

CONTACTS

COMMUNES NETWORK

- Laurieston Hall, Castle Douglas, S.W. Scotland, DG7 2ND.
- British network of communities (newsletter, info, directory, gatherings).
- Subscription £5 for 10 newsletters.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNES NETWORK

- P.O. Box 1777, Tel-Aviv, Israel.
-International (mainly European) network of communities (newsletter, info, gatherings).

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT

- 18 Garth Road, Bangor, North Wales.
- The Teacher's alternative to Communes Network (good mail order book list).

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND NETWORKS

- Westhill College, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LL.
- Produces 'Community' (subscription £3 a year), Directory of Christian Communities. Conferences.

TOWARDS COMMUNITY

- c/o Society of Friends, Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1.
- Quaker group promoting community living.

ECOLOGICAL BUILDING SOCIETY

- 43 Main Street, Cross Hills, Via Keighley, West Yorkshire.
- Useful and responsible home for spare funds.

WORKING WEEKENDS ON ORGANIC FARMS

- 19 Bradford Road, Lewes, Sussex.
- For contact with organic farms, smallholdings and collectives.

EDUCATION OTHERWISE

- 25 Common Lane, Hemingford Abbots, Cambridgeshire PE18 9AN.
- Movement for de-schooling society, promoting alternative education.

COMMUNITIES

- Box 426, Louisa, VA 23095, U.S.A..
- Good magazine on American communities, (available from ACM, address above).

GROUPS OFFERING COURSES :

- Beech Hill**, Morchard Bishop, Crediton, Devon. (Tel 03637 228).
- e.g. co-counselling, Reichian Therapy, T'ai chi.

- Laurieston Hall**, Castle Douglas, S.W. Scotland, DG7 2ND. (Tel 06445 275).
- e.g. music, healing, circle dancing, Gaia.

- Lower Shaw Farm**, Shaw, Swindon, Wiltshire. (Tel 0793 771080).
- e.g. gardening, wholefoods, massage, celebration.

- Monkton Wyld Court**, near Charmouth, Bridport, Dorset, DT6 6DQ. (Tel 0297 60342).
- e.g. rebirthing, dance and movement, playworld, family weeks.

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The COLLECTIVE



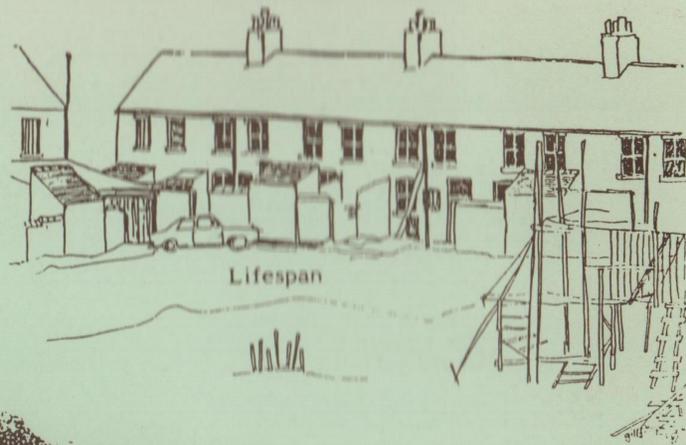
EXPERIENCE

ARTICLES AND POEMS
ABOUT COMMUNAL LIVING

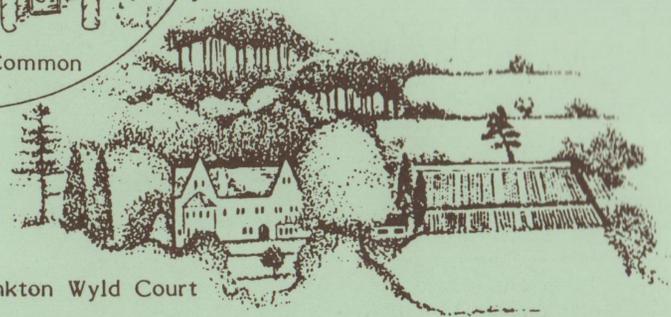
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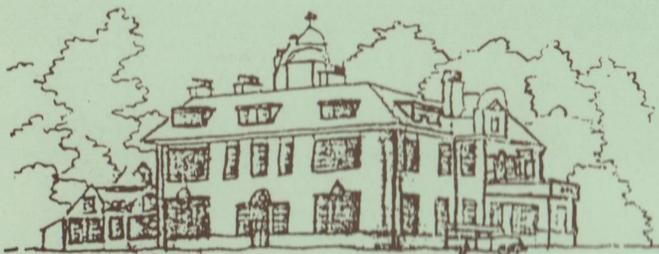
People In Common



Lifespan



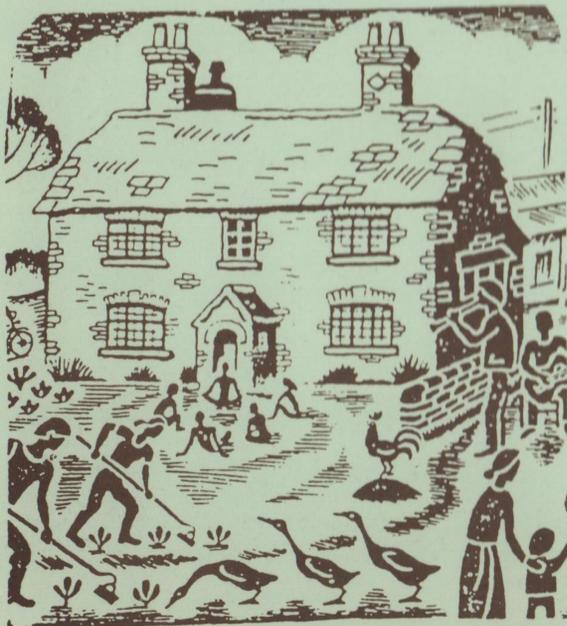
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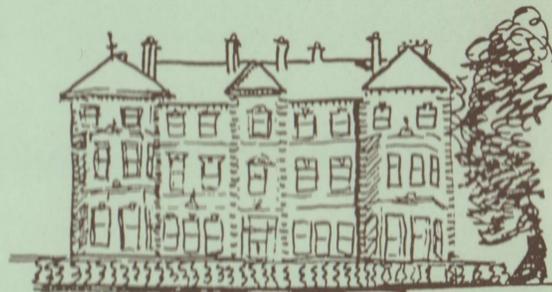
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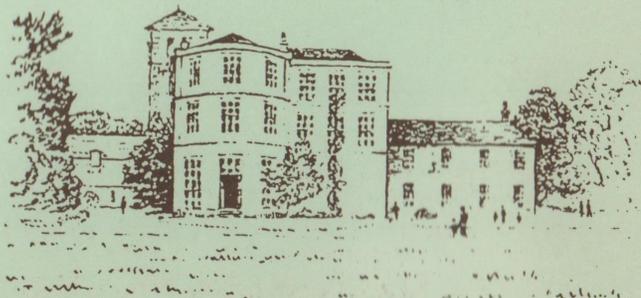
Canon Frome



Lower Shaw Farm



Redfield



Old Hall

THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

FOREWORD

THIS COLLECTION of articles and poems about communal living has been selected from the newsletters of Communes Network. This newsletter, started in 1975, is an "open letter between friends" for people living in - or interested in - intentional communities. For nine years the newsletter has enabled a diverse group of communities and individuals to keep in touch with one another, and to share their news, ideas, practices and experiences. Practical co-operation and friendship have followed from these contacts. However, this rather insular approach has meant that general information about collective living has been less readily available to the 'person in the street'. Now, after several years of keeping a low public profile, there is a feeling that we should be reaching out to a wider circle of people, and promoting more actively our ideas of communal living, collective ownership, and co-operation.

We hope this selection will give some insight into the joys, sorrows, humour, theory and practicalities of communal life, as seen through the eyes of communards themselves. Too many books on communes have been written by 'outsiders', typically itinerant sociologists.

Over the years, Communes Network has been produced by six different groups, and as a result its style has varied a good deal. This present selection - which is arranged in a rough time order - reflects this variation. And the selection also reflects the range of topics covered in the newsletter. So, for example, there is a strong bias towards the writings of rural groups - because urban communards have rarely sent in articles to Network. Some subjects have been discussed regularly; others have been hardly considered. Within these constraints, we have tried to give a balanced picture of communal living, but the fact remains that this publication is certainly not the definitive handbook on the matter. So, dip into it as you will. All the writings are authentic.

As to the general tone of the pieces, it is clear that communards and collectivists are well aware of the shortcomings of their chosen way of life, and of the often wide gulf between their ideas and the reality. Nevertheless, these failings are typically discussed with good humour, and the mood conveyed is one of cautious optimism. There is a sense of lessons being learned, as dreams are tested against realities, and re-shaped perhaps, but never quite given up.

We offer this publication as a celebration and affirmation of our communal way of life. We hope that you will enjoy sharing in our collective experience.

Keith Bailey and Bob Matthews
in collaboration with Jan Bang
for Communes Network
June 1984.

(Second Edition, June 1986.)

CHICKEN and CHIPS
and CHILDREN

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June 1986.

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CHICKEN and CHIPS
and CHILDREN

Remembered history. Any anecdotes written from the exalted position of 'looking back on' are rife with inaccuracies, and coloured by my present state. This is by way of an excursion into my life with the children at Laurieston Hall between 1973 and 1977.

At the beginning of '73 I was doing post-graduate teacher training at Goldsmiths College in London. It was a course for potential primary school teachers, and supposedly the 'best' in the country. I was pissed off with its radical liberalism. There was an attitude towards children which was very open in how you taught them, but closed in that what they needed to know was assumed to be the same old stuff. Mutton dressed as lamb. 'We can get them to learn long division by making it exciting' sort of approach. I gave up the idea of teaching at the same time, swamped by the actuality of schools. However well I could play with the children, I could see no way that 'I', my fragile self, could avoid being sucked under by the systems. I didn't want to spend all my energy on keeping my head above water. My home life wasn't exactly zing-a ding, living with Stephanie in a shared flat, above a chicken and chip shop in Lewisham High St. I started working occasionally at a truancy centre based at the Albany in Deptford. But nothing much was coming in for all the energy I was giving out. Unsure of myself and lacking the vocabulary to help me see differently. Open to the slightest push.

Then a friend pointed out this ad in Time Out of all places for people to join a 'child orientated community in south-west Scotland'. Now there was an idea. A commune! So I visited and was instantly captivated. You can imagine. Small time graduate from new town meets drop-out professionals, five to ten years older, with children, in vast empty mansion miles from anywhere, and north of Watford. An eye-opener. Not just a new door in my mind, but a bloody great hall full of doors. And my first contact with 'small' children, the sort that don't feel like a ton of potatoes when they sit on your lap, the under three year olds. Instant family. After an initial period away earning some money, I moved to Laurieston.

This is where it gets difficult. Actually recalling what I did and how I felt with the children. At first, it was the playing. I liked some more than others. I got on better with the four and up children, the way they are. Fantasy on the surface, honesty not far behind. The ability to shoot off instantly into a new world. To play at being in certain moods, stimulating and ready to fling themselves into the silliest possible ideas just for the sake of them. Always moving and using bodies unselfconsciously. Flicking from flaring anger to broad grin just like that, and meaning it. A million images, a million details of playing football, cards, mad scrambling games, frost and sliding on the pond, picnics, walks, bicycles, making up stories, keeping warm, and of whining, snivelling, upset, television fixated, anti-pathetic, slobby, lazy, ungrateful good for nothing jerks. But that's all part of it; the spaces between me and any of the children never stayed the same. Always alive, vibrating, unpredictable, full of vast

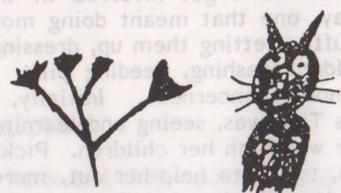
potential, sometimes frustrating, a pain in the arse, but never boring. Why not the same with the other 'groans'? Why did we get so rigid? Must be to do with 'responsibility' and 'commitment': children not needing to see beyond the next half-hour, if that. Aware that I'm like this because of my conditioning, and what am I doing but conditioning these children, along with a hundred other influences. There was one person at Goldsmiths who stood out when he said "that children have a right to have an adult around if they want that, an adult who will hear them first. That's all we can do".

However liberated and easy I wanted my relationships with children to be, I did find it difficult not to slip into treating them as I had been, or as we adults did to each other, expecting reasonableness, some sort of respect, etc. going to bed when we wanted them to: changing their clothes when we thought they needed it (after all, we did the washing...). I think in some ways I was quite a tyrant, getting the kids to do things for the sake of my own space. I think that this was partly due to having ten children living together in the same restricted area as we did. (It's a big house, but we can only heat a bit of it.) The children didn't take it badly because I was a friend, I suppose.

On the whole, they return to us the attitudes we bestow on them. A middle class libertarian community out in the wilds of Scotland is a pretty powerful environment, probably very confusing with their other main influences - the village school and their peers. Inevitably I influenced some children more than others. I think in particular of Joel and Sophie, Tina and Michael's offspring. As I got closer to Tina, so I did to these children. Partly because the systems of childcare at Laurieston were so loose that the only constants were parents and people having relationships with parents, and partly because I got on better with them than other children. And so I got involved in them in a different way, one that meant doing more of the dogsbody stuff. Getting them up, dressing, stoking up with fodder, washing, feeding pills. Caring. Becoming more concerned. Initially, I think, concerned as Tina was, seeing and learning through her, how she was with her children. Picking up on Tina's limits, trying to help her out, more or less. Somewhere along the line growing more protective: 'where are they, are they all right?' Taking on the role of a non-parent parent! That was the most effective role for being with the children at Laurieston. We had meetings to talk about the various ways of looking after the children, whether to take them out of school, how to have a school at Laurieston, etc. Everybody's opinions counted, but in the final analysis it was almost invariably the parents who decided what would happen to the children. The rights were challenged but never remotely demolished. If I wanted to take a child with me I had to ask their parents. When Mike - Joel and Sophie's dad - started to split with Laurieston, it was he and Tina who sat down to sort out what was best to do with the kids. There was no way I could say to those children that they could stay with me whatever happened. They'd had mum and dad from the year dot. I was, what Joel aptly termed me, a 'false daddy'. Love and security are invested in these real parents and are as hard to let go of as it is for me to leave a loving relationship for the unknown.

It was the children amongst themselves who got on with living communally best. We spent the first year trying to fit them into some idea of what children in communes should be like, giving them kids tea, encouraging them to be equal, etc: asking of them things we were asking of ourselves. They said, in effect, 'not likely'. As we slipped more into developing who we were rather than which ideal we'd like to be, so the kids did too. They found a different way of being to the way we lived at Laurieston, more chaotic, and to our eyes, seemingly pointless. But it had none of the despair and animosity that undercut the adults' attempts, nor the perpetual wrangles about what it was all for. Groupings which took months to form and consolidate amongst the groans would be changing every day with the children. But it was the kids who actually decided to sleep all in the same room. It was they who 'flowed' with each other. And the final insult is that it was the groans' inability to live with each other, and to be without their offspring as some sort of eternal crutch - 'I have a role, I am a parent' - which meant that the children are now divided between parents scattered round Galloway and further afield, half the time here, half the time there.

If I sound bitter about this, it's tinged with a certain amount of self guilt. I did actually leave Laurieston myself. If I had got into this position of false parent, how could I leave my 'false children'? Answer: by being a clever groan and intellectualising my withdrawal into a gloriously right thing to do. 'My not being happy at Laurieston is no good for them either. My doing what I want will make it easier for them to see that I'm not a false dad, but just me. The very act of leaving will force a difference. But who will I be away from them? I'll miss them, like hell. I could be free of my assumed role, but not of my love for these children.' And those children couldn't be free of the role we give them, that of being children before persons.



by Jock aged 34½

So here I sit at Crabapple, looking back from my exalted position of having 'done it'. Still fine with other children, but aware of a gnawing at the pit of my stomach. I see Joel and Sophie occasionally, but only for four or five days at a time. This more than ever puts me into the role of absentee parent. I feel I have to do things with them, make sure they are o.k. all the time. It's no way to slip easily into each other's awareness, to relax. I don't want children of my own. I don't want to be a non-parent parent. I do want to live easily, in love and care and excitement with other children as people, with other groans as people. I expect I'll keep trying. But watch out, you befrienders of children! Besides all the state laws against your having any status with regard to children, beware your self and its years of conditioning!

RICK -- Crabapple Jan 1978

The Three Wise Passengers

A FABLE FOR SURVIVALISTS

ONCE upon a time there was a great ship on a long cruise across the sea. It was a very fine ship, with all the comforts and entertainments the passengers could want so that they were never bored or troubled whatever the weather, and with only one class of accommodation (not counting the officers' quarters, which were naturally luxurious because they were such important people, and the crew's, which nobody worried about because they were mostly foreign or ignorant or both). It was a very long cruise, too, so long that children went to school and grew up on the ship.

Among these children were three lads called Tom, Dick and Harry who had reached the age when they had to decide what careers they planned to make for themselves. Among the things they considered in deciding this were some very disturbing rumours that had begun to circulate among the passengers. It was said that the officers had miscalculated the ships' stores, and that vital supplies were beginning to run short; that the ship was being sailed into increasingly dangerous waters; and even that the ship was becoming unseaworthy through neglected maintenance.

Said Harry: "I plan to become a journalist, and write for the ship's magazine. That way I can acquire a great deal of influence to support the Passengers' Committee in its campaign for better conditions on board."

"That's all very well" said Dick, "but if the ship gets into trouble no amount of influence with the passengers will help you; and the officers really take very little notice of the Passengers' Committee. If you want to influence the ship's handling you should do as I intend to and join the ship's company as a junior officer to work up to a position where you can do some good."

"You may be right" said Tom. "But it will take you a long time to work your way up through the ship's hierarchy, and from what I hear the problems are already serious. I am going to concentrate on studying the handling and navigation of the ship's lifeboats."

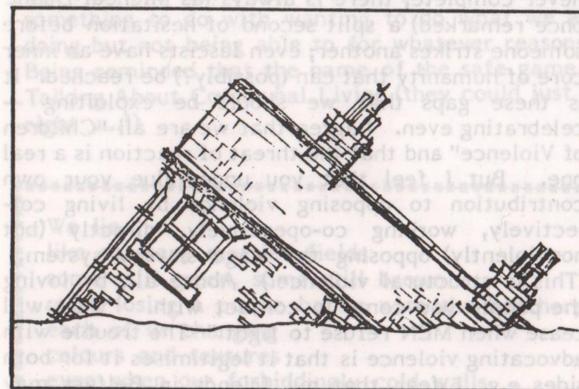
So they went their different ways. Harry soon became a very powerful figure in the ship, as he exposed bad planning and inefficiency and campaigned for "Passengers Rights". The Officers considered him a troublemaker, but many passengers felt he was the only one trying to help them.

Dick as a junior officer was sent "below decks" where he found that things were even worse than he had heard. But he soon found that his superiors did not want to know about the troubles he reported, preferring to believe the optimistic reports sent "above decks" by his colleagues; so he resolved to keep quiet and bide his time until he could reach a position powerful enough to put things right himself.

Tom found that most of the lifeboats were practically useless, because the officers considered

it uneconomic to maintain them when they were not contributing anything to the ship's everyday operation, and that hardly anybody knew where they were or how to use them, because they were not interested in such boring and old-fashioned things. So he studied sailmaking and carpentry and began to put the lifeboat nearest his quarters back into service. Most people could not understand why he bothered; they asked why he wanted to make himself a smaller and less efficient boat when he was on a perfectly good ship, or, if they agreed that the ship was in danger, why he didn't help Dick or Harry who were really doing something about it. But a few people who felt the same joined him and together they learned to catch fish with handlines and navigate by the stars and other skills that might be needed.

Now for some time the ship's officers had held that the helmsman should not touch the ship's wheel except on special emergency orders from the Captain, and that the ship should steer itself in accordance with the natural forces of navigation. This had given rise to several collisions with rocks, icebergs and suchlike obstacles in the past, but the damage had always been made good, although sometimes a few compartments had had to be abandoned. But finally the ship was holed in a part where the pumps had been dismantled and used for some other job. (The officer responsible had been congratulated by the Captain himself on the resulting efficiency of his section.) At first the officers could not understand why the leak was not being contained because they seldom left their luxurious upper-deck quarters. When an officer finally went below he found that most of the watertight bulkheads were weakened by corrosion, it having been decided some time ago that it was more efficient to keep them clean by filing off the rust now and then, than by painting them. At last the Captain spoke over the ship's P.A. system to say that there was no truth in the alarmist rumours that the ship was sinking, but purely as a precautionary measure passengers were requested to go to their lifeboat stations, if they could find an officer who could tell them where those were.



When this announcement was made Harry was the guest of honour at a party celebrating his appointment as Chairman of the Passengers' Committee. He at once stood up and said that this was clearly a trick by the officers to create an excuse for further harm to the passengers' environment. So they jammed the doors shut and sat on the floor and sang "We shall not be moved", and when the lights went out they sang even louder.

Dick had known for a long time about the state of the pumps, and had only been waiting for his promotion to section officer the year after next to do something about them. Knowing that the crew were quite likely to refuse to work to stop the leak, seeing it as a chance to demand better pay and conditions from the officers, he went below to organise them and was drowned when a rusted bulkhead collapsed.

When Tom heard the Captain's announcement he knew that things must be already critical, so he and his friends went quietly to their lifeboat and began to prepare to cast off. But while they were swinging it over the side, a mob of passengers from the lower cabin decks, whose cabins had begun to flood, came running up and tried to scramble onto it. They let on as many as the boat would carry, but more tried to climb aboard, and finally they had to fight them off with boathooks as they lowered the boat to the water and began to pull away.

As they pulled away, heavily overloaded and with swimmers clinging to the boat and holding it back the ship foundered at the bows, put up its stern and sank, making a tremendous vortex that pulled down everything in the water around it.

ANTHONY -- Glaneirw Sept 1977

GUN THERAPY

THE more "politically" minded communards can paint a devastating picture of the society that produces us and destroys or diminishes us at the same time. They/we reject the values of that society and while preaching revolution and attempting to practise it, we rely on the benevolence of that sick, evil world, in order to survive and to change. Politicians are slysters, policemen are pigs, the system is repressive, exploitative -- but only up to a point. What happens when the gloves come off, Laurieston Hall, Crabapple, Lifespan and other similar communes that keep occurring in this newsletter, wouldn't last a day. The growing self-sufficiency, all the work in the garden, in the dairy, the emotional energy expended in confronting and living "personal relationships" over the years would go up in a puff of smoke. We wouldn't begin to know how to survive -- we rely on the "niceness" of the society we condemn. Hell, we can't even stand up to "difficult" school inspectors, we freak out when a dozen policemen raid us, looking for dope. Give those policemen sub-machine guns and armoured cars instead of blue and white Ford Escorts, and you have a very different scene. They don't even need to plant the stuff, they don't give a damn whether there's a lawyer with you or not -- he'll just get the chop along with the rest of you. Just by the way we lead our lives we're exposed and we're vulnerable and yet we don't even begin to consider such possibilities. It's just too paranoid? We just won't believe it until/when/if it happens. We, with our largely middle-class backgrounds, raised on flower-power and Peace News, cannot really understand the reality of violence. We know about it intellectually of course, but we don't have much experience of it. We freak out when someone shouts at us, never mind threaten us physically. The odd scuffle in Grosvenor Square or at Grunwick doesn't even get near it. Violence, like cancer, with a bit of luck, happens to other people -- well, we can't have it both ways -- either we believe in our

criticisms of our society and its potential for getting really heavy, and do something about it, or agree that our lives are of no political social significance whatsoever.

I don't think, for one minute, we could begin to take on the aggression of the state, but we could begin to think of ways of coping with it, surviving it, even perhaps eventually resisting it. We, the so-called Underground, have to learn to go underground and live underground. If our communal scene crumbles, if it is crushed, then we have to have ways out, escape routes planned. We must survive, we will have to hit back later, and we have to have the weapons to do so. And that means weapons and how to use them. Just what the Territorial Army exists for. Learn from the enemy, learn more about the enemy. Only four or twelve days a year, plus two weeks in camp, are required, and you get paid. Two weeks in camp! Can you believe it? Make a bit of a change from the Communes Network gathering or a far-out, consciousness-raising radical conference at Laurieston Hall.

Maybe in your wildest nightmarish fantasy you just can't see yourself in a concentration camp, or your friends the victims of summary execution. Ask any one of the hundreds of Chilean refugees in Britain and see how they feel. And they're just a drop in the ocean.

"Are you coming to Yoga/Therapy/Feedback Meeting tonight?"

"No, I'm going to the T.A. It's small-arms practice night."

NIGEL -- Laurieston Hall July 1977

* * * * *

DEAR NIGEL

There are 101 things I should be doing but your article in the Network newsletter affected me so much I feel I want to write an open letter to you instead. So I have torn two pages out of my co-counselling manual (that's sacrifice for you) 'cos I've nothing else to write on.

Your article didn't piss me off -- it was obviously written with too much feeling to be dismissed lightly. In fact the feeling I got was one of anger -- possibly at us i.e. "we with our largely middle-class backgrounds, raised on flower-power and Peace News". I want to say a few things about what I take to be your assumptions about violence.

1. Violence is not only that which comes out of the barrel of a gun, but is also present in many people's lives every day. Rape, wife beating and sexual assaults of all kinds have rightly been cited as evidence of the violence faced by many women whether middle-class or not. It occurs to me that your ideas of violence are those of streetfighting MAN.

2. Who are those people who have this experience of the "reality of violence"? (On the radio at this precise moment is a punk rock song with nasty lyrics and music, called "KILL".) We should indeed listen to the victims of violence, but to my mind this means the Peace People as well as Chilean

refugees; concentration camp victims as well as war veterans and rape victims; also C.O.s who are in prison.

3. You seem to be suggesting that we should somehow be getting more experience of real violence (not just heavy demos), in order to train ourselves into an effective violent no-punches-pulled response if/when the time comes. Can I therefore make the following practical suggestions:-

(a) Get hold of the latest "snuff movie" and watch it enough so that you stop being sick. This I suggest will enable us to overcome any middle-class inhibitions we may have at watching someone being killed.

(b) Next organise trips to the local slaughterhouse to get used to the sight of blood. Perhaps eventually graduating to cutting a few throats.

(c) Instead of wasting time on the T.A. (little better than the Boy Scouts) why not get a few experts from selected terrorist groups to do a conference. Perhaps workshops on "Effective Bombmaking for Maximum Casualties", or "Bullet Saving by using Electric Drills for Kneecapping".

At this point the obvious silliness of my parody made me wonder if you hadn't written your article as a joke. But I was also bewildered by this statement: "We could not begin to take on the aggression of the state" yet you maintain the belief that we must somehow "hit back later". I feel that you are trying to have it both ways. Your argument would have more coherence if you had advocated seriously trying to match the state's monopoly on violence. (How about an atomic bomb in a suitcase or more feasible some really nasty biological or germ warfare?)

You very powerfully argue that nonviolence is crazy, naive and doomed to failure. Anyone prepared to use force will (at least in the short-run) get their way. If you see the world in terms of us and them then indeed this is the result. You say "we rely on the benevolence of that sick, evil world in order to survive..." --Yes, precisely.

There are gaps in the system; the conditioning is never complete; there is always (as Micheal Duane once remarked) a split second of hesitation before someone strikes another; even fascists have an inner core of humanity that can (possibly?) be reached. It is these gaps that we should be exploiting -- celebrating even. I agree that we are all "Children of Violence" and that the threat of reaction is a real one. But I feel that you undervalue your own contribution to opposing violence by living collectively, working co-operatively, directly (but nonviolently) opposing the wage slavery system. (This is structural violence.) Above all, by loving the people you come in contact with. "Wars will cease when MEN refuse to fight." The trouble with advocating violence is that it legitimises it for both sides e.g. I fear that my friends in Belfast may suffer "summary execution" at the hands of soldiers or terrorists. The idea of living your politics becomes pointless. In addition you lose some of the ground that has been gained by others. For example I see the beginnings of a revolutionary pacifist stance in the Peace People's insistence on "high moral standards from members of the security forces!"

MARTIN ZUKOR -- Leeds Nov 1977

The Move To Crow Hall

We move to Crow Hall on the first of August (will have moved by the time this comes out) and I want to write something about what its like sitting here in the week before we move, trying to get clear of the whole paraphernalia of years of nuclear suburban career-orientated living, and shifting towards something else.

It all seems so deliberate. Feeling is, that everybody else has been in communes for ever, and/or have lived so loose and free-floating that all they need is a rucksack and a good hitching day and they're away. Not so with heavy us. There's all this furniture and stuff.

The Handing in of the Notice. Go to meeting in morning. It is incredible, like people making noises inside a metal tank, but it is what I am spending my life doing. Is this going to be all there is then? Go home, disbelieving and pissed-off. "Do it now", says Ros. I write the letter. We deliver it by hand into County Hall letterbox that evening. Then I am helped into the pub and anaesthetised, starvation and ruin staring me in the face, glug, glug. But I don't really have to give three months notice. I don't have to give them anything anymore, I don't have to make their kind of noises anymore. Fuck them. Just keep refilling my glass.

Soon I stop telling people what we are doing. They come and ferret and dig and angle. "Where are you going then?" (Translation: What career post are you taking up next?) Answer: "Norfolk". "No I mean what are you going to do?" (Translation: What is going to be your employment?) Answer, and this is where I start to vary it: "Go on the dole/Write a book/Dig the garden/Look around a bit/Nothing much ..." it all gets so boring then. Two standard reactions: One from e.g. men, social workers, is to look uncomfortable, say "How exciting", and change the subject. I guess it hits their insecurities, their distress about their jobs and lives and their fear of change (as it does mine!!) The second from more alternative people, is like I Really Hope It All Works Out For You But I Don't Think It Will, which has something to do with wanting to do what we are doing but not being able to for whatever reasons. Being reminded that the name of the safe game is Talking About Communal Living (they could just be right!)

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*****
* We lie
* like so many mottled fields
* some still green, some still brown
* more losing a purple battle with the heather;
* each of us changing
* colours and textures
* even when our forbiddingly cold walls
* retain our size and shape.
* Trying to be a landscape.
*****
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THESE TWO brief poems are a bit melancholic but then, that's a mood I sometimes enjoy, and certainly with respect to writing about living together, it's the main mood that spurs me to write. I can get a lot more excited and positive about communal living - Chris Pyke.

The Circle of Friends: Which leaves a residuum of people we love who are saying "What you are doing is OK; maybe its not for us, or maybe it will be sometime, but its right for you and we wish you well". I've just done a mental count of them, I make it eight.

We pressure the people who are buying the house to buy off a lot of domestic equipment as well. Other items are more difficult, like an old table and some chairs that we've lived with for a long time. In the end we pass those on to some friends in exchange for a post-dated cheque and a load of thick woolly underwear, shirts and flannel nighties that they've collected at jumble sales. Two easy chairs we leave with a painter who is going to give us two pictures for them, when he's painted them. A letter from an ex-colleague who we lent an old sofa to, two years ago, says he's given it away to a handicapped person. Nice. Lucy says "I'll go round there and kick him in the, you know, in the front". That won't have any effect, we point out to her; he hasn't got any.

An Invitation To An Orgy. Phone call from this American lady, would we like to participate in an orgy? She is clearly well up on organising that stuff regularly we think (If wet, in the Village Hall), so we ring her back and say "Yes, Whoopee! When does it start?" Collapse of American lady who, it turns out, was just using the idea to turn her lover on a bit and never thought we would take her literally. Says, she wouldn't know what to do anyway. How disappointing. Thinks: "Have I changed that much?"

So this week it's back to the cardboard boxes, getting tools together, packing books, books, books. The kitchen notice says cancel papers, milk. Get them to collect TV. Keys back to work. Fetch bucket and mop! Phone, Electric, Gas; Clogs, Foam Plastic, Deliver table. I mentally add: Finish off the caulis in the garden, dig-up and bag the potatoes, remember to ring Toby, Li, a few others of the eight. Like we were emigrating or something. Ros says it's like waiting for a first baby; there's not much left to do but wait; you're no longer sure whether you want it to happen or not but you're committed; and you can't imagine despite all your fantasies, what life is going to be like from then on.

TONY -- Crow Hall Aug 1977

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*****
* Peter's tapestry
* hangs
* hardly started
* on it's large solid frame;
* the warps pouring certainly down
* to where in a confusion of browns
* the glory of a pattern is hinted.
*****
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*****
* Thousands of us
* taut puzzled
* collecting dust
* wait to be woven.
*****
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AN INMATE GETS 10 DAYS PAROLE

Visitors to communes often remark on the Us-Them attitude of the communards, of how conscious they are of themselves as one entity, quite apart from that other entity, the world Outside. Two letters mentioned this in the last couple of issues. We (on the inside) prefer to think this observation is unfair and untrue although it is, I think, in fact, undeniable. The world outside is seen as something horrific and hostile or as something with which we must communicate better, usually in this case, the local community. If the Puritan ethic (so rampant in so many communes) frowns on going to the pub after a hard day's work, it forgives if it can categorise it as a positive communal activity - initiating and improving relationships with the local people. But on the whole the World Outside is seen as something certainly to be changed, but also to be avoided. There are several good reasons for this.

For a start, when you physically hardly ever leave the grounds and your whole life is completely absorbed by the demands of the commune, it is not surprising that the world outside assumes something of a phantom reality. And the fact that this world is seen as something on the whole as horrific and hostile is because it is, in fact, precisely that: horrific and hostile. It is the world of police planning to raid you, and of educational authorities who want to hassle you and control your children, of an insane sexual morality, of money-grubbing and getting ahead, of inedible plastic food. It is only to be entered fleetingly to go to local Cash and Carry or to visit your parents. It is also occasionally, paradoxically, a place of refuge. When the communal nest, that haven of alternative living, suddenly turns on you and to your horror you see it is no alternative at all but merely a reflection, a more hip version of all that shit outside, and pressures build up - you have to leave for a while - for the anonymity of city streets, cafes, pubs, cinemas, Indian restaurants. For a day or two maybe you get a kick out of eating crap food and of wandering round streets and shops and looking at all the things in the windows you don't in fact want and find incomprehensible that other people do. It is good to know that you have some respite from the endless demands of work, meetings, stormy relationships, but it all quickly begins to pall.

