (Australia) and Lucy Sargisson, as

Diggers and Dreamers 1990/91: Vera Ansell (Redfield), Chris Coates (People in Common), Pam Dawling (Lifespan), Jonathan How (Redfield), and Andy Wood (Rainbow).

Photos courtesy of Kirsten Stevens-Wood



Kirsten Stevens-Wood and Jonathan How attend the 2022 Communities Conference at Braziers Park, UK.

Diggers & Dreamers
INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN

well as cofounder of Extinction Rebellion, Roger Hallam. It seems that the world of communal living is a hub for interesting and pioneering individuals.

In addition to the *Guide to Intentional Community in Britain*, we have also produced a number of books written and edited by ourselves as well as some that have been written by communities and published by us. Over time this is becoming a significant body of work.

Website

The website (diggersanddreamers.org.uk) came into being in the early 2000s. Despite an initial concern that this might completely replace the printed directory, this has not been the case, and the directory continues to be popular, although it is produced less frequently.

Much like that of our American counterparts at the FIC (see ic.org/directory), the communities database acts as a place for people to find communities and to move between communities. The website also hosts a high-traffic notice board which allows individuals to post opportunities or requests. This is an eclectic mixture of dreamers seeking the perfect place to live out their communal fantasies, and diggers who have identified the place but need the people to live there. We also have our fair share of people seeking retreats, off-grid living, and generally "different" ways of life.

Resource for community seekers

Diggers and Dreamers is often the first port of call for those who are seeking community. For some, the world of communal living is a totally new idea that they may have stumbled across in the quest for a different form of living; for others, it is an established and familiar movement within which to find kindred spirits and alternative lifestyles. The website receives an average of 8500 click-throughs from search engines per month. Nearly a quarter of those visitors go to the "Places needing Members" page. According to our statistics, one of our most popular communities (in terms of enquiries for visits) is Tipi Valley in Wales, an off-grid Eco-Friendly Community, started in 1976. Who would have guessed?

Conduit between communities

Diggers and Dreamers has a living relationship with many of the communities that appear in our directory, and over the years they have become a trusted source of advice. In 2023 we created a communities forum, a space for communities to share information, ask for guidance, and generally provide a space of solidarity and support.

Public face of UK intentional communities

We at Diggers and Dreamers are regularly approached by the media and researchers looking to find out more about communal living. Over the past four decades, we have accumulated a network of contacts, friends, and collaborators. The community of communities that has formed through our directory and books (which often include articles written by and about members of communities) is broad and eclectic bringing together academics, professionals, and the communities themselves.

Diggers and Dreamers holds a strange space of having no authority over communities (thank goodness) but is also seen as the pin that holds it all together. We run on a shoestring with all of the team giving their time voluntarily. We sometimes liken ourselves to the wizard behind the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*, in that there are only ever four or five of us, but we get an awful lot done and give the illusion of a much bigger organisation!

Not taking ourselves too seriously

In recent years the Diggers and Dreamers team has taken it upon themselves to provide the light entertainment at the (currently annual) UK Communities Conference. This takes the form of a panel game where community members are welcomed to the "stage" to recount a tale of community living that is either a "lie" or the truth. Tales are often wild, unwieldy, and entertaining. The teams then get to ask questions (equally amusing) and eventually have to make the call.

Ultimately, we work on a flexitarian governance structure (to quote Chris) and a sense of having fun with what we do.

For more information about Diggers and Dreamers, see diggersanddreamers.org.uk.

Dr. Kirsten Stevens-Wood is a Senior Lecturer for Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales, UK. She is also an editor and writer for the Diggers and Dreamers collective. Her core interest is Intentional communities as spaces of counter culture, social justice, alternative politics, and a better way of living. She is a predominantly qualitative researcher (Ethnography) interested in solutions to climate change, cooperation, and taking the slow road.

Honoring Ecovillage and Sustainability Activist and Global Ecovillage Network Pioneer Liora Adler, 1946–2024

Edited by Diana Leafe Christian

Liora Adler.

Albert Bates

On April 29 of this year beloved ecovillage activist Liora Adler passed away. She was an early member of GEN International (Global Ecovillage Network) and later honored as a "GEN Elder" by that organization. She is survived by her husband, Permaculture teacher Andrew Langford, and will be greatly missed by her many ecovillage friends and colleagues worldwide.

In 1968, Liora was part of a traveling theater troupe, the Illuminated Elephants. In 1982, the group bought and moved onto on a five-acre plot of land near the small town of Tepoztlán, about a 90-minute drive south of Mexico City. There they founded the ecovillage of Huehuecoyotl and settled down to country living. That is, until one of their founders, Alberto Ruz, wanted to travel and perform again and so, with Liora, fellow Huehuecoyotl cofounder Giovani Ciarlo, and others, launched the Rainbow Caravan of Peace. This bus caravan toured Latin America for 13 years, giving educational performances and instruction on environmental education and appropriate technologies, and inspiring indigenous activism.

Liora was a longtime director of Global Village Institute, a nonprofit founded by Albert Bates of The Farm Community in Tennessee; and also of the Global Ecovillage Network; the Ecovillage Network of the Americas; and CASA (Council of Sustainable Settlements of the Americas), the GEN regional network in Latin America. With her husband Andrew, she started Gaia University in 2005, offering classes in various aspects of sustainability, ecovillage, and permaculture topics to students worldwide. She was a board member of GEN-US, the United States regional GEN organization that publishes this magazine.

Here are highlights of her long and active life, written by some of her longtime ecovillage colleagues:

Ecovillage activist Albert Bates:

In 1996, in breakout sessions at the first International Conference on Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities in Scotland, we founders of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) created three potential GEN Regions—the Europe/Africa Regional Network, Asia/Oceania Regional Network, and the Americas Regional Network. I was appointed Secretary for the Americas and tasked with forming a regional network of ecovillages.

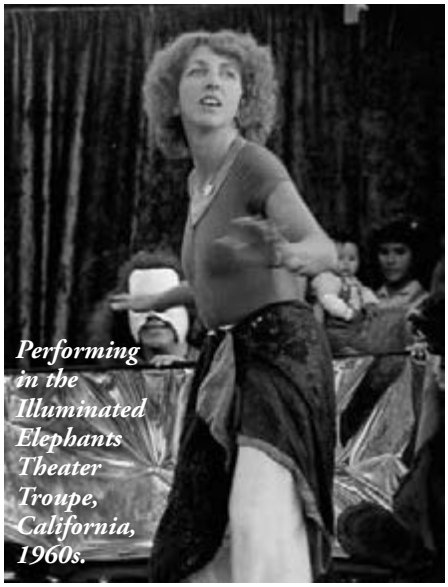
Thanks to Ross and Hildur Jackson and the generous support of Gaia Trust in Denmark, I was given enough budget to establish an office at The Farm Community in Tennessee and recruit staff for the office. I closed my law practice and embraced the work full-time. I had accountability to 1.3 billion stakeholders!

