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# Finding common ground: when the hippie counterculture immigrated to a rural redwood community

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**Finding Common Ground:  
When the Hippie Counterculture Immigrated to  
a Rural Redwood Community**

By

Lisa Gruwell Spicer

Accepted in Partial Completion  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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## **MASTER'S THESIS**

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Lisa Gruwell Spicer

Date: November 9, 2012

**Finding Common Ground:  
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Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements of the Degree  
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Lisa Gruwell Spicer  
November 2012

## **Abstract**

Youth of the 1960s took a collective stand against the establishment, challenging hegemonic forces intent on turning an informed citizenry into mere consumers; hypocrisy from the highest levels of government (Harrington 1962) was challenged by students, college enrollment was unprecedented (Roszak 1968). Unable to cause change at the top, scores of young people dropped out of mainstream culture in search of a better way to live (Miller 1991). Back-to-the-landers are the surviving members of the counterculture movement (Jacob 1997). Different from Sixties' political radicals or utopian commune hippies, the back-to-the-land movement is evidence of counterculture success and provides an ideological model for community building.

A hamlet in northern California is a model in community building because it exhibits the essential qualities of a resilient community: social cohesion, participatory decision-making, and shared commitment to environmental integrity (Theobald 1991). Immigrant generated conflict prevailed there during the early 1970s, based on fear. Serendipitously, residents created relationships and discovered common ground (Lamphere 1992). Smith and Krannich confirm, given an opportunity, newcomers and old-timers will discover they have more in common than previously believed (2009). Community members acknowledged their shared values, what Sumner terms the civil commons (2005); they established a unique kind of *communitas* of people and place (Turner 1969),

sustained by frequent experiences of collective effervescence (Durkheim 1912) at events supporting both common and individual interests.

Born in 1960, my life began with the counterculture. A consequence of “free love,” my hippie parents divorced in 1969; my mother, with four daughters, joined the back-to-the-land movement. Personal experience transforms this ethnography into autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2000). During a year of participant observation fieldwork (Spradley 1980), I returned to the town where I came of age as a hippie kid to discover how the people established peace.

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## Introduction

“Hippies took over our swimmin’ holes. There’d be a lot of nudies of both sexes in the river all day where we used to swim,” a Comptche old-timer explained to me in a distinctive accent that revealed Finnish ancestry. The remote timber community nestled on the north coast of California was settled by immigrants from Eastern Europe. I grew up in Comptche, arriving as a ten-year-old in a family who had joined the back-to-the-land movement. Listening to the elder Finn I had known in my youth, I felt a sympathetic resonance with “the Other” that I had not understood as a child. *What did it feel like when the hippies moved to town?*

Returning in 2011 to conduct ethnographic research in Comptche (pronounced “*comp-she*”) gave me a chance to understand and articulate what I could not in my youth. I was motivated by the sense that something unique happened in this town during the Seventies, when an immigration wave of back-to-the-landers to the rural redwood community with long-term residents effected positive social change—after a rough period of conflict. The research participants all agreed that something noteworthy happened in this small town, which is why they chose to contribute their thoughts, experiences, reflections—we all wanted to understand what happened. The variety of views among participants regarding what brought social change ranged from “children” to “time.” Just one respondent came close, surmising peace came to Comptche through “potlucks.” My findings

revealed that it was community events that provide common ground and a way for newcomers to integrate into the Comptche community.

### **Community Events and Common Ground**

The great social science ancestors Emile Durkheim (1858-1971) and Victor Turner (1920-1983) established that social gatherings and rituals are vital elements in healthy communities. Durkheim explains that *collective effervescence*, or exuberant social events, support social cohesion that contributes to a healthy community. Events in Comptche attract people to common ground who otherwise live in remote settings. Social gatherings are a key element in understanding what works well in Comptche because they create a synergy between people and place. These synergistic gatherings, in turn, support a virtual civil commons as they provide a unity of purpose (Sumner 2005). The result is rural resilience.

This ethnography reveals how the people of Comptche were able to overcome values conflicts between newcomers and old-timers through a tradition of social gatherings where people suspend differences and gather on common ground. These virtues were hard won in Comptche; the pre-1970s social structure “didn’t have room,” as one old-timer stated, for counterculture newcomers. Comptche’s eventual acceptance of immigrants occurred through a deliberate process. Community gatherings have become a mechanism providing numerous beneficial outcomes for people and place.

This ethnography demonstrates that it's not just "getting together," but gathering around common values that promotes and nurtures the functions of a healthy community (Theobald 1996, Smith and Krannich 2009, Lamphere 1992). Well into the new millennium, Comptche has a social structure that honors traditions and integrates newcomers.

In the spirit of contemplating something on a small-scale in order to understand the grand-scale, what happened in Comptche during the 1970s is a study in overcoming community conflict. My research makes clear that while finding common ground is a crucial first step, an effective way to maintain the commons is through supporting community traditions.

### **The Place and the People**

Comptche is an unincorporated town in Mendocino County, located on the Pacific coast of rural northern California. Land use is a recurring issue in rural communities experiencing in-migration of people from urban concentrations (Smith and Krannich 2000, Sumner 2005). Similarly, land-use was identified by participants in this study as *the* major issue in 1970s Comptche. Other common issues noted by participants were social exclusion, children, and fire.

Regional historical patterns show a cycle of in and out migration dependent upon timber and fisheries. Shifts in the timber industry caused shifts in employment, and the regional population continues to climb and fall with the ability of the land to yield resources. The downturn in regional lumber mill operations in the 1950s and 1960s created out-migration that was subsequently

filled in the 1970s by a new wave of immigrants from across the country: back-to-the-land hippies.

Following the California gold rush of 1849, railroad and timber companies acquired vast tracts of redwood forests along the state's north coast. Today, multi-national corporations own most of these lands and have swallowed the economies of many rural communities whose sustainability was based in natural resources and agriculture. Global corporate control of local economies has had devastating effects on rural family life and rural communities (Sumner 2005). These powerful hegemonic forces, however, have not had the same effect on Comptche. In the midst of corporate timber giants, the local people have accomplished what Jennifer Sumner (2005) asserts is essential for sustainable rural communities: establishing a civil commons.

The assignment by the Mendocino County Planning Division in the mid-70s to its towns to come up with their own general plans brought the community of Comptche together. The three year process got the people of Comptche engaged in a community building process that created a general plan and a vision for their shared future. Whether they knew it or not, they were identifying and claiming responsibility for their civil commons.

## **Methods**

To better understand the community building process, I used participant observation lasting a year, during which time I also conducted interviews, and visited cultural sites, archives, and museums. To make observations, analyze

data, and write the ethnography, I followed the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) method (Spradley 1980). Using the DRS method, in which participant observation is a step, I worked progressively through broad, then increasingly focused, observations looking for patterns and contrasts. This process produces to a cultural inventory. From this analysis, I found five organizing cultural domains: conflict, events, relationships, traditions and common ground.

The ground itself provides the common reason people have chosen to live in Comptche since the time of the original Pomo inhabitants. Of the many published accounts and statements made about Comptche in particular and the Mendocino region in general, all agree: this is a place of stunning natural beauty that attracts people to live here. With a child attending public school in Mendocino during my year of fieldwork, I had many occasions to speak with other parents; I heard a chorus of stories about a willingness to trade higher incomes and urban amenities for rural life on the coastal side of Mendocino County. People continue to be drawn by the beautiful environment and the healthy, safe small towns populated by people who value both community and privacy. Whereas the pioneering settlers made land claims, today's immigrants make claims of personal space, and the tradition of personal freedom persists.

### **Research Project Participants**

This study began in my home state of Washington. Wanting to conduct interviews, but challenged by distance, I developed a questionnaire that could

travel and work on its own. While lengthy, there was an excellent response rate. I recruited participants through social media, with the criteria that they were residents of Comptche during the 1970s and preferably still live there today. I asked them to define themselves as either an old timer or a newcomer in the Seventies, and both are represented. Children comprise a significant population segment in this study as fifty percent of the project participants were young children or youth during the Seventies.

Sixty four percent of the people initially expressing interest in the project became participants and completed the questionnaire. A study conducted on the response rates of 31 surveys sent via email were averaged with a mean response rate 36 percent (Sheehan 1996). While this is a generalized comparison, I attribute the relatively high response rate for the Comptche questionnaire to respondents' desire to share their stories. Twenty eight people completed the questionnaire.

All participants agreed that life in 1970s Comptche was a shared unique experience, and all expressed interest in the project outcomes. Shared stories and memories validate our collective memory; the combined stories share many points of agreement, thereby creating an accurate representation of a transformative period of time in a place.

### **How This Thesis is Organized**

**Chapter One** establishes the theoretical framework I use to clarify my findings and discusses the literature I used to link my observations together. To explain

the significance of community events to community health, I use Victor Turner's communitas theory (1969), augmented by Emile Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence (1912). Futurist Robert Theobald (1996) provides a theoretical model of resilient communities, asserting "the only way we can change directions is for citizens to commit to continuing involvement in creating the future they desire" (Theobald 1991:97).

Topical research is discussed in Chapter One, focusing on hippie counterculture, among some research participants I encountered a residual misunderstanding about the motivations behind the hippie movement. Chapter One considers the key socio-political action of the time, such as the government betrayal of the poor—pledging to wage a war on poverty, but then funding programs and policies that actually created or exacerbated poverty (Harrington 1962). A discussion of the back-to-the-land movement establishes that hippie communes were wholly different entities than the neo-homesteaders, and had very different outcomes (Jacob 1997).

Back-to-the-land hippies were a new type of immigrant, moving from urban to rural areas across the country. I look at rural communities from the turn-around migration trend of the 1970s, which shows newcomer-generated conflicts in other rural settings, and how community conflict was resolved. Resilient communities and reclaiming the rural civil commons are becoming time-proven methods for turning back the forces of hegemonic change (Theobald 1997, Sumner 2005). To solve immigration problems and build resilient communities, residents need to establish common ground—shared territories and community amenities, as well

as issues and life values in held common. Sumner (2005) offers a new perspective on the rural civil commons as a prototype for urban communities to reclaim their civil commons.

Futurist Robert Theobald advocated for communities to develop and include the essential things he found in the most dynamic, highly functioning cities and towns and defined three necessary components that must be present: social cohesion, participatory decision-making, and a demonstrated respect for the environment (1996). Residents of Comptche practice all three attributes of the "resilient community" Theobald described in *Reworking Success* (1996) as the new model for the new millennium.

**Chapter Two** is about methodologies and resource materials I used for this study. I discuss autoethnography and the value of reflexive knowledge, as my own story was part of the larger community story that comprise the data. Also explained the wide variety research materials I consulted, how this research was designed, and the methods used for gathering and analyzing data. The fieldwork methodology I used is the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS), which engages the researcher in participant observation for gathering data (Spradley 1980). Using the DRS method, I was able to develop and carry out a research project with a focused central inquiry but no preconceptions about outcomes. Participant observation transforms the ethnographer from a separate observer of people living life into a participant in the community, essentially observing a culture while also helping with harvest.



Data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, and my own experience. Raw data was then analyzed by continuing with the DRS method, finding cultural domains and themes that can be further analyzed to find units of meaning in over-arching cultural paradigm called “Comptche” (Spradley 1980). There is a pattern and rhythm to Comptche life apparent in cultural themes of open and closed, highs and lows, exclusive and inclusive, isolation and togetherness. The highs of *communitas*, occurring cyclically, provide an equalizing contrast to living and working in relative isolation, which can produce personal “lows.”

**Chapter Three** is a brief historical overview of Mendocino County that illustrates the deep yet tenuous inter-relation of people and place. The source of life and livelihood, the land shapes the people as much as the people shape the land. My intention is to provide context through an arc of time, to see patterns that become apparent through an expanded perspective. Since the source of conflict here in the Seventies involved immigration and shifting populations, I feel it is important to remember that the Pomo were the first people known to dwell in the grass valleys of Comptche.

A limited amount of logging, fishing, and ranching continues today, but the major industries in Mendocino County, as identified by the California State Employment Department are: government, healthcare, retail, and vineyards (ca.gov 3/23/12). Essentially, the region’s economy is now based in tourism and retirement industry services. Of the agricultural products, it would be remiss to avoid mentioning the cultivation of marijuana for which the region is known

internationally. A study commissioned by Mendocino County revealed that pot grown in the "Emerald Triangle"—as the tri-county region of Mendocino, Humboldt, and Trinity counties are known—generates up to two-thirds of the area's economy (Regan 2011). CNBC reported in January of 2009: "marijuana is increasingly filling the gap left by other failing industries like lumber and fishing" (Regan 2011).

While this thesis is about hippies, and it is well known that some hippies smoke pot, the plant is not an included topic for three reasons. First, the initial intention, research, and data are not about marijuana and the associated politics. Second, the topic of marijuana is delicate because county, state, and the federal drug laws are in conflict. Third, ethical guidelines compel me to avoid delving into issues or topics that could jeopardize others or me while conducting social science research. However, where there is relevant context in the ethnography, participant comments about "pot" are included.

**Chapter Four** is the first of a three-chapter ethnographic description of the culture that made Comptche unique during the Seventies; this is done by sorting findings into units of meaning called cultural domains. Children are an important part of this research for a number of reasons: they appear in the organizing cultural domains of "conflict" and "common ground." "Childhood" is also a cultural domain. Comptche is a good place to raise children, but polarized parenting styles are identified as fanning the flame of conflict.

Research participants were asked to define the kinds of differences they remember about "the other" in 1970s Comptche, helping the reader to understand

how these differences contributed to conflict. The disparities reported were superficial and appearance-based: personal hygiene or lack thereof, parenting style, what was worn or not worn, what was smoked, and housing choices. These apparent differences obscured their common ground. Common ground was discovered among Comptche old-timers and newcomers when they were compelled to form relationships and work together on issues of land use. The cultural domains explored in Chapter Four are: land use, children, sources of livelihood, acquiring country living skills, volunteering, and differences in the Other.

**Chapter Five** describes the vast array of events in 1970s Comptche; the events that have endured are outcomes of successful community building. Cultural domains considered here include events and gathering places. Events happen on common ground, where people gather, relationships are strengthened, and collective effervescence occurs.

Community traditions provide continuity, a reason for gathering, and social cohesion. A hand made community quilt is raffled at the fire department's annual chicken dinner. Such traditions support the on-going events that in turn strengthen relationships and community life.

Studies on conflicting relations between immigrants and long-term residents in contemporary societies identify scenarios similar to what occurred in Comptche: inter-group threats are both tangible and cultural; misconceptions and negative attitudes stem directly from fear of change (Stephan 2011, Smith and Krannich 2000). Other studies show that forming relationships between

newcomers and established residents are of key importance in the successful integration of the populations in conflict (Lamphere 1992, Sumner 2005).

**Chapter Six** discusses the cultural domains of traditions and common ground. The community established a way to resolve differences through an opportunity for community consensus building occurred in 1975, when Mendocino County officials asked every town in the jurisdiction to create a general plan for zoning. Comptche residents formed the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Among many things, the CAC determined a shared value was preserving the environment, with respect to stewardship of natural resources. The resulting *Comptche Conservation Plan* (1978) acknowledges that the town is in the heart of timber country; it defines their shared respect and responsibility for protecting the region's natural resources, while simultaneously protecting the independent nature of the people who choose to live there.

A theme that emerged in discussions with both newcomers and old-timers was how people learned to “agree to disagree,” in the words of an elder hippie still residing in Comptche. By the mid-Seventies, land use was the recurrent issue over which the community met, discussed, and felt heard (CAC 1979).

In Comptche, the very issues that were divisive in the first half of the Seventies—land use, children, fire—brought the community together by decade's end. Research findings show that at the heart of all Comptche community gatherings exists the key to resolving conflict: finding common ground.

## **Chapter One**

### **Theory: Counterculture, Communitas, Communities**

#### **Section One: The Culture that Produced the Counterculture**

This study looks at the back-to-the-land counterculture movement in the cultural context of the 1970s. To understand the motivations of back-to-the-landers, and other types of hippies, it is crucial to reflect on how the preceding few decades in America shaped the Seventies. Why did 16 million (Hoffman 1991) young Americans “drop out” of mainstream society during an economic boom that propelled the United States to the highest mass standard of living the world has ever known?

#### **Hippies Were Baby Boomers**

American children born between 1946 and 1964 are known as ‘baby boomers.’ Their parents survived the Great Depression of the 1930s, then endured great sacrifice during World War II in the 1940s. In the jubilant post-war 1950s, young married couples were having larger families. More babies were born between 1948 and 1953 than during the thirty years before, combined; the baby boom was widely considered “a tribute to the national glory... affluence was not just an economic fact, but a demographic one, and the demographic bulge matched the affluent state of mind” (Gitlin 1987:13).

In the 1950s and 1960s, to be young was to experience a new phase of maturation. “As society has grown more affluent, it has created still another period of human life, one that intervenes between adolescence and adulthood” (1972:44), writes Michael Harrington, who saw the affluent, radical young as a new cultural force. “Their bitterness with the existing order is partly the result of having been given the leisure and educational opportunity to take a disinterested and critical view” (Harrington 1972:44).

### **Unprecedented College Attendance**

Coinciding with the growth of wealth for the middle class that enabled more youth to attend college; government programs such as the G.I. Bill helped military veterans pursue a college degree. In the United States there were 2.3 million students attending college in 1950; that number grew to five million by 1960 (Roszak 1968). The university campus became a place where the young forged their group identity. Across the nation, courses in social sciences were, among other topics, covering contemporary issues; Michael Harrington’s classic, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1968), was an immensely popular book in the 1960s (Isserman 1993). Political and social awareness was part of student discourse, and there was, among the young, a nation-wide awakening to the excesses and contradictions about the world in which they had grown up.

## **American Poor Symbolize Social Hypocrisy**

In *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1968), Michael Harrington contends that post war affluence and the mass media generated the impression among citizens that the country's poverty problem had been solved. "In this theory the nation's problems were no longer a matter of basic human needs, of food, shelter, and clothing. Now they were seen as qualitative, a question of learning to live decently amid luxury" (Harrington 1968:1).

To a great many non-young Americans, those who were coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s had everything. The older generation's bewilderment over the counterculture is clearly expressed by interview subjects in the documentary, *Making Sense of the Sixties*, directed by David Hoffman (1991). For example, a professor says:

I had a strong feeling that these children were rebels without a cause. They had everything—they *could have had everything*. And I found it very hard initially to see what they were rebelling against. When the Vietnam War came along, the peace demonstrations at least focused on something. But initially, when they started dropping out from society, I was baffled because I thought it was a pretty good society they were dropping out from.  
[Hoffman 1991]

Beyond college campuses, the Sixties was also a time when the injustice of poverty, racism, sexism, and the Vietnam War were becoming harder to ignore in the apparent calm afforded by affluence. Harrington's study of poverty in America showed that twenty-five percent of American citizens, because of their economic status, were denied the minimal levels of healthcare, housing, food, and education. He found that people in both urban and rural communities were poor not because they were unwilling or incapable of finding work but because of ill-

conceived government policies. For example, the federal government financed the relocation of the middle class from the cities by building the suburbs as part of the post-war promise to provide new housing for America. Funding for this “entitlement” ran out, and the inner city poor were consequently abandoned, left behind in the inner cities, which in time became slums. Gitlin concurs: “millions of Americans were acquiring whole new spaces to live in...while the upbeat language of ‘renewal’ concealed the injuries done to millions who were left behind” (Gitlin 1987:14). The poor were denied dignity, asserted Harrington, and subsequently were blamed publicly for their lot in life and labeled as lazy. Harrington exposed the myth that poor people were being pampered by the government, and that the government was doing too much for them. In 2012, this sounds curiously familiar. “Most of the people on welfare rolls are victims of government action and technological progress. They receive only a fraction of the compensation they deserve, not in charity, but in justice” (Harrington 1968:xxii). In the Sixties, rural poor were being displaced from rural agricultural life because of federal policies that favored and funded what we know today as corporate agriculture.

Todd Gitlin, who was a student radical in the Sixties, reflects:

[P]rivate affluence was crowding out public goods, causing and obscuring the impoverishment of the public sector. If you looked at American schools, if you contrasted the condition of trains and subways with the condition of suburban houses and cars, you could see that public services were being starved, the public funds were going to fuel the boom in private spaces and private goods. [Gitlin 1987:14]



## Life, Death and Civil Rights

*Tin soldiers and Nixon coming  
We're finally on our own  
This summer I hear the drumming  
Four dead in Ohio.*  
Neil Young, 1970

Many scholars have credited Harrington's *The Other America* with influencing President Johnson's war on poverty, which the administration of the late President Kennedy had initiated. "The important thing was not just the President was going to commit money to the war on poverty," he wrote, but the White House was willing to focus "enormous moral and political power into this undertaking" (Harrington 1969:xvii). Harrington was invited to serve as a member of the federal task force against poverty and unemployment, headed by Sargent Shriver. In *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987), Todd Gitlin—who alongside Tom Hayden, headed Students for a Democratic Society—writes that Harrington's study on poverty had a major impact on their nationwide student organization. "Harrington was pivotal, for he was the one person who might have mediated across the generational divide" (Gitlin 1987:117).

The Sixties had other social victories—such as the Civil Rights Movement, lead by Dr. Martin Luther King, which established the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, for example. But national tragedies were the price: the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the escalation of the war in Vietnam throughout the Sixties, and the 1968 assassinations of Dr. King and Robert F. Kennedy. As a grim culmination of the tension generated during the Sixties, in May of 1970 four Kent State students were shot to death by National Guard; ten days later two

black students at Jackson State were shot to death by local police (Gardner 1978). The Sixties revolution created a legacy of disillusionment that Americans are still contemplating today.

A first approximation: this generation was formed in the jaws of an extreme and wrenching tension between the assumption of affluence and its opposite, a terror of loss, destruction, and failure. [Gitlin 1987:12]

For the young involved with the counterculture movement, losing the Kennedys, Dr. King, and the 1968 democratic presidential race was a political “turn off.” The nation’s new president, Richard Nixon, established a Republican agenda of decentralizing government—which meant de-funding and eliminating social programs that “pamper the poor,” a phrase used then and today. It is in this context of hypocrisy from the federal government to the suburban neighborhoods and their own parents that young middle-class Americans found reason to protest, demonstrate, sit-in, and drop-out.

Since it was “very difficult to live outside of the existing system, the function of the counterculture was defiance of the dominant mores. The counterculture was rebellion, a living protest vote, a declaration of choice—the Great Refusal to cooperate. [Miller 8:1991]

### **Technology Plus Hegemony Equals Technocracy**

1968 was a pivotal year. Theodore Roszak’s *The Making of a Counterculture* was published, which to this day remains among the best descriptions of the counterculture movement and its challenges. Students were protesting for civil rights and fighting to end the Vietnam War. Radical political anarchists advocated for dismantling the American system. One of these young radicals was Jerry Rubin, who, along with Abbie Hoffman, was a member of the

Youth International Party. In 1968 newsreel footage, Rubin stands in ragged counterculture clothing wearing beads and long curly hair, explaining the counterculture movement to news reporters in suits and buzz-cuts:

America is so obsessed with bad breath and with underarm deodorant, these are the biggest problems in the world, if you watch television at prime time, advertising, it's not concerned about poverty, it's not concerned about race oppression, it's not concerned about the police. The biggest problem is: 'Is your hair groomed?' and 'What's it like under your arms?' and "Do you have bad breath?' and this is *the* American obsession. And so I think that a generation of kids that says, "We don't care about your concepts of cleanliness," is a revolutionary generation. [Hoffman 1991]

Roszak, who was a 35 year old college professor when his book was published, understood the youth of Sixties and the challenges they faced in bringing radical culture and system change to America. Roszak emphasizes that one of the most crucial social problems of the era was so pervasive in American culture it was hard to detect. Technology, as a hegemonic force, was imposing a new structure and organization on nearly every aspect of American life. In hindsight, we know this is true. Here, he coins the term "technocracy:"

Ironically, it is the American young, with their underdeveloped radical background, who seem to have grasped most clearly the fact that, while such immediate emergencies as the Vietnam War, racial injustice, and hard-core poverty demand a deal of old-style politicking, the paramount struggle of our day is against a far more formidable, because far less obvious, opponent, to which I will give the name 'the technocracy'—a social form more highly developed in America than in any other society. [Roszak 1968:4]

The technocracy Roszak describes is a type of control over people manifested by modern industrialized society when organizational capacity reaches a level of power that demands efficiency, massive-scale coordination of workers and resources, and a thrust for greater affluence. The technocracy mandates

technological manipulation of society and its functions, relying on experts who make decisions for the masses (1968).

