

COMMENTARY ON COMMUNITY

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Why community?

Community, for me, is one of my two pillars, my myths to live by: family and community. My Mom exemplified family; my Dad epitomized community. I strive for a better balance between the two.

Our mission statement at Griffin Law Offices is “Commitment to Community.” We truly believe that our work is to nurture ourselves, our clients, and our local community. Serving community through work or play is natural. We serve our community during our work hours through efforts with and for clients and through such service as Meals on Wheels, moderating town meetings, and Fishermen’s Festival.

My most meaningful community service is through Rotary. The four avenues of service in Rotary are club, community, vocational, and international, with community service clearly being ascendant.

Community is an extended family, yet it can pull me away from family fun and obligations. Sometimes I realize that, like my father before me, community burdens have tilted the seesaw so far down that family focus gets blurred against the sky. Then I question my commitment to community. Perhaps this is a quest to understand and reassess my myth of community.

What is community?

Community is often invoked but rarely defined. My favorite living author is Wendell Berry, a Kentucky essayist, novelist, poet, teacher, and farmer, who delves deeply into the meaning of community in most of his work. In his essay, “Does Community Have Value,” Berry observes: “Community is a concept, like humanity or prose, that virtually no one has taken the trouble to quarrel with; even its worst enemies praise it. . . . The values that are assigned to community are emotional and spiritual – ‘cultural’ – which makes it the subject of pieties that are merely vocal.”^{i[i]} So first we need to pry beyond the planks and into the foundation of community.

The prime Random House Dictionary definition of “community” is “a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.” Secondary definitions include “a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society,” or “a group of associated nations.” The main definition thus requires place, governance, and heritage. Secondary definitions require only shared interests, and these weaker links do not appear to me to represent what I consider to be community. Above all, this primary meaning of community connotes its etymological cousins: the commons, communion, communication, and commonality.

Robert D. Putnam, a Harvard political scientist and sociologist, has published, in 2000, a seminal work on community, Bowling Alone. Putnam puts it this way:

“‘Community’ means different things to different people. We speak of the community of nations, the community of Jamaica Plain, the gay community, the IBM community, the Yale community, the African community, the ‘virtual’ community of cyberspace, and so on. Each of us derives some sense of belonging from among the various communities to which we might, in principle, belong. For most of us, our deepest sense of belonging is to our most intimate social networks, especially family and friends. Beyond that perimeter lie work, church, neighborhood, civic life, and the assortment of other ‘weak ties’ that constitute our personal stock of social capital.”^{ii[iii]}

For Putnam, the streams of emigrants from American farms and European villages in the late 1800s poured into teeming cities of tenements and skyscrapers, “a setting so unfamiliar and disjointed that many doubted it deserved the term community at all.”^{iii[iiii]} Perhaps these

immigrants “seemed to imperil the *unum* in our *pluribus*.”^{iv[iv]} The point is that “community” connotes connection and, perhaps, deep relationship.

For all generations, most get a real sense of belonging from family and friends, followed by co-workers. Older generations, more than twice younger generations, identify with neighbors, church, local newspapers, local community, and groups or organizations.^{v[v]}

Scott Peck, in The Different Drum points out that we bandy around the word, “community,” and apply it to almost any collection of individuals, regardless of how poorly those individuals communicate with each other. This is a false use of the word. Rather, Peck asserts that there is no one-sentence definition of community because there is a mystical element that makes community something more than the sum of its parts:

“If we are going to use the word meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to ‘rejoice together, mourn together,’ and to ‘delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own.”^{vi[vi]}

A community must be placed. Even the prime dictionary definition requires a “specific locality.” Every community must have a “commons.” Wendell Berry speaks most eloquently of this essential placed characteristic:

“If the word community is to mean or amount to anything, it must refer to a place (in its natural integrity) and its people. It must refer to a placed people. . . . [C]ommunity’ must mean a people locally placed and a people, moreover, not too numerous to have a common knowledge of themselves and their place.”^{vii[vii]}

This placed community is integrated with the local environment, as Wendell Berry explains: “If we speak of a healthy community, we cannot be speaking of a community that is merely human. We are talking about 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.”^{viii[viii]}

On the other hand, as Putnam points out, Americans have always lived a nomadic existence: today nearly one in five of us move each year, and nearly two in five of us expect to move again in the next five years.^{ix[ix]} This uprooting of place by separating our workplace from our home, diminishes this essential, placed element of community. Putnam notes: [I]t is not simply time spent in the car itself, but also spatial fragmentation between home and workplace, that is bad for community life.”^{x[x]} We must identify with our place, not our common ancestry, Berry submits:

“So long as we try to think of ourselves as African Americans or European Americans or Asian Americans, we will never settle anywhere. For an authentic community is made less in reference to who we are than to where we are. . . . A knowledge of foreign cultures is useful, perhaps indispensable, to me in my effort to settle here, but it cannot tell me where I am.”^{xi[xi]}

Yammering about “global community” is bunk. Wendell Berry is most perceptive about this “think globally, act locally” non-sequitur:

“Local life may be as much endangered by those who would ‘save the planet’ as by those who would ‘conquer the world.’ For ‘saving the planet’ calls for abstract purposes and central powers that cannot know – and thus will destroy – the integrity of local nature and local community. . . . You can’t act locally by thinking globally.”^{xii[xii]}

Berry adds,

“Unless one is willing to be destructive on a very large scale, one cannot do something except locally, in a small place. Global thinking can only do to the globe what a space satellite does to it: reduce it, make a bauble of it. . . . If you want to see where you are, you will have to get out of your spaceship, out of your car, off your horse, and walk over the ground. On foot you will find that the earth is still satisfyingly large and full of beguiling nooks and crannies.”^{xiii[xiii]}

The example of the telephone proves the primacy of place. In 1891, 15 years after the telephone’s invention, one telephone official proclaimed an “epoch of neighborhood without propinquity.” Instead, the first comprehensive study of the phone, in 1933, showed that this new medium reinforced existing local ties more than distant ones. By the mid-1970s, 40%-50% of all phone calls originating from a household were made within a two-mile radius and 70% were made within a five-mile radius. The phone reinforces, rather than transforms or replaces, existing personal networks.^{xiv[xiv]} Propinquity prevails. Place rules.

Wes Jackson, a geneticist and teacher who has advocated a return to the countryside, equates community with our biology: “As I see it, community is civilization’s upscaling of the gathering-hunting tribe. . . . I am impressed at how people hang on to their places and community life in spite of all the forces, both economic and social, that would destroy community. . . . Community . . . is a particular, a direct product of our biology, consisting of countless elements, the roots of which reside in social organizations going back to the early humanoids and before.”^{xv[xv]}

Origins of community

The historian in me requires that I dig deeper into the origins of community. The word derives at least as far back as 1375 from the Scottish “comminite”, which was borrowed from the more ancient Latin *communitatem*.^{xvi[xvi]} Both the concept and phrase of community have been deeply imbedded within us for millennia.

My quest gave me an excuse to re-read Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey with a focus on the earliest written testament to community. My translator of choice, Robert Fagles, sets the stage for the ancient Greek communities. Note how his description matches our dictionary elements of community: place, governance, and heritage:

“The city, the polis, as the Greeks called it, was for them the matrix of civilization, the only form of ordered social life they could understand; it is the exclusive form assumed by ancient Greek culture from its beginning to its end. The city was small enough so that the citizens knew one another, participated in a communal life, shared the common joy of festivals, the sorrow of public bereavement, the keen excitement of competition, the common heritage of ancestral tombs and age-old sanctified places. The destruction of a city is a calamity all the more deeply felt because of the close cohesion of its inhabitants and their attachment, reinforced over generations from a mythical past, to its landmarks and buildings.

“The first city we hear of in Greek literature is Troy. It is characteristic of the Iliad’s tragic viewpoint that this city, the literary prototype of all Greek cities, is to be destroyed.”^{xvii[xvii]}

The true hero in The Iliad, Fagles points out, is Hector, not Achilles. Hector does share with Achilles the berserk fury of a godlike warrior, but Hector’s purpose is far different. Unlike Achilles’ self-centered rage for glory and booty which starts on the very first line of The Iliad, Hector’s fighting prowess is the man of the polis, the protector of the community: Hector proclaims our first patriotic fighting legacy: “No, no, put our trust in the will of mighty Zeus, king of the deathless gods and men who die. Bird signs! Fight for your country – that is the best, the only omen!”^{xviii[xviii]} Although Hector is Troy’s most effective warrior, he is “a man who appears most himself in his relationships with others.” Peace, not war, is his native element, and his community is his core.^{xix[xix]}

Achilles is more villain than hero throughout most of The Iliad. He pouts and hides in his vessels on the shore, far from the fighting nearer the walls of Troy. Achilles refuses to reconcile with Agamemnon, his Greek leader, until near the end of the siege of Troy when Achilles repairs his relationships and then focuses his fiery fury. Later, Aristotle says in the Politics, “The man who is incapable of working in common, or who in his self-sufficiency has no need of others, is no part of the community, like a beast, or a god.” Fagles adds, “As far as his fellow Achaeans are concerned, Achilles has broken out of the self-imposed prison of godlike unrelenting fury, reintegrated himself in society, returned to something like human feeling; he is part of the community again.”^{xx[xx]} The bloodstained warrior, Achilles, like the later gentle philosopher, Socrates, defied the community and hewed to a solitary line, in loyalty to a private ideal of conduct and honor. Each lived and died in the same heroic, and tragic, pattern.^{xxi[xxi]}

While The Iliad snatches glimpses of community in its heroic and tragic chronicle of part of the ten-year siege and sack of Troy, The Odyssey portrays poignant portraits of community in its epic tale of the hero’s ten-year odyssey and return home following the Trojan War. Unlike the visions of Odysseus as the restless explorer, (such as in Tennyson’s “Ulysses” which derives from Dante who had never read Homer), “Homer’s Odysseus wants above all things to find his way home and stay there.”^{xxii[xxii]} For example, Odysseus addresses the gorgeous goddess Calypso who has forced him to live with her for many months and who even offers him the gift of immortality (a gift conferred previously to only one man, Hercules): “Look at my wise Penelope. She falls far short of you, your beauty, your stature. She is mortal after all and you, you never age or die. . . . Nevertheless I long – I pine, all my days – to travel home and see the dawn of my return.”^{xxiii[xxiii]}

Odysseus later remarked to another host: “Mine is a rugged land but good for raising sons – and I myself, I know no sweeter sight on earth than a man’s own native country.”^{xxiv[xxiv]}

