

# Managing the Spiritual Neighborhood

## How to Restore the Conscience of America's Communities

### A Grass Roots Approach



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Published by Tinker's Creek Press, Camp Springs & Aspen Hill, Maryland

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## Chapter 7

# Garden Zone Management

The specific duties of a Garden Zone Manager will depend on the character of his or her community – the collective coherence, the culture, traditions, wealth, etc. Much of a manager's job will revolve around efforts to simply get people interested in the program. Some neighborhoods may require a greater emphasis on crime, or to put it in preventive terms, on courtesy. Other neighborhoods may not have a crime problem at all, but that doesn't mean there isn't a problem with fear and isolation. In some areas the walking patrol may be less of a patrol and more of a walk, a ritual. As we've seen, a manager could spend a good portion of his time just keeping track of the kids in the neighborhood. For, even in a crime-free community you might still need to check up on people: senior citizens, the disabled. Moreover, you don't need to be sick or old to require a visit from a neighbor. What I've discovered is that the world is full of people who don't have physical ailments, yet who are not quite as able as others – emotionally, intellectually, intestinally – to deal with the challenges and complexities of life in modern society. They may be people who are single, or who don't have strong family ties. These folks feel the lack of community more acutely than others. They need to latch on to something that can provide them with a permanent anchor. This seems to be the case especially for kids without parents, and also many single women. It's disheartening to see how we turn our backs on such people. These individuals ought to be included in the affairs of the community, and of society. And the correct term is included, not exploited. We certainly know how to market products to the less fortunate among us. We're good at convincing people that you're not living the good life unless you play golf, smoke cigars and drive a Cadillac. But to be included as a consumer does not make you part of the whole. It fails to connect you to the machinery of man's evolution. Treating people as consumers turns them into commodities; it degrades people instead of dignifying them. I submit that even criminals ought to be included in the community. For, if we don't include the criminals, then by definition they are working outside the community, and hence, against it, and that makes it much harder to keep them from committing crimes.

So what do we expect of people who do get involved? We're not going to spend all of our time strolling the streets and socializing. What specific needs do communities have? What exactly are managers and volunteers going to do?

Actually, it makes more sense to turn the question around: What *isn't* there for people to do? The list is so long that one scarcely knows where to begin. The

problems and issues that we raised in the preceding chapters alone could keep a person busy for a long time.

Let's get specific here. How about this: How about helping Dennis Gale find a job? Dennis is the homeless Vietnam veteran we talked about in Chapter 3. As of this writing he still does live in this community, but it doesn't matter – wherever he happens to be, let's invite him back. Let's apologize for ignoring him for five years while he lived so precariously in our midst. We *owe* him this gesture, because he did us a great service. Dennis Gale gave us a mirror to our souls. He showed us how woefully deficient we are in the quality of compassion. Now it's time to repay him. Someone should follow up on this. Take a ride to the V.A. Hospital in D.C. and find out why they're not granting Dennis a full disability. Contact the Disabled American Veterans group and scare up a case worker. Maybe we could get him a job at one of the local businesses ... Pyles Lumber, the Andrews BX, one of the auto repair shops ... even a part-time job. Call around and locate someone in the neighborhood who has a room to let, and can perhaps give him a break on the rent. Find out what the county's own Department of Social Services can do for this man. Why for example, is Dennis not eligible for food stamps?

And what about the other homeless people living in Camp Springs? What about the folks we see panhandling on Allentown Road? Who is taking responsibility for them? It's deplorable for there to be people living in tents and cars amid such affluence. Something needs to be done with these people. Whether it's an alcoholic, an ex-convict, someone with mental illness, or a person who is simply down on his luck, somebody needs to assess each individual's situation and determine the best approach for dealing with it. We can't just stand idly by and watch the guy die a slow death out there, like an abandoned dog. If we were going to do that, we might as well shoot them all now and get it over with. Homelessness is a grass roots phenomenon and it must be addressed at the grass roots level. If there are resources available from the government, fine, use them. If there is money to be had, great, take it. But even if there isn't, people must come together and *solve the problem*. Take Vera for example, the other homeless person we talked about. She is able to survive pretty well on her own in her tent, but she has no way to feed herself. The community should have a committee that can arrange to get a daily meal to people like her. And if we can't find anyone to take Vera in, we ought to at least provide a drop-in center where she can sit, write, get warm, make phone calls, meet with people, and so forth. Who can create this for us? Who can pull the right strings to, say, convert one of our vacant store fronts into such a center? There should be cars available and drivers who can give a homeless person a ride now and then ... to the clinic, to the welfare office, to the metro station. Homeless people need to wash clothes, to bathe, to get medical treatment. They need to get out of the rain. I maintain that none of

this should be handled by the state or the county. It should be taken care of by individual neighborhoods and individual communities; by Garden Zone Managers. The manager should have a list of people he can call on for assistance: churches, neighbors, businesses. He should be able to coordinate his efforts with social service agencies, and with other neighborhood managers.

We could go on at length about the homeless problem alone. It's a complex issue. Obviously any actions we perform in this regard are strongly reaction-based, and chock-full of spin. Yet, I suggest that we can convert our approach to a preventive one if we apply courtesy reduction to it. We've already decided that Westchester is just good enough, quality-of-life-wise, to adopt as a permanent home. We would like people to view it as a quiet refuge, as a place where you can escape the harshness of the urban environment. In order to attract people here, including the potential managers that we speculated about, we must demonstrate how refined we are. We have to put on our best face for the folks who might become part of the community. It's the *courteous* thing to do. Clearly any attempt to make the community more attractive must include an effort to get homeless people into shelter. You wouldn't have the boss over for dinner while your teenage son and his football buddies were lying around in their sweaty T-shirts, or while crazy Aunt Margaret was tottering about the house in a fog. How much worse is it for there to be beggars in rags at your front doorstep? But isn't that where homeless panhandlers station themselves? At the front door of the community? In New York City the Manhattanites just step over such people. Of course, in New York a hundred people might walk by a mugging in progress without so much as glancing toward the cries for help. We want to show that we're better than that, that we're more civilized. Or should I say, that we're civilized period.

### *7.1 Marketing The Community*

The notion of attracting people to the neighborhood brings up another question. Who is responsible for keeping a neighborhood attractive? Do you leave it up to individual property owners? Moreover, whose job is it to market the neighborhood? Real estate agents are the first people you think of, but the real estate folks are not exactly community oriented. In the first place, their goal is to make money, not to improve the quality of life. But more than that, realtors sell individual homes to individual owners. They don't sell communities. Not in the sense that we would like to sell the community. They talk about the importance of location, but the value of location to a real estate agent is determined by the property's resale value. It has nothing to do with community coherence or shared spirit. Moreover, a real estate sale is a strictly private event. It involves

the buyer, the seller, the agent, and no one else. The fact that there are neighbors who might be interested in the transaction, including what kind of people will be moving in, is of no concern to the parties of the sale. Conversely, other than getting a fuzzy feeling that the house is in a "good area", most buyers care little about who is living next door. They don't see their new home as including the entire community. Thus from the community standpoint a typical home sale is an actually negative event. Rather than the community coming together to welcome a new member, you have yet another anonymous person taking up residence amid a group of wary strangers.

