



BRIDGING THE GAP

A Quaker Intentional Community Newsletter

Issue #1 (August 1999)

Welcome!

Hi, f/Friends! We in the Braun family and other interested families have been talking about community as a means to live our lives more responsively to Quaker testimonies for some time, and we are now working on making that happen. For reference, we have had individual discussions with many of you, have had gatherings in various parts of New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) to talk about community, have explored various regions of the country (southwest and northwest) and have had two interest groups at Silver Bay (where the NYYM Quakers gather) this summer.

We thought that as part of this process a newsletter would be helpful to accomplish a number of things:

We can get to know each other a bit, learn what aspects of community we are all particularly interested in (or adverse to), and gather together and move forward as a community of faith willing to work on this venture as an expression of our shared beliefs.

We can begin a discussion of issues related to living lives of integrity. We greatly hope to hear from you, and we hope to provide a forum for you all to respond to issues raised in this newsletter and elsewhere. At the same time, we expect that putting down our thoughts on paper will help us all think more deeply about the ideas and opinions expressed.

We can share small articles and other finds, suggested readings, relevant books, and other recommended resources.

We can discuss in depth the process of bridging the gap between the lives we now live and life as we would like to be living it.

In relation to all those goals, the Brauns and others can provide updates on our process of bridging that gap in our own lives.

Why Work on Community?

As presented at the Yearly Meeting interest groups, we are approaching community as a means of working toward priorities in our lives. These priorities are condensed into four and a half main objectives that, our thinking goes, can best be achieved in community:

RESOURCES: BOOKS

Have you read *Gaviotas : A Village to Reinvent the World* by Alan Weisman (Chelsea Green Publishing Co, 1998)? It's the story of a successful sustainable community in an almost-uninhabitable area of Colombia. Most everyone thinks it's fascinating and inspiring!

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

Where We're At

One frequently asked question has been “So where is this going to take place? How about [next door to whoever's asking]?” After much exploration of different locations, we (the Brauns) would like to work on this community project near Powell House, in the Chatham area of Columbia County, New York. Though in the short run the economics of land purchase in this area may not be as favorable as that of other locations, we feel led to the Powell House area for a couple of reasons.

CLIPPINGS: THOUGHT-
PROVOKING TIDBITS FOR
ALTERNATIVE LIVING

To create community we need to love each other, trust each other, and help each other; that is hard.

—Wendell Berry

The Quakerness of the project is important and this is a major crossroads for Quakers in this part of the country, both north/south and east/west.

Access to three metropolitan areas (Albany, New York City, and Boston) widens the economic alternatives, and enables an impact beyond the local community of whatever takes place here.

Powell House is nearby and the need is great for the community to be outward-looking, open, and connected to other institutions that provide spiritual energy.

In our discussions with others (many of you), the most frequent advice was, “Why don't you do this around a place like Powell House?” and we have sensed that there is great wisdom and opportunity in being close to F/friends, family, and institutions (such as New York Yearly Meeting) with whom we have become very involved during the past few years.

So, for this outbreak of Quaker intentional community, the Powell House area it will probably be.

Weigh In!

We need your immediate input: We see three primary options as ways to proceed. Any thoughts on these options, what you see as their major benefits or drawbacks, or how you would personally respond to each would be appreciated. Write the editor of this little rag, Ellen Key Harris-Braun, at 61 Pond Brook Road, Newtown, CT 06470 or ekh@panix.com by September 10 and we'll get a discussion going in the next issue.

1 Aim totally toward an organic flow of events—the Brauns buy a home in the Powell House area and work to put together the group that will come together into the community. The group would come together somewhat organically, as others could arrange for and make the necessary life changes to allow a move to the area designated as the community location. This could be seen somewhat as joining a village. Arrangements would ultimately be made by the individuals to meet their own needs, but we would all be locating ourselves in an area that would allow us to have neighbors with likeminded ideas about how life can be lived and a willingness to push forward together. We would plan to become more interdependent in the sense of “being there for each other” in ways not often seen in modern suburban life. The sense of community and the work done as a group with a specific identity would emerge as the critical mass of families and individuals was reached.

2 Aim more toward engineered (intentional) community. Brauns would buy/rent a home in the area while the group is formed. This would be a long-term view which would include much discussion of all elements of the community before anything happened “on the ground.” Part of this process would include locating the finances to create a package through which the group could then identify and purchase either houses in an existing neighborhood (one of the towns near Old Chatham) or a piece of property where custom housing would be built. During this period all interested parties would pretty much take care of themselves while all the pieces of the puzzle are gathered, but once the pieces are ready the community would come together according the preagreed upon arrangements, decision making processes, lifestyle options, and housing configurations. The community would immediately move on toward the joint work that would be among the defining elements of the group.

