



BRIDGING THE GAP

The Quaker Intentional Village Project Newsletter

LATEST NEWS

Issue 32, Summer 2011

As of last Thanksgiving, all member families are living in their houses on our community land. One family sadly had to move away in November (but has been back to visit). In January, we welcomed into the empty house a family who is renting and interested in membership.

In late winter some of us spent time in the machine shed tending the evaporator to make a lot of delicious and oh-so-local maple syrup. Spring triggered the usual rush to start garden seedlings and plan this year's outdoor projects.

Now that it's summertime, the rhythms here at QIVC have changed. We hang out more with each other during these long days – sitting together on the Farmhouse porch, keeping an eye on children at play, hanging laundry, working on a garden project, or chatting after a chance encounter on one of our many paths. We end up sharing frequent, impromptu dinners and planning joint berry-picking outings.



Community dinner on porch—see the funny pile of cell phones in the middle of the table?

We've lately been holding post-potluck discussion hours for adult members. At the first gathering, we enjoyed several deep belly laughs. At the second, we delved deeply into the question of aging as it affects one's ability to participate in and contribute to our community endeavors.

The latter conversation returned us yet again to a more fundamental question: How do we evaluate the progress of QIVC? By the number of members, where more is always better? By how long the community has been in existence, where longevity is always better? Or, more truly, by how we are living out our five intentions? We have welcomed the chance to join together to consider issues like this in more casual gatherings.

“OH! LOOK AT THAT BEAUTIFUL VISTA! “ DAILY PRACTICES THAT BRING US CLOSER TO GOD

The first of our five intentions states that we believe community is a way
To increase the mindfulness, spiritual focus and God-centeredness of our lives by finding and living with others who share these goals and thus will reinforce, on a daily basis, our desire to live in worship.

When I asked some folks in our community what practice(s) helped them to “increase the mindfulness, spiritual focus, and God-centeredness” of their lives, many responses involved interaction with the natural world.

Ellen described a deep urge to walk in nature. Too much time indoors and she feels off-center. Time spent walking outdoors seems to restore a balance that isn't easily described.

Lee walks out in his garden in the mornings, before the full-tilt of the day begins. As he described his walk around the yard, I imagined a slow circle, taking in the scents of flowers, the wet dew on



Daily Practices, cont.

the springy grass as it meets his bare feet, and the quiet absorption of sounds and sensations foundational to his being. He also mentioned, "...And if I have time I do the 5 Tibetans." Having never heard this term before, I googled it to discover a set of 5 "energy rejuvenating" exercises which

...represent a great way to keep your body in shape when you have limited time for a physical workout or limited space for a complete yoga routine. You can easily do the exercises in the space at the foot of the bed in most hotel rooms. [5 Tibetans energy rejuvenation exercises](#)

Rather than the morning time, Dan finds his spiritual center at night, after everyone else has gone to bed. There is no one thing he must do. Sometimes he gardens (with his headlamp strapped to his head, I imagine), sometimes he walks or works in his shed, or sometimes he just sits, taking in the night and the slowing of his thoughts. If he falls asleep while sitting, so be it. Whatever he does, it is his time outside, at night, that creates the space for unwinding, contemplation, and centering on God.

Paul finds God in his garden – digging in and nurturing the soil, bending and stretching to pull weeds, staking tomatoes, observing the flourishing that arises from his care. He also loves to take his morning coffee on the porch as he watches the chipmunks, birds, squirrels, and flowers awake with him.

I, too, am moved by the thriving, non-human life surrounding me. Lately there has been one small, brownish bird who sings, sometimes with his mate, in the cherry tree outside my bathroom window. I brought the binoculars upstairs just to watch him. As he tilts his head and sings, his whole, small body vibrates with the sound. It is a miracle to watch.

But having as much human interaction as I do, I find I need a practice I can turn to when censoring judgments arise to remind me of "that of God" in the other. So, when I can remember to, I close my eyes, notice my breath, and imagine I am breathing through my heart. Then I observe the judgment that has come to mind and seek to discover, using the model of Nonviolent Communication, the feeling and need that underlies the judgment. When I can empathize with myself, I then imagine what universal, human need the other is seeking to meet by the behavior of which I am critical. This empathizing process helps me see past the behavior to the humanity that connects us. We are not separate after all, but together in The One.



Emilie, too, uses her interactions to bring her to God. "Some things make it easier to remember God. For me community is one of those things." As she described her practice of consciously using interactions, especially committee and business meetings, to remind herself "this is all about my relationship with God," I recalled that it is so often Emilie who calls us back to worship when there is tension or conflict in a meeting. When I said this to Em, she said, "I am saying that is what you do for me." Noting the spacious Oneness many of us feel when we say "Oh! Look at that beautiful vista!" Emilie said, "That is how I feel when I'm with people."

