

# C.A.L.L.

Communes *A* + *L*arge *L*etter



INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNES DESK



YAD TABENKIN



Dear Readers,

It's been a full year since C.A.L.L. last popped through your letterbox and to be honest, there were moments when I thought that the ICD would cease to exist altogether. Since the 1970's we have been fostering links between intentional communities the world over. Our name is even a throwback to a time before the term 'Intentional Community' replaced the word 'Commune' as the appellation of choice.



This spell of uncertainty has prompted a period of soul-searching where we've questioned our desire and motivation to fight for our continued existence: Do we believe in our mission? Do we have a vision and a strategy for actualizing it? Do we have partners and supporters who care about us and are willing to continue ploughing the furrow of shared community experiences together with us? How do we remain relevant for them?

We are by no means out of the woods, but the responses that I have received since we were in danger of losing our entire budget have been numerous, heart-warming and more than anything else, inspiring.

Rather than satisfying ourselves by reverting to our old ways and our existing activities, and being overly dependent on our existing sources of funding, we have affirmed our guiding principles, are exploring alternative sponsorship, and are contemplating broadening our undertakings.

1) Aims of the International Communes Desk include:

- To foster links with intentional communities from around the world, in order to learn about their life styles and activities, to exchange information, opinions and ideas for mutual benefit.
- To provide an address for people from all over the world, who are seeking advice and information about the kibbutz in its different aspects and about communities the world over (including help in making contact for those wishing to visit a community or join one).
- To encourage and inspire those in the Kibbutz Movement, in Israel, and the world at large, by acquainting them with the various forms of communal living that exist around the world.

## CONTENTS

**4**  
**Book review: A Living Revolution**

**5**  
**Book review: Communes & Intentional Communities**

**6**  
**Co-housing Eco-communities, USA & UK**

**9**  
**Bruderhof Urban Community, USA**

**10**  
**ICSA Conference**

**11**  
**Maple Ridge, USA**

**12**  
**Kaleidoscope by Joel Dorkam**

**17**  
**Kibbutz Shorts**

**19**  
**CO-housing NOW, Sweden**

**20**  
**Niederkaufungen, Germany**

**22**  
**Brithdir Mawr, Wales**

**24**  
**Ravenna Kibbutz, USA**

**26**  
**Kibbutz Reinvention, Israel**



2) Present and possible future activities of the International Communes Desk include:

- Twice a year, the International Communes Desk publishes the English-language journal C.A.L.L. (Communities At Large Letter). This magazine reflects the extensive exchange of information and correspondence with organizations and communal groups abroad. Furthermore, it features articles and information about what's going on in both the classic kibbutz and follows closely the development of the new wave of urban communes in Israel. Could we publish C.A.L.L. three times a year?
- The International Communes Desk represents the kibbutz idea and practice, and its contemporary successors, at various Israeli and International forums (e.g. International Communal Studies Association conference, which this year is taking place in Israel on the occasion of the centenary since the establishment of Degania). Could we attend more of these international gatherings?
- The International Communes Desk maintains a website in both English and Hebrew. Could we update the site more regularly? Could we create a more interactive website, with articles, blogs, forums, and even live chat?
- When members of intentional communities travel abroad, they sometimes make an effort to visit a local community. Can we at the International Communes Desk initiate and organize visit exchanges?
- There are international communities conferences for academics, and there are regional/national conferences for members of communities, but there isn't a truly international conference for people living communally to come together to share and learn from each others' experiences. Can we at the International Communes Desk organize an international communities gathering?

3) Funding for the International Communes Desk:

- We are currently supported by the Kibbutz Movement, but we are searching for additional sources of funding to put us on a more solid, long-term financial footing, and to enable us to not just continue our present undertakings, but to broaden our activities. Can we employ a professional fundraiser? Do we have partners abroad that can help us with fundraising? Can we start collecting dues from 'members'?

These are some of the questions that we are grappling with here at the International Communes Desk. We wanted to share with our readers these dilemmas in order for them to become *our* dilemmas. I would love to hear your responses.

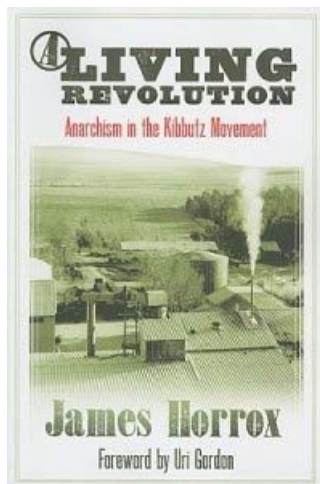
Finally, I want to take this opportunity to remind you of the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) conference which is taking place from 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> June here in Israel. I look forward to seeing many of you there, and I am hoping to convene a forum of 'Friends of ICD' to discuss some of the issues I have outlined above.

You can still send us your suggestions, corrections, contributions and retributions regarding C.A.L.L. to the usual email address,

Anton  
anton@kyovel.org  
www.communa.org.il

## Book Reviews

### A Living Revolution: Anarchism in the Kibbutz Movement by James Horrox



- Imagine a country built from scratch, from the bottom-up, by Anarchists, Socialists, Communists, Marxists - radicals from all the shades of red.
- Imagine a country where the founders voluntarily came together to found co-operatives, communities, unions, national health care etc without the presence of a government that could tell them what to do.
- Imagine a country whose pioneers, having mostly been urbanites, made a conscious decision to go back to working the land.
- Imagine a country with the most extensive and most successful examples of communal living anywhere in the world over the last hundred years.
- Imagine a country that today, in 2010, contains within it a network of communes which is growing by a couple of hundred people per year.

You would assume that if such a country existed, those even remotely interested in the communities movement, alternative living or those who are simply searching for signs that a non-coercive, non-capitalist society is possible, would be clamouring to find out more, to visit, and to garner inspiration from such a remarkable entity.

That this country happens to be called Israel, which possesses also negative attributes, not unlike all other countries, means that many progressive-minded individuals choose to overlook the good for the bad, rather than being prepared to engage in a more sophisticated, three-dimensional appraisal of complex historical processes.

One of those brave enough to cut through the din is James Horrox, whose book intends to be a wake-up call to those on the left who stubbornly refuse to hear anything remotely positive said of the rogue Jewish State, even if it means restricting their sight as far as the end of their noses.

In a nutshell, James' thesis proclaims that the kibbutz movement was established according to anarchist principles, and, in the absence of centralized institutions of a State, fulfilled all of the functions of a real workers society. He continues to surmise that the burgeoning urban communal movement of contemporary Israel is the ideological continuation of this anarcho-socialist trend.

I must confess that I met James multiple times during his writing of this book, and there is even a section within on my community, with quotes from interviews he conducted with me. I'm aware that James has had to contend with anti-Israel bias through the various stages of publishing, editing and marketing his book, and we at the International Communes Desk indubitably sympathise with his plight. Over the years, we too have felt the scorn of those unwilling to be in a dialogue with Israelis or Israel-based organizations such as the ICD. We at the ICD aim to be a contact centre which brings together people who believe that community and communal living, and the values that underlie it, should be encouraged and supported, and for them to affect the societies and countries that they live in, regardless of where they reside.

Review by Anton Marks





## Communes and Intentional Communities in the Second Half of the 20th Century by Ya'acov Oved

This book was published in Israel in 2009 and is a riveting eye opener for any commune and alternative culture enthusiast.

Tracing the communal scene decade by decade, Oved incorporates the global atmosphere of each period, the hardships faced and the dilemmas encountered, and discusses the main reasons for people joining this beautiful alternative way of life. For every decade he gives examples of specific communes or communities, accompanied with pictures that help stimulate the imagination, whilst describing some of the changes that they went through over the years and what they are up to today.

It is exhilarating to discover the diversity over time and place, and to recognize the many dilemmas that are similar worldwide and the different answers that they receive.

The four main questions that the book left me with were the balance between:

- Private and public
- How big or small should the commune be
- Selectiveness: Yes\no and how
- How to raise and educate the children.