Odysseus describes the Cyclops, one-eyed giants who have eschewed community, and the resulting chaos: “[M]ighty Cyclops, lawless brutes, who trust so to the everlasting gods they never plant with their own hands or plow the soil. Unsown, unplowed, the earth teems with all they need. . . . They have no meeting place for council, no laws either; no, up on the mountain peaks they live in arching caverns – each a law to himself, ruling his wives and children, not a care in the world for any neighbor.”^{xxv[xxv]}

The hospitality theme, integral to community, pervades The Odyssey. The moral obligation of the host is to welcome and protect the stranger, an obligation imposed on civilized mankind by Zeus. This divine code of conduct is necessary for travel abroad in a world of piracy at sea and anarchic raiding at home with no firm central authority.^{xxvi[xxvi]} This hospitality principle requires inviting the stranger into the house and feeding the stranger before asking his identity. Menelaus, an old fighting comrade of Odysseus, follows this principle and, after learning the identity of the stranger, Odysseus’ son, Telemachus, Menelaus expounds on this principle: “I’d never detain you here too long, Telemachus, not if your heart is set on going home. I’d find fault with another host, I’m sure, too warm to his guests, too pressing or too cold. Balance is the best in all things. It’s bad either way, spurring the stranger home who wants to linger, holding the one who longs to leave – you know, ‘Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest!’”^{xxvii[xxvii]}

The Odyssey, the perennial poem of adventure, stops but never really ends. Crafty Odysseus, the man of twists and turns, with as many incarnations and destinations, is forever outward-bound yet also community-focused. After 20 years of war-faring and wayfaring, he circles back to Penelope and Ithaca, and he finds his home and shares his kingdom with his offspring and his polis.^{xxviii[xxviii]}

Virgil, in the Aeneid, intentionally continues Homer’s legacy into Roman origins and times, with a focus on community. Wes Jackson noted, “And yet, for us, the Aeneid is as essential to becoming native . . . as the spear was to the Paleolithic Asians. . . . The homecomer will not learn the likes of Virgil to adorn his talk, to show off, but will study Virgil for insight, for utility, as well as for pleasure.”^{xxix[xxix]}

Community clearly has ancient origins. In our most ancient writings, those of Homer, community was the focus of the hero, Hector, in The Iliad and the center of the wanderer, Odysseus, in The Odyssey. Homer proclaims community over isolation, laws over anarchy, and sharing over selfishness. This need for community has been critical for our ancestors’ survival, relationships, and civilization. What about today?

Trends of community

Individualism has tugged against community for preeminence throughout our American history. The Puritans’ escape from European religious convention in the early seventeenth century conflicts with the Puritans’ insistence on conformity during the Salem witch trials later in that same seventeenth century. The struggle for independence into a loose confederation of independent colonies by the American revolutionaries during the eighteenth century quickly transformed into a

tighter federal system just a few years later. The rugged frontier independence of the early nineteenth century gave way to the conformity of the industrial revolution by the late nineteenth century. The Teddy Roosevelt bravado and independence of the early twentieth century clashed with the Franklin Roosevelt communitarian ethos two decades later; the same clash can be seen by glimpsing the conformity of the 1950s against the free spirit of the 1960s. Robert Putnam, who has qualified and quantified the traits and trends of community more than any other author I have encountered, notes this cyclical nature of community: “American history carefully examined is a story of ups and downs in civic engagement, not just downs – a story of collapse and of renewal. [W]ithin living memory the bonds of community in America were becoming stronger, not weaker, and . . . it is within our power to reverse the decline of the last several decades.”^{xxx[xxx]}

Alexis de Tocqueville, in 1832, observed American individualism which “disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself.”^{xxxi[xxxi]} De Tocqueville, however, was even more impressed with American community spirit and community action:

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types – religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. . . . Nothing, in my view deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America.”

Robert Putnam, in Bowling Alone, convincingly documents and quantifies what we have experienced and intuited: that we have been experiencing a decline in all aspects of community: political participation, civic participation, religious participation, workplace connections, informal social connections, altruism and volunteering and philanthropy, and reciprocity and trust. This ebb tide away from community has been serious and precipitous over the past 30-40 years; however, the rising tide toward community was equally important and clear during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. During this ebb tide, we have become reasonably well-informed spectators of public affairs, but poorly polished participants in the political game: 10%-15% less likely to run for Congress or write Congress or our local newspaper, 15%-20% less interested in politics and public affairs, 25% less likely to vote, 35% less likely to attend public meetings of any type, and 40% less engaged in party politics and in all political and civic organizations.

Today, as over 170 years ago, Americans are more likely than others to be involved in voluntary associations. Only Sweden, Iceland, and the Netherlands outrank us as joiners. Americans’ involvement in civic associations of all kinds rose steadily for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, but only mailing list membership continued to expand during the last third of this past century. Whether we consider organizational records, survey reports, time diaries, or consumer expenditures, active participation in face-to-face organizations has plummeted. Formal membership in organizations has declined 10-20 percent; more importantly, active involvement in these civic organizations has collapsed by more than 50 percent.^{xxxii[xxxii]}

Religious institutions, although numerous, have been declining. Seymour Martin Lipset has commented that Americans are highly religious: With the exception of “a few agrarian states such

as Ireland and Poland, the United States has been the most God-believing and religion-adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom,” as well as “the most religiously fecund country” where “more new religions have been born . . . than in any other society.” Nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church-related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context.^{xxxiii[xxxiii]} The classic religious, as well as political and civic, institutions have been “hollowed out”; that is, the institutional edifice appears virtually intact with little professed decline in membership, but the core support has decayed and consumed the load-bearing beams of our infrastructure.^{xxxiv[xxxiv]} Only the evangelical Christians experience an upwelling against the tide of civic disengagement, but this was due to simply social engagement in the religious community rather than to demography or theology.^{xxxv[xxxv]}

Some have hinted at a hopeful hypothesis that American community has not disappeared but simply moved from neighborhood ties to workplace connections, with the assumption that the line at the copying machine has replaced the back fence as the locus of community in contemporary America; however, all evidence points in the opposite direction. Co-workers account for less than 10 percent of our friends. Workplace ties tend to be casual and enjoyable, but not intimate and deeply supportive. The implicit employment contract has been transformed over the past 20 years with no lifelong corporate life likely. American workers are less likely than their parents to join with others in formal associations. For the one in three American adults who are not employed, workplace ties are nonexistent. The workplace is not the solution for our fraying civil society.^{xxxvi[xxxvi]}

We cast our hopes into informal social connections as a possible source of community. Americans now get together informally as friends (schmoozers) more than twice as often as we attend organized meetings (machers).^{xxxvii[xxxvii]} My image of a neighborhood street in Boothbay Harbor during a weekend in the 1960s was a line of cars parked in front of someone’s house for a community party; many people from all over the U.S. share that neighborhood-party image of a prior generation. The average American entertained friends at home about 14-15 times a year in the mid ‘70s but by the late ‘90s that figure had fallen 45% to eight times a year. Contrary to widespread impression, dining out (alone or with others) has increased little, if at all, over the last several decades. Americans say they prefer staying home with friends than going out with them by more than two to one, with the stay-at-home margin rising. The number of picnics per capita was slashed by 60 percent between 1975 and 1999. Thus the practice of entertaining friends, rather than merely moving out of the home, seems to be vanishing. The evening meal, as a family communal experience in all societies for a very long time, has declined by almost a third over the last twenty years, from 50 to 34 percent. Between 1976 and 1997 families with children experienced a decline in virtually all forms of family togetherness: vacationing together fell from 53% to 38%, watching TV together from 54% to 41%, attending religious service together from 38% to 31%, and just sitting and talking together from 53% to 43%.^{xxxviii[xxxviii]} In short, we engage less not only in “do-good” civic activities but also in informal connecting, and we spend more time watching and less time doing.^{xxxix[xxxix]}

The trend in volunteering continues to rise, but only for this Indian summer, since the volunteers are only concentrated in the older, “civic” generation, with volunteering ebbing in the baby boomer generation, particularly if volunteering involves community projects. Volunteering for

community projects, as opposed to one-on-one assistance, is actually already declining. People are not flocking away from civic associations to volunteering; rather, these association members are often the same informal volunteers, who are more likely than non-volunteers to participate in politics. There is cause for hope: the new Millennial Generation is displaying a commitment to youthful volunteerism similar to the WW II, or G.I., Generation and much higher than the Boomer Generation.^{xl[xl]} Indeed, the very term, “community service,” now connotes this young, civic generation, as Robert Coles discovered: “The phrase, ‘community service’ these days commonly refers to the work done by young volunteers: high school and college students working in schools, soup kitchens, nursing homes, or prisons. They help at camps and on playgrounds, visit homes and neighborhoods with books and instruction manuals, with basketballs and footballs and baseballs.”^{xli[xli]}

Putnam even looks to general reciprocity and trust for evidence of social capital, or community: “The touchstone of social capital is the principle of general reciprocity – I’ll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor.”^{xlii[xlii]} This generalized reciprocity lubricates the wheels of life, lowering the everyday business costs and also the commercial business costs. Joiners are generally more trusting and more trustworthy. With the decline in reciprocity and trust over the past few decades, “we are forced to rely increasingly on formal institutions, and above all on the law, to accomplish what we used to accomplish through informal networks reinforced by generalized reciprocity – that is, through social capital,” or community.^{xliii[xliii]} These social and economic costs skyrocket as the community core implodes and trust vanishes.

Education has always been a good indicator of community commitment. Wes Jackson, an author and teacher, has observed that education is not only failing; it is also undermining place and community involvement: “The universities now offer only one serious major: upward mobility. Little attention is paid to educating the young to return home, or to go some other place, and dig in. There is no such thing as a ‘homecoming’ major.”^{xliv[xliv]} Universities have become little more than holding pens that keep kids off the job market, Jackson asserts.

The bottom line is that the trends in all aspects of community relationships are in steep decline. Although such trends have been cyclical, this decline has been precipitous and could be calamitous. Before we can solve and reverse these trends, we need to understand some of the reasons for our loss of community during the last third of the twentieth century.

Why the downward spiral?

Time is the most common reason cited for failing to help. Each person truly believes that he or she has the most burdensome life. Similarly we tend to believe that we are busier today than others were a generation ago. But were the tasks of daily living really easier a generation ago? A century ago? Hardly. How can we even try to assert that we are busier and more financially strapped, when we live more regally than royalty of yore?