The other community marketing agent that comes to mind is the local government, which in my case is the county government. But from what I've observed, the Prince George's government is more interested in marketing the county to business concerns. Like most other municipalities Prince George's goes to great lengths to court high-tech corporations, football franchises, and shopping mall developers, but very little is done to stabilize neighborhoods and build community. Furthermore, in the government's order of things development takes clear precedence over the preservation of the natural landscape. The lawmakers don't seem to realize that new construction undermines the very thing that makes the county a desirable place to live. Here in Westchester for example, we are blessed with having a small piece of parkland next to us, and a stream that connects the subdivision to a larger expanse of woods and farmland. We don't see yellow-billed cuckoos anymore, but we are still able to watch red-shouldered hawks soaring overhead and to listen to barred owls hooting at night. Hummingbirds and butterflies grace the flower garden. Woodpeckers cruise the bird feeder. All sorts of critters creep out of the park to visit our backyards: deer, beaver, fox, raccoon, possum. But every year more and more of the green space is bulldozed. The woods are disappearing as the suburbs expand ever further out from the city, and shopping plazas, new offices and housing take up every empty lot. Look, if it weren't for the natural setting that surrounds the neighborhoods, there would be nothing to draw people to this part of the greater Washington area. Southern Prince George's County has little to offer but pawn shops, fast-food restaurants and liquor stores. That plus the ubiquitous 7-Eleven chain. The *only* reason for moving to Camp Springs is the neighborhoods. The *only* thing that would draw an intelligent person to live here is the quietness, the green setting of the older homes, and the proximity to open, undeveloped expanses. But the greenery is gradually being eroded by developers whose only interest in the community is how much construction business they can hustle.

What we need is someone who can defend the community against this erosion; someone in the neighborhood who can speak up for the plants, the trees and the wildlife; who can educate folks about their value, not only from the eco-

logical standpoint, but economically as well. The environmental movement has been around for forty years, but its principles still haven't penetrated the psyche of most Americans. People still don't seem to understand that having mature trees in their yards and a patch of woodland nearby, especially one that contains a stream bottom, make a neighborhood infinitely more livable, for the people and the wildlife both. This is where the Garden Zone Manager comes in. It is his job to convey this point. Getting lawmakers and developers to understand will be difficult because of their short-term orientation, but we ought to at least be able to educate the real estate brokers. What we need is some reverse psychology. Instead of running after every person with a checkbook and a credit rating, residents need to start acting as though the neighborhood were a slightly exclusive one. They have to pretend that they are actually *reluctant* to see a home buyer come through here. Not that you want to stop marketing the neighborhood entirely, but you want the agents, and the potential buyers to appreciate, to respect what they are getting. I'm not exactly sure how to accomplish this. I guess for starters the Quality of Life Committee will have to be formed for real (see Section 3.3). Even if it has no legal authority (and it's probably better that it doesn't), the mere existence of the group will send a message. The committee must see to it that everyone connected to the community is aware of its priorities. They must make it known that the committee's purpose is to manage trees and landscape, and to monitor the state of the neighborhood environment. Letters should be written. Pamphlets handed out. In the Appendix I've included a letter that I wrote on behalf of the neighborhood regarding several homes that were for sale near me. By letting realtors know that there are alert, sensitive people around, who are paying attention to how they conduct business, you take a significant step towards community involvement in real estate transactions; a step towards eliminating anonymity. Even if you don't say it in so many words, the agents will begin to realize that there are people out there who might be unhappy if they sell a home to someone who pours concrete overtop his dogwoods.

Let me give you an example. Not long ago an elderly lady who lived not far from me, Mrs. R., sold the home that she had occupied for thirty years. Quite a number of years before she had planted azaleas along the foundation of the house. The azaleas were of a somewhat unusual cultivar. One plant bloomed a golden-yellow; another was a fuchsia color. They were mature, well-established shrubs that lined the house on either side of the front door. She also had a big rhododendron in there, plus an array of perennials and bulbs, and several large lilacs around the side and the back. Mrs. R. would let me cut the fragrant lilacs for table bouquets when they bloomed in the spring. It was also in the spring that the azaleas would produce their striking display. All of these plantings provided cover for birds year-round. Moreover, the shrubs concealed some

rather unattractive security bars that Mrs. R. had installed on the downstairs windows.

When the new owner – I'll call him Jeff – arrived on the scene, within days of settlement, before he even occupied the place, he promptly had everything cut down, right to the bare ground. Every shrub, every plant, was hauled to the trash. The appearance of the property changed dramatically. With the azaleas gone the ugly window bars stood out sharply: black iron against orange brick. When I first saw it, I thought, "This looks like a slum house." Picture a row of brick homes in a poor city neighborhood ... bars over the windows, sitting on dirt lots, a concrete walk to the front door, not a flower in sight ... that's how Mrs. R.'s house looked when Jeff was done with it. It was sickening to see it. But it wasn't the removal of the shrubs that sickened me so much as the mentality that the act displayed. This guy Jeff clearly had no appreciation whatsoever for plants or landscaping.

One of the other neighbors talked to Jeff and discovered that he had also cut down a beautiful weeping cherry tree, and was planning to fence-in the backyard for Rottweilers. On top of this, he had had a new alarm system put in. It thus appeared that the shrubs were removed for security reasons. Yet it was obvious that Jeff knew nothing about security. Unless he was a CIA operative, or a gangster, or a big time drug dealer, he was clearly going way overboard in the measures he was taking. The house already had window bars on it, and steel security doors on all sides. Plus there were motion-activated flood lights over both the front and rear entrances. Nothing more was needed. Barring a tank assault, no one was getting into that house. Besides, it so happened that all of Jeff's neighbors, on both sides for two houses and across the street, were very conscientious folks. They all knew each other, and they all kept an eye out for one another. Jeff had lucked into an ideal living arrangement. Without realizing it, he had selected a house that was located smack in the middle of one of the best blocks in the neighborhood. He was surrounded by some of the most responsible, trustworthy people down here.

But all of this was totally lost on him. Neighbors? What neighbors? It's my house ... my yard ... my shrubs ... I live here ... what do the neighbors have to do with it?

Don't think for a minute that a situation like this isn't a serious problem. Keeping Rottweilers in the yard is bad enough, but with his butchery of the landscape Jeff not only made his own property look slummy, he affected the appearance of the entire street. The value of everyone's house was brought down a notch by its proximity to Jeff's. But the worst part of it was this: No thoughtful, intelligent person would knowingly occupy a home next door to someone as ignorant as Jeff evidently was. I felt sorry for the folks on either side of him. To tell the truth, the thought that Jeff might be a drug dealer did cross my mind. He

was the right age for it, late twenties, had plenty of money, owned some expensive cars, and appeared to be a typical product of the gender-confused 90s, complete with a diamond stud in his ear, and a tattoo on his arm. The most difficult aspect of having someone like Jeff as a neighbor is that there is no mechanism for dealing with him. There is no one to appeal to. Nowhere to turn. The law is no help. Jeff merely did to his yard what thousands of people just like him do in city neighborhoods everywhere. No one questions it, because they are either afraid to speak up, or they are so accustomed to a bare-dirt landscape that they don't realize how pitiful it actually looks. Even the lawmakers are clueless in this respect. How else can you explain why they allow ghetto neighborhoods to look so barren, so hard, so repulsive? If you can't turn to the government, what else can you do? The only thing left is to move. But that's exactly what we *can't* do. The commitment has been made. We are wed to this community, and this neighborhood. Remember, we have made this is our lifetime home.

