



Loving Intentions: A Look at Contemporary Mennonite Intentional Communities

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Abstract

In the process of defining the emic term "intentional community", this thesis tells the story of the McMillan House, a Mennonite intentional community in Winnipeg that existed between 2000 and 2007. This thesis also shares the stories of seventeen other young adults who have lived in various intentional communities across North America. This thesis uses ethnography and auto-ethnography to examine the seemingly common association between those who choose to live in intentional community and the often difficult move between moving away from one's childhood home and inherited traditions to creating a home for oneself and, thus, having the space to discover one's unique vernacular expression of these said traditions. Through the close and intimate relationships found in their different intentional communities, the young adults interviewed in this thesis found the emotional support they needed to move into the next stages in their life, to come to terms with their varying identities, and to actively live-out their belief in love. This abstract belief in love is expressed tangibly and actively by the participants through things such as environmental sustainability, the overcoming of social alienation, simplicity, and food justice - food justice being the most explored in this thesis.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	3
List of Figures	7
 Part One: Introductions	
Chapter One: How It All Came About	8
A) The intentions of this thesis	10
B) Introducing the key concepts	12
a) The motifs	12
b) The key terms and concepts	14
C) Out in the field: Introducing the participants	15
 Chapter Two: The McMillan House	
A) How I came to be a part of the McMillan House	70
B) The McMillan House as an intentional community	73
C) "The knowns" of the McMillan House	76
D) "The unknowns" of the McMillan House	80
E) Close relationships at the McMillan House	94
F) The "big" stuff	101
a) Sexuality	102
b) Physical touch and acceptance of the body	106
c) The "cool" parties	109
G) Food	112
H) Favorite memories	126

Part Two: Loving Intentions: The Roots, Branches, and Fruit

Chapter Three: Mennonites, Intentional Community, and the Intentions of Mennonites	134
A) The mainstream roots of intentional community	136
a) Brook Farm	138
b) Montague Farm	138
B) The religious roots of intentional community	140
a) Hutterite Communities	141
b) Church Communities	142
C) Some of the branches of intentional community	145
a) Jubilee Partners	144
b) Student Housing at CMU	145
D) Mennonite identity and intentional community: The sap of the tree	147
E) The new branches of intentional community	154
 Chapter Four: "Love, Love, Love; All You Need is Love"	 163
A) Community as family	165
a) Emotional support and physical intimacy	166
b) Desire to carry over the love from one's biological family into one's self-made family	167
c) Health and well-being	168
B) Overcoming social alienation	169
a) The story of Pete and how by just allowing someone into one's life community is fostered	171

b) The story of the stroller and being open to what, and who, comes your way	171
c) The story of the gang and making something bad into something good	172
C) Simplicity	174
a) Simplicity and social justice	174
b) Simplicity and stewardship of the earth	175
 Chapter Five: For the Love of Food	 179
A) Food, folklore, and identity	180
a) Food as foodways	181
b) What food means to people: Identity	183
c) One way that meaning is constructed: Cultural heritage	183
d) How food can be experienced in a meaningful way: Community	184
B) Food justice as an intention in community	185
a) Food, mindfulness, and Mennonites	186
b) Health of self and health of the world	188
c) "The kitchen is the heart of the home"	190
d) Vegetarianism	193
e) Gardening and do-it-yourself justice	195
f) Organic, local, and in-season	196
 Chapter Six: Conclusion	 201
 Bibliography	 205

List of Figures

Credits are given in the photos' captions. All photos are used with permission.

1. Outside the McMillan House, *ca.* 2003.
2. Me cleaning up after a burst pipe, *ca.* 2005.
3. Salvatorio dressed-up as Jesus, *ca.* 2003.
4. Suzanne and Bella at the Gay Pride Parade, *ca.* 2004.
5. Salvatorio and Suzanne, summer 2005.
6. A McMillan House party invitation, summer 2005.
7. Bob making bread, *ca.* 2004.
8. Bella on the roof top, *ca.* 2003.
9. Marie and Derek's wedding, summer 2008.
10. Claudia and me at her 30th birthday party, summer 2007.
11. Suzanne, Marie, Beth, and I, winter 2011.
12. Yvan, Salvatorio and Bella, summer 2009.

Chapter One: How it all came about

In Winnipeg there are, and have been, many intentional communities. These communities, or households, have generally been named after the street on which they are located and have been commonly called *the McMillan Avenue House* or *the Walnut Street House*, accordingly. Many of these communities are made up of young individuals of Mennonite¹ descent who are trying to act out, as well as figure out, their belief in love. These young, Mennonite adults consider living in such a community to be an active expression of this belief. For, within a Mennonite context, "belief is only real when embodied" (Driedger 2000: 39) and therefore no separation can, or should, be made between one's beliefs and one's actions. Such a dividing line would contradict everything Mennonites stand for (Driedger 2000: 71). For this reason, along with many others, the individuals in these Mennonite intentional communities are working together to create tangible expressions of their shared belief in love.

Love is a very complicated and contested concept and while it was tempting to turn this thesis into a philosophical discussion that tried to define what, in fact, love is, I abstained from this desire. Instead, the focus of this thesis is on how the participants themselves talked about love - summarized well by the Christian notion that one who loves should always "do justice, cherish the natural order, and nurture people" (Longacre 1980: 17). A belief in love, like all the other values in a Mennonite context, is considered sincere only when expressed through direct action. The intentional communities examined in this thesis substantiate and exemplify how this idea of active love plays out in the real world.

¹ The Mennonites are one of many religious groups that fall under the heading of "Anabaptist". This term refers to those Christian groups that believe one must be baptized into the Christian faith as a free-consenting adult, and not as an infant, as traditionally practices within the Catholic Church. The Anabaptist movement stems from the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century (Simons 1871: 24-31).

The McMillan House, an example of one of these intentional communities, was made up of approximately ten individuals² in their twenties (one of whom was myself) and lasted from 2000 to 2007. By examining the oral history of the McMillan House and by looking at other similar communities, this thesis will explain and analyze the emic concept of "intentional community" as acted out within the young, often Mennonite, social circles of southern Manitoba. In the process of defining and analyzing this multidimensional term, this thesis will also attempt to convey and illustrate the love that was actively sought after, questioned, and animated in these communities.

The term "intentional community" tended to be the preferred term used by the participants I interviewed to describe their experiences of living in community. This term is useful because such households are made up of more than just casual housemates but their "intentionality" does not usually reach the dedication commonly expected in traditional communes. The fact that in Winnipeg there are more Mennonites than in any other city in the world (Driedger 1990: v), along with so many intentional communities full of individuals who are determined to find ways to actively love, is a curious correlation that has come to intrigue me most thoroughly. This idea of intentional communities was so familiar in my social circles in Winnipeg that I took it for granted as a universally understood concept. However in the fall of 2007, when I first came to the folklore department at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, I was taken aback to discover that when I used the term "intentional community" to describe the living situation that I had recently left in Winnipeg, no one seemed to know what I was referring to. Though the term has been known in activist circles "for many

² There were five bedrooms in the McMillan House and so, usually, there would be five community members living in the house at one time. However, individuals came and went, sometimes sleeping on the couch or in the sunroom when there were no rooms available.

centuries [as referring to] places where idealists have come together to create a better world" (Fellowship of Intentional Community), and has had a folkloristic life for almost a decade (Primiano 2004), the term seemed to be as uncommon in St. John's as it was common in Winnipeg. The realization that I had been unknowingly shaped by the folklore, if you will, of my community was an early initiation for me into the world of folklore studies and is ultimately what led me to write this thesis.

A) The intentions of this thesis

In this thesis I demonstrate that, by looking at things which are commonly taken for granted in the daily lives of those living in intentional community, such as the reasons why they choose to eat and cook within a group instead of on their own, we can better understand what exactly makes an intentional community intentional and how these communities affect the lives of both the community members and the larger world. Thus the folklore of the groups in question indicates both the beliefs and praxis of their daily lives. Through their belief in love that is animated through caring relationships, simplicity and environmental sustainability, food justice, and the like, members of the intentional communities examined in this thesis are living better, more fulfilling lives, and they are attempting to make the lives of those they come into contact with better as well. I use ethnography and auto-ethnography throughout this thesis as ways of bringing forward the key themes and ideas, with the primary intention of examining the loving intentions of the participants and the relationship these intentions have to both the personal lives of the participants and the wider world. In this thesis I demonstrate that intentional community

can be a personal bulwark for an individual as he or she comforts this often muddled world of ours.

The intentional communities examined in this thesis are not generally unified as a group through an expression of shared Christian faith, as is common within many contemporary Mennonite circles and historical Mennonite communities (Beck 2004: 19). Most of the communities looked at are, however, unified through such Mennonite traditional folklore and explicit ideals as communalism, simple living, shared food preparation, and, at the most basic level, a Christian belief in love and justice. As Benedict Anderson points out, as one's worldview is opened, it gets harder and harder for that person to hold onto ancestral ideas (1993: 16 & 36). This idea is illustrated by the participants in these modern intentional communities who are well-educated, generally having at least one university degree, and thus tend to be liberal and open to a wide range of religious expressions³, rather than being conservative and insular in their beliefs, as traditional Mennonite communities often are. While being based on ancestral ideas, these new communities tend to be open to new and emerging concepts. The participants in this thesis have not replaced religious communities with their intentional communities⁴; rather they have restructured old ideas to suit their modern understandings. In this thesis I use the McMillan House as my primary case study of a group who has successfully taken old ideas and applied them in a new, and perhaps radical, way. In doing this, I explore what exactly an intentional community is, why many young Mennonites are choosing to live in intentional communities,

³ There is a Low German saying "*je gelehader, je verkehrter*" (the more learned, the more confused). This expression conveys the attitude common in traditional Mennonite social circles that being well educated is dangerous for it draws one away from one's conservative religious upbringing. (Kauffman & Deidger 1991: 37) The intentional communities discussed in this thesis suggest this suspicion is legitimate.

⁴ Anderson states that it is "short-sighted" to think that intentional communities are simply replacing traditional religious communities. (Anderson 1993: 22)

how their personal identities are attached to this choice, and the specific role food plays in creating and unifying intentional communities.

Of the twenty-two individuals that I interviewed, three were not Mennonite and two considered themselves to be culturally Mennonite but not religiously so. The other sixteen participants did claim some form of Mennonite religious faith, but most were reluctant to talk about their spiritual beliefs, except to say that living in community was an expression of their faith. The idea of actively, tangibly, and quietly, living out one's faith is common within Protestant communitarian traditions, exemplified well by the Quaker who prayed that "his life in itself [and not his words] might be a testimony [of his faith]" (Terry 1988: 39). The idea that one cannot divide one's beliefs from one's actions is also an aspect of religious folklife within folklore studies (Yoder 1974: 2-15; Primiano 1995: 37-56). However, because belief was not talked about explicitly by the participants, the focus of my thesis is not on beliefs per se, but on how ideals, often stemming from a Mennonite belief in active faith, shaped the communities and their members.

While I do use personal experience narrative and legend throughout this thesis as I let the participants tell their stories of living in intentional community, this thesis is not a genre-based study. While I do have a processual approach to foodways and ritual, this thesis is not meant to be a study of foodways or ritual. Rather, this thesis is an examination of how identity is negotiated and managed in a time of life that is very dynamic. By looking at small intentional communities made up of young Mennonites in southern Manitoba, I draw attention to a larger trend taking place in society. This trend refers to the many young individuals across North America who are seeking out intentional community in order to fulfill their personal need for loving relationships and to find the personal support they need to actively express their beliefs.

The idea of intentional community is not unique to Mennonites, nor is it unique to Manitobans. The idea of intentional community is widespread. It is my hope that by telling a few localized stories, wide scale applications can be made.

B) Introducing the key concepts

a) The motifs⁵

This thesis is organized into two parts. The first part is divided into two chapters: an introduction and an ethnographic case study. This, the first chapter, is an introduction to the basic ideas to be discussed in this thesis and it is also an introduction to the participants. The second chapter tells the story of the McMillan House through the words of the participants. In the chapter on the McMillan House I draw attention to the major themes, or motifs, that are discussed in more theoretical detail in part two of this thesis. This is seen in the third chapter which asks the question "What is an intentional community?" and answers this question by looking at intentional communities in the wider world, intentional communities in Mennonite and Anabaptist circles, and working its way down to looking at how intentional community is defined by the thesis participants. The fourth chapter asks "What are the intentions of an intentional community?" and looks specifically at the idea of love and how this concept is expressed by the participants. The fifth and final chapter explores the topic of food and food justice in an attempt to make all the previous points clear and grounded in one concrete example

⁵ It is important to note that, while I am aware that I am using the term "motif" in this thesis in a way that is loosely based on Stith Thompson's motif index which classifies folk tales, I have taken the term "motif" and used it in my own way. I use this term as a way of classifying the active expressions of love in the intentional communities examined.

of how the loving intentions in the intentional communities examined in this thesis are held up and acted out.

Love, the key concept in this conversation of alienation and fulfillment, is the main and most cherished intention held by all of the communities discussed in this thesis. This abstract concept, while often ambiguous, can be understood best by looking at how the sentiment was tangibly expressed in the households. For example, the intention of love can be seen in how community members in the McMillan House would care for each other through tender, non-sexual touch and how community members in the Walnut Street House try to eat only local and organic food that did not harm anyone or anything in its processing. The concept and intention of love will be unpacked in this thesis through a hierarchy of motifs, with love being at the top of the ladder and the common expressions of love working their way down the ladder. By examining intentional communities in this way I hope to draw attention to the way the everyday actions and interactions, indeed those things often taken for granted within the day-to-day working of an intentional community, can fit into a theoretical model that shows folkloristic patterns and insight.

b) The key terms and concepts

There are several important terms and concepts that come up time and time again throughout this thesis in the ideas of the participants and in my interpretation of those ideas. For the sake of clarity I have extracted these key terms and concepts and list them here for the reader: worldview and idealism; hybridization; self-made family ("fictive family"); maturation and

identity formation; social justice; food justice; and, of course, intentional community.

Throughout this thesis each of these will be discussed in turn.

C) Out in the field: Introducing the participants

Below I introduce the twenty-two participants who worked on this thesis with me. Eight of these participants lived in the McMillan House, the intentional community that I was a part of, and the community which I have highlighted in the second chapter of this thesis. All of the twenty-two individuals I worked with have, at some point in time, been a part of an intentional community. These different communities range from rural, highly dedicated and defined communities to urban, transient communities that can be easily overlooked as being nothing out of the ordinary - the McMillan House stands somewhere in-between. What all, but one, of the participants have in common is that they consider their particular community to be an intentional community. Before I try to answer the important question of what is an intentional community, I will further expand upon the tale of the interview process that took place in the summer of 2009 and introduce the participants and their ideas as best I can. The reader will notice recurrent motifs of intentionality and community, points I compile and analyze in the following chapters.

In late April 2009, after finishing my course work for the winter term, I flew from St. John's back to my home in Manitoba. My plan was to spend the summer with my partner Yvan⁶,

⁶ Everyone named in this thesis has been given a pseudonym due to the request of two of the participants. Golden Grain Community Farm is also a pseudonym due to the request of one of the participants. The other intentional communities discussed in the thesis are called by their true name.

who was living in Winnipeg at the time, and to also begin the field-work for this thesis. As it happened, I conducted twenty interviews that spring and summer. Shortly after arriving back in the Prairies, Beth, Marie, and I held a blessing way⁷ for Suzanne, for she was about to have her first child. We had invited Suzanne's friend Emma to the blessing way. I knew that Emma was a part of an intentional rural community and during the blessing way I built up the nerve to ask Emma if she would be my first participant. She agreed tentatively, saying that she needed to ask her fellow community members if they were okay with her talking about their community before she could officially commit to an interview with me. A few days after Suzanne's blessing way I emailed Emma with a list of questions that I would potentially ask in an interview⁸, so that she could have a better idea of what would be expected if an interview were to take place. She responded promptly, saying that yes, she would like to be a participant. We met a few days later at Cousins, a neighborhood bar known for its veggie burgers and local beer, in downtown Winnipeg.

Emma

Emma is in her late twenties. She grew up in Winnipeg and now lives with her husband in an intentional, rural community, about an hour's drive East of Winnipeg. She is a seamstress, a gardener and a baker – and just recently she became a mother as well. Emma and I had met a few years earlier at the McMillan House when she used to come over to see Suzanne. Like many

⁷ A blessing way can be held along side of, or in replacement of, a traditional baby shower. The idea is to give the mother-to-be blessings instead of material gifts. A blessing way is also a chance for the mother-to-be's community to celebrate with her the transition into parenthood and to offer her emotional and spiritual support in this transition.

⁸ All of the interviews that took place over my summer of field-work were recorded with a Panasonic RR-US40 recording device.

of the participants I interviewed, Emma and Suzanne had both attended Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC)⁹ in Winnipeg and they have continued their friendship since that time.

After her time at CMBC Emma wrote a paper reflecting on her time spent at the school and that is when she decided that she wanted to live in an intentional community. She spent a few years after university researching and visiting different intentional communities. She ended up joining Golden Grain Community Farm because when she met her husband he was already involved and committed to this particular community.

In the following quote Emma describes the basic design of her community. This community, out of all that I encountered during my field work, most explicitly illustrates the connection that often exists between Mennonite beliefs, simplicity, food justice, and environmental issues. This community grew out of an ongoing conversation a few individuals who attended the same Mennonite church were having about the need they felt to turn their belief in simplicity and environmental sustainability into concrete action.

Emma: I am a part of an intentional community.... It is a rural setting about an hour outside of Winnipeg. Right now there are seven adults and three children that are a part of it. It came out of a church community where a group of people were meeting to talk about rural issues and food issues and just how within the church they could respond to some things that were happening. They realized that some members of the group actually wanted to move out to the country and start some kind of food production and community living experiment. I wasn't a part

⁹ The Canadian Mennonite Bible College's (CMBC) name was later changed to Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). This change happened in stages during the time many of the participants were attending the school. Some of the participants refer to the school as CMBC, while others refer to it as CMU.

of that church but was brought in through marriage later.... At this point we have had experiments with laying hens and we've raised three batches of chickens. We've been gardening for about three years. One of the members of the group does bee keeping. We have regular meetings every two weeks - kind of like a business meeting. Once a month we'll either meet for a book study or for a worship time together.... We have a lot of work days together as a community and in the summertime families and friends and groups from our church come out for work days, too. So, yeah, it is really quite beautiful!¹⁰ We have a property right along the river. And there is about a hundred acres of fields and then forty acres of forest and swamp. So it is kind of a diverse piece of land.... The piece of land we bought didn't have any kind of infrastructure on it when we bought it. It didn't even have a well or a shed - there was absolutely nothing and so we have been spending a lot of time in the last three years just getting some of these things set up. The first thing was to build a little shack to cook in. Then we built a storage shed, which turned into living quarters. Now we are working on a larger house that will have three different families living in it. One family will live in the shed - the shed that has become a cottage. [Laughs.] We developed outhouses this year which is a step up and actually now we have indoor plumbing as well.¹¹

¹⁰ About a month after our interview, Emma invited Yvan and me up to her community. As Emma put it, "it is quite a beautiful spot." We spent the morning with her getting a tour of the farm, communal houses, and river bank. We met a few community members and a handful of chickens, picked some wild asparagus, and helped out in the garden for a little while.

¹¹ I have lightly edited most of the participants' quotes in this thesis for easier readability.

A few days after my interview with Emma, I went to spend some time with Beth. During our time together she made me a list, off the top of her head, of 45 people who she knew who were living, or who had lived, in an intentional community. I contacted twenty-four of the people from Beth's list. Thirteen got back to me saying there were interested in talking to me about community. I ended up interviewing ten of these people: Anne, Jan, Jerome, Val, Katie, Jake, Rachel, Maya, Joshua, and Holly. I was unable to interview the other three interested parties: Alice, Dale, and Simon. Alice sent me an email with her thoughts on intentional community. I did not interview Dale or Simon due to being unable to find a suitable time to meet. Dale and Simon are the younger brothers of the McMillan House members Bella and Claudia respectively. They have followed their sisters' examples and lived in households similar to the McMillan House.

In early May 2009 I ran into Anne at Cousins and asked her if I could interview her. We met a few days later for the interview. This interview went much smoother than the one I had done with Emma, for I knew Anne better and was much less nervous. Anne was the only participant who did not consider the McMillan House to be an intentional community. This fact startled me at first and caused me to take a step back in my approach to the interviews; I needed to allow the participant to speak their truth rather than assuming that they would necessarily be on the same page as me.

Anne

Anne is in her early twenties and is the youngest of the participants. She grew up in Winnipeg, attending a private Mennonite school and going to a conservative Mennonite church.

She is currently a student, working to fulfill her dream of becoming a librarian. I lived with Anne at the McMillan House for a short while right before I left the house in 2007. She came into the community as it was beginning to disintegrate and, sadly, her memories of the McMillan House are not very fond.

My interview with Anne took place in the old, beautiful home (the hall and stairs of her home are wallpapered with a pineapple print) where she now lives with two housemates. We did the interview late one morning in Anne's kitchen over breakfast. I brought granola that I had made, cinnamon buns that my grandma had made, yogurt, and fresh blackberries. Anne contributed an apple, introducing me to the lovely experience of eating my granola with an apple. We feasted while doing the interview.

Anne does not consider her current housing situation or the McMillan House to be an intentional community. For Anne, the only intentional community she has been a part of was when she lived in the city of Hamburg, Germany. Anne's definition of intentional community differs greatly from that of all of the other participants interviewed. For her, intentional community was more about one's larger community, such as the community of Hamburg, rather than the much smaller communities such as the McMillan House.

Anne: I found that in Germany specifically you find yourself to be very proud of being from the city that you're from. If you are from Hamburg you are very proud of being from Hamburg. And you associate yourself with sports teams and artists and things like that from that community, but you are much less likely to associate yourself with being German - you are way prouder of the city that you are from, versus the country that you live in. As far as that goes, that is the community that I really identified myself with - being from Hamburg.

Anne would prefer to live on her own. After leaving the McMillan House she wanted to find an apartment on her own, but she has continued to live with housemates because it is cheaper and because, ultimately, she sees the value in having the close relationships that only come from having housemates.

Anne: I was super set on living on my own. 'Cause for me the McMillan House was hard. I was sick of living with people. I was really done with it and I thought I would be really ready to do it on my own. I thought I would be a really great growing up experience as well 'cause I moved out of my parents' home when I was eighteen and I had always lived with so many people [Chuckles.] - I've lived with twenty-five or twenty-six different people in my few years [Laughs.] outside of my parents' home. I was really set on living by myself but the more I thought about it and the more apartments that I looked at I was like yeah, this is really expensive, what if I start choking and there is no one there to care. [Laughs.] No matter what your relationship to them is, it is nice to know that you are not alone. I mean sharing a space definitely has its frustrations, but it also is something that you can really appreciate because everybody brings different things that they can contribute. Things that you wouldn't necessarily know about or people you wouldn't necessarily ever meet. It's a very different experience living with someone than just being someone's friend. I am ultimately glad that I made the choice to live with people.

Next I interviewed Suzanne, for she wanted to be interviewed before her baby arrived. We met in the morning at her new home by the Red River. Suzanne had asked that I send her my list of interview questions before the interview so that she could prepare her thoughts. She sent me some written responses to these questions the night before our interview was to take place. I found that having these written responses caused our interview to be stifled, for we both kept referring to the written response, instead of just letting our spoken words flow freely. After the interview was done Suzanne took out some photo albums from her time living at the McMillan House and we perused these for quite a while. She let me take some of the photos home so that I could make copies of them for this thesis. After the interview was done we went together to meet Beth and Marie for lunch at The Tallest Poppy. Suzanne had heard that this new restaurant served only locally produced food and this excited all of us ex-McMillan House members.

Suzanne

Suzanne is 29 years old and she grew up in rural Saskatchewan. She currently works as a health care aid, assisting two women with all their daily needs. She is also a natural nutritionist, a gardener and, like Emma, a new mother.

Below Suzanne describes how and why she came to live at the McMillan House. She came because the house represented the ideals and beliefs she wanted to live out and because the house represented the kind of fun, socially "cool" way she wanted to define herself. Suzanne points out the connection that I discuss in further detail later in this thesis about the relationships that exist between intentional communities in Winnipeg and graduates of CMU.

Suzanne: The McMillan House had cool parties. The people living there were nice and really seemed to be living out their values and what they wanted to do and they were just really welcoming and laidback and fun, but also had integrity.... I came to live in this community about a year after graduating from CMU. Some friends of mine from CMU had lived in the house for a number of years already, and so it was already an established community house before I moved in. I had been familiar with the concept of people living together and sharing together because I had visited various other houses for parties or potlucks that were mostly made up of former grads or current students of CMU. The houses were always named by their street. I suppose I was idealistic in some ways about 'community living', but I think mainly I moved into McMillan because I wanted to have fun and because I wanted to live cheaply. They were always having great, huge parties at McMillan and I thought it would be fun to live in a house like that.... Also, the environmental aspect of vegetarianism in the house was very appealing to me. Using less of the world's resources to make a good meal was also very appealing to me. These were part of the house's philosophy.

After spending a morning walking by the Assiniboine River with Marie, I went to Organza, one of Winnipeg's organic grocery stores, to buy sea salt for my newly pierced nose. There I ran into my old friend Lucy who was working at the till. She asked what I was doing for the summer and I told her about my thesis and my fieldwork. She got very excited about it all and asked me if she could be a participant. I said yes, of course, and we met a few days later at

The Fyxx, a locally owned café, to do the interview. The next day I went for another walk along the river with Marie and we had our interview sitting amongst the tree roots that were snaking their way to the water's edge.

Lucy

Lucy is 28 years old and grew up in Steinbach, Manitoba. She is a nutritionist and just recently moved to Nova Scotia in order to pursue a job in this field. I have known Lucy since Grade Seven. We met through a mutual friend. I remember listening to the band Weezer in Lucy's basement and thinking about how much fun she was. We were friends all through high school, but never very close. It was a surprise to find ourselves in the same social group in Winnipeg - a social group not at all connected to our high school, but definitely connected to Mennonites. Furthermore, Lucy and I have been on the same volunteer shifts at the Winnipeg Folk Festival and we both were in the same yoga class during our time at the University of Winnipeg.

We met on June first during Lucy's lunch break. She ate a salad with guacamole and nacho chips, while I sipped my tea. We talked about her upcoming wedding and my relationship with my partner before getting to the interview. It was a quick interview and I left feeling like I should have been more prepared.

In the following section Lucy describes the different communities she has been a part of. What these various living situations have in common is their intention of creating loving, intimate relationships among small groups of friends. Lucy holds a very broad and loose

definition of what makes a community an intentional community. For her, as long as the group in question actively tried to develop close, loving relationships it is an intentional community.

Lucy: I guess I have lived in a few different groups. In one group there was about seven of us - both boys and girls, or men and women, whatever! And we lived in a common house and we shared food. We went shopping together for the food and we cooked together. We pretty much did everything together, besides work and school, I guess. And then I also lived in another community. There was four women in this community and it was pretty much the same as the other one. We cooked together, we shopped together, we ate together, and we hang out together, spent our time together and supported each other through our lives.... I would say I am now living in community. I have one roommate but we have a lot of people that come in and out of our house - friends and other people who live in our building. We share a lot of things, we cook together, we support each other, we have conversations. It is a different kind of community - because together we are a part of a larger community. We are just like a little micro community.

Lucy has lived in a few different households that she thinks of as intentional communities. Her definition of what an intentional community was is far broader than that of Emma's or Anne's and this realization pushed me to also expand my ideas about intentional community and what I hoped to achieve in writing this thesis. For Lucy, an intentional community was any situation where people were choosing to share their day-to-day lives with each other, whereas for Emma an intentional community involved people who were living together and sharing a long-term goal for bettering themselves and the world. For Anna an intentional community involved a group of people who were united by a shared heritage and

geographical setting. Seeing the difference among Emma's, Anne's and Lucy's ideas about intentional community pushed me to open my mind and see that the participants were not going to say what I had expected them to say and that my original ideas for this thesis needed to widen and change.

Marie

Marie is 30 years old and she grew up in downtown Winnipeg. She is the mother of two young children, as well as being a yoga instructor, a raw food chef, an artist, and a gardener. Marie and I lived at the McMillan House together for one year.

When I arrived at Marie's house for our interview she fed me noodles with vegetables, garlic, ginger, and soy sauce. We sat on the bench outside her home and talked about how our relationship has changed over the last few years. We ate ice cream and then went for a walk to the park near her house. We started the recorded interview close to the Chinese pavilion in the park, but a lawn mower arrived and disrupted us. We moved to sit amongst the trees by the river. The wind and birds sang to us during the interview. We ended the interview after about an hour because we were both getting cold. Marie and I were quite emotional during the interview. We both cried at different points as we remembered the good times we had shared at the McMillan House and some of the difficult questions we were asking at that time in our lives about sexuality and our hopes and dreams for the future.