Although the busyness, economic distress, and two-career family pressures have contributed to declining social connectedness, especially for highly educated women, time and money reasons amount to, at most, 10% of the decline:

“At the same time, the evidence suggests that neither time pressures nor financial distress nor the movement of women into the paid labor force is the primary cause of civic disengagement over the last two decades. The central exculpatory fact is that civic engagement and social connectedness have diminished almost equally for both women and men, working or not, married or single, financially stressed or financially comfortable.”^{xlv[xlv]}

Despite the facts that frequent movers have weaker community ties and communities with higher rates of residential turnover are less well integrated, rising mobility is not the main culprit of community decay during the past fifty years. This is because both long-distance and short-distance mobility have slightly declined in the past fifty years.^{xlvi[xlvi]} Indeed, by the 1950s, “large-scale commuting” noted by scholars in 1958, had transformed communities because they could discard their “respectability they are constrained to demonstrate while at their work site,” and “are ‘free’ to develop life styles” in their home communities around “socially organized high culture and leisure activities,” “organization of life around sports,” organizations devoted to the pursuit of cultural objects, and “the pursuit of a life of gaiety and wit, modern living, and the fun morality.”^{xlvii[xlvii]} Today, everyone old enough to drive finds it necessary to frequently escape, usually alone, from one’s own private compound located amidst many other private compounds.^{xlviii[xlviii]} The average American adult spends 72 minutes per day, behind the wheel, much of that alone, and this cuts the community-building of both the commuters and the non-commuters in mobile neighborhoods:

“The car and the commute, however, are demonstrably bad for community life. In round numbers the evidence suggests that each additional ten minutes in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by 10 percent. . . . Strikingly, increased commuting time among the residents of a community lowers average levels of civic involvement even among non-commuters. In fact, the ‘civic penalty’ associated with high-commute communities is almost as great for retired residents and others who are outside the workforce as for full-time workers.”^{xlix[xlix]}

Mobility, urban sprawl, and distance have been factors, although not paramount. Ray Suarez also noticed how the trends of mobility and distance from each other accentuated racial segregation, class stratification, and lack of empathy:

“When we no longer lived and worked in proximity to one another, we no longer knew the same things. Once we no longer knew the same things, we no longer had a need for cultural cohesion. Once we no longer had cultural cohesion, it was easier and easier to draw circles of concern more and more narrowly around one’s own doorstep.”^[1]

Americans have streamed out of the exhausted farms and stinking tanneries, and this nomadic life “has allowed Americans to sever more completely the connection between place and well-being than any other people on earth.”^{li[li]} This separation from place stands in stark contrast to the creation myths of people all over the globe, including our own Native Americans and our own

Christian heritage: the first men and women were formed out of the very soil and clay that is still their home. We've told ourselves that one place is interchangeable with another, and our landscape all too often mirrors that mistaken myth. Many people pick a life off the shelf or pluck the place from the global banquet to sample for awhile and then move on when the impulse hits. But we lose the particularity of place and the meaning of deep relationships when we choose meaningless routes over meaningful roots. Will we nurture our home environment or our neighbors and community as much when we know (or assume) that we may pick up and move on shortly?

Although most Americans hovered together around the woodstove and the radio featuring a limited number of programs in 1900, most of us today are isolated spectators, rather than gathered participants. At home we watch alone (even with others in the room) one of a multitude of TV programs (on average, 4 times a day^{lii[lii]}) or wander outside or in a car with our Walkman CD.^{liii[liii]} Television and other forms of electronic entertainment are probably a major cause of civic disengagement. Heavy users tend to be isolated, passive, and detached from their communities. But there is no hard evidence since we cannot be certain that they would be less sociable in the absence of such electronics.^{liv[liv]} There is hard evidence, however, that each increased hour of television viewing results in roughly a 10% reduction in most forms of civic activism.^{lv[lv]} Dependence on television for entertainment, as opposed to news, is the single most consistent predictor of civic disengagement.^{lvi[lvi]}

Telecommunications generally and the internet particularly have the potential to enhance our face-to-face encounters. Community, communion, and communication are intimately as well as etymologically connected. Although internet users tend to be more egalitarian and quicker to reach an intellectual understanding of a shared problem, computer-based groups have more difficulty reaching consensus and implementing solutions because they feel less solidarity with each other and have lower trust and reciprocity. Cyberspace facilitates sharing information, gathering opinions, and debating alternatives, but it retards building trust and goodwill.^{lvii[lvii]} Even this sharing of information and opinions may be confining our exposure to like-minded people, "cyberbalkanization," rather than forcing us to deal with more diverse people in a place-based community.^{lviii[lviii]} The internet helps the intellectual IQ, but harms the emotional EQ, and emotional intelligence is clearly far more indicative of personal and work success than intellect.^{lix[lix]} As Daniel Goleman, the author of Emotional Intelligence, put it: "As Aristotle saw, the problem is not with emotionality, but with the *appropriateness* of emotion and its expression. The question is how can we bring intelligence to our emotions – and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life?"^{lx[lx]} Like the telephone a century ago, the jury is still out as to whether or not the internet will facilitate communication through enhanced face-to-face, video-enhanced technology or will stifle communication through passive entertainment. Will the internet stimulate or stifle our creativity? If the phone holds a clue, the internet will not spin a new global community without propinquity; rather it will weave a richer tapestry of existing relationships. My teenage daughters echo this internet-place theme: they spend most of their internet time multitasking and IM-ing numerous friends while downloading and listening to their favorite tunes; in other words, like the phone, the internet enhances their existing face-to-face relationships rather than creating a global community without propinquity. Hopefully the net will mirror the phone, not the TV, enhancing our involvement instead of our passivity.

The generational differences are another key: “Age is second only to education as a predictor of virtually all forms of civic engagement, and trends in civic engagement are not uniform across all age categories. Middle-aged and older people are more active in more organizations than younger people.”^{lxi[lxi]} This was not the case 50 years ago. Although electronic ties are more important to younger Generation X (“GenXers,” those born between 1961 and 1981) than to older generations, “kith and kin are 20 times more important than cyberspace as a source of community” to these younger folk. Putnam concludes: “Much of the decline of civic engagement in America during the last third of the twentieth century is attributable to the replacement of an unusually civic generation by several generations (their children and grandchildren) that are less embedded in community life. . . . [T]he dynamics of civic engagement in the last several decades have been shaped in part by social habits and values influenced in turn by the great mid-century global cataclysm.”^{lxii[lxii]} The G.I. Generation, a cohort born between 1901 and 1924 and welded by wartime patriotism and national unity with nearly 80% of the men born in the 1920s having served in the military, is dying off. The Silent Generation (those born between 1925 and 1942) have been less involved but far more civic-minded than the next two generations. The Boom Generation (those born between 1943 and 1960) and particularly the Generation X (those born between 1961 and 1981) have been far less civically involved throughout their life cycles.^{lxiii[lxiii]} The short-term future for civic involvement looks bleak.^{lxiv[lxiv]} About half of our civic decline can be traced to this gigantic generational change.^{lxv[lxv]}

Thus civic decline can be traced roughly 10% to time and money pressures; 10% to suburbanization, commuting, and sprawl; 25% to electronic entertainment and especially TV; and a whopping 50% to the most important factor: generational change.

So what if community has declined?

What are the consequences, if any, of this loss of community? Even assuming that social connections are looser or non-existent, so what? In a nutshell, Putnam posits, “Civic connections help make us healthy, wealthy, and wise”^{lxvi[lxvi]} and “social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy.”^{lxvii[lxvii]}

A loss of community results in a loss of meaning and loss of relationships. Many of us work in one place, sleep in another place, shop in another place, find pleasure and companionship where we can, and care about none of these places.^{lxviii[lxviii]} Most Americans, unlike our European counterparts, do not make daily visits to sidewalk cafes or banquet halls. Our comings and goings are restricted to our homes and our workplaces; and, for many, we shuttle back and forth between the womb and the rat race and desire to “get away from it all.”^{lxix[lxix]}

This loss of meaning and decline in family and community support results in increased stress. Even ten years ago, American industry lost from \$50 billion to \$75 billion annually due to absenteeism, medical expenses, and lost productivity. Two-thirds of visits to family physicians are prompted by stress-related symptoms. Our mode of life is emerging as our principal cause of illness. At least a decade ago, the sorry sign of our times was that the three best-selling drugs in

the country were an ulcer medication (Tagamet), a hypertension drug (Inderal), and a tranquilizer (Valium).^{lxx[lxx]}

The more integrated we are within our community, the less likely we are to experience colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression, and premature death of all sorts. Face-to-face ties appear more therapeutic than geographically-distant relationships. Happiness is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one's social connections.^{lxxi[lxxi]}

The differences among U.S. states in their levels of community commitments are dramatic, with the highest levels of civic involvement occurring in the northern states and the lowest levels in the former Confederate states. This discrepancy is due to the low social capital inherent in the slavery system of the Confederacy with rippling and crippling effects permeating down to us today. This same national pattern was observed by Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s:

As one goes farther south [from New England] one finds a less active municipal life; the township has fewer officials, rights, and duties; the population does not exercise such a direct influence on affairs; the town meetings are less frequent and deal with fewer matters. For this reason the power of the elected official is comparatively greater and that of the voter less; municipal spirit is less wide awake and less strong. . . . Most of the immigrants who founded the northwestern states came from New England, and they brought the administrative habits of their old home to the new.^{lxxii[lxxii]}

Today, tolerance continues to parallel increased civic involvement. Although there are some exceptions such as the KKK and today's evangelicals, community-committed individuals are generally more tolerant than their stay-at-home neighbors. Community can become parochial, but there is no empirical evidence linking community involvement and intolerance.^{lxxiii[lxxiii]} Although community-mongers have fostered intolerance, the greatest threat to American liberty comes from the disengaged, not the engaged. The most intolerant individuals and communities in America today are the least, not the most, connected.^{lxxiv[lxxiv]}

As political participation declines, political extremism rises. As fewer and fewer voices engage in democratic debate, Nixon's moderate "silent majority" drops out, and the political pitch becomes shriller and less balanced at the political poles. Environmental "true believers" on the left clash with evangelical "true believers" on the right.^{lxxv[lxxv]}

At the individual level, social connections dramatically enhance one's life chances. Individuals who are socially isolated fail to get the "hand up" the social ladder, regardless of their educational or financial deprivation. Individuals who have valuable social ties can and will ply their social connections for job success. Casual connections, "weak ties," can often produce even better results than friends and kin. A worker's social and organizational ties embodied in his Rolodex are at least as important as educational qualifications and experience for career success.^{lxxvi[lxxvi]}

