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Ecomothering

Creating and Nurturing a Sustainable World

This article explores life at EcoVillage at Ithaca as a site for mothers who aspire to having it all: career, family and a lifestyle in tune with mother earth. It considers the question of whether or not it is a feminist act to live in community and especially one that identifies itself with concerns for the environment. Theorizing with the concepts of ecocriticism, this article investigates the possible impact of the practices of sustainability on mothering and the children brought up in this particular intentional community. The author shares her own experiences as a mother living at EcoVillage at Ithaca along with those of a sampling of other mothers who reside there. Unearthing the concerns and values of these mothers, this article relays the struggles of parenting in a society that promotes overconsumption, easy pleasure and instant gratification. The author draws from Wendell Berry's writings on sustainability and community, to then compare and contrast the realities of EcoVillage life with theory and expectations. She asks whether the more (mother) earth-centered lifestyle of EcoVillage at Ithaca can affect not only the youth brought up in such an environment, but also the communities outside its border.

Eco What? Sustainability?

This article relates the theories of ecocriticism to the realities of mothering in an era of shrinking farmlands, contaminated water and air, increased energy costs, non-binding agreements, and a host of other challenges due to the consequences of global warming and the realities of peak oil. While living in the intentional community called EcoVillage at Ithaca (EVI) for nearly two years, it has occurred to me that the practices of mothering might be affected by living in a community where sustainability is the central focus of

its theory and praxis. The study of the relationship between literature and the land is called ecocriticism, and while this article does not analyze literature, it does examine the relationship between culture and the land. Sustainability is the concept of healthy environmental, economic and social systems that can endure through time; and ecomothering is the daily practice of sustainability within the family unit. It is the simultaneous nurturing of our children and the environment. How we raise our children is perhaps one of the greatest expressions of the cultural values we hold, and the way we mother offers an avenue for social change.

Since the majority of residents at EcoVillage are parents who share a view about the importance of the natural environment, this investigation strives to identify any practices of parenting that speak to the convergence of this concern for our youth and our environment, and how that concern influences parenting at EcoVillage. There are other intentional communities literally all around the globe: Asia, Africa, Australia, the Americas, and Europe. This study focuses specifically on EcoVillage at Ithaca and the attempt to counter the non-sustainable culture of the West. A key part of my methodology has been to interview eight mothers as a sampling of parents at EcoVillage: from founders of the community to more recent additions, from parents of young children to parents of older teens, and from parents who home school to those who firmly believe in the public school system or favor private education. My own experiences are included here also.

Moving to EcoVillage

In May 2009 my son and I moved to one of the 60 houses in EcoVillage at Ithaca, built at the crest of a hill on 175 acres of woods and fields yielding a panoramic view of the town, Cornell University and Ithaca College. Our clusters of houses sit at the end of a dirt road named Rachel Carson Way, an address that speaks to our sense of place with regards to ideology as well as geography. I loved explaining to my son the double meaning of the word "way" in our address—the physical path in space and the philosophical path of how we choose to behave. For multiple reasons, this location attracted me; Ithaca itself is a unique community known for its progressive politics, its green economy, and its more ethnically diverse population compared to its neighboring counties. I was drawn to the concept of living in a community where people could socialize with each other more easily, connect to each other more spontaneously, and even work together towards a more sustainable lifestyle.

I primarily sought a place like EcoVillage because I believe in its aim to live more sustainably and more connected to nature and community. I wanted my son (then 15 years old) to grow in an environment where people consider the

natural world and others an important part of their lives. I never investigated other ecovillages because no others were located near my work. When I took a position at another college close to Ithaca, it became an opportunity to find out more about EVI and eventually live here. Prior to moving to Ithaca, I worked and lived in a suburban setting where we had caring neighbors, a park down the street, and access to any box store you can name (which I mostly avoided). Now we have quick access to local farms, organic foods, and nature.