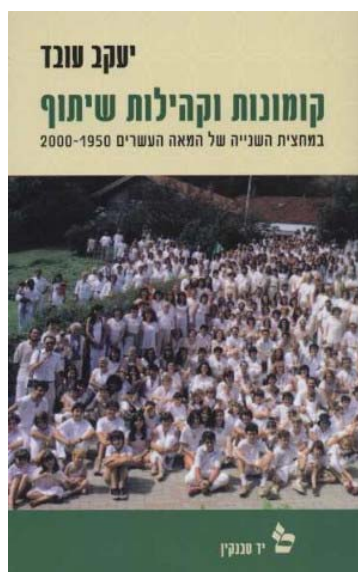
Oved highlights the importance of sharing and fostering partnerships, not only within community but also between communities - creating a kind of cooperative of cooperatives, or better yet, a circle of circles, to be joined on a voluntary basis. In addition, he acknowledges the importance of creating a utopian society in

the here and now, and to always remember that the mission is both internal and external: from the individual and group to the outer world. Being escapists won't aid long-term survival or influence the surrounding reality, which communities want to challenge, and then create a real alternative for.

I recommend this book if and when you want to uplift your spirits a little and get some historical perspective on what we are trying to accomplish.

Enjoy.

*Prof. Yaakov Oved is a member of Kibbutz Palmachim, and has devoted many years researching the history of communes. He has served as chairman of both the International Communes Desk (ICD) and the International Communal Studies Association (ICSA), the latter as a founding member.*



*During his research activities at ICSA he has published both nationally and internationally on topics related to the history of anarchism, socialism, utopian studies, and the history and genealogy of communes.*

*Books published by Yaakov Oved:*

- *Communes and intentional communities in the second half of the twentieth century 1950-2000 (2009)*

- *Evidence of the brotherhood: History of the communes of the Bruderhof brotherhood (1996)*

- *Distant brothers: the history of relations between the kibbutz movement and the Bruderhof (1993)*

- *Two hundred years of American communes (1986)*

Review by Leor Shapiro, Kibbutz Mish'ol, the urban kibbutz in Migdal Ha'emek and Nazareth Illit



Over the following pages we feature a couple of articles on Co-housing projects in the U.K. and the U.S. It seems that Co-housing has become a popular response to the dual concerns of environmental degradation and alienation in contemporary western society.

## Communal living: Love thy neighbourhood

Miles Brignall, *The Guardian*, Saturday 24 October 2009

Share your car, share childcare costs, share energy bills, but still enjoy the privacy of your own home. Welcome to the new age of communal living.

Does identikit suburban life leave you cold? Do you long for your children to grow up as part of a bigger community, where there's always help close at hand? Perhaps you are just looking to live a simpler, low-carbon existence, complete with your own space but surrounded by like-minded people?

If any of this strikes a chord with you, it could be time to consider joining one of the co-housing/communal living projects that are undergoing something of a renaissance.

For years, the concept has been falsely tarnished by the 70s clichés: religious fanatics or groups of hippies dropping out of society to do their own thing. While some plainly fell into that category, many of the communities that have survived have evolved into successful businesses, including organic farms or alternative conference centres.

Today, those living in co-housing projects are just as likely to have

a conventional job, and occupy their own space, as they are to be spending their time growing vegetables or living in a tepee.

At the heart of most of the newest schemes is the sense of being part of a like-minded community but retaining your personal space.

The most recent example of the modernisation of the concept can be seen in Lancaster. A group of potential co-housees have bought a former industrial site outside the city, where they plan to build a group of 30 eco-houses, complete with communal area. The scheme is a modern take on communal living that could have a wide appeal.

Already 21 houses have been taken, but the Lancaster project is still looking for another nine families or individuals to join them.

Chris Coates, one of its co-founders and something of a leading light in co-housing circles, says the purchase of the former engineering works and industrial units in the



Communal living appeals to Chris Coates and fellow future residents at Lancaster Cohousing Network.



village of Halton, just to the east of the city, ended a three-year search for a suitable site.

Adopting the Danish co-housing model, Coates and his colleagues' plan is to build a community on "ecological values and to be at the cutting edge of sustainable design and living".

The houses, which will be a mix of sizes, will be built to the highest environmental standards but cost the same as a conventional house of the same size in the area. They will feature solar water heaters, and there are plans to put in a biomass boiler. The long-term goal is to build an electricity generating hydro scheme using the picturesque river Lune, which runs adjacent to the site.

Co-housing doesn't just make environmental sense, it can also make financial sense. Residents should expect to save money on energy bills and through sharing things such as cars and childcare costs. Cooking and eating communally is also deemed important.

"We want to build a sustainable project that will become a beacon in the area, and I guess we are united in our wanting to change things - to show that individuals can make a difference", says Coates.

"We are a diverse group of all ages, although we are somewhat under-represented by the under-30s. Most of the group are in normal jobs, and we also have university staff and retired people - a real mix."

Coates says that, with 21 of 30 houses accounted for so far, the group hopes that planning permission will be granted soon (the previous developer had already obtained outline approval for a housing scheme) and that the building work will commence next year. The first groups will move in early in 2012, if all goes to plan.

For more details on the Lancaster project, go to [Lancastercohousing.org.uk](http://Lancastercohousing.org.uk)

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## Eco communities: Living the green life

By Mark Tutton for CNN

As today's urbanites become more concerned about reducing their carbon footprints, some are finding that modern eco communities offer them a way to live sustainably without foregoing their home comforts.

Communities that put an emphasis on green values range from isolated eco villages to sophisticated co-housing projects.

Co-housing was dreamed up in Denmark in the idealistic 60s. It allows residents to live in communities where they own their own homes but are actively involved in running their own neighborhoods, which often include a common house where shared dining and other activities are an option.

Sarah Berger, from the UK Co-housing Network, told CNN, "More and more people keep contacting us about getting involved in co-housing communities - there's an unquenchable thirst for this sort of thing."

As well as co-housing being widespread in Europe, the U.S. Co-housing Association



claims there are more than 150 co-housing communities in the U.S.

The Nubanusit Neighborhood and Farm in New Hampshire, U.S., is a new co-housing project designed to the highest green standards, including the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design benchmark.

Nubanusit co-founder Shelly Goguen Hulbert says its 29 homes are densely insulated and have triple glazing, meaning they are virtually airtight. A heat recovery system uses warm exhaust air to heat incoming fresh air, minimizing heat loss.

Homes are heated by a centralized wood pellet boiler system, with the pellets sourced from a manufacturer based 5 miles away. And the 70-acre site includes a farm, which means the community can grow its own food or have it grown right on their doorstep by professional farmers. All this helps minimize residents' carbon footprint, and that's a big attraction for many.

Although work on Nubanusit Neighborhood won't be completed until the end of the year, over half the homes have been sold and the people choosing to move there are by no means hardcore environmentalists.

As ordinary people become more environmentally aware the idea of eco communities is becoming more mainstream. In the UK, Living Villages has won architecture awards for its

Wintles development in Shropshire. Its 14 houses use lots of sustainable timber, are highly insulated, and have heat recovery systems and solar panels.

Like co-housing developments, Living Villages emphasizes community as much as environmentally sound design, with the Wintles homes facing each other around a village green to encourage social interaction.

But this kind of green living doesn't come cheap, with new Wintles homes on the market for up to \$900,000, a far cry from the inclusive ideology behind archetypal hippy collectives. And that's the catch - the more creature

comforts and environmentally-friendly features are built into a home, the more expensive, and exclusive, it becomes.

While these communities will never be for everyone, Berger maintains co-housing is a model for the future. "A lot of the basic concepts behind co-housing are applicable to larger housing developments," she says.

"Some of the principles could be woven in to conventional developments -- things like having the residential area car free, having a common house where you can eat communally from time to time, hold events, and have a children's room and games room for teenagers.

"Also, having offices for home working means you're meeting government objectives about reducing carbon footprints and living more sustainably.



The Wintles is a good example of a pedestrian priority zone, where the residents can enjoy a protected shared space and children can play





*All over the world, urban intentional communities of young people involved in affecting positive change in their surrounding neighbourhood are blossoming. We are pleased to feature an exclusive article from a member of a Bruderhof urban community in New York:*

I am a member of the Church Communities International group (formally known as the Bruderhof) and I have been living in Kingston, New York for the past two years. Living in a small city as this is very new for me as I grew up in a rural Bruderhof community in Pennsylvania. There are twelve of us living in two adjacent houses. The main reason for being right here in town is simply to live out what we believe: unity of faith, brotherly love, and sharing all things in common. And we hope to be a witness through that to true brotherhood for all mankind.