---Dee Duckworth

Paradox

paradox (noun): a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth

Western culture seems to have little room for the possibility that contradictory concepts and ideas can coexist – or even be mutually necessary. We know that life needs death and death needs life, but most of the wider cultural emphasis is on finding scientific solutions that, by definition, can be tested and proven to be true. There is not much use for a concept that can both be proven true and proven untrue, or for an assertion and its antithesis that are both accurate.

Yet in our experiment, where we live in community as a means to live out our stated intentions, I am finding that holding coexisting opposites is necessary. That which might seem contrary to building our group identity and consciousness is often indispensable to the process. Here are some examples:

Moving through conflict creates stronger relationships. If there is no conflict, no pushing of boundaries, no movement into zones of discomfort, and no discussion of different worldviews, then relationships remain much shallower than those where testing and probing is embraced. My experience is that those relationships where there has been the shared journey of exploration, despite the difficulty of the terrain, lead to knowledge and camaraderie that otherwise could not happen.

I do believe there are ways of doing this that have better or worse results. In our community, it seems to work best when we can look at the issue together and work to discern what we might do about it. The more common and less effective alternative is to phrase things not as "our problem with X issue," but rather as "my problem with your X." Communities where issues are not explored may function smoothly and well, but they do not achieve the strength or breadth of vision of those where conflict is accepted as an opportunity.

Accepting others as they are is most helpful to change and growth. In community, it is easy to want others to work on their faults. "If only he/she..., then I could..." What a strange paradox that we are most willing to consider change when we feel loved and appreciated as we are! Within a sense of dignity and self-worth there is much strength for improvement and change. Inversely, when we feel least adequate and most vulnerable, ostensibly most in need of changing something, it is the hardest to do so.

Our best tools are the imperfect tools we have. A poor tool is better than no tool. It may just be the case that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," but there may be a reason that sometimes the perfect tool is inadequate. The use of imperfect tools seems to create in a community the need to learn additional skills and attitudes that rely not on tools, but on the community and its members. It is in their imperfection that the tools reveal the work to be done and help discover the hidden talents of community members. They also provide perspective on the difference between means and ends, such that the means gain an appropriate importance with respect to the ends.

The most personal is where the group can be most helpful (usually in unexpected ways for both).

Living intentionally in active community blurs the public and private spheres. On a spiritual level,

Paradox, cont.

it is easy to chant the mantra of all are one, but we nevertheless often recoil when our elbows knock into each other and when the one actually has the opportunity to merge with all. My brother has spoken of the dream of mutual sovereignty – that place where the individual and the group are simultaneously sovereign. In that this paradox negates some of the legal and social constructs most valued by the wider society (“a man’s home is his castle”), it is understandable that we have a hard time opening up fully to community.

In freedom from the impulse to control lies the greatest security. The pervasive myth of our society is that stronger armies, tighter vigilance, and less tolerance of aberrant behavior produce greater security and safety. I think the “founding fathers” (at least some of them) understood that what ultimately makes us more secure is actually better education, dissemination of a broader range of news and reporting, and a populace that makes its own choices.

At the same time, I am not part of this community experiment to feel safe and secure. In fact, I am at QIVC to remove myself from the view of security held by much of the larger culture. This is not only because I perceive that version of security to be a false one, but also my experience is that when I trade the desire for security for the desire to develop spiritually, emotionally, and physically, the rewards are much greater. Oddly, security is increased when it is a non-issue. When the goals of control and security are exchanged for the goal of allowing the “other” dignity, room for positive outcomes is greatly increased. Security and control invariable decrease such space and limit possibilities. The “safer” and more protectively rule-bound a community, the fewer openings its individuals and the group will have to the important paths we should be traveling.

Others may have different thoughts about paradox and specific examples from their lives in community, but I welcome a world where we do not define the juxtaposed experiences as either good or bad, true or false. They are good and bad, and true and false, and they can contain joy and pain together. These may just be purposeful locations that our soul journey seeks out.

--Jens Braun



Gardens This Year! Or Who's Growing What?

Spring has finally sprung at QIVC and everything is green – many shades of green. Wildflowers have bloomed, trees are blooming, irises line the wall in front of the farmhouse, the grass is shooting up everywhere, and the humans on the land have been gardening. Who's been putting what into the earth lately on Bradley's Crossing Road?

Paul, down in the major garden plots across from the pond, which he has been amending and improving for eight years now:

Onions, leeks, and garlic

Potatoes, mangles (tubers for pigs), beets

Tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant

Edamame and pole beans

Squash, cucumbers, corn

Parsnips, carrots, celery

Dill, cilantro, Lettuce cabbage, kohlrabi, and bok choy

Swiss chard, arugula, and mustard greens

Flowers, gooseberries

The pink snouts of four piglets (serving as the pig-rototiller to clear the next patch of garden)



Jens and Spee:

Annuals:

Peas, bush, dry, fava, and climbing beans

Kale, chard, fast and slow beets, lots of sunflowers (if the chipmunks allow them), almost no squash (butternut, big native variety, hubbard, crookneck) – chipmunks ate them!

