

"We found an old document explaining conflict in the community 20 years ago. I had to read it twice because the conflict was the exact same conflict we just had, but with different names."

We were in the garden, and I was resting on a blanket as my friend sat in a chair wearing a sun hat and a mask, sick with a cold.

"Yeah, I'm familiar with that," I said.

We're hurting each other in the same ways, over and over. Let's disrupt the pattern and not have to start from square one every time.

power in community

So much of the struggle in community is with power. A dedicated leader wants to control their favorite aspect of how we do things and how resources are used. They get rigid about it, as their ego gets tied in.

When another person wants something different, it turns into "how dare you?" Various credibility stories are put forth as evidence for why we need to do it one chosen way.

Unfortunately there's a subplot—someone accused someone of a thing, but no one at this point has a clear read on whether that actually happened, let alone when and how. But the accusation complexifies the brew.

Often the main conflict is an assault itself, and there's a subplot of how certain people reacted. They did not handle it in a proper way, so bad turned to worse. Now some people hate each other to the point of not being able to exist in the same room or in the same meadow because it touched on our deepest traumas about safety.

Alliances ferment over the years. Or alliances are intense from the get go, when someone new arrives on the scene who is

obviously powerful. The “fuck marry or kill” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fuck,_marry,_kill question comes to mind. You can see me as a threat and try to squash me. Or see my values are like yours, and form an alliance that will benefit both or all of us.

Maybe we can try allying. Then you will betray me with a cruelty that will take my breath away. Other powerful people jump in like birthday party kids swarming on pinata candy. The morning after a chaotic moment where anything is socially possible, strange bedfellows wake up in the morning wondering, “How did I get here?”

As for dating, community members have aged beefs with other people based on a bad breakup seven years ago. We tell stories to each other, but the stories don’t convey the feelings.

cake

Of course we have sex, fall in love, do right then wrong, trust someone we never should have trusted, give up, walk away, come back, risk our hearts, spend hundred of dollars repairing the chainsaw before forestry camp with no fanfare, bring a bunch of mint starts that may or may not have taken root, bake a delicious cake, build an altar to honor someone who died, and do it all over again.

You can say, “Fuck it all,” and leave, but you’re going to find yourself in another community. Just a matter of how organized it is. An apartment complex is a community even if you don’t know each other’s names or have meetings. You’re going to fight about dog poop one way or another—communicate with words, or communicate by lighting shit on fire on someone’s porch.

Even if you live in a cave and talk to no one, community is already inside you. You will relive family drama with the ants and the birds.

tropes

I saw a website that lists the television tropes. There are only so many sit-com plots. Let's catalog all possible community conflict and make beautiful flowcharts with medieval margin monsters. I would think scholars are studying this.

What's the best way to respond to sexual assault in community? Just that one alone would be unfathomably helpful.

Disability complexifies how conflict is handled. Disabled people are so busy caring for ourselves and the other disabled people, maxed out by default, unable to take on another role. Let alone a chilling investigation of what really happened, being in touch with the accused person, or organizing the dreaded accountability process.

Abled people are maxed out as well, busy being exploited at paying jobs, parenting their kids without a village, managing care for a dying parent, clearing all the art out of a hoarded house, helping a relative get ready to move cross country.

It's so much easier to delay and hope someone else handles the conflict. Then time and failed memory churn everything up and spit it out confusing-er.

I'm sorry

I like apology rituals.
<https://www.ilikeyourstims.com/2023/11/01/autistic-forgiveness/>
/ I'm not afraid to say what I did wrong; I do so much wrong it's amazing. So I'll go first, hold your hands if you let me, look into your eyes, and say I'm sorry. Exactly what I'm sorry for, and why I'm not going to do it again.

I'm also willing to apologize for what someone else did to you. A little bit of me is inside the person who hurt you, and a little bit of them is in me. Energetically, Parent Earth will hold me as I apologize for whatever you need to hear an

apology for. Even if it happened before I was born, maybe my ancestor hurt your ancestor. I'm ready.

I used to think that conflict distracts from community. But maybe conflict is the main way we do community. If we can stay fair and clear, showing up for one another at the worst of times, we deserve each other at the best of times. We deserve each other.

Laura-Marie Strawberry Nopales (they ki he she) is a queer disabled art witch who lives in community. Find them at listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakesense.com and @xtrikeslutsx.

<https://www.listeningtothenoiseuntilitmakesense.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/xtrikeslutsx/>