

LESSONS FROM HISTORICAL UTOPIAN GROUPS

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Fall 2017 • Issue #176

## LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Reflections from The Farm

Tracing Windward's Memeology

Why I Study Communal Societies

The Twin Oaks Experiment at 50

Life Lessons for Community Longevity



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Jalisa and  
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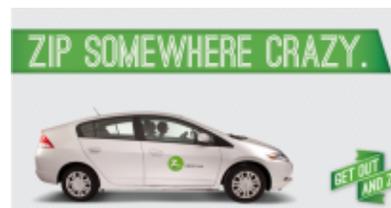
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- 3. Systemic interventions
- 4. Cultural sustainability



Curated by Paul Freundlich,  
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 (Co-op)  
 America





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At Quayside Village Cohousing in North Vancouver, British Columbia, a grandmother and her grandchildren harvest Italian prune plums from a broken branch. (See “Forty Years in Community: Has It Made a Difference?,” pp. 55-56.)  
Photo by Marylee Stephenson.

# COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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## Publisher's Note BY SKY BLUE



# CELEBRATING 30, LOOKING FORWARD

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Fellowship for Intentional Community. A lot has changed in 30 years.

For one, in 1987 the internet wasn't commercially available. No websites, no email. As a child of the digital age it's hard for me to fathom how people found communities before the internet, and how communities found each other. And yet, the network existed well before the FIC came together.

**COMMUNITIES** magazine started in 1972 as an amalgamation of several newsletters about communal living, which was a result of meetings at that year's Twin Oaks Communities Conference (Twin Oaks turned 50 years old this year, and the Communities Conference is still held annually). The first issue of **COMMUNITIES** included the first Communities Directory. It also mentioned the North American Students of Cooperation, which focuses on student housing cooperatives, and was formed in 1968. But like the FIC, it is a successor to an organization that goes back to the 1940s. We are growing this movement in very rich soil that's been cultivated for generations by people all over the country who somehow had the passion, dedication, and faith to build their communities and build a movement.

The social and political landscape has also changed dramatically. The counterculture and back-to-the-land movements of the '60s and '70s birthed many of the communities prominent in 1987, yet the schism with mainstream society they represented was only widening and intentional communities were becoming increasingly obscure and marginalized. It was an important time for the FIC to come together to help keep the momentum going.

Before long, in the early '90s, cohousing and ecovillages would join the mix and help begin the process of bringing intentional communities back to a more mainstream audience. Progressive

# VOLUNTEER IN HAWAII

movements and organizations in general were recovering from the Reagan era, and with the explosion of the internet, organizing for peace and justice only became easier. Things like the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, MoveOn.org, and the WTO protests in Seattle in '99 started showing us what was possible.

The 2000s were about the world finally coming to recognize that there are global problems facing humanity as a whole. And as we progress through the 2010s, it's clear that more and more people are looking for solutions. Intentional communities have always been models of integrated solutions, merging social, economic, and ecological concerns. But while the stalwarts of previous generations struggled to get this across to society, it seems younger people understand this intuitively. A number of news outlets have contacted us about the surging interest amongst millennials in intentional community; the interest major news outlets have been showing in intentional communities clearly represents a growing recognition in society that there must be a better way to do things.

There is so much wisdom embedded in the last 30 years and beyond, and this issue of COMMUNITIES aims to distill some of it. Of course, the complete set of back issues (some available now in digital form only) is a treasure trove of stories and perspectives. Sometimes wheels do need to be reinvented, and sometimes people just need to learn from their own mistakes, but sometimes knowledge can be shared and utilized and we can move beyond the challenges that vexed previous generations.

In some ways, the world belongs to the youngest generation. They are the ones who will have to deal with the mess we've made. The social, economic, and ecological problems intentional communities have long sought to address are only compounding. Old ways of doing things might simply no longer be relevant. But history does repeat, and the collected experience of decades of community builders is invaluable. The commitment and perseverance that people brought to their efforts to create the amazing intentional communities we see today cannot be underestimated. Let's carry forward the best of the past as we create a better future. 🌱

*Sky Blue (sky@ic.org) is Executive Director of the Fellowship for Intentional Community.*



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**COMMUNITIES** Editorial Policy

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

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek 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: COMMUNITIES, 23 Dancing Rabbit Ln, Rutledge MO 63563-9720; 800-462-8240; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at [ic.org/communities-magazine](http://ic.org/communities-magazine).

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## What is an “Intentional Community”?

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



Chris Roth

## Memory Lane Is No Dead End

While assembling this issue, I've traveled down many “memory lanes,” both collective and personal. The collective memory lanes I've visited include those shared in these pages by authors who experienced them first-hand—and who by moving them out of the mostly personal realm (history shared by just a few), have made them available for us all to learn from and make our own. In other cases, historical communities described in this issue are already in the public domain and much-examined by communal studies scholars—and yet every glimpse we get of them is also, paradoxically, through a personal lens, especially when these historical communities have laid the groundwork for contemporary experiments. The past is in many ways just as alive as the present is—with the ability to change our current course, to inspire the future, to reveal itself in new ways when looked at with new eyes.

I've traveled down personal memory lanes almost by accident recently, with a strange (but no longer surprising to me) correspondence to our theme. A search for a specific piece of information led me to immerse myself in back issues of *Talking Leaves* magazine, which I edited for eight years here at Lost Valley Educational Center before we ceased publication in 2006. More fully and eloquently than I remembered, it reflected our intentional community at the time, as well as the exhilaration of co-creating a publication together—and led to a good bit of nostalgia. The group of individuals and families that coalesced during that period all ended up going their separate ways, such that no one (save me) who lived at Lost Valley then lives at it now (and even I went away for a period, partly to be closer to my coworkers on this magazine, which I started editing two years after *Talking Leaves* folded).

Contributing to the rose-colored glasses with which I now view that period, I was in my late 30s and early 40s, with the injury and health challenges of my later 40s and now 50s still ahead of me and not even guessed at. Even through frequent changes and many comings and goings, the community was “tight,” providing an experience of extended family that won't happen again in exactly the same way for any of us who were there (no more than we can regain our more youthful bodies). And we had a strong sense of shared purpose.

After contracting and nearly collapsing once that golden age had ended, Lost Valley has grown again in population beyond what it usually was back then—entering a new era of a different kind of abundance. These days, the connections among everyone are by necessity and circumstance less close, on the whole, with less of a shared economy and less average member involvement in community and nonprofit life (everyone used to be “all in”—that can't be the case any more). And yet we are finding our way back to some of what defined that past community. My experience of “back then” informs what I know is possible, and I notice that many of the systems and elements of the culture we had before the collapse have been replicated and reinstated in this new era, in only slightly modified forms, as the new group has learned from mistakes and arrived at the same solu-

tions that worked for others in the past (sometimes with gentle nudges from people who were there). Even in new circumstances, which require their own unique solutions, lessons from the past apply.

My other major trip down memory lane has been with the community/educational center that first brought me to Oregon: Aprovecho/End of the Road, where I spent more than half of my mid-20s to mid-30s. I recently attended an alumni reunion marking 36 years on the land. I felt like a newcomer into an established community when I arrived five years into the experiment, but I'm a certified old-timer now, with memories that go back farther than all but one other reunion attendee. There's talk of an oral history project, involving people from throughout the group's history, and I'm excited about it.

Reflecting on my time there, I notice that the heightened senses and idealism that I apparently had throughout (along with a naivete, a less-developed radar to avoid drama- and conflict-filled situations, and less skill at facilitating functional rather than dysfunctional community dynamics) left indelible memories that others want to hear—partly because no one wants some of them to be reprised in the future. More than I realized, they shed light on what's happened over the last two decades since I left—they form the backdrop for the community's and organization's evolution.

Challenges (of which Aprovecho has had its fair share) do not arise in a vacuum, and historical patterns tend to repeat themselves even when no one is conscious of the origin. Sharing our histories helps us be more conscious of the genesis of the memes, habits, agreements, institutions, rituals we've created—makes the unconscious conscious. Appreciation, open discussion, the ability to change...all arise from this broadened awareness.

While it's important to Be Here Now, the present is impossible without the past, and in an era of collective amnesia and rewriting of history (not to mention erasure and denial of present reality) we'd do well to focus more, rather than less, on the past, and what we can learn from it. At least my experience would suggest so.

Thanks to the Communal Studies Association for giving us financial assistance with this issue, for tending the flame of communal studies, and for helping connect those who know that learning from the past is essential for navigating the present and future.

Please enjoy this issue! 🌸

*Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES and is gradually working on a collection of 30 years of writings which, despite or because of the march of time, seem once again relevant to him, maybe now more than ever.*

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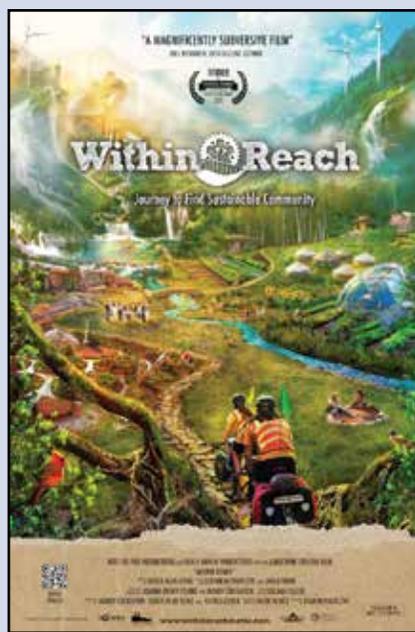
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# The Communal Studies Association

By Don Pitzer

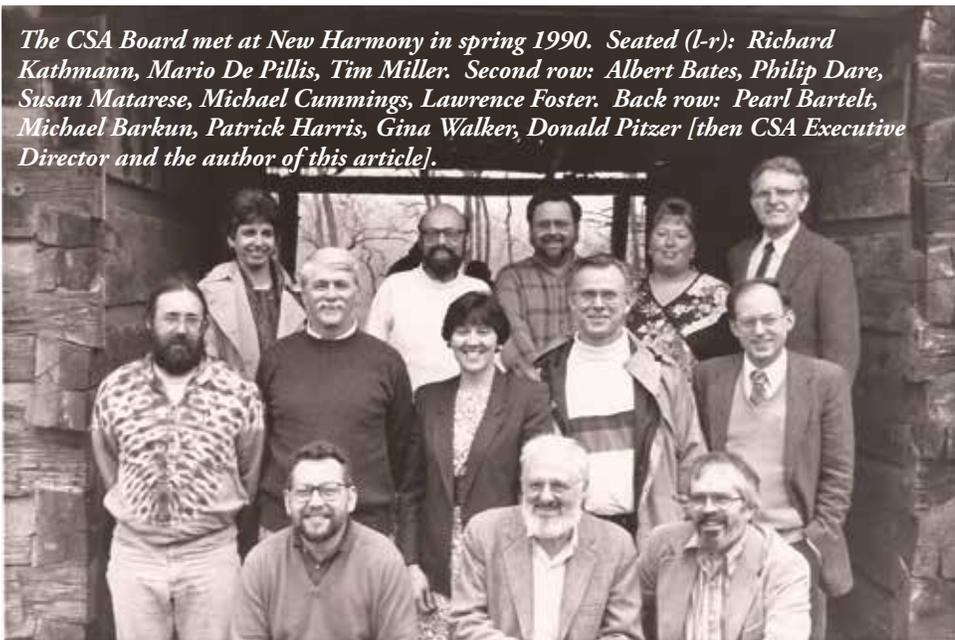
The Communal Studies Association is pleased to partner with the Fellowship for Intentional Community for its Fall 2017 issue of *COMMUNITIES*. For decades the two organizations have shared objectives, meetings, and members. The CSA, founded in 1975, and the FIC, founded in the 1940s and reorganized in the mid 1980s, also maintain cooperative ties with mutually kindred organizations in the causes of communal studies and communal living. In an unforgettable spirit of unity, members of the boards of directors of the CSA, FIC, International Communal Studies Association based in Israel, and Center for Communal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana met as one body in 1993. We sat together in a symbolic circle in the venerable Harmonist cooper shop in historic New Harmony, Indiana where our organizations were co-sponsoring a Communal Studies Conference.

It is in this same spirit of cooperation and support that the CSA and its members, some of whom have written articles for this Fall 2017 issue, are joining with the FIC to insure that *COMMUNITIES* remains the standard of excellence in documenting the voluntary communal laboratories which offer the world experimental evidence of hopeful solutions to pressing global problems. The CSA's journal *Communal Societies* and the FIC's *COMMUNITIES* are parallel publications helping make the world aware of the vital lessons to be learned from communal groups past and present. These lessons are now more urgent than ever to human survival itself—from conflict resolution, sustainability, and equality to the dangers of authoritarianism.

Just as communal living has a universal attraction to groups and movements seeking security, solidarity, and survival, the CSA was formed to attract and serve all who are interested in studying and learning from communal groups and their movements. Its founding constitution was written during a Communal Societies Conference at the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky in 1975. The stated purpose was “to encourage the restoration, preservation, and public interpretation of America's historic communal sites and the study of communal societies past and present” involving “preservationists from historic communal sites, residents of current communes, and scholars of communitarianism as active participants in its activities.” These activities included “publications, conferences, seminars, workshops, and exhibits” intended to “increase public awareness of the American communal tradition, to “act as a clearinghouse for information relevant to communal restoration, interpretation, funding and scholarship,” and to “provide a forum for the exchange of ideas to achieve an understanding of America's communal heritage.”

The CSA ([www.communalstudies.org](http://www.communalstudies.org)) desires to be increasingly inclusive. It welcomes all who find interest and information, fascination and fun in the important social phenomenon of communal living into the fold of its meetings, networking, publications, and tours. Annual CSA conferences, conducted in a reunion-like atmosphere and spanning the spectrum of intellect and emotion, can be deadly serious as in a presentation by Jonestown survivor Laura Johnston Kohl, innovative as in a lecture on transformative utopianism by anthropologist Josh Lockyer, or just plain entertain-

*The CSA Board met at New Harmony in spring 1990. Seated (l-r): Richard Kathmann, Mario De Pillis, Tim Miller. Second row: Albert Bates, Philip Dare, Susan Matarese, Michael Cummings, Lawrence Foster. Back row: Pearl Bartelt, Michael Barkun, Patrick Harris, Gina Walker, Donald Pitzer [then CSA Executive Director and the author of this article].*



*The 2015 CSA Board.*

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*Tours of historic communal sites, such as this one at Old Economy in 2005, are part of each conference.*



*CSA conferences are an opportune time for attendees with like interests to get to know one another, as these anthropologists did at Old Economy Village in 2005.*



*Conference attendees at Mary's City of David in 2003.*

ing as in a folk dancing lesson directed by historian Larry Foster. Guided tours at conferences introduce attendees to those historic or current communal venues, such as Mormon sites in and around Temple Square during the conference in 2016. Pre- and post-conference tours have taken visitors to Hutterite brotherhoods in South Dakota, Daniel Wright's Padanaram Settlement near Bedford, Indiana, Ma Jaya's Kashi Ashram at Sebastian, Florida, and the Transcendental Meditation community and Maharishi Vedic University at Fairfield, Iowa.

The CSA, with headquarters at Amana, Iowa, fulfills its clearinghouse function by circulating contact information of those who come to conferences and by having its officers, including Executive Director Kathleen Fernandez, President Marc Rhorer, and its other board members, available to answer questions online or by phone. Those seeking research materials are often referred to two collections with which the CSA works in close collaboration. One is the Communal Studies Collection in the Special Collections Department of the University of Southern Indiana Archives ([www.usi.edu/library/archives](http://www.usi.edu/library/archives)), which now has information on some 6,000 historic and present communal groups, including about 25,000 images and partial online access. The other is the Special Collections and Archives at the Hamilton College Library in Clinton, New York ([cgoodwillie@hamilton.edu](mailto:cgoodwillie@hamilton.edu)). It specializes in Shaker sources and publishes the *American Communal Societies Quarterly* that includes seminal articles on pertinent communal topics based on primary sources.

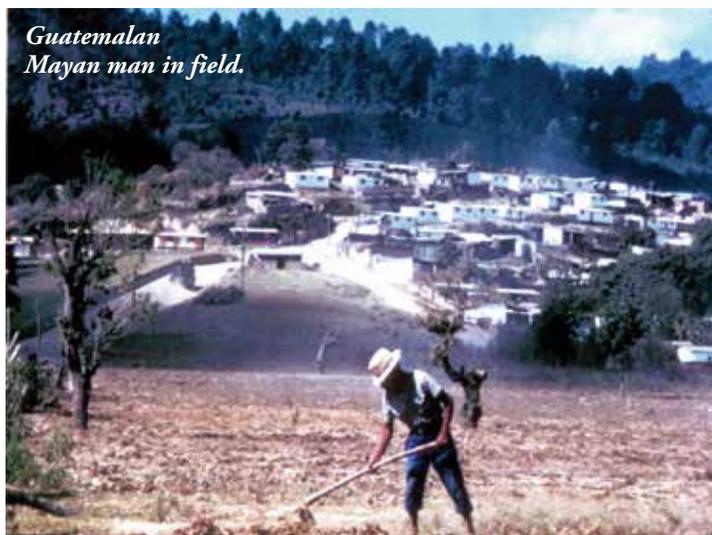
The CSA and FIC, their publications and outreach, are inseparably linked in the common cause for the communal, humanitarian, ecological, scholarly, and preservation activities they represent. The CSA invites all who are interested in its efforts to become members, apply for its Research Fellowship award ([www.communalstudies.org/researchfellowship](http://www.communalstudies.org/researchfellowship)), participate in its conferences, and submit news to its newsletter *Communiqué* and articles to its journal *Communal Societies*. Especially, we welcome all to attend the 43rd annual CSA Conference this October 5-7, 2017, at the Zoar Village State Memorial in Zoar, Ohio, where we will celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of the Society of Separatists of Zoar ([www.communalstudies.org/annualconference](http://www.communalstudies.org/annualconference)). 🌱

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*Don Pitzer was executive director of the Communal Studies Association from 1976 to 1993. He is now Professor Emeritus of History and Director Emeritus of the Center for Communal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville, Indiana. His more complete history of the CSA appeared as "The Communal Studies Association at Forty: A Personal Retrospective" in Communal Societies: Journal of the Communal Studies Association (volume 35, number 1, 2015), pages 81-108.*

# Why The Farm Collective Failed

By Melwyn Stiriss



*Guatemalan  
Mayan man in field.*



*Stephen Gaskin  
blowing born to start Om.*

The '60s spawned widespread pockets and tribes of people attempting to break away from the military-industrial complex, materialistic, conformist society to get back to the land to create a better lifestyle based on spirituality, simplicity, and sharing. Collective communities and hippie communes popped up all over. The Farm in Summer-town, Tennessee was “the ultimate hippie commune.”

The Farm was an amazing tribute to the power of human spirit and human energy working in harmony to manifest what we thought would be the best of all possible worlds—affordable Paradise on Earth, a gracious, fun, peaceful lifestyle the whole world can afford. At The Farm's peak in the late '70s, 1,450 people enjoyed Zero Unemployment, Universal Healthcare, and all necessities on a little more than \$100/person a month!

Over the collective's 13 years, a total of 5,000 people lived and worked together as “voluntary peasants” sharing labor, life, and friendship—living a path with heart—working labor of love without pay, manifesting a grassroots, 24/7 peace demonstration.

We built our own town nestled deep in Tennessee woods—a village complete with an FM radio station, solar-heated school, crews of people dedicated to farming, construction, and infrastructure. We had a soy dairy, clinic, doctors, midwives, bakery, cottage industries, a dozen satellite communities around the country, and our own hippie Peace Corps working humanitarian outreach projects around the world.

First, I hasten to make clear: The Farm did not fail, completely. The Farm is still around. It was only the original collective phase that proved unsustainable. First there was The Farm collective, the community's original incarnation—the “Stephen Gaskin as spiritual teacher” version—which existed between May 1971 and October 1983, when The Farm collective community threw in the towel, conceding the collective experiment was not sustainable.

Next came The Farm Cooperative which still exists to this day on the same land. People now pay dues, have their own money, own their houses, but not the land those houses sit on, because the land is still held in its original trust.

In 1980, Plenty International, our own hippie Peace Corps, was awarded “the alternative Nobel Peace Prize,” the Swedish Right Livelihood Award—“For caring, sharing and acting with and on behalf of those in need at home and abroad.” I myself worked as a volunteer with Mayans

and a crew from the community in remote indigenous villages after a devastating earthquake in Guatemala. We built schools, clinics, houses, and a clinic for Mother Teresa in a Guatemala City slum.

We did some good, helped some people; even saved lives. We made a difference in the world, shared great adventures, made dear friends, and demonstrated that we can escape the humdrum pedestrian. We learned people can get “out of the box,” leave behind soul-sucking jobs and lifestyles to live out dreams and be happy. So, what happened?

Why did the collective fail? It was certainly not for lack of trying. Typical residents were dedicated, hard-working people who contributed their blood, sweat, and tears in a labor of love. There is a concatenation of causes as to why it failed, but it boils down to:

- The Cult Effect
- Terrible Money Management
- Hierarchy and Denial of Hierarchy
- Ego
- Lack of Intergenerational Continuity
- Marijuana
- The Living-in-a-Bubble Effect

The Farm guru, Stephen Gaskin, was a charismatic, six-foot-five, long-haired, marijuana-smoking, magic-mushroom-and-peyote-eating, self-proclaimed tripping guide and spiritual teacher, who held free “tripping, energy, and telepathy” classes in San Francisco and Sunday morning meditations. A hundred colorful buses followed Gaskin on a round-the-country-save-the-world bus caravan/speaking tour. Over time, the former college teacher and US Marine Corps combat veteran became an adored life coach and guru to hundreds of hippies. In the beginning of The Farm, everyone was Stephen's devoted, enlightenment-seeking, out-to-save-the-world spiritual student, and The Farm was Stephen's ashram, school, and monastery.

With the wisdom of hindsight, it seems The Farm could have made it financially if we were not supporting Stephen's expensive travel and celebrity habits, all done in the name of “getting the word out.” There never would have been a Farm without Stephen, but, in the end, Stephen unwittingly undermined the whole experiment with his ego and bad financial decisions.

While the community struggled to stay afloat—everyone working overtime to keep the community covered for food, medical, housing, and

clothes, Stephen spent thousands of dollars of community money to buy a used Greyhound Scenicruiser, retrofit it, take 25 talented people out of our workforce and go out on national and international tours with our band, to give free concerts and for him to speak, recruiting additional community members, overtaxing all our systems, especially housing.

Another major flaw was the existence of hierarchy. Though we agreed in the beginning to create a “classless society,” Stephen not only allowed hierarchy, but he himself created a class system that had him and his immediate family at the top, followed by his inner circle who traveled with him on tour. Next on the ladder came married couples. Singles made up our low class. Hierarchy was counter-unity, and it got to be like George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*: “On the farm, all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

About the cult effect: Groupthink is rampant all over, not just in cults. Groupthink is that situation in which we overlook flaws in our leaders. We make excuses for them and rationalize all negativity. And, over time, we sacrifice judgment and critical thinking. Groupthink took its toll and also led to the end of our collective agreements. Once proud of our group intelligence, we were stumped on how to right our ship.

About marijuana: Though marijuana slowed us down at work, at the same time, marijuana kept our spirits high and often gave carpenters and farmers a “second wind.” So, it was a tradeoff, and I don’t think marijuana use cut into production significantly.

However, I think using marijuana engenders contentment and a pleasurable feeling that “all is right with the world.” Sometimes, we need a little relief from everyday stress, but everything was not all right with our world on The Farm, and the populace was lulled into a false sense of security and failed to act appropriately to deal with real problems that were taking a cumulative negative toll on the very underpinnings of our community.

Other contributing factors that weakened the community and undermined success include the 1981 election for the Council of Elders. Exercising Farm-style all-inclusiveness, the election was open to everyone, regardless of age. You could vote for anyone you thought was an elder, meaning a rock solid citizen, a pillar of the community, a wise, exemplary Farmie.

What happened was that the burgeoning, juicy teen population, feeling its collective power, conspired to organize and vote as a bloc, and the teens won 16 seats on the council. Our clever, rebellious teenagers hijacked the election, got some power, had their joke, and effectively shortchanged the community of a basic ingredient in any successful, sustainable society—elder power.

About living in a bubble: We were living a big, beautiful energy bubble—a bubble we consciously created and sustained with synergy, the combined energy of our daily shared labor of love.

We loved our bubble—our beautiful land, our beautiful people, our beautiful ideals and spiritual intentions. We were having an ongoing, mostly good time in our bubble. But there is a downside to living in a bubble, remote and insulated from the outside world. Precious little information gets in. For example, we totally missed out on Watergate and other major national and world events. I learned of Watergate years later. Most of what we knew about the outside world was what we heard from Stephen at services. Also by living in our bubble, content with homegrown entertainment, we missed out on experiencing art, theater, classical music, opera, Shakespeare, and popular culture like TV.

What are my qualifications to offer an educated opinion on why The Farm collective failed? I am a founder of The Farm. I was there Day One. I lived and worked on The Farm the entire 12-and-a-half-year collective period. Before The Farm, I was a member of the community of followers of Stephen Gaskin at Monday Night Class in San Francisco and on the great, ’round-the-country, save-the-world, hippie school bus caravan.

I am a journalist. Before my hippie days, I worked as a newspaper reporter and as a reporter, editor, and announcer for United Press International. For the past 30 years, I have been writing *Voluntary Peasants*—anecdotes, vignettes, and objective reflection about the community—and

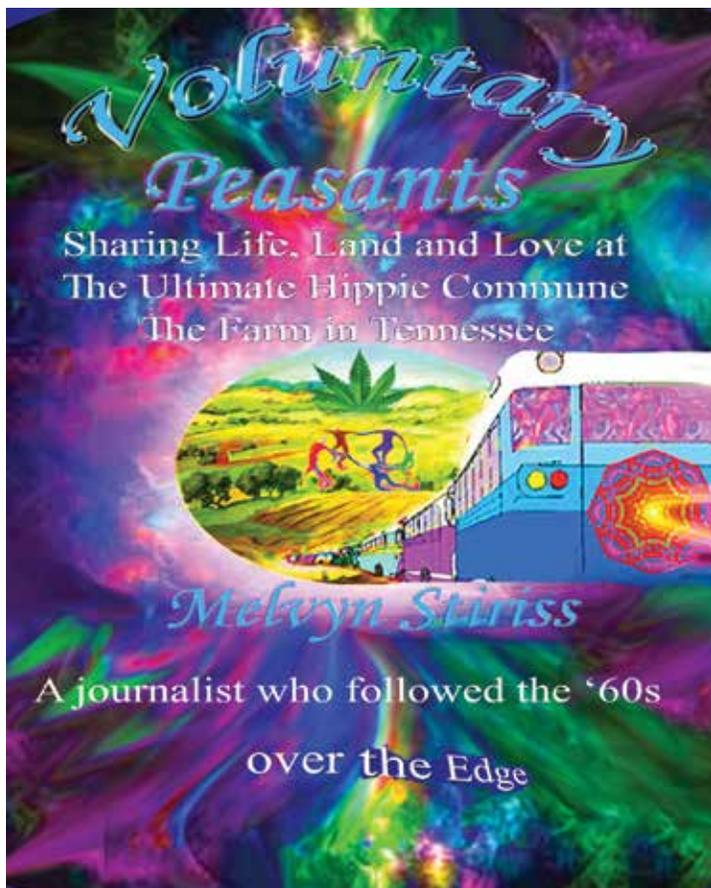
this process of writing has helped me better understand what really happened back there. ☁

*This article is excerpted and adapted from Voluntary Peasants—Sharing Life, Land and Love at the Ultimate Hippie Commune—The Farm in Tennessee, available in ebook and print editions. Visit [www.voluntarypeasants.com](http://www.voluntarypeasants.com).*

*Now 74, Melvyn Stiriss lives in upstate New York, enjoying his “senior career” as an author, publisher, storyteller, and aspiring movie maker. He speaks at colleges, organizations, and groups around the country. He loves hiking, playing keyboard, photography, travel, movies, and great literature.*



*Mel  
baking bread.*



Photos courtesy of Melvyn Stiriss

# Why The Farm Survived

By Douglas Stevenson



*A group photo. Today The Farm is home to approximately 200+ people, a mix of members, provisional members, children, and visitors or guests.*

It could be said that there's a million stories about what happened during The Farm's great change in September of 1983, and although the principal components of those stories may overlap, each interpretation is filtered by the individuals and their personal experience. So, while my friend Melvyn and I did live on The Farm at the same time, the conclusions or opinions we have are not entirely the same. Because I came to the community a few years after it started and stayed through "The Changeover," the transition from "The old Farm" and its communal economic structure, to our current, cooperative economy, and continue to live on The Farm today, I have a different perspective on how and why The Farm survived.

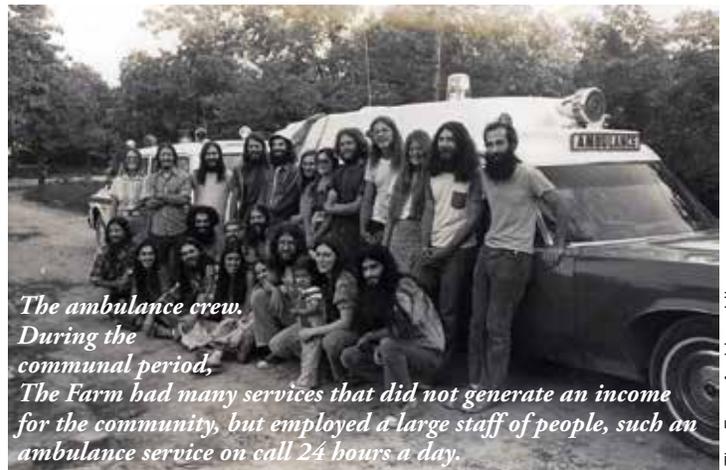
I joined the community in 1973, and was not part of The Farm's early beginnings in San Francisco or the bus Caravan that left California to find land in Tennessee. This meant that we, my wife and I, and many others like us, had much less of our commitment to the community based on a relationship with Stephen Gaskin. From my observation, often those who were with Stephen from the beginning became more disillusioned, lost faith, and left. Many who stayed in the community after The Changeover were those who came later.

## Cult or Cultish?

The first time I saw Stephen on a speaking tour to promote The Farm, he explained that anyone you give your attention and energy and use as a role model, is filling the role of your spiritual teacher. Better to be aware of how you are directing your energy and make the conscious decision to support someone with a positive message. In my mind, I was able to place Stephen in the role of preacher, someone who brought us together, but early on I also saw him as a man with shortcomings and ego. Ultimately, I recognized the community as my true teacher, defined by the people I bumped up against every day who helped me grow and change.

## A Hierarchical Power Structure

There is no question that Stephen was the "abbot of the monastery." This gave him the power to fire people who had risen to roles of responsibility, which frequently seemed more to do with conflicting egos than qualifications or abilities. He could make decisions that affected The Farm's econ-



*The ambulance crew. During the communal period, The Farm had many services that did not generate an income for the community, but employed a large staff of people, such as an ambulance service on call 24 hours a day.*



*After "The Changeover," most community businesses were privatized, owned by their former managers, such as an electronics manufacturing facility that produces devices for monitoring nuclear radiation, otherwise known as Geiger counters.*

*A midwife checkup. On the “old Farm,” the midwives performed their services for free, not just for community members, but for anyone who came, providing them with free housing, food, even taking on their hospital bills in the event of an emergency.*



Douglas Stevenson



*After “The Changeover,” community services were often privatized and converted into businesses. The “Soy Dairy” once produced tofu for the community. Today, Farm Soy distributes tofu and other soy products to a regional market. Community members purchase their tofu at The Farm Store.*

Douglas Stevenson

omy, but was not wise in the ways of money. There is no question that he spent money on promoting himself as the messenger, at times inappropriately. However, most of us who have shared this Farm experience were brought to the community through those efforts. Even though these expenditures may have had a negative impact on our bank account, they alone were not responsible for the financial debt that ultimately brought down the communal phase of the community.

### Poor Money Management—Young and Inexperienced

In many ways, during the communal period, Stephen played a very “hands-off” role in managing the day-to-day operations of the community. We could have become more organized, employed better financial management, but overall, we were young and inexperienced. Rebelling from our parent’s generation, we did not have and were not open to advice from elders.

Our disorganization meant that there were many different entities within The Farm that had their own income, checkbook, and relationship with our local bank, such as the farming crew and all of the different business start-ups. This meant they were able to take out bank loans, using the land as collateral, without the oversight of a central government. It wasn’t until the months leading up to The Changeover, that we pulled all of those checkbooks and bank accounts together and created a broad financial overview, revealing the enormity of our debt.

Our dream of supporting the community as vegetable farmers crashed when a blast of arctic air froze and killed a huge crop of green beans we’d planted in Homestead, Florida, south of Miami. This created \$100,000 in debt overnight.

The Farm did not buy nor could it have afforded health insurance. We took care of own healthcare, with a clinic, doctors, nurses, a pharmacy, and were able to care for most needs on our own. However, emergency runs dealing with life and death situations eventually built up overdue bills of well over \$100,000 to various hospitals.

There are many other examples of our financial mismanagement. A large crew of people operated and maintained an antiquated internal telephone system. Even though we were installing water systems in other countries, many homes on The Farm did not have running water, but had water delivered each day by two guys driving a truck with a large tank on the back, something we called a “temporary emergency expediency,” that went on for years.

### Living in the Bubble

When people joined The Farm, they wanted to live and work inside the community, not turn around and get a job in town. The vast majority of the Farm’s population did not generate any income. It relied on about 100

*A circle of residents, 1970s. At its height The Farm had a population of between 1200 – 1400 people, but not the necessary infrastructure to support them. Most homes provided housing for 30-40 people, but did not have running water or electricity.*



The Farm Archives Library

“basic budget boogie boys” who went out every day doing construction work. Unfortunately, the recession of the early 1980s brought a stop to much of the construction work.

