



Survey Profiles Health of Area Businesses

By Chrissy Wiginton

This is the second in a series of articles motivated by a concern for small, independently owned, local businesses and the economic health of the Takoma Park business community. The first article, "Put Your Money Where Your House Is," (August/September 2003) was an overview of the research that has been done on the effects of chain businesses on local main street economies. It also offered some examples of ways in which communities have supported their local businesses.

Many communities across the country are struggling to maintain economically viable local businesses that meet the needs of residents. Each community's challenges are a unique combination of economic factors such as demographics, economic base, commuting patterns, and overhead, and less-tangible factors such as customer loyalty and community spirit. The one common element, it seems, is that there is no single way to ensure a thriving local business community.

How do local business owners perceive the economic health of Takoma Park? What are some of the factors that affect their success? What are their concerns and challenges? By asking the owners and managers of seventeen small businesses in Old Town and Takoma Junction these questions, I hope to provide the readers of the *TPSS Co-operative Effort News* with an informal review of the health of the Takoma Park business community. Hopefully, the results will further the community's understanding of how our small businesses perceive their current situation and their hopes for the future.

I spoke with the owners and managers

in informal telephone interviews. All but one of the businesses have a storefront in Old Town or Takoma Junction. In most cases (70%), the owner was available immediately to speak with me. The businesses were a mix of retail, restaurant, and service establishments that have been open between 1 1/2 and 33 years. Well over half of the business owners I spoke with had been in business for over 10 years, with 41% (7 businesses) having been in operation for more than 20 years.

Perception of the Economy

Each participant was asked to rate the economic health of the Takoma Park business community on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most healthy (Two owners opted out of this question; they did not feel qualified to answer due to the nature of their businesses). Their answers ranged from 3 to 8. One in three business owners rate Takoma's economic health at a 5 or below. The average rating was 6. While some businesses are doing reasonably well, there is a shared sense among business owners surveyed that the Old Takoma/Takoma Junction economy is below average.

Of the ten owners who were asked, four live in the Takoma/Silver Spring area, and one plans to move to the area. However, five of the ten said that they used to live in Old Takoma/Takoma Junction but moved because they couldn't afford to stay. This is a condition that should be explored in more detail by those who are interested in the health of the local business community; what does it mean for a city when many business owners can't afford to live where they work?

Factors that Influence Business

For the majority of local business owners and managers that I spoke to, the success of their businesses is directly related to the state of the economy. Another key factor mentioned was the challenge of hiring, training, and retaining quality employees.

Many of the business owners that I spoke with said that competition, from both local independent competitors and large chain stores, was a major influence on their businesses. Well over half (59%) are concerned about competition from chain stores affecting their business, while only 12% (2 owners) were concerned about competition from local independent businesses.

47% (8 people) said that while they haven't been affected by large chain stores yet, they anticipate that they will be in the future. Interviewees also expressed concern about how the development of Silver Spring is going to affect Takoma business. Some fear that the pending arrival of a Subway restaurant in Old Town Takoma, and perhaps a Starbucks near the Takoma Metro, could have a debilitating affect on the restaurants and cafes that already serve the community. Two owners said that they have already felt some economic impact from the arrival of chain stores, and they anticipate being affected even more.

On the other hand, 41% (7 people) of the business owners and managers that I spoke to state that their businesses have not been affected by large chain stores, nor do they anticipate that they will. Many of these businesses' sense of security stems from the nature of their business, their solid reputations, and a loyal customer base.

Paying The Dues in Takoma Park

Paying rent was the most frequent challenge that business owners and managers experienced. The increase in property value, and therefore in the price of rent, is putting a major strain on local businesses. One business owner that I spoke to said that, due to the rent increase, their business would have to move in the next few years. Another owner voiced a concern that, as rents continue to increase, independent businesses would be forced out of Old Town and replaced by chain stores that can afford to pay the higher rent.

If chain stores are kept out of the area, however, there will be problems as well. As more local businesses leave, fewer attractions will be available to bring customers in and thereby help the remaining local businesses pay the increasing rent.

Business Owners' Solutions

Several business owners who participated in the survey offered the following solutions for some of the challenges they are currently facing:

- Takoma Park businesses should pool their resources and advertise the community in venues that would increase the market.
- Local policy makers should demonstrate their support for community businesses more aggressively.

Best Things about Doing Business in Takoma Park

The interviewees were almost unanimous on this point: *the people!* It was the first response of 13 of the 17 owners and managers interviewed. They sincerely enjoy serving, and getting to know, people in the community (see "A Town With Character(s)" on page 2). Many said that they wouldn't consider doing business anywhere else. According to the people I spoke with, not only are the people in the community wonderful, they have a real appreciation for the services and goods that businesses offer. This appreciation is another thing that makes doing business with the people of Takoma a pleasure.

The business owners and managers that I spoke to also liked doing business in Takoma because of the neighborly atmosphere. They described the community as close-knit, relaxed, safe, family-oriented, and intimate. Many specifically praised its progressive political and social attitudes as well.

The interviews clearly demonstrated to me that business owners sincerely love doing business here and that they are committed to sticking through the hard times for as long as they can. While local businesses are affected for different reasons and to varying degrees, it is clear that the Takoma Park business community is struggling.

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National Cooperative Month: Celebrating the Way We Do Business

By Adeena Reitberger

In October, the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Co-op will be joining the rest of the country in observing National Cooperative Month, which celebrates the accomplishments of cooperatives and also educates the public about the importance of cooperatives in society.

National Cooperative Month originated in Waukegan, Illinois, in 1924 when members of Co-op Trading set aside a time to promote and celebrate cooperatives. In 1948, Minnesota Governor Luther Youngdahl declared October as Cooperative Month. In 1964, it became a national event, and for seven years the government sponsored National Cooperative Month events. The government turned over their role in sponsoring events for National Cooperative Month twenty-three years ago to the National Cooperative Month Planning Committee, which is now in charge of educating consumers about cooperatives.

National Cooperative Month promotes awareness and appreciation of local cooperative businesses. Each year the planning committee selects a theme for the month to inform consumers about specific cooperative principles. Recent themes, for example, have included "Cooperative Networking Towards Global Competitiveness," and "Growth... Service... Partnership."

