



# BRIDGING THE GAP

A Quaker Intentional Community Newsletter

Issue #3 (January 2000)

Retreat! Retreat!

We're getting excited about our February retreat and hope we will see many of you there. The goal of the retreat is twofold: to start on the basic elements of gathering together as a community—to look at sites, agree on a decision-making process, and so on—and at the same time to experience the benefits of community: having fun and working together in varied families joined together in a larger group.

Powell House is the conference and retreat center of New York Yearly Meeting, the regional organization of Quakers. It's in rural Columbia County—the very area in which we want to establish our community, so by coming to the retreat you can also check out the lay of the land. (For more, see [www.nym.org/powellhouse/](http://www.nym.org/powellhouse/))

The retreat agenda so far is laid out in detail below in the hopes that it will tempt you to join us. Vicki Cooley, Lee Haring, and Janet Carter will be leading certain sessions so that all of us, especially those who are closer to the project, can benefit from their experiences and perspectives. Is something that you want to see missing from the weekend? We welcome suggestions!

Deep Community: Powell House Retreat on Intentional Community in Columbia County, February 25-27, 2000

## *Friday Night*

7:00 Dinner

30 min.: Getting to know each other exercises, with children

10 min.: Presentation of Agenda (We have addressed some questions we know will arise—where, what about work, how do we plan it, "governance"—and have left lots of time for other questions)

35 min.: Brainstorming of Questions: What are the questions people have that need to be answered? What do we need to know? Make a list of these, post the list, and try to address as many as we can during the weekend, with children

15 min.: Closure and worship

### RESOURCES:

#### ORGANIZATIONS/WEB SITES

##### Intentional Communities

What a great Web site! Come here with all your questions about intentional communities. Besides their directory of ICs, they have a reading list ("Prose 'n' Poetry"), background info, mailing lists, events, etc. Even for-sale listings for houses in ICs! Also, one of the shortest Web addresses ever:

[www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org)

## *Saturday*

7:30 Worship for those who are up

8:00 Breakfast

20 min.: Brainstorm on what a community should or could include. What are different people's dreams of what a community is like or needs to have? Write and post the list. Include children.

70 min.: Discussion of process

—Setting of ground rules/Quaker practice

—Identification of what can be resolved ahead of time, vs. what will just have to be worked out as it happens

—Recognition of different starting points and how we deal with these

50 min.: Use above list to create several task groups to work on different aspects of the community (land trust aspect—bylaws; approach to home design and construction; new members support; economic issues; incorporation of spiritual focus; family orientation; environmental appropriateness; and social service)

1 hr.: Group work project around Powell House, with kids

12:00 Lunch and song

1 hr.: Jobs presentation and discussion: Ideas for business or supportive projects and community mutual support

2 hrs.: Visit to sites/properties

90 min.: Discussion of sites

6:00-7:15 Dinner

45 min.: Stories by the fire

30 min.: Break to get children ready for bed

90 min.: Decision making

15 min.: Closure, worship

## *Sunday*

8:00 Breakfast

45 min.: Unanswered questions

30 min.: Where do we go from here?

15 min.: Closure, worship

The cost of the weekend is \$145 per adult, \$85 per teen, \$65 per child, and \$20 per infant.

### RESOURCES: GATHERINGS

The Second Luddite Conference

June 23-25, 2000

A gathering of people interested in plain living, organized by the Center for Plain Living (publishers of Plain Magazine). This second session of the Second Luddite Conference, which first met in 1996, will take place at Stillwater Friends Meetinghouse in Barnesville, Ohio, with speakers including Wendell Berry, panels, updates, silent meeting, and shared meals. Childcare is provided. Costs are reasonable. Write for more information:

SLC, c/o

Center for Plain Living

60805 Pigeon Point

Barnesville, Ohio 43713

Scholarships are available, and first-time attenders get a \$45 discount. We hope to see you there!

Growing Older in Community—We Need Your Vision!