We have gotten to know many of our neighbors and often invite people for food and fellowship and to encourage each other. It is always amazing how happy and thankful our friends, new and old, are after spending an evening with us. It sure is not because we are special people, but something given by God.

One very exciting thing we do is run a group-family daycare in the smaller of our two houses. A young sister, a member of our community, along with her husband, is the director of the daycare. Their two and a half year old daughter is enrolled along with nine other children, the oldest just turned three. These children are from Kingston and other near-by villages (not from community members.) We have gotten to know the children and their families very well. All of the women that live at the Rondout (Bruderhof) House have their turn working in the daycare. Caring for these children, teaching them about nature, singing, sharing, and simply bringing joy to their little lives is the best part of my day.

Our brothers run a renovations business where they get hired all over Ulster County to do home improvements, and many other carpentry, painting and landscaping jobs.

Any chance I can get, I enjoy walking around the neighborhood to visit people. There are a lot of older folk, widows, and lonely souls who love someone to sit and chat with for awhile. Some of us girls also get involved in neighborhood events and help with children's activities.

I spent six months at Kibbutz Revivim, twenty years ago. I talked to many of the older members there about why they started the kibbutz movement. Their original longing to live and work together in brotherhood is very much the same as our longing here in Kingston.

If any of you who read this are in the area, you are very welcome to come visit us at: 88 West Chester St., Kingston, NY 12401

Iva Jane Shirky

*My father Wayne, and mother Loretta, were among the first group of Bruderhofers to ever visit Israel. They were a party of 6 hosted by the Kibbutz movement and attended the ICSA Conference in Yad Tabenkin in 1985. Wayne passed away in 2002 and his widow Loretta, at 80 years of age, is still very interested in any news about our contact with the Kibbutz movement.*



## A Message from ICSA President, Professor Michal Palgi

Dear friends and colleagues,

Summer is getting closer and the preparations for our coming ICSA conference "The Varied Paths of Communal Life" that will be held at the Emek Yezreel College, Israel, on June 28-30, 2010, are at full speed. The organizing committee has met a few times as did some of its subcommittees in order to discuss and decide upon content issues as well as technical and organizational issues. All in all I think we are doing well on the organizational side considering the strict budgetary limitations. This is the reason we are attempting to do as much as possible by ourselves without hiring outside help.

Please watch our website for further information that will be uploaded frequently:

[http://kibbutz.haifa.ac.il/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=34](http://kibbutz.haifa.ac.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=34)

Soon we will put up the tentative schedule of the conference with the sessions and the speakers in each session.

For your convenience, a special conference rate has been arranged with hotels and B&B's. Reservations should be made directly by you as soon as possible as the number of rooms is limited. Accommodation options can be found here:

[http://kibbutz.haifa.ac.il/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=22&Itemid=39](http://kibbutz.haifa.ac.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=22&Itemid=39)

During the conference we plan to have a welcome evening organized by the kibbutz movement and a special half day tour organized by the regional council of Emek Yezreel and kibbutz Merhavia.

Those who come early can join the day tour to Nazareth on the 27th of June. On the 28th we will start the conference opening day at about 9 a.m. The plans for that evening will be published at a later date.

On the second day we have a full day until 4 p.m. and then we go to kibbutz Merchavia where the first cooperative started, and where Golda Meir, the fourth and only woman prime minister of Israel, was a member. There we will see the small museum and then have a plenary after which we will have a light meal.

On the third day we have a full day until about 5 p.m. when the conference will end. People who sign up for the two or three day tour will get a closer look at the different types of kibbutzim that exist today - old, religious and new ventures at communal life. On the third day they will have the wonderful experience of visiting and feeling Jerusalem.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank my colleague and friend Ms. Eliette Orchan for coordinating communications with you and responding to almost all your requests and questions.

Early bird registration is over and I urge those of you who have not yet registered, to do so soon. Accommodation details as well as pre and after conference tours details can be found on our website.

I would like to remind you that at the coming conference we will be electing the new ICSA president - if you have any suggestions please let me know and I will present them to the ICSA steering committee. You can please also write to me if you have any other suggestions or ideas concerning ICSA.

I hope to hear from you soon and see many of you here at the conference.

With much hope for the coming conference,

Yours sincerely,

Michal Palgi

ICSA President & Conference Chair



Maple Ridge Community is a commune of about 350 souls, from babies to 90 year-olds. We currently run a high school for our neighbors and next door commune, Woodcrest, for the 9th & 10th grades after which the students go on to the local public high school, which of course is a big cultural change, but our students

are well accepted despite coming from a very different cultural background without computer or internet use by our students. (See <http://www.plough.com/articles/education/technology.html> for an article about our computer use). Our high school produces a free quarterly magazine which is handwritten with usually controversial articles of their opinions titled "B-Hive". Write us for a sample issue or subscription.



Interactive worship experience at the Maple Ridge Bruderhof community with the New York Staff Band, and the Bruderhof Organ and Strings.

Apart from our factory producing play equipment for Kindergartens, we have acquired a fairly large orchard for apples, peaches, apricots, strawberries etc - a wonderful addition to our "kibbutz".

Our communal movement, known as Church Communities International (formerly Bruderhof) has several small outposts including a

new one in Paraguay. Paraguay was the only country which would give our movement refuge during the last World War

and we had some four communes there for 20 years before closing down and moving to Europe and USA, so there are very strong historical connections for us and we are very happy to renew those with a new small commune in Asuncion.

Our main longing is to promote brotherhood and peace in the world and to that end reach out to our neighbors as much as we can. Among other things we hold regular festivals and invite neighbors, as well as a weekly mealtime for all who wish to attend. 7 of us look forward to attending the ICSA conference at the end of June in Emek Yezreel College at which one of our members will give a talk entitled "Only Example Can Do It: Common Sources of Renewal Shared by the Kibbutz and the Bruderhof". See you all there.



"This land is your land, this land is my land...." The talented children from the Maple Ridge Bruderhof sing American folk songs

Shalom and best wishes

Martin and Burgel Johnson  
Maple Ridge Community, NY

# KALEIDOSCOPE

The Communitarian Scene from all Over and Under  
Compiled (and partly translated) by **Joel Dorkam**

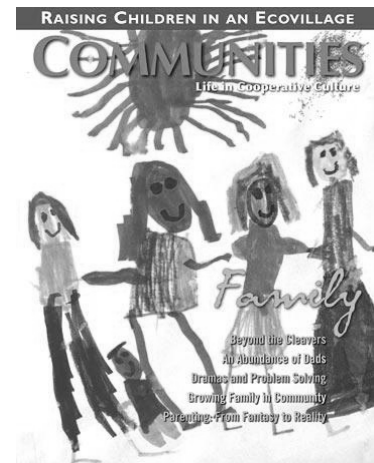


**The gusts of change are blowing continuously, sometimes on fast forward, sometimes on even faster backwards. Need some samples? Easy: high-tech advances (all kinds of pods and pads), spaceflights, life expectancy, brain surgery, human organ transplants, etc. On the other hand: weapons of mass destruction, resumption of piracy, child slavery, genocide, brainwashing, and human organs trade. Enough? Is it really progress, or simply a 'return to human nature?' Or is it possibly mother nature's way of applying Darwin's laws of natural selection, so as to keep some kind of order amongst the various animals, including 'Homo Sapiens' – and avoid overpopulation of our little planet? Which reminds me of recent findings in some European caves, which tend to prove that 'Sapiens' was only one of several kinds of Hominoids who competed for ruling the world, and our ancestors won. How did they? Obviously by being tougher, more cruel and merciless than the 'others'. And that, I reluctantly have to admit, probably has been at the core of our present genome, (which rhymes nicely with 'Gehnom' ('hell' in hebrew). To those who refuse to resign themselves to those blunt findings, and believe like myself that life in community is the best solution so far to counteract those destructive trends, I would like to dedicate this Kaleidoscope, together with belated Easter greetings and good wishes for the upcoming conference in Israel, to Continuous Chasing of Change in Communities , a.k.a. CCCC – a treat to those who enjoy the use of acronyms. And nothing better for putting ourselves in the right mood for a serious discussion of our topic than the opening of Chris Roth's editorial in the last issue of 'Communities', #146 of Spring 2010, relating to changing attitudes towards family at various intentional communities – some of which seem to have rediscovered the old-fashioned kind, whilst others would rather do away with that 'nuisance' and be able to practice some sort of 'free love', sometimes without giving too much thought to the implications.**

Among hot-button topics in intentional community, issues related to "Family" must certainly rank near the top. If "Kids, Pets, Food, and Finances" have the most proven potential to turn a tidy five-minute agenda item into a series of two-hour meetings, then "Family" is inextricably implicated in all of them. While the likely runners-up in the hot-topics category, "Relationships, Power, Participation, and Personal Challenges," may often get less attention in group discussion, they are equally tied into "Family." If "Family" causes so much trouble, why even bother trying to combine it with "Community"?