Communities Trust Cooperatives

This year, the theme for the National Cooperative Month celebration is "Cooperatives... Businesses People Trust." With all the corporate scandals these

days, it is not hard to recognize why the cooperative way of doing business is important to the integrity of our country. Many people believe that large corporations have inflicted financial woes not only on their shareholders, but also on the entire U.S. economy, deflating our economic security and confidence.

This perception has been supported by a recent opinion poll sponsored by a coalition of cooperative organizations. The coalition commissioned The

Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, N.J. to conduct a nationwide survey on the perception of cooperatives. The survey showed that 68% of the interviewees believed that businesses that have consumers on their boards of directors are more (or, according to some respondents, much more) trustworthy than corporate businesses.

The 48,000 cooperatives in the United States outnumber publicly traded corporations by more than three to one. Cooperatives serve approximately 120 million Americans, and operate industries ranging from housing and utilities to food, banking, and insurance.

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The 48,000 cooperatives in the United States outnumber publicly traded corporations by more than three to one. Cooperatives serve approximately 120 million Americans, and operate industries ranging from housing and utilities to food, banking, and insurance. "Cooperatives are an integral part of the community because they are locally owned and adapt to community needs," Adam Frank, president of TPSS board and a ten-year TPSS shopper said. "They are trustworthy because the mem-

bers in the community govern the store. Everyone can be a member, every member has the right to vote and bring issues to the management and the board. Board meetings are open to anyone who wants to attend, and the board is elected democratically."

Community Support and Cooperatives

TPSS also financially supports the community through donations to local non-profit organizations. This year, the TPSS Co-op started carrying its own line of bottled water, and donates 50% of the profit from sales to local charities. Last year TPSS Co-op donations, along with customer contributions, totaled nearly

\$6,000 for local charities such as Shepherd's Table, the Anacostia Watershed Society, and the Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC).

"We donate money out of our profits, but we also provide ways for our members to give contributions to local charities," Prisca Egocheaga, TPSS financial manager, said regarding the numerous ways co-op shoppers can donate money through the co-op. "Our customers can donate money anywhere. They can do it on their own, or they can go to Shoppers and Safeway. But they come to us because they believe in us, and what we stand for. We are in the middle of the community. We help tie our community together."

Last year, the TPSS Co-op celebrated National Cooperative Month by educating customers on products, nutrition, and food preparation. A variety of vendors set up demos of items such as dietary supplements and skin care. The grocery department offered different samples every day, including a variety of Spanish cheeses. The produce department invited a grower's cooperative to give a presentation to educate customers about natural produce and to explain why grower's cooperatives are important to the success of small farmers. The Co-op also sponsored a community yard sale.

This year, the TPSS Co-op will celebrate National Cooperative Month in many of the same ways. Demos, samples, and events will be posted on the Membership Board across from the registers and on the TPSS website at <http://www.tpss.coop>. Please join in the festivities and celebrate your Co-op! ●



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Next Issue:

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The Seven Cooperative Principles

From the National Cooperative Month Planning Committee Web site, <http://www.co-opmonth.org/about/principles.html>

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all people able to use its services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, one member-

one vote, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions.

3. Members' Economic Participation

Members contribute equally to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative. This benefits members in proportion to the transactions with the cooperative rather than on the capital invested.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If the co-op enters

into agreements with other organizations or raises capital from external sources, it is done so based on terms that ensure democratic control by the members and maintains the cooperative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information

Cooperatives provide education and training for members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperative. Members also inform the general public about the nature and benefits of cooperatives.

6. Cooperation among Cooperatives

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of communities through policies accepted by the members.

It's COOL to Care for the Oceans

This article is based on information provided to the TPSS Co-operative Effort News by the Campaign to Conserve Our Ocean Legacy (COOL).

By Adeena Reitberger

The Campaign to Conserve Our Ocean Legacy (COOL) is currently touring the nation to increase public awareness of the dangers currently facing our oceans. The campaign uses slide shows, lectures, and public discussions to inform people about the current and future state of ocean health.

Water covers three quarters of the world's surface, providing both coastal and inland residents with a renewable source of food and recreation. Modern commercial fishing practices have endangered our oceans and the life within them. "America's ocean fish are being devastated by unsustainable fishing practices," COOL spokesperson Erika Hartwig said. "Technology has advanced rapidly in the last few decades, and giant fishing fleets are legally and illegally emptying our oceans."

Hartwig explained that, every year, commercial fishing vessels destroy thousands of square miles of ocean floor, demolishing fragile aquatic habitats. These commercial ships are able to catch massive amounts of fish, bringing many species to the brink of extinction. Finally, fishing nets often trap and kill billions of fish and marine mammals that were not targeted for sale. These fish are given the deceptively innocuous name of "bycatch." This wasted bycatch is simply thrown back into the ocean – dead.

Another problem currently faced by our oceans is the defacement of the ocean floor. Massive fishing vessels, some the size of football fields, drop weighted nets – each one large enough to engulf a jumbo jet – into the ocean and drag them across the floor. These nets bulldoze over the delicate seafloor habitat, ripping up plants and



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algae that provide life-sustaining nutrients to the ocean community.

We have already begun to see the effects of overfishing. A study of Marine fish in

U.S. waters, conducted by the American Fisheries Society, identified fifty-three species and subspecies as endangered, and thirty-five species as threatened. Of these species, only a quarter are protected from further depletion by the Federal Endangered Species Act. This decreasing number of fish is directly associated with overfishing, bycatch, and habitat destruction.

Some of the major overfished stocks include bluefin tuna, flounder, swordfish, blue marlin, red snapper, and several species of salmon. A recent report concluded that when large fishing vessels moved into an area, fish populations declined 80% within only ten to fifteen years.

For more information on how you can get involved with the Conserve Our Ocean Legacy campaign, visit the National Environmental Trust's program page at <http://environet.policy.net/marine/>. ●

THE BOARD OF REPRESENTATIVES NEEDS YOU!

NOW ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR SIX (6) OPEN SPOTS

NOMINATING SCHEDULE FOR 2003

Self-Nomination Packets will be available **Sunday, September 14, 2003 by 12 pm** at the front desk of each store or contact Sec. Rae Murphy (RaeofTPSS@aol.com) to have one e-mailed to you.

Completed Nominating Statements and Packets are due **Sunday, October 12, 2003 at 9 pm**. They must be turned in to the designated box only (no e-mail returns) – see Policies and Procedures.

Nominating Statements will be **posted by Sunday, Oct. 26, 2003 at the Fall Membership Meeting.**

Voting BEGINS on Sunday, October 26, 2003 by 6 pm.