My son and I live in the second neighborhood of EVI, in an upstairs unit of 860 square feet, two bedrooms, one bath, a workable kitchen, and a deck at the top of the outdoor staircase: one of the smallest homes at EcoVillage. We have no basement or attic, which means the only storage we have is the four modest sized closets in the house: an example of where theory and practice converge. Accumulating objects is not viable in a small house with limited storage. This is a theory I wholeheartedly endorse, despite its challenging practice. Until I just recently acquired a carport at EcoVillage, I had no place to store my bikes in the rain or snow and tuck away my personal gardening tools for the winter. However, not everyone at EVI lives the paired-down life we do. Almost half the homes in our neighborhood are at least double the size of our house—some with enough space to rent out apartments to those who can't afford to purchase a home here. Rather than rent out space, some residents use their extra rooms as bed and breakfast establishments.

Before we moved, my son hated the house I was considering buying. He resisted with his whole heart the idea of EcoVillage, saying it was for hippies and that it was just plain weird. Despite the shared facilities of the common house pool table and ping-pong table, the basketball court, and 175 acres of undeveloped woods and fields at EcoVillage, he didn't want to live here. He dealt with the horrible realization that we were going to move anyway, by saying to himself, to me, and my friends that he would put up with EcoVillage until he turned 18 and then he'd be out the door. He was also planning to make friends outside of the Village and stay at their houses as much as possible during these next three and a half years.

We moved on a weekend and by the following Friday, my son had met the group of boys his age and was beginning to change his opinion about EcoVillage. It seemed he was accepted instantly to his peer group, consisting of about five teens that were already versed in the lifestyle of EcoVillage. Sadly, I will note that some children here have been excluded from certain peer groups, and do not interact with their neighboring peers. By the end of that first full weekend, my son was loving EcoVillage and even articulated that he couldn't believe we both liked the same thing. He and his peer group continue to interact, amuse each other, walk to school or carpool together depending on the weather, and hang out as teenagers do, the only difference being that here they hang out in

the common houses, or in the woods, or at someone's house that is less than a minute's walk away.

Life at EcoVillage

I grew up in the post-war baby boomer bubble that I imagine my parents tried hard to create for me. My experience of that bubble is that I felt alienated and disconnected to my family and my community and the realities that surrounded us. And perhaps we at EcoVillage are only creating a different kind of bubble. As an intentional community, EcoVillage at Ithaca is the manifestation of a vision of a group of people who sought and continue to seek a more sustainable way of living. The planning stage of the first 30 homes began in 1991. Twenty years later, EcoVillage now has two adjacent neighborhoods of thirty clustered homes each and two common houses, all of which occupies only ten percent of the 175 acres. The second neighborhood began planning its development and building in 2001. It differs architecturally from the first neighborhood, primarily in its use of space and its building materials and design, but the basic premise is the same for each. The first is called FrOG for First Neighborhood Group, and the second is called SoNG for Second Neighborhood Group. A third neighborhood is in the planning stages.

Also on the property is an organic berry farm run by one of the residents and an organic CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), or farm that is supported by people in and out of EcoVillage who buy shares in the farm every spring in order to receive a weekly portion of the produce all season. Some of the residents in each neighborhood have come together to build chicken coops, care for the chickens, and share in the eggs produced. There is a community garden in each neighborhood where residents can purchase a plot at ten cents per square foot each season and produce their own food. Participants can learn gardening techniques from the more savvy gardeners, but the community garden is not a cooperative effort, rather the planting, caring for and harvesting of one's plot is the responsibility of each individual. Monthly neighborhood meetings occur where residents discuss policy, issues that come up, and future plans. All decisions are made by consensus, which at times is arduous. It is a pedestrian community so all cars are left along the perimeter, some in carports and others to weather the elements of the northeast.

