

Locating Midpoint : A Journey Toward Community

by Skylark Disraeli

Every one of my former partners has been right: I'm a controller. But after endless attempts to eradicate this trait, I have ultimately located an environment that relishes it!

Over the past two decades, I have dipped my toes into countless types of relationship and at least as many styles of accommodation. While all of these provided essential lessons, none was a perfect fit. Indeed, by my mid-thirties I was utterly bewildered as to where I might belong. Deep inside, I knew I must fit somewhere. Though I did not know its location, language or features, my tribe's call resonated clearly within my soul.

At one point, a friend said to me: "You're an agnostic attending a Christian church, a non-addict attending AA meetings, and a person in a heterosexual relationship serving on the board of the Gay & Lesbian Association. What's up?" Simply, these involvements allowed me to live out my beliefs within community. However, while all of these collectives were truly welcoming, each felt peripheral to both my essence and my day-to-day life. I desired community as midpoint –as an environment in which collaborative play infuses the political, broad visions are embraced co-operatively, and the various aspects of one's life are interwoven rather than compartmentalized.

The entity I dreamed of involved a range of cultures, orientations and ages holding in common a deep respect for social justice, the environment and each other. My steady desire was for several of us to live in close enough proximity that we could support each other in our shared interests (constantly challenged by mainstream culture as they are) while practicing with each other to achieve the ideals we all held. But as an introvert with a tendency toward feeling overwhelmed, achieving this appeared

impossible.

My heart insisted there was a way.

One day, I stumbled across the term "cohousing". As my understanding of this lifestyle developed, I came to interpret it as "community for introverts". The fact is, this form of intentional community warmly welcomes as much diversity as it attracts --extroverts, businesspeople, artists, students, seniors and more are leaping toward these mini-villages. But it also held room for me, a person who needs to choose her diet, determine her own cleaning schedule, and immerse in solitude as many hours as not. With its support of both privacy and engagement, cohousing seemed the perfect fit.

But, oh! Good luck getting into one! With an increasingly heavy heart, I found myself "too late" for one new development after another. Along with countless other cohousing wannabes, I was waitlisted time and again. I learned the hard way that cohousing units, once occupied, rarely come up again --a testament to how well they work, yes, but a real blow to my personal goal.

The cost, too, seemed prohibitive. How on earth would I be able to pony up shares? My trust persisted. When my dream of dreams came up --an urban development with a rural feel-- I let go of my questions long enough to make a visit. Pacific Gardens Cohousing Community, fifteen years in the planning, had just broken ground near the center of Nanaimo, BC. The property was a stunning 4.37 acres of forest and heritage apple orchard. A salmon-bearing river ran through it. The eco-friendly project would be 25 self-contained living units, plus common amenities: a sound-proof room for meditation or music; workshop; exercise room; children's playroom; teen room; guest rooms; and a large dining hall for hosting our potlucks and dances.

I was smitten. When the relentless question of finances rose yet again, a former certified financial planner on staff easily resolved it. At this point, my commitment was all that was needed. Was I really ready for this? Was I willing to let go of the amazing in my current life to let this dream fly? I was. I did.

March 2009, twenty-five singles and families will move into their private units, then begin connecting over regular potlucks, hikes and other shared activities. Car-sharing, composting and recycling will be norms. We'll work through the inevitable conflicts and celebrate each other daily. Sounds like a pipe dream, right? Well, so far, so good. Both distant and local owners, myself included, are already actively involved in consensus decision-making and community-building, not to mention just plain fun! With room for a handful more singles, couples or families, I am deeply curious as to who will make up the remainder of our community. As *The Cohousing Handbook* reflects, they will very likely be more “controllers”: proactive, involved, compassionate people who take concrete steps to make their dreams reality.

By word and video, explore Pacific Gardens at www.pacificgardens.ca