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Preserving Communities for Our Children's Sake: Interview with Right Livelihood Award Winner Helena Norberg-Hodge

by Charmaine Wellington

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Mom and Dad can't do it all, says Helena Norberg-Hodge. To develop a strong sense of their meaning and purpose, children also need community. Author of Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh and recipient of the Right Livelihood Award in 1986, linguist Norberg-Hodge has for the last fifteen years spent a half-year living with the people of the Tibetan plateau. From them she has learned that a stable yet resilient community is just as important as a stable family in offering young people, especially adolescents, a sense of their own worth. In order to save our children, we may need to save our regional economies as well.

Charmaine Wellington: How can someone who is interested in helping the young people of today understand their own self-worth learn from your description of the community of Ladakh? Adolescents in the United States are feeling very lost, especially with all the pressures on them to conform to an image, imposed on them partly by TV.

Norberg-Hodge: I would advise schools and parents to do what they can to forge community links that are as close as possible. A community enables young people to gain a sense of themselves through living relationships rather than through media, through abstract, distanced symbols.

Of course, what I talk about in *Ancient Futures* is that, ultimately, meaningful changes will come about only through profound changes in the economy and through forging economic links that are more intimate and more immediate to people's lives.

For instance, community-supported agriculture helps communities to develop a direct link with farmers, so that we can buy food more directly. That's taking a real step toward gaining more control over our own lives and creating relationships on a more human scale, ones not mediated by this vast, anonymous, distant connection that deprives us of power over our own lives.

CW: The change away from a community-based agriculture has taken place, it seems, within my lifetime. I can remember Mom buying eggs from the "Egg Lady," the retired woman who raised laying hens to supplement her income. Now I don't know of people who sell produce from their homes.

N-H: It's amazing how quickly it went away. Of course, in Europe even twenty years ago in Spain, you had those connections. In the past ten years, they've been destroyed by the macro-economy consciousness of the European Community. That basically introduces goods that are mass-produced far away. Because they are mass-produced and because governments subsidize transport, these policies destroy the small shopkeeper, the small farmer—everything local. This broader analysis helps us understand the reasons behind your question about how we can help strengthen the sense of self through community.

CW: Yes. As that macro-economy develops, one of the consequences is that children are deprived of a work role. In that wonderful chapter of *Ancient Futures* called "Joie de Vivre" you talk about the way a real capacity to celebrate life—a deep foundation in one's identity that leads to maturity and balance as an adult—comes from a relation to family and a role in the community. In America, children are kept out of a relation to family, are kept out of a relation to community through centralization of the economy and the school system.

N-H: Absolutely. The segregation into age groups contributes to this greatly. This is not something we can change overnight. Perhaps we can't even change it in school right away. I think it's important to understand that if you have children reacting to people of different ages, you get a completely different relationship and forge a different sense of identity than if you segregate them into age groups.

If you have a whole room full of children who are all at the stage of learning how to walk, it's physically impossible for one child to reach out a hand and help another one. And inherently, it creates competition, too. But if you have a group of people made up of a range of ages from one to sixty, which is how traditional people have lived, you get totally different interactions. In this kind of social arrangement, even five-year-olds will develop a sense of responsibility and caring for an infant or a toddler. It brings out their own sense of nurturance—both boys' and girls'.

Now when I look at our society and see the plastic dolls and stuffed animals and contrast it with Ladakh where they are daily interacting with living babies and animals, and learning to care for them, it's so clear that our substitution of these stuffed things just doesn't work.

CW: As I think about one of the contrasts between the Ladakhi society and ours, I realize that divorce was not mentioned in your book as an institution.

N-H: Well, actually, that's true. I may not have talked about that. In fact, there were instances—although things are changing very fast now—where divorces took place. Essentially, when you marry in Ladakh, you're marrying into a whole household. It wasn't unusual that, if it didn't work out, a spouse would go back and live with his or her family. The decision tended to happen very soon, as if there were a trial period. And the decision to return to the family home tended not to have the bitterness and sense of rejection associated with it that we find in our divorces out of the nuclear family.

But I think that the Ladakh's sense of greater security and health comes from being connected to a lot of people. You don't get the sort of bipolar instability that we get in the nuclear family when two people are so intensely attached, and attached in a void of community and of other bonds. Being part of a community means that you're not getting all of your emotional needs from one person. One person can't possibly supply all the deep human needs that can in fact be nurtured by a lot of relationships.

CW: How would the children be affected in these two scenarios—Western and Ladakhi? We know that in Western divorces, children can be pawns in a power struggle. And the children—even in the best case, their attachments to the two people who are their parents are ruptured.

N-H: Well, you see, from the point of view of Ladakhi children, the intensity of divorce is not so great either, because they have attachments to grandparents and a whole group of people. It would vary. Most divorces took place before there were

children, but not always. The children would either stay in the household where they were born or return with their mother to her family.

Of course, the nurturing environment for a child in Ladakhi society starts even before birth, with a mother that is very relaxed and supported. It's very rare to see a child cry. It's not that the children never cry, but it's so much more rare than in our society.

CW: Some of what you're saying might lead someone to infer that you think women taking on careers and absorbing themselves in stressful corporate life detracts from their ability to mother. Is that true?