As I saw it, my first task was to collaborate with any closely aligned initiatives. That included the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC, now the Foundation for Intentional Community), the North American Bioregional Congress, ABRASCA in Brazil, the *Consejo de Visiones* in México, the Permaculture convergences, the international cohousing movement, scholarly groups like the Communal Studies and Utopian Studies associations, and various parts of the United Nations and government development agencies. The field is broad. It also includes professional groups of planners, architects, and builders; organic gardeners; alternative currencies and finance; peak oil; biophysical economics; and much more, many with annual conferences, trade journals, and research centers.

In the fall of 1996, Farm member Gayla Groom and I traveled to attend an *"Aldea Temporal por la Paz"* (Temporary Village of Peace) at the *Consejos de Visiones de Guardianes de la Tierra* (Council of Visions of Guardians of Earth) at Meztitla, a Boy Scout camp on the outskirts of Tepoztlán, Mexico. The late Alberto Ruz gave a slide show one evening that caught my eye because his third slide was a familiar picture (to me) of white school buses leaving San Francisco in 1971 to found an intentional community in Tennessee, The Farm. What Alberto proposed was to embark that week upon a similar voyage—*La Caravana Arcoires por la Paz* (Rainbow Peace Caravan)—to travel the length and breadth of Latin America from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego and from the Sierra Madre to

In the early days of the Illuminated Elephants Traveling Theater Troupe, California, 1960s. Liora is in the back row, far left.

Giovanni Ciarlo



Performing in the Illuminated Elephants Theater Troupe, California, 1960s.

Giovanni Ciarlo

the mouth of the Amazon.

As I wandered the grounds of the festival I happened upon one of the organizers, not only of the *Consejo*, but of *La Caravana* as well. She was dressed all in white and part of the original performing troupe Alberto had assembled years earlier, the Illuminated Elephants. She was a cofounder of the troupe's ecovillage, Huehuecoyotl (which means "the old, old coyote") in the hills above Tepoztlán. She took us to her home and introduced us to her fellow ecovillagers and the *Caravanistas*. This was how I met Liora.

In the years that followed I would entrust more than half our Global Village Institute's annual budget to Liora and *La Caravana*, with no strings attached. She, Alberto, and their merry band of *Caravanistas* toured 17 countries in 13 years, hosting hundreds of events for nature and social justice, linking arms with social, environmental, and indigenous movements throughout Latin America. The *Caravanistas* created peace villages at the World Social Forums in Porto Alegre and Belem de Pará, Brazil; Caracas, Venezuela; Santiago, Chicle; and Mexico City.

In 2001, we received a grant from the US Department of State's Bureau of Cultural Affairs to convene all the women's development and rights groups in Ecuador into a Women's Peace Village. This included 140 women leaders of women's NGOs and 40 indigenous representatives. Over the course of a month, we held trainings on using email and cell phones, grantwriting, facilitation and consensus, child development, crafts and fair trade, and more. An hour-long Spanish-language video helped to replicate the program in other Latin American countries.

Over several years *La Caravana*'s work was also generously funded by the government of Brazil. While the ecovillage network expanded ever so slowly in the US and Canada, it burgeoned in the global South, eventually becoming the Council of Sustainable Settlements of Latin America (CASA) and founding more than twice as many new ecovillages and conservation communities each year in Latin America as compared to ecovillage start-ups in the North.

La Caravana cofounder Alberto Ruz wrote in 2020: "The model of these meetings has been adopted by a large number of groups, not only in the Americas but in the rest of the world, and today they are replicating, each with its own characteristics, but maintaining principles of inclusion, ecumenism, and plurality. This is the pulsating heart of our ecovillages, giving room by sharing all the visions that point to the creation of a new planetary paradigm."

When the Global Ecovillage Network—GEN—founded its Council with two delegates from each region, it was Liora and myself whom the Americas chose to represent the Americas. In 2003 it was again the Americas' turn to host the GEN Council meeting, and Liora organized the *Llamada de Condor* (Call of the Condor) in the Sacred Valley of Peru—more than 700 people from 36 countries gathering near Machu Picchu on the Summer Solstice.

In 2002, the Chinese government, inspired by a visit to Liaoning Province by architect William McDonough, announced it would promote the formation of 8,000 ecovillages by creating official standards and placing top-down design and development into its national five-year plan, to be guided by the National Academy of Architecture. While top-down design of ecovillages is not usual, the lead for the initiative was taken by Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping. Madame Peng convened the "First Global Forum on Standards and Goals for Eco-Villages and Eco-Regions in Beijing" in 2004. The Farm's Ecovillage Training Center sent Liora Adler, her husband Andrew Langford, and Farm members Paul Gaskin and Valerie Seitz to participate. Many local leaders vied to get their villages and regions approved by meeting the new goals. The forum produced a National Ecovillage Construction Standard, National Demonstration Ecovillage Construction Indicators, a Guide for Construction of Beautiful Countryside, and an Evaluation for the Construction of Beautiful Villages. From that process, 107 top-down ecovillages in China were certified by the government and some 100 more grew from the bottom-up to form the Sunshine Ecovillage Network in China.

After more than a decade of this work, Liora and I retired from the GEN Council and went on to the next stage of our work. The first classes of Gaia University, founded by Liora and her husband Andrew Langford, were held at our Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm in Tennessee. Also with Andrew, Liora founded Cambia, an innovative permaculture-based system to reform the almond-growing paradigm in California's Central Valley, a method using half the water usually needed for almonds in that water-scarce area, while multiplying carbon drawdown by 500 percent.

Liora and Andy soon joined the Ecosystem Restoration Communities now spreading around the world as volunteer efforts to reverse climate change with natural solutions. They became the Knowledge Exchange Coordinators of the Ecosystem Restoration Camps Foundation.

In 2007, Liora helped The Farm win a $50,000 rural development grant to organize our county seat into Tennessee's first Transition Town. City fathers of Hohenwald, Tennessee passed municipal resolutions to make it happen. An Elephant Sanctuary welcome center popped up on Main Street. A large biochar production plant was planned for an industrial park to handle municipal waste. Community gardens sprang up. An annual Sunshine Festival closed the city's streets. An alternative currency—ChamberBucks—was issued by the local Chamber of Commerce.

Liora's creative spirit knew no bounds. Born in New York City in 1946 and spending part of her childhood in Israeli kibbutz before graduating college, she lived for many years in Colombia and México and raised a family. She started Millennio, a village women's sewing cooperative and a men's campesino collaborative, and in 1968 cofounded the Illuminated Elephants Traveling Theater Company, Huehuecoyotl Ecovillage in 1982, and *La Caravana* in 1996.

Over the past several years, she and Andrew put their attention into developing iCAAFS—the International Cooperation for the Accreditation of Ancient Future Skills—as well as a regenerative agriculture project in collaboration with UNDP and the Department of Organics of the Agriculture Ministry of Syria, training more than 100 field and extension agents in permaculture, biodynamic, and syntropic techniques, with those trainers eventually training thousands of others in the region.

Dancer, educator, administrator, artist, lover of life, entrepreneur, academic, performer, and woman for all the ages—that was the Liora Adler I knew and loved. Her last words to me were to remind me of *buen vivir*—good living.

Maybe we are climate pessimists who've despaired at accomplishing lasting change. Maybe we've given up on politics. But as Liora demonstrated, we can do what we can for the Earth and still live a good life. And in that, like Liora, we can become the change we want to see.

