



In the Arms of the Community: *an exploration through creative writing*

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In the Arms of the Community is a writing compilation consisting of eight stories based on my time living with the New Meadow Run Bruderhof Community. Each story illustrates a value that I observed as central to a thriving, active community. My hope is that these stories inspire conversation that will 1) encourage us to envision what we want our own communities to look like, 2) challenge us to learn from other examples of community in our world, and 3) celebrate and value our already dynamic UNH and Durham community.

Introduction

My proposal for a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) was to write a compilation of creative non-fiction stories based on the theme of community and grounded in direct experience.

In that spirit, during June of 2007, I spent three weeks living with the New Meadow Run Bruderhof Community in Farmington, PA.

The Bruderhof are an intentional community who center life around family and faith in Jesus— most prominently the teachings of 'love thy neighbor as thyself,' nonviolence, faithfulness in marriage, and compassion for the poor. Sharing all things in common, members work to live a faith and a lifestyle that values every member and always thinks of the common good.

My intention was not to research the Bruderhof specifically but rather to witness community in action and the values central to living with a genuine spirit of community.

During my time, I lived with a host-family and experienced life as a Bruderhof woman my age would. Daily life included:

- cooking and cleaning in the communal kitchen
- working in a thriving wood-shop
- harvesting vegetables in the 13-acre organic garden
- sharing meals and meetings with over 200 people
- singing, praying, and dancing frequently
- learning the history of the Bruderhof Community
- joining the youth group, *Shalom*, in service work
- engaging conversation & asking endless questions

Upon returning, I formulated eight cornerstones that I determined were foundational to the health, integrity, and sustainability of the community.



Unity



Sense of Place



Sense of Time



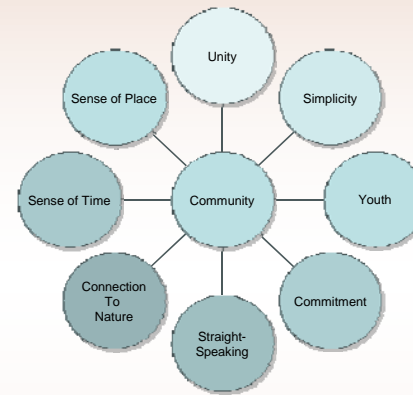
Connection to Nature



References:

<http://www.churchcommunities.org>

<http://auroraquanta.com/SwishSearch?submit.x=0&submit.y=0&Keywords=bruderhof>



Sample Writing Piece

CONNECTION TO NATURE

You cannot save the land apart from the people, or the people apart from the land, to save either, you must save both.
Wendell Berry

For the Bruderhof's, the definition of community extends beyond people to include the wider earth community of which people are only one part. The Bruderhof's have adopted a land ethic that encourages the human population of the community to live in harmony with the non-human populations. Enlarging the boundaries of their definition of community informs a respect of the land that manifests in various ways, e.g. farming organically, holding meetings and dinners outside when weather permits, intentionally leaving communal grounds wild, encouraging children to explore, giving thanks for a beautiful creation, using clothes-lines, running common vehicles on bio-diesel, conserving water and electricity, recycling, composting, and so forth. In viewing the soils, animals, water, or collectively, the land, as part of their community, the Bruderhof's share the value of connecting to nature. Encouraging a connection to nature in members inspires an intimacy, wonder, humility, and respect that proves to be the challenge and benefit of the entire community, humans and non-humans alike.

To Walk with Kings

The trail bursts with wildflowers. Fogglow hanging in bright blue and purple bells. Sweet Williams blooming in thick pockets, lilies with curling orange and white petals. It is Sunday, and Susie King is teaching me the names of flowers and shrubs before breakfast. She walks by my side, telling me everything she knows about the flowers, hungry to pass on her knowledge. I run my fingers along the brush, bending slightly under the weight of morning dew that overhangs the trail. On this early June morning, the wildlife wakes as we pass—petals welcoming the sun, birds stretching in song from their nests, animals smelling the new day in search of food. Weeks earlier I would have moved quickly along this trail, seeing only green and hearing little else than my own footsteps.

But nature is teaching me something of change.

This morning, everything that happens in nature happens inside me as well.

Susie calls out to her husband, "Dad, look! Look at all of the black raspberry bushes!" Their two sons, Alan and Caleb, walk with hands in their pockets on either side of their slim father. They turn first, grinning to each other at their mother's excitement. Eddie, her husband, is a farmer. He wears a yellow button down shirt that radiates vibrantly against his browned arms and the green trail. Later today the family will work long hours in the communal gardens, but right now are taking time to walk together. He turns now, smiling too, perhaps thinking of the pies, jams, and breads to come.

Susie kneels, leaning forward to the low branches of the bush. She cups the hanging plum-colored berries gently in her hand, her eyes alive with this discovery. Twists of white hair blow in the breeze under her red kerchief. "Dad, boys, come, come look!" I stand behind Susie and she flaps her hand at me to also come look. Some of the fruit is unripe, a lighter color than the others, and I notice now the thorny brambles Susie must weave her hands through. But there is a difference between how I look at the berries and how Susie wonders at them, like a child might.

Nature has taught Susie how to move and to be moved.

I am brought to my knees, still learning.

Simplicity



Youth



Commitment



Straight-speaking