N-H: No. What I'm saying is much broader. Looking at the socio-economic context by contrasting a whole other way of being and living from our own, we can construct guidelines of the direction we should head.

I think it's a terrible tragedy to put women in the position of choosing between being confined to a household that has lost its vitality, all of its life and meaning—an empty shell in our society—or being out in the world, feeling as if they're making a meaningful contribution to our society. They have to choose between having children and having meaningful work, and that is putting a terrible strain on them. That is not the situation for the Ladakhi women.

A big problem is that when I talk about the household and how much power women have in the household, it's very hard for westerners to imagine something behind that world. Their own experience of the household is a relatively meaningless entity. I'm trying to help people see the profound changes that have taken place in our society.

There are attempts to make corrections in our direction away from the household and family, but they're fairly isolated attempts, and they're not being supported by policy and by economic choices. Those policies and economic choices are tearing apart the fabric of the community and separating consumers and producers.

CW: You've already mentioned the European Community as an economic structure you're gravely suspicious of—and, I would assume, too, the trade agreements with Mexico.

N-H: Yes, what's being attempted now in the name of the "globalization of the economy" really cannot work. It's going against the laws of nature and society. The question is how much destruction will take place before that becomes obvious. Right now, all governments of the world are bankrupt, and they see, with the very narrow economic lenses that they use, that globalization is a way of healing the economy and creating fuller employment.

It's very hard to educate people about this. We ought to be having a full-blown debate about the consequences. At the very least, Congress should do that. But Bush pushed through something called the "fast-track" in order to co-opt discussion. The general public is being deprived of the opportunity to come together and form an agreement.

It's such a tragedy that the people who resist are being characterized as stubborn and selfish—like the French, for instance, who are trying to protect their farmers. This is being characterized as an isolationist selfishness, when in fact what we are talking about is an enormous step in the disintegration of communities. Governments ought to be looking to protect the interests of their citizens when in fact they are protecting the interests of their corporations. The result will be a terrible fragmentation of society, a ruthless competition at every level of society.

CW: What you're saying is relevant directly to children. I live in a small town, and the people who raise their children here, and the children themselves, wish that they could stay in this area or this community, but in order to get jobs, they have to move to economic centers.

The alternative—and people are making a great effort around here—is to set up local agricultural distribution and small businesses that provide an economic life that the children can attach themselves to

and use to support their lives. But those efforts are feeble in the face of the attractions—the perverse charisma—of modernization.

N-H: When we talk about political and economic power, we're really talking about jobs. I'm quite sure that if there were more employment in smaller towns and rural areas, we would see a very rapid migration of people to rural and smaller communities. People would move back if they could have meaningful employment there. People are fed up with the crime and the anonymity of the large cities and the deadliness of the suburbs.

CW: I'm a scholar of British literature, and I've read many novels written during the period before the industrialization that led to the collapse of the cottage industry. One of the strong messages in the books written then was that their lives were boring. Is that a problem inherent in rural life, or is that because people then were on the verge of a shift in the structure of life and were beginning to see an alternative?

N-H: If I hadn't lived in Ladakh in the very early years, I would probably think it was inherent. But I've seen such an enormous change away from the very early days, when there was an incredible vitality that started with the vitality of each individual. If you can imagine living with people who have great energy, vitality, and joy, and who all sing, dance, and tell stories and farm and make shoes and houses—but do it all with a joy and a sort of fullness—it's not boring. But I've seen those same people very quickly lose self-respect and their sense of being at the center of things; it becomes sort of dead.

Now in Ladakh it's still probably a more joyous place than most places in the world, but the quality of it has shifted, and that's deeply depressing to me, who know it so well. But it's also instructive, and it makes it even clearer: this enormous difference between what the Ladakhi were and what they are today only strengthens my conviction that this process of the destruction of community is destructive to the very spiritual center of the individual.

CW: That makes perfect sense. If I were to have to describe it, I would say that you're describing the loss of their conviction that they're the center of their universe. And along with that loss comes a lapse in their own creative drive.

N-H: Yes, and a lot of that can be interpreted incorrectly, to give the impression of someone who is hideously arrogant, but what I'm trying to point out is the healthy sense that the center is where you are, which in fact gives rise to much greater tolerance and compassion and openness to the world around you. This understanding must be brought to bear on our awareness of the forces in the world around us. It's when we lose our confidence of being at the center of things, of losing control, that we become fearful of losing our boundaries and develop hatred of differences. You're not fearful of differences when you're secure and know who you are.

Helena Norberg-Hodge is founder/director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture: The Ladakh Project, an international organization concerned with the search for human-scale and sustainable ways of living. For information, write to P.O. Box 9475, Berkeley, CA 94709, (510) 527-3873. Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh is available from Sierra Club Books (415) 291-1600.



Deleting Childhood: Computers and the life of children

by Mary Ann Lieser, Managing Editor of *Plain*

reprinted from the December 1995 issue of Plain

About a year ago, my family moved away from the home where we'd lived for three years, within the borders of a town with a very high median income. Most of my neighbors had much more disposable income than I. Many of the local businesses thrive by catering to the interests of people who demand "nothing but the best" and are willing to pay for it.

