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

Simplicity

Youth

Commitment

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.

References:
http://www.churchcommunities.org
http://auroraquanta.com/SwishSearch?submit.x=0&submit.y=0&Keywords=bruderhof

Sample Writing Piece

For the Bruderhof, 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 elements of our planet. An example of gay marriage, we have long maintained that it is not possible to separate the people from the land. In working with the land, we are also working with nature, giving thanks for a beautiful creation, using our hands, nurturing common animals in the field, conserving water and electricity, reusing, recycling, composting, and more. In growing the soil, animals, and plants, we are also growing our own faith.

For example, during the community’s annual Shalom day of service, a group of us worked to plant flowers. The flowers were from a local farm and the group included many of the youth from various parts of the community. The camping group had been working on the same property a week before. A leader of the group, a woman, was talking about the power of community. She described the importance of working together and the beauty of the experience. It was a moment of connection to nature. Through service, a community can manifest its hope, inspire wonder, humanity, and respect for others. These practices provide the challenge and hold of the entire community, humans and non-human alike.

To Walk with Kings

The main house is surrounded by woods. Fresh peas hang in bright lilac and purple balls. Street Williams flooring in this room, filled with a giant orange and to help people. It is human, but the house is teaching me the concept of thousands and what it means to be human. We walk by the windows, talking about what it means to be human. Ignorance is gone. As the house is being built, the community is growing. I am walking as a young person, asking the same questions, but the house is already there. For more than 100 years, a community has been growing in this house. With the house, we are able to ask questions, to be human, and to share knowledge.

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