I was away for ten days recently and never escaped the nightmarish quality of that hideous world that is reality every day for 99 per cent of people. Driving at an insane speed (65 mph) down a motorway along with a thousand other cars during rush hour, crossing in and out, before and behind, feeling like a country boy, terrified out of my mind. Sitting in pubs, cafes, watching people scuttling along the street, I can't help but be obsessed and upset by their faces. Those over 40 have their faces so well set, grim, resigned, hopeless, despairing, bitter, sad, angry, tight and tense, repressed. In those younger, the muscle tone still holds out, but the ravages are already taking hold and it doesn't take a lot of imagination to see how grim and mask-like their features will become. Always hard to please, there

are a few youthful faces, untouched, round, healthy, stupid, empty, unlined. And there aint a hell of a lot of difference, whether I'm looking at the strained faces of the middle-class matrons of the posh home counties, or the worn-out appearance of the downtrodden over-hardened Glaswegian, hugely fat or ridiculously, pathetically skinny. Makes me consider my own face, my own repression. I look at the interesting, handsome face of a woman talking to a man in a pub. She catches my eye. I look away at once, pretending she is the last person in the room I'm looking at, and we go through this charade a dozen times. Why don't I just stare, look at what I want to look at and then leave her alone? Because my mother told me it was rude, because friends tell me it is chauvinistic, that I'm reducing that woman to an object, when the plain truth is that for every male face that catches my interest there are 10 female ones. They are more beautiful, more ugly, always more reasonable and interesting. I look at the fire in the grate and notice that something is wrong - it hasn't changed; the flames are exactly the same height, the wood at exactly the same stage of disintegration as 10 minutes ago. I kick it, expecting it to crumble - it doesn't budge - the whole thing is artificial. I seek refuge at the opera, sitting alongside several hundred other well behaved, well-repressed individuals, jerking off on the deep emotion openly, honestly and beautifully expressed on stage.

Life on the ranch down at Laurieston Hall seems a million miles away. But there are flashes of it here and there - I overtake Suma's van on the motorway, pausing in my conversation with the guy giving me a ride to wave. A blank stare, then a puzzled wave back. My driver gives a toot on the horn for me, then goes on opening up his heart and soul to me, a total stranger he picked up not an hour ago. I stand on the corner of Tottenham Court Road for a smoke and am approached by two women who were at a Laurieston Conference a few months ago and who recognise me. I meet a bloke at a party who I last saw in Marrakesh when we split up after a week on the road together, he to go further deeper into Africa, me to go north back up into Spain.

So I wind back at the Hall; I haven't really missed it except for a few people I know well and love, but I find I'm in a good mood. It is the Famous Return-Home Syndrome; well recognised here. People who are bitterly unhappy here complain about it, criticise it, are so relieved to be back in what at first sight appears to be shelter from the storm (outside) that for two days or more they are actually glad to be living here, before they slide down into the equally well recognised morass of depression and despair. (Others, it is true, having romanticised the place while they have been away, are brought down by having their sentimental illusions shattered by the so-far-from-perfect reality, and take a few days to re-adjust.

When I first came to Laurieston Hall I worked part-time outside for nearly a year in a hospital 25 miles away. I gave it up, and for a year, apart from a couple of visits to parents and to Crabapple (twice) and Lifespan, I have been confined to barracks. Now I'm thinking seriously again of returning to the Outside on a part-time basis by going to work as a nurse every other weekend for 3 or 4 nights in the notorious casualty unit of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The others with whom I live have raised no objections to this. There are

several reasons why I'm returning back in part to the world outside, and to a particularly horrific part of it - this casualty unit, outside of Belfast must be the bloodiest, most brutal place in Britain on Friday and Saturday nights.

First, while in theory I'm 100 per cent behind the self-sufficiency movement, in practice my interest in it is limited. I'm unwilling and/or unable to accept a lot of the responsibility for a lot of the work that goes on here. I don't want to devote a lot of my energy to the cows, garden, etc. But to take this attitude and live here full-time is untenable. I become either a passenger or a peon, which is as intolerable for me as it would be for the others who live here.

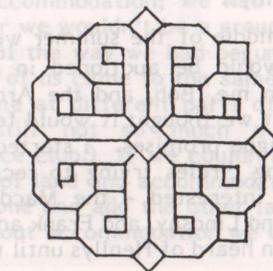
Secondly, I do feel it is important for me to keep in touch with the horror of urban industrial society. I do feel the communes movement is somewhat self-obsessed and self-centred and too divorced from the reality of the lives of most of the population.

Furthermore it keeps things in my own life in perspective. I have to be in touch with the facts of life, birth and death. I feel that is a sickness in our society that we hide these things away, as the Victorians did sex. Some people confront death and images of their own mortality by mountaineering or something. I do so by working in a hospital where one can never forget (as one can Outside - that word again!) the fact and the reality of death. And that profoundly affects the rest of my life and how I live it. The problems that can loom so large in a small community like Laurieston Hall take on a more sober, less important hue in the presence of death. I for one don't get my knickers in a twist quite so quickly. Also in the life-and-death situations of a hospital I can experience an emotional intensity that deepens my life and which I find missing at the moment, even here.

Finally, nursing is the one practical skill I do possess and I want to keep in touch with it for straightforward, straight practical reasons. I can envisage rougher days ahead when the Revolution will need my services as much as the Commune Movement needs now the services of handymen and builders, and organic gardeners, etc.

I have my reservations about returning, of course, mainly of working again with mad barbarians like doctors and other nurses. But maybe working with them will lead me to appreciate more than I do the comparative sanity of my fellow communards. Certainly I could never contemplate a return without their support and a base at L.H.

NIGEL - - Laurieston Hall Oct 77



On Being In It

"Theory is the only reality countenanced by our culture"

Awake again reaction? Up get time, down stairs clomp, egg out eat, toast on put, same faces, breakfast. Great! Even my stomach can predict what's coming. "Variation on eggs and oats" by Ludwig van oh, shut up! 'Least it's made for you. 'Least we're all eating together, not drifting up at all hours. Starting off the day as a group. A group? My group? What does it start? This day. Can't escape the preoccupations but there it is. Breakfast as per rota. I know the night before who'll cook it. I know who'll be eating it. I know. Knowledge. Learnt. Insight. Awareness. Huh! Boredom more like!

Suppose then that you began with the proposition that boredom was a kind of pain caused by unused powers, the pain of wasted possibilities or talents, and was accompanied by expectations of the optimum utilisation of capacities. (I try to guard against falling into the social science style on these mental occasions.) Nothing actual ever suits pure expectation and such purity of expectation is a great source of tedium. People rich in abilities, in sexual feeling, rich in mind and invention -- all the highly gifted, see themselves shunted for decades on dull sidings, banished, exiled, nailed up in chicken coops. Imagination has even tried to surmount the problems by forcing boredom itself to yield interest.

From breakfast to breakfast wash-up. Perhaps if you wash up fast you break things? Hum! Look at the chart. Crabapple equivalent of the weather map or football results. Guideline or creed? Faith or question mark? Sometimes I relish in its objectivity. Pieces of paper, inky scratches, it feeds straight into the eyes of the beholder and lo! It shall be done. Sort of. Depending. On what? On who and how who feels. What if I go down and look at it and think oh shit, I don't want to, I'll go in my room and sit and maunder. And as I leave silently those words will jump off the chart and squabble after me like a bunch of chattering starlings, "but what about chicken feed, and shop work, and you can't ignore the Aga, someone else will have to do it, the least you can do is tell someone". ".... ALL RIGHT! SHUT UP! I'M COMING". But it's only me piling guilt on me, isn't it? Or is it a system that's working? Getting me out of my self-depression into "it all". Forcing me persuasively to go and be and connect with other people and things? To be needed? Or cop out? Or is it too cliché, I "oppressing my instincts". Maybe I want to be miserable and it's stopping me, goddam it! Leave me alone! But it's only me and us, isn't it? We're just people. We make it. We can make it something else. Yeah, but can I? Can I be I when I wants to?

You have a great organised movement of life, and you have the single self, independently conscious, proud of its detachment and its absolute immunity, its stability and its power to remain unaffected by anything whatsoever -- by the sufferings of others or by society or by politics or by external chaos. In a way it doesn't give a damn, and we often urge it to give a damn, but the curse of non-caring lies upon this painfully free consciousness. It is free from attachments to beliefs and to other souls. Cosmologies, ethical systems? It can run through

them by the dozens. For to be fully conscious of oneself as an individual is also to be separated from all else. This is Hamlet's kingdom of infinite space in a nutshell, of "words, words, words", of "Denmark's a prison".

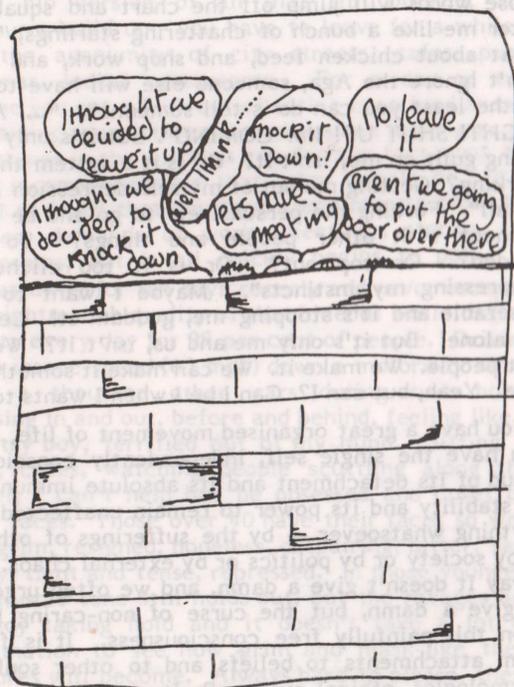
So what do I do now? Lie here and work out how "I" will be part of "we" today? Go for a walk? Burn the house down? Anything you say, I. Oh, I know the obvious. I make limits, I choose to be here. I choose to recognise "earning a living" -- old world concept number one. And being "with other people" and "love" and "sexual relations", and they are all limits to my structures. My view of "we". Compromise -- oh, I hate that word. What a stifling, deadening, unenjoyable, flat expanse of language. Compromise. Collective.

"Work out your objectives, evaluate your resources, take account of real constraints (but not mere prejudices), create and test a system for the purpose, then say what you want to do."

OK, I'd better get up now, 'cos if I don't someone else will have to get up twice as much, so to speak. Maybe no-one else really wants to get up? Maybe we're all lying here hoping nobody else makes it this morning? One up, all up? Inertia. What we normally do goes on: what's different needs an army of millions to make it happen. Children. Now there's a nice nub of chaos. They'll demand where I shut up. They don't leap to a notice, no sir; they'll twist and wriggle through any pinprick hole The bell. Breakfast. Ah me! Come on feet, out you get. Shoes, to heel But do human beings -- us, collectives, radicals -- really want effective organisation? Is that joy? Whatever it is it's different for everybody. So what the hell do we do about that? Keep looking

"The sensible course for the person is not to try to change the system's internal behaviour, which typically results in mammoth oscillation, but to change its structure (images, norms, symbols) so that its natural systematic behaviour becomes different."

PATRICK -- Crabapple Oct 1977



Busy, Busy, Busy

"If you find your life tangled up with somebody else's life for no very good reason," wrote Kurt Vonnegut as his anarchic prophet Bokonon, "that person may be a member of your karass".

A karass is a team put together by God for his own purposes. The members need not know what their team's job is, or even who their teammates are, but it helps if they can get some idea. When Bokononists see a particularly striking example of God's complex manipulations, they murmur in admiration "Busy, busy, busy." When I consider how our group has come together, I am tempted to say, "busy, busy, busy".

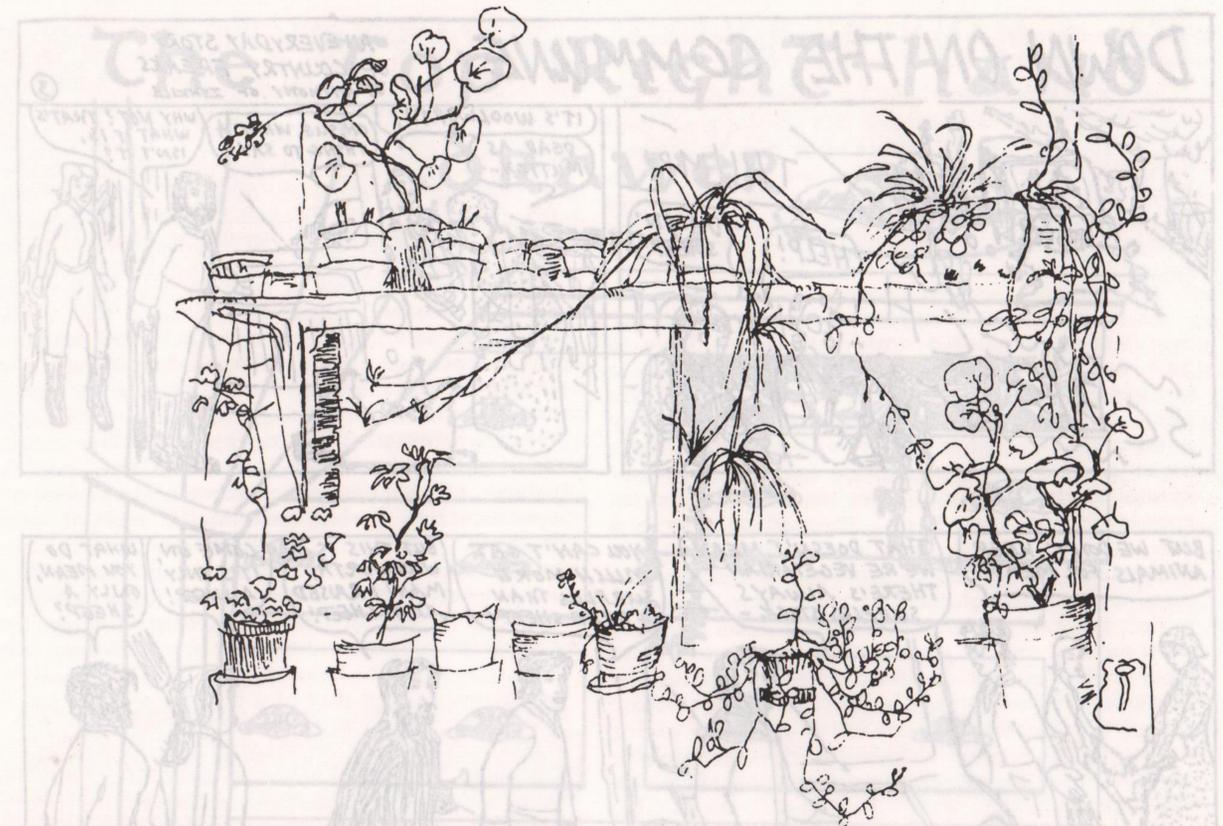
Bokonon also says that every karass has a wampeter, a pivot, something around which all its members move. Wampeters come and go, but for most of 1977, the wampeter of our karass was a hundred-acre farm near Llandovery, with a big white house, a stone farmyard, two cottages, a ghost, woods and streams, called Henllys. When Bob of Glaneirw found Henllys it had been empty for three years and was advertised as open to offers. He thought it would make an excellent commune, and advertised in Network, Resurgence, Practical Self-sufficiency and the like, for people to come together and buy it. I saw the advertisement in Undercurrents and went to a meeting at Glaneirw at Easter.

That meeting was probably a valuable experience for a lot of people - including Gerry and Lindsay, whose advertisement you may have seen in Network 32, Nigel and Serena, who got their own thing started a few months ago, and the Macdonalds farm group. But it didn't form a commune, and it was probably just as well; it would have been a granfalloon, a faked-up group with no real basis for its existence. Bokonon compares it to a skinless balloon.

So the others went on their different courses, and I stayed at Glaneirw to take over from Bob the hunt for possible members. I'm not sure that Glaneirw would have let me stay if they'd known it would take the rest of the year!

In the meantime, as it was meant to happen (as Bokonon says), Don Arnott, a trustee of the Future Studies Centre, was advertising in the centre's newsletter for people to join him and his family to start a farming community. His advertisement was picked up by In The Making and thence reprinted in Network, where I saw it. (Busy, busy, busy...). We exchanged letters and seemed to agree on most things, and his son David came to look at Henllys and liked it. At this stage everything was quiet and we seemed to have all the time in the world, so I went on writing to dozens of interested but non-committal people and making occasional silly offers for Henllys.

Then in the middle of the summer we had notice that Henllys would be auctioned in a fortnight's time. Between me, Bob, and the Arnotts we had about half what we thought it would fetch, and the rest was all vague promises. I started to move in rapidly widening circles trying to recruit anybody who might be interested - the Macdonalds Farm people, Jerry and Lindsay, and Frank and his family, who hadn't even heard of Henllys until they came to



try to join Glaneirw. If we had bought Henllys then, we should have ended up with a granfalloon, but (as it was meant to happen) the auction was postponed until September.

The combination of a definite proposal and a couple of months delay tightened up the group. Jerry and Lindsay moved on. Gil and Mark, who had applied to join BRAD before it folded, were contacted by Frank and liked the look of us enough at one meeting to commit themselves. With a week till the auction we were all ready to go. Two days later the auction was postponed till January.

The Henllys story is a long and sad tale, like the mouse's, and I'll tell it some other time if you're interested. But having served its purpose of drawing the group together it ceased to be the wampeter of our karass, and we started to look for other places. It didn't seem to get us anywhere. There were big farms with little houses, and bigish houses with tiny farms, and places that were just right except that the land was a swamp or the house falling down. The tensions of that period made us realise that, much as we liked and agreed with Frank and his family, they didn't share in the unspoken trust and understanding the rest of us had felt from the start; they weren't part of the karass. They moved on.

The winter brought with it the threat of a fresh rise in land prices in the spring. The Arnotts were in temporary accommodation; we had to find something soon, or we wouldn't be a group much longer. It is typical of the way we had begun to think that two or three of us came to the same conclusion at the same time at different parts of the country. (We were still not so much a group as a correspondence club.) If we couldn't get our ideal combination of land and accommodation, we would have to get one and add the other later; and if we got land without accommodation we would sacrifice the group.

Don found Porthriw on a househunting trip to keep him from worrying about Jean, who was having radiotherapy for cancer. We all looked at the place and fell in love with it, though we felt we had to look over a few others for form's sake before we agreed it would do splendidly. It is a rambling old white house about ten miles inside Wales, with a couple of cottages, and a stables/garage/workshop/flat block nearly as big as the house, standing in six acres most of which we can do something with. We are going to spend most of our time getting it into shape for the first year, though Leslie will have her workshop and the two Davids (we call them Dai Bach and Dai Mawr, or sometimes Dai Train and Dai Lorry) will have outside jobs. One of Gill's neighbours asked her 'But what's Mark going to do at your new place?' and all she could do was laugh.

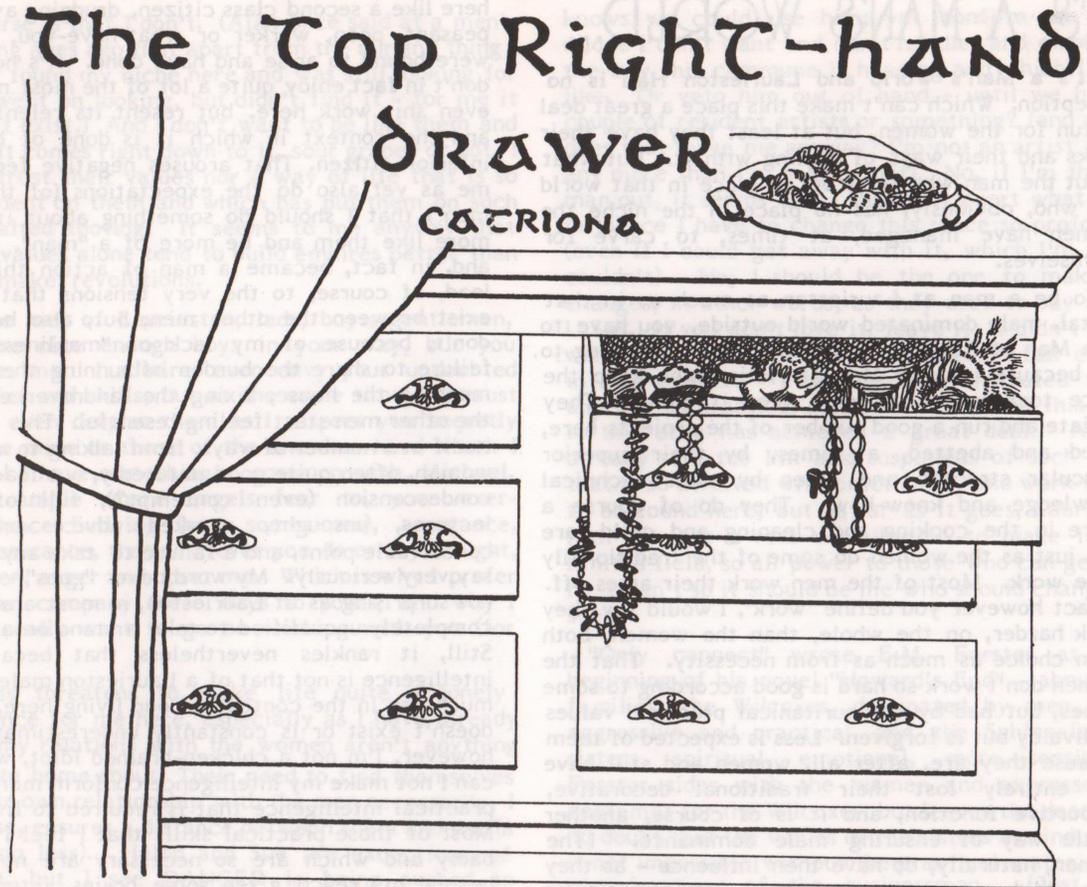
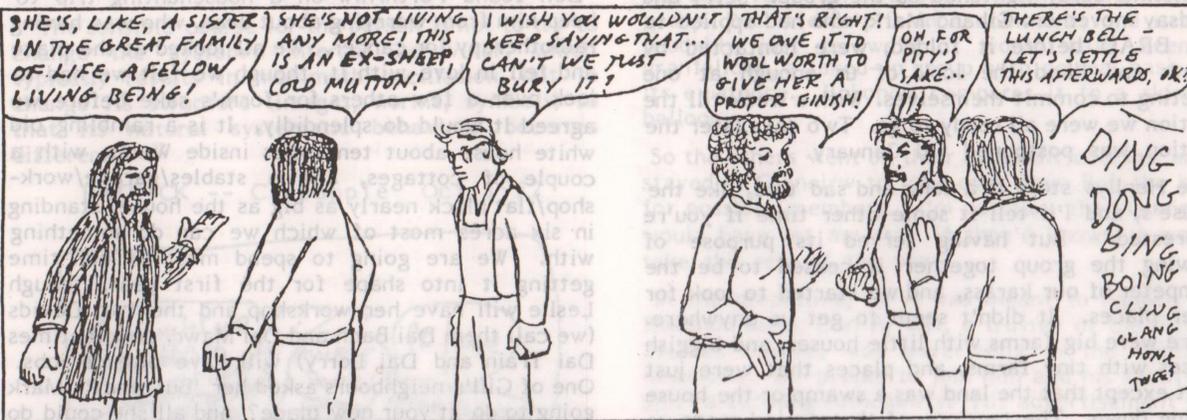
What are we going to do? We're going to make a garden and a workshop and a kitchen. We're going to make bowls and drive trucks and keep goats. We don't know what the group is for, but maybe it doesn't matter. Bokonon says that when man was created he sat up and looked around at the newly created world, and said 'This is all very fine, but what is the purpose of it all?'

'Does it have to have a purpose?' said God, surprised.

'Of course' said Man.

'In that case, I leave it to you to find one,' said God, and went away.

ANON Feb 1978



THEY kept everything of value in their top right-hand drawers. At first it was just things that the outside world valued, like money and stamps. So instead of finding these things close by, in communal spaces, that everybody used, where they would be convenient (and where they could also unfortunately get nicked, and frequently did until the change), anyone wanting them had to go far from the inhabited areas, along dark, dusty passages and up the stairs of worn linoleum and bannisters with pieces of wood missing from the handrails, up to the secret nests where people kept their private selves. There, behind the beautiful enclosing protective hangings, lay the only warmth in the house, the fires burning with wood smoke, and all the precious ornaments were revealed to the trusted who penetrated this far, but concealed from the bitter world. Beyond yet more draperies, hard to behold in the dimly-lit atmosphere was the shining well-polished wooden chest of drawers, and in the top right-hand drawer lay that which was sought.

So it was with their true selves, which had been plundered and ripped-off too often to be left carelessly and trustingly lying about in the communal areas. The tattered shreds and broken pieces, the unwanted leftovers which nobody else had learnt to prize yet, were tenderly gathered up, mended and put together. Unlike the money and stamps, parts of them were irrecoverable, and one came to recognise the bits missing as a communal feature -- a certain hardness, a tendency to abandon visitors, a defensiveness, an ever-repeating patter which meant nothing to lips it tripped over. Nor could the true selves be faultlessly mended. The cracks gaped, as the wrong question was asked or the wrong assumption made. The visitor felt with

her tongue the roughness of the mended cracks as she lifted the communal cup to her lips to drink.

But, after all, these worn fragments were all they had left to prize -- they had no access to the bright glittering world, no loose change in their pockets with which to buy a new sense of confidence, new interests, uncontaminated relationships, a fresh joy or even a relaxing diversion. What they had left, they were forced to treasure, or abandon themselves to the total poverty of a person without a self. None dared that desparate undressing of the self, peeling off the flesh and standing in simplicity, all bone and structure. Instead they hoarded their damaged treasures, warming them to life with their heart fires, charming them to illusory beauty in the dim, flattering light of the soul's room of hope and safety. Never were they loosed to free sight and touch for fear of further breakages, but shared only with close intimates. Most secret and deepest within lay their love for other people, which they kept locked in their top right-hand drawers. The conscious mind governed the turning of that key, and since each was equally locked away, cool facade judged cool facade and found it wanting, unfit to be opened to and received into the warmth and lovingness of each self's heart room of retreat.

Unvisited, untended, unrenewed, those rooms grew cold and empty; the light died down, the treasures were abandoned and covered with dust, no longer gleaming and no longer attracting notice, they were easily brushed off the mantelpiece by a self-lost, groping hand and broken into a thousand worthless fragments, just as the protective self had feared. And hoarded, they had charmed nobody.

IT'S A MAN'S WORLD...

It's a Man's World and Laurieston Hall is no exception. Which can't make this place a great deal of fun for the women, but at least they have their perks and their ways of dealing with it. But what about the man who feels out of place in that world and who, obviously, has no place in the niche the women have managed, at times, to carve for themselves.

To be a man at Laurieston as much as in that brutal, male dominated world outside, you have to be a Man of Action. And that's not a bad thing to be, because it's the Men of Action who keep the place together or at least keep it going. They initiate and run a good number of the projects here, aided and abetted, at times, by their superior muscular strength and often by their technical knowledge and know-how. They do of course a share in the cooking and cleaning and child-care etc. just as the women do some of the traditionally male work. Most of the men work their arses off. In fact however you define 'work', I would say they work harder, on the whole, than the women, both from choice as much as from necessity. That the women don't work so hard is good according to some values, but bad by the puritanical practical values we live by but is forgiven. Less is expected of them because they are, after all, women and still have not entirely lost their traditional decorative, supportive function, and it is of course, another subtle way of ensuring male dominance. (The women, naturally, do have their influence - as they always did, even in the most unliberated times - but they can't compete with the men unless it is on their - male - terms and become 'like' men and adopt their - aggressive - tactics. Those who can't or won't do this can take refuge together, or cut off, or break down).

Trouble is I can't compete with the men either. But it has taken some time to realise this. For the first time in my life, while living here, I have got on better with men rather than women. My relationships with most of the women here have been, at best cordial (lovely word!), often indifferent, and at times, just terrible. On the other hand, I have shared moments of real warmth and intimacy with some of the men which have meant a good deal to me. But, thinking back, while I have learnt a good deal about sexism here, paradoxically, I have had to maintain a more "macho" front than I think I have ever done before. I have put up with this (because half the time I was hardly aware of it - and repressed it when I was) to keep a place in the male world and to cover up my own doubts and insecurities about being a man in general and a man at Laurieston in particular. Other men have seen through this from time to time when John earlier on and Bill more recently, criticised for failing to "take responsibility" or "take initiative". But these failings were tolerable or at least tolerated, because I was willing to work fucking hard, didn't steal their thunder (I was never in a position to argue or question their ideas in work because they always knew more than I did in work situations. In other words, when working with the men here, I was never likely to produce the tensions that exist between, say, Pat and Bill, Bill and Geoff, Pat and Geoff), and because I never fucked with any of "their" women. Yet, because I'm not a woman and because I occasionally resented living and working

here like a second class citizen, drudging away as a peasant, peon, worker or what-have-you, tensions were bound to arise and have done. It's not that I don't in fact enjoy quite a lot of the most mundane, even shit work here, but resent its relentlessness and the context in which it is done of being an inferior citizen. That arouses negative feelings in me as yet also do the expectations (of the other men) that I should do something about it and be more like them and be more of a "man". If I did and, in fact, became a man of action this would lead, of course, to the very tensions that already exist between the other men; but, also because I don't, because of my lack of "manliness", my failure to share the burden of running the garden, mending the house, fixing the landrover etc. then the other men start feeling resentful. This presents itself in a number of ways, from talking to me like a woman, often quite good naturedly, but loaded with condescension (even contempt?), full of penny lectures, unsought, unasked advice on every conceivable point, and a failure to take anything I say very seriously. My word never "goes" - which is not surprising as at Laurieston, in most areas, I am completely unqualified to take a stand on anything. Still, it rankles nevertheless that because my intelligence is not that of a Laurieston male i.e. not much use in the context of our living here, that it doesn't exist or is constantly underestimated. If, however, I'm not a chicken-brained idiot, why then can I not make my intelligence conform more to the practical intelligence that is required to live here. Most of those practical skills that I feel I lack so badly and which are so necessary are not surely beyond my reach given some brains, interest and dedication. I don't think they are. I do think aptitude comes into it and I'm pretty short of that in those areas, but no, it is not impossible, and with interest and dedication, I daresay I could be out there initiating, organising, fixing things alongside the rest of them. But I don't choose to.

Because I don't, won't or can't knuckle under and master these skills, I sometimes feel very inadequate here. And, indeed, in many ways, I think that is true. I think I am inadequate here but that can sometimes spill over into feeling inadequate full stop. It takes a tougher mood of defiance, resentment and anger to put a stop to that one and think we have got enough "doers" here as it is (we haven't though - there is always so much urgent practical work to be done). And I say there has to be room for people like me, and many a lot more "useless" and "inadequate" than I, in the revolution, in any new society. I tell myself that, in fact, I am willing to take on responsibility at times e.g. a ward full of seriously ill people, a couple of patients on ventilators etc., but maybe not the responsibilities here. I like working in the garden, I enjoy milking the cow etc. but perhaps just don't have the interest or inclination to spend most of the time thinking, worrying or talking endlessly about these things. Yeah, I seem to have wandered into the wrong scenario somewhere, somehow. It's taken me two years to wake up to the fact that because I approve of self-sufficiency and think it's vitally important and must play a large part in any new society, it doesn't follow that on a personal level, I feel very involved in it. And that's an uncomfortable way to be or feel at Laurieston Hall. And I look at all the men who live here and on the Laurieston fringe and see all these incredibly capable, practical, efficient people and think Where do I fit in here? The answer

of course is that I don't. (Alan once said at a men's meeting ages ago that apart from the nursing thing I hadn't found my niche here and was still looking for it. I went on looking, but didn't find it - for me it doesn't exist.) And I don't want to be like them and when it comes right down to it, sour grapes or not, I don't trust their values nor a way of life that is so dependent on them and which has put them on such an exalted footing. It seems to me anyway that these values alone tend to build empires better than they make revolutions.

O ye men of Laurieston, lads, boys, gentlemen, you are nice enough boys in your way, but you oppress me. I admire, even envy your undoubted qualities and skills, but at the same time I distrust them, even despise them as I suspect you secretly despise mine or those of the one man here whom I do feel I have something in common with, Michael. You trample where angels fear to, your over-confidence bullying (yes, sometimes), arrogance, self-assurance, that whatever you do or say is right, frighten, anger and upset me. Which is why I prefer my own company these days to yours, and why I don't really want to go on working with you (for you).

This threatens to make life quite a lonely existence for me here, especially as I have already said, my relations with the women aren't anything to write home about. Their need to find themselves in their own relationship with the men necessarily, I suppose, ensures a distance between them and me (a man, no less). Helen and Sue are exceptions, of course, but I see DANGER in being pushed to depend on them for social life, warmth and intimacy. For a start, Helen has enough of her own obsessions and preoccupations, so that rather looks like leaving Sue and I don't really have to spell it out. It's a situation I don't like, don't trust and have tried to avoid - not to avoid a good relationship with her, of course, but the situation of having one very close relationship in the context of a multitude of bad and indifferent ones - like putting all your eggs in... etc. etc. Not good for me nor her nor the community as a whole. This, of course, partly explains why I get on so well and spend so much time with Michael, Jude, Selina and Matthew, all four of whom I love. I seem to get on better with them than I do with most of my fellow brother and sister communards. Certainly I feel closer to Michael than to all the other men here or hereabouts but I knew which way the cookie crumbles. He's compared to Philip and is found wanting: since he's left work he has done nothing compared to Philip who has renovated this and fixed that. The fact that since Michael left teaching, he has produced some of the finest paintings I have ever seen is, apparently, irrelevant. Or didn't you know, or aren't you interested? Have it any way you want it, it just shows me where the prestige and power lie in this place, and that such prejudice runs against me rather than in my favour.