So back to reality. What should we do about this ... we managers ... we the Camp Springs Quality of Life Committee? Something does need to be done. Of that there is no doubt. Here is what we would like:

- No Rottweilers. If Jeff wants a pet, that's one thing, but Rottweilers are not pets. They are a special breed of guard dog, and they have a reputation for biting people. Besides, he simply does not need them.
- Replace the shrubs. At least put in a decent foundation planting. Perhaps the Quality of Life Committee can help select something appropriate from a local nursery
- Drop a casual hint to Jeff that the folks in the neighborhood don't approve of drug use. Don't accuse him of anything, but make him aware that we keep an eye out for that kind of thing.

The challenge is to accomplish all of this without having to resort to force, not even to the force of law. And the way to do it is by approaching the man in a neighborly way. Bring him something ... flowers from the garden, a homemade pie. Give him a copy of the neighborhood newsletter. Invite him to dinner, or to a meeting. Get to know the guy. Find out what interests him. You want to massage Jeff into a position where he is open to friendly advice. Advice from a friend is far more powerful than threats from an enemy. People take what you say more seriously when they perceive that you mean them well.

So who is going to do this? You can't rely on just one guy. There must be support, and that support has to be cultivated, organized, prepared. What specific person in the neighborhood is going to take the pie over? Who is going to talk to Jeff about security? Who can convince him of the value of trustworthy neighbors, the importance of trees and shrubs, the negative impact of Rottweilers? And this is just the beginning. How will you go about introducing the topic

of refined awareness to someone like Jeff? Is this where our gimmicks and rituals come into play?

There is a significant amount of work to be done here. And there is more besides. Jeff isn't the only resident who has massacred his landscape. There are several other Westchester homes where the owners performed a similar chop-job on their shrubs. Everything we do with Jeff will also apply to those other homeowners, assuming that they are homeowners and not renters. If the occupant of the house is a renter, it adds a new dimension to the problem. A renter does not have as great a stake in a neighborhood. He will not be as sensitive to quality of life issues, because if the value of the property declines, the renter loses nothing. Westchester is fortunate in that nearly everyone – I'm guessing about 95% – owns their own home, but in areas where this is not the case it will clearly require much more effort to build the kind of stable community that we've described here. I realize that there are people who rent their entire lives, but clearly renting is not a practice that favors permanence and commitment. A renter who wants to make a commitment to his community has to hope that the landlord doesn't evict him someday, or sell the property out from under him. Moreover, if you live in an apartment complex, and pay rent to an anonymous corporation, there is even less incentive for you to keep the place looking nice. The corporation pays a manager and a grounds-keeper to worry about exterior maintenance. The resident is lucky if they let him plant a couple of petunias somewhere. Still, I think it is possible to build a community among apartment dwellers. You could still have a patrol, for example. There could be a hallway patrol. But you would have to figure out a way to reduce the isolation, to improve the interior geography, to open up those apartment doors. What about putting old-fashioned screen doors on each apartment? Wouldn't that allow more interaction? Better yet, how about no door at all, just a beaded curtain? Or how about this: you install windows that face inwards, towards the corridor? And without question a common dining room is a must for each building. Truthfully, a common eating place is a good idea anywhere, for any community, even a neighborhood of single-family homes. Indeed, especially a neighborhood of single-family homes.

I didn't mean to get sidetracked on a discussion of apartment communities, but this gives you an idea of the magnitude of the task at hand. When you consider how one goes about changing a culture – in this case the rental culture – it's not a small potatoes operation that you're dealing with. As we've been saying all along, it will require a completely new mind-set, a change in perspective, on the part of a goodly number of people. That's why it's important that you take full advantage of what a neighborhood like Westchester has to offer. If our program can't work in a perfectly livable place like this, where can it work?

## 7.2 *The Art Of Loitering*

I'd like to return for a moment to a problem that we discussed in connection with schools. In the last chapter we argued that the situation with intimidation and harassment by schoolyard bullies was serious enough that the community, and Garden Zone Management, ought to take immediate action to remedy the problem. Let me point out that it's not only at school that you find bullies, and it's not just kids who do the bullying; there are plenty of adults who are good at it. I'm thinking in particular of people who are harassed on the job.

Here's an example. I had a lady friend, Jody I'll call her, who was being harassed by a person, an adult, who worked with her at a local restaurant. It seems the co-worker felt she had to establish a superior position in the employee pecking order. Jody had a slight disability that I won't bother to describe, and the co-worker singled her out specifically because of her condition, insulting and belittling her about it.

When I hear of a problem like this, my first thought is, how contemptible can a person be to put down someone who is less able than they are? My second thought is, let's pressure the restaurant to fire this little twirp, but before we do, we'll slap her around some just to teach her a lesson. Upon more careful reflection however, you realize that by beating her up, or forcing the co-worker out of her job, you have reverted to the violent, reactionary mode of functioning that man in his ignorance has perpetuated for all this time. Inflicting pain on the bully clearly will not change anything. Removing the bully from the job would help Jody of course, but the bully would no doubt find another victim elsewhere. Truthfully, it is not the co-worker who is at fault in this, it is *we* who are to blame, *we* meaning the community. The reason that we are at fault is that we are not *managing* people like Jody and her co-worker correctly. Despite her physical disability (or maybe because of it) Jody is cheerful, likable and eager to please. She is not however, very assertive. Her co-worker is just the opposite: petty, mean and spiteful; a person who finds it necessary to dominate those who are weaker. Yet from a character development standpoint it is the co-worker, not Jody, who is disabled. She is spiritually disabled. If the restaurant manager were doing his job, he would not allow a person with such a severe disability – and I'm talking about the co-worker now – to even speak to Jody, let alone abuse her. He would make it crystal clear that such behavior was not appropriate in his workplace. If he commanded any respect at all among his employees, he would only have to give this instruction once, and never again would anything like this happen. Again, just the presence of an authority like this – a person who takes notice of discourtesy, and who is not afraid to show his or her disapproval – the mere presence of such a person goes a long way towards curing problems of this sort. For, on some level people like the co-worker are aware of their disabilities, and

they are sensitive to criticism about their spiritual shortcomings. When faced with situations that require a more sophisticated sense of fairness, their instinct is to look for guidance from the folks who surround them. The problem is that our communities aren't structured to provide this kind of guidance. Even when there are people who might take the lead in this fashion, they aren't allowed to do anything meaningful. Society doesn't permit such freelance decision making.

Do *I* have a greater sense of fairness? Are my own instincts more refined than those of other people? In the past I might have said no, but lately it seems that everywhere I turn I discover something else that is not right, not fair, not natural. Have things become that much worse during these few years, or is it I who have changed? Actually I think both are true; that both I and society are different. Unfortunately, it appears at the moment that we are not headed in the same direction, the world and I. Perhaps this simply means that I need to be more diligent about practicing subjectivity; about focusing on the good rather than the bad, so that I can rise above these nagging moral dilemmas.