Ecovillage activist Giovanni Ciarlo:

I first met Liora in 1978 when she showed up at the Round Mountain Ranch community in Ukiah, California with her then-husband, Baru Adler, and their small child. They had left the east coast to search communities across the US and somehow found the radical psychology group from Berkeley that came to form an intentional community. I was living there with a gypsy band of young artists and activists. We were guests in the newly forming community and Liora immediately felt a kinship with our group and didn't hesitate to join in our street theatre productions and social activism. One of the first things I remember Liora and her young family doing was to purchase a small house across town, slated for demolition, and then moving it to the ranch on the outskirts of town so they could join the rest of us on the land.

She was there in the early days of what became The Illuminated Elephants Traveling Theatre Company, our "tribe." Later they bought a used school bus and converted it to a living and traveling home, adding it to our growing caravan, now numbering five converted buses and a horse trailer. She named her bus Hikayana.

Liora loved to dance, sing, and perform on stage, so it was natural for her to gravitate towards our theatrical performances and contribute with her dance, songs, and organizational skills. We soon incorporated Hebrew dances and songs that she brought into our productions as we exchanged cultural showpieces from our varied backgrounds with audiences throughout California and Mexico. In 1980 our caravan crossed into Mexico and toured the country, bringing our performances to traditional and indigenous Mexican villages and cities with a message of cultural understanding, peace, and environmental awareness.

Liora was still with the group in 1982 when we decided to settle down, purchase land, and develop our own ecovillage, Huehuecoyotl, in the central mountains of Mexico. At that time Liora was not quite ready to stay in one place, so she continued to pursue her passions in social activism in other ways, including becoming a voice for GEN. She later moved to Colombia, returning to Huehuecoyotl for short stays until 2006 when she and her new partner/husband, Andrew Langford, started to consider Huehuecoyotl

Liora teaching a class in Gaia University, the educational organization she founded with her husband Andrew Langford.

Albert Bates

Teachers, students, and administrators of Gaia University.

Jennifer English

their home and moved there permanently shortly after. There they continued to develop Gaia University and a number of ecosystem restoration projects until her passing in April 2024. Before that, Liora spent several years traveling and performing with The Caravana Arcoiris por la Paz, which left Huehuecoyotl in 1996 to discover and network with intentional communities throughout Latin America. Her accomplishments were too many to name here. Others will surely address those.

Her health took a turn in the last few years, but that did not stop her from continuing to work, organize, mentor young people, and live her life to the fullest. She will be remembered fondly and missed by all who got to know and work with her, and most especially by her family and friends, her son, her grandchildren, and her loving husband.

Ecovillage activist Jennifer Morgan:

In 2004, I was working as the Program Director at the Ecovillage Training Center (ETC) at The Farm in Tennessee. That August, Liora Adler and Andrew Langford visited Liora's dear friend and colleague, Albert Bates, to participate in board meetings for Global Village Institute. Within moments of the visit, my head began buzzing with stories of their birthing of Gaia University. After eight years of fantasizing about developing a study-abroad program, when I heard the radiant, dazzling light that was Liora speak of change-making her vision beckoned me nearer. Within days, Liora and I were scheming about turning the ETC into Gaia U's first regional center. Her passion and energy were truly remarkable. Liora was not only charismatic and persuasive, but she exuded an infectious enthusiasm that ignited a fire within me, as it did with so many others she inspired. As Liora and Andy left Tennessee, I eagerly agreed to help host a Gaia University design charette for that fall and another for the following spring. We also began spearheading conversations with an organizing group on The Farm. I later co-hosted 14 Gaia U orientations worldwide and represented Gaia U at multiple international convergences and gatherings, often at Liora's side. Both founders of Gaia U supported me in organizing the first Financial Permaculture Summit, our local Transition Initiative, the Summit for Sustainable Tennessee, and the 10th Continental Bioregional Congress. Their groundbreaking work at Gaia U revolutionized educational designs through eco-social-based hands-on learning. Liora's transmissible impact was felt by everyone she collaborated with, taught, and touched with her generous shimmer as she lit up any room.

Throughout the next 15 years, Liora remained a consistent mentor and co-creator. She was a visionary elder and master motivator, a designer with unparalleled creativity, and an unwavering advocate for collaborative world change work. Her legacy of contributions to Gaia University International, Huehuecoyotl Ecovillage, Council of Visions, the Rainbow Caravan of Peace, Global Ecovillage Network, El Llamado del Condor, the International Cooperation for the Accreditation of Ancient Future Skills, and Cambria, positioned her at the forefront of the ecovillage, Permaculture, bioregional, and facilitation movements, She empowered and inspired countless individuals to take action. I was fortunate to visit with Liora in Tennessee in April and received another spark of motivation just before her transition. Let us all dedicate ourselves to carrying forward the torch of collaborative agency.

Ecovillage activist Daniel Greenberg:

I first met Liora in the early 2000s when we were part of the group that cofounded Gaia Education (and out of which emerged Gaia University). We reconnected at many community gatherings over the years and I'll always remember her as a grounded visionary who was fully committed to co-creating a better world. Whenever Liora was around, I knew we were going to get a lot done and have fun doing it! She easily spoke truth to power while also being tender and vulnerable. I am sad to lose her as a friend and colleague, and I trust her life and her love will continue to ripple out and continue changing the world.

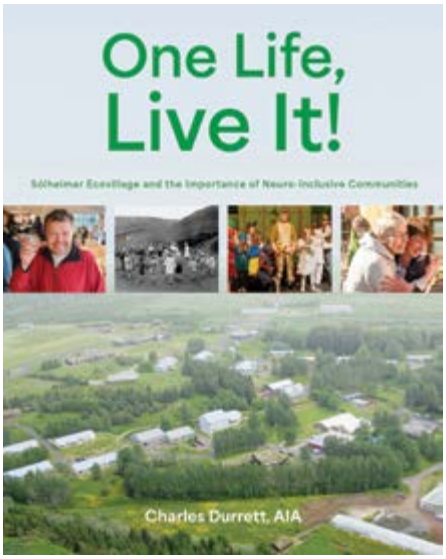
Albert Bates has been Director of the Global Village Institute for Appropriate Technology since 1984; Director of the Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm in Tennessee since 1994; and Farm resident since 1972. A former attorney, he has argued environmental and civil rights cases before the US Supreme Court, drafted a number of legislative Acts during a 26-year legal career, and served on the steering committee of The Farm's Plenty International nonprofit for 18 years, focusing on relief and development work with indigenous peoples, human rights, and the environment.

Jennifer Morgan (previously Jennifer English) played a pivotal role in the creation of Gaia University and the first regional centers. At the University, Jennifer was an advisor, designer, and teacher for 18 years and the Director of Advisory and Mentor Services for eight years. Jennifer is also the founding president of the Center for Holistic Ecology. She cofounded the Financial Permaculture Institute and chaired the first Transition Town in the Southeast US. Jennifer built and continues to live at Solar Springs, a naturally constructed off-grid lodge and Regenerative Permaculture Farm and community in Tennessee.

Giovanni Ciarlo is a cofounder of Huehuecoyotl Ecovillage in Mexico, former Board President of GEN-International, Faculty Advisor for Goddard College in Vermont, Education Director and CEO at Gaia Education, and longtime board member of ENA (Ecovillage Network of the Americas), GENNA (Global Ecovillage Network North America), and GEN-US.