One might as well ask: Whoever had the idea of combining "Humans" (with all their idiosyncrasies) and "Society" (which we'd like to run smoothly), or "Bodies" (which age and fall apart) with "People" (who want to stay young and healthy forever)? In other words, except in those communities which deliberately exclude them, families, in their multiple forms, are unavoidable parts of the equation, both for better and for worse. And even in childless communities and in those groups with agreements that preclude coupling between individuals, some element of "Family" (with both its attendant challenges and its rewards) still exerts an influence.

The articles in this issue shed light on the multiple ways in which Family can manifest in community, and offer ideas and many real-life examples of how that association can help, rather than hinder, the growth, health, and happiness of all involved. We asked potential contributors a wide range of questions and received an equally diverse array of responses. A quick review of the Table of Contents is enough to show that no two people experience this topic exactly alike.



**“A healthy mix” is Ma’ikve Ludwig’s definition of raising her 12-year-old son communally, in a scene “where the lines between community and family were a bit fuzzy”. Let us give her a chance to speak for herself:**

*Growing Family in Community By Ma'ikve Ludwig*

During one of my son's brief forays into something resembling regular "school," I picked him up one day and was greeted by a quiet and somewhat perplexed version of my usually gregarious child. When I asked him what was on his mind, he reported that the class had been assigned a genealogy project, and he was to bring to school the next day a family tree.

"Let me guess," I said, feeling a wave of both amusement and compassion. "You're having trouble figuring out who to include?"

Jibran was raised in a scene where the lines between community and family were a bit fuzzy, to put it mildly. Even if he'd been asked to simply represent his siblings, parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles, he'd be sketching something closer to "bush" than "tree." His dad, Marqis, for instance, can legitimately be referred to as either an only child, one of four, or one of 10, depending on whom you count. And do you count your parents' current partners? Or just legally sanctioned relationships? And if the latter, do you then take the opportunity to share the story with your second-grade classmates about the time your dad made you, look up every swear word he'd ever heard you utter in the dictionary, only to discover that the word "bastard" was actually an accurate label for yourself?

The timing of the assignment made for even more intense soul-searching on Jibran's part: I was eight months pregnant with his half-sister, Ananda. And while halves- and steps- could hardly have been that strange in his alternative school, the circumstances around this child surely were.

Let me back up.

Jibran has spent his whole life living in some version of community. When we were pregnant with Jibran, we made our first family move to living communally, and he's been raised with a healthy mix of strong parental ties and having lots of kids and adults in his life that mattered a lot, but aren't related. He is highly independent, has influences from dozens of adults who have been in his life, and is amazingly socially savvy for a 12 year-old. And he has, in many ways, never truly been "mine."

Jibran's name was inspired by Kahlil Gibran's poem, "On Children":

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you, but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you...



We loved this poem, both Marqis and I, and when he suggested that the child in my belly might be named Jibran, we both had an immediate sense of rightness, and never re-opened the boy's name conversation again. And after all our years in community, Jibran embodies the poem beautifully.

**Bruno Wegmüller of Brachenreuthe prefers to look at the issue from the parent’s point of view and relies on Germany’s greatest poet no less, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, to introduce his contribution to the debate in “On light and shadow”, which awakened faint memories for me of heated discussions about communal life in my youth movement days:**

Writing history is ever a precarious undertaking. Despite honest intentions one runs the risk of being dishonest; indeed, he who undertakes such an accounting declares beforehand that he will place some things in the light and other things in shadow.

GOETHE

The story which is told here runs the risk of being dishonest since which of us likes bringing the shadows into the foreground. Why is it always so easy to find fault with others, and even to make others responsible for our own failures? Is it part of human nature, is it vanity, or do we distance





ourselves from the unpleasant aspects or our own personality? Do we unconsciously project things onto other people, or do we lack a faculty for self-critical reflection? Are we driven by fears which prevent us from seeing the shadow in our own eyes?

## **Seeing the shadow as a chance for change**

Whatever the reasons for this behaviour it is a fact that these weaknesses offer each of us a chance to change, to turn towards the light. And this is particularly true for organisations or communities such as ours. If we are able to avoid equating the critical comment of a parent regarding his son's dirty trousers with a personal insult, then we create the trust necessary for dialogue. This dialogue alone provides the possibility for all concerned to bring about change. Insults and hurt feelings don't generally solve problems, they lead, rather, to a narrowing of thoughts, feelings and actions. Thus, the willingness to accept feedback is also a maxim for institutions and can be practised in training courses, in staff teamwork or in the many meetings which take place. This doesn't mean, of course, that one should accept every critical utterance without contradicting. This would convert the feedback into its opposite. After all we are not here to become what others want us to be. It is simply about seeing the perceptions of others as an opportunity to shed light on one's own blind spots. What the individual or the organisation makes of it is alone a matter of personal responsibility. And, by the way, hardly anyone is born with this talent.

## **What I like about you and ... what bothers me**

Meanwhile it is standard practice in Brachenreuthe to ask the parents from time to time what they appreciate about our work, but also what bothers them. Such a 'survey', done in 2001, led to an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, and out of this concrete changes were proposed and also put into practice. Mr. Hauburger, the parents' representative in Brachenreuthe, describes this process within the for the parents very important framework of the school holidays and the attendant question of childrens' staying on. Since 2003 parents may bring their children back two weeks earlier. Then, last year we directed our attention to communication and information processes and asked ourselves 'Where is it working, and where not?' The challenge is to continue this process of change with awareness and not to let it fizzle out.

We have learnt that it is worthwhile to deal with failures, mistakes and the shadows, without losing self-confidence. We gratefully acknowledge praise and take pleasure in it without holding our heads unduly high as a result of it.

**If for no other reason than the name of the author, Arizona Nashoba – this was good enough to attract my attention. Besides it provides me a bridge from the distinguished, SIPpy (Serious Intellectual Periodical) Communities into the FFF (Folksy, Funny, Fancy) newly digitalized Leaves of Twin Oaks, Issue #106 of Summer 2009. This E-Leaves inaugural issue actually represents a triple changing process: from now on you only need to push a button to read the latest news; further we are astounded to hear that not only is the place full to bursting point, but also, can you believe it, there is a waiting list of 15 people ready to move in when space opens up! In addition, probably as a result of the crowded space, there is a baby boom. By the way, the third change is that hammocks are no longer the main source of income at TO. And finally, together with heartfelt congratulations, may I suggest a final change: instead of the Fallen Leaves, a more appropriate new name: “Pulsating Twin Oaks”? Just kidding!**

The dreaded day in every mother's life finally arrived for me. All my children were out on their own, scattered around the world. It quickly became apparent that living in the family home, quietly waiting for the kids to have time to come visit me, was not a lifestyle I could adjust to. So, I sold my house and started moving around the country trying to find a place that would feel like home. Inevitably, everywhere I went included four empty walls that were devoid of the laughter, conversations, and shared work that I had become accustomed to while raising my children. Working, cleaning, and cooking for myself alone was just not worth the effort. I was stuck and I was going crazy. Empty-nest



syndrome left me feeling lonely and without a purpose.

Four years later, in total desperation, I took my search to the internet looking for unique community living experiences. I thought that I could find a neighborhood that shared occasional potluck meals and truly interacted with each other. What I found instead was the Federation of Egalitarian Communities. The more I read about these intentional communities, the more excited I became. Could I have found my answer?

