

COMMUNITY HEALTH INSURANCE • SENIOR COHOUSING

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Health and Well-Being

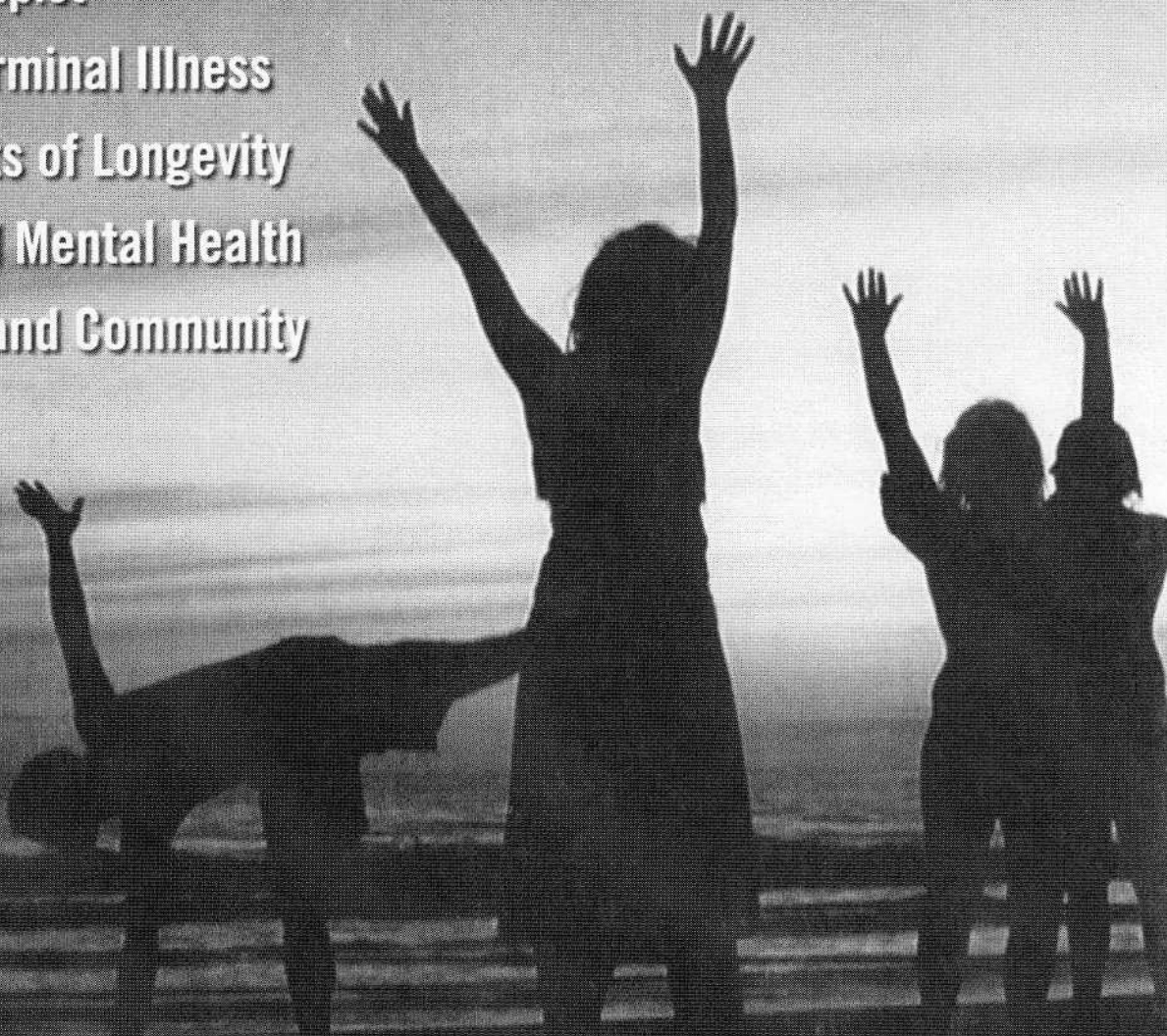
Garden as Therapist

Embracing a Terminal Illness

Shakers' Secrets of Longevity

Cell Phones and Mental Health

Healing, Quiet, and Community



Winter 2009 • Issue #145

\$7.00 / \$8.00 Canada



communities.ic.org



HIGH WIND: A Retrospective

Belden Paulson, University of Wisconsin professor for 35 years, cofounded (with his wife Lisa) the High Wind Association in 1977 and the High Wind community in Plymouth, Wisconsin in 1981. The following interview-style article was inspired by a conversation that Belden and late community networker Geoph Kozeny had intended to have before Geoph's passing, but never did.