There were a few other sources of income, some guys who ran a trucking company, a couple of doctors working emergency room shifts, but it simply wasn't enough. There were numerous additional business start-ups, but they weren't generating sufficient cash flow to make contributions to our communal bank account. At the time of The Changeover, the community was bringing in only

placed its Council of Elders, who had no real power, with an actual board of directors. This shift also meant that Stephen Gaskin no longer had the authority to make any financial decisions for the community.

An overview of The Farm's finances and all its operations was performed, followed by a democratic vote to determine the operating budget for running the community. Each adult member was able to vote for the services they deemed essential and the allocated cost. This included operation of our water system, hiring bookkeepers and accountants, maintenance of roads and public buildings, plus the cost of community services such as our clinic and lifeguards for our swimming area. The total amount was then divided between all of the adult members, establishing the amount each adult was required to pay every month. Altogether, it added up to about \$100 per person, plus an additional \$35 a month per person to go towards paying down our debt. Within four years, the community was debt-free!

All of the businesses in the community (with the exception of The Book Company) became privatized, owned by their principal managers, the people with the skills and knowledge to actually run

the business. These companies had to start paying their employees, so that these folks would have an income to cover their personal needs, feed their families, and pay into the operating budget. Right away it became clear which businesses were generating real money.

Those not employed by a community-based business were forced to seek employment outside—that is, get jobs. A large number of people went back to school, getting two-year nursing degrees at a local community college. Over

time several of the community's business start-ups became solid and provided employment. Once unfinished, overcrowded houses with 30-40 people became beautiful single-family homes.

The Farm survived because the vision of intentional community was much greater than the cult of celebrity, including a hippie spiritual teacher. The teachings that have held the community together really did not come from Stephen, but were broader truths, the fundamentals of hippie culture:

- Peace and nonviolence
- Respect for nature, understanding our role as stewards of the land
- A responsibility to treat each other with respect, and to honor each person's path

The journey is not over. The community is in a new period of transition, from the original founding generation to the next. Survival is never a given, but comes from perseverance and the result of great effort. May the members of The future Farm carry with them the wisdom of what we have learned from the past, and the vision to keep the spirit of community high and vibrant! 🌱

*Douglas Stevenson is the principal volunteer media interface and spokesperson at The Farm, once recognized as the world's largest hippie commune, now one of the most widely known ecovillage intentional communities. His interviews have appeared in countless newspaper and magazine articles, documentaries, and TV news programs such as CNN's United Shades of America. Douglas is also the author of two books, Out to Change the World and The Farm Then and Now, a Model for Sustainable Living, where he shares insights developed from over 40 years of life in community.*

## The teachings that have held the community together really did not come from Stephen, but were broader truths, the fundamentals of hippie culture.

around \$6,000, but spending \$10,000 a week.

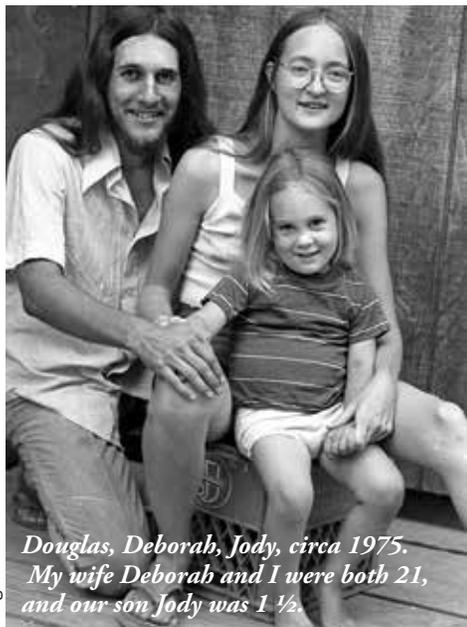
Because of the communal economic structure, our businesses did not pay their employees a salary. This meant there was no real accountability, or financial oversight to determine if a business was running efficiently or showed any true potential for making a profit.

Although not expected to generate an income, work crews for various services within the community, such as the clinic and the motor pool, were also tremendously overstaffed. The extra hands could not make up the difference for a crew short on adequate tools and supplies.

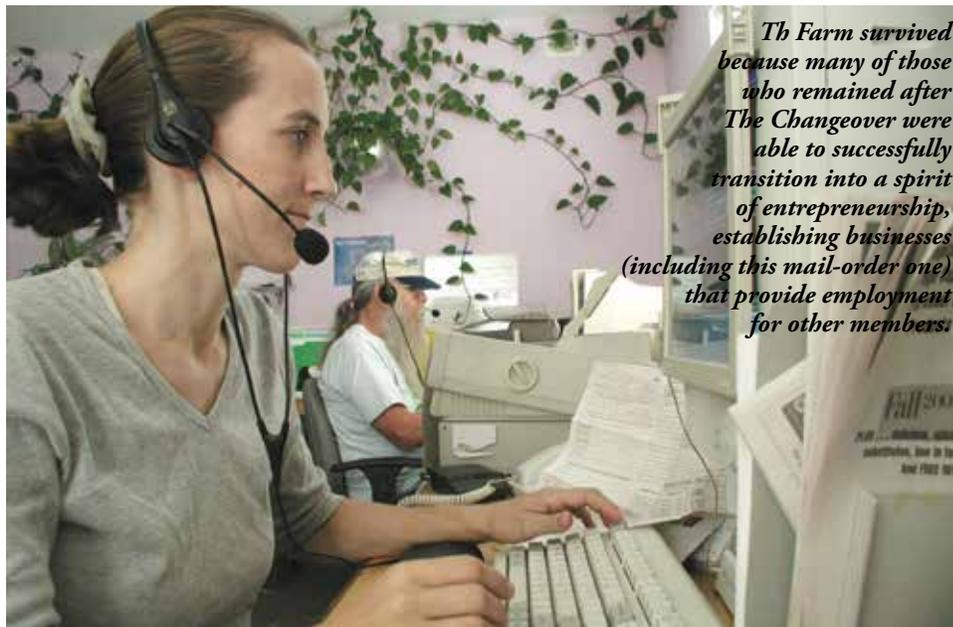
Everything became radically different after The Changeover.

### Becoming Financially Sustainable

With onset of The Changeover, The Farm re-



*Douglas, Deborah, Jody, circa 1975. My wife Deborah and I were both 21, and our son Jody was 1 1/2.*



*The Farm survived because many of those who remained after The Changeover were able to successfully transition into a spirit of entrepreneurship, establishing businesses (including this mail-order one) that provide employment for other members.*

# Tracking the Communities Movement: 70 YEARS OF HISTORY AND THE MODERN FIC

By Sky Blue and Betsy Morris



Since 1987 The Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC; [ic.org](http://ic.org)) has been a primary resource for documentation, support, and networking among secular and religiously based intentional communities. While several associations and networks exist for some of the specific types of intentional community (which include communes, housing cooperatives, student cooperatives, ecovillages, and cohousing), FIC has the largest reach and history. New experiments in shared living continue to pop up, under new names, such as coliving or cohousing.

FIC began as the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, formed in 1948/49 as a mutual aid network among 20 communities mostly in the eastern US. Pacifism, simple living, equality, and agrarian self-sufficiency on land held in common were common values. A majority were religiously affiliated, but not in mainstream traditions. Secular influences included Robert Owen, the Rochdale Pioneers, Bolton Hall, writings of Henry George, and Robert Borodi's *Flight from the City*, which spoke of the value of returning to agrarian lifestyles and attracted educated professionals and artisans.

One of the early FIC's founders was Arthur Morgan, later president of Antioch College. Morgan, among other things is credited with conceiving of the land trust (based on the principles of Henry George). In 1937, Morgan cofounded Celo Community, Inc., a land trust community of 40 homesteaders in rural North Carolina that continues to govern itself by consensus. Celo residents also started a private "organic school" based

on child-centered education methods, developed by Margaret Loomis, an influential educator, and later cofounder of the Heathcote community in Freehold, Maryland. Morgan's children continue his legacy through several intentional communities and the nonprofit Community Solutions, Inc. ([www.communitysolution.org](http://www.communitysolution.org)). Celo and Heathcote still operate and are among the oldest ICs in the *Communities Directory*. Although FIC's members and ICs in general remain predominantly European American, several other of the founding communities started by Quakers were among the first places in the United States where whites and blacks could choose to live as equals. Early founders also helped create the first Black community land trust (CLT) in the US.<sup>1</sup>

Pre-FIC communitarians had already split with other US cooperativists who favored urban programs with government financing to build housing cooperatives and publicly managed housing projects for the poor and working class. By 1961, another split by members primarily seeking expression of their religious way of life left FIC in a near dormant state for many years. The rapid increase in ICs from the 1960s, '70s, and '80s prompted another round of outreach and organizing. Leadership transferred to another generation of younger, mostly rural communitarians.

The change in name to Fellowship for Intentional Community in 1987 was subtle but important. Rather than an informal mutual aid association, the new Fellowship for Intentional Community restructured its gover-

1. Antioch College was a pioneer in educating both women and African Americans. Robert and Marjorie Swann—an Antioch graduate and a Quaker, respectively—were students of Morgan and classmates of Coretta Scott King. They helped King relatives create the first large-scale land trust/farmer's cooperative with African American farmers (the Federation of Southern Cooperatives), as well as the National Community Land Trust Network and important land trust initiatives in Massachusetts. In 1972, Bob Swann with Robert Borsodi also founded the E.F. Schumacher Society and the local currency movement.

nance and administration, incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit governed by a board of directors, and developed ongoing projects managed by staff, most of whom live in intentional communities around the country. The board expanded its mission to promoting the principles of intentional community to the larger world. Its activities include publishing COMMUNITIES magazine (starting in 1992, when it revived then-20-year-old magazine after a very brief hiatus) and the *Communities Directory*, in print since 1994 and online since 2004 ([ic.org/directory](http://ic.org/directory)).

### Definitions

The mission statement of the FIC is *to support and promote the development of intentional communities and the evolution of cooperative culture.*

FIC defines cooperative culture as encompassing both ICs and a broad array of other practices, found in other organizations and in movements. It offers the following definition.

**Cooperative Culture:** *The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs among people that are characterized by sharing, empathy, self-responsibility, understanding and celebration of differences, peaceful conflict resolution, high regard for connection and relationship, interdependence, and care for how things are done as much as what gets done.*

Examples of movements and organizations that current FIC leadership sees as representing cooperative culture include worker cooperatives ([usworker.coop](http://usworker.coop)) and other kinds of cooperative business ([www.ncba.coop](http://www.ncba.coop)), Tran-

sition Towns ([transitionus.org](http://transitionus.org)), permaculture networks ([www.permaculture.org](http://www.permaculture.org)), time banks ([www.timebanks.org](http://www.timebanks.org)), community gardens ([www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)), car sharing ([carsharing.org](http://carsharing.org)), and the wide range of groups represented by the New Economy Coalition ([www.neweconomy.net](http://www.neweconomy.net)) and the US Solidarity Economy Network ([www.usсен.org](http://www.usсен.org)).

The FIC's definition of *community* is not meant to contradict or replace other definitions of community. It is simply the definition the organization uses to help give context to its definition of *intentional community*.

**Community:** *A group of people who identify with each other. The association could be based on any combination of geography, history, language, religion, vision, purpose, philosophy, or common social, economic, or political interests.*

The FIC's definition of intentional community is meant to be as broadly encompassing as possible while clearly delineating a specific set of groups:

**Intentional Community:** *A group of people who live together or share common facilities and who regularly associate with each other on the basis of explicit common values.*

No one owns the term intentional community. Anyone who wants to identify as an intentional community is free to do so, and some groups that the FIC would identify as intentional communities do not choose to use that label. FIC communities, board, and staff have personal and business ties with many other secular IC networks, as well as research groups such as the Communal Studies Association ([www.communalstudies.org](http://www.communalstudies.org)), Cohousing Research Network ([www.cohousingresearchnetwork.org](http://www.cohousingresearchnetwork.org)), and Commonomics USA ([www.commonomicsusa.org](http://www.commonomicsusa.org)).

An intentional community can be thought of as a set of social and economic relationships, the physical (as opposed to online, or virtual) place or places where these relationships intersect and are carried out, and the explicit common values that provide the basis for members to decide how these relationships and places are organized.

In more illustrative terms, conjure up an image of an extended family compound or a traditional village and you will have an idea of what many people are attempting to emulate or replicate. In our modern world, and especially in urban centers, life is necessarily more complicated than in a traditional village, but, in rural or urban settings, the aim is to have an integrated, interconnected, interdependent life with others that provides both social and economic benefit, as well as providing a place to live out other values, such as sustainability, social justice, or spiritual/religious tenets.

### The Directory

There are 1442 public listings in 65 countries in the online *Communities Directory* as of July 2017, including ICs in various phases of development (forming, reforming, established, or disbanded).

Listing in the *Communities Directory* is voluntary, by answering a lengthy online questionnaire. FIC does reserve the right to request more information or edits and, if necessary, exclude listings that appear to:

- Advocate violence;
- Restrict the ability of their members to leave or to contact people outside the community;
- Substantively misrepresent themselves in their listing.

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**An intentional community can be thought of as a set of social and economic relationships, the physical place where these relationships intersect, and explicit common values.**

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In 1990, the first published Directory reported: “More than 8,000 people, including over 2,000 children, live in 186 of the more established North American intentional communities and extended family groups listing in the first edition of the Directory of Intentional Communities (1990). Of course, these 186 communities represent just a small fraction of the North American communities movement.

“Over 700 more intentional communities in FIC address files have declined to provide public listings for the Directory. There are thousands more residing in traditional monastic enclaves or service groups, tens of thousands living in Hutterite colonies, and millions of indigenous Americans living communally. So the information in this Directory describes just a small portion of the cooperative lifestyles practiced in North America.”

As of July 2017, of the 1442 public listings, 747 were “established” (at least four adults living together on a site for at least two years), and 79% of the Directory’s “established” listings are in North America (US, Canada, Mexico). The 544 established communities in the US identify themselves with the following community types (multiple responses are frequent):

<b>Established Communities in US by Selected Types</b>		
Total Respondents	544	100.00%
Communes (income sharing)	87	15.99%
Ecovillages (focus on sustainability)	139	25.55%
Cohousing (private homes with common facilities)	214	39.34%
Shared House/Cohousehold/Coliving	170	31.25%
Student Coops	40	7.35%
Transition Town	2	0.36%
Religious/Spiritual	13	2.39%
School/Educational/Experience	3	0.55%
Other (including economic enterprises)	77	14.15%

These numbers need further clarifying. These are voluntary categories not legal structures or screened in any way. Newer communities are frequently small and aspirational, and use models of existing communities as a touchstone for future development. A few entries are multi-site networks or include multiple neighborhoods. Also, many communities identify with multiple types. And, as mentioned before, many communities (including many religious/spiritual communities with their own pre-existing networks, most indigenous groups, and groups which wish to remain more private) choose not to list themselves at all.

### Community Types and Organizing Principles

**Housing Cooperatives and Student Co-op Houses:** The Cooperatives movement began in 17th century England and France as a concerted resistance to the loss of cultural and economic resources under rapid industrialization fueled by capitalism. Housing cooperatives, built and financed by unions and socialist/communist parties for their members, were a source of urban housing, endorsed by federal policies through the 1980s. Federal policies and programs encouraged and helped finance thousands of cooperatives, both in business and housing, from the 1930s to the 1980s.

The Rochdale Principles of Cooperation (established in England in 1844 and with minor additions; see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochdale\\_Principles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochdale_Principles)) remain as values espoused by the National Association of Housing Cooperatives established in 1958 and the North American Students of Cooperation founded in 1960s. Both groups offer some combination of training, communications, financing, and political lobbying for members along with annual conferences open to the public. They are:

- Open, voluntary membership *without discrimination to those who wish to join.*
- Democratic governance; one member–one vote.
- Economic participation of members (shared or limited return on equity).
- Surplus belongs to members.
- Education of members and public in cooperative principles.
- Cooperation among cooperatives.
- Concern for the community (in which they are located).

**Communes:** ICs that identify as communes typically involve higher levels of economic involvement, social engagement, accountability, and participation. Historically, religion combined with ethnic ties and/or political ideologies brought people into communal living groups, each with their own internal economies. The Hutterites and Bruderhof were communal income-sharing societies present in the 1940s founding of FIC. The Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC), whose purpose is similar to the original FIC, was founded in December 1976 for secular purposes. The organization was originally inspired by the networks of mutual support observed among Israeli kibbutzim by Kat Kinkade, cofounder of Twin Oaks, East Wind, and Acorn Communities.

Cooperation amongst FEC communities ranges from loans and labor exchange to sharing community-building skills and shared outreach. FEC also administers PEACH ([www.thefec.org/about/projects/peach](http://www.thefec.org/about/projects/peach)), a cooperatively financed “self-insurance” health care fund, which also acts as a revolving loan fund. The FEC currently has six full member groups and 11 other allied Communities in Dialogue. (See [www.thefec.org](http://www.thefec.org).)

Each member community of the FEC agrees to these commitments:

- Holds its land, labor, income, and other resources in common.
- Assumes responsibility for the needs of its members, receiving the products of their labor and distributing these and all other goods equally, or according to need.
- Practices nonviolence.
- Uses a form of decision making in which members have an equal opportunity to participate, either through consensus, direct vote, or right of appeal or overrule.
- Actively works to establish the equality of all people and does not permit discrimination on the basis of race, class, creed, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- Acts to conserve natural resources for present and future generations while striving to con-

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Historically, religion combined with ethnic ties and/or political ideologies brought people into communal living groups, each with their own internal economies.

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tinually improve ecological awareness and practice.

- Creates processes for group communication and participation and provides an environment which supports people’s development.

**Cohousing:** The term cohousing was coined by architects Katherine McCamant and Charles Durrett in their highly influential book, *Cohousing: A Contemporary Model for Housing Ourselves*, published in 1987. The term and the first edition were based on a type of intentional community that had become widespread in Denmark by the 1980s (and that has continued to grow and evolve). For many years, the Cohousing Association of the US and cohousing communities identified with these six characteristics of cohousing McCamant and Durrett summarized from their extensive study of Danish cohousing:

- Participatory Design Process
- Neighborhood Design balancing privacy and spaces for spontaneous socializing
- Extensive Common Facilities
- Resident Management
- Non-Hierarchical Leadership
- Independent Incomes

The Cohousing Association of the US website ([cohousing.org](http://cohousing.org)) currently characterizes cohousing communities by:

#### *Relationships*

- Neighbors commit to being part of a community for everyone’s mutual benefit.
- Cohousing cultivates a culture of sharing and caring.
- Design features and neighborhood size (typically 20–40 homes) promote frequent interaction and close relationships.

#### *Balancing Privacy and Community*

- Cohousing neighborhoods are designed for privacy as well as community.
- Residents balance privacy and community by choosing their own level of engagement.

#### *Participation*

- Decision making is participatory and often based on consensus.
- Self-management empowers residents, builds community, and saves money.

#### *Shared Values*

- Cohousing communities support residents in actualizing shared values.
- Cohousing communities typically adopt green approaches to living.

**Ecovillages:** The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) emerged through American and European communitarian environmentalists, in response to the Club of Rome’s *Limits to Growth* Report. The definition that first became widely used was Robert Gilman’s: “a human scale, full-featured settlement, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be continued into the indefinite future.”

Today, the Global Ecovillage Network “embraces a holistic approach to sustainability encompassing the Social, Cultural, Ecological and Economic dimensions of human existence.” “Ecovillages are communities in which people feel supported by and responsible to those around them. They provide a deep sense of belonging to a group. They are small enough that everyone feels safe, empowered, seen and heard. People are then able to participate in making decisions that affect their own lives and that of the community on a transparent basis.”

(See [ecovillage.org/en/article/dimensions-sustainability](http://ecovillage.org/en/article/dimensions-sustainability).)

One-hundred-fifty-nine ICs in the Directory identify GEN and 46 identify the Ecovillage Network of the Americas as networks with which they affiliate.

**Religious Communities:** Thirty-seven Directory entries define themselves as primarily religious or spiritual organizations—while many others reported religious affiliations as a group or among their members, and only 228 checked the box for “Not a particularly religious or spiritual community.” Many communities are unaffiliated with any particular tradition, or consider themselves religiously ecumenical while still having a dominant spiritual practice, such as the Zen Center or the Maharishi University Fellowship in Iowa (transcendental meditators). Christian and Jewish communes or student coops may be listed in both of their categories, or just one. Other ICs, however, are clearly associated by religious affiliation, such as the Catholic Order of Benedictine Fathers, the Catholic Worker House network, Camphill communities (associated with Rudolf Steiner), and the Twelve Tribes.

### Implications

The ICs that we know are not isolated utopias, romantic idylls, or scientific experiments. They consist of living, breathing people who know what the world has to offer, and are doing their best to bring their desires for peace, sociability, cooperative autonomy, economic justice, and environmental responsibility to life pro-actively. These values are ones many people around the world share, but cannot realize alone or within institutions dominated by people seeking profit or power above concern for people and the planet. Intentional communities are broadly characterized by an emphasis on

- **Cooperative/participatory democracy**
- **Cooperative economics**
- **Gender equality**
- **Satisfying interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution**
- **Living well while decreasing waste and increasing renewable resource consumption and waste**

The *Communities Directory* provides multiple snapshots into a parallel world, where people are dreaming and then becoming empowered agents, able to take collective and personal actions in creating and then sustaining a nexus of institutions, relationships, and activities made real by their choice to continue participating in them over time.

Most forming groups and young ICs fail, and many established communities grow, decline, and learn by trial and error on their own what works and does not. Nevertheless, we observe convergences, groups learning from experience and observation of other ICs to find core values and practices that work best over time. ICs may start as unique to their own time and place, but become examples for managing and incorporating key features, such as shared governance, use of consensus, or shared ownership of land.

Secular ICs can become quite sophisticated and multidimensional over time, within the context of transparent vision and purpose and consent-based governance. The communities are not simply engineering solutions; they function because of the willingness of members to put collective attention and creativity to sustaining and supporting high quality communication and personal relationships—foundational to any material or technological success they reach.

The articulation of cooperative culture—in practice—is one of the contributions of ICs to

a world seemingly dominated by competitive global capitalism and exploitive relationships of people and planet. IC pioneers have also written and trained thousands, offering a unique depth of experience gained in practices of team-building, trust-building, and getting the work done cooperatively. A number of communitarians have gone professional and influenced the larger field of organizational development. One example is the GroupWorks Card Deck ([groupworksdeck.org](http://groupworksdeck.org)), instigated by a former member of Twin Oaks and Acorn, and promoted widely in the National Coalition for Dialog and Deliberation. Fifty people contributed to the final product, which is available as a free download. Another example

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**The articulation of cooperative culture—in practice—is one of the contributions of ICs to a world seemingly dominated by competitive global capitalism and exploitive relationships of people and planet.**

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is the Network For a New Culture ([www.nfnc.org](http://www.nfnc.org)) which offers workshops in human awareness and intimacy, but specifically designed to help people live more cooperatively with each other in everyday circumstances.

We invite researchers to look more deeply at ICs, beyond the typical one-off case study. FIC would be happy to collaborate with efforts to do high quality independent research to test the findings presented here that can be shared within the communities movement and with the rest of the world. 🍷

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*Sky Blue is Executive Director of the Fellowship for Intentional Community. Betsy Morris, Ph.D. is co-organizer of Cohousing California. This article is adapted and updated from a paper first presented at the mini-conference “Re-embedding the Social: New Modes of Production, Critical Consumption and Alternative Lifestyles” hosted by the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, June 24-26, 2016 at the University of California, Berkeley.*

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# Learning from Our Past

By Bill Metcalf

The theme of this edition of *COMMUNITIES* invites us to learn from the past of the intentional community in which we live, and to learn from our own, personal past—including whenever we have lived within or without community. This has led me to reflect on 45 years of researching, writing and teaching about, and living within intentional communities around the globe.

My first foray into this movement came as a young graduate student: four friends and I formed an urban commune in 1972. In hindsight, given our ignorance about what we were trying to do, it is a miracle that we lasted almost two years and parted as friends.

Since then I have lived communally for much of my life, have almost continuously been researching intentional communities past and present, and have written seven books, my doctoral thesis, and several dozen academic and popular articles about this movement. As *COMMUNITIES*' "International Correspondent" I have written about intentional communities from around the globe and from the past two centuries.

I want to share some of what I have learned.

**Global/Eternal Patterns:** First, I have learned that intentional communities have existed throughout, and probably before recorded history. Homakoeion, established by Pythagorus in about 625 in what is now Italy, some think to be the earliest known group, while others think one or more of the early Indian Ashrams predated it. But there might well have been even earlier ones that left no record. There have certainly been peaks and troughs in the formation of intentional communities but it seems to be a natural human urge to try to create a better society through enhanced cooperation. While some of these social experiments have been intensely communal, others have limited the daily social interaction. For example, some have had forms of open sexual relationships while others have segregated the sexes.

One observation, from looking at this millennia-long pattern, is that most groups become less communal across time. And we can see the same pattern today with intentional communities—the shift within any group is usually away from communalism and towards individualism. If not checked, this will obviously lead to the end of the intentional community. Most intentional communities end “not with a bang, but a whimper” (with acknowledgements to T.S. Eliot) because unchecked individualism has sapped the communal drive to the point when the intentional community does not collapse so much as simply cease to exist.

**Forming:** Whenever people ask for advice on forming an intentional community, of any sort, I have learned to respond “Don’t!” I then clarify with “at least not until you have lived long enough in several intentional communities to know what you really want/love, what is available, and what drives you nuts.” I follow: “Are you sure that intentional community living is for you?” “Are you sure there are no intentional communities out there looking for someone like you?” “Have you the emotional, social, and financial resources and background to give this project a good chance of success?” Money and energy are wasted by people without appropriate skills trying to create an intentional community which has almost no chance of being born, let alone surviving.

**Joining:** I have learned that when anyone wants to join an intentional community, it is important to have enough personal and social awareness to see a good fit. I have known non-Christians upset after joining a Christian group, prudish people upset after joining a clothing-optional group, and other such absurdities. Joining an intentional community is a bit like

finding a life partner(s); one must first know oneself very, very well.

**Recruitment:** I have learned that whenever members of an intentional community are looking for new members, the same rule applies—members must be open and clear about what they are doing, what they want in a new member, and what they have to offer. It is unfair, almost fraudulent, to entice someone to join a group under false pretences. It is vital that a prospective member understands and accepts the group’s *raison d’être*, why they do what they do, how they operate, etc. Of course all of this can change but to allow in anyone whose goal is to change the group is downright stupid.

**Socialising:** I have learned that the most important social interactions within intentional community do not take place during meetings but over meals, chats, working bees, etc. Social interaction, at some level, is an almost constant feature in successful intentional community—even if it is as simple as making warm eye contact. We all need “time-out” but too much means the end of community life. It is important for people wanting to join to know what will be expected and assess whether they are up for this.

**Governance:** Many people assume that intentional communities must operate under consensus, and that such consensus means a loss of individuality, and aiming for the lowest common denominator. I have learned that this is all wrong. Consensus can work only when people are close enough to have a “we-consciousness,” that is to think of “us” as being more important than “me.” This happens often in normal families as well as with life-partners. It can also happen within intentional communities but only after a great deal of interpersonal work. Group decisions can then be made on the basis of “what is best for us” rather than “what is best for me.” Until a group has achieved this level of interpersonal intimacy then it is better to follow a form of democracy, needing supermajorities for certain issues, or perhaps sociocracy. Good governance, using other formats, can lead to interpersonal confidence and shared trust—then consensus can, like a flower in spring, emerge.

**Conflict:** I have learned that conflict can arise whenever humans interact—and much of that is healthy and productive. Whenever we have different goals, perspectives, opinions, or passions, we shall have conflict. The issue is not how to avoid conflict but how to deal constructively with it. In conflict we must listen extra-well, try to get into the head/heart-space of the other, try to understand his/her position—and try to calmly and clearly share our own perspective. Only then can people look for common ground. And, in intentional community as in every other aspect of life, there are sometimes winners and losers and that is just life.

**Children/Elderly:** Many people assume that children are good in intentional communities and that too many elderly members are a problem. When challenged, rarely can anyone cite evidence. I have learned that the evidence is clear that intentional community is good for children—but the opposite is problematic. Children, like pets, take energy and resources, and can be points of conflict around noise, messiness, etc. A large number of children within an intentional community can mean that there is little spare energy and time for adults to devote to communal functions such as sound governance, interpersonal growth, and conflict resolution. For these reasons, many mature intentional communities are wary of accepting too many children. Another observation is that parents of young children are often incredibly conservative and can stymie needed changes in

an intentional community. Perhaps counter-intuitively, elderly members are often the most willing to make dramatic changes, try new processes, etc. They usually have more free time to devote to communal activities, generally have more social maturity, usually have better interpersonal insight and skills, etc., hence they are often observed to be core people in an intentional community.

**Impermanence and Non-attachment:** One of Buddhism's many lessons is impermanence, that everything is changing all the time. I have learned that within intentional community this means that the rules members established last year and which have worked well might no longer be germane. Because we did something last time, shall we do it again? Because you and I have clashed in the past are we likely to clash again? Intentional community, like every other social construct and every human, is always changing. Change is neither good nor bad—it simply is. Non-attachment does not mean indifference. So while members must not be indifferent to change, they must not be so attached to one way of doing things that they will suffer if this changes. Intentional community is about growth on all levels.

**What Goes Wrong:** I am astonished at the energy people within intentional communities devote to strawbale construction, solar power, and organic gardening, while ignoring the human dimensions. As Karen Litfin wrote, on page 147 of *Ecovillages: Lessons for Sustainable Community*, “no community has ever collapsed for want of solar panels or composting toilets, but many have been torn asunder when trust wore thin.” I have learned that failure can be a great teacher, and most people in thriving intentional communities are there because they have learned from previous errors. Everyone makes mistakes but only idiots keep repeating—without learning. Focus on interpersonal relations, and the solar panels, strawbale construction, and organic veggies will all happen.

**Future:** Intentional communities seem to be on the increase everywhere I look. The two best-known forms are ecovillages and cohousing groups. I am sure that new rural ecovillages will be formed around the globe but expect the rate of growth will decrease. On the other hand, cohousing, particularly elder-cohousing, I predict will grow rapidly as baby-boomers age. It is such an obvious form of intentional community, aimed at a demographic often with the financial resources, social maturity, and life experiences to make this work. The second form of intentional community that I predict will grow rapidly is urban communes, either in apartment/unit blocks or large houses. Escalating house prices, falling rates of marriage, increasing single-person households, and environmental concerns in most western countries, all converge to point out the logic of urban communal living—probably in groups of 10 or less. I wrote about one such group, Mish'ol, in *COMMUNITIES* #149, 2010, pp. 57-9. A subset of this communal form that seems to be dramati-

cally increasing throughout modern society is “multiple-generations plus” where urban communes are formed by at least three generations of a core family, with others joining them. Their financial capacity to buy up large urban homes, and their extensive age range mean that many operate very well. This form will surely increase.

**Summary and Conclusion:** I have learned that intentional communities, of whatever size and with whatever orientation, answer so many human needs that they can only increase. That said, there is still much ignorance about this form of social life, where many people try and fail, then foolishly conclude there is something fundamentally wrong with communal living. To live in intentional community is to be in a collective experiment, and a lifelong personal growth workshop. Communal living, like any form of human social interaction such as being a friend, parent, or life-partner, needs to be learned and techniques honed. For those who seriously engage, the payoff is fantastic. 🌸

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# Tracing Windward's Memeology

By Walt Patrick

*When the past no longer illuminates the future, the spirit walks in darkness.*  
—Alexis de Tocqueville

Windward started in the mid-'70s as an anti-war protest with the goal of creating a sustainable way of living that didn't support the military-industrial war machine. Over the years, we've had our ups and down as we worked out our plans, experienced how practice differed from theory, and then used what we'd learned to craft new plans.

In 2011, we reached a milestone as the last of the old crew handed off the operational leadership of the community to a new generation. Being part of the previous leadership team, I would like to claim that we survived as a community because of the exceptional quality of our wisdom and insight, but the reality is that much of Windward's ability to survive where so many other communities didn't came from our willingness to seek out and build on the hard-won experiences of those who traveled this path before us. By studying their successes and failures, we were able to avoid some of the perils that undermined them.

Since stepping down from a leadership role, I've been spending time delving more deeply into the origins of the concepts—the memes—that enabled Windward to weather the social changes of the past four decades. I've come to think of that research as a process of tracing the origins of Windward's meme set. A memeology is like a genealogy, in that the further back one looks, the more ancestors one finds; some were heroes, some were fools, and lots were just people who did the best they could. Still, given enough data, key patterns emerge over time; I'm writing to share some of what I've gleaned from that study.

Like many other successful communities, Windward's founding was inspired by a book that offered a vision so inspiring that people wanted to use it as a blueprint for building their own community. For Windward, that book was Robert Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, the story of a lunar colony that fights for independence. Central to the story is a polyamorous line family that manages a farm and gets caught up in the struggle. The story resonated because many of those who founded Windward identified as self-emancipated "orphans" who hungered for a family of choice, a social structure that could provide that elusive combination of security and freedom we needed in order to become more fully ourselves. The concept of the line family suggested a way to achieve that.

I've come to believe that the modern polyamory movement grew out of Heinlein's work, most notably from *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *Harsh Mistress*. Some poly folk who identified strongly with *Stranger* went on to found the Church of All Worlds and coin the term "polyamory"; others who identified more strongly with *Harsh Mistress* went on to found Windward.

A key question for me was what led Heinlein to the style of relationship that we now refer to as polyamory, and perhaps more importantly, what convinced him that polyamory was viable at the community level? I found a clue in Heinlein's reference to the similarity between *Stranger's* fictional "Church of All Worlds" and the real life Oneida Community of upstate New York—a group marriage of 300 people that lasted from 1848 to 1878.