EcoVillage is inhabited largely by white, middle-class people. There are a few minorities, mostly Asian. It is not inexpensive to buy a house at EVI, many are able to afford a home here after selling their previous homes that were located in even more affluent areas, such as Northern California and the New York/New Jersey metropolitan region. However, there is a couple, born and raised in Ithaca, who chose to build their house and raise their family

here. Also several residents rent out rooms in their homes, which adds to the EVI population a varied group of people interested in experiencing life at EcoVillage without making any financial commitment. EVI is, however, a multigenerational community spanning infancy to the retirement years: families, couples, and individuals. In addition to the business owners, nurses, writers, artisans, musicians, ministers, technicians, farmers, accountants, nutritionists, massage therapists, lawyers, and teachers who reside here, Cornell University employs ten EcoVillage residents and Ithaca College employs two, both institutions being just a hilly bike ride away. Wells College and Elmira College each employ one resident from EVI. Most people do have cars (nearly one-seventh of which are Prius). Some rely on their bikes, public transportation and occasional help from the community to get to and from town. In my neighborhood of 30 houses, roughly two thirds of the households are families and of those families one quarter are more traditional in structure where the father works out of the house and the mother stays at home and tends to the bulk of the child-rearing duties.

Presently there is one set of lesbian parents working full time and raising their child, currently 12 years old. There are stay-at-home mothers, single and married, as well as heterosexual parents who both work equally demanding jobs that take them away from the home. Practices more directly related to mothering than fathering such as breast feeding have tended to be more the norm at EcoVillage, as well as attachment parenting (where the infant stays physically close to the mother at all times), which has typically caused an uneven distribution between parents, regarding the work of parenting young children. There are also exceptions to this "norm," such as one mother who emphatically stated, "I didn't wear my baby or breast feed my children until they reached high school. I didn't whip out my boob every minute nor did I believe that putting my children in a crib was like putting them in jail." She described her mothering style as one that included taking care of herself and the environment along with the care giving of mothering. Interestingly, she sees her more conventional style of parenting as something outside of the norm for EcoVillage.

What I discovered in my interviews with parents at EcoVillage was that all the mothers were most concerned for their children regarding the dismal state of the global environment, a condition that we adults have created for them and their children. This primary and underlying concern for the environment is not typical to other neighborhoods and communities where I have lived. However, within this concern, there were diverse responses about how to cope with such gloomy prospects for mother earth and her inhabitants. One parent has had conversations with her own children suggesting to them that they consider not having children because of how bad the environment will

be for that generation and beyond. Half of the rest of my sample group were more up-beat and positive, only focusing on the importance of our community and our efforts toward sustainability, namely the houses we live in that were built with super insulation and passive solar, the composting we do, the open land we've preserved, the local food we help grow and we eat. The other half expressed EcoVillage's contributions to sustainability but also conveyed their feelings of powerlessness against the overriding negative impact (socially and environmentally) of the culture outside of EcoVillage on our youth.

Life at EcoVillage can include partaking of the optional community meals that occur 2-3 times a week, the number depending on the season. Vegetarian and vegan meals are created by some of the residents as part of a "cook team" with impressive culinary skills. The food in general is extremely nutritious and tasty. All residents are expected to contribute two to three hours of community work per week, which can be anything from bookkeeping, preparing meals, kitchen clean-up, to maintaining the property, or keeping the common houses in order. Some contribute more than others with their time and expertise. The community shares certain equipment such as lawn mowers, gardening tools, a tractor, and the washers and dryers in the laundry rooms of each neighborhood.

Some of the mothers of young children share the task of caretaking as they watch over theirs and others' children in scheduled play dates in the children's play areas of the common houses. The physical layout of EVI makes raising young children much easier than in cities or suburbs. And compared to suburban or city life, EcoVillage really does offer community, if only because of the formation of the clustered homes in each village. Some residents live here because of the opportunity to live more connected to others, and this is borne out in their consistent appearance at meetings, communal meals, and all the special events created by the community. Others have been drawn to EcoVillage for the "eco" component to life here, creating expansive food-producing gardens, participating in the Community Supported Agriculture farm, Westhaven, and creating and maintaining a small-footprint home. Some embrace both aspects of life at EcoVillage.

Our community's footprint is 40 percent less than that of the average suburban neighborhood of the same amount of homes (Walker 174). As a community, we have wholeheartedly accepted the practice of "reduce, reuse and recycle." It's even been suggested that we should add a fourth "R" to the slogan to include "repair." All of this has become second nature for the children and teens at EcoVillage. Composting is a standard practice for residents of all ages. Many families avoid shopping at big box stores or do so on a limited basis. One family who lived in suburban Northern California prior to moving to EcoVillage can compare the two lifestyles and see the differences in their

consumption patterns now. They don't make weekly pilgrimages to Target, for example. They try to take only one daily trip downtown for errands and child pickups. Another family stated how their children don't have as many toys and things as their friends outside of EcoVillage have-a situation that is in part created by limited storage space at EcoVillage.