Below, Marie talks about her community experiences in New Zealand. She volunteered with the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF)¹² and lived on a commune there for a year before coming back to Manitoba and seeking out intentional community in Winnipeg. Marie is not Mennonite and yet like most of the Mennonites I interviewed, her reasons for wanting to live in community are very much based on her ideals of living a loving, beautiful, environmentally sustainable life.

Marie: We were so healthy and we were so free [in New Zealand]. We would spend our days working in the garden for four hours every morning and then we'd all make a meal together at lunch and then everybody who lived in the commune would come together and we'd all eat our meal together. And we'd all hold hands and we'd sing a song together, before eating. And then we'd eat and then we'd all do dishes together and then we would do something like walk to this national park together and swim in the ocean. Or we'd all ride our bikes to this waterfall. And then in the evening we'd make our meals together and everything was from scratch. Which was totally new to me because I was so used to the grocery store where everything was canned and pre-made. And all we had was basic ingredients and if we wanted things like eggs or milk or something like that we had a limited supply. Every week we had maybe ten dollars and we had to decide as a group what we wanted to do with that. But otherwise everything was from scratch. We didn't even have to decide who was making what each night. We just all started cooking together and we'd all clean together. It was never even a

¹² WWOOF stands for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Through this international organization an individual can find organic farmers in each participating country that are willing to trade room and board in exchange for help on their farms. This is an educational, cost-effective, and community-building way to travel and has been taken advantage of by many the participants I interviewed. (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)

discussion. It was kind of this understanding that we were there working together and it was like a little family. And then in the evenings we would just sit by the fire and work on crafts or write in our journals. There was no alcohol or drugs or anything like that. Or TV or video games or anything that. You never even considered doing that because your life was so perfect and beautiful just the way it was. And then we'd wake up the next day and do it again. And it was - it was amazing. If it wasn't for all my family and my friends being in Winnipeg and in Canada I would have stayed there. I still think of it as my second home and I still think I always kind of yearn for a life like that. McMillan was the closest to that that I had found here in Winnipeg.

After my interview with Marie I emailed Matthew and asked him if I could interview him for this thesis, for when I thought of people passionate about the idea of intentional community, he was the first to come to mind. He responded saying that he would love to be interviewed. We met at a 'Mondragon', a cooperatively owned, anarchist-based, vegan restaurant. Matthew brought with him to the interview his friend Carl, for he thought I might want to interview Carl as well. I ended up interviewing both of the men that afternoon. They lightly participated in each other's interviews.

Matthew

Matthew is in his mid thirties and he grew up in Winnipeg, working at his Dad's used book store. He currently works at one of Winnipeg's public libraries. Matthew and I met about

five years ago when we were both attending St. Augustine's United Church in Winnipeg's Osborne Village. I was intrigued by him because he would refuse to use plastic or styrofoam dishes at church potlucks because of the negative impact these materials have on the environment. We became friends because we would continually run into each other at different places and events - at summer solstice parties in downtown Winnipeg, at the University of Winnipeg, and at folk festivals.

I contacted Matthew for an interview because I was pretty sure he would be keen to talk about community. He and I had once daydreamed about together starting an intentional community, but I quickly became overwhelmed by his commitment and passion. He was, and is, much more excited about the idea than I ever have been. He has lived in community with the Disciples of Sri Chinmoy, a religious community in San Francisco, and has been involved with the Student Christian Movement, which he considers to be an intentional community. (Since our interview in the summer of 2009, Matthew has lived in an intentional community apartment block in downtown Winnipeg. He left this community because he was unable to be as involved in the politics of it as he had wanted to be and because he was not elected to the board.)

Below he describes the Student Christian Movement community that he was a part of. By defining this community as an intentional community, Matthew further broadened the definition of this term for me. What this community has in common with the others looked at in this thesis is its intention to care for the members and create a more sustainable world.

Matthew: So I used to be part of a student group that met at least once a week, if not more than that. For me that was an intentional community because we supported each other and looked after each other and - it was intentional. We

participated in worship - we had a weekly worship which not everybody would always turn up for because we were busy students. We also had social gatherings. We'd get together and make food and eat together, watch movies, and play board games. We also did political activism. We held workshops about social justice issues and we'd talk about spirituality and things like that.

Matthew goes on to describe the Disciples of Sri Chinmoy community. Although this community was united under an ideal of loving relationships, because the social justice ideal was not acted upon in such a way as Matthew felt comfortable with, he decided to leave.

Matthew: It took me years before I finally joined and then, once I did, it was great. I had a whole new group of friends. We got together and meditated and afterwards we'd have blessed food, and then we would talk about meditation and about our guru.... We lived together, we worked together, we meditated together, and we played together. And it was so comfortable. It was so nice having someone to talk to and being supported and having people around you who really understood their own values and put those values forward. They weren't just living day-to-day blindly. I'm not sure why I left that group. On a subconscious level I think the justice element was missing. They said that they were spiritually advanced and that they wanted to share that with the world but then I didn't see any real concrete ways that they were helping to ease people's suffering and I think that is why I left. And I found a way to do that in the Student Christian Movement and the Student Christian Movement gave me the words to talk about it. They are the reason I am so articulate 'cause for years I was in that group and we talked about all this stuff.

Carl

Carl is in his early thirties and grew up in the Prairies. In his twenties Carl lived in a Catholic community called the Madonna House¹³ in Eastern Ontario. This community was started by Catherine Doherty in the 1950s. It is a large community where clergy live in and amongst lay persons. Carl went there specifically to discern whether or not he wanted to enter the priesthood.

He describes the loving spirit of this intentional community below. This community, out of all I encountered during my fieldwork, was the oldest, the most defined and regulated, and probably the one making the most obvious impact on a larger social scale. The Madonna House was very explicit in its belief that to be a Christian one must actively live out certain Christian beliefs. Although Catholic, the beliefs of this community were very similar to the Mennonite communities I encountered - both believe in simplicity, love, respect, and the fight for justice.

Carl: Over the course of time they found that in order for there to be stability to be in the community, it was best if people took the promises of poverty, chastity, and obedience while living in the community. It really is community living - it really is there! An easy way to describe it would be as a community of love. Everyone tries to love each other and love everyone who comes and visits.... My definition of intentional community would be to be a community of love - learning how to work with anybody.... That is my Catholic understanding, but it has to be definitely expanded beyond Catholic things as well. It is basically where you are intending to be together in one way and live a simple life. [A long pause.]

¹³ For more information on this large community see: www.madonnahouse.org.

I guess another aspect of it too is being accepting of everyone and where they are at, who they are - that would definitely have to be a part of my definition. Not be forceful - talking things out. There were a lot of guests at Madonna House who were not Catholic, which is perfectly fine, and the community was able to accept them for that as long as they were able to accept the community for who the community is. If you are not willing to participate in the prayer times or the meal times then it is not going to work. There have been really beautiful things that I have seen come through that.

During his time at Madonna House Carl found the support he needed in order to decide that he did indeed want to enter the priesthood. He felt strongly that without the community support it would have been very difficult for him to make this life-changing decision. When I met him he was about to move to Alberta to start his theological studies.

Jan was the first person I interviewed that I did not know personally. I had called her, having gotten her phone number from Beth, and she agreed to be a participant on the spot. That same night I got an email from Alice with her ideas about intentional community. Alice was working in northern Alberta for the summer and wanted to participate in this thesis, despite the distance between us.

Jan

Jan is in her mid thirties and she grew up in Southern Ontario, working in the market garden her family ran. She is a writer, an activist, a gardener, and a mother. I met with Jan at her Winnipeg apartment in a building known as one that fosters community, even though it is not officially a co-operative housing unit. I had met Jan casually before because she is a member of the Wiens Shared Farm, a farm just outside of Winnipeg where my partner and I had worked in exchange for fresh produce one summer, but this was the first time we really spoke to one another.

The interview took place in the early afternoon in Jan's kitchen. Her young son was present, as well as some wonderful muffins that she had just baked. We drank rooibos tea, ate the beautiful muffins, and looked at picture books (one about giant machines and one about vegetables) with her son while doing the interview.

Like Lucy, Jan's definition of intentional community was very broad. To her "there can be all kinds of levels of intentional community." As long as the people involved "decide to live together in an intentional way and share certain aspects of their life" it is an intentional community. Below she lists some of the many communities she has been a part of.

Jan: My first year out of high school, I lived here in Winnipeg and I was on a church-related volunteer program and I lived in a community - all of us who were a part of that program plus another couple and their baby all lived together in a house in the North End. There were eight of us all together. So I lived there for eleven months and then I went to university. I was there for three years. For the first semester I lived in residence, which I hated. Then I lived with a family for a

year. And then I actually lived in a Catholic retreat centre which had been a monastery - a nunnery - but as you know there is hardly anyone joining the order so they were working hard to try and find ways to keep it alive so they made it into a retreat centre and they made half of it into a residence. So there were a couple of nuns who lived there from that order that owned it and a few other nuns and then a few other random people. The first year I was there, there was maybe only seven or eight in the community - maybe even less, but the second year there was actually about thirteen of us all together. So I lived there for a year and a half and then I moved to Toronto and I lived in a campus co-op, which is a co-op that is attached to the University of Toronto. They own like thirty massive houses in downtown Toronto. So they own about thirty of those and - I cannot remember if it is two or five of them were intentional communities. From my point of view they were much less intentional communities than from what I'd lived in before, but we did share meals together and we shared other things and we had lots of common spaces and made decisions as a household together. And I forgot that in-between there I lived at the Jubilee Partners community in the States for four and a half months I think. I think that is it. Well, when I lived here in Winnipeg I lived in this apartment - this is my eleventh year and we've had ups and downs of having friends live nearby - and they weren't - they generally weren't people we knew very well before they moved in but we got to know them. So for maybe my first four years here there was a young couple that lived across the hall and it was almost like our apartments were one unit. And I didn't know them when they moved in. Whenever we needed to borrow something, either way, we didn't

knock, we just wandered into each other's apartments and took what we needed. And we ate together twice a week. I have had three different roommates in the time that I've lived here - before my husband moved in and after we got married also. The third roommate stayed after we got married. She has now moved out. She moved out a little bit after Zachery was born because she was moving out of town. But she and I had lived together for five years. I think for a long time I had lived with her longer than I had lived with my husband. And we were probably more intentional at the beginning - towards the end we were less intentional about living together. She got a girlfriend so she was gone a lot, but, yeah, I consider that part of my community. And then it was interesting getting married and being part of that and trying to negotiate that relationship and thinking about what is the difference between having a husband and having a roommate. When we first got married we didn't want Gertrude to feel left out so we really tried to share everything and I think as time went on I realized that we needed to spend some intentional time on our marriage - in a different kind of way.

Jan goes on to talk about how by living in community and by sharing resources we can live better lives, lives that are more holistic and grounded in the basic processes of life that keep us healthy and happy.

Jan: It just makes sense that people have to live in groups and share work and share resources. I think over the years my thinking on this has expanded. People should share resources and they should share their children and old people and the work.... I've spent a lot of time in other countries and I just have a lot of problems with how people are living in North America. People live very

segregated lives and they live very alienated from each other and they live very alienated from the processes that keep them alive. So people don't know how to grow their own food, don't know how to care for children. And even if you do know how then you spend some time caring for children - doing that all the time - then you move on to paid work and then maybe you move on to community work and I just think things should be different. I think everybody should have a chance in almost every day of their life to work for the community, to do the cooking and the cleaning and the homebuilding and the - whatever you need. And I think people should have an understanding of the processes that keep them alive. If you eat meat you should kill a chicken and you should know how to grow your own food. Not that you have to do every single part of that - I do believe in trading and bartering - but people should not be so alienated.

CF: And intentional community is a part of that?

Jan: Yeah. I think that is all part of that understanding.

Alice

Alice is in her early thirties and she grew up in rural Saskatchewan. Alice works in environmental research and was working in northern Alberta when I was conducting the interviews. She agreed to answer some questions via email. I did not know Alice, but was given her name and contact information by Beth. Alice is Holly's sister and Lucy's sister-in-law.

Alice lived in an intentional community called Jubilee Partners in order to complete her practicum at CMU. She chose to do this because "the work was something [she] felt passionate about and because [she feels] the best and healthiest when [she is] living with other people." She describes this community and the community she currently lives in below.

Alice: I lived in an intentional Christian community in Atlanta, Georgia in 2001. This was a community that lived and worked together with a mission to serve the homeless, providing meals, showers, and basic services, while also speaking out for justice and trying to change the systems that put and/or keep people in poverty. It sounds great and the work was great, but the community itself was very dysfunctional with a leader who had a need to control everything. Now I work in the outdoor industry, which means seasonal jobs and moving 3-4 times a year. Most of my jobs come with staff housing which does form somewhat of a community and is the thing that makes moving so often more bearable.... I love community. To me, it's really just about a group of people that support each other and it can take on many forms. The most meaningful communities are those that are really intentional - those that live and work together and that share some common beliefs and values while also being open to individual opinions and differences. A community that forces one belief system on everyone or that believes there is only one right way to do things is not healthy.

Like Alice, the participants Jan, Emma, Maya, Holly, Joshua, and Val all went to Jubilee Partners as a part of their practicum at CMU as well. Holly and Joshua have returned numerous times. This community strives to actively live out a Christian belief in justice by, for example, working with and for refugees, and by working to abolish the death penalty in the United States

(Jubilee Partners). This community stands as an ideal community for many of the participants I interviewed and one that they have tried to mirror within their smaller communities.

On the night of the summer solstice 2009 I went with Yvan, my dad, and a few friends to a party at the Northern Sun Community Farm just a few miles west of my Dad's home in Steinbach. I spoke with a few individuals that night about their community, but no formal interviews took place. This community reminded me of Emma's community in its dedication to environmental sustainability. It was also very different, however, for Emma's community called itself a Christian community and was very committed to this, whereas the Northern Sun community defined itself with a much more liberal philosophy that reminded me of the back to the land communes I had read about of the 1960s and 1970s.

A few days later Jerome returned my phone call saying that he was interested in being interviewed. He invited me to his home in Winnipeg's neighborhood of Wolseley³⁴ and, when I arrived, his wife Val and the two other members of the Walnut House, Katie and Jake, were there also and eager to be interviewed. This was the first group interview that I did and it worked out really well. A few days later I met with Rachel in her home in Wolseley and we had our interview over a cup of tea.

³⁴ This neighborhood has the reputation of being the most community orientated, left-wing, hippie-like neighborhood in Winnipeg.

Jerome, Val, Katie, and Jake (the Walnut Street House)

When I started seeking out people to interview for this thesis almost everyone I talked to told me that I needed to interview Jerome, Val, Katie, and Jake. These two couples share a home on Walnut Street and are well known for their strong belief in, and love of, community. All four community members are in their mid thirties. Jerome grew up in Steinbach, Manitoba, Val's parents were missionaries and so she grew up all around the world, Jake grew up in Southern Ontario, and Katie grew up in Germany.

I had been at the Walnut Street House in the past to pick up free-range farm eggs that they distribute for a local farmer, but this was the first time I spent any time with these folks. They all have some personal connection with other McMillan House members. They all went to CMBC. I had planned to do the interview with Jerome only, but when I arrived at his house all the community members were sitting on the porch eating cookies from Tall Grass Prairie Bread bakery, a local bakery that uses only organic and local grains. They suggested that we do the interview with the whole household.

Below, they describe their community and how it is like a family - a family that lovingly supports its members in all aspects of life. Other than Emma's community that very obviously stemmed from a church community this - the Walnut Street House - out of all I encountered, was the most dedicated and clear in its desire to live out ideals and beliefs that stemmed from the Mennonite faith tradition. Examples of this can be seen in the way they intentionally ate together and strove for a simple existence.

CF: How did you guys come to live in the way you are living now? What is the story of how this came about?

Jake: We had been renting here for a number of years and then we had the opportunity to purchase it from the previous landlords. That is Katie and I. Then we rented out the bottom suite to MCC¹⁵. That arrangement had started shortly before we purchased. And then when that term ended and the apartment was for rent we thought it would be really great to have some friends, or some people that we know, move in. We wanted to treat it not so much as two separate apartments but - like Jerome was saying - where we can spend some time together, have house suppers and just have community.

CF: Okay, okay. Do you have house meetings together or has it been a bit more organic, more natural than that? How long have you been -

Jerome: I guess it has been two years.

Jake: I remember at the beginning, like shortly after you moved in Jerome, at house suppers sometimes we'd talk. It usually was not just supper. We usually have supper and then spend the evening together. It is more than just a meal. I think we have had a least maybe two, three, maybe more occasions where we have been maybe a little bit more intentional and checked in with each other about how our experience is living together. We'd bring up things that are bothering us about each other. [Laughter.] Different things - if there is going to be any conflicts we try to identify it early and be aware of it. We haven't done that in a long time. [Laughter.]

¹⁵ MCC stands for the Mennonite Central Committee. This international organization of Anabaptists strives to live out the Christian beliefs of love and compassion by working to provide all people with their basic needs and by working to promote peace worldwide. This organization has a strong following in Winnipeg, as well as many active volunteers and employees. For a while the Walnut Street House rented out its bottom suite to MCC for some of its volunteers to use. For more information of MCC see: <http://mcc.org>

Val: I think we kind of work things out as they come up, without being super formal about it. So we have taken on projects together. We built a bike shed in the back, for example, and we planned that out together and did sort of a work-bee as a house on that. We did some work in the basement - insulating it and cleaning it out - and the basement is shared space - so figuring that out together and stuff.

CF: Were you friends before you lived together?

Jerome: Yes. We would often come over once a week anyway and have supper together and we kept saying, oh it would be nice if we didn't have to go all the way home now. [Laughter.]

CF: So it was natural?

Jerome: Yeah.

Jake: It is just nice to live with people that you know well enough that you know their likes and their dislikes and you can tease them about it. [Laughter.] On our house nights we always drink tea because Val loves tea. [Laughter] We always play games because Val loves games. [Laughter.] I'm just being silly - on a more serious note, just living closely with people - it is like extended family, or a different kind of family. And it is really important and it has become a huge part of our lives.

Val: One of the dynamics that I am looking forward to sharing is sharing parenthood together. Jake and Katie just had a baby and we are expecting a baby in August. It is just neat to think of how our kids can grow up together. The back

and forth, the sharing and the support and the - the unwinding and the debriefing
and the whatever - it is special.

CF: For your kids it will very much be a family.

Val: Yeah.

I ran into Jerome and Val a while later at a housewarming party for three of our mutual friends who had just started an intentional household together on Mulvey Street. At this party their new baby was there - happy and healthy.

Rachel

Rachel is in her late twenties and she grew up in rural Manitoba. She is a grad student, studying history and its relationships to health care. I had met Rachel originally through Beth. Beth lived in the Dominion Street House with Rachel before she moved into the McMillan House. At the time of this interview Rachel still lived with one of the other housemates that had been a part of this earlier household, but Rachel was planning on moving out on her own in the near future. Rachel and I have become friends over the last five or so years, sharing a love of the *Harry Potter* books, good food, and outdoor adventures. Our interview took place in Rachel's dining room in the afternoon on a very sunny day in July. We drank tea and caught up before starting the official interview.

For Rachel one of the main reasons she had chosen to live with people is the basic fact that it is cheaper to do so - "it is cheap and good." This sense of being cautious with one's money

is very common in Mennonite circles and, curiously, helps to define the intentional communities in Winnipeg.

Rachel describes the good parts of being in community below. For her, like many of the other participants, living in community is about relationships.

Rachel: I think living together with people is nice. Especially back in the day when everyone I lived with was a student - then you had your work time but then everyone would end up in the kitchen or something. You'd have ten minutes of hanging-out time - a little bit of conversation and then you'd go back and do your own thing. Or someone could go and watch TV or someone could go read a book and others could sit around the kitchen table. I really, really like that part about living with people - that you do not have to go out and have really, really intense times. Like, "How was Monday and then how was Tuesday and then how was Wednesday?" Living together with people - that whole coming and going thing - I really enjoy it.

I recently ran into Rachel on the street outside of her new apartment where she lives, for the first time in her life, alone. She had just returned from the garden she keeps at her parents' place in the country and she gifted me with a big bag of lovely green beans.

Yvan and I had planned to get married on July 4th, 2009 but due to a mental health calamity the wedding was postponed; we are now planning the wedding for October 2011. Claudia, my dear, dear friend, decided to come out from Montreal and stay with me over the weekend that was supposed to have been my wedding weekend. Instead of getting married, on

July 4, 2009 I interviewed Claudia for this thesis. We sat in my Dad's backyard, soaking up the beautiful sunshine that, thankfully, decided to grace us with its presence. Half way through the interview we realized that we were running late and that we needed to drive to Winnipeg (about an hour's drive) in order to get to Marie's house in time for the group interview that had been planned with three other McMillan House members. Claudia and I finished the interview in the car as we drove into the city.

Claudia

Claudia is in her early thirties and she grew up in Prince Edward Island and in Ottawa, Ontario. She currently works for the Women's Studies Department at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. She is an artist, a gardener, and a baker. Claudia was one of the individuals who started the McMillan House in 2000. Below she talks about how it came about.

Claudia: Well I went to CMBC in 1999 and that year I met Bella. I was living on campus and she was living on campus and we decided we wanted to live in a house the following year. She had a friend from when she was growing up in Winnipeg, Riley, who also needed somewhere to live and so we decided to live with her. We also found Cameron and Travis - so we had the people but we had no house. I left over the summer and Bella left over the summer and Riley found the house and so we moved in. Riley just stayed for a year and Cameron and Travis only stayed for a year, but Bella and I stayed for five.

Claudia goes on to talk about how the McMillan House grew into being an intentional community, but even from the very beginning its residents were very intentional about finding

the right housemates to share their space with, people who had similar ideals in communalism, simplicity, and justice.

Claudia: It was always intentional. We were intentional about how we chose who to live with. We didn't want to just live with anybody and we never just advertised in a paper or something to find new roommates. We always wanted to find people to live with that we thought we'd have fun living with, that we could live with well, that we thought we could eat with well, talk through any conflicts that would arise and what that meant. In the beginning it was largely people from the Canadian Mennonite University because that was our main common social group. And then also friends like Riley - friends of one person in the house. It wasn't so much from the beginning an intentional community as far as adhering to any specific ideals. It was just the desire to live with people that we thought we could live with well and have fun with and communicate with well. And we always made a point whenever we needed new roommates to meet them first. So we'd have these hilarious interviews with the current housemates and those that were going to be there next year and we'd sit down and meet and greet and interview that new, potential, possible housemate.

CF: What would you ask in the interviews? What would you be looking for?

Claudia: Most of the people we associated with were vegetarians and we wanted to be able to share meals and share food and so we wanted people who were happy to eat vegetarian food and who didn't necessarily want to cook all their own food for themselves, although that did occasionally happen. But there was

that emphasis on "we want to be able to live and eat together." As the years went on and we had more experience living with people we came to realize how much communication and effort it took to live in community and we wanted to know if people would be open to that.... And as the years went on we realized we really liked to have house parties and so we wanted to know if people would be comfortable having people in and out of the house because the house was often a place where friends were able to just drop in at any time and so we wanted to know if people would be comfortable with that kind of social fluidity - late night parties and having people stop in randomly. Beyond that I think it was more about finding people we were comfortable with - like minded people - we didn't look for people who specifically had social activist, left-wing leanings. It was more about seeing if we could see ourselves being comfortable living with them and would they be wanting to eat with us and are they comfortable with the social setup that the house works within.

Claudia went on to talk about the welcoming spirit of the McMillan House by giving the example of how as a house they would welcome those that needed a safe space to be when they had nowhere else to go. The McMillan House was a safe house of transition and change.

Claudia: We would often have people who were temporarily homeless that were in our social circle who would move in and live in the hallway for like six weeks or a month or more..... There was kind of the understanding that we would take in other people - people who were kind of in flux. There would be this grace period for a while but if it went on too long they had to start contributing some cash. [Chuckles.] And that worked out really well. It meant that we had other friends

coming and staying and it also meant that we could provide a grace period and it meant that within the larger social circle they knew there was somewhere they could come and crash if they needed to for a while.

Claudia was known as the McMillan House mother. Below she talks about this role. In an intentional community the roles played by the members and the responsibilities taken on are not all the same. Each person must find their place and, ideally, this will create a community that runs smoothly and that has each individual feeling confident and happy with the role they play in the community. As Claudia notes, this is not an easy balance to find.

Claudia: Yeah, I was the mother of the house.... It was pressed upon me growing up that the Jesus story had to do with compassion for those who had less, for looking out for other people's needs, caring for others, weeping while other people weep, having compassion, holding people, taking care of other people's specific needs and this all translated very directly into my caring for, looking out for, and being attentive to other people's needs. There was a positive feedback loop too - it felt good. I enjoyed that closeness. The drawback was that I didn't always feel I could also relax and be a kid when I needed to be or that I could stop thinking about being responsible. Sometimes it felt like people would do fun things when I wasn't around because I wasn't as fun perhaps. So there was that drawback.... I also really enjoyed the homemaking aspect a lot more than some people did so that, just by contrast, put me in the role of the one who created the home and bought dishes and painted the walls. I created the space to a large degree. I did this partly because I enjoyed it and because I am a bit more of an introvert - I didn't have the energy to always be going out and it was important to

me to have a space where I felt comfortable and that kept me alive and creative and energetic. I guess I really did a lot. I painted the walls. Bella and I choose the colours together but it ended up being me that actually put the paint on the walls. I got that kind of stuff done.

Below Claudia talks about how she left the McMillan House because she wanted to re-connect with her family in Ottawa and because she felt if she stayed in Winnipeg she would be left behind. For her there was a strong sense that, although the McMillan House members were very close at the time, even like a family, these relationships were not dependable in the long term. She was not willing to stay in Winnipeg and watch her community dissolve. Now, years later, she thinks she would return to Winnipeg if there was a very obvious reason, one being if the old McMillan House members decided to once again live together in community.

Claudia: I didn't want to build this wonderful community and then watch everybody leave. So that was one reason I left. Another reason was that I wanted to re-connect with my own family and I wanted to strengthen those ties, especially since I didn't know where I would live for a greater length of time as adult. I wanted to be closer to my family to strengthen those connections in preparation for wherever I would go next - wherever that might be. Another reason was that I wanted to finish my Bachelor of Fine Arts and I could have done that at the University of Manitoba but I wanted to do it at Concordia University in Montreal and I also had kind of wanted to live in Montreal ever since I'd been in high school really. I got fixated on the idea that I wanted to move to Montreal and finish my Bachelor of Fine Arts. So that became something I wanted to do. There was a real sense that if I stayed I'd probably get left behind and so I better move

on and find out what was going to be the next step - another chapter of my life. I know Bella used to ask me why I didn't want to stay. She'd get mad at me about it - "Why won't you stay? Why is staying not even an option for you?" Now I can see coming back but it would have to be a choice and there would have to be some real reason. I've often said if there was a relationship or a job or a community - whether it was buying a house together or a piece of land together - or an artistic career opportunity - if there was something concrete like that I would come back but I don't think I could come back to look for that or to live near my friends who I am not quite sure are going to stay either. To some degree it is a decision around connections and needing to maintain different connections at different points in my life.

Yvan's sister got married on July 12th in Winnipeg and after spending some time with my soon-to-be-family-in-law I went on a road trip to Vancouver in order, in part, to interview McMillan House members Bella and Salvatorio. While in Vancouver I stayed for a week at Bella's house and there I met her housemate Maya. This was the first time that I met Maya, but I had heard of her before through mutual friends and I had seen online her photos of the potluck club that she, Salvatorio and Bella belonged to in Vancouver. Right away I felt comfortable with Maya and there was a sense of familiarity - we shared common friends, a common background, and a common way of life. I interviewed Maya one morning over breakfast and the next morning I interviewed Bella.

Maya

Maya is in her early thirties and she grew up in rural Saskatchewan. She is a professional photographer, currently working in and around Vancouver. Maya has lived in a few different communal settings in her life. In our interview we talked mostly about her current intentional household, the Mennonite potluck club she is a part of, and her time spent with the Jubilee Partners. Below she talks about her current living situation and its intention for close relationships, often expressed through shared food preparation.

CF: Is how you are living now at all an intentional community?