Similarly, the community level is enhanced by social ties. Silicon Valley, California's economic and technological miracle, was rooted from the start in horizontal networks of informal and formal cooperation amongst fledgling competitors. Conversely, its major U.S. competitor, the Route 128 corridor around Boston, maintained traditional norms of corporate hierarchy, secrecy, self-

sufficiency, and territoriality. Route 128's "go-it-alone" philosophy is largely responsible for its poor performance relative to that of Silicon Valley's cooperation ethos.^{lxxvii[lxxvii]}

Wendell Berry argues that a national economy destroys community "by the destruction of the principle of self-sufficiency not only in the local economy but also in the local culture."^{lxxviii[lxxviii]} He warns also of environmental devastation: "But in fact as knowledge expands globally it is being lost locally. This is the paramount truth of the modern history of rural places everywhere in the world. And it is the gravest problem of land use: Modern humans typically are using places whose nature they have never known and whose history they have forgotten, they almost necessarily abuse what they use."^{lxxix[lxxix]}

The global economy, even more than the national economy, destroys local community. No person puts the global economy in context with local community better than the Pulitzer-prize winning journalist, Thomas Friedman. In his The Lexus and the Olive Tree, Friedman describes the importance of community, epitomized by the olive tree:

"Olive trees are important. They represent everything that roots us, anchors us, identifies us and locates us in this world - whether it be belonging to a family, a community, a tribe, a nation, a religion or, most of all, a place called home. Olive trees are what give us the warmth of family, the joy of individuality, the intimacy of personal rituals, the depth of private relationships, as well as the confidence and security to reach out and encounter others. . . . But while olive trees are essential to our very being, an attachment to one's olive trees, when taken to excess, can lead us into forging identities, bonds and communities, based on the exclusion of others."^{lxxx[lxxx]}

On the other hand, the Lexus is the greatest luxury car in the world being built by robots, representing globalization. The Lexus versus the olive tree may resemble Abel versus Cain: Abel became a keeper of sheep with more mobility and fewer roots, while Cain became a tiller of soil, grounded in place. Conflicts inevitably erupt. The challenge in this era of globalization is to find the balance, for both countries and individuals, between preserving a sense of identity, home and community and surviving within the globalization system.^{lxxxii[lxxxii]} Similarly, the internet could be a sort of Tower of Babel, a technology that does not create new kinds of communities, but rather just creates a false sense of connection and intimacy, as with the French internet bridge partners of Friedman's mother. The Almighty might just make the whole internet crash like the Tower of Babel, since we cannot really build cyber-communities that will replace real communities.^{lxxxiii[lxxxiii]}

The case of a real CyberNation, made virtually real by fiction, illustrates the consequences of the loss of community. In one of the Tom Clancy "Netforce" books, Cybernation, the possibilities and consequences of loss of community come into sharper focus:

"The web is the future! Information should be free! Access is all! Yeah right. The CyberNationals - her term for the human engines that drove the concept - really wanted this to happen. They believed the slogans. They ate, slept, and breathed the ideas. And they had plenty of support, especially among kids who had grown up with computers as much a part of their lives as cars and television. . . To these people, the concept of

intellectual property, those who even understood it, was passe, a product of the Dark Ages, and those times were past.”^{lxxxiii[lxxxiii]} “And at the heart of western civilization is the concept of private property. And that includes intellectual property, too. You take a man’s living when you steal his songs or books or secret formulas. Most laws are moral by society’s standards.”

This conflict between community and globalization, that is to say between mobile Abel and rooted Cain, between the Lexus and the olive tree, between CyberNation and nation-states, or between free information and private property, illustrates the stakes of losing community (or losing Cain or the olive tree or the nation-states or private property).

Paradoxically globalization swamps us with information which makes us ill-informed. Losing one’s place causes ignorance, just as finding one’s place preserves and conveys knowledge: “This living procession through time in a place is the record by which such knowledge survives and is conveyed. When the procession ends, so does the knowledge.”^{lxxxiv[lxxxiv]}

Wendell Berry suggests that the loss of community results in the loss of love and the rise of exploitation: “Affection requires us to break out of the abstractions, the categories, and confront the creature itself in its life in its place. . . . [P]eople exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love. To defend what we love we need a particularizing language, for we love what we particularly know.”^{lxxxv[lxxxv]} Berry adds,

“We have more than we can know. We know more than we can say. The constructions of language (which is to say the constructions of thought) are formed within experience, not the other way around. . . . But when I try to make language more particular, I see that the life of this place is always emerging beyond expectation or prediction or typicality, that it is unique, given to the world minute by minute, only once, never to be repeated. And then is when I see that this life is a miracle, absolutely worth having, absolutely worth saving.”^{lxxxvi[lxxxvi]}

Perhaps this helps to explain why Yahweh destroyed the Tower of Babel, forced us to speak such varied languages, and created the miracle of love and community.

The loss of community and increase in mobility diminish us. Berry points out, “We all are what we are partly because we are here and not in another place.”^{lxxxvii[lxxxvii]} He adds, “One knows one’s place, that is to say, only within limits, and the limits are in one’s mind, not in the place.”^{lxxxviii[lxxxviii]} He goes on, “Good artists are people who can stick things together so that they stay stuck. . . . Farms, families, and communities are forms of art just as are poems, paintings, and symphonies.”^{lxxxix[lxxxix]} Wallace Stegner portrayed his American West where there were two types of humans: “boomers” who pillage and run and “stickers” who settle and love the life they have made and the place they have made it in.^{xc[xc]} These less conspicuous “stickers” built the communities which have transformed us more than the flash-in-the-pan “boomers”.

The loss of community relationships can result in unrealistic vision not grounded in reality, causing destruction of our environment and even of ourselves. Wendell Berry puts it this way:

“Only imagination, for example, can give our home landscape and community a presence in our minds that is a sort of vision at once geographical and historical, practical and protective, affectionate and hopeful. But if that vision is not repeatedly corrected by a fairly accurate sense of reality, if the vision becomes fantastical or merely wishful, then both we and the landscape fall into danger; we may destroy the landscape, or the landscape (especially if damaged by us in our illusion) may destroy us.”^{xcix}

Wendell Berry has noted the decay of local community resulting in a vast amnesia and homogenized sales-talk and entertainment and education. This loss of local knowledge, local memory, and local culture results in both intrinsic and economic losses:

“For example, when a community loses its memory, its members no longer know one another. How can they know one another if they have forgotten or have never learned one another’s stories? If they do not know one another’s stories, how can they know whether or not to trust one another? People who do not trust one another do not help one another, and moreover they fear one another. And this is our predicament now. Because of a general distrust and suspicion, we not only lose one another’s help and companionship, but we are all now living in jeopardy of being sued,” with its resulting liability premiums and inefficiencies.^{xcii}

What is to be done?

We must start, as does Wendell Berry, with every community’s recognition of the importance of place and “that all its members have a common ground, and that this ground is the ground under their feet.”^{xciii} Berry’s own experience in the Kentucky farmland has shown him that “it is possible to live in and attentively study the same small place decade after decade, and find that it ceaselessly evades and exceeds comprehension.”^{xciv} Indeed, he affirms that “it is possible to spend a lifetime in a magellanic voyage around the trunk of a single tree. . . . [I]f we watch, refine our intelligence and our attention, curb our greed and our pride, work with care, have faith, a single tree might be enough.”^{xcv} Berry opines that we must choose relationships over money and local place over global abstractions:

“The only preventive and the only remedy is for the people to choose one another and their place, over the rewards offered them by outside investors. The local community must understand itself finally as a community of interest – a common dependence on a common life and a common ground. And because a community is, by definition, placed, its success cannot be divided from the success of its place, its natural setting and surroundings: its soils, forests, grasslands, plants and animals, water, light, and air. The two economies, the natural and the human, support each other; each is the other’s hope of a durable and a livable life.”^{xcvi}

The Polish writer, Czeslaw Milosz, winner of the Nobel prize for poetry in 1980 and a first-generation immigrant in Los Angeles, suggests a similar solution of place and communication. The answer to the “myth of Ithaca” and “years of wandering” is return and place:

“I AM HERE. Those three words contain all that can be said – you begin with those words and you return to them. Here means on this earth, on this continent and no other, in this city and no other, in this epoch I call mine, this century, this year. . . . That single phrase which, were it truly weighed, would suffice as a life’s work. However, here, now, I have the courage to speak, a sort of secondary courage, not blind. . . I am here - and everyone is in some ‘here’ – and the only thing we can do is try to communicate with one another. One would like to astound the world, to save the world, but one can do neither. We are summoned to deeds that are of moment only to our village. . . . But if I am to nourish the hope of writing with a free hand, with gaiety, and not under pressure, then I must proceed by keeping only a few Polish readers in mind. . . . I must recognize that the myth of Ithaca stems from profound layers of human sensibility. I was looking at a meadow. Suddenly the realization came that during my years of wandering I had searched in vain for such a combination of leaves and flowers as was here and that I have been always yearning to return. Or, to be precise, I understood this after a huge waive of emotion had overwhelmed me, and the only name I can give it now would be - bliss.”^{xcvii}[xcvii]

Scott Peck declares both secular and divine answers to achieving true community, but his concept appears ideal and only transient:

“The wisdom of a true community often seems miraculous. This wisdom can perhaps be explained in purely secular terms as a result of the freedom of expression, the pluralistic talents, the consensual decision-making that occur in community. There are times, however, when this wisdom seems to my religious eye to be more a matter of divine spirit and possible divine intervention. This is one of the reasons why the feeling of joy is such a frequent concomitant of the spirit of community. The members feel that they have been temporarily - at least partially - transported out of the mundane world of ordinary preoccupations. For the moment it is as if heaven and earth had somehow met.”^{xcviii}[xcviii]

Tom Friedman posits that the solution lies in balancing our routes and roots, our globalization and local customs:

“Balancing a Lexus with an olive tree is something every society has to work on every day. It is also what America, at its best, is all about. America at its best takes the needs of markets, individuals and communities all utterly seriously. And that’s why America, at its best, is not just a country. It’s a spiritual value and role model. It’s a nation that is not afraid to go to the moon, but also still loves to come home for Little League. It is the nation that invented both cyberspace and the backyard barbecue, the Internet and the social safety net, the SEC and the ACLU. These dialectics are at the heart of America, and they should never be resolved in favor of one over the other. But they also should never be taken for granted. They have to be constantly nurtured, tended to and preserved - and we can do this by supporting our public schools, paying our taxes, understanding that the government is not the enemy and always making sure we’re still getting to know our neighbors over the fence and not over the Web.”^{xcix}[xcix]

Robert Putnam suggests that the mid-century global cataclysm, the Great Depression followed by World War II, may have galvanized a whole generation of Americans into increased community commitment. He adds that this generation, after experiencing the horrors of war and the civic virtues to be protected, framed their task as the search for “the moral equivalent of war.”^[c] Perhaps we are experiencing a similar cataclysm with the events of September 11 and the War on Terrorism. President George W. Bush, in his November 9, 2001 Atlanta speech, pointed out the dramatic changes:

“In my inaugural address, I asked our citizens to serve their nation, beginning with their neighbors. This fall, I had planned a new initiative called Communities of Character, designed to spark a rebirth of citizenship and character and service. The events of September the 11th have caused that initiative to happen on its own, in ways we could never have imagined.