...

How did you get involved with intentional communities?

In October 1976 Lisa went to a conference at Findhorn, the spiritual community in Scotland, for three weeks. She had heard about the 40-pound cabbages and roses blooming in the snow, all near the Arctic Circle, but she was dubious about some of the tales. She'd already had a traumatic encounter in northeast Brazil with Macumba (a voodoo-type experience that almost paralyzed her). Recently she had helped found Psy-Bionics, an organization in Wisconsin teaching altered states of consciousness.

In those days, the latter 1970s, the New Age had not yet become an over-used cliché. Her scraps of notes included this: "the New Age means recognizing that mutual cooperation and respect and love are essential if our planet is to survive. All living things but humans operate naturally within this system; our intellect and greed and selfishness and lust for power have gotten in the way of a larger awareness." She quoted David Span-

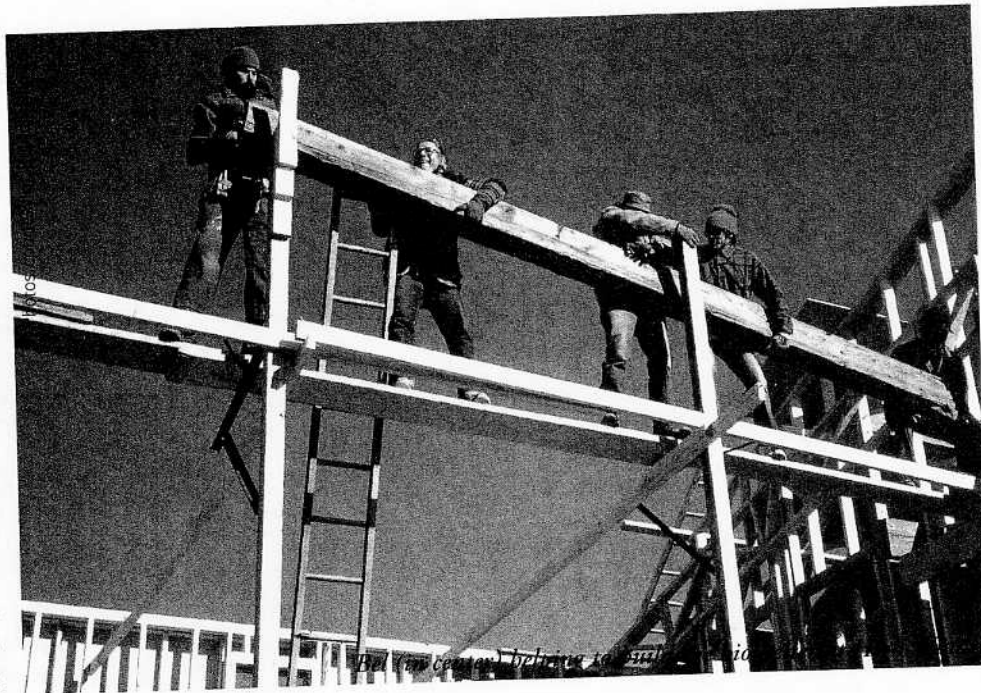
gler, one of the conference speakers, who wrote in his *Revelation—The Birth of A New Age*: "the New Age is fundamentally a change of consciousness from one of isolation and separation to one of communion, attunement, wholeness."

How did you take to all of this New Age stuff?

I was very perplexed. We'd been married for more than 20 years but I'd never seen her so fired up. I wasn't even sure of the best questions to ask to draw out the Findhorn experience. Lisa obviously felt she would soon be dragged back from the heights

of the New Age into the mainstream culture.