Ballots will be available starting at this meeting where the candidates will be available to meet and mingle.

The election ends on the second Sunday in December 2003, 12/14/03. The results will be tallied. New Board Members will be contacted one week later. The new Board will be announced in the front of each store and in the next issue of the TPSS Co-operative News.

Takoma Park Businesses, continued from page 1

Despite the challenges, this is an exciting time of transition and growth for both Takoma Park and Silver Spring. As members of both of these communities, we must take an active role in shaping their future. Some of the many ways that we can do this are to continue to be mindful about where we choose to do business, and to continue to discuss how we can support the revitalization of Silver Spring and also sustain a vital economy in Takoma Park. ●

The author and the TPSS Co-operative Effort News thank the business owners and managers who took the time to participate in the survey that served as the basis for this article.

A Town with Character(s)

How do business owners describe Takoma Park residents? Drumroll please! The descriptive terms most used by business owners during this survey, in order of popularity, are:

Nice, Diverse

Eclectic

Artistic, Have good taste

Friendly, Intelligent, Independent, "Characters"

The Survey Questions

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1.) How long has your business been open?</p> <p>2.) On a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the most healthy, how would you rate the economic health of the Takoma Park Business Community?</p> | <p>3.) Has your business been affected by the opening of large chain businesses nearby, or do you anticipate that it will? If so, in what ways?</p> <p>4.) What other factors, positive or negative, influence your business?</p> | <p>5.) What is the biggest challenge of owning a small business in Takoma Park?</p> <p>6.) What do you like about doing business in Takoma Park?</p> <p>7.) Are you a resident of Takoma Park/Silver Spring?</p> |
|---|---|--|



Comment Corner

by Bob Atwood, General Manager

Fall is finally here, and along with the change in the season it's time once again to answer your questions in the Comment Corner. Every month I address your comments, suggestions, and questions that appear in the customer comment boxes in the front of both stores. Comment cards are sorted and distributed to the appropriate managers on a regular basis for their response. Then the cards, with the managers' responses, are filed in the customer comment logs. These are available for review in the front of both stores.

Please feel free to contact me or a member of the staff at the Takoma Park store at 301-891-2667 (COOP) or at the Silver Spring store at 240-247-2667 (COOP), if you need more information or a more detailed answer to your questions. Or you can always e-mail me directly at bobatwood@tpss.coop. Remember, if you want a direct response to your concerns, please include contact information (name, phone number, e-mail address, etc.) on your comment card.

We always enjoy hearing from our members and customers. As you can imagine, we get many comments in the customer comment boxes in both stores, and whether they are addressed here or in the comment logs. I encourage you to take a moment the next time you are in the store to read some of the questions and comments and their responses.

— *"Where's the meat & fish? I'm waiting!"*

The recent membership vote on whether or not to change the Co-op's mission statement was not a mandate for the store to start carrying meat and fish. It was, rather, a clear directive for the store's manager and staff to explore ways to carry a wide range of non-vegetarian items. Many customers have expressed their desire to have the store carry meat and fish, and in order to determine the

best way to do that we have hired a consultant who will help us develop a five-year strategic plan to map out the complete scope of products the store will carry.

As part of the process of developing this strategic plan, at some point we will be conducting a full survey to determine how well the store is doing. We will use other avenues to determine if we should carry meat into the Takoma Park store. One possible way, for example, might be to special order turkeys for Thanksgiving. Or, we might have samplings of all natural meat and fish in the store. Meat at the Takoma Park store is clearly popular; at the Labor Day festival, we sold over 100 sausages, chickens, and hot dogs — and only one tofu dog and two Boca burgers. We will post notices and other communications about this process in the store and in future issues of the *TPSS Co-operative Effort News*.

— *"Please don't take out the ATM machine; it's so convenient here!"*

The ATM was a popular feature with many of our customers. The contract for the ATM that we used to have ended in August, and the vendor that owned it decided not to renew their contract because it was not making enough money. We had hoped to provide a "seamless" transition to a new machine, but the vendor removed the machine a month earlier than expected, causing an unexpected gap. Currently, we are reviewing a number of ATM vendors, but they have all said that the number of transactions per month (based on the previous machine and on their estimates) don't warrant installing one at the store. We're still looking for a vendor who will be willing to install an ATM in the store, but it could be months, if at all. Please bear with us while we continue trying!

— *"I found mold on the upcountry seitan in the refrigerator case. Moldy seitan is a problem I've encountered here before... I'm afraid to buy it anymore. Can you address this problem?"*

Thanks for calling this to our attention. This is a problem that we are aware of, and we are trying to resolve it so that you and

others will be able to buy it with confidence once again! The problem appears to be with either the manufacturer or the distributor. We've contacted the distributor and informed them about this continual problem. They have assured us that they are looking into it. We will continue to try and solve this problem as soon as we can. In the meantime, if you purchase any items that are moldy or otherwise inedible, please bring them back and we will be happy to give you store credit for them.

— *"Why not get some 'peace' rainbow flags like in Italy? They have 'PACE' on them and are sold for 5 euros (about \$5.50) by political organizations there."*

Sounds like a great item! It would be a big help to us if you could try to find out the name of the manufacturer or some other information that would help us find them. Unfortunately, the time required for one of our staff to research this would just not be cost-effective. The store's general merchandise buyer reviews several catalogs regularly for such items, but flags like the ones you describe haven't appeared in them. We have to rely on our customers and members to help us find little gems like these.

— *"Please order MORE LBNY choc. chip muffins!"*

Fans of these popular muffins take heart: your message has been received loud and clear! We have increased our order for these locally-baked (that's what the LB stands for, for people who don't know) muffins from New York. You may also want to try the Baldwin muffins from Vermont; they bought out the New York manufacturer, but they aren't changing the recipe. And we also carry Vermont organic hot dog and hamburger buns, and breads that are all very good. By press time, these items should be gluten-free too.

— *"Thank you for improving your fruits & vegs, also for expanding your book section. Great going!"*

Thanks for your support and encouragement. We're constantly in the process of adding, changing, and trying new things in response to your requests and based on our

observations of what works and what doesn't. Please keep your suggestions coming, they help us make the Co-op as good as it is and keep us striving to make it even better. Our managers and buyers are a dedicated group of people, and they really are working hard every day for you. In addition to writing your praise — which we really value — why not also take a moment to thank them in person too? It's what keeps us coming in every day! ●

Customer Comments

Please write your questions, comments or suggestions below and the appropriate staff person will respond. Your response will be posted for 2 to 3 weeks from response date. Write on the back if you need additional space. Thank you for supporting the Co-op!