Most families at EcoVillage share the same opinion regarding television and do not have television sets in their homes. This speaks to two important topics. One is that the children aren't as exposed to advertising, nor is the vapid content of most television programming a common experience for them. Also the younger children in particular are engaged in more physical as well as social activities that develop their coordination skills, keep them fit, and help them interact with each other. During the spring, summer and fall, they ride their bikes back and forth in one or both neighborhoods, endlessly play on the swing set, and run around in the common central field in unstructured free-flow play. One retired single resident commented that she thought all the young children of EcoVillage were so beautiful because of the healthy food they get and the endless hours of outdoor play. Another mother of two children, eight and six years old, commented that EcoVillage has met her expectations and more with regards to the freedom and safety here. She says there are days when she lets her kids out the door and they just play all day long in the community. They come home when they're hungry unless someone else has fed them. She feels very supported as a parent here because all the parents care about each other's children. She knows her children are safe in the other residents' homes. Another perk to the community at EcoVillage is that it is common for cross-generational relationships to form outside of the home. This same mother says that her six-year-old son frequently chooses to hang out with their neighbor across the way, a retired single woman.

Wendell Berry, the influential writer on community and agriculture, published in his collection of essays titled *Another Turn of the Crank,* "17 Rules for a Sustainable Community." These guidelines relate cultural issues with economic realities and are reminders for keeping resources and efforts in the local community so as not to "become merely a colony of the national or global economy" (19). Rule number 12 stresses the need for strong ties between the generations: "See that the old and the young take care of one another. The young must learn from the old, not necessarily and not always in school. There must be no institutionalized 'child care' and 'homes for the aged.' The community knows and remembers itself by the association of old and young" (20).

Concordant with this important concept/rule, EcoVillage residents do create events that bring the generations together, but they usually do not attract the teens. Some parents have begun to meet and brainstorm about how to address this issue, and perhaps create ceremonies or events that could serve as rites of

passage. Teens could acquire some relevant skills and knowledge about land stewardship and sustainability, while the community could witness, confirm, and acknowledge the transition to adulthood. Interested parents are currently only at the talking stages on this idea. In the meantime, some of the younger teens have grown up here participating in programs such as "Primitive Pursuits" (a nature program offered right on EVI property) and have continued to be involved in programs offered by "Peaceweavers" (a retreat center about an hour from EVI) both of which teach about connection to the land and others.

One mother commented that as a result of growing up on the land at EVI, her daughters feel a special connection to these woods and fields. Their participation in "Primitive Pursuits" has deepened that connection as well as their awareness of the land. As a result, they know what edible plants grow here; they can forage, track, make fires, and even skin a fox (road kill, mind you). The parents of one teen are helping their son organize his coming of age ritual with "Peaceweavers" where he completes a 24 hour solo/vision quest in the woods, followed by group time with his invited peers in a sweat lodge, sweating, drumming, chanting and sharing stories together in a circle. These examples, however are not direct expressions of EVI. How to incorporate the teens into the community continues to be a challenge for EcoVillage, perhaps an indication of the health of our community as well as of the difficulties present in any community that attempts to create an alternative to today's consumerist society.

Theory vs. Life at EcoVillage

In a collection of edited essays titled *Beyond You and Me: Inspirations and Wisdom for Building Community,* journalist, deep ecologist, and author on the intersection of politics with spiritual growth, Geseko von Lüpke asks, "How can people from the post-modern age, raised in an atmosphere of competition, alienation, and separation become fit for community? How can we mature in a society promoting childlike consumerism and using the material world to compensate for meeting our inner needs?" (25). The struggle to show our children a different way to be in the world is slightly eased by living in an intentional community such as EcoVillage, but it has not eliminated that struggle, as I naively hoped when deciding to live here.