Daniel Greenberg is Co-Director of the Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC); former Education Director, Findhorn Ecovillage; former Board President of GEN International; Founder/Director of Earth Deeds nonprofit and the former educational nonprofit Living Routes Educational Consortium. Daniel has lived at Findhorn Community in Scotland, Auroville in India, and Sirius Community in Massachusetts, where he is still affiliated. He served with Liora as Board Member of GEN-US.

Diana Leafe Christian, Board Member of Communities' *publisher GEN-US, is author of* Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities, *and our eight-part article series, "Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors,"* Communities *#193, #194, #196, #197, #198, #200, #201, #203. She lives at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina.*



One Life, Live It!: Sólheimar Ecovillage and the Importance of Neuro-Inclusive Communities

Charles Durrett, AIA

The Cohousing Company, Nevada City, California, 2024, 236 pages.

Charles Durrett's newest book, *One Life, Live It!*, is a remarkable and clearly described tale about the power of cohousing.

This book defines the essence of community as can be created and cultivated through the art of cohousing—and makes a truly deep dive to explore, describe, and understand Sólheimar, a highly successful, long-lived cohousing community for people with autism and Down's syndrome in Iceland. It illustrates and brings to life the unique driving forces and building blocks of a community like Sólheimar which effectively transforms lives of people who would otherwise be at very high risk of being socially marginalized, isolated, and not living their life to the fullest.

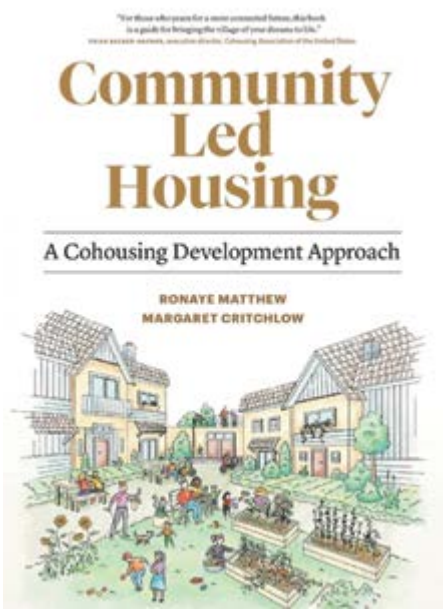
The book uses a personal immersive experience of the community of Sólheimar to describe how the power of community, facilitated through cohousing and humanistic, ecological management principles, can be a sustainable source of feeling accepted, of confidence and self-worth, of immense sense of purpose, and ultimately of greater well-being and fulfillment for a diverse group of people of all ages with autism.

The book also discusses the challenges and solutions to financial and managerial aspects of such cohousing projects, recognizing the significance of being persistent, committed, and tireless in engaging with all stakeholders, internally and externally, to create a sustainable foundation for success.

The intent of the book is clear—to inspire, encourage, support, and enable the reader to take action and make change happen through the application of community and cohousing principles.

The book goes further to consider the broader movement of cohousing and communities for people with neurodivergence, with disabilities of different kinds, reminding us that while Sólheimar is a unique community, there is a growing international recognition of the value of community-based therapeutic approaches for people with disabilities, and there are multiple different ways of doing it. Each community is unique and has its own path to success reflecting its starting point and make-up—but can be guided by the core humanistic principles, strategies, and best-practice tips for cohousing communities presented in the book.

Soren E. Skovlund, PhD, Senior Director and Researcher at Patient Centered Research Science, is a resident of Skråplanet, the second cohousing community (bofællesskaber) in Denmark.



Community Led Housing:

A Cohousing Development Approach

Ronaye Matthew and Margaret Critchlow

Page Two Press, Vancouver, Canada, 2024, 408 pages.

As I know from three decades of studying how successful new communities get started, founders cannot just guess at what they need to do. I've seen it go haywire when would-be founders assume they'll just figure it out as they go along. This approach will likely end up among the 90 percent or so[1] of forming-community projects that don't succeed, or even get off the ground.

For new communities to actually succeed, the founders need useful real-world data from experienced and successful community founders—and in cohousing communities, also from cohousing professionals, including cohousing developers.

One of my passions is for intentional communities to be formed effectively and successfully, so I love useful new resources that help people do this. *Community Led Housing* is certainly one such resource: a clear, well-organized guide offering practical advice for starting a successful new cohousing community with a developer consultant or developer partner. Considering the often-daunting start-up process for any community, I believe this book offers sensible, real-world advice useful to founders of other kinds of communities too, including those *not* working with developer consultants or partners.

Community Led Housing is written as a field guide for those who want to create their own cohousing neighborhoods, as well as for potential cohousing professionals who would help them: zoning consultants, traffic consultants, planners, developers, architects, contractors, and so on. The authors, two of the most skilled and experienced cohousing experts in North America, are uniquely qualified for the task. Ronaye Matthew, a cohousing developer consultant and longtime member of Cranberry Commons Cohousing in Burnaby, BC, founded Cohousing Development Consulting (CDC). Margaret Critchlow, cofounder of Harbourside Cohousing in Sooke, BC and former professor of social anthropology at York University, now works with CDC as a community-building facilitator. Each brings experience from two sides of the cohousing development process: Matthew and CDC helped develop 11 successful cohousing neighborhoods in Canada, and Critchlow as "burning soul" organized her own community's core group which then hired CDC to help them.

Founders of *every* kind of intentional community can benefit from learning more about creating one or more legal entities, conducting a land search, establishing credibility with banks and local zoning officials, figuring out early how to establish buy-in costs, and so much more.

I *thought* I knew a lot about the community-founding process before reading *Community Led Housing*, and was quite surprised by how many different, discrete management processes, research quests, and decisions are required to launch a successful cohousing community, whether working with a developer or not. The authors outline seven major phases of the process, each involving from four to a dozen steps (55 steps in total): Getting Started, Setting Up a Development Corporation, Determining the Group's Organizational Structure and Building Membership, Finding and Securing the Site, Designing and Developing the Envisioned Physical Infrastructure, Construction, and Finishing the Project.

The authors thoroughly describe each of these as well as each kind of professional the cohousing founders will need to work with, from the developer consultant to website designer, land use planner, attorney, real estate agent, architect, contractor, and so on.

If a founding cohousing community works with a developer consultant or developer partner, a cost factor affects the group's decision-making process. "Tasks that have a financial consequence if not completed in a professional or timely manner," the authors write, "are best performed by paid professionals. Costs increase when there are delays or problems, and these have an impact on everyone. We recommend creating a clear task structure that focuses on the community-building aspects while giving the group 'big picture' control over the project, with professionals performing the majority of day-to-day activities of managing development."

I know this well. I watched as a forming cohousing group who'd hired an experienced cohousing consultant floundered when they used what they thought was So-

ciocracy, but unfortunately were using it incorrectly and only partially. They had the dreadful conflict-generating arrangement that any group member could stop a proposal *after* it had already been decided (which is not a part of Sociocracy), so of course the group had to stop and resolve any conflicts, therefore moving forward with excruciating slowness. "In all my years of working with cohousing groups," the cohousing consultant emailed them, "I have never seen a community so tangled up in its own process. … [The way I work with most groups] we set timelines and meeting times…. *[I]f you actually want to live in this community in your lifetimes,* please learn to trust and appreciate those who are making the time to move the community forward." I wish that group had been able to read this book!