## Oneida Led the Way

Of the hundreds of intentional communities founded in New England since the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the Oneida Community stands out as a remarkable success. For any would-be community that's struggled to put people first and still pay the bills, their financial success was beyond impressive. However, it was their achievements in the arena of women's rights that I find most encouraging for those who want to create a community in which people come together as equals.

Some tangible examples of their accomplishments include the Lazy Susan—which they invented and used in their dining hall to help feed 300 people at a sitting—and non-rusting spoons and forks—which they developed to the point where *Oneida Ltd.* became the world's leading producer of tableware for more than a century.

I believe key elements in their success were the advances they achieved in the quality of life enjoyed by the women of Oneida. In a time when most women spent a day a week doing laundry by hand, the Oneidans built machines that washed their clothes and dishes. Whereas in the mid 19th century very few homes had running water and indoor plumbing, Oneida even had a Turkish bath. Household chores were done by all. Breaking away from the rigid gender roles of the times, at Oneida you'd see men doing childcare and women doing manufacturing. The community was fully

literate, and they even created an early form of person-to-person messaging which presaged email. They built their 93,000-square-foot residence themselves, sewed their own clothes—even made their own shoes and dentures.

In their startup winter of 1848-49, they were so financially strapped that the men had to sell their pocket watches to buy enough food to make it through the winter. By the late 1860s, the community's annual sales had exceeded a million dollars. To put that in perspective, imagine an intentional community today growing their own food, producing their own housing, clothing, and furniture, and on top of that, creating more than \$15 million worth of goods for sale!

All that would have been enough to earn the Oneida Community a place of renown in the history of intentional communities, but their monetary achievements pale alongside the degree to which Oneida empowered its women members. In the late 1840s, respectable women wore waist-length hair, a maintenance challenge which could consume an hour a day. Custom required women to wear corsets and dresses weighing upwards of 20 pounds. The women who founded Oneida rebelled against such constraints—they cut their hair to shoulder length, wore pantaloons, and got on with the effort of creating their community.

But these were just things that were visible from the outside. The community formed in a time when women were the property of their fathers or husbands, and Oneida did away with that by embracing the radical proposition that women are not property. The community even wrote and published a remarkable one-act play comparing the institutions of slavery and marriage in the 1850s by making a strong case that there was no moral difference between the two.

More than a century ago, the women of the Oneida Community women enjoyed their own sexual revolution. At the height of the Victorian age, when it was widely believed that decent women lacked sexual desire, sexual intercourse was believed to be inherently damaging to women. Well, the women of Oneida didn't buy it; instead, they developed a form of tantric practice, later known as *karezza*, in which they enjoyed sexual intercourse multiple times a week in sessions lasting up to an hour each. This practice enabled women to enjoy multiple orgasms while the men practiced the self-discipline needed to not ejaculate during coitus.

A key goal of this practice was to free women from the nearly constant state of pregnancy commonplace during that time. Men who lacked the necessary skill and self-control needed to avoid undesired pregnancies were referred to the eldresses for remedial training, and none of the younger



women would have sex with any man who couldn't first demonstrate his competence to the elders. The Oneidas' sexual practice was so successful that the rate of unintentional pregnancies ran around one per 150 women per year—a rate similar to using an IUD<sup>1</sup> to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Oneida's technique proved to be such a successful form of birth control that the Comstock Laws were passed to make it a felony for the community to publish the details of their sexual practice.

In 1878, when the community had been practicing this form of group marriage for 30 years, an independent gynecologist did a study<sup>2</sup> of the health of the Oneida women and found “hysteria to be remarkably absent.” He also noted that “I have been told by the lady members that the practice of male continence was popular among the females.” Still, given the sex-hostile tenor of the times, the most he was willing to say in his published report was that his study of the women of Oneida found “negative evidence of harm.”

And so, when people ask the question, “Is it really possible for a group of polyamorous folk to make a go of it?” the Oneida Community allows us to confidently answer, “Absolutely, and Oneida is proof.”

### Learning from the Oneida Nation

If it's true that the Oneida Community inspired Heinlein, then this leads to the question of where did Oneida's vision of a better way come from? And what gave them sufficient confidence in such a radical plan that they were willing to adopt it? Did they conceive of such a fundamentally different social order all on their own?

My search for these answers led me to the Haudenosaunee League, also known as the Iroquois Confederation<sup>3</sup>, which had long embodied concepts such as equality between men and women and the empowerment of elders. At the time of the American Revolution, the Haudenosaunee were the most powerful military force in North America. For centuries, this defensive alliance of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca tribes established and kept what they called the Great Peace, a confederation that ended warfare between the member tribes and successfully discouraged other tribes from attacking them.

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**Inspired by the women of the Oneida Nation, the women of the Oneida Community cut their hair, threw away their corsets, and got on with living the life they wanted.**

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In the early 1840s, the Oneida Nation sold most of its land to the State of New York, and three quarters of the tribe moved to Wisconsin. In 1848, the nucleus of what became the Oneida Community purchased land straddling Oneida Creek and moved there to build an intentional community in the midst of the Oneidas who stayed behind. As the fledgling community worked out their new way of life, the women of the Oneida Community were understandably influenced by the living example of their neighbors—the women of the Oneida Nation.

The first wave of feminists—women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage—grew up in the midst of the Haudenosaunee culture. The first women's rights conference was held in Seneca Falls, New York, the heart of the Haudenosaunee. The equal status these white women wanted to acquire didn't arise from some utopian vision, but from the recognition that legal equality, sexual autonomy, and individual sovereignty were rights that Haudenosaunee women already enjoyed. In effect, they wanted the same rights their neighbors already had and they campaigned so that some day they too could own property, have income, and retain custody of their children.<sup>4</sup>

But the women of the Oneida Community went further; they didn't wait for the establishment to grant them equality. Inspired by the women of the Oneida Nation, they cut their hair, threw away their corsets, and got on with living the life they wanted. For example, they adopted a liberating style of dress that was a modern version of the loose tunic and leggings worn by native women. The authority of the Oneida Community's elders over the sexual life of the community mirrored the authority that the clan mothers exercised over the sexual life of their tribe. If an Oneida Community woman became pregnant, the child was raised by the mother's community just as Haudenosaunee children were raised by the mother's clan.

I believe that the women of the Oneida Community were beneficiaries of the Oneida Nation's matrilineal structure, a set of memes that enabled both groups of women to enjoy a degree of equality and sexual autonomy that mainstream women couldn't imagine. Their success inspired Heinlein to use

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1. Annual success rates: rhythm—75 percent; condoms—85 percent; pill—92 percent; IUD—99.2 percent; Oneida—99.3 percent; tubal ligation—99.5 percent.

2. “Gynecological Study of the Oneida Community,” Dr. E van der Warker, *American Journal of Obstetrics*, August 1884.

3. Whites referred to the Haudenosaunee, “The People of the Long House,” as the Iroquois Confederation.

4. See *Iroquois Native American Cultural Influences in Promoting Women's Rights Ideologies 19th and 20th of July, 1848*. Hagan, Center of the American West, University of Colorado-Boulder.

the memes they embodied to create the vision of the polyamorous line family that formed the heart of *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. That in turn inspired the women who created Windward to develop an organization founded on the concept of the *comadre*—a core of strong, connected women surrounded by a select group of men they love and respect.

### What Changed?

Every family's history can be seen as a mixed record of the best that could be done at the time given the limited information and options at hand—but history can also function as a sort of operator's manual illustrating what worked and what didn't. When gleaning the historical record for insights and guidance about available options, it's important to be kind and appreciate the inevitable separation between what people intend to do and what actually happened. Sometimes they got it right, and sometimes they didn't, and sometimes they discovered new challenges they'd never imagined going in.

The impressive achievements of both sets of Oneidan women are part of the factual record, but the question of why these communities later underwent radical change is necessarily subjective. Accordingly, much of what follows is speculation offered for your consideration.

Any society that imposes passive roles has to deal with the passive aggressive behaviors that will manifest and undermine community relationships. Young women embody the power of youthful sexuality, while the elders embody the power of experiential wisdom. Without a stable structure that protects the interests of both groups, trust is difficult to build, and when trust is lost, communities wither and die. My analysis is that much of the power of both groups of Oneida women grew out of the strong alliance created between the younger and older women. Their matrilineal structure was effective at creating social harmony and mutual support among the women, who by acting jointly were able to appoint, control, and—when they chose to do so—“knock the horns off” the men they'd chosen to represent.

In dyadic cultures, where people pair off as couples, there's a tendency to look for the one person who can meet one's every need, and there's never enough of those to go around. In polyamorous line families such as Oneida and Windward, no individual person has to be able to do it all—they just have to be good company and pull their weight. If someone turns out to be mean, lazy, or disrespectful, the women can toss them out. In the case of one fellow who wouldn't listen to Oneida's elders, he got tossed out a second story window into a snow bank.

When forming a new community, it's tempting to “copy and paste” some successful community's social structure, but that's a risky thing to do in that it's easy to get tripped up by the unrecognized assumptions that were woven into the foundation of that community. For example, the Oneida Nation believed they were being guided by the Great Spirit, and the Oneida Community believed they were being guided by the Apostle Paul. It isn't necessary for us to believe that either was actually the case in order to benefit from their lived experience. Regardless of the source of their inspiration, the women of both Oneidas have much to teach those who wish to lead tomorrow's communities. Studying their successes and failures is crucial because those who wish to lead must never cease to learn.

Today, what remains of the Oneida Nation in New York runs a casino, and Oneida tableware is made in China; what factors caused such a sad transformation? My conclusion is that the key element is that both groups prospered as long as their young women maintained their alliance with the older women. When that tradition fell away, and the young women started following the romantic narrative and entering into dyadic relationships independent of the older women, their communities fell apart. Whatever the reason, that later development doesn't diminish the magnitude of what the courageous women of both Oneidas accomplished. Their courage set a powerful example for the strong, sensual, and wise women of today who feel called to celebrate what their memetic foremothers accomplished, and then build on it to go even further. 🐦

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*Note: For those interested in studying the Oneida legacy, Windward offers three-month on-site apprenticeships; visit [windward.org](http://windward.org) for details.*

*During the War in Vietnam, Walt Patrick got into building sustainable community as a way to protest the violence of the military-industrial complex, and served on Windward's Board of Directors for more than 30 years. In 2011, he retired from active leadership of the community, and spends much of his time working on developing energy sovereignty based on the community-scale utilization of woody biomass; details at [biomass2methanol.org](http://biomass2methanol.org).*

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**Both groups prospered as long as their young women maintained their alliance with the older women. When that tradition fell away, and the young women started following the romantic narrative, their communities fell apart.**

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# Why I Study Communal Societies

By Susan Matarese

The study of intentional communities, both past and present, is a rich and rewarding enterprise for the student of political theory. The members of intentional communities, whether historic or contemporary, religious or secular, short-lived or enduring, must grapple with fundamental questions about human nature and human organization. In doing so, they illuminate in microcosm the perennial questions of concern to political theorists.

Political theorists have traditionally been interested in the nature of our collective existence, the relations between individuals and groups, and in particular, how human beings can deliberately order their collective existence in an effort to achieve the good life. Throughout history, political philosophers as diverse as Plato and Aristotle, Locke, Burke, Thoreau, Mill, Marx, and Wollstonecraft, have deliberated about the best form of social organization, the proper limits of social authority, the sources of conflict and alienation, as well as the requirements for human happiness and fulfillment.

Political theory is an exercise in critical thought. Political theorists seek to explain the underlying reality of human relations, but also the possibility of changes in these relations. So a second characteristic of political theorizing is an ethical or normative one, a concern for what is desirable or right. In other words, there is a strong prescriptive dimension to the speculations of political theorists: they are concerned not only with what *is*, but also with what *ought* to be.

The members of historic as well as current communities share these concerns, and the element of intentionality, of conscious purpose, is common to both political theory and community building. Those who found and those who join intentional communities are asking the very questions that have long been of interest to political theorists and vital to us all: What is the best form of government? What is the meaning of equality? Is equality possible? What is the proper relationship between the individual and the group? What is the best way to make community decisions? Are factions and conflict inevitable? How can we prevent the abuse of power? How should resources be allocated? How should work be organized? How should we raise and educate the young? How should we care for the sick and dying? What are our responsibilities to the earth and to other species?

The answers to these questions have varied from community to community. In exploring the beliefs and practices of groups as diverse as the Shakers, the Perfectionists at Oneida, the Owenites, the Fourierists, the Transcendentalists at Brook Farm, or the members of contemporary communities like Twin Oaks or The Farm, the student of political theory finds compelling illustrations of some of the most profound dilemmas with which political theorists have grappled from antiquity to the present.

For example, the Shakers provide a wonderful illustration of the possibilities of communal ownership of wealth and the energy and remarkable productivity that Marx predicted would result from social cooperation and collective labor. However, they also illustrate the challenges such arrangements present for the individual member. Shaker records attest to the struggles of many Believers as they sought to ex-

press their talents and abilities, their unique personalities and distinctive viewpoints in a society that valued humility, obedience, and devotion to community goals. In doing so, they bring to life John Stuart Mill's arguments concerning the importance of individuality as a central ingredient of human happiness, one of the major themes of his *Essay on Liberty*.

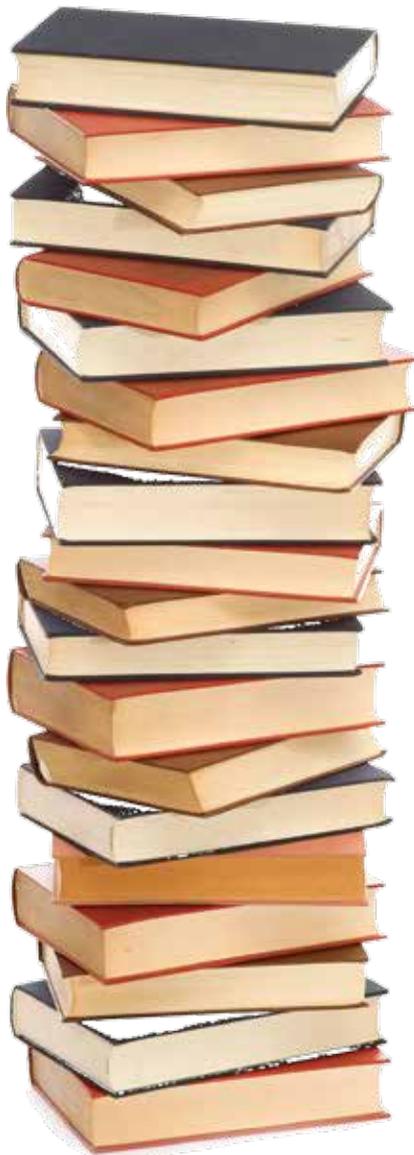
Similarly, the Fourierist and Owenite movements and the Transcendentalists at Brook Farm are rich resources for exploring the question of labor, more specifically how it should be organized and how it impacts the personality of the worker. These secular "utopians" were among the first to recognize the psychological ramifications of emerging industrial capitalism. All were in some form or fashion attempting to offer an alternative to the loneliness and anonymity that characterized life in the new industrial cities. All were seeking to respond to the loss of a sense of community, the face-to-face contact and sense of mutual obligation at the heart of pre-industrial social relations, a way of life celebrated by the conservative philosopher, Edmund Burke.

All were seeking humane alternatives to an emerging industrial system that appeared to subordinate human and ethical values to those of a business order, an order in which workers became sheer commodities to be bought and sold like other kinds of products. They believed they had found the answers to these problems in small-scale, socialist communities committed to cooperation, planned production, economic equality, and material well-being for all members.

Like Thoreau, whose great work *Walden* is an extended meditation on living "deliberately," the members of Brook Farm were distressed by what they saw as industrial society's tendency to force people into narrow, confining, and constricting occupational roles. George Ripley and his followers sought to create a community in which intellectual and manual labor would be united, a goal that was central to the Fourierists and Owenites as well.

The question of how work should be organized is a recurring theme in political theory from Plato and Aristotle to Marx and Wollstonecraft. The communities of the secular utopians are helpful windows through which to explore the contours and implications of the differing views of these political thinkers. Furthermore, the difficulties all of these communities experienced in creating viable economies are instructive and point to the dilemmas of cooperation versus competition that have so preoccupied political theorists throughout the ages.

These communities also provide valuable insights into issues of work and gender. The Transcendentalists at Brook Farm anticipate contemporary feminist demands for equal pay for women. The community embraced individual choice in work assignments, assignments that often crossed traditional gender lines. It was an article of faith among the members of Brook Farm that men and women receive identical wages. By contrast, there were bitter controversies over the nature and value of "women's work" in the Owenite and Fourierist communities. Encountering these debates through



(continued on p. 72)

# Fifty Years of Utopian Intentioneering AT TWIN OAKS COMMUNITY

By A. Allen Butcher

**T**wain Oaks was begun as an “experimental community” in central Virginia in 1967. After the community’s first five years Kat Kinkade, one of the cofounders, published a book about Twin Oaks titled *A Walden Two Experiment*, in which she wrote on the first page that “we are trying to make a new and better society.” (Kinkade, p. 1) Fifty years on it is time to evaluate the Twin Oaks experiment.

As a former member of both Twin Oaks and East Wind, and a lifelong communal researcher, I’ve identified several primary lessons learned from Twin Oaks’ history. In this article, I’ll describe three:

- Theories notwithstanding, the optimum population of such communities is so far about 100 adults.
- A labor-credit system makes it possible to create a society that does not use money internally.
- In an egalitarian time-based economy, domestic labor or “women’s work” can be valued equally with all other labor or “men’s work” including income-generating labor.

(For a much longer treatment of the subject, including additional lessons learned about ease of communal life, clashes between ideology and practicality, and failures of communal childcare, see the “Fifty Years” blog post at [www.Intentioneers.net](http://www.Intentioneers.net).)

## 100-Member Limit (as of 2017)

While B. F. Skinner, whose novel *Walden Two* provided the inspiration for Twin Oaks, populated his fictional Walden Two community with 1,000 pliable members, the practical population limit for the self-willed people comprising egalitarian societies is set by the experience of Twin Oaks (TO) and East Wind (EW), currently at under 100 adults each. At whatever population level, Twin Oaks will continue to represent the standard for secular, egalitarian communal societies in America.

Kat Kinkade wrote in her 1972 book about Twin Oaks that 1,000 members was “our theoretical goal.” This was one of the design parameters that she and the other East Wind cofounders took with them to Missouri, although in the initial EW bylaws the theoretical goal was reduced to 750 members, since the *Walden Two* idea of 1,000 did not seem to be practical. In 2010 EW reset its “membership ceiling” at 73, less than a tenth of the original goal, while the community’s 2016 population level slightly exceeded that. (Kinkade, p. 42; EW Legispol 2011, section 11.52)

Neither Twin Oaks nor East Wind seems to want to grow larger, probably because of the concern for the communication and other quality-of-life problems resulting from an ever-growing population, however slow that growth may be. In 2017 Twin Oaks is looking to purchase more contiguous land, although probably to create another communal group upon it rather than to expand its current membership. If this land is acquired and a new income-sharing community is founded upon it, that will increase the number of satellite communities of Twin Oaks in Louisa County to six, with Acorn being the largest at around 30 or 40 members.

While one may tend to think that the communal labor system, governance processes, social contract, and other aspects of these communities should be able to accommodate much larger numbers of people, TO and EW, at least, seem to have reached a practical limit. The growth of Twin Oaks is now essentially delegated to its newest satellite communities, most of them founded in the same county of Louisa, while East Wind has yet to create any communal satellites in its Ozark County.

There is much to be said about the numbers game for identifying ideal population levels for different types of intentional communities. Among primitive clans and tribes the anthropologist Robin Dunbar says that 150 people is the average human’s cognitive social limit, according to his plotting of “overall group size against the



*Twin Oaks 50th Anniversary banner and performers.*

McCune Porter

*Many hands make light work while raising trusses on a new residence.*



Photo courtesy of [www.twinoaks.org](http://www.twinoaks.org)

neocortical development of the brain.” Meanwhile, the paleo-anthropologist Richard Leakey writes that the number 25 is the typical limit for the clan, and 500 for the minimum size of a breeding population, constituting the “dialectical tribe” with which the individual identifies. (Leakey & Lewin, pp. 111, 113-4; Ryan & Jethá, p. 171)

Among the various forms of contemporary intentional communities: the religious Hutterites split when they reach 150; most cohousing groups have 40 to 70 adults; and some Israeli kibbutzim had over 1,000 members before they gave up communalism and became collective communities on government land trusts. The kibbutzim estimated that a population of about 350 people is needed in order to maintain a complete age-range from youngest to oldest over the generations.

### A Revolutionary Invention: Labor-Credit Systems Can Replace Money

There had long been the ideal, since at least the early 19th century in England, of creating an economic system which would reward workers with the full value of their labor, rather than the capitalist model of business owners taking as much from labor as they can get. Ronald Garnett explains in his 1972 book, *Cooperation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain: 1825-45*, that “The basis of communitarian thought was equality—economic rather than political—in that the labourer had a right to the full value of the product of [his or her] labour.” Much of the development of this theory was due to the excesses of poverty and debasement resulting from the dispossessed and deprived underclass during the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in first England, then France, Germany, and later in America and elsewhere. To

create economic justice, it was believed, a society or a culture had to do away with the use of money internally and substitute something else. However, finding something which would substantially serve the ideal took about 140 years. (Garnett, p. 26)

From the mid 1820s to the early 1830s the idea of a time-based currency, so named in the present author’s School of Intentioneering, was developed in England, with the principle designer or intentioneer being the Welsh industrialist Robert Owen (1771-1858), who had earlier been influenced by Gerard Winstanley’s 1652 book, *The Law of Freedom*, and by the Quaker, John Beller’s 1695 book, *Proposals for Raising a College of Industry of All Useful Trades and Husbandry*, which was a call for a form of publicly-supported education program designed as an intentional community. Beller’s educational-community idea has occurred to many others through time as well, from the ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras, to the New England Transcendentalists at Brook Farm, to Findhorn University in Scotland. (Rexroth, pp. 151-2)

Robert Owen’s and others’ ideas about time-based economies resulted in giving workers a form of paper scrip stating the amount of time the worker had contributed, which were then redeemed in a community store for goods and services, essentially comprising an alternative exchange system to that of the official currency. The “labour theory of value” was explained by Owen as goods being “exchanged on the equitable principles of labour, for equal value of labour through the medium of Labour Notes.” The labor exchanges served to bring the trade unions into the cooperative movement. (Garnett, pp. 139, 141)

Intermediary exchange associations were set up to facilitate the circulation of both labor notes and monetary currencies, yet the whole system imploded by 1834 as there was no standard equivalencies for converting “labor notes” into British currency, which resulted in the destruction of many cooperative societies including the first co-op stores, labor exchanges, trades syndicalism, and the movement for the eight-hour workday. (Garnett, pp. 140, 142)

Robert Owen brought the labor notes idea to America with his communal experiment at New Harmony. However, every attempt to use forms of labor notes in intentional communities through the 19th century in America (as in Britain), such as at New Harmony in Indiana (1825-27), and at Kaweah (1885-92) and Altruria (1894-5) both in California, resulted in the labor notes system being the first thing to be abandoned as the communities began to fail.

By Donald Pitzer’s count, there were a total of 29 Owenite communities: 19 in the US, one in Canada, and nine in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. They developed preschools and “communal” childcare systems, and at various times and to different degrees, experimented with communalism. At 12 years Modern Times was the longest lived. (Pitzer, pp. 122-3)

Not until Kat Kinkade developed the vacation-credit labor system at Twin Oaks Community in the summer of 1967 would a successful communal labor-credit system be invented. Edward Bellamy had included a time-based “credit card” system in his *Looking Backward* utopian fiction (1888), and from this B. F. Skinner got the idea that a community could use ledger accounts for managing individual labor contributions with no form of exchange of anything like coins or paper bills. In *Walden Two* Skinner wrote, “Bellamy suggested the principle in *Looking Backward*.” (Skinner, p. 46)



June 16, 1967 is the day Twin Oaks members moved onto the land.



Garden activity: plants carted post-harvest to compost pile.

Photos courtesy of www.twinoaks.org



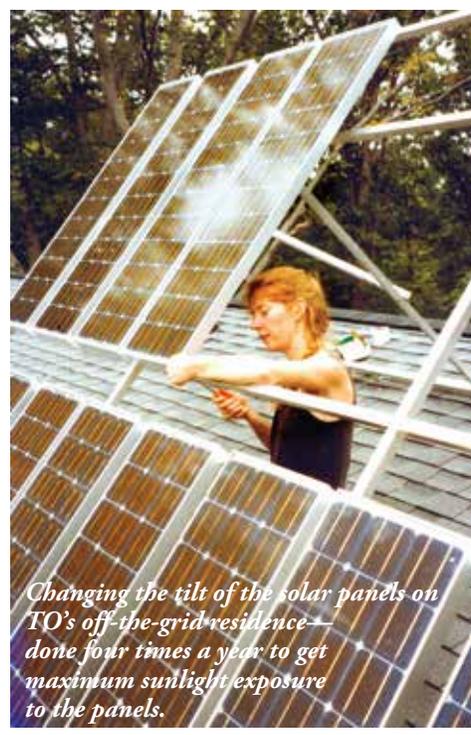
*Hammocks has been one of TO's main collective businesses since the early 1970s.*



*Fall harvest from the organic vegetable gardens.*



*Outdoor meal: at picnic tables outside Zhankoye (main dining hall).*



*Changing the tilt of the solar panels on TO's off-the-grid residence—done four times a year to get maximum sunlight exposure to the panels.*

Bellamy, Skinner, and others have also suggested rewarding labor differently for different types of work in communal society. Walden House (in Washington, DC), Twin Oaks, and East Wind all experimented with “variable-credits” for 10 years from 1966 until about 1976, rewarding some work done with more labor-credits than other work, until members decided to value all labor equally. It is an important lesson to keep in mind that variable compensation for labor is an aspect of monetary economics, while being both impractical and anathema to time-based economics.

Building upon Skinner’s idea of ledger accounts, Kat Kinkade’s brilliant innovation, called by the present author the “vacation-credit labor system,” set a weekly work quota that all members agree to meet, with vacation time earned by working over-quota. This time-based economy, called at Twin Oaks simply the “labor-credit system,” became, as Twin Oaks member Mala stated to a reporter, “the glue that keeps this community together.” (Mala, quoted in Rems)

It is phenomenal how the thing that was usually given up first when communal groups failed, their time-based economy, became the most important thing that now makes them successful! Kat Kinkade essentially created the first complete alternative economic system to that of monetary economics, and sadly, very few people outside of the egalitarian communities movement know anything about it. It would seem that such an achievement would be worthy of much pride and promotion, yet most people think nothing of it. Reporters and academicians come and go and rarely ever understand the significance of Twin Oaks’ vacation-credit labor system.

Extending equality in America from the political system to the economic system was the whole point of Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*,

which was immensely influential around the end of the 19th century. Today the labor-credit system is essentially the portal to a parallel reality existing within global monetary economics, enabling the very thing that has eluded social reformers since the early Industrial Revolution—a truly egalitarian economic system.

### Feminism Is ALIVE When All Labor Is Valued Equally

Along with the idea that workers ought to receive the full value of their labor is the sentiment that all labor that directly benefits the whole community or society ought to be valued equally. The feminist ideal of domestic work or “women’s work” being valued equally with income-generating work and all other work typically performed by men is served via the vacation-credit labor system. This is another fantastic achievement and characteristic of Twin Oaks and other egalitarian communities providing an important lesson. While feminists and others have looked for ways for women to earn money for housework as a way to create economic equality, only non-monetary, time-based economies, including labor exchanges as well as quota and anti-quota labor systems, value “reproductive work” the same as all other labor.

While people generally discount the idea that in a labor-credit economy a doctor is rewarded the same for their work as someone cleaning a barn, there have been doctors who have been members of Twin Oaks, East Wind, Ganas, and other egalitarian communities. Clearly, for many people the benefits of egalitarian economics are seen as being more important than differential compensation for labor. For this “Feminism is ALIVE” communal lesson the egalitarian ideal of valuing domestic and income work equally is a major success for Twin Oaks and its associated groups comprising the Federation of Egalitarian Communities.

Kat Kinkade wrote a letter to anthropologist Jon Wagner saying about Twin Oaks that “absolute sexual equality is fundamental to our idea of equality, and equality is fundamental to our approach to changing soci-

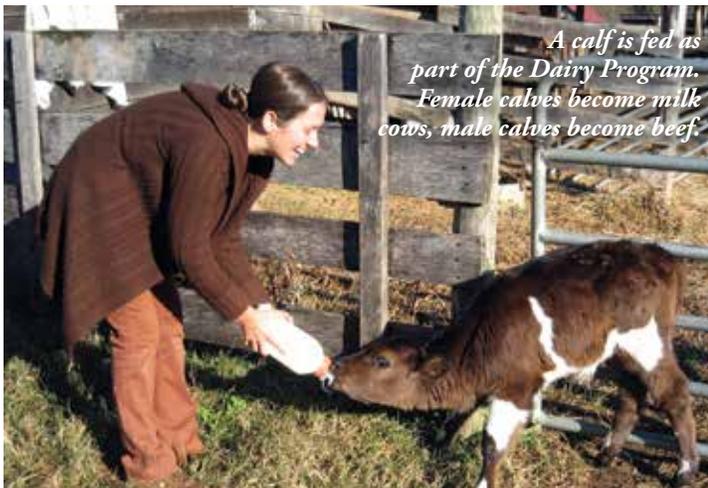
ety. There is no platform of our ideology that is more central.” (Kinkade, quoted in Goldenberg, p. 258)

In her chapter titled “Feminism at Twin Oaks” in the 1993 book *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, Zena Goldenberg quotes Jon Wagner stating an endorsement of Twin Oaks’ egalitarian culture in his comment that Twin Oaks “may be among the most non-sexist social systems in human history.” (Wagner, quoted by Goldenberg in Chmielewski, Kern, & Klee-Hartzell, p. 258; Wagner, pp. 37-8)

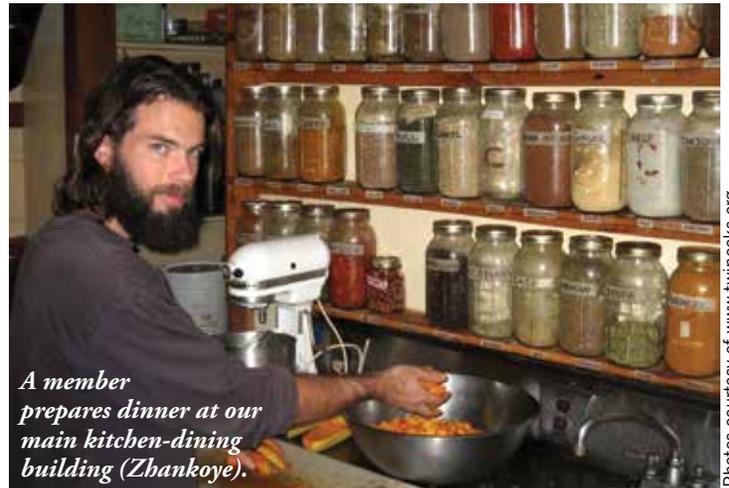
### The Future: A Growing Network

Now arising in Louisa County, Virginia is the dynamic of an interdependent, growing number of communal groups around Twin Oaks. The idea of a network of communal and collective groups in local proximity in America as a force for social change has been a goal since at least the publishing of the 1884 book by Laurence Gronlund titled *The Cooperative Commonwealth*. Whether this is called today “radical decentralism,” “deep democracy,” “democratic confederalism,” “communal municipalism,” a “regional commonwealth,” or something else, this is a fascinating story now developing, with challenges to be identified, lessons to be debated, and glorious revelations yet to be realized and celebrated! 🌱

*Portions of this article were previously published by the author in the 2016 book, The Intentioneers’ Bible: Interwoven Stories of the Parallel Cultures of Plenty and Scarcity, currently available only as an ebook on Amazon.com. The Intentioneer’s Bible tracks several themes including time-based economies, equality of the genders, and communal childcare through the prehistory and history of Western Civilization. A. Allen Butcher is a former member of East Wind and Twin Oaks communities, currently living collectively in Denver, Colorado.. Contact the author at 4thWorld@consultant.org, and see www.Intentioneers.net.*



*A calf is fed as part of the Dairy Program. Female calves become milk cows, male calves become beef.*



*A member prepares dinner at our main kitchen-dining building (Zbankoye).*

Photos courtesy of www.twin Oaks.org

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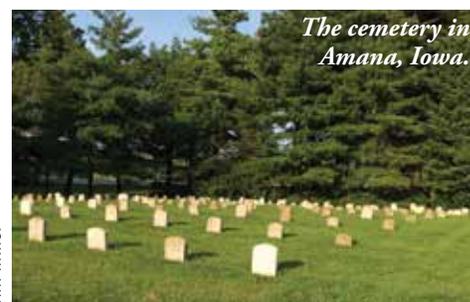
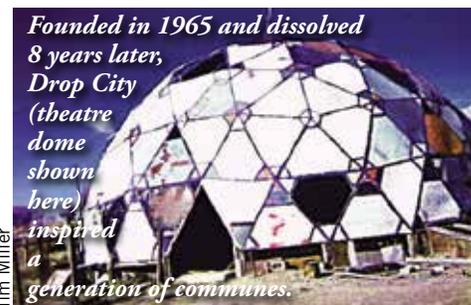
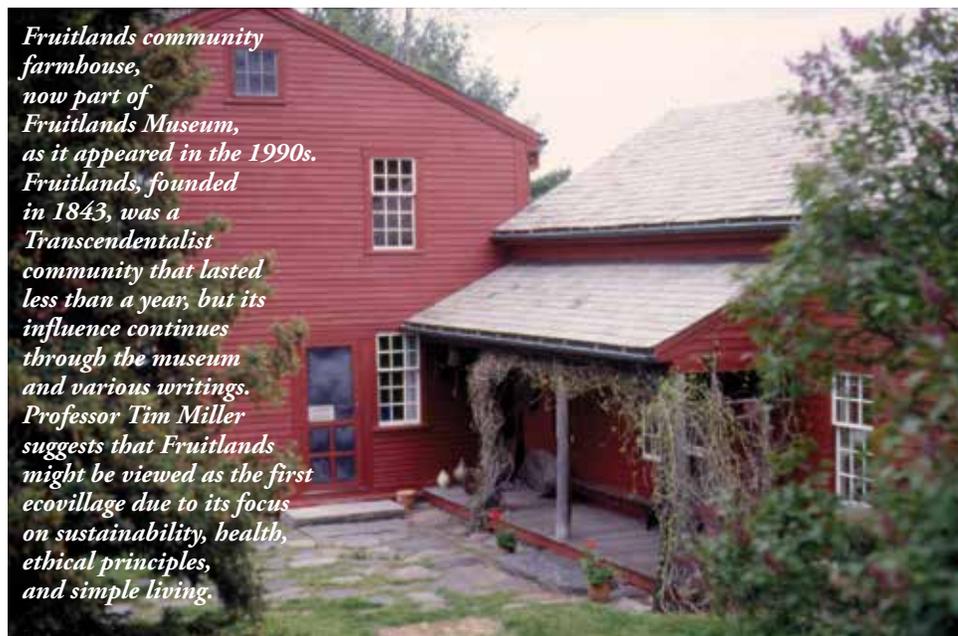
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# The Value of Community: WHAT DEFINES SUCCESS?