The second goal of this intentional-community project is to design our lives to be more family friendly. Can we organize a community not only to be a healthier place to raise our children than the standard suburbia-and-public school situation, but also to accommodate our own aging? Our society seems to have primarily focused on retirement and continuing care facilities as the option for us as we grow older. I know my parents, who have chosen to live in Ecuador and continue in their home past age 65, have received much pressure from friends and their cohorts in this country to get their names on the waiting list at one or another retirement home.

My hunch is that this community we are building will not be a '60's commune with a lot of 20ish-year-olds, but rather a very mixed age group from small children up to retirement-age folks. So in considering the structure of our community it would be interesting to set aside the current Western wider societal models for addressing aging and death issues and to look at how we want to approach them from the perspectives of spirituality, family, economics, and environmental appropriateness. We might wish to add a category such as body-mind-spiritual wellness in an overt manner, though I would hope it consistently remains intrinsic to all that the community does.

RESOURCES: MAGAZINES

YES! A Journal of Positive Futures

published by the Positive Futures Network, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting people's active engagement in creating a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world. Each issue has a theme, like changing the climate, peacemakers, local currency, education, etc.

Quarterly, \$24/year. Subscribe online, by calling 1-800-YES-4451, or by writing:

YES!

PO Box 10818

Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818

[www.futurenet.org](http://www.futurenet.org)

To start the process of incorporating aging as an integral and valued part of our lives in community and recognizing death's role in the cycle of life, we might begin by examining our goals, objectives, and priorities for these stages of our lives. Once individual goals, objectives, and priorities are expressed we can begin working on how the community can build both its physical and social "infrastructure" to embrace this period of life.

This is not the place or time to propose what our goals or priorities for aging should be. Rather, at this time I have two thoughts I would like to share. One is that as part of the division of labor (and there is much to be done!), those among us for whom these issues are more pressing might work to discuss, plan, and design the community to best fit our dreams. All that we design and build should take into account special mobility, privacy, and

care needs, and it may be easier to keep these in mind if a "committee" exists to make suggestions and recommendations about plans and designs both in terms of our material as well as our social constructions. It would be well for us to be gathering our thoughts along these lines for a time in the near future when we address details and consequences of moving into community.

My second thought is that I know my parents and others in the over-60 set who have not moved into retirement homes have a lot of opinions and comments about the usual alternatives for American "senior citizens." Those of you who are considering this kind of a community as an alternative have a huge experience base and probably, if we let you at it, will create a phenomenal new alternative that will enrich all of our lives.

Go to it!

—Jens Braun

***Let us know for the next issue of the newsletter:*** What do you want the place you spend your over-65 years to be like? What do you dislike about retirement communities (even the good ones)? What do you like? What would you miss most if you had to move into the best one you know about tomorrow?

(Send your responses to ekh@panix.com or the editorial address at the bottom of page 7.)

CLIPPINGS: THOUGHT-PROVOKING TIDBITS FOR  
ALTERNATIVE LIVING

Did any of you hear the piece on NPR's "Car Talk" about an intentional community called Dancing Rabbit? They have a car problem. The members of the community share the use of three vehicles: a tractor, a pickup truck, and a VW van. All vehicles have diesel motors and run on homemade diesel fuel. (I've looked it up—the formula is relatively simple and is easily made at home with various ingredients including used vegetable oil from your local McDonalds.) Being a VW van owner myself, I was saddened to hear that the tractor and pickup run fine but the VW chokes on the homemade fuel. Click and Clack (mechanics and hosts of the radio show) think the fuel may be dissolving the cheap VW fuel hoses. Nevertheless, think about the usefulness of car cooperatives and then think about the freedom of making our own fuel...

—Jens Braun

Money Talks

We have been having a discussion "around the kitchen table" on money. As we know, this is a big, lots-of-baggage-attached, everyone-has-an-opinion, it's-not-that-easy-to-change-how-we-spend-it-right-now type issue that is particularly touchy given our capitalist, consumer-choice-oriented American society. You probably also know that communities range from very individualistic in their approach to money to the essentially biblical/communist "everyone shares everything" approach. Most of our discussions have made us think

our community is likely to fall into the village model, in which we are responsible for our

own incomes; however, we will likely eventually have community enterprises that pay ourselves salaries, and we will focus much attention on neighborliness, sharing what makes sense to share, and an economy of grace.