The authors recommend classic, traditional consensus, but rather than comparing it to modified versions of consensus like the N St. Method (which I highly recommend), they use the tired old and outdated argument that it's more inclusive and creates more harmony than majority-rule voting. Unfortunately I've found that using classic, traditional consensus rather than a modified version can often trigger awful conflict in a group. (See article series, "Busting the Myth that Consensus with Unanimity Is Good for Communities," Communities #155 and #156.) The authors do suggest a voting fallback method when the group needs to make super-fast decisions, if there might be a negative financial or legal consequence if they didn't decide in a timely manner.

They note they've found Sociocracy's Proposal-Forming and Selecting People for Roles processes helpful when included in the consensus process, as well as the Sociocracy idea that proposals need only be "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try." However, they also have serious misconceptions about Sociocracy, which, regrettably, they state as facts. For example, they say people need to trust each other first in order to use Sociocracy (they don't!), and are required to delegate decision-making authority to various committees rather than making decisions with the whole group—also not true. I've taught Sociocracy to communities for the last 11 years and, take it from me, the whole group absolutely can make decisions about anything if they want to. Lastly, they say Sociocracy takes much, much longer to decide anything than with CDC's version of consensus.

I think I know why they believe this. They may have seen, as I have, forming communities like the one cited above who practice "Sociocracy" incorrectly or only partially, which causes so much conflict and slow-down it makes me want to weep! Yet when Sociocracy is practiced as it was designed, and with all its mutually reinforcing parts, meetings tend to go faster and be more enjoyable than usual, as enthusiastic community members can attest. "We've made more decisions in the past two months than we have in the past two years!" emailed Davis Hawkowl of Cherry Hill Cohousing in Amherst, Massachusetts after that group switched to Sociocracy. "A visitor said she'd never seen a community meeting be so effective, efficient, and fun!" stated cofounder Hope Horton of Common Ground Ecovillage in Mebane, North Carolina.

The tone of *Community Led Housing* is serious and businesslike. It's mostly written in the passive voice, however, which may be off-putting for those who prefer a more direct and personal approach to learning new information. Also, some readers may conclude that since the authors so often mention the consulting company they're are both involved in, the book is mostly a promotional effort for CDC's services. I think this is fine. Pretty much every book on community does this: not only offering useful information but also letting readers know about its authors' services. No matter that the book promotes CDC, as least the authors are sharing what they've learned over the decades of doing this work—a gift to readers for only the price of the book. Community founders need solid, grounded, real-world information from experienced authors, and they'll get it here.

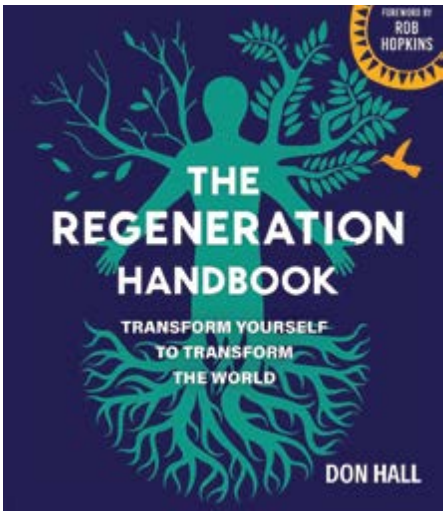
Two minor concerns: You'll find great testimonials from satisfied members of cohousing communities CDC has helped develop, but they're noted only as "Member of __ Cohousing Community," one of the communities CDC helped develop. I believe this significantly reduces a testimonial's impact. The endorsements would be considerably more credible and impactful if the person giving endorsement was identified by name. Also, they don't mention hiring one of the most important kinds of professionals: a conflict resolution consultant who can share with the founding group valuable ways to reduce and eliminate some kinds of community conflict and design an effective conflict resolution method. I know of a cohousing community whose founders worked successfully with a developer consultant, but later fell into wrenching conflict that neither their in-house conflict team nor outside consultants could seem to resolve. So I hope they'll add this necessary aspect of community development for future projects, and also in future editions of this book.

The Appendices describe legal entities they recommend for communities in Canada, an example of a typical financial projection for a forming cohousing community, a Glossary of Terms, and much more.

Diana Leafe Christian is author of Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Start an Ecovillage or Intentional Community *(New Society Publishers, 2002), the first step-by-step guide for starting new communities. Author of the article series "Working Effectively with Especially Challenging Behaviors" (*Communities *#193, #194, #196, #197, #198, #199, #201, and #203), Diana speaks at ecovillage and cohousing conferences, offers consultations, and leads in-person and online workshops internationally. She has taught workshops and spoken at cohousing conferences in the US and the UK, and ecovillage conferences in the US, Europe, and Japan.*

---

1. This was my armchair guess in the late 1990s and early 2000s when I wrote *Creating a Life Together*. The authors note that among cohousing startups in Canada, 80 percent fail and 20 percent succeed, and of those helped by CDC, half succeed.



The Regeneration Handbook:

Transform Yourself to Transform the World

Don Hall

New Society Publishers, Gabriela Island BC, 2024, 256 pages.

"*The Regeneration Handbook* has a lot to offer anyone who longs for a better world and wants to help make it a reality."

I couldn't have said that better than Don Hall did. Wherever you may be in your own journey of personal and collective change, there is very likely some new treasure of wisdom or useful tool in this book for you, or a welcomed revisit or reframing to help renew your connection to something familiar, or to help communicate it to others.

The Regeneration Handbook provides a clear and digestible survey of some powerful ideas and practices—shining little lights of regenerative wisdom—gleaned from many diverse fields of thought and distilled by experience and reflection.

First grounding us in the journey of enhancing relationships within one's mind and heart and spirit, he then ushers us through great little introductions to a myriad of practices that can help us grow healthier relationships with ourselves and each other and the world.

Rob Hopkins, a founder of the Transition movement, said in his foreword for the book:

"As someone who has been a Transition practitioner at a local level (Transition Sarasota), a regional level (Transition Colorado), and a national level (Transition US), Don Hall is in the perfect position to write this book. It emerges from hard-won experience."

I have also been an active participant in the Transition movement for many years and can attest to Don's hard-won experience. I have had the privilege of working with him on a number of projects with other amazing people in the Transition movement. We've seen some tough times and had some celebrations together, and I've learned a lot from Don over the years. We've learned from each other, which has usually been my experience in Transition groups, in true regenerative spirit.

If you are not familiar with the Transition movement, *The Regeneration Handbook* is a great introduction. Don Hall presents a fair amount of context and history of the movement while still keeping the majority of the focus on what I see as the main point of the book—and of the movement: to participate in guiding ourselves and our communities in our ongoing practices to "transform yourself to transform the world."

To frame the book, Don shares an overview of the global context of our times and meaningful orientations for human beings in this terrifically challenging and opportune context in which we all are awakening. He also shares some of his own personal story of participating in the movement, learning and applying some of these principles.