“Flags are flying everywhere – on houses, in store windows, on cars and lapels. Financial donations to the victims’ families have reached more than a billion dollars. Countless Americans gave blood in the aftermath of the attacks. New Yorkers opened their homes to evacuated neighbors. We are waiting patiently in long security lines. Children across America have organized lemonade and cookie sales for children in Afghanistan. . . .

“Many ask, what can I do to help in our fight. The answer is simple. All of us can become a September the 11th volunteer by making a commitment to service in our own communities. So you can serve your country by tutoring or mentoring a child, comforting the afflicted, housing those in need of shelter and a home. You can participate in your Neighborhood Watch or Crime Stoppers, you can become a volunteer in a hospital, emergency medical, fire or rescue unit. You can support our troops in the field and, just as importantly, support their families here at home, by becoming active in the USO or groups and communities near our military installations.

“We will also encourage service to country by creating new opportunities within the AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs for public safety and public health efforts. . . .
“ci[ci]

The jury is still out on whether or not some of the specific community service suggestions will remain just rhetoric or will become real community work and enhance community ties and relationships. Certainly the immediate aftermath of September 11 creates the aura of increased commitment to community.

Rotary: An example

Rotary, for me, has been a very fulfilling experience. Rotary’s motto of “service above self” has inspired me for the past 21 years. Getting together with others on a weekly basis is not only fun, but a catalyst for learning, a spark for socializing, and an opportunity for sharing in community and international projects. Robert Putnam recognized this same phenomenon for Rotarians generally: “For example, service clubs, like Rotary or Lions, mobilize local energies to raise

scholarships or fight disease at the same time that they provide members with friendships and business connections that pay off personally.”^{cii[cii]} The Boothbay Harbor Rotary Club started our local school scholarship fund in the 1960s; it has grown into probably the largest community scholarship fund in Maine: the Boothbay Region Student Aid Fund. This same club, in the mid-1990s, led a medical relief program for the volcano-torn island of Montserrat in the Caribbean, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical equipment and supplies. It currently is organizing some HIV/AIDS relief projects in South Africa. Like all clubs throughout the world, it has contributed thousands of dollars to the world’s largest private foundation: the Rotary Foundation, which, among many worldwide projects, has led the almost-completed effort to eradicate polio worldwide.

There are good years and weak years, cycles of my own life rhythms and cycles of our club’s ups and downs. Our Boothbay Harbor Rotary Club, formed in 1939, has maintained fairly constant membership numbers, membership in the twenties from 1939 until 1944, climbing to the thirties from 1944 until 1948, jumping quickly to the forties in the post-war boom from 1948 until 1966, up to the fifties ever since (and even 61 or so for periods in the mid-70s and mid-80s). Recently, the club membership has hovered in the low fifties and even down into the forties at times. Our club has weathered the storms that have staggered many other Rotary clubs and decimated many other service organizations.

But the warning signs are evident. Rotary clubs generally have had impressive growth throughout this century, until recently. The first Rotary club was organized in 1905. Soon Rotary and other service clubs eclipsed the old-guard fraternal orders: “By the early twentieth century fraternal organizations were challenged by new service clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, the Jaycees, and the like) and by professional associations. These newer groups offered business, contacts, a more modern face, and more outward civic zeal, though this came at the expense of the ‘brotherhood’ of fraternalism.”^{ciii[ciii]} Indeed, “most major, broad-gauged civic institutions in American life today were founded in several decades of exceptional social creativity around the turn of the twentieth century. . . . [I]t is hard to name a major mainline civic institution in American life today that was not invented in these few decades. Furthermore, organizations founded in that fecund period at the turn of the twentieth century have been unusually long-lived.” More than half of our contemporary national societies and associations were founded between 1890 and 1920, well over the number of those formed between 1960 and 1990.^{civ[civ]} Moreover, the groups founded between 1890 and 1920 are more likely to be broad-based professional, civic, or service organizations.^{cv[cv]} Most of these groups originally focused on private concerns and gradually turned their attention to community issues and political reform.^{cvi[cvi]}

But there are larger trends at work throughout Rotary, and they can only be recognized by bringing into sharper focus those same trends in local clubs and organizations generally. Between 1973 and 1994, the number of Americans who attended even one public meeting declined by 40%, the same percentage decline in the number of Americans who served in any office or committee in a local club or organization for the identical period.^{cvi[cvii]} During this identical period, the number of Americans who took any leadership role in any local organization, from “old-fashioned” organizations (like Rotary) to new age encounter groups, was sliced by more than half.^{cvi[cviii]} The more that community activities depend on the involvement of others, those community activities which bring people together, the more rapidly has been the decline in civic engagement throughout

the U.S. during the past 30 years.^{cix[cix]} Membership rates in almost all community organizations doubled between 1940 and 1945 and then “began to plateau in 1957, peaked in the early 1960s, and began the period of sustained decline by 1969.” Rotary was the exception to the rule, remaining on a higher plateau until the 1990s.^{cx[cx]}

The next decade, between 1985 and 1994, was even more devastating for community involvement when active involvement in community organizations fell by 45%. As Putnam put it, “By this measure, at least, nearly half of America’s civic infrastructure was obliterated in barely a decade.”^{cxix[cxix]} Even simple club attendance was cut by 58%, from one a month in 1975-76 to only five meetings per year in 1999. Put another way, two-thirds of all Americans attended club meetings in the mid-1970s, as contrasted with nearly two-thirds of all Americans in 1999 never attending meetings.^{cxii[cxii]} Hours per week invested in community organizations plummeted from over half of all Americans investing some time each week in the 1960s to less than one-quarter in the 1990s. Virtually all this decline is due to generational replacement: members of any given generation are investing as much time in organizational activity as they ever were, but each successive younger generation is investing less.^{cxiii[cxiii]} This can be inferred from almost any Rotary club: each club is looking grayer every decade. Now that the civic G.I. Generation is dying off, many clubs are looking smaller as well.

Worldwide, Rotary membership over the past decade, from 1991 to 2001, does not appear too disturbing. The membership graphs portray a plateau in growth, but no steep decline. This global plateau, however, masks a significant decline in existing Rotary club membership worldwide; the new clubs in foreign countries have largely hidden the serious decline in existing club membership generally and American club membership particularly. By the late 1990s the evidence had become clear, even in Rotary: existing club membership declines exceeded new club membership gains.^{cxiv[cxiv]} Rotary International has recently launched a more aggressive membership campaign, Global Quest, seeking younger members through its “New Generation” program, and wisely loosening up its classification system and bestowing membership on civic-minded retirees through the “Past Service” classification and an even more recent loosening of the entire job classification requirements for Rotary membership.

There has been an explosive growth throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s in the national environmental organizations. Does this mean that there has not been a decline in civic engagement, but rather only a reorientation from old-fashioned Rotary and Lions clubs to new-fangled Greenpeace and Sierra Club groups? No. Membership in these new environmental clubs is essentially only mailing lists, with “membership” only “an honorific rhetorical device for fundraising.”^{cxv[cxv]} Greenpeace, for example, tripled in membership (to 2,350,000) in only five years (from 1985-1990), but then lost 85% of its members in the next eight years. Not one of the Rotary-type chapter organizations suffered an 85% decline in all 3 or 4 decades since their peaks.^{cxvi[cxvi]} As Putnam put it, “Citizenship by proxy is an oxymoron.”^{cxvii[cxvii]}

Getting involved is the key. Helping out in international Rotary projects generally is an indicator of high involvement in Rotary club and community activities. This is consistent with volunteering generally: “Joiners are generally ten times more generous with their time and money than non-joiners. Social capital is a more powerful predictor of philanthropy than is financial capital.”^{cxviii[cxviii]} For example, as Putnam points out, less than one Texan in 15,000 is active in

the sturdiest environmental organization while every week over twenty times as many Texans gather for lunch at chapter-based Rotary clubs.^{cxix[cxix]}

Indeed, the structure of Rotary has been critical to its success. Every Rotarian is a member of a local Rotary club, more than of Rotary International. This means that every local Rotary club has members who meet each other face-to-face on a weekly basis. Such personal encounters have been Rotary's salvation; it also has been the salvation of many people and projects sponsored by Rotary. As Putnam put it, "One distinctive feature of a social-capital-creating formal organization is that it includes local chapters in which members can meet one another. . . . By way of comparison, there are seven thousand local Rotary chapters in America, to take a typical 'old-fashioned' chapter-based civic organization. In other words, Rotary alone has nearly twice as many chapters as all eighty-three public-interest groups combined."^{cxix[cxix]} This is a truly remarkable statement about the enormous success of Rotary's face-to-face weekly clubs exceeding all the public-interest entities' local chapters combined.

Loosening up makeup opportunities to two weeks before and two weeks after a Rotary meeting and allowing other civic activities to serve as a makeup for the weekly Rotary meetings has helped ease attendance requirements. However, further easing of these weekly attendance requirements (currently 60% of the meetings each year) to, perhaps, one or two meetings per month could be catastrophic if it results in inadequate face-to-face joining, since these frequent personal encounters have been the social catalyst for all forms of civic contributions of time and money throughout the past century in America. Converting a face-to-face organization into a mailing list group would be devastating to the Rotary organization and to all clubs and communities benefited by this massive civic involvement.