## **Hippies and Radicals**

*“There’s a whole generation,  
With a new explanation.”*  
San Francisco, by John Phillips 1967

By 1968, awakened “tuned in” youth were rejecting the technocracy as well as distancing themselves from their middle-class parents. The political system was part of the technocracy, so fighting back through policy seemed pointless, even though there was concerted political action through campus-based organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Youth International Party (“Yippies”). Political action was not a long-term way of life for most of the young revolutionaries in terms of livelihood (Roszak 1968). The counterculture had different branches: political radicals were different from the hippies, who saw the individual as powerless against the technocracy and had reason to believe political action resulted in little tangible gain (Roszak 1968, Toch 1967).

Among the non-political hippies, some took a pacifist approach and dropped out of mainstream society. The back-to-the-land imperative was to reject the old and to start anew, to discover and create a new society on a human scale, based in values of love, freedom, respect for the natural world, and the rejection of modern materialism.

If you are twenty-five and have exhausted the dilatory possibilities of college and parental support, you *do* want to ‘grow up’ and ‘be

responsible'... So how *do* you grow up? Where is the life-sustaining receptacle that can nourish and protect good citizenship? ... The answer is: you make up a community of those you love and respect, where there can be enduring friendships, children, and, by mutual aid, three meals a day scraped together by honorable and enjoyable labor. Nobody knows quite how it is to be done. There are not many reliable models. The old radicals are no help: they talked about socializing whole economies, or launching third parties, or strengthening the unions, but not about building communities. [Roszak 1968:203]

The differentiation among hippies who moved to the country is an important distinction for this thesis, which concerns back-to-the-landers. Some who dropped out founded or joined communes which were often short-lived. This thesis demonstrates that many back-to-the-landers have continued homesteading in the new millennium—they just do not call attention to themselves.

The counterculture movement, without question, exposed the problems in America during the Sixties that the status quo was reluctantly confronting: poverty, racism, war. Yet in the face of a power so much greater than the hippies, some became anarchists and resorted to political agitation. By the close of the Sixties, those inclined to pacifism simply left the scene.

Starting in the mid-1960s and on through the 1970s, each year thousands of urban émigrés found their way to the countryside to set up individual homesteads on a few acres of land... One student of the movement estimated that by the end of the 1970s, at the height of the urban-to-rural migration flows, there were over one million back-to-the-landers in rural North America, almost all on small acreages rather than living in communes or on large farms. [Jacob 1997:3]

The popular refrain was “back to the garden,” the Garden of Eden, to start over and find a new way to live that was not dictated by the pursuit of material goods or the puritanical rules of the old guard, but focused instead on discovering and

building a new kind of community that brought them closer to nature and closer to each other (Jacob 1997, Miller 1991).

### **Communes: Birth and Rebirth**

*We are stardust... we are golden...  
Caught in the devil's bargain  
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.*  
Joni Mitchell, 1969

The counterculture movement was populated by people in their twenties, who were experimenting with all things pleasurable, forbidden or highly regulated in mainstream culture, like sex. Contraceptive pills, introduced to the public in 1961, were initially only available to married women. It took an act of Congress in 1972 to make birth control pills available to *all* women (Steiger 2010). Consequently, the “flower children” were having babies. A new generation was being born amidst the rebirth of their parents.

Being educated and aware of alternative visions for humanity, counterculture hippies relied on models of utopia in establishing communes to raise children. With families to raise—and a fair portion of hippies were single mothers since their partners were “free” to move on—these hippies left political activism to the yippies and the Weather Underground. Commune dwellers and back-to-the-landers were inspired by utopian ideas of B. F. Skinner, David Suzuki, and Buckminster Fuller, among others (Jacob 1997, Kanter 1972, Westhues 1972). A popular book mentioned by participants was Helen and Scott Nearing’s *The Good Life* (1970). Hippies near or crossing the threshold of thirty considered it necessary to re-focus their desire for social transformation by withdrawing as

completely as possible from the mainstream to create smaller communities based around relationships (Jacob 1997, Miller 1991).

In Rosabeth Moss Kanter's definition of utopia in *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (1972), the word "communes" could replace "utopia," while the essential word remains "vision."

Underlying the vision of utopia is the assumption that harmony, cooperation, and mutuality of interests are natural to human existence, rather than conflict, competition, and exploitation, which arise only in imperfect societies. By providing material and psychological safety and security, the utopian social order eliminates the need for divisive competition or self-serving actions which elevate some people to the disadvantage of others; it ensures instead the flowering of mutual responsibility and trust, to the advantage of all. [Kanter 1972: 1]

Although a few communes that were begun in the 1960s and 1970s still exist today, with smaller memberships, the life span of most hippie communes was about two years (Jacob 1997, Kanter 1972, Meunier 1994). This is also true in Comptche, where there was a commune in the early 1970s. The sustainable model turned out to be as a community of smallholders, not communes. Utopia remains a dream.

The problems with communal life arose in the very values over which this generation was grappling: authoritarian structure (Jacob 1997, Miller 1991, Westhues 1972). Social groups need structure (Turner 1969). In *Hippies and American Values*, Timothy Miller found that a recurrent problem on most communes was sexism; while professing liberation and equality, men on communes maintained their mainstream expectations about what women should and should not do on a farm (Miller 1991). Miller's study defines three reasons hippie communal life failed: most communes lacked coherent direction and vision,

there was failure to enforce rules and agreements, and the hippies' lack of leadership translated into an inability to change communal goals as situations changed.

Ironically, while it may have been Harrington's *The Other America* among the earliest of counterculture inspirations, Harrington is critical of Roszak and the youth he represented in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, asserting that the movement was reactionary and naïve. Harrington argued the disenfranchised should *not* drop out of society, but instead, should continue to work for transformation through political action. "The poetic demand to do away with machines, so compelling to young people who have never run them or realized their own dependence upon them," he wrote, would lead to starvation for millions of people if the counterculture were to carry out their agenda (Harrington 1972:46). Although most communes were short-lived, the success is in what was learned from them (Miller 1991).

Back-to-the-landers were another manifestation of the desire to live a simple life closer to nature and become self-sufficient. Since many of these neo homesteaders still remain on their land, they are the most successful, or sustainable, of the different hippie modalities. As found in this ethnography, back-to-the-landers were typically young families with enough money to buy a small farm or piece of land in rural America. In true hippie syncretic fashion, the back-to-the-land hippies culled from many different traditions in order to both learn the best practices of rural living and blend these with their values of individual freedom and community. Hippie eclecticism has today become a hippie tradition.



Out of necessity, some back-to-the-landers eventually added traditional jobs to their scene, including commutes of up to two hours (Jacob 1997, Westhues 1972). Creating a hybrid lifestyle enabling hippies to thrive in “the garden” three and four decades later, the back-to-the-land movement represents community building that works.

## **Section II: Theoretical Underpinnings**

Emil Durkheim (1858 - 1917) recognized that “above the individual there is society, and that society is a system of active forces...” (1912:342). The counterculture movement in 1960s America was one such “active force” that rocked the foundation of American society through its popular culture, social and political systems. The counterculture force reverberates in American culture to this day: innovations in sustainability have their roots in the counterculture, as does the revival of the feminist (suffragette) movement, Gay Pride, rock music, recycling, organic food, Earth Day, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (Miles 2004). In light of the writings of Durkheim and Turner, the counterculture seems like a normal reaction, as if it could have been expected: a revolutionary movement against political corruption is not uncommon, and can be considered a sign of a healthy society. But at the outset of the Sixties, times were good, and the awakening of the young to the contradictions of “the man” caught society napping. The revolutionary force of change was a shock for mainstream America.

Call them freaks, the underground, the counterculture, flower children or hippies—they are all loose labels for the youth culture of the 60s that

transformed life in the West as we knew it, introducing a spirit of freedom, of hope, of happiness, of change and of revolution. [Miles 2004:9]

### **Jesters, Pranksters and Being Poor**

In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner writes about the societal function of particular low-status figures, such as a court jester, who expose deception, betrayal, and hypocrisy among its higher-status leaders. In this role, a low-status individual possesses privileged or sacred attributes. In societies where it is risky to rebuke a political leader, jokers, court jesters, and editorial cartoonists are uniquely situated in their ability to express the outrage of the populace. Turner points to examples in folk literature that are rich in symbolic figures such as “‘holy beggars,’ ‘third sons,’ ‘little tailors’ and ‘simpletons,’ who strip off the pretensions of holders of high rank and office and reduce them to the level of common humanity and morality” (1969:110).

I contend that by adopting poverty, the hippies acquired the attributes of a low status position that enabled them to speak candidly like a jester. Aside from arrests by the police, which happened frequently (Gitlin 1987, Miller 1991), hippies were above reproach. They couldn't be fired from jobs they didn't have. High profile hippies could be considered jesters, such as Jerry Rubin or Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. Kesey and friends toured the country in a day-glow painted school bus, offering LSD trips to hippies and “turning on” the curious; this ended when possessing LSD became illegal in 1968 (Mishor 2010, Wolfe 1989). Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were chronicled by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1989).

Hippies in the Sixties socialized at free music events called love-ins, human be-ins, and boogies. Their values were easily disseminated through music. Mottos were: “If it feels good, do it, just as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone or yourself” and “Do your own thing” (Miller 1991). Their call was for love and peace in contrast to excess, isolation and war. With no role models for the vision of humanity the hippies were advocating, they borrowed from Eastern spiritual traditions and Native American values to develop their movement and philosophy. Counterculture ideals, values, and issues were communicated through the underground press, an informal network of newspapers (Jacob 1997, Miller 1991).

### **Pseudo Poverty and Communitas**

*“Everybody I’ve met who became a hippie,  
including members of my own family,  
came from some sort of affluence.”*

Old-timer respondent

It is significant that, in dropping out of mainstream middle-class America, counterculture hippies chose poverty over participation in the technocracy by getting a job and an accompanying conventional life. The hippies chose poverty, but on their terms. In his article *The Poor and the Hip* (1972), Louis Zurcher found similar psychological characteristics among counterculture hippies and the poor, but asserts that “the hip” adapted these traits.

The hip were observed to be: present oriented; alienated and anomic; spontaneous in affective expression; nonintellective; existentially oriented, personalistic; prone to passivity; struggling with identity; agonizingly self-reflective. [Zurcher 1972:67]

Zurcher contends that the counterculture rejection of the “straight” society and institutions created a structural vacuum. They adapted to this void by enacting new social agreements, such as alternative housing, flexible relationship boundaries and communes; the institution of marriage was replaced with sexual freedom. “The hip psychological characteristics were suited to life within the social innovations they had developed” (Zurcher 1972:67). By adopting poverty, hippies were able to establish a *communitas* of non-conformity.

In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner observes the values of *communitas* are apparent in the collective culture of the beat generation and their cultural heirs, the hippies: peace symbols, flowers, long hair, and long dresses. The beats and the hippies both adopted:

...the stigmata of the lowly, dressing like ‘bums,’ itinerant in their habits, ‘folk’ in their musical tastes, and menial in the casual employment they undertake. They stress personal relationships rather than social obligations, and regard sexuality as a polymorphic instrument of immediate *communitas* rather than as the basis for enduring structured social tie. [Turner 1969:112-113]

Turner seems to imply that hippie events such love-ins or “tuning on” through acid trips, enabled them to “get on the bus” to *communitas* for the sake of *communitas*—the group high—without all the ritual preparations and the structure that surrounds and supports such experiences. The experiment was not sustainable.

In his work with pre-industrial peoples, Turner established that *communitas* is a dimension of all societies past and present, and its parallel, co-existing dimension is *structure*. One of his examples is a rite of passage ritual: “men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by

their experience of *communitas*. What is certain is that no society can function without this dialectic” (Turner 1969:129). *Communitas* is a state of being with one’s fellow humans, and that state of being transcends structure. The social life of hippies was an experiment in togetherness without all the trappings. It was unsustainable, as the commune movement proved, until a new social structure emerged, created by back-to-the-landers during the 1970s.

*Communitas* is a state of being together as one, humans interacting in a pleasurable or meaningful way. But this communion needs its binary opposite, structure, in order to exist. *Communitas*, or anti-structure, and structure are similar to how night is accessible only at the end of day; *communitas* is accessible only through its juxtaposition to structure. Hippies desired *communitas* because there is found existential meaning about being together that all humans find enjoyable, but their rejection of structure was at the expense of *communitas*. *Communitas* cannot be sustained if the structural and organizational needs of human beings are not addressed. Perhaps this is the overall explanation of why most hippie communes did not last.

In Kelly Luker’s article about hippie commune kids, Zane Kesey—son of Ken Kesey, author and head of the Merry Pranksters—commented on the problem of communes: “My dad said that the commune idea of sharing was great, but it all breaks down in the fridge” (Luker 1996). Having no role models, hippies had to discover for themselves the importance of structure to hold all that freedom.

The hippie emphasis on spontaneity, immediacy, and ‘existence’ throws into relief one of the senses in which *communitas* contrasts with structure.

Communitas is of the now, structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom. While our focus here is on traditional preindustrial societies it becomes clear that the collective dimensions, communitas and structure, are to be found at all stages and levels of culture and society. [Turner 1969:113]

Communitas without structure, as critics pointed out, resulted in hippies being evicted from their pad (Toch 1967) and is the same reason communes were short-lived (Turner 1969). Back-to-the-landers, this ethnography shows, were eventually able to find the balance of communitas and structure—the evidence being that many former hippies are still homesteading today. A few communes that established structural elements such as rules and participation agreements continue into the present. The Farm, in Summertown, Tennessee, was founded by Stephen Gaskin, a visionary leader who established a functional commune structure. It still exists today, self-described as an “intentional community” (Farm 2011, Meunier 1994).

### **The Hippie Hangup: Critique, Fear, Myth**

*“A hippie is someone who dresses like Tarzan,  
has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah.”*  
Ronald Regan, Governor of California, 1967

Hippies were cultural newcomers to 1960s America. Their “immigrant” ideas and values provoked fear of change among the old guard, and they were right—American society was transformed. Society’s fear of hippies is important to consider in the gestalt of the Sixties and Seventies because it was pervasive and systemic. The literature I reviewed and the project participants who identified as

old-timers are in agreement: specific issues causing fear were drugs, sexual liberation, and social change.

In the late Sixties, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) launched an undercover investigation modeled on the domestic intelligence practices of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States under Director J. Edgar Hoover. In his article, *'They smell bad, have diseases, and are lazy': RCMP Officers Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties* (2009), Marcel Martel states: "By collecting information on drug users, and then identifying 'the hippie' as a drug user, the RCMP was able to successfully depict hippies as a threat" (2009:217). Hippies constituted a threat, Martel found, because they challenged status-quo morality and were establishing new social values (2009). An undercover RCMP officer wrote in his report that "hippies were dangerous because 'by using drugs and disobeying laws they would also change things'" (Martel 2009:234). Making hippies appear as a menace and a threat was part of the agenda from the highest levels of government (Martel 2009, Roszak 1968).

Rozzak, interviewed in the 1991 documentary film *Making Sense of the Sixties*, explains the counterculture role of drugs: "The fascination with drugs was not fun and games in the Sixties. For many people it was a way to see reality differently, and hopefully, therefore to change your values" (Hoffman 1991). But to the uninitiated general public, hallucinogenic drugs were to be feared. *Time* magazine's description of the marijuana and LSD experience didn't help to calm fears: "most hippies become insatiable hedonists, smoking and eating whatever

can turn them on in a hurry; making love, however and with whomever they can find that ‘feels good and doesn’t hurt anybody’” (*Time* 1967).

The Hippies, as explained in the *Time* article, were profoundly offensive to the “straight sector” because of their total disregard for consent or disapproval as expressed in their ethic of “do your own thing” which replaced the Protestant Ethic (Time 1967). Another reason hippies were enigmatic, according to *Time*, is that: “while condemning virtually every aspect of the American scene, from its foreign policy to its moral values, [hippies] offer no debatable alternatives” (*Time* 1967:10). However, my research leads me to conclude that the hippies were demonstrating their alternative when they went back to the land in search of a better way to live. Perhaps blinded by their fear, the “straights” of the *Time* critique couldn’t see this alternative model. The hippie alternative of a better way to live has taken forty years to mature and bear fruit. The “debatable alternative” is known today as *sustainability*.

### **What works: Rural Communities and Civil Commons**

The 1970s began a rural renaissance for America, not exclusive to hippies. This phenomenon was termed the “turn around migration.” Population immigration from farm to city was the norm, but for the first time in United States history, Americans were immigrating to rural areas at a higher relative rate than were immigrating to urban areas (Smith and Krannich 2009). Since this thesis examines the relationships between established and newcomer/immigrant rural residents in 1970s, and how they resolved conflict, it compares well with similar



studies on rural community building. Important to note, these studies, and my own, looked at large numbers of immigrants moving into communities, relative to the existing population. Back-to-the-landers added to the population of Comptche by approximately one-third during early 1970s (CAC 1978).

Based on three different studies conducted by Louise Lamphere (1992) on relationships among immigrants and long term residents, Michael Smith and Richard Krannich (2009) on newcomer culture clash in the Rocky Mountains, and Walter Stephan (2011) on fear of immigrants, five phases emerge. These phases of interaction are also apparent in 1970s Comptche. These are:

1. Conflict happens. Conflict between immigrants and established residents can be expected. Healthy communities are prepared for a constant influx of newcomers with the ability to anticipate conflict and ways to integrate newcomers.
2. Conflicts between immigrants and long-term residents are based on values, assumptions, and superficial appearances.

The theoretical reasoning is... the newcomers of urban origin bring a particular sociocultural identity to the rural communities to which they migrate; this identity and the associated value *orientations* differ significantly from those held by longer term residents. Price and Clay (1980) called this difference a 'culture clash' between newcomers and longer-term residents. [Smith and Krannich 2009:399, emphasis added]

First impressions matter. Locals were offended by the general appearance and smell of back-to-the-land hippies when they arrived in Comptche in the early 1970s. Newcomers since the turn-around migration, are also more likely to value environmental preservation of resources, whereas long-term residents often

endow natural resources with economic value; these different value orientations lead to social conflict (Smith and Krannich 2009).

3. Conflict among rural residents is often based on fear of change. As discussed previously, middle-class perceptions of the counterculture included fear of change. This was also a characteristic of the Comptche conflict. Stephan identifies problems stemming from immigration are connected to “tangible threats, cultural threats, fears of change, and the negative attitudes and misperceptions that flow from these threats and fears” (2011:1).

4. Relationships lead to common ground. Any occasion or issue that brings community members, new and old, together will generate relationships; the catalyzing issue or event serves as common ground. When common ground is established, relationships then build and become stronger (Lamphere 1992; Sumner 2005).

5. Understanding of differing values between disparate groups can occur organically and spontaneously. As shown in the studies cited here and in this ethnography, *finding common ground* was a key component in the way newcomers and old-timers discovered their own way of building relationships. Common ground relationships reveal that newcomers and established residents have more values in common than previously assumed (Lamphere 1992). In anticipation of the potential values conflict that immigrants unpack when they move to town, prepared communities can establish ways to integrate newcomers into their communities. This can provide hope for community building based on

understanding, respect and cooperation with others. As this discussion has shown, these are also counterculture life-values.

These five phases of community building by finding common ground through conflict resolution also resonate with Jennifer Sumner's call to citizens of Canada and America to reclaim the civil commons (2005). In *Sustainability and the Civil Commons: Rural Communities in the Age of Globalization*, Sumner explains how hegemonic forces, such as the technocracy, have expanded exponentially since the counterculture era. Her concern is how this affects rural communities. "As corporate globalization penetrates every aspect of rural life, rural culture is being challenged by a global capitalist culture" (Sumner 2005:56). Free trade on a global scale allows the wealth of natural resources to be extracted in one region of the planet and transported to another, while the profits of this wealth never returns home—unless one considers low cost consumer goods as a benefit. Wealth from raw materials is transferred to major urban financial centers. This global economic model is destroying unaware rural communities but, Sumner suggests, survival and sustainability for rural communities can be found in recognizing and claiming the civil commons that already exist in every community. "[T]he civil commons is what any legitimate state or government properly supports, and what the corporate market will never provide" (Sumner 2005:98).

The civil commons is comprised of the shared base of civic life: water, roads, schools, post offices, parks, fire departments, and, in rural communities, things like farmers markets, barn raisings, and nature. These are the things that

are valued in common by everyone in a community. “In the age of globalization, people must learn to value the civil commons and fight for it” (Sumner 2005:99).

Robert Theobald, in *Reworking Success* (1997), shares a concordant message. He observed what works in successful and healthy communities in the new millennium, communities that are weathering the “rapids of change” brought by economic globalization and climate change. Resilient communities, as Theobald calls them, are not specific towns or cities, but are found within them: neighborhoods ranging from 200 to 500 people. The population of Comptche hovers near 450. Theobald’s “resilient communities” exist on a human scale where relationships are developed. “People in these neighborhoods are deeply committed to each other, and aim to grow and produce much of what is needed for living through local activity” (Theobald 1997:107). The current “think global/act local” movement encourages people to shop locally and seasonally.

*Reworking Success* identifies three criteria found in resilient communities:

1. Shared values identified by the community (social cohesion)
2. Participatory decision-making
3. Shared commitment to environmental preservation

Sumner (2005) sees rural communities and Theobald (1997) saw urban neighborhoods as models for a sustainable interface between human society and the environment: Sumner advocates for informed, sustainable rural communities as a working model of stewardship for urban as well as rural civil commons. Both assert that the level of a community’s respect, appreciation and management of

the commons, the common ground, is directly linked to its sustainability. Theobald advocates for community members to find ways to come together to identify values and ensure residents have opportunities for participatory decision-making. All community members hold a stake through commitment to environmental stewardship and preservation.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology: Resources and Autoethnography

*How can you study a system that you're a part of?*  
[Newcomer respondent]

#### Section One: Resource Material

##### Autoethnography

One of the voices in this ethnography is my own, establishing an autobiographical aspect to my inquiry; I am both insider and outsider. Including myself in this research enables me to work with “multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner 2000:745). I have been able to investigate the misconceptions of hippies in general from the perspective of the greater culture, which consequently obliged me to reconsider my own point of view.

Growing up as a hippie kid had biased me in favor of my clan; throughout my life, I have always proudly confessed my childhood context, sometimes pointing out the absurd, other times amazement. However, a sense of naiveté crept into my personal narrative, as I became increasingly aware of an ever-present negative “vibe” against hippies. Apparently, we weren’t as “hip” as I had believed. An ex-hippie once responded incredulously, “I’m surprised you’re admitting to being a hippie.” This growing incongruity inspired my research.

A review of the literature reveals a crusade to discredit the hippie counterculture. Goebbels set the empirical standard for propaganda during

WWII—the most tragic and horrific example of the absolute power of misinformation. In *The Making of and Elder Culture* (2009), Roszak describes power elite operate think tanks that conceive of and execute misinformation against the counterculture aimed not only at hippies, but higher education, and more recently, aging baby boomers (a demographic that includes ex-hippies) who will soon begin to draw federal resources through federal retirement entitlements. *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) by Allen Bloom, whom Roszak calls “a major neoconservative mentor” (2009:21), established a new conservative ideology in the 1980s. Bloom set the agenda for right-wing attacks on hippies, college professors for encouraging the young to protest, and the counterculture in general. The “failed counterculture” campaign has been infused into mainstream culture, typified by shabby, stoned hippies in the popular media. As a tool of the hegemony, propaganda disseminates non-truth and cause perceptual shifts on a massive scale. This has been an effective maneuver in spinning national belief about the “failed” counterculture and the ridiculous, irrelevant hippie.

My research shows *the counterculture did not fail*. In fact, it continues to succeed through grassroots change in ways discussed in Chapter One, but also in our daily lives. Recently walking through a shopping mall parking lot recently, carrying my re-useable shopping bags, I noticed two curious bumper stickers. One read “Consume Less, Share More” and another spelled “respect” with religious icons and the peace symbol. Inside the mall peace signs were everywhere, even on camouflage t-shirts. There is a cultural irony here begging for acknowledgement. Why would “the powers that be” engage in a culture war

against the counterculture movement? It seems a simple explanation would suffice: the movement was an absolute threat to those at the helm of the hegemonic force. It had to be crushed. And here, I find personal and clan validation; the counterculture movement worked and persists because it established an ideological civil commons, a *citizens'* commons.

Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) advocate for autoethnography as a form of writing that makes “the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right” (733) rather than seeming “as if they're written from nowhere by nobody” (734). Expanding my methodology to include my *self* has provided an unexpected outcome; it has enabled me to articulate and understand what I could not as a child (Okley 1992). As a hippie kid I was culture bound. I took for granted that the reality of life in Mendocino County, California, was *the* reality (Spradley 1980). Paradoxically, hippies in the 1970s were becoming culturally un-bound, “dropping out” and exploring new ways of living outside the norms of the dominant social structure.

While there are outcomes of this research regarding the broader implications discussed above, the autoethnographical journey has validated and explained experiences from my personal history. I re-encountered my childhood during fieldwork and in the literature. Phrases and lingo that rolled off my mother's tongue echoed from the pages of the underground press in *Hippies and American Values* (Miller 1991). She frequently espoused the hippie credo, “If it feels good, do it, just as long as it doesn't hurt anyone.” I now realize it was the underground network through which she gleaned hippie philosophy. There was usually a stack



of periodicals such as *Mother Earth News*, *Rolling Stone*, *Country Living*, and the *Whole Earth Catalogue* on our redwood burl coffee table. In an interview with research participants who were her close friends, I learned my mother first came to Comptche after responding to an ad placed in the *LA Free Press* in 1970 by a Comptche newcomer, the late Larry Salmon. In March of that year my newly divorced mother was moving with her four girls back to the land—from Topanga Canyon to Comptche, California, in a purple school bus. I was culture bound.

The literature on autoethnography discusses the discipline's early criticism of autobiography as narcissistic and debates the concern for objectivity within autobiography (Okley 1992). Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) validated the significance of self in ethnography, recognizing the essence of ethnographic work is to discover the natives' primary passions, which in turn helps us to see what is essential in ourselves. Malinowski wrote in his diaries, published posthumously, that "the other" is a kind of mirror (1967:119). The current argument among anthropologists tends to promote autobiographical inquiry as the ultimate in reflexivity (Ellis and Bochner 2000, Etherington 2004, Hastrup 1992, Okley 1992, Spencer 1992). Paul Spencer points out a dichotomy: while autobiography yields unique and personal insight into history, life and the aging process cause distortion of memory (1992). Hastrup contends, however, it is in retrospect that we can more fully grasp the meaning of our collective and individual life histories (1992). This has proven true in the ethnography of Comptche. Our collective voice tells the meta-story, while our unique perspectives provide illustrative nuance.

## **Regional Topic: Comptche and Rural Communities**

The best and most detailed historical information about Comptche and Mendocino County has been gathered and recorded locally. Volumes of small-press publications sit on reference shelves at local libraries, archives, and among personal collections. The region's history has been, and continues to be, well documented and photographed with great care by resident historians. The Kelley House is an archive for *the Mendocino Beacon* newspaper, photographs, historical manuscripts, and other historical materials, as well as an historic landmark and museum in the village of Mendocino.

Local Comptche historian Elsa Thompson (1902-1986) researched, wrote and self-published *Early Settlers of Comptche Along its Many Roads* (1973). She was well-known by the community for this, and her weekly newspaper column "Comptche and the Coast" appeared in the *Mendocino Beacon*. Because she typically limited her research and interviewing to friends; she obtained numerous historical accounts second and third hand and was not consistent in confirming factual information. Consequently I was sure to fact-check stories from Thompson. However, the value of her work is indisputable because *Early Settlers of Comptche* details Comptche's first one hundred years and the interrelated pioneer family histories.

Comptche's current unofficial historian and librarian Katy Tahja followed Thompson's book with *All Roads Lead to Comptche* (1999). Tahja provided an updated, cross-checked history of Comptche's founding families, chronicling

descendants who maintain family land to this day. Thompson and Tahja both include accounts of Comptche's first people, the Pomo. Ethyl Docker's autobiography *The Good Old Days* (1968) is the oral history of a woodsman's daughter in the late 1800s from Ukiah who, like Katy Tahja in 1976, married into a founding Comptche family, the Dockers. The narrative of Docker's childhood reveals meanings of place names and paints a vivid picture of pioneer life when Comptche was sparsely populated and heavily forested.

Numerous locally published materials provide extensive oral histories. Comparing the various accounts, I found two reoccurring elements among immigrants of the late 1800s, the mid-1900s, and the 1970s: communes and food co-ops (Yoneda 1988, Levene 1989). Other self-published materials provide histories of the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department and the Comptche Community Hall, which was home to the Comptche Grange from 1938 until 2000 (Tahja 2003). Tahja also documented Comptche's fire department history in *Comptche Past and Present* (1998), and *Last Stand at Tank Four Gulch* (2008).

Traveling to the County Planning and Building Services office in Ukiah, I met with Vale Whippert, Planner II GIS/Cartographer. Whippet provided me with stacks of binders full of demographic data that had been gathered about Comptche in the 1960s and 1970s—much of it is U.S. Post Office reports filed by Post Master, Aletta Hollister, who was also our 4-H leader. I was specifically searching for population data prior to 1980—more recent demographics can be found on the Internet. Hollister's reports provide post office boxes counts. Since the only mail service for Comptche is to the post office, box-counts can give a

population estimate of households. I found what I was looking for among reports filed by the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) during a county-wide zoning process between 1975 and 1978. Through the county-wide zoning process, this body forged Comptche's first general plan. Whippert remembered the county-wide planning meetings of the late Seventies. Fresh out of college, he had just begun working with the County. "Those were lively meetings," he said, implying people got emotional about the land issues at hand. "Comptche was very organized," Whippert remembered. "None of the other districts were prepared and organized like Comptche."

During my year of field research in Comptche, I was given additional data and documents produced during the three years that the Citizens Advisory Committee worked to create their first, and only, general plan for Comptche. Tahja provided me with a copy of "Comptche Area Attitude Survey," the CAC's 1977 community questionnaire. This was an administrative copy with response totals and results from 93 respondents, 21 percent of the town population at that time. The results of this survey agree with results of my questionnaire written in 2011. This serves to support the demographic profile of Comptche in the Seventies presented in this ethnography.

Comptche Area CAC Chairman Michael Nolan provided me with a copy of their final report and recommendations, filed with the County in June of 1978: *Comptche Conservation Plan*, prepared by Comptche General Plan Citizen Advisory Committee and Mendocino County Planning Division. However, this is not merely Comptche's general plan; it is a unique and fascinating record of the

remarkable process between old-timers and newcomers. The report details how they found common ground and created a shared vision for how they wanted to manage growth.

The *Comptche Conservation Plan* provides an honest and thorough assessment of a town by its residents. It is the result of participatory decision-making. Intended to be a “living document,” it should stay current with desires and intentions of its population through periodic review by a meeting among residents. *Relationships* are written into this community process. Relationships and cooperation among new and long-time residents are how the residents constructed a bridge to common ground. Numerous studies of rural communities and common ground agree that collaboration, cooperation, relationships, and building community capacity are imperatives for building healthy communities (Gardner 2004, Lamphere 1992, Lovan et al 2004, Smith and Krannich 2009, Stephan 2011, Sumner 2005, Theobald 1991, Woods 2005).

### **Community Studies**

As discussed in the conclusion of Chapter One, studies in rural communities and *in-migration*—migrants from within a region or country—show a consistent pattern of conflict created by newcomers who bring with them new values that challenge the values of established residents (Lamphere 1992, Smith 2009, Woods 2005). Communities can overcome conflict when disparate groups build and strengthen relationships through collaboration and discover common ground through participatory decision-making and community events (Durkheim 1912, Gardner 2004, Lamphere 1992, Theobald 1996). *Collaboration* is a

conscious choice, something people must consent to (Gardner 2004).

Collaborative process can be set into motion when participants decide to be flexible and open-minded. “Effective collaboration does indeed require listening to and working with those who hold different perspectives and may historically be seen as the opponents” (Gardner 2004:81).

Futurist Robert Theobald (1929-1999) theorized that there are three essential components of successful, resilient communities: participatory decision-making, social cohesion, and a respect for nature. In *Reworking Success* (1997), Theobald argues that maximum growth economics have pushed the world’s carrying capacity to its peak. Writing in the mid 1990s, he asserts that we in the West, the wealthiest nations, have no choice but “to develop radically new directions and success criteria” (1997:98) or face the inevitable social and environmental systems collapse that, indeed, we face in 2012. From a grassroots approach, Theobald (1997) and Sumner (2005) contend that how people at the local level respond, or not, will determine future outcomes on a larger scale.

Chapter 6 shows that in the late 1970s, the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee used a model that closely parallels Theobald’s model, not published until 1991. His “resilient community” model presents a sequence of steps for use by community groups to resolve conflict through finding common ground. The community profile Theobald describes has been sustained in Comptche since the mid-Seventies following the establishment of their general plan. The kind of cultural change we need, Theobald asserts, comes from the

“grass-shoots” model, starting with people in relationships at the community level—defining “community” as geographical, professional, or interest group. Through these relationships, people find common ground, and this is where the transformation takes place, at the local level.

Comptche is but one example of people collaborating to make their community a better place. As more communities do this, a critical mass takes hold. As goes the country, so goes the world. In my view, our society is shackled with a dialogue about what doesn’t work; we are in dire need of effective role modeling of *what does work* to transform communities into the best places they can be for humans and nature.

Theobald (1991) presents a methodology for urban communities to collaborate by working in small groups on the neighborhood-scale. Sumner (2005) asserts that rural communities, with smaller populations, can be equally effective. She advocates for rural communities to *create* a crisis for the ruling class’s hegemony—recently labeled “the one percent”—through this kind of far-reaching, small scale, grass roots organizing:

[T]he crisis of the ruling class’s hegemony... occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking, ...or forcibly extracted the consent of broad masses, or because *huge masses have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity and put forward demands which taken together... add up to a revolution.*  
[Sumner 2005:62, emphasis added]

This not only describes how the hippie counterculture became a revolution—moving from a state of collective passivity to collective activity—but also describes how citizens can effect change again—perhaps this time fortified by the lessons of the counterculture.

## Section Two: Methodology

### Participant Observation and Respondents

This study generated primary data from both participant observation (Spradley 1980) and the individual stories and retrospectives of respondents. Storytelling as data must acknowledge loss of memory and distortion (Okely 1992). Given that memory is subject to loss and distortion, my findings arise from points of consensus, like common ground, among stories, incidents, events, institutions, and individuals cited by participants. All respondents noted, for example, the “fire department’s annual benefit chicken dinner” as a community event in which they participated. Consequently, the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department (CVFD) is an important element of the ethnography. Data from the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC 1978), and the many volumes of locally published literature supports the data gathered by my questionnaire.

Findings among these points of consensus are also supported by historical patterns in national and regional events. For example, the *back-to-the-land* movement of the 1970s coincided with the “turnaround migration” trend that began in the 1970s, marking the first time in the United States that “rural areas experienced a net flow of population relative to urban areas (Smith and Krannich 2000:397). In the way that generalities can be seen in the particulars (Spradley 1980), historical cycles provide another way to view the transformation of Comptche in the Seventies.

Working with respondents, whom I also refer to as participants, has been the most personally satisfying aspect of this study. Their stories were as engaging



and enjoyable as the re-acquaintance process—many interviews constituted my first adult conversation with the grownups of my youth. It was an honor and a responsibility to receive these stories. The amount of time respondents spent on the questionnaire reflects their interest and thoughtful contribution. A number of enthusiastic respondents assisted in locating additional participants.

### **Recruiting Respondents**

Recruitment began with a flyer (Appendix A) that I mailed to a friend in Comptche late 2010 to post on the bulletin board at the Comptche Post Office—a significant location discussed in this ethnography. After the first few phone contacts were made by way of the flyer, I began to hear from interested people through a project-dedicated e-mail address and a project Facebook page.

Using social media to locate and network with participants, I created a project page on Facebook: **Comptche Stories: Ethnography of Change in a Rural Community**. Having an Internet presence enabled me to find and interact with people who had lived in Comptche in the 1970s. I sent my project questionnaire to potential participants (Appendix B). As research progressed, I posted early findings on Facebook, including graphs of quantitative data from the questionnaire, such as “Household Amenities” (See Appendix C.) The Facebook project page became relatively inactive beginning in August of 2011 when I arrived in Comptche, although people continue to “like” it.

Living at the field site enabled me to interview additional residents and conduct follow-up queries; I was encouraged numerous times to interview two

particular old-timers. “They have so many great stories about the hippies,” said one research participant. “I have invited them, they’re not interested,” I explained. Some consider the absence of these two particular men with deep Comptche roots to be a glaring omission. One did not respond to my e-mail. The other, when his wife put him on the phone after I had missed him a few times, declared he didn’t have anything to add to the study. For me, however, the important consideration is that these old-timers were invited.

Data was collected through the questionnaires from 28 participants—current and former residents who lived in Comptche during the 1970s. The population of Comptche in 1977 was 454; six percent of that population participated in this study in 2011.

Respondents range in age from 44 to 80 in 2011—the year questionnaires were answered. This means that in 1970, 41 years ago, these same people were between 3 and 41 years of age. Half of the participants were children or youth during the Seventies. Twelve were men and 16 were women. Eleven classified themselves as an “old-timer” in the Seventies, and 17 classified themselves as newcomers.

The terms “old-timer” and “newcomer” are used because they are neutral. Instead of labeling Comptche residents as “straight” or “hippie,” I asked respondents to choose which one fit them best. Further in the questionnaire, in order to generate memories about the era of conflict, I asked respondents to list the slang terms for each other during the Seventies (see Table 1). Although I want to emphasize that these terms are no longer used, I include them as evidence of

conflict. Today, and in every instance during my study, residents referred to “the Other” with respect.

<b>Slang referring to “the Other”</b>	
<b>Slang used by newcomers</b>	<b>Slang used by old-timers</b>
Locals	Hippies
Old-timers	Newcomers
Rednecks	Flower children
Loggers	Love-children
Straights	Counterculture types
Squares	Dirty hippies
Plastics	Stinking hippies
Up-tight	
Assholes	

**Table 1**

A significant point was made by one newcomer participant, who stated emphatically that she was not a hippie and never was a hippie. However, she conceded that she was comfortable considering herself a back-to-the-lander.

All research participants agreed that together, we lived through a unique shared experience in Comptche during the 1970s; I find their contribution to this study to be a validation of that shared experience. Some respondents said it was gratifying to know they were sharing their own perspective and personal experience from this transformative period of time in a specific place. A newcomer participant said she appreciated the “opportunity to set the record straight.” Each person holds a piece in the story of the whole, in the sense that each individual is an integral part of the whole (Durkheim 1912).

## **Section Two: Methodology**

### **Research Instruments**

The questionnaire asked 40 questions. Recipients received a packet that included a questionnaire (Appendix B), project description, and a consent form along with a large self-addressed envelope affixed with the appropriate postage to facilitate an easy return (Yammarino 1991). Completing the questionnaire took respondents about an hour. Sixty-four percent of the people to whom I mailed a research packet completed and returned it, which is considered an excellent response rate. A study of e-mail survey response rates in 2000 showed a mean response rate of 24 percent (Sheehan 2001). I used a hybrid of social media and U.S. Mail, so I refer to this response rate for general comparison only.

Seventeen of the 28 respondents requested a hard copy of the questionnaire to complete by hand. Eight elders preferred to be interviewed; one was done by phone early in the research period and the other seven interviews were conducted in person as part of my fieldwork. The interview mirrored the questionnaire and I took additional notes. Anticipating there would be respondents preferring to “go paperless,” I created an interactive electronic version of the questionnaire in MS Word. Three respondents chose this option. The e-version had boxes to tick, expanding fields in which to type responses directly, and could be easily sent without postage.

## The Questionnaire

Each question was based on the central research question: How did Comptche resolve the conflict of the Seventies? Two of the helpful questions that helped me establish a focus of the questionnaire are found in Quick Ethnography (QE) basics: “Who agrees with whom about what and to what degree?” and “What precursor life experiences explain who agrees with whom about what and to what degree?” (Handwerker 2001:5).

The first third of the questions generally asked for quantitative data about life in Comptche during the 1970s. The rest of the questions asked participants to identify *kinds of things*—types of exclusive and non-exclusive events, kinds of traditions, kinds of conflict and disagreements, and the differences they saw in “the Other.” In this way I was pre-sorting the data. The questionnaire finishes by asking participants how they think the conflict of the Seventies was resolved.

Respondents first answered questions intended to refresh their memories by asking about how they lived and earned a living. Why did newcomers move to Comptche, and how did old-timers feel when newcomers arrived? How did they acquire the skills for country living? A series of questions about gathering places and events were intended to identify instances of social exclusion in the community. Next, respondents were asked to identify kinds of differences, conflict, and issues, and then which of these were issues were held in common.

Although I asked respondents to list Comptche residents who stood out as key figures in community life during the Seventies, I did not include this in the ethnography; I don’t have permission from all of these people to name them in this

study, and some have died. However, the question about memorable characters was helpful as it served to generate discussion about differences, conflict, and resolution. For example, Chain Saw Sally was a hippie woman who went most places bare-chested and is remembered as saying, “If men can go without shirts, women can, too!” She also taught a few newcomer women how to use a chainsaw.

Finally, I asked respondents if they felt the conflict of the Seventies has been resolved, and if so, how? Respondents attributed the transformation to the passage of time, change through the children (who are now adults), and discovering common ground through “peerness,” a term used by a newcomer respondent. Another Seventies newcomer stated, “We learned to talk about our differences, rather than fight. We learned to agree to disagree,” A respondent from an old-timer family noted about Comptche today: “It seems like people don’t hold differences against each other anymore.” A newcomer respondent came close to what this ethnography revealed when she wrote: “Potlucks.” A few respondents wrote about the zoning work of the CAC as creating the community’s first general plan, and this is part of the answer because the three-year process established common ground and the civil commons. The other part of the answer is hidden in plain sight. It is *communitas*, experienced at recurring events. These are the reasons for community transformation and cohesion in Comptche.

Questionnaire responses create a picture of how people in Comptche lived during the 1970s—how they derived income, the nature of their home environment, and their social life. Participants provided insight into the nature and

causes of conflict between old timers and newcomers, and shared their assessments as to how the conflict, essentially centered on values, was resolved.

### **Participant Observation**

To grasp the “native” point of view (Malinowski 1922), I had to do more than analyze questionnaire responses. While I was an insider from the Seventies, I had a newcomer bias. *Participant observation* enabled me to engage in community functions and events while observing through an ethnographer’s eyes; I was not studying people, I was learning from them by joining in regular activities (Spradley 1980). Participant observation is a powerful way to understand three fundamental aspects of culture: behavior, knowledge, and artifacts—what people do, what they know, and what tools they use (Spradley 1980).

Fieldwork in Comptche occurred in two phases. The first visit was over ten days in April 2011. The questionnaire was mailed out in October 2010, with a requested return date in February 2011. I scheduled the first research trip to coincide with the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department (CVFD) annual awards banquet, providing a chance to re-acquaint myself with people I had not seen in over thirty years.

Being at the field site enabled me to conduct deeper research; I visited regional archives, spoke with a historian, conducted in-person interviews, and drove east to the county seat in Ukiah where I found crucial demographic information unavailable via computerized databases. There was one important number I could not find either online or over the phone: the population of

Comptche mid-1970. An afternoon searching through spiral binders at the County Planning Division yielded data I sought. I found paperwork filed by the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee in 1978 and the number I was after: The population of Comptche in 1977 was 454.

The ten-day trip to the field in April convinced me that, while I could conduct this study from afar, the research would be more comprehensive if I could arrange to live in Comptche for a year with my family and participate in community life. In August 2011, I returned with my husband and daughter for a year. I was able to find locally-available research materials, conduct additional interviews and participant observation. We arrived in time for a summer fund-raising event, the Comptche Cool Down. By September I was attending planning meetings for community events, and my daughter and I spent the year volunteering.

Cooking meat for community events is a noteworthy tradition in Comptche. The Community Hall (formerly the Grange Hall) has never had adequate oven capacity to roast all the meats for the various dinners and events. So community members volunteer their home ovens for roasting, and the fully cooked meat is then transported to the event. This is the same method used for pies and bread, and constitutes a tradition of wholly homemade meals for community events. My volunteer work included cooking a pork roast and baking pies for different events.

Comptche is a place where food is home grown, home preserved, and home cooked. This means there is always plenty of work for volunteers. Volunteering builds relationships. It is an effective way for newcomers to engage in the community. As a returning newcomer, this was an effective way for me to



re-connect with former friends and acquaintances and build new relationships. Volunteering for event production was also a way to communicate with Comptche residents, new and old, about the research I was conducting. These conversations were productive and I found people to be very interested in the findings of this study. Volunteering is also a responsibility. While attending to the appetizer table at the Winter Warm Up event in December, I was speaking with great enthusiasm about this study to a couple whom I had not seen for many years, when I overheard from the kitchen, “Oh God, Lisa’s talking about her thesis again!” I bit my lip, changed the subject, and thought about participant *observation*.

Ethnographers usually find one person in a fieldwork setting who becomes their principal informant or consultant (Spradley 1980). Since I was insider as much as outsider, I did not feel the need for a key insider to help me understand the tacit knowledge of the culture. However, one friend from my youth took it upon herself to check in on me regularly—in the Comptche tradition of dropping in on neighbors. This friend hails from a Comptche family with roots that go back to ownership of land that is today Montgomery Woods State Nature Reserve. I spent countless hours with her talking about the old-time families of Comptche, gaining a better understanding of life for them before the hippies moved in, as well as how her family responded to the change in their hometown brought by the arrival of back-to-the-landers. I was able to participate in community life, to give of my time and abilities, and consequently received back from the community a “place” for my family and me. We felt at home.

In February each year, the women of Comptche gather to start the process of creating a community quilt to be raffled at the CVFD chicken dinner in June. They meet first to discuss the design and color scheme, each person leaving with a square backing and fabric scraps to make a block for the quilt. The women meet periodically during the quilt-making process at sessions called “Stitch-N-Bitch,” a local Seventies twist on the term “quilting bee.” A newcomer respondent wrote:

We made a community quilt to raffle off at the chicken dinner. We asked 20 to 25 women of the area to embroider a 12-inch by 12-inch patch. The (fire department) auxiliary pieced the patches together over the course of several meetings. It was a huge success. So we continued to do it annually and the tradition is still carried on. [Newcomer respondent]

My mother was among the women who embroidered a quilt square, and as much for my own pleasure as participant observation, I appliquéd a square for the 2012 quilt (Appendix D).

Quilts are a well-known pioneer art form, and the tradition of Comptche community quilts goes as far back as the families who settled the region. Comptche quilts are a tradition that has evolved along with the people, regularly given as gifts for weddings and newborns. In recent years, the annual CVFD community quilts have won top honors at the county fair, and a few Comptche women have made quilting their cottage industry. Although not exclusive of men, it is an art form of the women and in recent years, girls have been included in the Stitch-N-Bitch quilting sessions if they are working on a quilt square. Community quilts serve as common ground, as noted by a newcomer respondent: “This is very important: The making of quilts. [Old-timer] J.S. made a square and that

became what unified us. All of us women came together to make a quilt to raffle at the chicken dinner and raise money for the fire department.”

Through participant observation I found that fund raising is an on-going aspect of life in Comptche. A continuum of events is always underway; planning and preparation yields the next gathering for people, and another opportunity for *communitas*. Like agricultural cycles, the event cycle produces regular funds to support what is important to the community, the major recipients being the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department and the Comptche Community Organization.

Participant observation is a discovery process, but what is discovered cannot always be included in the ethnography. There may be too much data to include in the study, or there may be data that is too sensitive. Both are true for this study. While I encountered no outright resistance, I was always aware that while I was observing, I was also being observed. There are people and stories preferring the hallmark privacy afforded to all Comptche folk. The Comptche tradition of privacy persists.

### **Field Methods and Data Analysis**

*In anthropology, as in all social sciences, the concern with the particular is incidental to an understanding of the general.*

[James Spradley 1980:163]

The Developmental Research Sequence is a method of gathering data via participant observation and is based on increasingly focused levels of observation, followed by a systematic mapping of findings. Organizing data into

cultural domains establishes a viewpoint of the culture that helps provide meaning and understanding.