The majority of the book is focused on sharing these tools: *Thinking* tools that provide various useful ways to frame the ongoing processes of evolutionary change and relationality, like Theory U and Spiral Dynamics; *Mindfulness* tools and wisdom from traditions such as Shambhala; *Relating* tools that help us navigate effective communication and cooperation and conflict resolution, like Nonviolent Communication; and *Organizing* tools that help us participate in managing successful projects and in learning to help steer the development of organizations and communities with the principles of living systems and "power-with." Much of the classic Transition group organizing framework is included, along with a bit of sociocracy, and plenty more. Don presents these well, and he also shares some of his own helpful adaptations.

He finishes with some of his personal reflections, including hopes and prospects for the Transition movement and for the emerging "movement of movements." Don writes clearly, succinctly, and humbly. He thoughtfully acknowledges his own limitations, and invites us each into our own process of discovery. He reminds us that "The map is not the territory" and "All models are false. Some are useful." Don observes, "Eventually, we all need to become our own teachers to travel out beyond the edges of all the maps that have been handed to us. From this perspective, this book can also be thought of as merely a jumping off point for your own explorations. What you get out of it is ultimately up to you."

Galen Meyers is a systems thinker and group facilitator, focused on integrating theory and practice in the wide, diverse field of human socio-ecological systems change.

cohousing

2025 CohoUS Membership

Join the movement for a more connected future

CohoUS exists to support the movement for a more connected future, a movement of which you are a critical component.

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

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

www.cohousing.org/membership

REACH

REACH is our column for all your Classified needs: ads intended to match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, plus ads for events, land, internships, services, books, personals, and more. To place an ad, contact our Advertising Manager, Joyce Bressler, at ads@gen-us.net or 845-558-4492, or go to gen-us.net/advertising for more information.

THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #206 Spring 2025 (out in March.) is Jan. 31, 2025. Rates: ≤50 words: $25/issue; ≤100 words: $50/issue; ≤150 words: $75/issue. You may pay using a credit or debit card, bank transfer (contact the Advertising Manager), or via check or money order payable to Communities (include all ad info) mailed to Communities, 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074.

COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

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

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

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY: ALTAIR ECOVILLAGE IN KIMBERTON, PA. Altair Ecovillage is planned as a 30-unit 55+ Cohousing community with clustered townhomes, a large Common House, walking paths, and many additional amenities. Investors of $50,000 (or more) are being solicited and offered 5% ROI or a discount on a home (rentals allowed). There are currently nine investors engaged in the project and eight homes reserved. We are applying for our Subdivision and Land Development (SALDO) approval, with construction slated to begin during 2025. The Zoning Ordinance has greater density than previously allowed, with lower impact per the US Green Building Council's Sustainable SITES Initiative, Passive House Certification, reduced parking due to a ride-sharing program, and other criteria. Our enthusiastic group of committed members, supporters, and professionals works together well, so we anticipate that Altair, with its very special appeal, will become everything we've dreamed of! Interested? Contact: Joel Bartlett. AltairEcovillage@gmail.com 610-220-6172 https://www.altairecovillage.org.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION! At Ashland Cohousing, in Southern Oregon, a 2 Bedroom, 1.5 bath, home is for sale now, and a 4 bedroom will be for sale soon. We're a vibrant intergenerational community of 13 homes in a college town of 21,000 known for its Shakespeare Festival, walkability, organic Food Co-op, outdoor recreation, and excellent schools: $355,000, 978 sq ft, Common House with multiple amenities, Community Garden, Fruit Orchard, Radiant floor heat, passive & active solar, South Facing Windows. info: cohousing.org. contact seller graceyogashala@gmail.com.

EMPLOYMENT

JOB DESCRIPTION – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. Plenty International ("Plenty") is recruiting for its next Executive Director. Now in its 50th year, Plenty is a small non-profit organization birthed and headquartered on The Farm in Summertown, TN. Plenty currently partners with local groups in the U.S., Central America, Africa, and Nepal on projects that benefit indigenous communities, women, and youth. We're looking for a motivated, service-oriented person, ideally with non-profit work experience, to manage Plenty's operations and growth and to ensure that Plenty transitions effectively into the future. The position is full-time (minimum 30 hours), with a flexible start date. Virtual locations may be considered but the current Plenty Office is located within The Farm Community. For more info and the full job description, please send a request to info@plenty.org Thank you!

SERVICES/OPPORTUNITIES/PRODUCTS

MEET YOUR ECO-CONSCIOUS, GREEN MATCH ON GREENSINGLES.COM. No superficial swiping. In-Depth Profiles and Amazing Members! Compatibility Percentages, Video Chatting and More. We provide our Members with Fabulous Tools to Meet their Ideal Match. Join the Oldest, Largest, Dating Site for "Green" Singles. Your Success is our Joy and Passion! www.GreenSingles.com.

WHY PAY RENT/MORTGAGE PAYMENTS when you can live rent free? We publish 1,000+ property caretaking and house-sitting opportunities, worldwide, each year. We cover all 50 states and overseas. Online subscription: $29.95/year. Postal subscription: $34.95/year. Published since 1983. The Caretaker Gazette, 1205 E 31st Street, Austin TX 78722. (206) 462-1818; To learn more, please visit www.caretaker.org.

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKS, WEBSITES, WORKSHOPS, EVENTS

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

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

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

Diana Leafe Christian

Upcoming Live Online Trainings

Sociocracy, Part ONE

Proposal-Forming, Evaluation Questions, Consent Decision-Making

Saturdays, Jan 4 – Feb 1
10am-12:30pm Pacific, 1-3:30pm Eastern

Sociocracy, Part TWO

Selecting People for Roles, Role-Improvement Feedback, Consenting to Circle Members, Sociocracy's Circle Process