By Deborah Altus



When Rosabeth Moss Kanter conducted her research on commitment mechanisms in 19th century utopian societies for her book *Commitment and Community* (1972), she classified groups as “successful” and “unsuccessful” based on their length of existence. For Kanter, a group had to last for at least 25 years to be labeled successful.

Certainly, long-lived communal groups have a great deal of useful information to share. They can teach us how a community maintains its vision for the long term, remains economically viable, retains members, outlives the founders, and sustains relationships. But should longevity, alone, be the defining measure of success? Conversely, should short-lived intentional communities be viewed as failures?

In the mid-1990s, I traveled from Florida to Alaska for Professor Tim Miller’s 1960s Communes Project. My job was to interview people who lived communally in the ’60s and ’70s and to visit intentional communities still in existence from that period. I quickly learned that the length of time my interviewees lived in intentional communities wasn’t correlated with their sense of identification with, and feelings of fondness toward, these communities. Often the people who were the most eager to speak with me were those whose communal experiences were the shortest. One interviewee traveled many miles to talk at length about a group that, nearly 30 years earlier, he had belonged to for a few weeks. Another had written a book-length manuscript about a group that had lasted for a couple of months.

What became clear to me was that the experiences of my interviewees were deeply meaningful and life-changing, regardless of their length. These experiences often impacted their life trajectories in profound ways—the careers they chose, the people they lived with, the groups they joined, the political and social issues they fought for, the way they spent their money and their leisure time, the way they raised their children. They continued to seek involvement in cooperative ventures—food co-ops, buying clubs, alternative schools, barter systems, and more—and deliberately chose occupations that aligned with values related to cooperation and sharing. And many of them expressed the desire to live communally again in retirement.

These feelings rang true to me. Over 30 years ago, I spent over a decade living in a series of cooperative living arrangements. While each group was interesting and memorable, one stands out as particularly formative. We pooled our money to pay the rent and buy our food—cooking and eating together each night at a rickety picnic table in the dining room of our run-down farmhouse. We hung out together—listening to music, talking about current events, walking the dog, bicycling, watching movies, gardening, laughing, crying, and sharing the ups and downs of our lives. Then, after a couple of years, we gradually went our separate ways. There was no big breakup. We simply had opportunities

and interests that took us in different directions.

Despite our short time together, this experience taught me how much I loved sharing life with others in deep and intimate ways. From there, I sought experiences that strengthened relationships with the people in my life and that allowed me to practice my cooperative values. Although I went on to live in a nuclear family, I became a board member of my food co-op, started a dinner co-op, joined a credit union, joined a parent participation preschool co-op, continued my involvement in the FIC and the Communal Studies Association, and incorporated information about intentional communities in the courses that I taught. Without having lived cooperatively, albeit for a relatively short time, I don’t know that I would have sought out these experiences—at least not with the same level of passion and commitment.

I also learned practical life skills in my co-op years—cooking, home maintenance, bookkeeping, group decision making, meeting facilitation—skills that have served me well throughout my life. My experience with cooking for a large group helped me land one of my all-time favorite jobs as a cook at a biological field station. My experience with co-op meeting facilitation helps me run meetings in my paid and volunteer work. My experience with co-op labor-sharing systems helps me promote equitable distribution of work in the groups to which I belong. The list goes on.

My experiences and those of my interviewees are not unique. When examining the history of communal living, it is easy to find examples of short-lived communities that had lasting impacts on their members and the larger society. Robert Owen's New Harmony is a striking example. New Harmony lasted only a couple of years (1825-1827), yet it is arguably one of the best-known historic utopian communities in America. Countless scholarly publications have been written on New Harmony and its impact on the natural

Century (2013), Pitzer describes how experiments by 19th century utopian communities in universal education, democratic governance, and equal rights helped to bring about reforms in these areas in the 20th century—though the communities often did not last. Similarly, Pitzer points out that the communes of the 1960s have shaped “major features of world culture in the twenty-first century.” Many of these communities, of course, were short-lived, but Pitzer notes that “they pioneered changes in eating habits and health care and made commitments to tolerance and spirituality, equality and justice, peace and love that have helped move the world toward multiculturalism, gender equality, interfaith dialogue, and peace initiatives.”

In a recent book, *We Are As Gods* (2016), on the 1970s back-to-the-land movement, author Kate Daloz describes how intentional communities from the '70s, even when short-lived, continue to influence practices and products of today. As examples, she points out the popularity of natural food stores and organic products, along with the now-mainstream brands of Celestial Seasonings, Cascadian Farm, Stonyfield Yogurt, and Tom's of Maine. In her words: “Every last leaf and crumb of today's \$39 billion organic food industry owes its existence in part to the inexperienced, idealistic, exurbanite farmers of the 1970s, many of whom hung on through the '80s and '90s, refining their practices, organizing themselves, and developing the distribution systems that have fed today's seemingly insatiable demand for organic products.... Every mixed greens salad; every supermarket

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## It is easy to find examples of short-lived communities that had lasting impacts on their members and the larger society.

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sciences, public education, public libraries, workers' rights, women's rights, the abolitionist movement, architecture, and more. Robert Dale Owen, Robert Owen's son, and Frances Wright, abolitionist and founder of the Nashoba community, spent years working for social reforms that were influenced, at least in part, by their experiences at New Harmony.

Donald Pitzer, professor emeritus and former director of the Center for Communal Studies at University of Southern Indiana, developed the theory of developmental communalism to explain how an organization or movement does not necessarily end when its communal period dissolves. Rather, Pitzer noted that communal groups may evolve into new forms of association or otherwise continue to impact society beyond the end of their communalism. The Amana Colonies, for example, ended their communal phase in 1932. However, they have carried forward some aspects of the communal era to the present day, such as the distinctive Amana Church and land that is collectively owned by the Amana Society. As scholar Jonathan Andelson has noted, burial in Amana cemeteries still proceeds in rows by order of death, not in family plots, continuing to emphasize long-held values of simplicity and equality.

In a chapter on developmental communalism in the book, *The Communal Idea in the 21st*

carton of soy milk; every diverse, stinky plate of domestic cheese; every farm-to-table restaurant, locavore food blog and artisanal microbrew has a direct ancestry in the 1970s' countercuisine.”

Daloz allows us to see that the back-to-the-landers and the intentional communities they built, even if they didn't survive for long, offered something valuable to their members and to society. She emphasizes this point through the words of a 1970s communitarian: “Just because we didn't end up with what we thought we were going to end up with doesn't mean we ended up with nothing. We ended up with something else. Which is beautiful.”

In 2013, three women in Pittsburgh published a book, *My House, Our House*, about their experience with cooperative householding. In the book, they chronicled the joys and struggles of living together and offered a plethora of how-to information to help those wanting to do the same. Their home-sharing experience ended two years after the book was published and 11 years after they moved in together. But the women do not view the experience as a failure. On the contrary, they view it as a successful venture that met their goals. The experience also allowed them to teach others about how to make a cooperative household work—not only through their book but through their website, blog, numerous presentations, and even an interview on the Today Show with Jane Pauley.

When they started their household, they made an explicit agreement to stick together for five to 10 years—and they made it one year past the long end of that agreement. Not only do they remain friends and look back fondly on their time together, but two of them went on to live together in a different city. In a blog post, they wrote, “We can confidently tell you that it is possible to disband a shared living arrangement in an equitable way that preserves the friendships—no, more accurately, the LOVE—that grew in our home for 11 wonderful years.”

In her book, *Commitment and Community*, Kanter described commune seekers of the hippie era as “children of the affluent who dislike school and feel that they have no place else to go. It may be only a temporary episode for these people, a year out of their lives.” A year, perhaps. But a year can be pivotal. A year can be life-changing. The value of an intentional community to its members and to society cannot be determined by the mere passage of time. 🌸

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# Life Lessons for Community Longevity

By Graham Ellis

*The life which is unexamined is not worth living.*

—Plato

**M**y advice for creating longevity for intentional communities comes from my own experience living for over 27 years in a community I founded. It was a super fun but often bumpy ride and now my personal dream of living there for the rest of my life has gone.

If I knew what I know now would I have done things differently? YES! Do I regret my commitment to this experiment? No! My life is so abundantly rich with memorable experiences and great friends that I know it was all totally worth it.

Bellyacres Artistic Ecovillage was founded in 1987 and is located in the Big Island's lower Puna District. It sits between the Pacific Ocean and Kilauea Volcano, which has been erupting ash and oozing or spurting lava for all of our community existence.

My motivation for living in community came after two residencies at Israeli kibbutzim and from co-founding a workers' collective in Canada. I saw the opportunity to manifest an innovative community based on principles such as living cooperatively with a convivial and fair way of life, causing minimal ecological impact, and striving to become more socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable.

I made the huge assumption that my international busker friends whom I invited to participate also supported this as our vision but later realized that our common bond was a love for performing, partying, and independent living and not for intentional community. My belief that a group of anarchist jugglers could learn to live harmoniously in a Hawaiian jungle has been seriously compromised in many ways in recent years, leaving me with many lessons learned from this experiment.

Here are a few of those lessons:

## Having a shared vision is crucial for any community.

We originally described ourselves as a jugglers "collective" without thinking much about the meaning of the word. We entered a state that author Scott Peck describes as "community chaos" and so I focused on creating some structure within our anarchist gang. Slowly and painfully, we started having more engaging meetings, improving our communication skills, and even adopting bylaws, articles of incorporation, and the legal name "Village Green Society." I strongly believed in the old adage that "it takes a village to raise a child" and, as a teacher, I was always focused on providing for kids.

Other members were not so enthusiastic; in fact, a majority at an early meeting voted to keep kids excluded from our land as much as possible because "they made too much noise." I



Photos courtesy of Graham Ellis

laughed knowing that it was impossible and predicted that these same troubadours would have kids of their own when they grew up; but, this proved only partly true.

provide. This was definitely the case with our group.

I erroneously held the belief that embracing diversity meant adopting the principle of total inclusivity and so our original membership was open to any of my juggling friends who wanted to join. The only financial commitment they had to make was a lifetime, non-refundable membership fee of \$2,000. This entitled them to set up a campsite and maybe a jungalow. For an additional \$4,000, they could build a full-sized house. I realize now how seriously naïve and flawed this model was.

We really should have adopted a carefully thought-out recruitment process including a detailed interview procedure; a contract outlining responsibilities, rights, and values; and a well monitored probationary system.

In 1990, after we already had 21 members, we established a new member recruitment procedure. It definitely reflects how alternative and

inexperienced we were at the time by inclusion of questions like “What is your favorite Beatles song?” We increased our membership fee to a whopping \$3,000 and house sites to \$5,000. All new members were put on a 12-month probationary trial; however, this was flawed because most of them did not stay living on the land during this time. New members were accepted by consensus at our AGM, even though most had never lived with existing members for more than a couple of weeks.

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## I erroneously held the belief that embracing diversity meant adopting the principle of total inclusivity.

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### Recruiting community members needs to be done very consciously and carefully.

We all have challenges learning to live communally. With very few exceptions, we have been raised outside of intentional communities and bring our deep-rooted conditioning based upon competition, scarcity, individualism, and personal ownership. Human nature itself has a predisposition to reject many of the compromises required for community and to underappreciate the value of all that communities can

### Every member needs to fully embrace the decision-making process.

I introduced our group to the concept of consensus decision making, as I had two years’ personal experience using the method with a workers’ collective in Victoria, Canada. With our Bellyacres experiment, I learned for consensus to work it is imperative that everyone is committed to learning the process and be willing to donate the time and energy to practice it. No one in our group disputed our decision to have a consensus-minus-two process (until 2014); however, we never had



any study sessions, training, or workshops on how to effectively utilize it in our meetings. Looking back, this was a mistake.

### Two regular weekly meetings is a basic minimum requirement.

Our early meetings were hilarious with more of a party scene than community organizing—people would drink, smoke, and share jokes, so keeping conversations on track was crazy. I introduced the concept of rotating facilitators, agendas, minute keeping, and motions. We were on a steep learning curve and two members expressed their distaste for meetings by heckling randomly from the outside.

I would have liked to have had three weekly meetings: one for business, one for personal communication and check ins, and one potluck for food and fun, but this never happened. We functioned best when we had two weekly meetings and regressed when these connections lapsed.

I created the tradition—and even made it a serious request—for all residents on the land to attend a Sunday potluck and a weekly campfire on Tuesdays. Despite our busy schedules and other events, many of us acknowledged the value and importance of getting together, with the work-exchange folks and guests, to talk story and deal with issues. Ironically, when more of our members arrived in the wintertime, weekly meetings often got superseded by party or vacation plans.

### Expect and accept unequal participation.

Structure is important in any organization but participation is what determines effectiveness. Even though our original membership of 12 eventually increased to 35, we have never had more than six members living full-time on our land at any one time, for various reasons, and sometimes I was the only resident member.

While major decisions are made at our annual general meetings and attendance has varied from 12 to 22 members, we have had severe limitations on the possibilities for full participation in ongoing decision making. As technology has improved, we have used newsletters, telephone conference calls, and emails. However, without a clearly approved process and with a membership geographically dispersed across several countries and half a dozen time zones, it has worked only marginally for improving communication, but not much for decision making or for involvement.

The Bellyacres experiment has taught me to not expect everyone to be equally involved or to contribute the same amount of work. This fact of community life is not easy to accept but is necessary. It is also cruelly ironic that members who are only peripherally involved and contributing very little in work still often demand a full role in decision making.

From my two stays on kibbutzim in 1969 and 1973, I was introduced to the socialist concept “to everyone according to their needs and from everyone according to their abilities” and it fit my humanitarian ideals. As I brought together our collective, I tried to factor in the wisdom of a kibbutz founding member who told me that despite their egalitarian principles, when the annual elections of officers happened, the same 20 people always volunteered. This seems to be the situation in almost every community and inevitably results in power being concentrated within a small group.

### Be honest and realistic about leadership.

Our transient membership and lack of resident members often resulted in decisions being made by me or just a few individuals out of necessity. As the founder, I was always the public face of the organization and originally accepted



responsibility for the legal, financial, and physical-reality development of Bellyacres.

Personally, I have never desired to amass power and control, yet I found myself constantly playing the role of leader by necessity. I only ever wanted this to be temporary until other members began to take on more responsibility and become more involved in activities that moved us along. Unfortunately, this was not our reality and what I discovered instead was a serious case of Founders' Syndrome, which came to a head in 2014 and contributed to me deciding to leave.

My studies of sustainable community development show that most have a hierarchical organization with a spiritual guru, a charismatic leader, or a group of "elders." Secular egalitarian communities seem to have the greatest difficulty in staying together after the initial idealistic euphoria wears off. I know of a very few (Twin Oaks, Sandhill, East Wind, The Farm) that have survived more than 25 years, outlasting their founders and developing identities not dependent on particular personalities. The development of an egalitarian structure of governance is a huge challenge facing communities and one that requires commitment, training, and consultation with experts if it is to succeed smoothly. Regrettably, while our ecovillage still exists after 30 years, it did none of these and is now paying the price.

### Share a common vision regarding children.

From our beginning, we were very divided about the desire to include children in our community and this has plagued us still today. During my two kibbutz visits and my workers' collective experience, I was impressed that children were always a big part of the ideology and it led to my belief that children are an essential part of any sustainable community.

Unfortunately, when I gathered the founding members of Bellyacres, we never discussed this until after we'd started our settlement. A major factor I had seriously overlooked was that all my new partners were bohemians. They were in a phase in their lives where they believed kids would severely threaten their freedom to party hearty and to travel to the streets of busking cities worldwide.

My naiveté on this subject was clearly expressed one evening over dinner at our first encampment. A friend was visiting us with his girlfriend and a newborn baby. This little addition to our party was prone to get a little restless in the night and her sweet shrill cries cut through the jungle air. We had some late-night party people who expected to get a deep and undisturbed sleep when they eventually crashed. When we went around the circle, one by one everyone said how kids didn't belong here and that was not what they signed up for.

How different this perspective was to mine—I looked around and reckoned that many of these same people would have their own kids in a few years and attitudes would change. I was only partly right on this and never expected that it would be the childless partners who'd end up living at Bellyacres while members with families would choose the better education and work opportunities of the mainland US or Europe.

I thought we failed really badly by never having an official policy regarding children. Over the years, I offered single-family accommodations, counseling, transport, and free circus classes for loads of kids. But when parents had expectations of finding a community with compassion that embraced their kids by providing supportive aunts and uncles and surrogate parents, they were generally very disappointed by many members' responses. In most cases, there was a "clear hands-off approach," coupled with the feeling that they were just "not a kids person," or having worked entertaining kids

for many years had an attitude of "I need to take a break while I'm on holiday." I felt very differently, I was not on holiday, this was my permanent home and I wanted to have loads of happy, thriving kids around.

In all my years at Bellyacres, this issue alone caused me the most grief. My own daughter lived there from birth but never established anything close to the connection that occurs in blood families with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins sending birthday cards, Christmas presents, and checking in regularly about school grades, favorite hobbies, and bad colds. There are very few long-lasting bonding relationships between the different generations at Bellyacres, and sadly when the opportunity has existed the general membership has not embraced it.

### Establish a clear pet policy.

Pet ownership has been another reoccurring issue for us, with the understanding that owners are responsible for pets' behavior and some do a better job than others. Because of repeated bad experiences with neighbors' unruly dogs roaming our land, pooping, killing our chickens, and even a goat, we adopted a "no dogs policy." There have been controversial exceptions and some very heated debates regarding members who had dogs or renters who wanted to bring dogs. Not all dogs are alike and our decisions about which dogs and owners are acceptable have been erratic and often not rational and have had some severe negative effects on residents' relationships.

Cats tend to be more benign, at least as far as humans go (impacts on wildlife are a different matter); however, they can be unbearable at times with wild cat fights and raids on neighbors' homes for food, usually at night. Sometimes, with a cat population close to exceeding the number of residents, we've had to place household limits and insist on neutering. Not every owner willingly ac-





cepts community restrictions on pets, especially when pets are kid substitutes, but it is essential for the sake of long-term harmony.

### **Establish a clear drugs policy.**

Drug policy is often a defining issue in the membership of a community and my understanding is that the longest-lasting spiritual communities are very restrictive. Being renowned for our amazing parties, we have had no rules and a very liberal attitude to drug use and our members have indulged, mostly very responsibly and without adverse consequences.

Drug use, both legal and illegal, is generally considered a personal and private issue; but, where communities do not create clear standards and boundaries, major problems can arise. We had to impose strict rules regarding the cultivation of illegal cannabis on our land until medical marijuana permits became an option. After a particularly bad experience, we insisted that illegal drugs are not stored in our communal spaces.

We have attempted to establish a culture of responsible drug use and have mostly succeeded given that Bellyacres is located in one of the marijuana capitals of the country and our modern society accepts tobacco addiction and alcoholism as socially acceptable. We adopted no-smoking zones and have taken car keys away from inebriated residents and guests wanting to drive. Apart from this, we have been extremely tolerant of drug use and some abuse. This could have been an issue we dealt with better when recruiting members, but people's habits change over time so having a clear policy could really help reduce later issues.

Late in our development, I learned to ask work-exchange folks and interns if they were on or had been on any medications for mental health issues. Having lived for three years with one of our



founding members going through severe manic depressive episodes due to a bipolar condition, I learned how crucial medication can be for stabilizing health. If answered honestly, this question enabled us to be more supportive and understanding when living with anyone mentally challenged. It's very hard to enforce responsible medication practices but since we all are impacted, it is a respectful request to make.

### **Be prepared to deal with mental illness, depression, and withdrawal.**

These problems affect many in our society at some point in their lives and will inevitably impact your community. After years attempting to support our bipolar member, we made one of the hardest of our group decisions and revoked his membership because we believed he would get better treatment and support if he moved back to North Carolina. It was a huge lesson in tough love but we were right because he regained control of his life and now appreciates that we were caring for him the best way we could.

### **Choose a location that suits your lifestyle.**

Where your community is located will seriously affect your healthy development so think ahead and get a good picture of how your neighborhood will look 30 years into the future. You will need to have neighbors who accept you.

We bought 11 acres of Hawaiian jungle for \$55,000 in an area where unpermitted structures and squatting were common practices. Our land was close to a beach, warm ponds, and lava adventures. It had lots of useful trees, a great climate, and adequate rainfall to fill catchment water tanks. It was also adjacent to an undeveloped subdivision with 933 lots selling for less than \$5,000 and we envisioned our friends buying many of them and expanding our community.

We chose to live with the predictable mosquitoes and jungle critters, droughts, tropical storms, rocky terrain, etc. What we did not anticipate were new issues like climate change, fire ants, rat lung worm disease, invasive tree overwhelm, discretionary permitting enforcement by County and State agencies, and the build-out of three neighborhood subdivisions which brought a huge influx of people, including many supporters of our community development programs, but also a few opponents who managed to successfully impose a tyranny of the minority.

In our idealistic early days at Bellyacres, we studied and dreamt of living off the land. We put a great deal of energy, money, and other resources into a variety of agricultural projects that, for one reason or another, were incompatible with our membership, other projects, or the suitability of our environment and land. We had to constantly make compromises and adjust our perception of what was possible given our resources and location. Trial and error has its price.

I discovered over time that a subtropical jungle and climate was not the most conducive place to live as we grew older. Perceiving ourselves as eco-warriors, we originally removed a minimum of trees to accommodate our basic needs. Eventually we realized that air and light and distance from bugs and creeping foliage was essential for our healthy living. Removing more trees around houses also became a safety issue and a necessity to prevent leaves contaminating catchment water systems. If we had originally made a lot more clearings and cut down more trees we would have saved ourselves the huge amounts of work required later. The jungle never sleeps or takes a vacation!

In striving for a high level of sustainable living, we also committed ourselves to lots more hard work with off-grid power, catchment water, and organic farming, and are only now realizing how challenging this is for our aging membership.

### **Learn to love the food that loves to grow where you live.**

While our group officially committed to increasing our level of sustainability, I'm not sure if members understood the implications of this. In terms of food, my view was that we should be growing locally appropriate foods that were suited to our subtropical climate. Having lived in the tropics for over 40 years, I found it easy and preferable for my staple foods to be breadfruit, avocados, bananas, citrus, and exotic fruits, etc. I estimated that 70-80 percent of my food was grown on the island.

By comparison, my partners preferred to maintain their temperate-climate diet and struggled to grow lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, and cucumbers, etc. in our greenhouse. While the crops I was eating were drought-resistant and required virtually no maintenance, the greenhouse crops need watering twice daily by hand. This practice placed a huge burden on our labor pool when other work needed to be done and could have been more efficiently resolved by members' eating the food that grew easily on our land and/or purchasing temperate crops from our weekly farmers' market.

### **Define what sustainable living means to your community.**

In my view, sustainable living goes far beyond permaculture systems, organic gardens, fruit trees, and animal husbandry. It has to include membership, community service, buildings, transport, recycling, energy, and more.

### **Wherever you live, raise worms and rebuild your soil, for continuum.**

Living on lava rock, I was very motivated to experiment with soil production and eventually learned the importance of earthworms. Aristotle called them "the intestines of the earth," Charles Darwin wrote a whole book about them, and for the organic gardener, they are the single most important element in the program of building a rich, healthy soil. Using manure from our two horses to feed the worms, I was able to produce enough worm castings and worm tea to feed all our crops without needing to purchase any imported fertilizers for the last seven years I lived there.

### **Have a clear exit strategy.**

This is most critical for community members who invest large amounts of time and energy. Our original exit strategy did not take this into account and I now realize it needed to be clearer and more detailed to allow for the changes in people's relationships, values, and beliefs that inevitably happen over time. Many communities fold because they cannot survive the impact of founding members' pulling out and needing to get repaid. I ensured the future for Bellyacres by buying the land outright and putting it into a land trust. However, my own future has now been compromised due to complications in selling the two houses I own on the land.

### **Stay legal if you want an easy ride.**

If you want to challenge laws and bring changes, be prepared. Recruit a good lawyer as a member. For details on this issue, see my article in *COMMUNITIES* #168 (Fall 2015), "My Struggle to Legalize Sustainable Living."

I'm presently working on a book entitled *My Sustainable Community Experience: 27 Years Living with Jugglers in the Jungle*. It's an autobiography with lots of juicy personal stories that I hope will serve to make the community experience relevant, important, and more successful for present and future communitarians.

Here's a sampling of a few additional lessons from the book:

**Be prepared to deal with disasters by keeping your whole group committed to staying united.**

**Start by building an amazing communal kitchen—it's your most important structure.**

**Do not try to live out of sight of your community members.**

**Do not build anything temporary.**

**Don't share cars, houses, or partners.**

**Celebrate the financial successes of other members.**

**Don't let the bookkeeper run your organization.**

**Be open to different spiritual practices and beliefs.**

**Develop rituals for meals, meetings, and celebrations.**

**Have group projects.**

**Be patient with those who work slower or work less than you.**

**Don't permit passivity and non-participation.**

**Review your group vision every three to five years and get 100 percent buy-in.**

**Post bylaws, rules, minutes of meetings, vision, and community events prominently.**

**Recruit a community archivist.**

**Have a clear enforcement policy.**

**Celebrate weddings, births, birthdays, etc. together.**

**Give priority to your community members over other outside friends.**

**Be hospitable—invite guests.**

**Identify the talents and weaknesses of your fellow members.**

**Don't assume smart people have learned basic life skills.**

**Have flexibility, compassion, and forgiveness. Be human.**

**Do not expect people to be perfect all the time.**

**If you want community longevity, build a cemetery.**

**Have a sense of humor and always remember this old English saying: "There's nought as queer as folks." 🐾**

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*In 1987 Graham Ellis founded Bellyacres Artistic Ecovillage on a 10 acre jungle lot with a vision to experiment with sustainable community living practices. By 2007 Graham had raised \$500,000 to build the Seaview Performance Arts Center for Education (S.P.A.C.E.), which in 2010 was described as "perhaps the most sustainable community center in the USA." His article "My Struggle to Legalize Sustainable Living" appeared in *COMMUNITIES* #168, Fall 2015, and he is currently writing a book, *My Sustainable Community Experience: 27 Years Living with Jugglers in the Jungle*. As we prepared this issue for press, we learned that Graham was deported from the US on July 19, 2017 for an expired visa under the stricter immigration enforcement protocols put in place by the Trump administration. He, his wife, and their five children had already been planning to relocate later this year to the UK, where he hopes to serve as a community consultant—but uncertainty remains about when or if the rest of his family will be granted the visas necessary to join him. See [www.civilbeat.org/2017/06/a-big-island-juggler-with-leukemia-faces-deportation](http://www.civilbeat.org/2017/06/a-big-island-juggler-with-leukemia-faces-deportation).*

# What Past and Present Communities Can Teach New Communities

By Raven MoonRaven

I was inspired to write this by a link I was sent to an article entitled “Utopia Inc.” It was subtitled: “Most utopian communities are, like most start-ups, short-lived. What makes the difference between failure and success?” (Find it at [aeon.co/essays/like-start-ups-most-intentional-communities-fail-why](http://aeon.co/essays/like-start-ups-most-intentional-communities-fail-why).)

As someone who is interested in starting communities (and has started communities), I’m well aware of the precariousness of new communities. What can folks who are trying to start new communities learn from the communities of the past as well as those around now that have lasted?

First of all, as the author of the online article (Alexa Clay) points out, 90 percent or so of new communities fail—but that’s also true of business start-ups. Starting a new venture is always risky. However, as the author also points out, many of these communities weren’t very well put together to start with. She goes on to say that “intentional communities and utopias can serve as short-lived petri dishes for emergent culture.” This is very similar to my personal view of communities as laboratories for social change. In communities, we see what works and doesn’t work. So looking at other communities can help us decide whether it makes sense to try something or not.

In looking at past communities, Ms. Clay talks about Fruitlands, which is my favorite example of how not to start a community. The founders (Amos Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane) mandated a very strict and rigid routine. The Wikipedia article on Fruitlands claims, “Diet was usually fruit and water; many vegetables—including carrots, beets, and potatoes—were forbidden because they showed a lower nature by growing downward.” There were no formal admission requirements or procedures to join the community and they attracted quite a few men (apparently Alcott’s and Lane’s wives were the only women) who do not seem to have been the most stable characters. I think that one of the biggest problems was (quoting Wikipedia again): “many of the men of the commune spent their days teaching or philosophizing instead of working in the field.” Fruitlands lasted only seven months. Given how it was structured, I’m surprised it lasted that long. But we now know that you can’t run a farm by discussing philosophy.

The author also talks about New Harmony and she points out that (not that different from Fruitlands), “Of its population of 800, only 140 were adept at working in local industry, and just 36 were skilled farmers. The community was far too open and indiscriminate in its invitation, allowing anyone to join, and attracting a lot of free-riders without the necessary skills or appetite for hard work.” New Harmony lasted two years.

When Alexa Clay looks at success stories, she points to spiritual communities such as the Shakers, Quakers, and Amish. One thing that I notice about all of them is a willingness to work hard.

One community that I’m surprised she doesn’t mention is Oneida,

which lasted a good 30 years, and embraced a very communal structure and complex sexual structure in the 19th century, and, from something I read, was missed by many of its members after it was gone. Unsurprisingly, they had a good work ethic. (From Wikipedia: “All Community members were expected to work, each according to his or her abilities.... Community members rotated through the more unskilled jobs, working in the house, the fields, or the various industries.”)

A spiritual community that has lasted much longer is the Amana Colony, which was founded in 1859, and continued communally until 1932, when the community split into a spiritual “Church Society” and a for-profit company which continues to own much of the land. Again (from Wikipedia):

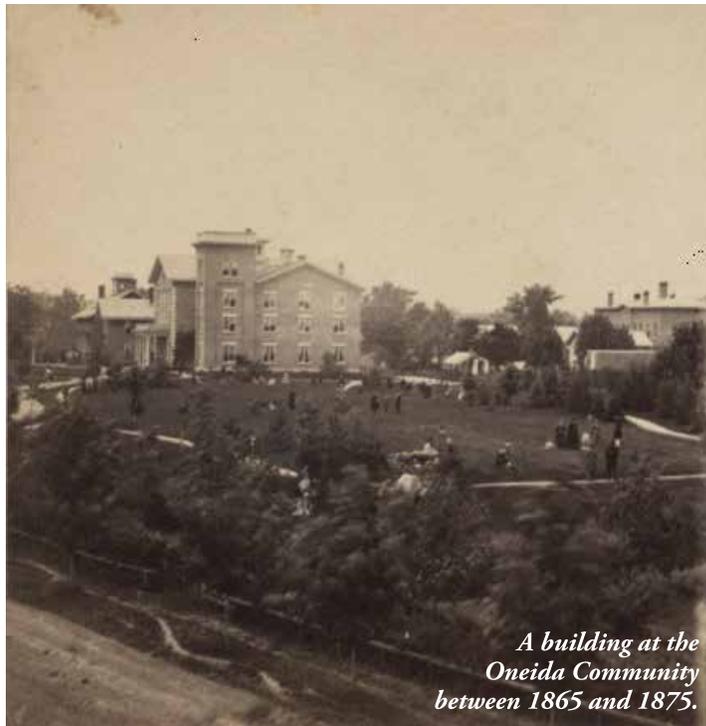
“For eighty years, the Amana Colony maintained an almost completely self-sufficient local economy, importing very little from the industrializing American economy. The Amanians were able to achieve this independence and lifestyle by adhering to the specialized crafting and farming occupations that they had brought with them from Europe. Craftsmen passed their skills and techniques on from one generation to the next. They used hand, horse, wind, and water power, and made their own furniture, clothes, and other goods.” Amana refrigerators were a legacy of this community.

These communities come from what I think of as the first wave of communes, that occurred during the 19th century, mostly between the 1840s and 1890s. The next major wave of community building occurred during the 1960s and early 1970s. Most of these communities are gone.

Ms. Clay does mention Findhorn, which began evolving in 1962 but was established as an official foundation in 1972. She quotes social entrepreneur Kate Sutherland who said: “It’s not utopia. It’s microcosm. Everything that’s in the outer world is there—marginalisation, addiction, poverty, sexual issues, power. Communities are just fractals of society.” However for Sutherland the difference between Findhorn and the rest of the planet boiled down to “good will and a clear commitment to waking up” or as she said, “People are willing to look at their stuff.”