I myself was at a point of some openness to alternative thinking. I had joined the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and University Extension in the early 1960s, teaching political science, and was heavily involved dealing with inner city poverty and racism. Lisa and I had met in the waterfront slums



of Naples, Italy, soon after college and worked for years overseas. After our immersion on the front lines of great world needs, both of us were concerned with a culture in trouble.

Several months after Lisa's return from Scotland, she talked me into driving to Chicago to attend a lecture by Peter Caddy—who, along with Eileen Caddy and Dorothy Maclean, had cofounded Findhorn. I was impressed by Peter's down-to-earth talk on the community's successes and challenges and his idealism about serving the planet with a new consciousness.

How could you relate any of this to your position at the university?

A professor in the university's school of engineering had just received a grant to explore advanced thinking on the interrelationship between technology and culture. I introduced him to the "Findhorn story," with its emphasis on lifestyle changes, and to E.F. Schumacher, one of the Findhorn conference speakers, whose book *Small is Beautiful* advocated simple living. He was intrigued and asked me to represent the university on a planning committee for a major Chicago conference in spring 1977, keynoted by Schumacher.

With Schumacher the magnet for the 2300 attendees, along with 60 other lectures and workshops, we reserved a room for 15 people where Lisa could talk about Findhorn. To our astonishment, 400 folks lined the corridor, demanding a larger space. Next to Schumacher, "Lisa's Findhorn" was the big event of the conference. I had invited one of my deans, who was so enthusiastic about her workshop that he urged me to organize New Age education through the university.

In June 1977, since people were thirsty for information, we got the university to sponsor talks by Peter and Eileen Caddy. In the largest available space on campus, they wowed the 1200 attending, drawing in people we never imagined were interested.

In short order, I got approvals from university officials to begin lining up a series of seminars. Over the next two years, we offered several cutting-edge programs, including "Planetary Survival and the Role of Alternative Communities," and "New Dimensions in Governance—Images of Holistic Community" (with David Spangler and Milenko Matanovic, coorganizers of the Lorian Association)—drawing people from business, government, and academia, as well as traditional students and people who had attended our previous talks and were questioning conventional trends and belief systems.

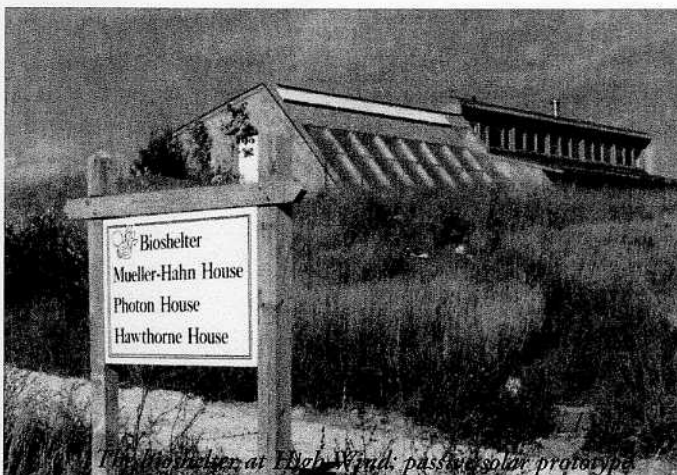
During all this activity, what was happening with you—with your initial skepticism about intentional communities like Findhorn and the New Age?

By the end of 1978 I was realizing I was no longer the same

person I'd been. In spring 1978 when Lisa returned to Findhorn, I went along and participated in a week-long intensive experience of the community. My contact with the leaders and residents convinced me of the significance of this kind of model for rethinking the future of our culture. My intimate collaboration with David and Milenko, along with many others we had brought in for classes and consultations, had deepened my perceptions of reality far beyond anything I had learned at Oberlin College and the University of Chicago.