I realize I made optimistic assumptions about what life at EcoVillage would be and what community life really means. For me it was important to be with others who share my philosophy of child rearing. This has not been the case at EcoVillage. Rather, just as anywhere in our greater society, I am parenting alongside others whose styles and ideologies differ from mine. Perhaps the challenge is even greater here because of our proximity to each other,

creating almost a co-parenting situation with many parents holding values oppositional to my own. This has become the biggest challenge for me about living at EcoVillage. While it is safe to generalize and say that the majority of residents are not participants in mainstream western culture, that may be the only unifying belief among us.

I know that I felt that EcoVillage would be a buffer from a culture that promotes consumerism, poor nutrition, and an over-reliance on technology. I assumed the culture here would encourage healthy eating, appreciation of nature, and face-to-face communication with people of all generations. To my surprise, I found that some of the families here are fine with video war games, unlimited access to the computer, and in general seem to advocate total freedom without any responsibility. While the community as a whole seems to encourage creativity over consumerism and acquisitiveness, many of the teens who live here are glued to their computers playing World of Warcraft; to their Xboxes playing Halo (at best); or to their DVD players watching films that generally encourage easy pleasure, mindless activity, and no connection to anyone beyond the peer group.

My experiences around mothering at EcoVillage have been in direct conflict with those I've read about as well. Though Liz Walker in her book about EcoVillage warns that the community is no paradise, the conflicts she describes do not entail issues of parenting. Hildur Jackson, pioneer of the cohousing movement and founder of the cohousing community in Denmark called *Hoejtofte*, wrote in 2007 in *Permaculture Magazine* about the challenges of raising children in the twenty-first century in Western society. Her concerns echo my own, and 40 years after she began her successful cohousing experiment she claims that cohousing was a solution to the negative influences of mainstream consumerist society. Her article in *Communities*, summer 2005, poses the cohousing movement as an extension of the feminist movement, where women (and mothers in particular) have equal opportunity precisely because the cohousing structure addresses the issue of how to mother and work professionally. *Hoejtofte* was founded specifically because of her desire to have children and raise them in community, which would enable her to be equal to her partner in regards to contributing economically to the household without having to pass off her children to strangers in daycare. She found the support she needed through the community so that she could raise her children AND have a career—the magic "I-can-have-it-all and do-it-all mothering."

It is true that many of the mothers here at EVI share that same desire. They have chosen to live here because they love being mothers and want to balance that part of their lives with their careers. One mother of two daughters expressed her wish to raise girls to be empowered leaders and advocates for the earth. She teaches Permaculture to others, but then wonders how much of

this her own children are learning from her. She also struggles with how much information to provide to her girls: how to protect them from the horrors of the world and avoid passing on her own feelings of despair while equipping them with the plain facts.

In my interviews, it was the parents of younger children who felt very supported here as mothers and saw this environment as beneficial for their children. Something shifts for many of the preteen and teen-age children, however. While their connection to the world beyond EVI strengthens, so does their desire for technological gadgets, junk food, and perhaps other more unhealthy choices. *Hoejtofte* was founded in 1969, and the success of providing a truly positive, nurturing and supportive environment for the children who grew up there may have been a result of the times then—when computers, internet, Xboxes, and Facebook were not yet staples in our teen's daily reality. Neither were ADD, ADHD, AIDS, and rehab part of young people's vocabulary. Though it's as important as ever, I'm not sure the cohousing movement holds the strength it once did in the battle against mainstream culture. The boundaries have become much more permeable between the two cultures because of technology. Also the amount of freedom here at EVI becomes more problematic for some families once their children reach the teenage years. Some of the teens exercise fairly good judgment while others consistently abuse the lack of structure and supervision here. Parents of the teens are not in agreement on basic parenting issues around expectations, responsibility, and consequences. The families with looser ideas around parenting end up affecting greatly the lives of families who wish for more accountability for their teens. Success and comfort of raising a child at EVI is largely dependent on the peer group of one's child. Influences from neighboring families are felt profoundly because of the double-edged sword of the close proximity of our houses.