Date:

I Just want to say your store is great!
We Love to Shop here!

Response:

Staff:

Date:

NCGA Launches National Pricing, Branding Initiatives

By Paul Lagasse

The National Cooperative Grocers Association (NCGA) has announced two national initiatives for cooperative grocery stores — a National Pricing Program (NPP) and a branding program. These initiatives are part of the NCGA's efforts to develop stronger national-level collaborations among cooperatives.

The purpose of the NPP, according to Robynn Shrader of NCGA, is "to increase the relevance and economic strength of food co-ops and the system that supports them" ("Building a Cooperative Virtual Chain," *NCGA News*, http://www.ncga.coop/news_cganeews_200301.html). Basically, the NPP would take the place of regional price negotiations with wholesalers and achieve better and more uniform prices for all co-ops. This program has been made more relevant by the recent sale of a regional cooperative warehouse and the proposed sale of another.

The NPP was deemed the NCGA's highest priority program for 2003. The program began as a feasibility study in August of last year, and two months later the NCGA Board of Directors passed a formal resolution to undertake a nationwide pricing program for member cooperatives. Realizing the potential of such program on the Association's collaborative structure, the Board brought in an outside business management consultant to determine the most effective way to bring such a plan about. Shrader and Corinne Shindelar of NCGA were designated as liaisons to the consultant.

The consultant examined the potential impact of the national pricing approach on service, staffing, and accountability. The consultant also developed financial models. The consultant was asked to consider three possible organizational scenarios for the program: one in which the regional CGAs merged with the NCGA; one in which a "federation" structure is developed between the CGAs and the NCGA; and one in which there were no structural changes to

the relationship between the national and regional associations. After reviewing the consultant's final reports, the NCGA board unanimously recommended the merger option. This decision was announced at the NCGA annual meeting in June 2003.

NCGA stresses that it does not intend for the NPP to completely supplant the purchasing programs of the regional CGAs. For example, a region could choose to pursue regional IT or training programs for member stores. In such cases, though, the NPP could be used as a resource to connect stores with similar needs in different regions. The ideal of a "virtual chain" could be realized by the NPP, according to the NCGA.

Because the implications of the purchasing program for the structure of the NCGA membership could potentially be quite significant, the NCGA has encouraged members to participate in the development process by sharing ideas, concerns, and questions with the Association. Questions such as resource allocation, decision-making

processes, and timetables all have yet to be determined fully. "The board strongly supports and is committed to a process that is inclusive of members and regional directors" as the process continues, the NCGA announced in a press release on the subject in July ("NCGA Board Member Linkage Report," http://www.ncga.coop/news_announce.htm).

The concept of a national cooperative branding program is a natural extension of the unified purchasing program, according to the NCGA. Several workshops exploring branding options were developed for the NCGA annual meeting this past June, and feedback has been positive. Many CGAs have committed funds for the development of a national cooperative branding strategy.

To share your thoughts about the national pricing program and/or the branding project, contact Bob Atwood, General Manager of the TPSS Co-op, at 301-891-2667 (COOP) or e-mail him at bobatwood@tpss.coop. ●

FEATURED EMPLOYEES



OMAR SENGHORE

Omar seems to inspire a fan following wherever he works. When Omar came to the Takoma Park store from My Organic Market 2 1/2 years ago, a loyal cadre of customers followed him. And when he became the buyer at the Silver Spring store a year later, they followed him there too! And it's not just the customers who appreciate his warmth, humor, and good cheer, either. "All the women here love Omar," said Janiece, giving him a big hug. (Sorry, Omar, it was just too good not to mention!)

The feeling is mutual, says Omar. "I love the wonderful people here," he says. "Whenever I think of moving, it's the people who keep me here." Omar says that he really enjoys the atmosphere of the Silver Spring store, and the staff is fun to work with. Plus, he enjoys being able to help the Co-op carry out its mission. "We have the most competitive prices, but we're not here just to make money," Omar says. "We're here to help the community, and to be part of it." Omar says that his goal is to work as hard as he can to help the Silver Spring store thrive, and he intends to be around for a while. "I want to see the store become really successful before I leave." Good news for his fans!



PETER FIGGIS

Peter has a unique perspective on cooperative stores; for the past 14 years, he's traveled around the country, working at a variety of co-ops along the way. He's lived and worked in Austin (where most of the staff were musicians), Santa Cruz, Seattle, and Minneapolis, among others. And before that, he co-managed a café at the cooperative in his native Dublin, Ireland. Prior to arriving in Takoma Park, he lived in Montpelier, Vermont, where he took a brief break from cooperatives by working as a carpenter and Christmas tree farmer. "I was ready to do



SHOSHANNA BRADY

By the time you read this, Shoshanna will have already left for high school, but she promises to be back next summer. Shoshanna is one of the regular "summer people," a group of local high-school students who work for the Co-op during their summer breaks. Shoshanna likes to work the cashier stations at the Takoma Park store because she gets to see old friends and make new ones. "The people who come here are really cool!" she says. Her family and friends are members and regular shoppers too, and she enjoys having a few minutes to get caught up on the latest news and stories while she rings them up and helps them bag groceries. "It's a real 'family affair' here," says Shoshanna.

Shoshanna has lived in Takoma Park for almost her whole life, and really enjoys the community. But her education takes her far from home, and sometimes around the world. Her high school is an organic farm in New Hampshire, where she is one of only 30 students who study in the morning and work on the farm in the afternoon. They hold class in the living room, sitting on couches. "Why sit at a desk when you can be comfortable?" she asks, though she said that in the winter the students usually have to bundle up under blankets. A recent school trip to Peru and Bolivia has sparked her interest in anthropology, and she hopes to pursue that when she travels abroad this year too, to either Mexico or Cuba.

So when you see Shoshanna at the store next summer, be sure to ask her about her travels; she'll enjoy getting the chance to chat with you.

another stint," he says, and began researching cooperatives in the Metro DC area. He settled on the Takoma Park area in large part because he liked the TPSS Co-op. Many cooperatives, he says, are becoming more and more corporate. The informal, community-oriented feel of the TPSS Co-op was a welcome contrast for him. Peter, who only eats raw foods, also enjoys the community's diverse social and philosophical makeup.