For this study, Comptche in the Seventies is the *cultural scene*. The completed questionnaires provided data that was already sorted into *cultural domains* because the questions were intentionally written that way. The cultural domains include: Reasons to Live in Comptche Sources of Livelihood

Differences in the Other  
Learning Country Living Skills  
Volunteering  
Issues in Conflict  
Issues in Common  
Places to Gather  
Events  
Traditions  
Common Ground

I found there are three over-arching *organizing cultural domains*: Events, Traditions, and Common Ground. The domains organize the meanings of the cultural scene. These cultural domains are explored more fully in the following chapters on the topics of people and place, Comptche in the Seventies, events, and common ground.

In Comptche, there is a tradition of commitment among residents to maintain the social structure; they create events for this purpose. The unintended consequence of regularly occurring community events in Comptche is regularly occurring collective effervescence—an essential function for a healthy society (Durkheim 1912, Turner 1969). This phenomenon affords participants a departure from their daily lives and responsibilities and unifies them in a shared space where they experience together a state of equality and unity (Durkheim 1912,

Turner 1969). In the year of my fieldwork in Comptche, I lost count of the times I experienced *communitas* and collective effervescence.

These are the cultural patterns that people used to organize life in 1970s Comptche. Ethnographic fieldwork has proven to be an effective way to study a system of which I was a part. The discipline provides excellent methods and tools for looking at ourselves, not just the exotic Other. The methodologies described above provided me with a way not just to observe and question, but to learn by doing, remembering, and engaging in a level of directed discourse that revealed gems of knowledge that were new to me as both an insider and outsider.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Regional Context: Historical Cycles of People and Place**

A sense of place is helpful in appreciating the feelings that both pioneer old-timers and immigrant back-to-landers developed toward Comptche (see Map of California's North Coast, Appendix E). Mendocino County history is better understood in cycles, rather than a linear progression. Looking at cycles, patterns, and contrasts shows why people are attracted to settle in the region; livelihoods are linked to resources that have not always been harvested sustainably, which determines one's ability to remain. It is often hard to discern if it is the people or the land that takes the lead in shaping the region. Most likely, it is an interplay between people and place that generate the cycle of change through time.

In Mendocino County history I found the emergence and development of the region's civil commons. The areas and resources first used by the native people became the same lands and resources valued by succeeding generations: redwood forests, the Pacific Ocean, waterways, grasslands, wildlife. The values of land and resources change only by orientation: part of a Pomo subsistence system, then an economic value as fisheries, timber and hay for early settlers, and then as Gaia—to be revered and preserved—among the back-to-the-landers of the Seventies. All these values remain valid.

The Gold Rush exposed California's abundance of natural resources and opportunity, attracting to the Redwood Coast immigrants with timberland skills, primarily from Europe—Finland, Portugal, Germany, Italy, and also China. In the

absence of towns and villages, early immigrants lived in logging camps or set up communes based on ethnic heritage, language, and mode of exchange (MHS 1967, Yoneda 1988).

Early logging practices required immense work and were destructive to waterways. After being felled by handsaws, logs were hauled by teams of horses or mules to riverbanks for transport to the sea. At Burke's tie camp in Comptche in the early 1900s, railroad ties were "split out" (KHM 2011). Lumber was dragged by ox and mule teams to a hillside of damp clay where the ties slid down to Big River. Timber would pile up along the dry riverbed, which had been dammed. At 2 a.m. water would be released from the dam, and the rush of water carried the logs downstream to the mill in Mendocino, waiting at the mouth of Big River (KHM 2011, Thompson 1973).

The region's rivers are not navigable by boat. Before railroads, the rivers were harnessed to carry logs to the sea. A seemingly endless procession of logs floated downstream to the millponds situated at the headwaters of rivers. Hydro powered sawmills cut logs into lumber, which was loaded onto schooners, and later steamships, bound for San Francisco. After the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, Mendocino County lumber helped to rebuild the city. By then, California's north coast timber industry was a major player in world trade (Caspar 2011, MHS 1967, MRC 2012).

## **Before the Immigrants: Pomo on the North Coast**

The village of Mendocino was founded in 1850 as a logging community. The saw mill was situated on the north bank of Big River, which had previously been a Pomo settlement called *Buldam* (KHM 2011, MRC 2012). Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber (1925) estimated the pre-contact population of Pomo as 8,000. The Pomo are not a single tribe, but are made up of politically independent tribes with seven distinct languages, according to ethnographer Samuel Barrett (1908). University of California at Berkeley anthropologists, such as Kroeber and Barrett, conducted extensive research on the Pomo in the early 1900s. Today the Pomo are considered the most widely studied natives of California (DeGeorgey 2007).

The Mendocino Indian Reservation was established in 1855 on the coast north of Mendocino. The Indian Agent and military were posted at Fort Bragg, and the town of Fort Bragg was established in 1857 (Baumgardner 2006). The Mendocino Reservation closed in 1866 and the native people were consolidated at the Round Valley Indian Reservation, north of Ukiah. In 1873, the United States Congress released Indian reservation lands into the public domain. The 25,000 acres that comprised the Mendocino Reservation was then sold by the United States to European immigrants (KHM 2011).

Prior to the establishment of reservations in Mendocino County, the Pomo lived in relative peace with the first immigrants and never made war on the settlers. There are written accounts of settler raids on Pomo camps to capture and enslave them to harvest crops, after which they were released (MHS 1967). In *Fort Bragg Remembered, A Centennial Oral History* (1976), Pomo Chief Dock



reluctantly agreed to share his sentiments about his people's history with editors Bruce Levene and Sally Miklose.

Children, your fathers roamed these hills and valleys in freedom. There was plenty of deer in the forests and fish in the streams. There was plenty for all. There were no white men from the land of the sunrise to draw lines upon the ground and say that the land was theirs... Who has driven the game away? The white man. Who has taken our lands and made slaves of us? The white man... The white man says we must not steal, that we must not steal a blanket, that we must not steal a coat. You must not steal at all, but he has stolen everything from us. Chief Dock, 1976 [Levene 1976:124]

*Pomo*, like many tribal names, means "people" (MHS 1967, KHM 2011, Kroeber 1925). It is generally known that Pomos camped in Comptche on their annual migrations between their winter camp in Ukiah and summer camp, called Buldam, at the mouth of Big River, which was later the site of Mendocino Mill. The name "Comptche" is understood to be named after Pomo Chief Comptche (Hoak 1954, Tahja 1999). Thompson wrote that "Comptche" is a Pomo word meaning "in the valley of many hills," (1973) but there is no other data to support this translation.

### **Comptche's First Immigrants**

In 1862, Newman E. Hoak landed at Big River at age 28, as a member of a hunting expedition from San Francisco (Hoak 1954, MHS 1967). He remained in Mendocino when his party returned to the city. He was "charmed by the beauty of the virgin wilderness... and followed a party of Pomo Indians over a trail which led from Mendocino to Ukiah" (Hoak 1954). Hoak's daughter Charlotte published her father's story in the *Mendocino Beacon* in 1954. She describes her father's

friendly relationship with the Pomo of Comptche and relays his account that the local Pomo named this place for their revered ancestral Chief Comptche. “They pointed to his burial mound which lies at a high point in a hayfield at Prairie Camp, one mile and a quarter down the road. In early days, old Comptche’s burial mound was respected” (Hoak 1954). This homestead is now known as Grimes Ranch, which re-emerges as a notable site in the ethnography.

The Hoak Ranch neighbored a traditional Pomo camp where the natives stayed during travels between Ukiah valley and the coast. There, the native people got water from a spring they called “Living Waters, which they believed had curative powers. They almost worshiped this small pool” (Thompson 1973:70). As of the late 1970s, this was still protected by a picket fence to keep cattle out (Thompson 1973). At a local creek, they pounded abalone and ground and washed acorns; they fished in the nearby Albion River. During Comptche’s hot dry summer, they dried fish, crab, clams, mussels, abalone and seaweed on their return from the coast, and they gathered acorns and basket materials in Comptche for use in winter camp (Hoak 1954, Kroeber 1925; Tahja 1999, Thompson 1973).

“One of the largest oak groves was the wide spreading one under which my father made the agreement with the Indians never to cut down the Indian acorn orchards or destroy their salmon waters” (Hoak 1954). Logging practices have changed the forest, but many of Comptche’s natural open grasslands with oak trees remain. However, the salmon waters of the regional streams and rivers were destroyed when they became aquatic conveyor belts transporting timber

from mountainside forests to seaside mills. Today California's Department of Fish and Game can point to efforts that have reversed damage; but most of the rivers have lost their runs of Coho salmon.

### **Timber Immigrants**

Immigration and timber harvest increased simultaneously in another wave of newcomers to Mendocino, driven by an expanding railroad system that opened up the inland region of Mendocino County in 1901 (DeGeorgey 2007). Railroad companies merged with timber companies as tracks required wood to "tie" the steel rails together. An elder Finn participant described Comptche's role in the growing timber industry and how he and other immigrants seized the opportunity:

Lumber companies liked the Finns, they worked hard and didn't complain. Comptche was known for making ties, they were loaded down at 'Tie Landing' at Norfolk Bridge. Southern Pacific Rail Road bought Albion Lumber Company for the supply of lumber to make ties, Southern Pacific was building a railroad along the Pacific Coast. It was easy for an immigrant to get set up. All they needed was a cross-cut saw, a hand saw, and a sledge hammer, for not much expense they could be in business. Land was easily acquired, 40 acres or more was easy to get. The Homestead Act opened up land to Americans and Europeans. I remember seeing those popular steam ship ads that said "Go West, Young Man."  
[Old-timer respondent]

In 1945 timber harvesting practices along the Redwood Coast changed dramatically due to the introduction of logging trucks (KHM 2011). Instead of using livestock to haul logs to the river or train landings, trucks enabled loggers to load timber near the harvest site. Log trucks in the Mendocino area were typically bound for the mill in Fort Bragg or to a smaller independent mill, such as Comptche's Philbrick Mill.

In the 50s, the mills were running. I was in first grade in 1960, and there were 33 kids in the Comptche School, so there was an influx of people in the Fifties due to the mills. The Philbrick mill burned in '64 and a lot of people left. It was the major mill. So there was no industry here in the 60s and a lot people left. I was the 3rd and 4th grade. [Old-timer respondent]

Since the town's establishment in 1877, Comptche has been timber country. Numerous timber companies and sawmills have employed Comptche residents over the past 150 years: Albion Lumber Company, Mendocino Redwood Company, Masonite, Union Lumber Company, Boise Cascade, Georgia Pacific, Aborigine Lumber, along with other smaller, independent enterprises. The woods around Comptche have yielded tan oak bark, railroad ties, raw logs, and cut timber providing a livelihood for many generations.

The area of Comptche covers a ten-mile radius, with the Comptche Store and post office located at the center. Today these area boundaries are technically referred to as the Comptche Community Services District (CCSD). The CCSD provide municipal support for fire-fighting and other emergency services. These are services that the Comptche community has worked hard to secure. In 1952, residents took it upon themselves to install an emergency fire service telephone. Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) permitted them to use electric poles where needed, but the emergency phone line was strung primarily on trees along the road (Thompson 1973). The Comptche Volunteer Fire Department in 1964 and was supported solely by the community until the CCSD was established by vote. The County now provides funding for the CVFD.

## Historical patterns of humans and natural resources

Patterns of resource depletion and recovery follow immigration patterns of people to the north coast. The sea otter population, nearly lost to the Russian fur trade in the early 1800s, has recovered under protected status. The awareness of timber industry leaders of their responsibility for resource stewardship are evident in the early 1900s, as seen in the lament of E. C. Williams, owner of Mendocino Lumber Company from 1872-1906:

The winter rains had not wholly ceased and the river bank full... the tall redwoods with their great symmetrical trunks traveling toward the skies, with the bright colors of the rhododendrons profusely scattered over the hills. Over all the hush and solitude of the primeval forest... as I recall the beauty of this picture, *I cannot but regret the part it appeared necessary for me to enact in what now looks like a desecration.* [MRC 2012]

The historical patterns discussed show people immigrate to the Redwood Coast and choose to live here for reasons of natural beauty and natural resources. From experience, I can attest this is not an easy place in which to live. But the land provides a good life for those willing to work hard and reside in relative isolation from the outside world, a trait that continues to define the character of Comptche residents to this day.

In 1931, Charlotte Layton described Comptche in a voice both of her time and timeless:

Comptche section [is] so well known for its beauty, and which enjoys a greater reputation for its health-giving climate. It was in search of that precious treasure, health, that I came to Comptche November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1925 and during that time nature has added appreciably to the ninety-six pounds that I weighed... The yard about my house had been sown to red clover which was now making that rich soft stand so attractive and so useful about a country door yard. A few fine young redwoods standing with their feet in this green mat only added to its beauty. [Layton 1931:3]

Of Comptche life in the 1970s, a research participant wrote a description similar to Layton's: "Its secluded location and expansive wilderness provide an Eden-like beauty. The forest filled with healing herbs and magnificent wild flowers and wild animals is enchanting." The persistence of a quintessential Comptche way of life through time shows how land has evolved here along with the people. The community has intentionally kept growth at bay—there are no services for tourists, not even a rest room at the Comptche Store. The beauty and benefits noted by Layton in 1931 harmonize with the observations of newcomers in the 1970s: beauty, health, safety, ideal setting for raising children. Amidst the rapid pace of change of life in America, it takes planning, relationships, and cooperation for a community to preserve a way of life and an environment.

The boom and bust nature of the timber industry has had a corresponding boom and bust effect on the region's population. In the 1800s, pioneers found opportunity and riches in timber and fisheries. County population grew along with the demand for forest products. A logging boom after WWI attracted Italian and Portuguese timber workers who had first immigrated to the Midwest and southeastern United States. This logging boom depleted the resources, causing mill closures and job loss in the 1960s. Many people left, creating room for another wave of in-migration in the 1970s: hippies of the back-to-the-land movement. This next wave of immigration is the cultural paradigm of this ethnography, discussed in the remaining chapters.

## Chapter Four

### Comptche in the 1970s: Land, Children, Fire

*There is a shared respect and love about Comptche's specialness. We each will likely define this differently but we all share the feeling.* [Old-timer respondent]

*We liked the secluded wilderness and pristine beauty of the forest. It provided an opportunity for us to live off the land, simplify our lives and strive for self-sufficiency.* [Newcomer respondent]

#### The Land, the Garden

“Truly a Garden of Eden” is how Elsa Thompson describes Comptche (1973). During his fieldwork on the Pomo of the north coast, Alfred Kroeber was awestruck by the environs to the point of distraction (1925). A newcomer respondent wrote, “We fell in love with the redwoods.” Such romantic descriptions reflect a common passion. Whereas *common ground* is the central idea to this thesis, the literal ground is the common reason why immigrants have chosen to live in Comptche since the first homesteader in 1867. Among the many voices comprising my research in various forms—oral histories, academic and popular literature, respondents’ statements—resoundingly these voices say the Redwood Coast is a place of stunning natural beauty. Beauty of place is the common reason for living here.

During the first forty to fifty years that settlers lived in Comptche, the Pomo and the immigrants shared the land. It was common ground. In their oral histories, the first homesteaders reveal tolerance, even friendship, with the band of Pomo

who continued to camp, harvest, and travel the Comptche commons; the area was part of the Pomos' usual and accustomed places. Concurrently, these lands were parcels, according to our Western concept of land ownership, being purchased by homesteaders from the U.S. Government. The Pomo originally had *primary use rights*, the commonly understood relationship to land held by Native Americans. The Pomo continued their primary use rights during this era of peaceful co-existence in Comptche.

Oral histories also relate that early settlers and the Pomo interacted and shared information. *They had a relationship*. Comments made in the late 1800s and early 1900s about the region's native people can be degrading and piteous, but accounts of fear are limited to mountain lions and bears (Docker 1968, Hoak 1954, KHM 2011, Tahja 1999, Thompson 1973).

### **Comptche Today**

Comptche is an unincorporated town of 483 (U.S. Census of 2010), spread out over a ten-mile radius. This area is officially designated as the Comptche Community Services District (CCSD), and it is through the services district that the fire department receives County funds. The center of town is situated at the hub of this ten-mile radius and it is there that some of the town's most important gathering places are located: a U. S. Post Office, the Comptche Store, the Chapel of the Redwoods, and the Comptche School with grades K-3.

From the Mendocino Coast and U. S. Highway 1, the Comptche-Ukiah Road leads through town, as the name implies, to Ukiah and Highway 101. This



east-west route was originally traveled by the Pomo. Comptche is situated 16 miles inland along this road, with Ukiah 30 miles further east. Flynn Creek Road intersects the Comptche Ukiah Road at the center of town, traveling from the south. Flynn Creek Road is a nine-mile meandering section, essentially the southern portal at Highway 128 (see Mendocino County map, Appendix E). These three legs of road traveling east, south and west are roads used today. In earlier times, logging roads in and out of the forest, such as Low Gap Road stretching from east Comptche into Ukiah, offered additional routes in and out of the area.

## **Cultural Domains**

*Cultural themes* emerge among the cultural domains. Please refer to the Cultural Domains in Figure 1 for the following discussion.

1. The theme of *division*, or divisive elements, appears in the cultural domains of Sources of Livelihood, Transportation, Differences in the Other, Issues in Conflict, Places to Gathering, and Events. Where themes of division do *not* appear is especially noteworthy: Traditions and Common Ground.

2. *Relationships* is another theme and appears in all the same cultural domains as the theme of division, as well as two others: Learning Country Living Skills and Volunteering. Not surprisingly, the theme of Relationships occurs in all the cultural domains of Comptche in the Seventies except the domain of Differences.

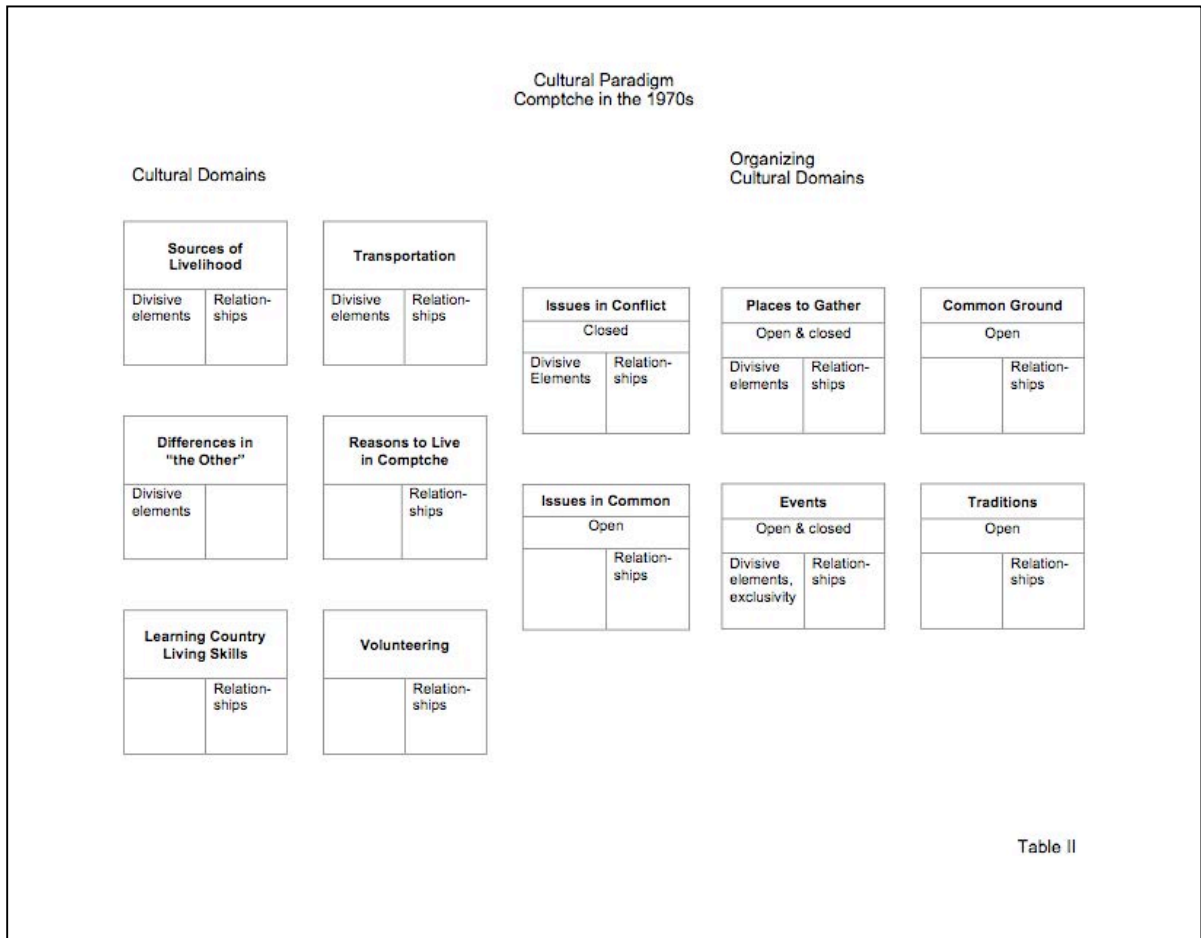
In the cultural domain of Differences in the Other, the only theme to appear is that of division. This suggests that when people focus on differences,

relationships do not form, people tend to be exclusive, traditions are not made, there is no common ground, and the void created by divisive elements attracts conflict. In hindsight, some of these differences are humorous, but in the ethnographic present of the Seventies, the differences between immigrant newcomers and established old-timers caused community conflict leading to social exclusion. While the conflict never grew violent, it was unpleasant, sometimes obnoxious, and created distances between people.

3. *Open and closed* is an important set of cultural themes pertaining to places and happenings. Cultural domains fitting the theme *open* reveals: Places to Gather, Events, Traditions, and Common Ground. This suggests that when gathering places are open to everyone and the events that occur at these locations are all-inclusive, traditions and common ground can be found, created, and sustained.

Finding the cultural domains that fit the theme of *closed* reveals: Places to Gather, Events, and Conflict. For example, hippies were excluded from membership in the Comptche Grange. This pattern suggests that exclusive events and conflict close people and places down, and create feelings of exclusivity that are divisive. Exclusivity contributes to the alienating nature of social structure (Olaveson 2001, Turner 1969).

4. *Recurrence* is an important theme in Comptche's successful community-building events, which can be translated to *traditions*. Over time, recurring, effervescent events in Comptche have been transformative for the whole community.



**Figure 1**

## Reasons to Live in Comptche

### Land Use

*“The back-to-the-land thing was interesting. But we were wondering, outhouses? Why?”* [Old-timer respondent]

Along with natural beauty, the ability to use one’s land as one saw fit was another reason to live in Comptche in the 1970s. Large plots of land afforded an isolated kind of privacy that people who have lived here still seek. During the 1970s a new round of newcomers came to Comptche—the fourth wave of

immigration to the region. “Recent increases in population have largely been due to the back-to-the-land movement” (CAC 1978:3) says Comptche’s general plan, written in the late 1970s. This population increase was not isolated to Comptche; the whole northern coast of California experienced a similar hippie immigration (Luker 1996, Wilson 2006).

Research participants were asked why they moved to Comptche. “The back-to-the-land movement. I was two, my parents wanted to get out of the city.” Young adults embracing this movement wanted to simplify their lives: “To live off the land, strive for self-sufficiency... grow organic vegetables and raise livestock,” wrote a respondent who was a young mother at the time. “The culture of Mendocino. Natural beauty and number one: affordability and availability of great parcels of land,” wrote another. For the people and place of Comptche, this was a new kind of land use. Historically, people depended primarily on small-scale farming to support the family members who were working the land logging and ranching. In the 1970s, the new immigrants wanted to preserve the forest environment and subsist on small farms in tune with nature.

While differing approaches to land use caused conflict (specific instances will be explored in Chapter 4), the ways residents used land also created and supported relationships among new and established residents. To learn how to live off the land, newcomers relied on old-timers, some of whom were open and welcoming to the young families reclaiming rural life.

