

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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Looking Back, Looking Forward

Stumbling Toward Diversity

Remembering Tree Frog Farm

Especially Challenging Behaviors

Stories from a Country Commune

The Many Failed Theories of Twin Oaks

Text

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by David Schrom

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In community I've learned about friendship, fun, and freedom, and about blunders, miscalculations, and setbacks. In times of difficulty, I've recalled often Abraham Lincoln's, "You can't fail until you quit."

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When prospective community members over the age of 55 come knocking on community doors and asking for membership, please think twice before saying "No, you are too old" without first asking what they have to offer a community.

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Here, there have been no days spent alone and shaking in my pain, but friendship, support, love until I could stand on my own again. No fairy tales for our children, just the strong, honest beauty of pain and love in loss.

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All through the peak / of the downpour, / that three-note birdcall never stopped / praising the rain.

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Integrating the **values** of community into the **functionality** of community yields inspiring results.

ON THE COVER



Past, present, and future converge at Community Village, Oregon Country Fair, July 2019: Jenny Leis of Cedar Moon Community, a friend, a cell phone, and a copy of COMMUNITIES #180 bear witness to the enduring influence

of the 1960s counterculture as a front-cover scene from 2018 plays out again in real time a year later. Photo by Chris Roth.

Magic, Ever-Evolving

By David Schrom

I've made it! Fifty years of living the dream! At 75 I feel triumph, even exuberance, regardless of what comes next.

Oh, I've had hard times along the way, many of the kind I might have expected had I paused at the outset to contemplate the audacity of imagining me—a product of unabashedly egocentric post-WWII American society—learning to identify my own good with the common good. But who among the hippie or (in my case) hippie-influenced dreamers of that era paused to question?

To the dreamers of this era, "Thank you!" As we oldsters prepare to exit, few things are more satisfying than to see younger champions of a cause to which we've been so devoted.

If you're young, or naive at whatever age, please learn from my confession. I thought I already knew everything I needed to know about creating the community of my dreams, just as I presumed to know so much else about which I've been mistaken. I'd done family chores growing up. I'd contributed in school. I'd volunteered. I'd given to church and charity. These were preparations all. But, at least in my case, they were far short of sufficient to mature that loving by which we make each other's interests our own 24/7/365, even as we protect against converting interdependence to co-dependence. Expect challenges. Relish them. Give thanks for them. Love them. However persistent or recurrent, they're a crucible in which to forge a stronger self and community.

The words spill out, born of a half century of lessons, each in turn drawn from its own foundation in day-to-day life. In community I've learned about friendship, fun, and freedom, and about blunders, miscalculations, and setbacks. In times of difficulty, I've recalled often Abraham Lincoln's, "You can't fail until you quit."

As our group has divided and regrouped, with one or another of us off to test waters elsewhere, sometimes returning in various ways and sometimes remaining distant in all, we've kept alive a spark of community, a vision of people joined in commitment to consensual, rather than coercive living, all for one and one for all. And we've done this both because we've tasted its joys, hunger for more, and want to offer them to others, and because we see it as key to human survival and self-realization. Viewing community in this way, we imbue our work to create it with an extra measure of meaning.

In community I've reaped advantages of partners in healthful living and public service, and I've benefited from vast economies of sharing, living way beyond my individual means even as I shrink my ecological footprint. Beyond these ample gains, however, has lain a surprising reward, a veritable jackpot that I now view as the greatest gift of community: opportunity to become vulnerable and transparent as I reveal day and night, year in and year out, a person behind a public persona.

Seeing myself reflected in words and actions towards me of a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-talented, multi-skilled, multi-visioned stream of hundreds of co-residents, visitors, and guests has been both illuminating and sobering. Whether I've minutes or decades ahead, I'll live them changed for the better by having enjoyed the perspectives of these diverse mirrors and, with insights gained, adjusted my self-perception to be more accurate and my behavior to be more as I intend.

To all who are beginning, or even just contemplating intentional community, or are somewhere further along this path, including people younger than I, peers, and elders, I offer gratitude for partnership, however distant and seemingly disconnected from each other we may be. Experiencing the meteoric rise in interest in, and the

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increasingly open and enthusiastic responses to the community in which I live, I perceive that while some may be a measure of our own evolution, much is evidence of increasing, widespread hunger for broad, deep, sustained, authentic connection. I give thanks to have been able to contribute to both a laboratory for, and a demonstration of the rewards and responsibilities of such connection.

In an era when Nature is admonishing us ever more firmly to see self and surroundings more accurately, that we may better predict consequences of our unprecedentedly large human family wielding similarly unprecedentedly powerful technologies, intentional community can be means to accelerate our learning. And as we see more clearly what we want as living beings and as humans, and the limits of our world to provide, community can be a means to concentrate on what we can generate and enjoy in abundance, our love and understanding, and to share with compassion for each other and respect for the Earth the limited capacity of the biosphere to fulfill material want.

Looking backward, I celebrate my and others' small steps towards oneness. Look-

ing forward, I imagine with a smile those steps we've yet to take. 🐦

Since 1979, David Schrom has been a part of Magic (ecomagic.org), a service organization and intentional community doing pioneering work in "valuescience." Magic demonstrates how people can address individual, social, and environmental ills nearer their roots by applying science to discern value more accurately and realize it more fully. Contact david@ecomagic.org or via snail mail: Magic, Box 15894, Stanford, CA 94309.



Magicians, friends, and supporters celebrate Magic's 25th anniversary.



Author (pink shirt) with guests at Magic's 25th anniversary.



Magicians and friends celebrate winter solstice by planting local open space, December 2021. (Author wears blue hat in last row.)

Photos courtesy of David Schrom