Or, at a recent meeting, one person already known to us but not well, wants to come and visit us with a possibility of joining. Approving grunts (and shit! you know how fast some poor potential communard cum visitor can be put down) and quick-as-a-flash, I know it: why he's in, O.K. I bet he's another practical wizard. He is of course; suspicions confirmed. But what should I do about it? He's a helluva nice guy, and will be a great asset, so should I say O.K. let him come in, God

knows we could use him; yet confirm the male clique I don't want and can't handle, and emphasise the way this commune is heading and which I don't like. Or veto him out of hand - until we have a couple of resident artists or something? (and where does that leave me anyway? I'm not an artist either any more than I'm a Mr. Fixit). No, if I'm the odd man out, it seems that I shouldn't exert what little influence I have to change this place so profoundly (even if I could get away with it, which I'm sure I couldn't). No, I should be the one to make the changes; in other words, as they used to say in the U.S.A. If you don't love it, leave it. I didn't agree with that statement then but I think it's fair enough in this context. I have already indicated that I approve of practical self-sufficiency and this place in this area has achieved a great deal. As I've already said too I'm also suspicious of such a life that is so involved with practicality and work that is to be found here, but as far as it goes, Laurieston Hall has got a real contribution to make in this limited field, so all power to those who can get into it. I can't so it should be me who should change my scene.

"Only connect" wrote E.M. Forster at the beginning of his novel "Howard's End" - about two families: the Wilcoxes, dominated by men, hard, aggressive and practical, and the Schlegels, two sisters, spiritual, emotional, more sensitive. Forster sides with the women and expresses his contempt for the Wilcoxes, but leaves the readers in no doubt that the values of the sisters are indulgent, if not impossible without the practical materialistic considerations of the businessmen. (Just as I suppose Niel's paintings won't keep the rain out). Yet, Forster says that the values of the men are barren, sterile, destructive and dangerous without the awareness and spiritual insight of the sisters. "Only connect".

Trouble is I don't see much connecting going on though I do see the results of an over-dependence on the values of a practical self-sufficient way of life in plentiful supply: an obsession with work, a contempt for anyone or anything that isn't immediately what Rebecca called the other day "useful". Even our therapies and criticism meetings are to make us function better, to enable us to be better communal workers - about the same level as the Pentagon or Harvard Business School including Meditation as part of their training.

So, if the puritan ethic is to the fore, you can bet that Guilt and Anxiety aren't far behind. They aren't. They run this place and have many manifestations: the awful competitiveness in work. Pat rushes up to me first thing in the morning and says straight out, "I've been working since 8 a.m. this morning". Straightaway, I blurt out, "Well I've been milking (since 7 a.m. ho-ho)", when I should have maintained bored indifference or else replied that I'd had a lie-in and a nice wank to boot. The non stop shop talk is another manifestation. All very necessary, I'm sure, but it drives me to distraction and is, no doubt, another sign of how out of place I am here. All ceaseless shop talk is boring but I reckon I preferred that of my academic life in the U.S.A. when it was sharing enthusiasm over a new book or trying to close down the university, or that of my nursing life and the constant rapping on about the improvement or deterioration of a patient's chances. (Paradoxically, I find I'm unable to talk about anything else but Laurieston Hall and

my obsession with it, outside.) Another manifestation is the existence of the Laurieston Police Force. Every single move is watched and often noted down mentally for ammunition in the future. So people do things secretly, get their own stash of coffee, booze, sweets or whatever, and hope nobody'll notice. Or if there are two or three people involved, then the guilt is lessened, and there is a conspiratorial air of naughtiness, like a couple of schoolkids going into the bog for a quick illicit fag. Mutual constructive criticism, or raising consciousness, are phrases that are slung about with abandon and which I used to believe in when I could remember what they meant, but which for me now are usually fine words to disguise dirty deeds, called in other circles, bitching, interfering, nit-picking, or if you want a political shade, something that's more akin to neighbour watching and doing our revolutionary duty and shopping them to the fuzz - except that we are our own C.I.A./K.G.B. Another manifestation is our rigidity, we talk of expanding our base or involving people perhaps slightly less like ourselves, but our attitude to those who are not efficionados of Laurieston, who don't feel involved or even interested in it, or who don't see it as relevant to their lives or even to the revolution, who don't see it as the one and only way to salvation, is unbelievably intolerant. Maybe condescending if they're real nice folk. But then it's difficult to expect anyone to fit into the mould of an ideal Laurieston Hall type when none of us can and while we're so intolerant of each other anyway. Perhaps this is part and parcel of our isolation or perhaps better said, our isolationism. Certainly we have lots of visitors and hundreds of contacts which is fine, but the whole commune movement seems at times incredibly inward looking and incestuous, that excludes 99.9 per cent of the population (however much we say we want to involve it) and this makes me wonder if we're not a slightly more hip, more secular version of the Mormons, Divine Lighters, Evangelical Union, the Trancendental Meditaters or anyone of the thousands of sects who see their way as THE way to the Truth and who are strong on principles and pressures. I suppose it also bothers me that we are so 'political', so obsessed with our lives here, that only two of us are interested in fighting on any level at all, the plan to dump nuclear waste near the bothies. That plus the presence of three nuclear power stations on our doorsteps, worry me just as much if not more than whether the hens are laying or if the cows are giving enough milk. Yet I for one usually feel far too knackered to go out and start raising shit over nuclear power. After a 14 hour day I want some peace and quiet, a fire and a smoke and... (TV and slippers, pop?). So maybe instead of a therapy session or mutual criticism meeting, I should go out to campaign against Chapelcross, Windscale, etc. - what! and miss a criticism meeting? Not even I would be guilty of such a communal irresponsibility.

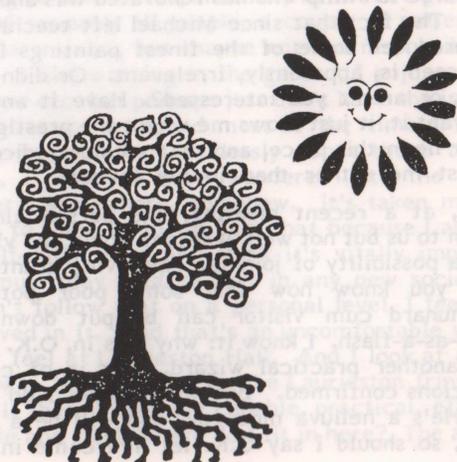
Having written all this it seems obvious that, as I've already said, I should change my scene, so what's the alternative to the alternative? I don't know. I did contemplate moving in with Michael and Jude; they agreed at once but I changed rooms instead. I think it's pretty obvious I should leave. But that's a lot easier said than done. This is after all my home and I have nowhere to go. And in some ways I do like it here. I find the thought of leaving this countryside, the children, behind almost too painful to think about, especially Guy. I even have

reservations about leaving my conflicts and personal clashes behind, not to speak of the personal closeness I feel with a few here. I find that even now, just the other day, not only do I talk 'Laurieston shop' away from here, but actually become protective and defensive about it. I know too that the shit of out there is even worse than the shit of in here, although to choose to live here because it is the lesser of two evils is no more satisfactory than voting on such principles. In short, I guess, I'm addicted to the place and I'm scared shitless of leaving and going into 'cold turkey' out there. Roger's lonesome letter from out there did something to encourage me, but I have been seriously thinking of several things: of returning to nursing, of going abroad again, especially to Christiania in Copenhagen, of doing a midwifery course. At the moment to return to nursing seems the least drastic move although I have reservations about it. Nevertheless, it will give me time to think the change over further, will keep me in touch with the real practical skill I do possess, and will keep me in touch with the hell of modern urban industrial capitalist society which is so important to me. At least I'll be dealing with people who are not necessarily young, middle class, beautiful, white articulate Laurieston types, yet I'll still be in contact here and may appreciate it (and you all) more. I'll still be able to take part in some of the activities here without feeling guilty that I'm not taking enough responsibility. But that's your decision. Maybe you'll think I'm using the place, maybe you'll see it in a more positive light. I think anyway for the time being I should continue to come to business meetings since I shall be living here, and school meetings as this is the one other area that personally, politically excites me and involves me, but that I should leave the rest of you who feel more committed and involved with full time Laurieston living than I do.

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To end then on a sentimental if irrelevant note: I like those two beautiful golden pheasants that have made their home here. They don't contribute to the economy, even drain it as they eat chicken feed: They toil not, neither do they spin, yet I say unto you, not Solomon nor any of the other men in all their glory was arrayed as like unto one of these.

ANON -- Laurieston Hall May 1978
(And the names have been changed!)



Thoughts On Living In The Outside World

I left Crabapple at the end of March, realising that I was leaving behind me much that I valued, some close friends and lovers, and a two year experience that had changed and shaped me radically. I had no illusions that the way of life I would be taking up would be any better, that any problems would be solved. But it was still a shock to be suddenly part of the "outside world" - a shock I wasn't prepared for and never could have been, given the life I was leading in Crabapple. I did expect to be lost for a while, to be unhappy, but never this feeling of being so completely alien, in a world that was still alternative although not part of the communes world. I found myself being shocked by the ways in which I saw people behaving. I found myself in an environment that cramped and twisted my mind, and everyday life became suddenly difficult.

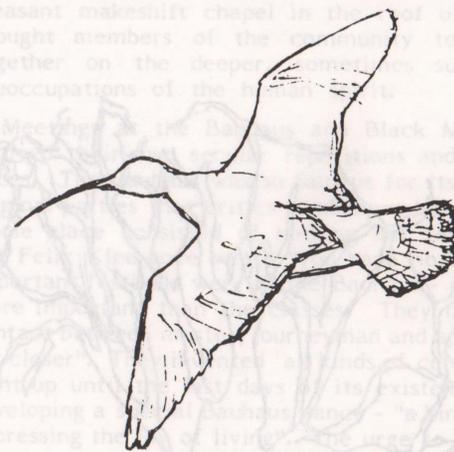
The last few months have brought a series of disasters to my life and the lives of most of my close friends, which has obviously clouded the picture I have of that time of transition. Now I have begun to find my space in this new environment, I feel interested in what I'm doing (which is trying to energise the alternative bookshop in Lancaster) and hopeful that the 4 of us who moved together, plus one more friend, will be able to find our own space somewhere near here, where we can have the animals and a garden, and feel a bit more normal again.

I haven't got over the alienation of town-life, the noise and dust of travelling by public transport, the weirdness of going out to buy vegetables and milk. The lack of anything satisfying to do at home drives me out into the city, where all I can do is spend money (apart from working in the bookshop of course). Although I'm living in an edge-of-Lancaster village the house, with its back yard and tiny rooms, makes it seem like being in any town, anywhere. It's very odd to have nothing to throw the scraps to, no reason to collect the eggshells, no place where I have the "right" to wander when I need space from people. And I'm not aware any more of the moon, what it's doing...

Sometimes I have to stop and try to think out how much more sane the world can be - and remember that I don't have to fit in with the way things are. It's been two months and already the world I left is fading rapidly, but the me that emerged is a product of a way of life which was radically different, and my feelings of weirdness make that quite plain. We set up a world which was isolated and introverted, hence the feelings of shock to someone leaving. But I've come to appreciate the new values we created far better now than when I lived with them every day, and got so used to them that I no longer noticed the difference. We created a whole new set of expectations and attitudes, and while not all of them were progressive, and while some of our

attitudes were used wrongly or hidden behind, we did go a long way towards changing ourselves and confronting each other's behaviour. We did fairly well at not bitching about each other, but saying whatever we wanted to say to the person concerned. We certainly managed to share our belongings and our living space with very little fuss and possessiveness. There was never the feeling that someone was the "boss" and had more responsibility and more power, even though we all joined with vastly different capital assets and on very different levels of experience. We did a very good job at passing on specialised skills and knowledge, and at creating spaces for people to learn in. We shared the workload with, sometimes, not much hassle... Certainly we expected sexist behaviour to be confronted, domineering behaviour to be confronted. And we expected to change ourselves, to be constantly working on ourselves, and that's the aspect I miss most in my new life.

All this doesn't make me want to run back to Crabapple. It makes me more determined to try to change things. Yet it's a spiral - I want to live with people who think as I do, and I need their support to carry on, but I don't want to be isolated again. I feel that I'm searching for people who are in the same space as me. At the moment I seem to be constantly trying to explain to people why I don't want to fit into certain patterns of behaviour, why I find certain things reactionary and upsetting, and so often people can't understand what I'm on about. Leaving Crabapple I also lost my parameters for a while - I felt I had no identity. So many of the things which had shaped my environment, and especially the people I was closest to, were suddenly no longer there. Who was I? Who was the person who now lived in this unknown world?



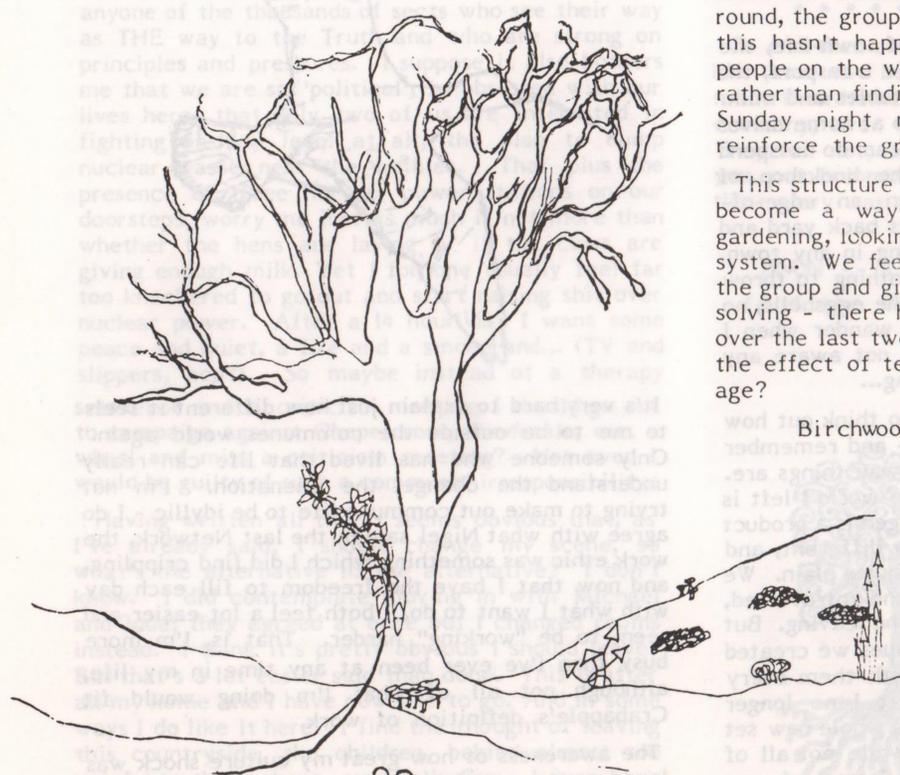
It's very hard to explain just how different it feels to me to be outside the communes world again. Only someone who has lived that life can really understand the change, the alienation. I'm not trying to make out commune life to be idyllic - I do agree with what Nigel said in the last Network, the work ethic was something which I did find crippling, and now that I have the freedom to fill each day with what I want to do, I both feel a lot easier and seem to be "working" harder. That is, I'm more busy than I've ever been at any time in my life, although not all of what I'm doing would fit Crabapple's definition of work.

The awareness of how great my culture shock was leads me to question the life I left, as well as to

challenge the life I now find myself in. Because I don't think that leaving a commune necessarily has to mean that great a change. I could have assumed that for me, living with people I knew well and wanted to live with, and going into another part of the alternative scene, it would mean very little adjusting. It makes me question why those changes in attitudes were possible to begin with at Crabapple - more possible than "out here". The word commitment hovers around in my mind, but I'm wary of it because it has in the past been used to throw at somebody to guilt-trip them. Isolation, of course, is part of it. Introversion? Intentional? Certainly, we were an intentional community, not a group of people who found ourselves together and wondered why we couldn't work out anything. There was a framework already worked out, which tended to mean that people who didn't think along those lines didn't join us anyway... and that leads back to the introversion again.

I left Crabapple partly to find the space to express my growing political consciousness, and certainly I can find or make that space now. But it's ironic that at Crabapple the personal change was being worked on enough to enable me to put a lot of energy into more outside things, though the space wasn't granted. Now I have as much space as I can use, but so much energy needs to be put into coping with the relationships between the people in my life. At the moment I just feel exhausted.

SUE -- May 1978



TEN-MINUTE MEETINGS

MOST COMMUNES at some time experience situations where a large gulf arises in a relationship between two people, which affects them so they can't be honest with each other and affects all the people around them too. The 'ten minute meeting' system is an attempt to overcome this by setting up a loose structure.

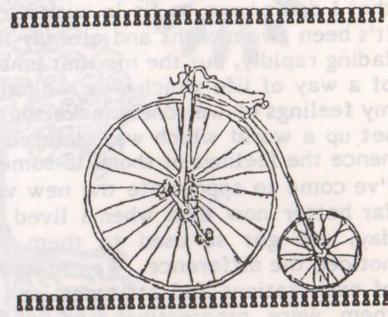
The idea is that you spend time with each other person in the house on your own, once every two weeks but how long is completely arbitrary. To talk about your relationship, any problems or good things in it, and if there are no pressing issues in your relationship, something that affects you both closely - perhaps a wider issue concerning the whole community.

What is discussed at these meetings is not totally private and can be brought up at larger group 'feelings' meetings unless the two people concerned decide that it's something they want to keep between themselves. The dynamics of a ten minute meeting are very different from a large group feelings meeting. It is a much safer feeling talking about something that is important to you with one other person who is involved than talking in a large group where something important someone says or how upset they look might go unnoticed. It's much more threatening being confronted with something you've done to upset/annoy/hurt another person in a group meeting than when you're talking one to one with that person. The fact that discussions in ten minute meetings can be brought up at large group meetings means that they have a very positive bias i.e. very little back biting or things left unresolved.

Surprisingly enough everybody in our house agrees that ten minute meetings have been very successful. We've been having them for over two years now and very few have been missed - maybe partly due to the sanction that if you haven't had one by the time the Sunday night 'feelings' meeting comes round, the group waits until you've had it!! In fact this hasn't happened yet, I think mainly due to people on the whole enjoying ten minute meetings rather than finding them traumatic or a chore. The Sunday night meetings are also important to reinforce the group and talk out group problems.

This structure is not as rigid as it sounds and has become a way of life like cooking, cleaning, gardening, looking after kids rather than an imposed system. We feel that it's increased trust amongst the group and given us more confidence in problem solving - there have been significantly fewer rows over the last two years!! - Can this be put down to the effect of ten minute meetings? Or is it old age?

Birchwood Hall Apr 1980



IT would take too long to describe properly what Lewis Mumford meant when he said that the roots of culture lie in the four R's - repetition, ritual, rhythm and religion - and anyone interested could usefully cast their eyes over his monumental work for themselves. His thesis was a radical and strange one to hear in the midst of a technocratic society like ours:- that it is imaginative activity, as

***** CEREMONY *****



experienced through the arts that necessarily prefigures the technical inventiveness of men and women. In other words - for a society to advance technologically, it would be sensible for it to nurture its "cultural" life through an emphasis on dance, architecture, painting, poetry, music etc., rather than invest in a purely mechanical and utilitarian form of education that is designed to produce engineers, technologists and scientists.

I believe the same is also true of societies in embryo - that the interests of small communities would be served best by nurturing what for Mumford constitute the roots of culture:- repetition, ritual, rhythm and possibly - for those who like it religion. Maybe we can substitute something else for the to the seriousness of life - we recognise and go some to the seriousness of life - we recognise and go some way towards being unserious and carefree but perhaps gravity and solemnity do not get expressed sufficiently in our culture? Maybe the phrase "nothing is sacred any more" has something to do with the demise of religion? I am not defending religion but three of the examples I give of ceremonies happen to relate to religious practice and I find them singularly attractive and beautiful.

Maybe there are some secular rites that compare in beauty with religious ones? Few secular communes seem to last long enough to bury their dead, but quite a few birth ceremonies are carried out. It would be interesting if any non-religious C.N. readers have devised or know of any satisfying birth or death ceremonies - especially where they have become a regular pattern - and to send them for inclusion in a future issue.

Recreating a ceremonial centre in communities is something that could be tried in various ways - In the north of England, Methodists evolved a practice known as the love feast, for which special large and beautiful water cups were made to pass round the gathering. According to John Wesley "the very design of a love feast is a free and familiar conversation in which every man, yea and woman has liberty to speak whatever may be to the glory of God".

Extraordinary moments of a timeless simplicity and beauty are caught in the service known as Tenebrae; during that service the candles are extinguished one by one until the chapel is in complete darkness. Then the Mierere is sung.

The lay community which ultimately became attached to Prinknash abbey (in Gloucestershire) after several troubled years as an anarchist commune owed its later stability not just to religious conversion but to the comforting sociability and rhythm with which they regularly attended the divine office throughout the day. Work took on more meaning when periodic retirement to a pleasant makeshift chapel in the roof of a barn brought members of the community to reflect together on the deeper, sometimes submerged preoccupations of the human spirit.

Meetings at the Bauhaus and Black Mountain evolved their own secular repetitions and observances. The Bauhaus was so famous for its gay and original parties that critics sometimes believed the whole place consisted of nothing but festivities. But Felix Klee once wrote "you have no idea how important festivals were at the Bauhaus - often far more important than the classes. They made the contact between master, journeyman and apprentice far closer". They invented all kinds of celebrations right up until the last days of its existence, even developing a special Bauhaus dance - "a kind of hop expressing the joy of living". The urge to perform, to invent and play - described by Schiller in his Letters on Aesthetic Education - "is the power from which flows the truly creative values of man (sic - typist) undemanding, naive joy of creating and designing, without distinguishing between the worthy and the unworthy, sense or nonsense, good or bad".

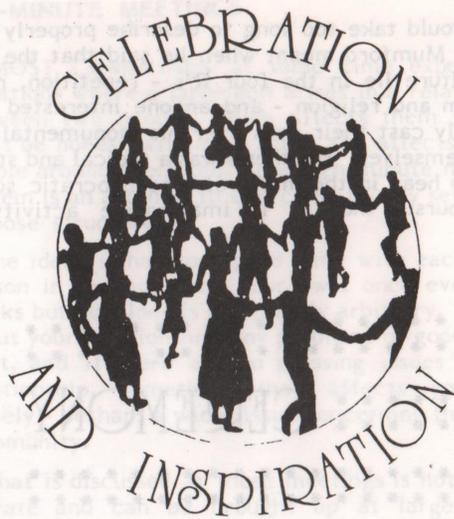
Some would say that ceremonies need to evolve rather than be invented, for as Brecht has written "when things have a meaning then sufficient ceremony will be generated if that meaning is brought out". Maybe the orderly coming together and departure of communards at their regular meetings could provide an occasion for the embellishment of communal life.

GRAHAM CAREY Jan 1980

..FOR CHRISTMAS?

Reading Graham's article about the potential for, and importance of, celebrations in communities caused me to think about our most recent effort here at Lifespan - Christmas. Why did we bother? I found the experience both disappointing and troubling. It seems to me that Christmas generally has come to have significance in three areas - first, if is an opportunity for conspicuous consumption, for people to 'enjoy' themselves in the (only?) way we have learned: eating and drinking in excess, spending lots of money etc.; second, it is a time when families are glorified, despite the difficulties that members of these units find in getting on with each other when they're finally gathered round the turkey; thirdly, it has connections with Christian faiths of one sort or another. In all of these respects, it seems to me that Christmas is discordant with the life I/we aim for in the "alternative culture" of communal living. What were we doing spending lots of money on food and alcohol to celebrate a festival that has nothing to do with our daily lives here? I feel we should consider much more carefully what and how we celebrate. Why not brew our own liquor if that is what we feel is important to a celebration? Why spend all year thinking about self-sufficiency, economy etc., and then participate in an over indulgence. It occurs to me now that there are not only other more appropriate ways for us to celebrate, but also many other things we could appropriately take time out to celebrate, to reflect on, to use as a pause for rejuvenation. We should celebrate each other perhaps, as we did so, briefly, at the end of our last visitor free week; we should celebrate particular village 'successes' - the completion of a piece of building work, the planting of the first seeds of the year; we should celebrate events of personal significance - the birth of a baby, the arrival of new members; we could celebrate in different ways - restoring our diary to its lost but rightful position as the chronicle of the joys of life; we could more often share music and poetry; my limited imagination stops there. At any rate, the experience of Christmas convinces me that it is not enough to transfer rituals across from the patterns of life 'outside', unless those rituals have some real meaning in the life 'inside' communities. We should be devising our own rituals and festivities, giving meaning to our own lifestyles. Let's remember that we do have much to be joyful about.

JILL - - Lifespan Jan 1980



TWO WORDS GUARANTEED TO ALIENATE you from the people you live with: the greatest of these is RELIGION but almost as good is ART. In their essence they are similar, and both words used together have had great power over our past. They have been abused and misused to oppress us. It takes a courageous, self-conscious act to reject the oppression whilst still retaining the parts of our heart which these words really describe.

In understanding these parts of our heart, two forms of art are of relevance: one is "inspirational", the other "devotional". One of these is the wilful creation of an individual or individuals, the sharing of insight, understanding, or indeed despair. The other is the product of the group heart, "devotional" in the sense that it celebrates rather than communicates. (A third form, also an individual one, is the satire, in the old bardic sense of exposing hypocrisy and corruption.)

Communal (devotional) art is the expression of the group heart: this is religion in its untainted form. This kind of ceremonial celebration can only take place within the group heart: and the essence of ceremony is time. Seasonal celebrations are obviously significant only when the passage of the seasons is immanent in our lives. Celebration of other events, birth, death, love, only make creative sense when such events create and recreate the group heart. In this sense, celebration both creates the group heart and is created by it. Celebration and the group heart can only grow in time, and are inseparable.

Of these celebrations, two traditional ones retain their significance. One is the communal feast (gluttony is a personal sin). In one sense, every communal meal is a vehicle for celebration; but the communally prepared, festive meal is one of the most easily accessible forms of celebrational occasion, and its deeper implications have their roots in a tradition as old as the species. The second is the dance: it is the expression of the emotional and rhythmic unity of a group: the full force of nervous identification is released. The dance provides a means of losing individuality and becoming once more a part of the general group release. It is also a unique statement of the rationalising ascetic and emotional erotic (!) the pure enjoyment of repeating pattern.

Ceremonies however, as Graham says in his article, cannot be invented. They belong in time, but they also belong in the world of symbol. The demise of established religion has meant the dissolution of systems of symbology. A true ceremony is not only a celebration of an event, it also has the power, by its symbolism, to relate that event to all aspects of the cosmos. Without the power of an established and acknowledged system of symbols, this is impossible. For this reason I have normally found invented ceremonies embarrassing. Systems of symbolism are established in time by a common corpus of art produced by the inspiration of individuals, which brings us to the second form of art.

There are poets, artists, musicians and writers amongst us; it should be their task to inspire us, to link us with our common experiences, to help us feel a definition of the intangible nature of our particular society: such attempts are not malevolent, they are poetry. I don't believe the problems and delights we encounter are essentially different from those met by anyone, anywhere, but they do manifest themselves in a way unique to our culture, and I feel it to be essential that a unique way of expressing them should naturally grow out of the communities movement. I believe it is the duty (!) of anyone who feels these delights, these sorrows, and has any skill in expressing them, to address themselves to the task of expressing them in a way which is nourishing to us all. Out of such work perhaps a concept of symbolism might grow which would create significant ceremony.

There are moments of exceptional clarity when we feel an understanding of the nature of what we are doing, and we have no doubts. It is a function of art to keep us in touch with those moments, to enable us to recollect them when our energies are sagging, and to reinforce them when we are high.

"Art must be of use, says the Orkney fiddler: a stone between the field and the beach; some fisherman with a plough had scratched on it a fish and a cornstalk -- wind and wave going through both in a single wavering fruitful line."

How can a scratch on a stone or a fiddle or a rhyme be of use, a source of energy? Perhaps when they are in the right relationship to our work and our lives they tell us why, they define once again the indefinable.

In a society rooted in the indescribable realities of nature, art is the only real alternative source of energy.

"The fiddle, the skull and the corn-stalk yield their real significance only when seen in relation to each other."

PETE -- Lifespan Jan 1980



ANOTHER LIFESPAN CHRISTMAS

I enjoyed Christmas Day so much here that I sat down in the evening and wrote about it. I decided to share my thoughts in Network because I and other communards I'm sure, often feel at a loss as to how a community can celebrate special occasions without falling for the whole commercial consumerist trick, and this was one day that for me went really well.

We'd decided a few weeks before to each make a secret present for one other person whose name we drew out of a hat. That itself gave us a couple of weeks of laughs, as people sat round the stove knitting furtively inside carrier bags. As the day grew closer, it became clear that the raw materials were wool, wood and paper; the hunt was on for glue, varnish, compasses and stanley knives.

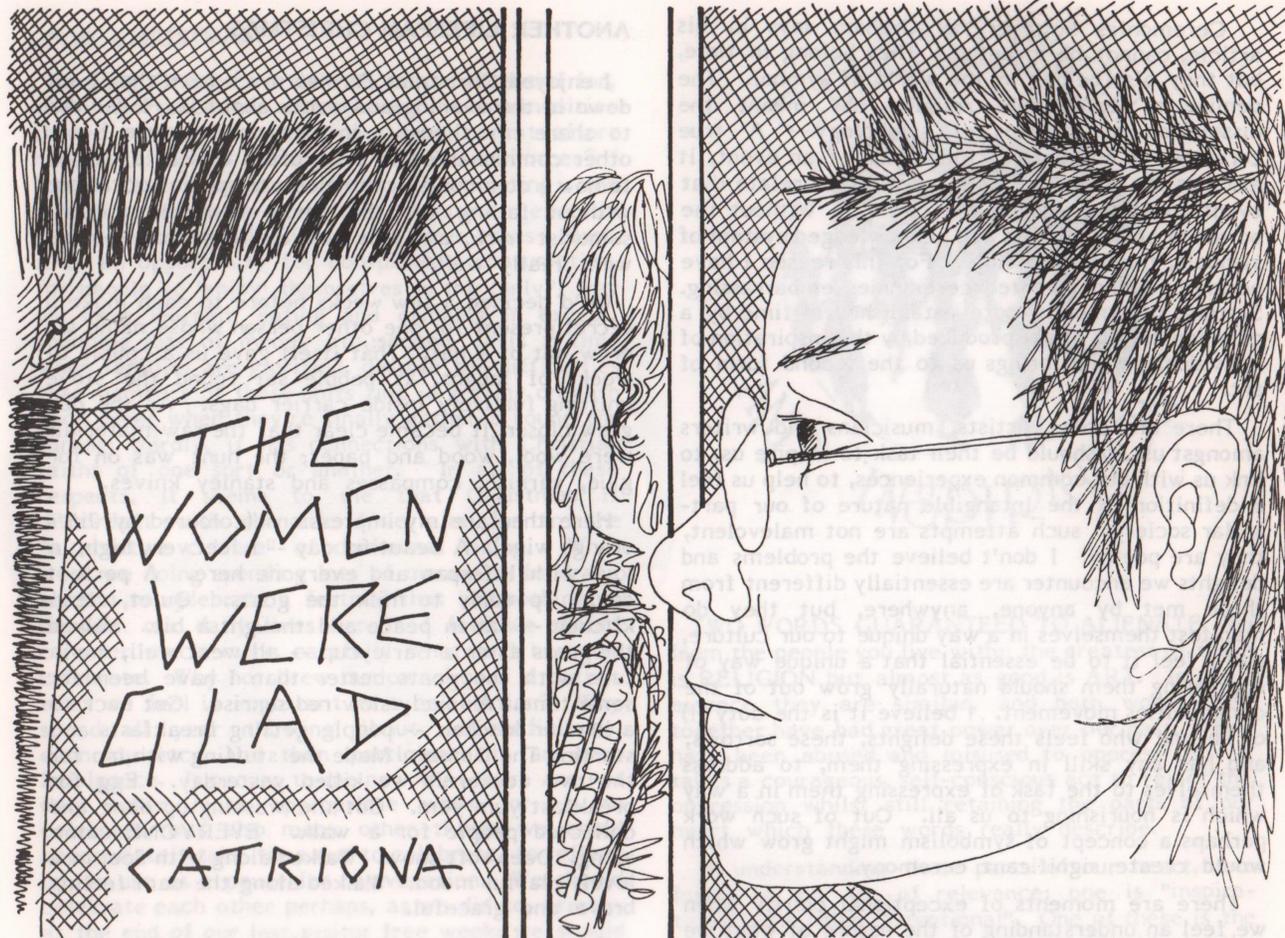
Here then are my impressions (coloured by Jill's orange wine). A beautiful day -- I feel very high, in love with Lifespan and everyone here. A perfect day. Up early to milk the goats. Quiet, clean kitchen -- sat in peace and thought a bit. Milked the goats after a Barleycup -- all went well, me in tune with the goats better than I have been for some time. A lovely slow red sunrise. Got back to a livelier kitchen -- people getting breakfasts and starting The Dinner. Made the stuffing with Ian for the two cockerels we killed yesterday. Egg for breakfast yum yum. Got the washing up done and collected people for a walk. EVERYONE came along. Deep soft snow. Walked along with Joel in a lovely playful mood. Walked along the dam feeling brave and graceful.

Got back and a team of five made an amazing lunch. So full of first course we postponed the pud until after the presents. Handed out by Sally, our pregnant Mother Christmas. Beautiful opening them one at a time and showing what we got and sharing how we liked them. Amazing presents too, mostly made with bits and pieces lying round the village! And lots of love and care. What we can do with next to no money and what would otherwise be rubbish. Good to see such beauty arising from this place, which can seem grey and graceless at times.