The standard among my neighbors was for children to begin a formal preschool program at the age of two. Many local preschools advertised their programs by listing all the myriad "enrichment" activities offered, usually including (and highlighting) computer instruction. Around the corner and down the road from my house was a storefront business offering nothing but computer classes and individualized computer instruction for children, from toddlers to teenagers. These pay-by-the-hour classes were promoted locally with all the usual Dire Warnings: "Start them young or they'll be left hopelessly behind in the dazzling Information Age future they are destined to inherit."

Some parents, who might not otherwise have been drawn to provide computer instruction for their very young children, are led to enroll them because of these advertising campaigns and by peer pressure from other affluent adults. They reason that, if all the other four-year-olds know how to turn on the machine and make colors flash across the screen, maybe little Katie will be behind when she starts school. So off Katie goes to computer camp.

I'm worried about what Katie is missing, too, but I'm not worried that her computer skills will be forever lagging. I'm worried about what Katie (along with millions of other children) is missing because of all the things she's *not* doing during the hours she is in front of a computer terminal. And

I'm worried computer instruction, computer play and educational computer drills at school and at home are affecting the way in which today's children will forever view the world, and the other people who live in it.

They certainly won't be missing anything they can't easily catch up on in later years, even if parents and teachers were to delay all computer exposure until high school or beyond. After all, millions of adults who never saw a computer as children are currently making a living using computers, designing them, writing software for them. Many learned what they know now in a few years of intensive, hands-on experience. They didn't start at age two with Sesame Street software. And children today can "catch up" with high technology twenty years from now, if that's what they choose. We should be asking ourselves— What sort of things *can't* they catch up on twenty years from now, if they don't spend enough time doing them in the present?

[In spending time with computers and TV], coloring, cutting and pasting, listening to nursery rhymes, building pretend houses out of sticks in the backyard, molding clay, beeswax or playdough, playing in the mud, rolling in the grass, building with blocks, watching ants, bees and grasshoppers, creating their own scripts for their own puppet shows, playing store with pretend food and money, making up silly songs and singing them, talking to dogs, cats and other animals, riding tricycles and scooters, climbing, jumping and running, listening to stories, building roads, tunnels and cities in a sandbox, listening to stories and making up their own, being children, discovering the real world, with sounds, smells and tastes, at their own pace, and in their own way [is what children would miss]. In short, all the elements that made up a typical early childhood for the generations who came before television and computers.

For thousands of years children have learned about the world through direct experience. It is evident now to many who study child development that children have an inherent ability to spontaneously seek out those experiences that will most challenge

them and help them to grow at the times they are most ready for them, with little outside guidance. Of course, children need moral and spiritual guidance, and a good example set in the home. However, the practice of providing them with a mediated experience—computers and television—as a substantial part of how they learn about the world is an experiment to which I am unwilling to submit my own children.

Those who champion the use of computers with children generally believe that a computer is just another tool for us to use, another medium of information and communication. The introduction of computers to children is a good thing, they say, because it will enrich the child's world by broadening the child's horizons. The more varied the child's world, the better, they assert.

But I believe that computers are not just a tool we use for good or ill, as the case may be. Computers use us, too. A computer is not simply an addition to the real world, especially for children; it changes the way its user views the real world, even when the user is away from the screen. No matter how sophisticated the graphic capability or how flashy the program (and I realize that many are quite impressive) computers reduce everything that moves through them into raw bits of information, and thereby move us away from the subtle presence of the real world into the grossness of a two dimensional world that bears little resemblance to the beautiful creation that envelops us.

Just as the heavy user of fast-action video games becomes less able, over time, to attend to the extremely slow-action, real-time beauty of a sunset, I believe computer use renders us less able to see the subtle and many-dimensional beauty of our world.

I have noticed a commensurate and increasing move away from fine detail and toward a grosser level of perception in many of the artifacts with which our culture surrounds children. Several years ago my daughter participated in a week of preschool "Vacation Bible School" at a church near our home, and I assisted one of the adult organizers, a neighbor and

friend of mine. I enjoyed getting to know the children, but was frustrated each day when it was time for them to color or draw a picture. There were almost no crayons to be found, but one of the other adults could always produce a canister full of color markers. Many of the children seemed to prefer using markers rather than crayons anyway. The colors were brighter and a larger space on the paper could be filled in less time. But they also almost always bled through the paper, making every child's picture a messy blob of dark color.

The next time I was at a store that carried such items, I looked for a large box of crayons to purchase. I finally found what I wanted, but only after looking at box after box of markers. Color markers of every imaginable size and color had taken over what was formerly the crayon section, and they now occupied approximately five times as much space as crayons.

So what's so wonderful about crayons and what's so bad about markers? Everything we give our children teaches them something. Crayons teach children that there is variety and subtlety in the world, and that little things matter. After much crayon use, a child discovers that it makes a difference how hard you press down, and in what direction your strokes go. Markers teach children that little things don't matter. Many different levels of pressure all produce the same shade on the paper.

Markers seem to me to be most appropriate for children who are accustomed to learning the concepts of "less" and "more" from public television's Sesame Street, rather than from being in the kitchen helping Mom, and who learn about colors on a computer screen, rather than by helping to sort the laundry. But I don't believe that markers are what children really need at all.