In sum, Robert Putnam captured the trends in civic organizations generally and Rotary clubs particularly:

"Organizational records suggest that for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century Americans' involvement in civic associations of all sorts rose steadily, except for the parenthesis of the Great Depression. In the last third of the century, by contrast, only mailing list membership has continued to expand, with the creation of an entirely new species of 'tertiary' associations whose members never actually meet. At the same time, active involvement in face-to-face organizations has plummeted, whether we consider organizational records, survey reports, time diaries, or consumer expenditures. We could surely find individual exceptions – specific organizations that successfully sailed against the prevailing winds and tides – but the broad picture is one of declining membership in community organizations. During the last third for the twentieth century formal membership in organizations in general has edged downward by 10-20 percent. More important, active involvement in clubs and other voluntary associations has collapsed at an astonishing rate, more than halving most indexes of participation within barely a few decades.

"Many Americans continue to claim that we are 'members' of various organizations, but most Americans no longer spend much time in community organizations – we've stopped doing committee work, stopped serving as officers, and stopped going to meetings. And all

this despite rapid increases in education that have given more of us than ever before the skills, the resources, and the interests that once fostered civic engagement. In short, Americans have been dropping out in droves, not merely from political life but from organized community life more generally.^{cxxi[cxxi]}

Although past performance, thankfully, is not always a guarantee of future performance, this uninterrupted decline of service clubs for more than a quarter century could be catastrophic: “[I]f the current rate of decline were to continue, clubs would become extinct in America within less than twenty years. Considering that such local associations have been a feature of American community life for several hundred years, it is remarkable to see them so high on the endangered species list.”^{cxxii[cxxii]}

Encouraging signs include the emerging Millennial Generation (those born after 1982), who show amazing signs of increased civic involvement, such as helping out at volunteer events in high school, much more than their older cohorts. “However, the Millennial Generation will have their hands full if they are to make up for the impending departure of their highly civic grandparents and the longtime incivisme of their parents’ generation.”^{cxxiii[cxxiii]}

At least ten percent of Boothbay Region Rotarians give blood at every blood drive, organized by the Lions Club and held at least four times a year in the Boothbay Region. This ten percent participation rate is over five times the one to two percent participation rate amongst the Boothbay Region population for blood donations. This reflects Putnam’s observation generally: “To predict whether I am likely to give time, money, blood, or even a minor favor, you need to know, above all, how active I am in community life and how strong my ties to family, friends, and neighbors are.” A hint on how to increase such volunteerism is easy: “When volunteers are asked how they happened to get involved in their particular activity, the most common answer is, ‘Someone asked me.’ Conversely, when potential blood donors are asked why they haven’t given blood, the most common response is, ‘Nobody asked.’”^{cxxiv[cxxiv]} Blood donors have dropped off nationally between 1987 and 1997, at the same time that fears of AIDS contamination by giving blood also declined^{cxxv[cxxv]}; the reason for declining blood *donation* appears to be, again, the aging of the civic generation and the reality that most people who give blood are young people with peak donations occurring in their thirties and declining sharply after fifty.^{cxxvi[cxxvi]} Not surprisingly, people who report that TV is their primary means of entertainment, give blood less often.^{cxxvii[cxxvii]} College graduates are twice as likely as people with a high school education or less to have volunteered in the past year or to be blood donors. Conversely, “active blood donors are more likely to volunteer time and give to philanthropy than non-donors. Altruistic behaviors tend to go together.”^{cxxviii[cxxviii]}

Conversely, “bowling alone:” represents one of the nation’s most serious health challenges: disconnected people are two to five times more likely to die from all causes. If you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying within the next year by half. Indeed, if you’re a smoker and belong to no groups, it’s a toss-up whether or not you should stop smoking or start joining.^{cxxix[cxxix]}

Our leading authority on community connectedness, Robert Putnam, highlights the high happiness quotient of joining a civic club such as Rotary:

Regular club attendance, volunteering, entertaining, or church attendance is the happiness equivalent of getting a college degree or more than doubling your income. Civic connections rival marriage and affluence as predictors of life happiness. . . . The biggest happiness returns to volunteering, clubgoing, and entertaining at home appear to come between ‘never’ and ‘once a month.’ There is very little gain in happiness after about one club meeting (or party or volunteer effort) every three weeks. After fortnightly encounters, the marginal correlation of additional social interaction with happiness is actually negative – another finding that is consistent with common experience! Churchgoing, on the other hand, is somewhat different, in that at least up through weekly attendance, the more the merrier. . . . The Beatles got it right: we all ‘get by with a little help from our friends.’^{xxx[cxxx]}

Rotary’s central focus is community service. This is the key, as Robert Putnam notes generally: “A mounting body of evidence confirms that community service programs really do strengthen the civic muscles of participants, especially if the service is meaningful, regular, and woven into the fabric of the school curriculum.” This bodes well for the recent success of the Boothbay Harbor Rotary Club’s 2001 introduction of an Interact Club, a Rotary club for high-school students, in the Boothbay Region High School. Led by Rotarian and advisor, Kevin Burnham, this has galvanized a large group of Boothbay Region students who are genuinely interested in community service. The September 11 events have motivated them even more. This youthful participation in extracurricular activities is a proven link to increased civic and social involvement in later life.^{xxxi[xxxxi]} This Boothbay Interact Club exemplifies the increased community commitment of the new Millennial Generation, a reassuring reflection of the dying Civic Generation.

Rotary’s weekly face-to-face meetings clearly contribute to increased civic involvement and betterment. Alexis de Tocqueville, almost 200 years ago in 1832, eloquently elucidated this “power of meeting” for associations in America: “Men have the opportunity of seeing each other; means of execution are combined; and opinions are maintained with a warmth and energy which written language can never attain.”^{xxxii[xxxxii]} These weekly face-to-face meetings generate a warmth and energy, a power of meeting, which can not be duplicated by the pen, the tube or the net. Personal relationships outperform more efficient communication forms. A little inefficiency inherent in Rotary’s frequent human encounters produces ever so much more long-term efficiencies of all kinds: personal well-being, better interpersonal relationships, more community improvements, and increased world peace and understanding.

De Tocqueville, almost two centuries ago prophetically predicted and equated civic associations with community improvements: “Amongst the laws which rule human societies, there is one which seems to be more precise and clear than all others. If men are to remain civilized, or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased.”^{xxxiii[xxxxiii]} Civic associations, like the Boothbay Harbor Rotary Club, must continue to revive and thrive in order to enhance equality of conditions, peace, and understanding, in the Boothbay Region and in other communities, small and large, throughout the world.

This call to service through involvement in Rotary activities mirrors the consequences and motivations for this call to service generally. Robert Coles explains: “A major consequence of community service for many, young and old alike, is an inclination to think about the words ‘community’ and ‘service,’ to seek in them some larger vision . . .”^{cxxxiv}[cxxxiv] He continues,

[T]he call of service . . . was a call toward others – heart, mind, and soul – but also a call inward, a call to oneself, a call that is a reminder: ‘Watchman, what of the night?’ -- the darkness that defines the moment of light in us, the darkness that challenges us to shine for one another before, soon enough, we join it.”^{cxxxv}[cxxxv]

Through Rotary, we are able to answer our call to service, plumb our own depths, deepen our relationships with other Rotarians, encounter varied people, commune with our community, heighten our horizons, celebrate our diversity, promote global peace and understanding, impact another village or person, and prepare to meet our Maker. I have conversed with a number of Rotarians, as they are dying, and they truly treasure their Rotarian fellowship and service among their greatest lifelong legacies. These Rotarians clearly lived the Rotary motto of “service above self,” while enhancing their own capacities to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy. What better reason is there for us to live and to die?

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Lawyer: An example

“Harry Caudill . . . spoke with the eloquence of resolute intelligence and with the moral passion of a lawyer who understood and venerated the traditions of justice. . . A sense of justice, though essential, grows pale and cynical when it stands too long alone in the face of overpowering injustice. And moral outrage, by itself, finally turns intelligence into rant. To explain the endurance of Harry Caudill, it is necessary to look deeper than his principles. . . . He did not come there, then, to serve justice. He has been there because he has belonged there; the land and people for whom he has spoken are his own. Because he got his law degree and went home with it, his mind has never made the expedient separation of knowledge from value that has enabled so much industrial pillage, but has known with feeling and so has served with devotion – a possibility long disregarded by modern educators, who believe despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary that education alone, ‘objective knowledge,’ can produce beneficent results. . . . Mr. Caudill tells how these stories came to him: ‘I practiced law within a mile of my birthplace for twenty-eight years and saw and talked to a daily procession of people. . . I tried to afford them a good listener.’ . . . ‘These tales,’ he writes, ‘are intended to show how the cultural layers were formed and a people fashioned.’ They spring, as perhaps the best stories always have, from the ancient fascination with human extremity, . . . Harry Caudill is master of an art of storytelling that I think could rightly be called ‘legal,’ for it has been practiced by country lawyers for many generations.”^{cxxxvi}[cxxxvi]

This is a country lawyer to emulate. A man committed to his community, shaping his locality and being shaped by his environment, natural and cultural. Deeply rooted, a man of his place. Two

ears and one mouth, a good listener. Intimate with his neighbors, an excellent counselor. Trusted advisor, a great storyteller.

Some hopeful people have conjectured that socializing has switched from the neighbor's fence to the workplace water cooler. However, co-workers generally account for only 10% of our friends, and workplace friendships tend to be casual and enjoyable, but not intimate and deeply supportive. Few people list any co-workers on their lists of closest friends; many list their neighbors.^{cxxxvii[cxxxvii]}

Robert Putnam concludes that “any solution to the problem of civic disengagement in contemporary America must include better integration between our work lives and our community and social lives.”^{cxxxviii[cxxxviii]} However, “[t]he workplace is not the salvation for our fraying civil society.”^{cxxxix[cxxxix]} On the other hand, Putnam does recognize that family-friendly and community-congenial workplaces benefit both the employer and the employee and must be attained in order to replenish reservoirs of social capital within and outside the workplace.^{cxl[cxl]}

Allowing any of our six employees to at least occasionally bring their children into the work place and encouraging employees to take time for community projects have been longtime practices at our Griffin Law Offices in Boothbay Harbor and an increasing number of law firms and other businesses, as can be gleaned from the rise of the Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility (MEBSR). We, and a growing number of law firms, are members of MEBSR. In our office we all share in our profits, as well as our stories; most of us have been a vital part of our law firm for many years. We are a family of sorts and probably have much closer relationships with each other than in most workplaces. Our involvement in our community further fosters relationships amongst ourselves and certainly nurtures our own individual fulfillment.