Maya: This is probably the closest I've come to an intentional community since 2002. I guess it is intentional because we are older and could have lived on our own but we choose to live together. One reason is because Vancouver is too expensive to have real space. I guess we could have other roommates, we could live on our own, but we chose to live together. We make an effort to have house suppers when we can, talk to each other about issues and not just function around each other.... We make an effort to eat together. We do buy our own food because our schedules are so different. It is hard to buy communal foods. We take turns buying milk, or things like that. There are some things people don't do as roommates. There is an intention, but we are all living our own life without the intention of staying together or making a long term commitment. At Jubilee you were there for a purpose. You were there to live together in order to work together and this is different. We live in a big city and we are choosing to live in a house

and have more community in it, as opposed to just living together. I like intentionality.

She went on to talk more about Jubilee Partner and how it was an intentional community in the "extreme". It is extreme in its dedication to loving each other and the wider world through its work with refugees and it is extreme in its structured and intense day-to-day living set-up.

Maya: There was this underlying theme of intentional community at Bible School but then when I decided to do voluntary service I got into this place called Jubilee Partners in Comor, Georgia.... So I was twenty-one and I went down to this intentional community and it was the first time I'd been away from my world but it was still a little bit of a safe place within my world. So I went for four months in order to experience what I thought really was intentional community to the extreme.... I think Jubilee is what I would call intentional community. Living with roommates is community but we are all intending to leave. So I think there is some difference. I experienced intentional community in the extreme version. I guess there is some parts of it in other ways that I live, but that idea of giving away all your belongings and going to live together with such an intention - I decided when I left that I wasn't ready for that, being so young. I wanted to experience more things and wasn't ready to just be at that one place. They did allow each other to leave at some points to do other work, but it was such a process. It felt at my age to be a sacrifice of freedom - it was liberating in some ways because you never had to worry about buying groceries, you never had to worry about having money and so it was this amazing experience of not having to

worry about your daily needs but at the same time you had to give up going wherever you wanted whenever you want. I wasn't ready for that.

CF: What was the philosophy - what was the spiritual leaning of the place?

Maya: I think it was taking the teachings Jesus had seriously.... Well Jesus actually said "give up your belongings and follow me." Here they were going to do it seriously. So you did give up your belongings and allowed the community to provide for you. It wasn't led by one person, it was led by consensus. I think it was for these people their way of actually living out what they thought Jesus meant. I liked it because they took it seriously. I was struggling with what it meant to be a Christian and here were these people that took it full on, they were really into it. They wanted it to make a real difference in their lives. Not necessarily for their entire life - some people came and went over time, but it was hardcore.... I learnt more about what was going on in the world there. Before I didn't really know what was going on. At Jubilee I knew so much about conflicts in other countries. People were really aware of what was going on in the world, but I didn't really know what was going on in Atlanta unless it had to do with the refugees.... I found it hard to come out - hard to know what was going on. I feel very disengaged from the people in other countries when you just live your life and you don't really have a way of getting in touch with other people.

Bella

Bella is in her early thirties and she grew up in Winnipeg and in Abbotsford, British Columbia. She is currently the director of the University of British Columbia's radio station. As mentioned, Bella, along with Claudia and a few others, started the McMillan House in 2000. Bella and Claudia were the only two out of the original community members that stayed for more than a couple of years and these two were fondly known as the parents of the McMillan House by many of us who lived there with them over the years.

During my stay with Bella and Maya in Vancouver, she and I renewed our friendship over late night chats, held an interview for this thesis, and ate the best vegetarian food I had ever had at one her favorite restaurants close to the University of British Columbia.

Below, Bella talks about how the McMillan House came into being. She points out how the house had a very obvious Mennonite connection in the beginning and she briefly tells the story of her friend Riley who felt it was important to live in an intentional housing situation before she got married. This idea that living in intentional community is a good place for the transition that takes place between childhood and adult life is common amongst many of the participants. Bella summarizes this sentiment nicely when she says that "the house was a cushion" between leaving one's parents' home, or the safety of university residency, and entering the bigger world of one's own making.

Bella: When I was in my third year of university I needed to a place to live and so came the negotiation process where you try to find people to live with and a space to live in. The first year at McMillan was quite a disparate group. My friend Claudia and myself had decided to live together. We found Travis. So then we

had three. And I had a friend from junior high who was thinking about getting married the following year and she wanted to live in a group housing situation because she had lived on campus in residence and she had lived with her parents and she wanted to experience young adult house life before she got married - so there was Riley. That was four and we needed a fifth. We found Cameron at school. Four of us had gone to Canadian Mennonite Bible College which is now CMU. Riley, actually, I knew her from a Mennonite school as well. We decided to try and find a place for five. Riley did most of the house hunting because we were all gone for the summer and she found us this amazing house.

Bella mentions how her time at the McMillan House was a very "formative" time and how that experience greatly influenced her current life.

Bella: It was definitely formative I think. I don't think of myself as living in any particularly different way than I did then. It was a community.... I had a great time living with everybody. I think of it as an exciting place to have lived. There are great memories.

Below Bella describes how her current household is a community similar to the McMillan House in its intention and spirit. Bella also mentioned to me outside of the interview how her current house is quite different from the McMillan House because the three women are no longer young adults and do not seem to depend on each other for the same kind of emotional support that was needed when she was a younger and in a state of constant transition.

Bella: I think my current situation does feel like a community. There are three of us and we are choosing to live together and we want to be a part of each other's

lives and have conversations about what is going on. We have conversations about the house. We try and deal with conflict. That is different when you are in a roommate situation and someone is never there or someone does not take intentional time to build those relationships. I would say yes, I am living in community now. I think it is subtle.... I am not a great cook so it is nice to have people who can cook. I can do something else for them and they can help me cook. That division of labor is nice. I don't think I'd prefer to live on my own because I think your lives are enriched by the people around you. I enjoy living with people.... Then there are times when we intentionally plan house dinners so that we can spend some time together as a group.

Before going to Vancouver I had gotten in touch with Salvatorio and Julia to see if they were willing to be interviewed. Both had agreed. I met up with Salvatorio soon after arriving in Vancouver, but instead of doing the interview we went for a bike ride down to the beach. We decided to meet a few days later to do the interview. Yvan flew to Vancouver to meet me at this time and he came with me to Salvatorio's. Yvan made us a spaghetti dinner while Salvatorio and I did the interview. After our interview Bella came over and I lead a group interview with her and Salvatorio. I met with Julia the next day at a café on Commercial Drive in Vancouver to do our interview.

Salvatorio

Salvatorio is in his early thirties and he grew up in Abbotsford. He is a paramedic, as well as a master *rollkuchen* maker. Salvatorio lived in the McMillan House on and off for many years. I lived with Salvatorio there for one summer. He currently lives in Vancouver and is a part of the potluck club discussed by Maya. He and I have often dreamed about starting another community together.

In the following dialogue Salvatorio talks about his beliefs and values and where these beliefs and values stem from. In his identity as a Mennonite and as a hippie he has found the common threads of community and the need to create just and kind relationships.

Salvatorio: I think I heard about the term "intentional community" a little bit later on when I started being exposed to the hippies and I became a little bit more a part of the counter culture - that term makes me think of communes and stuff.

CF: Do you associate Mennonites and hippies - or are they unrelated?

Salvatorio: Well my Mom was a hippie - so I would automatically associate that with hippies and Mennonites because they are kind of the same thing.

CF: How do you define hippie?

Salvatorio: Hippie - counter-culture, maybe a little spiritual, sometimes flaky but not always flaky - there are definitely not flaky hippies - socially conscious, trying to make a world a different place.

CF: How is that different from Mennonites?

Salvatorio: Well you asked me to define hippies - that is the definition of hippies. It would be maybe less - probably it has less of a history of exclusion - the hippie came out of the sexual revolution - free love, sex and drugs. Those things are not in the Mennonite community.

CF: Do you think it all - did we get along at the McMillan House because we were Mennonite or counter-culture?

Salvatorio: Yeah. There is a whole counter-culture section of Mennonite beliefs - my Mom was really instrumental - it was important to her that I knew the world and what it was about. That culture is very counter culture. She made sure I knew about the peace aspect and the rebellious aspect. These are things I respect about the Mennonite tradition - trying to do the socially conscious thing with the right morals.

CF: Would you call yourself a hippie then? McMillan House?

Salvatorio: Absolutely, yeah. That doesn't mean we all have dreadlocks and we all smoke pot and dance around - circle dance - but we all had a certain motive for living in community and being socially aware.

Salvatorio, like many other young Mennonites in Winnipeg, assumed that after leaving college he would move into a community like that of the McMillan House. Salvatorio also assumed that by living in community he would be "doing good things for the world."

Salvatorio: It was the obvious next step - that we were all going to live in a house together and cook together and hang out and try to do good.

Julia

Julia is in her early thirties and she grew up in rural Germany. She currently works with an organization in downtown Vancouver that helps people in difficult situations find and maintain supportive communities. Julia lived in the McMillan House for a few years with Claudia, Salvatorio, and Bella. I lived with Julia at the house for a few months one spring right before she moved back to Germany to get married. In our interview Julia spoke more about the work she does than her time at the McMillan House. For her, although she has wonderful memories of her time spent at the McMillan House, what she has done since matters more to her in terms of its relation to community and her own personal growth.

Below, Julia talks about what it was like to be a Mennonite growing up in Germany where there was no Mennonite community close to her village. Her experience of being ostracized because of her Mennonite identity is very different from the experiences of those participants who grew up in Canada, where the Mennonite community seemed to saturate their existence.

Julia: For me, being Mennonite means having grown up in a Mennonite church so my belief system has been built around values and philosophy of Mennonites. It also means food [Chuckles.] - certain kinds of food come to mind. And it means, to me also, being an outsider. People would ask me, "Is Mennonite something to eat?" People had no idea. Our family was also very different from others in the village. For example, we wouldn't give money for the army purposes or whatever. Everybody would participate but us. That created a difference.

Despite their lack of Mennonite neighbors, Julia's family found a way to have and create a Mennonite community in their home.

Julia: I feel my life was defined by intentional community but I never thought about it. My parents had participated in the MCC program where people would come and work on the farm from Canada and the States¹⁶ and so through doing that over seven years - there was always connections - our house was always full of people. It was open - we never locked our doors. We tried locking it - people would wander in off the streets and my Mom would get scared so we'd try locking it but then after two weeks it was back to the old way of not locking it. Thinking about that now I think already my parents were not living in intentional community but they were really welcoming - hospitality was a big thing growing up.

Julia goes on to say that when she moved into the McMillan House she didn't consciously think that she was moving into an intentional community; she just did it because it seemed natural to her and because the opportunity presented itself. Below, she describes how in her current job she helps others create and sustain intentional communities and how this process is so much more intentional than the McMillan House ever was.

Julia: It is a non-profit organization. Ten years ago they thought they should do something about housing here in Vancouver. It started out of a church in this

¹⁶ The Mennonite Central Committee sponsors a program called the Internmenno Trainee Program. It is similar to an exchange student program where a young person goes to another country for an extended period of time in order to learn about that culture and learn the language, except in this case the purpose is specifically for young people to learn about Mennonite culture and heritage. Usually the Internmenno program involves a young Mennonite from North America going to live with a Mennonite family in Germany or Switzerland. This summary comes from a conversation I had with Salvatore, as he participated in the Internmenno Trainee Program right before he moved into the McMillan House.

neighborhood - a Baptist church. People just started opening their homes and having people stay with them who are more vulnerable. That is how it started. What we have now is five houses and two of those are for refugees. Three of those are intentional community homes where people live alongside people who are more vulnerable. All the people living in the houses are choosing to live there knowing that some people they live with will need a lot of support - more than a regular roommate. There are people with mental health issues, people with a history of living on the streets - that kind of stuff. So that is what that is about. The real idea is that you don't need a big system. You can just -work to take care of each other - give hospitality to the stranger, people different from you. It is permanent. One of the houses has had the same people for seven years. And then there are guest rooms in the houses - people can stay for a week - few months to get a break from the streets.... Anyone who moves in is expected to be open to that idea of intentional community. We really encourage common meals at the houses. In one of the houses there are ten people and that is a lot of people to get together but you can get together around food. People need to eat. We really encourage that. This is not just a place to stay - it is more than that. You are expected to take part in house meetings, in chores, in maintenance of the garden, in maintenance of the yard. It is a house of hospitality. We welcome other people in. Some people carry that more than others. Or people go through different season - you can take on more and then maybe you can't take on much.

Expressing oneself through food preparation, oil painting, bike restoration, or the like, all seem to be very common activities in intentional communities; it is common that expressing and

creating beauty are encouraged in intentional communities. Julia and her husband currently live alone in an apartment building, but they are considering moving into a community house because "it seems like the right thing to do". When I asked her why it was the right thing to do, she said:

Julia: I feel like community is a hub for creativity. I don't know why - where that is coming from but I see it. If it is around food or it is around art or it is around - stuff is happening in these houses. Maybe because people moving in relate more through those mediums.

After traveling around BC and Washington State for a few weeks, I came back to Manitoba in late August. Almost right after arriving back I interviewed Joshua and Holly at The Fyxx one afternoon. This couple was the most enthusiastic about intentional community out of all the people I had spoken with over the summer and they inspired me to keep trudging along, despite my growing exhaustion of the subject

Joshua and Holly

Joshua and Holly are both in their early thirties. Joshua grew up in Steinbach and Holly grew up in rural Saskatchewan. I knew Joshua and Holly loosely through Suzanne and other McMillan House members, for Joshua lived at McMillan for a while before I lived there. Also, I grew up in Steinbach with Joshua's brother. Throughout the course of my fieldwork many of the people I interviewed suggested that I speak with Joshua and Holly, as they are widely known for their work in and with intentional communities - especially Jubilee Partners. Coincidentally,

Joshua and Holly stayed with Bella and Maya in Vancouver right after I left - we missed meeting up in Vancouver by a day! At the time of our interview in Winnipeg they were about to go back to Jubilee Partners to spend some time before moving to Sudan to do work with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

We met one sunny afternoon in August to do our interview. Yvan was with me but he sat at a different table in the café during the interview. After the interview was done, all four of us chatted a bit and then Yvan and I drove them to a mutual friend's house for a potluck.

Joshua and Holly strongly believe in creating community wherever they go and in whatever they are doing. At the time of our interview they had just returned from Korea where they have been doing voluntary service through the MCC. In this interview, they talked primarily about the community they worked to create in their work place in Korea and their time spent with Jubilee Partners. Below, they talk about what made their workplace in Korea a community.

Holly: ...because we tried to do things together and keep each other accountable and we ate together and we worshipped together and we worked together, we played together. And we talked about community a lot and what that means. That is why I would define it as a community. Community is really important to Joshua and I too and so we really encouraged that and make sure that was there.

They go on to describe why they continue to return to Jubilee Partners; how it is a good place for transition and how this community is a safe place for personal growth and reflection.

CF: And you are going back tomorrow. How long will you be there?

Holly: We'll be there for four months.

CF: And what brought you there? Joshua, you said you did it as a part of your university program. What made you go back?

Joshua: We've been back one other time since then. We had been living with her parents in Saskatchewan and I'd been working in a church as a youth pastor and Holly was managing a thrift store and both of those environments turned out to be fairly high stress and we were really feeling the need to do some debriefing and reflection on the direction of our lives and we kind of figured that Jubilee could be that place. We found that it was quite conducive to that - sort of a transition point. We'd been in Saskatchewan for a year and a half and it was right before we went to Korea. We felt it was a good transition place between what we had been doing and what we were about to do and so we figured it would probably be a good place to transition again. We decided after visiting our friends and family we would go there again and try to do some reflection on our time in Korea.

CF: It sounds like there is a lot to do while you are there. What about it makes it a place for reflection?

Holly: Where do we find time to reflect? [Laughs.]

CF: Yeah. Or is it not about time. What about it makes it a safe place?

Holly: Yeah, I think it is a safe place. I think Jubilee tries to create a safe place - create a really safe space. It is mostly for the refugees who have come from very traumatic experiences often. I think a lot of the volunteers who come through there also are there for various reasons, but some are there to get away from what they've been doing or to try something new. Living in intentional community and

doing service for more than just one day a week isn't a normal thing in our society, right? So in this new thing, Jubilee tries to create a safe space and a healthy space for reflection. Hopefully there is time to do that. They encourage quiet time in the morning for prayer or reflection - you can sleep in if you want to. [Laughs.] They set that time aside. For the community that is quiet time. They give space for personal retreats. One day a month.

Joshua: Half a day.

Holly: They have a prayer hut where you can go and spend time by yourself. Also just trying to create good relationships with people. As you make those relationships and talk with people - a good time to reflect as well.

Joshua and Holly continue to describe the ins and outs of the Jubilee Partners community. At Jubilee Partners the intentionality is very structured and planned. The intentionality found in the community is not something that comes about by accident.

Joshua: I think for some people, when they go to Jubilee, one thing they notice is that it is very structured. Scheduled - almost every day is scheduled except Sunday. Every day is pretty intensely scheduled but in that schedule are all the things Holly was mentioning like monthly retreats and every day before lunch there are devotions where we get together and reflect on something someone has chosen to reflect on. All of those things are built into the schedule. It is not a hectic pace. It is like systematic reflection. They build it into the structure of what they want to be doing. If you are open to it it will just kind of happen.

CF: How is the intentional part of their community sought?

Holly: They have lots of meetings. [Laughter.]

Joshua: They also pair up each of the volunteers with one of the partners and you make up how you are going to meet. You are supposed to meet once a week at least. Those relationships - it is sort of a mentoring - check-in and accountability.

Holly: They do lots of things to make it intentional. They eat together, every Sunday they worship together, they have meetings together, they play together, they hang out on the weekends when they are not working, they all live together. I think if you create, eat and play then you've got yourself an intentional community. [Laughter.] Whether you know it or not.

Joshua and Holly go on to talk about how community can be hard and yet they both feel it is something worth working for.

Joshua: I think we've realized between the two of us that community is something we really value. We almost crave it when we don't have it. We try to encourage people around us to be in community. I feel like wherever we go we try to make little, temporary intentional communities. But as far as more permanent, long-term community, I think I would like to do that.... I have the idea milling about in my mind. How could I create something similar here? What would it look like here? For me, that is something I'd like to experiment with.

Holly: We need people in our lives to keep us accountable - to keep us healthy. In Swift Current we let the stress get to us and it was not good. Since then I've realized that accountability is really important and I think that is what is really valuable about community. We can keep each other accountable for how we are

living and the direction that our lives are going. [pause] Community is really hard. We've been talking a lot about all the good things. It is so hard and when I think about the future and the idea of creating a community - it seems really overwhelming. I just want to go and live in one and be happy. [Laughs.]

A few days before I flew back to St. John's to finish my course work, Beth and I finally met for our interview. Beth and I had been trying to do it all summer, but it just never seemed to transpire, as she was "sick of talking about the McMillan House" and I didn't want to push her.

Beth

Beth is 29 years old and she grew up in Leamington, Ontario. She is a bike mechanic, a sociologist, an urban forager, and an artist. Beth and I lived together at the McMillan House for almost five years. Together she and I tried to continue the intentionality of the house after Claudia and Bella, the ones who started the McMillan House, moved away. This attempt was difficult and, eventually, the house as I knew it disbanded.

Beth is one of my very best friends, but this relationship did not happen naturally. I had been at the house a few months when she moved back into the house after spending a year in the Philippines. We decided to meet regularly for breakfast in order to get to know one another. We felt that it was important to become friends quickly, as we were both close with all the others in the household and we worried that our lack of friendship would cause problems in the

community. Whether or not it is because of these intentional breakfast dates or not, Beth and I became quite close and our friendship is still going strong.

Beth was the last to live in the McMillan House of the participants and she really was affected by the changes that took place in the house as it became less and less a community and more and more a regular roommate-style house. Below she talks about this change and how important the shared Mennonite identity that once defined the house really mattered.

Beth: You and I started hanging out and started talking about all the positive reasons for living where we were living - especially when dynamics in the house changed with different housemates and it became clear that what had been there had been really good. The changes pointed out the reasons why I had been living in community. Also the need to articulate some of our assumptions to new housemates - it was interesting. I remember you and I trying to talk about intentional community or community living - having it come out later that everyone had different ideas about what that actually meant. We thought we were all on the same page and talking the same language but we weren't really. At that point it became clear that what I had previously really appreciated in the house was the fact that we spent time together and we did that through life-sharing. Communal meals or coming home after a day of work and talking about how the day went and hanging out and chatting till all hours of the night about big life questions - going on stupid, crazy excursions - all the adventuring. And then later on it became just about space-sharing. We tried to share food still. That worked for a while but not as well. And also I think the collection of values in the house shifted as well - from everyone having similar values to having slightly different

ones. People from backgrounds that were not so strongly influenced by Mennonite ideas.

Beth talks about the goals of intentional community.

Beth: I think the goal is to build something together, do something together but also care about each other in the community. That is the difference - there is more of an emotional connection rather than something that is purely functional - more functional goals. There aren't always perfect relationships within an intentional community, but the goal is work on that - it may not be easy but for the sake of the community you try to make it work - intentional living.

When I got back to St. John's in September 2009 I moved in with Sam, Melissa and their three children. They too had lived in a Mennonite intentional community when they were in their early twenties and we spoke often about doing an interview, but it just never seemed to happen. I felt like I was living in intentional community again while staying with them and I didn't feel the need to talk about it when I was living in it.

I moved back to Manitoba in December 2009. When I moved home I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to house-sit for about four months for Ellen, a friend of my Dad's. Ellen's house is situated out in an open field close to Steinbach. There, looking out into the vast prairie covered in snow, I transcribed all of the interviews that had taken place over the previous summer.

The conversations Beth and I had in 2005 about intentional community and about how to help the McMillan House continue to be an intentional community, even after most of community members had left, are what got me thinking about this topic in a more theoretical, and less emotional, way. I have Beth, and our late-night chats over cookie dough, to thank for leading me, initially, to this thesis. In the next chapter I will let the McMillan House members further tell the story of their beloved community, as I draw out those patterns and motifs that make this paper not just a collection of ideas and memories, but a folkloristic thesis.

Chapter Two: The McMillan House



Figure 1: Bella cleaning up the autumn leaves outside the McMillan House, ca. 2003. Photo by Claudia.

In 2010 I moved back again to Winnipeg after two and half years of living in St. John's and, after traveling to the other side of Canada, have found myself living just three blocks away from where the McMillan House was. Each and every day now I walk under the same tree-lined street where as many as five or six of us McMillaners used to walk with our arms linked as we made our way to the local organic grocery store (Organza) or to a party being hosted by a similar intentional community in the neighborhood. Just yesterday I played in the snow at what we fondly called "Puddle Park" (due to it being a gigantic puddle for most of the year until it freezes over into a skating rink in the winter time) and cried big, sloppy tears of gratitude for the memories of walking through this park late at night with numerous McMillan House members, talking about a recent break-up or the many questions that seemed to haunt us surrounding our spiritual faith, our futures beyond the safety of the McMillan House walls, and our deep longing to do something good and beautiful with our time and energy. I love the McMillan House members and writing about them here and now in this way was very difficult. I feared that by

putting our community on the black and white page I would somehow diminish our experiences. It is my hope, however, that I will do the opposite. It is my hope that by telling our story I will create something we can all be proud of and that will help us remember how the relationships we formed in the McMillan House helped us as we matured and grew into the beautiful and loving people we are today. For, as a folklorist, my intention is to not only describe a community, but to valorize it as well.

This chapter is organized into eight sections. In the first I utilize auto-ethnography to tell my personal story about how I came to live at the McMillan House and the way this community substantially changed my life - for the better. In the second section I begin to tell the story of the McMillan House using the words of the participants. I begin this story by examining how the members of the McMillan House understood the house as an intentional community. In the third section I look at "the knowns", or expectations, of the McMillan House and how these common motifs express the intentions of the McMillan House. I then go on to look at the close relationships that developed in the McMillan House, followed by a section looking at how these close relationships made it possible for the community members to work through difficult issues, such as issues surrounding sexuality. In the sixth section I look at the role food played in the house and how, as in the other communities looked at in this thesis, food united the McMillan House members through acts of food justice and through fellowship around food. I then have a section that simply presents some of the favorite memories of the participants. Throughout all of these sections are placed some favorite photographs given to me by Suzanne and Claudia.

In this chapter, full of sentimental stories and cherished memories, certain ideas arise that draw attention to the key concepts and terms that pertain to all the intentional communities

examined in this thesis. The first of these has to do with the term “worldview” and its relationship to the concept of idealism. Linda Degh defines “worldview” as:

... the sum total of subjective interpretations of perceived and experienced reality of individuals. Any human action is motivated by such a perception. It contains beliefs, opinions, philosophies, conducts, behavioral patterns, social relationships and practices of humans, related both to life on this earth and beyond in the supernatural realm. Worldview, then, permeates all cultural performances, including folklore. Narratives, in particular, are loaded with worldview expressions: they reveal inherited communal and personal views of human conduct. (1994: 247)

Idealism, by extension, is when the “beliefs, opinions, philosophies, conducts, behavioral patterns, social relationships and practices of humans” held in one’s worldview are expected to be experienced and expressed in the most ideal and absolute way. For the members of the McMillan House it was a part of their worldview to believe that such perfection was indeed attainable by them and their community members – this is seen in the following narratives. Curiously, the members of the McMillan House illustrate the concept of belief hybridization as well. The term “hybridization” expresses the idea that an individual or a group can mix and match ideas and ideals found in various worldviews to create a new, hybrid worldview. An example of this seen in the McMillan House is of the women who were raised as Christians and who now practice yoga as a part of their spiritual articulation. The idea of hybridization is complicated and folklorists are continually trying to wrap their heads around this untidy concept (Kapchan and Strong 1999).

Presented in this chapter is also the concept of "fictive families" (Gubrium and Buckholdt) or, what I prefer to call, self-made families, believing that they were not fictive, but quite real. Self-made families are created when a group of people living together in a common space share a common need for emotional and practical day-to-day support, and when they find this need satisfied in each other. In the example of the McMillan House, this self-made family continued and was solidified after the members no longer lived together in the community. The self-made family of the McMillan House continues to this day. For the members of the McMillan House, and many of the other participants in this thesis, creating a self-made family through intentional community was integral to their maturation and identity formation. While I am aware that that concept of identity, like the concepts of worldview and hybridization, has been often debated by folklorists and cultural scholars (Abrahams 2003), in this thesis I maintain the opinion presented by the participants that individuals have the ability and right to create their own identities, that these identities are integral to one's self-actualization, and that much identity formation takes place during one's early twenties as one leaves behind one's childhood and forges out to create a home for oneself. This opinion and concept, along with the key concepts discussed above, will be fleshed out through the stories of the participants in this chapter and throughout this thesis.

A) How I came to be a part of the McMillan House

Just after writing my final exam for the winter term of my third year at the University of Winnipeg, I came home to my tiny bachelor apartment to find a note from the city of Winnipeg slipped under my door. This fateful message stated that my apartment building was condemned, that my landlords were required by law to pay back to me the last six months of my rent, and that

I had to move out within the week. I panicked. I did not want to move back to my father's home in Steinbach, for although I knew he would welcome me with open arms, I no longer felt welcome in that Mennonite town with its reputation for quiet condemnation and close-minded faith. I did not want to move in with Cory, my boyfriend at the time, for although I knew he might also welcome me with open arms, my upbringing and my faith forbade me to live with a man before he and I were wed. I was stuck between not wanting to return to the conservative arena of my childhood and yet not willing to completely forsake the traditions that had been bred into me.

A woman in one of my classes owned a house and I knew she rented the rooms out to female university students. I called her, she showed me the house, and three days later I moved in. I was not happy. My room was not much bigger than the size of a closet and my two new housemates ignored me. To make matters worse, the kitchen was so full of month-old dirty dishes that I could not stomach spending a minute in there - never mind the hour it would take to make a nice dinner - and the friendly gray cat continually left dead mice in front of my bedroom door as a housewarming gift. I stayed at this boarding-type house for about two weeks before showing up on Cory's front steps in tears. At that very moment Cory was just about to go visit his cousin Matilda who lived next door and he invited me to come along. I dried my tears and reluctantly agreed to go with him.

We were welcomed next door by Matilda who, with her trademark dreadlocks and beautiful homemade clothes swirling and whirling around her, invited us to come and sit with her by the fireplace. The aroma of a freshly baked saskatoon pie and the undeniable smell of marijuana saturated the big old house and, soon enough, these two pleasurable vices were a part of our fireside chat. The three of us played cards for a while until Matilda became too anxious to

concentrate. She declared, rather nervously, that she still had not found someone to sublet her room while she travelled to South America. She was leaving in a week and could not afford to pay rent on the room while she was away. Timidly I asked if I might sublet her room and, within a minute of speaking up, was scheduled to meet the other four housemates for an interview the very next evening to see if I was a suitable replacement for Matilda.