But this does not address some of the practical issues we are facing right now. For example, it costs about \$50 per issue to copy and mail all these newsletters. On the one hand it is a pleasure to share this information with people who have expressed interest in the community. It's a good way to spread the word because we are sure some of you out there are talking with f/Friends and showing them your copies. Whether or not people join our particular community-building effort is not so important as building a critical mass of people talking about the issues and planting seeds in their minds that may in the future grow into action.

On the other hand, \$50 per issue is \$300 per year. Two other examples are this upcoming retreat, which costs close to \$300 per couple (though that doesn't at all cover Powell House's costs), and research on properties or community land trusts, which would proceed faster with a little more financial investment. (We will need to hire a lawyer to research New York State's

land-trust rules and regulations and draft the community bylaws, and we will need to pay for water and soil testing for properties in which we are seriously interested.)

Now, if one of our priorities is to create alternatives to the existing all-consuming economy, it would be great to figure out means to accomplish our goals without so much expenditure of dinero. For example, an e-mail newsletter would be cheaper (free except for our time). However, the facts sort of get in the way: many of our subscribers don't have e-mail access, and an e-mail newsletter is just not as real and compelling as a paper one. And as for the retreat, we will accomplish so much on so many levels at an in-person gathering that in many ways it's worth the money.

We are cruising ahead with the basic attitude that if we have money (and we are blessed that we do seem to have enough) we will try to use it as best we can, such that our expenditures reflect the priorities we have set, and not unconsidered habit-based or impulse spending. Any thoughts?

RESOURCES: BOOKS

The Plain Reader: Essays on Making a Simple Life  
by Scott Savage, editor of Plain Magazine

What some readers have said: on Amazon.com about this book:

"I can't tell you what a breath of fresh air this book was to me, and how much it opened my eyes to wants, needs and how they aren't the same thing--even though we fool ourselves into thinking that they are."

"This book will make you think about our "consumerism" lifestyle, and how we can escape to a more satisfying way of living."

"A book for anyone who has the growing feeling that all of modern life's complexities aren't really such a good thing after all."

(We wanted to quote from the book but the author refused to allow his publisher to put an excerpt on the Internet!)

## New Year's Weekend

My little family (myself, Eric, and toddler Will) spent the New Year's just past at Powell House at the New Year's Celebration weekend. We went because our other family (Jens, Spee, and kids) were going to be there, and also because, of our few social options, this seemed like the one that best fit the occasion. Looking back on it (and still feeling that judgement is correct) I realize how far out of the mainstream of American life we happen to be on this issue! Our New Year's Eve weekend included no alcohol, no watching the ball drop in Times Square, no municipal or personally-risked fireworks, and no monitoring TV or the Internet to make sure a curtain of Y2K chaos was not sweeping across the globe. Instead we had good meals, lots of families and children, arts and crafts, baking cookies, homemade hot-air balloons sent aloft at night, skating on a frozen pond with Will (and skating with flashlights in the dark!) and a silent meeting ending at midnight on the 31st. And I didn't miss the other stuff at all.

The only odd thing was spending New Year's with so many people I hadn't met and didn't get to know. How much more fun and more meaningful that weekend of celebration would have been if most of the people there had been my fellow community members during the other 364 days a year! My hope for future New Years is to spend them similarly, but within a group of people—a community—that is really mine.

—Ellen Key Harris-Braun

## RESOURCES: ELECTRONIC MAILING LISTS

ECOBALANCE is an online discussion group dedicated to the creation and maintenance of self-sufficient, sustainable communities, in which people live in harmony with each other and with nature. A full range of human communities are represented, from the individual household, to a cluster of households (cohousing), to neighborhoods and cities. A number of participants are working to form Ecovillages - newly created communities embodying within them the principles of living in harmony with nature and each other.