Getting back to Jody, all that was needed in her case was for the manager to assess the kind of people he had working for him, and to instruct them accordingly. And the correct word is instruct, not command. As we've already remarked, you can't beat people over the head with this stuff. There has to be an element of education in how you handle it. But given that the restaurant management was not up to the job, would this be a situation where a Garden Zone Manager should become involved? Could he or she go in there and apply courtesy reduction somehow?

Notice that there are parallels between Jody's situation and the situation we have with people living in the neighborhood. The same methods we proposed for dealing with the John Dillinger character who abused his wife (see Section 5.7) ought to work equally well with the folks who abuse Jody at the restaurant. Recall that the key to dealing with a problem like this lies in how you approach the parties involved. Approaching people is a far sight easier if you have taken prior steps to counteract anonymity. In the neighborhood we use Neighborhood Watch to overcome the anonymity barrier. The nosy neighbor principle allows people to widened their focus somewhat. With the Patrol it widens even further. By becoming mobile we are able to look out for people who are more distant, yet who still reside within the community. Moreover, by operating conspicuously in the garden zone, patrollers take a position that enables the transfer of qualities to and from the interior environment. From the streets and sidewalks they can interact with, and perhaps influence, residents who might otherwise be inaccessible. Such interaction builds confidence. When people have confidence in you, they respond better to your suggestions.

Gaining the confidence of a business operator will be more difficult, however. These folks are busy. All of their energy is directed towards making

money. It's hard to approach someone whose attention is completely absorbed like this. Moreover, business owners don't have same stake in the community that a resident might have; they are less likely to be concerned about the quality of life. Nevertheless, I'm proposing that we treat them as we would any neighbor; to talk straight out to them; invite them to get involved in community activities, whichever community that happens to be closest. We need to be a little bit nosy, in a friendly way of course, just as we would with the family that lives next door. One thing we could certainly do would be to expand the Patrol to include the commercial areas, the shopping plazas and what-have-you, but I'm thinking that we really have to get out of our cars if we want to make contact with people. In the case of a restaurant it's easy. Patrollers can walk right in, sit down and have lunch. That doesn't mean that they are welcome in the kitchen, or in the accounting office, however. But isn't that where we would like to be? Looking in once in a while on the places where people actually work? This might seem awkward, but you can eliminate the awkwardness by taking the correct angle.

Pot juggling might work in this regard. Recall that balancing flower pots is actually a demonstration of courtesy, where courtesy is refinement of action. By performing action without spin you develop a deeper appreciation for what spin actually is; which is to say, a more clear understanding of those human qualities that belong to the non-material side. This is the angle that we're talking about: acting externally while at the same time keeping one foot in the inner realm. It's the spiritual angle, and I submit that it's the best way to get the attention of business, by approaching them with flowers on our heads.

Sitting here in my private compartment, pondering this stuff intellectually, this seems like great gimmick, but clearly some business owners will freak-out if we hit them with the flowers right away. As it was with the neighborhood, unless there is significant support from respected community leaders, the guys in the white coats would no doubt descend on us very quickly. Perhaps we can take an intermediate step that doesn't frighten people so much. What about this: Several managers or patrollers meet in front of the business – the restaurant, the store, whatever – and simply hang out. In other words, we'll loiter, just as if we were derelicts or delinquents. Except, we're not. We're the most sane and responsible people in the community, yet we loiter. How can that be? What's going on here?

We could sit there silently, on lawn chairs perhaps. I think silence would be best. Not that we'll be glum, but we're not laughing and joking either. We just sit quietly ... watching ... offering no explanation. We simply observe. Perhaps not every day, but often enough that we become recognized. And if we can get some of the more enlightened local leaders to join us, the recognition will indeed happen. The more respected the leader, the quicker the recognition would come, and the better the results would be. What results are we talking about? Again,

we're performing an exercise in refinement of action, which generates the experience of greater courtesy. Courtesy is our jumping off point for spirituality.

Clearly this gimmick will work better in some locations rather than others. Loitering at a downtown office building, or at an amusement park, or a gravel pit, isn't likely to accomplish much. The geography of such places makes interaction difficult. Although, right here on Kirby Road, in neighboring Clinton, there is a large asphalt factory directly across the street from a development of single family homes. Needless to say, a company that makes the raw material for parking lots is not exactly friendly to the environment, or to the community. Pouring roads is a necessary evil these days, but it clearly does little to connect communities to the earth. Since this particular factory is located so close to a residential area, there might be some value in setting up our chairs at the entrance to the yard, if only to count the dump trucks that roar up the street, showering rock off their rear ends.

You can think of all sorts of places where loitering could be applied: gas stations, schools, government buildings. Even the air base could be loitered. But the establishments that I really have in mind are at the nearby shopping plazas. That's where the broadest cross section of the local community comes together. In certain plazas in this part of Prince George's County there are signs posted that warn patrons against loitering. Apparently the police will be summoned if you hang around too long outside the entrance. At other plazas I've seen just the opposite: benches that seem to invite people to linger for a while. The problem is that we don't understand the dynamics of garden zone interaction. I submit that loitering in the garden zone is a natural thing to do. People linger at public places in order to communicate and compare common interests. Though they may not realize it, they are also stirring up collective awareness when they gather like this. It's not a very coherent awareness, however. Not when the loiterers are groups of teenagers looking for some action. Young folks seem to reach an age where they want to know what is happening outside their homes. They develop a desire to take part in the events of the real world. Truthfully, I think that kids who hang out like this are actually looking for a stronger leader to come along and take control of things, to tell them what to do essentially. We could of course ask local tradesmen to visit these locations in order to recruit workers. That's already happening in parts of the county where the immigrant population is high. But I'm thinking that if we got the okay from the property owners, Garden Zone Managers could just sit out front and watch. We're not even thinking about crime prevention here. We are simply acting as the eyes and the ears of the community ... the true community ... the Natural Community. We are there as part of the sky, and part of the wind. We position ourselves on the concrete tarmac to be representatives of the softer, greener side of the garden zone; as ambassadors for the earth, if you will.

As with the neighborhood patrol, there is a good possibility that people will want to loiter along with us. But the interests of the folks who frequent a commercial plaza may not be the same as those of neighborhood residents. We're going to encounter a somewhat different group of people. Nevertheless, we might yet discover a potential Garden Zone Manager among the merchants, patrons and passersby. And although we are not visiting these plazas to act as spies or detectives, it will no doubt happen that we will register information about people that may become useful later. We will at least get to know faces; to know the employees, the customers, and to perhaps learn who the bad and the good guys are. Things might even progress to the point where the business owners invite us inside. For what purpose? To improve the connection between the business and the community; to reinforce the geography, to communicate common interest, and to refine shared spirit. I believe the more perceptive businessmen will catch on to the value of this. With the sleazier operations however, we'll have to see what transpires.

But what about some of those sleazier types? What if it's not just Jody's co-worker, but the co-worker's boss, and the boss of her boss, who are low-life ruffians? What then? Do we sue the company for discrimination? Call the Better Business Bureau? Ask a social worker to investigate? How about we start a boycott? We'll picket the place and contact the news media to get a reporter on their tails. Or perhaps we should simply form a vigilante squad and trash their building some night. That would get their attention, wouldn't it?