I arrived the next night excited, totally ignorant of what I was getting myself into, and feeling very, very shy. Matilda had made waffles with raspberries and a classic Mennonite white sauce for dinner and, as I ate, I became acquainted with the four women who were soon to become my housemates and, with time, some of my best friends. Marie, Claudia, Bella and Suzanne explained to me that this house of theirs was not like the boarding-type house I was currently living in. Here, at the McMillan house, they intentionally strove to create community and develop close relationship, both with each other and with the larger world. Also, it was important that I know they shared food and ate together regularly, that it was a vegetarian household, they were queer friendly, and, just in case I was wondering, three out of the four were Mennonite. Call it what you will, but I believe that it may have been destiny¹⁷ that led me to this vegetarian, queer, pot-friendly, Mennonite intentional community with its welcoming and engaging souls who were consciously trying to balance old Mennonite traditions with the new and emerging ideas that we all needed to explore at that point in our lives.

I moved into the McMillan house in the winter of 2003 and stayed until the summer of 2007, when I moved to St. John's, Newfoundland. The McMillan house became my "sacred canopy", for, as Leo Driedger put it in his discussion on Mennonite communities, "humans tend

¹⁷ I remind myself of the members of the Montague Farm who believed in a kind of "mythology that underpinned life on the farm". This mythology was, for them, ruled by a belief that its members were led to there by way of fate. (Fels 2008: 21)

to attribute the sacred to structures that provide protection, hence the "canopy" that provides a mysterious sense of safety in a reconstructed familiar" (2000: 71). The McMillan House, and its radical way of interpreting Mennonite traditions, was a reconstruction of the familiar Mennonite community that I grew up in and, under this new, provocative, and safe canopy I developed deep and honest friendships. These close relationships helped me to feel safe enough to explore and eventually accept my Mennonite identity, struggle with big ethical questions, claim my spiritual faith as my own and express it in ways that were unique to my soul and my journey, explore my sexuality, start painting abstract paintings full of colour and emotion, experiment with drugs and alcohol, and, perhaps most importantly, learn how to cook. At the McMillan House I found a safe place to say 'good-bye' to the shy, broken girl (from the small, conservative, Mennonite town of Steinbach) that I had been for so long and welcome the confident, beautiful young woman (living in the big, left-wing, culturally-diverse city of Winnipeg) I was learning to become. As will be seen, my personal story parallels those of others.

B) The McMillan House as an intentional community

The McMillan House did not set out to be an intentional community but, over time, as the community members grew in their relationships with each other, and in their personal convictions, the McMillan House became for many, as Salvatorio put it, "the definition of intentional community." Below Claudia and Bella talk about how this intentionality came about.

Claudia

In my interview with her, Claudia talked about how the McMillan House was not like many other housing situations she saw other young adults living in at the time. The McMillan House was more like a family house than a boarding house. We shared the day-to-day tasks of mopping the floor, washing the dishes, and eating together and, as Claudia put it, “through these very basic mundane things” we formed a family that also shared the very deep and personal things.



Figure 2: A photo of me washing everything in the bottom kitchen cupboards at the McMillan House after the sewer pipes burst, ca. 2005. Photo by Suzanne.

Claudia: I get the impression that when a lot of other young adults live with people they kind of treat each other like they are living in a boarding house. So it is like you have your own food, your own shelves and you do your own dishes and you do not necessarily hang out with each other. It was important to me that the people I lived with were also interested in being my friends and there would be a relationship there and that we could turn to each other both for fun as well as for emotional support. It was important that we shared house chores. We would take turns cooking house meals and we would take turns doing the dishes or

mopping the floor or cleaning the bathroom. The very basic mundane things were shared on a rotational kind of basis rather than being like, "You clean up your own mess and you deal with your own stuff and that is that" - cut and dry. There was more of a family setup.

Bella

Like Claudia, Bella talked about how she and Claudia intentionally worked to make the McMillan House an intentional community. It was important for them to create a safe and welcoming space, not just for their Mennonite community, but for all the people in their lives. They wanted to be different from some of the other intentional communities that had been started by those that went to CMU, in that they wanted to be in relationship with the world beyond just that of the Mennonites. The love found and fostered within the McMillan House was intended to be shared by many.

Bella: Yes, it was intentional. The first year was really rocky. It wasn't the prime of McMillan 'cause I don't feel like we had great community in the first year. In the second year it got a lot better. Claudia and I really wanted a house that embodied a welcoming spirit and friendliness. We wanted to welcome people into our home and to be hospitable and help people build connections and relationships. We had potlucks for a while and that was definitely the intention. A lot of the other Mennonite houses stayed very insular in terms of staying only within the Mennonite friendship circles they had made at college. We really

branched out. When we had parties only a third of the people there would be from CMBC.

Julia

Although looking back, Julia can see how the McMillan House was an intentional community of sorts, contrary to what Claudia and Bella said, Julia does not equate it with the intentional communities she now works with. The McMillan House was unorganized and full of youthful spirit, rather than being planned out and full of a dedicated drive and, in Julia's mind, this disqualifies it from being an intentional community.

Julia: I don't think McMillan was intentional community because now my work is about helping communities start living intentionally together and there is a lot of concern going into that before people move in with one another. There is a lot of thinking things through. There is a bigger process happening before you move in with one another and at McMillan it just kind of happened. That could just be the youthfulness of all of us. You just do it. I was excited to live with people. I always wanted to do that and so in that way I was seeking that but I guess for me having intentional community means having a common purpose or some kind of common goal or hopes that you have. We might have had those but we didn't voice those before moving in necessarily. We did have the interview - getting to know you, what you wanted. Thinking about it now I think it was an intentional community, it was just not that organized. I didn't use that term then. It was more youthful. If you are older you are going to be more cautious about who you are

going to live with, right? When you are eighteen - I had just come to Canada from Germany and I was like, "Yeah! This is awesome! I want to live with people. Let's do it!"

This youthful spirit Julia speaks of I believe is exactly what helped to create the intimacy found in the McMillan House. As we moved through the growing pains present when one transitions between youth and adulthood, we had each other to depend on and seek refuge with. Through this time of questioning we had each other, and the closeness formed through this caused our community to grow quite deep. The McMillan House may not have been as organized as intentional communities that are more dedicated to be together for the long term, but I am not so sure the level of intimacy found at the McMillan House could have been planned or organized.

B) "The Knowns" of the McMillan House

Claudia coined the term "the knowns" of the McMillan House. These common, often unspoken, understandings and agreements were usually based on Mennonite tradition and ideals and were the main ingredients that helped the community to run smoothly most of the time and what also, I believe, largely contributed to the personal depth we were able to reach with each other. These "knowns", or common understandings, helped to create a safe place where we could test our personal boundaries and our beliefs, while knowing that we would not be left alone to pick up the pieces.

Claudia

Below Claudia further explains "the knowns" of the McMillan House and how they stemmed from our common Mennonite heritage. These "knowns" had to do with issues such as the Mennonite religion, Mennonite ideas pertaining to premarital sex, the ideal of justice, and why we choose to try and uphold various other aspects of the Mennonite tradition.

Claudia: What were the knowns? Well, it was safe to talk about Jesus. We had all grown up with the Ten Commandments. We had all grown up being taught it was wrong to have sex before marriage and that is was a good thing to be in a male-female marriage couple and make babies. And, within the Mennonite faith specifically, that it is a good thing to serve - to put others' interests before your own. It is good to be involved with peace and social justice work, that talking about God is not an uncool or stupid thing to do, that the spiritual side of things is real and valid, that *plants* and *rollkuchen* are good foods¹⁸, and even that washing out your zip-lock plastic bags is something that good grandmas and Mennonites do - or that saving all your plastic grocery shopping bags and braiding them into rugs is not an unheard of thing. "Reduce, reuse, recycle" is kind of a laughable, new thing - people's grandmas had been doing this for years and years and years, partly out of necessity to get by when they were immigrants and refugees from one country to another but also partly out of a sense of simple living that is also connected with the Mennonite Anabaptist faith. And that simple living was a good idea - consumerism and consumption were negative things. That principle

¹⁸ *Rollkuchen* is a deep-fried bread, similar to a donut. *Plants* are a kind of cake made with fruit and rolled outs. These are both Low-German terms common in Mennonite social circles.

always came out in hilarious ways in what people wore. We laugh about the dress code of old jeans and an old baggy t-shirt - this was somehow morally superior to any other way of dressing because it was simple! [Chuckles.] And buying second-hand clothes and re-quilting and making new things out of old things - reusing things. All of that was kind of a cultural, faith background that was known.

Having all these background assumptions made it a place where you could kind of depend on the fact that you would be taken care of if you got puking drunk at night. You could push boundaries and still be in a place where you were with people that you knew and where people knew your grandparents and your parents and your aunts and your uncles and your siblings. There was still that sense that if it really goes awry I will still be taken care of, I will still be looked out for, I will not be left on my own. I think that was one of those things that was a lot less conscious in the beginning and then we started to realize that that was going on and then we started wanting to keep that happening and so we were more and more intentional about that. So that would be one of those other themes, or things that was often going on - how much do you step outside of the known, how much do you push your own boundaries, how much is acceptable and how much will you catch each other if you fall?

Claudia goes on to talk about how the McMillan House was unconsciously Mennonite, how this was, perhaps, the most important of "the knowns". We were all working through what this meant to us as we grew up and away from the faith community we had been a part of as children and decided how we wanted to express our spiritual beliefs as adults. On a side note,

amusingly, Suzanne told me how even though she was not Mennonite people assumed she was because she lived at the McMillan House.

Claudia: I think our shared Mennonite background was unconscious in the beginning and increasingly conscious as the years went on. And that partly was due to the fact that many who lived there had lived at CMU in the residence and there there had been some very clearly articulated moral or ethical positions that were stated. There was a lot of talk about community. It was termed "the C word" because there was so much talk about community. That was very much coming from the Anabaptist Mennonite ethic of a faith that is lived out in community. Of a belief system that is not really a personal relationship just with God but that is visible in the way you interact with your neighbors and the way you treat the people around you and in the life choices you make. A lot of the Anabaptist beliefs come from a revisiting of the Jesus story and how the early disciples, the early church lived by the sharing everything in common and by sharing all belongings and food and money and resources. That really has influenced the Mennonite belief system which then influenced our residence life setting which then, somewhat unconsciously, influenced our decisions in the McMillan House. And then, as we lived longer together and started having conflict - then we asked why we made these decisions - that would be what we'd harken back to. Like, "Why is it important that we eat together, why is it important that we do things together instead of having our own dishes and own food and labeling things?" Because community is important! Because it is important to share things! Because it is important take of each other and not only take care of one's self as number

one! A lot of our reasoning when we started to articulate why we wanted things the way we wanted them was coming from our faith background and our faith teachings.

Bella

Bella expands upon what Claudia says further by explaining the close ties and relationships found within Mennonite circles. She also says how it was inevitable that the beliefs and attitudes found in the McMillan house would be "informed somewhat by the way we were raised", for even if we moved to a new city we would inevitably find Mennonites to commune with and who would remind us of the Mennonite "knowns".

Bella: Well Mennonites historically have chosen to live apart in order to live out their own beliefs. So there is very much this isolationism that I don't think is necessarily good. We want to be in the world but not of the world. We want to do our own thing. We don't want to participate in the evil structures of society so we are going to retreat and have our own communities. There are Mennonites who are engaged highly in political life and then there is also far more of a trend to not get involved in politics and have separate communities and be isolated. So that whole community aspect of supporting your own and living together somehow happens even in urban settings because Mennonites have such strong family or religious ties. So when you go to a Mennonite Bible school you get to know Mennonites from across Canada and you go on choir tours to churches across Canada and then you have been to every Mennonite church across Canada and

you go to Conference. You feel those ties when you go to Ottawa - little old ladies tell you they made food for your parents' wedding and then since you are going to school with Mennonites from across Canada every time you travel across Canada you have some place to stay. Immediately you have these networks that go across the country and perhaps into the States as well. You can meet a Mennonite and actually know five people in common, which is somewhat insane, but that is how it works.

Beth

Beth expands upon this idea more to talk about Mennonite values and how she personally expresses them in "simple living."

Beth: Simple living is something that is a part of the Mennonite values that I gleaned over the years too. It manifests itself differently for different people. For me cycling and food justice are rooted in the philosophy of simplicity. And in terms of the larger world, whether it is the environment or humans on the other side of the globe or across the province - the choices we make every day affect people all over the place. Mennonites generally try to make the world better for different people and some of those ways are admirable and some of those ways are much less so - the whole missionary world or international development world - it gets very complicated very quickly. I am coming at it from a different angle. Rather than going somewhere and trying to do something for other people I try to evaluate my choices here - understand how my choices affect other people. By

changing one's own way of living you make the world better for everybody. One of the aspects of community living is that it tends to be less of an intensive drain on resources. In terms of space sharing - when you share space - five people at McMillan for example - we all had one kitchen as opposed to if each of us had been living on our own - we would have been taking up way more space than we were combined. In terms of heating costs and electricity costs - way less than if each individual does their own thing. That is definitely one aspect of it all. It is also a system of accountability for your values, especially when people in that community do have similar values and there is a close enough relationship - people call you on stuff and they see when you are eating too many Fudgee-Os. [Laughing.] We all work together to figure out how we can use less water in the house. If someone is leaving the water running than someone will say something about it - whatever it is. For practical things around the house and ways of living - we talk about food sharing and are able discuss what we want to do. It also creates space for education around different issues. It is the context where that stuff comes up all the time and it affects our practical decisions - it does not need to be talked about in such intense ways that it defines the relationship.

Claudia

Claudia continues to talk about how the McMillan House worked well because of the shared ideas and ideals held by the members. The smooth running of the house was rocked a bit when someone who did not come from a Mennonite background moved in, and therefore did not

take the same "knowns" for granted. When this happened the community would look for common ground in other areas of life, such as similar political views.

Claudia: I think when we didn't have a similar faith background we looked for people that had similar political views or day-to-day living habits that were similar to what our faith led us to in our decision. So the outcome would be similar but the source may be different. And so that kind of insured some smooth running. I think that it made for more explanations when the faith assumptions weren't there and that took time and when the people who moved in were willing to put in the time to get to know what was going on and why and where it came from then that was easier and that made it workable but there needed to be that willingness for us to find out where they were coming from as well and why they had their decisions. It made it harder when they didn't have the same faith background because the assumptions weren't there - it made communication that much more important and that much more time-consuming.

Beth

Living in community came naturally to Beth because of her Mennonite upbringing. The very idea of living in community was one of the Mennonite "knowns" for her.

Beth: I guess in all my church experiences, and later on school experiences, there was always an emphasis put on community and getting to know everybody. For example, after church we'd have potluck lunches in order to get to know each other. That was one of the aspects that was really emphasized at CMU. That was

one of the selling features of my high school too - it was a small Mennonite high school. Especially at CMU - it was a major part of what I appreciated about being there. I made a lot of awesome friends at CMU. A lot of emphasis was put on the positive aspects of staying up till all hours of the night talking and having big theological debates. Also eating together in the cafeteria - the food-sharing thing has always been a major part of Mennonite community. Later on moving into the McMillan House, which was an extension of that. I lived in another house before that as well with friends from CMU. It would have felt very lonely and isolated to live alone in an apartment. It would have seemed strange to not have community. It has been really nice to have people close by in my life.

Anne

Anne talks about "disenfranchised Mennonites". These are the many people in her social circle who grew up in the Mennonite church, but have since rejected many of its tenets. Anne, like many others I interview, claimed to be "culturally Mennonite but not religiously Mennonite" or, as Salvatore put it, "I am Mennonite in that I really appreciate the cultural aspects and the community and some of the belief systems. However, I do not in any way consider myself to be a Christian."

Anne: Like the term Menno-Nots. I think that is a Miriam Toews¹⁹ phrase. That is the new attitude that I have really sensed - "I am Mennonite and yet - but I am not. I don't do that stuff. I don't - I am not participating in any of that." But you

¹⁹ Miriam Toews is a prominent Mennonite writer from Steinbach, Manitoba.

still identify yourself as being a Mennonite. And I think that is definitely an attitude I have seen in a lot of people, but at the same time something that I really appreciate too is that people don't have a flippant attitude towards it. It is not like: "Fuck that, I don't even care anymore. I don't want anything to do with this." It is more of like: "I don't really know. I went through all of this stuff and then I started to doubt and then I stopped going to church and then I never really got any answers so I am kind of just hovering around until I figure my stuff out." I think that is kind of the way a lot of people are standing. They are not willing to give up on being Mennonite. I think a lot of people are really milling about with no direction as far as their faith goes and as far as direction goes. That can really only come from oneself. I don't think that a church can tell you where you want to go. It can give you some guidance but it can't determine that. I think that's what people have recognized. They have recognized that direction has to come from themselves but themselves really isn't giving them any. [Laughs.]

What made the McMillan House so special for many of us was that it was a safe place where we would still hold on to our Mennonite identities and yet question and change at the same time. Like Anne, although many of us were no longer a part of the Mennonite church that we grew up in, we wanted to continue to uphold the Mennonite belief in having kind and open relationships. This spirit of loving relationships was something we all aspired to in the McMillan House.

Anne: What I find is really important to me and something that has really been ingrained in me since childhood is certain attitudes towards other people that I think are not necessarily intrinsically Mennonite, but are really something that is

very core to Mennonite system and a Mennonite community and Mennonite beliefs - like how you relate people and how you interact with people and how you respond to what they have to say is a reflection of your faith and of what you believe, of what you stand for. And in that sense yes, I do think that I unintentionally-intentionally want to portray myself as Mennonite because I associate those attitudes with Mennonite - those certain elements of caring for other people and not jumping to conclusions and all these sorts of things and that is something that I learnt from being a Mennonite and something I would like to continue to act out.

Salvatorio

Despite no longer being religiously Mennonite, Salvatorio did not want to turn away from his Mennonite heritage and he loved being in the McMillan House. In this community he could question, and even revolt against, the Mennonite faith and yet still happily participate in cultural expressions of it - without anyone chastising him too much.²⁰

Salvatorio: But there is still something special about the Mennonite thing. When you talk about, "Oh, I am going to make *rolfkuchen* this weekend" people's eyes

²⁰ Salvatorio may not have been chastised by his fellow community members for his active rebellion against the Mennonite faith, however many of the more conservative Mennonites out there would be quite unhappy to hear of the way he, and many others, see no problem claiming a Mennonite identity, despite a lack of Mennonite faith. For, according to authors such as Ervin Beck, "Mennonites should not regard themselves as ethnics, lest cultural baggage interfere with the message of faith that Mennonites have to offer." (Beck 2004: 36)

just got so big. They know what it is. That is just something that is so special. Or,
"Your Oma²¹ does it that way. Well, my Oma does it this way!"



Figure 3: Two photos of Salvatorio dressed-up as Jesus, ca. 2003. In the photo on the right he clearly states his religious opinion. Photos by Claudia.

Salvatorio, the most rebellious of the McMillan House, still loved many parts of his Mennonite heritage and culture and, while he could be offensive in his rebellion, he never went so far as to be rejected wholly by the group. He, like most of us in the community, nicely illustrates Barre Toelken's twin laws of the folklore process. Toelken's idea is that conservatism and dynamism go hand-in-hand for, "balancing the dynamism of change in performance is the essentially conservative force of tradition itself" (1979: 34). Change happens within a tradition and it is up to the tradition bearers to figure out how much change can take place without the whole traditions itself being lost. At the McMillan House we embraced the idea that we could uphold and love parts of our Mennonite heritage while also expanding, and even changing, our understanding and expression of it. Folklore and tradition are dynamic, constantly changing with the people who sustain them (Toelken 1979: 34-36). The McMillan House, with its "knowns"

²¹ "Oma" is the term commonly used amongst people of German heritage to address their Grandmothers. "Opa" is used to address Grandfathers.

and loving intentions, exemplifies this reality well. We were Mennonite and we wanted to maintain and honour this identity, yet we were also individuals with many, many questions, doubts, and desires that, quite often, seemed to challenge the traditions we had been handed as children. Within our community we found the safe space needed for us to be able to modify and re-contextualize our Mennonite belief system.

Marie

Marie talks about what it was like to not be a Mennonite in the McMillan House. Although it was sometimes difficult to not be a part of the Mennonite social circle that visited and partied at the McMillan House, it did not affect her too much because she had the love of the McMillan House members – that love was enough.

Marie: I felt really honored for the differences, as opposed to excluded because of the differences. And there were so many similarities and so much warmth and so much welcoming that I never ever felt like excluded. You know the only time is if there was a group of people that were all from CMU and that was never an issue because not everybody went to CMU. And I gradually met people from CMU. I didn't work too hard on it though 'cause I just felt like I was never going to go to CMU and that was a bit of a battle that I wasn't willing – it wasn't a battle but a challenge that I wasn't really willing to take on 'cause unless I was willing to go to CMU I wouldn't be a part of that CMU group and that was futile. There was no point in really trying. I didn't need to, I had McMillan. I had our community. And I think, in terms of the Mennonite things, people weren't overtly preachy. It

wasn't like anybody was trying to push their spiritual values. It was like everybody respected mine and were actually quite embracing of the meditation and things that I did and I felt more like we had so many values in common. I never had reason to feel uncomfortable. Those were the values that I had found in a lot of the lifestyles that I had found when I was traveling in New Zealand. The, you know, communal living, living simply, environmentalism, living consciously, living a healthy life style.

The primary "knowns" in the McMillan House discussed in this sections were: that a Christian faith and Biblical understanding were assumed to be held by the majority of the McMillan House members and that is was good to talk about these things in detail; that working to live a simple, justice-centered life was to be encouraged; that we would take care of each other and the wider community in times of need; that in the McMillan House we shared not only a religious background, but a cultural background and that we should celebrate this; that one did not need to be religious in order to be Mennonite; and that community was very important. All of these motifs are identity markers that the McMillan House members held on to as they negotiated their way away from their childhoods into adulthood. This central issue of identity will be returned to again and again in this thesis.

C) Close relationships at the McMillan House

Above and beyond the "knowns", the McMillan House was united primarily through the love the members felt for each other. The community became like a new kind of family for its members and, for many of us, this family of support and love was one we had been searching for much of our lives.

Marie

Below Marie speaks with great emotion about how special the relationships at the McMillan House were for her and how the McMillan House was a place of empowerment and personal growth.

Marie: There was a lot of affection in the house and a lot of love and a lot of people with common goals and desires. We wanted to make the world a better place. [Crying.] That is what made it such a beautiful place to find yourself in. It was beautiful, nurturing. It was a place of re-birth where we found the things that maybe we didn't have growing up. We found it in each other. It was a really good spring-board, diving board. And something I do very much want to create in my family and in my home. I was trying to find community and I found so much more. Up until that point I was very much living in the mainstream way of life. And so to even find something that was a little bit more the direction that I was yearning for was incredible and I found the warmth and the community at McMillan that I was really searching for. I remember it healed so much of my childhood. It healed so much of me and opened me up to possibilities that I didn't

really know were there. To know that something like that was sustainable and that you could actually work through differences and to be able to, at the end of the day, give everybody a hug and come into each others' bedrooms and to just hang out with somebody and have people around. There was just so much love in that house and I don't feel like I necessarily had that growing up. My parents and my brothers were not that emotionally available. Whenever there was some big emotional event in my life it was always something that I was to deal with on my own. It was never something that I could actually have support with because I don't think my parents knew how to do that. They didn't have the tools to do it and so it was very much "go to my room and do it on your own" and so I think I had always been searching for that. I think McMillan and the relationships at McMillan healed a part of me and made me who I am and made me so I was more emotionally available for other people. I didn't realize all this stuff until now! [Crying and laughing at the same time.]

Marie: Well, I feel like McMillan was a very empowering place to live. That everybody really honored each other and respected each other and loved each other. And we were willing and we were very interested. From the beginning we were very interested in each other and our relationships developed slowly, but because we lived together it was actually over short periods of time. We would each go on our days and go to our jobs and we would come home and there would be somebody there and you would just sit and have coffee with them and talk to them about their lives. We took the time. I remember sitting on the roof once at McMillan when I'd first moved in and Matilda was there and Claudia was there –

we were just all sitting on the roof and talking about life and just our struggles and our paths. And I remember having tea with Suzanne one day and her telling me about her past and where she came from. And the fact that we made meals together. We would each take turns making meals. It was a special thing. Or chores or have our house meetings where we'd make decisions communally. [Pause.] I just felt that there was a lot of warmth in the house and that nobody was ever mean or unkind or teased anybody or was out to get anybody. We all seemed very open with each other and I never felt jealous about relationships in the house – like some people were better friends than others and I felt like we all very much had our own individual relationships with everybody in the house and at the same time we had more of like group relationships too where we – we functioned differently as a group. Granted things happened and there were challenges.

Marie now has two young children and she wants to create similar loving intentions to those found within the McMillan House within her current family, rather than mirroring her parenting after the somewhat distant love she grew up with. The close relationships found in the McMillan House have become the guide which Marie follows when working to create community and loving relationships in her current life.

Suzanne

Suzanne touches briefly on the close amity that seemed to be present in the community – how by living in the McMillan House it became almost inevitable that you would make long, lasting friendships.

Suzanne: Those are probably some of my best friends. I mean definitely. Those are my best friends. I'm not sure exactly how this happened. We weren't necessarily friends before we moved in together. But the house was conducive to forming friendships.

Beth

Like Claudia pointed out in talking about "the knowns", the intimacy found in the community came about through the "everydayness" that we, like a common family, shared.

Beth: I am sure there were some really intense conversations that happened from time to time but that is not really what I think of as what created the most depth in the house. I think it was more the regularity and the everydayness. We did spend so much time together! Whether it was coming down and seeing people for breakfast or cooking together. It was lovely to come home in the evening and you knew people were home – you'd see the shoes around or the coats on the coat rack. You knew there were people around doing something interesting – giggling or talking somewhere. I'd wander through the house till I found the pile of people somewhere. It was nice knowing there were people who were excited to see you

when you got home at the end of the day. It was interesting how we all had different roles too. We each valued different aspects of that community. Claudia was often around and often the one who help people sort out their lives. I'd go onto her bed and talk to her as she was doing her painting.

Claudia

Claudia tells the story of how in the community she was cared for in a time of need and how she felt safe enough to be vulnerable, broken.

Claudia: There was one night when I had recently broken up with a boyfriend and Suzanne and Marie, I think, took care of me all night long because I had gotten drunk and I was all upset. They told me stories. There was the sense that they were there and it was a big house party and there was a lot of people over and there were probably bands playing and yet they were willing to spend most of that party night looking after me rather than going off and meeting other people and doing other things. There was a safety in knowing that. It was pretty incredible.

There were so many people with whom Claudia felt safe and comfortable with at the McMillan House and, thus, there was always somebody to talk through life's big decisions with. Her housemates were the primary people with whom she talked about her growing pains.

Claudia: There were just unending conversations. Part of that was just having good friends, but there was something even more intimate about having good

friends that you lived with. They knew the ins and outs of your day-to-day life and with five to six plus people living in a house there was generally somebody around if you wanted to rent a movie or if you wanted to go out and do something or if you wanted to sit home and talk through whatever was on your mind or if you wanted bake cookies or do something goofy and fun. The conversations were often in the context of my figuring out who I was, and coming to terms with who I was as I grew up, and the choices I was making and the experiences I was going through. Those conversations were very much within that house and with those housemates the support network was built.... The household setting, because we were together day-to-day, became a more trusting, a more intimate, a more vulnerable place in which to do that growing up and learning.

As Salvatorio said, "It is not like we had some cause or something. I think just being accepted in the community made it something important. I don't know if I was accepted unconditionally, but I definitely was accepted for who I was."

Claudia's relationships with the McMillan House members have changed since she left the community. The McMillan House members are like her real family, perhaps even closer than her family because with the community members she was able to share personal aspects of her life that she has not shared with her family members.

Claudia: I have remained really close with some people and have kept kind of a solid connection but not so much of a current, growing friendship with other people. I can come back to town and can hang out with some people just like it was five years ago but I don't talk to them in the interim – in the two years

between visits. Whereas other people I very much keep in touch with and they know what is going on in my life and we continue to support each other in a variety of ways.... I think that they are definitely some of my most solid relationships and friendships and ones that I do expect will continue and hope will continue. These friendships are solid in my life and not only have they helped shape who I am, but I hope will continue to shape my life. And I think a lot of that is because we lived together. We were able to go that deep. We were able to be that connected. As somebody who has a lot of brothers and sisters it is a different relationship than a brother-sister relationship to me but there are a lot of similarities. In some ways I am closer with the McMillan house group because we've talked about things and worked things and dreamed about things that haven't been really articulated with some of my siblings in those young adult, growing up years because that is when my own family kind of dispersed and these McMillan people were the people that I picked up with at that time.