## Children

*“How neat it was to finally have more kids to hang out with!”* [Old-timer respondent]

*“We ‘old-timer’ kids had chores—cutting kindling, milk and feed the cows.”* [Old-timer respondent]

*“There were more kids to pick up on the school bus.”* [Old-timer respondent]

*“I wanted my kids to know where their food came from and not take anything for granted.”* [Newcomer respondent]

*“As a nursing mom, we’d nurse each other’s kids. The noisiest thing in my yard was chickens, the wind, and my kids.”* [Newcomer respondent]

Children are a reason to live in Comptche. Of the newcomer respondents who were young parents in the 1970s, all cited *children* as one of the reasons they re-located. A respondent who moved to Comptche as a single father, who resides there today, wrote: “There is a very real sense of community and family. Each kid is all our kid and if they are in trouble we all try to help. My kids had no active Mom, but they had several Comptche Moms”.

All of the research participants who were children during the Seventies noted that living in Comptche was a highlight of their life, as reflected in the statement: “A great place to grow up. Rural, safe, had freedom I can’t give my child today.” Respondents from old-time families observed their newcomer peers as having more personal freedom than they were allowed to enjoy. It was also noted that hippie kids were not taught the same volunteer ethic as their old-time family peers, which I find to be conditionally true. Helping one another was part of the hippies’ holistic way of life, intentionally not defined as a community activity

labeled “volunteerism.” The underlying value of community service was there, but how it was referred to was different, so it was interpreted by the Other as a difference in values.

The kids of Comptche were forging friendships, but respondents from both “sides” noted that old-timer parents generally did not want their kids associating with the newcomer kids. Reasons identified by old-timer respondents were based in the perception that hippies lacked in parenting skills, “their children were not disciplined very well.” Old-timer respondents who were young in the Seventies saw their hippie counterparts as “so free and so cool, without restrictions. We knew they were smoking pot.”

It was pointed out numerous times that old-timers believed hippie kids did not do chores, and just “did their own thing”. Based on the data and my personal experience, I agree with the old-timer perceptions that hippie kids “did their own thing,” but disagree with the perception of irresponsibility embodied in the statement: “hippie kids didn’t do chores.” On the bus ride home from school, my girlfriends and I would plan to meet somewhere on horseback for an afternoon ride—but only after doing their chores, my friends declared. I recall thinking I did not have chores since I did not have to do unpleasant things like shoveling out hog pens, or decapitating and plucking chickens. My mother also did not use the term “chores.” I felt guilty for telling what I thought was a lie when I said, “Me too,” about going home to do chores. This fieldwork process has enabled me to forgive myself because *I was a hippie kid who did chores*. My sisters and I cut kindling, re-filled the wood box, fed our livestock, along with normal household

responsibilities like washing dishes, cooking, baking, and monitoring pantry supplies. We learned how to can and preserve food, sew, knit, and embroider. The only chore-related problem that occurred in my mother's home was the cow-milking war between my sister and me. We were to alternate the afternoon milking when we got home from school. After the novelty wore off, or if milking conflicted with things like riding my horse, I did not want to milk the cow. When we could not re-negotiate our schedules, my elder sister and I would have tremendous outbursts of rage that, a few times, resulted in broken skin and broken bones. I suspect the cow was only the tipping point, but these sibling altercations were good examples of our lack of boundaries. If we felt rage, we expressed it with physical outbursts punctuated by foul language we picked up from *Zap* comics. Mom did not, perhaps could not, stop us.

Some of the young back-to-the-land families had been living a nomadic life during the 1960s and felt it was time to establish roots. "Finding a place to settle down and put our children in school, building our home, creating a homestead. Being vital part of community of like-minded, intelligent, creative people." Members of back-to-the-land families were similar to the established family members in terms of finding Comptche a wonderful place to grow up. Respondents from established families noted that they were delighted to have new kids in the area: "In 1970, I was sixteen. I thought it was great, new people were coming in. I thought Comptche was going to die. The mill was gone. Now, there were new people coming in—artists, musicians" Another wrote: "For a long time there were so few of us... and a lot of distance between us." Most of the

children in Comptche lived a short distance apart and could reach one another by walking, horse, motorbike, hitch hiking, or occasionally by convincing one's parent to drive. Hippie immigrants were filling in the spaces on the land created by logging, and the children of the established old-timers were happy to have new friends.

There were two stories relayed by hippie kids walking with their mothers and being harassed by "rednecks." A respondent who, at age four, was walking with her mother across a field when they were "playfully shot at" by a redneck who later said he was "not aiming at them." Another respondent relayed a story about an incident when he was four or five years old. Hitch-hiking to town with his mother and sisters, they customarily walked until someone stopped to give them a ride. "We walked past the Grimes ranch and a bunch of redneck dudes were out there practicing rodeo, so we stopped to watch, it was kinda cool. When they saw us watching, they yelled, 'This ain't fer you hippies! Git on down the road!'"

An old-timer who raised her children between the 1950s and 1970s in Comptche brought up a notorious incident about a hippie girl who came to school without underpants. This was, at the time, the K-4<sup>th</sup> grade Comptche School, which had a small local school bus. Dropping the kids off at school, the driver or teacher noticed a girl without underwear, which is a major cultural violation, but not to the hippies. The girl was boarded back on the bus, driven back home, where her mother was informed about school dress code; fully dressed, she was brought back to school. This is a good example of the double-standards that were difficult to live with as a hippie kid. At home, we could be hippie kids without



boundaries, but at school or in the presence of “square” parents or relatives, we had to conform to different standards. It was like growing up in a bilingual home.

Many of the old-timers who were staunchly anti-hippie died that way, while so many others established relationships over time at events and through neighborliness. Comptche’s first church brought others together after 1981. A substantial portion of Comptche’s current population grew up here, each generation strata has “neo” natives. A few respondents noted that it was the passage of time and the old-timers passing on that has brought change to Comptche. The pre-1970s old-timers who persist are joined now by the old-timers of the Seventies, as a new kind of immigrants came in the 1980s and 1990s. The post-Seventies immigration is not part of this study, so I am not prepared to characterize these neo-newcomers, except to say that they are different from back-to-the-land immigrants of the 1970s.

The friendships between the children of newcomers and established families helped to bring long-term change to Comptche, but did little to help bridge their parents’ gap. "Had a hard time with the 'squares vs. heads' tension created by the *adults*..." wrote one respondent. An old-time family respondent stated: "I don't think I looked at the kids as anything but kids...I can remember being fearful of some of their parents. Mostly because of their appearance, but also because they were so different from our parents."

The children were cause for change. The newcomer parents of the Comptche School wanted their kids to integrate the community into the school curriculum. They arranged field trips such as visiting local ranches; back-to-the-

landers were asked to teach things like chess. These changes were made, but still met with resistance from some old-timers who felt things were fine before the newcomers showed up.

I liked things the way they were. There used to be more community things, everybody was part of the Grange. But then there were too many people, the newcomers made for too many, like with the Christmas party. We used to buy a gift for every child, but then there were too many kids. The school Christmas play had to end and then it was put on by the Sunday school.  
[Old-timer respondent]

The old-timer parents were concerned that the hippies would have a negative impact on their children, especially with regard to smoking pot and being exposed to free sexual mores. “Impacts” on one’s children by the Other went both ways: I was greatly influenced by the “straight” kids and wanted to be like them, yet I was also happy with who we were—a duality I was learning to live with. The younger generation also did not harbor the same resentments their parents did, namely the judgment against growing and smoking marijuana. Local laws and attitudes have changed, and this is no longer an issue in Comptche.

The significance of children in this study is that they formed strong relationships; there have been intermarriages and friendships lasting to this day. The Fire Chief today is the member of an old-time Comptche family, and the fire department is a model of openness. The Comptche Community Organization, the fire department, the new Chapel of the Redwoods—all these valued community organizations are currently under the direction of people who grew up in Comptche, or have lived there since the Seventies.

## Sources of Livelihood

*People live in Comptche by choice, and that selection is not generally related to their work, but to the style of living they prefer... Comptche's residents support themselves in a diverse number of ways including spending less and living more simply. [CAC 1978:9]*

The cultural themes that appear in the cultural domain of “deriving an income” are polarizing opposites of *division* and *relationship*. Data reflects old-timers’ perceptions of hippies as “freeloaders” and not working unless they had to, contrasting with the old-timer worker’s profile of “hard worker.” Old-timers’ livelihoods centered on harvesting the forest for timber while newcomers harvested the forest for mushrooms, herbs, roots and wildflowers. Also known as “wild crafting,” the practice of gathering resources from the forest sometimes entailed trespassing, which caused resentment—a divisive element.

Relationships were forged when residents hired one another for services such as grading roads, digging wells, or surveying land. Most people had more than one source of income. Many bartered items, such as fresh milk for an agreed upon period of time in exchange for a cord of firewood. For a short time there were four back-to-the-lander women with fresh milk for sale or trade; one of the women offered free delivery and consequently sold a lot of milk. Another back-to-the-lander had experience as a butcher, and he provided valuable services for old-timers and newcomers alike. There was no veterinarian in the area, so the newcomer butcher and the old-timers with animal husbandry knowledge were sought out, establishing more relationships. These people were bridge-builders.

Providing for one's family was a way for the people of Comptche to build relationships and bridges.

<b>Sources of Livelihood</b>	
Kinds of Workers (Most residents have multiple sources of livelihood)	
Old-timers	Newcomers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logger</li> <li>• Mill worker</li> <li>• Rancher</li> <li>• Farmer: produce, dairy, eggs, meat</li> <li>• Land Surveyor</li> <li>• Local business owner employee</li> <li>• Government employee Post Master School staff</li> <li>• Fisheries</li> <li>• Firewood cutter</li> <li>• Social Security</li> <li>• Disability benefits</li> <li>• Independent realtor</li> <li>• Retirement pension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare recipient</li> <li>• Barterer</li> <li>• Farmer: produce, dairy, eggs, meat</li> <li>• Butcher</li> <li>• Construction worker</li> <li>• Received family support</li> <li>• Child support recipient</li> <li>• Teacher</li> <li>• Preacher</li> <li>• Mill worker</li> <li>• Fire wood cutter</li> <li>• Massage therapist</li> <li>• Non-profit agency employee</li> <li>• Entrepreneur</li> <li>• Investment income</li> <li>• Vehicle repair</li> <li>• Artist</li> <li>• Musician</li> <li>• Hand-craft artisan</li> <li>• Woodworker</li> </ul>

**Table 2**

Deriving an income in Comptche during the 1970s was a good indicator of whether one was an old-timer or newcomer. Old-timer respondents noted logging and ranching as their top source of income. Table 2 shows the top income source noted by newcomers was welfare, along with small-scale farming and agriculture. The CAC conducted a survey of Comptche residents in 1977 and recorded similar

types of income streams, noting that most households derived income from more than one source. Research participants for this study noted it was “hard to make a living” and there was “little money, hard to find any.” Living in Comptche during the Seventies required resourcefulness and depended on relationships within the community.

Data collected by the CAC in 1977 shows additional sources of income: an auto wrecking yard, medical and counseling practices, upholstery, automobile repair, professional musician services, and investments. At least one resident had a retail shop in Mendocino village and another person was a seamstress. Some hippies were artists who sold or traded paintings; those skilled with a craft made redwood burl boxes, sculpture, pottery, clothing, furniture, and hand-tooled leather goods. Handcrafts were used in bartering among locals, as well as offered for sale at fairs, festivals, galleries and retail shops in Mendocino catering to tourists. Comptche’s successful painters and musicians earned a respectable income as professional artists. At least two fine arts painters lived in Comptche during the Seventies: *en plein air* artist Jody Evans and the celebrated and collected realist Olaf Palm (1935-2000).

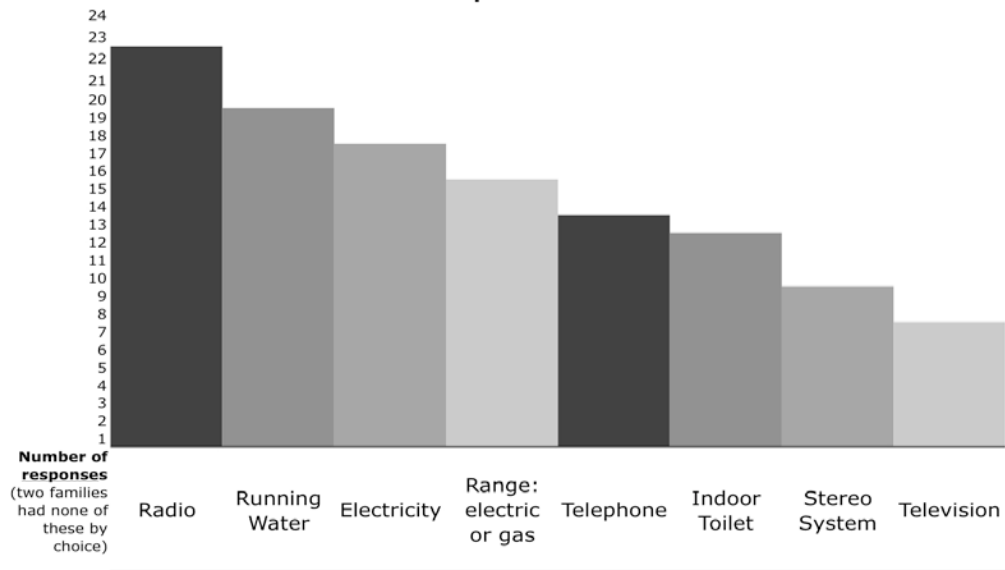
The CAC describes 1970s residents as “economically unique.” First, the average family income in Comptche was below state and national averages, and second, residents had different priorities for spending than did middle class America at that time. The report explains how this is possible: “...the abundance of consumer goods typical to average American communities is less in evidence

here” (CAC 1978:9). There was an economic value shared by old timers and newcomers alike: “spending less and living more simply” (CAC 1978:9).

The community as a whole had a similar ethic toward income and expenses. This is represented in Appendix C, showing household amenities in the Seventies. For some back-to-the-landers, the only modern appliance was a radio or audio cassette tape deck. Others had propane powered appliances such as refrigerators and water heaters. “They were living off the grid,” recalls an old-timer respondent. The Parker Commune was “the only so-called hippie commune in Comptche,” as one old-timer described it. I recall a childhood friend living on the Parker Commune in a small cabin with her mother and sister. Their kitchen was made with camping equipment. My survey overlooked “automatic clothes washer,” which the CAC poll showed existed in only 12 percent of the homes during the 1970s.

The hippies lived in the real world, but their ideal remained a disapproval of the materialism of American society. At the very least, they proclaimed a disavowal of consumer culture... the counterculture sought new values for living, values that will fill the spiritual emptiness created by material affluence. [Miller 1991:112]

**Table 3 Home Amenities in 1970s Comptche**



**Table 3**

Relationships were forged among Comptche residents who, historically, have depended upon one another for survival, and this has always included participation in the local micro-economy. Newcomers say they shared resources with each other, such as chainsaws and other tools, because they couldn't afford to own every tool they needed. Borrowing and returning tools was a component of social life, as visiting over coffee was often part of the exchange. Newcomers also hired or bartered with old-timers for work requiring machinery commonly used on ranches, such as tractors and rototillers. One old timer was a land surveyor. Another was a dowser who helped newcomers locate water for wells, and still another old-timer with a back-hoe helped the immigrants dig those wells.

Back-to-the-landers knew their survival depended upon good relationships with *all* local residents and seemed to be patient in allowing those relationships to form. “It took me thirty years, but now I am friends with a lot of the old timers. I value them for what they know,” explained a respondent who was a newcomer child in the Seventies. He shared a story of befriending an elder old-timer who had become a recluse in his isolated home in the woods. After developing a friendship with this man and “turning him on [to pot], the old coot came out of his house and became the town nuisance for the last five years of his life!”

Over time, the established residents grew to appreciate the immigrants and the talents and abilities they introduced to the community. “There was a real difference between the back-to-the-landers and the squatters. We came with skills and resources. B.E. was a butcher and the old-timers went to him.” Squatters were hippies who lived anywhere they felt like it, which meant they often trespassed in abandoned mill shacks.

The work of the CAC mid-decade provided an opportunity that showcased the value of higher education that many newcomers brought to the community. This was important because, according to one old-timer respondent, “the redneck culture has a disdain toward higher education,” reasoning it is not a prerequisite to working in the woods. It was a different set of values, he explained, “pride in work versus rejection of work.” The old-timers observed the hippie conundrum in our Western culture of work. “We were always expected to take care of ourselves, it’s never someone else’s responsibility. Before the hippies, there was no welfare or food stamps in Comptche.”



This relates directly to the hippies' adoption of poverty, discussed in Chapter One, and links to what I see as a major contradiction of the movement. While it was typically the single hippie mothers who qualified for welfare and food stamps, the hippies did not seem to recognize their own hypocrisy in rejecting the government but then turning to the same entity for public assistance.

The large number of single head-of-household families is one of the reasons for the high percentage of newcomers receiving government assistance.

A newcomer described her family's livelihood:

Our Mom and Dad had recently divorced, he disappeared and we went on welfare. Mom wanted to move us to the country to teach us how to live off the land. She taught us how to can, we made all our food from scratch, we picked berries, had chickens, pigs and two cows. We made butter and ice cream and traded milk for firewood. [Newcomer respondent]

Because many of the newcomers received government assistance, old-timers considered them to be "freeloaders" and lazy. Old-timers defined themselves as "hard workers," which is how the newcomers also perceived them. The *hard worker* persona has a historical precedence in Comptche, and this study shows that anyone who has ever lived successfully in Comptche has worked very hard. The people who came back to the land differ from those who first came to make a living from the land. The hippies were interested in living with nature and preserving the environment, while the old-timers' livelihoods were dependent on resource extraction and the management of natural resources. These are fundamental differences. Yet this study reveals, in Chapters Five and Six, the residents of Comptche discovered that their differences could be overcome by the values they held in common.

Over the CAC's three-year assessment process, the community had an on-going dialogue and hold strategy sessions that produced Comptche's general plan. The plan addressed issues of income. In order to maintain the quality of life, the CAC restricted economic development and discouraged tourism and any new business enterprises larger than a cottage industry.

### **Learning Country Living Skills**

*"Don't churn cold milk for butter."* [Newcomer respondent]

*"What was most important was no one had all the knowledge or resources and we were forced to share, trade, and help each other. There was a norm of sharing, rather than hoarding."*  
[Newcomer respondent]

A variety of means were used by the 1970s immigrants to learn how to live on the land. Many back-to-the-land hippies were college educated. Knowing how to research written materials helped them to acquire some of the knowledge and skills needed for successful rural living (see Table 4), but the immigrants also knew that the established residents were a valuable resource. However, many of the old-timers found the hippies offensive and would not associate with them. Some back-to-the-landers wanted to figure things out for themselves and did not seek out the advice of old-timers. A respondent who was a newcomer-kid said, "We learned from scratch. A lot of hippies re-invented the wheel. 'Lot of us were so ornery. Myself, I learned by watching the failures of my parents, I've been watching people build incorrectly for thirty years."

<b>ACQUIRING COUNTRY LIVING SKILLS</b>	
Resources: books and journals	Resources: people
<p>“Books—we read a lot before moving here.”</p> <p>Topics: rural agriculture, chicken house &amp; barn building, homesteading, cheese-making, how to build a log cabin, simple shelter, vegetarian cookbooks, natural foods cookbooks, canning &amp; food preservation, keeping chickens</p> <p><b>Titles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fox Fire</i> series</li> <li>• <i>Mother Earth News</i></li> <li>• <i>Whole Earth Catalogue</i></li> <li>• <i>Diet for a Small Planet</i></li> <li>• <i>Country Woman</i> magazine</li> <li>• <i>Living the Good Life</i>, by Helen and Scott Nearing</li> <li>• <i>Our Bodies Ourselves</i>, by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective</li> <li>• <i>Countryside</i> magazine</li> <li>• <i>Albion</i> magazine</li> <li>• <i>Farmers Almanac</i></li> <li>• <i>Five Acres and Independence: A Handbook for Small Farm Management</i>, by Maurice G. Kains</li> <li>• <i>Putting Food By</i>, by Ruth Hertzberg, Janet Greene &amp; Beatrice Vaughan</li> </ul>	<p>“Let’s plant these seeds and see if they grow.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old timers</li> <li>• Generations of rural life</li> <li>• Community input</li> <li>• Local know-how</li> <li>• Other newcomers</li> <li>• Our mother taught us</li> <li>• Community members</li> <li>• Hands-on learning</li> <li>• Local folks</li> <li>• Neighbors</li> <li>• Elders in family</li> <li>• Elders in community</li> <li>• Simple Living workshops</li> <li>• Experimentation</li> <li>• Each other</li> <li>• 4-H club (2)</li> <li>• Canning, embroidery from the old ladies at the Grange</li> <li>• carpentry, plumbing from my dad; auto mechanics, electrical, woods experience on my own</li> <li>• “I grew up on a farm; my husband and I had lived rustic lives, built simple homes.”</li> </ul>

**Table 4**

For respondents who were among the established residents, knowing how to live in the country was acculturated from birth. "My family were old time Finns and we always knew how to live there." The early pioneers of Comptche passed down their knowledge to descendents remaining on family land through many generations. "All the information we have came before my time when my grandparents first got the property. We just do what needs doing."

Staying overnight with girlfriends was a way I learned how to live in the country. In warm weather, we slept outside in our sleeping bags and named constellations and counted falling stars. Once on a sleepover with a friend whose family were old-timers, I awoke in the morning to what sounded like grass being pulled up from the roots. I looked over and saw my friend's sleeping bag was empty; following the sound, I observed her sitting across the yard with a headless chicken, plucking out the feathers.

"My father was born and raised in Comptche so he taught us everything we needed to know. If you didn't know something, you asked your neighbor for help," wrote one respondent. Country living is learned by observing and listening, by doing, and being inventive. Old-timer children had chores they had to work into their school day, such as cutting kindling, feeding and milking the cows. "We just grew up that way. Mom was a widow with two kids. She was born and raised here, so she already knew how to live in a rural place. Mom would laugh at the newcomers: 'Why would anyone want to go back to that?'"

Newcomers list numerous things they needed to learn as a homesteader: building a house, plumbing, developing land with roads, parenting, fixing things

with salvaged parts. “Money was scarce for everyone. We were all too poor to buy what we needed, we had to make it or make do without it.” One newcomer respondent wrote that before moving to Comptche, she was a vegetarian. She and her husband decided, like many people in Comptche, if they were going to eat meat, they would raise it themselves. Butchering meat and canning fish, however, turned out to be more than some of the newcomers bargained for: “I learned to can salmon cheeks with JB for winter protein. We went to the Noyo Harbor processing warehouse, and came home with pounds of fish to can on a wood-burning stove. I learned I didn’t want to do it again.” But the meager incomes of the back-to-the-landers also made them resourceful. Being creative with the materials on hand brought discoveries and rewards. “I made a zucchini pineapple jam—I entered it in Mixed Jam category at the county fair and won 1st Place.”

Learning to live in the wilds of Comptche was dependent upon building and maintaining relationships among all people in the community. Immigrants needed to learn the tacit rules specific to that place, as well as the practical skills of daily life. It took the first few years of the 1970s for some of the old-time population to get past the divisive elements and accept the newcomers. Most, but not all, old-timers eventually opened up and shared their country living skills and knowledge in some way. Personal relationships became the key that unlocked the process of transformation from a conflicted to a resilient community.

## **Volunteering**

Volunteering is part of life in Comptche. The primary beneficiary of volunteerism among residents is the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department. This was noted by all respondents, new and old. The Comptche Area Fire Auxiliary appeared as a close second in the number of times it was mentioned by respondents.

Other community needs fulfilled by volunteer labor in the 1970s included the Comptche School, the Grange Hall, the school board, and the Citizens Advisory Committee. Building the firehouse was listed as a volunteer activity separate from fire department volunteerism. There were a number of other community structures maintained by volunteers in the Seventies, but those noted above were mentioned by *all* respondents. The data suggests that everyone in Comptche volunteers for something, sometime.

Whereas most towns in Mendocino County have paid firefighters, the smallest towns all rely on volunteers who are essential. During the fire of 2008, the CVFD was on its own to defend their region. The state's firefighting resources were completely tapped and could provide no support. The forested hills of Anderson Valley, wherein Comptche is situated, were burning. Coordinated efforts of prepared volunteers saved forest, homes, and livelihoods

The fund raising events that support vital services in Comptche—the fire department and the Comptche Community Hall – depend on volunteers. Volunteering happens because people want to support these entities. The geographic setting makes homes vulnerable to forest fire and challenging to

reach. Also because homes are relatively isolated throughout the district, volunteer activities afford opportunities for social gatherings. Volunteers fulfill these important community needs. Relationships form between volunteers forging common ground through simple processes like serving flapjacks at a firehouse breakfast, maintaining fire engines, renovating the community hall, or making a square for the annual CVFD quilt.