All of these options will always be open. They're always in the back of your head. But as teachers, as leaders, we're trying to rise above the grosser measures; to eschew actions that come from a forceful, reactive mind-set. The strongest measure we should ever have to take is this: We approach Jody's co-worker, or boss ... we take her aside ... and we politely suggest that she treat Jody with more dignity.

That's it. Nothing more. Once again, all this requires is talk. Plain, straight talk. How about that? What a concept, huh? The loitering will set this up for us, just like the Patrol sets up the approach to the neighbors.

Now realize, there is nothing to stop us from walking in right off the bat to confront the employee, or the proprietor. In fact, I have a problem right now that demands that kind of boldness. A friend of mine has apparently been ripped-off by a pizza shop that he used to manage. Bobby was the right-hand man for the owner, and he was very loyal and hard-working, but after spending several years at this particular shop, a very successful enterprise by the way, he decided to strike out on his own, and he moved to West Virginia to open his own restaurant there. All of this took place pretty quickly, and he had to leave before he got his final paycheck. The owner promised to send Bobby the money in a week or two, but several months have gone by and he still hasn't received anything. He

has called his old boss a number of times, but the guy keeps giving him the run-around. It's not a huge sum that's at stake, a few hundred dollars, but it is not insignificant either. So what does one do here? A genuinely good guy is getting screwed by someone who does business in our community. Doesn't someone need to speak up about this? Shouldn't someone ride over there and ask the owner to make good on what he owes? It seems obvious to me. Will the owner respond? Maybe not, but he will at least be made aware that there are folks here who pay attention to such things. And we for our part will know better than to do business with this guy in the future. The drawback is that if we go in cold like this, and get nothing, then any future attempts at loitering that business won't be nearly as effective. When we start off with heavy spin on our action, the spin lingers for a very long time. Thus we will have squandered our chance to convey a lesson in deeper courtesy.

Nevertheless, here is your golden opportunity, dear reader. Who would like to volunteer for this? Who has the mettle? Let me know when you're ready, and I'll be happy to provide the pertinent details.

### *7.3 Gardening As A Community Ritual*

In various contexts during this discussion we have touched on the idea of giving and growing flowers. Recall that Carol was able to break the ice with the Dillinger family by taking flowers to them, and that the Quality of Life Committee was formed initially for the benefit of my own flower garden. Since I took up gardening, it has become manifestly apparent that no home, no community should be without flowers. Nothing captures your eye like a floral bouquet. The drabest room lights up magically when you add a vase of garden flowers to it. For a while now I've been giving vases and baskets of flowers to friends, and invariably people are blown away when they see them. Dahlias especially. Their effect is dramatic. Everyone exclaims how beautiful they are, and when you tell them that they came from the backyard, they're astonished. But what's more astonishing to me is that no one has thought of this before; that something so simple, yet so wonderfully uplifting has been overlooked for all this time. I say overlooked, because at least in my stratum of society – white, blue-collar, baby-boomers – flower gardening is a rarity. What I want to know is, where have our minds been? What vitally critical things have so thoroughly monopolized our time that we have neglected this practice? What kind of backwater boors are we that we can't sow a simple sunflower seed, or bury a gladiolus bulb, or grow a black-eyed-susan? How can we call our society cultured when we fail to recognize this basic aspect of civilization, the harvesting of Mother Earth's most glori-

ous handiwork? There should be flower gardens everywhere, in every community, every neighborhood. Hundreds of them. Thousands.

How important are flowers?

Let's put it this way: Forget everything we've talked about thus far. Assume we know nothing about awareness, about prevention, courtesy, etc. I submit that if all we did in a neighborhood was to establish a permanent, community-run cutting garden, either a very large one, or several smaller ones, and we involved everyone in the project ... working folks, retirees, families, children ... we tended the plots from spring to winter ... did all of the things a gardener does ... mulching, composting, weeding, transplanting, pest control ... and we delivered fresh cut flowers in season, to local residents, personally ... I submit that such a project by itself would significantly reduce, if not eliminate, crime in the neighborhood. At least, that is, the crime committed by our own residents. The catch is that people have to take the thing seriously. First of all, the leaders have to take it seriously, and they in turn have to convince the community of its value. They have to establish flower gardening as a strong common interest activity for each community member. Even if an individual doesn't actually come out and dig dirt, he must be involved at least to the extent that he has positive thoughts about the project. The community will thus be defined by the gardening. Gardening will become the community's reality.

There are all sorts of benefits to be derived from community gardening. In the first place, gardening improves both common interest and geography, which brings about an overall increase in the strength of community, and a commensurate top-to-bottom improvement in the quality of life. If you inject into this activity a permanent group of neighborhood elders and leaders, folks who have refined their awareness somewhat, the shared spirit factor would also be strengthened. We would then have the kernel of a legitimate Natural Community. Add to this the Neighborhood Watch program, and the crime prevention package is complete.

Of course if we grow a flower garden, it makes sense that we ought also to be growing vegetables and herbs. When you speak of connecting to the earth, growing food creates perhaps the closest connection of all. It's easy to see this connection at the gross level, at the level of working the soil, but one can also imagine a much closer relationship between humans and plants. The question of how matter, material nourishment, is transformed into non-material intelligence takes you into deep territory. It brings up issues not just of nutrition, but of what effect foods have on the entire spectrum of thoughts, feelings and emotions. Can certain plants create happiness for example? Take spinach. Can a spinach salad pick you up? Can it calm you down? Can it make you depressed? If so, could we then infer that one or more of these qualities – happiness, etc. – were contained in the spinach plant, structured within it somehow? It's probably not cor-

rect to say that the spinach plant has a happiness gene, but you might argue that it somehow expresses a happy flavor. Could we go a step further and theorize that spinach evolved this trait for man's benefit? After all, no other life form is capable of true emotion. If a plant produces happiness, it could only be doing so for us. We may be stretching things a bit with this line of reasoning, but I submit that such possibilities do exist, and that humans can indeed detect the physiological and psychological effects brought about by the food we eat. Will having a community garden restore our appreciation for the emotional value of spinach? Maybe not, but the roots of agriculture are ancient enough that man might well be programmed with an instinctive drive to cultivate plants, and if a gardener can recognize that instinct, he may also recognize even subtler links to the plant world.

The sort of gardening that I have in mind is one in which everyone shares in the cultivation of the entire field. In a typical community garden the field is partitioned into individual plots where each person grows crops independently. The gardener pays a small rental fee for his piece of the lot, and harvests what he himself plants. But what I'm thinking about for the neighborhood is more along the lines of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) where local residents invest in the operation of a nearby farm. At the start of the growing season a household will make a modest donation, a few hundred dollars perhaps, to the farmer. In exchange the shareholder receives a basket of fresh produce every week or two. Here in Washington D.C. the climate is relatively mild. The last spring frost typically occurs in early to mid-April, and the growing season extends roughly from March to November. I've planted vegetables in my own garden as early as February. There is a wide variety of crops that do well in our area: corn, beans, potatoes, carrots, beets, collards, spinach, broccoli, cabbage, squash, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, watermelon, cantaloupe, blackberries, peaches and figs, just to name a few. The rainfall here averages 38 inches per year and the soil is fairly decent, containing a good measure of mineral-rich clay. Unfortunately, in most of the Westchester house lots the top soil was scraped off and hauled away when the subdivision was first built. What's left is at best very heavy and compacted. At worst it isn't soil at all, but rocky land-fill. In spite of this it is possible to grow flowers and vegetables almost anywhere if you don't mind working large amounts of compost into your soil. And even when there's a rock pile under your lawn, as in my yard, you can still build raised beds on top of the rubble.