Computer advocates also tout the use of computers with very young children because of the independent learning children can conduct at a computer terminal. The child can gain a sense of mastery and control, they assert, by learning that predictable things will happen when particular buttons are

pressed. Not only that, but the child is just as capable of pressing the button and controlling what happens on the screen as an adult, who otherwise does so many things a child, to his or her frustration, cannot do.

This argument ignores the fact that what the child is gaining mastery over is a machine, hooked up to a power source. Shut off the power and the child controls nothing. What the child is controlling with a computer is a series of pre-selected, predigested choices. Granted, much of today's sophisticated computer software presents quite an array of choices, but all the possibilities have ultimately been decided by some other person or the machine itself.

Instead, I'm teaching my preschoolers mastery over paper, scissors and glue. Combined with their own imagination this sort of mastery will take them farther than any computer software ever will, for there is no limit to what can be created with scissors, paper and glue. My four-year-old daughter has made hats, baskets, quilts, wings, bulrushes (for a play she helped script), birthday cards, coats, capes, aprons, Indian headdresses, boats, leaves, hearts, and flowers, most of which have been entirely of her own design and execution.

A child can learn many things through the process of creating such an item: how to plan and carry out an idea, how to construct, how to problem-solve when something doesn't work out at first, and the sheer joy of finishing, and knowing you made, a thing that didn't exist before and which is unique among all the other things in the world.

I believe it's important for children to learn all of this by using their own hands on three-dimensional, real-world items. Being "creative" by pushing plastic keys to select items in a computer program's menu cannot compare.

Introducing computers to young children also serves to accelerate the growing gap between young and old, already so large in our culture. I used to hear it all the time when I worked in a large, urban,

public library. Grandparents would come in and either shudder or run the other way in fear when they saw a computer. But at the same time they would brag about their grandchildren's facility with computers.

The younger generation, some of these elders seemed to believe, was in some mysterious way predisposed from birth to be comfortable with computers. Actually, most of the younger generation's comfort can be accounted for by exposure and familiarity, while the older generation's fear and distrust may be well placed.

The elderly are respected in many other cultures, precisely because of what they know—because of their wisdom and knowledge. In a culture that places no value on wisdom and knowledge, favoring (or even worshipping) information instead, the elderly are held in low esteem. What does Grandpa have to offer when he doesn't even care to learn how to turn on the computer, much less use it?

The answer is that a grandparent offers a base of experience that is large enough to make some sense of the "information" with which we all, especially our children, are burdened.

Computer use by children is being sold to us on the basis of its supposed ability to broaden experience. But what is being given up in return? Our children's relationships with their grandparents' generation, with those who sustain the link between past, present and future will be impossible to experience twenty years later, along with all the other dimensions and wonders that computers have begun to delete from childhood.



A Revolution of Hearts: Notes on the Second Luddite Congress

by Bill Felker

"We are faced with an ecological, social, and spiritual crisis which has been both caused by technology and which cannot be solved by technology. The needs of the people exceed the needs of the machines, machines that are now being used to accelerate the extinction of species and destroy the natural world."

Reprinted from the "Summary Statement" of the Second Luddite Congress, Barnesville, Ohio, April 13 - 15, 1996.

On April 13th and 14th, I joined 350 other delegates from around the United States to the Second Luddite Congress in Barnesville, Ohio.

The original Luddites were 19th century British farmers and shop keepers whose livelihoods had been ruined by the Industrial Revolution and who burned factories and killed factory owners in an attempt to halt the tide of mechanization. Their leaders were quickly hunted down and hanged by the government, however, and the Luddite cause was lost in a matter of months.

One hundred and eighty-four years after the first Luddite Congress convened to plan a guerilla campaign against the British government, the Second Luddite Congress was called by Ohio's Center for Plain Living in order to reflect upon what author Kirkpatrick Sales called the "Second Industrial Revolution driven by the omnipresent microchip."

According to Sales, keynote speaker at the gathering, Luddism may have been suppressed almost two centuries ago, but it "raised the machinery question—a question which is still with us." And although the Barnesville delegation had no interest in, or sympathy for, the violence which characterized the 19th century revolt from industrialization, the original Luddites, said Sales, "are the symbol of

those who reject and resist the technologies which threaten their lives."

The Congress speakers who followed Kirkpatrick Sales suggested that those technologies might include everything from television and computers to automobiles, air conditioners and electric lights. While those who addressed the Barnesville gathering realized that few present were actually going to abandon all forms of modern machines, they urged a "revolution of the heart," a revolution through which to rethink the role of technology in modern life, to rethink how to really live.

Most of these speakers were people who were already involved in a kind of private, personal resistance to the tools and weapons of mass society. Gene Logsdon, farmer and essayist, spoke in favor of things such as sustainable, decentralized food production. He spoke out against mandatory and regimented schooling which "treats children like robots." He called for face-to-face information by-ways instead of electronic information highways.

Charles Siegle, urban ecologist and author of *The Preservationist Manifesto*, traced the history of urban expansion since World War II, and described a kind of freeway-centered growth which continues to dominate many American suburbs. He also talked about a new kind of urbanism which focuses on building neighborhoods around mass transportation centers—streetcar suburbs instead of Lexus suburbs.