Our mission statement at Griffin Law Offices is “Committed to Community.” We try to live this value during our work day by helping out with Meals on Wheels, taking time for Rotary planning or community projects, volunteering for municipal town meetings and elections, and leading Fishermen's Festival planning and activities. All of us help out in more ways outside our work hours. We also do Medicaid planning, which is not economically worthwhile, but which is a need of many in our community. We are the only Boothbay Region group to maintain an elder caregiver list which has helped many individuals and families in need. We focus on the homeowner and buyer, more than the lender, in our real estate portion of the practice – a practice which differentiates itself from the treadmill-paced focus on the lender to the exclusion of the most important party – the buyer -- in the real estate transaction. Our fastest growing area of the practice, estate planning, focuses on our clients – our friends and neighbors -- and their goals, as a lifelong, relational process, and not only on the estate planning documents as a one-time, objective transaction – a practice very different than that of most typical estate planners.

Despite the dramatic industrial and urbanization changes of the past century, big government and big business, Great Depression and New Deal, and the replacement of the handshake with the legal contract, the number of lawyers (and guards and police) grew very little for most of this century. However, after 1970 the fraction of lawyers to the rest of the American population doubled and grew three times faster than the growth of the professions generally. In 1970 there were 3% fewer lawyers than doctors; by 1995 there were 34% more lawyers than doctors. Despite keeping a

constant and much lower level of legal advice during the first 70 turbulent years of the twentieth century, Americans doubled their investment in legal advice during the final 30 years of this past century. Despite the talk of increased regulations, this phenomenon was a feature of the New Deal landscape; despite talk of a litigation explosion, court dockets are not significantly more crowded today. Rather the largest increase in legal expenditures has been “preventive lawyering,” getting it in writing, and discarding the past reliance on reciprocity and moral obligation.^{cxli[cxli]} This swift switch from the hearty handshake to the legal contract has precisely matched the dramatic drop in trust and community-building over the past three decades.

Scott Peck, unlike Robert Putnam, believes that “[t]he workplace is the center of most people’s lives,” more central than even the family and far more central than church.^{cxlii[cxlii]} He advocates a politics of transformation by introducing community to the workplace where so many of us spend so much of our time and energy. Issues of long-range or important planning and decision-making are generally best dealt with in a community, a more egalitarian mode. Less important or more immediate operational decisions are generally better made in the traditional, hierarchical mode.^{cxliii[cxliii]} Peck adds, “Build community and welcome God into your organization, and you will be introducing a wild card,” a good and creative wild card that will generate more spice and excitement and risk.^{cxliv[cxliv]} Although the bottom line in business is profitability and not saving souls, “business will adopt community as a standard mode of operation for the sole reason that community is cost-effective.”^{cxlv[cxlv]}

Working in a rural law office, focused on community clients and on estate planning and real estate work, is both intimate and inspiring. Many clients share with us stories and concerns more private than they may even tell a spouse or any other close friend. Relationships ripen. Understanding increases. Commitments extend. Community bonds. Spirituality surfaces. We enhance our effectiveness as we get to know our clients, their families and friends, that is, as we commit to our community.

Lessons from local history

Local history, by its very nature, is placed and fosters community. The Boothbay minister, Reverend L. S. Coan, in his 1866 Centennial Sermon, stressed the significance of preserving local history for the Boothbay Region community: “And it is a shame, and a loss of community, that the evidences of this are hidden in the town records of those days, far gone, fast going toward decay, and liable to certain destruction.”^{cxlvi[cxlvi]} Our collective local memory binds us together in a shared heritage with common roots and stories. Any loss of our local history is a loss of community.

Indeed, when Reverend Coan preached his 1866 sermon, the Boothbay community could look back over a century for this rural, mainland community and over two centuries of fishing history for its island communities. Damariscove Island had a year-round fishing community, with 13 year-round fishermen, 30 sailing ships, and a spruce palisade fort in 1622, and it was not eclipsed by Townsend (later named Boothbay) until 1730, when Boothbay was a struggling group of farmers

and clambers. By 1866, Boothbay had been transformed from low circumstances during the American Revolution to one of the most prosperous and least parochial communities, with Boothbay fishermen and traders and their families frequently traveling to many different ports along much of the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. Just a decade later, Boothbay learned the hard lesson of excessive reliance on a “one-crop” economy of menhaden, or porgies, which went boom and bust during the 1870s. Rather, Boothbay by the late nineteenth century learned to build itself around multiple fisheries, shipbuilding and tourism, learning from its local history lessons.^{cxlvii[cxlvii]}

However, Boothbay’s fishing and shipbuilding declined in the twentieth century, particularly in the context of international trade which had flourished for much of the nineteenth century. Boothbay’s inhabitants turned inward, and the community became more parochial. Sarah Orne Jewett described this phenomenon in 1919: “A community narrows down and grows dreadful ignorant when it is shut up to its own affairs and gets no knowledge of the outside world . . . In the old days, . . . they saw the world for themselves, and like’s not their wives and children saw it with them.”^{cxlviii[cxlviii]} Boothbay’s fishing community became more conservative and resistant to change during much of the twentieth century; for example, few would swiftly switch from traditional salted codfish to novel fresh cod during the first half of the century, despite the advent of refrigeration.^{cxlix[cxlix]}

Boothbay, like many other towns in the early twentieth century, evoked the traditional “frontier democracy” ethos of its past. This ethos involved a genuine development of local democracy, equalitarianism, friendliness, economic aggressiveness, mobility, expansiveness, and opportunity consciousness. Mencken criticized this opportunistic materialism and called it “Yahooism, boosterism, Rotarianism, and the ideology of the *boobus Americanus*.”^{cl[cl]} Boothbay, like many towns in that era, used its local history, but it may have abused it as well in its nostalgic parochialism and its reliance on an outdated frontier ideology from over a century earlier.

World War II precipitated much change. Men returned from Europe with the first recipes of Italian food and new ideas and customs from all over the world. The economy boomed.^{cli[cli]} Cooperation amongst Boothbay fishermen soared and took off in 1949 with the formation of the Boothbay Region Co-operative Association, soon to be known as the “Co-op”, which has remained strong and a focal point for most Boothbay Region fishermen. In 1977, local fishermen and businessmen combined to save the East Side fish processing plant, known as the “Freezer,” which has since become town-owned, as the entire community has united to help foster the declining fisheries. This community support of the fisheries is not only to prop up the fishing industry but also to enhance the tourism industry, which relies on the advertisements, postcards, and paintings which reveal that we are drawn toward the seafaring life. This nostalgic portrait of a quaint fishing village attracts the tourists of today as it did the rusticators of a century ago.

Max Lerner in 1957 perceived that nostalgia for a small town need not be construed as nostalgia for the town itself but rather a “quest for community.” Lerner added,

“The critical question is not whether the small town can be rehabilitated in the image of its earlier strength and growth – for clearly it cannot – but whether American life will be able to evolve any other integral community to replace it. This is what I call the problem of

place in America, and unless it is somehow resolved, American life will become more jangled and fragmented than it is, and American personality will continue to be unquiet and unfulfilled.”

Almost a half century later, Lerner’s prophetic “problem of place” rings true. Too many in-migrants in Boothbay Harbor immediately transform from developer to environmentalist. They want to stop all growth and change, after their house is built or renovated or, worse, want to restore Boothbay to their genteel image of a Norman Rockwell painting. Too many longtime locals, although viewing a long stretch of local happenings and thus more receptive to local landscape change, resist new ideas and give up on contributing to their Boothbay Region community.

On the other hand, Boothbay Harbor, Boothbay, and Southport, more than most towns, have successfully harnessed the energies, funds, and ideas of newcomers and the local knowledge and work ethic of locals into an evolving, integral community. This miraculous merging of these local and “away” talents and treasures in the Boothbay Region has created Maine’s best YMCA, which is the Boothbay Region’s community core. Although the sense of community and the local knowledge of most inhabitants have declined, the community itself is much more diverse and effervescent than it was forty years ago. Although many disagree, I believe this tradeoff -- of some loss of community for some gain in diversity and energy -- has been beneficial here in the Boothbay Region.

Although the medieval proverb, “city air liberates,” has some truth, small-town atmosphere connects. Putnam’s research confirms this feature of small-town community-building: “[V]irtually all forms of altruism – volunteerism, community projects, philanthropy, directions for strangers, aid for the afflicted, and so on – are demonstrably more common in small towns.”^{clii[clii]} He adds, “[R]esidents of small towns and rural areas are more altruistic, honest, and trusting than other Americans. In fact, even among suburbs, smaller is better from a social capital point of view. Getting involved in community affairs is more inviting – or abstention less attractive – when the scale of everyday life is smaller and more intimate.”^{cliii[cliii]}

The Boothbay Region has exceeded the American rise in home ownership. American home ownership has risen to an all-time high of 66.2%. Lincoln County is much higher, at 83%, the highest in Maine. Lincoln County’s median age is also the highest in the state, 42.6. Thus the Boothbay Region is in the heart of the grayest county in Maine, which is the fourth grayest state in the country.^{cliv[cliv]} This high incidence of participation by our old Civic Generation (those born between 1901 and 1924) has been a significant factor for our high level of community involvement and success. Can this high-energy level of civic commitment continue into the less active Silent Generation (those born between 1925 and 1942), Boomer Generation (those born between 1943 and 1960), and Generation X (those born between 1961 and 1981)?

Local face-to-face meetings, even ones solely for social reasons, lead to community building in the Boothbay Region. Just as Robert Putnam has described bridge games as leading toward civic involvement, Boothbay boasts the same trends. Fifty years ago, Grace Calhoun, Barbara Williams, Dottie Brown, Jean Trafton, Donna Ulma, Betty Smith, Ora Dodge, and Mary Lakeman, formed a weekly bridge club. For the past half-century, since about 1952, they have met each other each week to play bridge and swap stories. Three of the original bridge players, Grace Calhoun,

Barbara Williams, and Dottie Brown, along with Marge Winslow, continue this half-century tradition of weekly bridge-playing. About two decades ago, Grace Calhoun and Barbara Winslow, through their comradeship and bridge association, joined in the creation of the Thrift Shop, which is an offshoot of the Hospital Auxiliary, a financial support of the local St. Andrews Hospital.^{clv[clv]} The trends of civic decline can also be seen in this bridge club, which is comprised entirely of women from the G.I. “Civic” Generation. In Boothbay, as in the rest of the country, bridge is about as foreign a concept to most of us as whist was a generation ago.