He has found that cooperatives are more popular in the United States than in Europe. For example, the cooperative in Dublin is more like what we would consider a farmer's market. It's open only on Saturdays, and operates out of a church hall. Farmers from all over the area bring their produce to the cooperative. But the Dublin cooperative has been in operation for more than 20 years, and is still going strong. Peter hasn't been home to Dublin in four years, and he says that he's planning to return home eventually. But in the meantime, he says, he's happy in Takoma Park. "I've decided to stick with it!"

Board Report for September 2003

By Adam Frank, President

There has been quite a bit of change on the Board this past month. First, several members were automatically removed because of the number of meetings that were missed (three members, in fact). The by-laws state that a board member will be removed if they meet three meetings in a row or more than 4 meetings in a one year period. All three members missed more than 4 meetings in a year period, in some cases five meetings. This is one quarter, or more, of all board meetings. Because of this, the current Board is looking to appoint at least one or two new members as interim members until the upcoming election. Please contact us via the board mailboxes at the front of the Takoma Park and Silver Spring stores, or through e-mail at tpssboard@yahoo.com.

Speaking of the elections, the schedule

for the upcoming elections has been altered somewhat. Instead of announcing the results of the election at the October membership meeting, we will be announcing and introducing the nominees at that time. The election will commence immediately following the October membership meeting. There are several reasons for this. First, this allows the membership an opportunity to meet the nominees. Second, since the Board training is at the beginning of January, it makes more sense to have the first new Board meeting be after this training session.

If anyone is interested in running for the Board, there is more information about the election elsewhere in this newsletter. Nomination packets should be available at both stores. We will let you know how the new process is working in the next issue of the *TPSS Co-operative Effort News*.

Peace. ●

Upcoming Events at the Co-op



Membership Appreciation Days

To show how grateful we are for the loyal support of our members, both the Takoma Park and Silver Spring stores will be offering members a 5% discount on everything in the store (except special orders) all day October 22 from opening to closing. It's our way of saying "thank you!"

Personal Growth Seminars at the Silver Spring Co-op

The Co-op is excited to offer a series of four seminars by holistic health practitioner Mayuri Sobti of the Washington Institute of Natural Medicine. The seminars will take place from 2:00 to 3:00 pm on the third Sunday of each month from August to November. Each seminar is \$15 per person. The dates and topics for the last two seminars in the series are:

- **October 18: Herbolgy for Health & Vitality**

Provides a basic introduction to the safe use of herbs for health and healing. This will be a great opportunity to learn about commonly used herbs such as Echinacea, Ginseng, Valerian, Kava Kava, Slippery Elm, and more. These herbs can provide excellent first aid for many common ailments. In addition, specific cardio tonics and liver cleaners will be discussed.

- **November 15: Homeopathy, a Safe Choice**

A basic introduction to homeopathy and ways to use it safely and effectively to treat common ailments. Students will learn how to identify symptoms and write out a simple case in order to identify an effective homeopathic remedy. The most common single and combination remedies will be discussed, and tips for creating a first-aid homeopathy kit will be shared.

For more information about the seminars, or to register, contact the Co-op at 240-247-2667 (COOP) or pick up a registration form at the store.



2000-0809. East Brunswick, NJ. 1/1-04

The aim (of education) must be the training of independently acting and thinking individuals who, however, can see in the service to the community their highest life achievement.

Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955)

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Tomatoes, Tomatoes, and More Tomatoes

By Mike Tabor

I was out in my field yesterday, picking tomatoes. It's a contemplative experience, so my mind started focusing on the issue of all the time and energy my farm workers and I put into growing our crops. For every good tomato I pick, I was throwing away at least three. A combination of too much rain, stink bug damage, and consumer demand for a pretty-looking tomato was causing an incredible waste of good food and good hard work.

Nevertheless, we picked, cleaned and sorted approximately 80, 25lb cases of tomatoes and managed to get them out to some of our wholesale accounts including the TPSS Co-op with the vast majority aimed at our largest outlet – a Saturday morning Adams Morgan farmers market we've been selling at for almost 30 years. Then, rain struck again on market day, which kept many shoppers away and left us with a whole lot of leftover cases filled with all those tomatoes.

Such are the tribulations of small-scale

local farmers. Randy, the organic farmer who sells next to our market in Adams Morgan, has been hit for the second year by a blight that wipes out the leaves of tomato plants and prevents his tomatoes from growing and ripening further. Although we experience blight and many of the other nasty diseases that strike on a wet year, our plants seem quite a bit more resistant due to our use of "compost tea" which encourages the growth of healthy bacteria and in turn allows the plants to better resist disease. (However, we've just learned of a bureaucratic decision that might outlaw the use of compost tea under organic standard regulations and we'll have to wait and see before using it again next year.)

Probably our biggest problem in selling our tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, basil, and fruits centers on consumer resistance. The proliferation of fast food outlets, the availability of prepared pre-packaged foods, and local access to good restaurants has reduced consumer demand for fresh vegetables and fruits. Now, I know many of you might shop at select local markets that are actually considered upscale farmers markets—ones



where prices are high and consumers with limited incomes rarely patronize. I encourage you to continue to shop at the TPSS Co-op for your produce – they pay farmers very fairly and then turn around and price very competitively.

My philosophical commitment to accessible, healthy food at affordable prices has narrowed my marketing considerably. Many of the upscale farmers' markets are demanding \$3.00/lb or more for heirloom tomatoes; we sell ours for 89 cents to \$1.39/lb (with a 25lb box of canning quality tomatoes going for \$10!). Again, we believe that we'll also move a lot more volume if the

price is reasonable. Plus the affordable prices enable those families utilizing limited government subsidies through the WIC Program to have access to these organic, tasty tomatoes and other pesticide-free produce. Our affordable prices, plus the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition program, encourage these families to shop at our market.

So, as I write this, I'm looking up at clouds and the prospect of a second week of rain, which in mid-September will bring on the quick ripening of 80 more cases of tomatoes. We'll pray for a clear weekend. ●

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People interested in experiencing a week or so of farm work can contact Mike. It's a different sort of vacation and one that gives you an insight into the complexities of farm life—plus you'll probably come away feeling healthy and refreshed. Mike is also interested in hiring farm workers for the next season. Folks need to be in good physical shape, non-smokers, and willing to eat a vegetarian diet. Fax requests and resumes to (301) 587-7535.