After days of carefully reading about each community, I decided to write a request to visit Twin Oaks. That single decision has led to a series of life-changing events

The three-week visitor period provided me with ample opportunity to see how the community functioned. I worked alongside community members, ate with them, socialized with them, and quickly fell in love with the community lifestyle. My decision was made. I was applying for membership. The 10-day wait for 100 people to decide the fate of my choice was one of the longest periods in my life, but finally the wait was over-I had been accepted for provisional membership.

We've just passed Summer Solstice, and life is big at Twin Oaks. As of this writing, we have more members than we ever have in our 42-year history-94 adult members, with a Waiting List of about 15 people ready to move here when space opens up. New life and celebrations are bursting out all over, as we're in the midst of a mini "baby boom" here these days with 2 newborns, another baby due this fall, and two more planned for next year. This will raise our child population, and that combined with Population Capacity, means we're taking a break from accepting any new families into the community. We had a spring wedding in May, with two members exchanging vows in one of our large yards, with many friends and family gathered to help the happy couple celebrate.

Some recent membership stats, as of June 1, 2009: Our average adult age is 39, with 44 members who are age 18-39, and 40 members who are age 40-85. Fifty-six percent of current members are female. The average length of membership is 7.6 years. (The average male has been here 2 yrs longer than the average female). More news about membership lower down in this newsletter.

**I have purposely left the most astonishing change processes for the finale. For many years the Bruderhof "Plow" and its "Beehive" younger sibling, or rather offspring – together with Shalom Connections, came across as rather conservative, especially on the delicate topic of human sexuality. So I had to reread twice an unusual statement by Johann Christoph Arnold in Plough # 75 entitled "Homosexuality and one-gender Partnership" that advocates tolerance and understanding for these former 'abominations', in order to truly believe what my eyes saw. And that's not the only change: years ago I noticed that the black Hosenträger had given way to lively coloured ones; women had begun working side by side with men in the workshops; and of late the very name "Bruderhof" has entirely disappeared from all publications. But let us listen to Johann Christoph:**

"I believe in matrimony as a bond between a man and a woman. That is the real meaning of family. As a fruit of such a marriage children are born into this world, so as to ensure the continuation of humanity. So it has been since the beginning of our times. Wouldn't it be good if it would stay like that for the benefit of our children? The collapse of the family is worse than any terror attack. On a personal note: my wife and I have been married for 44 years. We are blessed with 8 children and 43 grandchildren.

I don't know why so much dust has been kicked up around the question of equal gender partnership. On both sides of the arguments there are contradictions and divisions. How does it happen that reasonable people react so frightened and tensely as soon as this topic comes up? That's just a waste of time. Frequently it is a sign of insecurity when something is talked about so much.

Something is wrong. We stand in danger of losing our healthy common sense and our good manners.

There must be a better way of living together, without fear of retaliation. Actually it has only been two decades since I realized that such heavy importance was attached to that theme. Formerly, everybody seemed to be quite satisfied living together. As for me I stick to the golden rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' as the only answer to that question. We should never disdain another person, and of course we never can force our own convictions upon somebody else,

most certainly not by coercion. That applies to all those who advocate equal gender partnership as well as those who oppose it.

All of us possess a conscience that indicates to us what is right and what is wrong. This moral compass shows us through all problems and will never let us down. It is our best friend. If we listen to our conscience we then have to make a choice and make a decision. That choice has to be made freely and can never be imposed. Each decision we make has consequences. When we make a good one, there are good consequences. When we make a bad one, there will be bad consequences.

A word of encouragement for all those who feel attracted to the same gender: when you listen to your conscience, you will find the right answer. Some of my best friends faced that question. I witnessed a whole bunch of them coming out of the closet, many of them are very dedicated people who work quite eagerly to serve their communities.

Marriage, sex and family are the most important areas of a human life. They influence the spirit, the body and the soul. Great damage occurs, when those intimate aspects of life are not respected.

Wherever that happens, it is always the children who suffer, throughout their life they carry those marks on the soul. I have experienced this to be the truth during the many years of my service as a pastor.

We are all human beings with the same hopes and fears. Life is hard enough. Let us respect other people, if we want them to respect us. We must help each other to make the right choice, when we are faced with a decision. But above all let us listen to our conscience. It will always lead us to the right decision."

**I had barely had time to recover from my surprise, when I discovered on the back cover of a Feb. 2010 "Beehive", the newsletter of Maple Ridge High school, the following "readers respond" column, which seemed to have taken a page from Johann Christoph Arnold's text:**

"I'm afraid that the belief that gay people are not born gay comes out of the same basket that has said the earth is flat, earth is 6,000 years old, and left-handed people are sinister. I cannot in good conscience fail to encourage you to seek the truth of this matter with a mind open to evidence which you have not yet considered". John K. Stoner, PA.

**The final touch came in the form of Tim Otto's celibacy vow, as described in "Shalom Connections" of March 2009 – a frank and honest report about a gay Christian's decision to live in celibacy. Not a particularly original choice, and no guarantee of success, but nonetheless a brave attempt at living by his Faith.**

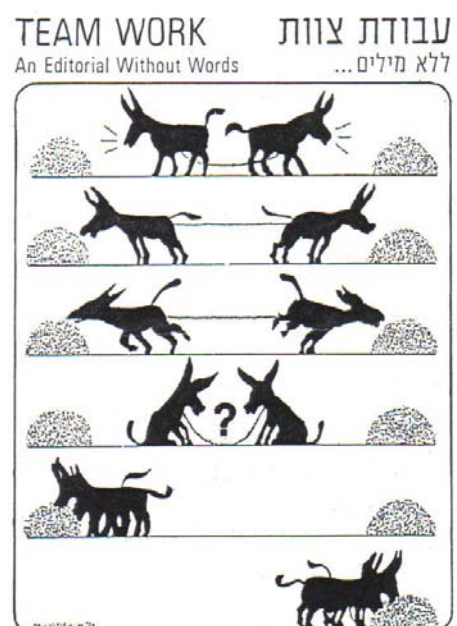
I feel a need to comment that my taking a vow of celibacy is not a result of thinking that this is the only faithful choice for homosexual Christians. Celibacy is what I think God has for me in the specific context of Sojourners. In the next year I hope to write something about homosexuality that might contribute to the conversation taking place in the church. Please pray for me as I do that, and I'd be interested in any thoughts you have, or book recommendations.

Grace and Peace,

Tim Otto

Israel's famous (some would say infamous) late, one-eyed commander Moshe Dayan once remarked, when confronted with his frequent changes of wives, girlfriends and political views: "Only donkeys don't change their minds". Well, to the right is printed positive proof (PPP), black upon white, to the contrary.

Cheers, bye, Joel Dorkam.



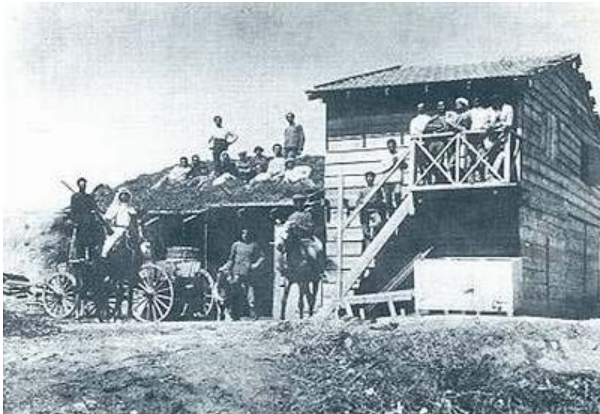


**Welcome to “Kibbutz Shorts”, where we discover what’s new on the Kibbutz in an update from around Israel.**

Compiled mainly from the Kibbutz weeklies by Yoel Darom, Kibbutz Kfar Menachem

## **A Hundred Years of Kibbutz**

When the first group settled Degania in the Jordan Valley, one of the hottest places in Israel (then Ottoman Palestine), they were warned by some contemporary health experts that in this climate they themselves may have a small chance of surviving, but they will certainly never be able to raise children. But their pioneering spirit precluded them from giving in: the first group of six absorbed six more *chaverim* (members), later on another eight, but when they reached the huge number of twenty-four, they decided that this would be too big for "the new family" they intended to create, and hence split into two, Degania A and Degania B. Today both Kibbutzim (which are located very near to each other) count hundreds of members and many, many children, (some of them nearing the age of 100 and some their fifth generation!) that they stopped counting.