Amish farmer, David Kline, described the kind of close-knit world in which he grew up and continues to live—where "all the role models are local people."

Independent community midwife, Judy Luce, shared her experiences with giving birth and assisting with births outside of the impersonal and sometimes dehumanizing setting of a hospital. "How we birth," she said, "is how we live."

Art Gish, who belongs to an intentional, self-supporting Christian community near Athens, Ohio, talked about what it could mean to reject the spirituality of the technocracy. "I want a spirituality," he

said, "that makes genetic engineering, nuclear power, global control, and the curse of individualism unthinkable."

Computer expert and author of *Silicone Snake*, Cliff Stole, debunked the current "wisdom" that kids need to use computers in school in order to be successful in life.

Bioregionalist Stephanie Mills discussed ecological restoration to prevent further extinction of species. "Techno-addiction," stated Mills, "keeps one in complicity with the vast destruction which modern technology produces."

New York publisher Bill Henderson came to promote his latest book, *Minutes of the Lead Pencil Club*, an anthology which "deplores the amoral, mindless commercial frenzy of our age that is spurred on by an increasing array of electronic gadgetry reducing us to a nation of soulless ciphers."

Educator, John Taylor Gatto, gave his version of the history of American public education, describing it as a conspiracy to "dumb down" the curriculum of the masses and to thereby keep control of society in the hands of an elite.

Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*, provided examples of communities that were solving the problems of pollution and transportation and food production. He suggested that the greatest hope for change lay in the heart of materialism itself. "The greatest vulnerability of materialism," McKibben said, "is that it doesn't really make us happy!"

If the invited speakers brought professional witness to the Congress, the delegates themselves provided a moving complement to their themes at a two-hour session that the program called a "meeting for worship on a concern, held in the manner of Friends."

The concern was "Technology, Materialism and Community," and the "manner of Friends" was a forum in which the 350 Congress delegates met to meditate on the topic, to rise, as the spirit moved

them, to express themselves, and, in so doing, define the nature of modern Luddism in a patchwork of individual positions.

There was silence for the first minutes of the meeting. The first person to speak expressed her gratitude "for being among people who think along the same lines." For two hours after she sat down, others got up to briefly share their thoughts.

"Luddism implies violence," said one person. "Words are important. Are we using the right label?" There was no answer for her, nor was there for any of the other questions that followed. The next person rose: "The first Luddite Congress was in 1812. Will we have to wait another 184 years before we meet again?" he asked. "Or maybe this meeting will be enough... Or maybe we need to get together yearly...." A young man spoke: "We all have Chernobol on our back yards. Our pursuit for solutions, for community, is not trivial...." Another: "I'm a well paid, very unhappy systems analyst for Amoco, I've come here hoping to find a vision...." Another: "The problem is that people are not in control of technology anymore...." Another: "There's no hope for activism which does not come from community...." Another: "There is a vast array of technology against us. There is a vast array of power against us. It is my hope that our power will come from the heart and from the Lord...." Another: "If we are going to change society, we have to change ourselves first. We have to make choices that change. The issues are not in New York or China. The issues are in our own lives...." Another: "I'm trapped in my job, and I've come to learn how to escape...."

A woman who called herself an animist, pagan, bioregionalist and a grandmother: "I felt compelled to be here. I'm worried about a world that is dying, and I know that my grandchild is going to have to face this world...." A man stood up and told about how once when he was in Philadelphia, the electric power went off, and then everyone came out into the street and started to talk to one another. After a little while, the power came back on, and then the people went inside and back to watching TV. "I

collect stories like this," he said. "If you have any, please share them with me."

The statements, it seemed, could have gone on throughout the rest of the day, but at four o'clock, Seth Hinshaw, the clerk, stood up and brought the meeting to a close. His summary tied together just a few of the many themes: "We can find comfort that we are not isolated and alone in this world... There is no hope for productive action which is not based on community and discipline... If there is going to be change, we must first change ourselves...."

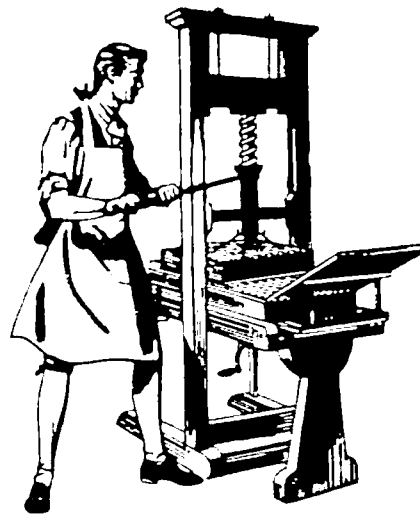
Like the formal speakers and like the individuals who had just expressed their ideas, the clerk gave no radical solution to the problems of technology. Nor, in the end, did the Congress itself. In its final day, however, the delegates brought together a basic position paper around which one might build resistance to a culture dominated by materialism and machines: "We offer these particular recommendations," declared that manifesto: "Each of us can care for some land, even if only a flower box; We can give up our televisions; drive less or not at all, and we can eat locally grown food, cook our own meals, and have our neighbors in for dinner. We can slow the traffic in our neighborhoods, and take the interests, concerns and imagination of children as a guideline. Home education is an important means to freeing our families from the consumer society. We feel an obligation to all young people and to their future.