Playing games together. Class Struggle, Killer, Charades. Being hysterical, nearly unable to continue for laughing. Tea of cheeses and cakes and fruit salad -- rare delights so appreciated. More and sillier games, so many ideas, so much willingness to try things. Seemed days since the morning when I went out to dig out the sage from under two feet of snow, to make the stuffing tasty. We started thinking about how to celebrate other special days. We may make presents again at midsummer and Sally has a plan for annual "awards" at New Year -- supplier of most burnt cakes this year perhaps.

I'd like to hear about celebrations in other communities, who has anything to share?

PAM -- Lifespan March 1982



THE WOMEN were glad to see so many of their women friends at once. Often they came disconnectedly, or came for one of the conferences. This time they all seemed to have come just for the sake of seeing their old friends. It seemed special, and they celebrated the occasion, without intentionally planning it (and that in itself was a relief) by gathering together round a fire in Sue's room. It was a comfortable, untidy room full of beautiful oddments to gaze at and handle idly. They lazed on the huge bed, relaxing and getting high, letting the guilts of neglecting the children and avoiding other visitors drift away from them - the men were perfectly capable of doing those things. But the men and the children refused to be forgotten. Tom especially kept popping in, rather uncomfortably, realising it was a women's evening and he shouldn't be there, but all the same delivering whatever message he had had in mind.

Kate, his newest lover, noticed that he spoke either to Chris, his wife, or to Sue, his other lover. She was unhappy about that, she felt excluded and unimportant. She wanted to draw his attention by saying something funny, but was afraid he wouldn't notice, and that it wouldn't be funny, and that all the other women would realise what she was feeling. She kept quiet, even when he had gone, just laughing with the others. She thought she would go to see him. She thought she wanted to sleep with him, but she couldn't quite walk straight from Sue's room to his, which was next-door. She was afraid that his wife and his lover would hear where she went. She was afraid Tom wouldn't want her. It was late, and it was reasonable for her to pretend to go to bed.

So she said goodnight and walked past his door (no light showing underneath), down the stairs, along the corridors, to every other place he might be; the main kitchen, the living rooms, the little kitchen. No, he wasn't in any of them. Kate scolded herself, irritably, for not having the courage to look in his room in the first place. She decided to go to her own room right over the other side of the house, because now she had been seen all over the house by her friends, and his wife and lover. They had all left Sue's room and decided to have tea or coffee, listen to records in the living room and be sociable with the other visitors. She was embarrassed at meeting them so often, but she argued with herself that they couldn't possibly have known why she had been wandering round the house.

She went to bed, but she couldn't sleep. Maybe she could try again to go and see him, but first she had better make sure that she wasn't too tired and that she really did want a fuck. She was sure that it would be embarrassing if she went to bed with him and then didn't feel the least bit randy. Nonsense, she said, how could she possibly feel shamed by something as silly as that. He wouldn't mind, so why should she - but all the same it would make her feel like a type she despised - a bit of a flirt; leading a man on and then disappointing him. She felt her clit with her finger, and masturbated gently, trying to get just the right amount excited, though part of her was becoming nervous and tense.

With a fine air of decision she flung the covers off, got up and got dressed again. Outside her door she meant to go downstairs, but her feet swerved and took her to the loo to wash her hands. She

didn't quite like the idea of him knowing that she had been masturbating. She took the longest of several possible routes to his room, tip-toeing as she went past inhabited places, though sometimes, on the contrary, she marched boldly as if to say, "I don't care if you do know its me" just in case those who knew her came out of their rooms as she was creeping suspiciously along. She heard steps coming up the stairs toward her. She dived into the broom cupboard until they had gone on up to Tom's landing. She listened hard for voices in case she heard his, which might make it simpler. No one spoke.

Now she knew a lot of people were upstairs. More to risk meeting. They would think it odd if they met her, since she lived at the other end of the house. Someone might say, "What are you doing here?". Friendly, of course, but that wouldn't help. Still in the broom cupboard, she thought of her own bed, how safe it was. It certainly wasn't as riskily exciting as being with Tom, her first lover. She heard more footsteps, away and back; several people on different errands. With a start it occurred to her that while she was dawdling about the corridors or hiding in the cupboard, Tom might have gone to her room to see her. She might have missed an easy chance to get what she wanted, without having to take the responsibility of asking for it.

She tried to imagine how it would be when she got to his room. Maybe he was asleep by now and she'd switch the light on and wake him up. Or maybe Sue or Chris would be there in bed with him. They'd know she wanted him and couldn't have him because they were there first, even if she did say something off-hand like, "I only came to say goodnight!". She grew angry and resentful. It was easy for him. He didn't have to risk finding other lovers in her bed. Why should he have it so easy and then reproach her for not coming to see him as often as he came to see her. She would get another lover. So he didn't want her to be dependent on him, hmm. She'd show him.

Her angry mood wilted. It wasn't really very likely that she would get another lover, and it wasn't what she wanted anyway. Sadly she realised that she was going to go back to her own bed. She was so tired and her stomach was tense. She couldn't face the terror of waking him, let alone risk finding Sue or Chris there. Slowly she walked all the way back along the cold empty corridors.

CATRIONA -- Laurieston Hall Apr 1977

AND ANOTHER STORY...

ONCE UPON A TIME there were two children called ROBIN and RUTH. They lived in a small house in the country. Then their mum was ill so they moved to a big house in the town. It was a commune. Lots of people lived there, not just one family.

The grown-ups had MEETINGS where they talked about awareness and attitudes. That means someone had forgotten the shopping or the washing up.

Ruth and Robin took their pets; two mice, two goldfish, two hamsters, a rabbit and a cat. It was like Noah's ark. There was a kitten at the commune

already, and when it met the cat they didn't like each other. Until one day, the kitten fell into a bowl of chocolate pudding. The other cat helped to lick it off, so now they are friends.

The cats and the kids solved their problems quite simply, and lived happily ever after.

The grown-ups went on having meetings . . .

Next morning
She swept the Floor
of another night's hard meeting,
brushing up clouds of small memories;
the dust of people's feelings
settled evenly on sills and shelves.

It's women's work
collecting mugs and cups
that once brimmed hot
with steaming exhortations;
but then lie scattered,
wasted of goodness.
Their cold and bitty residues
nauseated her.



She tipped into the bin
the debris of so many nervous habits
that flared and knitted
and idly drew their ways
through the uneasy deliberations;
conferring upon the words
a semblance of order;
fetching decisions out of unwilling mouths.

There are other ways,
the women of history tell
as they tidy the meeting-places of men;
gossiping poems in darkened corners,
embroidering song and sense
into the plain-cloth of life,
tending and comforting with careful hands
the violated rooms.
She slowly raked the ashes in the grate.

Quote SELF-SUFFICIENCY Unquote

This article was written for internal use at Old Hall, but it might be interesting to others as well.

A. NEED FOR MORE RELEVANT CONCEPTS

If our community is about anything it's about self-sufficiency. Or is it? It's my belief that there's nobody here who by the way they live shows that they are properly endeavouring towards self-sufficiency. But a basic part of the ethic of the community is that this is what we're aiming for. So it seems to me that there is hypocrisy or illusion about. This came out in our recent discussion on eggs. That a self-sufficient lifestyle might entail a reduction in egg consumption from the levels attained by agribusiness-consumerism was not contemplated.

Other "indulgencies" don't square with self-sufficiency. Almost at random:-

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Mains Water | Washing Machines |
| Cement, Bricks | Welding Gas |
| Holidays Abroad | Hi-fis, T.V. |
| Schools | N.H.S. |
| Circular saw | Drills |
| Tractor | Films |
| Cars | etc. |

So why do we keep saying that self-sufficiency is what we're aiming for? At least part of the reason is connected with how we present ourselves to outsiders. "Self-sufficiency" is a concept both comprehensible and acceptable. But something else we pursue, anarchism, while comprehensible is not acceptable, and we keep quiet about that. Another concept applicable to us, Illach's "conviviality" is not understood and doesn't get mentioned at all. Now how we present ourselves to the outside world doesn't matter that much, but unfortunately we see ourselves as our own P.R. image i.e. we confuse the picture that we present to outsiders with what we actually are, we deceive ourselves that the simple, naive descriptions necessary to communicate outside are really us. After 4 years of actually doing it - whatever "it" actually is - the community should be bringing itself to discard the simplistic concepts in common parlance and be getting to grips with ideas that really relate and are helpful to our understanding of ourselves.

B. THE LIMITS OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

It might be helpful for discovering these more relevant concepts to consider the limits of self-sufficiency. I suppose that nobody at the community does say that they believe in total self-sufficiency but only to a degree. Let's find the limit of self-sufficiency beyond which we don't want to go, i.e. to find the extent of dependence on outside society that we think is desirable to maintain.

Without going into specific issues, here are some general observations:-

1. Alienation

Total self-sufficiency would alienate us in a fundamental way from the rest of society.

2. Diversity, quality, specialisation and simplicity

The diversity of human activities in a group depends on the size of the group, e.g. the number of trades practised in a town is greater than in a village. In a tiny group like our community the number of activities practised would be very limited. If the community is on a self-sufficient basis then these are the only skills available and hence there would be a general cultural impoverishment. To counteract this, there would be pressure on the community to practise as wide a range of skills as possible. But 'Jack of all trades, master of none' - deep skills in any particular sphere would be lacking i.e. the quality of work would be mediocre.

Another point is connected with simplicity - for me at least this is desirable in a life style. In a simple life one is master of one's work; being extended in many half understood, unrelated directions makes for a complex life, so, contrary to the usual view I regard specialisation as leading to simplicity. And specialisation, as I've tried to show, is not very compatible with self-sufficiency.

3. Ecology

Some things are inherently more efficiently made in large quantities, an effect of physical laws of heat losses etc. Examples, cement, welding gas, bricks. Made in small (self-sufficient) quantities the production of goods like these is very wasteful. If we are concerned with conserving resources, in particular energy, then these sorts of things are best made on a large scale.

Self-sufficiency can be unecological.

4. Scope for Creativity

Going further along this line let's look at the most precious resource of all, human energy with its wide scope for creativity. Small scale production can squander human energy just as it can physical energy.

For example, we could make our own screws here; but what a waste of effort when there's maybe one machine somewhere that can churn out a million screws a month. Time spent in making screws has to be taken away from the time available for the more creative tasks of using those screws to construct good furniture, buildings, etc.

Old time quality and creativity was achieved on the sweat and drudge of serfs and wage slaves. My view is that it can be done now on the basis of a judicious and intelligent use of machines.

C. USEFUL SELF-SUFFICIENT GOALS

If we don't pursue the mirage of total self-sufficiency then we can be discriminating in our goals. A few suggested criteria for selecting worthwhile goals:

1. People's interests - areas in which they wish to build up skills.
2. Superior quality - a lot of our own food is higher quality than bought-in stuff.
3. Natural resources - e.g. we've got a variety of timber; it makes sense to use this for furniture making, building, tools, etc.
4. Quantity of product required - a trivial example : we get through maybe 50 mugs a year and it's

sensible to be able to make replacements. But we don't break bread tins, and if we want one or two occasionally we might as well buy them.

5. Enjoyable.

6. Socially desirable, etc.

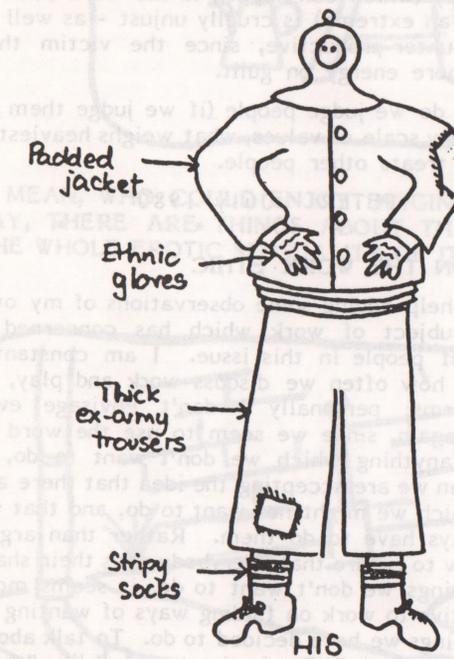
BOB -- Old Hall Feb 1979

Wheatstone in Winter

WE ARE AT WHEATSTONE AND SHRINKING FROM OUR SECOND WINTER amid the frozen wastes of Northern Herefordshire. I will try to tell you what we are like, but unfortunately, at this time of year, our perception is trammelled by the lowness and shortness of the arc described by the sun, and the frosting which occurs about the eyes. However, I am battling with it and into the periphery of my dim gestalt hoves Wheatstoned, as we call ourselves, bulked to twice its size by the traditional winter plumage of ex-government size 64L trench coat under which some half-dozen hotties are suspended by a cunning mechanism from the midriff. Below the coat obtrude two enormous muddy wellies, within which many layers of shredded sock increase in foulness towards long-forgotten feet. The head is clad in several bobble-hats pulled low over a low forehead and

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hooked beneath the ears. As the figure lurches back into the gloom, to pursue its mysterious purposes, I remain, both hands to the pen, in desperate communication.

Our house, known as Overton's Revenge, having something I believe to do with the purpose of its builder, a local misanthropist, is a minor Edwardian monster, housing in varying degrees of discomfort

nine adults and eight children. The diet is varied and wholesome -- well, fairly varied and wholesome. It is in fact swedes; varied and wholesome swedes. We share income -- we often wonder with whom, because there seldom seems to be enough. Elusive stuff income. But there's plenty of swedes -- of the varied and wholesome variety.

We are work orientated. One may often observe the work, and us orientated around it. Round and round. We believe in full participative discussion of work projects. And it's funny, isn't it, how the more one discusses it, the more it seems to go away. Everyone, it appears, has a different way of doing it; there are so many alternatives. That's one of the things about the alternative society -- there are so many of them, alternatives that is. And after a really fulfilling and participative discussion, one's motives for wanting to do the work in the first place seem, after all, so bourgeois.

We are non-sexist, especially in winter when the sexes are indistinguishable, and who on earth would consider ironing a size 64L ex-government trench coat, even if you could get one off somebody.

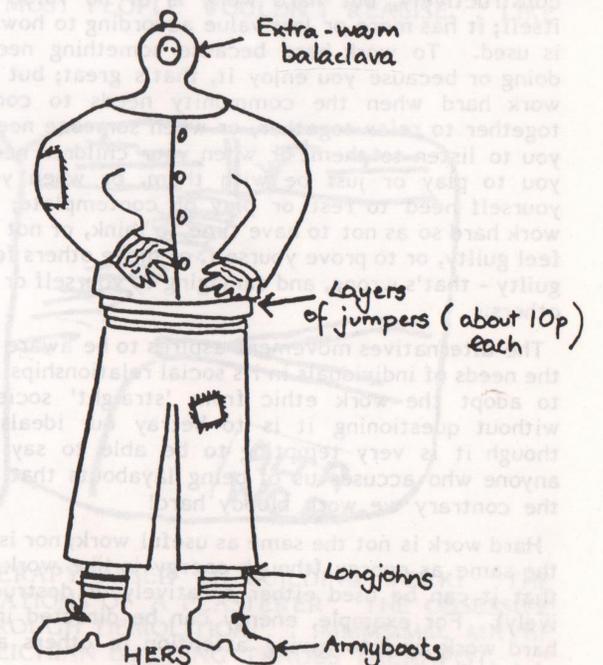
We are lots of other things, but mainly we are Wheatstone.

MICK -- Wheatstone Jan 1977

Wheatstone in Winter

OUTSIDE, A SNOW WHITE, SLOW WHITE, gently dripping world pretending to thaw yet waiting for the already rising east wind which will freeze what has melted and lay yet another blanket of white over all that stands in its path. In the field, patient cows call for the warm, hay-smelling cowshed and to give the pail of steaming milk which is their part in our simple mutual bargain. The sheep disdaining all help except the pile of hay and trough of oats

FASHIONWEAR



Ways of BEING AND DOING

7AM. I THINK it's May 12th. Whatever the date it's our 8th week without significant rain and mostly warm, sunny days. The sun is again streaming into my room.

Dear Communes Network, i am trying to write you a letter but as usual i get trapped in my desire to write THE objective, totally true and accurate account, sociological, right-on, saying everything, got-it-all-taped-and-everything-solved thesis. But whenever i try it comes out stilted, pretentious and dead. When there are 20 people living together they are weaving a fabric of many hues and thicknesses and there's no way really that i can tell you all that in black and white on a piece of paper is there? i can give you some threads as i see them and live them.

i want to use a piece i wrote in about february, arising from some disputes we were having (and no doubt will have again). My last paragraph in a recent CN on living groups here skated rather precariously over "polarisations" because at the time i couldn't grasp all the issues involved. i still can't very easily, but time has meant some things are resolved simply because it's a different time of year, and because some of the details have got forgotten.

On the surface the dispute which was largely between two living groups went "you lot sit around and talk and aren't working enough" and "you lot don't do anything else except eat, sleep and do work." These two messages carry a familiar contradiction in styles of living together which often results in people leaving a place. It caused me to think quite a lot about the word WORK, because over the last ten years of living communally it has cropped up time and again to be thrown around as an accusation. Along with the "work:non-work" contradiction go others like "inward looking: outward looking", "materially centred: people centred". Spot the similar groupings. Underneath all the labels, however, there are usually deeper currents of emotional conflicts between individuals occurring, and the whole lot takes a long time to unravel and solve. (An important point here is that the process of understanding what is happening to people is the solution, or put more simply - talk about a problem and it mysteriously vanishes. That's not to say that there aren't often still some knots that do need solutions and i find a difficulty in spotting which problems need what).

Anyway back to work.

February 1980

WORK - a word which has lost its old meaning from the herstory of my foremothers. Now synonymous with employment, slavery, drudgery, not-play, nasty, unhappy, enforced, unchosen, against freedom, DEATH. Thanks to capitalism. You work or play. Not both. Play hardly existed as a separate concept before the industrial revolution. Like childhood. They were inventions of an increasingly moneyed and powerful class of people and whitewashed as status symbols. "This is the best

and the right way to live", and it got beautifully reinforced as an appealing message as another class of people were forced into one major occupation for life which was called Work. "Play" before the seventeenth century was the communal act of coming together for weddings, deaths, births, solstices, centred on the earth and people's daily life; mystical and practical rituals arising from the pleasure of something happening and the desire to make a break; not the boxed-gift-wrapped saturday-sunday present in exchange for the monday-friday slavery. Now we don't work we have our play - afternoon football, evening boozing (where's the women's play in capitalist/patriarchal 20th century?).

It wasn't romantic and all wonderful work-is-all-we-need, then. It was slog for survival a lot of the time; a kind of slavery even if it was for yourself and determined by yourself. It's just that it was an integrated way of life and that's what i want here. Work is my way of life here. Work is my Way of Being with people. i say that and i feel apologetic because i think i should be sitting down and talking to people. No, that's part of the split too. i'm saying that sitting down talking isn't work, and i didn't mean to.

I feel apologetic about wanting to work as a way of being with people as there's something inferior and wrong about that. Suddenly i feel angry about that. Yes, for years in communities there's been shit thrown about work. For years the arguments have raged inside me, while knowing that i love doing things; that i'm a "worker" - that dirty word. I've felt apologetic that i can do things, that i'm competent and practical. People have been envious of me and so kept their distance and called me aloof. (Suddenly typing this out has brought a real flood of tears. Like now i'm seen as a busy person, always going around doing. And i read/hear that as a criticism, because i've got this voice somewhere saying working and doing are bad; instead of seeing it as a real fact that is OK. It's OK SARAH TO BE BUSY AND DOING. Recognise that as real and ok then i can actually act much more clearly, and say no, i'm too busy to talk to you instead of feeling apologetic and trying and usually failing to fit someone in. This is me writing may 12th. Back to february.

Nearly all the time i love what i do. I listen to myself, i listen to the needs of the place i'm living in and i match up what i'm going to do this new day. I have chosen to live somewhere that makes demands on my need to live in relative comfort - to have enough wood for cooking and heating; to have a roof over my head; to have vehicles in ok shape because i have need of commodities from some distance away; to have enough money. All the time i'm making choices, swiftly, almost sub-consciously; balancing up the pros and cons of doing or not doing. Take vehicles. I'd rather keep them in shape by regular checks than find a sudden crisis which means i or someone is then forced to do something whether they feel like it or not. Crisis gives less choice, and at the time makes it difficult to teach anyone else.

Yes, sometimes it feels as if the only right-on way to grow and change here is in therapy week or therapy sessions or a therapeutic style of living daily. As if work is an antithesis to being human. But i grew (up) pulling weeds in the garden with my mum and talking about politics and strange adults

and rules at school. i was ridiculously lucky in that. Growth only comes through doing. Nothing grows that stands still. Nothing actually stands still of course though many humans come pretty close to that she says nastily. Yes. I'm in danger of losing what is my real identity because i'm in a world that sees work as bad and nasty. And it's here too in this community. "There she goes, off to make woodstoves" as if its not the Right Thing. It's not Right if i'm only doing it for the income we need. But of course it's not the only reason i do it. i started to do it because it is a way we can earn more income but it's a project that has grown naturally out of the Way i live here; out of the experience of developing sensible heating; my desire to see what i can do working with metal; something which is totally new to me (well, creating out of a flat sheet. Working on vehicles is working with metal too and i often do that) and my desire to work with a group of people because we decided to do that since it's usually more fun. Making woodstoves isn't something i can do unless it is my Way of Being too.

There's another thread too. Work and women. When that class of people got shoved into Work it was largely the men and where there were women they were seen by the upper classes as "men". In the upper classes languishing gracefully was the death of many women. They were bored, bored to death. Stripped of their work and placed on pedestals to be worshipped in exchange for total nurturance and emotional sustenance to their entrepreneurial husbands. Read Rousseau. A whole medical practice was built on the boredom of women. In the "working" class, so much of the work that women had done got taken away from the home and into the factories and gradually as the romantic myth of the natural role of motherhood filtered down from the upper classes and men made laws to exclude women from schools or apprenticeships, women got confined to the home where work isn't work. So we can still talk in communities about sharing skills and that doesn't mean sewing, nurturance, cleaning or cooking. "Oh, anyone can do that". All the exciting new areas are outside those, just as the world outside the home that men can explore is more exciting. The things women do in the home aren't seen as work and i can hear men saying, "No, my wife can't go to work because i support the family. All that's in me too. The kind of work i do and the way that i do it - called patriarchal. That's still seeing there being men's work here that i do too. It's assuming that i'm doing it to achieve status to put women down; that men's work is more important. Take looking after children - that is often treated as secondary to all else. Being a mother isn't considered as work; it's still seen as some sort of "natural" flowing easy life, and you can be expected to take part in the communal life like any non-mother as well. So, OK, i'm not asking us to go overboard to support mothers but the balance certainly needs redressing.

May again.

Just having written all that above i'm very conscious that i'm about to write about what we have been doing, and that reminds me that there is another theme in the Work discussion. This one is that of Doing and Being. I've mentioned it sometimes above, but not elaborated on it. One sense of the word Work is that it is deadening. Again that is how it affects most people (oh, a

favourite bit of music on the radio... i'll have to wave my hands around conducting...). One of the lovely things about being here is that i can shape my life around lively work so that Doing is Being and there is no conflict. Doing is not Not-Being. So now i'm going to proudly say - This is what we have been doing here at Laurieston recently - Lots and lots of gardening. Richard is doing the beans patch, planting at the times according to the biodynamic calendar. Spring cleaning - actually washing down the walls, scrubbing the lino, painting corridors at last (not been done for 20? years and covered in distemper so it takes a week to do one corridor). Preparing and sowing the "football" field with new grass and fencing it, getting poles from the forest, shaping and creosoting them, and rescuing fencing wire from the broken fences of neighbouring farmers. Pete and Rich have been measuring the water flow over the weir and searching out the information and equipment for our own hydro scheme. We've started a tree nursery. Linda has planted a hedge. Lizzie and Alice have sweated away on the last newsletter which had to be written by hand 'cos Alice dropped the electric typewriter. We did stone picking for the farmer we want to buy the land from and he's given us hay, straw, a 100' roof (all the wood and slates) if we dismantle in a week. We've cooked and cleaned, cared for and enjoyed 4 small conferences and gone on organising as usual for the coming summer. We've had runs of people in bed with fluey things, teeth problems, exhaustion and looked after them. We've been improving our meetings and talking lots about things like W*** and housing co-ops. Starting to make wine - birch sap and dandelion. Bardot had 9 piglets, and Beulah had a heifer (we wanted a bull). We cleared up the rubbish in the back yard. Window boxes are flourishing and increasing. Over the winter Les and Rich worked at flooring the loft above their living area and making rooflights which aren't in yet. Blue started talking about a 4th living group but went for a time to Shangri Co and has now joined them. We accepted Dirk as a member. He's a big German who can stride along balancing tree trunks, and a beautiful smile... and well, i don't know him very well yet but i'm glad he's here. And some of us have been talking about having babies. Catriona is pregnant, and Linda hopes to be and we've talked about how communal the baby care, and whether to make one of the cottages into a children's house because caring for toddlers in this vast house is a hassle. We've had lots of visitors and the Bentham volleyball team came up and we all played a lot of volleyball, in the dining room which we took over for a winter court, and outside. We refused Steve membership and asked him to come back and stay again and now we wait for Catriona to come back and decide altogether.

Lizzie came up with some new ideas about looking after conferences and we had a good people centre meeting one morning. Three more women are in varying degrees interested in joining. It was refusing Steve that threw up some underlying polarisations between the living groups early this year. They often come up at moments like that. Pat and i have gone on fighting about what our relationship is and trying to build one other than an exclusive couple with both of us still living here and having close relationships with other people. John is studying grass management for the animals. Some of us on garden week went over to help

Lothlorien people finish planting 6000 trees. I'm learning to play the tenor recorder and use homeopathic medicine. Linda and Dave went to a week of Lifespan's building month. Lizzie has done some lovely decorative painting on some of the doors. We finally got a shower which has been one of those crazy fantasies of some people for so long. We have fairly regularly done a weekly wood trip to the forest, our sunday morning tree worship.

It's been an amazing spring yet again. It all happens so incredibly fast. Like the first few years of a baby, these first two months nearly every year wild flowers blossom and some of them will continue over the summer. All the trees flower and the bees have been going wild over the currant and gooseberry flowers. Looks like there is going to be masses of fruit yet again. We've been watering the garden but we could do with rain.

SARAH - - Laurieston Hall June 1980

ENLIGHTENMENT

Before enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water;
After enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water.

CUTTING PEAT AT LAURIESTON

IT TOOK ABOUT SIX ADULTS and as many kids, the Land Rover and what Dave optimistically calls a trailer. Up the hill somewhere above Laurieston is the quarry, flat and sandy with a shallow pool, like the surface of Mars. We started cutting at one edge of the quarry. Some martian picnickers fled, unwilling to become accessories after whatever fact was being committed.

Cutting peat is not just hacking it up with a spade. You take the turf off. That's the worst. Unsubmissive, incomplete peat, it kicks back and resists you. Then you're through to the real stuff -- brown, smooth, textured, coherent. From now on it's mathematics. It has to come out in bricks, all of a size, handy for the fireplace. Two of you working together: slice, slice, lift; slice, slice, lift. We talk about what it's like. Ginger cake, parkin, cowshit. What it feels like to our fingers. What it tastes like (it tastes like peat). Slice, slice, lift; each slice like a little damp mattress.

Cutting peat is a bit like living communally, it's about process, not product. You do end up with peat, but then it has to dry -- another process. And then burn -- another, which gets people warm -- another. Mainly it's about skill, precision, economy of movement, working together, smell, touch, sunshine . . . Jim (the dentist) likens our hole to a cavity, such as he might hollow out for a gold filling. We all absorb that for a moment, each glimpsing an incredible pool of gold set in the hillside.

Coming back, the fuzz are in the village, we blow a tyre on the "trailer" and we get home in a heap, of peat, people, disintegrating rubber.

Another process.

TONY PADFIELD -- Nottingham Aug 1976

SEX ROLES RULE OK?

WE RECENTLY RECEIVED a questionnaire in which one of the questions was "are traditional sex roles disapproved of or generally accepted in your community?" The flippant reply was "yes, they are disapproved of, and yes, they are generally accepted". The edge of honesty in this reply made me think. Since one of my reasons for coming to live in this community was to do with wanting to see changes in the whole area of sex roles, traditional sexist attitudes and so on, this comment forced me to reflect on our lifestyle here and how much it succeeds or fails in creating new ways of seeing each other and relating to each other.

So I started to think about the past year here when for the first time in Lifespan's history (herstory?) there was a majority of women (seven women and five men -- the balance now alas has changed). Had this led to any changes in the feel of the place? Of course the answer must largely be no -- the depth of our conditioning is such that things cannot change overnight especially in areas where we feel deeply vulnerable. But I do think that the change in this place from being a very male dominated place, has led to changes in the way the community does some things, and though not enough changes have happened and not enough questions have been asked, I do think a start has been made.

Just confining myself to thinking about traditional areas of "work" for men and women, I started to think about the things we do here, wondering whether any generalisations could be made about the patterns of male and female involvement . . . and here are some notes and thoughts I jotted down . . . domestic work . . . this is allocated by a voluntary rota . . . there are individual differences in the amount of importance people here attach to domestic work, but I would hesitate to say that they are sex-linked . . . there have been women here who did no cleaning and failed to see its importance, as well as men who consistently failed to find time to cook. If there is a space on the rota it is often a woman who "cracks" and fills it, but then there are more women here than men anyway, so the chances would be that a woman would step into the breach more often. I think the preparedness to see domestic "chores" as important is related as much to people's philosophy of communal living as it is to their sex . . . the fact that our system works fairly well, we get good meals and the communal areas seem well cared for, may relate to the fact that there are more women here than men, and those kinds of things are traditionally more women's concerns, or it may relate to the fact that people understand that part of communal living is sharing the responsibility for feeding each other and cleaning up after each other . . . I can't decide.

Wood . . . in the past, wood runs (which involve 3 - 4 hours of quite strenuous work throwing wood onto a lorry), wood stacking, wood cutting, stove building and stove lighting have been dominated by men, and I would say that it is still the case that more "man hours" than "woman hours" go into these tasks, but the balance is definitely changing as the women here take more responsibility in this area . . . and I am hopeful that our "stove building" week, when we try and sort our heating out for the winter, will prove to be a good opportunity for me and other women who are interested to get involved.

"Heavy work" . . . well everyone's attitudes are very mixed up here. There are some women who do a lot of heavy work -- building, gardening, roof work, and there are some women, like me, who hover about on the fringes. My belief is that I am here to put myself in a situation where I have to take more responsibility for myself, lifting, loading, digging, repairing the houses I live in -- my experience is that it is difficult to overcome self-consciousness, lack of self-confidence, years of believing myself to be physically inept etc., and it is only too easy to hide behind the things I can do rather than venture into the dirty, messy, physically harder world that I've always been excluded/excluded myself from . . . that is without all the problems there are in skill-sharing especially between men and women . . . we don't talk about these problems enough let alone find solutions to them . . . there is so much ambivalence in us all . . . I, for example, as well as believing that I should venture out into new areas, also resent the pressure to do "heavy work" because of the often unexpressed but frequently felt argument -- you feminists want all the perks of complaining about male oppression etc. without the dirty work of taking care of yourselves . . . hmm and even as I write this I am realising that I have not included things in my definition of heavy/dirty work, like carting a 23lb baby around and washing shitty nappies -- which I do all the time . . . anyway good things are happening here as well . . . I've been pleased to be shown bricklaying by a woman . . . we did lay a concrete floor on the women's building weekend . . . and Lifespan does create a more favourable atmosphere than the outside world for getting involved in traditionally male occupations like plumbing, wiring, joinery etc. . . . I mean where else would send out a rewiring team consisting of one self-taught electrician (male) and two complete novices (one male and one female) and a baby in a cradle?

Business . . . the business of the community has in the past year been almost entirely in the hands of men . . . by business I mean accounts, organising sales etc. . . . in 14 months the treasurer has been male for at least 10 months . . . the shop accounts and closing of the business were done entirely by men . . . most of the VAT work has been done by men . . . the admin of our print orders till very recently was done by a man etc. . . . I'm not sure why this is, we all get a chance to volunteer for these things at our meetings, maybe it relates to people's philosophies of life rather than to their sex . . . a lack of interest in bureaucracy and regulations, a different set of priorities, which means that to some people things like book-keeping and invoicing seem like a waste of time. I certainly found 2½ months as a pregnant treasurer enough, but I also found it gave me a better insight into the financial and precariously beating heart of the place, so maybe I'll take on the corporation tax return . . .

Childcare . . . so largely in the hands of parents that it is difficult to generalise . . . I feel alternately depressed and joyously surprised by people's involvement with the small children here, and certainly the fact of community living means that a much larger participation by men/fathers in childcare is possible here than in any other situation . . . our children do at least grow up seeing what their fathers and other men do -- and being able to participate in their work . . . and they do see

women doing other things than cooking and cleaning and being more things than mothers . . . and I think the men that live here value the contact they have with babies and toddlers, contact that they would be deprived of otherwise unless they were parents.

This begins to look like an account of what women don't do here; why should the pressure be all on us to involve ourselves in non-sex-role-linked things? I still think that the community relies heavily and almost entirely on women to do the "emotional cement" work -- the nurturing, nourishing and listening -- work that is not noticed as work, work that I'm not sure how much men are prepared to take on, work that I think is essential.

And over the last year, we have made a place for women-only events and meetings here at Lifespan for virtually the first time. These have varied in their "effectiveness" but generally speaking have been really important to me . . . there is occasionally a very real and loving feeling of the women being a group here, I wish we could overcome our divisions and separatenesses and experience it more often. But this needs working at too.