Even if you have no yard of your own, the suburbs of southern Prince George's County are still sufficiently spread out that one can usually find a patch of undeveloped land within walking distance of his home. It's important that a community garden be either inside the neighborhood, or very close by, so that residents can see what's going on with it. Allowing folks to observe creates

common interest. Moreover, being able to walk to the place where the crops are growing would enhance the ritual aspect of the activity. If enough folks get involved with the project, it's easy to envision volunteers in boots and sun hats trudging down to the farm to put in a few hours of work. When you can walk to the garden from your house, and the gardeners live right there with you, clearly it attracts a lot more attention to what you're doing. As it was with patrolling and loitering, when the most respected community members get involved in an activity, they draw other people into it. Moreover, gardening is such a naturally life-supporting activity that it almost doesn't matter what kind of spin you put on it; you really can't screw it up no matter how you go about it. And if you garden in a purely innocent way, the positive effects will flow right on out to the far reaches of the universe. At least it seems that way from an intellectual standpoint. There is a subtle relationship between activity and awareness – connections that I'm not completely sure about. At some point I was drawn to work the earth. Exactly how that happened I can't fully explain. What I can tell you is that it feels natural to be out in the morning sunlight, listening to the sounds of nature, feeling the wind; watching as the rain brings the seedlings to life. Not that gardening is easy work. On the contrary, it can be very taxing. But gardening is comfortable. It's a good fit.

In Westchester we are bordered on two sides by land that is owned by the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), a multi-jurisdictional agency that oversees the use of public land in the Maryland suburbs of Washington. Camp Springs Park as it's called, would be an ideal place to establish a community garden provided someone could convince the Parks and Planning folks to let us use it. And why wouldn't they? The neighborhood parks are there for the neighborhoods, are they not? One would think that Parks and Planning would jump at the chance for a community garden. However, there are legal statutes that govern how land is used, and with the government it is always the statute, and not necessarily reason, that prevails. Nevertheless, this is what I would like to propose to the residents of Westchester: that we petition MNCPPC to allow us to establish a CSA-style farm plot in Camp Springs Park. Now, when I say "we", I don't actually know whom that means at the moment. No doubt some sort of legal entity will have to be created. A non-profit corporation perhaps? And I suppose permits will have to be secured. Will there be fees to pay? Reports to file? Must we write "by-laws"? And of course where money is involved, there will be accounts to keep, which means bookkeepers, tax consultants, IRS forms...

Ugh! How distasteful it all is. All of this legal minutia. Have you ever read the tax rules for non-profits? It's insanity. To be legal is to be insane. How on earth do we ever accomplish anything with this cracked logic?

I suppose I should stop griping about it. One does what one has to do. If you want to change the world, you have to start with the way the world is now. But I tell you what ... let's not try to sort out every detail of this process. Let's leave the legal and financial questions for later. We've already postulated that there must exist a philanthropist out there who will take an interest in our plan. Moreover, we have to hope that eventually support will come from the members of the community, and that's really where the bulk of our effort should be – on generating support within the neighborhood.

If it turns out that the park is off limits, or it takes too long to get approval, we can see if there is someone with a decent-size lot who wouldn't mind having the garden in their yard. Failing that, we can ask a nearby church to lend us a piece of their property. Putting the garden on the grounds of a local school is another option to consider. Virtually every school, public and private, has acres of empty playground space. Friendly High School for example, is surrounded by a very large expanse of open field, and is within easy walking distance of several neighborhoods. Furthermore, the school has an enclosed courtyard that has fallen into disuse. The courtyard was landscaped twenty years ago, with walkways, benches, ornamental plantings, and even a greenhouse, but no one goes out there anymore. It would be an ideal place for students to establish a perennial bed, a cutting garden, a kitchen garden, or even a dahlia bed. Is there enough interest for this? Well, all you would need are a couple of energetic kids, and maybe a teacher to supervise. Other students are bound to become interested when they see what's going on. Why wouldn't every school have a teaching garden like this? It's scary how much sense this makes.

What I envision here in Westchester is that in the beginning there might be four or five of us who will cultivate a small plot somewhere. I can almost name the people in my neighborhood who would consider doing something like this. Interestingly, most of the neighbors who come to mind are women, and most of those are black women. There are two African-American ladies close by to me who are already growing vegetables in their backyards. These two gardeners don't use pesticides on their plants; they're trying to have an organic garden. Imagine that. Maybe the message about the environment is getting through after all.

Starting a brand new garden is no small task. Apart from the sheer physical labor, a good amount of planning is required. The vegetable and herb gardens will of course have to be organic, or as close to it as we can get. I'm thinking that if we also grow flowers, that we could get away with using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) on the floral side of the fence. IPM involves techniques that minimize, but don't completely prohibit, the use of chemical pest controls. There will obviously be a learning curve to negotiate with this stuff. Westchester doesn't have any resident agronomists that I'm aware of, so we may want to

invite some experts to come in and give us pointers. It happens that there is an organic farm fairly close by. The Robert Ware Straus Ecosystem Farm in Accokeek is a CSA farm, and a fully certified organic operation. Not only do they not use synthetic pest controls or fertilizers, they practice sustainable agriculture methods such as planting cover crops to conserve and restore the soil during the winter months. Are we going to go that far with our own plot? Perhaps not right away, but we should certainly be thinking in that direction. If the garden is indeed at the park, we'll also have to think about whether or not irrigation will be necessary. The Ecosystem Farm draws water from the Potomac River with a solar-powered pump. We ourselves may end up laying a water line to Tinker's Creek, or digging a well.

Having the garden at the park is going to attract deer, which are pests in this region, so we'll have to build a fence. And we'll certainly need a shed, because there will be tools to store – spades, rakes, cultivators, pruners, spray equipment, a wheelbarrow, a yard cart. There may also be power tools to lock up, so the shed will have to be well-secured. Maybe even alarmed. How about electricity? Will we need lighting? Perhaps we can install a windmill, or a solar panel like the Ecosystem Farm. The alternative is to ask the power company to run a line out there for us.

All of this is just preparation. We haven't even talked about selecting crops, sowing seed, fertilizing, weeding, pest control or disease control, not to mention tilling. In the ornamental garden we'll have to worry about things like staking, pruning, dividing, dead-heading, and storing tubers. Also, mulching, trimming and root-pruning for trees and shrubs. Certainly we should grow cut-flowers, including dahlias, but it would also be nice to think about creating a natural landscape with native plants. This raises the possibility of establishing a nature trail, a bird walk perhaps. The banks of Tinker's Creek would be ideal for this, provided of course that MNCPPC allows it.