### **Differences in the Other**

*"A hippie is someone who dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah."*

Governor of California Ronald Reagan, 1967 [Kaiser 2011:xxi]

*"We called them rednecks and they called us dirty hippies."*

[Newcomer respondent]

Every old-timer participant encountered hippies who were dirty and smelled bad: "My mom picked up a hippie hitch-hiking back from town, and I can still remember how the patchouli oil and B.O. stunk up the truck." Other differences identified for the hippies cited by old-timer respondents include colorful psychedelic dressing, braless women with underarm hair, men with "shaggy un-combed beards" and a bad smell attributed to patchouli oil and body odor. "A glimpse would reveal which side one belonged to. Dress primarily. Hair length and style. Most newcomers had old cars." The kind of car one drove, or not, as some hippies hitch-hiked, denoted differences. Old-timers tended to have newer vehicles in good repair. The cars, trucks, and vans driven by back-to-the-landers seemed to be consistently in need of repair (Table 5).

<b>Differences in the Other</b>	
Old-Timer perceptions of newcomers	Newcomer perceptions of old-timers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hair</li> <li>• Dress</li> <li>• Cars, old</li> <li>• Food: “pie crust like cardboard”</li> <li>• Beards, messy</li> <li>• Bad smell</li> <li>• No bras</li> <li>• “Does he salute the flag?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hair</li> <li>• Dress</li> <li>• Cars, new</li> <li>• Food: “over-cooked veggies”</li> <li>• Beards, trimmed</li> <li>• “...but I valued them for what they know.”</li> </ul>

**Table 5**

Along with outward appearances, newcomers also observed old-timers had different attitudes: “Lack of exposure to the outside world—many had never been out of the area,” wrote one. “I observed some ‘closed mindedness’ and inability to accept or tolerate people who weren’t like them; also more of a concern for cleanliness and conformity.” Newcomers felt some old-timers were territorial and provincial.

Some hippies were real nice, stayed clean and were sociable, others looked real ratty—they had long hair never combed, long beards never trimmed. Some set up camp any place they felt like it, some squatted in old saw mill cabins, and that caused resentment. A lot of them I got to know, even though they were seedy-looking, but they never bothered me. They were interesting to talk to. It depended on the individual person. [Old-timer respondent]

Differences entered into volunteering. A newcomer respondent wrote that when working in the Grange Hall kitchen during a benefit dinner that she felt unable to clean the kitchen counter to the standards set by some of the Grange women. “And then, there is pie crust,” wrote an old-timer respondent. “The old-



timers tried to teach the hippie mommas how to make pie crust right, but they kept making it with whole wheat crust. It tasted like cardboard.”

Although the differences were real, they were also superficial. Once newcomers and old-timers became acquainted through work relationships, volunteering, and at community functions, they began to accept one another.

The difference in origins was noted by one old-timer: “Every hippie I ever knew came from some sort of affluence.” Miller addresses this in *Hippies and American Values* (1991), asserting that the romanticism of the counterculture pointed to a social status voluntarily left behind. “Some of the hippies who talked the most about the abolition of money were children of privilege for whom the grinding reality of real want was nonexistent. The poor rarely found their young turning into hippies” (Miller 1991:112).

The disparity described by research participants in these domains reflect different values and ideas. Does one make money harvesting timber and running herds of livestock or by micro farming in the clearings of the forest? Is a single mom living on welfare and bartering milk a freeloader? In Comptche, choices in livelihood seem to reflect one’s perception of the land. The shared challenge is finding ways of making enough to live on. When the Philbrick Mill burned down in 1964, jobs were lost and many people moved away. Could those people have stayed instead and found different ways of living in Comptche?

The obvious differences in physical appearance, combined with the differences in knowledge and skills for country living, show how people were

repelled by one another based on appearances, and then drawn together based on subsistence needs and shared communal infrastructure supported by volunteer labor. This was how relationships began to bridge the gap between newcomers and old-timers. Conflict among the residents of Comptche in the Seventies can be seen in various domains. It is noteworthy that the differences old-timers observed about back-to-the-landers were largely behavioral-based differences: how one looks and smells, what people drive or do not drive, housing choices, parenting choices. These lead to exclusion. The data in this study shows that the newcomers made attempts to befriend old-timers, but that only some old-timers responded. Many old-timers resented the people they perceived as “dirty hippies.” The hippies pointed to exclusion and issues of exclusivity as their point of conflict with the old-timers; they did not identify offensive physical attributes in the Other. The issue of social exclusion is developed in the next chapter, in the domains of “gathering places,” “events,” “issues in conflict,” and “issues in common.”

## Chapter Five

### Gathering Places and Events

*People live in Comptche by choice, and that selection is not generally related to their work, but to the style of living they prefer.*  
[CAC 1978: 9]

The domains in this chapter are *organizing domains* within the cultural paradigm. They organize the cultural domains discussed in the previous chapter, building on what is known about why people live in Comptche and how they make their living. The organizing cultural domains of “places to gather” and “events” are categories within which differences stand out, conflicts occur, relationships happen, and common ground is found.

The types of events that happened in Comptche’s gathering places are listed in Table 6, below. It is through these gatherings and events where conflict and differences became apparent. Over time, these events changed with the people, reflecting community cohesion.

#### **Places to Gather**

Comptche had just the basic community amenities in the 1970s: a store, a post office, a grade school, a fire department, a tavern, and a Grange Hall. Notoriously, Comptche “ has always been known as the town that never had a church or cemetery” (Thompson 1973:62). Sunday school was held in the home of Earl and Alma Wells, established residents who also ran a small dental tool manufacturing company.

<b>Kinds of Community Gatherings</b>		
<b>Event name or type</b>	<b>Old-Timers only</b>	<b>New-comers only</b>
Fire Dept Chicken Dinner		
Sew N Sews/ Stitch N Bitch	X	X
Fire Ladies Auxiliary		
Community parties		
Easter gatherings/Easter egg hunts		
Grange art painting group		
Saunas	x	x
Dances		
Holiday bazaar		
Grange meetings	x	
Grange-sponsored events		
School assemblies		
Church gatherings		
Christmas at the Grange		
Halloween at Grange		
Concerts		
Hippie events, boogies		x
Weddings	x	x
Pot Lucks		x
Funerals		
Solstice in Surprise Valley		
Annual Pond Party, Surprise Valley		
Baby showers	x	
Bridal showers	x	
Movie night at Comptche School		
Talent shows at the Grange		
Pancake Breakfasts - Fire Dept benefits		
Spaghetti Dinners - Fire Dept benefits		
Chivarees	x	

**Table 6**

In the 1970s, Comptche had two taverns, operating in succession. Cozy's had been in business for many years, an establishment appreciated by some and detested by others. A participant characterized Cozy's as "a bar across from the Grange Hall that was frequented mostly by alternative types." In reality, patrons at

Cozy's were loggers *and* hippies, another participant clarified. "A hepatitis outbreak was identified as having spread from there and shut it down."

Subsequently a new tavern opened near the heart of town, the Blue Rose. For a few years it was a favorite gathering place for weekend music and dancing. This tavern closed after just a few years, when owners decided to sell and leave Comptche. As one respondent recalled: "We used to go to the Blue Rose but that was short lived. It was a community bar and gathering place. They didn't make money 'cause none of us had money."

The Community Advisory Council was working on the general plan during this period, between 1976 and 1978, and there were many community meetings to discuss issues around zoning and community planning. The people of Comptche determined taverns and Comptche roads are a bad mix, so the general plan advises against the establishment of a new tavern. Concurrent with the closing of the Blue Rose, the old Comptche School building was condemned by the school district. Community members worked diligently *together* to retain their small K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade school, and the school now occupies the large redwood barn that was originally built to house the Blue Rose Tavern.

### **"The Town without a Church"**

On Easter Sunday, 1981, Comptche's Chapel of the Redwoods Baptist Church held their first service. The church was constructed like the *Stone Soup* fable. In the early 1970s, a period of time when a number of professional musicians resided in town, Booker T. Jones bought a parcel of land together with

his in-laws, Dick and Charlotte Coolidge. Coolidge was a fine carpenter, and during his first few years in Comptche, he built a home for his daughter Priscilla and her husband Booker and their family. He also built a home for himself and his wife Charlotte. More importantly, Coolidge (1917-2012) was a Baptist preacher. His preaching was so engaging it attracted curious hippies. Not wanting to conflict with the established Wells Sunday School, Coolidge held his sermons on Sunday evenings in the Grange Hall. These were popular, attended by old-timers and newcomers alike. Coolidge had a great sense of humor and was a wonderful orator. During his “chalk talks” at the Grange, he sketched nature scenes with pastels on an easel. His wife Charlotte, a tall beautiful woman of Cherokee descent, played the piano. While entertaining, the Coolidges’ ulterior motive was salvation and conversion of the non-Christian locals.

During our interview for this study, Charlotte declared, “When we arrived, Comptche was anything but a church.” And this is true: Table 7 shows an array of religious beliefs and practices held by residents during the 1970s.

Participants identified a remarkably even split into thirds in terms of kinds of spiritual practice, including non-believers who claimed atheism. The pagan and earth-based spirituality identified by participants were part of the emerging New Age movement, a syncretic belief system made from other traditions: part Buddhism, Hindu, Native American, astrology, alternative medicine, and other practices (Kaiser 2011, Miller 1991, Roszak 2009). Although the term “New Age” was not used, my mother was in this category; I would listen to her talk with friends for hours on topics of death, dying and reincarnation, creating your own

reality, manifesting what you want, and that karma is a consequence of our actions. I came to view New Age spirituality as a smorgasbord of belief systems where practitioners could assemble their own unique belief system; the problem, I surmised, was when we pick and choose parts of a system, the more challenging aspects, such as discipline, tend to be left behind with the “over-cooked veggies.”

<b>Kinds of Religious Stances in 1970s Comptche</b>	
Christian	Lutheran
	Catholic
	Baptist
Hippie spiritualism	Pagan
	Earth-based
Other	Atheist
	Non-religious

**Table 7**

In 1980, land became available in the center of Comptche. A newcomer to the community, Tyrone Hill, bought four acres of land for the church and construction began—by hand. The Wells are a prominent established family; the senior Earl Wells founded a manufacturing business in 1935 in Comptche; he and his wife Alma and ran the Sunday school. His son Richard Wells (1936 -2010) had a large family and served on the Mendocino School Board. “We were digging in rock. The sun was hot,” Coolidge explained:

We were digging and sweating when Richie Wells came up and watched us for a few minutes, and finally said, “You could do that a lot easier with a backhoe.” And I said, “I know that Richie, but we don’t have a backhoe and I don’t have money to rent a backhoe.” He never said another word; he just watched us work, then drove away. In about thirty minutes, we heard

machinery coming. It was Richie Wells on his backhoe and following him was his son, Marvin, on another backhoe. Before they day was over, they had completed digging the whole foundation for the building. Then, Richie said, 'Where you going to get your concrete?'" [Coolidge 1990]

The building was constructed in this manner, which defines the way things get accomplished in Comptche: through relationships. People volunteered their time and skills, made lunches, and donated materials and money. This story illustrates how old-timers and the newcomers found common ground by collectively building something meaningful to the community.

In Comptche, gathering places are important because they support many functions of social life and gathering places represent the structure of the community. The Coolidge-led church construction story is symbolic of the transformation that took place throughout the 1970s. Community members had previously attempted to establish a church. In the 1960s, Charles Mantyla donated two acres of land for this purpose. "They could never decide which denomination it should be, so they agreed to disagree," explained a respondent, and the two-acre parcel remained undeveloped. This donated land remained undeveloped until 1976, when it was re-dedicated as a location to build a firehouse. Like the Blue Rose Tavern building which was re-purposed to house the Comptche School, the fire station was built on land that had been initially designated as the location for a church.

### **The Comptche Store and Post Office**

The Comptche Store and the Post Office were the most frequently mentioned gathering places in Comptche. On the store porch sat a phone booth



and a roughly hewn redwood bench built by Bob Enochs who, with his wife Edith, owned the store in the 1970s. To this day, “the Comptche Store bench” is a place where the community has spontaneous conversations, where relationships are furthered, where initials are carved, sodas are sipped and memories are made. The Comptche Store bench is a place open to everyone; it is common ground.

The owners of the store during the Seventies were Edith and Bob Enochs. Edith was behind the counter daily. She was identified as one of the people who helped “bridge the gap” among residents through her diplomacy. “Edith Enochs always had something good to say; since she was an old timer, people would listen to what she had to say. But she was also a business woman.” The store is in the geographical center of town and is a regular place to gather. One respondent said he rode his new bike to the store to show it off because everyone would come there eventually. Conflict also happened in front of the store, but Edith Enochs, who was widely respected, was able to diffuse it. A respondent related a story she called “The Roping of (newcomer) by a group from the Grimes Ranch.”

This guy was a teacher’s aide at the Comptche School. He was Jewish, a young man from New York. The Grimes guys in a pick-up roped him and made him run along behind the truck as they drove in front of the Comptche Store. Edith Enochs stepped out and yelled, “What are you doing?” Someone in the pickup yelled back, “We got us a hippie!” She responded, “He may be a hippie but he’s our hippie! Let him go!” And they did. [Newcomer respondent]

As it is today, going to the post office in the 1970s was a daily occurrence. The first U. S. Post Office at Comptche was established by one of Comptche’s first settlers, Newman Hoak, on March 19, 1877. Mr. Hoak also served as

Comptche's first Post Master. A mule team moved the original post office building in 1926 to its current location at the center of town across the street from the store. Aside from the obvious delivery of mail, the Comptche Post Office bulletin board is an important means of communication. It wasn't until 1955 that phone service arrived in Comptche, and it was a party-line. But many Comptche residents remained without a telephone through the 1970s, particularly back-to-the-landers. (I recall many family phone calls made to Dad from the phone booth at the Comptche Store, where my sisters and I would wait on *the bench* for a turn to talk.) The bulletin board remains an effective means of communication today. A small bench on the post office porch is where people leave things for one another: bags of apples and pears from overflowing trees, zucchini, empty egg cartons for use by many who keep chickens, out-grown childrens clothes, paperback novels, and back-issues of magazines. The post office is an important gathering place for communication and social exchange.

### **Swimming Holes**

Swimming holes in specific rivers and creeks were frequently named by respondents as significant gathering places. These were coveted locations, sometimes not far off the road. Other swimming holes were more remote, like "the Pot Hole," a deep natural pool reached by following the Albion River (technically a creek at this stage; it eventually becomes a river) on horseback or on foot. Comptche is very hot and dry in the summer. It rarely rains during the warmest months, which increases the fire danger. People escape the heat by going to their

favorite swimming holes in creeks and rivers. Big River Beach in Mendocino and a few man-made ponds and dams in the area also offered respite from the hot, dry weather. Water has always been an important resource in the summer for escaping the heat.

When hippies went swimming, it was usually in birthday suits, not swimming suits. They were living in nature and it was a natural way to swim. Those who opted for skinny-dipping were boldly, sometimes defiantly, exercising the hippie credo: *if it feels good, do it, just as long as it isn't hurting anyone*. "They took over our swimming holes. It was the first time I saw nudity," wrote an old-timer respondent.

A newcomer related an incident regarding nudity at his pond, situated near a shared roadway. His family had visitors from "the city" who were swimming nude in the pond. Meanwhile, the afternoon school bus was bringing students home from Mendocino. An old-time family mom was driving her kids back to the ranch after picking them up at the end of their rural road. They drove past the pond full of nude hippies. Not long after, the father came barreling down the road in his pickup, trailed with a cloud of dust and disgust:

...furious that there's naked hippies on his road. He runs over, and in my face says: "What the fuck?!" Calmly, all I could say was, "B., we're going to have to learn what each other likes and doesn't like. Starting today." He's now an ally and friend. [Newcomer respondent]

Swimming holes were gathering places where differences were apparent and caused division. Nude hippies out in the open and nude hippie invasions of their favorite places are instances when old-timers felt offended by newcomers.

## The Grange

*"You hippies changed things. It scared us."*

[Old-timer respondent]

Social exclusion is indicated by the data as the primary way the town's tension played out during the first half of the 1970s. For example, every participant noted the Comptche Grange as a "source of conflict." Hippie newcomers were not able to join the Grange as members. They could only attend functions the Grange sponsored for the whole community. These were occasions when everyone in Comptche came together. As another *place*, the Comptche Grange represents common ground in terms of community *structure*, and as such symbolized the conflict at that time. Social exclusion occurred at specific events in specific places that had previously considered as all-inclusive among the old-timers of Comptche because everyone who wanted to join was granted membership. The newcomers were superficially offensive and brought change, and this caused fear and consequently exclusion by old-timers. This is a common long-term resident reaction to newcomers (Stephan 2011, Woods 2005).

The Grange was also cited by every participant as a "place to gather." As the only membership-based organization in Comptche, some events were exclusive to membership while other events, such as fundraisers, were open to the whole community. The Comptche Grange was organized in August of 1938. The Comptche Community Hall, established in 1912, was deeded to the new Grange organization and the building has become known as the Grange Hall. The Grange operated in Comptche until members voted the organization "inactive on January 19, 2001" (CCO 2003). Grange records were given to the Mendocino

County Museum in Willits that year, but along with other archival materials, the records are not accessible, the museum is closed due to lack of funds. When the Grange folded, the title was returned to the community in 2001, and the historic building has resumed the original name, The Comptche Community Hall.

This building has been a community hall for all purposes since it began. Churches, polling places, public talks, pictures (movies), small clubs, parties, showers, weddings, dinners, dances, and now the Volunteer Fire Department and its auxiliary and other clubs use it. [CCO 2003]

As a gathering place, the Grange was like a stage upon which much of the Seventies conflict played. Newcomers wanted to join the Grange, but the old-timers refused to grant them membership. Town drama surrounded each incident of black-balling, stirring up gossip and conflict. "Black-balling" was a method of anonymously voting against an applicant. According to an old-timer, if someone did not salute the flag, that person could not be a member. Notoriously, hippies were non-political. Another old-timer respondent explained:

The Grange was secretive; they used passwords. The Grange evolved around farming and ranching. Pre-hippie, they rejected the folks who ran the bar, Cozy's Corner, because of the alcohol. After the hippies, they rejected the hippies. [Old-timer respondent]

Comptche back-to-the-landers sought Grange membership as part of their vision of community-building and also to be involved in the Grange as an agricultural association. The National Grange Organization gave farmers and ranchers political clout as well as buying power (CCO 2003). Restricting access to membership equated blocking access to knowledge, resources and power. An old-timer respondent described Comptche's quandary:

They had exclusive events and the hippies tried to get in, but to be accepted the members had to vote, and a bunch of people black-balled the

hippies. For many years there were no hippies at all. So they joined the Whitesborough Grange at Albion. Once you're a member you can go anywhere. So the hippies started showing up anyway. [Old-timer respondent]

Despite the rift, everyone in the community did gather for events held in the Grange Hall, as it was the community's public gathering place. This was the original intent of the isolated homesteaders in a town with out a community hall (CCO 2003). There were numerous social occasions, particularly around holidays. The most anticipated and well-attended event was the annual benefit chicken dinner for the fire department. The event depends upon a score of volunteers and has consistently raised a significant portion of the fire department's operating budget (CVFD 1998). An article from the *Mendocino Beacon*, hand-dated June 1973, appears in *Comptche Past and Present*:

The chicken dinner involves everyone in the small community—from the people who peel hundreds of potatoes and bake bread and pies for days in advance, to the people who donate water and a water tanker so the Grange Hall will have good water all day. This year, become a part of these happy festivities and come visit on Father's Day. [CVFD 1998:70]

This was an annual event that got the old-timers working with the newcomers out of necessity and relationships slowly began to grow. The fire department and the Grange are community entities that are “always asking for help,” explained a participant. “They were saying, ‘we’re gonna have to let the new people in.’ The fire department welcomes everyone, to this day. But the Grange, they black-balled hippies.”

All respondents said they enjoyed volunteering for the fire department's benefit dinner. "One year I baked 82 loaves of bread for the chicken dinner.

Everyone baked a pie,” said one respondent, and another, “I’ve been in the kitchen there 35 years on Fathers Day.” This tradition lives on today, but it has moved from the Grange to the firehouse, built in 1976. An addition soon after that provided a kitchen to support fire department events and feed fire crews during emergencies. The Grange did not survive as the members aged. A membership based organization that was closed and exclusive died when its members passed away or lost interest. There were no new people to replace them and keep the organization alive and evolving.

After the Philbrick Mill burned in 1964, many people left in search of other jobs. Some who stayed thought Comptche was dying. The pattern here suggests that continuous waves of immigrants are needed to keep communities from becoming stagnant and dying. Once they arrive, immigrants also need ways to integrate into the community and find common ground. Common ground, therefore, is ever evolving.

### **The Comptche Volunteer Fire Department**

*The hippies on the CVFD ate just as much smoke during the fires as the rednecks did. [Old-timer respondent]*

The CVFD is the community's premier unifying institution and is the exemplar of *communitas* in events, adaptations and ideology. The fire department is where Comptche forged a new normal. A large sign at the fire station reads:

New Members Urgently Needed  
Comptche Volunteer Fire Department  
Young, Old, Male or Female  
All Are Welcomed  
Call Fire Chief Larry Tunzi

"We all live and work here so why wouldn't we want to do our best? The Fire Department is intentionally inclusive—everybody has something to lose from a fire," Fire Chief Tunzi explained. Homes lost to a series of devastating fires between 1962 and 1963 prompted residents to organize a volunteer fire department. The Comptche Volunteer Fire Department (CVFD) was formally organized in 1964.

Our first engine was a 1956 surplus tank truck, which we purchased in November 1964 for one dollar from the State of California. Our second engine was acquired in 1969. These two engines along with an old equipment truck were our fire fighting force for many years. [CVFD 1998b:3]

Later, in 1989, the Comptche Community Services District (CCSD) was formed as a way to receive tax revenue from the county general fund. Establishing the CCSD initiated a local property tax benefit assessment that determines local property tax. This is a limited resource, but it covers the fire department's basic operating expenses. "Additional fund raising efforts such as our annual chicken dinner enables us to buy additional new equipment and provide funds for training" (CVFD 1998b:3). The CVFD and the CCSD are part of Comptche's civil commons. Today, the annual Father's Day BBQ Chicken Dinner



has become “more than a fundraiser, it’s a community event,” explained Assistant Fire Chief Randy MacDonald after the 2012 dinner. We learned at CVFD/CAFA meeting following the event that the fundraiser grossed \$31,000.

The volunteer commitment shows the value bestowed by the community upon the fire department. The fire fighters meet weekly—one meeting per month is for business, others are devoted to training and education. The fundraising branch is the Comptche Area Fire Auxiliary (CAFA) who meet monthly to plan fundraising events projects such as an occasional community cookbook and the annual quilt.

The fire department is more than emergency fire services, however. Training and rigorous department-wide testing for a fire insurance classification through the Insurance Services Organization (ISO) has earned the CVFD an “ISO rating of 9 which reduced fire insurance premiums to home owners in our district nearly \$100 per home on an average annual policy” (CVFD Cookbook 1998:3). Numerous dwellings built in Comptche during the 1970s were constructed without building permits. The Comptche homes that remain non-permitted, however, are ineligible, but they all value the security of having emergency fire and first-responder services.

Turner’s communitas theory explains that one of the many functions of ritual is to make the obligatory desirable (Turner 1969). Fire department volunteerism and fundraising functions fit this description, in terms of being ritualized events wherein people make preparations, leave their normal

modalities, enter a designated space, experience *communitas* and collective effervescence, and then go home. The anticipation of *communitas* makes the obligation of supporting the firehouse a joyful social experience. In terms of being a self-supporting community entity, it makes sense to create a system of mutual support. Fund raising events have increased in frequency. A recent Sunday breakfast for which I volunteered raised over \$1,000 toward purchasing emergency vehicle extraction equipment. The CVFD describes their funding stream:

The department supports itself through a variety of fundraising activities and volunteer assistance, which have allowed CVFD to build its fire station, as well as obtain vehicles, emergency equipment and supplies, and training for department personnel. A small tax levy, approved by the citizens of Comptche and administered by the Comptche Community Services District (CCSD), provides funding for workers compensation insurance and some department maintenance. [CVFD 1998:63]

In Comptche, residents can support the fire department, and they can *be* the fire department through different levels of volunteerism. Volunteer firefighters become stronger through training with the department, learning new skills and knowledge, which consequently enhances their standing in the community. This is possible for anyone who lives in Comptche and is an excellent way for newcomers to integrate with the established residents. The fire department itself and all its associated volunteer support activities create common ground that is open and easily accessed by everyone in the community.