So I'm not sure what I can conclude about sex roles and whether they're changing here. I'm not sure whether everyone here is committed to that change anyway (make a mental note -- try to find out!) All I can say is that I want to; I want to see the sexism in myself; to liberate myself from its restrictions and to liberate others from its restrictions as well; to change the balance of power in the world -- that is if I can find people to live with who desire to change in that way. And living here is at least helping me to grasp the size and nature of the problems if nothing else. And women's events at least give me the warmth and support and inspiration to think about things again and to resolve to try and find out more about what the men and women I live with think about it all, and then maybe we'll start doing something about it together.

I've been drastically and fatally interrupted in my rambling musings by the arrival of my baby, who is now playing in a cardboard box on the floor . . . she reminds me how difficult it is to find the time and space to think about the way we live here . . . let alone the energy to do anything about it . . . it's so much easier to stick to the old ways of behaving than to grope about for new . . . I'd really like more people to write about their hopes and dreams and observations in this area of communal life.

Love,

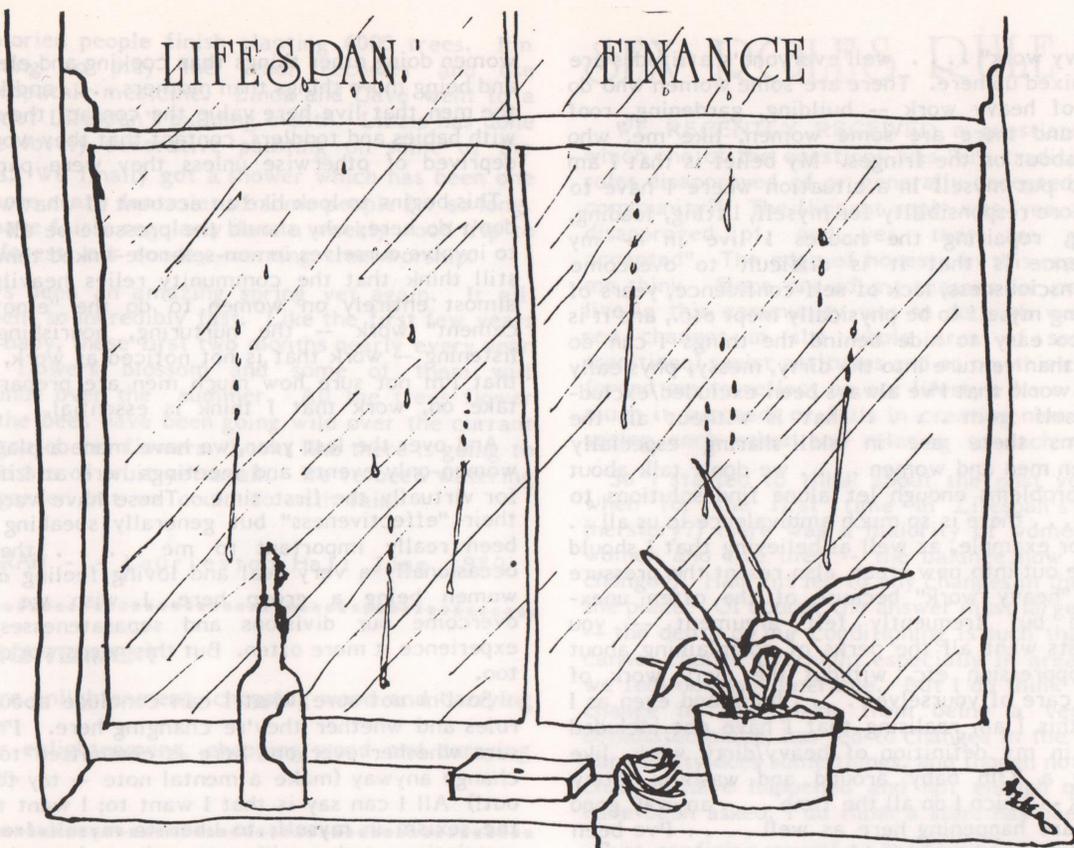
JILL -- Lifespan Oct 1980

APPEAL

- ** Winter wheat ruined!
- ** Sheep escape at midnight!!
- ** No sun at haymaking time!!!
- ** 400 feet of carrots and thrice sown peas and beans devoured by slugs!!!

Could YOU live with all this and keep smiling?

Crabapple Community needs more people to trap slugs, mend fences, and lots, lots more. Anyone with influence over the weather goddess especially welcome. Send s.a.e. for details of gloom and doom



OUTSIDE A STEADY RAIN is throwing a thin veil across the view of the mottled hillside opposite. Inside, deep inside, slightly grey possibly refreshing rain obscures my feelings for this place, my home. I'm winding up to going away for a few days, a break for personal assessment and a time for reflection. My ways of relating to the people no longer feel as fresh as I think they ought; I'm a bit weary of the institutions and the roles.

I thought I'd better say that before writing about Lifespan's finances. Perhaps it will explain certain tones I might adopt. I also feel it is relevant because the depth of my unquiet is in inverse proportion to the health of the Lifespan economy. Since I've been here, almost three years now, our economy has changed from being something of a joke, a familiar comfortable, tatty old pair of slippers, maybe, to being rather well founded, smooth, good leather boots. I've been a certain part of the trend in that direction but I now can't help feeling that our successful little printing business, our plans to improve part of the upper terrace to a standard that will attract groups of people willing and able to pay an "economic" rate for the hire of its facilities are a bit empty or at least run ahead, as commercial propositions, of our real desire to be wealthier or even well-founded.

Lifespan, when I joined had an air of muddling through. Just getting by was the nature of the place. And a strong element in its vitality. Since then such concepts as the "windfall" or "crisis" economy have emerged to describe how things happen here. At present we have debts of perhaps £600 (and that's not including the mortgages) but creditors owe us three times that amount. It is a classical and not-at-all alarming cash-flow such as most small businesses sometimes face. It feels quite comfortable, both that situation and the lifestyle here. But it's different from the past, less challenging, less stimulating and even less real.

To give some background information; Lifespan was bought six years ago by the two people who put most energy into founding a community along Summerhill lines but aimed at a post-schooling age group. The money, less than £8000 needed to buy this unusual set of buildings came from the mother of one of these people. It was loaned on very favourable terms and the property was purchased in the names of the founders. They gathered round them people to help develop the place and that was achieved through appealing for gifts which provided a fair proportion of the money for the early day-to-day existence of the members. More income was earned by the sweat and skills of those who went out on building jobs, re-decorating etc. in the locality. Doing such work has remained a feature of Lifespan income though it has fluctuated wildly rather than develop into a mainstay of the economy as for example at P.I.C.. Instead, the leasing of a whole-food shop in Huddersfield became a source of regular income while the building work provided the greater proportion backed up by the sale of articles made in the weaving "shed", the pottery or the wood-workshop. The shop was passed on to other folk for a variety of reasons, at the same time as the publication of recipe booklets was getting under way. Since the expansion of the printing, including the acquisition of the pieces of equipment necessary to perform all the processes, publishing has become the source of over half our weekly income and has materially affected our lives through its regularity. We now earn something like £300 a week.

In the time that this transition has been taking place other things have changed also. The number of members has declined from a high of 25 to a steady 15 or so; we were given £700 towards the work on the top terrace by a successful co-operative business and have received other donations, smaller but cumulatively considerable; the crafts have tended to fade away as aspects of life at Lifespan; our policy towards members' capital

has altered; we've set up as Lifespan Community Collective Ltd and this society has purchased the property from the founders (now no longer resident) at the price the property was originally bought for. These last two points deserve elaboration.

It has always been a feature of membership of Lifespan that private capital is not shared and is the responsibility of the individual. A refinement of that was introduced a couple of years ago when it was recognised that members having large personal funds should "income-share" the interest on these fortunes. At a time when we seemed to be very hard pressed financially this development made a considerable impact and was the feature that gave rise to the term "windfall" economy. Now, with the departure of various people, the input from this source is negligible again. Individuals with money or possessions though have undoubtedly aided the community in the past by purchasing expensive items which have then become communal or by leaving their possessions here on leaving. Our present car and much of the equipment in the pottery were left in this way. Jealousy over inequalities of wealth is not unknown and though the spending of private money isn't prohibited it has now become the convention to ask about such expenditure at meetings.

The registration of our Industrial and Provident society took a long time and was eventually celebrated by a different group of people to those who worked hard for it and argued over its complicated set of rules. Probably, instituting such a legal entity with a need to prepare accounts and get them audited has moulded our economic development more than we realise. Some of the haphazard ways of the past were necessarily replaced by tighter systems and it has made the job of treasurer more onerous in terms of sheer book-keeping. The purchase of the property by the society has also been a steadying influence. Now members, as share-holders, are part owners of the property and the possession of such a major asset, mortgages notwithstanding, gives a credence that maybe was not there before.

The role and function or the treasurer is also something that has changed. A major factor has always been the personality of the incumbent; but this has been moderated a bit since we've been operating a tighter book-keeping system. Handling income has never been much of a problem. Sometimes work is done for another employer who insists on paying one of our members rather than the community. On these odd occasions we usually put the income into the books as a donation from the member who has been paid. But usually income comes directly to the community as would the receipts of any business. The treasurers' task is sometimes more complicated when it comes to expenditure. While the theory is that the treasurer opens the purse and hands over such money as a member may ask for, the fact that s/he probably has a more complete understanding of the exact financial position at the moment is bound to influence some decisions. We try and avoid this by giving warnings of anticipated requirements at our regular "business" meetings but the system isn't foolproof. Surprisingly few major hassles have resulted from this but it remains a potentially controversial area. Lastly, the rigidity with which we stick to a system whereby neither wages nor

pocket money are paid out, is sometimes called into question but it has been consistently viewed as one of the strengths of the community.

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AWAYDAY TICKET

I come
sometimes
into the city
just to observe "the others" I don't know;
just to find the pools of solitude
from which I gaze
across the distances, at people
all so strange.

And I marvel to myself
at all their strangeness
and the unfamiliar stirrings in my mind
as this fair child or that unhurried woman
play on the furthest edges of my life.

I come, sometimes, into the city
under pretexts so mundane
I am convinced of their validity;
but my need for the delights and sadness
of these fragile little meetings
rides avidly in my pockets.

CHRIS PYKE - - Lifespan June 1980

FEBRUARY AT LIFESPAN

January brought us much coming and going. Now we are seven women and five men. I feel part of a much more settled group. But February is a strange time; the snow comes and goes, mild days alternate with days when the bus cannot negotiate our hill through the snow. Our world is poised, wondering just what to do, whether to stay involved in the dark introspection of winter, or press on with the spring; and we seem to be held here with it, all sure of the potential and at the same time caught in the inability to realise it.

And today perhaps, the first pair of curlews glimpsed in the grey sky across the moor. They are the sound of our world announcing its decision to press on with the spring. We have called April a transformation month, come and share it with us. By then the plovers will be back, and the rowan trees turning green. Laurel will be four months old then, and she's never seen them before. It's only by installing central heating that we can make next winter warmer than last.

PETE -- Lifespan Feb 1980



JUMPING OFF

BEFORE JOINING OLD HALL, I'd visited the place for three weekends, and when moving in did hope that it would be for good. But after living there only a fortnight I realised that it would not be so and thought that my stay would be about a couple of years. As if has happened, I've stayed for four, but now the time has come to leave and I've asked for my loanstock to be redeemed. It seems a good time to take stock of the community and my experience there.

What I write is just my view, from a person dissatisfied enough to leave. (Others may see a rosier picture of the community or it may be that they are less free to go.) The views of one person may not count for much, but we're pioneers of a different lifestyle. Others can read this and compare it with their own experiences. Some things will seem right, some wrong. By exchanging our experiences we can learn and build up a body of understanding about communal living.

* * * *

As people who have visited Old Hall will know, it has a lot going for it. Set in idyllic countryside, it has a 50 acre farm producing most of the community's food and a large house (set up for a community be the previous occupants - Franciscan Friars). The people who have come to live here in some 18 'family units' are very capable - more graduates than not, with a selection of useful practical skills - farming, forestry, building, mechanics, accounting. But how they came together in the first place, has resulted in a fundamental flaw which still mars the community. The Friary was up for sale. Advertised in the national papers brought together people answering to the call for ecological, middle class socialists. Camping and talking together for a few weekends in the grounds of the Friary, the group was self selecting with just enough people to purchase the property and fill it up. Time was short, as there was another possible buyer, and so there was no opportunity for the group to explore itself in depth. The Housing Association was set up, the Friary bought and turned into Old Hall in 1974. But living together requires compatible and/or tolerant people. The superficial acquaintanceship that people had was not enough to sort out a group with enough liking for one another, nor enough similarity of ideas. In fact I sometimes wonder why some of the people here are in a community at all. It seems to be a funny combination of marital expediency and idealism.

How much can one rely on intuitive assessment of people over a short time? Quite a lot, has been my experience. What do other people think? You need to know how trustworthy is intuition when choosing members for a community. Anyway, if the possible dangers of future rifts were seen by some, they were put aside in the determination to get the community going. And after a year or so, a split did occur and a quarter of the community left, looking for more idealistic, simpler living. It seems there was an incredible row about purchasing a vacuum cleaner! New people moved in (myself included). Since then the community has been pretty stable with only one other family moving out. This

stability is generally seen as good by outsiders, but I see it differently - more a case of being static than stable. There remains too much dislike, distrust and, at times, hatred between people here. At least half the people have seriously considered leaving but for complex reasons don't. Why not? - Loanstock is less volatile than moods or situations; adults may find life difficult but it's good for their children; a dislike of going to live in isolation again; an idealistic dedication to making the place work; the thought that if the grass seems greener elsewhere it's only an illusion; hang on - the other lot may leave! But if the people here are to evolve into a compatible and harmonious group then there needs to be more comings and goings. I reckon myself that the community should give every one leaving a golden handshake!

While we're on the negative side, I'll deal with what I consider to be the other major flaw in the community - the veto. Decisions are made by unanimous consent. It sounds fine - everything we do everybody agrees with. But consider the corollary - if anybody dissents to an idea then it's rejected. Just one person insisting on opposing a proposal vetoes it. Status Quo Rules OK? It's my contention that this decision making process is a major contribution to the heavy blanket of inertia and apathy that's draped over Old Hall. It certainly doesn't help towards dynamic vitality to have to take all the people with you all the time. Some people claim the system is radical. I claim it's conservative. So perhaps the so called socialist community is radically conservative?

Other factors make the situation worse. If person A makes a proposal but person B dislikes A, B doesn't say 'I don't like A, I don't trust him and won't support his ideas'; rather out comes some plausible rationalisation of why A's proposal is wrong. (B probably believes his own rationalisation). Time and again this has happened, emotion clouding intellect. (The typist should not change my 'him' to 'him/her'. This usually goes on amongst the men. "How much more harmonious the women are than the men" some of the women claim, but the women are there behind the men egging them on, 'supporting' them.) And the veto system at Old Hall makes this worse. Every time B can thwart A. The veto gives anybody so much power to frustrate the aspirations of another. It exacerbates the distrust between people, poisons relationships, and inflames egos.

So I've been an outspoken critic of decisions by unanimous consent. But to be fair, there are a couple of observations to make. In two circumstances the veto may be justified - for the admission of new members and in situations which affect the very essence of an individual's life within the community. The other thing to say is that only one other person at Old Hall was openly against the veto. All the rest support or acquiesce in it. It's their bed for them to lie in.

* * * *

Life at Old Hall is both dull and endlessly entertaining. Being a large community in the country it tends to be socially self sufficient. Most people here have few friends in the society around us. Mixing with the same people all the time gets boring. But it's also fascinating. Outsiders need the Archers, Crossroads, Coronation Street, Wag-

gers Walk etc., but we supply all that ourselves, and our everyday story of community folk is for real! Living with people you see them in all their diversity. Outwardly, the people here are pretty similar, but there's variety enough inside: spiritually, emotionally, sexually, and also materially. Followers of Jesus, Bhagwan, Sri Romana, Buddha and nature spirits offset the general tone of religious indifference. Emotionally some are isolated in ivory towers, while some seem unable to live for themselves but only through others. (Personally I think the song that goes 'People who need people are the luckiest people in the world' is a big lie. And that of course says something of me.) As is well known, sexual mores vary enormously. One fellow gets so many phone messages - I just didn't know that many girls' names! And another - does he dream of cars at night?!

Financially, some just get by, (a few with the aid of the State). Buying clothes at 10p a time is popular - the quality of cast offs in this affluent village is high! Others are comfortable on professional salaries. The difference comes out most on holidays. For some, round the world tours or Spring holidays in Greece; for others, camping at the local resort. But except for the newness of your car and the frequency of your visits to the pub, there are not many other opportunities for showing wealth. In fact, the absence of envy over people's income and wealth is one of the best features of the community.

What is not so good is the distance there is between people, the lack of warmth that many visitors notice. Why? Is it the sort of people we are, the result of our numbers (how can you relate well to so many?), the reaction against living closely together (keeping space for yourself), an indifferent architectural layout, the absence of a spiritual bond? Perhaps they all contribute. A visitor from Germany who stayed a few months made a pertinent observation: the first few days you stay at Old Hall you wonder what it is that is making everything tick. There must be something behind it all that gets people to do the work. Then after a while you realise that there isn't anything in fact. They just do it. The community lacks a soul.

And there is a lack of intimacy. For me, intimacy is not so much a matter of bed as of being yourself; just being your real self in the company of others; saying what you really think whether it shows you as selfish, fool or whatever (even saint or lover). I feel that this is the essence of homeliness; home is the place where you are what you really are without pretence. That is the difference between living at home and in an institution. How seldom here do people talk about 'home' - for some it still even means their parents' homes.

And what rigid masks some personalities are!

Tall
She wanders within the garden
And tends a rose or two.
The Princess
By her expectations of herself
Is contained within her prison.

Contact is frustrated by an impenetrable barrier of land talk, building talk, children talk, nature talk or whatever - each person has their specialised armour (beware of pipe smokers!). At times, I've

found this one sidedness quite overpowering, emotionally and intellectually stultified. I've longed both for some emotional spontaneity and for fresh ideas to feed the mind. How strange that with all these well educated people here we never speak of religion, politics, world events, and barely of the arts. Nearly all conversation revolves around the community - an all pervasive domesticity. Is this emotional and intellectual isolation a reaction to living so closely with others?

It used to be a point of discussion in the community whether we were like a village or an extended family. In the village situation, I suppose, cooperation is for mutual benefit and any ties can be broken; in the family, there are stronger obligations for one sided help and the relation is permanent. It's probably accepted now that our community has the weaker bonds of the village model. There is not the long term indefinite commitment of a family relationship, rather the immediate expediency of neighbouring lives (with of course bonds of friendship interlaced). A majority of people have seriously considered moving away.

And what of that old chestnut, sexual/emotional/family relationships? Most of the 'unit' groups that have come here have come as conventional (happy) nuclear families. The casualty rate has been high, something like 4 divorces and 3 separations; in fact, more families broken up than intact. The question that's asked is whether the families that have chosen to come into the community are ones that were likely to split up anyway, or whether they were a typical cross section, and that it's the pressures and opportunities of community life that have caused their break. The answer is probably a bit of both. There's the obvious opportunity of living fairly closely with people of the opposite sex. And because the community takes on some of the family responsibilities, e.g. cooking and some child care, families are looser knit. The quality of a couple's relationship affects the rest of the community. From a couple happy together good vibes spread around; if uncertainty between them and an absence of public affection then other relationships tend to be unsure and tentative. Occasionally, there is direct aggro spilling out into the rest of the community.

Some people have tried multiple relationships. There has been a chain of relationships with husbands/wives relating out to other spouses. This was quite open and for a time seemed to work well. But now it's all broken up. Most people reverted back to a couple relationship in the end. What seems to happen when couples come into a community is that relationships go into a melting pot, and then crystallise out again, maybe into the same pair bonds or maybe into others.

And there have also been one or two secret relationships; maybe more - by definition, not many people know about them.

What of the children in this shifting scene of adult relationships? They cope better than the adults. They're O.K.. In fact, it's the children who benefit most from the place: so many other kids to play with in so much beautiful space, so many adults to relate to (expurgating that English malaise of shyness), so many diverse activities going on to learn from and enjoy. For our young kids it's the nearest they're ever going to get to Paradise.

Not so for the teenagers, many of whom suffer from aimlessness and boredom, like their contemporaries outside. Part of their trouble is the social isolation that is the lot of the adults too i.e. being with the same group of people all the time. Not being particularly involved in the work of the community they get little satisfaction from that source. How many will carry on living communally once they have a choice? Half maybe?

* * * *

The passing of the seasons affects country dwellers more than city folk, and it has a marked effect on the mood of this community: low in winter (a temporary alleviation around Christmas) and high in summer. It's understandable enough: weather affects people's moods anyway; and in summer we're outdoors enjoying the natural beauty, the influx of visitors brings life into the place, and we have a sense of purpose in growing our own food. In winter we're shut up inside shabby surroundings with the same old lot of people.

Other trends in mood can be observed too, reflecting the vitality or apathy, togetherness or waywardness of the group. Historically, it was at it's highest in the beginning - some months of honeymoon. Then it went down to a real low with the breakaway group splitting off. With their replacements, new people bringing in new energy for a while, the mood soared high again. But since then it has been gradually declining, to a new low last winter. A barometer of the group mood is the number of people having dinner together - a mere handful on occasions in the dark month of last February. The community had sucked its people dry.

We needed visitors again. What a boon they are. They come and work for nothing, and sometimes pay too! They bring in energy and more besides. Their curiosity about communities gives us a sense of purpose, making us feel significant in the world. And yet some of us have an antipathy towards them: they are a distraction checking us from working out our togetherness as a group; being nice to them saps energy when they seem irrelevant, part of the endless flow through the place; they do work we should be doing. The number of visitors we allow and the degree of our hospitality is one of the many ongoing compromises that we live with.

* * * *

The amount of work that gets done at Old Hall is a good feature of the place - and the amount that doesn't a bad one! A lot does get done and a lot else doesn't. All work is voluntary, a good principle for people who love their work or the people they're working for. But some work is unpopular. In a hierarchical system this would get allocated according to some rational system of cost effectiveness, or whatever, but with us it's left to individual inclination. The land is well looked after, the building neglected. An aspect of ecology, which is what we're supposed to be into, is cherishing resources. Too much are we careless and abusive of what we have. There's an overall shabbiness and at times shittiness about communal areas (not so private units). And lack of care breeds more uncaring, another discouragement to work.

There's an enormous variation in the amount of work that individuals do for the community, say from 0 to 30 hours a week. It's another of the good

aspects of the place that this does not cause much bad feeling. But perhaps it would be better if some basic minimum was expected of people (we do expect a certain financial contribution, why not one of work too?). Theoretically there could be more satisfaction in working for a group of people than for just yourself or family. Isn't it much more worthwhile to be cooking for 20 people than just one or two? Apparently not. Sometimes nobody cooks.

One discouragement to working is the prevailing notion that you need to have consideration for everybody. A lot of energy goes into communication. As a new member observed soon after arrival, there's more talk of doing things than actually doing them (how many hundreds of person hours have gone into the talking of building a sauna over the years?). Those that do things let themselves in for criticism, those that do nothing are left alone. If you paint a door (or even a door handle!) someone's not going to like the colour and become upset. One member left the community because he thought the main activity of people here was getting uptight. There used to be a lot of talk about the need for tolerance, but it stayed in the head, not the heart.

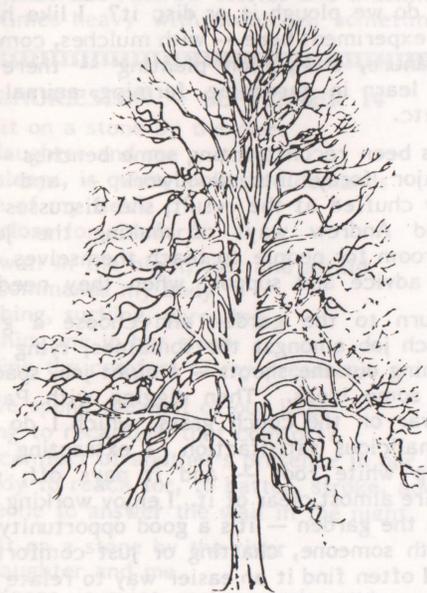
The full blast of uptightness was directed at me when I returned from holiday with a pup. "No right to have a dog without community permission", "keep away from the children", "lock up in courtyard", "keep on chain", "keep in your unit", "it can't stay there where I pass by", "keep away from house". The bundle of zest and joy was a community PROBLEM, and the full weight of community oppression was directed at me. Even sympathisers wouldn't pat the pup if anybody else was looking. I let the furies rage over my head till they'd blown themselves out, but not before our oldest resident (aged 85) had come to hate my dog and me. Not being able to have his way "for the police to dispose of the pest" he moved out. A few years ago Hugh McIlvaney wrote of the great racehorse Arkle, saying how people who had been in the horse's presence were enriched by its grace and spirit. That seemed far fetched to me at the time, but now I do realise that animals are imbued with many of the qualities that we usually consider as essentially human, and that we can gain from their presence. Anyway, the dog is now an accepted part (member?) of the community, liked by many. But his initial reception I haven't forgotten.

That affair played its part in my resolve to eventually leave. Some resolve it does need, because living is comfortable enough on a day to day basis. For me though, there are inner dissatisfactions. Virtually everybody here except myself is in some sort of family grouping. So I feel the social isolation, both within the community and from people outside. And the creative work that I wish to do is to build and to make furniture. There's no scope for new building here, and the general dilettante approach is not conducive to intensive professional craft.

Glad to have come to Old Hall I'm now glad (and sad) to leave. Time here has been an education, at least dabbling in a whole variety of things that wouldn't usually have come my way: hay-making, tree-felling, roof repairing, weaving, horse riding, butter and cheese making, massage, sauna, encounter, washing machine mending, running fair stalls, pantomiming, and lots of parties - some boring, some exciting. Dabble is the appropriate word. Too wide

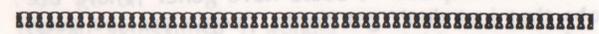
an attempt at self sufficiency leads to extension at the expense of depth. I personally prefer more depth and specialisation, which I see as paradoxically bringing more simplicity for the individual. The quest for self sufficiency reflects a distrust of the society around.

My stay has taught me lots about people and how they relate, and about myself. I've learnt to let my concentration be more diffuse (more feminine), to cope with the 1001 impingements that come at you in an anarchic community. (In a hierarchical system, one person deals in depth with one thing. In our anarchic system many people deal shallowly with many things. Sometimes one, sometimes the other may be the better approach). I've had four years in a physically healthy environment - clean air, superb food (our own grown food is so good, especially the meat), beneficial physical exercise (plenty of log splitting to keep warm), in a beautiful outdoors. A friend once told me that what I'd miss most on leaving would be the trees. They are magnificent. Alone and in groups they stand diverse and grand, in a sublime landscape that has soothed many a fevered mind.



The community at Old Hall looks like it is going into a period of change. It needs to - the longer it stays static the harder for it to change. Martin Brown, the main person involved in establishing the community, is leaving with his parents. New people in place of them and myself (anybody else leaving?) can bring in new ideas and fresh attitudes. And the general dissatisfaction that people have here with the community may be sufficient to overcome their inertia and find some way to evolve. There is still potential.

BOB MATTHEWS - - Old Hall May 1980



Some things Laurieston Hall needs:-

- A second-hand colour telly;
 - A new theory of relations;
 - A charismatic leader and/or religion;
 - A herd of dairy Charolais.
- ANON. Nov 1976

HEADING BACK TO STRAIGHTSVILLE

(To the theme tune from Star Wars)

One day I had a vision of a new utopian land
Beautiful people, walking hand in hand
Love and peace and sunshine, smiling all around
No more worries, no more cares, love will abound

Growing all our food and stuff like that
Self-sufficiency is where it's all at
Six o'clock sunrise and milking the cows
Good morning brother, hello cows

So I joined a groovy commune down by the sea
A bunch of groovy people, it seemed alright to me
Ducks and chickens, kids and cats
Wasps, fleas and mice, slugs and rats

Wake up in the morning and it's pissing down again
A cup of cold tea then out in the rain
Leaky wellies in the mud, shit up to my knees
Can the love in our hearts, save us please?

We meet together once a week, it's about the only time
Nervous giggles all round, what's on your mind?
We have to have consensus so we can't castrate the cats
Paint the van pink, or poison the rats

You tell me I can't sleep with my lover anymore
That's too easy man, we've gotta try for more
You draw your night's bedmate from a name in a hat
It'll make you love everyone -- expect me to believe that?

We've got a new bureaucracy, we know what to do
Trust deeds, mini-coops, maxi ones too
Meetings, conferences, minutes of it all
We read lots of letters, but not the writing on the wall.

BRUCE (or RALPH) -- Glaneirw Feb 1978

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SHIFTING SANDS

shifting sands
waves of other's emotions washing me over and over
boats bobbing uneasily at their moorings
tumbling dice; changing destinies; unknown futures
experiences, unreflected on, lie like the after
effects of an indigestible supper
heavy on my mind

mist
damp, cold
like the fog of other's confusions
seeping melancholy into my soul

talk
echoing round the dining room
echoing in the spaces between us
islands in a vast lake
aware only of each other's contours
ignorant of the luxurious vegetation of each
individual habitat

irresolute, fearful
problems not answers well defined
a day like any other day?

JILL -- Lifespan July 1980

A Corny Piece

I THOUGHT I'd try to write something about CRABAPPLE -- but it's difficult; there's so much to write. Have I written too much about the joys or too much of the problems? As I read this I realise it is horribly corny, sorry -- but literary prowess is not my forte!

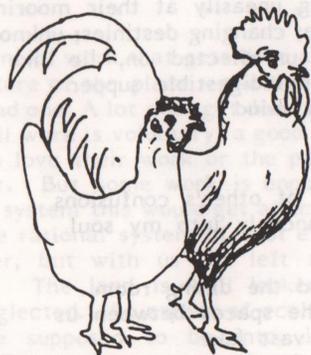
The triumphant chortle of a hen making its contribution to the lunchtime omlette pulls me into awareness -- I'm milking today, but I lie for five minutes longer savouring the luxury of bed. Then I stumble downstairs to put the kettle on for sterilising the milking bucket. (I notice FIRE scrawled in red felt-tip on the back of my hand to remind me to look after the Aga -- I am notorious for forgetting it -- so I riddle and fill it.)

Gavin emerges bleary-eyed -- he's also milking -- and gives me a hug: a good way to start the day.

Out in the backyard -- full of the fresh smell of damp earth -- last night's thunderstorm cleared the mugginess from the air. The morning sun lights on the pink fragrant rose against the mellow red brick wall of the stables. Vervain and Parsley, our Jersey cows, are lying lazily in the sun at the far end of the field -- we have to go and fetch them. Parsley greets me with a nudge on the thigh -- it's well meant but leaves me hobbling across the field after her -- she's feeling skittish and kicks her heels up behind her as she goes.

In the cool darkness of the cowshed I sit meditatively milking -- almost lulled back to sleep by the rhythmic drumming of the milk into the pail. I'm woken from my meditations by Parsley having a piss -- my back and arms get splattered but I'm stuck, pinned between two cows, and protecting the bucket from the spray.

We return the cows to the field -- a task requiring considerable strength and skill: you have to push Parsley to keep her going, and to notice a tasty morsel of nettle or holly before she does and deflect her from that direction. Vervain walks sedately across the field, but it wasn't always like that -- I remember several of us chasing her across the kale field in the snow, trying to coax her back into her field, until she decided she'd had enough of playing us up.



Then off to feed the chickens. I enjoy opening the hen-house door and watching them pour out; each hen has her own style -- some leap eagerly down the ramp, others strut sedately, two struggle to get out of the door at the same time, squabbling with each other. Valerie, the bantam, a very independent little creature, berates a cockerel who dares to try

to screw her. The ducklings leap joyfully out of their house and dive for their baby's bath where they dunk their heads and toss the water around in delight.

Now at last for a well-earned breakfast -- one of my (many) favourite moments of the day -- a peaceful unhurried breakfast of muesli and creamy yoghurt, toast and honey and a mug of steaming enlivening tea -- sitting on the porch in the sun, watching the shadows of clouds drift across the Wrekin. The shop van goes clattering past -- Susan, Tony, Helen going off to the shop.

Oops -- I've written one side already and I've only got as far as breakfast, I'll have to miss out large chunks of the day -- there's so much I could write about.

The morning is spent working in the garden. Then lunch of several salads whilst sitting in the sun on the lawn. A car comes down the drive -- prospective buyers for the cottage next door have made a wrong turning; the respectable occupants of the car look with horror at the half-dozen naked bodies lapping up the sun, and reverse rapidly up the drive! We discuss our plans for the green-manure patch -- do we plough it or disc it? I like having space to experiment here -- with mulches, compost, green manure, companion planting -- there's so much to learn in gardening, farming, animal husbandry etc.

Soo has been reconstructing some benches -- her first major foray into woodwork -- and she's obviously chuffed at the result; she discusses with Gary and Andrew ways of making the joints. There's room for people to teach themselves skills and get advice and support when they need it.

I return to the garden and choose a gentle after-lunch job amongst the tomatoes, tying them and pinching out the shoots -- a quiet job, space to sort out some ideas. Then digging with Pam -- waging war on the couch grass, which I do with almost malicious satisfaction -- extracting each last sharp white root -- and it pays off; some patches are almost clear of it. I enjoy working with people in the garden -- it's a good opportunity just to be with someone, chatting or just comfortably silent -- I often find it an easier way to relate than just sitting talking.

We are all hot from gardening in the sun, so we cross the lane and walk down to Berrington Pool for a dip. It's great to feel the water lapping around my body. We all return refreshed and dripping to tea and peanut butter sandwiches.