However there are some other communities from the ’60s and ’70s that are still around. One of them is Twin Oaks, which is turning 50 this year, has almost 100 members who live very communally, and appears to be going strong. And, yes, they have a strong work ethic.

Twin Oaks hammocks and tofu, Oneida silverware, Amana refrigerators, Shaker furniture, Amish farming. Alexa Clay notes: “Perhaps the irony is that many of the administrative and managerial forces that individuals are running away from within mainstream society are exactly the organisational



*A building at the Oneida Community between 1865 and 1875.*

(continued on p. 73)

# My Advice to Others Planning to Start an Ecovillage, Revisited

By Lois Arkin

*This advice was originally prepared for the book Eco-Villages and Sustainable Communities: A Report for Gaia Trust by the Context Institute (1991), Robert and Diane Gilman. The 1991 version was written when I had been engaged in Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) planning processes for about four years, but had not yet begun LAEV on-the-ground in our current location, nor was there an intentional community at that point. Now, after almost 25 years of living in the fully functioning, intensely urban LAEV intentional community, at times up to 40 persons, here are the original 10 pieces of advice from 1991 and how I refined the advice in 2005, again in 2011, and most recently in 2017.*

**1. Start with people.** Ultimately, land and buildings are always accessible to a group of people who have a common vision and commitment.

**2005 Refinement:** A strong vision, good planning, groundedness, and perseverance are the four qualities that will generally get you what you need and want, eventually.

**2011 Refinement:** It takes some of us longer than others.

**2017 Refinement:** Be clear at the front end about the personal qualities and habits you want your initial members to have. They will be the foundation for the emerging culture of your community. If you choose carelessly, be prepared for lots of drama and delays, if your community survives at all.

**2. Develop a core group of people who have some kind of existing track record.** If you don't have one, find those who do and sell them on your vision.

**2005 Refinement:** Make sure you get a congenial core group of folks with complementary skills and knowledge who can make a five-year commitment to one another. Then learn to care deeply for one another in relation to the land where you want to work, in relation to the problems with the life support systems in your chosen bioregion, and in relation to the issues in your local political jurisdiction..

**2011 Refinement:** Learn early how to pick and choose your battles with one another, and do not tolerate unresolved negative conflicts; agree to disagree and love each other anyway.

**2017 Refinement:** People and their priorities change. Much as those initial members may have contributed in the start-up phase, most of them will leave before the ecovillage is significantly manifested. Make sure succeeding members in those early years share your start-up group's vision and core values and have needed knowledge and skills to contribute or passion for learning them.

**3. Don't be in a hurry, but do be persistent and persevering.** We have been very fortunate in focusing on a site that has not been immediately available to us. It's given us the time to develop the culture of the Design Team, develop political and community support, enhance our track record, and attract resources for moving forward. Of course, for a group that already has all that together, this advice is not applicable.

**2005 Refinement:** It's about process as much as place. So get your team geographically contiguous as quickly as practical, but don't worry about it being your final location. The experience of interactive processes working on making the connections between and among the ecological, economic, and social systems of your community can go with you wherever you ultimately settle.

**2011 Refinement:** In the world we live in today, it is critical not to be too attached to place, but to be fully engaged with place wherever we are. The world-changing work we are engaged in and the pace at which the

earth herself is changing may require us to relocate from time to time.

**2017 Refinement:** Many neighborhoods today are advancing in their sustainable practices through their growing associations with the Transition Movement, the Cool Blocks Movement, TimeBanking, or a few neighborhood leaders doing local outreach and just tagging themselves as a "Sustainable" or "Resilient" community project. So, don't be attached to the word "ecovillage." Congratulations if a neighborhood becomes sustainable or an ecovillage through the accident of residential choices and doing the work where you're at!

**4. Do not compromise your vision to acquire funding.**

**2005 Refinement:** Look for creative ways to solve potential funding problems that advance your vision.

**2011 Refinement:** Often, the less money you have the more creative you are. Our movement is about doing more with less. Brag about it a lot.

**2017 Refinement:** Develop your constituency before, during, and after your project has been manifested. Communicate with them often. Lots of people want to support your project even if they have no need or interest in living in your community.

**5. Keep educating all members of the group on the overview.** Provide opportunities for members to learn in informal and exciting ways about all the major systems and sub-systems of an ecovillage: social, economic, ecological.

**2005 Refinement:** Make the time to do it. Everyone won't have the same understanding, no matter what you do, but they'll bring fresh energy and help the founding core group to see things in new ways too.

**2011 Refinement:** Institute story-telling as early as possible. You don't have to wait 10 years to share memories. Begin your own rituals as early as possible. Let them flourish.

**2017 Refinement:** A lot of story-telling will happen informally in the social context of living together. But don't depend on that. Incorporate



*Kids on LAEV tour  
bug our 106-year-old  
sycamore tree.*

story-telling into your celebrations: birthdays, anniversaries, solstices, equinoxes. These more formal occasions are an opportunity to correct inaccuracies too.

## 6. Let your integrity combined with your pragmatism be your guide.

Don't be immobilized by ideology.

**2005 Refinement:** Those who don't agree with the founding vision or have not taken the time to understand it, but enjoy the fruits of the labor of the founders, may try to convince others that you are inflexible, a control freak, attached, stuck in your ways, crazy, evil, and worse. Stay strong, focused, loving, and forgiving in the path of these attacks. But at any point that the shoe really fits, be willing to recognize it, and change your ways. Work on improving your selection process to secure diversity with emotional maturity.

**2011 Refinement:** Learn to let go when the time is right. What it develops into may be very different than what you originally imagined, but you'll have changed too.

**2017 Refinement:** Yes, now it's been 25 years. At 80, I've grown old and have less energy too. I'm ready to simply admit that I've done the best I could in the time and place that this L.A. Eco-Village has happened, and it's doing just fine. Now my organization has just acquired an adjacent property that will probably take another 10 years to develop. So, that could extend my life and add fresh excitement and energy to the existing L.A. Eco-Village community. Footnote: an ecovillage is never finished; like an eco-system, it's fluid and ever changing.

**7. Don't be attached to the project or being number 1.** Facilitating widespread sustainability consciousness is the goal; "ecovillage" is a method of helping people get there.

**2005 Refinement:** Form coalitions with groups as they come on-line advocating for, teaching, demonstrating what you have been working on for years. Or once the ecovillage ideas "catch on" in your bioregion, go to the next phase of sustainability, e.g., developing curriculum for local schools, creating your own school, engaging in more public advocacy, writing the zoning codes, giving public talks, civic engagement, running for public office, etc.

**2011 Refinement:** ...unless you just want to retire to the garden. You've earned it!

**2017: Refinement:** If you stick with it long enough, all those "e.g.,"s will come to fruition and more!

**8. Do not use or exploit guilt to motivate people,** but recognize that many people depend on guilt for their own self-motivation. Help people transcend guilt by keeping focused on the vision. Keep your doors open to fresh and exciting energy. Generate excitement through art, parties, issues-oriented dialogue, etc.

**2005 Refinement:** Show a lot of appreciation for what others do to generate excitement.

**2011 Refinement:** Help others to overcome this tendency as well. Learn, teach, use an effective feedback method such as nonviolent communication.

**2017 Refinement:** In the intensely urban area we function in, and the growing disaster on the planet, everyone is over-extended, doing too much, not always stopping to smell the roses or engage in self-care. Become a hugger! Thirteen hugs a day may be the answer to a healthier you, and, thus, a healthier planet.

**9. Keep borrowing from others;** always credit when you can, but if there is not space or time or memory, trust our sustainability networks to know that you are trying to act on behalf of all of us.

**2005 Refinement:** Recognize others at every opportunity.

**2011 Refinement:** ...even when they don't really deserve it. Hopefully, they'll be inspired to rise to their publicity.

**2017 Refinement:** Generally, you can accomplish anything you want to in life, if you don't care who gets the credit!

**10. Be gracious,** maintain your sense of humor, keep people on track, forgive people from your heart; we're all doing the best we can; keep the air cleared; work at manifesting the values in the processes that you want to live with.

**2005 Refinement:** Attend to your own health first.

**2011 Refinement:** Attend to your own health first.

**2017 Refinement:** Attend to your own health first. We need each other to live as long and productively as we can. 🌱

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Lois meets with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to share sustainable urban living ideas.



Group photo of L.A. Eco-Village community.

Photos courtesy of Helene Raisin

# HAPPY, HEALTHY, FUNCTIONAL, FIT: What Works Best in Present-Day Intentional Communities

By Zach Rubin, Ma'ikwe Ludwig, and Don Willis

The *Communities Directory* is best known as an invaluable resource for community seekers: many a dog-eared copy has traveled the country on road trips in search of cooperative culture, and many a community enthusiast has the online Directory bookmarked. But the Directory is also an invaluable resource for a growing number of researchers. Yet, because cataloging can be a tedious process both for the FIC and member communities, the Directory's data is in some ways a superficial snapshot of the state of communities today.

We wanted to delve more deeply into the social systems of communities. Have you ever wondered what actually works? What leads to greater satisfaction, and what traits are common among communities that have survived the test of time? We wondered too, and this article is our first public presentation of the results of an 80-question survey we conducted of communities in the Directory in early 2017, created out of those curiosities. Almost 300 communities responded to this survey, though not every community answered every question, so not every chart in this article adds up to 300.

We are grateful to both the FIC and all of the communities that participated in this study, which paints a much deeper picture of the intentional community (IC) movement as it exists today. There is no way we could cover the full breadth of new knowledge created in just one magazine article, so here we focus on several key and salient themes that we think communities will find the most interest in: decision making, age of community, community satisfaction, and conflict resolution.

The topic that perhaps interested us the most was how communities make decisions, because that is linked to almost every other aspect of the community experience. There were two questions on the survey about community governance types: one that asked for the “Decision-Making Types” as formally outlined by the community (reported here in Chart 1), and one that asked for the “Decision-Making Structures” in how decision making actually happens in the community (reported here in Chart 2). These may seem like very similar categories, yet when the results are presented side-by-side the differences are palpable. The first question reveals that most communities use some form of consensus as their formal means of decision making, with a smattering of communities relying on majority votes, community councils, or sole leaderships.

For the second question, based on the prevalence of consensus, we might expect that most people would describe their community as having functional equality in decision making. Yet that number is less than half—only 60 report functional equality compared to the 139 consensus communities, and nine of those 60 that reported it also reported some other decision-making type than consensus. That, combined with the large number of respondents who said their community has a group of informal leaders, means many communities have a consensus-based structure that is not living up to its name. This overlaps to some extent with the response in Chart 2 that the community has a small group of leaders making the decisions, which is about 30 percent higher than the number of communities that reported being run by council, which also suggests that there are a number of communities whose consensus process is dominated by a few rather than being fully egalitarian.

Veterans of consensus decision making know that it doesn't necessarily eliminate power dynamics right away, nor promise to be the perfect end of community squabbles and struggles. Rather, consensus can help equalize power and create more equality even if they don't reach the “leaderless” idealized arrangement.

We know from previous research and personal experiences that these problems are not new to purportedly “leaderless” organizations—indeed it is often a pitfall when trying to run an organization with egalitarian decision-making structures that those who are either more outspoken, know how to manipulate group feelings better, or are simply more stubborn about group discussions will see that *their* consensus often wins out. Such groups tend to benefit from training on decision making and conflict resolution, which is discussed later.

Regardless of leadership type or structure, some ICs are happier than others when it comes to their group's ability to reach a decision. The use of consensus, or the presence of a sole leader who manages the community through charismatic authority, or informal leaders that rise to the top may influence how satisfied a group is with their leadership, though those should be considered alongside several other factors.

To capture community satisfaction with decision making, we built a *satisfaction scale* through combining the survey questions about each community's decision-making process, which are found in Box 1. Each question poses a ranking of 1 to 10, and with 13 questions that made for a maximum possible score on the scale of 130. Not a single community scored themselves as perfect, though a handful (five) were above 120. Only 12 percent of communities were below the halfway point on the scale, and the overall distribution skewed towards higher satisfaction. The average score on this scale was an 87, which implies that the average community is happier than not with their decision-making processes yet sees room for improvement.

Chart 3 breaks down average satisfaction and population across community age groups. Age, for this chart, was broken down into roughly equal cohorts of 20 percent of the respondent sample. What this means is that roughly 20 percent of the communities that responded to the survey were between zero and six years old (zero meaning that the community has not yet officially been established), with the oldest community reporting in the survey an age of 80 years. In parallel are the community populations, which show a predictable trend of increasing, on average, as the community gets older, though with a leveling off somewhere between 12 and 27 years old.

Age, though, seems to have little effect on a community's satisfaction with their decision-making processes. This tells us a few possible things: 1) communities will always struggle with their decision making, and getting it right is more of a journey than a destination, 2) population size doesn't seem to have a distinguishable effect on satisfaction, since communities do tend to grow as they age if they make that a part of their model, and 3) there are a healthy number of young groups buoyant with optimism about the community they are working to create. The only cohort that reports a notably higher score on the satisfaction scale is the youngest one, which is likely due to the presence of newly established or not fully established communities that have yet to run into their first major conflicts or roadblocks in decision making. While we might expect that as those communities age (if they survive) their satisfaction level will go down after encountering inevitable conflict, they also represent a rather notable cohort of new communities being formed. If the youngest cohort contained a wider set of ages than it does, that would mean few communities being formed, and if it were a narrower set of ages that would mean either explosive growth or a wave of utopian experiments forming much like we saw in the 1960s and 70s—and being similarly unlikely to survive long-term as many of them from that era didn't.

It would seem that leadership structure has more to do with satisfaction

with community governance processes than age. It doesn't matter how long your community has been around, getting governance right is what predicts whether a community will be happy with their decision making. In Charts 4 and 5 there are the same questions about community decision-making types and structures—except that instead of measuring the number of communities that practice each type those have been replaced with the average satisfaction level for that type. Chart 4 shows that the most satisfied communities are those with a community council. That smaller group of respondents shown in Chart 1 seem to have figured out something that other communities haven't, a right combination of egalitarian decision-making that gives everyone the feeling of an equal stake while also reducing the amount of work each individual needs to commit to by vesting some degree of it in a council. Often, community councils can rotate among community membership, so no one leader or group of leaders can ever claim too much power for too long, so it is also possible that the community council form helps to bypass the frustrations mentioned above with consensus decision making and the possibility of informal leadership.

The least satisfied communities were those with a sole leader at the helm. Those communities were also the least common type among communities surveyed, and this is a leadership style with a couple of caveats worth noting in the context of this survey. First, many communities that have a sole leader are often organized around a charismatic religious leader. Our data shows that communities with a sole leader are slightly more likely than others to report being based on a specific religious background or ideology. These may sometimes be better characterized as apocalyptic or millenarian, unconcerned with communities as a movement. It's not surprising then that fewer communities with sole leaders would be registered with the FIC Directory, or respond to our survey, as they would see themselves as part of some movement or tradition that is very different from the mission of building a sustainable and cooperative world. (At the same time, while this is FIC's mission, it is hardly universal among communities listed in the Directory.) Second is that sole leadership seems to be waning in popularity in communal experiments, though we can't make such conclusion from this survey alone. Compared to historical data on ICs, there are far fewer sole leaderships represented in this survey than in past snapshots of the movement (like Rosabeth Moss Kanter's book *Commitment and Community*, or Foster Stockwell's *Encyclopedia of American Communes*).

We know, though, from the survey responses that the most popular decision-making structure among communities is consensus or modified consensus. This is by no means a surprising revelation, and something we fully anticipated by adding an extra section of questions for consensus communities. Several of these pertain to the use of blocking, which is a key feature that distinguishes consensus as an egalitarian decision-making strategy. Typically, blocking is something that happens when an individual or small group exercises a form of veto power over finalizing a group decision because they see it as inherently damaging to the group or as contravening the group's values. So we assumed as part of the survey that the more a community permits or uses blocking, the more difficulty they would encounter in making decisions and smoothly governing the community. Box 2 shows the criteria we tested, as well as how they were assigned values in creating a blocking scale. For most of the statements, answering in a way that we expected to make blocking a bigger barrier to finalizing decisions in a smooth and easy manner were coded positively, and for a few we assigned a negative value because we expected them to demonstrate blocking was less of a barrier to smooth and easy decision making in the community. For example, if a community answered affirmatively to "we have never had a block," that was considered an indicator that blocking did not hold up decision making in the community, whereas if they answered "anyone can block a decision for any reason," we considered that as an indicator that blocking was more likely to hold up decision making either more regularly or for longer (or both).

The scale is presented in Chart 6, where we have designated communities on a scale from "Low Blocking" (those with blocking criteria that didn't interfere with decision making) to "High Blocking" (those with blocking criteria that more often interfered with decision making). Based on the answers to the questions in Box 2, we would expect blocking to happen a lot

### Box 1 – Decision Making Satisfaction Scale

Rate the following statement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (10). My community's decision making process...

1. is functional
2. is complicated
3. has served us well so far
4. is fair to all involved
5. reflects our common values
6. needs to change for the community to be successful
7. excludes some voices\*
8. is perfect
9. has more flaws than the decision-making processes of other communities\*
10. involves everyone
11. has been the source of a lot of struggle in my community\*
12. is easy to understand
13. generally has a high satisfaction rating from members

\*these question scores were inverted in building the satisfaction scale.

### Box 2 – Blocking Use Scale

How does blocking in your consensus system operate? Check all that apply.

1. Anyone can block a decision for any reason
2. We only allow blocks for reasons tied to group held values
3. We have a specific process in place for validating a block
4. We use a modified form of consensus that allows some number of blocks
5. Blockers must work with the group (or a subgroup) to create alternate proposal
6. People have to explain why they are blocking a decision\*
7. People do not have to explain why they are blocking
8. Blocks happen regularly--more than once a year
9. Blocks happen very rarely\*
10. We have never had a block\*

\*these options were encoded with a negative value on the scale, since they indicate lower barriers in blocking decisions.

Chart 1 - Decision Making Types

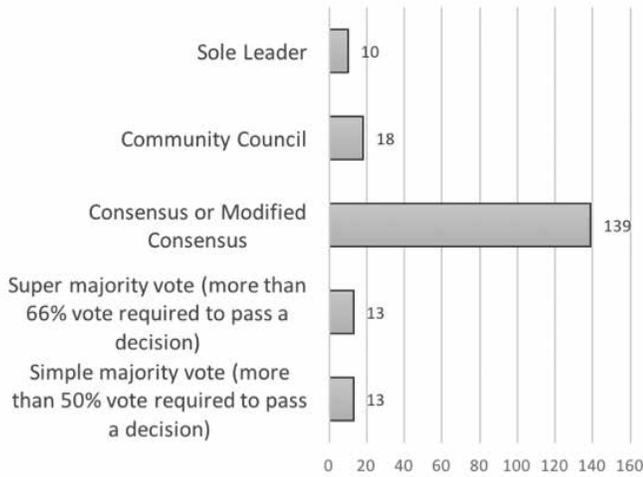


Chart 2 - Community Decision Making Structures

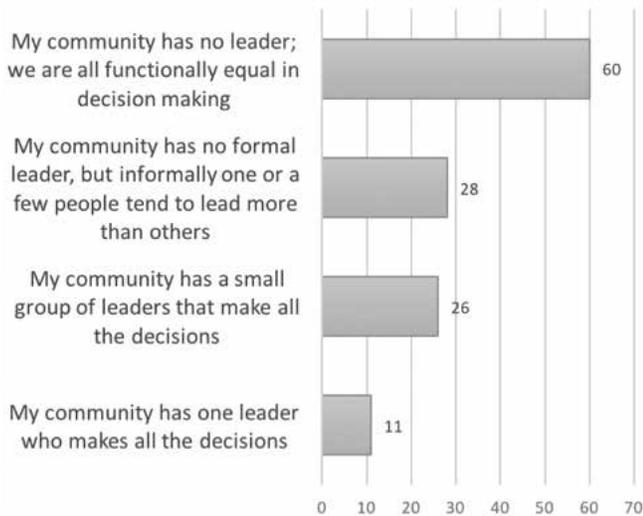
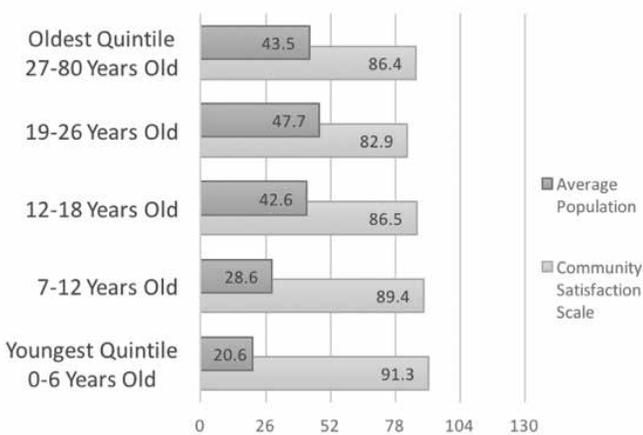


Chart 3 - Community Age, Population and Satisfaction



more often in High Blocking communities, and less often in Low Blocking ones. Another way to think about this would be that blocking interferes with a group's ability to make decisions more regularly in High Blocking communities than in Low Blocking ones. Therefore, we compared this to the Satisfaction scale (seen in Chart 6) and found that the more towards Low Blocking the community was, the greater level of satisfaction reported in their decision-making process.

To some extent, this is unsurprising; communities whose decisions are not obstructed with the use of blocks probably have a smoother decision-making process in general. We can't really say that blocks are a key cause of lower satisfaction, but rather that they are likely a symptom of some other type of discord in the community or a less well-functioning consensus system.

Rather than there being a causal connection between the use of blocking and dissatisfaction, it makes more sense to think of some other factor(s) that would have an effect on both satisfaction and the use of blocking. We can't really separate cause and effect from each other, though, as it is probably more of a feedback loop between community members holding up decisions through blocking and other reasons for community dissatisfaction.

A couple of other factors included in the survey may also have an effect on satisfaction. The first is the extent to which a community practices income sharing, which usually means that all income (from community businesses or other sources) is combined into one pool, from which everyone's needs are met. The data arranged in Chart 7 shows us that communities with full income sharing tend to report a higher degree of satisfaction with community decision making, and that communities without full income sharing tend to report similar but lower levels of satisfaction regardless of how sharing they were. (This conclusion comes with a caution, though: very few communities reported as full income sharing, so margins of error are higher; furthermore, deeper statistical analysis suggests that confounding factors that affect both income sharing and satisfaction may be yielding these results, rather than the two affecting each other directly.) Note that most communities reported no income sharing (177 of them), and only a few reported each for partial <50 percent on average (18), partial >50 percent of income on average (4), and full income sharing (16). None of the other variables considered here manifested such lopsided distributions. In order to say something more definitive about income sharing and satisfaction, a deeper study is warranted. At the very least, we can say that there is a weak but positive correlation between income sharing and decision-making satisfaction level, though nothing firmer than that.

A second factor was how communities handled conflict between community members, which we broke down into two categories: "minor" conflicts, which included interpersonal disputes on issues not critical to the community as a whole, and "major" conflicts, which included acts of violence, threats, or disputes that threaten the integrity of the community. These are reported in Chart 8, which shows that there is little difference in satisfaction reported between how communities handle major and minor conflicts, but a large degree of difference in satisfaction between communities that have formal requirements for members to go through community-mediated conflict resolution and those that make it optional to some degree or have no formal conflict-resolution process.

Those that have mandatory requirements for conflict resolution are strongly related to those that report a high level of satisfaction with decision-making processes. While the two measures are distinct, they are nonetheless related. Decision making often uses the same skill set as conflict resolution: careful listening, a willingness to take into account what is important to others, and ability to shift perspectives in light of new information. Therefore, the work a community and its members do towards maintenance of relationships also transfers to decision making, as individual conflicts either erupt in a group setting over group issues or well-maintained rapports support each other in resolving points of controversy.

A third factor we examined was how much a community spent on training for conflict-resolution processes. Communities were prompted with a series of questions on whether they deployed common conflict-resolution techniques like restorative circles, co-counseling, a public airing of grievance, and mediation, then asked how much their community spent in a typical

year for training on the use of those tools. In Chart 9, we see that communities with the highest level of satisfaction are those that actually spend nothing on conflict-resolution trainings. It is likely that many of those communities are either very new, and therefore have not yet encountered conflicts that have spurred them to seek outside help; are very homogeneous, and that helps them avoid conflict; or they have developed their own tools without the aid of outside help. Those that do spend money on trainings seem to benefit most from a high level of commitment to it—those that spent a little (\$1-\$500 per year) reported a low level of satisfaction in decision making, while those that reported a higher level of spending (\$500+ per year) were almost as satisfied as those that expended nothing on training. The lesson here is that communities that wish to commit to getting outside trainings on conflict resolution should not skimp, as a small investment doesn't seem to yield the same outcomes as a larger investment.

A final factor we examined is whether communities are particularly selective in bringing in new members. Unlike income sharing, membership selectivity did not seem to track in any particular way with community satisfaction. This is shown in Chart 10, which displays a fairly even level of satisfaction across a range of possible selectiveness, from being very selective to just letting in pretty much anybody who wants to join the community. Therefore, it would seem that community decision-making satisfaction is more closely tied to how members integrate into decision-making structures once they enter the community, rather than whether they are a good fit upon entry.

The aggregate of these results tells us a couple of very compelling things. First and foremost is that, on average, the more an IC works towards *community*—that is, the sharing of life's activities and necessities—the greater satisfaction level they report with their communal experiments. A lot of factors can be mixed into this (somewhat vague) notion of community feeling: how homogeneous a population they are, how radically different they are from the mainstream culture, and just how communal they start out. But determining whether they will be happy with it is much more a product of the mutual energies they expend toward their experiment.

There seem to be two sides to the coin for community. On the one, those individuals who are likely to find happiness in a fully communal lifestyle can more easily integrate into communities that place more communal requirements on them while those communities that try to strike a middle ground and are communal only in some ways will attract a membership with more varied orientations to communalism. On the other, communities that have a better sense of community in the first place are probably more likely to develop more communal mechanisms over time.

The second conclusion is that commitment mechanisms are a key part of generating satisfaction with community decision making. The more people are required to give of themselves—economically, behaviorally, emotionally—the more likely they are to have higher satisfaction in community decision making. This reaffirms what many studies of historical ICs have already told us, so we know the lessons of the past still hold true in some form to today. For example, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's 1972 book *Commitment and Community* (also mentioned above) was a historical survey of ICs from the 19th century and the 1960s. She found that communities that had a greater number of commitment mechanisms persisted for longer, and were therefore in her estimation considered more successful.

More recently, Richard Sosis and Eric Bressler elaborated on this hypothesis in the academic journal *Cross-Cultural Research* by re-examining many of the same communities and describing the key commitment mechanisms as those that were "costly to fake." Commitments such as belief structures are easy to say that one adheres to, but commitments like abstention from alcohol or daily prayer are difficult to avoid doing, and therefore communities with commitments members would have difficulty faking were more successful in building a long-lasting community through quickly and easily weeding out the uncommitted. Likewise, some of the commitment mechanisms we've covered here like income sharing and mandatory conflict resolution are very costly, if not impossible, commitments to fake. A community's initial selectiveness in finding new members didn't have anything to do with this, either. Our survey reconfirms the centrality of commitment mechanisms to community success.

Of course, success should not only be measured in longevity as those previous

Chart 4 - Community Decision Making Types, Satisfaction

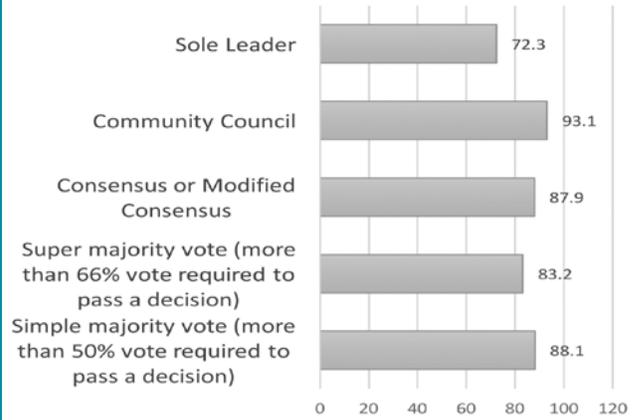


Chart 5 - Community Decision Making Structures, Satisfaction

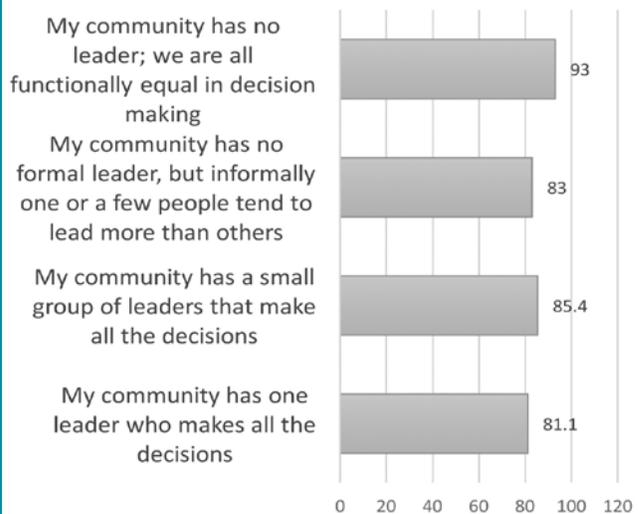
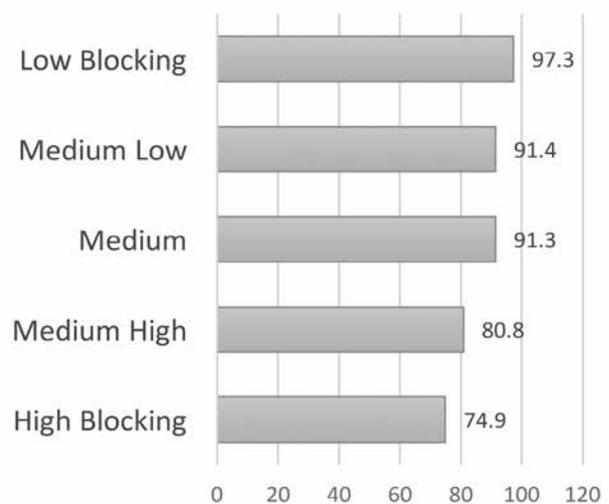


Chart 6 - Blocking and Community Satisfaction



studies have used, so we think that this survey adds some nuance to their conclusions by introducing the importance of satisfaction in community decision making. That may or may not predict longevity, but given that our data is about the present we have no way of predicting such things. Besides, people move to communities for reasons rooted in the present: self-actualization, a feeling of connection with others, reducing consumption, etc. Perhaps the historians of the future will use a different metric of success for the ICs of today.

We caution the reader to not take our results as gospel for what works to make a successful community. It's worth pointing out that using survey data comes with some key limitations, most notably that we are forced to talk in terms of averages and aggregates instead of individuals. Whether you are in a community presently and thinking of ways to improve your decision-making processes, or are thinking of founding one and deliberating what those processes could look like, this should only be a suggestion point for understanding what sort of practices will work best in your situation, and perhaps encouragement to discuss options you may not have otherwise considered.

Nonetheless, these data represent what we think are significant indicators of what makes for a happier, more cohesive and functional community. Should your community take steps to increase the level of egalitarian practice, create stronger commitment mechanisms, and seek outside assistance in conflict resolution, we would expect that community to become more

satisfied with the outcomes in decision making.