Quick Tips for Healthy, Happy Dogs

By Judith Sylvane

After more than 25 years working at the National Zoo, I know something about canids, the dog family. But that's book learning, guys. What I know about dogs in real life is this – dogs aren't cats. So I am really starting from scratch with this article.

I began by asking dog owners, "What's the best thing about having a dog?" I received a variety of similar answers—"the companionship;" "they're my best friends;" "the unconditional love and loyalty;" and "What, do you think I'd have a cat!?" Good answers, but with one exception, they also apply to cats. Speaking as a cat person, I think the best thing about dogs is that wherever you go, they want to go, too. That's the trait that I really envy. (Sometimes it's tough to realize that, when I'm leaving the apartment, all my cat may be thinking is "Fresh food?" "Clean litter box?")

Animal Wellness Magazine is available at the Co-op. A recent issue had an article on pet-friendly hotels, B&Bs, and even summer camps for dogs. What fun! The article included a directory of web sites—e.g., www.PetsOnTheGo.com and www.Pet-FriendlyTravel.com—which list accommodations that welcome pets. There is one caveat, however; check the places out, because some of them put people with pets in their less-than-acceptable rooms.

A Dog is ...

If you're just thinking about getting a dog, how do you choose the breed that's right for you? Will you purchase through a breeder or try to find the perfect pound puppy (my personal favorite)? Whichever you do, *The Natural Dog: A Complete Guide for Caring Owners* (available at the Co-op) suggests that you should begin by looking closely for the following features:

- Bright, clear eyes
- Healthy skin and hair
- A friendly nature (not aggressive or growling)
- Ability to run and walk without difficulty
- The right size for you and your lifestyle.

A Dog Needs ...

Cats take care of their own grooming and bathroom needs. Dogs require much more hands-on effort. While it's possible to

find people who will walk, shampoo, and brush your dog, when it comes to training the job is yours. *The Natural Dog* lists five basic expectations. Dogs must be:

- Housebroken wherever they are
- Leash trained and obedient when walking
- Obedient to voice commands when not on a leash
- Able to ride in (and stay in) a car for long periods
- Able to get along with people and other dogs.

Most long-time dog owners are experienced in training their own animals, but the novice owner might need some help. Professional trainers abound in the Washington area. Certainly get referrals from friends, family, vets, etc., but first interview the trainer yourself; both you and your dog must be comfortable with this individual.

A Dog Eats ...

Dogs just love meat, vegetables, potatoes, chocolate, tacos, popcorn, etc. ("Eat your vegetables!" is a command your dog won't have any trouble following.) Whatever you choose to feed your dog, read the ingredients carefully. Avoid foods that list meal, by-products, or soy protein first. The meal and by-products are very likely low-quality protein, and dogs don't metabolize soy well. You want to see chicken, lamb, or beef listed first, not by-products.

At the Co-op, for example, you'll find Spot's Stew—with water (because it's a stew), chicken, carrots, celery, yellow squash, zucchini, chicken livers, green beans, green peas, pasta, turkey, rolled oats, barley, soy sauce, dried kelp, garlic powder, calcium lactate, ascorbic acid, zinc gluconate, di-calcium phosphate. Also look at the Pet Guard line which includes Rabbit & Rice (first ingredient, rabbit), Lamb & Brown Rice (first ingredient, lamb), Venison & Rice, Chicken, Brown Rice, & Herbs, Liver, Vegetables, & Wheat Germ. You get the idea.

Even supermarket dog foods

can be improved by adding meat, vegetables, eggs, yogurt, garlic, or healthy table scraps. The extra vitamins and minerals will do wonders for your animal. Pet Guard and Three Dog Bakery (Bethesda, MD) also have vegetarian meals for those few dogs that are allergic to meat. No one, however, recommends a vegetarian diet unless it's necessary. Carnivores require meat; omnivores, like humans, can work around it.

A Dog's Treats ...

Food is love, and special food is even more love. The Co-op carries Liv-a-Littles—freeze-dried pieces of whole chicken or cod—which adds texture and good protein to a meal (even Mimsy the cat loves it). Three Dog Bakery bakes its own line of wholesome treats right in the store. Two favorites are the Peanut Mutter cookies, made with peanut butter and whole-wheat flour, and the Pup Tart, pastry shells filled with honey-yogurt frosting colored with fruits and vegetables, not food coloring. They even bake wheat-free treats for customers with wheat allergies.

The right dog, hands-on training, good food, lots of love—that's all it takes to have first-class companionship and plenty of fun! ●