It's time for milking again. Parsley and Vervain have had a busy day; they have been filling in a trench that Gary and some visitors have been digging for the water supply to the field. We are out of cow muesli (crushed grains and beans) -- I feel a twinge of irritation and then guilt -- no-one has been to Ken's to make some more -- but then I shouldn't complain -- I could have gone. There are jobs that just don't get done: people are too busy, or forget, or think someone else will do it -- such are some of the problems of living communally. Sometimes, there just seems to be too much work. The weeds grow as fast as we pull them out -- we don't seem to be able to catch up enough to hoe regularly; the fruit needs picking and bottling; the accounts need doing -- work that's all pleasant in itself, but if you allow yourself to feel hassled by

the number of things to do, they can lose their joy. I mull over this as I milk -- I guess I'm learning to cope with just being with and enjoying the work that I am doing, and not to feel too hassled by the work I've left undone. It doesn't really matter if I don't have time to make compost today. Then I find that the job I've been worrying about for a week or two suddenly gets done, and it didn't take that long. That's one of the good things about being in the shop -- I go into the garden the next day and find the weeding I had been planning to do is done Vervain coughs and pulls me from my reverie -- she's getting fed up with being milked and is looking forward to the game of going (and not going) back to the field. As I ward her off from tearing into the wood, I look and see the stark remains of the Wellingtonia -- once an elegant 80 foot tree that stood out above all the other trees -- as a beacon that could be seen for miles around -- a welcoming sign as I cycled home from work in the evening. One day it wasn't there any more -- it was struck by lightning and exploded with a tremendous crash and sent the pieces flying all over the field.

Supper time -- so variable, sometimes clamorous with jokes and Andrew stories and mucking about, sometimes heavy with problems, sometimes quiet

AT LAURIESTON -- SEPTEMBER 14

We sit on a stone by the river
My daughter and me
She sleeps, is quiet, makes no demands
Flesh of my flesh
Too close for comfort

The wail in the night, lost and afraid
She commands my body
Grabbing, sucking, caressing
Touching me in her sleep
Needing the comfort of my presence

Do we spend the rest of our lives
Trying to recapture that comfort?
The comfort of another's presence in our sleep
A body to reach for, to batter, stroke, adore
Someone to answer the wail in the night.

We sit on a stone by the river
My daughter and me
She sleeps, is quiet, makes no demands
I am free to caress the curve of her skull
To take pleasure in the contours of her tiny body
To marvel at a distance.

JILL -- Lifespan Oct 1980

HANDS FULL

Oh I've got my hands full alright!
Arms and legs too
Catching holding stroking
Feeding fetching poking
Cradling clasping slapping
Running juggling begging --
I could go on.

I do go on
Though sometimes I wonder
If my tender pink possibilities
Haven't all long ago
Found their feet and used them,
If all I hold with white knuckles
Is a bunch of black umbilical cords
And dry placentas.

ANON. -- Laurieston Hall Nov 1976

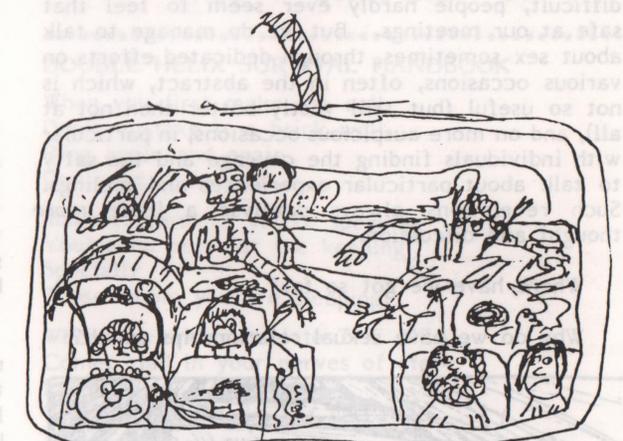
with the peacefulness of a busy and pleasant day's work. In the evening people are scattered about the house; a smoking group on the porch solving the problems of the world, Susan washing up with the help of Joni Mitchell, Tony making bread, people sewing, reading, making music, playing volley-ball. I go to shut up the hens and ducks -- the air is warm and heavy again, the sky is overcast and starless -- rain again soon -- thank god we eventually got the hay in last week. Valerie is in the duck house -- she seems to prefer to be a duck and protests noisily as I move her to the hen house. The ducks waddle reluctantly home; I close the doors and return to the house contentedly weary; I crawl into bed and relax into its warmth -- Oh hell -- I forgot to fill the Aga!

* * * *

This all makes me wonder why I'm leaving -- I'm sad to go in many ways. I guess the problem was, as always, I tried to take on too much. Being at Crabapple and working as a doctor are not really compatible -- I end up giving neither the time and energy I would want to. I wish Crabapple well -- I've enjoyed a lot about being here and I've learnt a lot.

SATI -- Crabapple Sept 1980

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY



What the coach driver saw in his rear view mirror on the way to Redfield.

ONE TUESDAY IN APRIL, a coach load of screaming six and nine year olds arrived (clutching sick bags) at Redfield. The children had come from Harlesden in London, from the school I go to. One day I thought it was a nice idea to have my class visit the commune my dad lives in, so they could look around at the animals and the woods. So my dad talked to the rest of the commune about it and they said OK.

When we arrived we had some orange and biscuits and then split up into groups for a tour round the garden, wood and house. It was lucky there were plenty of dock leaves. Then we came back in to eat our packed lunches -- that was chaos with everyone swapping sandwiches. Then we went outside again to fill in a quiz sheet about what we had seen, and it rained. Then we went home.

SOPHIE (age 9) -- Redfield June 1983

SEX and DRUGS & ROCK and RÔLE

WITHIN CELLS IN THE HELIX it has been a historic taboo for members not to have sex with each other. Encapsulated in phrases such as "no couples within houses", and heartily adhered to from within, but looked on askance from outside by some. We always have "couples" on the agenda as an item to be discussed properly when we make more time for it, but we're in too much of a state of crisis management to make that time to really talk about it.

One of the big reasons for coming to live in a place like Double Helix (or at least one of mine) is to get away from that big number one and only dependence on a lover to have important non-sexual relationships which include emotional dependence, trust, but without sex. In the Helix there is a tacit agreement that strong heterosexual monogamous bonds are not right-on, yet the majority of our members are (more or less guiltily) involved in such entanglements. On many occasions couple exclusive relationships have been responsible for breaking up the happy home. We never seem to talk about this as well as is desirable.

We never seem to talk about sex in general enough. Talking about sex is difficult. Talking about sex in large groups seems to be even more difficult, people hardly ever seem to feel that safe at our meetings. But we do manage to talk about sex sometimes, through dedicated efforts on various occasions, often in the abstract, which is not so useful (but still vastly better than not at all), and on more auspicious occasions, in particular with individuals finding the courage and the safety to talk about particular experiences and feelings. Such revelations always catalyse a little more thought and discussion.

Where have we got so far?

Why do we have sexual relationships at all?



What do we get from them, apart from pain and germs, that we can't get from our close and loving co-op?

We all need a lot of loving, got to get it any way we can, only easy way to give and to get is the way we were taught when we were too young

to know any better. When we were all too young to know any better we was all taught about the guilt of masturbation, we were all run over by the big GUILT gender ROLLS of the sexual establishment. We were all taught that girls and boys are different and play different games. We were all taught versions of a big fairy story about romantic love with princes and princesses and happy-ever-after nuclear families. We were not encouraged to talk about sex because it was rude. Any expression of our emerging sexuality was either ruthlessly repressed or carefully grafted into the fairytale.



We may have got as far as replacing some of this fairy story with a different creed, with some right-on theories and different fairy stories; for instance that homosexuality is not sinful and is tolerable, that you don't just get married once and that the man goes out to work whilst the woman stays at home, the woman is the man's property, his servant, and full of mystery.

All the stuff we are running up against is rooted in sexual repression, but how can we get through the pain and trauma of creating a new liberating sexual ideology when we don't really know where to start and it hurts a lot? The Russians only sustained the sexual bit into the first few months of their revolution; the Chinese don't seem to have got very far with dealing with sexuality and sexual needs; the sixties European sexual revolt doesn't seem to have got us very far, and anyway now we're still suffering from the reaction. When it comes to dealing with our own feelings of who we are attracted to, how we express our sexuality, how we label or understand our feelings of sexual arousal, how we are lonely, how we are jealous, how we have been hurt.

. . . . Well, OK, of course you've got sexual problems everybody's got sexual problems but what's it got to do with living in the goddammed co-op?

Well, because we made this safe rule: "NO SEX" within houses (i.e. between the residents, not that we don't allow sex on the premises); well it means that we can talk about it in the safety of knowing that it's not going to happen between us. The idea is that we are free to explore our mutual trust, and all the intimacies of our inter-relationships, without the added complications of sex and sexual

jealousies between members. On the whole, we all find this eminently satisfactory. We all feel that if there were sexual episodes occurring between members of a particular household, that the time and energy required to sort things out (for all members of a household) would be too much when things (inevitably) went wrong.

Of course, it is interesting to note that we don't have the same prejudice about the energy we all put in on those occasions when the non-sexual relationships in the houses inevitably go wrong, we simply assume that it is slightly less complicated than it would have been if sex had dared to raise its ugly head.

So we are left in this rather luxurious situation where we can develop new ways of looking at and talking about our inter-relationships and the sexual ingredients in them, getting away to an extent from all that early sexual repression. Maybe a little artificial, some say, but an admirable attempt at starting to unravel the fairytale.

Really we're all rather scared of everything that's labelled "sex", paralysed with fear and guilt -- but FASCINATED. Except for one problem, that although we may be able to show admirable self-discipline in avoiding sex between ourselves, we are sexual beings with sexual needs, which we satisfy by our relationships outside the co-op. So most of us are variously involved in the joy and anguish of beautiful ugly couple scenarios outside our close, loving, non-sexual co-op relationships; so we still share the problems (suffer) that sex brings. There is the problem of jealousy and resentment. We are happy for the outside relationship, but we are jealous and resentful and want it to stop. The person of our number who is in the relationship is caught in a tug-of-love between the house and the lover. The lover is supposed to deal with all the difficulties potentially inherent in meeting "the family", being accepted, and on what basis? As a lover, the other half of a couple, or as a person who has independent status and relationships with the family? All quite dodgy stuff to deal with, but then tell us a time when any sex was easy and straightforward.

So sex is one of those issues which usually get dodged. One which we try to keep at arm's length, all the better (we excuse ourselves) for keeping it in perspective. In this post sexual-revolution age, how many people (apart from lovers) do you really know who can sustain frank, questioning, and explicit conversation about sex? Well, I for one don't know enough people who can, and I consider it to be an important issue which needs examining.

I'm an emotional cripple, and I think you are as well. I can spot all that stuff on telly and everywhere that tries to play on egos and inadequacies about which brand of essential product X to buy to stop being inadequate and to become suck-sexfull and I can laugh about engagement rings and stuff, but there's still large areas of shame that I won't easily talk about, and how can we ever change our lives if we can't challenge the cruel all-pervading effects of sexual conditioning?

RICHARD -- Double Helix Oct 1984

DOUBLE HELIX RAP

Bought a house in Brixton town
Me and my friends all around
Houses big, an gardens pretty
Gonna be a bright spot in smokin city

Double Helix rap all the time
Talk about sharing 'til morning chime
Money problems, laundry blues,
Please clean the bath after you use

Double Helix kite we're gonna fly it
All around the people riot
Sick to their guts with Babylon
Double Helix rap rap on

The people they come, and they go
Some leaving say, "I told you so"
All the time we beat our breast
Tears runnin down we try our best

Double Helix getting bigger
Check new members wi' fresh vigour
The more people come the more we rap
"Don't know you", "I'm the new chap"

Just bought a new house with Abbey National
At £55,000 not very rational
The procedure of moving new people in
Gonna make us rap 'til we all get thin

PAUL -- Double Helix Oct 1984

***** DOUBLE HELIX SURVIVAL HANDBOOK

When you first make the call
Don't mistake it a brick wall.
Ring again and again
Don't let them stall.

Make it clear as you're speaking
You've no pets for the keeping
Specially
Those whom you are sleeping.

When you are invited to THE MEAL
Come, clad in your nerves of steel
Ironically
You will be asked what you feel.

The procedure is long, as a rule
Don't try and rush, stay cool.
You want in?
Stubbon it out like a mule.

If, at last, you invited in,
Don't ignore those prickles on your skin.
Remember,
This is the point your troubles begin.

There's no official guide to how it goes.
There's many sensitive toes,
Tread carefully,
There's no map, but everyone knows.

The meeting will enlighten,
To some, even frighten,
Don't panic
When that cold hand tighten.

People full of good intention,
Concerned about that ting you mention,
Only
Procedure is beyond comprehension.

PAUL -- Double Helix Nov 1984

COMMUNES MIGHTWORK

THIS ARTICLE BEGAN as another description of REDFIELD, a sort of introduction . . . then it wandered off, and got more interesting. I started by trying to explain why we call ourselves a "socialist community". "Community" was easy; communes income-share, and share all facilities, space, assets etc., whereas we have "family" units on which we pay rent, don't income-share, and have privately owned cars, tellies, and even cows. We do share communal cooking, eating, washing, etc.. And then too, we don't all live and work on the place, but variously do, according to interest, commitment, jobs etc. Some of that doesn't sound all that "socialist" perhaps. Private ownership? I think we use the term not to describe what we do here, so much as to wave a sort of "Keep Off" banner to all those elements of the "alternative" that we don't want. Therapy groups who attempt to adjust minds and not reality, relationshipists who mutually inspect each other for emotional fleas, free-booters, and life-stylers who spend so much time looking at their own reflections, seeing if they're properly attired in the trappings of "alternative-ness". And people who think that their precious individuality is of paramount importance and significance, that their happiness and feelings of isolation and alienation belong to them uniquely, and have to be treated as such, and that communes are the last civilised refuges for battered spirits, where renewed personal energy can be transmuted into deeper and more vivid relationships . . . and on and on . . . And I know that for a lot of us and you, communes are places where socially conditioned roles and attitudes can be questioned, challenged, and changed . . . So instead of being too boring, it went like this . . .

May, 1982. The Tory government insists it is bottoming out of the worst of the slump. A host of right-wing governments have been trying to stop two of its nastier sorts shooting the shit out of each other; the military junta in Argentina that spent most of its time smashing its union organisation has just been engaged with the Thatcher junta that would love the chance to do the same, but has to adopt a much more subtle approach, like passing bills through Parliament to stop unions organising pickets on behalf of their fellow-workers. The last lot of coffins of "our brave lads" that had to be carried back to well-publicised funerals, came from the Ulster wing of the British government's onslaught on other people's rights. They'd been sniped and bombed by some people who have a relatively clear-sighted view of what's what, while some tea-drinkers in communes on the same British soil too often, far too often, try to preserve a hyper-level of tolerance towards all things, that far too often leaves them unable to tell the difference between putty and shit. Consequently their windows keep falling out.

Kitchen. 8.30

- Where's H?
- Just taking the kids to school in the van.
- Did he get his beetroot in yesterday?

-- Christ -- listen to this -- "Profits for the half-year, HALF-year mind you, showed an increase of seven percent to 34 million pounds!" What recession?

-- Only for one section of the population, I'm afraid.

-- Bastards! Look at this picture of Maggie smiling.

-- Can you feed the cats for me again? I'll be back tomorrow afternoon.

-- Tea?

-- Definitely!

-- We can put the family with the kids in the end rooms.

-- Anyone seen Tom?

-- What bum's pinched my hammer!

The day scrambles itself along; the post has got tea-cup rings on it. A pair of unwashed saucepans copulate crazily on the draining board.

-- Where have all the spoons gone?

Questions career across the room like heat-seeking missiles. It's a cold day. People stand up and go off to pump the day into action, the necessities. A boilersuit collapses to the floor before being pulled grudgingly up over a pair of trousers. A velvet jacket slides past the cooker.

-- Cheers!

-- Have a good day at the office darling.

Sweet trivia; the day's staples, hitching bits and things and jobs and purposes together, unrigmaroled.

WE all know the voices and gestures, what they mean, what it's about. But YOU need a referent, what's behind it, to make sense of it. You know the context, so it's familiar. And I think WE need that same referent too: to know what's behind the minutiae, that locates it all.

I live in a community, I like it, and I can't stand the communes movement.

My reading of the history of communes indicates that our British communes movement owes more to the religious groups from the seventeenth and eighteenth century onwards, than to the Paris Commune or the Chinese communes. I'm going to over-simplify history appallingly now for a quick run-down on how we got here. In the post-feudal struggles of emergent mercantile capitalism during the seventeenth century, the peasant and landless classes got metaphorically, and sometimes literally, slaughtered. To survive they did one of two things. They either necessarily collaborated with the ruling classes of bourgeoisie, separated their religious and political beliefs, which had hitherto been unified, and carried on with the religious parts, worked hard, and were no more trouble. Or they packed their bags and got the hell out, mostly to the Americas. There, cut off from their social and political roots, they established communities by a lot of hard work, and virtually cut themselves off from the rest of world in order to create enclaves of "freedom". Back in dear old Blighty, the great English revolution snuffed out all the decent ideas, of communal ownership etc., and left the radicals

hanging on to what they could salvage. What they were allowed to salvage was the right to worship who, how, when and where they chose -- but without the social and political backing it had once had -- and it became individualism. The collective spirit, that had pervaded the New English Army for example, was broken. The politics was still there in movements like Dissent and the Jacobins, but the increasing pressures of industrialisation, and mechanisation of work relations soon put that in its place. Then the nineteenth century -- increasing riots, threats of mob rule, national instability. Some of the cleverer of the artisan class of workers saw a way of expressing their discontent without seriously damaging the fabric of society. Co-ops, for example, were alternative ways of trading, just as education was an alternative way of repressing people to fit factory conditions, with both institutions run by religious groups like the Methodists. Many of the early trade union leaders accepted conditional surrender in wages and conditions, and finally formed the Labour Party as a way of having a voice in the parliamentary process, which had already proved whose interests it served.

Imagine it:-

1992. May. 8.30. Some communal kitchen.

-- Uuugh, yuk! Not that horrible Campaign Coffee again!

-- Tea anyone?

-- Definitely!

-- Look at this. Two steelworkers shot, and there's a picture of Sir Francis Pym trooping the colour. Makes you sick!

-- Who pinched the Communes Network out of my pigeon-hole?

-- . . . Nah, there was only a couple of hundred on the march. They placed flowers on the steps of the Town Hall in memory of the Asian kids . . . someone started singing the Red Flag . . . Christ, you should have seen the military police pull him out of the crowd!

-- Seen this? "G.E.C. gets arms contract for ten billion."

-- Is H. back yet? He's supposed to go to the station to pick up that couple who lost their house in the Camden riots.

-- What do they want to come here for anyway?

-- They just said . . . er . . . where's the letter? . . . here y'are . . . "Communal life seems to offer a viable alternative to the violence inherent in urban decay."

-- Not another sociologist?

-- Mmm, and she likes gardening.

-- Good, we need another digger.

And on T.V.:-

". . . Here is the news. The two terrorists suspected of the wounding of the Minister of Attack, Lord Tebbutt of Toxteth, were last night arrested by Buckingham police at the Rosyred Housing Co-operative, just outside Winslow. Police say that they had been hiding there since Falklandmas. Little is known of the hide-out, but in the large adjoining stable block, a cache of arms of

Chinese origin have been found, and a quantity of inflammable materials indicating a supply for the provision of the kind of bombs thrown at last month's riots in Milton Keynes. The New City Care Patrol Squad were surprised by the sophisticated organisation and arms of the rioters, who devastated ten square miles of the city, including its railway station, in response to the Emergency Laws against the raiding of banks and shops by strikers and unemployed youths, who were said to be without money and food for nine months since the Work Protection Act was passed last year. The government is to initiate an inquiry into the composition of housing co-operatives, suspecting them of being infiltrated by Popular Front trade unionists and military deserters."

"Two children were sent home from school today in Manchester for their parents' refusal to permit them to wear the new khaki uniforms made compulsory by the Ministry of Re-education last week. Military police are worried in view of the fact that there is growing support for the radical Red Shirts group of youths, who harass school-children and prevent them from attending their academies . . ."

Communes contain a lot of people who, having experienced the alienation of work conditions and its accompaniments in family life, financial security and the rest of it, have got the hell out -- very sensibly too. Normally, in other societies not as civilised, developed, clever, as ours, these are the people who form the front-line of revolutionary change. What happens here? They join bloody communes and wave arriverderci to the rest. "Once people realise we present a viable alternative" they say, "they'll realise what's what and inevitably flock to the movement". That hasn't actually happened yet either, and never will. The communes movement has become divorced from the very mass of people, part of whose ideology it inherits.

It is an "alternative". An alternative way of coping with a full-frontal attack on people. It operates quite nicely, thanks, within the system it seems to reject. We'll have our own villages, banks, food, sexual code etc. Alternative Legoland. It's a neat little get out that has all the gestures and none of the clout, because it doesn't have the understanding, the knowledge, or the history to make the kinds of connections it should be making with the experiences and political processes of which change is really made.

What will be the position of the communes movement when Tebbutt becomes King and orders the troops in against the rioting workers in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds . . .? Will it abhor the violence and pity the poor souls who have failed to come to terms with the destructive urges that exist within each of us? Will it try to get people on council estates to celebrate the summer solstice as an expression of class solidarity? Will they, WE, build barricades with herb-flavoured bikes, or make petrol bombs out of re-cyclable bio-degradable plastic? Or make truncheons out of rolled-up copies of Resurgence?

Go on . . . !

PAUL -- Redfield June 1982

Born Outside The Law

"You're 33, it's your first child and you're 45 minutes from the nearest hospital. A home birth is out of the question." The doctors were adamant. I'd have to go to hospital.

Then quite by chance I met an extraordinary lay midwife . . . and I knew that if she were present at my birth I'd have no problems. However, it would be illegal for her to deliver my baby. I would have to maintain that I had done it myself -- they can't prosecute a mother who delivers her own baby.

At half past midnight on 27th March "WHOOSH!" my waters broke. Oliver dashed off to call Penny and Henry who are both pretty experienced at delivering calves and suchlike, so I reckoned they shouldn't have too much trouble with me! I phoned my lay midwife friend whilst the guys got cracking with the Hoover in the big room and hunted around for a heater, a mattress and some old sheets.

My contractions came on with a vengeance -- hard, long, and very close together. Penny, Oliver and Henry took it in turns to massage my back and flanks as I leant over a chair. Not for long -- soon I was lying down on the floor, half on my side with my head in Oliver's lap, and there I stayed throughout my labour. It was a position I never ever imagined I would take up, but it seemed to suit me. I found that lying that way I was able to conserve the most energy and relax between contractions without having to change positions. I felt I couldn't afford to waste an ounce of energy. Oliver had lit a candle which burned all night, and Dollar Brand's African Jazz Piano washed over my head in rhythmic waves like a tide on the run. On every contraction my friends were there massaging me, and laughing and joking above my head. Penny had hold of the home birth manual "Special Delivery" and was checking me over, book in hand. She kept muttering "text-book case . . . text-book case". Nearly two hours went by. Apparently, unbeknown to me, at this point Penny was flipping anxiously through the chapters trying to find the section "Cutting the Cord". She was becoming convinced she was going to have to deliver me, as the others hadn't pitched up. But suddenly there they were -- Jan and Sue and my lay midwife friend. It was 3 am. They had been stopped for speeding!

My friend took one look at us and realised that we had the situation entirely under control, so she left us to our own devices. The only thing she asked to do was to listen to the heart beat. We had a moment's scare when she couldn't find it, only to realise it was right low down. "My god, you're almost there!" she exclaimed.

I now had Oliver, Penny, Henry, Jan and Sue all massaging me during contractions -- my neck, my back, my hands and my feet! It was tremendously helpful and enabled me to let go and open out. I hadn't been to classes, but found I knew instinctively how to breathe -- heavy (erotic, I'm told!) groans and sighs.

I was always aware of my friend moving quietly around in the background, trying to get everything together for the delivery. Every now and again she'd pass me a couple of homeopathic pills. The only time she came forward was for a moment in the transition stage. I remember saying "no one

told me contractions were so painful! If they go on much longer I don't think I'll last out!" I kept closing my eyes and freaking out inside. My friend urged me to open them and look at her and stay present in the room.

She tried to get me to go into a vertical position to speed things up, but I couldn't -- it was too painful. So she suggested "At every contraction think of opening your cervix so the baby can move outwards". It worked a treat.

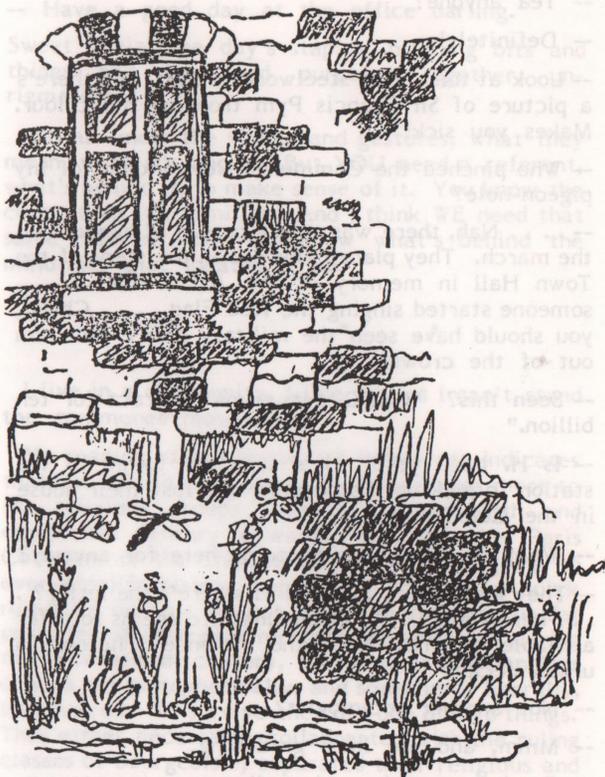
Then, all of a sudden, I wanted to push. In a flash they had me upright in a supported squatting position. Suddenly my head cleared and I felt a rush of elation. I laughed and looked around the circle of people. Everyone was beaming. On the second push I gave an almighty shout that ran like a thunderbolt through my body. The midwife was yelling "pant", but I wouldn't have it and out the baby came in one burst into the circle of jubilant people, just as the first light stirred in the East.

Exhausted, she lay on my belly in the soft light -- our little outlaw daughter.

* * * * *

We went to the Registrar, he told us that we were the third home birth out of the 5,000 he'd registered in the last five years!

JULIET -- Redfield Sept 1982



CULTURE IN COMMUNES

Culture in Communes?
We get the Guardian every day and the Times on Sunday.
A library full of books.
And ex-university students. (Some).
What do people mean by culture. Education?
Ritual?
Dressing for dinner -- we did that once.

RUMBLINGS in the back passage

I AM ONE OF FOUR TEENAGERS currently living at Redfield, and I have the distinction of being the only person not part of an established Redfield family and of moving here recently of my own accord, leaving behind a home and family in Malvern. Because of this, I think I am the most objective person to write about our home, although the others, Hannah (17), Maff (14) and Ben (13) have contributed.

We all have our own rooms in Redfield, which is the policy of the community at the moment. But I know that others who live here would either like to see us live more communally, or kick us out to fend for ourselves in the big outside. A convenient halfway stage would be a neighbouring cottage which the community owns -- but this is yet to be negotiated.

I asked Hannah and Maff what they thought the advantages and disadvantages of living communally were, as I already know Hannah hates it here whereas Maff and me like it.

He says he has more independence than his friends because he can discuss problems with others apart from his immediate family, and therefore has a broader outlook on life. (Jan, his mum, can also do the same.)

He also feels he is lucky as he doesn't have to leave his home as much as his peers, as there is "plenty to do here" and he doesn't need any special effort to talk to and see some of his closest friends. I asked him whether he thought any of the adults here were willing to pass on some of their skills, e.g. cooking, gardening, crafts etc. to the youngsters here. He admitted that Henry had taught him a good deal about trees and horticulture, and Dimitri had given him some lessons in the darkroom to develop his own photos. On the whole we agreed that if you wanted to learn people were prepared to teach, but you had to search them out.

Over most issues, Hannah agreed with the advantages Maff had volunteered, but to her there were many more disadvantages than things in the community's favour. All of us get annoyed when things go missing, especially from our rooms, although this is rare. Things borrowed are usually returned in good condition but lending to kids is fatal.

I next asked about privacy or the lack of it, and we all agree that because we all have our own rooms the problem is not acute, but privacy cannot be relied upon. Hannah is very vulnerable when it comes to kids wandering in and out, having a central ground floor room. They usually want their hair dyed or crimped the same as hers.

I asked Hannah and Maff a few related questions about their feelings on firstly: When does a child become an adult at Redfield and is the transition difficult? Did they feel that sometimes they're automatically blamed for things as the kids are excusable and the adults beyond reproach on matters such as a missing piece of trifle. And did they feel that on community issues it was difficult to get opinions taken seriously in the group because of who expressed them?

To these posers we were all in agreement -- YES.

I then asked whether the experience of living communally helped you to mix better with people and generally be more tolerant and easy-going.

Hannah's and my feeling is "No". It can do more harm than good. For a period of months when she first arrived, she didn't attend school, but feels learnt nothing more of getting on with different ages or types of people until she went to college. I personally feel along with her that I have noticed myself becoming defensive and paranoid, and being rude to others; I have lost some faith and respect for other people. But it has taught us a lot about little kids. We feel we can get on much better with them now and actually love them a bit too. (This comes from two ex-child-haters, and it isn't our age.)

Hannah is slightly embarrassed about bringing friends in case they get upset by the dirt or the sheer numbers of people under one roof. Some friends tend to think we either live in a sort of hotel, or we're a bunch of "drug-crazed hippies" who have orgies all the time. Little do they know of the day to day toiling that goes on in the kitchen, garden and maintaining the building.



Hannah is also embarrassed when she first brings a boyfriend here because of the wolf-whistles; the "that's not the same one as last week" and the "who are you?"s by the kids. Some girl friend may feel ill at ease if she's spotless and isn't used to cat fleas and piles of washing-up everywhere. But personally I think my friends would love the friendliness and hospitality of everyone; the wholefood, the garden and the spacious rooms, and would want to come and live here. After all that was my initial impression and I took the plunge. It was my choice and I don't regret it. Ninety-nine per cent of my time I actually enjoy living here, even if that doesn't shine through in my writing. And Hannah knows in her heart that a semi-detached existence in Milton Keynes would soon send her up the wall.

As for Maff, life without the long drive to drive his motorbike on, and the stable block in which to take it to bits, would be unbearable.

JANE -- Redfield Sept 1982

THE PROFESSIONALS

We are issuing this ultimatum
We are the professionals
We are a new commune
We are the slickest thing on four wheels since the Arc de Triomphe
We are totally logical
We have solved all mankind's problems
We eschew conventionalism
We eschew lollipops
We are 100 percent into group sex
We are organic down to our nylon socks
We don't chew gum
If you want to join us, forget it
You're just not good enough

The Professionals Feb 1978

LAND USE

LAND USE, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTEXT OF ORGANIC FARMING, is something that has been of central importance at Glaneirw for the past seven years. I would like to put in writing some of my thoughts and opinions on the subject, in a personal capacity, whereas other members of the group may feel differently. At Glaneirw we have 40 acres of arable quality land, and practise mixed farming, including growing cereals (for bread making and animal food), milking cows and calf rearing, and vegetable and fruit growing. Our basic aim is to be as self-sufficient as possible and to feed the ten adults and their children usually living here, to grow the food organically, and to sell the surplus which covers the running costs of the farm including replacement and new machinery.

I think a central factor when considering land use is that farmland, like gold, is a very secure form of capital investment. In practice, in our free market economy, this has led in the past decade to a rapid rise in land prices, so that today it is impossible to buy land if you need to borrow money to purchase it. This would apply equally to individual farmers, communities, or collectives, organic or not. Land in Wales averages £1,000 an acre, and if money is borrowed to purchase this, the interest rates would be a minimum of 10 per cent, i.e. £100 per year. (At the moment with inflation at 5 per cent, it would be 13.5 per cent per annum.) Land in Wales under arable cultivation or pasture would only yield £100 a year profit, given reasonable management under an organic system (e.g. - 100 bales of hay per acre at £1-20p a bale, plus some grazing in the Autumn: approximately £150 an acre income less costs of machinery, diesel, muck spreading, combining and tractor work). A chemical system might give up to 25 per cent higher production, and labour would be less; but after deducting the costs of artificial fertilizers and sprays, the final profit would not be much different from the organic system. In England the land is much better and has an average price of £2,000 an acre, and might yield £200 an acre profit per year.

In practice, this means that it is very easy to spend a whole year working very hard on the land and at the end of the year, after paying the bank the 10-14 per cent interest, you have exactly nothing for several hundred hours of work - provided you have a reasonable season; otherwise you will have an even bigger overdraft. The more land you own and farm the more hours you will have to spend working for nothing. At the same time you will have to work on an income-earning job to bring in enough money to meet your living expenses. If you own more than 2 acres of land as an individual, in this part of the world it is counted as your capital assets and you are unable to claim Social Security.

There are many variations and part solutions to this very bleak problem. The Ministry of Agriculture classify the minimum viable holding as 100 acres in Britain. With 100 acres and about £50,000 invested in buildings, stock and equipment, it is possible for a family to make a reasonable living if the land is partially paid for. Land also increases in value by approximately 10 per cent a year, but most working farmers and people in co-operatives would not benefit from a capital increase unless some land was sold off on the open market, which only occurs as a last resort.

Also, intensive systems - pigs, battery hens, intensive calf rearing - could well be included as part of a farm and give a very high return per acre. In fact, less than an acre would be needed, and the main cost would be in housing the animals. However, in practice, a lot of intensive farmers sell off the rest of their land or only have a small-holding to start with. Intensive systems are capital or labour intensive, and as most of the animal food is bought in are usually non-organic and unecological, and can also be inhumane.