As Bella mentions, "On a whole, roommates become family because you see them every day and they see you in your pajamas and other states of undress and disarray and every mood possible." Suzanne misses the "random encounters" that happen when you live with people and lead to intimate conversations and close relationships. These random encounters are, in part, what makes a community household like a family.

Claudia talks about some of her favorite memories at the McMillan House. She talks more about the comfort and safety she felt.

Claudia: I have some really good dancing memories. We had some really good house parties with dancing. It would just be super fun to be able to dance and thoroughly enjoy it and be so comfortable because it was my own home with all my good friends and yet it was still an adventure because you never knew who would come through door – everybody would bring other people so there was still that excitement of not knowing what was going to happen. It was my turf, it was my home so I felt I could really claim that. I also enjoyed a lot of the dressing up – dress-up picnic parties we would have or even just the day-to-day dolling up together – borrowing each other's clothes, that kind of thing. Especially once it was five girls living in the house – you could raid each other's wardrobes to a certain extent and it would probably just be okay.

D) The "big stuff"

Through these close relationships we found the safe space needed to wrestle through some of the issues that needed sorting through. The primary issues haunting many of us had to do with our sexual identities, our level of comfort with physical intimacy and the human body in general, and our ideas surrounding alcohol, drugs, and the very basic need to rebel. As many of us came from a Mennonite background where all of these issues were looked upon with animosity and fear, it was important that we had a place where it was safe to be open with our questions and need for experience.

a) Sexuality

Marie

Marie, like many of the McMillan House women, was exploring the possibility of dating women and what this would mean for her. She found the support and acceptance she needed at the McMillan House to do this without fear of judgment or dismissal.

Marie: Suzanne had purple hair and she was dating this girl and I was like: "Suzanne is so cool and I am just starting to date women." And I was totally into affirming my sexuality – being comfortable with the fact that I could date women at that point. So very much a huge part of McMillan for me was being proud and being out and being proud of who I was and just being okay with who I was no matter who I was with. And so meeting Suzanne and having Suzanne dating that girl and having Suzanne having purple hair was important.



Figure 4: A photo of Bella and Suzanne at the Gay Pride Parade in Winnipeg, ca. 2004. Photo by Claudia

Marie: With women it was so much more of a healing, nurturing relationship. It helped me to learn how to nurture myself and how to heal myself. It was almost like through relationships with women I learnt how to mother myself the way my

mother was unable to mother me. [Crying.] And I became whole again once. And then once I learnt how to mother myself and love myself and nurture, I learned how to become a complete woman. Then I was able to be with men again. And I was empowered to be with men. As soon as Claudia and I broke-up actually, for the first time, I asked a man that I knew – didn't know that well, I knew who he was and had connections with him through other people. Anyways, I actually asked him to sleep with me. It was such a empowering thing for me to be the one pursuing somebody and for an intimate relationship.

Claudia

When I moved into the McMillan House I remember being asked how comfortable I was with queer issues, for this subject was very important and prominent within the house. Claudia discussed how such a controversial subject was talked about and sorted through within the community. She talks about how it was especially important for the Mennonites in the community to come to terms with how queer sexuality played a role in their lives.

Claudia: At Bible School such things were either wrong or very acceptable and, in fact, something to be celebrated. There are theological arguments for each of those viewpoints and we came to understand, the more we lived together, that there were people among our housemates who were gay, who were queer, and it was important to us that whoever else we brought into the community was going to accept that. While we were not always able to have the conversations within our church community or within our school classes, and so we wanted our home

to be a safe space where we knew that everybody at least to some level was going to be able to be accepting and affirming of different sexual orientations and the different beliefs and attitudes that people had there. Queer sexuality and the whole vegetarian question – those affect day-to-day life. We wanted to surround ourselves with people who could also participate in that. Rather than move in and start telling us how everything we were doing was wrong.

Claudia goes on to talk about how the McMillan House evolved to be more open sexually.

Claudia: Well, it is really funny. I remember in the first year there was actually a spoken rule of: "No sex in the house. We don't want to hear it." And by the time I left, five years later, some of us had dated each other, some were sexually active with each other, some weren't. We would laugh about hearing other people in the morning over breakfast and the whole dynamic totally changed over the five years and I think that part of that is a growing-up, making choices and going from living according to a belief system or a moral system that one has been taught by one's church or one's family to exploring some and experimenting some and trying out different things and coming to one's own decisions. We also realized that there was a vast number of people throughout the house and that we wouldn't maintain that kind of a rule.

Bella

Bella expands upon this idea that at the McMillan House there was a growing spirit of inclusiveness that lent itself nicely to sexual discovery.

Bella: I think as we grew as people we figured out what we thought and what we believed. We transitioned together through that. I think we became more inclusive. Probably when I moved out it was probably quite obviously inclusive. People moved in who were gay and bisexual and experimenting and figuring out who they were and we wanted to make sure it was always a safe place for the people who were a part of our community. I think there was an evolution. There was a point where I was the straightest person in the house which was a good dynamic to experience.

Claudia

Claudia goes on to talk about how the question of sexuality mirrored some of the other big life questions we were asking as young adults.

Claudia: I think we were a lot more open and a lot more theoretical and rational, as well as emotional, than a lot of young adult social circles. We got to talk as well as to try things out and I think that that is a positive thing. Our gender and sexuality were in question. It also was a time when we were making choices about study or life or career and about how much to stay within a faith circle or to leave it. That was often one of those growing-up, coming-of-age decisions – how

much to believe, how much not to believe, how much to remain involved, how much to be passively on the fringe? The McMillan House was a safe place to rebel.

b) Physical touch and acceptance of the body

Moving beyond accepting one's sexual orientation was the need to accept one's own physical body. At the McMillan House a lot of us found the ability to do this through the love and affection that we showed each other.

Marie

Marie: Part of McMillan for me too was empowering myself and feeling comfortable in my body and in my skin. And being comfortable with dating women and not being ashamed by it and not being ashamed for who I was and what I was doing. Being comfortable with my body was huge. I remember going to visit Claudia in the morning and she would be in bed and her breast would be showing or something and I'd be like: "This is kind of interesting. That is kind of cool" And there would be times when I'd be cutting my hair in the bathroom and somebody would walk by and be like: "Hi!" I remember it being a really empowering and wonderful thing. I remember a lot of physical affection and not in a sexual way. We'd all watch a movie together and cuddle or every time they'd come home from work I would give them a hug. Or when somebody was doing

dishes we'd get back scratches and massages and it was so wonderful because I did not have that growing up at all.

Salvatorio

At a very basic level, being at the McMillan House helped Salvatorio to find the courage he needed to feel comfortable within his own skin. He says that since leaving the community he has lost much of the comfort he had gained with physical intimacy while living in the house. Perhaps without the love offered at the house Salvatorio has lost some of his ability to love himself.



Figure 5: A look of near terror on Salvatorio's face as Suzanne makes herself comfortable on his shoulder, ca. 2005. Photo by Claudia.

Salvatorio: For me, I have a huge personal space issue, I don't like touching people and at the McMillan House my issue became a lot smaller that it had been. Now it has gone back to how it had been. I don't openly give hugs or that kind of thing anymore, but for those years I was a lot more physically affectionate.

CF: How did that happen? Why was it easier at the house?

Salvatorio: The level of comfort I think. Everyone was so comfortable.

Claudia

The McMillan house was a very physically affectionate household. Claudia feels she may have been responsible for bringing this cuddly intention to the community. By having a safe place where we could all have physical touch without sexual expectations attached we were able to grow slowly and gracefully into our sexual relationships with others.

Claudia: I remember Salvatorio telling me that I personally was responsible for teaching him to relax around girls in particular, but human bodies in general. Because I refused not to hug him that he had to learn to relax and allow himself to be hugged. In later years he could come up to me and request a hug and it just charmed me to pieces. I remember when he first moved in he would jump if I came within about a foot and a half of him. He would twitch. He was just not comfortable around other people and he wasn't comfortable being physical and touching. Maybe that is something else I brought to the household to some degree. I came from a very huggy, touchy-feely, physical family. I couldn't leave the house without my mother telling me that she loved me – a daily ritual. So that sense of holding and touching and being just physically present in each other's lives and that sense that it could be non-sexual. I think it really shocked me when I left the house and moved to Montreal how much I just missed being touched and having hugs and being able to curl up on the couch with my housemates, with my friends and that I think a lot of turning to sexual relationships maybe more quickly

or more serious than somebody might even be comfortable with is actually the looking for that human touch. And I think we gave that to each other which, to some degree, extended our time – allowed us to mature – time to get to a place where we actually wanted the sexual relationships and could seek out the sexual touch but acknowledge it for what it was because we were already getting just the affection.

In our interview I followed this comment of Claudia's by talking about how much I personally loved the physical intimacy of the community.

CF: Oh, how I loved it. Curling up on that big couch with anybody – it didn't really matter who. [Laughter.] I fell asleep on that couch hugging and holding so many various housemates. And your bed Claudia! I loved curling up on your bed. And when Beth and I were on the top floor together – every morning for a while one of us woke the other up by crawling into bed with the other. It was the best. I was so mad when she started dating Sharon because our morning ritual ended.

c) The "cool" parties and how the McMillan House was a safe place for Mennonites to rebel

Bella

Bella tells some fond stories of the infamous McMillan house parties. These parties were infamous due to the fact that the police showed up on numerous occasions, that marijuana and alcohol were generally readily available, and that the McMillan House members had a reputation

for being very creative and wild at such events. For Bella, all of this equals “good memories” where community was built and fun was had.

Bella: Oh boy. [Chuckles.] Um, we had a lot of parties. Four times a year we’d throw a big party and very strange things happened at every one of them and they were fantastic. Salvatorio brought a different spice to the house. He was the one that made us able to turn into a party house because the year before that we didn’t have the reputation as partiers to enable that to happen – to draw people. Once we had a few parties they grew. We had parties with DJs and parties with bands. There was one where we had our trampoline in the living room and a lamp got broken and they duck taped Salvatorio to the lamp and put him on the trampoline. Salvatorio started smashing chairs at one party and we had to tell him the next day that that wasn’t appropriate because they weren’t his chairs. What else? An entire living room of dancing to Queen. Such good memories.... We painted the windows. We painted the walls. We really transformed our space into something that was homey and colourful and bright. We spent a lot of time on the porch that kept falling down.... Dance parties, canning, we had a toga party once, spin the bottle – a lot of strange things happened. We had a party once where everyone had name tags. We had Christmas cocktail parties. We put mistletoe up all around the house but the Mennonites were too afraid to kiss each other. Once we found a bottle of hair dye and we had a draw for hair dye and Mike won it but he didn’t want his hair dyed but he had no choice. Julia just marched him up to the bathroom and dyed his hair. Mike had reddish hair for a while after that.



Figure 6: An invitation for the last party at the McMillan House before Claudia and Bella moved away, 2005. At this party the police shut us down for being too loud and we ended up having to go to court for the offense.

Marie

Marie talks about how she found it hard to watch naive Mennonites, her housemates included, getting drunk irresponsibly at McMillan parties. Having grown up in a more mainstream environment, where such rebellious expression was usually done at an earlier age, Marie found it hard to watch when she had already moved past this stage in her life.

Marie: I guess people who had lived a very pure and straight life who all of a sudden, at 22 or 23, were sort of exploring alcohol or drugs or intimacy with people for the first time. And yet I was at the point where I was already kind of done with a lot of it. Where I had done that when I was younger and felt a little bit like I didn't want to be there so much anymore because I had done so much of it and experienced so much of it. So I think that was the only aspect that I struggled with a little bit. I enjoyed the parties that we had but sometimes I felt like it was a little much.

F) Food

One very tangible way to understand how the intimate and close relationships found in the McMillan House were formed and maintained is by looking at the role of food in the community. Food played many roles in the house. Food can “provide sustenance for our bodies and comfort for our aching hearts” (Jones quoting a participant in Jones 2007: 135). In the McMillan House food itself not only helped to comfort our aching hearts, but the processes around and through food helped us community members to care for each other’s hearts and souls, as well as, potentially, the hearts and souls of those out in the greater world.

Beth

Food was one of the primary mediums through which deep, personal conversations were able to transpire. By sharing food and having that common ground to start from, sharing our desires and secrets was a lot easier. Beth talks about this below.

Beth: I remember when you and Cory broke up. Shortly after that, I was cooking something and I remember trying to roll out some dough – making cookies maybe. This was just when we were starting to get to know one another too and you were telling me about how things were going and about how you were feeling. It was really nice to have the opportunity to have a pretty serious conversation and also have the tangible work that we were also doing at the same time. It gave a balance to it and made the space for silence okay. If I didn’t know what to say to make you feel better or if you were tired of talking – the combination of things made moments like that more possible. And there were a

lot of continued conversations too. Someone would be doing something and need something from a different part of the house – the conversation would pause – go get that thing and come back five minutes later and we'd keep the conversation going. Or you'd need to run off to work – the next day we'd continue the conversation. It was super nice to have that regularity of people around – didn't need to have super intense interactions all the time or set aside three hours of your time so you could have your friend time with this or that person. Food was a good social lubricant!

Not only did the love we had for each other help us deal with the difficulties of life, but the food itself was known to heal. Beth goes on to talk about Marie's "magic soup". This much-loved soup was known for its ability to heal any emotional or physical ailment one was suffering from.

Beth: I remember Marie and her magic soup. She would go and try to make some weird thing. It would be sketchy at the beginning – I was never sure how it'd turn out but it was always pretty great in the end. She'd cater to whoever was sick – the soup was always for some healing purpose. Whether it was emotional or physical, that was her thing. Food solved everything!

Marie

Below Marie talks more about her "magic soup". It came from her need and desire to love her housemates and create a more loving world.

Marie: And I remember making my magic soup. That very much was putting my essence into the food. It was just like – creativity! It was just like trusting your intuition and being creative in your cooking and putting little bits of whatever inspired you into it. And then the magic, in the magic cooking, was love. It was putting love into your food and making sure that you were in a good head space and that you were putting as much love into the food as you could.... This is something I got very much from working at the meditation course. It was putting love into everything that you did and, as you were cooking you, were thinking: I hope that this food helps to nourish the people who eat it and helps them find peace and helps them find happiness. It was about really having those intentions. I felt like I was offering something to McMillan and I felt like that was appreciated.

Claudia

Claudia talks about how decisions about food were made in the house and about how we shared food. Similar to the communion ritual we had all grown up with in our home churches, by breaking bread together we became a close and intimate community.

Claudia: Decisions about food were talked about a lot and that was a subject of much conversation between us. Most of the time the five of us made a point of taking one day a week to cook supper and that covered Monday through Friday and the weekends were kind of a free-for-all. In fact, we weren't often all there at once for dinner, but the fact that we all knew on any given week night there would be food at home and we had the responsibility on one of those nights to

make food for everybody else increased that sense of cooperation and helped us to be aware of other people's need. The act of breaking bread together, of fellowshiping over food, of laughing together, of talking, of joking and spending time together over food became another point at which we would bond or we would get to know each other more. We would share in each other's lives. As my friend Beatrice would say, "We would learn to know each other." I think a lot of the more spontaneous food stuff also added to that a lot. Whether it was baking cookies or baking bread or having Bob²² come over occasionally and bake for the day and make us all a feast that then we'd all share it together. That kind of thing added to the sense of us caring for each other's physical and emotional needs and enjoying each other's company and spending time together and looking after each other.



Figure 7: A photo of Bob making bread in the McMillan House kitchen, ca. 2004. Photo by Claudia

²² Bob was a McMillan House member. He did not wish to be interviewed for this thesis.

Salvatorio

We took care of each other in times of need, whether that was due to physical sickness or unemployment or emotional distress. For example, when Salvatorio moved out he would return to the McMillan House periodically for emotional support, a good meal, and even a place to sleep.

Salvatorio: We'd eat together basically every single night. You can't make that happen. It has to be natural. If you try to force that it isn't going to work. It was so awesome. I think often about that one summer when I came back and slept on the couch. I was unemployed and so having that meal and having community was so important.

Suzanne

It was not only about supporting each other through difficult times, but also about enjoying each other's company and having a good time. Food was the perfect way to create an event and support our growing community. Suzanne talks about how wonderful it was to eat with people and have her social circle grow and be nourished. By eating together community was formed.

Suzanne: We just enjoyed being together and wanted to make sure that we did it. I really liked how anybody could come for dinner and you would just be sort of a part of it. It was cool. So—and—so would just bring their friend and then we'd just sort of hang out. And we hung out for a long time after meals. We would sit there

and eat and then it would be like two hours had passed and you are just sitting at the table hanging out.

Julia

The thing Julia misses the most about living in community is the sharing of food and the fellowship and personal growth that ensues.

Julia: I also think being intentional around eating food is huge. You don't do that as much if you are alone. When I was to be cooking once a week for a bigger group of people that would be my whole day. I would go shopping and cook my food and then I would share it. There is something so intrinsically good about that. I miss it in my life right now. Even with my partner – it is nice to do it with your partner but – I don't know – I want to sit around a table with more people. There is something good about that. I think living with more people is more work maybe but it challenges you in ways that I think are really helpful. I think my life could be enriched by community. It is a lifestyle choice.

Beth

Food was a safe way to play with our traditions. We could eat traditional foods together and enjoy times of fellowship, while also rebelling against that which we no longer agreed with from our Mennonite heritage. This step away from our background was not necessarily a revolt, but a fun, light, and community-building rebellion.

Berk: Supper was always pretty fabulous. One of my favorite times was when Salvatore would make his *rollkuchen* feasts with vodka and watermelon. We'd have the housemates around as well as other friends or neighbors – whoever happened to be available. We'd sit on the porch and eat and eat and eat and drip watermelon juice all over the place. We'd have to explain what *rollkuchen* was to the new people who were not familiar with it.

Claudia

Claudia expands on this theme to talk about how the McMillan House would express its Mennonite identity by sharing cultural foods, while also expressing its rebellion by serving alcohol²³ along with such traditional fare. Such a juxtaposition mirrors what often went on within the community – tradition played right alongside rebellion. We took what we wanted from our tradition and we loved it, while we disposed of the rest. Once again Toelken's dynamic twin laws are clearly shown.

Claudia: And I mean there was also the stuff around food – the very specific Russian Mennonite cooking that many people had grown up with and had a nostalgic attachment to or that was a taste of home – it was comfort food for them and it was fun. It was the soul food of the house. Whether it was beet borsht or making *rollkuchen* and then having a party – we'd have three or four batches of deep-fired *rollkuchen* going on at the same time and watermelon filled with vodka and we'd have an afternoon summer picnic party out of it on the front

²³ Within the conservative Mennonite tradition alcohol is forbidden.

porch. There was this sense of cultural knowns – we were known through the cultural stuff, like having *rollknäcken*, but then there was a pushing of the boundaries, a growing up, a testing the limits through also drinking alcohol or having the watermelon vodka. And putting those two together made pushing the boundaries less intimidating, less scary, more safe. There was a sense that we were figuring out who were in the world, while also selecting some things from our background that we wanted to take with us into the future. We also found other things that weren't in our background and tried them out to see if we wanted them. There was real playfulness and a real respect for both tradition and innovation that I think wove through a lot of our daily lives – the way we celebrated, the way that we partied, the way that we rebelled. It was very much a time of exploring and figuring out. And the nice thing, I think, about that was that we could keep what was known and not feel that we were being children, or being sappy, or being losers, or being too naive, or too conservative, or too constrained by wanting to keep something of where we had come from in the fast-moving world. We'd been taught good things – there was a recognition that there were good things in the faith and cultural background from which many of us had come from but that there was also things we wanted to leave behind. We wanted to keep the cultural foods but including alcohol, keep a sense of community and look out for each other, but not say that nobody comes to God except through Jesus Christ and so therefore nobody can be in our community because we only accept people who believe in Jesus Christ. We wanted to keep a sense of walking lightly on the earth and living simply that had come from the Mennonite understanding but

incorporate into that a very contemporary understanding of environmental awareness.

Salvatorio

Salvatorio: The *rollkuchen* and potlucks are very important to me. Especially things like *rollkuchen* where you eat that with your family and there is a strong tradition. It is soul food for sure. That is something that is important. I really, really appreciated it.

Marie

On top of being a social lubricant and safe way for the McMillan House members to explore their growing awareness of the role of Mennonite tradition in their lives, food played the very tangible role of helping the community members actively express their beliefs in justice and environmental sustainability. By working towards food justice the McMillan House members found a way to love the world beyond their house's boundaries. Below Marie talks about the intention for food justice at the house and how for her this was a very personal issue.

Marie: I had worked in organic stores and had done a lot of organic farming and I was really big into healthy eating and healthy food. At the McMillan House we would split everything equally unless it was something like ice cream or something that clearly nobody else was going to eat. Those things would come out of your own money. But otherwise if you cared enough about the food then

you had to make the purchases and I think there were some people who didn't eat food that I would normally but yet they didn't do as much shopping because they didn't care as much about the food. I feel like the people who really cared about the food that they ate would do extra shopping and so people who didn't were just happy to have food in the fridge. And it meant that occasionally people would buy things that I wouldn't normally eat, and it was kind of a treat sometimes.

Suzanne

Suzanne talks about how food justice was expressed in the McMillan house, even it was done somewhat unconsciously. She talks about how the intentions behind food justice are not always pure.

Suzanne: You should be thinking about food justice! You can't just go through life acting like you have all the resources in the world and you can do what you want with them. To me food justice means that so much food is wasted in our society and this is just plain wrong because there are people who don't get enough food to eat. I suppose this is related to McMillan because since we shared food, and it was vegetarian, it was really cheap. I don't think I knew the term 'food justice' when I lived at McMillan. But I did read the Mennonite cookbook *More with Less* cover to cover and cooked from it many times. It is about using less of the world's resources with a redistribution philosophy. Also it is about being mindful of what we do have and being grateful for this. We shared meals and took turns cooking for the house at McMillan. This was one of the best parts of

living there. There were always good hanging-out times to be had over supper. Also there was always, or almost always, enough food and we could just invite other friends over randomly and they were welcome and it made for more fun times. Sometimes I think the main focus for Mennonites and food is thriftiness. Which is too bad because it may miss the main points of food justice.... Food justice is just an extension of environmentalism and that whole picture.

Claudia

A few of us at the McMillan House became expert dumpster divers²⁴. Whether this was done to save money, for environmental reasons, or just for the plain old fun of it, is not clear.

Claudia: There was also the whole dumpster diving thing. We were all students and we were all basically living off of student loans or part time work. Those were the years we were learning how to take care of ourselves, how to be adults, how to be independent. I think it was incredibly valuable that we had each other to take care of. The whole dumpster diving thing was a way of saving money and using food that would otherwise just end up in a landfill and spoil. It would often be a fun outing as well. [Laughter.] Oh, I loved the dumpster bread from the bakery!

²⁴ To dumpster dive is to intentionally look in dumpsters, back lanes, recycling bins, and the like, for food and/or items that have been thrown out, but that can be salvaged and used again.

Suzanne

Many of the McMillan House members worked, at one time or another, at 'Organza', the organic grocery store that was just a few blocks away from the house. A lot of food eaten by the McMillan House member was food that would have been thrown away at 'Organza' had it not been rescued by the ever-thrifty and food-justice-thinking community members.

Suzanne: I remember bringing home reject stuff from 'Organza'. That was like the best happy medium, right?! It was free and it was organic. Yeah, that was great. I would crisp all the lettuce at the store and then all these lettuce leaves would fall off the lettuce because I was handling it and so instead of throwing them out I would just keep them and bring them home in a bag – lettuce pieces. Or they would just be a little moldy spot on one side but you would just cut that piece off. Like artichokes. I remember bringing those home too.

Claudia

Claudia goes to talk about how a belief in food justice was expressed in the community. She saw food justice expressed primarily through the effort to eat only fair trade, local, and organic foods, for she saw this as a way to actively express her beliefs in justice and global equality.

Claudia: There were a number of vegetarians in the household at all points and times and there was a leaning towards wanting to have organic food and fair trade food and that had been expressed by me personally by starting a café while I was

going to CMU. For me that had really consciously been an act of being tired of going to protests and rallies and not seeing any day-to-day change because of my social justice, activist, looking out for the poor and the hungry in the world kind of beliefs and leanings. And so as a specific, conscious act of practical theology I, with several other students started up the Blaurock Café and we only carried fair trade, organic coffees and teas and local grown snacks from Tall Grass Prairie bakery and various other places – organic fruit and stuff. So during my years studying theology at CMU that had become very conscious for me that I wanted my belief to be lived out in the way that I lived on a day-to-day basis and one way to do that was to incorporate that into the food that I ate and I did that then by starting out the café. A lot of the people that lived in the house at one point or another volunteered at the café and it was also a bit of an art centre and so we'd have coffee houses and we would go there for social events and stuff as well. So that kind of carried over into the way that we lived at the house in that we wanted to have fair trade and organic and healthy eating. Some people took that to wanting to be vegetarian. Whether that was an expression of pacifist belief systems through the Anabaptist faith or more of an environmentalist leaning – treating the earth well because God created it and we are stewards of it and factory farming is really nasty and there is a lot of chemicals in the food – in the meat.

Beth

Since living at the McMillan house Beth has expanded the way in which she expresses her belief in food justice. Like Claudia, Beth maintains that it is very important to eat locally produced food as much as possible in the attempt to treat the earth and its inhabitants with respect.

Beth: In my life food generally comes from the front yard – a little garden – or it comes from the Landless Farmers, Clam and Leila – who I am living with now – both are involved there and they bring home lots of stuff. Otherwise we try to get most of the stuff from local farmers. We order directly from them rather than trying to go through a middle supplier. We just ordered a bunch of grain – oats and flour and spelt flakes and wheat berries – from a farmer in western Manitoba. I try to shop at the small independent grocery stores, some of which are worker co-ops. Food justice is related to an ethical working environment for people and trying to make sure that people who produce food are able to earn a living wage and support themselves doing so. Farmers are in pretty dire state. The small farmer anyway is not doing so well in Canada these days. In general it is about supporting the small farmer and not the large corporate farmer – being easier on the environment. Corporate farms tend to move towards genetically modified food – not growing heritage crops or crops that are native to this part of the world. Food justice is trying to support as much as possible the simplest, least complex system of being around food. We are trying to get into urban foraging as well – gathering extra fruit – apples or raspberries that people have on their lots but do not use. Also becoming more familiar with native plants of Manitoba. There is a

lot of stuff around that is edible that isn't generally considered food – the dandelion root cake I was telling you about. And also food justice is related to knowing where your food comes from and what is involved in producing it and being self-reliant and not needing to go to the big box store to get your Japanese carrot. Going with what is available – striving for simplicity rather than crazy diversity. It is about not exploiting the world – feeling like it is okay to take whatever you want from wherever in the world, no matter how it affects people over there. Learning to be responsible for your actions – it is a system of accountability.

E) Favorite memories

In this final section of the chapter I put forward some of the favorite memories of the McMillan House that the participants had, with no interpretation so that that reader might just enjoy a bit of free-flowing story-telling and, in the process, gain a clearer picture of the McMillan House and the loving relationships found within it. Most of these favorite memories revolve around play and joy that was shared in the community; a shared sense of belonging; art and creation; nurture and deep conversation; and, of course, food.

Julia: I think one of my favorite memories is sitting on the roof of the McMillan House, in the backyard. We didn't do it that much, but it was just really fun. Just sitting up there, hanging out, having a beer on the roof. It felt like a vibrant house – things were happening. And another favorite memory is sitting in the front

porch when it was absolutely raining – raining like crazy! I could sit on the beam, there was a wall of rain and people around with me.



Figure 8: A photo of Bella on the McMillan House roof top, ca. 2003. Photo by Claudia.

Salvatorio: The thing I miss most about McMillan was going to bed at night and feeling I was a part of something. That is a totally a hippie thing to say, right? You know, “I was a part of the Sixties, I was a part of a cause.” But that is really how it was. I would wake up with Bella jumping on me or Claudia jumping on me – Claudia and Bella jumping on me.

Salvatorio: Another non-specific favorite memory is just sitting on the couch – specifically with you. If I was stressed out or anything like that we could just sit on the couch. We didn’t have to talk about anything specific. It was just sort of an easy-going, fun venture that made it – not anything serious but substantial enough that I felt relaxed and fulfilled. True socialization – socializing where you feel

fulfilled. Sitting on porches on tree-lined streets – it was awesome. That porch had a heart to it, for sure.

Salvatorio: One of my favorite memories was when I was in bed and I think I had just woken up because Julia and Claudia were getting ready for work or school and Claudia had the same pajamas as me and Julia came downstairs and she was so groggy – I could hear them talking outside my room – and she was so confused as to why Claudia would be wearing my pajamas. She was like, “Did you eat Salvatorio? That is not allowed.” [laughing] It was early in the morning and I was laughing in bed – laughing very hard at what she had just said. That is one of my favorite memories.