As increasing numbers were drawn to our seminars and presentations, we began hearing the comment: "We're seminared out. Let's do something practical." That's when we established the High Wind Association, to develop a sharing community, relying largely on renewable energy, utilizing the land as an ecosystem, and serving a demonstration and educational role. Lisa and I made available our run-down 46-acre farm 50 miles north of Milwaukee.

With two colleagues we accepted the invitation of John Todd and his associates to visit the New Alchemy Institute on Cape Cod and Nova Scotia, to see their experimental bioshelters. They were pioneers in solar energy, energy-efficient construction, and sustainable agriculture. They convinced us to try something comparable in Wisconsin. They helped us design and submit a bioshelter project to the US Energy Department in its small grants program for appropriate technology, to be built at the farm.



The bioshelter at High Wind: passive solar prototype



Folk dancing at High Wind

When we convened a meeting on a blustery evening in February 1981, to announce the new grant and recruit volunteers, we thought 15 would be a good turnout. Two hundred showed up, and immediately we had an experienced carpenter who agreed to be lead builder for bioshelter construction, and a teacher/gardener who would grow food to support the workers. Soon, a PhD psychologist signed on; she would run the household, including the kitchen operation. We already had an idealistic technical genius on-site who worked at the *Milwaukee Journal* as editorial librarian. Suddenly the farm was humming with activity, the farmhouse had become a "pressure cooker" with 10 residents and two dogs, and a construction gang was on the ground. Soon we had evolved into an intentional community.

I was undergoing my own personal revolution; maybe a better word was transformation. I fully endorsed the *vision*. The test now was whether we could find the will and resources to move beyond the talk and rhetoric and actually *do it*.

What was your first big conflict, when the community could

The founders had articulated the vision and purposes, but community members rightly wanted to make the experience their own.

have blown apart?

We all knew the bioshelter was a complex building, with no examples except New Alchemy's "Ark" out East. The construction engineer who'd been advising our lead builder wanted to use wood construction in the greenhouse, while our well-known solar architect, who had volunteered her services, favored spancrete flooring. I won't get into details other than to say her model was strongly preferred by several at High Wind, who happened to be women.

Since our builder and his mostly male crew had already gone ahead, they would have to tear down what had been done. Winter was coming on and the building had to be closed in. Our builder was feeling the criticism and tremendous frustration; it would be a disaster if he quit. Likewise, it would be most undesirable if our architect pulled out with her professional oversight. The building inspector had approved her design. Underlying it all, there was resentment against the macho energy—"the men know best." We had always used consensus for major decisions at High Wind.

We told our builder to hold up the work. This was our first internal crisis, which threatened to break apart our fledgling community. We held numerous meetings, and contacted outside experts who had differing opinions but usually sided with the architect. I felt some personal responsibility because I had recruited both the engineer and architect; I personally was open to either solution. We finally agreed to continue along the lines our builder and his allies laid out. Our architect resigned and no other architect would touch the situation. While Lisa was one of the builder's biggest critics on this, she wrote him a heartfelt letter of appreciation of him as a person. One of the guys wrote the community: "We at High Wind represent an ideal that we must uphold. This means not getting trapped in tactical-level controversies that afterward will seem like tempests in a teapot."

As High Wind evolved, what were the biggest personal challenges you felt?

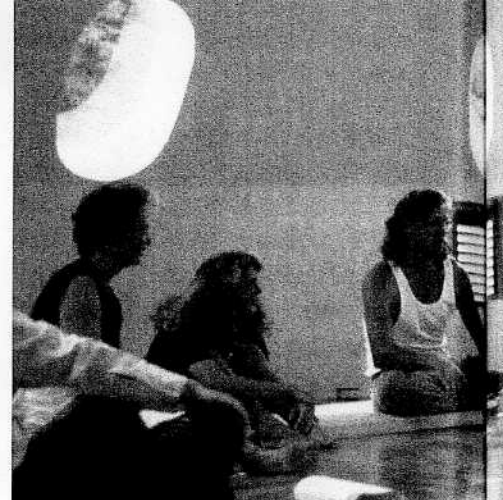
As a host of sticky community issues surfaced, especially in the earlier years, they often ended up with Lisa and me. After all, we started the whole enterprise, we had owned the property even though most of it was now in High Wind hands and some we donated, and when serious financial bottlenecks occurred, we usually stepped in. Often it came down to an issue of perception: who held the power?