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Animal Wellness Magazine

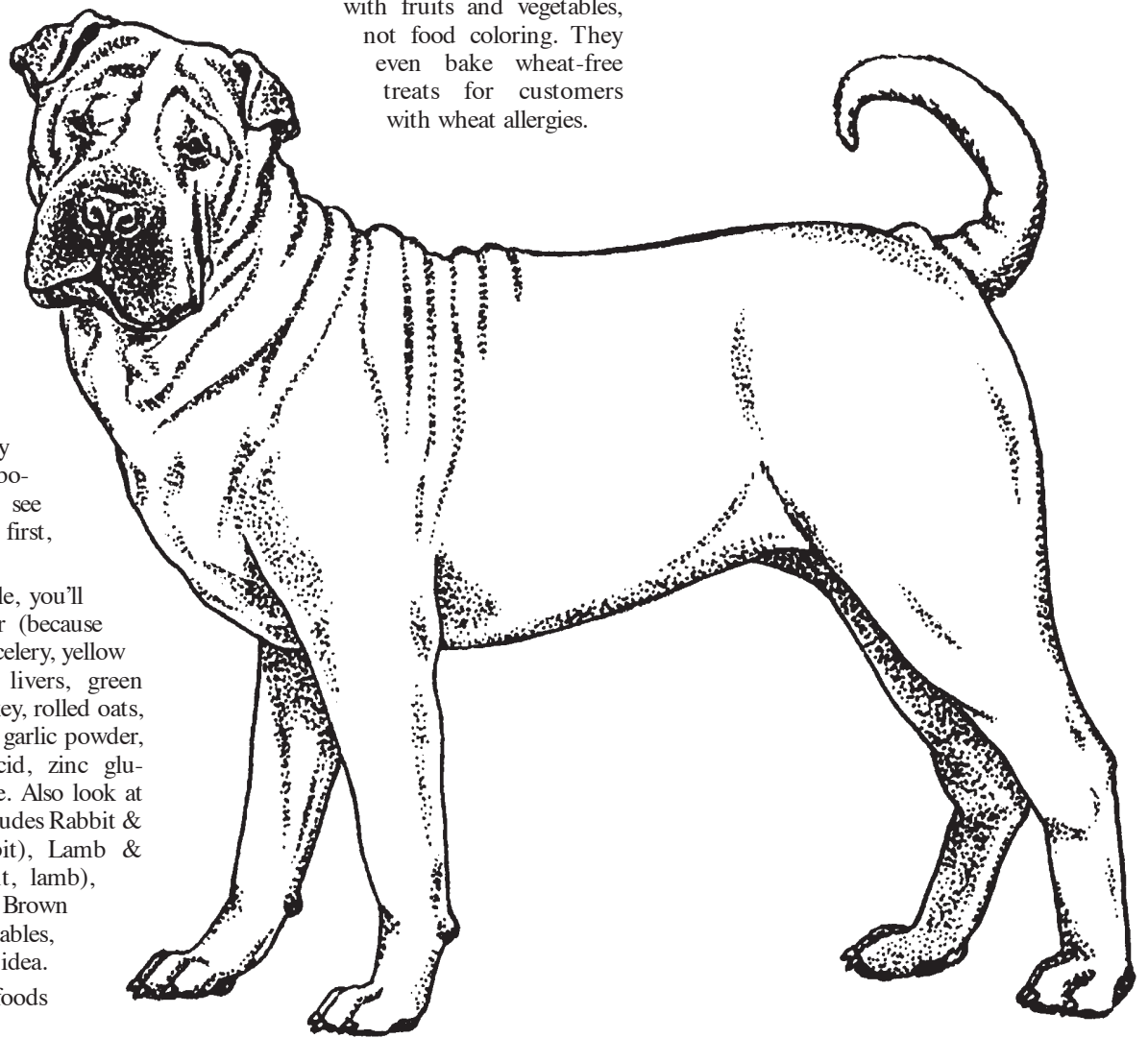
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Three Dog Bakery, Bethesda, MD, (301) 654-1540

www.DogInfomat.com

www.PetFriendlyTravel.com

www.PetsOnTheGo.com



MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION DAYS

Mark your calendar with these important dates! To thank you for your support of the TPSS Co-op, one day a month is set aside as **MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION DAY**.

Shop at the Co-op and receive a 5% discount on your purchases! Just our way of saying thanks!

(Discount does not apply to special orders)

UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION DAYS:

2003

October 22

December 26

2004

January 24

February 15

March 22

April 21

May 20

June 25

Takoma Park's Green Dry Cleaner

In the last issue of the *TPSS Co-operative Effort News*, we reported that Kessler's Dry Cleaners in Silvers Spring was the first and, so far, only dry cleaner in the area to use the environmentally friendly GreenEarth® cleaning process ("Green Dry Cleaners: Good for You, Good for the Environment.")

We've been informed by an alert reader that Takoma Laundry & Dry Cleaning on Laurel Avenue in Takoma Park also uses environmentally friendly cleaning methods. Efforts to report on this in more detail were hampered by the intervention of Hurricane Isabel, and we hope to have more information about the Takoma Laundry's green cleaning processes in the next issue. Sorry!

What Does Being Healthy Mean to YOU? Part 2

By Robin Anderson, Holistic Health Practitioner

This article is a continued examination of what it means to be healthy. The previous newsletter presented 13 "pearls" for being healthy. Subsequent newsletters will continue to describe each of these "pearls" in more detail.

One of the themes for this issue of the *TPSS Co-operative News* is the familiar one of "back to school." By the time you receive this newspaper you will be well into your own back-to-school routine. In addition to its familiar meaning, the idea of "back to school" can also mean a change in our state of consciousness.

Some would say that September represents the end of summer fun and the beginning of serious business once again. Others believe that September represents the time of year when the August heat subsides, autumn appears and a more reflective, peaceful mode begins to set in. Regardless of your personal philosophy, I think we can agree that September represents new beginnings. We see this in our children (and perhaps in ourselves) returning to school, the season changing and the summer festivities coming to an end.

I do not believe that the "back to school" mentality should be limited to this change in the physical world, but should also represent a change in our inner world. "Back to school" can mean seeking inner guidance through meditation for our own personal growth, direction and healing. September is a great time to begin to practice such a peaceful mode of inner reflection. Autumn begs for us to begin slowing down to prepare ourselves for winter.

What does it mean to meditate? How much time is needed for meditation? What are the benefits to meditation and what does this have to do with being healthy? Let's take a closer look at the art of meditation and its relationship to being healthy.

Healthy Pearl 3: Set aside time every day to meditate

I first became familiar with the power of meditation about five years ago, when a tumultuous relationship I was in came to an end. I was devastated. I had given my all in this relationship and I wanted it to work out. He was about four years younger than me, a doctor, handsome, a "good catch." We had nothing in common and did not fully enjoy each other's company. But he looked so promising "on paper." I thought I would never meet another handsome, young doctor again, so I had better hang on to this one.

And hang on I did. Everything that he wanted to do, I tagged along, knowing full well that I had absolutely no interest in these activities. I was afraid that if he participated in these activities without me, he would find someone else and dump me. So, during the course of our relationship, I agreed with everything that he said, created a lovely home for him, and participated in all of his activities. Oh, how tired I was at the end of each day! It is tiring and depressing to live an inauthentic life.

I wish that I could say that I was not in touch with my Higher Power through prayer and meditation. Even though I did not meditate during this period of my life, my inner guidance would scream at me, nonetheless, to end this relationship. For example, I would go for a jog, and hear my inner voice say to me, "Leave him!" I would be taking a shower and hear a clear message that I was not honoring my divine path. I chose not to listen. I was afraid of being alone, not being in a relationship and not being able to coyly brag about having a handsome, young, doctor boyfriend to my friends and family.

But the fateful day came. It was not *I* who ended the relationship but *he!* I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was the end of August, the beginning of September. He sat on "my" couch (before the breakup it was "our" couch) and

told me that we had nothing in common and that he needed to move on with his life. I knew we had nothing in common. However, that had never stopped us from pretending that we did. But there I was sitting on "my" couch crying and begging him not to leave me. I could neither think coherently nor talk logically. All I could do was beg and plead for him not to leave. I remember when he stood up and looked at me with such pity. Pity! And he walked out the door, never to return again.