3 Jump start the process. Brauns would rent in the area only long enough to identify a suitable place/property for the experiment. This piece would be purchased with a patchwork financing that we think would be possible assuming a sizable mortgage. It would be expected that individuals joining the venture would contribute toward the canceling of the mortgage. All would build a cohousing style community as they join, though the property would offer housing to help those in transition (the original farmhouse?). At the earliest opportunity the deed would be converted to a land trust or homeowners' association. The functions and configurations of the community would be worked out, by Quaker process, as issues arise, but always maintaining our objectives in the forefront. The community would look toward a holistic and spiritual approach to growth and

RESOURCES: WEB SITES

For more on cohousing, see The Cohousing Network's Web site at www.cohousing.org or the Intentional Communities Resource Page at www.infoteam.com/nonprofit/nica/resource.html

life enhancements (friendship, good food, art and music, rewarding work).

To be upfront, though we are asking you for input, we are leaning toward option three. The actual legal approach to designing living space and ownership would fall into either a fairly standard community land trust (CLT) or a homeowners' association, both of which well support cohousing ventures.

Where Are You Coming From?

(And "Do you know where you're goin' to..." etc.!) Please donate a little of your brain power to this intentional-community project! Send us ideas, questions, musings, excerpts from thought-provoking articles, clippings of all sorts (except grass), books, Web sites, other resources—we'll share them with others who are interested. The plan is for this to be the vehicle (solar-powered) by which intentional community pioneers, seekers, supporters, groupies, wannabes, and hangers-on share ideas, progress, issues, problems, and resources

CLIPPINGS: THOUGHT-PROVOKING TIDBITS FOR ALTERNATIVE LIVING

Some thoughts from "Traffic Noise and Quaker Silence" by Peter St. James (*Friends Journal*, December 1998)

...As ever increasing traffic has overwhelmed our cities and our traffic has overwhelmed our cities and our culture, many of us have discovered strong links between traffic and nearly every one of Friends' testimonies and concerns:

Human Relations: Traveling in cars through our neighborhoods means we miss many regular opportunities to interact with neighbors. We may wave as we drive by, but we don't know if they are happy or sad, need help or comfort, have something to share, or just would gain from being close enough to sense life in another person. People have enclosed their expressors and receptors of humanity into their swift metal boxes.

Simplicity: Car culture expenses have made multiple breadwinner families the norm. Working and commuting long hours eat up life. Such time-poverty creates the need for additional costly and complicating possessions and services. Ever increasing auto use sprawls cities, pushing necessary destinations farther and farther away, making every errand into a journey. Life itself gets lost in the rush to make a living....

Environment: Oil spills into oceans. Air pollution erodes the ozone layer. From the seas, traffic creates or worsens nearly every form of pollution and increases the destructiveness of problems as it eats away at life itself.

Worship: as modern urban life submerges under a story sea of traffic, people's sense of reverence, divine awe, and spiritual wonder corrode. Clamor, rush, and stress make God seem further away, harder to connect with, less a part of life...

Decisions Friends make about where we gather, how we travel there, size and geographic sweep of monthly meetings, and so on have meaningful, measureable effects on our world. Personal choices about where we work, live, and play hold the key to healing our culture and our planet. Friends can speak Truth to traffic's power.

of all sorts...all for the purpose of learning how to bridge the gap between conventional American life at the end of this century and the communities we would like to be part of at the dawn of the next.

We would also appreciate a small donation of hard-earned cash from any of you who can manage it to defray the postage and duplication costs of this newsletter. Consider your donation one small step in divorcing yourself from the cash economy. Not tax deductible (yet!) but imagine the warm fuzzy feeling the next time you receive this spiffy collection of pages by first-class mail. We know you're out there, and you've told us you're interested. Let us hear from you!

Thanks for your support and encouragement thus far.

Peace,

Columbia County, NY: home of farms, horses, the pesky Thruway, and Powell House

Albany is over thisaway,
45 minutes away

Powell House is in
Old Chatham, NY

New York City is three
hours' drive south; Boston
is two and a half hours'
drive east.

Amtrak goes to Hudson
and Albany from NYC and
points south.

Albany has a medium-sized
airport.



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