Beth: The other thing I was thinking about was Marie and painting. I remember her room was one of the masterpieces in the house for a while – the upstairs, third floor. And also when she got into canvas painting more. When I moved in at any rate Marie and Claudia were often painting together in Claudia’s big room. It was a really cool space to be in. I would hang out and do something else and watch them paint.

Claudia: I remember that. You would curl up on the bed [B: Yep.] and Marie would be often sitting on the floor because your paintings were smaller and you'd be working right – sitting down and then I'd be working on the easel.

CF: I am thinking about curling up on your bed Marie and about you – you had all these essential oils lined up over the sink and you would – I don't know if this is one memory or if it happened a few times – I was upset or sad or sick – I don't know. I was unhappy for some reason and you were putting different essential oils on different parts of my body and we were both really quiet – really serene. I don't think we talked at all – you were just – you'd put it here and tell me to breath then you'd put in on my knee and tell me to breath. I remember just feeling so safe and so taken care of and yet I really had no idea what you were doing but I totally trusted you and it felt good. I don't think I knew you at all then. This was in the first few weeks I was there and you were totally taking care of me and it was fantastic.

Suzanne: This isn't really even a memory. I looked over at you Beth –before you had a curtain upstairs in the attic and I totally saw you naked. [Laughter.] And I remember thinking, "Should I tell her?" It is a fine memory!

Beth: Suzanne had a space heater upstairs because her room was also cold and then one day Suzanne went around knocking on everyone's doors saying, "Okay, beach party in my room." In half an hour we all went up and had fancy drinks and put on our bathing suits and sat around and talked. [Laughter.] It was January and it was minus forty out! Suzanne had cranked the heat. It was so hot in there. I was totally sweating. It was such a super good idea.

CF: I remember my very first night at McMillan House. I was in my room and I was feeling really lonely – really quiet and I didn't want to leave my room because I didn't know anybody yet and I remember Suzanne had said earlier in the day, "Come to my room. Any time." And I was sitting there thinking, "Should I go up there? I know she is up there." I tentatively knocked on her door and she was sitting in that window nook—thing in that room doing art or something and I sat on the floor and she just kept doing her art and we didn't really talk and I remember thinking, "Wow, this is really cool." And then she asked me if I wanted to go to Cousins. I had never been to Cousins before and so she said she must bring me there. She brought me to Cousins for the first time and then she bought me a veggie burger. And we both had veggie burgers. I remember Suzanne telling me her life history. I felt so thankful for her openness and kindness and – yeah. She totally made my first night at McMillan awesome.

CF: I would go out to the porch – the balcony – and I would lay there and watch all the birds and just feel so happy. I loved it so much. I got so sad when it started dropping. Beth said to me one day, “You know, you probably shouldn’t go out there anymore.” And I was like, “No!” And I even slept out there a few times. And also climbing out on to the roof. I loved doing that. That is where me and Marie would meditate. We would meditate on the roof.

Marie: I remember Claudia’s bed being a work of art. She had all these random comforters and blankets and ever since then I don’t want a fancy duvet or matching sheet set like I grew up with. [Laughter.] I’m all for the random – I want a whole bunch of blankets all on one bed.

Claudia: I just have lots and lots of memories of sitting on the porch and sitting on the roof with Beth. I remember one time in particular because I have photos of it – Marie and you were painting and we were all helping you paint and then we all crawled out onto the roof in the back just because the fumes were getting to us – we sat out there and had wine on the roof top in the summer sun. And Caroline was over. I have other memories of just nice chats on the couch on the front porch – often smoking cigarettes and sitting there and having little catch-ups. Either on the way in or on the way out often – as one of us was coming or going. Little catch-up moments.

Suzanne: Marie always had crazy hair. I have one funny picture of Marie with really funny bed-head. [Laughter.] That isn't really a good memory. I also remember when we were both upstairs in the attic – we would both help each other clean – clean each other's rooms. I remember that – sitting there, Marie was always rearranging her furniture – sorting through all her stuff and making it a different place than it was. It is a good memory.

Claudia: I remember Marie and food. Oh my goodness! The fabulous foodie Marie. The layers of fruit and granola and drizzled syrup and incredible things on top. And I also remember soup that had an incredible – almost chewable amount of cinnamon and nutmeg and I think maybe allspice and cloves in them – mostly cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. I think I had a little bit of an overdose of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves in soup after that first year that Marie moved in because she would make some really intensely spiced soup.

CF: I remember waking up in the morning and Marie's smoothies would be sitting on the stairs. She would have made them and then just sat them there for you for when you woke up.

To end this chapter on the McMillan House I wish to use Salvatorio's quote to sum it all up.

Salvatorio: Obviously there were bad times, but most nights I felt like I was a part of something. I felt like I was accepted and had worth and I was a part of a community – being excited to get up the next day in order to spend it with people. That was very nice.

It was very nice to be a member of the McMillan House and I sincerely hope that this chapter on the community has painted a fair picture that portrays the love that was present.

In the next section I dive further into the topic of intentional community by examining intentional communities in the larger world and by looking at how this topic has made its way into folklore research. I will also look more specifically at how the participants beyond the McMillan House members understood this term and how this understanding affected their day-to-day lives in their individual communities.

Chapter Three: Mennonites, Intentional Communities, and The Intentions of Mennonites

Am I a Mennonite? My Grandmother's parents on my father's side were persecuted in Russia in the early 1900s because of their Mennonite faith and lifestyle. They immigrated to Canada because of this. My father went, till the age of seven or eight, to a Mennonite church and, even after his parents started attending the United Church, his Mother continued to feed him Mennonite food and ideas of simplicity. Am I a Mennonite? I grew up in Steinbach, a small town in south-eastern Manitoba where the majority of its inhabitants come from a Mennonite background. I attended Mennonite youth groups as a teenager and talked about the question of Mennonite identity during sleepovers with my girlfriends. Am I a Mennonite? I eat farmer sausage and *rolikuchen* frequently, *plants* whenever I have the chance, and delight in Sunday afternoon *fauspa* followed by a *metaslope*.²³ I attend as many potlucks a year as possible. Am I Mennonite? I am a pacifist. I feel strongly connected to the land and believe we need to be stewards of our earth. Am I am Mennonite? I walk and use my bicycle as often as possible. I believe in God. Am I a Mennonite? I lived in an intentional community for five years – this must surely make me a Mennonite.

As Leonard Primiano points out, as individuals "encounter, understand, interpret, and practice" a religion, it is "impossible" for that religion not to become a personal, vernacular religion (1995: 44). He goes on to say that:

²³ *Fauspa* is a light, cold meal eaten after church. It is usually prepared the day beforehand so that no work needs to be done on Sunday, the day of rest. A *metaslope* is the nap that usually follows a meal. These are both Low-German terms common in Mennonite social circles.

No one... neither the Pope in Rome nor the Dalai Lama of Tibet... lives an "officially" religious life in a pure and unadulterated form. The members of such a hierarchy themselves are believing and practicing vernacularly, even while representing the most institutionally normative aspects of their religious tradition. (Primiano 1995: 46)

I, along with the nineteen participants in this thesis whom claimed to be Mennonite, have found personal and distinctive ways to express our Mennonite identity. Whether or not the institutionalized Mennonite Church agrees with our expressions is not relevant. For, those within such an institutionalized body have, necessarily, found ways to express their Mennonite identity vernacularly and thus their expression, no matter how "official", is unique to them alone. It is not up to me, or any other, to decide if another is, in fact, Mennonite. In this thesis I attempt only to examine why so many of those who take on a Mennonite identity also chose to live in intentional community. How are these two things connected and why?

In this chapter I will set my own identity aside as I try to answer the questions: 1) "What exactly is an intentional community?" and 2) "Why is there such a strong correlation between those, like me, who are trying to figure out their Mennonite identity and those who choose to live in intentional communities?" I answer these questions by first looking at the big picture, as presented in academic and mainstream literature, and then by working my way down to the smaller picture, as presented by the participants.

The intentional communities looked at in this thesis have two major root systems. The first is the communes and communities found across North America in the late 1800s and then, again, in the 1960s and 1970s. In this chapter I look at one community from each of these

important eras in order to paint a picture of what these intentional communities looked like and how they relate in their philosophies and intentions to the modern communities lived in by the participants. The second root system is the Anabaptist communities found across Europe and North America since the time of the Reformation. I will look briefly at two Anabaptist groups that strongly promote intentional community as a way of life to, once again, show where the communities featured at in this thesis come from. I will then look further up the tree at the two intentional communities that some of the participants have directly modeled their communities on. I will end this chapter by examining how the participants understand their Mennonite identity and, finally, how they themselves define the term "intentional community." As I work my way through this family tree, if you will, of intentional communities I will put forward a comprehensive definition of the term "intentional community" for the reader.

A) The mainstream roots of intentional community

According to the Fellowship for Intentional Communities, a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting intentional community worldwide, the term "intentional community" is "an inclusive term for ecovillages, cohousing communities, residential land trusts, communes, student co-ops, urban housing cooperatives, intentional living, alternative communities, cooperative living, and other projects where people strive together with a common vision" (Fellowship of Intentional Community). In 1974, The Canadian Council on Social Development simply defined such communities as any group of people who have an "intentionally chosen lifestyle characterized by sharing and working toward a common good" (Carter 1974: 1). What this common vision, or common good, is varies depending on the

community in question. In an ecovillage, ecological sustainability is generally the most commonly shared goal. In an elder housing co-op, or student housing co-op, the common intention is usually to create a situation where individuals with limited funds can share resources and enjoy a closer connection with their neighbors and/or housemates. In religious communities, such as a yoga ashram or Christian community, sharing spiritual practices and working together as a community to create a more just and loving world, are often the main two intentions (Christiam 2007: xviii-xix). What all these different and diverse communities have in common is that they have a shared intention and, thus, are intentional communities.

Although it would be a fun and illuminating project, it would be unrealistic for me to give a review of all the intentional communities known in North America in this thesis. In Manitoba alone, there are ten intentional communities listed with the Fellowship for Intentional Communities and none of these ten are the ones discussed by the participants in this thesis. This being said, it is clear that there are many intentional communities out there, both known and unknown. In order to get a better grasp of the very broad and inclusive definition of intentional communities I will, instead of trying to give a comprehensive list, briefly illustrate two communities that stand to represent the two very important stages in the history of intentional communities in North America. The first, Brook Farm, existed in the late 1800s and embodies the communal and natural living movement that became popular in the 1800s through Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The second community I will look at, Montague Farm, was one of many "back-to-the-land" communes that grew out of the New Age movement of 1960s and 1970s.

Brook Farm

Brook Farm began in 1841 in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, started by George Ripley, Sophia Ripley, and about fifteen others. The primary intention of this community was to live out the transcendentalist ideals taught by Ralph Waldo Emerson, mainly "the merging of values, ideas, and spiritual matters with physical events, and the union of mind and body, spirit and flesh" (Freibert 1993: 75). This intention was practiced by the community members through physical labor that was thought to be the condition for one's overall well-being. And so, although many of the members were artists and poets, they all spent at least eight hours a day doing physical labor. Brook Farm was a utopian society that based itself upon the ideas of Charles Fourier and upon Christian ideals (Gordon). This community is famous for having people like Abby Morton Diaz, an activist and children's novelist, amongst its members. It is also the first intentional community in North America to be known beyond its own boundaries, for it influenced society with its revolutionary ideas, such as having women work alongside men, having women educated alongside men, treating children as equals who deserve respect, and encouraging the anti-slavery movement (Freibert 1993:74-84; Gordon).

Montague Farm

Montague Farm of western Massachusetts was one of four communal farms known as The Farm Group that, in the 1960s and 1970s, formed in order to try and establish a way of life that did not judge an individual on his or her race or gender, was peaceful, was open to new and alternative ways of viewing and experiencing spirituality, and that respected and honored nature. The Farm Group was started by the members of the Liberation News Service, a radical news

service that "covered marches, riots and social movements, and reported on public figures and peaceworkers in a manner unavailable in the mainstream press" (Famous Long Ago). Above and beyond its radical fight for a more just world, the Montague Farm was a place where people came together to create, to love, and to find a home. The excerpt below by Tom Fels, in his book about his experiences at Montague Farm, nicely paints a picture of what life in this community was like:

We grew our own vegetables, raised our own meat, and kept cows and chickens. We heated with wood and fixed our own cars; we were largely, though not completely, self-sufficient. The farm embodied the ethos of the time, that unique wedding of dissatisfaction and ingenuity that we called the New Age.... There was a sense of purpose. The farm was a locus, a social node through which a great number of people passed. One would teach us the simple art of making a salad by pressing salted lettuce with a rock, while another would bring tales of the declining cities, plastic and degenerate.... Everyone, it seemed, was an aspiring painter, potter, or weaver. We had the freedom to create our own lives and to make a world that worked. (Fels 2008: 11)

As one can see, as with the McMillan House, food, simplicity, and self-sufficiency were key factors in this intentional community. Fels goes on to talk about how "life at the farm was very much an extension of adolescence" and how the members knew that a "coming of age was necessary." They were there not only to help the world become a better place, but to help themselves grow into better people who, once they were ready, could move out into the world and work to change it (Fels 2008: 29 & 56). Again, we have seen this factor of maturation to be important in the McMillan House also.

Montague Farm, like Brook Farm, represents a very specific time in North American history. Time, however, has not seemed to change the spirit, or character, of what makes a community intentional. Both Montague Farm and Brook Farm mirror the modern intentional communities discussed by the participants in this thesis, for all the communities in question are committed to living in a communal fashion and are actively living out specific ideals that encourage justice and love towards all people and for the natural world. All the communities discussed in this thesis are, through the intention of love, trying to make the world a little bit more peaceful, a little bit more beautiful, and a little bit more gracious.²⁶

B) The religious roots of intentional community

Beginning in about 1870 Mennonites, Hutterites, and other pacifist Anabaptist groups began to emigrate from European nations to North America due to the religious persecution they were facing in their home countries (Graber 2005: 71). Their “world was not defined by comfort and education” as often it is today, but by “terror and violence” (Dueck 2008). Throughout this upheaval the Mennonites held on to familiar elements such as religious traditions, common food preparation, farming, and singing. These traditions formed a “sacred canopy” (Driedger 2000: 71) that protected them and kept them united as a community as they fled from Europe and attempted to re-create their communities in North America. However, unlike the Hutterites for example, the Mennonites choose not to live in intentional communities where all their

²⁶ The reader should be aware that not all communities that call themselves intentional communities are committed to these ideals of justice and the like. Some, in fact, have sinister intentions that have harmed those involved. While I do not wish to ignore the fact that such ill-intentioned intentional communities exist, I, like the Fellowship of Intentional Communities, do not consider any group that “advocates violent practices or... interferes with members’ freedom” (2010: 2) to be relevant in the discussion of intentional communities which are defined by “idealism” and a vision of “living in a better way.” (Kozney 2010: 14)

possessions and day-to-day activities were shared. Rather, they kept their personal and family possessions and maintained their own individuality within their personal homes. Their community identity was expressed through their participation in the Mennonite Church and by choosing to live in small, rural towns where most of their neighbors were also Mennonite. They felt safe under their "sacred canopy" because those that they lived with and beside had the same intentions, stemming from the same religious doctrine. Historically Mennonites have not lived in intentional communities in the way other Anabaptist groups have, but yet a strong sense of community has always seemed to be present and shared, even when Mennonites have begun to move away from their small, rural communities into urban, multicultural centers (Kauffman 1991: 88).

Hutterite Communities

The roots of Anabaptism are long. In 1528 a group of about 200 Anabaptists in Moravia, Austria decided that in order to truly follow Jesus's commandment for peace they must refuse to pay any war taxes and that a "true theocratic Christian community was not possible under the existing political order" (Hofer 1998: 75-77). In a true theocratic society they felt "the community is looked upon as Mother, the caregiver. God, who ultimately has authority over the community, is looked upon as Father" (Hofer 1998: 17). They traveled to Austerlitz, for the lord of this land supported the Reformation and they believed he would give them a safe place to re-establish themselves. Along the way they decided to follow the example set by the apostolic community in Jerusalem. The legend told is that the leaders of the group placed a cloak on the ground and everyone laid his or her possessions on to the cloak and from that point on all

possessions were owned collectively by the group. This symbolic act unified the group who later became known as the Hutterites, after Jacob Hutter was elected as their first leader (Hofer 1993: 77).

In the late 1800s the Hutterites left Austria and moved to North America in an attempt to find religious freedom. Today Hutterite communities can be found all across North America (Hutterities.org). They still believe in pacifism, living in a community, sharing all of their possessions, and that their lives should be guided by what they believe to be the expectations of Jesus laid out in the Christian Bible. They maintain that it is important to live a simple life. This is reflected most obviously in their choice of clothes, which generally resembles those of their early ancestors (Peters 1965: 3). The Hutterites believe that in order for their hearts to be simple and loving as Jesus commanded them, their clothes must be simple and made with love, along with everything else in their communities.

Church Communities

The Church Communities, formally known as the Bruderhof Communities, began in the 1920s in Germany by Eberhard Arnold, who later was ordained by the Hutterian Church in the 1930s, and his wife Emmy. The Church Communities and the Hutterites have a lot in common and are still closely connected in both their beliefs and ways of expressing these beliefs (Eggers 1988: 7). The following quote comes from the Church Communities website:

Church Communities is an international communal movement of families and singles who seek to put into action Christ's command to love God and neighbor.

Like the first Christians described in Acts 2 and 4 [of the Bible], we have been called to a way of life in which all are of one heart and soul, no one possesses anything, and everything is shared in common. We also draw instruction and inspiration from the Reformation era Anabaptists who revived the early Christian example of discipleship in full community. (Church Communities)

When an individual joins the Church Communities and takes his or her baptismal vows he or she "signs over all he [or she] owns to the community forever" (Zablocki 1971: 114). Anyone is welcome to join one of the Church Communities that can be found worldwide if he or she is willing to work together with the community in whatever job is assigned to him or her, and is willing to eat together with the community, play together with the community, pray together with the community, and raise children together with the community (Church Communities). Along with signing over all of one's property to the Community when one joins, one is also expected to pledge that he or she will die for another community member if the need arises (Zablocki 1971: 115). The Church Community believes that one's old self must die in order to make room for a new self. They believe that this new self, by way of his or her community, will make the world a better place through love because they are intentionally living out what Jesus' commanded them to do (Zablocki 1971: 321). Zablocki testifies to this intention when he states, after visiting with the Church Communities, that he had never before "felt the presence of brotherly love so permeating a place that [he] felt [he] was breathing it" (Zablocki 1971: 17).

Hutterite communities and the Church Communities, although quite strict and conservatively religious compared to the intentional communities lived in by the thesis

participants, mirror the simplicity and communal love found in the intentional communities examined in this thesis. By presenting these two examples of large, well-known Anabaptist intentional communities I hope I have shown the reader the deep roots that help to hold up the communities of the participants and shape their individual identities. Choosing to live in an intentional community is, for the participants, a choice that is deeply rooted.

C) Some of the branches of intentional community

Jubilee Partners and the student housing at CMU are the main two intentional communities that the participants directly modeled their communities on. While both of these communities consider themselves to be Anabaptist communities, they are, like the participants, both much more liberal and open to change than the two groups discussed in the previous section.

Jubilee Partners

The Jubilee Partners community is located in Comer, Georgia and has about twenty-five members who have made it their permanent home. This community was started in 1979 by a group of individuals who had been living together in another intentional community called Koinonia Partners (Finklea 2007). Jubilee Partners welcomes volunteers who can live and work in the community for three months to a year. In addition, there are usually about twenty-five refugees from Sudan, Afghanistan, or other war-torn countries who live in the community.

Jubilee Partners "becomes a safe place for them where they can study English, get acquainted with their new country, rest, play, regain their health, and begin their new lives in an environment of love and support" (Jubilee Partners). In addition to their refuge program, Jubilee Partners works with Nicaraguans who are trying to help war victims and rebuild their country; welcomes church leaders from around the world who want to study English; works to abolish the death penalty; visits prisoners; organizes delegations in places of conflict; brings medicine to children who need it in war-torn countries; and, generally, promotes peace-making in all that it does. In all their efforts, its members are trying to be "active followers of Jesus in a world that badly needs the hope that he brought to us" (Jubilee Partners).

Student Housing at CMU

There are three large dorm-like residence buildings at the Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg and any student who chooses to live in one of these residences is expected to help "create a healthy Christian community" (Canadian Mennonite University: Residential Life). To get a better understanding of what this means exactly I have provided a quote from their website:

A primary expectation of all members of the CMU community is that we take seriously the interests and well-being of others. It is hoped that a Christian spirit of love, care and concern will permeate all of our interactions. We want to be supportive of each other, but also want to hold each other accountable for the choices we make.... Our approach to accountability and discipline at CMU is

based on Matthew 18:15-17, commonly known as "The Rule of Christ," which says: "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector" (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible). This passage outlines a healthy way of approaching confrontation and beginning dialogue on issues that affect the CMU community. It is this foundation that informs our Philosophy of Discipline and stands as an example of how to approach each other with an attitude of love and concern. (Canadian Mennonite University: Residential Life)

According to many of the participants who lived in the Student Housing at CMU, in holding each other accountable, eating every meal together, studying together, praying together, and learning what it means to be an adult away from one's childhood home, those who live in the intentional communities at CMU develop lasting and strong friendships. These friendships seem to be the primary ingredient in the creation of the intentional communities which often develop after the students have left CMU and moved out into the larger world.

D) Mennonite identity and intentional communities: The sap of the tree

As noted above, Mennonites have not generally lived in intentional communities to the same extent as those living in the Hutterite Communities or Church Communities. Mennonites have, however, always had a strong sense of community based on their religious faith and this shared ideology makes the idea of communal living easily palatable (Kauffman 1991: 88-89). Today young Mennonites live a world that is more spiritually diverse and open-minded than any period in that past. Today many young Mennonites are more educated and versed in ideas that come from beyond their Mennonite background and their forbears. I cannot help but wonder that in this time of philosophical and spiritual overload young Mennonites need to form communities together with those who come from a similar background (even if all parties involved no longer believe in the Christian faith of this background) in order to feel like they still have a "sacred canopy" to hide under, grow within, and emerge from when ready – I know I certainly did.

Below are the responses by some of the participants in my thesis to the question: "Are you Mennonite?" In presenting these participants' ideas about their Mennonite identities I hope to show that what matters most to these individuals are the ideals and intentions they have gleaned from their Mennonite background and, also, the sense of community they have found within Mennonite circles. In choosing to live in intentional communities that are mirrored after Mennonite ideology the participants have found a unique way of expressing their Mennonite identity in a vernacular way that sits outside of the traditional Mennonite faith communities.

It is also very interesting to note how hesitant some of the participants are to claim outright that they are, indeed, Mennonite. I am not going to attempt to understand or explain where this self-consciousness comes from, but I do want the reader to make note of it, for I think

it greatly influences the need young Mennonites have to be surrounded by other Mennonites and, thus, live in community. These individuals are wrestling with questions of their identity and they need each other to be supportive in this struggle.

The common themes, or motifs, that crop up in what the participants say regarding their Mennonite identity are: Mennonite as a cultural and social identity; Mennonite identity as tied to the Mennonite Church; an identity tied up with agriculture; a belief in pacifism and social justice; Mennonite food; ethnic versus religious Mennonite identity; communalism; and various expressions of the belief in simplicity.

Emma: I am a Mennonite. Yes, in all sorts of ways. I guess it is my primary identity. Both my parents come from a Mennonite background and there are fairly strong church connections on both sides. So for me being Mennonite is both cultural and spiritual. And social – a lot of my peer networks are associated with the Mennonite community. And so, yeah, I consider myself to be Mennonite.... I guess everything fits together. So being Mennonite affects everything and it makes it hard to explain.... It is really difficult I think to explain how your culture impacts you, whatever culture it is.

Jacob: That is a tough question. I am probably Mennonite because I go to the Mennonite Church.... I don't know how to answer that.

Val: Yeah, I definitely identify as Mennonite, both culturally, ethnically, and religiously.... I feel like for myself and in my family the values that I was brought

up with and that got lived really speak of being Mennonite. These are things like voluntary service and things like simplicity and the connection to the earth. I think of my parents and grandparents gardening and farming and canning and all sort of very land-based connections.

Jake: Simple living and being stewards of the earth – being close to and having grown up having a close connection to agricultural life. Peace and social justice have been important parts of my upbringing. And they continue to be what I am involved in. Yeah, I would definitely describe myself as a Mennonite in terms of all of that. And just being actively involved in the Mennonite church.

Julia: For me that means having grown up in a Mennonite church so my belief system has been built around values – philosophy of Mennonites. It also means food [chuckles] – certain kinds of food come to mind. And it means, to me also, being an outsider. People would ask me – “Is Mennonite something to eat?” People had no idea.

Anne: It is a bit of a tough question! I find that I am more ethnically Mennonite than I am religiously Mennonite. I mean I grew up Mennonite, my parents are very involved in the community, my sister is involved in the community, it was always a very big part of growing up. And so that of course is a part of how I grew up, so it is a part of me and it has influenced my decisions. Therefore I am a

Mennonite 'cause it is so ingrained in me, but I identify more with the elements of growing up as Mennonite versus not currently being Mennonite. Religiously I mean. I will always be ethnically Mennonite. And although I know that is not correct – I understand that Mennonite is not an ethnic group – I identify more with attitudes of Mennonite – the feel of the people.

Beth: The short answer would be yes. To me it means coming from Mennonite heritage. My parents and grandparents are Mennonites – on both sides. I don't know how far back that goes. I grew up in a Mennonite church, although I am currently am not actively attending a congregation in Winnipeg..... Another part of the Mennonite definition is the values that come along with it. The religious aspects – despite not being super religious now the values that come along with that – not all of them – are still a part of who I am. They reflect how I live my life and how I view the world..... There is the pacifism aspect – that manifests itself in different ways – gentle relations with other people or active war resisting. The whole community aspect too – trying to live cooperatively with people and share resources in order to all have a better life together.

Salvatorio: Yes and no. Yes, in that I really appreciate the cultural aspects and the community and some of the belief systems. No, in that I do not in any way consider myself to be a Christian.

Alice: Yes – sometimes I consider myself more culturally Mennonite than religiously. I have sometimes called myself Mennonite even when I am wary of Christianity and went through a period of believing that if I were not Mennonite I would not be Christian as my faith revolved more around ideas of community, peacemaking and simplicity than it does around salvation and redemption. Currently I do not attend a church. I believe in living my daily life consistent with my beliefs and ideals.

Many of the participants talk about how they are culturally Mennonite, but not necessarily religiously Mennonite. Below they talk about the ideals, such as simple living, which stem from the Mennonite faith and how they believe these ideals are important for them to cling to, whether or not they consider themselves to be Christians.

Beth: Simple living is something that is a part of the Mennonite values that I gleaned over the years too. It manifests itself differently for different people – different communities. Cycling and food justice are rooted in the philosophy of simplicity. And in terms of the larger world, whether it is the environment or humans on the other side of the globe or across the province – the choices we make every day affect people all over the place. Mennonites generally try to make the world better for different people and some of those ways are admirable and some of those ways are much less so – the whole missionary world or international development world – it gets very complicated very quickly.

Salvatorio: These are the thing I respect about the Mennonite tradition – trying to do the socially conscious thing with the right morals.

Joshua: I grew up in Steinbach where it is pretty Mennonite but I grew up in an evangelical church which wasn't very explicit about Mennonite values and what made a Mennonite Mennonite other than my last name and ancestry. So I think for a lot of my childhood I didn't really know what a Mennonite was but I knew I was one. When I went to Canadian Mennonite University I started to realize what the values of the Mennonite faith were and I started to really value those myself. I sort of grew up Mennonite but then sort of became a Mennonite later on.... I think the commitment to pacifism, to peace making, and the focus on community was pretty important. It is different than just everybody knowing everybody – everybody cares for each other. And the commitment to social justice – that was another significant part – that was something that was very new for me. That wasn't something I grew up with. It came as a shock at first because, coming from a very sheltered background, I didn't know what was all out in the world – all these people that were disenfranchised.

Jake: The Mennonite idea of living simply I think means not striving for excess or for luxury stuff. I think of all of us here – I think we would agree that living simply means trying to avoid consumption and purchasing unnecessary things. What is unnecessary, right? [laughs] We wouldn't all agree on what is necessity

and what is not, but I think we all strive to have a small footprint on the earth. I think living simply is probably connected to stewardship for the earth.... So living simply is also related to doing things like gardening, being supportive of community supported agriculture, composting – things like that.... We do have a car.