There may be security issues to consider with such a trail, however. Many of the homes here are located quite close to the creek; the house lots extend right to its banks in some places. Considering the problem we have with thefts and break-ins in this neighborhood, residents might be nervous about having a walking trail so close to their back doors. Truthfully, there may be security issues to consider with the garden itself. Not many people know about Camp Springs Park. It's tucked into an out-of-the-way corner between subdivisions. Nevertheless, a number of local delinquents have managed to find it, and they occasionally go to the park to drink and do drugs. Recently a kid was arrested in possession of a handgun there. It's disturbing because nine and ten-year-olds go there too, and the younger children are quite often hanging with the adolescents. Some folks might be intimidated by these punky teens, but this is exactly why we need to be out there. There is a crying need for responsible adults to step up and

become visible in the garden zone, in the places where kids congregate, first of all to show that intimidation doesn't work in this community, but furthermore, to *take charge* of these kids. We need to organize their free time, to structure it. Yes, kids should be allowed to play, but there should be a constructive element to the play. There should be a connection between what kids do during play time and what we adults do in real time. I suggest that tending a garden would serve perfectly in this regard. It's a great way to set a positive example for the neighborhood youth, and also to connect them to a fundamental aspect of real life: the production of food. Just by adults being out there, without even putting any pressure on the kids, you might be able to draw a few of them in, to get them involved in the work. Moreover, it's easy to see community gardening as part of the larger farm system that develops young Garden Zone Managers (see Section 5.10).

If the community garden is successful, the neighborhood could set up a market stand where we would sell whatever produce remained after the shareholders got their baskets. Another idea to consider is a periodic dinner for the gardeners and supporters. I'm thinking that a monthly dinner would be quite doable, provided that enough folks helped out with it. Actually, if we ever do manage to create a semblance of community, we ought to consider eating together more often, perhaps even daily. We could of course eat at a local restaurant, or at a church, but again, the ideal place to meet would be right in the neighborhood. That way we can take full advantage of the local geography. We could serve lunch for the folks who are home during the day, or organize an evening meal that working people could attend. What an accomplishment *that* would be, to establish a communal dining facility in an enclave of suburban anonymity.

In any case, if there were any doubts about whether a Garden Zone Manager would have enough work to keep him busy, this should put them to rest. This community garden project alone could become a full-time job. We've been describing the project as it might take shape here in suburban Washington, but clearly everything we've talked about would apply equally well almost anywhere. The exceptions would be those areas where the climate or the terrain were not suitable for gardening. Does this mean that Garden Zone Management can't be practiced in certain areas? Actually, the real question is, can there be a garden *zone* if there can't be a garden? I would suggest that the answer is yes, there is indeed a garden zone anywhere that people happen to make their homes. The intermediate zone between the interior environment and the wilderness can be said to exist even in areas where nothing will grow. But you have to wonder why people would want to live in such places. What would compel a person to make his home in the Nevada desert, say, or in the frozen tundra of the far North? The infrastructure of the industrial age has enabled man to settle re-

gions that were previously uninhabitable. We can transport water and food hundreds or even thousands of miles to turn the driest desert into an oasis, but this is clearly not such a great way to organize ourselves. For one thing, it requires a great deal of energy to keep such a transport system in operation. In any event, those of us who are fortunate enough to enjoy a favorable climate should be growing what we can in whatever place is available to us, be it a square-foot garden in an urban courtyard, a terraced backyard in the suburbs, or a green meadow alongside a country road.

#### *7.4 Moving Towards Self-Sufficiency*

We began this discourse by examining how crime relates to the quality of life, and quickly found ourselves pursuing lines of thought that took us far afield from our initial inquiry. Indeed, we ventured so far afield that we crossed into metaphysical territory. To be precise, we crossed into that territory intellectually, which doesn't really qualify as a crossing at all. As it turns out, there is a connection between crime and metaphysics, a very intimate connection in fact, but you won't get the full sense of it from reading this essay, or from reading period. We've also had to address some broad social issues, and what we eventually concluded was that the problems of society have their origin within individuals, in the lack of personal, spiritual development. This is true not just of the criminal population, but of all of us. We discovered that even something as basic as Neighborhood Watch will not work unless there is some degree of spiritual advancement among neighbors. We argued that the place to address these social issues is close to home, on every block and in every little neighborhood. In terms of fixing crime, what we have proposed with Garden Zone Management is a grass roots solution to a society-wide problem. But say that we did eliminate crime in the neighborhood. Say we achieved the preventive ideal of a permanent, 100% reduction in the local crime rate. What then? When Westchester has become crime-free, do we declare the project a success and close up shop? Do we go back to our bunkers and resume our private lifestyles?

What we must keep in mind is that all along our approach has been a preventive one. Rather than struggling to improve the truly bad areas, we want to work in those regions where the quality of life is already good enough to attract people. From the community development standpoint this means that we select a location where the components of a Natural Community – geography, shared interest, and shared spirit – are each present to such an extent that one would consider making that place his permanent home. There must also exist some small amount of wealth among the residents; the necessities of life must be fairly well covered. On the other hand, because of weakness in geography, the pro-

gram would not work well in the fenced and gated estates that house the upper income classes. We are looking then for a moderately well-off, relatively healthy community, and we would like to introduce it to higher spiritual levels, while at the same time making sure that its wealth, however modest, is nevertheless sustainable.

Wealth in America is usually measured by the value of one's material possessions; that plus the amount of income one has. However, folks who belong to a community might see it differently. They might think of wealth in terms of the strength, coherence and permanence of the community that embraces them. I would also suggest that the self-sufficiency of a community contributes to its wealth. These days people equate self-sufficiency to having a pension they can draw on, but there's another perspective to consider. The question we must ask is, what things are necessary for man to live comfortably. What technology is necessary, for example? Televisions? Satellites? Rubber-soled shoes? And pensions aside, how does one go about supporting oneself in a self-sufficient community? Must we all get jobs in offices, say, or can there exist a local economy that doesn't require a big corporation, or a factory to be located nearby? Without going too far into these issues, let me point out that our lives have become significantly more complicated than they need to be; complicated from the standpoint of our dependence on sophisticated technology, heavy industry, and long-distance transportation. Materially speaking, a self-sufficient community is one in which people work where they live, have little or no need to travel, supply their own energy from a renewable, non-polluting source, eat locally grown food, recycle or otherwise dispose of their waste in an ecologically sound fashion, and have only a minimal requirement for the utilities of high technology. Of course, defining what "minimal" means is a whole other topic. Perhaps the better question is, can we develop a technology that has a minimal impact on the environment? Can we build a biodegradable computer, say? One that can be tossed on the compost pile and then raked over the tomato bed in three months time? Or perhaps we need to go the other way – to build computers that run for ten thousand years, with components that are 100% recyclable and plug-compatible with other electronic devices.