Lots of lettuce, carrots, potatoes, sweet corn, popcorn, broccoli

Chickens

Perennials:

Baby lavender from seed

Kiwi vines on a new arbor on the north side of the house

Green and purple asparagus, rhubarb

Plums, peaches, raspberries, strawberries



Dan, around the house and in his "moat garden" patrolled by chickens and turkeys on the hunt for bugs and slugs:

Peas and green beans

Onions, potatoes, beets

Spinach, green and red lettuce

Soy beans, dry beans

Carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, celery, leeks

Eggplant, peppers, tomatoes

Carnival and butternut squash, purple martin gourds

Asparagus



Gardens this year! Or Who's growing What?, cont.

2 variety of corn, cilantro, basil, hops

Trees: apple, pear, cherry, mulberry, plum, peach, persimmon, Korean pine nut, hazelnut

Skittles (tropical flavor)

Kristin and Pat, all around their house:

Basil, cilantro, tomatoes

Cucumbers, potatoes

Spinach and lettuce, radishes, carrots

Kale, collards, arugula, Brussels sprouts, cabbage

Onions, leeks

Peas (sugar snap and shelling)

Blueberries, cherries, peaches, hazelnuts, apples, berry canes

Flowers and herbs in great profusion

Lilac babies

Volunteer apple tree, 2 years old, from our venerable mother apple tree between the houses



Aidan:

"A Three Sisters garden with beans (green bean), squash (delicata), and corn around my apple tree (which actually has five apples growing on it this year!)."

Eric and Will, in narrow terraces that follow the curve of the drop-off between their house and the Hanley/Scheibles', and down in the big garden:

Tomatoes (two plants of which came by mail!)

Radishes

Potatoes

Peppers

Lettuce, spinach, arugula

Basil, cilantro

Armenian cucumbers

Quinoa



And the community's ongoing growth projects include:

Raspberries

Gooseberries

Elderberries

Comfrey

Apple, peach, nectarine, plum, pear, and nut trees



--Ellen Harris-Braun



Transforming My Participation in the Consumer Economy

I haven't written a single article for our newsletter in all the years of its publication. But Ellen asked me to write something "about what I do," so here goes:

"What I do" is a direct outgrowth of our third intention: *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.*

Back in 2003, Jens and I attended the E.F Schumacher Society's *Tools for Change* seminar because we wanted to learn more about Community Land Trusts, as part our intention to emancipate the land we live on. But the seminar wasn't just about tools regarding land; it was also about labor (the tool being worker ownership) and capital (the tool being local currencies). Learning about this last one is what stole my heart.

I discovered that changing how we issue money – starting to do so locally – was at the heart of transforming my participation in the consumer economy (which was already mind-blowing enough to me). Then I had the staggering realization that we are living in an era in which a new expressive capacity is showing up that is on the same order of significance as language itself. Language gave humans an extraordinary capacity to access and share meaning with each other; this new expressive capacity will give humans a similarly extraordinary ability to access and share value with each other.

All mammals have mechanisms for sharing *meaning* with each other. But human language is a uniquely powerful "composable abstraction": a handful of phonemes that can be mixed and matched to create words, which can be assembled in a subject-object-predicate grammar. Using this tool, we have a virtually infinite capacity to express meaning: we create new words and new sentences to share our experience of being alive together.

But in the realm of sharing *value* with one another, we are currently deeply limited. At small scales, as in the family and in trusted circles, where our biologically built-in capacities allow us to create so-called "gift economies," we are quite efficient and can share value deeply. But at the larger scale, we resort to money and markets, which are only as good at sharing the fullness of value as a squirrel's tail-waving is at sharing the details of imminent danger. Indeed, it does make its existence known, but fundamentally the shaking of the squirrel's tail can't encode all the things the squirrel might want to say, just as money and markets can't possibly encode all the forms of value we need to acknowledge and share with each other. The fact that they can't do this is what's at the core of the heart attack that is in progress in the social organism that is our global society.

So, having said all that, "what I am doing," along with a few colleagues who see the world through this same lens, is trying to piece together exactly what are the equivalent to phonemes, words, sentences, and grammar such that in the new expressive capacity of value, we'll have that same infinite ability to create value-sharing "sentences" that we have in the meaning-sharing realm of language.