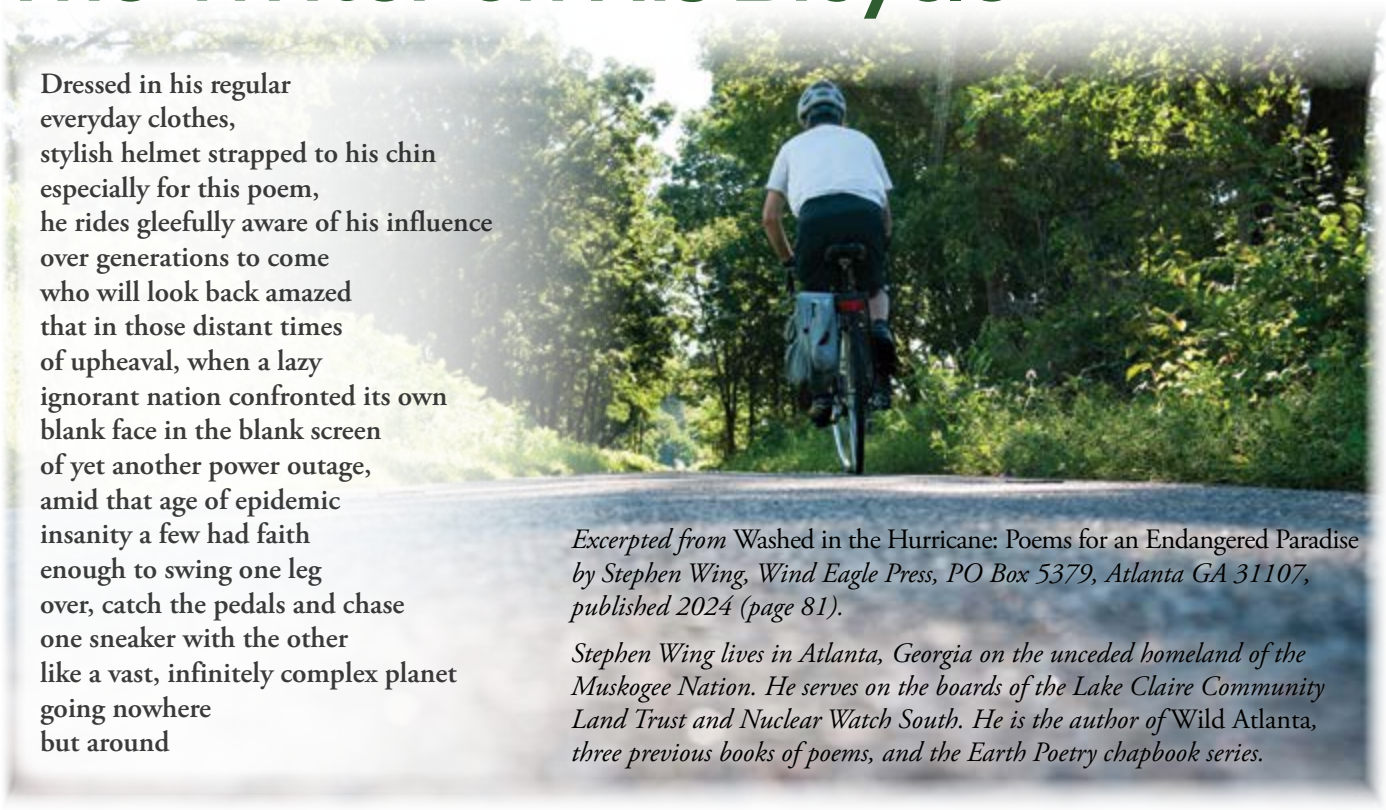
Saturdays, Mar 1 – 29
10am-12:30pm Pacific, 1-3:30pm Eastern

"Your recent Sociocracy training was outstanding!"
—William Walsh,
Envision Community, Minneapolis, MN

"I love this course. Who knew governance could be so fun!"
—Jeff Conklin,
Eugene, Oregon

More Info:
www.earthaven.org/classes-and-events/

The Writer on His Bicycle



Dressed in his regular
everyday clothes,
stylish helmet strapped to his chin
especially for this poem,
he rides gleefully aware of his influence
over generations to come
who will look back amazed
that in those distant times
of upheaval, when a lazy
ignorant nation confronted its own
blank face in the blank screen
of yet another power outage,
amid that age of epidemic
insanity a few had faith
enough to swing one leg
over, catch the pedals and chase
one sneaker with the other
like a vast, infinitely complex planet
going nowhere
but around

Excerpted from Washed in the Hurricane: Poems for an Endangered Paradise *by Stephen Wing, Wind Eagle Press, PO Box 5379, Atlanta GA 31107, published 2024 (page 81).*

Stephen Wing lives in Atlanta, Georgia on the unceded homeland of the Muskogee Nation. He serves on the boards of the Lake Claire Community Land Trust and Nuclear Watch South. He is the author of Wild Atlanta, *three previous books of poems, and the Earth Poetry chapbook series.*

WHY BOOKS MATTER: A CASE FOR BOOKS ABOUT COMMUNITY MAKING

(continued from p. 64)

an end? That is, a full story, a complete scenario of how to make it? It told readers: this is how you start a new project, prepare for the journey, launch it, manage it through the rough seas, land it, and then settle."

Now, it's common for folks to just go to the internet and get helter skelter, mumbo jumbo, and almost entirely gobbledy gook information. Some of it is by experts, most of it not. Most of it is anecdotal and under-considered. Some of it is contradictory to cohousing standards, but who knows the difference? People call things cohousing that are not. Nobody but The Cohousing Company seems to help nascent groups or developers course-correct when they say they are cohousing but in fact, are not. Luckily, Sage Cohousing, the senior cohousing nonprofit, certified what senior cohousing is and what it isn't so that people can no longer get away with fooling seniors (see the book *Cohousing Communities*). One successful cohouser, Janet Palmer from Quimper Village, put it bluntly: "Get the books and read. Don't get caught in a project with pretenders, imitators, and fakers." Everyone in the Quimper Village group read *Senior Cohousing* before we started.

Hannah, the journalist, also observed, "Communication in getting projects built is the big complication." Books make it easy to get on the same page with each other, compared to the worldwide net of infinite complications.

Hannah was entirely correct. Without the right books, the cohesiveness of the information about cohousing is gone. Random, incomplete, chaotic, and piecemeal would best describe the info on the net at best. I notice that, when asked about the same community, one person on the internet will say we have too little parking, and another person from the same community will say we have way too much parking. One data point or even two does not make legitimate data.

By contrast, in book form, work is checked and double-checked. I have a new book out about cohousing for the I/DD population (people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities), *One Life, Live It!*. That book went out to 15 different expert reviewers. Every statement was checked, double-checked, and triple-checked.

You can barely find the definition of cohousing on the internet—and if you do, it's usually not a smart one. See it on page 8 of *Creating Cohousing*, and in the introduction to *Cohousing Communities.* You can't find the definition of Study Group One on the internet, but it's all of chapter 7 of *The Senior Cohousing Handbook.* Study Group One is the number one way that the Danes use to help seniors get into cohousing, because the various books set them up for success. There is no good important discussion of the optimal size of a cohousing community on the net. It's on pages 99 of *The Senior Cohousing Handbook*, and 49, 101, 145, 175, 255, 295 of *Cohousing Communities*. (In Denmark, the size of the community is the number one consideration for the long-term success of a cohousing community). There is no discussion about the important metrics which ascertain whether a cohousing is functioning or not. See pages 364-392 in *Cohousing Communities*.

Read a book, know something. Search online for something about cohousing—get confused. Social science is harder to find on the net. The story needs a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The challenge is more than getting the book into bookstores. I guess you have to imagine helping people realize the benefits of reading the book, because we are so far away from the habit. Quimper Village Cohousing asks everyone who is considering buying a house there to read *Senior Cohousing* and *State-of-the-Art Cohousing* first. Everyone that I have asked there said that the books helped them segue into cohousing successfully. They have plenty of copies to loan out. And there are many reasons why that project is considered "State of the Art of Senior Cohousing" in the US, but the fact that everyone comes to the table with foundational information, wedded to the notion and the understanding of a high-functioning neighborhood, and has both feet in the future, makes a huge difference.

Books have played a major role from the beginning in terms of getting cohousing to this country and built in your town, starting with our first book, *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* (The European Story). Bookstores play a key role in culture change in general, and cohousing is no exception.

I'll bet $100 that the next group that embarks on a project just based on the following three books: *Creating Cohousing*, *Senior Cohousing*, and *Cohousing Communities*, will finish their project in two to three years—just like the good ol' days. Anyone want to take that bet?