"We affirm the importance of Sabbath: times of rest, fasting from production and consumption; time spent in solitude, listening, waiting. We encourage support for local libraries, for libraries are one of the few places left in society where we truly share. We do not consider books obsolete. Books, of course, should be read in moderation, but they are a key means to attaining sufficiency. We invite everyone to accept the freeing gift of simplicity. We can find limits based not only on the limits of nature, but also on the basis of our values. We encourage the development of livelihoods free from corporate control. To do this, we have to help each other to lead sustainable lives, helping to teach one another

and ourselves how to be sufficient, how to live locally, how to make everything we can on our own, how to really live."

And, in hopes of opening rather than closing the Luddite dialogue, the paper concluded with the following call to action: "All who agree with the statements herein—partial and imperfect though they may be—should consider themselves delegates to the ongoing work of the Second Luddite Congress, and are granted the responsibility of acting in the name of the Congress, until such time in the future that this Congress is adjourned."

Bill Felker is head of the Foreign Language Department at Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. He writes an almanac column for various newspapers, including the Yellow Springs News.



Community Service Conference

This fall's Community Service Conference on "The Value and Future of Simple Living" will be October, the 18th to 20th, at the Outdoor Education Center in Glen Helen nature preserve in Yellow Springs. This gathering might easily have a subtitle "where to draw the line in the use of modern technology" to show its relationship to the Luddite Congress held at Barnesville in April.

Scott Savage, editor of *PLAIN* magazine and one of the organizers of the Barnesville gathering, will be our opening speaker Friday night, October 18th. His subject will be "Getting To The Future."

Saturday morning we will have a participatory session where those present may share their concerns and insights for how our choice of lifestyles can effect the future of our planet. Peg and Ken Champney, long time members of the Vale Community and authors of "Community Made It Possible" (Vol. XL, No. 1, Jan./Feb. 1992 of Community Service Newsletter) will also be with us to share their experience.

Later in the morning Jim and Eileen Schenk, from Imago in Cincinnati, (see Holly Knight's article about IMAGO in the last issue of our Newsletter), and Joe Jenkins, author of the *Humanure Handbook*, will speak about their particular solutions for helping the earth so that attendees in the afternoon may decide whether they wish to learn more about how to make an ecological neighborhood where they live or how to safely build humanure composts.

Linden Qualls, a graduate of Earlham College and a leader of Peace Education Workshops and Cooperative Games for 9 years, will join us to lead non-competitive games Friday night and Saturday. There will also be time for guided nature walks in the Glen Saturday afternoon.

Saturday evening those who attended the Second Luddite Congress at Barnesville will share insights from that gathering and participate in a discussion of "How Technology & Materialism Effect Community" and how best to peacefully deal with the alienating, anti-community facets of society.

A conference brochure including costs and registration form will be forthcoming in July. Please save these dates, October 18th - 20th, and join us with your perceptions. If you do not receive a brochure and would like one, let us know.

Book Review

The Humanure Handbook: A Guide to Composting Human Manure by J.C. Jenkins; 198 pages; 63 tables & figures, 19 photos; \$18 postpaid from Community Service.

by Jane Morgan

The Humanure Handbook by Joseph C. Jenkins emphasizes minimum technology and maximum hygienic safety. Jenkins has composted his family's humanure, along with food scraps, for over 15 years, using the resulting sweet smelling compost in his garden where he grows 50% of his family's food. His extensive research and experience proves that proper hot composting deals with all pathogens.

In this book he outlines the history and philosophy of dealing with humanure and discusses the scientific process involved in safely composting it. He includes designs, photographs, and descriptions of thermophilic composting and of various toilets.

"Cigarette butts, empty beer cans, plastic six-pack rings, Styrofoam clam-shell burger boxes, disposable diapers, discarded appliances, discarded pop bottles, newspapers, old car tires, spent batteries, junk mail, nuclear garbage, exhaust emissions, the 5 billion gallons of drinking water we flush down our toilets every day, and the millions of tons of organic refuse discarded into the environment year after year," these things Jenkins calls "human waste." But human excrement is not "human waste," unless you waste it, flushing it away instead of recycling it. It's a resource we regularly waste and, along with it, we waste lots of pure water as well, which really rangles him.

The handbook contains a lot of information taken from the author's years of humanure composting experience. Jenkins has also done considerable research. He has directions for safely composting humanure with tables and figures of things like carbon/nitrogen ratios for killing pathogens and compost temperature curves. He includes diagrams

of sawdust toilets and various composting toilets from the Guatemalan moldering toilet to the camp composter. He provides extensive references, glossaries, step-by-step illustrations, and supply source lists.

Jenkins provides a convincing case that human waste can be a safe composting material, a fact supported by the growing popularity of Clivus Multrum composting toilets in "mainstream" facilities such as national parks. Jenkins approves of the Clivus Multrum, since no water is required to use it. Major drawbacks, however, are that it costs anywhere from \$2,500 to \$10,000 and it requires electricity.

His preferred toilet is the non-commercial, home-made, sawdust toilet. "He gives a detailed, illustrated description of how and why the sawdust toilet works, and why he believes the low-impact, low-technology sawdust toilet became the most civilized invention since we moved from caves to houses," says Molly Miller in the Fall 1995 *Mother Earth News*.