By the end of the 1970s, events in Comptche were open and occurred on common ground such as the new fire station. After 1976, the fire department had

a permanent home; they brought their fire trucks out of storage in area hay barns and were able to park them under one roof. The fund raising events also moved, from the Grange to the fire house and adjacent park.

Traditions have kept Comptche's succession of events continuing in a cyclic fashion, providing a way to do things and pass these ways along to the next generation. The way to do things is the way they have been done, but in Comptche these ways are flexible. Their traditions can change and evolve through time. A new event may begin, last a few years, then evolve into another event—the CVFD benefit concerts and dances of the 1970s became the Family Fair and Fun Day in the late 1980s, and then was rearranged into the Comptche Cool Down later in the 1990s, and now supports the CCO instead of the CVFD.

Traditions help newcomers know how to integrate with the community. During our year of fieldwork, my nine-year old daughter and I volunteered with the CAFA and the CCO. We attended meetings, helped with fire department breakfasts and dinners, and at CCO holiday parties. Like my mother in the Seventies, I sewed a square for the annual CVFD quilt. The ease of integrating into this community has rendered it a pleasant process with more choices for engaging with the community than I can list. Traditions and gathering places contribute to cultural continuity.

When gathering places are exclusive and closed, interest eventually withers—as with the Grange, which folded after their membership base diminished due to lack of interest in the 1980s and 1990s. Of course the structure remains; the Community Hall is but a building that was once known as “the

Grange.” During its first ten years, this stately building was the Comptche Community Hall, a place where people could gather to socialize after decades of dancing in cabins. Through time, this gathering place is once again common ground. Places and people that are open to newcomers and inevitable change will find common.

## Chapter 6

### Traditions and Common Ground

*It is important to protect this community's way of life...once you have your Coke at the Comptche Store you have to move on unless you know someone, and that was on purpose. It's like a gated community without the gates. [Newcomer respondent]*

The organizing cultural domains of “traditions” and “common ground” can be seen in the way people in Comptche use land and the way they raise funds to support services that are mutually valued, such as the volunteer fire department. These and other traditions affect how people interact. The data suggests that traditions support common ground as both a physical place, like the civil commons, as well as common ground as an ideal where people put relationships above differences.

#### **A New Tradition of Land Use**

Old-timer community members were aware that some of the hippies were growing pot in their gardens. An old-timer respondent related the following incident. A hippie newcomer had a large patch of corn in her garden, close to the road. One day, while this newcomer woman was in town, a neighbor's cows got out of their pasture, into her garden, and ate all of the corn. However, the cows did not touch the pot plants that the corn had been masking. Everyone driving by could see what was in her garden besides corn. This newcomer was also a respondent. She stated that her primary reason for living in Comptche was “so I

could grow and smoke marijuana.” In the Seventies, this became a tradition among the hippies who settled in Comptche.

The hippie immigrants brought with them new values for land use. Understandably, what some hippies were growing in their gardens was a source of conflict between old-timers and newcomers. “Newcomers brought pot to Comptche. We grew a little but it wasn’t really a topic, like growing tomatoes” [newcomer respondent]. It was tolerated by the former residents because of the tacit, “unwritten laws of Comptche,” that people do not report one another to the authorities. “Most folks tend to mind their own business and leave the neighbors to do their own thing,” explained a respondent.

Among the data for this study, there are no reports of hippies being turned in by old-timers for growing marijuana during the 1970s, but there was paranoia around it, as one respondent wrote: “For years, there were questions of which old timers you could or could not smoke marijuana in front of—without worrying about their reaction.” Between logging and growing pot, old-timers and newcomers wanted to use the land in ways that sparked contention. Logging and “growing” were topics of debate, but people did not seek support of the constabulary to resolve their differences.

### **The Tradition of Not Calling the Sheriff**

*Comptche has its own law. For years, you could call for a deputy and he may or may not come. They considered Comptche would take care of itself. [Old-timer respondent]*

In Comptche, there was a common acceptance of “bending the rules.” Both old and new residents put up structures without building permits, which was a Comptche tradition pre-dating the hippies. One respondent said he heard a local radio interview with the county sheriff, who stated on the air that Comptche never calls the cops. Residents respected the unwritten law of Comptche, and in this way, they were agreeing to disagree, and went on with their lives. “Even though different than in the decades of the ‘40s and ‘50s, it has always been considered a safe place to live. Everybody knew everybody. We know our neighbors, we know who our kids are playing with,” explained an old-timer respondent.

“Comptche folks are characteristically reserved and independent” (Thompson 1973). Comptche has always attracted the kind of people who have an independent spirit, a required quality for survival in this particular area. Until the 1980s, Comptche residents were notorious for building all kinds of structures—homes, buildings, dams—without permits. County officials were aware of Comptche’s “outlaw” nature, I learned from Vale Whippert at the County Planning Division in Ukiah. Comptche’s CAC reports on file with the County show dwelling counts with identifying “non-permit structures” (Figure 2). That these housing numbers were identified with an asterisk suggests the tacit nature of this data, as it denotes: “see below.” Below the surface, there is something going on that would not be tolerated in other parts of the country. Did the tradition of intentionally not seeing something set a precedent for turning a blind eye to the marijuana some of the hippies grew?

COMPTCHE CAC						
PROJECTED GROWTH						
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	*	**	<u>1985</u>	**
Population	463	549	107	656	600	707
Housing Units	206	233	50	283	248	298
Persons/ Occupied Unit	2.91	2.79	2.2		2.77	
Vacant Seasonal	43	32	1	33	27	28
Vacant for Sale or Rent	4	4			4	

\* Non-permit/owner-built structures  
 \*\* Adjusted to reflect non-permit/owner-built structures

**Figure 2**

The tradition of non-permitted building was not exclusive to Comptche. County data from this period shows all of the CACs Mendocino County reporting this activity. Initially the tradition was known exclusively by the established residents; this was tacit knowledge that newcomers had to learn. Once they caught on, the news spread quickly among the back-to-the-landers. In his autobiography, Dick Coolidge wrote about arriving in 1972. While Reverend Coolidge and his wife Charlotte were newcomers, they were “anything but” back-to-the-landers. “When I first came to Comptche, I was told, ‘This is wild country up here, you don’t need a building permit. Just go on and build what you want to’” (Coolidge1990:113). Chronicling his permit process, Coolidge was able to find the humor in the agonizing contradictions of building to code in Comptche.



## **Mill Shacks**

Non-permit building was a tradition that began before the hippies out of necessity and likely arose from forestry practices. Not only were trees cut as raw logs for mills to saw into lumber, some timber men were cutting railroad ties, and others stripped bark as a raw material for the leather tanning industry, called “tan bark.” Mill shacks were quickly constructed tiny cabins that housed timber workers in the days before logging trucks. These shacks were scattered throughout the forested hills, as loggers built what they needed in order to work in the woods; commuting to work was not an option. As the forests were cut, additional cabins were put up near new harvest sites.

As was the case with growing pot, the old-timers did not report hippies for building without permits. Both newcomers and old-timers were thus engaged in the same practice of building without permits. In an odd way, the “unwritten rule” of not reporting the Others’ illicit activity strengthened relationships because all the residents had secret knowledge.

## **Land Use as Common Ground**

Land use, not social exclusion, was the issue that finally motivated the residents of Comptche, new and established, to come together and talk. Meeting at the Grange Hall in 1976, they confronted a conflict caused by different perspectives on land use. The incident involved an airstrip that Richard Wells was building without a permit on a ridge in the south-central area of Comptche. The airstrip was supported by some arguing for improving emergency services access

and denounced by others on the grounds of noise, pollution and air traffic where none had previously existed. A respondent who participated in this community process recalls the airstrip as a pivotal event:

The Wells airstrip controversy was the first hippie conflict with rednecks and churchgoers. It was a conflict about property rights overlaying some mostly personal animosities. There was no principle involved. It was all about conflicts Richard Wells had with his neighbors... But two unwritten rules in Comptche were, do not turn your neighbor in to the law, and do what you want with your land as long as you do not hurt anyone else. The Wells airstrip controversy challenged both of these rules. [Old-timer respondent]

The community met at the Grange Hall to discuss the proposed airstrip. “Lots of concerns were aired and most everyone felt heard. The airport was approved but with limited traffic and noise controls,” wrote a participant who attended these meetings.

Land use issues in the Seventies were complex. Regional timber practices had traditionally involved selective logging, according to an old-timer participant who is a logger. Old-timers earned their income from logging and saw newcomers as “tree huggers,” a true assessment. Hippies valued the natural environment and fought to preserve it, attitudes that led to the beginning of the environmental movement (Miller 1991). But in the 1980s when the multi-national timber industry began clear-cutting the redwoods as never before in history, many in the community agreed that clear-cutting was bad. The timber giants with their unsustainable logging practices became a common foe for the people of Comptche.

Issues over land use were recurrent topics of discussion and community members met as necessary to present their views until all felt heard (CAC 1979). Comptche in the Seventies had a sudden and vast change in its population profile. From a community of timber families, the profile transformed to embrace nature lovers. The accompanying new ideas, concerns, and values that had caused conflict in the beginning of the decade, were by 1976 beginning to be mediating factors. A new tradition began, that of meeting to discuss issues of land use. This coincided with the start of the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), which operated over a three-year period from 1975 to 1978.

### **Common Ground: The Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee**

In 1975, residents formed the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) in response to a Mendocino County Planning Division mandate. By county ordinance, every town in the county organized a CAC with the task of creating a general plan for zoning property. This was a three-year assessment project that required regular local meetings with 15 officers. Comptche's was the only CAC to have a democratically elected planning committee, according to Chair Michael Nolan. "The other committees were appointed by city councils, but we're unincorporated. Comptche elected its committee."

Community amenities and asset mapping was one of the Comptche CAC projects. It was auspicious timing: together the representatives of the new and established residents asked questions, conducted a community survey, and sat down to look at the data together. They saw themselves in the mirror. After seeing

the new community, they worked long and hard to develop goals and policies.

They learned who the Other was, and then they wrote this:

The people of Comptche historically have been independent and generally remain so today. Proudly individualistic, old and new residents alike agree that they hold their land dear. They respect the value that the world has put upon the unique products of their forests, but they also cherish the natural setting and covet the independence to be found in a sparsely populated community. Comptche is outwardly a very sleepy and quiet place, there is a good deal of private and community social life. Life in Comptche is a good life for the children, the young, the middle-aged, and older people. [CAC 1978:1]

The result of their efforts is the Comptche Conservation Plan, the town's first and only general plan. The process of doing the work, collecting the data, and discovering each other—this is where that essential exchanges happened as relationships were built between the old-timers and the newcomers. This established a process for resolving community conflict.

Some participants expressed that the zoning outcomes has flaws. As pointed out by one of the old-timers: "They parceled property into two-acre minimums in the center of Comptche, at the store, radiating out to 40 through 80 acre minimum parcels. We can't divide our parcels. What about our heirs?"

Nonetheless, the Comptche General Plan is the result of participatory decision-making, one of Theobald's criteria for a resilient community (1991). The Comptche Conservation Plan is also a living document, intended to stay current with desires and intentions of its' population through periodic review.

Relationships were written into this community process. "It worked out because of peer-ness, finding a normal-ness among families and family ways. We discovered

we had the same values, especially when we did the General Plan together,” said one of the newcomers who served on the committee.

When the CAC members assessed their community with a survey in the 1970s, their findings reflected those in the part of my study that looks at household amenities (Table 3). Their Comptche Area Attitude Survey begins: “This survey is intended to determine the desires of the residents in the Comptche area.” While the report is too long to include here, what I found interesting are the things the community did *not* want in the 1970s: outdoor advertising, mobile home parks, nor a public park; the majority were not interested in establishing “Regional Occupational Center” classes or community college classes in Comptche. What the residents of 1970s Comptche wanted was road improvements and a better community fire alarm system. They were content “spending less and living more simply” (CAC 1978:9).

Comptche’s three-year experience through the zoning process produced results similar to the findings in other studies showing that sustainable solutions to community conflict can be found by looking at what the people share in common (Smith 2009). For example, in their study about public decision-making and conflict mediation, Meldon, Kenny and Walsh found that “citizen involvement in local development is the key to equality, inclusiveness and sustainability” (Meldon et al 2004:40).

The Comptche Conservation Plan ends with admirable transparency. Included in this document’s appendix is an assessment of their process. In a section titled, “How We Coped” the committee shared their challenges and how

they worked through them. Each member had a respected point of view and each recognized they represented themselves and their constituents, but decidedly did not represent non-resident land owners. “Between all of the Committee members, everybody in this area is known by someone on the Committee. All individuals—all different. All real people, not numbers” (CAC 1978:ii). As elected as representatives, they acknowledged they each tended to be vocal and opinionated, but that “some of us can’t talk very well. Some of us can’t listen very well. Sometimes both” (CAC 1998:ii). Using Roberts Rules of Order, they talked and listened for three years. “Sometimes people got tired and frustrated. Over time, we said what we really meant. We stopped being careful and got real” (CAC 1978:ii). This is significant because it shows the process of resolving community conflict takes time.

We found out that we were ladies and gentlemen. We had honor. We weren’t sneaky or mean. We still don’t agree on everything, but we aren’t trying to ‘get’ each other.... We agreed on every fundamental principle. No one wanted much growth... We don’t want a tourist trade here. We believe in ‘property rights’—our homes, are our castles. We respect our neighbors’ rights to live their own way—and expect others to respect our ways. [CAC 1978:iii]

### **From Dance Cabins to Chivarees**

*“Now it’s so hard to get dynamite.”*  
[Old-timer respondent]

The Comptche-based autobiographies I found in booklets, articles and collected oral histories all mentioned Comptche *gatherings as significant events in the community*. Parties, dances, music performances, “balls and festivities,” chivarees, and boogies brought Comptche community members together on

many occasions. Stories from the 1860s through early 1900s recall families traveling considerable distances through the Comptche area and staying to visit for days. *Common ground* was designed into simple cabins in the woods, enabling the locals to gather in small spaces.

The oral history of Myrtle Mallory Wilsey, as told to Thompson in 1965, is illustrative of pioneer life in Comptche. As a child, the men would go hunting along Big River. Then everyone would gather and bring cake and sandwiches. “They made beds down in one room for the children and used the rest of the house to dance... Many of the cabins had removable walls for dancing” (Thompson 1973:55). These were healthy social and psychological practices. Gatherings provided social breaks in an isolated way of life—some of them were single men living in mill shacks. People experienced *collective effervescence* in the redwoods a century before the hippies rolled into town.

A new kind of party was introduced to the local culture during the third wave of immigration to the redwoods, in the early-to-mid 1900s. This phase of the Comptche immigration cycle is represented by first-generation European immigrant woodsmen, who brought the chivaree, or shivaree is from the French *charivari*, meaning “rough music” (Alford 1959). It is a European folk ritual originating as a social conformity mechanism. Town folk gathered late in the night outside the home of an unwed couple and woke them with a sudden cacophony of sound. This was a statement that cohabitation out of wedlock was not an acceptable in the village (Johnson 1990). Sometime during the U.S. immigration process, this ritual of social correction was transferred to married couples,

perhaps because “living in sin” does not have the same stigma. In America, chivarees became a surprise thrown by the community for unsuspecting newlyweds sometime after their wedding.

An old-timer participant explained: “We’d wait until the couple is home a few days and unsuspecting. Then about midnight, the town folks would set off sticks of dynamite nearby.” For Comptche old-timers, according to another participant, chivarees were parties involving “loud noises including shotguns, chainsaws, banging pots and pans, then lots of drinking.” Women brought special food and people stayed up late into the night partying with the newlyweds.

### **From Chivarees to Boogies**

Perhaps because “dynamite got too expensive,” chivarees began to fade from Comptche’s social scene around the time when back-to-the-landers were arriving. These new immigrants brought boogies and a new breed of musician. Boogies were outdoor concerts lasting from one to many days. People camped and cooked communally. “Lots of dancing, conversation, flirting. Good food, drinking. The children ran with other children as a tribe,” wrote a newcomer who was a young mother in the Seventies. Hippie adults were particularly pleasant at these events because of their sense of play, I recall. They played music and danced with abandon, blew large bubbles, painted children’s faces, made colorful banners, and taught us how to play instruments. They wore comfortable clothing of their choosing, like Chainsaw Sally.



The one common meeting place that brought a mixture of the old and new people together was the Grange. A newcomer respondent who was a young child in the Seventies, and continues living there, recalled residents seemed to be more social than today.

It seems like every weekend there were boogies. The community got together a lot more I'd say—at people's places. The whole town would be in the Grange Hall when they'd open it up to us. [Newcomer respondent]

Along with fire department fundraisers, there were also dances at the Grange Hall that were open to everyone in the community. These events were wildly popular. "A friend and I walked to a dance at the Grange one night on psilocybin; I saw a purple cow. When we got to the Grange, the dancing was rocking the building off the foundation."

Comptche parties were enhanced by the presence of rock-n-roll musicians. "Starting in the 60s, musicians were building homes and studios. Booker T. Jones, Philo Hayward, Joel Scott Hill, Chris Etheridge, John Barbata and the Grateful Dead's Bill Kruetzman all found their way to Comptche" (Tahja 1999:25). Rick Soderland was also among the recording artists who moved to the redwoods with their families, always building very interesting abodes.

Magical moments shared with others give people a break from their worldly concerns and isolation. Durkheim and Turner both explain that social gatherings are part of an integral social system (Durkheim 1912, Olaveson 2001, Turner 1969). Collective effervescence is a brief "moment of oneness" (Durkheim 1912), and *communitas* is part of a large system of structure and anti-structure (Turner 1969). These conditions provide the individual and social groups with a sense of

identity and cohesion. People actually need joyous interactions; we seek them out because it is sustenance. Joyous social events like dances and potlucks maintain individual and community health.

### **Finding Common Ground**

The hippie ethic in Comptche became *build what you want where you want, just as long as it doesn't hurt anyone*. This ethos is behind the hippie tradition of *squatting*—occupying empty mill shacks on privately held timberland. Sometimes hippies dismantled the shacks and used the lumber to create dwelling assemblages. An old-timer explained:

The cabins that guys lived in during sawmill work were taken over by hippies who just lived where ever they wanted. Some took the cabins apart and rebuilt cabins elsewhere. So landowners took cabins down and reused the lumber, or burned them down. [Old-timer respondent]

The perspective held by the Pomo was of *land as common ground*, not a commodity to be owned (Kroeber 1925). Back-to-the-landers were adopting an approach to the land similar to the indigenous inhabitants. Books on Native American culture were present among the many books stacked in nearly every hippie home I recall visiting. Through books, hippies sought knowledge of the First People, who knew how to live off the land even better than old-timers. My mother and her friends frequently discussed these books in their quest to find a new spirituality along with a new way of life in nature. Generally speaking, through their crazy-quilt of adopted perspectives, it makes sense that hippies saw the wilderness as common ground. In the vast woods of Comptche, back-to-the-

landers could gather mushrooms, herbs, acorns, water, fish and recycled lumber. It was all there for the taking. Wild crafting “didn’t hurt anyone.”

The data for this study shows some of the old timers resented hippie trespassers. Some back-to-the-landers did seek permission from old-timers, which helped build relationships; some newcomers owned large parcels of land that held plenty of wildlife to satisfy wild crafting pursuits. Therefore, not all instances of wild crafting were occasions of trespass, but my data indicates this was a hippie pattern that caused resentment among old-timers, which in turn leads to an important finding in this study.

When people gather on what is literally common ground, the ideals conveyed through the *concept* of “common ground” cannot be assumed. Whether “common ground” means a shared idea ideal or physical space or both, common ground as a guiding principle cannot be taken for granted; it is negotiated through relationships. This study indicates that common ground, as a place or an ideology, is established through mutual consent.

The unprecedented urban to rural migration trend that began in 1970 changed attitudes in rural communities about wilderness-based amenities—the civil commons. Smith and Krannich also saw this in their 2009 study of the immigration trend in the Colorado Rockies. As in their study, there are two general groups: nature-preservers versus resource extractors. The first group values wilderness-based amenities such as outdoor recreation; the other group has a long-time tradition of making a living from the land’s natural resources.

Popular media accounts and some social science literature suggest that newcomers have very different values than longer-term residents regarding

environment, growth, and development issues. And that these differences are resulting in widespread social conflict. [Smith and Krannich 2009:396]

The researchers found that conflicting values about land use caused resentment between newcomers and established residents; resentment of immigrants is so common it can be expected. As in my study, Smith and Krannich found that “newcomers and longer-term residents actually occupy substantially more ‘common ground’ than might be expected or perceived by either group” (Smith 2009:418). Given an opportunity, newcomers and long-term residents are highly capable of finding common ground.

With Comptche serving as a model, this study presents seven key findings about resilient communities:

1. Grassroots change works well in small communities such as urban neighborhoods or rural towns, which can subsequently effect change in larger contexts.
2. Events and traditions create and support common ground that in turn provide:
  - a. social cohesion, fundraising, integration of newcomers
  - b. traditions, existing and new, that support community and individual health.
3. Finding common ground resolves community conflict:
  - a. through relationships
  - b. through mutual support for shared values and ideas
  - c. by providing forums for discussion, debate, and celebration.

4. Common ground can be a place or an idea and is mutually agreed upon.
5. Newcomers are essential in avoiding stagnation as long-term residents move or die; immigrants contribute to community health.
6. A resilient community has ways to integrate immigrants into the existing social structure.
7. By being open to all and serving all, organizations and communities thrive.

Through this ethnography, I have found that common ground is inherent and can be found in physical places such as the civil commons or in ideology. In either context, common ground is discovered through relationships and always through agreement. Durkheim (1912) and Turner (1969) harmonize with Theobald (1996): collective effervescence and *communitas* produce social cohesion—essential elements of resilient communities.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion: Thanking the Elders and Ancestors

#### Back-to-the-Community

“This hall is one hundred years old,” I reminded the small audience gathered in the Comptche Community Hall on a cool June evening in 2012 (see flyer, Appendix G). “Framing began in 1911, and they had a dedication ball in May of 1913. Right here in this room, people gathered to dance and feast, to hold community meetings, like we are tonight.” In that moment, at one with the audience and the ancestors, I felt as a deep sense of pride, appreciation, purpose, and belonging. This was an informed audience, and in the fleeting instance, we recognized we were experiencing collective effervescence.

A community presentation of this research was important. All participants had expressed interest in the findings, and there was curiosity and concern among community members during my year of fieldwork—how would I represent this town? One former Comptche kid wrote a biting *Slate* article about the damage done by hippie parents (Beach 2001, Echols 1999). Undoubtedly, for some who grew up as hippie kids, remedial living has been necessary (Luker 1996). As for myself, I launched into this study to understand how my counterculture childhood shaped the person I have become.

The audience responded enthusiastically to my research presentation. I learned of two small but important factual adjustments I would make. They stayed

on to talk and look through research materials I had laid out on large tables: books, charts, maps, photographs, newspaper clippings, and cultural domain diagrams. True to Comptche tradition, a few women made cookies for the coffee and conversation. Attendees told me they understood the history of their community in a new way, and there was a sense of appreciation for the work done in the mid-Seventies to establish not only the general plan, but peace in Comptche. Grateful for the support and cooperation afforded by my research participants, I wanted to return to them what they had helped me to find. Through the autoethnographical components of this study, using the tools and methodology of the discipline, I was able to return to a place, a time, and a people to better understand the cultural movement that shaped and transformed us in the 1970s.