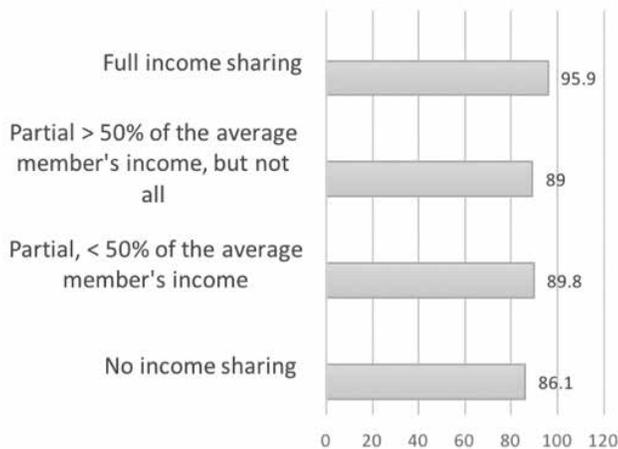
If this seems like common sense, then all we've done is put some empirical weight behind your view of communities. If it seems extraordinary, then perhaps it will open you up to thinking about new arrangements and possibilities. Either way, we hope to have contributed in some small way to a healthier, more functional communities movement. 🌱

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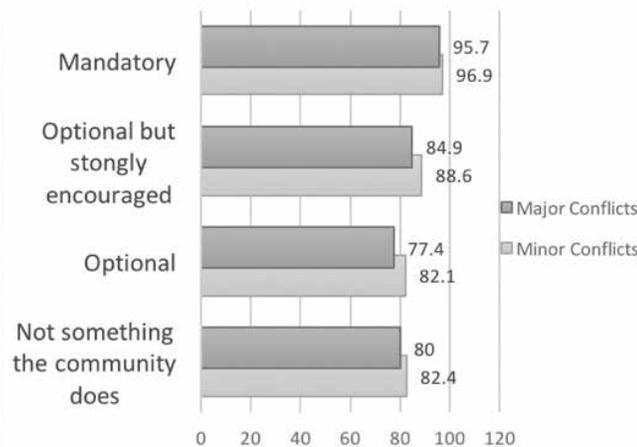
*Ma'ikwe Ludwig works with intentional communities as a consultant and trainer, has lived in community for 20 years, and is working on starting an income-sharing ecovillage in Laramie, Wyoming. She is the executive director of Commonomics USA, which works at the intersection of economic and ecological justice, and is on the FIC's Board. Her most recent book is Together Resilient: Building Community in the Age of Climate Disruption.*

*Don Willis is a Huggins Fellow and doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He earned a B.A. in sociology from the University of Central Arkansas and a M.A. in sociology from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, where he completed a thesis entitled "Resources and Relationships: Food Insecurity and Social Capital among Middle School Children." Broadly, his interests are in social inequality, health disparities, food insecurity, youth, and the life course.*

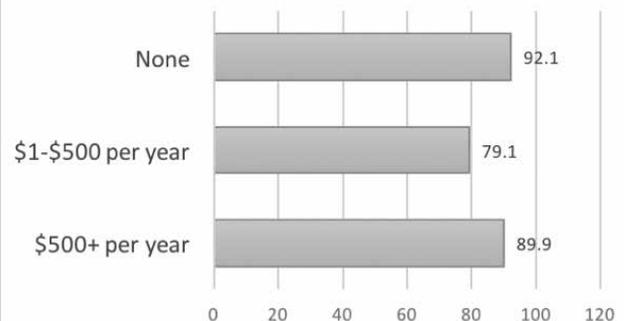
**Chart 7 - Income Sharing and Community Satisfaction**



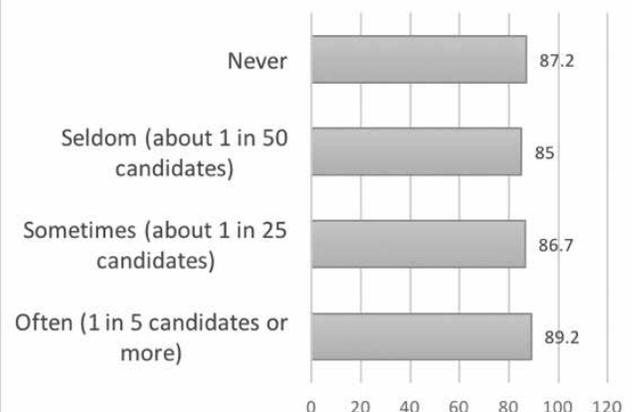
**Chart 8 - Conflict Resolution and Satisfaction**



**Chart 9 - Conflict Resolution Spending and Satisfaction**



**Chart 10 - Member Selectivity Community Satisfaction**



# INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IN A NICARAGUAN JUNGLE:

## Honoring my duality through community practices

By Elizabeth Arnott

Elizabeth Arnott

Sunset overlooking  
Ometepe's volcano.

I have always been two things at once...literally marked on my body through a pair of confused eyes—one blue, one brown, and reiterated through my visit with a Shaman in the highlands of India, as he stared into these tangled eyes and uttered the words “you are this, and you are that, and you forever will be both.” It took many years to understand what he meant, but as I entered an intentional community in the Nicaraguan jungle, I began to understand.

I was studying international law at the time, and with this came a bureaucratic world full of elitist language and moot court competitions and a long, complex thesis. I loved this part of myself; I loved dressing up and drinking expensive wine and talking political jargon at exclusive events. For many years, however, this came at the expensive of the mystical goddess inside of me—the woman who longed to be jumping barefoot through the jungle with knotted hair and a hammock for a bed. I struggled with this duality inside, not quite understanding how I could be both of these things at once and consequently ignoring, arguably, the more important part of me. Others would struggle with it too—and such black-and-white judgments took a toll on the way I viewed myself. I spent a lot of time pushing this goddess away, trying to hide and ignore her for fear of criticism. But, just as placing a band-aid on a wound only hides but does not heal, this goddess eventually bled out.

In the company of my academic friends, I was often able to receive a type of intellectual stimulation that I will forever thrive on. I would spend my evenings partaking in heated political debates and sharing legal insights, always learning and growing from each other's knowledge. But when it came to my desire to feel more spiritually connected to the earth, to spend time in nature, and to investigate alternate states of consciousness, many of my academic friends thought I was a little out of my mind. By the same token, when I would spend time with many of my friends who embarked on a less conventional and more spiritual path, I also faced judgment for being “too far into the matrix.” For years, I felt torn between one group of friends who judged me for dancing around fires, and another who judged me for throwing on mascara and kickin' it at the office. But as the Indian Shaman had cautioned me so many years before, I am this, and I am that, and I forever will be both. I owe my Nicaraguan experience to embracing this beautiful symmetry in my life.

My stay at an intentional community in Nicaragua taught me that not only is it okay to move in between these two worlds, but that anybody else's judgment about this has never actually been about me. Furthermore, it taught me how to harness the moral foundation of intentional community and use it as a tool which I am free to pick up and put down throughout my life, as I see fit.

Here are three lifelong lessons that my stay at an intentional community taught me:

### Unplug

First, and perhaps quite obviously, the benefits of unplugging from technology are indescribable. It is evident that as a society, we are over-attached to technology. In community, we had access to Wi-Fi only during certain hours and in a common space far from the rooms where we would eat, meditate, and sleep. We were encouraged to lock our technology away and to call upon it only when deemed necessary.

Ironic as it may seem, living in a community setting can largely be about finding solitude and creating a safe space for self-reflection. Of course, solitude is hard to find when you are constantly plugged into the outside world, so it is important to turn off and remove these harmful distractions. It is hard to do at first out of your own sheer will power, but after easing into this transition with the help of my community, it is a practice I will forever draw up in order to re-balance.

Unplugging from technology creates the shift into the next lesson learned:

### Experience genuine connection without expectation

Staying in an intentional community allowed me to practice honest love and connection with my fellow human beings, without judgment or expectations. As a group, we often created and participated in workshops that, to someone outside looking in, probably seemed a little strange. We mimicked animals, we danced topless, we expressed ourselves however we felt fit—all without a wince of judgment. Through participating in a space free of judgment, I was able to let go of judgments about others and myself.

When we release these expectations about how people should behave, or how they should treat us—when we let go of that energy we've been taught that sees a black-and-white world in which people are either wrong or right—we leave room for something magical to happen: authentic connection. We create freedom.

The people I spent time with in the community were from all over the world, coming and

(continued on p. 74)

# Overcoming Our Americanness

By Colin Doyle

“I’m planning to start my own community.” Ah, a consummate American statement. Solo cooperation.

In this country there is a common sentiment that a person should go forth and set the trend, then others join it. In a culture where Warren Buffett, Donald Trump, Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, and Richard Branson are elevated as role models, we are trained to think big or not at all. No one in fourth grade says they want to be a social worker or a farmer or a good cooperater—that’s not sexy enough. I become a bold leader and they join me. Experienced communitarian Karen Hery hit gold when, speaking at the Village Building Convergence in Portland, Oregon a few years ago, she had all present hold up their right hand and repeat a pledge to try living in existing communities *before* starting their own. That’s just what the movement ordered.

Communitarians in the United States are in an interesting position. On one hand, we are inheritors of a societal attitude of “To hell with what everyone else is doing, I’m doing my own thing.” Examples include starting ones own company, lone wolf homesteading, triathlons, and climate change denial. On the other hand, we have come around to the perspective that cooperation is both essential and satisfying—sharing lawnmowers, childcare, and best practices. This pertains not just to dealing with others in our present but acknowledging the past and what can be learned from it. This conflict I believe mostly simmers unnoticed in the heart of an American, but has important outward effects in how we act in community.

This tension is much less in other parts of the world. On a recent trip to Denmark I learned about the strong history of Danish co-ops, a nationwide system and ethic of collectivism that was the norm until the 1950s. Cooperation still pervades society. It’s little surprise, then, that cohousing first began in Denmark, and that my friend Camilla says her thriving ecovillage—which is noteworthy by my American standards—is common and unextraordinary in Denmark.

Learning from the past is probably also more common outside the United States. At Auroville in India it was clear to me that the spirit and message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother resonate strongly through the community decades later.

Movement toward such cooperation in the US may be connected with age, of both the country as a whole and of its citizens. As the young upstart ages he tends to discover that resonance with those around him is a good thing, worth having in life. And going it alone gets tiring—paddling against the current of society tires the arms after a while. Because of both quality of life and ethics, there is a steady flow of Americans toward communal living, but our individualist imprint runs deep, and can bubble up unrecognized by us.

Where I do I land on this topic? Raised as an American who tends to be independent and spends a lot of time alone, I have a prominent *screw them* streak in me (which I don’t flaunt, so it takes new acquaintances a long time to discover it). Over the years, though, I also came to see that I want similar-minded people around me. But I don’t want to just have people physically around me, but actually engage with them—I get energy from other people, and at heart I (and almost every human) want to socialize. So partly for my personal well-being I joined an intentional community. Playing well with others isn’t hard for me: doing my dishes, observing quiet hours, treating other people and our shared resources with consideration, and generally not being an asshole. But the young rebel in me doesn’t go down easily. In my community (Lost Valley Educational Center) we encourage new residents to read up on sociocracy, nonviolent communication, and permaculture, yet as a long-running pillar in the community on only one of those three have I made any degree of effort.

On the history front, until recently I hadn’t acknowledged that I have ancestors and they may have something of value. This would be akin to a cardinal sin in most cultures, but not in anti-historical young America. I consider myself to be of hum-drum white European background, and am happy when people can’t guess which part of the US I come from, because I’m not proud of that region. An arrogant, irrational slice of me still thinks I popped into existence *ex nihilo* and I’m the lone agent of all things in my life.

Having wised up some, when I came to Lost Valley in 2010 my main goal was to help intentional communities learn from each other, to not reinvent the wheel but be a stronger force in changing the broader society. But the community/business was in survival mode then, and I quickly put down the push for intercommunity exchange, and mostly haven’t picked it up again. The need to make money to stay afloat can keep us busily separated—cooperation and interchange doesn’t have an immediate revenue stream.

Compound that with the simple ease of not making the effort, add a dash of human laziness, and

you have a recipe for a meal for one, not a potluck of many.

I see an added challenge to sustaining communities. My observation is that independence and strong will are a requirement for someone to join an intentional community, but those same characteristics can undermine the collective mentality that makes them function well. When whitewater kayaking, you need to paddle hard to get out of the strong mainstream but then much more gently once you're in the calmer eddy, or else you may zoom out the other side, flip yourself, or crash into others. It takes both passion and restraint to arrive at *and* cooperate well in an intentional community in the US. It is partly because of this challenge that the one I live in has only a single resident of over seven years out of the 50 living onsite. (I'm sure dealing with the turnover/passthrough challenge has probably been covered in other COMMUNITIES articles over the years. But I wouldn't know—why would I read someone else's article? I'm doing my own thing. But I expect *you* to read *my* article...)

However we desperately need to learn from past (and present) communities, and collate lessons from our own. Otherwise we choose to bob as separate crafts on the ocean of our uncooperative and ahistorical Americanness. Let's lash ourselves into a more solid size, throw up coordinated sails, and make faster headway toward the social and ecological sustainability that enriches our lives and gives our society a future hope. Hooray!

But I'll get to that later. I'm busy right now—I need to harvest my tomatoes, and nobody else is gonna do it. 🍅

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*Colin Doyle is head of sustainability education and events at nonprofit Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter, Oregon, and lives in onsite Meadowsong Ecovillage (lostvalley.org). He enjoys thoughtful conversation, experiencing different cultures and ecosystems, and exploring huge, craggy mountains.*

## An Irony of Modern Communitarianism

There is an irony that we are all participating in by reading this very magazine. We communitarians focus on quality of life and resilience at a very local level while at the same time learning from others thousands of miles away. I learn more from articles about Dancing Rabbit in Missouri and Findhorn in Scotland, or visits to La'akea in Hawaii and Damanhur in Italy, than I do talking to locals I live within biking distance of. Likewise, Lost Valley is known to many permaculturalists and communitarians around the country but is unknown to some in our own little town. It's a strange irony made possible by modern technology, which we've come to see as perfectly normal.

—CD



Danish ecovillage.

Colin Doyle

# A Community Journey

By *Brittney Love*

I had never put much thought into changing my lifestyle, or embarking on establishing a community, until I spent the nine months of my pregnancy living remotely in the National Forests of Arizona. It was then that I realized our old world was falling in on itself, and there's nothing more motivating to make change than when you're about to bring life into this world. This precious time in nature showed me that it's crucial to learn how to work with the land and strengthen community.

After my son was born, I discovered the Intentional Communities website and decided it was time to travel the country and explore the variety of ecovillages and alternative lifestyles on the planet. Over the course of six months, my son and I traveled from Washington state, down through the Southwest, and up the East Coast to New York City, stopping at multiple well-known communities along the way.

The first thing that stood out, with each community we visited, was the incredible architecture, unique homes, and the shared intention of building with minimal impact. The Lama Foundation, in New Mexico, had the most breathtaking views from their mountain oasis, and I admired their pristine craftsmanship. Almost all the communities had structures that were designed from sustainable materials, such as cob, as well as minimizing the need for fossil fuels and implementing solar and hydropower for electricity. "It's highly likely that in my lifetime, there will be a collapse and we are going to need an ecological way to live and coexist. There are so many things in our culture that we think are necessities, but are really luxuries. We need to learn not only how to grow food, but how to work together on a social level," said a member from Earthaven, located in North Carolina. Freedom of artistic expression was also a shared theme at the ecovillages, which was a joy to see, especially since it's such a rare find our modern world.

All the communities had their own organic gardens, most of which were grown in a permaculture setting. I wouldn't say they were completely self-sufficient, but most were close when it came to growing their own food. Community meals became a favorite ritual of ours at each stop, as we were provided some of the most delicious and nourishing meals I'd ever experienced, and I enjoyed being with everyone. As a single mother, I also found the childcare programs to be so helpful and the children truly loved being together. Avalon Gardens, near Tucson, Arizona, had one of the best academic programs, where the students not only learned general studies, but also had quality time for arts and crafts, creating music, and spending time in nature. "I wouldn't want to go to a regular school because they teach you to think in a limited box," said a seven-year-old boy. "I love all my friends here and how much time we get to be outside. My favorite subject is math."

Each community had various work-hour requirements and structured meetings. It did appear that the communities with daily check-ins and weekly quotas had members that were less stressed and were getting a lot more accomplished. Another key factor I found influencing the success of the various communities was the drug and alcohol policies. The places where the use of alcohol was more prevalent seemed to also have a lot more drama and members coming and going. Open and clear communication was another big challenge, but the communities where meetings were held on a more regular basis did not struggle as much with this issue. "Community living comes with its own set of challenges. We have to practice being able to deal with people that you may not like, or agree with, but you still need to be able to sit down and have coffee with that person," said a member from Acorn, in Virginia.

"I've been a part of several communities throughout my life, and I think the reason I was called to them was because I was searching for family. I see community living as an imperfect avenue where people don't have to live in a hypnotized way and don't have to contribute to building an empire. You have food that you know is good quality and you learn how to be self-reliant. The other thing is, we live in a society that isolates us as human beings. But to live in a place where the intention is to break down the walls of emotion and reclaim your vulnerability—to share in your joy and your tears, it's a profound and beautiful thing. Living in community is a way to take back your humanity and everything that's been taken from us," said Mick, from Heathcote, in Baltimore, Maryland.

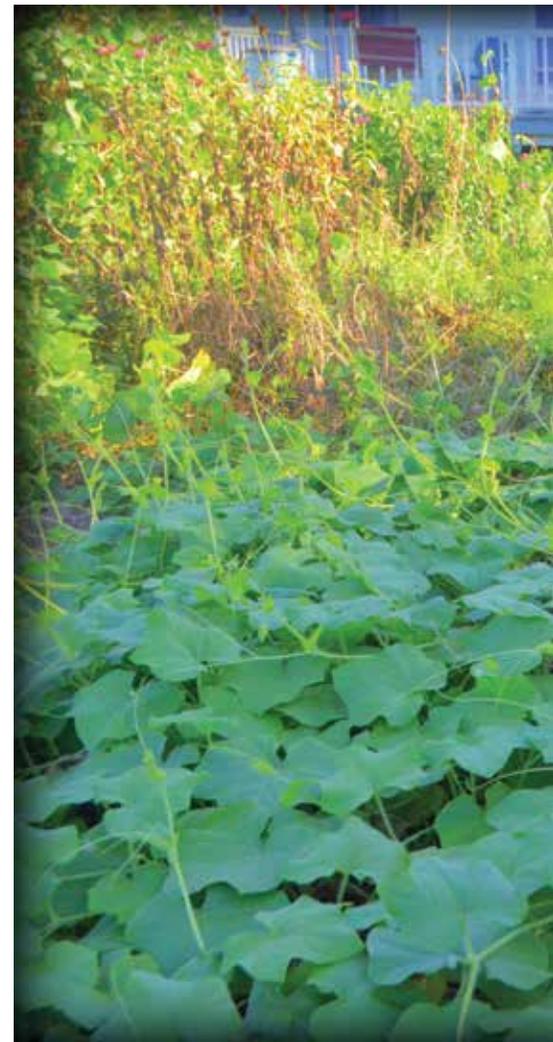
Since returning to Arizona, I have begun working with a beautiful, young, and inspired group of friends who are making a big difference in this area. We currently have a community house in the suburbs, but we've transformed the lawn into an organic garden and host neighborhood block parties, so we can share information on growing food, composting, and being there for our fellow humanity. We've adopted the weekly meeting check-in, which has been a powerful tool to get to the root of an issue and to address emotional needs. Our next step will be acquiring land, which now

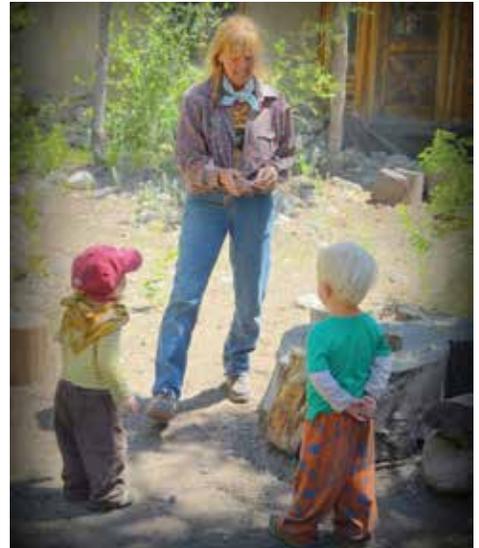
we are extensively researching.

My journey across the country was so humbling and gave me a strong renewed sense of faith. Coming together to work for the betterment of life and each other is happening and it's working! The success of coexisting comes with the remembrance of why we chose to come together in the first place, and not losing sight of that. Challenges and setbacks are a part of life, but we can never give up. We need to look out for one another, do our part on this Earth, and not expect everything to be handed to us. There are some things in life that take work and effort, but it's worth it! I hope you never feel you're too small to make a difference... 🌱

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*Brittney Love is the author of the inspiring travel series, Diary of a Starseed. Her books and videos are available at [StarseedStory.com](http://StarseedStory.com).*





Photos courtesy of Brittany Love

# DREAMING of a Different Way

By Amanda Crowell

My parents wanted the American Dream. Both college dropouts with blue collar jobs, they valued education and the trappings of middle-class living. By the time we were in high school, we had transitioned from a rented city house to a post-war ranch house in the growing suburban town where my mother had gone to high school. No matter the financial strain, we always had our school supplies, church clothes, and family photos. I knew funds got tight pretty frequently, although my parents would never talk to us about the realities of family finances and they continued to run the air conditioning and buy new furniture as though they did not have any worries. My mother in particular enjoyed being a modern woman, with a television in her bedroom and boxed and canned food ready to eat. My own predilections towards the outdoors and hand-crafting encouraged by my dog-eared copies of *Little House* and *My Side of the Mountain* were indulged as cute, until high school when I spent a messy afternoon baking bread with my high school boyfriend and got banned from the kitchen.

Going to college was never a question for bookworm me, though I understood that I would have to pay for it myself. I earned a few scholarships, not enough to pay room and board as well as tuition, so I took out loans. I naively picked biology as a major based on what I thought would be most “right” for a career, and ignored my own inclinations primarily because I had no idea about careers or aptitudes. I went into a major I had no talent for. Two years in I switched to English because I loved to read and could do that better than the math-intensive classes I was failing. I still had no direction, but at least the courses were more interesting and I had the knack for them. I was able to take some classes that sang to me, but still did not inform any plan for my future—Amish History and Culture, Missouri Fish and Wildlife, and, oddly, Macroeconomics. At the same time I moved from work-study jobs into more professional jobs, including substitute teaching, which I did not care for. I was struggling with intense loneliness; living in the dorms had been fun, but moving off-campus left me isolated. I invited people over

all the time, often to the detriment of my school work and my own integrity. Spending leftover loan funds filled the space with hardcover copies of classic novels and matching kitchen sets, but I was still lost.

At the end of my junior year, a friend introduced me to Sandhill Farm community. I had no idea intentional communities existed, and to spend time at Sandhill and learn about Dancing Rabbit, Twin Oaks, and others excited me about the future. May Day celebrations! Outdoor work! Environmental justice! Family living! After some discussion with a resident at Sandhill, though, I was told that I could not live there until I had paid off my student loans, as there was no mechanism in that income- and expense-sharing community for dealing with resident debt. Before it had even begun, my future seemed over. To a 21-year-old English major, \$15,000 of debt seemed insurmountable.

With the goal of paying off the loans, I approached a professor for advice. Knowing little about me besides my aptitude for books, he suggested graduate school was my only option. Looking back, I realize that I could have gone to career services, just as I could have questioned the financial aid office’s blindly giving out maximum student loan dollars to someone whose Bachelor’s in English might not make for good risk. At the time, I had only the example of my parents, who got loans for houses and cars, who put everything on credit card, and who seemed to be doing well. I applied for graduate school, and of course, more loans.

At some point after I started graduate school, I gave up my goal. Perhaps it was the mounting debt—I took out the maximum every year, whether I needed it or not, and spent it on trips and furniture and constantly moving from apartment to apartment, trying to find a “home.” It might



*The author's husband tuning the banjo for a Friday Firepit.*



*Front yard farm on the Fourth of July.*



*A community garden in St. Louis.*



*Potluck!*



*The author and her son on an errands walk, Pine Bush: the Alien Capital of New York.*



*First New York pumpkin, 2010.*

have been seeing my friends from undergrad go on to get jobs and start families. It may just have been accepting what I felt was inevitable: I would become a teacher and get better furniture and maybe someday I could retire and travel. Whatever the reason, giving up for me meant self-destruction. I spent more money, blew through credit cards, had frequent and mostly awful relationships in my fight against loneliness, and stopped most of my green habits. Luckily I had made some good friends who held me through depression and nasty break-ups, but I was still searching.

Finally I decided, mostly subconsciously, that I needed stability. I found a willing partner on short notice, got married (ignoring all the signs that it was the wrong decision), and almost immediately got pregnant.

And gradually found my center. How could I have my son and justify destroying the world he was going to live in? At this point, I had over \$100,000 in student loans. The year I had my son, my parents' house was foreclosed on after bankruptcy. I saw the future, and I knew I didn't want it. I turned into a different person, or rather, I rediscovered who I wanted to be. My stunned husband agreed to recycling, a ban on processed foods and soda, and joining materials-sharing sites such as Freecycle.

A near-suicidal bout with postpartum depression after a move to an isolated suburban ranch house catalyzed us to buy a big old house in the center of St. Louis. I reveled in the public transportation, shopping at the farmers' market on Saturdays with my son, planting flowers in my yard, and getting to know our neighbors. When my brother died just before my son turned two, I channeled my grief into two abandoned city lots on my block, turning them into flourishing community gardens. My family and friends all came out to help, drawn together by creation after loss. The day over a dozen people, including my father, my two best friends, my husband, half a dozen neighbors, and some students helped me build the final beds in the second garden was the day I realized that I was not limited to a "fantasy someday" move to an intentional community. Cobbling together part-time teaching jobs was not going to make me debt-free, and my time priority was my son. But I had wonderful people surrounding me, all of whom seemed to crave the same connectivity.

The community gardens provided a solid link to my community. I'd get up on a Sunday morning at 5 a.m. before the sun got too hot. My son and I would slip out of the house to the gardens, him digging in the piles of compost the city delivered for free, me weeding. By 6:30, neighborhood kids were out and would stop by to dig, see worms, and stare in bemused disgust as I nibbled mint leaves straight off the plants. I would crack the hydrant with the tools given to us by the water department so we could water the garden, and I'd set up a sprinkler to wa-

ter the kids and the garden. When churchgoers stopped their cars to compliment the gardens and tell me about the gardens their grandmas had, I would press zucchini or cucumbers on them. I always offered my students extra credit for community service, and every semester I would have a handful working with me in the gardens. Some kept coming after classes ended. The local nursery donated fruit trees; Gateway Greening donated seeds. I got to know neighbors, my alderman, my state rep, the city foresters, and all the local greeners. While it wasn't perfect—there was occasional vandalism and always lots of squash vine borers—nothing was better than coming into the house with my filthy but smiling son after a long day in the community gardens.

Monthly potlucks at my house provided

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## I've learned over the last 20 years that community, no matter where, is the people who show up, whether to work or to eat or to toast marshmallows.

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more community. All those stories of barn raisings and church socials inspired me to find a giant table secondhand; every month we'd invite everyone whose email address we had. Coworkers, grad school friends, high school friends, family, neighbors—they all came at various points and in various configurations. We pulled our mismatched chairs up and talked about politics, music, movies, books, dreams, and, of course, gardening. We shared food, tried new recipes, and laughed as the children in attendance ran in circles around the table. In good weather we ate outside and sometimes toured the gardens; in bad weather someone might bring a game or crafts. It was what I had wanted all along: a full house of people, relaxing, living, and working together (we always cleaned up before dessert!). The fewest guests I ever had was three during an ice storm; the most was 42, which was the last potluck before I moved to New York.

Moving to New York was hard. Finally having found my community, I had to leave it, again because of the student loans. My husband had heart failure at 28 and could no longer realistically work the desk job that was killing his spirit and his body. I had to get a full-time position doing something I was still not sure I wanted to do as a career. We found a tiny apartment (even upstate New York is pretty pricey) and left the gardens, the friends, the family, the neighbors, and the potlucks.

My husband discovered a local intentional community while we were scrambling to find our place, and when we toured I asked about

resident policies. I was hoping that we could work something out where I would work my job as a teacher to pay my debt, but my family could still live there and dedicate ourselves otherwise to the work of the community. Yet again my loans were an impediment—residents were not allowed to work outside of the community businesses, and personal debt burdens were unwelcome within the group's shared purse.

The next few years were difficult. Working full-time at a job that had 80-hour weeks or 10-hour weeks depending on the time of the semester took adjustment. My husband and I, long rocky, divorced. My father was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, necessitating many trips back to Missouri. Financially, living in New York is much more expensive. While many in New York are friendly, communication is different. "We'll have you over for dinner sometime soon," does not actually mean a dinner date; it is a standard farewell. Distance in New York is different, too. In St. Louis, distance never seemed a social challenge, with potluck attendees sometimes driving an hour to join us. In New York, distances of a half hour or more are often a real barrier to gathering, although probably the weather and the mountain roads are to blame. Other than trains or buses to the city, there isn't public transportation, so having a car is crucial, despite our efforts otherwise. There are also more limited schooling options for my son, who has very high anxiety that does not mesh well with standard public school formats.

Luckily, we were adopted by a farming family who had lived in the same place since 1775.

The seventh generation of Westtown Lains took us in as renters and as family. They plowed a garden for us, taught us the different planting cycles of the Northeast, and invited us to their family reunion. Even after I had to move because of the divorce, they remained friends. They gave my son an extended family when he was truly longing for all the relatives left behind. Otherwise, creating a community here has been harder; my "welcoming to all" attitude has sometimes left me open to those who were not supportive and who did not understand my more direct, Midwestern commu-

nication. Having personal upheavals also prevented me from really meshing into a community, although I'm very lucky that my son's father has remained close as a great co-parent. One of the blessings of working full-time is that after failed attempts at public school, I can send my son to The Birch School, an experiential school that shares similar values and is small and active enough to alleviate his anxiety.

Seven years into my life in New York, I am finally finding the community sweet spot again. I'm now married to a man who has also longed for a deeper community connection; we've got a little house in a Mayberry-meets-Norman Rockwell kind of town where we can—and do—walk to the grocery store, the hardware store, the nursery, and the farmers' market. We know our neighbors' names and have enjoyed lending them a hand as well as appreciated their help (Thank you, Gary, for snowblowing the last 26-inch snowfall off our driveway!). We have made a point of being involved in street festivals, road cleanup, and pancake breakfast fundraisers. What we cannot grow in our yard, we buy from nearby farmers. Our students honk at us as they pass us walking our dog; the UPS driver finds us with the note, "That family whose front lawn is a farm," and our mail carrier's dog plays with ours at the dog park. Last summer we tried out the concept of a "crop mob," where several families put in one rotating work day every month at each other's houses. It was barn raising, 2016 style! Potlucks haven't really worked out here, but we built a firepit in our tiny back yard, and in summer we have monthly Friday nights when we invite all to bring snacks and sit around the fire. Talented musician friends bring their instruments. It's a house full of family again.

I have not given up on intentional communities. One change I made after my son was born was to live within my means. Now that I'm full-time, the exchange for all the work hours is that I'm slowly paying down my student loans. By the time my son is out of school, I should be able to pick up and go; the thought of finally being able to live in an intentional community still holds attraction. Whatever happens, I will not be discouraged if I cannot live in an intentional community. I've learned over the last 20 years that community, no matter where, is the people who show up, whether to work or to eat or to toast marshmallows. My parents wanted the American Dream; I found out how joyful it is to wake up from that dream and meet reality. If I had not been turned away from Sandhill and the other community because of my indebtedness to that dream, I would not have met the people I share my life with now; I would not have discovered the community I needed was there all along. 🍷

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*Amanda Crowell is an English professor at Orange County Community College. She lives with her husband and son in Pine Bush, New York, although her heart will always belong to the Cardinals. She recommends avoiding student loans to anyone who will listen.*

# FORTY YEARS IN COMMUNITY: Has It Made a Difference?

By Linda Moore

When I was in my 20s, living in community became a lifestyle that pollinated my soul. I was living in a tenement-style building in what is now known as Mile End in Canada's largest bilingual city, Montreal. Prior to that, I had grown up in a nuclear family on the west coast, in Victoria, aptly named after one of England's monarchs. As we sat together over coffee, one of my new roommates asked, "Aren't there a lot of WASPS in Victoria?" WASPS? Like the ones that sting?? I was confused! My friends laughed openly. "Uh, no, White Anglo Saxon Protestants!!" Thus struck the first crack in my cultural conditioning. I came from a place where almost everyone was a WASP, which explains why I didn't understand the acronym. I was now living in a cosmopolitan city, and there was a lot to learn about culture.

A year later, in 1977, I returned to complete my final year at the University of Victoria. I was excited about alternative lifestyles, and wrote an essay for a sociology course that included references from COMMUNITIES magazine. I got involved in cooperative housing, a Canadian publicly funded housing experiment that had taken hold in that period. I attended weekly planning meetings that would result in extending the original cluster of four duplexes to include two new buildings that could house another 20 families.

Over the years, I have lived in two communities that have included several households, homes for 20 to 40 people. The first was a rural experiment on Quadra Island based on spiritual principles that encouraged one to work on one's self in the context of sharing daily life in a group. Through collective efforts, we ran a successful grocery business that introduced organic food to the islanders, started a Waldorf School, ran a fruit stand, grew food in two large gardens, celebrated through shared meals, song, and dance, and nurtured the young lives of at least 12 children. The interpersonal relationships that developed at that time were the most deep and meaningful I've had in my life. In my youthful idealism and based

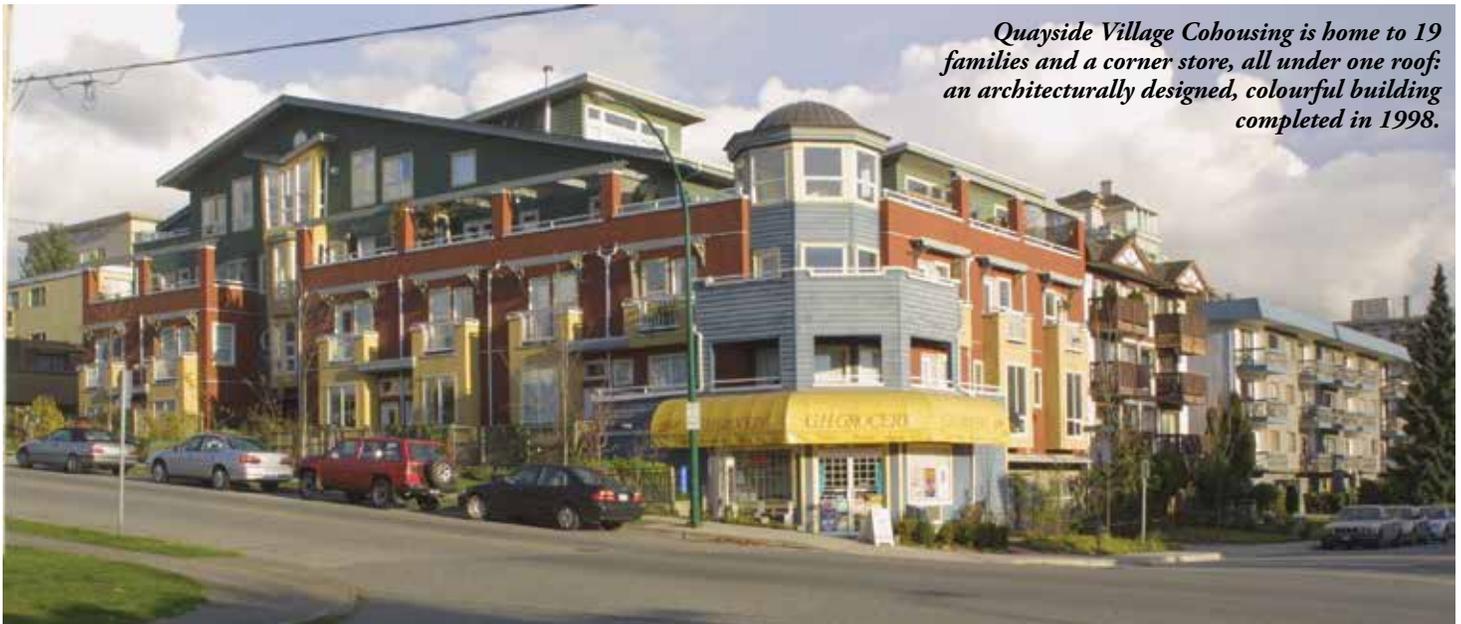
on my studies, I believed that was normal. This is how life works! Sharing endeavors with others, developing ongoing meaningful relationships, knowing where your food comes from, it seemed like the only way to live.