Degania in the early days

Today, whilst everyone celebrates the 100th birthday of the first communal settlement in Israel, which has developed into a large movement of over 270 Kibbutzim, we are obliged to take note not only of their power, growth and endurance, but also of the recent developments that have shaken the Kibbutzim to their very foundations. Many of them have abandoned some of their founding and integral principles of life, which were "No private property" and "Your income unrelated to your work", meaning that the mechanic got the same monthly budget as the director of his factory - and more if he had more children. This trend of the last 25 years is called

"privatization". We have to admit that many, especially of the younger Kibbutzniks, are happy with this profound change and are ready to work more or harder in order to earn more.

This is, of course, a very superficial description of the broad, on-going reforms, which have "conquered" most existing Kibbutzim. They will have a profound influence not only on each Kibbutz in Israel, but also on the theory and praxis of all who live (or research) the communal way-of-life the world over.

## **Trying To Foresee the Future**

"...The very fact that the crisis of the Kibbutzim has not destroyed even one of them, and many have actually managed to consolidate their economy, can give us hope that they will find the way of living Kibbutz, though in a different style, in the future too".

This will be the main subject of the international conference of communes and communities, which will take place this June in Israel, in the Yizre'el Valley College. Of course: all are invited!



"Dear *chaverim* (friends)", reads the written circular, "I want to tell you what has happened to me in the ten wonderful years I have been living here in Kibbutz Re'im. From the moment I decided to get married here, I understood that I have to leave my past behind and fully join your way of life. But my name Tzuhan is so dear to me, that I can't change it, so you will have to go on calling me so. The name stands for 'taking responsibility for my life and for the environment' which is written in all your books too".

### Art – In Memory

Eitan Arnon of Kibbutz Bet Zera exhibits his artwork in a large Tel-Aviv gallery, under the title "The Disappearing Israel". "In memory of my parents" he declares, "who came to this country and settled here in the Jordan Valley [very near Degania] as part of a life-long process of ongoing revolution. They considered themselves pioneers of a completely new social order and lived accordingly all their life."



A painting by Eitan Arnon, from his series, "The Pioneers".

### Communities - A Permanent Feature of Social Life

Yaakov Oved, a life-long member of Kibbutz Palmachim, has been researching and teaching the history of Communes all of his adult life, especially those in the United States and in Israel (Kibbutzim). His books have become classics, a treasure of information, each and every one. His new book "Communes and Intentional Communities in the Second Half of the 20th Century" (at present only in Hebrew – see review on Page 12) tells of the upsurge of intentional communities all over the world, especially in the U.S. Here are some extracts from the concluding chapter:

"In the relevant period, different groups signed up to the experiment of building a collective way of life: pacifists, anarchists, socialists, Evangelists, Anabaptists and Catholics, diverse hippie groups, 'New Agers' and ecological groups. Their aims were not identical: there was the aspiration for social reform, the quest for a meaningful life, the need to 'belong', the search for an alternative to the antagonistic and alienated society, counter-reaction to the materialistic world, the utopian vision of 'the truly good society', and a pragmatic approach for a better quality of life. All those different motifs came from the same source: the realization of a personal striving to live free of the rule of governmental interference, a life of freedom from any coercion".

After the crises that many communes experienced in the first half of the 20th century, which were vividly described and analyzed in Yaakov Oved's book "200 Years of Communes in the U.S.", he proceeds by saying:

"I hope that my new book makes it clear to all: Communes and Intentional Communities exist today as a constant phenomenon, and even though they did not become a path-for-the-masses, they represent a minority whose influence reaches far beyond the number of its members".

### Cake for All



Nira Scheuer

Thirty years ago Nira Scheuer of Kibbutz Kfar Menachem wrote and published a book named "Cakes for All", which has sold half a million copies to date, which for Israeli standards is considered a real best-seller. Nira, the first baby of this kibbutz, is now 75 years old and has given up her baking. Over the years she has held many different jobs, and wherever she has been, be it at work or in her spare-time, she used an old recipe to sweeten her co-workers' life: "I have tried to realize my old maxim: a nice word of understanding and sympathy for any of your fellow *chaverim* can work wonders!"



# A hopeful gathering

Richard Jandel

Last March, the Swedish co-housing organization, CO-housing NOW, held its annual meeting at a new Co-house in Stockholm, Sjöfarten. More than 50 people from different co-houses and friendship organizations turned up. The big issues were last year's publishing of a book about Swedish co-housing and the planning of an international conference in Sweden this year. The title of the upcoming conference will be 'The International Collaborative Housing Conference'. Hopefully 150-200 delegates from around the world will take part.



The Swedish co-housing organization was founded in the 1980's, probably inspired by different co-housing projects in Denmark and the general atmosphere in the world. The Swedish welfare-state was, if not flourishing, then well off, and words like solidarity and equality still prevailed in common parlance. From the 1990's up until approximately 5 years ago the organization did not make much noise. One could say that it was more or less asleep.

Since then a lot has taken place. The new secretary of the organization, Dick Urban Vestbro, together with John Fletcher, Elisabeth Olszon and others, has done tremendous work.

Today the organisation consists of 35 co-houses spread over the whole country and 3 groups of people who are in the planning stages of building co-houses. It has a magazine, so far only published on internet, with 3 issues annually. And recently a book about how to organize a co-house was published. Besides this, a network with similar organisations is being established, seminars are organised and open-house days are held all over Sweden to invite people and politicians to see how a co-house works.

The last 20 years has seen the rise of a world that is almost totally dominated by capitalistic values. The labour movement and left-wing liberals have been on the retreat on all fronts, including in Sweden. Today the welfare state is gone and we are left with a society that is getting harder every year. The atmosphere is not in favour of those who want to develop projects based on mutual aid. But with the world economy in crisis it might open up possibilities for the return of communal values. Then we will surely see a growth of different communities.

CO-housing NOW's homepage: <http://www.kollektivhus.nu/>

You can reach me at: [richard.jandel@yahoo.se](mailto:richard.jandel@yahoo.se)



# Solidarity Economy in Kommune Niederkaufungen

Kommune Niederkaufungen is one of the largest intentional communities in Germany. It is an egalitarian, income sharing commune with nearly sixty adult members and nearly twenty children and teenagers, living and working together in a complex of former farm buildings in the village of Niederkaufungen near Kassel, central Germany.

Solidarity Economy, defined by the US Solidarity Economy Network as "an alternative development framework that is grounded in practice and in the principles of: solidarity, mutualism, and cooperation; equity in all dimensions (race/ethnicity/nationality, class, gender, LGBTQ); social well-being over profit and the unfettered rule of the market; sustainability; social and economic democracy; and pluralism, allowing for different forms in different contexts, open to continual change and driven from the bottom-up", is the basic economic idea in the commune of Niederkaufungen, both in the interactions within the commune and through many of its economic activities outside. As well as having a radical, completely communal economy internally, the commune can be seen as part of the "third sector" in which economic activity is aimed at expressing practical solidarity with disadvantaged groups of people, and as a participant in the struggle of those seeking to build an economy and culture of solidarity beyond capitalism in the present. Indeed, most members of the commune believe that solving our most pressing political, economic, social and environmental problems requires a revolutionary transformation on a global scale, with networks of groups and individuals working up from the grassroots to influence the wider society. The commune has been actively proposing and attempting this for over twenty years.

Since the foundation of the commune in 1986, its core principles have included: common ownership of all land, buildings, means of production and motor vehicles; income sharing; consensus decision making; work in self-managed, non-hierarchical collectives; and a reduction of patriarchal, competitive structures. Politically, it sees itself as a left-wing project. In addition, a number of measures have been taken to reduce the "ecological footprint" of the commune, because "living beyond our means" is both leading to the degradation of large parts of the planet and is unjust towards the millions of poor people living in those regions.

Kommune Niederkaufungen is a member of the Kommuja Network of Political Communes, which has a fund for the support of new and existing communes and which helps to start and organize new communities. For more info. see: [www.kommuja.de](http://www.kommuja.de)



Kommune Niederkaufungen, Kirchweg 1-3, D-34260 Kaufungen, Germany.