Jacob: I get clarity thinking about simple living when I think about how my life differs from how I imagine a main-stream Canadian might live their life.... For example, we do not have a car – we often choose to walk or to bike or to bus when going places. We don't have a TV. In fact we try not to go to the mall [chuckles] because we are just not supportive of that kind of culture. Those are some of the things that come to mind for me.

Fal: I was thinking a lot about how simple living is also about how we prioritize time. And so for me working a forty-hour work week is not a priority for me. I would rather work part-time and have time to do other things – gardening and preserving, cooking meals from scratch, spending time with friends, knitting – you know those kinds of things. They are just more meaningful to me.

Claudia: Keeping a sense of walking lightly on the earth by living simply has come from the Mennonite understanding but I am incorporating into that a very

contemporary understanding of environmental awareness and how the world as a whole is consuming so much and living so roughly on the earth. We may not be able to live on this earth for much longer unless we take care and are really conscious about our decisions. I am taking that heritage, even though it was faith-based, and realizing how applicable it is to our current environmental sentiments and problems today. And then saying there is something valuable that came out of this and yes, it is valuable from a faith perspective, but it is valuable from a global perspective right now because it is so pressing for survival. I am then applying that to my day-to-day choices around food or around waste or around spending money or resources.

Anne: What I find is really important to me – and something that has really been ingrained in me since childhood – is having certain loving attitudes towards other people. I think this is not necessarily intrinsically Mennonite, but is really something that is very core to a Mennonite system and a Mennonite community and Mennonite beliefs.

E) The new branches of intentional community

The emic term “intentional community” can be frequently heard on Winnipeg’s streets and in the broader world of those seeking to live a sustainable, simple life. However, despite its seemingly common usage, the term seems to have a very broad definition; a definition that is not always agreed upon. In the following section, using the words of the participants, I discuss this

term and, in doing so, flesh out the common motifs of loving relationships, the desire for a more just world, and the belief in simplicity, that seem to unite all the different communities looked at in this thesis, communities that may seem dissimilar at first glance. The loving relationships, desires for a more just world, and the belief in simplicity are expressed most commonly through: fellowship around food and play; sharing a common purpose or goals; emotional support; sharing possessions and/or time; love and intimacy; and simplicity.

Holly

For Holly an intentional community is anywhere people are working together, playing together, creating together, and eating together. An intentional community is formed whenever people come together regularly to have times of fellowship. This term, "fellowship", is the most commonly used term in Mennonite circles to describe the desire for loving relationships and time spent as a group nurturing these relationships.

Holly: It was a community because we tried to do things together and keep each other accountable. We ate together and we worshiped together and we worked together and we played together. And we talked about community a lot and what that means. That is why I would define it as a community.... I think if you create, eat and play together then you've got yourself an intentional community. Whether you know it or not!

Maya

Maya sees a large difference between the community at Jubilee Partners and her current household. The Jubilee community is quite large and members were united around a very specific purpose and committed to being together for the long term. Maya's current house is made up of three women who are living separate lives, each with separate goals and ambitions. However, Maya considered both communities to be intentional, for both desire close, loving relationships with the other community members and both believe that they can affect the larger outside world for the better – even if just a little bit.

Maya: We make an effort to have house suppers when we can, talk to each other about issues, and not just function around each other.... There is an intention, but we are all living our own life without the intention of staying together or making a long-term commitment. At Jubilee you were there for a purpose. You were there to live together in order to work together and this is different. We live in a big city and we are choosing to live in a house and have more community in it, as opposed to just living together.

Jerome and Jake (the Walnut Street house)

Neither Jerome nor Jake considered their household to be an intentional community when I first contacted them and asked them for an interview. However, over the course of our interview, they both came to the conclusion that their community was indeed intentional, in that they intentionally supported each other through life.

Jake: I guess at its most basic, intentional community is choosing to live with other people and share life with other people.

Jerome: When you first used the phrase "intentional community" I thought of these grandiose experiments where people share lots of things in common and do everything together – material possessions and that sort of thing. That is the first thought I have when I think of intentional community. But then when I've been thinking about the situation that we have here and that you said we qualify as an intentional community, then I was kind of like, "Yeah, this is an intentional community!" We are intentional about living together, even if our lives aren't integrated quite to the largest extent. We wanted to live with other people that we could share things with and have a relationship with. We want to support each other and that sort of thing. So in that way it is kind of redefining the term "intentional community" for me.

Jake: I lived in an intentional community which was maybe a little more radical than this a number of years ago. A little more ambitious – perhaps too ambitious. [Laughs.] And so I didn't really view this as that, but I think it is. It is certainly in the sense that we do support each other and spend time together.

Val (the Walnut Street house)

Val's definition of intentional community is very broad. Like Holly, for her an intentional community takes place whenever people come together with the intention of creating solid,

lasting relationships. Unlike Holly, however, Val believes the decision to form these relationships must be a conscious choice that cannot happen randomly.

Val: I guess it is important that it is an intentional decision. It is not just a matter of being thrown together with random roommates, but it is a decision to share life together – whether that is sharing possessions or just sharing time together.

CF: Does it mean necessarily living with those people or can it go beyond living with people?

Val: I think it can happen living with or not living with – both. I think of our church community, for example. It has been a strong community in my life. I don't live with those people but it is definitely a strong network of emotional support and nurture and social interaction and that kind of thing.

Jan

Jan believes that the whole world can, and should, be an intentional community, for we should have loving relationships with all we come into contact with and we should always lovingly consider how our every action affects people everywhere. There are different levels of intimacy of course in different relationships, but all relationships should be thought of as intentionally nourishing a loving global community.

Jan: I think certainly that intentional community is about recognizing the relationships that exist between all people that you come in contact with in a

direct way – the people that you live with and the people you see on the street –
but also the broader global community.

Lucy

Lucy's definition is simple and seemingly straightforward.

Lucy: It is just groups of people that support each other in different areas and intentionally work together for the good of everyone in the group.

Having lived in an intentional community, however, I know that accomplishing such a loving way of being this is not quite as easy as it sounds.

Matthew

Like Lucy, Matthew's definition of intentional community is simple: it is wherever people come together and take care of each other. Matthew looks briefly at how difficult this can be, for as human beings we tend to focus on our own needs and hurts, rather than the needs and hurts of other.

Matthew: For me the Student Christian Movement was an intentional community because we supported each other and looked after each other. You have to be prepared to struggle a bit with your intentional community – hash out your problems until you fix them. And you need to understand that your problems are your own and that you can't blame other people. You need to forgive them for

their shortcomings. John Vanier said that community is fifty percent forgiveness and fifty percent celebration. You spend some time feeling sorry for yourself and then you forgive the people who have slighted you and then you have a good time! Because if you are spending all your time in misery you are going to want to get the heck out of there. So deal with the problem and then turn to gratitude and remember why you are there, because intentional community is awesome! It feels great when it works so get yourself back to that point and get back to celebrating!

Alice

Alice points out that although the best intentional communities tend to be those that are unified around a common goal, if a community becomes too rigid in its expectations it loses its ability to be nurturing and life-giving.

Alice: I love community. To me, it's really just about a group of people that support each other and it can take on many forms. The most meaningful communities are those that are really intentional – those that live and work together and that share some common beliefs and values while also being open to individual opinions and differences. A community that forces one belief system on everyone or that believes there is only one right way to do things is not healthy.

Carl

Carl sums it up nicely by saying that an intentional community is anywhere where one finds "a community of love". For him, and many of the other participants, this love extends out into the world and is often expressed through simple living that does not demand more from the earth's resources than is necessary.

Carl: My definition of intentional community would be to be a community of love. It is about learning how to work with anybody. It is basically where you are intending to be together in one way and live a simple life. I guess another aspect of it too is being accepting of everyone and where they are at and who they are – that would definitely have to be a part of my definition.

As Jan said, it seems "there can be all kinds of levels of intentional community." This can be seen clearly in the first part of this chapter where different communal situations are described. For Jan, as long as the people involved "decide to live together in an intentional way and share certain aspects of their life" it is an intentional community. This idea differs from Emma, whose community grew out of the already established church community and is grounded in a set ideology that holds the community together for the long term. This difference in definition is what, I believe, makes this subject interesting. In this chapter, by noting the historical and social roots of intentional community and by looking at the religious and cultural philosophies that give life to these communities, I have presented a basic overview of intentional community as understood by the participants.

The theme of choosing to share your life with the others in community and support the others in your community seems to be strongly voiced by the participants. This theme of loving and intimate relationships seems to be one of the basic ways in which intentional community can be defined. In the following chapter I will explore this theme further as I look at how the participants often thought of their fellow community members as a kind of extended family. The deep and personal relationships found within the different communities are based on love and this love is what the purpose of intentional community seems to be. By exploring the common themes brought forward by the participants in our interviews a clearer understanding of what exactly an intentional community is, and isn't, will emerge.

Chapter Four: "Love, Love, Love; All You Need is Love"

A few days before I wrote these pages, I had dinner with my partner's family and they, once again, asked me to tell them about my thesis. After I had talked for a while about what an intentional community is, my soon-to-be-brother-in-law said, "So it is kind of like on-purpose living." On-purpose living – this awkward and charming phrase got me thinking about what exactly we were doing on purpose in the McMillan House and how living in community, in a general sense, seems to encourage a way of life that is based on love – on purpose. In this thesis I tell the stories of twenty-two participants, eight having been members of the McMillan House, and their experiences living in intentional community. Love as an intention comes up again and again in these stories and thus I think it is of high importance that I flesh out what I, and the many participants I interviewed, mean by love. The motifs looked at specifically in this chapter about love are: how living in community is like being in a family, the desire to overcome social alienation, and the desire to live a simple, sustainable life. In the following pages I deal with each topic in turn. This concept of love is for me, and I think most of the participants I worked with, to be the primary intention of intentional communities.

This chapter on love and the different ways it is expressed within intentional communities can be summed up by the comments made by Joshua and Holly about accountability and right relationships. For the participants in this thesis, when one lives in community one is expected not only to respect one's fellow community members, but to learn how to be open enough to love them and help them become more loving themselves. For most of us, this is very difficult, as Holly notes below.

Joshua: I came to realize my effect on other people. If I lived by myself I could have everything I want, but instead I choose that flexibility that I would only learn in community. I came to learn that not everybody does things the way I do. Living in community can help you to be more open and more willing to give a little to others. It helps you to step back and reflect on – “What am I doing? Who am I?” I realized that I was not just doing this for myself. I am affecting this person and this person and this person. If I yelled at my roommate it might help me to feel better but it will have an effect on their life. Living in community helps us to continually reevaluate. It keeps us conscious of others.

Holly: We need people in our lives to keep us accountable and to keep us healthy. I’ve realized that accountability is really important and I think that is what is really valuable about community. We can keep each other accountable for how we are living and the direction that our lives are going. Community is really hard.

Living in community is hard. Living in a community that expects you to love your community members as if they were family, work to overcome social alienation, and live a simple, just life, is even harder. As Dave Bookless states it is, in fact, a “discipline.”

It is a discipline because our culture keeps pulling us back into resource-intensive, consumer-driven, greedy lifestyles, but it is also about becoming more carefree: free of the care and stress of competitive culture, and increasingly conscious of our dependence on others, on creation, and on God. (Bookless 2008: 132)

By living in communities that are intentional about loving the world one can learn how to both trust love and be loved, for, despite what mainstream culture tries to tell us, we are not isolated entities – we need each other to love, and to be loved.

A) Community as Family

For some of the participants, intentional community is a way of life. For most, however, it seems to be a stopover one takes in one's early twenties when trying to understand and decide what one wants and needs to do with one's life. As Lucy put it, her community became like a second family as she transitioned from her childhood home to her adult home with her new husband. In earlier generations there was not time for such transition and reflection, as young people entered marriage, usually with someone sharing the same faith and cultural background as them, soon after puberty. Today's world, however, is not so cut and dry (Kauffman 1991: 106–124). Today most young people have more questions and more decisions to make and, thus, a self-made family of like-minded friends is often necessary while one sorts one's way through limbo. This is exemplified well by Rachel who grew up in a very conservative community where young women more often than not got married right after finishing high school or university and started a family of their own. Rachel chose not to follow this path and, for her, her community became her family instead. Her community filled the space that a husband and children traditionally filled for a young woman.

Rachel: My high school friends would have gone to university to be a teacher and then moved back to their community and gotten married. So it is like they move

directly from their parents to their husband. I didn't do that and so then my house became my family instead.

It is important that love is a primary ingredient in these transient communities, as the members are often vulnerable as they leave their childhood behind them and enter the big, wide world.

In both Emma's community and the Walnut Street house the community members planned on raising their children together as they grew in community. Although for most of the participants there was not this kind of long-term commitment made within their intentional communities, the feeling that they were, in their own way, creating a family was often present. Below a few of the participants comment on how their intentional community became like a loving family to them and how important having such a self-made family was as they transitioned into adulthood. The emic sub-motifs examined under this larger motif of love and self-made families are: emotional support and physical intimacy, the desire to carry over the love from one's biological family into one's self-made family, and health and well-being.

Emotional support and physical intimacy

Matthew did not find the support and love he yearned for in his biological family and this is one of the main reasons he sought out an intentional community. He believes that one's community can be the supportive, loving family one needs and that it is good that we have the wherewithal to create our own families when the ones we were born into do not provide us with what we need. One of the largest personal issues Matthew was able to work through with the help of his intentional community was his discomfort with physical intimacy.

Matthew: I'm not really close to my family. They don't really support me and I don't know that I want to spend a lot of time with them. So I am creating my own family.... I guess I've had problems with intimacy, which stems from my childhood. I had parents who were kind of distant and so having the opportunity to be around people and be close to them and have them accept me and just support me was important. In the Student Christian Movement community we are kind of like hippies – some of them were open to cuddling and stuff like that and that helped me to get through some of my physical intimacy problem.

The reader may remember Salvatorio, a McMillan House member, who also commented that through the support he found in the McMillan House he was able to learn how to be physically close with others.

Desire to carryover the love from one's biological family into one's self-made family

Jan, unlike Matthew, came from a strong and loving family where she felt very loved and supported. When she moved away from her childhood home, Jan sought out community because she missed the support she had grown up with and she felt that living in an intentional community was another way of finding such love and support.

Jan: I grew up in a strong family. My family was a real unit. My family ran a business and so we were all really involved in that. Our life was seasonal because we ran a nursery during the summer and so we were massively busy at certain times of the year and we all lived through that together. And we always ate family meals together and we went on family vacations together –many, many family

vacations. And we went to church together. And we lived in a rural setting so in some ways we were isolated. We grew up in kind of a small town and we didn't fit in super well. Our politics and stuff were different from most of the people in our community. We grew our own food and did lots of work in our home and on our yard and the parties we would have and stuff were different – they were real communal efforts. My Mom would say she did all the work. [Chuckles.] We were just a real unit and so I was just really lonely when I moved out. When I lived in the first intentional community it was wonderful.... It just made sense for me that people should live together and share things and cook for each other and whatnot.

Health and well-being

Like many of the other participants, Alice believes that one's community members can become one's self-made family. These close relationships foster personal health and happiness and, Alice believes, it is because many people do not live in community that so many people are suffering from physical and mental health issues in our society today.

Alice: It's more about making more meaningful connections with other people. Making the commitment to share time with people rather than isolating ourselves which is what I see more and more in the world today. I think that it is our breakdown in community and support networks that lead to so many mental health and even physical health issues.

While intentional community can become one's family, it is also interesting to note how both Lucy and Jan saw the need to separate themselves a bit from their communities in order to strengthen their relationships with their new husbands. Lucy stated it well when she said that she felt that the larger intentional communities she was a part of in her early twenties supported her well as she formed her ideas about the world and what she wanted and needed to do within her life. Her community played the role often taken by family members in the support they showed her. She talks about her community members as if they were her "siblings" and how they are still all a family, but just as siblings must move apart, so did the community members – "It is just a natural course of the family." Now that Lucy has had that support and feels secure in her life decisions, she is ready to "grow up" and live alone with her soon-to-be-husband.

As seen in the interview, the self-made families found in intentional communities help the members to feel supported, cared for, and loved as they move from being young adults with many, many questions to being more mature, settled adults who are ready to make life-long decisions. These families often extend well beyond just the time of the community's existence into the ongoing life of the community members. This is quite clear amongst most of the members of the McMillan House who are still quite interwoven in each other's lives. Suzanne's little girl, for example, calls me Auntie and I do try my best to live up to this role. I will look more at these lasting relationships later in this thesis.

B) Overcoming Social Alienation

Through the love and family-like support found in intentional communities many of the participants point out that they found the encouragement and emotional foundation they need in

order to go out and make a meaningful difference in the world. This is shown clearly in Emma's community where the desire to be environmentally sustainable could not be achieved without everyone in the community contributing in some way.

Emma: It is like a counter-cultural kind of movement. Mainstream culture believes that bigger is better and we are working towards a farm without fossil fuels at all. We want to go back to horses and things. We want to be on a smaller scale, rather than a larger scale.... It is important to have community support otherwise I do not know that I'd have the inner strength to go against the grain of society on my own.

Emma goes on to talk about how the knowledge needed to live off of the land in a self-sufficient and ecologically balanced manner has "skipped a generation" and that she and her community need to learn how to live as their ancestors once did.

Emma: One of the reasons we are doing this as a group is because none of us really knows how [to live off the land] any more. We need to learn from each other because we've lost some of that knowledge. And so as a group everyone brings their different skills and experiences so that together we can do this. I mean, as an individual it would be way too overwhelming to even start.

Below are Jan's three stories of how, by thinking about her entire neighborhood as a community and intentionally treating everyone she meets as community members, she is actively working to overcome social alienation and break down class boundaries. I hope to give, by presenting these three stories, a clearer understanding of how by loving all those in her

neighborhood as intentional community members, Jan feels she is creating a more just and beautiful world. Jan feels that the love of intentional community can, and should, extend beyond the walls of any given house or cooperative building.

The story of Pete and how by just allowing someone into one's life community is fostered

Jan: There is this guy – I don't know, apparently he has lived in this community for 36 years. I don't really believe everything he says, but he is this old fellow. I think he might be a recovering alcoholic or has some other issues – I don't know what they all are. He is just a poor old man that lives in the neighborhood. So we take our son Zachery for a walk every night and so Pete, who doesn't walk super fast, decides he wants to come along for a walk with us and that is how I see our neighborhood.... Our walks are a time when my partner and I can actually talk in the day and then there is Pete wanting to come along and tell us about himself. And yesterday I just thought in the beginning – oh, I am not mad about this – this is just Pete and I am glad we are giving him something to be happy about for today. And he is an entertaining guy. We know a lot of people that way in this neighborhood. It is about talking to people – talking to people on the street.

The story of the stroller and being open to what, and who, comes your way

Jan: Last week someone stole our stroller. We left it at the bottom of the stairs. Wayne forgot about it because he was picking Zachery up to put him to bed and

then forgot to go down. So I am like, oh I hate to be so attached to my stuff and I got it at the thrift store anyways and we had another stroller, it is just not as good.... So the next day we are driving – which we rarely do, but my parents were visiting – and we see this gal pushing our stroller. She was dumpster diving. And so I jumped out and then – anyway, we got our stroller back. We paid her some money. She is a nice old woman and I think she has a baby obsession. She walks around with a teddy bear in a sling and stuff like that. Anyway, my parents were kind of amused. They [don't] know this neighborhood and they are just kind of amused by the whole thing. But they are from a super wealthy town. They were just interested in how I interacted with her – did I ask her if she stole it, did I accuse her? So we have this big conversation and then in church on Sunday – there she is! And now I know her name and I am like, "Hey Judy, how is it going?" So that is a good example of how we interact in the neighborhood. I think it is just about being present to what surrounds you and not living in your isolated little tower.

The story of the gang and making something bad into something good

Jan: There was a gang – I am sure they were a gang – sitting on our steps once and I was kind of annoyed. They were taking up the space and I was coming in with the baby and stuff. They were taking up the whole steps and were not going to move over. I just said to one of them, "Can you give me a hand with my

stroller?" I just thought there is a way the guy can do something useful and I can get him out of the way and he can be like, "Hey, I am helping this person out."

Overcoming social alienation is not just about connecting with those on the outskirts. Living in intentional community can also be about one's personal development and growing ability to step out of one's shell. The close, loving relationships found in community foster an environment where such growth is possible. For Carl, living in a loving community helped him to find the courage he needed to stop isolating himself and be more open to relationship. Before living at the Madonna House he described himself as being quite shy, and even awkward with people. The day-to-day interactions at the Madonna House, along with the open and loving spirit of the place, helped Carl to find his own voice and his own way of comfortably relating to people. Intentional communities have the potential, and often the intent, of breaking down the barriers that create social alienation. This breaking down of barriers can happen both within the individuals in a community and within a larger social network.

Carl: That is one of the big things about being in community – being able to sit down and eat together and love each other and learn how to talk to each other too! I know I have learned a lot in how to communicate just by talking with people. I surprised myself when I left Madonna House. All of a sudden I was talking with all these people. [Laughs.] That was one area that I grew in.

Carl, along with many of the participants, uses the term "being in community". This term nicely summarizes what it means to live in, love in, and grow in an intentional community. To be in community is to know that you are taken care of, that you are responsible to take care of the

others within your community, and that you are accountable to yourself and the community for the way you act in the world. To be in community is, in itself, the very essence of overcoming social obstacles that prevent loving and meaningful relationships.

C) Simplicity

In the last chapter I briefly looked at the idea of simplicity and how this idea relates to intentional community and Mennonite beliefs. The idea of simplicity extends beyond the world of Mennonites into the larger world of those people who are trying to find ways of actively loving this world of ours. Below I flesh out the emic motifs expressed by some of the participants that stem from the larger motif of simplicity. By doing this I hope to show how some of the different day-to-day actions of the participants express a larger worldview.

Simplicity and social justice

The link between social justice and simple living is very closely connected. For most of the participants, a desire for social justice and a way of life that is simple are impossible to separate. Both desires stem from love – love of self, love of others, and love of the environment. The difficulty in separating these two themes is shown by Jan, for whom the two subjects are not separate, but one and the same.

Jan: I am very interested in food and clothing issues. We interact with food and clothing every day and we have no idea mostly where any of that comes from and so I'm very involved in an anti-sweatshop group and we actually got the

government in Manitoba to change the legislation and I was a part of the 100 Mile Diet group too. I have lived in this neighborhood for eleven years and we are very aware of the neighborhood that we live in. You cannot help but be affected by what you see around you. You can also put yourself in different positions. We are very aware of living in this neighborhood – choosing to live in this neighborhood and most of the people we live with – not everybody has a car, most people don't have TVs, we don't acquire much stuff for our kids at all.

Simplicity and stewardship²⁷ of the earth

There are many, many books in the market these days that are full of practical advice on how to live a more environmentally sustainable and simple life. The most famous of these books in Mennonite circles is *Living More with Less* by Doris Janzen Longacre. This book is dedicated to those who are on a "pilgrimage toward simple living" and who have "heard enough theory and want practical, concrete suggestions" (Longacre 1980: 6). These suggestions range from shopping at "mom and pop stores rather than large chain department stores" to making wedding rings from paperclips to having a picnic instead of going to a fancy restaurant to celebrate special occasions (Longacre 1980: 85, 192, 215). All the different suggestions for simplicity have in common the belief that one should always be mindful to never again make a decision without thinking of the environment or the poor in the world (Longacre 1980: 26). To do this people need community and the love and support found within community, for "if you head into unfamiliar woods, you had better find companions first!" (Longacre 1980: 55).

²⁷ "The word 'stewardship' is used with increasing frequency today to describe the care of the earth. It is a good word, and it describes a crucial human task." (Wilkinson and Wilkinson 1992: 16)

The folks at the Walnut Street house talked about what it means to live a simple life, how this way of life is supported by living in community, and how this way of life is connected to being environmentally responsible, for with the support of the community things like gardening, sharing a car, having daily home-cooked meals, and working part-time are more feasible. Without the community support it would be harder to live a simple life and therefore harder to live in a way that leaves a small ecological footprint.

Jake: I think living simply is probably connected to stewardship for the earth. So living simply is also related to doing things like gardening, being supportive of community supportive agriculture, composting – thing like that. Jerome and Val not having a car. [Laughter.] Katie and I do have a car.

Katie: You can't claim other people's stuff! [Laughing hard.]

Val: We live in community. We get to use your car. [Laughter.]

Jake: We share our car with them! We are very supportive of them not having a car. [Everyone is laughing.]

Jerome: This is totally valid. It makes it possible for us to not own a car. We don't use it very often, but when we do, we have that option.

Jake: And we love being able to enable other people not having a car while at the same time enjoying the freedom of having a car. [Laughter.] I will admit it! I don't know. People can chime in with other simple living things. Cooking meals from scratch is a huge thing for us.

Jake: Is it simple?

Katie: It is a luxury to eat good home-cooked food all the time. I guess it is both a simple living thing and also a really valuable thing, at the same time.

Jake: I get clarity thinking about simple living when I think about how my life differs from how I imagine a mainstream Canadian might live their life. There is always a lot of assumptions in terms of that, but even the fact that we do have a car, we often choose to walk or to bike or to bus when going places. We don't have a TV. In fact we try not to go to the mall because we are just not supportive of that kind of culture. Those are some of the things that come to mind for me.

CF: Any other ideas of what simple living means?

Fat: Well when we were talking about home-cooked meals and how that could be considered a luxury, I was thinking a lot about how simple living is also about how we prioritize time.

Jake: Yes.

Fat: And so for me working a forty hour work week is not a priority for me. I would rather work part time and have time to do other things – gardening and preserving, cooking meals from scratch, spending time with friends, knitting – you know those kinds of things. They are just more meaningful to me than –

Jake: Spending more money and things like that.

Fat: Yeah.

This chapter looked at the loving intentions, the fruit, of intentional communities. It would be impossible in this thesis to look in depth at every emic concept and intention found within these complex communities and, for this reason, I have chosen one common intention within intentional communities – the intention to share food and participate in food justice – and in the next chapter I will look at it this delicious topic in great detail. I hope by doing this to further explain the intentions of intentional communities and how these intentions are based on the ideal of love.

Chapter Five: For the Love of Food

When I asked the participants to tell me stories about their experiences living in intentional communities almost every one told me a story that had to do with food. All of the participants spoke specifically of food and how a love of food played a major role in uniting their communities. This focus on food was often expanded to include the idea of "food justice." One who believes in food justice makes decisions regarding foods purchased, produced, prepared, and eaten based on a belief in such things as environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, community sustainability, as well as an appreciation for aesthetics and a concern for how food is handled all the way from the garden to the plate. Food justice advocates promote the well-being, health and happiness of the farmer, producer, consumer, and environment, as well as the food itself.

Traditionally, folklorists have looked at food as text, focusing on recipes, specific ingredients, and even food-related events (Yoder 1972). More recent folklorists (e.g. Long and Everett) have tended to look at food as an expression of a meaningful performance. I fall into the latter category, believing that, although the Mennonite recipes used in intentional communities like the McMillan House are important and are tied up in the identity of the participants, what matters most is the relationships and intimacy that food in general helps to create and sustain. Thus, food is more important as process than as product.

By focusing on the role of food, and food justice, within these intentional communities I plan to "feed two birds with one crumb."²⁸ The first bird is to further expand upon the previous

²⁸ This expression, a play on the older more violent one, is commonly used by Beth, one of the participants who lived at the McMillan house. This revamped expression nicely illustrates the pacifist leanings of Beth's Mennonite upbringing.

chapter where I outlined some of the purposes of intentional community and to dive further into the recurring theme that by being in community one is better able to actively love the world and love one's self. The second bird is to look at the way food, personal identities, cultural heritage, and community are interwoven and how this interconnection affects the choices one makes. By sitting around the table and eating together, community members find the love and support needed to step outside the safe walls of their community and work towards things such as food justice in the greater world – like breeds like.

A) Folklore, food, and identity

As Margaret Visser writes so pointedly, "Food is never just something to eat" (1986: 12). Food is full of meaning and, not so coincidentally, "underlying folklore studies are questions of meaning: What does food mean to people? How is that meaning constructed? How is food experienced in a meaningful way?" (Long 2004: 8) In this section I hope to answer these three questions as they pertain to the participants and their experiences living in intentional community. I do this by looking at the connection that exists between food and identity, food and cultural heritage, and food and community. First, however, I give a brief literature review relating to how folklorists have dealt with food issues in the past and in the present and, secondly, how food is important in the Mennonite community in general.