The next few days were an extremely painful blur. I walked around not knowing what to do. I then decided to attend a workshop conducted by a good friend and spiritual counselor. The workshop's goal was to assist participants in connecting with their inner guidance for direction and clarity. My friend was not only a spiritual counselor but also a talented psychic. I attended this workshop to ask her why he had left me. I was not interested in connecting to my inner guidance for direction. I knew that my girlfriend could provide me with immediate answers (accurate or not); I did not have the time or talent to "go within". At the end of the workshop, after hounding my friend constantly for answers, she said to me, "You need to meditate on a daily basis, Robin. Here, buy this meditation tape. It will help you."

Needless to say, I was disappointed with this "holistic health" workshop. I walked away with advice to meditate and a new meditation tape. Big deal, I thought to myself. I still did not know whether the ex-boyfriend had found someone else – which I imagined was the real reason he had ended the relationship. I also did not know exactly how he was spending his time now that we were no longer a couple. I felt that I desperately needed this information.

Having forgotten the activities that had given me so much pleasure before the relationship, I now had loads of time on my hands. I decided to play this so-called meditation tape one bright, cool but not exactly cold day in September. The leaves were just beginning to change colors. The atmosphere was serious, reflective. No more barbecues and pool parties now. Little did I know that, as I placed the meditation tape into my tape recorder, that this would be the beginning of my "going back to school," my new beginning.

I had no idea what it meant to meditate. What it meant to sit quietly for a moment each day to quiet the mind, feel the Universal love, and actively change my whole lifestyle. This may sound rather grandiose, but it is true. The tape recommended journaling after each meditation session, to heal wounds. So I bought an inexpensive notebook and began to write after listening to the tape.

Over a period of about 3 months, I began to notice that my Higher Power often spoke to me through other people. For example, I would have three different people tell me the same thing. I began to realize that this was one method that my Higher Power used to communicate with me. I also noticed that I wrote a lot about the relationship, which was very therapeutic. I found that through regular meditation I was less likely to have anxiety attacks on crowded subway trains. In other words, I found myself to be calmer, focused and much more peaceful.

Most importantly, I found me again! I rediscovered all of the activities that I loved to do before the relationship. And I did them with joy and passion. I no longer cared whether these activities were considered not hip or would not get me a "cool" boyfriend. I fell in love with me instead!

One day about a year after my relationship had ended, I was standing at the bus stop after a long workday. I heard someone call my name and I turned to see the young, handsome, doctor walking towards me. I wish I could say that I felt a deep sense of inner peace, an all knowing that it was okay now, that my regular meditations had taken me to a total state of serenity and nothing could hurt me now. What I actually felt was the need to cry and scream at him for leaving me. I felt as if my heart was going to jump right out of my mouth.

I remained calm as we greeted each other. He said that he wanted to see me before he left town. He was moving out west and he wanted to say goodbye. I thanked him for thinking of me and I wished him the best and then he was gone . . . again.

About three months after that incident, the phone rang. It was him again. *This* time, I did feel peaceful, sure and confident. *This* time I knew it was okay in the space that I was in. So when he asked me if I would come and visit him out west, I told him, "No". Things had changed for me. I told him that he always would have a friend in me but that I think it would be best for him to stop calling me and to let the relationship go. I did not express this in anger but in a place of love, agape love. And I meant it. I could tell that he understood and we finally peacefully parted.

I have never heard from the doctor since that phone call. And it is okay! I know without a shadow of a doubt that regular meditation helped me to take my baby steps towards healing from that relationship and finding my authentic self again. I will always be grateful to my spiritual counselor and friend on that autumn day when she handed me the meditation tape out of frustration and love and said, "try this."

I still meditate on a daily basis. My meditations are purely my own. They have evolved according to my own personal growth and commitment to the practice. I started out with one hour-long meditation tape, which walked me through deep breathing and relaxation of all of my muscles. Afterward, I wrote down whatever came to me. I noticed that I wrote a lot about painful relationships in my life that needed to be healed, forgiven and released. I noticed that I was holding on to them in anger and that they were affecting me physically, possibly forming diseases in my body, and changing my perception of the world. This was not a healthy way to live.

I then bought several meditation books and more tapes. Regardless of their instructions, I instinctively did what felt right for me at the time. As I became more faithful to my meditation practice, it became more powerful. Last year, I decided to make one room in my home the "meditation room." Theoretically, this is the place that I go to relax and become peaceful.

During the week, my meditation practice consists of me sitting on my bed before I go to sleep, listening quietly to my breathing. I allow my chest and head to tilt slightly forward as if they are opening up to receive and feel the Universal love and to allow myself to let go and simply be in that moment. These weekday meditation practices last anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour, depending upon how tired I am. On weekends, I will go to my meditation room and spend a few minutes reading an inspirational message. I then play a relaxation tape and spend the next hour just focusing on the music or the message. After the tape has ended, I spend about 10 to 30 minutes just sitting in the quiet, sometimes looking at the trees that are smiling at me through the window. In that moment, I feel the oneness of it all as well as its absolute beauty. Sometimes I will journal if I am inspired.

When I first started meditating, I would hound my inner guidance for direction and guidance and *answers!* Now, I know that my Higher Power has many ways of revealing my truths to me. Sometimes these truths are revealed through meditation; other times, I hear the "pearl" or answer that I have been seeking in an everyday conversation. The important point is that it is always revealed and I no longer have to prod or beg my Higher Power. I can now use my meditation time to connect to the loving feeling of the Universe and leave my meditation knowing that there is Divine Order in all things. As sure as the season changes, and the flowers grow, there is absolute order, even in my life.

Meditation is, I believe, purely personal and a great way to heal a hurtful past. There is no wrong or right way to spend time in inner reflection. Some may prefer to sit in the lotus position and chant. Others may prefer to take a long walk in the woods. And still others may use relaxation and prayer tapes. Some may feel comfortable "going within" during the morning hours; for others, the mid-day or evening may be the optimum time for inner reflection.

Part of the healing process is discovering and living your authentic self, and this includes finding the most comfortable practice for *you* to go within and get connected to your Higher Source. No one can prescribe a method for you. This is purely your own journey and yours to take alone. Enjoy your trip, my friend! Enjoy. ●