For 16 years, Jenkins' family has been using a simple sawdust toilet (a 5-gallon bucket), which is emptied every few days into his thermophilic compost pile. It provides his family with free nontoxic garden fertilizer, and only uses the labor and materials necessary for good compost.

"Jenkins' care for earth, people, and ethical systems is evident throughout his work; his painstaking research and historical review serves to remind us that '...feces recycling is one of the regular and necessary chores of sustainable human life on this planet,' and it's clear that he's doing a much better job in his backyard than the local D.O.E. or wastewater management company," says Barbara Rose in the August 1995 *Permaculture Drylands Journal*.

Acting on the information in this humorously written and inspiring book is an important step for anyone who is concerned with clean water, a healthy earth, and nutritious food.

You Can Bring Light to Death Row

by Michael B. Ross #127404

"I wish we could challenge church people to take it upon themselves to get the names of some death row inmates and write to them. It's important to come in contact with them and know them as people, not as criminals awaiting execution. They ought to take it upon themselves to find out about these people that society has condemned to die."—mother of Mike Berryhill, a death row inmate

Death Row can be a very dark and lonely place. As a condemned person, you have been told by society that you are not worthy of even life itself. You are automatically deemed too dangerous to be placed with the general prison population, and are isolated from all the other prisoners by being housed in a separate special unit called death row. And finally, this isolation goes even further, for many condemned men and women eventually lose contact with and/or are abandoned by their own families.

How do I know this? It's because I'm a condemned man myself, on Connecticut's death row. But I'm one of the lucky ones. I still have contact with some of my family, and I have several pen pals—even one in Canada and two in Ireland! However, I'm the exception, and certainly not the rule.

I personally know of inmates who receive no letters and have no visits. I know of many other condemned men in other states who are in the same situation. I even know of persons who were executed and had no one to claim the body. They were buried in a state pauper's grave with no one at the services but the prison chaplain—that's if they were lucky enough to have services at all—and with the final indignity of having a prison number on the grave marker instead of a name. They were just faceless convicts executed by the state and buried in a nameless grave, with no one to even notice their passing, never mind mourn their deaths.

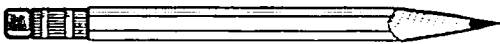
Yes, death row can be a very lonely place. But *you* have the power to change that. You have the ability to bring a ray of light and hope to the dismal darkness of death row isolation. And at the same time, that ray of light just might touch your own heart, and teach you things that you never imagined.

It's as easy as writing a letter. You see, in prison, letters can be that ray of light and hope to someone who might otherwise be totally alone. That's why the Death Row Support Project, a pen pal service for death row inmates, was started.

The experience of writing often had a profound effect on the individuals involved—on both sides of the correspondence. The persons on death row know that someone is concerned about them, and are better able to deal with the difficulties of life on death row. Those persons on death row who feel connected to support on the outside are less likely to waive their appeals and volunteer for execution. Those persons on the outside learn that to know just one prisoner can dispel some of the misconceptions and fears about prisons and those locked away there. Many have been moved to a variety of actions, such as writing articles for newspapers and newsletters, becoming actively involved with local anti-capital punishment groups, and encouraging others to begin writing to other death row inmates.

Jesus's call for us to visit those in prison is clear. Perhaps correspondence can be your way of "visiting". So how can you get involved? It's simple—for the name and address of a condemned man or woman, write to: Rachel Gross, Coordinator; The Death Row Support Project; P.O. Box 600; Liberty Mills, IN 46946. Or give her a call at (219) 982-7480. And please be sure to tell her that Michael Ross sent you!

As a condemned man myself, I thank you. But once you get involved with the Death Row Support Project, I believe that you will thank yourself.



Readers Write

About an ideal extended community

I want to build a community of people from all walks of life from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. I offer my home as a place for us to meet but it would not be tied to my home. It would be an extended community, spread far and wide.

My home is a spectacular place, seventy two acres surrounded by mountains in the Shenandoah Valley, with a private eleven acre quarry lake and a river running through the fields. I want you to share with me and others the knowledge, skills, variety of lifestyle you have. My idea is to have a place where you all can get to know one another.

One of my first projects is to build a house, large enough for many guests. If you want to stay and help build, you are welcome to, but construction is not a requirement to visiting. I also want to build a barn, garden, and massive workshop for woodworking and space for working on cars and other machines.

I have many hobbies and interests which you are invited to join me in. Perhaps you have some hobby or skill that you could share. I envision a place where people are involved together, doing many different activities. Construction will be going on regularly and everybody is invited to take part in that.

My home is like the way I think a school should be. In real life, we are all teachers and we are all students, and the world is the classroom. Our lives are the lesson plan, and everyone should be given the opportunity and encouragement to teach what one knows. Age segregation happens too often in our society. Old and young working and playing side by side is healthy. Older folks have a lot of experience to share with the younger, but they are rarely given the opportunity. Any community should recognize the importance of intergenerational activities. All ages of people are welcome here.

It is unfortunate that we live in an economic system set up so that people are rewarded for being greedy. I am not suggesting communism, but that people start caring about the world that they live in, and see themselves as part of it. We, on a people to people level, have got to stop worshipping the rich, and start rewarding one another for unselfish behavior.