"Founders' Syndrome." This was the title of a panel for founders of six communities from around the world, held at Findhorn. The panel articulated a universal issue all the founders faced: the tension between the originators who articulated the vision and purposes, and community members who rightly wanted to make the experience their own. This might mean seeking to reframe community goals and challenge the initial leadership. High Wind, like all the panel's communities,





Sunrise Indian balance dance at High Wind.



As the years passed, I realized that I was not very good at intentional community group dynamics. While visionary thinking was what we were all about, it could be scary, even oppressive.

emphasized its commitment to non-hierarchical leadership and governance by consensus. I cannot recall a single High Wind community decision reached by consensus that Lisa and I overturned, even if we had had the power to do so. But there were many intense debates during interminable meetings to reach consensus. On several occasions when we felt the community might be falling apart, with factions developing, and we were unsure of our proper role, we sought counsel from experienced Findhorn or Lorian friends. Their response was always the same: founders hold responsibility to sound a clear note about the vision. If there are members with other visions, they should be respected but asked to leave and create their own community. Though we respected these advisors, we found their counsel impractical, as visions do evolve, co-authored by others in the community. In fact, Peter Caddy was asked to give up his role due to his authoritarian leadership. The Lorians, although often indicating interest, never founded a residential community.

Another personal issue?

Processors and Doers. As residents at the farm evolved from the original construction gang to an intentional community, some people were very production/goal-oriented. Others were more concerned with the process of getting there. While both obviously were essential, at times one or the other approach took over and, in my view, became extreme. Sometimes Lisa leaned toward process: slow down, take care of the ever-present human dimensions. Often I was so concerned about all the challenges before us, holding a lot of responsibility for “results,” I could go too far toward “getting it done.” I could become impatient when evening sessions were convened where everyone was required to “share your pain,” even if at the time there were those who didn’t feel any pain or didn’t want to share it. I was labeled as someone with “thick skin,” insensitive to those with “thin skins” who were easily hurt by life’s experiences. (My “thick skin” was also nurtured by having worked for years in areas of dire need with poverty and refugees, and also

as a teenager caring for an invalid mother who could die at any moment.)

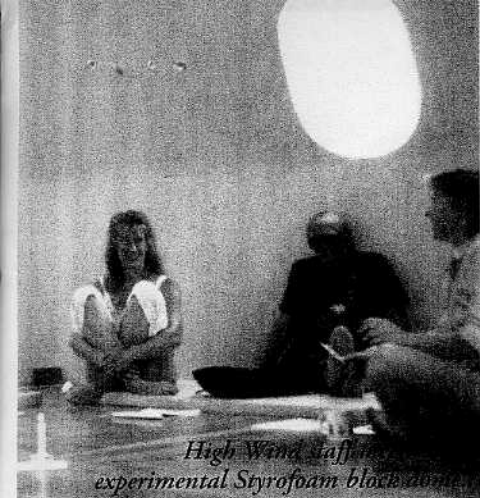
I welcomed our periodic “internal conferences,” sometimes with an outside resource person, when each of us could express our needs and wishes. Lisa and I, as much or more than other community members, got a healthy share of criticism: she for her lofty visions—editorials in *Windwatch*, the community newsletter, to lift the residents out of their daily nitty-gritty grind. I received even more censure, in part because I was often introducing ideas and plans for educational programs that scared the community, and which they thought too hard to carry out. Also, when someone else came up with a project and I said, “Great idea, you do it,” it was interpreted as code for “I don’t think it will work and I don’t want to get involved.”

The most significant issue I had to confront was the realization that as the years passed, I was not very good at intentional community group dynamics. At High Wind I learned that while visionary thinking was what we were all about, it could be scary, even oppressive. All agreed that while the community’s mission was imperative, the process was at least as important as the results. The qualities that were optimally required for my approach did not fit too well into the conventional group dynamics of an intentional community.