Crops with a relatively high value per acre, such as vegetable or fruit crops could also potentially give a reasonable income. In Wales there is very little vegetable production (except early potatoes in Pembrokeshire) because of the heavy soils and wet winters. Commercial vegetable production is so highly mechanised and specialised, and so many sprays and weed-killers are used, that it is very difficult to compete. Carrot-digging machines at about £30,000 each can lift and grade about 10 tons of carrots an hour from the peaty, flat £5,000 an acre vegetable land in Lincolnshire. They can be sold at 3p a pound wholesale and the farmer makes a good living. If you grow vegetables in bulk organically and hand weed them and dig them, or even use tractor cultivation and harvesting, you would still only have 3p a lb. for your carrots from the wholesaler, and one or two acres of carrots would be an extremely boring and tiring way to earn a living. Organic vegetable growing commercially is really so time consuming that one has to be really dedicated to do it; and to really make a living there would be little time for child-care, relationships, politics, culture, holidays, learning new skills and trying to avoid sex-role stereotyped work, which is a high price to pay for an income I feel.

This really seems a pretty bleak picture and one wonders why people own farmland at all. But most of the fore-going applies to buying a moderate acreage of farmland with borrowed money, and trying to make a living thereon.

If someone buys the land outright, or has inherited a paid up farm, or is a capitalist investor with hundreds of thousands of pounds to spend, the picture is entirely different. Probably 90 per cent of British farms are in the above three paid up categories, at least partially. A farmer or investor in Wales who owns a hundred acres without a bank loan has an income of £10,000 a year and also an increase in capital assets of £10,000 a year - 20 per cent on a very solid investment. This is based on the same figures as would yield nil to a family farmer or co-operative buying land on borrowed money. Since most farmers and investors own more than 100 acres, I think the above figures show clearly how much land ownership is now weighted in favour of capitalists.

* * * * *

More relevant to us directly, I personally think that there are some arguments for owning and using land, other than the purely economic. A vegetable patch for home consumption may not be strictly economic, but can be very satisfying work and very creative work, provided there is not too much of it. It can also give members of a group a common interest, providing fresh organic food which is probably a very significant factor in our health; and work in a garden can usually be fitted in fairly flexibly with other activities.

In our own situation, perhaps the whole farm could be looked at in a similar way. Certainly it can provide us with a lot of good quality food, with about £2,000 - £3,000 of farm sales as well, which can cover running costs with perhaps some profit. It is also a very central and unifying activity, and every member of the group has some part in the farm or garden work. It is also very satisfying to eat complex meals, or even something simple like bread, butter and cheese, and to know it's all home grown -- to know who milked the cow, who made the butter, who made the bread which tastes better than yesterday's. I find this mentally reassuring in a consumer society which is very de-personalised. (In some American supermarkets they now have video talking computers instead of sales assistants to deal with customers!) I think that provided the work load isn't really excessive and members' other needs are also met, ownership of land by a collective should not be looked at only in economic terms.

In our own case, we have a mixed economy, and we only had to pay £500 an acre for our land on borrowed money (the 1975 price) - due to non-equity sharing clauses in our and the previous group's constitutions. We have a pottery and craft shop, central heating business and various small outside jobs, and some S.S. to provide the cash income we need. Even so, it is always difficult to strike a balance between the agricultural work, the necessity to earn cash, and people's needs for relaxing, private time, wider interests and all the other functions necessary for your co-op to run smoothly and happily.

PETE WEST -- Glaneirw March 1983



ORGANIC GROWING -- IS IT WORTH IT?

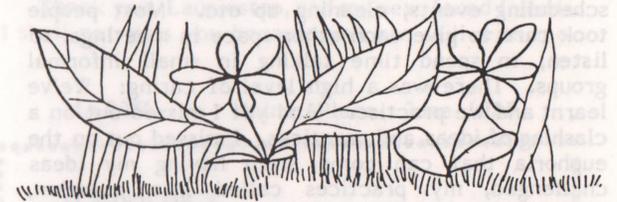
"Organic vegetable growing commercially is really so time-consuming that one has to be really dedicated to it"

PETE WEST PAINTED A REALLY BLEAK PICTURE in Communes Network 70, though I feel most of Pete's article holds true if growers limit themselves to selling organic vegetables to commercial wholesalers. However, what Pete omits is that there is also a market where this winter, Bindon sold carrots for as much as 12p a pound (most of the crop was sold at 10p). Unfortunately that market is generally situated in one place where people have the income and desire to buy organic veg -- principally London and other cities. Unless there is cheap regular transport, which we have, growers would be limited to root crops. But the demand is certainly there. We hoped to sell a local grower's potato crop in London this spring, in 30 cwt loads at between £3 and £4 a bag. Three loads should have made £4-500. We didn't do it because he wanted all the profits.

These are just two examples. Swedes at 8p a pound, parsnips at 8-12p a pound, or garlic at £1 a pound are prices we could sell at this winter. We do also sell to wholesalers occasionally, but only when we have a large surplus. With this in mind, organic vegetable growing isn't quite as hard work as Pete says. We manage to support seven adults and three young children, have a large degree of collective childcare, skill-share and take holidays. Recently, we have not been greatly involved in the local political scene I suppose, but bulk organic veg growing isn't utopian . . . yet. I do feel that it gives us one of the best opportunities to share childcare, to learn new skills and develop our relationships.

I must add that we have no mortgage or rent to pay, which would put a different light on the situation, although I doubt whether it would render the picture as bleak as Pete West's. We would have to broaden our outlook even further, something organic vegetable growers need to do anyway.

IAN -- Bindon
Agricultural
Collective June 1983



AS USUAL

I wake up feeling all fucked up as usual
Last to bed and first one up as usual
I wonder if you all feel the same
If you do what a fucking shame
Just don't give me all the blame, as usual

Check the rota find out who's on kids as usual
Wipe the sleep from my eyelids as usual
Jesus Christ what a noise
The kids are coming down with their toys
Look ecstatic and try to rejoice, as usual

Another day with ten things to do as usual
I try to approach them with another view as usual
But it's the same as the day before
Just another silly stupid chore
And there will be no feedback like before, as usual

The morning has flown in again as usual
I'm still wearing this stupid grin as usual
Must change the nappies full of piss and shit
Oh why did I let myself in for it
I'm nearly ready to throw a fit, as usual

Pick up the toys and clean the floor as usual
Someone's banging on the door as usual
The kettle boils the phone starts to ring
I can't think straight about anything
Fucked up again my brain starts to sing, as usual

I hope the afternoon will bring something new as usual
Put the kettle on for another brew as usual
I wonder what to do about grub
Fuck the wholefoods I'm off to the pub
But first I shall have to get a sub, as usual

ROD -- People in Common May 1978

WHY? WHY? WHY?

THOUGHTS FOLLOWING THE 1983 INTERNATIONAL COMMUNES FESTIVAL AT LAURIESTON HALL

IN some ways to return from Africa to such a conference was to leap a couple of centuries, but in other ways I felt a direct transfer from the intimacy of the extended village families to the warmth and familiarity of the extended family of communards. For me, this was the loveliest aspect of the week, feeling once more at home despite more than half the people being new to me. It was definitely a Festival: We talked and played and generally found where we agreed rather than sought to cajole or convince of the betterness of our respective ways of practising communal living. This same softness and amiability also left me feeling a bit uneasy. There was indeed a maturity about us. This came out in many things, from the way Laurieston had organised the week with a careful blend of personal support groups, rotas, and daily co-ordination meetings, to the way people responded to this by taking responsibility for scheduling events, cleaning up etc. Most people took care to give each other space in meetings, to listen, to spend time talking in small informal groups. There was a high level of caring: We've learnt and we practise. And yet I missed out on a clashing of ideas and practices. I missed out on the euphoria that can come from having my ideas challenged, my practices called into question, something that happened in the 1980 festival with Atlantis, and was present throughout in the Israel gathering in 1981. The concentration of the meetings and talks I took part in was towards hearing how we all approached similar problems of organisation, of sexual jealousy, of income distribution. They were good places to get some new ideas, but without a depth of talking that got close to asking "Why?", I felt a slight weariness, a sense of people in their thirties who had begun the radical commune of the late sixties/early seventies, and were now a bit of a bubble that had floated on above and away from the challenge of the wider society we came from. These are obviously my concerns. I am very aware of the change that I feel has come at Laurieston over the years, from being an energy centre for the lively Alternative in Britain, to being a home with more relevance to the locality than to any radical/political change. People who leave Laurieston now are moving in couples or singles to live and work locally. The elder children are beginning to leave home. We ARE an older group; we do have our own history and patterns that need to be recognised and built on, and also CHALLENGED. I still want to push at "Why?". Why do we choose to live together? What is the ideology, what are our aims and goals? And what are our utopias? And who is going to kick me up the arse?

I suppose what I am asking is that we continue to set up communes and to organise and aim them at making changes in society. That we look at what the hell is going on and seek ways to make changes in it, not just by being members of C.N.D., not just by waiting for society to challenge us, as maybe at Coral,* but to go out and disturb, excite, create in the very way we make our revolutionary lifestyles. Good old rhetoric maybe, but it still needs to be there for me in communes. So festivals like this

one are important for bringing together all the various attempts to be communal, to not only boost ourselves through togetherness, but to be critical and to examine how the hell we can continue to have an impact on making social changes. Communes should never be just a home.

PATRICK -- Laurieston Hall Feb 1984

*Coral is a commune in the South of France where deprived children can stay and enjoy freedom. The commune has been under pressure from the authorities and their founder imprisoned for three months.

* * * * *

ONE REPLY

I'd like to put down a few thoughts in response to Patrick's piece in the last Communes Network. I have bouts of aimlessness to do with living communally, cyclical periods of questioning why I'm doing what, and it's relevance to wider issues. My answer to why I choose to live communally is in the last analysis to do with basic day-to-day living standards! There is no way that I could have access to the same facilities; tools, van, space, land, time . . . outside of a group. Things like my diet, the use of resources, shared childcare, emotional support, these are things that I value about living here. But still I find myself asking "Why?"

I used to wonder why people used to leave and go to live in situations that were materially much worse than living here. I feel now, that it has something to do with this expectation that a commune should be more than just a home. When a commune fails to meet this expectation -- or fails to even be a home let alone more than one -- then people leave looking maybe for somewhere where they can just be at home.

In some ways it is the word "home" that jars when applied to communes -- too much association of "home" with semi-detached nuclear families -- and in that way communes are always "more than just a home".

People in Common is my "home", and I value it most for being just that. When my "home" is functioning well, I have amazing amounts of energy for "changing the world", for going out of myself, stretching my imagination and abilities. On the other hand, if I'm struggling to make things work at home, then I just want to crawl back inside myself to find safe spaces to be, and no amount of social consciousness-raising will get me out until I'm feeling fairly happy about my home-life again.

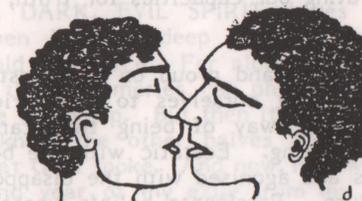
So if anything, part of any "political" failure of communes is that they have failed to be just homes for people.

Patrick sounded despondent that Laurieston (all communes?) were becoming safe/mature/settled. In some ways I take great hope from just that. Now that we have experience at what we're trying to do, now that we're not making so many mistakes, socially and practically (although it's probably a truism that different people have to make the same mistakes in order to learn from them), maybe now we will have the resources as individual communes and together, to go out from our homes and use our different perspectives on the world to change it.

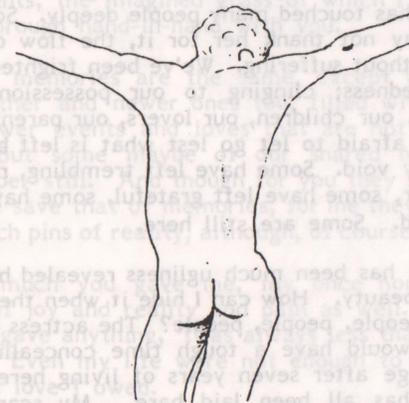
CHRIS -- People in Common March 1984

gay men's week at Laurieston

SO MANY OF US said it in our different ways, but the meaning and understanding were the same. "All of my life I've been searching for my home . . . and I found it here"; "I felt I was where I belonged"; "There was a wonderful feeling of togetherness"; "I didn't know until this week that it was possible to get together so many alternative gay men".



Laurieston Hall Gay Men's Week was one of the deepest and most meaningful experiences in my life. Mere words cannot express my feelings and thoughts adequately or bring to life the strong emotions I had. I experienced sensations in my body and psyche which I had no idea could exist. I had to constantly remind myself that this was reality. I really was at Laurieston Hall in the midst of the beautiful Scottish countryside, doing all sorts of wonderful things with a group of lovely and loving men. At times I told myself that this was such an artificial environment that I would come down to earth with a bang. Yet I knew that the experiences I had were more meaningful for me than any I normally felt. The intensity of experience could no doubt not be sustained, but I had found that some of the things lacking in my life, that I needed or wanted, were obtainable.



We joined hands, we linked arms, we threw arms round each other, we kissed, we walked, ate, danced, played, sang, talked and slept together. Everyone gave so freely. There was a togetherness that I had never before experienced, and it was not confined to the twenty men on the Gay Men's Week. I sensed very strongly that we were together

with the residents at Laurieston, and indeed some of them told us this was so, both in words and actions. "WOW", says a sign over the front door, and "WOW" it was so much of the time.

I learnt so much there in so many ways with so many people. In this environment I was enabled to feel a oneness with nature which has long eluded me -- even though I live in a beautiful rural area. I felt -- and I sensed that others did too -- a wholeness of body, mind and spirit, and could easily put into context the need for a holistic approach to health, and indeed life.

This was just the start of getting in touch with my/our needs and gifts. I came away with such hope. There were sad times, even times of despair, but I always knew, at least deep down, that there was hope beyond the despair. I cried and I let out the anger I had bottled up inside me over the years, not directed at people, but expressed constructively and safely. It was an environment where I felt both secure and vulnerable. I laid myself open and the experiences were overwhelming, yet paradoxically, containable.

Thank you, Laurieston, and my new-found friends. I shall not miss you because you are still with me.

MARTIN -- Holme Place June 1985

SCHOOLING?

Long ago we had our freedom
Long ago we had our land;
Everyone was pure and equal
Youngest holding elder's hand.

Now the ground is like a cake with
No earth left without a price:
Carved with brutal barb and wire
Now you have to buy a slice.

Long ago we taught our children
How to care for life and land;
In the fields they'd help us labour
Learned by interest not command.

Now they go and sit on chairs, from
Nine to four obey the bell:
Is it really so important
For them to tolerate hell?

Long ago we showed our children
Right and wrong and what it meant;
Now we send them off to school and
Trust it to the government.

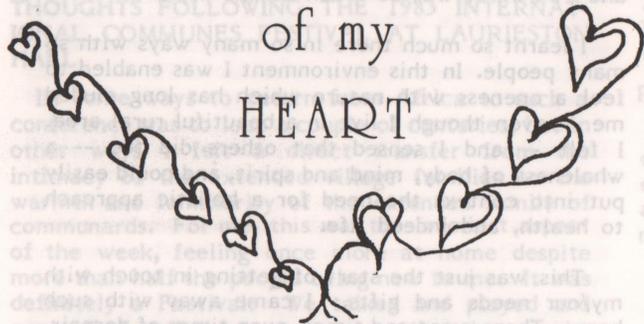
If you believe in what you do why
Send your children off to school?
To get pumped with their potent policies
And there to learn a different rule.

Long ago we had our freedom
Long ago we had our land;
Grab the freedom while you've got it
Don't give in to conditioned command.

PAUL -- Wheatstone August 1984

LITTLE BITS

of my HEART



WAVES OF NOSTALGIA : I sit by the window, pen in hand, staring out at the hazy Wheatstone days gone past. Memories flitting and swirling through my mind. Oh, I would so much like to capture those days on this paper, share some of it with you -- but how? I haven't the words -- not at my command anyway.

Still the feeling, deep deep inside me, I felt over seven years ago when I first came to this place. An almost painful joy that could cloud my eyes with tears. I found so much. More than the people, more than the house, more than the land, more than the animals: I found something inside me, something that was waiting, as a dormant seed, to burst and grow. The yearning within me that knew not its direction finally found some satisfaction, some comfort.

Misty memories: suntouched bodies moving naked and free in the garden; little children creeping stealthily through the raspberry canes, emerging with grinning sticky pink faces; blazing bonfires and a ring of warm smiles; Dave's skilful fingers on the guitar, and my throat bursting with song; elderberry wine in tin mugs, another poor victim reeling and puking, discovering its potency; long lines of backs trenching potatoes, joking and hopeful; long lines of backs forking them out, moaning and marvelling at the variety of wildlife nestling in the holey vegetables; noisy crowds packed in the back of the bone-shaker off to glean spuds in the farmer's fields; sophisticated potato wars when the gleaning became too boring; shrieking and swimming together in the cold clear river; twelve people out to corner one ram; admiring the golden bundles of wheat we scythed and stooked; sweating and sinking wellie-deep into steaming horse-shit; filigree ferns of frost on the windows; the warm smell of cow, hands pleasurable full of gushing soft udder; piles of socks with never a pair to be found; the dash for the hot seat on the stove; sardined bodies huddled round the Rayburn; laughter, wit flashing quicker than lightening across the table; glum faces desolate with disillusion; souls tortured with guilt, confusion and caring; lustful love; anguished explosions of hurt and jealousy; warm hugs; cuddles in the kitchen; intense talks late into the night; long long meetings and the fears of confrontation; the laughs, the farts and the fun.

And then there was Mac. Sometimes putting words to my thoughts so clearly that it seemed as if I was speaking -- soul-mates -- validation for each other's hopes and fears. Growing into each

other, planning and intertwining so closely that, without each other, it became difficult to stand. Utopian community here we come! Mac and I would make it. It all seemed so possible, so real, so worthy of the fight. The old paradox of fighting for peace, fighting for perfection, fighting for love. Riddled with resentments for people who soiled our path to idealistic living. Not knowing how to handle the resentment, how to nurture our beliefs and create harmony together.

Love distorted by conditions. Where is unconditional love anyway? Ah, so easy to gloss over my feelings with philosophy, with oughts and ideals. How often did we say we ought to be the free people, ought not to be possessive, prejudiced, elitist, selfish? We felt special; to be here was our own special choice and frequently not the free laughing life we hoped for. How often did we soar to dizzy heights on our illusionary wings only to find reality shattering our magic and to feel again our crushed and conditioned selves. Our hurts castrating our capacities for truth, love and fulfilment.

We rode high and proud on the crests of our idealism, allowing ourselves to be carried along with the whole way of being that came from sharing and caring. Ecstatic with the beauty of our success and agonised with the disappointment of our failure. Passionate beliefs where politics and emotion could no longer be divided. Arguments where we failed to be rational and logical yet again, because it all mattered too much. Our children HAD to be freed from the ghastly debilitating schooling institutions; our home and the earth that gave us food HAD to be freed from being "Property"; our door HAD to be opened; our relationships HAD to be opened; we HAD to free ourselves from the moneyed society; we HAD to be pure; to be organic; to be close; to be honest; to be communal; to be sharing; to give, give, give . . .

And you gave so much, Mac, and you expected so much. You needed replenishment for what you gave out, you needed to quench the thirst you created by your sweating. We expected too much.

Wheatstone was your child, Mac, your life-blood, and she has touched many people deeply. Some of them may not thank her for it, the flow doesn't come without suffering. We've been frightened by our nakedness; clinging to our possessions, our property, our children, our lovers, our parents, our facades; afraid to let go lest what is left be only an empty void. Some have left trembling, running for cover, some have left grateful, some have left exhausted. Some are still here.

There has been much ugliness revealed here as well as beauty. How can I hide it when there are always people, people, people? The actress of the century would have a tough time concealing her true image after seven years of living here! So, here it has all been laid bare. My scars, my hurts, my fears, my anger -- and my love.

Scattered heart. Little bits, and bigger bits, leaving with those that pass through. Ragged edges left patterned with pleasure and pain. Faces and feelings -- some now unnamed. Their imprint still felt.

And so it goes on. Wheatstone. You have taken so much from me, but you furnished me with the gift to give.

QUOTE

"What she had begun to learn was the weight of liberty. Freedom is a heavy load, a great and strange burden for the spirit to undertake. It is not a gift given but a choice made, and the choice may be a hard one. The road goes upward towards the light; but the laden traveller may never reach the end of it."

Ursula le Guin -- THE TOMBS OF ATUAN

With love,

GINA -- Wheatstone June 1984

Reply from Barcelona

SOME DARK, EVIL SPIRIT drives me on to reply when I know, deep within myself that I should hold my peace. For alone, without a love to hold, these memories can only bring me pain, and make me weep. But then it did anyway. For I alone knew the other halves of the half-said things that Gina spoke. And now, half-way through the second year of my exile from my home, the pain bites as deep as it did the cold wet winter morn I hitched away from Wheatstone, and nearly turned round and hitched back at Ludlow, and didn't because I knew I mustn't.

The window I look through is different. A still, darkening evening, breath warm, with palm trees and traffic in place of the sward and cows and medieval hedgerows that I knew and grew to love so much. No workshop in which to try my little skills; no one to bring me brown mugs of tea and sit and talk and say "I love you", no kids to wander in, mayhap to talk, or help, or ask for help to mend a bike. Just palm trees and traffic I cannot love, and no one. No one? No -- that cannot be true. There are three million people living within thirty miles of where I sit. But they are not you, whom I love and miss so much. And so they serve no purpose except to crowd the pavements, the imagined grass of which I want to walk through hand-in-hand with you.

The memories are the same, except that you have other and newer ones too, filled with other and newer events and loves that are not part of me. But some maybe of our shared ones you remember still. And though for you they serve no purpose save that of memories, for me they remain the lynch pins of reality, although, of course, unreal.

So much you gave me, my once home. So much of joy and reality and pain as well. And if ever I gave anything, 'twas always less than that I owed. Even my life were not enough to pay the debt in love I owed.

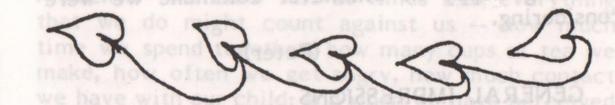
Reading the things that she wrote, I realise that Gina, as always, expresses in words the things I have felt, so much better, and with so much more force than I could manage. I wonder which of us feels the words the more? Which is more potent, the grass under your feet, or the grass in your memory? Which more real, the lover whose

body you entwine, or the memory of that love which is now allowed only as a haunting dream? I suppose that old men, replaced by the strength and beauty and virility of new life, will forever be relegated to the chimney corner, there to weep away their remaining useless time; bemused by the suddenness with which they ceased to be people and became an irksome burden. But we have no answers since we are all proponents and victims both of the same shabby trick.

So, for Wheatstone, and for me too, no doubt, it goes on. For me too, Wheatstone, you both took and gave so much. Your only, but irredeemable, crime to me was that you took my heart, chewed it, and spat it out. And even though the bloody pieces lie scattered on your tear-stained floor, there was never time enough to stoop and try to gather them together. I tried to do it alone, but could not, for I could not find the pieces. I cried and begged for help in my craving to be whole again. But no one had time, save to tell me it was my problem. And so now, eighteen months on, I continue to try to make a new one from fresh beginnings. And each time it falls apart for lack of the essential ingredients: Home and Love.

FREEDOM IS INDEED A HEAVY LOAD, BUT PERHAPS JUST BEARABLE IF YOU HAVE A HAND TO HOLD.

MAC -- ex-Wheatstone July 1984



WEBS OF WORDS

Talking talking
talking
playing with theories
changing nothing
we weave webs of words
which only trap
ourselves.
Trapped
in a web spun from
yesterday's habits
our heads cannot change
as fast as
our theories.
If we could only
think
before reacting,
could only keep our theories
always before us,
then the web would
disintergrate
slowly.

But until then
we are
hypocrites
and our theories
only cliches
which we are powerless to convert
into reality.

SEARCHING

THIS IS A RECORD of some experiences and impressions gained in nine months of visiting communes in England, Wales and Scotland, and some thoughts arising from them. From September 1981 to May 1982 we spent most of our time travelling and visiting communes in an attempt to find ourselves a new home. We were already living in a community, but it was not what we wanted. What we did want we were not exactly sure, but we knew we wanted to live closely with other people but to remain to some extent a couple; to live with other small children as companions for our son (eighteen months old when we hit the road), and to share childcare; to live in the country and to be able to work in a garden and maybe with animals; to live and work with others as equals in a non-hierarchical, non-sexist set-up; to be able to eat wholefoods; and to have time and support to do some of the things that matter most to us, such as self-help therapy, counselling and peace politics. We also knew from unhappy experience that it was most important that we should find the right people, but it was impossible to specify in advance what sort of people these would be. With these ideas in mind we started the commune-visiting procedure: finding communes that wanted more people, writing letters, arranging visits and sometimes further visits, and all the time sharing impressions and trying to assess our chances of being happy in whichever commune we were considering.

(Peter)

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

One of our strongest impressions was the extent to which communes differed in several important respects -- source of income, lifestyle, values (deduced from what appeared to us to receive most time and attention, rather than from what communes said about themselves), attitudes to children, ways of dealing with crisis, and degree of contact with, or isolation from, the world outside. There are always different degrees and interpretations of communality: the aspects of one's life that one shares, and the extent to which one shares them, vary greatly between communes. After nine months on the road, I do not have a sense of a unified communes movement, but rather of a number of groups of people who have few aims or values in common beyond the desire to live "communally", although this common desire is a bond strong enough to keep the different groups in contact with each other. I feel that I have more in common with many people who live in nuclear families, or on their own, than with many of the communards I have met. Communal living is one of several interests or values or aims which can connect me with other people, and it is not the strongest; the highest values for me are concerned with the way people treat each other, and this is what the strongest bonds are made of.

(Peter)

VALUES

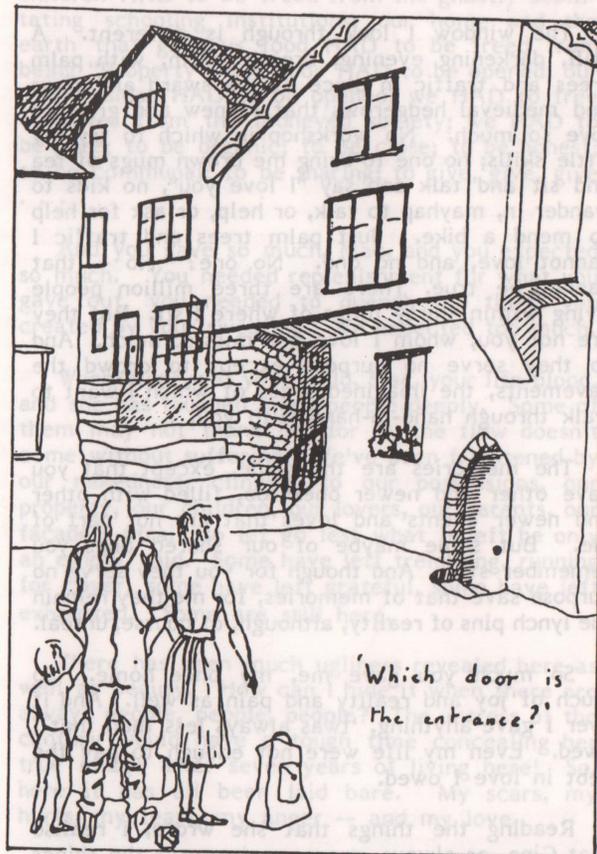
Each place had its own set of values and distinct priorities. No two places were the same, though in expressing their values they would all describe themselves on paper with the same words and

phrases. Being vegetarian wholefood eaters in one place would mean an attempt at being self-sufficient, at times living mainly on potatoes and cheese; at another there would be a strong macrobiotic influence and a diet consisting largely of rice. Sometimes these two extremes existed side by side with some members never eating potatoes and dairy products, and others hardly ever having a meal without them.

Non-sexist attitudes in some places meant that the traditional male roles, especially work outside and money-earning, were highly valued by men and women alike. No-one bothered much with the side of life that is traditionally taken care of by women: cleaning, cooking, childcare, making a comfortable home for the residents. I came to see this as directly opposed to my idea of feminism which values the work that has always been done by women. I was struck by the image of a man, still in his filthy boiler suit and wellingtons, hurriedly producing supper in a grubby, badly designed and equipped kitchen, with bored children getting under his feet and other men lounging about smoking cigarettes. Is that what we have come home to after a hard day in the fields? Not in my ideal commune. I preferred the place where nearly everyone seemed keen on cooking, cleaning and childcare, even though it sometimes seemed that there wasn't much time and energy left for doing the work that made the money.

(Stephanie)

WELCOMES



We learnt that communes expect people to be able to look after themselves or ask for what they need, and find out what is expected or required of them. This starts on arrival; even finding the entrance can be an initiative test, then finding someone

who knows that you had arranged a visit. If you are desperate for a cup of tea, or the loo, or to know where you are going to sleep, we found that it was best to say so. Most communards respond well to direct requests, but some are better than others at anticipating the needs of the traveller. You must also be prepared to cope on your own if everyone disappears. In some places, people retire to their rooms early in the evening and/or emerge late in the mornings. If your pattern is not the same, you may spend what seems like hours alone reading notices, making yourself tea and exploring grounds.

(Stephanie)

CHILDCARE

As the parents of a small child, we were particularly interested in systems of childcare and attitudes to children in the communes we visited. The problem of childcare in a nuclear family is that it is a relentless 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week responsibility, which can isolate the childcarer from adult company and stimulation. If the burden can be shared, ideally it would cease to be a burden at all. Being with children can be fun for the adult, and consequently fun for the child, if you feel fresh. The trouble with organised childcare in some communes seems to be that it treats looking after children as a chore. People don't expect to enjoy it. There is little scope for spontaneity and imagination.

Living communally should in itself reduce the degree of isolation, but it may make the experience of isolation more intolerable. I have felt the bitterest feeling of isolation and powerlessness when I spent time with my crawling baby in one of the safe rooms in the house, while everyone else seemed to be talking a few feet away in the kitchen where my infant couldn't crawl, and screamed in frustration.

Also, adults are much more interested in each other than they are in children. So children in communes can easily get less, rather than more, adult attention than children in nuclear families. Older children seem to thrive on this lack of attention, but small children can suffer if people are not reminded of their special needs. Some courageous parents worked hard at increasing awareness. Others, usually those with older children, seemed to have abandoned them almost entirely to their peer group.

Or a parent might feel she has to protect and fend for her child because no-one else gives him a thought. New habits have to be learned by all adult members of a household with a small child: such as opening doors gently to avoid knocking over a toddler on the other side, putting away dangerous things or precious fragile ones. If the other adults don't, or won't, learn to be more aware, then someone has to watch the child constantly to protect him and everyone's property. If it is always a parent who plays this role, feelings of anxiety, loneliness and bitterness may poison her relationship with the other adults.

Communes with children differed greatly in their attitude to them. One place we visited seemed quite strict, with rules about times for

eating and going to bed and playing (in contrast to the principle of self-regulation that I expected communes to follow), and a strong sense of adult authority; adults sometimes showed warm affection towards the children, but rarely if ever a sense of delight in them. Another place was much more libertarian, though never to the point of neglect; the children (apart from the babies) shared a life that was largely separate from the adults, consisting of school, television and games, and probably closer to the world outside than that of their parents. In a third commune, great importance was placed on providing high quality, communal childcare. Every adult took a turn at being responsible for one or two small children, playing with them, changing them, doing their laundry. Each shift on childcare was less than a day and was often shared with another adult. Everyone involved, adults and children, showed obvious affection for each other, and the adults seemed to enjoy and be stimulated by the children here more than anywhere else.

(Peter & Stephanie)

BEING ON TRIAL

One of the hardest things about our commune visiting has been the feeling of being on trial. However practised we became at adapting, settling in, finding our way around and making the best of it wherever we are, we cannot escape the consciousness that we are being judged as prospective residents. We have felt at times that everything that we do might count against us -- how much time we spend together, how many cups of tea we make, how often we get angry, how much contact we have with our child; and when we have perceived or imagined someone giving us a black mark, wanted to explain or justify whatever we have done. So that when we visited another commune for a holiday and not as prospective residents, it was a great relief to be able to enjoy ourselves and do much as we wished, without having to worry about how we were making out.

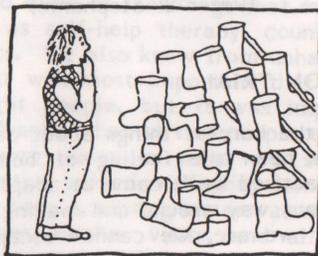
So we are continually being made aware of our insecure position, and worried that we might be putting people off by our faults (or what may be seen as faults). Perhaps this is an empty worry; I can only be myself, now or in months to come; if they don't like me they won't want to live with me; so it's best if they get to know me as I am, now. But one may accept certain characteristics (such as a fiery temper) in someone that one likes or respects, or welcomes for other qualities, but be put off getting to know that person and those other qualities, by such characteristics. Also, the visitor doesn't know how high a degree of acceptability, how close an adherence to their standards of personal behaviour and attitudes, residents will demand of them. Since the residents are looking at people who might be living and working with them for years, it is not surprising if most of them want to be careful to get the right people, and to be concerned about quite personal and intimate aspects of those who want to join them.

So the feeling of being on trial is very likely unavoidable; but it is a great strain, and I suspect an intolerable one for someone who is uncertain of or finds it difficult to accept her/his identity. For such a person, lacking a sense of her/his own selfhood and worth, the experience of being judged

in one's inner personality by people who seem to have the power to decide one's future, and to be rejected, might be devastating.

Do communes need to be as fussy as they seem to be? I have been on both sides of the selection process, rejecting prospective residents because I felt I would not be able to get on with them, and being rejected by residents who felt they would not be able to get on with me; and I can't give an answer. Does the determination to get the right personal mix (and to get other aspects of communal life right as well -- most communes work very hard at getting things right) lead to unreasonably high expectations among communards? I know a number who had felt they had to get away, temporarily or permanently, because communal life was costing them too much. Certainly the communes movement is very small in numbers, however strong if might be in faith.

(Peter)



Fortunately, our travels came to an end before our car expired, when by chance we found a new community as desperate for members as we were for somewhere to settle. The couple already there liked us and we liked them. Some of the things we had been looking for were absent: small companions for our son, a policy of income sharing, long term tenure on the property; but it is a beautiful place and it was so nice to feel wanted.