My own child has not embraced nature as a solace to contemporary woes, despite the fact that it's right outside our door. He and his buddies are no more socially conscious than the middle class students brought up in mainstream culture making up the majority of those I teach in college. While he enjoys his cohort of "ecoboys" (my term, not his) I have found him to be less open to people of other generations since we've lived here. I don't believe that the unbridled freedom here has brought my son or his peer group at EVI any greater awareness in their searching for identity and purpose in life. I see it as quite the opposite, with them living in a false sense of security and lacking any consciousness of the privileged life they lead.

Perhaps, in part, this lack of awareness is due to the fact that half of my son's particular group of friends is comprised of transplants to EcoVillage, my son included. If so, then it's unfortunate that those who have been raised here practically from birth don't have a clearer set of values (such as respect

for themselves, others and nature) that could distinguish them from and help them impact effectively on their more recently arrived friends. While I enjoy and regard highly many of my neighbors, I have not found this to be a safe place for my son to develop as an engaged and caring young man, nor has it been a supportive environment for me as a parent when dealing with setting limits and following up with consequences. The overriding tone of permissiveness has only created a sense of entitlement in my son, poorer connection to our family, lack of responsibility, and complacency. Typical teenage malaise? If so, why isn't there any difference in the teens at EcoVillage than those living downtown or in the suburbs? Why hasn't the eco-lifestyle produced teens of another ilk?

Hildur Jackson from *Hoejtofte* ends her article stating that the ecovillage movement offers a solution for children and that it takes a village of at least 20 parents to raise a child. She believes that "ecovillages have laid a firm foundation for the future and are ready for broader recognition and support as the increasing disillusionment with the negative consequences of so-called 'free markets' and consumer society spreads…" (127). I still want to hold this belief, but it's not my experience that we at EcoVillage are providing those "20 parents to raise a child" nor am I certain that here we are laying any more of a "firm foundation for the future" than some of my friends back in suburbia who drive SUVs and don't compost but who have a strong connection to their extended family, their children's schools, their neighborhoods, and their communities. Furthermore, I don't see the teens of EcoVillage any less susceptible to mainstream marketing.

An article from *Communities* magazine titled "When an Ecovillage is Raising your Child," also speaks to the need for a village in raising a child. It describes the ecovillage in Missouri called Dancing Rabbit and lists the advantages to raising children there: the space for children to explore nature, more connection among family members due to downsized homes, children's exposure to the dynamics of many interpersonal relations, the opportunity to have many different and positive role models, the availability of advice and support from 30 potential parents, and learning how to interact through Nonviolent Communication (Scheidt). Many of these positive qualities about Dancing Rabbit echo the advantages of living in *Hoejtofte*, and EVI. It appears in this article that the members of Dancing Rabbit are comfortable with how all of their neighbors influence their children. Perhaps its smaller size allows for this comfort and welcoming of neighbors' strong impact on one's child. However, the differing ideas about parenting here at EVI make for some uneasy relationships between some neighbors.

Hildur Jackson's claim about a firm foundation for the future can also be analyzed from another and broader perspective. Though I don't agree with him,

it's important to consider political philosopher and economist Takis Fotopoulos' theories about the limitations of what he refers to as lifestyle strategies (ecovillages). In his article published in *Democracy and Nature*, he disputes whether or not ecovillages have any real power to change society: "…moving out of society and 'doing our own thing' in villages, communes, etc., outside the political and economic arena (as many of the ecovillagers in the North do) does not have any potential either to change the institutional framework or to create a massive consciousness for systemic change" (307). This then begs the question, of how *do* you change an unhealthy (unsustainable) lifestyle if you are participating in it and contributing to it by just living in it? If you can't make changes from outside the centers of power, where does the change come from? Certainly anyone living in an ecovillage or participating in other types of environmentally concerned activities that are not proscribed by mainstream culture believe that their actions will eventually affect a systematic change.