What about the high points of your High Wind experience?

Notwithstanding the challenges, our community was an exciting place. Dedicated folks were converging at the farm to give their all, the bioshelter was moving toward realization, the media had made High Wind its darling. Residents were very aware of the dysfunctionalities of modern life and were seeking a new way to see the world. For me this endeavor merited every ounce of my energy (although I couldn’t give it my all because I also had a full-time university job). This was one place to *take a stand*. What we were attempting to create had more potential than anything else I was aware of.

I learned that when the community really “worked,” there



was a special “glue” that held together the vision and the practical daily operations. (Sometimes the vision became too starry-eyed or in the daily nitty-gritty we forgot its purpose). It seemed only certain people had that unique gift of integrating the larger High Wind vision with implementing the essential daily tasks. They embodied a unique spiritual capacity that cemented our community life into a functioning whole. It was only later, when some of us looked back on High Wind’s peak periods, that we could identify those particular individuals.

As a learning center, we had many successes. We brought in “new thinking” from around the country and world. Every summer for a dozen years High Wind and the university co-sponsored seminars with the Lorians that combined “the spiritual” with “the practical.” We organized several trips to Findhorn. Our university-sponsored semester-long three-community seminar—one month at high Wind, one month at Findhorn, one month at another community—usually produced a life-changing experience for participants. We offered this five times.

The University and High Wind put on three national conferences—on neighborhoods and appropriate technology, transformation and economic growth, and the future of work—drawing in resources from around the world. We organized a group with the Sirius and Findhorn communities and ICIS (International Center for Integrative Studies) that conceptualized what an alternative think tank would look like. This led to a national consultation held at the U.N. Annex in New York, with 60 leaders from alternative groups. Through the university over a decade we offered a series of classes on Sustainable Futures (for graduate credit). The highlight was always the tour at High Wind involving its history, solar homes, and organic farm. One weekend we convened a group to explore what a university of the future would be like, and then used this material for several courses. The popular annual tour of our solar homes stimulated many folks to build or rehab their own dwellings. One of our most rigorous efforts was a two-year contract with the Milwaukee Public Schools to bring 700 inner city middle school kids to High Wind.

What happened to High Wind?

In 1991 the High Wind board decided to end High Wind

as an intentional community. We now considered ourselves an “eco-neighborhood.” This was a searing decision, but the old idealism had lost its intensity. Four different waves of residents had shared their lives in the community for shorter or longer periods. After a dozen years most of us felt burnt out. We felt we could no longer serve the lofty mission in the same way as at the time of our creation. High Wind continued for another decade as a learning center, with a full educational program and receiving some substantial funding. Then in 2001 the board decided to sell its “public campus”: the bioshelter, farmhouse complex and other buildings, and some adjoining lands. Those of us who continue to live at High Wind still have substantial lands, share the same values as initially, run tours, meet with visitors, and consult, but the tempo is free and easy compared to the past. The organic farm, now owned and managed by two former residents, is a major CSA in the region, feeding over 500 families.

The High Wind Board now operates as a foundation, using funds from the sale of the property, added to by sensitive investing. It provides small grants to sustainability-related organizations in the region. The new owners of the public buildings are two Buddhist groups that for years had been sponsoring retreats at High Wind.

Ultimately, no matter what form it takes, High Wind’s work goes on. A certain creative spiritual power always had its role to play in both the residential and non-residential communities, because it didn’t deal with place but with vision and spirit. For me, consciousness means spirit; it has something to do with such values as compassion, empowerment, justice. In this circle of consciousness, life actually is hard, because it involves commitment to a paradigm that challenges most of the values of our dominant culture. The vision itself is extraordinary while we ourselves are ordinary. This unrealized gap easily leads to frustration, because hard as we try, our expectations are seldom fulfilled. Yet I believe that the intentional communities movement—I refer to all the actual residents of communities and to all those who are not residents but have embraced the idea—is truly on the cutting edge of the emerging culture. ❁

Belden Paulson’s memoir, Odyssey of a Practical Visionary, was published in summer 2009 by Thistlefield Books.