E-Mail: [info@kommune-niederkaufungen.de](mailto:info@kommune-niederkaufungen.de)

Homepage: [www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de](http://www.kommune-niederkaufungen.de)



## Towards Social Equality

In an attempt to achieve more egalitarian social-structures, the communards in Niederkaufungen have tried to reduce or abolish oppressive patriarchal and competitive structures within the commune. In addition, all major decisions are made in consensus. The new internal structures include:

**Life in small living groups:** Rather than live in traditional nuclear families, the members of the commune in Niederkaufungen live in eleven small living groups. Two of these groups are "Womens/Lesbian" living groups, there is one men's living group, the rest are mixed. Some of the living groups have parent couples with children living together, but there are also single parents with children in some groups. Nearly all children have one or more self-chosen adult carer extra to their parents. The commune tries to keep to a ratio of one child per three adults in order that there are enough non-parents who can help with the children.

**Childcare and cooking done by collectives:** From the age of one, commune children can attend the commune Kindergarten "Die Wühlmäuse" in the mornings. This enables both parents to work, not just one (usually the man). The Kindergarten evolved from a self-organised childcare group and has places for children from the village of Kaufungen as well as for commune children. As most people work in the commune, parents are near their children if needed, and children regularly get to visit commune workplaces to see what is going on. Commune children get to know village children through Kindergarten attendance, and village kids and their parents get to know communal life in exchange. Many commune children have friends who are happy to visit them because there is so much to see and do, and a lot more freedom than in the nuclear family household.

From Monday to Friday, lunch-time cooking for the commune is done by the kitchen collective, **Komm Menu**. The collective is, at present, made up of four men and one woman. The "centralized" preparation of meals by a collective again frees up communards from some housework usually done by women. The collective also does the bulk buying of foodstuff.

Other housework done on a rota basis: Preparation of breakfast, of the evening meal, of meals at the weekends, the dish-washing and cleaning of the kitchen are all done on a rota basis by all communards. Cleaning the rest of the commune is done by volunteers, and each small living group organises its housework autonomously. Running the wood-burning central heating system is done by a team of volunteers who organise their own rota. Thus men do much the same amount of "women's work" as the female communards. There is a great degree of freedom of choice about whether you cook, wash dishes, or do other household and kitchen chores, but it is clear that everyone has to do their fair share. And everyone has to wash their own clothes and clean their own rooms..

**Consensus Decision Making:** Most forms of decision making and governance result in a minority of people (or sometimes the majority) being dissatisfied with the decisions or feeling discriminated against or oppressed. In order to ensure that decisions are made which can be accepted by all communards, major decisions affecting all commune members are made through a system of consensus decision making.

Decisions within the living groups and work collectives are also made in consensus.



Here we present a report on the Welsh community of Brithdir Mawr. On a communities tour of the UK, Frank Richardson-Schäfer, of the German community of Niederkaufungen, compared notes on community living with his European hosts.

## Observations and impressions, memories and musings:

I have lived for many years, on and off, in communities, both in Italy and Germany, and I know many people in a number of groups in those countries. Coming from Britain, I thought that it would be interesting to get to know people in communities there too, and see what their projects are like and what is going on. In addition, I was interested in telling them about what is happening in Germany and, particularly, about the "Kommuna" network of left wing communities and, of course, my home commune of Niederkaufungen. Initially, I read about some of the British communities in the "Eurotopia" directory ([www.eurotopia.de](http://www.eurotopia.de)). I was interested in finding secular communities that had consensus decision-making, some sort of agriculture or horticulture, and which aimed at sustainability. At this point, I found Brithdir Mawr, a most interesting British community.

My visit to Brithdir Mawr lasted nearly a week. It is a rural community of nine adults and four children near the lovely little harbour town of Newport, in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park in southwest Wales. The community members live in the converted farm buildings and parts of the typically Welsh farmhouse, with its stone floors and walls and its slate roof. Other rooms in the farmhouse are for guests.

The community use part of the land for organic horticulture and agriculture, and two other small communal projects are on the site. Using wind, water and sun power, the community is self-sufficient in electrical energy. The group rents the farm from an ex community member who no longer lives there. It is an idyllic setting, quite high up on a hillside opposite Carn Ingli, the Hill of the Angels. The area is "gently wild", not bleak like many parts of Wales, and they have their own stone circle to add to the magic of the place.

I arrived at Brithdir early on the day that they began to bale up the hay. The old MF tractor and baling machine both needed careful nursing and attention, and, at one point, the baler needed a replacement part, but the harvest, which took three days, was a success. Just about everyone in the community, plus guests, helped with loading the bales on to the carts, and with unloading them into the barns. One cart was horse drawn, and I enjoyed seeing how a horse can still be integrated into agricultural work. The hay harvest this year was about double that of last year, which means that the community will be able to feed their livestock through the winter and be able to sell some for cash. The evening we finished the hay I gave a presentation of the commune Niederkaufungen with a slide show. As well as members and guests, a couple of visitors from other projects in the area attended, and we talked and drank home brew until late into the night.



In addition to helping with the hay, I was able to help for a couple of days with the picking and cleaning of soft fruit (blackcurrants, gooseberries) in preparation for bottling and jam making. Again, this was done in a group, so I had the possibility to chat quite a lot, and ask and answer many questions about communal life. I was also able to go with them to a beach party on the Saturday afternoon, which was very pleasant, relaxing and picnicking in the sun.

On the Sunday, I went with one of the adults and some of the children to the Iron Age settlement at Castell Henllys. Two of the children are home schooled, and I found them to be independent, intelligent and friendly young people who were integrated into community life, mixing with adults and other children alike, and, in many situations, learning by doing.

I felt very comfortable and at home at Brithdir. The members of the community are warm, open and friendly. I felt that many were on the same wavelength as me. I like the fact that, on their home page, they describe themselves as a collective. I find that "Community" is a very general term, whereas "collective" more clearly describes the intentional "coming together" of people for a common purpose. I thank them again here, for their hospitality.

At present, Brithdir Mawr has less than ten adult members. With founder members leaving and new members joining, changes have taken place.

The community is quite open about their current situation, "We are

undergoing a period of re-evaluation and growth (we hope)." The search for a clearer, possibly more detailed, common vision is time consuming and not always easy. Furthermore, the situation of being tenants rather than owners is one of the concerns with which the community has been dealing with for some time. Lack of living space for more than one or two new members is, at present, a limit to further growth. However, despite some uncertainties about the future, I had the impression that they were finding ways to resolve problems. Despite some conflicts, they seemed to care for each other, and I had the impression that they recognised that each person has "good" and "bad" sides and that you have to live with each person as she or he is.

The question remains whether intentional communities of ten or twenty adults can be economically and socially sustainable over long periods. This may not even be their aim. The history of the intentional community movement seems to indicate that larger groups have better chances of long term survival than smaller groups, regardless of ideology and internal structures. Of course, large communities also change and develop over the years, as we can see, for example, with the Kibbutzim in Israel, but there are far fewer examples of smaller communities continuing to exist for more than a few decades. A further question is whether small intentional communities can provide for the needs of the members when more and more of them reach old age. Again, in this area, larger groups would seem to offer an advantage.





Joel Rothschild, founder member of Ravenna Kibbutz (Seattle, Washington) sends us this article, exclusively for C.A.L.L.

Sitting as I often do with my laptop open over an old treadle sewing machine, I hear someone coming up the steps. "My house is too quiet!" Steven announces as he walks in and starts rummaging through the novels, pamphlets, magazines, and New York Review of Books in the Ravenna Kibbutz's media room. Steven lives in House Aleph, one of the Kibbutz's three shared houses - each part private space and part commons shared by all eighteen residents - and I live in House Bet, a few doors down our plum tree-lined city block in Seattle.

Two years ago, when there were only five of us, House Aleph was a 24/7 social vortex, but these days the party roams from house to house. Tonight it will be here, when the monthly Yiddish Movie Night takes over House Bet's couches and video projector. Tomorrow night it will be at House Aleph, where we plan to hold our weekly community Shabbat potluck dinner while the other two houses are cleaned for Passover. (This year, Aleph's residents decided not to clean for Passover. It's a religious tradition, and they're happy to be the most secular house.) Monday the party will be a

Passover seder dinner at House Gimel, where residents, friends, and strangers who found us on the internet will fill a 50 foot-long table in the "Zen room" which we normally use for yoga classes or dance parties. We will talk about the Biblical exodus, modern human trafficking, enslavement to iPhones, health benefits of fermented food, and the many difficulties of Jewish identity, over the two things that arguably tie our motley crew together: music and food.