TO SUBSCRIBE: Send e-mail to [requests@gaia.org](mailto:requests@gaia.org); the message body should say SUBSCRIBE ECOBALANCE

## Winnowing

If you don't want to receive this newsletter anymore, please let us know by the end of February and we'll take you off the list. It costs \$3.50 per subscriber for us to copy and mail a year's worth of bimonthly newsletters to you. If you do want to stay on the list, which we hope is the case, please consider sending us a \$3.50 donation. And if you've already sent in a donation, of course, you don't need to send in another—we will assume that you're interested enough to stay on the list!

Also, if you have a new e-mail address or have not yet sent us your e-mail address, please send it to us! We need to keep track of the "e-mailability" of our subscribers so that we can judge when it is time to make the move to all-e-mail or e-mail/postal mail distribution.

Addresses: Ellen Key Harris-Braun, 61 Pond Brook Road, Newtown, CT 06470 or [ekh@panix.com](mailto:ekh@panix.com)

Thanks!

CLIPPINGS: THOUGHT-PROVOKING TIDBITS FOR  
ALTERNATIVE LIVING

Here's a book full of pearls of wisdom relevant to the transition we are trying to make toward a more simple, centered life. The book is called "This Country Life: Making the Most of the Simple Life" by Samuel Ogden. It was first published in 1946 and revised and republished over 25 years later (1973) to help those in the back-to-the-land and commune movements of the 1970s.

In the Foreword, Ogden explains the purpose of the book: "As the years have passed we have heard with increasing frequency the same old question, variously phrased. Generally, it runs something like this: 'What do you do to make a living in the country? Of course I know what you do, but you are a special case. What could we do? If only we could be sure of enough to live on, if only our children were educated, if only we could live as you do, we would throw up everything and come to the country to live too.'" Ogden goes on to say, "I have come to the conclusion that the greatest single barrier to the making of the change, is timidity."

"With the disappearance of the community spirit, something very worthwhile has disappeared from our national life. For the most part such vestiges of community life and spirit as remain will be found in the rural districts, and in the main all hope for its rebirth lies here. Community living requires active participation on the part of the individual, but the returns to the individual are out of all proportion to the effort expended." (p. 33)

"I confess that I dwell on the events and values of days gone as though they were better than what we find in the world today. I thoroughly believe that they were. Men were a part of the nature around them, recognizing it as the awesome world they lived in. Artificialities and imitations we take for granted had not been thought of including imitation maple syrup or any of the other artificial flavorings, additives, and preservatives that fill market shelves today....

"Nowadays the syrups which mouth-watering pictures in the magazine advertisements urge us to pour over the golden, gleaming cakes of oleo-margarine which crown the summit of a pile of ready-mix buckwheat cakes contain no essence of the maple tree whatever, and the making of maple sugar plays an ever diminishing part in human affairs.

"Such is the work of progress! And here there is a paradox, for the very forces of technology and the mechanization which have resulted in the non-syrup and the non-butter and the non-buckwheat cakes, are now being assembled for the rescue of the maple sugar industry." (pp. 174-175)

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We believe community can be a means of working toward these four and a half main objectives:

1. To increase the mindfulness, spiritual focus and God-centeredness of our lives by finding and living near others who are like-minded and will reinforce, on a daily basis, our desire to live in worship.
2. To strengthen our family life both by creating a “village” setting in which to raise our and others' children, and by caring for our elders. This includes an emphasis on leaving behind cultural obstacles that interfere with providing the time and energy that healthy family life requires.
3. To examine carefully our participation in the national/international consumer economy and begin to build the critical mass necessary for viable business networks and sources of goods and services more appropriate to our Quaker testimonies.
4. To focus on a lifestyle that is environmentally sound and that attempts to give back to our planet as much as is taken from it.
- 4.5 To include a good measure of joy, fun, outreach, and service in our lives as we strive to meet the first four objectives.

Send us ideas, questions, musings, excerpts from thought-provoking articles, clippings, books, Web sites, etc., and we'll share them via this newsletter with others who are interested in intentional community...all for the purpose of learning how to bridge the gap between conventional American life at the end of this century and the communities we would like to be part of at the dawn of the next.