Folklorists have long asserted that "food is a symbol of our heritage" (Jones 2007: 147) and that, like in Jewish Passover Seder, it can be a "symbol for the [Jewish] family as a whole" (Sherman 1988: 27). This being said, however, "the idyllic picture of a cohesive family all sharing the same folklore is modified, if not shattered, when we consider individual differences"

(Sherman 1988: 40). Individuals are dynamic and "ethnic culture is dynamic" (Brown 1984: 8) and so it is important to study foodways with this in mind. We cannot lump all Jews, or all Mennonites, into one slogan that says "they eat this way and therefore they are this way." Nevertheless, "foodways can show how family stories, community histories, and the significant events of humanity are regularly and traditionally expressed through food" (Rahn 2006: 33). "The food we grow to eat and drink, the people with whom we share this bounty.... and where we feast all symbolize who we are, as individuals and as communities" (Rahn 2006: 34). We need food and our traditions around food to keep us grounded in times of change. This does not mean that we don't change and that the foods we eat don't change, it just means that through food and tradition we can remain rooted in something that is, fundamentally, ours (Rahn 2006: 40).

Food as foodways

Don Yoder was the first North American folklorist to draw any special attention to, what he calls, "folk cookery" or "foodways" (1972). For Yoder, foodways research looked at things such as recipes, ingredients used, food styles, and specific food-related events. For Yoder, and those who came directly after him, food was just another way to read about a culture. Modern day folklorists, such as Michael Owen Jones 2007, Millie Rahn 2006, Holly Everett 2007 & 2009, Lucy Long 2004, and Diane Tye 2010, take foodways studies to an altogether different level, maintaining that food itself, and the way it is prepared, processed, and presented, is full of complex and ever-changing meaning. By looking at the food an individual eats, when, how, and why an individual eats, a folklorist can glean much about that person's ideologies, values, and

beliefs. Food is a part of the meaningful performance called life and by studying foodways, much can be learned about how an individual chooses to live his or her life.

Mennonite Foods and Folkways from South Russia, The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes, and *More-with-Less Cookbook* are three cookbooks that, I suspect, can be found in most Mennonite kitchens across North America. These cookbooks contain varying recipes for traditional foods such as *rollekenchen*, *borscht*, and *plauts*, along with more widely known dishes such as carrot cake, chili, and tomato soup. Beyond just their ethnic flair, these cookbooks are uniquely Mennonite in that, scattered throughout the directions on how to properly knead bread, you can find directions on how to live a more spiritual and justice-filled life. As it proclaims in *The More-with-Less Cookbook*, "Mennonites – a people who care about the hungry – are on a search. [They] are looking for ways to live more simply and joyfully, ways that grow out of tradition but take their shape from a living faith and the demands of our hungry world" (Longacre 2000: 5). Without being consciously aware of it, Mennonites have, for a long time now, embraced the modern folkloristic idea that food is more than just a way to satisfy a biological need. For Mennonites, food is one way of expressing their deep beliefs in justice. As Rhoda Janzen says in her memoir about growing up in a Mennonite community, "Everything that went into our mouths was homemade and chemical-free" (2010: 110). Mennonite food, at its best, is food justice food – it is wholesome, natural, generally home-made, organic, local, and free from unjust practices.

What food means to people: Identity

Some recent folklorists, such as Michael Owen Jones (2007), Holly Everett (2007), and Lucy Long (2004), have written about how "food is a resource for enacting and constructing group identity" (Long 2004: 9) and how "in social interactions involving food, individuals often make decisions about who they want to appear to be, who they do not want to appear to be, and what the best way to behave is in order to be perceived as they wish" (Jones 2007: 135). For example, "vegetarians and health food advocates clearly state their positions through their culinary choices, asserting their identities with every bite" (Jones 2007: 144). This same sentiment is seen clearly by the participants, especially in relation to food justice. Every bite they take, whether it be from an organic, locally grown crab apple or from a piece of bread found in a local bakery's dumpster, reflects their desire to be someone who believes in food justice. The participants live their lives with the knowledge that "the leaves of lettuce [they] pop into [their] mouths are imprinted with the realities of fossil fuel consumption, globalization, immigration policies and economic injustice" (Bedford 2007: 8) and this knowledge causes them to want to be people who not only appear to be working to change this reality, but are, in fact, changing this reality. The food choices made by the participants are full of meaning and greatly reflect their chosen identity.

One way that meaning is constructed: Cultural heritage

Although it is probably true for many that "in this country, eating a healthy diet with many fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains is a class-based privilege" (Bedford 2007: 8) and that "voluntary restraint and freedom of choice toward food differentiates well-fed, well-off

people from poor people" (Carole M. Counihan in Everett 2009: 39), it is also true that "the old Mennonite virtues of thrift and simplicity are being cultivated in new ways" (Bedford 2007: 9). How are these two facts related? For the participants in this thesis, they were related, once again, under the heading of food justice, with a little bit of creativity thrown in for good measure. Although many of the participants live their lives closer to the poverty line than would be encouraged by mainstream culture, they have used their cultural heritage of simplicity and thrift to find ethical ways of eating wholesome, healthy food – they have not let the purported idea that poverty must equal unhealthy lifestyles affect their ethics or beliefs. This translated into not buying their produce from the expensive organic grocery stores but, rather, growing their own organic produce or salvaging produce that would have made its way into the dumpsters behind the swanky grocery stores.

How food is experienced in a meaningful way: Community

Humans have turned food, one of the most basic biological needs, into a way of creating and sustaining community. The personal and group identities that are expressed through food are especially obvious during times of festivals – when a community celebrates its existence (Humphrey 1988: 1–2). In the Mennonite tradition, for example, this can be seen in community potlucks or Easter feasts on Easter Sunday. However, as seen by the participants, food penetrates community on a much deeper and lasting level. "In times of trouble and in joy we seek each other's company. We comfort and console with food; we acknowledge our commitment and relationship with each other through shared food and drink" (Humphrey 1988: xi). Food unites communities, as "eating is a medium for social relationships" (Visser 1991: x).

B) Food justice as an intention in community

In discussing the intentions held by the intentional communities looked at in this thesis I have created a kind of hierarchy of motifs, love being at the top of this ladder – just below love on this ladder, and perhaps slightly to the left, can be found food justice. Not all the participants define and understand food justice in the same way, so I let the participants speak for themselves on this topic, while highlighting the common motifs that weave their way through all the communities and all the different philosophies of food justice. While I have identified six different motifs related to food justice, in reality such separation is arbitrary. All the motifs are interconnected, as all have to do with a love of food and the world.

The first motif looked at has to do with the connection that exists between food, mindfulness and Mennonites. This relates directly to the idea of simplicity that has already been discussed – Mennonites, in general, maintain that in order to love the world one must love and respect one's neighbor and the earth. This means that, to be a good Mennonite, one must be mindful of where food comes from, making sure that no injustices were performed in its production. The second motif looked at has to do with the issue of health – health of both one's own self and the health of the world. These two things go hand-in-hand for the participants, for they believe that the food that is the healthiest for them is also the food that is most respectfully produced – wholesome, natural, organic food. The third motif examined relates to the importance of the kitchen and how this space of food assembly and enjoyment symbolizes the close relationships found in the intentional communities looked at in the thesis. The issue of vegetarianism is the fourth motif examined. Vegetarianism is a very concrete example of the belief in food justice as expressed by many of the participants. Next I look at gardening and, what I have called, "do-it-yourself justice." This relates to the small acts many of the

participants do daily in their attempt to actively live out their beliefs. Finally I look at how, and why, having food that is organic, local and in-season matters to the participants.

The members of the McMillan House in particular expressed their shared desire for food justice by eating the evening meal together daily, having a vegetarian diet, dumpster-diving for food that had been thrown away by others in the neighborhood, rescuing food that was still useable but not sellable from the local organic market, cooking together daily (often cooking traditional Mennonite dishes), and by trying to buy only local, bulk, organic food that was not wrapped heavily in plastic packaging. These expressions of their shared desire for food justice mirrored traditional and religious Mennonite practices of communalism, humanism, and simplicity and, in fact, through food a tangible expression of the desire to keep Mennonite traditions alive while also pushing the boundaries of what was considered acceptable. Below I present how the other participants in this thesis expressed their belief in food justice, connecting all these different expressions and stories in order to show the patterns that connect all these different individuals.

Food, mindfulness and Mennonites

At its most basic level, food justice is about being mindful of where your food comes from and how it and you are connected to the wider world. It is about caring for your world, your community, and your own self, in the many different ways that are available to you. An example of this can be found in Carl's statement in which he assumes that in order to be mindful about food you must farm using organic methods.

Carl: Having to be mindful of what you were doing with the earth, with your farm, is an important part of food justice and so the farm at Madonna House now is mostly organic.

The idea of mindfulness and its relationship to food can extend into ideas of spirituality and the connection that exists between food and faith. This connection is especially strong within the Mennonite world, as food and fellowship are assumed to go hand-in-hand. Joshua points out this basic assumption below.

Joshua: Food is very important. One thing that used to make me angry in Mennonite churches is how they always talked about fellowship time. Fellowship time is just eating time and I thought, "Oh, this is so dumb. They are trying to make eating into a spiritual act." Then I started to realize that they weren't trying to make it that way, it actually was that way. It wasn't a marketing gimmick to make eating more spiritual; eating actually was spiritual!

Rachel is Mennonite and this fact strongly influences her decision to live in community and her decisions around food. By living in an intentional Mennonite community she seems to almost naturally eat food that is local and wholesome.

Rachel: I am really fascinated in how Mennonite food can be made in Manitoba – which is something quite amazing. It is all local food. It is cabbage and a lot of cream products. All the food that I consider traditional Russian Mennonite food comes from the land. And it takes a long time to make. I appreciate that.

Food justice is about not only being aware of where our food comes from and trying our best to support ethical food production, but about opening one's heart and trying to love this

world of ours. As Jake put it, "It all goes back to the Lord's Supper!" The participants in this thesis have taken on this intention, whether due to biblical expectations or not, to share food and love with great enthusiasm which has resulted in numerous expressions of food justice.

Health of self and health of the world

Before one can love the world and take care of others, one must love and take care of one's self – as Maya put it: "You have to put all this food in your body and it affects how you live – why not put the good stuff in?" Such a way of thinking can often be found amongst those who believe in food justice and is usually expressed by eating healthy, wholesome foods as much as possible. For Emma's community, in particular, this was expressed by the desire to not just eat healthy food, but grow and produce it.

Emma: A core value in our community is that we want to raise healthy food for ourselves and for our local community.

Just as desire to live in a supportive, loving community is directly related to the desire to help make the world a better place, the desire to eat well is directly related to the desire to promote food justice in the world. Out of all the participants, Jan spoke the most about the connection that exists between social justice (and by extension food justice) and intentional community. For her, it seems, one equals the other. By living in community an individual is no longer isolated and therefore can find the strength and support needed to enter the world in a loving way and work towards a more just world – rather than spending all his or her time coping with the pain that comes from being isolated.

Alice defines food justice as "ensuring that there is enough food for everyone in the world and also that the food we eat and produce is being produced in a way that is sustainable and taking care of our environment." For her, and those at Jubilee Partners, food justice was actively expressed by sharing food with the homeless at least four times a week. This humble act of sharing food with those in need is an expression of the definitions of food justice given below by Jan, Emma, and Matthew.

Jan: I have very strong feelings about food. I am very passionate about food!

Food is something people put in their bodies – three times a day at least – many more times a day usually. To state the positive, I would say food justice is a system in which everyone has enough to eat and that eating does not lead to the exploitation of others or to the earth. That is practically impossible to have, I would say. Just about every piece of food has exploitation attached to it, in some way or another.

Emma: When I think about justice I think about everyone having enough and so food justice would basically be everyone having enough food, which would include people not having too much or too little. I think about where my food comes from. A lot of the food we see in our supermarkets comes from overseas where people are starving or finding it very hard to feed their families and yet we are getting this cheap food flown in from those countries and so this is where I see the injustice. Those people should be able to feed their families and we should be able to feed ourselves too, but everyone should just have enough.

Matthew: Food justice? I'm moving away from using the language of social justice and of fairness and rightness and that kind of a thing. I am moving into what I consider to be more an existentialist approach. I am trying to meet my own needs and the compassionate part of me looks at the world and sees suffering and wants to make the world better for people. That's what it is about. It is about helping people to suffer less. The types of things people do for social justice I am doing because of my own compassion. Because of my own need to make the world a better place. Because if I didn't I would be cutting myself off. I would be losing part of myself. I would be dying. Part of me would be dying. I wouldn't be living fully.

Food justice is about working towards a world where everyone has enough healthy food to sustain themselves. The participants in this thesis believe that by living a simple, loving life in community they are actively working to try and create such a reality.

"The kitchen is the heart of the home"²⁹

While it is important to note the extensive research that has been done on "kitchen culture" (Innes 2001: 3) and the relationship that, more often than not, exists between the kitchen and gender roles³⁰, the participants in this thesis did not once bring up any ideas that hinted at food being a women's only topic. For them, rather, the kitchen, and the glorious food that came

²⁹ This phrase comes from Millie Rahn's paper "Laying a Place at the Table: Creating Public Foodways Models from Scratch" where she talks about how traditions surrounding food are often the longest kept traditions and how a love of food can help us stay grounded in our ever-changing society (Rahn 2006: 34).

³⁰ See: Tye 2010 & Innes 2001 for examples of such discourse.

out of it, was shared by men and women equally. For the participants the kitchen was indeed a place of love. Rachel, in particular, talks about how the kitchen was the "focal point for the house."

Rachel: I have always shared food. That is also an economic option but it is also easier just to share food and then make communal meals. For this house and this setting right now it has been a lot of fun because a lot of our social activities have been focused on food. We will have things like cook-offs! Who can make the best chicken noodle soup? Or we will try new recipes. Things like that. It is quite – special I think.... What would we do together if we didn't cook and eat? When we first lived on Dominion Street then we would for special occasions like Christmas or Thanksgiving and for birthdays have special house meals. For Christmas once we made a chicken with stuffing. It worked okay I think – it was on a budget! In this house there are a few people who like to cook for lots of people and make it a big deal and invite lots of people over. That is nice.

CF: Do you cook together?

Rachel: Well our kitchen is kind of small. So one person cooks and is in charge and the rest of us kind of help. One person will be like, "I am making this." Chicken noodle soup or something – then everyone else kind of stands around drinking wine or something. But the kitchen would be our focal point. And even if we are not making food – if someone is doing dishes then everyone kind of comes in and either stands by the counter there. Yeah – it is the focal point for the house.

In Lucy's different communities food justice was expressed primarily through cooking food as a group and by sharing meals together as a community. For Lucy, food united the community.

Lucy: Your whole day revolves around food. Whether you are shopping for it, cooking it, eating it, or cleaning up from it. I have also been in groups where we didn't eat together or shop together – where we didn't share food and that took a big chunk out of our time together.

This sentiment that by sharing food you create community, or a family even, was also expressed by members of the Walnut Street House.

Jake: How would we spend our time together if we didn't eat together?

[Laughter.]

Katie: We can't play the train game all the time. [Laughter.] I grew up with the assumption that you cook food and you sit down to eat together every day as a family – that was normal in my family story growing up and more and more now we have realized it is not like that for everyone– oh, not everybody does this!

Jerome: We do that with people we are close to.

Fal: People that are also sort of, in a sense, a family – like us living together.

Sharing food is a good way to be connected.

Sharing food and food preparation unites a community. It is an easy and enjoyable way of connecting with people and this, in itself, encourages food justice. As Maya puts it, "You have to eat, so why not eat together?"

Maya: I do think eating well is a part of that community thing too. I don't know why – is it just because as I grew up there were potlucks and I loved that? I don't know why it connects with me so well. You have to eat. Eating brings people together without having anything else in common. The only thing you have in common is that you have to eat and that can be such a basic way to get to know somebody. It is a daily function you can share with somebody else. You can't do a lot of other stuff with people on purpose.

"Eating with the fullest pleasure – pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance – is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world" (Berry 1999: 110). By sharing food and sharing community the participants are working towards building a more just world, for if every action is rooted in an intention of love, love will blossom.

Carl: All of the meals are together. So you eat breakfast, lunch, supper all together. And you work all together. Catherine Doherty, she believed that whatever work we do can be apostolic. And so this is a way to preach the gospel, in no matter what work you're doing, whether you are sorting donations or working at a farm or doing the dishes or sweeping the floor.

Vegetarianism

Many of the participants expressed their belief in food justice by being vegan or vegetarian.³¹ Whether or not the choice to be a vegetarian stemmed from the Mennonite pacifist

³¹ Vegetarians, in general, do not eat any meat products but will eat eggs, honey, and dairy products. Strict vegans do not eat any food that relates to an animal's life.

leanings of most of the participants, it has been said that “omnivores are thought of as aggressive in contrast to the more passive herbivores [and that] meat eating is a symbol of our fall from grace” (Jones 2007: 140). Although there were varying reasons behind this choice for the participants, compassion tended to be the common denominator – compassion for the animals in question, compassion for the earth, and compassion for their fellow human beings.

Matthew: We have to eat every day and for most people in North America that means that you are killing the earth and you are exploiting people and you are causing massive suffering to animals in factory farms. By destroying the planet I think we are throwing away our future. And I think it is happening very rapidly. My compassion won't let me get away with that anymore. So my options are either to torture myself with guilt, to kill part of myself off and live a half life, or to act. I do some of all three of these things I think.

Alice: Jubilee Partners was largely vegetarian as an act of solidarity with those who cannot afford meat.

Not all of the participants were vegetarian. Those that were not were still very concerned with where their food, especially their meat, came from.

Maya: I try to make conscious choices of where I buy my meat. It is a big issue for me. I don't know any farmers yet but I go to a place where I know they buy more ethical meat. I go to the Farmer's Market so I can buy directly from the farmer.

By intentionally seeking out just sources for their food, the participants are actively trying to make the world a more just place to be. As Maya put it:

Maya: In a world where you are told you cannot make a difference – I think you can. Even if it is on a very small scale – why not? Someone says, “You can’t make a difference so why bother?” Why not bother? You are not making it any worse; at least if you are doing the right thing.

Gardening and do-it-yourself justice

A very common theme, or motif, that ran through all the communities looked for this thesis was the belief that by doing small, beautiful and good things people can make a small, beautiful and good difference in the world. Gardening, for example, was done by most of the participants as a way of encouraging environmental sustainability and encouraging community. The members of the Walnut Street House talked the most about gardening and how this small act can bring people closer together.

Jerome: I think that food seems to be something we put a lot of energy into just because we think it is important to have good food and, I don’t know, to be a little bit more self-sustaining. I mean we each garden – we all garden. We try to put up a lot of our own food. I think there is an element of self-sustaining in, and connection to, the food that we want. Thinking mainstream, we are really separated from lots of things in the world and this is one thing we have the skills and the ability to do somewhat – like to grow food or be closely connected to people that grow food and it is something that brings us closer together too.

Val: Well I think eating together and gardening are such natural social rituals. I mean any time you have a party of course you are going to have food. It just kind

of creates the space where you hang out and talk and be together – food is just such an automatic part of that.

Organic, local, and in-season

Like the choice to be a vegetarian, the choice to eat organic, local, and in-season food is commonly made by the participants as one way to express their belief in, and need for, compassion, love, and justice in the world. This choice is, and can be, expressed in a variety of ways. In Lucy's various communities they often could not afford organic food, but they tried to buy local food as much as possible. As she said, they tried to be as "grassroots as [they] could on what [they] had." This "grassroots" sentiment mirrors what Carl found at the Madonna House.

Carl: Part of it also has to do with eating together and that part of food, consuming it together, was very important to Madonna House. So we eat very simply during the week. Breakfast is yogurt that we made at the farm and oatmeal or cornmeal bread – we buy the flour but we bake it ourselves – and then some kind of fruit. If we have apples at the time then we'll have apples. In the winter, when there is no more apples, we'll also have canned rhubarb that we grew. And then when that is gone we might get donations of apples. We might get apple juice [Laughs.] if nothing else. And then lunch is mostly beans and eggs and maybe some kind of little cheese thing and millet or rice – some kind of little, simple grains and some kind of vegetable that we grew ourselves. And then Sundays and special feast days during the church calendar – days commemorating Mary or Saint Joseph or – days like that – those days we'll have a feast day and

then we have a lot more fancier meals. We'll usually have some kind of meat dish for those suppers. And then Sunday brunch is different than the rest of the meals. That is one of the big things about being in community – being able to sit down and eat together and love each other and learn how to talk to each other too!

For this community the question of whether or not the community should only eat organic food is not an easy question to answer. Food justice is not an easy intention to take on, for there are many sides to its story, as shown by Alice and Maya. One of the main points of contention has to do with whether organic food or local food is better for the environment and for local communities.

Alice: Where I am now, there has been some talk of whether or not we should go organic. As it is the organization we are working for that supplies our food, this is a tough sell because of the cost. I am not entirely convinced that this is the only thing we need to do in order to eat responsibly, but I do think it's important that people think about where their food is coming from and what is going into our bodies and the earth. Organic food is currently a luxury item and if we insist that it was the right way, we forget about all the people who are barely scraping by. We forget that it is cheaper to buy junk than really good and healthy food and that there are many more issues than just whether or not chemicals are used in production.

Maya: I try to eat more healthy. I like organic but it is a bit of a price thing. I try to eat in season too, which is fascinating. Or the 100 Mile Diet – all these different concepts that are coming up right now about eating local and eating

natural – I really make an effort because I think it is healthy for my body and healthy for the earth. It supports the people in my community – there you go! With the 100 Mile Diet I am buying meat from someone that I've seen and I really like that idea – not only because it allows someone to do a job that they want to do – to live in this community and not have to outsource to another country – I can support those things.

The 100 Mile Diet¹² was a very tangible expression of food justice that many of the participants had, or were, participated in. The goal of the 100 Mile Diet is to only eat food that is grown and processed within a hundred mile radius of one's home. Below Jan talks about this more extensively.

Jan: We had been working towards it for quite a while with the 100 Mile Diet. We made a huge effort. First there was the 100 day project – we did eat only local food during that time. And as a part of that we had been buying lots of local food before and as a part of that there were certain things we stopped buying – we have started buying some of those things again, but some we haven't. I'd say that 80% – maybe even 90% of our food is local.

CF: What are the things you couldn't live without? What did you start buying?

Jan: It is not like we couldn't live without it. I just thought our life was more interesting with spices and nuts. Nuts and dried fruit. And then some vinegars – some of those flavoring kinds of things. For sweetener we have only honey or fair trade sugar. And you can get fair trade spices. And we started to buy local oil or

¹² For more information about the 100 Mile Diet see: Smith and MacKinnon 2007 and 100 Mile Manitoba.

fair trade olive oil – the fair trade olive oil that costs tons of money that is really delicious. We also started buying more organic. We don't really buy vegetables throughout the year because we grow our own food. We try to be aware of each product that went into the things we were eating. And buying a lot of stuff from local growers. We buy all our flours and grains directly from local farmers. We eat a lot of buckwheat and spelt. We eat a lot of granola. All of our grains – buckwheat flakes, spelt flakes and rye flakes and flax seed and whatever – we buy from local farmers. Eggs we buy from local farmers. We buy direct from the producer as much as we can.... We started to eat meat again too because we wanted to support local growers.

Jan says that it is true that in order to eat locally, to have a 100 Mile Diet, community is necessary and how it was not at all difficult to find people who wanted to be a part of this community based on a belief in food justice.

Jan: We did it two summers ago. We did it in the fall but we did prep for a year before that. From September first to December ninth. We had, I don't know, 130 people sign up and lots more people didn't officially sign the pledge but they did participate in it. People were ready for it. And lots of farmers were really keen on it too. One of them called me a few days ago and said he was growing some sweet corn – can I sell it for him to the 100 Mile group?

Of all the participants I interviewed, Emma and her community were the most dedicated to food production and how this relates to food justice. This desire is expressed pragmatically by

Emma's community by being certified organic and by "growing food in a sustainable way". They "want to leave the land better for the next generation than the way [they] got it". Without the support of the community Emma would not, in both a practical and an emotional way, be able to live off the land as she is now learning how to do. But, by living in an intentional community, Emma has found the love and support needed to live out her personal decisions and convictions. As a result of this community's love and support Emma is more capable of loving the wider world and this is shown in her actions towards food justice. Similarly, by living in community Matthew, like Emma, found the support he needed to examine his own beliefs and learn how he personally would live them out in the world. For Emma this resulted in a very pragmatic approach and for Matthew it is a bit more philosophical, but the result is the same: by having community support they were both able to discover how they wanted to act out their belief in and need for food justice. Furthermore, by being in a community of faith Carl was able to strengthen his faith and begin to be able to take on the role of leadership. By being in a community of food justice Carl was able to share food and begin to be able to share himself personally and practically with the world.

In this section I have tried to show how the intention to support food justice relates to intentional community, in that by having the support of fellow community members the participants found ways to express their common love of food and love for the greater world. To put simply how a belief in food justice holds the communities together:

Jake: If someone in the community served a whole lot of processed food I think we'd all split up!

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This thesis has elements of ethnography based in living memory and of auto-ethnography. The first of these, ethnography, was done through the interviews outlined in the two introductory chapters. The second of these, auto-ethnography, is based on my experiences living in intentional community and on my experiences of fieldwork with the participants in this thesis.

In this thesis I have looked at the stories of twenty-two individuals who, at some point in their lives, have lived in an intentional community. I have told the story of the McMillan House; given a brief overview of intentional communities in the larger world and how these communities relate to the many similar communities that can now be found in southern Manitoba; examined the relationships that exist between Mennonites and intentional communities; looked at the common intentions in intentional communities; and, finally, looked in depth at one such intention, that of food and food justice. Through all of this my primary goals were to define the ambiguous term "intentional community" for the reader and to unpack the relationship I saw between young Mennonites and the need for communities of love and support. I think I have accomplished all of this. I have also added to folkloristic research in the respect that I have, somewhat subtly, added to the growing field of foodways studies. More notably, I have opened up folklore studies to include the idea that folklore can provide deep insight into the personal lives of the participants and the folklorist while, at the same time, voicing widespread themes. Like Debora Kodish I believe that the fight for social justice can be a part of folklore studies and that folklore studies has the potential to draw attention to important societal needs, such as the need for community. It is also my belief that in doing this the

folklorist can also tell stories, be emotionally attached to their subject, and even create things of beauty.

As I sit here trying to figure out a way to wrap this thesis up into a final neat and concise package, all I can think about is the current relationships I now have with many of the McMillan House members and how, no matter how hard we might try, our intentionality with each other is neither neat, nor concise. Relationships are hard and when a group of people, like those who participated in this thesis, decide to intentionally live together and put great effort into creating healthy, sustainable relationships, and there is always price to pay. Whether this price is one's individual space and freedom or the time one must put in to continually negotiate around other's emotional lives, the price is a high one. Below Beth talks about the "Club Club." This is what Beth, Suzanne, Marie and I named ourselves. We are the four McMillan House members currently living in Winnipeg and we get together on a regular basis to have potlucks, play with Marie and Suzanne's children, do crafts, play outside, and support each other in our lives. Although sometimes very rocky, we four women greatly appreciate our very intentional continuation of the McMillan House.

Beth: The Club Club came out of us trying to keep the McMillan house people who were in Winnipeg still in contact with each other and we were all a bit worried – Marie especially was worried – about the community disintegrating and losing community. We were trying to find some other sort of structure, if not a house where we were all living, to continue our community somehow in a formal, informal sort of way. I think we all appreciated the community of the house and,

in some way, are able to get that from each other now. It is nice to be a part of something. I know if you and Suzanne and Marie plan something you are going to call me. It is a family continuation – having four friends – even if we don't always get along! We will be each other's support circles. Marie can ask us to plan her blessing way and we will do it. I like to believe we have each other's best interests at heart and we still have that connection that continues on without needing to try as hard as we did when we were living together.

Whether or not the people in an intentional community live together, the primary intention of such a community is love – providing loving support for each other and working to become more loving in all our day-to-day actions and encounters. The price one must pay for this love I believe, and I think all of the participants would agree, is quite worth it.

The following photos have all been taken since the McMillan House disbanded. They show the continuing relationships many of us ex-McMillaners share.



Figure 9: Top row (L-R): Beth, Clara, Suzanne, David
Middle Row (L-R): Claudia, Yvan, myself
Front Row (L-R): Derek, Marie

A photo taken with my camera by a fellow wedding guest at Marie and Derek's wedding, summer 2008.



Figure 10: A photo taken by Claudia's housemate in Montreal with my camera of Claudia and me at her 30th birthday party, summer 2007. I traveled to Montreal to be there for this special occasion.



Figure 11: Me, Suzanne, Marie, and Beth (L-R) at the first craft sale where Marie sold her raw, vegan chocolate bars, winter 2011. The photo was taken with my camera by a stranger.



Figure 12: Yvan, Salvatorio and Beila (L-R) at Salvatorio's apartment in Vancouver, summer 2009. This photo was taken by me right after I interviewed Salvatorio for this thesis.

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