People speak of getting back to the land, of self sufficiency, and retracting from society. I propose mutual caring about one another, so that we may nurture our society, and the earth that we live on.

Music and arts are an important part of life. I would like to host a music festival someday which would take a large cooperative effort from a lot of people. This is also an excellent place for conferences.

My place is just three hours drive from Washington, D.C., eight and a half from New York City, two and a half from Richmond, and twenty minutes from Staunton, VA. Close enough for you to drive, or for me to pick you up at the station, or the airport.

I am starting an extended community. It is my home, and I want my home to reflect my ideals and values. I am inviting you to visit me, so that we can get to know each other and learn from one another.

If you want to visit, please write me and let me know who is coming and when. Let me know about your likes, dislikes, allergies, suggestions. Tell me of any special needs that you have, which I might need to know to make your stay more comfortable. Let me know what your particular interests and hobbies are which you would like to do while you are here. If you have a particular skill or interest that you would like to share with others, let me know so we can announce a workshop in advance.

We may not be able to change the world, but we can change our attitudes, and live our lives according to our values in a supportive, extended community.

*David Rufus Kaufman, Rt. 1, Box 194
Craigsville, VA 24430*

About Community Service

It is important to us to continue as members of Community Service. We look forward to every issue of the Newsletter—read it cover to cover, then pass it on to friends.

We all felt the visit last fall with Walter Tulecke was an afternoon well spent—and very helpful in clarifying immediate goals. For the present Deep Woods will continue its present status. For the longer range, a 501C-3 structure is still desirable—either independently or thru affiliation with an existing 501C-3 with similar mission. Meanwhile, our best wishes to you and staff for another significant year at Community Service.

David & Dorothy Blyth, Worthington, OH

I enjoy reading the Newsletter. Also last summer at the World Future Society meeting in Atlanta I was privileged to meet Ernest Morgan of the Celo Community who has contributed to the Newsletter.

Harold Arnold, Seguin, TX

About Technology and Community

I agree that technology has changed the world, and often in less than humane and sustainable ways than we would like. However, I don't believe that all technologies are bad. I believe that the problem lies not intrinsically in the technology, but rather in the people who have not matured enough to truly live a life of service and love. Unfortunately, power and greed have caused the pain, suffering and inequality that we see in the destruction of the planet and in unsustainable and inhumane ways of living. We can take those same technologies and turn them to the service of the planet and each other, to allow our creativity, caring and love to flourish....we will continue to do the best we can to influence as many people as we can to live a sustainable and caring life.

Diane A Gilman, Ex. Director, Context Institute

Announcements

Land Trust Alliance National Rally '96

The LTA Rally '96 will be held October 17-20 in Burlington, Vermont. Join over 800 land trust leaders and land managers from across the country.

Over 80 sessions offered on land transactions, conservation easements, fundraising, partnerships and land stewardship.

The only national conference specifically for land trusts, the LTA Rally is the perfect educational event for people new to the land trust movement to learn about basic land protection techniques. For experienced conservationists, there's information on the latest legal and legislative developments, new financing options and sophisticated land transactions.

Registration starts in late June. LTA members pay \$205, others pay \$305. Accommodations range from \$72 to \$109 per room. For more information, contact the Land Trust Alliance, 1319 F Street NW, Suite 501, Washington, D.C. 20004-1106; phone: 202-638-4725, fax: 202-638-4730.

Permaculture: Cycles & Connections

A one day session on 'Urban Permaculture' will be held August 24, from 9 AM to 5 PM, at Grailville, 932 O'Bannonville Rd., Loveland, OH 45140-9742. Explore options in urban quality of life for backyards, neighborhoods, bioregions. Includes container gardening, structures for season extension, water conservation and soil building. \$30 includes lunch. Write or phone (513-683-2340).

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Membership

Membership is a means of supporting and sharing the work of Community Service. The Basic \$25 annual membership contribution includes a subscription to our quarterly Newsletter and 10% off Community Service-published literature. Larger contributions are always needed, however, and smaller ones will be gladly accepted. Community Service is a nonprofit corporation which depends on contributions and the sale of literature to fund its work. All contributions above \$12 subscription for NL (\$15 outside the US) are appreciated, needed and tax-deductible. **Due to added postage costs, foreign membership, including Canada, is \$30 in U.S. currency.**

Have Your Friends Seen The Newsletter?

Please send the names and addresses of your friends who might enjoy receiving a sample Newsletter and booklist. If you wish specific issues sent, please send \$1 per copy.

Editor's Note

We welcome letters to the editor (under 300 words) and articles (700-2000 words) about any notable communities or people who are improving the quality of life in their communities. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you wish the article returned. The only compensation we can offer is the satisfaction of seeing your words in print and knowing you have helped spread encouraging and/or educational information.

Address Change

If there is an error on your mailing label, or you are moving, please send the old label and any corrections to us. It increases our cost greatly if the Post Office notifies us of moves, and you will not receive your newsletter promptly.

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You can tell when your Community Service membership expires by looking at the month and year in the upper left corner of your mailing label. Please renew your membership if it has expired or will expire before 9/96. The annual membership contribution is \$25. We do not send individual reminders to renew.

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