We still use the slogan, "Would it kill you to find a nice Jewish commune?"

because it captures something essential about the Ravenna Kibbutz: Jewish community is always a serious business - our heritage is at stake! Think of your Jewish grandchildren!—so we need to be careful not to take it too seriously. That should go for intentional community of any kind. It is a pursuit of passionate people, and many communities and organizers fall prey to unmoderated intensity, followed by burnout.

So, trying to be accessible for Americans accustomed to free-market capitalism, and for Jews guarded against a culture often framed by its religious and political zealots, the Ravenna Kibbutz has opted to live outside many established norms. We aren't strictly a kibbutz: we all work outside, and our collective wealth comes from membership dues based on the sizes of our housing shares, not on our individual incomes. We aren't exactly a

commune: we value private space and property equally with the commons, and despite being a "Jewish" community, we are ideologically diverse, almost to a fault. We are inspired by co-housing, but we don't individually own our homes. (The Kibbutz

rents them on our behalf. A new initiative would allow us to invest personal wealth in the property where we live together, but it would allow non-residents to invest in it as well.) Though we operate in many ways like a co-op, we pick and choose from the Rochdale Principles as it suits us. And despite taking outside support to host public programs on a nearly daily basis, like a synagogue or community center would, we are keen to remain an amateur, peer-run place where guests will always feel more like they're visiting a friend or relative's home than being served by a non-profit institution.



Calling ourselves a kibbutz, we sometimes ruffle feathers. "You aren't a real kibbutz! Where's the single shared bank account? Where are the workers in the orange groves?" To be fair, the same questions can be asked of most kibbutzim today, and we figure a little experimentation couldn't hurt a distressed movement - but we do struggle with this "kibbutz" ideal ourselves. Our internal challenges are more basic than economic philosophy. They are, simply: land, children, and commitment.

Children are a challenge, because today the Kibbutz is a community of young pioneers in a young city where we come to pursue careers, education, and personal growth. Sometimes we half-jokingly call the Kibbutz "Jewish summer camp for adults." But we all think a community like ours would be a wonderful place for children. So as some of us look ahead to starting our families, we wonder how to balance space and resources, such that children growing up here would not prevent adults from feeling like they are equally free to keep growing up here as well (making "that's what she said" jokes all the way). In an American culture where moving away from family is a standard part of maturation, trying to build a community where people in different stages of life feel equally at home and empowered requires us to overcome fundamental notions of who our fellows are.

Our community demands a lot of its residents - money, time, patience, and tolerance - but we have stopped short of demanding long-term commitment. Some residents come and go. Others have been here from the beginning and would stay for

many years to come. We try not to privilege one over the other, because everyone's contributions today are valuable. A resident who is moving away next month has an equal voice in choosing new community members, even though she won't live with them. Some tension, however, is unavoidable. Kibbutzniks who have been around tend to accrue power through knowledge; and those who want to stay to raise families are naturally more

interested in long-term community planning.

Living together with these challenges is not bad. If anything, it pushes us to become more understanding, compassionate, and better communicators. The Ravenna Kibbutz is hard to

define on paper, but the experience day-to-day is deep and real. Our conflicts light the way to growth, together and as individuals - and no one will ever claim that life on the Kibbutz is boring!

Our other unofficial motto is, "The Ravenna Kibbutz: company when you want it, solitude when you need it, and cholent\* when you least expect it!" It's a statement

of life balance - community support, personal growth and wellbeing, cultural belonging, and the playfulness that makes the whole process not merely bearable but fun - and it's not clear, even after we've built so much, what on earth this community will

look like in three years, much less thirty. Still, so long as we can speak that motto and feel its truth, equally in seriousness and in laughter, then I can say it will have been entirely worthwhile.

joel@ravennakibbutz.org  
<http://ravennakibbutz.org>

\*Cholent is a traditional Jewish stew.



# In Israel, Kibbutz Life Undergoes Reinvention

by Lourdes Garcia-Navarro  
NPR

October 13, 2009

For years now, the kibbutz movement in Israel has been struggling. These communal farms were a big part of the utopian dream that married Zionism with socialism. Many communities were privatized; others were abandoned. But from the ashes, some Israelis are trying to branch out and take the old movement in a new direction.

## The Urban Kibbutz

It's dinnertime at an apartment in Jerusalem's Kiryat Yovel neighborhood.

The door is unlocked and 20-something men and women walk in holding dishes of food for the potluck

meal. It looks like a gathering of any group of young Israelis, but the people here are members of an urban kibbutz.

"It's the renewal of the kibbutz movement. And I think it takes the basic and core values and principles of the kibbutz movement but places it in a different context," says Michal Gomel, a 28-year-old social worker.

She grew up on a traditional kibbutz — one that was set in a remote rural environment, where all the funds and the work were shared.



Members of an urban kibbutz located in the Kiryat Yovel neighbourhood of Jerusalem

"What we felt [was] that in modern society today there is a lot of alienation between people in the cities, where most of the population today lives," Gomel says. "So this is why we felt we want to live in a more urban setting but with the solidarity and the friendship and the personal ties of a small kibbutz."

Her urban kibbutz — one of dozens in the country — is made up of 13 adults and three children. Most of them live in this apartment building.

"We want to share a space, that's for sure. We don't share the same apartment. We're not in a commune setting," Gomel says. "We have some

kind of economic sharing. We celebrate holidays together. We also have a lot of ideological sharing, which means we learn a lot from each other."

And they want to achieve

certain common goals. This group is active in local politics. At the moment, they are leading the charge in trying to maintain the secular character of their neighborhood as increasing numbers of Orthodox Jews move in.

Communal meals are an important feature of their life, when they can discuss and plan activities. As dusk falls, they sit down to eat.

## The Kibbutz In Progress

There are 256 kibbutzim in Israel, according to the movement's official Web site. But for the past decade, the



movement has been in crisis. "We are in a situation of restarting the whole thing," says Muki Tzur, a historian and former secretary-general of the United Kibbutz Movement. Sitting in a park in Tel Aviv, he says he is hopeful that the movement can survive this difficult time.



Bryan Meadan walks down the stairs of the urban Kibbutz Tamuz in Beit Shemesh, outside Jerusalem, one of dozens of urban kibbutzim in the country.

"It's a pregnant movement. There are many directions, many adaptations; there are many new ideas that are coming through, and many old dreams that couldn't be accomplished in the past can be accomplished today," Tzur says. "The



Kishorit: Working on the largest organic goat farm in Israel

kibbutz is in the hospital, but to go to the hospital doesn't mean that you are sick. Sometimes you go to the hospital because something is going to be born."

### **The Special-Needs Kibbutz**

"Kishorit is a home for life for adults with special needs located in the Galilee and has 140 members. The vision of the founders was based on

the kibbutz model," says Dita Kohl-Roman, one of the directors. Yochanan Bayit, a resident with special needs, came to Kishorit five years ago and works in the community's television station.

"I came here to change my life. I have interesting things to do," he says. Kohl-Roman says the kibbutz members here all have different backgrounds — some are autistic, some are schizophrenic, all have some form of disability. Eventually, there will be a community for family members abutting Kishorit. A sister area for Arab members with special needs is also planned.

"The kibbutz has an enormous ability to heal. The community life in the kibbutz, the fact that one celebrates the holidays together, actually is very good for people with special needs," Kohl-Roman says.

Having a place where no one judges you, where there is a safety network, she says, is vital. "You have people who are taking care of you here, and you have

friends here. You can help others who are weaker than you and you can get help of other members who are stronger than you," she says.

As in a traditional kibbutz, everyone is expected to work. There is a toy factory, a goat farm and a kennel. Kohl-Roman says there is nothing like Kishorit anywhere in the world. She says she is excited by what's happening here. Far from the kibbutz movement being dead and buried, she says, it is being reborn.



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Yad Tabenkin  
Seminar Efal  
Ramat Efal  
Israel 52960

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**Editor**

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