Our dream was to build a community that would last for 200 years. Alas, we fell short of that goal; it lasted only four. Imagine my shock when the group decided to disband and move to the city. This idyllic life came to a rather abrupt end when the major shareholders decided to put the property up for sale. It didn't take me long to realize that I could not caretake the property without the community, and I reluctantly followed some of the others to take up an urban lifestyle.

It was 1986. The food store concept we had been working with metamorphosed into an urban version that included artful displays of organic and gourmet food, fresh baked goods, bulk foods, and an amazingly popular café, an awesome menu, and genuine service. People loved it.

That same year the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded. The news of the devastating effects of nuclear energy resounded around the globe. The thinning of the ozone layer hit home quickly; my own sister was diagnosed with basal cell carcinoma. I no longer wanted to bask in the sun. On the positive side, the Montreal Protocol was an astounding breakthrough where nations of the world came together to take action against the beginnings of climate change for the first time ever. I remember feeling that all my life decisions would have long-lasting consequences. What should I do? How could I bridge my interests in community, the environment, growing food, and education? The answers to those questions emerged slowly, and led through a series of shared living arrangements, until in 1997, I became an active member involved in developing Vancouver's second cohousing project, Quayside Village.

I have lived at Quayside Village in North Vancouver, British Columbia since the beginning; our 20th anniversary is on the horizon. During the planning phase, we decided that the name should reflect the experience of



*Quayside Village Cohousing is home to 19 families and a corner store, all under one roof; an architecturally designed, colourful building completed in 1998.*

Graham Meitzer

days gone by when people lived closer together. Quayside Village is actually a four-story building that includes two- and three-story townhouses as well as several one- and two-bedroom homes, 19 in total, and our local corner store. It is home to (give or take) 35 people, ranging in age from five to 81.

While Quayside no longer lives up to my ideals around environmental sustainability, it certainly provides a village-like atmosphere. Currently in Vancouver, there is a surge in interest in building more cohousing projects, including ones that incorporate greater ecological sustainability for the longer term. People are seeking affordable alternatives, and while the actual building costs in the city are not what many consider to be affordable, it is the other social qualities of cohousing that make the pursuit attractive to a cross-section of people. Trading off smaller-than-average living spaces for shared common areas is a formula that increases social interaction, and increases the richness of those who choose to live this way.

Today, a typical Sunday in spring, it's 10 a.m. and the yoga class is getting going in the common house. Tables and chairs are moved aside, and 10 regulars roll out their mats and go through the *asanas* under the guidance of a certified instructor. At noon there is a work-party planned to finish the fence repair around the building. Meanwhile one of the residents will be preparing food in the common house kitchen for tomorrow's dinner for the 20 of us who have signed up to attend.

Living in close proximity with others is transformative, never dull. But it's not all peace and happiness either. A recent example: I had spearheaded a small committee to deal with the fact that for the past two summers, our food, herb, flower, and fruit gardens were not getting enough attention. Increasingly hot, dry summers meant that more frequent watering was needed, and the help had not been forthcoming. The committee proposed to install an automated irrigation system that would minimize human effort. In the larger group, there were differences of opinion as to whether or not we needed such a system. A series of dynamic communications ensued. Community values were explored in face-to-face meetings. Questions were asked on a wide range of issues. From there, several people expressed a willingness to participate in a "do it ourselves" system. With a remarkable combination of several people's skills, we now have an elaborate manual system designed to ensure that the food and flower gardens get the water they need in dry summers. And we have volunteers to carry through on the watering of the various areas that sustain plant life around the entire building. How great is that?

From my first year in the city, I found ways of growing food in small spaces. Although I started simply with peas and lettuce in a container on my balcony, each time I moved to a new place, I would ensure that I could grow more food than in the previous one. Following that trajectory over the 30 years I've been in the city, I can honestly say that our evening meals

today almost always include something I have grown and harvested, either fresh, stored, or preserved.

Being able to grow food in an urban environment is one of my greatest passions. It has been exciting to see my neighbors jump in with both feet to allow more plant life on our street-facing landscape. Passersby comment on what they see: children creating flower mandalas, blossoming apple and plum trees, lettuce and kale plants peeking out between colorful patches of tulips, architecturally designed raised vegetable beds growing greens year-round. I can't think of another townhouse or apartment landscape on our long street that comes anywhere close to the display we have here.

I look forward to seeing this year's food-growing results at Quayside. We will find out how well the irrigation system works in the longer term. Regardless of the results, I do know that working together has been a "win" for the community this year. It is a living example of what happens when people are deeply committed to the village lifestyle; there is a synergy that can overcome apparent obstacles.

I feel encouraged being with others who value community. I love that people of all ages live under our big roof, that all generations are represented. Our diverse group includes writers, educators, artists, musicians, a midwife, consultants, zero-wasters, carpenters, students, business people, and more. These are real people on their own personal journeys, putting their energies into making the world a better place.

In community, we can take on projects that fulfill long-held dreams. We can work through differences when they arise. We can celebrate simple and special occasions. We come to know and understand ourselves better. While we hope to make a better world one step at a time, there are times when I ask myself, "Is this enough? Am I fulfilling my purpose? Have we made a difference? Can we avert a climate disaster?" These are tough questions! We can live our lives embracing these questions. Who can tell us the answer? I have hope in the "30-plus" generation, those who are having their own families now and those who understand the environmental challenges we all face. I feel that they are the generation that can move us forward. Our great grandchildren will live with the results of all our efforts. And I will continue to ask myself, "What have you done with the garden entrusted to you?" 🌿

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*With one foot in the corporate world, Linda's other foot is firmly planted in the garden to keep her life in balance. Starting at her grandfather's knee, growing food in small spaces, in a time of climate change, has become a thrill unto itself. Whether in containers, raised beds, or the greater expanse that a community garden provides, there is a daily attuning to what is going on with the seeds, the young sprouts, the strong plants, the pests and diseases, the harvests, and the joy of sharing these with others. See [joyfulgreenlife.com](http://joyfulgreenlife.com), [cohousing.ca](http://cohousing.ca).*

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1. Antonio Machado's poem "The Wind One Brilliant Day," translated by Robert Bly.



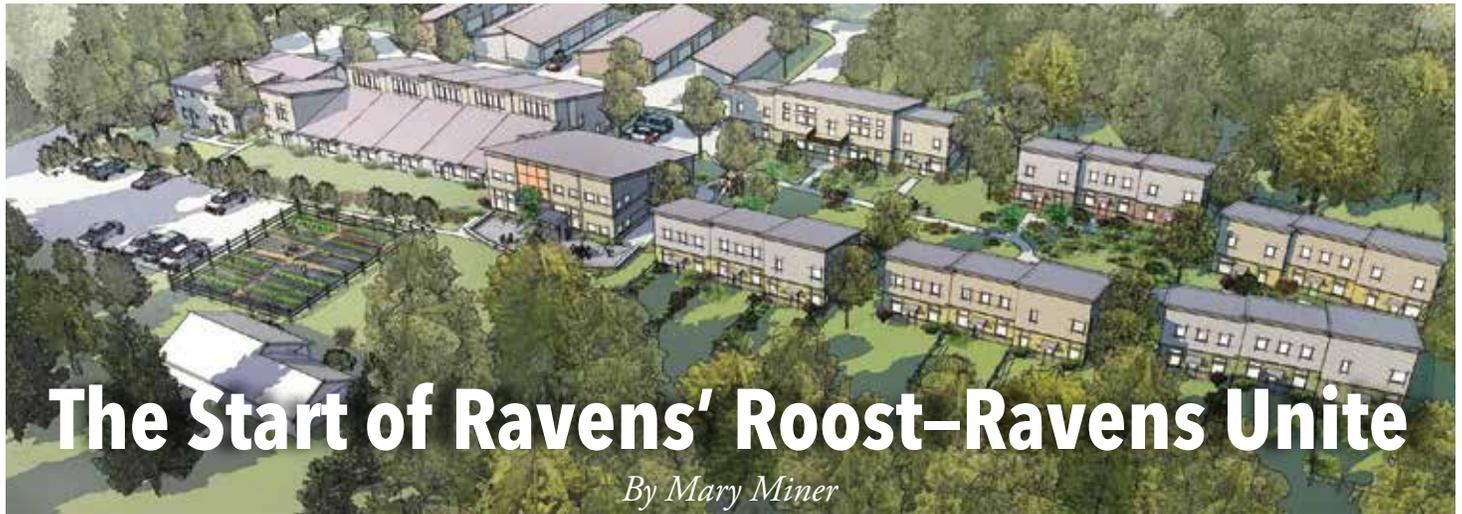
*Relaxing around the table in the common house after Thanksgiving dinner, always a popular and well-attended event. The stained glass windows were salvaged from one of the three buildings circa 1912 that stood on the property when the land was bought, carefully refitted into the dining room.*

Marylee Stephenson



*Last year's plum harvest: the tree was so laden with fruit that the branch broke! Heather and her grandchildren pick a crop of Italian prune plums to be shared with all.*

Marylee Stephenson



# The Start of Ravens' Roost—Ravens Unite

By Mary Miner

When my husband and I were newlyweds, we lived in a small town called Fort Defiance, on the Navajo Reservation. Fort Defiance was so small that people walked wherever they needed to go. In the evenings we had pickup games of soccer or gathered at someone's house for dinner and when times were tough we looked after each other. When my neighbor Cezanne was on bedrest for six months or so, we all stepped up and helped with meals, books, and music.

It was a really tight community.

In 1990, we came home to Alaska and settled in Anchorage on the Hillside. Instead of walking everywhere, we drove our car. Our main encounters with the neighbors were as we waved hello or goodbye while clicking the garage door opener. But I never forgot our first neighborhood in Fort Defiance. As I was driving around Anchorage, whenever I'd see a neighborhood that might have a community vibe, I'd stop and knock on doors, asking if anyone was interested in selling, but no one was.

This went on for 20 years.

Then, in 2011, I was at Title Wave used bookstore and found this book called *Creating Cohousing*. It's a how-to manual for regular, non-developer folks to go about building neighborhoods that are designed to support and encourage community.

In cohousing neighborhoods, the houses are clustered together and the parking is kept to the periphery so people can see and talk with each other as they go about daily life. Cohousing includes a common house where people can get together for potlucks, and shared features like play areas for kids, common gardens, and a workshop so everyone does not have to have their own power saw or snow blower.

WOW! This was an epiphany for me. A neighborhood designed for people and not cars! I was so excited. I began talking about this to anyone who would listen. Most people I spoke with thought it was a great idea, but not for them...maybe somebody else. Then one day, this woman named Terri called me. She had been traveling around the US and Europe visiting cohousing and thought it was a great idea AND she said she would do this with me. So we put on a Getting It Built workshop and more people got involved. We formed a company and came up with a great name: Ravens' Roost. But we needed land to build the project on.

We looked all over Anchorage, and talked with lots of property owners; some laughed at this crazy idea, some were irritated with me for wasting their time.

Then one day I was driving up Abbott Road and I saw this gorgeous tract of land next to a small farmhouse. I pulled into the driveway and knocked on the door. It was February and this little white-haired woman with wire-framed glasses opened the door and the first thing she said was, "Honey it's cold out, would you like to come in and have some tea?" Well, would I ever!

I was so overcome, I said "I would love some tea and could I give you a hug?" She looked at me cautiously and said, okay. I went in gave her a hug and had a cup of tea, at her kitchen table.

It turned out that she and her husband owned the land and wanted to sell it. That was how we found the site.

At that point there were seven households in Ravens' Roost. We were working on this when, one day, my phone rang. It was this guy named Tom, who said (to paraphrase), "I've been interested in cohousing for a long time, and, yes, I know where the land is, I live across the street. My wife Marilyn and I would like to join you, and by the way, I'm an architect and Marilyn is a midwife."

Holy Tomatoes!! Who better to help deliver this project than a midwife and an architect? When Marilyn and Tom joined and we had the land, the project really took off.

Our next step in developing Ravens' Roost was to get a design done and approved by the city. This involved a public hearing before the Planning and Zoning Commission. In preparation for this hearing, we went to the local community council a half dozen times, with information, hoping they support our project.

Well, this backfired. It turned out that the president of the local community council was much

more comfortable with the conventional suburbia-type subdivision and we were not doing that. We were building 35 homes clustered with the parking to the periphery. This president had a lot of concerns about our project, to the extent that he sent a snail mail letter to every household in that CC's catchment area, advising them of our public hearing date and encouraging folks to attend and express any concerns they might have about the project.

When we got wind of this, the Ravens put our heads together and wrote a letter of our own, and in the spirit of community, we decided to deliver it in person, to every house that bordered our land. This was in December, and we had a ton of snow that year, so nights and weekends we bundled up, climbed over the snow banks, and introduced ourselves to our future neighbors.

The public hearing was held the first week of January 2012. When we got to the Loussac library, the room was packed, standing room only. When I saw all the people in the room, I thought, "I hope we don't get clobbered." Our case was presented, and during public testimony, people spoke for and against the project. Then the Commission grilled us about the project. When the Planning and Zoning Commission voted, and the votes were tallied, they had unanimously approved our project. That packed room erupted in cheering, whistling, and applause. It was a great moment for community.

Five years have passed. Ravens' Roost Phase I has 29 homes compete with 27 households moved in. We have two more buildings with six units to complete, and will be doing those as new reservations allow. The common house is busy, with community meals four nights a week, guests in the extra bedrooms, and the snow got shoveled all winter. The shop is seeing a lot of use and the new bee hives are humming. Life is good! 🐝

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*Mary Miner is a wife, mother of three, and retired civil engineer who served as the burning soul and project developer/manager and construction administrator for Ravens' Roost Cohousing in Anchorage, Alaska.*

# Five Things We've Learned BEFORE WE'VE EVER BUILT

By Mairéad Cleary

It's amazing to watch how community can be created and enthusiasm generated from a twinkling of an idea. I believe this is because people are craving community and connection in this increasingly disconnected world.

Bruns Eco Village in Byron Bay, Australia is rapidly forming, spurred on not only by the desire for shared living, but by a desire to trial a model that can be affordable, ecological, and enterprising.

The ecovillage on Australia's east coast has been started by Kelvin and Skai Daly and a strong working group of professionals with various expertise. The working group formed in mid-2015 and with the project being in the forming stage at present, they have been working weekly on building the foundations that the ecovillage will rest on—legal structure, planning, design, investment, communications, social fabric, and renewable resources.

Not a sod has been turned but already we have learned many lessons.

## 1. Sustainable isn't enough

Since the very inception of Brun Eco Village in January 2014 it has been almost taken for granted that the ecovillage would be designed, built, and maintained with sustainability principles at its core. The definition of sustainability is “the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level.” It is a term that is bandied about liberally these days and the credibility of environmental sustainability is in fact dependent on many factors.

In February 2017 Shane Sylvanspring, who runs the Village Development Program for Bruns Eco Village (more on this later), organised a workshop with Jamaica Stevens, author of and project manager for *ReInhabiting the Village: CoCreating our Future* (see [reinhabitingthevillage.com/product/reinhabiting-the-village-book](http://reinhabitingthevillage.com/product/reinhabiting-the-village-book)). During the one-day workshop Jamaica carried the focus beyond sustainability, pointing out that it's time to move past organic and sustainable to embrace regenerative methods. As she states in her book, “regenerative describes processes that restore, renew or revitalize their own sources of energy and materials, creating thriving systems that integrate the needs of society with the integrity of nature.”

Jamaica's workshop served as a turning point in how we now view our environmental responsibility in creating this ecovillage. Sustainable measures are no longer enough. We have refocused our

concept to incorporate restorative and regenerative approaches that can leave the land better than we found it.

## 2. Experiencing community before living in community provides a reality check early on

All too often ecovillages and communities fail. Community living, as many are aware, can be romanticised and idealised; however, in reality, joining a community is a significant commitment and a lot of things need to be considered.

In an effort to avoid the disillusionment that often comes when romantic ideals aren't met, Shane Sylvanspring, an ecovillage designer, created a Village Development Program for Bruns Eco Village. Shane drew from the Global Ecovillage Network's Ecovillage Design Education Curricu-



Photos courtesy of Mairéad Cleary



lum, a storehouse of up-to-date knowledge from intentional communities around the globe.

The program is a series of workshops that exposes its participants to the various elements of living in community. It kicked off in September 2016 with a full house of 125 participants and has covered topics such as social design, invisible structures, and nonviolent communication as a method for conflict resolution. It has hosted well-seasoned ecovillage figures such as John Talbot, former Director of the Findhorn Ecovillage, Scotland and currently Project Director of Narara Ecovillage in Australia, whose real life experience provides an invaluable learning for aspiring ecovillage creators.

This process is allowing interested potential residents to engage with the village in a meaningful way without the full commitment and financial risk of moving into a communal living arrangement.

As of May 2017 the year-long program is half way through completion and is facilitating the intended experience. Participants are being challenged in all sorts of ways, some to speak up for themselves, others to be quieter and make space for others. Many are still in the slightly uncomfortable process of finding their place in the forming community. For some participants (albeit very few) the program is revealing that Bruns Eco Village is not what they thought it would be and cannot provide what they need. Rather than this being a negative outcome, however, it can be seen as a positive result. Far better for would-be residents to realise early on that the shoe does not fit than to walk several miles with sore feet!

The remainder of the program will cover ecological design, innovative economics, and will formulate the values and ethics of the village community.

An imminent workshop will host a discussion regarding “Pet Policy.” This is a topic that many in the Village Development Program are divided on. In Australia wildlife are particularly vulnerable to domestic animals. The majority of national parks across the country prohibit dogs and cats and many living communities have followed suit by adopting a similar policy within their boundaries. The outcomes of this discussion will mark a milestone in the community’s development and provide a test of the community’s cohesion.

### 3. Innovation attracts attention

The Bruns Eco Village approach is pretty unique in Australia. We’re challenging the mainstream concept that *success = ownership* and are advocating for the concepts of *success = connection* and *success = energy*, but also *success = interdependence*.

Bruns Eco Village has developed an innovative concept called an Alternative Ownership Model that means the 129 houses built in the ecovillage can’t be sold on for profit later. Instead the houses will be owned and managed by a village cooperative that oversees the village homes, renewables precinct, commercial zone, school, and wellness centre. This keeps the houses “affordable” in an area that is high-

ly unaffordable, even for earning professionals.

It's not always easy to convey this alternative concept considering mainstream society has trained us to think of houses as commodities. However for those who are actively seeking solutions to the affordable housing crisis in the country, the Alternative Ownership Model is inspiring closer investigation.

Since launching the ecovillage's website in July 2016, the Bruns Eco Village working group has been invited to speak at a Byron Shire Council Affordable Housing Summit in February 2017 and further afield to a Bellingen Shire Council affordable housing meeting in July 2017. Both councils are facing critical housing shortages in their communities for both renters and buyers.

Whether the Alternative Ownership Model can be adopted to suit potential housing initiatives elsewhere is yet to be seen.

#### 4. Affordable is a relative term

Byron Bay is not unique in the fact that it is experiencing a housing crisis. This is a phenomenon that's sweeping the globe, particularly propelled by high income-generating holiday letting, such as AirBnB.

In June 2016 the median house price in Byron Bay reached \$1.24 million. Rent for a two-bedroom house in 2017 has reached a phenomenal AU\$480 per week. In comparison, the median household income in Byron Bay is \$871 per week.

Bruns Eco Village wants to offer homes to residents at rates that are affordable and lower than the area's current rates. But what is "affordable"?

This very question was raised in a working group meeting as recently as May 2017 where Ella Goninan, one of the working group, challenged the use of the term as potentially misleading.

Since the conception of Bruns Eco Village, land steward Kelvin Daly has been adamant that the land upon which the proposed ecovillage is to be built remain the property of the future ecovillage cooperative and not be susceptible to land speculation. As such each house built will not have freehold title and cannot be sold on by its inhabitants. In this way the value of each home cannot increase individually in value beyond the reach of Byron's residents. This measure is intended to keep the homes "affordable" for those who wish to become members of the cooperative and live in the ecovillage long-term.

The proposed rental rates will be below Byron's market rates, but those rates are still very much outside the reach of many Byron residents. For those people, the ecovillage is far from affordable. This makes the term potentially problematic.

The solution for now appears to be to define "affordable" in context so as to avoid disappointment when people realise that Bruns Eco Village may not be "affordable" for them. Time will tell whether this can avert the dashed hopes for those craving community but lacking sufficient funds.

#### 5. Dynamic governance is seriously productive

We have seen that unclear leadership and governance can be the undoing of a project and a community. Which is why we have considered various governance structures early on in the forming process of Bruns Eco Village.

Our working group meetings began around shared meals and continued that way for several months. These were a friendly and casual opportunity to catch-up as well as to work on the tasks at hand.

In February 2017 the working group decided to adopt dynamic governance (also known as sociocracy) as a method of governance. The intention was to trial dynamic governance within the core working group and as that has proven successful we are now expanding that governance structure to include other people and groups (or circles) as the project progresses. Each circle has two representatives who meet with representa-

tives of other circles.

One of the refreshing things about holding a meeting under a dynamic governance structure is that every member of the group gets an opportunity to both facilitate and record the meeting but more importantly, every voice is heard. It eliminates the hijacking of a meeting by one or two dominant voices and empowers the quieter members of the group to include themselves.

Round-table discussions are held on every important subject, which makes for rich and often incredibly productive meetings.

The main challenge of course is that this is a new way of interacting and while the initial motivation kept the working group on track, it can be very easy at times to fall back into popcorn meetings where everything is discussed at once and very few matters are fully resolved.

Feedback from other communities that have adopted dynamic governance has been that there is a danger of important tasks failing to be accomplished because no one person takes responsibility for their completion. Perhaps this awareness will be enough to keep us on track for the foreseeable future.

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This process is only starting and each element of the ecovillage project carries with it the excitement of innovation and shared learning along the way.

Bruns Eco Village is on a steep learning curve, the curve that each intentional community must travel as it forms and establishes itself. Our working group members are leaning on the experiences of other communities to learn what has worked and what has failed in the past, and is taking a slow and purposeful approach in order to establish a solid foundation beneath it from which to progress the project.

We are continuously reaching out to other intentional communities

to form important bonds so that we can support each other and also hear first-hand about other communities' experiences. Locally we have visited established communities. Internationally we have had conversations with both successful and not-so-successful villages.

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**Round-table discussions are held  
on every important subject,  
which makes for rich and often incredibly  
productive meetings.**

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successful and not-so-successful villages. Atamai in New Zealand is one such community which unfortunately ground to a halt in late 2016 due to financial and governance difficulties.

We are recording the process as we go along, in both written and video formats so that we can in turn share our wins and our challenges with other groups that wish to start an intentional community. Our hope is that capturing this information in the moment can provide a realistic fly-on-the-wall perspective for others.

Pictures paint a thousand words, so seeing our ecovillage in action, even though only forming, will go a long way to attracting like-minded people to the project and providing valid guidelines for others starting their own project.

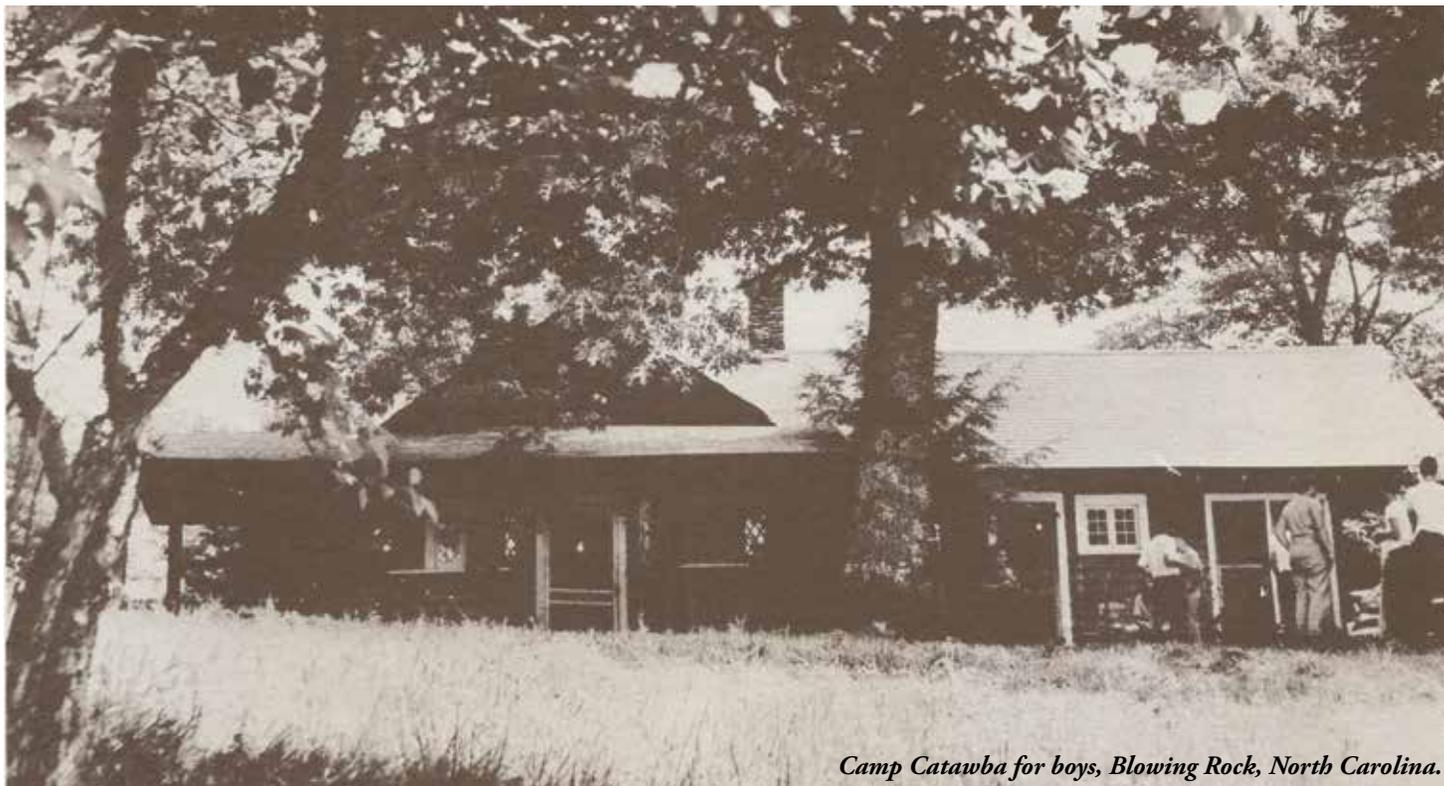
We are all looking forward to seeing where the road will lead us next. 🐦

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*Mairéad Cleary is an engineer by profession but a researcher and writer at heart. In 2016 Mairéad published Byron Trails, a comprehensive walking trails guidebook for the popular Byron Bay region (byrontrails.com). Mairéad is completing a Masters in Gestalt Therapy with a focus on ecopsychology. She has a passionate interest in how people relate to their environment and to the environment and how that relationship impacts them. Mairéad is a member of the Bruns Eco Village working group.*

# The Community of Camp Catawba

By Charles A. Miller



*Camp Catawba for boys, Blowing Rock, North Carolina.*

I learned about community, both the reality and the idea, at a summer camp for boys in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Its name was Camp Catawba.

Catawba was founded in 1944 by Vera Lachmann, who had fled Nazi Germany in 1939. Her camp was modeled in part on the Odenwald school, a progressive school in southern Germany that she had visited in the Weimar era. I was a camper and on the staff of Catawba for a dozen summers, beginning in 1948. I visited after that into the early 21st century.

A poet and a teacher, Vera was also a classicist. She told the campers the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in alternating years. She directed plays by Shakespeare (my favorite was *The Tempest*) and by Molière, Yeats, Lessing and, natural to her but unexpected for the boys (and their parents), Aristophanes. The young boys who sang the chorus in his *Birds* sounded their role: “toro-toro-toro-toro-tinx!”

The community of Catawba campers bonded when we went on hikes, including Grandfather Mountain, one of the great geological formations of the Appalachians.

But no community is a utopia—a Greek word that, literally, means “no place”—and Catawba naturally had its moments of friction. One time Vera handled the friction by explaining to a group of counselors one evening after the campers went to bed that “tomorrow morning at Assembly I will spontaneously explode.” Another way was more ordinary: she held a private conversation with a camper.

Camp Catawba was undoubtedly a kind of educational enterprise. Realizing this, Vera never charged the parents much for a season on Catawba’s 20 acres. Socrates was a great teacher, she said, and he charged nothing at all.

One of Vera’s poems was titled simply “Catawba.” It was written in 1972 when she was in New York, where she lived and taught at Brooklyn College. She had suffered a heart attack and hoped she would be well enough to return to camp the following summer:

## Catawba

You dear piece of earth, wafted over by  
butterflies, where the hydrangea stands heavy  
with clusters—how I shall miss you.

The hill meadow is alive. And the cherry tree,  
once lightning-struck, now open to the sky like a  
harp, raises scaled branches.

The road curving upward can sometimes take  
away my breath, but how often did sorrow end  
at the sight of the home roof!

In front of the tiger lilies that fold at night two  
signs of peace give benediction, the two oaks  
whose dragon-roots are hardening with age.

Will you wait for me through the year, greeting  
me first with strawberry drops in grass hair,  
and then with the blackberries’ shiny mitres?  
Oh guard what is...and what was.

In the last stanza the “you” in the first line is Catawba itself. The last line of the poem entreats the reader to preserve both the place and the values that Catawba—that is, that Vera—imparted to all who knew her.

Down the hill from Catawba were the camp’s neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Ira W. Bolick, descendants of 18th century immigrants from Germany who landed in Pennsylvania. After several generations they found themselves in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Before the camp season, Mr. Bolick cut the camp’s sloping fields with his team of horses. When there were only a few people around, both before and after the camp season, we used



*Musicians.*



*The Fauré Requiem.*



*Hike.*

Mrs. Bolick's butter. I watched her at work with her churn in the couple's kitchen.

I end with another poem. It was written on one of the camp's hikes—to Thunder Hill, about two miles from Catawba along the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was at Thunder Hill that Jackson Mac Low, a counselor in 1950, composed his "Song for Eva Frankfurter." Eva was Vera's niece and the arts and crafts counselor at the camp.

**A Song for Eva on Thunder Hill**

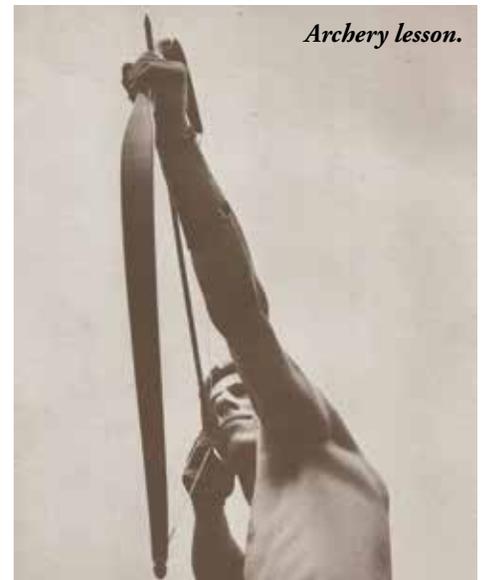
On Thunder Hill when you lay sleeping  
quietly your breath was moving,  
softly flowing in & out.  
& the flush upon your cheek  
rose & passed with every breath  
as you lay sleeping.

On Thunder Hill when you lay sleeping  
quietly the air was moving  
softly flowing round about  
& over your forehead & your cheek  
your hair's fine lines made arabesque  
as you lay sleeping.

On Thunder Hill when you lay sleeping  
quietly your hands were moving  
softly white upon the ground;  
thunder rolled & children shrieked  
but as I gazed I stilled my breath  
& you lay sleeping.

In the years since the camp ceased operation, many of us who spent summers there have remained friends. We have experienced an evolving sense of the community that is Camp Catawba. I expect it will continue for the rest of our lives. 🐦

*Charles A. Miller writes that as a camper and staff member at Camp Catawba, "I learned so much about community that not a day goes by when I have not thought about its meaning and acted on the values that it imparted." He now lives in New Market, Virginia.*



*Archery lesson.*

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REACH is our column for all your Classified needs. In addition to ads intended to match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, Reach offers ads for events, goods, services, books, personals, and more to people interested in communities.

You may contact the Advertising Manager Christopher Kindig to place a Reach ad. Email Ads@ic.org, call 443-422-3741, or go to [communities.ic.org/ads/](http://communities.ic.org/ads/) for more details or to submit your ad online.

THE REACH DEADLINE FOR ISSUE #177 - Winter 2017 (out in December) is October 24, 2017.

The rate for Reach ads is Up to 50 Words: \$25/issue or \$75/year; Up to 125 Words: \$40/issue or \$125/year; Up to 350 Words: \$60/issue or \$175/year. If you are an FIC Member you may take off an additional 10%.

You may pay using a card or PayPal by contacting Christopher online or over the phone using the contact information above, or you may mail a check or money order payable to Communities with your ad text, word count, and duration of the ad, plus your contact information, to: The Fellowship for Intentional Community, 23 Dancing Rabbit Lane, Rutledge, MO 63563.