Many groups have contacted the publisher (New Society Publishers and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) directly to get bulk

discounts, and I find that successful projects get started when lots of folks do this fun homework. I usually need to give a dozen copies of *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities*, *The Senior Cohousing Handbook: A Community Approach to Independent Living,* and *Cohousing Communities: Designing for High-Functioning Neighborhoods* away to planners, banks, neighbors, mayors, new residents, local architects, builders, and so on for any new project—to give them context. It saves the group thousands and thousands of hours, dollars, and delays, and most importantly makes for a better project. I just did this in San Luis Obispo County, including the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, and in my view, it got the project off to a fruitful beginning.[1]

Cohousing is more than a sound bite; it is cultural pivot, and it takes folks with curiosity doing some fun research first. Seattle and the surrounding areas have about a dozen cohousing communities today largely because the bookstores in town have sold more than 1,000 copies of *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities*. The San Francisco area has over 20 cohousing communities largely because the book has sold more than 2,000 copies there.

Read a book, know something, share the book, and start the discussion—it is still worthwhile.

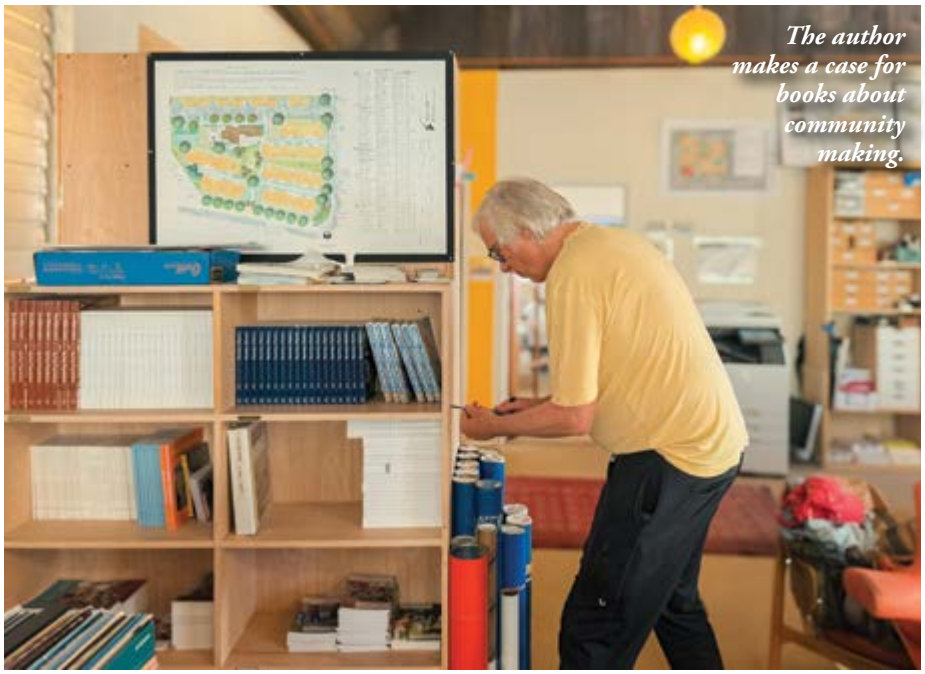
Charles Durrett is Principal at The Cohousing Company (www.cohousingco.com). He is an architect, author, and advocate of affordable, socially responsible, and sustainable design. His most recent books are Cohousing Communities: Designing for High-Functioning Neighborhoods *and* One Life, Live It!*—about designing an ecovillage for a Neuro-Diverse Community.*

---

1. See also Hannah Quinton's article "It Takes a Village" in Klipsun Magazine, April 2024 (klipsun-magazine.com/spring-2024-connection/it-takes-a-village). It features Bellingham Cohousing, which arranged three book signings in the local bookstores when that project was being organized. Bellingham moved in full upon completion, all very affordable houses in a high-functioning neighborhood. They were affordable because all 33 households had read *Creating Cohousing* and knew how to do it. And it's a very handsome cohousing.

Why Books Matter: A Case for Books about Community Making

By Charles Durrett



The author makes a case for books about community making.

Photos courtesy of Charles Durrett

The very first cohousing in the US, Muir Commons in Davis, California would not have happened if the book *Creating Cohousing: Building Sustainable Communities* had not been in every Davis bookstore and library. A dozen bookstores, new and used, and every library (six or seven) carried it. That project took exactly two years from the night of the public presentation to the morning of move-in. Every adult in the group read the book and we were always figuratively on the same page.

State-of-the-art Southside Park Cohousing in nearby Sacramento would not have been built without the activism of my mother, Rosemary, the ultimate grassroots organizer (she organized her bra-making union during WWII!—"It was hard to get support for that project," she would say...). She went to every Sacramento bookstore (about two dozen in 1991) and asked, "Do you have this book?," "Can you order this book?," "Can I leave this book on consignment?"

I know that I'm going counterculture here, but there seems to be a big correlation.

In this era of information chaos, it's time to bring a little balance back into our information consumption.

A young journalist, Hannah Quinton, called about a month ago with a new and provocative question: "Why did cohousing have a much more rapid growth when your first book came out in 1988 than it does now?" Then, before I could think of an answer, she proceeded to answer her own question. "Is it because in the beginning, there was only one book available, a book with a beginning, a middle, and

(continued on p. 62)

LOST VALLEY
EDUCATION CENTER

Visit lostvalley.org

HELP CREATE A REGENERATIVE FUTURE

PERMACULTURE EDUCATION

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.

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 or learning period, and are looking to make like-minded friends, develop marketable skills, and experience living in community. Food and lodging included.

EXPERIENCE LIVING IN A COMMUNITY

EXPLORE A HOLISTIC LIFE PATH

RESIDENCY

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

Subscribe to COMMUNITIES!

What Readers Say about COMMUNITIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—**Chuck Durrett**, The Cohousing Company

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

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

See gen-us.net/subscribe.

To subscribe via online payment, please visit gen-us.net/online.

To renew your subscription online or update your address, please log in at gen-us.net/account.

To subscribe via postal mail, send a **check or money order payable to COMMUNITIES Magazine** along with name, address, city, state, zip code, country, email address, phone (optional), subscription type(s), start issue requested (current or next) for each subscription, and addresses/contact info for any gift recipients, to: **Communities, c/o Roths, 330 Morgan St., Oberlin, OH 44074 USA.**

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Print + Digital: $30 per year in US, $25 for each additional in US; $40 per year outside of US, $35 per year for each additional outside of US. **Print + Digital, Supporter:** $40 in US, $50 per year outside of US. **Print + Digital, Sustainer:** $50 per year in US, $60 per year outside of US.

Digital Only: $20 per year anywhere in world, $15 for each additional. **Digital Only, Supporter:** $30 per year anywhere in world. **Digital Only, Sustainer:** $40 per year anywhere in world.

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

gen-us.net/subscribe

PLEASE EXPLORE OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS!

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

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

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

MORE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

Donate to COMMUNITIES: **gen-us.net/donate/magazine**
Become a Benefactor: **gen-us.net/visions** and **gen-us.net/reach**
Submit writing, photography, artwork: **gen-us.net/submit**
Advertise: **gen-us.net/advertising**
Explore past content: **gen-us.net/back-issues**, **gen-us.net/themes**, **gen-us.net/index**, **gen-us.net/index-by-community**