Just so you know, the arrival of a new expressive capacity into the universe is not new. Language was a huge one, but writing and the printing press were similar in structure, in that each of them, as expressive



Transforming My Participation in the Consumer Economy, cont.

capacities, totally changed the structure of society. And far bigger in scale than language was the development of the expressive capacity we call DNA.

Structurally, DNA is an expressive capacity: it is built out of a small set of "phonemes" (ACTG) that are put together into protein "words," which themselves are assembled into gene "sentences," which build up into genomes that "express" all the different types of living organisms everywhere.

What I now understand is that for social organisms, this new expressive capacity for sharing value is the equivalent of DNA. It literally forms the structure out which social organisms get their life. Unfortunately, the kind of life current social organisms have, because they are built using a monetary system that requires constant growth, is what we call cancer: a form of life that destroys the host it lives in, and consequently destroys itself.

So "what I am doing" is working on creating the underlying mechanism, or, you might say, an infrastructure, for this kind of social DNA.

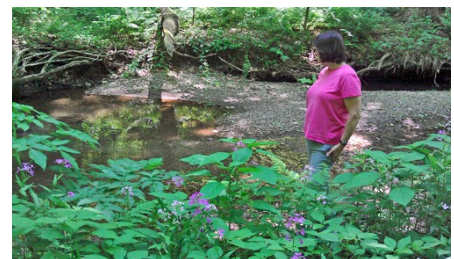
---Eric Harris-Braun

One of My Favorite Spots on the Land

Travel with me to the sledding hill, which starts at the northern border of our land, and walk, run, or ride with me down its green slopes to where the pasture levels out. Take a sharp left and walk along the grassy path next to the stone wall and trees that define the edge of the woods. Spot the two stones sitting in the grass, one propped on the other, and turn right into the woods, leaving the bright light behind. See the break in the old stone wall with a huge trunk just beyond?

Stand there in the break and let your eyes adjust to the darkness. Examine carefully the steep side of the ravine to your left and imagine a herd of cattle eager to head down to the stream. Can you see an old path sloping gently, diagonally down the hillside toward the water, wide enough for two people?

Descend along the path and appreciate the ease with which one of your steps follows the other – as opposed to slipping and sliding among leaves and branches as you plummet straight down into the ravine at any old location. When you reach the clear stream at the bottom, examine how the water flows and imagine that water flowing down through the cool darkness of the ravine on our land and then through our neighbors' land, slowing down a bit while passing alongside the Cemetery of the Maples and under the railroad tracks, edging close to the Cottage Restaurant, pouring through a culvert under the road, and tumbling into the Stony Kill. Several miles away, the water in the Stony



Where the stream flows through the cool darkness towards the Hudson River

One of My Favorite Spots on the Land, cont.

Kill will flow into the Kinderhook Creek, which will carry it out to the mighty Hudson River and down to the Atlantic Ocean.

Sit on a log by the stream. Pick up and feel the smooth cool roundness of its pebbles. Appreciate the skunk cabbage and the wild flowers. Spot the roughly built sauna and find the fire circle nearby. Sit on a rough bench for a while as you inspect the plant life growing on the sauna's roof. Imagine people inside soaking up the steam and then running straight out the door, leaping down three steps, and jumping into the cool shallow water. Don't you want to join in next time?

When you have had your fill or when the mosquitoes become too fierce, travel back up the path toward the light of the open land. Imagine, who used this path 25 years ago and with what purpose? Who used it 50 years ago? 100 years ago? Perhaps even 200 years ago? Can you imagine the exploration of the stream 216 years ago, when the Kirby family came from Connecticut and settled on this land?

---Spee Braun



Spee lifting the flap of the roughly built sauna

CLIPPINGS

Excerpt from The Power of Collective Wisdom and the Trap of Collective Folly, by Briskin, Erickson, Ott, and Callanan, 2009, pp. 37-39, BK Publishers, Inc.

Suspension of Certainty

A transcendent discovery is far more possible for individuals and groups when there is a willingness to risk, or admit, not knowing – when we confront directly the full weight of our confusion or the dilemma we are facing. The human capacity to make meaning together depends on a suspension of any one individual or subgroup's having always to be in the right. This commitment to suspend certainty is what makes our knowing together collective, because something new and often unexpected emerges in and through the group. A greater collective wisdom becomes possible because ideas are no longer the possession of one person or subgroup, but are shared by those who helped shape it together. As suspension of certainty is akin to beginner's mind, a commitment to not know in order for new knowledge to arise.

Welcoming All That is Arising

How we invite others into relationship matters. The stance of welcoming brings conscious attention to how gracefully we treat each other – recognizing different needs, respecting differences, and celebrating our common humanity. It brings attention to sharing power with others and treating others as equals. This commitment also encourages us to welcome the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of group life, recognizing that even disruptive obstacles or difficult circumstances can be critical aspects of our passage to wholeness.