Historical fact often transformed into community folklore, which united Boothbay’s inhabitants around the campfire, woodstove, or street corner to tell or listen to these tales. Primary source documents in the 1600s and 1700s reveal pirates in the area; later story-tellers proclaimed pirate treasures buried in Boothbay. A 1689 diary entry of John Giles attests to Damariscove owner, Richard Patteshall, being killed by the Indians in his sloop in Pemaquid Harbor; later legends describe his headless ghost and dog stalking the island of Damariscove in the 1890s and up to current times, more than three centuries later. Written records and oral lore have helped bind together the Boothbay community of today with our ancestors of three centuries ago and with each other today.

Locals and in-migrants blend into a harmonious whole in the Boothbay Region. Unlike most other towns and cities to the south and beyond, Boothbay natives and newcomers rarely put on airs or flaunt extravagant clothes or vehicles. Rarely do we flock around celebrities. There is an aura of equality. Rarely can one distinguish a wealthy, retired executive from an older fisherman by appearances. Social status is based more on mutual trust and respect than on wealth or fashion. This tone of not looking too different from everyone else may stretch back to the Puritans’ sumptuary laws which were intended to prevent average citizens from aping the rich.^{clvi[clvi]} This tone is not always observed by newcomers, as Tracy Kidder, a summer resident of the Damariscotta area, wrote in his 1999 Home Town book about Northampton: “Many people ask a lot of a new town. They expect it to change their lives without their having to change themselves.”^{clvii[clvii]} But there is some inevitability to the forces of place that change each of us as we change our place, just as an artist is transformed by the landscape he or she paints.^{clviii[clviii]}

T. S. Eliot captured the essence of our quest for community and place: “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”^{clix[clix]} This exploration and these tugs from the wider world may pull us far from our native place: “Everyone lives somewhere, and sooner or later the suspicion that somewhere else is better disturbs the peace of home.”^{clx[clx]} Perhaps the new place becomes the adopted home; perhaps we remain in our native place; or perhaps we return to our native place and know it for the first time.

The traditions of the short-lived Squirrel Island Squid and the century-old Boothbay Register, have helped foster continuity of traditions and recognition of noteworthy achievements.^{clxi[clxi]} Native residents and recent in-migrants, alike, share in this common heritage. The more we pay attention to our native or adopted place, the more focused is our sense of place and our perspective of the town in which we live and the age in which we are living. Just as the rower must look backward, from where he was, in order to glide forward; we need to know our past so that we can effectively blaze our new trail and leave a lasting legacy.

Future of community

The late nineteenth century Progressives had to resist the nostalgic temptation that life was better in the village and that we should go back to the farm; instead they chose against trying to reverse the tide and selected social innovation. Similarly we must resist the temptation to assert that life was better in the 1950s and require all women to report to the kitchen; instead we must choose to guide the tide and not buck it. Rather than mourning the loss of our small-town folkways or re-inventing the Boy Scouts, we must be willing to experiment as our Progressive brethren did a century ago, when they created the Scouting movement.^{clxii[clxii]} Let's guide, not grieve over, social change.

Let us begin by at least knowing the names of our neighbors. As Putnam observes:

Institutional reform will not work – indeed, it will not happen – unless you and I, along with our fellow citizens, resolve to become reconnected with our friends and neighbors. Henry Ward Beecher's advice a century ago to 'multiply picnics' is not entirely ridiculous today. We should do this, ironically, not because it will be good for America, - though it will be - but because it will be good for us.^{clxiii[clxiii]}

Scott Peck describes the four stages of building community: (1) pseudocommunity, a stage of pretense, when a group covers up differences with manners; it is polite, inauthentic, boring, sterile, and unproductive. (2) Chaos, a stage of trying to obliterate differences when group members try to convert, heal, or fix each other, or argue for simplistic norms; this often results in the destruction of community or retreating into the former pseudocommunity phase. (3) Emptiness, a stage of hard work, when members strive to empty themselves of prejudices, snap judgments, fixed expectations, the desire to convert, the urge to win, the fear of appearing the fool, and the desire to control. (4) Community, a stage of an authentic spirit of peace and silence, coupled with authentic, high-quality communication and a commitment to communicate on an ever more deep and authentic level. Thus, on any level, "Community-building first; decision-making second."^{clxiv[clxiv]} The process of building and maintaining community must be one of formal, structured communication. "Structure is the organizational incarnation of discipline. Liberty without discipline is license for destruction."^{clxv[clxv]} Peck concludes, "In and through community lies the salvation of the world. . . . Community is the way – the means and the technology – to institute a planetary culture of civility."^{clxvi[clxvi]}

Tracy Kidder notes the essential, changeless nature of community in the midst of technological and landscape change:

[Civilization] implies just this, a place with a life that shelters individual lives, a place that allows people to become better than they might otherwise be – better, in a sense, than they are. The town contained evil, but didn't abide evil. It managed to keep it contained. Of course, dumb luck had helped out the old town, not the least of it the mysterious hold it had on residents' affections. Many people had no better reason for living here than the place

itself. For them it wasn't just anywhere, but the place they chose because they felt it had chosen them. . . .

All the generations who have passed through town, all the generations to come. The people who have suffered here and the people who have prospered. The residents who traffic in gossip and the residents who add to the town's charity. The natives who have stayed and the natives who have left. The ones who have departed to disgrace and the ones who dream themselves back here when they dream of home.^{clxvii[clxvii]}

One way of evolving the concept of community from a small town or in a city neighborhood may be to change our focus from home and work to "third places," such as the English or Irish pub, the Arabian coffeehouse, the German bierstube, the Italian taberna, the old American frontier tavern, the Viennese coffeehouse, or the French café. All around the world, these third places serve as neutral grounds and levelers for equality. The primacy of place for community is both ever-present and evanescent:

"The environment in which we live out our lives is not a cafeteria containing an endless variety of passively arrayed settings and experiences. It is an active, dictatorial force that adds experiences or subtracts them according to the way it has been shaped. When Americans begin to grasp that lesson, the path to the planners' offices will be more heavily trod than that to the psychiatrists' couches. And when that lesson is learned, community may again be possible and celebrated each day in a rich new spawning of third places. If there is one message I wish to leave with those who despair of suburbia's lifeless streets, of the plastic places along our 'strips,' or of the congested and inhospitable mess that is 'downtown,' it is: *It doesn't have to be like this!*"^{clxviii[clxviii]}

Wes Jackson's recipe for revitalizing communities is to become native to our particular place: "We are unlikely to achieve anything close to sustainability in any area unless we work for the broader goal of becoming native in the modern world, and that means becoming naïve to our places in a coherent community that is in turn embedded in the ecological realities of its surrounding landscape."^{clxix[clxix]} Jackson recognizes that "it is the wholeness of community life and the need for community life that are on the line. So when we think about the revitalization of small towns and rural communities worldwide, rather than insisting that we go back, I am instead insisting that we be careful as we go forward to avoid several impulses," such as the temptation "to gentrify the small places."^{clxx[clxx]} He adds, "Why community works . . . is a complex mystery," and rather than studying it and its connections, "most of us simply accept it, are glad that it works, and seek to keep it healthy. . . In the main, all we have to do is *provide the context* for community to happen and live in ways that will keep it healthy."^{clxxi[clxxi]}

The best hope for long-term rebuilding of community rests with our youth of the Millennial Generation, those children born after 1981. Robert Putnam estimated that half of our civic decline is due solely to generational differences in levels of community commitment, with the highest commitment for the past 75 years being with the G.I. Generation, from the time they were young adults to their venerable age of today, as they are dying off. He also noted the incredible increase in the level of community service of the young Millennial Generation, those born after 1981, who

mirror the dying G.I. Generation in so many ways. This rebirth of civic commitment was predicted by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their impressive book, Generations: The History of America's Future, in 1991, when the oldest of the Millennials were only 10 years old. Strauss and Howe coined the new "Millennial" name for this new "can-do" generation, and they show the cyclical nature of generations throughout American history. In 1997, they refined their predictions: "Every youth domain will become more mannerly, civic-spirited, and emotionally placid. . . Whatever their new economic hardships (and they could be severe), Millennials will not rebel, but will instead mobilize for public purpose."^{clxxii[clxxii]} This new civic generation will provide the greatest impetus for a resurgence of community and community-building.

Wendell Berry, as usual, puts it best for me with the following metaphor for community:

"A battered galvanized bucket is hanging on a fence post near the head of the hollow, and I never go by it without stopping to look inside. For what is going on in that bucket is the most momentous thing I know, the greatest miracle that I have ever heard of: it is making earth. . . . This slow work of growth and death, gravity and decay, which is the chief work of the world, has by now produced in the bottom of the bucket several inches of black humus. I look into that bucket with fascination because I am a farmer of sorts and an artist of sorts, and I recognize there an artistry and a farming far superior to mine, or to that of any human. . . . However small a landmark the old bucket is, it is not trivial. It is one of the signs by which I know my country and myself. . . . It is irresistibly metaphorical. It is doing in a passive way what a human community must do actively and thoughtfully. A human community, too, must collect leaves and stories, and turn them to account. It must build soil, and build that memory of itself - in lore and story and song - that will be its culture. These two kinds of accumulation, of local soil and local culture, are intimately related. . . . A human community, then, if it is to last long, must exert a sort of centripetal force, holding local soil and local memory in place. Practically speaking, human society has no work more important than this. Once we have acknowledged this principle, we can only be alarmed at the extent to which it has been ignored."^{clxxiii[clxxiii]}

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In sum, we must collect and use our soil and stories. We must sink our roots into the rich topsoil created by the Civic generation. We must create our own humus, humility, and earthiness. We must nurture the young Millennial Generation's commitment to community. We must accumulate our soil and culture. We must gather, grieve, and rejoice with our neighbors. We must sink roots into our chosen place. We must find our commons so that we can commune, communicate, commiserate, and celebrate our commonality and our differences. We must look beyond, after securing our place, and try to listen to, understand, and help others outside our community. We need to seek a different direction. We need to "practice resurrection."^{clxxiv[clxxiv]}

As Stephen Covey put it, "The four basic needs of all people are to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy."^{clxxv[clxxv]} All of these basic needs are tied to community. George Bernard Shaw said it best:

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For

the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It's a sort of splendid torch which I've got to hold up for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations. ^{»,clxxvi[clxxvi]}

I do believe all that. But I equally treasure my family. How do I burn the community torch and blaze the family torch just as brightly? Maybe I'll find out in four years when my younger daughter leaves the nest. Or maybe I'll learn the lesson in five to ten years when my wife and I return to reside in the Boothbay Region on a year-round basis. More likely, this balancing and probing will never end. This quest for community never ended for Hector and Odysseus, and this struggle for balance and for community will continue well beyond all of us.

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