I would never advise anyone else to do what we did. Communes on the whole are places for people who feel strong. Anything which saps your strength, such as anxiety about being homeless and without income, makes it less likely that you'll be acceptable as potential communards. I hope this does not sound very bitter. We still believe in communal living, and hope one day to get everything right.

(Stephanie)

STEPHANIE FUTCHER
PETER DARLING June 1985

(Taken originally from the third edition of the RURAL RESETTLEMENT HANDBOOK)

MINERS & CO-OPS

HAVING STRIKING MINERS to stay in the co-op where I live, and another one visit often, has been an education for both of us. They see an alternative way of living, and I am jolted out of my trendy middle-class, comfortable life, and faced with real people. Sometimes it's been difficult because although our political aims may be the same, our lifestyles are completely different. Even the food we eat is different -- for all the miners it was their first vegetarian meal.

Neither of the co-ops I know (both in cities), live a very routine life: meals get cooked but not at a particular time. There are always a lot of people around, and sometimes the miners looked pretty bewildered at the numbers. For my part, I found living with them could be a problem from a woman's point of view. They obviously found it easier to talk to other men about the strike and their work -- yet another blow to my tenuous credibility. They come from a position where male strength, labour and comradeship are idealised. Most of them live in nuclear families where patriarchy still rules. A woman friend of mine felt that she had to cook meals for them on time, or to leave something in the oven. Would they do the washing-up, she wondered? (They did offer!)

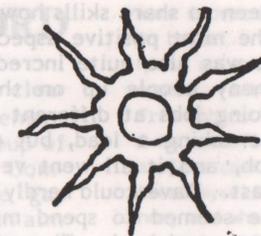
Before the miners came to stay, I found it difficult to support their strike wholeheartedly. I felt they stood for the repression of women. Yet hearing two miners talk about their comradeship, I simply felt that it was good that such a strong bond existed between them. They said when their lives depended on each other, it had to be like that. And hearing a description of what it's like working a mile-and-a-half underground -- at Tilmaston in Kent -- I did feel awed. It was also obvious that the role of women in the strike -- even if it is a support role -- is being recognised. The women are being allowed to organise independently in some, though not all, areas. One wife had to ask a NUM official for fifteen pounds to arrange a children's party. There also seemed to be a lot of interaction between men and women on a caring level -- one miner told me that he had been asked by his mate's wife to take his mate away to picket a power station because they were getting on each other's nerves.

I hope that some of the miners have stayed with us long enough to appreciate that life in a co-op does have some coherent ideas behind it, and is not the disorganised chaos it sometimes seems. It's good that they see the men who live here taking an equal part in childcare and cooking. I hope that they have learned as much as I have, because I have decided to support them fully (in public at least!) despite my feminist reservations. They stand against a government which is treating people like shit for the sake of profitability, and it's the most important political struggle today.

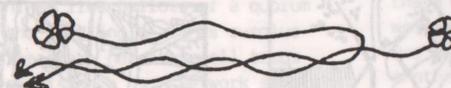
CATHERINE -- Double Helix Nov 1984



Rural Communes Revisited



I HAD JUST FINISHED an article about the "Real Significance of Urban Communes". It was very right-on and did an implicit demolition job on most other kinds of collective living groups. It was mostly grade one bullshit, so I eventually tore it up, and this article is about what I think I was doing first time round.



I have chosen to live in an urban collective where we share our money and childcare. We give and receive a lot of attention and support within the group but do not work together, and therefore do not live together as intensely as many other groups. There seems to be an implicit (sometimes explicit) assumption by most of us -- including me -- that this way of life is in some way more "relevant" and more "in touch with reality" than any other way of living collectively that we have either heard about or experienced.

I don't like this assumption at all. I think that it is a way of deceiving ourselves (myself?). For myself, I have been using it to squash my doubts about what I am doing here and why. I have been remembering things my dad says along the lines of "please don't get so London-minded that you can't see the interesting and positive things happening in other places". It is so easy to do. I have heard myself saying "living in the country with goats and crops and babies is all very well, but . . ." more times than I care to think about. All very well but why for Christ's sake? I like goats as it happens, and babies. I was brought up in the country nearly 200 miles north of Watford, but I have taken on the metropolitan mentality so thoroughly over the last five years that someone recently guessed my origins as London-Jewish.

I am beginning to wonder how much of the stuff about being in touch with political action, the local community, the straight working world etc., etc. is really the reason I stay in London. Are these just very right-on sounding (and therefore unchallenged) excuses to put other groups down and convince myself that I am doing something really significant? Maybe I live here for the easy life. We run six cars, have central heating and enormous bills, expensive holidays, (virtually) unlimited supplies of whisky and tobacco, and all the other trappings of the successful conventional lifestyles we reckon to despise. Maybe I can live here because I have access to such an enormous range of activities, comrades, lovers outside Double Helix, that I can opt-out and get support/approval elsewhere if things ain't going too well within the group. Maybe I live here so I can massage my political conscience by talking a lot, going on

head-count demos a lot, and living with people who are actively involved in all those campaigns which I passively support but don't actually know much about. Maybe these are some of the reasons I live here. Maybe they aren't the only ones.

Usually we talk in terms of alternatives to nuclear families and dependence on couples; freedom from landlord/tenant relations and our ability to generate money in a capitalist economic structure; and belief in collectives being stronger/wiser than individuals. I'm not knocking any of those things: they are reasons why I live here too, but I'm still worried about the urge to be scathing about goats and babies and leylines.

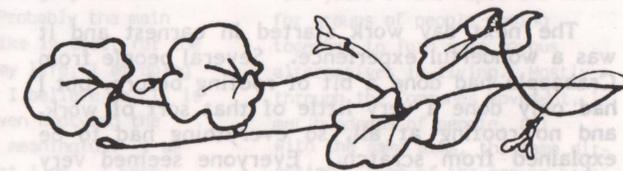
Perhaps what it comes down to is the ability to own a choice without feeling the need to condemn the options which have been rejected. I realise now that the reasons I choose to live here sometimes just outweigh the reasons I might have to leave. I think that is why I had been expending so much energy putting down other people's choices to live differently. I am attracted by lots of things about other places but I was finding it difficult to acknowledge as it seemed like a betrayal of my commitment here.



I am now feeling much more secure in my own choice to stay here. Doubt! Helix is not the be-all and end-all (whatever you might have heard), but it is a very stimulating and supportive place to live (and very comfortable), and I love lots of people here and they love me. So I will stay, and be clear that when I change to the extent that I am not happy here any more, and don't feel we are achieving anything, I will go. And when I go I will try and stay clear that it is because I want to and not because the place or the people are "bad" or "ideologically unsound". I want myself and everyone else to stop trying to rubbish things we don't choose for ourselves at the moment.

I think I am at my most scathing about things I am a bit attracted to but don't feel I can let myself have or want. I have been dragging myself into holes of cynicism about all sorts of things that I might want in future. I don't choose to change my lifestyle at the moment, but when I do I will have to sort out all that defensive mumbo-jumbo that I have built up.

SARAH -- Double Helix Oct 1984



RAPID TRANSFORMATIONS

I MOVED TO CRABAPPLE last June, and I was only just finding my feet when life changed from being merely hectic to being totally chaotic for two weeks as Rapid Transformations mended the roof on our stable block. It was two weeks of hard work, of skill-sharing, of rain nearly every day with only sporadic sunshine, of music, good food, people everywhere tripping over kids and dogs, and memorable saunas in the evenings. The story started well before I'd even thought of Crabapple, so in a way I'm not the best person to write this, but here goes

The stable block is our main outbuilding, approximately thirty yards long by six yards wide, two storeys with a single-storey workshop attached. It encloses a spacious yard with the house. At present, the ground floor is used as workshop, garage, bikeshed, milking parlour and cowshed. The first floor has tremendous potential for more living space, with eight interesting rooms. The roof however has been going for a number of years. Most of the slates were like flakey cardboard and fell to bits when we took them off. The battens were sagging and there were numerous leaks. Nobody dared guess what shape the actual roof-timbers were in. Bodge repairs were becoming out of the question and the whole building was on the way out. The cost of having the block re-roofed professionally would have been completely prohibitive and there was not the experience or the time and energy to do it ourselves. So there it sat: we were resigned to watching a valuable building disintegrate.

Then came the "manna from heaven". Keith from Tweed Street was visiting Crabapple whilst passing by, and got talking to Dave about the roof. It was casually mentioned that Rapid Transformations might be interested in the job. Dave was interested but sceptical. In case you haven't heard of Rapid Transformations before, they're an elite anarchistic group (their own description!) who live in communities or are otherwise engaged in alternative activities, who choose to take a "holiday" together each year, to do a roofing job for a community in need. In exchange, the community offers food and accomodation (in our case a field) and expenses if they can afford it.

Dave reckons he wasn't sure anyone was going to come until the first vehicle appeared. Meanwhile we'd been out ordering materials, collecting slates, sorting out scaffolding, and signing cheques like mad with fingers crossed. The scaffolding was half up when the first roofers arrived. They let us finish that job whilst they started on more important tasks, like setting up the sauna tent and digging the plunge pool! At last it seemed like it was going to happen.

The next day work started in earnest and it was a wonderful experience. Several people from Crabapple had done a bit of roofing before, but I had only done a very little of that sort of work, and no roofing at all, so everything had to be explained from scratch. Everyone seemed very

keen to share skills however, which I see as one of the most positive aspects of this sort of working. It was also quite incredible to be working with so many people up on the same roof at once, all doing jobs at different stages. No-one seemed to be taking a lead, but everyone seemed to find a job, and it all went very smoothly and incredibly fast. Dave could hardly keep up with the materials, he seemed to spend most of the time driving to town and back. The main roof was easily finished in the two weeks, including new chimney, new gutters etc. We also made a start on the roof of the adjoining workshop, which wasn't so bad but still needed doing. We really appreciated what Rapid Transformations had done for us when we had to finish the workshop on our own. It seemed so slow and laborious.



Now seven months later, two of the upstairs rooms are in use temporarily as bedrooms. We still haven't the time or money to do them up properly, but one year we will have. We are meanwhile making plans for roofing jobs on the main house for this Summer, and next year, and on and on We are very indebted to Rapid Transformations for the skills and confidence they have given us.

I'd like to take this chance to thank everyone who put in so much hard work, and wish Rapid Transformations good luck for the future.

ALISON -- Crabapple April 1986

CHILDREN'S VIEWS

Finn, aged four, goes ahead of me out of the house on to the pavement, and chats to the road-sweeper.

"Are you sweeping the road? I'm going down town. Don't forget to sweep down town."

Finn to Ian and Andy of Lifespan.
"If you have another jelly, phone us up and let us know. Me and Chris will come."

Jim, aged three-and-a-half, next to a car's headlamps beaming through the pouring rain.
"There's rain coming out of that car's eyes."

A four-year-old friend of ours, Shaun.
"Why don't you clean your van?"

TESS -- People in Common March 1985

FOR THE RECORD

When in early 1975 it was clear that the old Communes Movement had ceased to function, a group of around thirty people set up Communes Network to fill the gap that had been left. The main aim was to produce an informal newsletter, a kind of open letter between friends, to help people keep in touch and co-operate. The organisation was deliberately low key, anarchic and friendly, aiming to avoid the constitutional and procedural wrangles that had beset the Communes Movement.

Things like ballots or a quorum or the handling of funds surplus to immediate needs are all traps which distance us. Network should be as simple as possible, while keeping people in touch. It's got to work on trust, and if we begin to devise systems of control, however 'democratic', we're just saying "I don't trust you".

Chris Pyke CN 10.

Many of those involved had had a taste of communal living which left them with mixed feelings:

It was a tiring, mad, but useful time -- We went through every ideal on how to live together that we could think of -- anarchic, encounterish, political -- ending up with a strict rota which meant that we hardly saw each other -- It looked rather good from the outside but was completely hollow.

Sue Bower CN 8.

- or downright disillusioned:

I think it would be useful to explore the stuff of which the dream of communal living is made, as well as the means of realising it. I myself have had some very bad experiences of communal living - it taught me a great deal about other people and even more about myself, but I couldn't imagine or recommend it as any more than a temporary, instructive experience, certainly not as a long-term way of life for either myself or for 'society' (whoever they are).

Bev Day CN 8.

There was, however, a desire to learn from past mistakes:

I would not trust any feeling of liking for another person to be of the slightest durability if I had not lived with them. I felt there was an over-concern in our group for early warm relations which

were independent of real conflicts in belief. That is building a house on sand, and the cracks soon appear. I think my need for warm friendships will produce them when I am satisfied there are no serious conflicts of interest. I trust myself to know where I am now, and what I want. Not on a general, philosophical level, but on everyday practical points: How to ensure adequate provision of food, money and shelter; the nature of relationships outside established pairs; methods of resolving conflicts and making decisions; responsibilities of the individual to the group. If there is not substantial agreement on these points, then there is no way we can be happy living together. One man's (sic) freedom would be another's tyranny.

Communes are not intrinsically good, they merely offer the chance of making real choices about how life should be. I make the best shot I can at ensuring a satisfactory life. If you do the same, then we can see clearly if living together is to our mutual best interest.

Roy Cutler CN 9.

- and encouragement from at least one newly founded commune:

I don't expect that Crabapple qualifies as a 'permanent' group yet; most of us have only known each other for two years, and we have only been living together on the farm for nine months.

Despite that, I do feel able to compare it with my previously relatively conventional lifestyle. In the year before joining Crabapple, I was working as a part-time teacher at various local technical colleges. I lived as part of a pair bond with a child in a very pleasant houseboat (all mod cons) at an idyllic mooring on the South Stratford Canal. Our material standard of living was, by my standards, quite comfortable.

Since joining Crabapple, my material standard of living has, in most respects, fallen (food's better though...), and I probably do more work. I have only £2 per week pocket money to spend as I wish, and I am not the least bit interested in changing back at this moment. Probably the main thing that I like is that, for the first time in my life, I am doing something that I believe in. It is meaningful. Even emptying the shit bucket is meaningful. I am involved in what I do. I know

that it is furthering aims and ideals that I support. Ideals are being tested against the harshness of reality, and frequently being turned into reality: financial equality, the most mutually agreeable distribution of work, non sex typing of work, co-operation with others, non-specialisation and variation in work, communal child care, and equal involvement in decision-making procedures.

And then the whole thing is so stimulating: so many people (thinly disguised as visitors), ideas, books -- all interesting. I think more and learn more. By comparison, my stay at university was intellectually dead. Even the problems (oh yes, they exist too) are fascinating. How can they be resolved? What type of solution seems best? Does the problem show up an inaccurate construct of reality? Do I need to change my ideas? What to?

I believe communal lifestyles are much richer in possibilities than more conventional lifestyles. Possibilities for unpleasant things, as well as good and socially constructive things. Our mutual background of a society based on values of unfairness, competition, violence, male chauvinism and so on, makes it very difficult for us to make the changes necessary to ourselves in order to fit appropriately into a living situation with the values we want. I believe it is a struggle well worth fighting, and that we can learn from our experience.

John Seymour CN 10

Nevertheless, many early contributors were people who, for the time being at least, had turned away from the all out pursuit of community. As individuals and as couples, they were taking straight jobs to earn money, buying or renting houses, and moving to the country as and when they could. Life carried on, children were born, and it seemed better to make compromises and act than to nurse idle dreams. This led to criticism - one person's compromise is another's sell out:

I feel it is time to express some opinions about the people involved with this movement. For five years I have hoped and tried for groups of people coming together to form some joyous alternatives in living. Mostly through the Communes Movement, I met hundreds of people, all with the same aims, the same direction. Some of the groups have

come together, split again or gone on to something else. I'm glad at least that some have tried.

I used to look forward to receiving and creating Communes magazines. It was always good to make new contacts, meet new people and ideas. Then I realised that the people who were really getting a revolutionary activity together had nothing to do with the Commune Movement, in fact scorned it as a 'mamby pamby' hobby for the controlling few. The people who have used (and still do) Communes Movement and Communes Network literature to voice their armchair theories, merely enjoy an intellectual adventure into totally unknown territory. How many times have I read about our nice new fifteen acre farm, with a nice garden, nice cat, nice goats, our lovely children with their liberal parents in nice stable couples. This ain't different, this ain't alternative. It's just what everybody walking the streets wants.

Anybody with a bit of sense and energy can run a house and half acre of garden. And it's so very convenient to live in a house which has other people living in it. What about the other very important states of mind that are necessary for any group to work? How many of you have ever had to face the implications of the popular phrase 'non-nuclear'? Yet so many reel it off, together with a list of other qualifications. How many of you have ever lived truly communally? It's so easy to get together with another couple in a pretty country cottage, then sit back and fondly imagine you are a commune.

How come there are so few free schools, medical centres, real productive farms; how come there are none within the Communes Network? Where are the results? If there is anybody out there getting something positive on, then let me know! If not, then I think Communes Network literature should cease to carry reports of petty-bourgeois country homes.

Hilary CN 7.

This difficulty is always with us. To change the world, you have to accept it the way it is, while at the same time hanging on firmly to the dream of how you'd like it to be.

The generally limited scale of British communities led some to doubt their value as a viable alternative:

About three years ago we visited several communes and met a lot of

nice people, but we couldn't see that any of them were good places to live. (A commune which lasts a short time can be a valuable and 'valid' experience, but it can't claim to offer any sensible alternative to the mess called present day society, unless it provides a better and stable alternative environment for members and kids).

American communes and Israeli kibbutzim are far more successful in these terms -- why? It seems to us that the main reason is just plain size. The typical British commune with eight to ten members sounds a nice cosy place to live, but when you try it, you have just enough people to get on each other's nerves, not enough to give everyone a chance of finding someone they really like. And one person's departure is so much more disrupting in a small scene, so that the whole thing soon falls apart. The old extended family may have been about the same size, but it wasn't always a happy place to be, and usually survived because people had no place else to go; but that isn't true of a commune.

Almost as important, are the kind of people who join communes. People who find it difficult to make friends like the idea of a small group of friends; people who hate authority like the informality; people who find it difficult to make their own decisions like the idea of group decision-making; people who find it difficult to communicate like the idea of a small group to communicate with. Get to know any of these people and they are usually pleasant and sensitive. But put a group together, and you have a bunch of people who can't organise themselves, can't make friends, can't make decisions, and can't communicate. And that, I'm afraid, was our impression of almost every commune.

There isn't much chance of changing that unless you produce a larger, less cosy atmosphere which will attract different kinds of people as well. We and various others have tried to create such a larger commune or community, but it's never been possible to get enough people together at one time.

Well, we can't wait for the revolution to happen around us; we have to make it happen, or it just won't happen. So us is finished with playing careers; off to somewhere cheaper where we can get rid of our large mortgage and we'll see what comes along; we'll grow a few veg in a back garden, try to find ways to make money outside the

system, and make do with less money all round. Maybe it isn't exactly what we'd like, but it's better than playing along with the system.

And a thought to you dreamers and schemers in Communes Network: make your dreams action. They're pretty dreams, but they don't mean a thing until you make them work.

Sandy and Hilary Morrison CN 14.

This problem is still with us.

Something else that is still with us are the letters from people wanting to join a commune. "Many people ... seem to have the idea that there are plenty of communes already set up and waiting for them to join. There aren't that many groups ... Most are full (but not all). Most need new members to contribute not only energy and ideas, but also income and/or capital" runs an early Communes Network blurb. The task of answering such letters was taken on by Network from the beginning.

The letters ranged from the straightforward:

My husband and I are in our twenties, and would like to join a small rural commune which grows its own food, or to join some people in setting up such a commune. We are interested mainly in music, arts, crafts and farming, and adhere to no particular cult. Do you know of a commune which is looking for new members, or anyone setting up a commune? If so, I would be very glad to hear from you.

- to the patronisingly confident:

At the end of this week I want to live and work on a communal farm. . . . As time is short, please is it possible you could send me a list of places where I could be accepted as part of the group. My choice areas are:- The Pembroke area; Yorkshire and Cumberland area; Kent area; The Moray area. But I am willing to accept what is offered. Please write at your earliest convenience.

- and the outright distraught (from an 18 year old mother and widow):

. . . Please help. I'm not worried where it is. I don't know anyone down here, so for the last four months we've been feeling really depressed, just me, my son, and no one to turn of talk to, and no company at all. I've written to so many people but it seems they're too wrapped up in them-

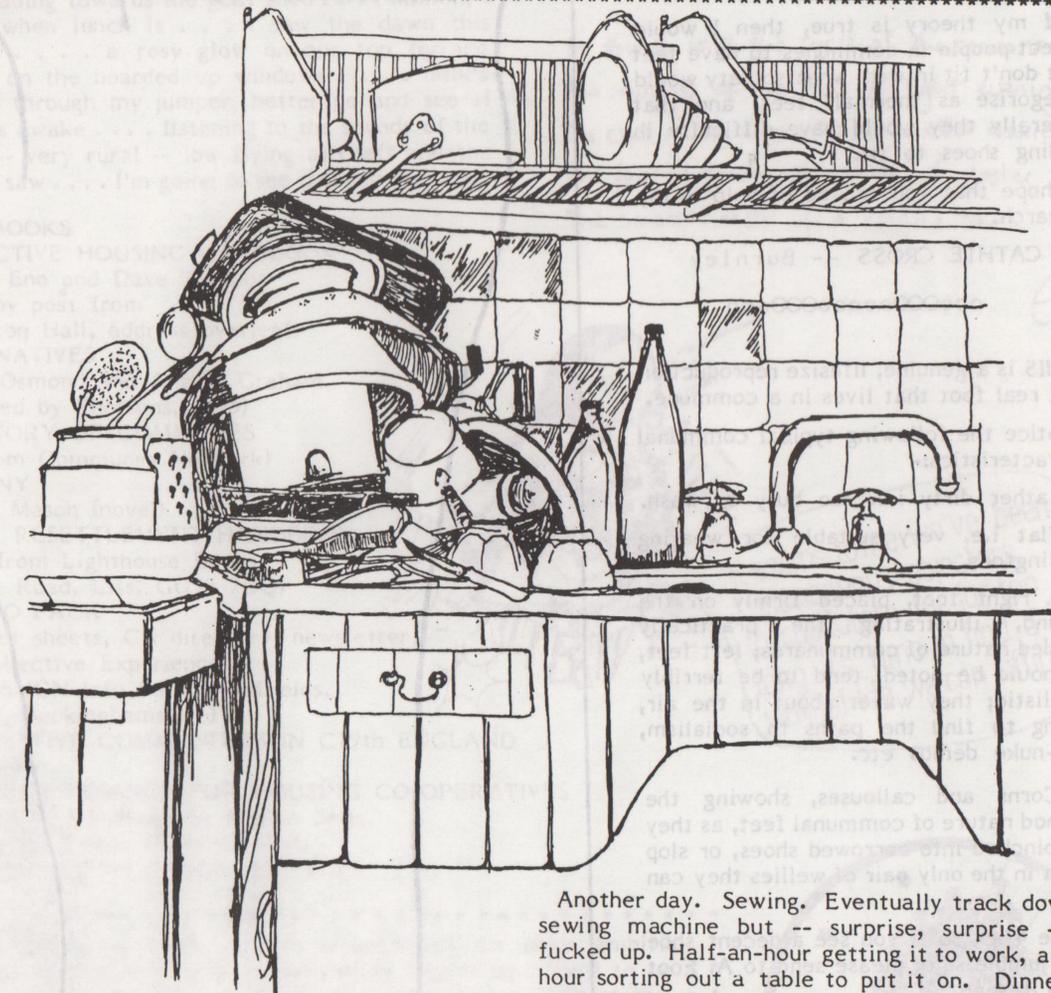
selves to give a damn. Even if you can't help, hand this on; don't just throw it in a bin somewhere. You're my last chance, and I really do need to get in with people again. Please! Don't just give me another address to write to. Try for me yourself first.

Many of these people began subscribing to Network and attending the Network gatherings that took place every few months. As a result, the Network's role as the newsletter of a particular group of friends diminished; it

began to function much more as a link between 'outsiders' and established communes, and then between the communes themselves. At the outset only Laurieston Hall and Trogwell were actively involved with Communes Network, but as time passed other groups contributed - Crabapple, Birchwood, Lifespan, People In Common, Wheatstone and Glaneirw, to mention some of those still around today. These were new groups at the time, just emerging from the initial struggle of getting established.

As if to signal the changing role of Network, Trogwell, who had produced the first 18 newsletters from Bradford and Huddersfield, handed over production to Mike, Dave and others at Laurieston Hall in the autumn of 1976.

And that is where this Selection has started, as the people who are actually living it out in communes and housing collectives, write in and relate their experiences . . .



Another day. Sewing. Eventually track down my sewing machine but -- surprise, surprise -- it's fucked up. Half-an-hour getting it to work, another hour sorting out a table to put it on. Dinner bell rings. Oh well!

Gardening. A real pleasure. Out there enjoying the fresh air and mother earth. Wonder how one prong of the fork got bent at a right angle. Only one spade between us but plenty of shovels. Ever tried digging with a shovel? Never mind, the skylark's really on form this morning, blackbird too. Hands are numb with cold -- will that dinner bell ever ring, it's pissing down with rain.

Forgot to mention the cars. Have you heard what happens to cars that join communes? Too gory to tell.

Why don't I leave?

You must be joking. This is only half the story.

PAT -- Lifespan May 1977

THE COMMUNAL FOOT

I AM a student at Burnley College and I am doing some research into the relationship between people's feet and their beliefs (their politics, the way they look at life, religion etc.)

My theory, and my initial research tends to bear this out, is that there is a direct relationship between the shape, size, smell and colour of people's feet and their beliefs. I am writing to you to ask if you could ask people who live in communes to look at each other's feet and see if there are any marked similarities, and let me know.

If my theory is true, then I would expect people in communes to have feet that don't fit in with what society would categorise as "normal" feet, and that generally they would have difficulty in finding shoes to fit.

I hope that you can be of help in my research.

CATHIE CROSS -- Burnley

oooooOoooooOoooo

THIS is a genuine, lifesize reproduction of a real foot that lives in a commune.

Notice the following typical communal characteristics:-

Rather dirty i.e. too busy to wash.

Flat i.e. very suitable for wearing Wellingtons.

A right foot, placed firmly on the ground, illustrating the practically minded nature of communards; left feet, it should be noted, tend to be terribly idealistic; they waver about in the air, trying to find the paths to socialism, anti-nuke demos etc.

Corns and callouses, showing the ill-shod nature of communal feet, as they are pinched into borrowed shoes, or slop about in the only pair of wellies they can find.

Size 4½-5, so if you see a decent shoe at a jumble sale, please send to A. Foot c/o Lifespan.

Other, more individual characteristics of this foot:-

It is frequently to be seen resting by the Aga, "put up" and "having a nice cup of tea".

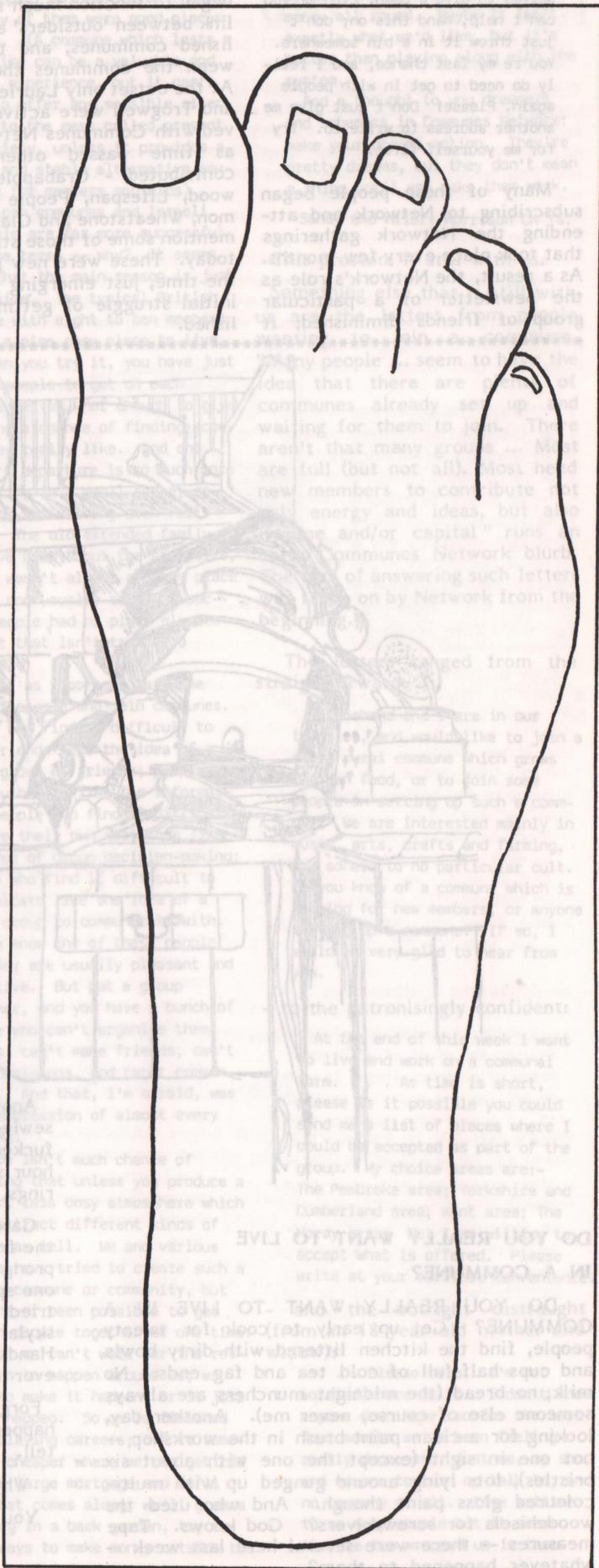
Sometimes it gets taken up the garden path.

Occasionally it dances.

It's definitely not as young as it used to be.

You can rely on it to keep a leg up, but that's about all.

Finally, its favourite occupation is being tickled pink.



LIFESPAN EDITORIAL

HMMMM -- thinks -- I wonder when lunch is I've started making too many typing errors, Chris' efforts to recycle carbon ribbon have left the typewriter tied up I've just spilled correcting fluid all over the table and it stinks the studio though beautiful is very cold and my feet are frozen two guys have just turned up to look round the place and Pete has made the entertaining suggestion that we should ask if we could look round their semi-detached sometime do you have er shared sleeping arrangements don't you find a lot of problems living this way with er relationships what do you do about money however Nevil is doing the honorable thing and I can see them heading towards the goat shed hmmm, I wonder when lunch is saw the dawn this morning a rosy glow on our top terrace glinting on the boarded up windows milk's dripping through my jumper, better go and see if Laurel is awake listening to the sounds of the village -- very rural -- low flying aircraft and the electric saw I'm going to see if lunch is ready.

SOME BOOKS

COLLECTIVE HOUSING HANDBOOK

- Sarah Eno and Dave Treanor (£3-90 by post from Laurieston Hall, address overleaf)

ALTERNATIVES

- John Osmond and Angela Graham (Published by Thorsons, £3-95)

DIRECTORY OF COMMUNES

(50p from Communes Network)

BETHANY

- Anita Mason (novel)

RURAL RESETTLEMENT HANDBOOK

(£4-95 from Lighthouse Books, 55 Mint Road, Liss, GU33 7DQ)

CN INFO PACK

- 14 fact sheets, CN directory, newsletter and 'Collective Experience'.

(£3 from 'CN Info Pack', Redfields, Winslow, Buckinghamshire)

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES IN C19th ENGLAND

- D Hardy.

MORTGAGE FINANCE FOR HOUSING CO-OPERATIVES

- a practical handbook by Martin Jelfs.

(£3-50 from Empty Property Unit, 157 Waterloo Road, London, SE1 8XF)

 * ONCE UPON A TIME, a man enquired of his son's ambition, *
 * whereupon his son replied -- Man, when I grow up I want to be a *
 * Woodcutter, a Quarrier, a Bricklayer, a Carpenter, a Plasterer, a *
 * Plumber, a Painter, a Poet, a Prophet, a Priest, a Watchmaker, a *
 * Lover, a Shep- *****
 * herd, a Swine- a Weaver, a *
 * herd, a Cowboy, a Helper, a Friend, *
 * Mechanic, a Tha- a Sailor, a Dan- *
 * tcher, a Miller, a cer, an Alchem- *
 * Brewer, a Baker, * ist, a Watchman, *
 * a Cobbler, a a Wise Man, a *
 * Blacksmith, a Child, a Survivor, *
 * Rock and Roll a Teacher, a *
 * Singer, a Mother, * Nurse, an Explor- *
 * a Father, a er, a Cook, an *
 * Hunter, a Tailor, Adventurer, a *
 * ***** Stowaway, a No- *
 * mad, a Lighthouse, a Traveller, a Gypsy, a Finder, a Storyteller, a *
 * Warm Wind, a Clown, a Potter, a Printer, a Doorman, a Brother, a *
 * Stranger, a River, a Forester, a Builder, a Distant Cry, a Shower in *
 * the Orchard, a Full Moon, a Reason, a Thought, a Brain-driver, Man. *
 * *****



In touch out of touch in touch
 Out of touch with the world
 The world of latest books + films + records
 Of who is sleeping with who
 Of encounters that bloom into friendship
 Of buses + trains + planes + holidays
 Of what's going on where, the meetings to be at
 The campaigns to organise
 The struggle for life against the system of death
 In touch with the cycle of the seasons
 The sadness of the loss of light evenings
 The chill in the uncentrally heated narrow
 The feel of earth, of grease, of plaster, of sweat
 The smoothness of a child's skin.



It seems to me we've been conscientious objectors to capitalism for far too long. It's time to find a way of life we can affirm



ALTHOUGH accounts of foreign communities have not been included in this publication, there is an International Communes Network. The ICN has an annual gathering for communes worldwide (though mainly European). Contact the address on the back cover, or Laurieston Hall, at the address overleaf.