Intentional communities listing in the Reach section are also invited to create a free listing in the online Communities Directory at [Directory.ic.org](http://Directory.ic.org), and also to try our online classified advertising options. Special prices may be available to those who wish to list both in the magazine and online.

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**ALPHA FARM IS A SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY** founded in 1972, located in the Coast Range of western Oregon. We are seeking new members to assist in our current revitalization and the development of new community income streams. Of particular interest are individuals with a cooperative mindset, skilled in Office Administration, Auto Mechanics, Infrastructure Maintenance or large scale Organic Gardening. If this sounds like you, please contact the Visitor Coordinator at [alpha@pioneer.net](mailto:alpha@pioneer.net).

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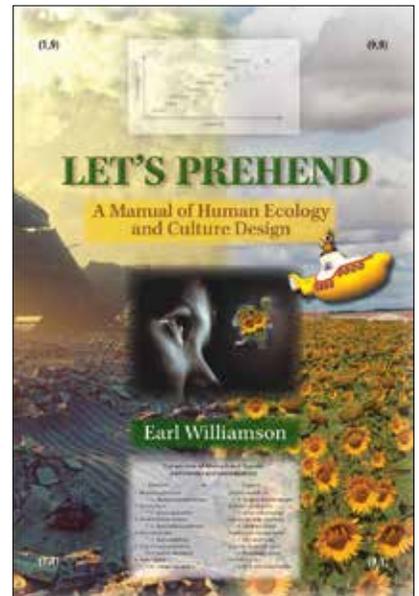
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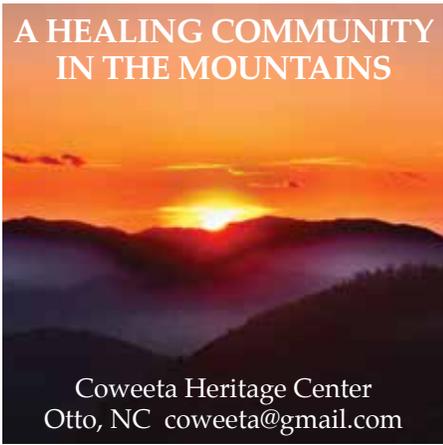
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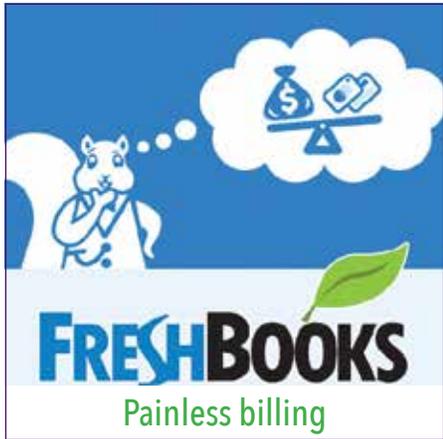
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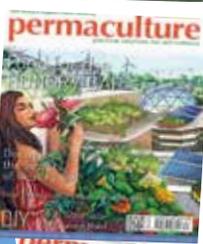
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**THE STANDARD AMERICAN LANGUAGE** we use is difficult to learn. Learning involves extensive memorization. Since many letters have multiple sounds and sometimes no sound at all, some Americans can neither read nor write. The US Department of Education and the National Institute of Literacy claim that 14% of the adult population can not read and 21% can not read beyond the 5th grade level. These people are disadvantaged and need help. There are

many reasons for this literacy deficiency, but a big one is the complexity and irregularity of written Standard American language. I have created a phonetic American language that has about 60 rules. Almost all of the rules the average American already knows: the consonant and vowel sounds described in the Merriam Webster Dictionary. Nothing is changed in the pronunciation, just the spelling. This phonetic language should be easy to learn. Students should be able to "sound out" words. Learning 60 rules is so much easier than memorizing thousands of words. This will be especially helpful to foreign students who will not have to use the dictionary to learn the correct pronunciation. My 67 page treatise includes 18 lesson outlines to teach the 14 vowel and 25 consonant sounds. It also discusses the problems of sound-alike and look-alike words and many pages illustrating the difficulties of Standard American spelling. I am 80 years old and need help developing and implementing this language. I need individuals to create 18 lesson videos, and to write or translate writings on math and science. Please write me to indicate your interest. I don't want to communicate by email initially. I get too much email already. After I have received your letter of interest I will communicate with you by email. Richard Claus, 0 North 485 Herrick Drive, Wheaton, Illinois, 60187

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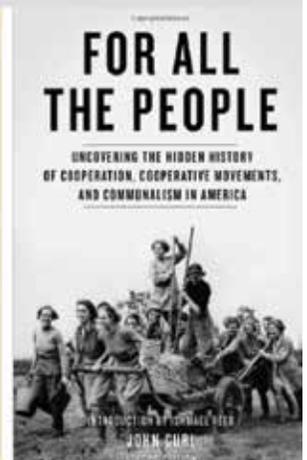
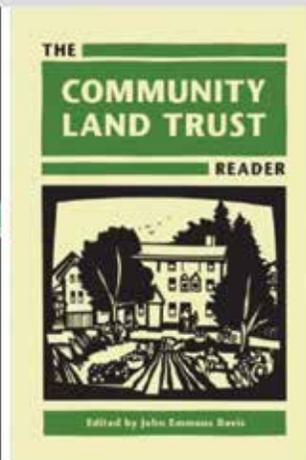
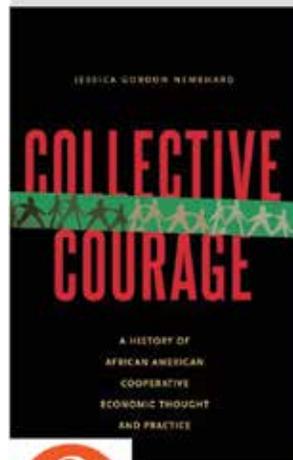
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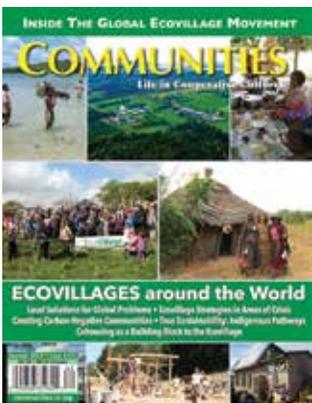
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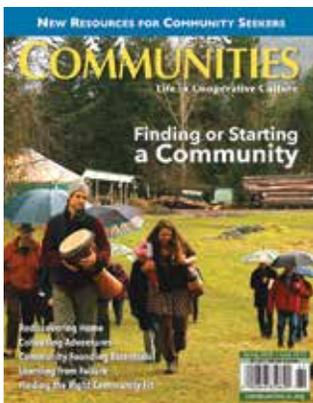
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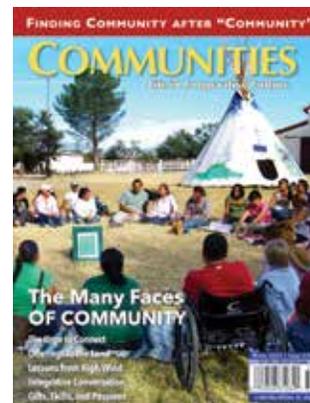
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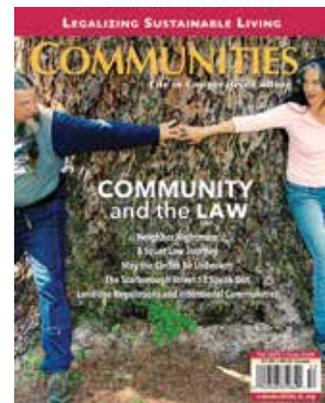
#171 Ecovillages around the World



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#169 The Many Faces of Community



#168 Community and the Law

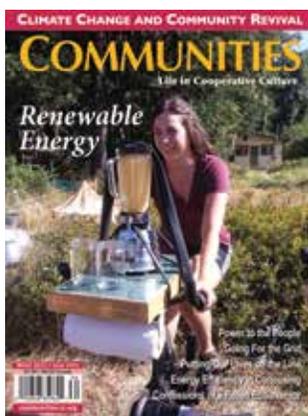
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#176

# Community Stories at Community Bookstore

When it comes to compiling stories, learning from the past, and standing on the shoulders of those before us, the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) is your first stop. We have existed for nearly as long as the inception of modern American communes and have been chronicling our shared experiences ever since.

FIC's Community Bookstore aims to share as many of those experiences as possible so that you, lovely reader, may be as best equipped as possible, whether you are exploring joining a community, aiming to organize your neighborhood gardens, or seeking ways to better communicate with your community action groups.

For a broad-stroke view of what our bookstore offers, take a look at 12 Common Resources for historical communities and community stories. All are available at our online bookstore at [www.ic.org/community-bookstore](http://www.ic.org/community-bookstore).



## 1. *The Modern Utopian: Alternative Communities of the '60s and '70s*

By Richard Fairfield. With contributions by several authors, *The Modern Utopian* explores the once-emerging counterculture communities of the 1960s and '70s. From an era that catalyzed the "back to the land" movement, you can learn how these communities started and how they impact the intentional communities movement today. Available in print only (\$15).

## 2. *The Farm Then and Now: A Model of Sustainable Living*

By Douglas Stevenson. One of the featured communities in *The Modern Utopian* is The Farm of rural Tennessee. Since its inception in 1970, the Farm has endured many adversities, culture shifts, and adaptations, and is still thriving today as one of the leading intentional communities. This book is offered as a model for how one commune-turned-ecovillage approached such changes and what that means for them today. Available in print only (\$20).

## 3. *Is It Utopia Yet?*

By Kat Kinkade. Another keystone community, Twin Oaks, is chronicled at its 26th anniversary so that we may take a peek at its inception and growth over the years. A leading egalitarian community in Virginia, Twin Oaks can serve as a model for decision-making, income-sharing, and communal living. Available in print only (\$15).



## 4. *Songaia*

By Fred Lanphear. *Songaia* is the remarkable story of a few individuals who made their dream a reality in a multigenerational cohousing community on the gentle hills north of Seattle. Lanphear tells of the hurdles along the way and explores topics such as personal relationships, aging and death, group process, and much more. Available in print only (\$10).

## 5. *Findhorn Reflections*

By Graham Meltzer. Beyond North America, we see strong examples of intentional communities across all seas. In Scotland, Findhorn Ecovillage is the home of over 500 individuals who focus on spiritual and natural connection, low-carbon technology, and innovative agriculture. Author Graham Meltzer shares his account of living at Findhorn for 10 years, with both nostalgia and loving criticism. Available in digital book only (\$10).

## 6. *The Community of the Ark*

By Mark Shepard. Founded by Lanza del Vasto, a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi in the practice of nonviolent civil disobedience, The Community of the Ark is a model utopian community from the '70s located in southern France. In this book, Shepard recounts his tremendous experience while visiting the farm in 1979. Available in print only (\$5).

## 7. *Power of Community*

Produced by Community Solutions, directed by Faith Morgan. This inspiring documentary tells the story of Cuba's response to adversity during the '90s as they lost access to Soviet oil. The country used cooperation and community to feed its people and create a low-carbon society. The film reflects on Cuba's crisis while addressing the issue of peak oil we all now face, and with an opportunity to look towards community as a solution. Available for rent, digital purchase, and as DVD (\$2.99-\$15).

## 8. *Visions of Utopia*

Directed and produced by Geoph Kozeny. This two-part documentary takes you on a road trip to several leading intentional communities with an insider's look and from the perspectives of the members themselves. Kozeny also offers a brief history of communal living before profiling the 17 featured communities. Available for rent, digital purchase, and as DVDs (\$2.99-\$35).

## 9. *Encyclopedia of Intentional Communities*

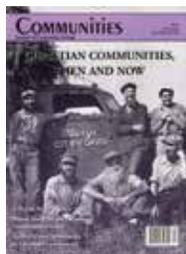
By Timothy Miller. At long last, we have a comprehensive guide to historic and contemporary American intentional communities, from the first European settlements in America to communities of today. With nearly 600 pages, this book references 3,000 communities, offers brief descriptions, and provides resources for more information. Discover them all, of every size and kind, from the obscure to well-known. Available in print only (\$75).

## 10. *Communities Directory Archive Bundle*

Our *Communities Directory* has been a leading resource for intentional communities across the globe since 1972. Before we began publishing directory books, we compiled community listings in special issues of *COMMUNITIES* magazine. We now offer an archive bundle of all the directories of past and present for your resource library, thesis research, or personal curiosities. Purchase arrives in both digital and print (\$65).

## 11. *Best of COMMUNITIES XIV: Challenges and Lessons*

Compiled by FIC, various authors. From our 15 compilation books, *Best of COMMUNITIES*, we offer an entire issue focused on the common challenges and lessons learned of forming, sustaining, and living within intentional community. We have collected 19 articles spanning all lenses from "the shadow side" to "the vision of utopia." Available in print and digital (\$15; \$10).

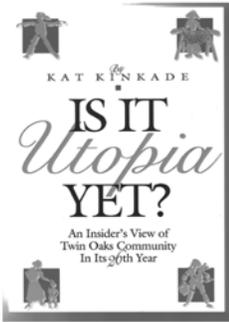


## 12. *COMMUNITIES issue #92: Christian Communities Then and Now*

### *Christian Communities Then and Now*

*COMMUNITIES* has continually been a rich resource for folks seeking and living within intentional community. Each issue reveals a wealth of personal stories and accounted lessons from which we, the readers, can glean. And some of our back issues focused entirely on this subject. "Christian Communities Then and Now" looks at communities of faith, individual accounts within them, and how they have evolved. Originally printed in 1996, this issue is both timeless and a cultural marker for its era. Available in both print and digital (\$4).

Be sure to check out our other resources on topics ranging from co-housing to land trusts; nonviolent communication to group facilitation; peak oil to permaculture. FIC aims to support the development of cooperative culture and we understand that can look different for each of us. We hope to offer appropriate resources for all your community-oriented curiosities. Suggestions and feedback can be sent to our Bookstore Manager, Kim Kanney, at [bookstore@ic.org](mailto:bookstore@ic.org).



## An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community in its 26th Year by Kat Kinkade

*Is it Utopia Yet?* is a lively, first-hand account of the unique struggles and triumphs of the first 25 years of Twin Oaks Community, one of America's most prominent and successful communes. This thoughtful and entertaining 320 page book from the author of *A Walden Two Experiment* is illustrated with 16 photographs and 60 cartoons.

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## WHY I STUDY COMMUNAL SOCIETIES

(continued from p. 26)

community publications and the letters and diaries of community women is a powerful experience for the student of political theory. They bring to life many of the theoretical insights of early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Elizabeth Cady Stanton while also speaking to contemporary feminist debates concerning work, class, and gender.

Yet another example of the relevance of intentional communities for the student of political theory centers on the issue of community decision making. Communal societies have experimented with both authoritarian and democratic forms of governance. The charismatic leadership of community founders like John Humphrey Noyes and George Rapp contrasts with the efforts of many contemporary communitarians to embrace and encourage active engagement in the decision-making process by all members.

The history of political theory is, at its heart, a history of ideas concerning the best form of governance. From Plato's philosopher king to John Stuart Mill's spirited defense of universal suffrage, including suffrage for women, to the anarchists who posited the ideal of a society without coercion, political philosophers have grappled with the thorny issues that beset the public exercise of power. The efforts of communal groups to articulate and defend their particular conception of the best way to govern mirror and illuminate these debates.

Communities like the Perfectionists at Oneida serve as cautionary tales concerning the ubiquity of elites and the dangers of authoritarian rule, even by a seemingly benevolent leader. Others, such as The Farm, embrace substantial elements of direct democracy including town meetings and community votes. Many contemporary groups show an admirable commitment to widespread participation in community decision making despite the challenges inherent in striving for consensus.

These are just a few examples of how the study of communal societies can help us explore the perennial questions of concern to political theorists. Political theory helps us sharpen our analytical and critical skills, deepen our moral judgment, and expand our understanding of dilemmas inherent in the quest for community. The study of communal societies is a powerful means of encouraging students to learn about political theory, but also to learn how to think theoretically about the art of politics. 🍀

*Susan Matarese is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville where she teaches courses in political theory including American Utopias: The Quest for Community.*



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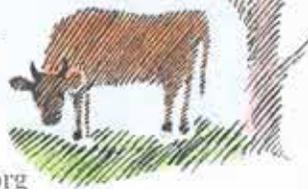
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**WHAT PAST AND PRESENT COMMUNITIES CAN TEACH NEW COMMUNITIES**

*(continued from p. 39)*

tools that would make intentional communities more resilient: that regardless of how much intentional communities with utopian aims seek to step to one side of worldly affairs, they succeed or fail for the very same pragmatic reasons that other human enterprises—notably businesses and start-ups—succeed or fail.”

But it's not just about the willingness to work hard. It's about building relationships, looking at your stuff (as Kate Sutherland said), and willingness to listen to each other. What amazes me, as someone trying to start community, is how many people still think just having a good idea is enough to build a community.

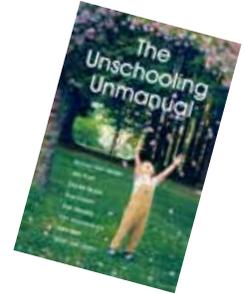
Unless we are willing to learn from other communities, both past and present, the failure rate of new communities isn't going to decline. 🐦

*Raven Moon lives at the Ganas community in New York City and works with the Point A project (frompointa.org) to start new egalitarian, income-sharing communities in the city. He also manages the Commune Life blog (communelife.org) which focuses on the diversity of egalitarian, income-sharing communities.*



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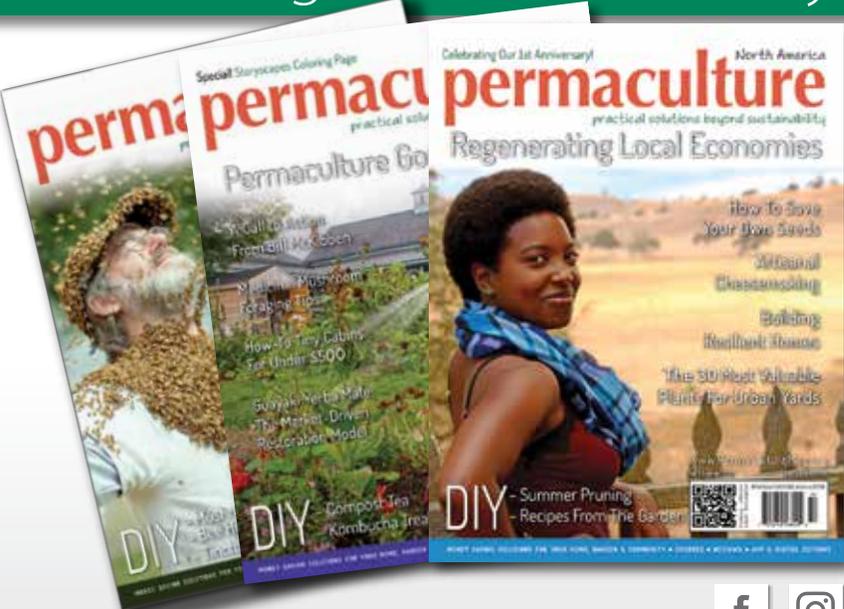
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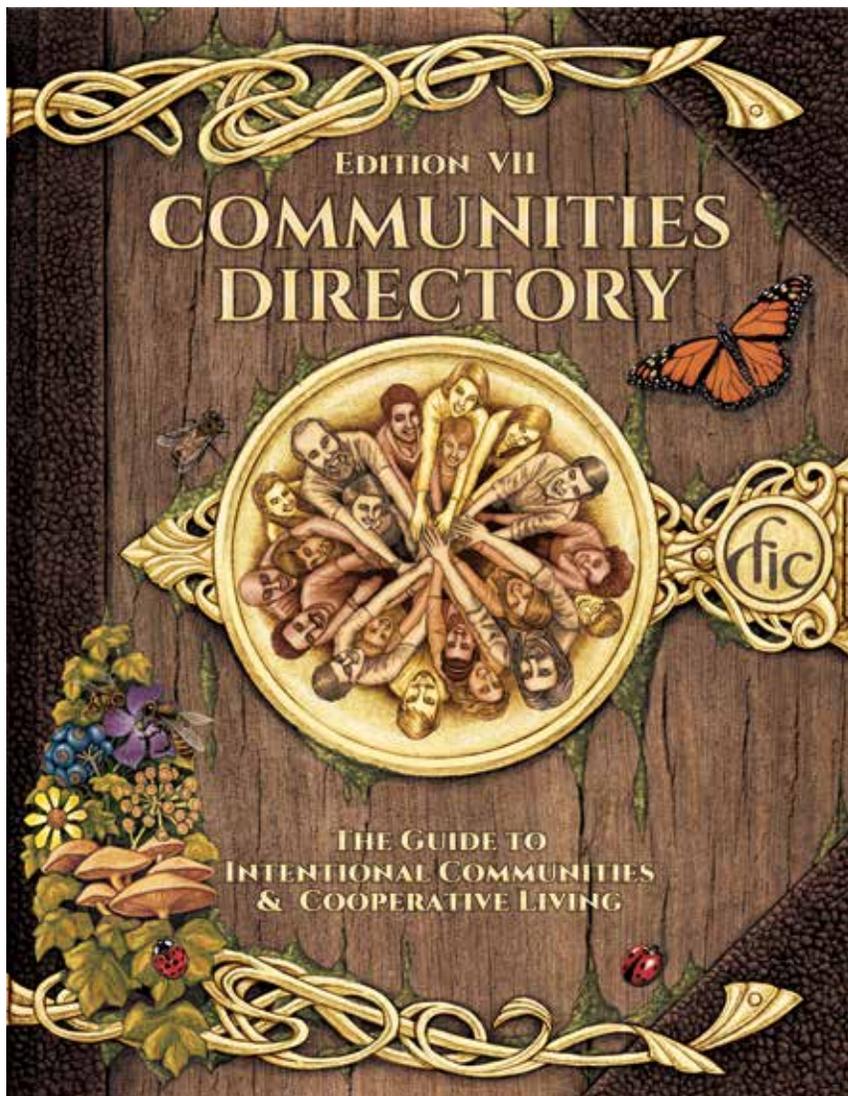
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### INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IN A NICARAGUAN JUNGLE: HONORING MY DUALITY THROUGH COMMUNITY PRACTICES

*(continued from p. 47)*

going, with different kinds of goals and ambitions. But none of that mattered, because we were there to sit with each other in the moment, to see each other as we truly are, and then to let go. I will forever strive to bring genuine connection without expectation into all of my relationships.

#### Strive to create a lifestyle in line with your morals

The intentional community helped to remind me of the very basics: put your money where your mouth is. If you don't support animal cruelty, don't eat factory meat. If you are worried about the state of the environment, be conscious about the amount of water you are using, about leaving your lights on, etc. Respect your body—think of food as fuel; you wouldn't pour tar into your car engine and expect it to run properly, so don't put it into your body and expect different results.

In our kitchen, we did not allow meat or dairy. We ran on a diet of organic fruits, vegetables, and grains. Apart from the kitchen, other sources of water were located far down a hill. This meant that every time I wanted water, I actively had to work for it. Moreover, my cabin had no electricity, which reminded me that a bedroom is an intentional space used to rest and recharge, not to sit up and text late at night.

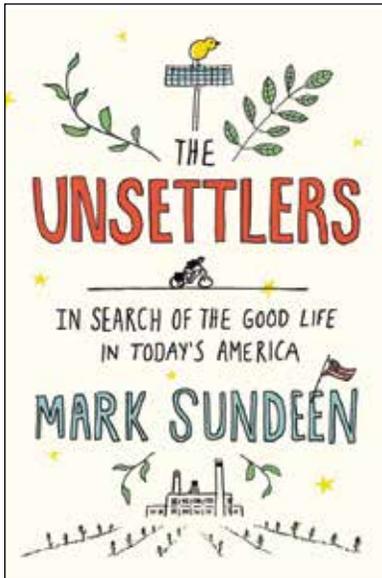
Although many of the things listed above may seem obvious, they can be very tough to actually implement into everyday life. These are the simple lessons that support me in my symmetry—that I continue to draw upon whenever I am, at times, feeling a little overwhelmed by a bureaucratic world. I will forever come back to community-based living whenever I feel a disconnect between this symmetry.

Regardless of your lot in life, I truly believe spending some time in a community-based setting has something magical to offer everyone.

Through spending time within this community, and living freely without judgment, I began to understand that the duality within me is something to be honored, not judged.

I am this, and I am that, and I forever will be both. 🍌

*Elizabeth Arnott is from London, Ontario, Canada. She has spent the past three years traveling for work, academia, and her own personal growth. A cultural alchemist, she has traveled through Haitian highlands to Indian jungles, experiencing the meaning of community in many different ways. Elizabeth works in human rights law and has most recently been living in a small Mayan community on Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. Contact Elizabeth at [earnott8@gmail.com](mailto:earnott8@gmail.com).*



# The Virtues of Unsettling

**The Unsettlers:**  
**In Search of the Good Life in Today's America**  
*By Mark Sundeen*  
 Riverhead Books, New York, 2017, 336 pages

Reading *The Unsettlers* has been an adventure, the product of the author's search for four American couples who decided to pursue a life of radical simplicity. He helps us make their acquaintance through writing that combines (to quote David James Duncan) "fierce reasoning, romance, impeccable research, the narrative pull of a thriller, and the subliminal magic of some wondrous old myth." The book has given me an opportunity to walk in the footsteps of visionaries for whom the "good life" of the subtitle refers not to a suburban home with a two-car garage, but a radically alternative life, lived lightly on the earth and focused on the well-being of all people, present and future.

Sundeen caught my attention immediately by describing two "unsettlers" alighting from an Amtrak train in La Plata, Missouri in early 2007, each of them wrestling with a large cardboard box. Inside each box are bicycle parts, which Sarah, a classically trained opera singer, five months pregnant, and her husband Ethan, a former marine biologist, manage to piece together—their only transportation since they have vowed to eschew all vehicles whose wheels move because of fossil fuel. Their destination is an old off-grid Amish farmhouse where they hope to conduct their simple life, but they have never been there. In the darkness, with semis speeding by, they soon find themselves lost, but a friendly policeman comes to their rescue and leads them to their new home.

Sarah and Ethan are founders of the Possibility Alliance, an intentional community and activist group, one of whose projects is the Superhero Alliance, a creative venture in which participants dress up as superheroes (with names like CompashMan, Queen Bee, Love Ninja, and Atomic Calm) and ride bicycles, seeking people on their travels who need help, whether it be building a fence or planting a garden. Intentional community is a logical outgrowth of and accompaniment to the work to which Sarah, Ethan, and their friends are called, as it allows them to better embody their goals of more elemental, service-based living. [See articles by Ethan and friends in *COMMUNITIES* #140, #141, #165, #172, and by Sarah's mother Victoria in #149.]

A scene very different from rural Northeast Missouri awaits us in the next section, entitled "Detroit," where Olivia and Greg, an interracial couple, have a vision of urban farming in the vacant lots of a rough part of town. Some of it is not easy reading: for a while, I felt as if I were struggling along with them. In the end, thankfully, the vision comes to fruition.

In the next chapter, "Montana," Sundeen visits a large farm run by Luci and Steve, for whom sustainable living has become close to a religion. Unfortunately, this does not apply to their finances; they are in debt, struggling to find a market for their crops. What *does* one do with tons of unsold organic potatoes, especially since Missoula, the location of the closest farmers' market, is the only city within 150 miles? Their son Emmet (who has the distinction of having been born in a tepee on the farm!) is now in New York studying art, rather than contributing to his parents' venture. The influx of Hmong refugees into the area brings new life to the farmers' market and Luci and Steve are finally on the path to recovery.

So how about the author, himself? One reason he undertakes this extensive research is that he himself has felt an increasing attraction to dropping out of the prevailing culture. He is influenced in this by a young woman named Cedar, his partner, who was raised by hippies and knows that world well. One of the key decisions made in this book is his own, as he encourages her to follow

her own dreams and to study poetry at a university. His conversations with her are some of several that lead to his own conclusion about his future; he comes to understand that the people he met chose their lives because they wanted to live that way. He, however, is not cut out for it: what seem like "freedoms" to his subjects would be "hardships" for him.

How fortunate that, rather than deciding to be an "unsettler" in the style of those he describes, the author chose to write about them instead. His message is an important contribution to our own knowledge of lives very different from the mainstream.

As Sundeen shares the lives of his subjects, we cannot help but become "unsettled" ourselves. As we come face to face with their values, we can't help but ask some questions of ourselves.

The end result? After closing this book, there is another, as yet unwritten chapter for each reader. It might be entitled "My Own Life." It challenges us with a question: How can I use my *own* particular skills and passions in order to contribute to a healthier, happier, and more sustainable world? Your answers may be similar to those we've read about...or very different choices. Even those already living in intentional community or pursuing a simpler life may be challenged and inspired to make further changes. We need lots of kinds of "unsettlers" these days. 🍌

---

*Nancy Roth is a writer, Episcopal priest, retreat and workshop leader, musician, and dancer. She is the author of 13 books (including Grounded in Love: Ecology, Faith, and Action) and numerous articles, including nine in Lost Valley Educational Center's former publication, Talking Leaves (see [revnancyroth.com/articles.html](http://revnancyroth.com/articles.html)) and four previous articles in COMMUNITIES (see [www.ic.org/communities-index](http://www.ic.org/communities-index)).*

# HONORING Diana Leafe Christian



COMMUNITIES is happy to announce that our former longtime editor (1993–2007) and frequent contributor Diana Leafe Christian has been chosen by the FIC’s awards committee to receive the 2018 Kozeny Communitarian Award, “honoring the indomitable spirit of Geoph Kozeny, who devoted his adult life to creating community in the world.” (Before his death in 2007, Geoph was a regular contributor to COMMUNITIES, spearheaded the first *Communities Directory* book, traveled the communities world lending a helping hand, giving his slide show, and then creating the *Visions of Utopia* videos, and attended innumerable gatherings where his gentle spirit, love of community, wealth of personal experience, and commitment to service made him always welcome.)

The Kozeny award celebrates the accomplishments of a person or organization who has contributed to the communities movement in one or more of the following ways: networker, media relations, good neighbor, community builder, creating community in place, cooperative leadership, and/or historian/preservationist. Remarkably, Diana Christian has made significant contributions in all of those areas, sometimes by taking a leading role, and sometimes by providing invaluable assistance to others working in those areas.

The citation from the awards committee reads in part as follows:

“Diana’s dance with community began as a young adult, when her experience living in shared households piqued her interest in intentional communities. In 1991 she cofounded the *Growing Community* newsletter—the first of many works focused on starting communities. Two years later she was chosen

by the FIC to be the Editor of COMMUNITIES magazine, where her job was to bring it back into regular production, focusing on the ideas and issues of community living. Over her 14-year tenure, Diana became known for her writing and editing about community living, for leading workshops on starting communities, and for networking during community visits and events.

“Diana published her first book, *Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities*, in 2003. It has become one of the most widely cited and recommended titles for people wanting to start a community. In support of her workshops and consultations Diana amassed a large body of print materials from COMMUNITIES and other sources, which she actively draws from and shares—much as Geoph Kozeny did with slides for his renowned networking presentations.

“Diana’s strong commitment to community outreach was significantly reinforced by her joining Earthaven (Black Mountain NC) in 2002, where she has been active in that community’s development. As a well-established ecovillage, Earthaven’s mission includes being a model and inspiration to others aspiring to build or establish community with a strong ecological component—which commitment fit Diana like a glove.

“In 2007, Diana released her second book, *Finding Community: How to Join an Ecovillage or Intentional Community*. In this book Diana draws on her personal experience as well as those she interviewed. *Finding Community* has served a dual purpose: both as a core resource for people seeking a home in community, and as a resource for those already in community who want their home to be more inviting.

“Diana is a widely-traveled public speaker, workshop leader, and consultant. She specializes in ecovillages, community living and its challenges, and approaches to governance and decision-making (especially sociocracy). Her work is remarkable for its scope and depth. Her curious, yearning mind raises questions that often reveal subtleties and interesting ideas. Of particular value is Diana’s willingness to directly address the difficult questions involving the ‘business of community’—such as costs, legalities, and zoning. While less in the spotlight, these foundational issues must be addressed for communities to sustain themselves, and Diana’s work has helped many face these challenges successfully.

“As an active networker, she is in regular contact with intentional community organizers across the spectrum of those living and working in community. In addition to her deep connections with the FIC, she has actively engaged with regional, national, and international community networks, such as the Northwest Intentional Community Association, the Cohousing Association of the United States, and the Global Ecovillage Network. She regularly attends, presents, and participates in gatherings, meetings, and events focused on community living.

“The FIC celebrates Diana Christian’s many contributions, and her personal commitment to her mission in the world, which is, in the words of her website, ‘to help intentional communities of every kind get started successfully and function effectively and harmoniously.’” 🌱

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## What Readers say about COMMUNITIES

I love COMMUNITIES magazine. 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

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.

—Christian Williams, Editor, Utne Reader

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.

—Chuck Durrett,  
The Cohousing Company, McCamant & Durrett Architects

For more than 40 years COMMUNITIES has done an outstanding job of promoting the communitarian spirit as well as serving intentional communities and other groups coming together for the common good.

—Timothy Miller,  
Professor of Religious Studies, University of Kansas

For many years we've been associated with and have strongly supported COMMUNITIES because we're convinced of its unique contribution to the communities movement in the United States and the world.

—Lisa and Belden Paulson, Ph.D.,  
cofounders of High Wind community

COMMUNITIES has been important to me ever since I began researching intentional communities back in 1980.... The Editors have always been willing to include critical articles which challenge accepted norms.

—Dr. Bill Metcalf,  
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

COMMUNITIES is an invaluable resource.

—Professor Emeritus Yaacov Oved, Tel-Aviv University

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