There are other aspects of self-sufficiency besides the material requirements. We talked before about filling the leadership gap between the government and the neighborhoods. Your first thought in this regard might be that we're just adding another layer to the existing bureaucracy. However, what we're really talking about is bottom-up government; one in which the communities – which is to say, the individuals who make up the community – govern themselves. Clearly self-government of this sort is an essential element of self-sufficiency. Something else that we don't automatically consider is the physical health of the community. It's reasonable to surmise that in a fully self-sufficient community

most people will be in good health most of the time. Moreover, folks will be careful about practicing preventive health care: eating right, getting enough rest, and so forth. In such a community, instead of dealing with disease and acute illness, doctors will spend more time treating people who are already fairly healthy, and who want to become even healthier. Furthermore, a self-sufficient community will be in fairly decent spiritual shape. To understand spiritual self-sufficiency we have to go back to the four part definition of spirituality that we compiled in Chapter 4: adopting a preventive mind-set, refinement of awareness, distinguishing the inner realm, and growth of character. Self-sufficiency in these areas has to do with maintaining the knowledge of how one develops internally; to create a collective memory of the methods and the philosophy of spiritual growth, and to put this philosophy into practice. Without spiritual self-sufficiency the shared spirit will decline and the community will lose its coherence. In a self-sufficient community there will exist a tradition where the knowledge of how to continue living in a self-sufficient manner – materially, physically and spiritually – is passed on from generation to generation. For this there must exist a permanent group of community members whose job it is to maintain that knowledge. I'm not sure that a typical community can accomplish this by itself. There aren't enough knowledgeable people to go around, not at present anyway. Here, then is where we will have to rely on other people for help, where it's important not to be isolated from the world around us.

Given the current state of global affairs – the interdependence of national economies, the pressures of population growth, the continuing degradation of the environment – it may not be realistic to expect that a small community could ever become completely self-sufficient, not in the industrialized West at least, not without adopting some sort of radical, survivalist style of existence. The survivalists are indeed self-sufficient to some extent, but they are also isolated, and no caring, enlightened person would ever live in such isolation. On the contrary, you want to be reaching out in whatever way you can to assist others. The idea of self-sufficiency is not that you cut yourself off from people, but that you establish a position of strength for yourself, so that you can reach out. A weak community is always having to react to internal problems. It has its hands full just maintaining. A strong community on the other hand can offer more help to its neighbors. Ultimately a self-sufficient community can offer more help to the world at large. How does one help the world? In all of the usual ways – volunteering, donating, praying – but in our scheme I suggest that we could also help by coordinating our activities with those of other neighborhoods and communities. How exactly we would do that I'm not sure. I guess you first have to find out who, if anyone, is running a Neighborhood Watch, or is active in a civic association, say. It might also be good to get in touch with groups like garden clubs and PTAs, and clearly the local clergy are people with whom you should have

some contact. As we suggested in Chapter 5, church pastors might even become Garden Zone Managers. At the very least we ought to plant the seed by letting folks know about our Patrol and other activities. The idea is to set an example not just for the people in your own neighborhood, but for those who are outside looking in. As it happens, our activities here in Westchester have indeed started to attract attention. People have noticed what we're doing and I get calls now from other Neighborhood Watch organizers who want to consult and compare notes.

We are obviously just scratching the surface of the self-sufficiency question in these few short paragraphs. The point I wanted to make is that eliminating crime is only the beginning. The philosophy of Garden Zone Management leads one to realize that what we ultimately want to accomplish is the elimination of crime not just in the community, but in the world. As impossible as this might seem, the aim is entirely consistent with the preventive mind-set. There are many such seemingly unattainable goals which gradually appear less remote as the preventive mind-set takes root in one's consciousness. For example, we mentioned the importance of a healthy lifestyle, and in particular the importance of getting enough rest. Imagine for a moment what it would be like if people took this advice seriously. What if we could convince everyone in Camp Springs to go to bed by 9:30, say? The lights are out, the TV is off, the thermostat is turned down, and people get under the covers and go to sleep. And *everyone* keeps to this regimen. Think of how it would be. Stores and restaurants could close at a reasonable hour. We could extinguish the street lights, because no one would be driving. The police could sit in the station house and snooze, because there would be nothing for them to do at night. With all the lights turned off we could once again look up and view the glorious stellar arc, just as our ancestors did. It's possible that we might recover the lost connection between man and the heavens. Maybe someone would reinvent the ancient art of astrology. Prehistoric men put down their spears to chart the firmament at the dawn of civilization, and they were somehow able to determine a connection between the course of the planets and the course of human spirit. What prevents us from doing the same? Is it just that we can't see the stars anymore, or has something else been lost?

Here's another thought. We talked about forming a Quality of Life Committee to coordinate landscaping among property owners. We also discussed the possibility of creating a community garden at the local park. How about we combine these two ideas? How about creating multi-family gardens in the backyards of several adjacent houses? Recall how I was able to design a "Bean Garden" that connected me to two of my neighbors. Why not extend this scheme to include not just a tiny corner of one or two yards, but entire properties connecting entire blocks of homes? For example, there are twenty homes on the perime-

ter of the quadrangle formed by my block of Chesterfield Drive and the streets on either side and behind me. The combined house lots extend for eight or nine acres. The contiguous backyard space of these homes covers roughly five acres. Let's say we take down the chainlink fencing that separates the yards, cut back some of the screening shrubbery, remove the plethora of silver maples, and create a common garden that all twenty homes can access. Five acres is a good amount of space. We could have quite a large ornamental garden, with paths and trees and all, as well as a substantial vegetable plot. And there would still be room to install a children's play area, if people wanted that.

What about privacy? Won't people be reluctant to give up their exclusive backyards?

As I see it, you're not losing privacy with this plan, you're gaining it. Imagine stepping off your patio into a five-acre park that is accessible to you and a few neighbors, and is otherwise closed to the public. Not that family and friends aren't welcome, but a tour bus from Ohio couldn't ever visit the place. Now isn't that about as exclusive as you can get? Wealthy people pay big dollars for such exclusivity. They don't, however, pay to live in a weedy, chainlinked dog run, surrounded by strangers. Isn't it obvious that our isolation is hurting us? That our community is less desirable, and our property values are lower, because we are too fearful, and too ignorant to cooperate with each other? A garden like this would add tens of thousands of dollars to property values, especially if some of the folks involved were committed to the community the way that they need to be committed – for the long term.

We could continue in this vein almost indefinitely. The possibilities of self-sufficiency are very far-reaching. For example, what if people actually did start working at home, or from home? Could we do away with automobiles? With gasoline? What if small communities really were able to produce their own energy? Say, from solar power? Would we still need nuclear plants? Coal plants? What if everyone did become seriously concerned about trees? Moreover, what if they bought into the idea of using native plants for landscaping? Could we restore the environment of pre-colonial days? What if we really could grow enough produce to feed the community? Would people eat healthier? If so, would it hurt the fast-food industry? What about the supermarkets and the food processing companies? Would they be impacted? And if they were, so what? Are we wedded to the present system of food production? For that matter, are we wedded to any system? The economic system, the social system, the system of government?

These questions have been asked before of course, and intelligent people continue to debate them today. So how do we find our way through this maze? Where does the debate end and the correct action begin? For that matter, even if you do get it all figured out, how can one person make a difference when the is-

sues involve so many different aspects of our social organization. It hardly seems possible that the solutions could come from a tiny group of gardeners working in an obscure Washington suburb, no matter how ambitious they were. Yet this is how one begins. Grass roots activity is how one grabs the world. Not just any activity mind you, but activity that is spiritually based. For that is the issue, and the question that overrides all the others: What if people experienced true spirituality? What if they developed a recognition of the infinite side of life? What wonders would we see? I submit that we have already embarked on this road; that a spiritual awakening is taking place right now, at the start of the new millennium. And my sense is that we will find out sooner rather than later just how wondrous the world will become as this process unfolds.