Though EVI may seem to some as a community on a hill separate from society, in "ecocircles" it is noted for its more moderate approach to sustainability and as something that can be a model for more mainstream developers creating new communities: a sort of bridge between those communities far outside the power structures and those who work from the center. EcoVillage also expends energy, resources, and time on outreach programs that invite groups and individuals to come and see what the community looks and feels like. Students from both Cornell, Ithaca College, and even Montclair State University in New Jersey regularly appear here as part of their college courses on sustainability. We also have students from all over the world who come here to stay for a month or longer to work as interns or conduct research. EVI works both in and outside the structure, and some of its members are attracted more to the "outside" while others are more comfortable participating in both worlds.

"Ecovillages can provide a lifestyle which reduces our ecological footprint considerably, are possible in all countries of the world, and can lead to global justice, solidarity and cooperation," states Jackson after her experiences of founding and raising her children at *Hoejtofte* (Jackson 127). My experience is that living in extra-insulated houses, eating vegetarian food together a few times a week, making decisions by consensus, driving a Prius or compact car, and sharing a beautiful piece of property does not lead to "global justice, solidarity and cooperation." For many of my neighbors, global justice issues are not even a concern. Their gardens, their personal freedoms, how they recycle, and compost, are of concern. I find it hard to weigh the effect of these personal choices against the environmental and social injustices of say, Texaco in Ecuador. Even EVI's location seems questionable, though what has been created here is certainly an improvement on the more typical current development of farmland into one-acre lots dotted with McMansions.

Psychologist Gordon Neufeld and M. D. Gabor Maté, co-authors about community and child rearing, claim that our current culture has caused the destruction of the American childhood. They believe that effective parenting requires a healthy context: a good parent-child relationship and connection to community. Their treatise on parenting points to many of the ills of our society, one that lacks true nurturing, community, and support for our youth –essential elements for the development of our children. They blame the demise of a healthy maturation process during childhood on the overly domineering youth culture that severs ties between the young and old. They propose that we adults recreate "attachment communities" in order to provide emotional connection between the generations (254). EcoVillage might just be such a community, functioning well for many of our children from infancy until the adolescent years. However, many of the teens are removed from community life: rarely participating in the common meals, not held to the weekly work commitments, and disinterested in our special events. Though some teens do contribute to the community with a weekly task, many do not. Meanwhile, adult influence seems to have been usurped by the teen-peer group and technology, a dangerous dynamic that threatens the transmission of healthy culture and customs, according to Neufeld and Maté.

The aforementioned Wendell Berry in a different collection of essays titled *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*, regards community as a "neighborhood of humans in a place, plus the place itself: its soil, its water, its air, and all the families and tribes of the nonhuman creatures that belong to it" (14). This is an ecocritical definition of the environment, which sees humans as only one of its components. He stresses the importance of finding harmony between the human and the non-human world and he presents two models for society: the one we currently endorse, which he calls living by fire and the one he encourages and models on the economy of plants. The former privileges short term profitability over the health of natural and human communities (29).

It consumes the world in order to live in it. The latter lives within its means and "never grows beyond the power of its place to support it, produces no waste and enriches and preserves itself by death and decay" (13). He calls for a change in our private lives as well as our public lives (33). My assumption was that EcoVillage would be a manifestation of his call for change. Berry acknowledges the role of culture in our lives and its power to either perpetuate damaging environmental practices or to change to a more plant-model society.

Conclusion

The way we mother our children creates opportunity to impact on the environment and to change the practices of our culture. We can educate our young

people about environmental perils, we can advise them about how to confront those difficulties and dangers, we can model positive practices in harmony with nature such as composting, consuming less, eating organic food produced locally, sitting down to home cooked and nutritious meals, and working in jobs that positively affect the environment. These are personal and everyday actions that if adopted by more communities, will impact more significantly on the environment. However, I find that these practices in our small community pale in comparison to the current realities of Western society: one predicated on over-consumption and a lack of awareness about self, others, and the environment. Does EVI have any impact on the attempts to create a more sustainable world? Because of the nature of sustainability, the answer will only be found in the future results of what we mothers have tried to impart to our children here at EcoVillage. Only time will tell if the Rachel Carson way has had a positive and lasting effect on the children and teens of EVI and the local and global communities beyond our 175 acres.

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