### **Comptche Stories as a Collective Voice**

The very act of forming stories requires us to create coherence through ordering our experiences, and provides us with an opportunity for reclaiming our selves and our histories. New selves form within us as we tell and re-tell our stories and when we write them down. When we use our own stories, or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice. [Etherington 2004:9]

The reflexive aspect of this research, the autoethnography, has enabled me to explore my personal experience through this inquiry and connect the findings into a wider cultural meaning. Always on my mind was the question: *how does my experience compare with and reflect the experience of other back-to-the-landers—especially those who were children, like me?* I was able to connect my own experiences and memories with others who shared the same time and place,

resulting in a greater understanding of our collective experience. Now, “the Seventies” is not just a phase we endured, it is has a transformational meaning. By gathering and reconsidering our collective stories, together we created an opening to understand and even forgive the Other and ourselves. In this way, the telling of stories provides the same function as cabins with removable walls for dancing: story telling brings us together out of our collective isolation.

By emotionally binding together people who have had the same experiences, whether in touch with each other or not, the collective story overcomes some of the isolation and alienation of contemporary life. It provides a sociological community, the linking of separate individuals into a shared consciousness. Once linked, the possibility for social action on behalf of the collective is present, and, therewith, the possibility of social transformation. [Richardson 1990:26]

We build community on the foundations laid by our ancestors. Someday, we will be the ancestors, remembered through the stories we leave behind. It is therefore meaningful to acknowledge our own stories as part of the historical arc and record of a place. Archival photographs of giant redwoods make us grateful for the remaining behemoths at Montgomery Grove State Reserve, while reminding us what of we have lost. Stories tell us what was once here. On the threshold of a new historical cycle, we can either forget or honor the work of the Comptche Area Citizens Advisory Committee, or the tale of how the town without a church finally overcame differences and built a chapel. We can claim the civil commons or carry on unaware while greater hegemonic forces descend and demand more resources to feed a global economy hungry for raw resources.



## Feeling Bad About Feeling Groovy

Through understanding my own story and memories in the context of a community *and* the greater culture, I want to change the popular opinion of hippies. This desire stems from my own experience, and research that shows negative stereotypes have been constructed by political propaganda (Roszak 2009).

She does so in order to understand her own story but also to change some of the perceptions around these issues. In essence autoethnography is a story that re-enacts an experience by which people find meaning and through that meaning are able to be okay with that experience. [Bochner 2006]

I have compared our collective Comptche stories to the general claims of counterculture failure, ridicule, and commonly held opinion that hippies were a blight on society. One of the harshest critiques of the Sixties counterculture came from Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). He attacks multiculturalism, universities, feminism and gay rights as the antithesis to Western family values. Asserting the 1960s counterculture was vulgar and trivial, he dismisses it as a pompous exercise in egalitarian self-satisfaction. Bloom insists that the counterculture movement was intent on “destroying the western world’s universal or intellectually imperialistic claims, leaving it to be just another culture” (Bloom 1987:234).

I want to understand what is happening today by returning to the counterculture truth: society was broken, America was plagued by failed government policies, we were at war, and the citizen was being turned into a

consumer. Our cultural amnesia around recent social and political history is a disservice to ourselves and to those who follow us.

Michael Harrington presented an indisputable case that in the Sixties, the poor were being blamed for their circumstance as a way to smokescreen the truth of the problem—failed government policy (1962). There is an interesting parallel here: the hippies adopted poverty, and, like the poor, are being blamed for the “failures” of the counterculture movement. But these failures are not as significant as the change the movement influenced, yet the critique is generally ridicule. The hippies were resented for upsetting the apple cart of affluence, for protesting the Vietnam War, and then blamed for social problems created, again, by failed government policy. We have allowed the hypocrisy of one era to overtake another. Today we face the same social problems on a larger scale: American society is split in two, hypocrisy in government is at an all time high, we are at war, and consumers are *never* referred to as “citizens” by the media.

During my research, I spoke with people who were reluctant to admit to being a hippie. Social criticism has been sharp. The legitimate failures of the movement are documented in this ethnography, as elsewhere: hippies created their own blend of double-standards by taking without asking or “helping themselves,” disengaging from politics and then applying for government support, forming communes without structure, raising kids without boundaries and inappropriate freedoms (Luker 1996, Beach 2001). However, it is a cultural loss that we have allowed these failures to overshadow the accomplishments; we have

lost sight of the counterculture influences that had positive impacts on daily life in America.

The hippies birthed new movements: organics, recycling, the environment, civil liberties, feminism, alternative medicine, and syncretic spirituality, to name a few. In *How the Hippies Saved Physics*, David Kaiser (2011) credits hippies with saving quantum physics from cold war obscurity. Post-mortem, Steve Jobs has been “outed” as a hippie: he dropped out of college, “tuned-in” on LSD and envisioned a new interface between technology and humans. "I had no idea what computers would amount to," wrote Jeff Goodell, Rolling Stone editor and friend to Jobs, "and no idea that this guy would turn out to be one of the greatest visionaries of our time. To me, he just seemed like a lost hippie kid" (Rolling Stone 2011).

The counterculture enabled mainstream America to evolve, and in so doing, revived one of the foundations of democracy: individual freedom *and* a balanced social structure. The constructive outcome of the experiment in community building has been overlooked. Counterculture criticism has *intentionally* obscured its success and made some former hippies embarrassed by the activism of their youth (Roszak 2009). I believe they should be celebrated.

### **Embracing Structure**

Knowingly or not, back-to-the-landers discovered through rough-hewn experience the harmonic significance between the theories of Durkheim (1912) and Turner (1969): anti-structure necessitates structure, that the *togetherness* of

communitas is normal, desirable, healthy, and enduring, but the shared experience of collective effervescence is as fleeting as a group orgasm. The group high cannot, does not last indefinitely. Communes without structure were like a bouquet of helium-filled balloons: held together at a temporary focal point, full of gas, bobbing together in a colorful bunch, high above it all, and then suddenly released. Each balloon floating, wandering into obscurity, perhaps eventually to return to earth, solitary and deflated. Who knows where lost balloons go. I recall a seemingly endless parade of colorful, flamboyant, sometimes deeply troubled hippies pass through Comptche, a fanfare that gradually ended with back-to-the-landers who were small holders—micro-farm and land owners with a stake in the community.

Hippies tested the limits of mainstream culture, but eventually most found it necessary and even desirable to re-integrate into the greater society. Society *had* changed, it was not the same one they dropped out of. Deceitful President Nixon had been impeached and the disastrous Vietnam War was brought to an end. Those returning to the mainstream, having grasped the fundamental shift in consciousness, brought their awakening with them. Timothy Miller interviewed former commune members who remember their counterculture youth as pivotal in the life work they chose: education, health care, social work, the arts, non-profit organizations, organic agriculture, environmental sciences and activism, and computer engineering, to name a few (Miller 2002). This is where the flower children went. Rather than chide former hippies for nebulous failure, we could recognize that the shift they caused in popular consciousness is what made it

sensible for many to return. All of the youthful, flamboyant, defiant ways of expression were explorations in *what could be*. Through time and experience a critical mass of citizens caused change through a youth movement. They paid with blood. They paid with tears.

### **Counterculture to Elder Culture**

Theodore Roszak was “a most articulate, wise, and humane historian,” wrote Alan Watts in 1969 (Gladysz 2011). In 2009, just two years before he died, Roszak’s definitive work was published: *The Making of an Elder Culture*. Having now attained ancestor status, this book is a gift, a culmination of his insights since *The Making of a Counterculture* (1968). In the Sixties, Roszak was a beginning professor, “[f]ascinated with the political ebullience of college-aged, and even high-school aged, youth as the rest of the world around me,” he reflected (2009:19). His description of the generation gap of the Sixties remains accessible and relevant, and he calls now upon boomer elders to pick up the unfinished work of their political activist and hippie youth.

He warns that an anti-elder campaign is being waged by neoconservatives against 77 million retiring baby boomers. “The greedy geezer is a figment of political propaganda” (Roszak 2009:10). The political elite has manufactured the current crisis over social security and Medicare entitlements, as Vermont’s independent Congressman Bernie Sanders declares regularly via You Tube. It is deeply disturbing that citizen entitlements are now being faulted for breaking the federal budget, when in fact this is not true (Baker 2000). Roszak points to the

malicious irony of the anti-elder campaign: “Why are they not celebrating mass longevity as capitalism’s greatest achievement?” (2009:11). This is an excellent question. Among the solutions, he encourages boomers to engage politically and culturally through counterculture roots.

It is an exercise in *practical nostalgia*. It mines the past to find solutions for the future. In that respect, it stands somewhere between a critique and an appeal. My purpose is to explore the values, ideals, and reforms that the first generation of senior dominance will bring into the later years of life. [Roszak 2011:12]

Robert Theobald concurs: “The conditions in which we currently live,” he wrote “have been created because we have failed to challenge so-called economic and technological imperatives (1997:15). Civil rights and sustainable practices having been established, there is activism remaining for the boomers in retirement.

Changes accomplished through the counterculture relate to how we live our daily lives, and represent how transformation occurs from the ground up.

Roszak urges boomers to use their retirement to continue the process of social transformation, specifying that critical work remains in the realms of politics and culture. He suggests revisiting the idea of communalism and utopian theory.

Even when they washed out after an uncompromising start, these fragile communitarian efforts achieved something of value. They found their way back to the root meaning of utopia. Utopia, they discovered, is not absolute perfection... Rather, the original goal of utopia was to create a community where personal autonomy, commonplace decency, and self-respect could be achieved. And what did that require? Sharing the wealth in ways that offered basic security and equal access to the good things of life. [Roszak 2009:143]

Revolutionary movements of the past have gotten hung up on the actual revolution, not on community-building afterwards. Roszak pointed out in 1968 and

again in 2009 that the counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies was the first such movement to advance beyond the actual revolution, experimenting with intentional communities—this was unprecedented. Therefore, the back-to-the-land movement is fertile ground for a fresh harvest of energy and ideas toward solving contemporary political and economic crises.

[If the ideals of the Sixties had prevailed] it would be a world, where people lived gently on the planet without the sense that they have to exploit nature or make war upon nature in order to find basic security. It would be a simpler way of life, less urban, less consumption-oriented, and much more concerned about spiritual values, about companionship, friendship, community. “Community” was one of the great words of this period, getting together with other people, solving problems, enjoying one another’s company, sharing ideas, values, insights... And if that’s not what life is all about, if that’s not what the wealth is for, then we are definitely on the wrong path. [Roszak, PBS 1997]

### **Comptche and the Civil Commons**

Comptche is a microcosm of the back-to-the-lander immigration to rural America, a movement that scholars estimate was comprised of over a million people (Jacob 1997; Roszak 2009). As in many rural communities shaped by the turn-around migration of the 1970s, a significant number of 1970s newcomers to Comptche still live there today (Jacob 1997). Immigrating from the middle class, which implies they had financial resources and education, back-to-the-lander baby boomers acquired land and built homes or settled into existing small farms. Renovating barns into homesteads was common in Comptche. After being away 35 years, I found their properties featured impressive improvements through many years of enlightened stewardship. The back-to-the-landers who remain have

made an endearing commitment to land and community; the community is enhanced because of the shared values they identified in the Seventies through finding common ground and building relationships. The improved relations between 1970s newcomers and old-timers have enabled the community to work through divisive issues that have come through town in the years since.

Jennifer Sumner urges rural communities to re-build in the face of resource and job loss caused by globalization and top-down government policies by claiming their civil commons (2005). The civil commons are common ground, and Comptche's is vast. It encompasses the community buildings that are preserved, renovated and re-purposed; the post office with its bulletin board and give-away bench, the community hall, the fire department and adjacent park, a state redwood reserve, wildlife, clean air, fresh water, and the road from Ukiah to Mendocino that began as a migration path for the Pomo. Even those things that are privately held—the store, the trees, creek beds, swimming holes, dirt roads, grasslands, livestock, historic homesteads, mill shacks, rock musician abodes, Pomo camp grounds—all these things are valued by community members. While Comptche's civil commons has an expanse of physical attributes, it also includes ephemeral qualities as found in the region's historical narrative. Highlights include the unique relationship between the Pomo and the pioneers, and the now-historic clash between back-to-the-land hippies and old-timers. This is why the stories that convey Comptche and Mendocino history are to be treasured.



Shared values among locals is another facet of common ground, such as shared reverence for the natural world, and the choice to live simply with less. Everyone is a stakeholder: wild fires, corporate logging, a proposed airstrip, tourists, and trespass remain shared concerns over which residents have come together on to discuss. Given that it is hard to carve out a living there, I contend that the civil commons is why people live in Comptche, and the common ground of shared values is a dynamic means for the community's robust social life.

### **Resilient Comptche**

Counterculture-inspired transformation was a grass-roots movement across the spectrum of life in America. Theobald (1997) and Sumner (2005) both advocate for system change from the ground up, formidable as it may seem to confront the faceless dominant paradigm that operates from the top down. The myriad counterculture movements discussed are examples of grass-roots social change.

Grass-roots change happens on the local level, whether in rural communities or urban neighborhoods. The essential criteria for community change as defined by Theobald are: effective participatory decision-making, a respect for nature and ecological systems, and the development and maintenance of social cohesion (1997). "Those attempting to preserve industrial-era systems saw no need for common-ground strategies and rejected this approach. Those who saw the need for fundamental change recognized that no individual or group could be sure they were right and that conflict could lead to new understandings

and synergies if everybody were willing to listen carefully to each other” (Theobald 1997:98).

The strategies for local level change that Theobald described in the 1990s compare remarkably to the community-building strategy that the citizens of Comptche used two decades earlier. Issues around land use, children, and fire brought newcomers and old-timers together into a dynamic of participatory decision-making that produced social cohesion, which they have maintained. A respect for nature, first expressed through the choice to live in Comptche, is seen in the community’s commitment to protecting the environment—evident through the fire department and the general plan established by the Citizens Advisory Committee. A key issue remains centered on forest resource harvesting; everyone agreed they valued trees, even though their values emanate from different perspectives.

Common ground is often confused with compromise. Compromise, choosing a solution within current thinking, assumes that people’s initial positions represent their true best interests... Common ground strategies, on the other hand, require that people with conflicting ideas or opinions on a certain matter think together and learn to define a problem in wholly different terms. Everybody may feel they have won. [Theobald 1997:63]

Old-timers in Comptche were biased against higher education, reasoning they didn’t need a college degree to work in the woods. The back-to-the-landers, who had college education, but not necessarily degrees as most tended to drop out, were able to share their intellectual resources, which the old guard has come to appreciate. For the CAC, they conducted community surveys and asset mapping, and were prepared to write the general plan and report. Back-to-the-landers found common ground with old-timers through their shared values, such

as spending less and living more simply. In Comptche, shared values have become part of the civil commons.

One of the greatest successes of the hippie counterculture movement can be found in the “unimpressive” (Jacob 1997) back-to-the-landers, who have not called attention to their success. Back-to-the-land homesteading prevailed where communes failed, in part because they accessed the best practices of old-timers for that particular region, and blended these with innovations and emergent values—such as bio-dynamic gardening. Back-to-the-landers learned from the old timers, who in turn learned from the college-educated hippies new ways of assessment and organizing as a community. The successful dialogue in Comptche crossed boundaries of culture and age. “The older generation should not be teaching what they think they know without listening with great care to what the younger generation has to tell them about the world today” (Theobald 1997:92). New relationships were established that survive today, and Comptche has become dynamic community able to sustain the sense of place that attracts residents to settle and commit to the land. As a back-to-the-lander declared to an old-timer during a conflict: “We’re all in this together, we’re going to figure out how to live together. Starting today.”

*“Sixty-five people worked together to build this cabin.”*  
[Newcomer respondent]

Community is a state of mind, says Theobald. “It exists whenever people are committed to each other and willing to work to achieve desirable goals. It is still the exception rather than the rule, because community requires people to be

open and honest with each other” (1997:88). Relationships support people in speaking candidly because a trust has been established between them.

This study shows that transformation happened in Comptche after a period of conflict between immigrants and established long-term residents. At the heart of all Comptche community gatherings exists the keys to resolving conflict: common ground and relationships. Their new paradigm is sustained through regular community gatherings, and there is a way for newcomers to integrate into the community through volunteering, where new relationships can form and grow. Anticipated benefit events, such as those supporting the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department, provide regularly occurring opportunities for the people of Comptche to come together. This affords community members with periodic experiences of peak oneness. *Communitas* in Comptche is balanced by the relative isolation and privacy of most homes. Residents acknowledge the work involved in maintaining their community and nearly everyone contributes by attending or volunteering for benefit gatherings intended to preserve both the land and a way of life. Comptche is yet an imperfect town with inter-personal issues typical of any small town, but by and large, Comptche people are *happy*.

## Comptche Stories

A project about life in Comptche  
during the 1970s.



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When and why did you or your ancestors move here?  
If you or your family members remain, why?  
If you moved, why?

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Former Comptche kid Lisa Gruwell Spicer (the Gruwells lived on Flynn Creek Road) is asking these questions for her masters thesis in anthropology, *Comptche Stories: An ethnography of a rural community* (working title).

An ethnography is a description of a culture. The people of Comptche comprise a unique sub-culture.

The ethnographer seeks people with interest in sharing their stories of living in this place. We will add a new volume to the comprehensive history of Comptche, which has been well-documented.

All topics are on the table, especially around themes of community conflict resolution.

When published, copies will be available to the community at area public libraries and Kelley House in Mendocino, and other outlets to be determined.

Interested in participating?  
Want more information?  
Contact Lisa Gruwell Spicer:  
[SpicerDent@gmail.com](mailto:SpicerDent@gmail.com)  
on FaceBook: *Comptche Stories*

Lisa is a candidate for her MA in anthropology at Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington. [www.wvu.edu/anthropology](http://www.wvu.edu/anthropology)

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Please participate  
by telling your story.

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## Appendix B

# Comptche Stories:

## Ethnography of a Rural Community



Thesis Research Project  
By Lisa Gruwell Spicer  
Department of Anthropology,  
Western Washington University

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### Purpose Statement for Participants

Anthropology is the study of human culture. Ethnography is the writing or description of a culture. I am doing an ethnography of Comptche and asking a specific question. As a grad student and former resident, I would like to work with you as a resident of Comptche. The people of Comptche have established, and today maintain, a peaceful co-existence despite different values and philosophies, but it wasn't always this way. *How did this happen?*

The time frame for my question starts with the late-1960s, when Daniel Parker's commune brought the first wave of new residents, and extends to the present, with a particular focus on the 1970s. During the Seventies, Comptche experienced tremendous population growth as it transformed from a small number of old-time families who settled the area, into a destination for a wave of young families following a trail back to the land. It is ironic that the new-comers arrived with ideals of living in peace on the land, wherein their arrival created resentment and tension among old-timers. Not only did the population swell, causing a natural adjustment in any community, but the new-comers brought seemingly new ideas and values that appeared to threaten the status quo.

Throughout the 1970s, the community was divided into two groups, generally speaking, the old-timers and the newcomers. Yet, there was a third group who were at ease on either side.

Upon my return in 2008 for the 1970s Mendocino High School reunion, I noticed a palpable change in Comptche. The divisive tension is no longer there.

Project Parameters:

To be a project Participant, please agree to the following:

- You lived in Comptche during the project time frame: between the late 1960s to the present, with an emphasis on the 1970s.
- You are willing to share stories about life in Comptche, focusing on the time period of this research project.
- You are willing to complete a questionnaire, around an hour of your time.
- You will sign a consent form, giving permission to use your questionnaire.
- You are open to possible follow-up conversations via phone or email.
- You have a phone, mailing address, or email access to communicate with me.

We each hold pieces in the constellation of memories, experiences, and reflections in the story of Comptche. These can be considered cultural artifacts. Almost anyone who lived in Comptche from the 1970s to the present has a contribution to the process of understanding how a community finds common ground.

Participating together in this project, I hope we can define the differences and tensions of the past and then build an understanding of how Comptche residents resolved differences and transformed into a peaceful community.

*This thesis project could be the “tip of an iceberg” for a larger story telling project if there is adequate interest. A more comprehensive story telling project would not be bound by the academic requirements of my thesis.*

Thank you so much for being a project participant. Feel free to contact me with any questions, ideas, and comments you have.

*Lisa Gruwell Spicer*

# Comptche Stories

## Questionnaire for Participants

- Questions refer to events of the late 1960s to the present, emphasizing the 1970s
  - Responding to the questions will take around an hour of your time.
  - You may skip any question you choose not to answer.
  - If an example is given after a question, feel free to also use that in your response.
  - Information is intended to be anonymous. Your information will not be linked to you or your name. This is to encourage candid responses and respect privacy.
  - Respond to questions from your own point of view, feelings, and experience.
  - Please complete the questionnaire to the best of your ability and return by 1/15/11.
  - This is an interactive form. Here are simple directions:
    - Save the form onto your computer.
    - Type directly onto this form in the grey field following each question. The grey box will expand as you type.
    - To undo typing in the grey box, go to the EDIT menu, select CLEAR, then CONTENTS. Or, go to the EDIT menu and select UNDO TYPING.
- 

1. You are:      Male  Female
2. Current age:
3. Do you presently live in Comptche?  
Yes  No
4. During what years you have lived in Comptche?
5. Did you grow up in Comptche?  
Yes  No   
If no, age when you arrived?  
Did you move to Comptche as a:  
Family  Single parent with kids  Couple  Individual
6. Please define your housing during the 1970s:  
 Homeowner, long-term family property  
Year acquired:  
 Homeowner/bought house (late 1960s – 1970s)  
Year house was bought:  
 Land owner/buying land  
Did you/your family build a home? Yes  No   
 Rented  
 Home/land caretaker in exchange for housing  
 Other:



7. In the Seventies, which of these contemporary amenities were in your home?
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone             | <input type="checkbox"/> Stereo system |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electricity           | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric or gas range | <input type="checkbox"/> Running water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Microwave oven        | <input type="checkbox"/> Indoor toilet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Television            | <input type="checkbox"/> Other :       |
8. In the 1970s, how was your home heated?  
Electricity  Wood  Oil  Other, define:
9. What kind of transportation did you (even if you were too young to drive) use to get around? (check all that apply)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Car/truck/van         | <input type="checkbox"/> Horse                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motorcycle, motorbike | <input type="checkbox"/> Hitchhiking           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please define: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foot                  |  |
10. In the Seventies, how did you or your family derive income? (check all that apply)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ranching                | <input type="checkbox"/> Musician                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Logging                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Entrepreneur                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other natural resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by local<br>business, industry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fisheries               | <input type="checkbox"/> Government employee                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Farming, agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction            | <input type="checkbox"/> Welfare                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retail                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Child Support                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Artisan, define:        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, define:                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Woodworker              |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visual artist           |  |

11. Religion is a very personal topic, yet it plays a key social and cultural role.
- In which church or spiritual practice did you engage, if any?
  - What is your practice today?
12. Please list any volunteer work you have provided to the community (i.e.: Volunteer Fire Department).
13. Politically speaking, would you consider your family in the 1970s:
- Liberal
  - Conservative
  - Somewhere in the middle
  - Non-political
14. On a scale of one to ten, how satisfied were you with life in Comptche during the Seventies?
- 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
15. Based on the level of satisfaction you checked, can you provide comments about which aspects of life you found satisfying or unsatisfying?
16. If you are a member of an **old-time** family, how did it feel to experience a surge in population? What was that like for you?
17. If you were among the **newcomers** moving in, what are some of the reasons you/your family choose Comptche?
18. Living in a rural environment requires certain skills and knowledge. How did you/your family acquire the information necessary for successful country living?
- What resources did you use (i.e., books)?
  - Did you learn things from specific people? If so, what, and from whom?
  - Do you have a story or specific incident about acquiring new skills?

19. With which “side” of the social divide did you socialize with *most* in Comptche during the Seventies?

Old-timers  New-comers  Both

20. With which group would you associate your family to?

Old-timers  New-comers  Neither

21. Please list some of the **kinds of community gatherings** you and your family participated in:

22. Did any of these gatherings create traditions? If so, what **kinds of traditions** emerged? (i.e.: community quilts for newlyweds)

23. In the 1970’s, what **kinds of social gathering places** do you recall? (i.e.: the school, the store, Blue Rose...)

24. Please list the **kinds of events open to everyone** in the community:

In the Seventies, what **kinds of exclusive events** can you recall that were held primarily for people in your group? Based on your responses to questions 24 & 25, do you have a story that you feel is a good example of what these events were like, what happened?

25. What were the **kinds of nicknames or slang** you used to refer to “the other”?

26. From whichever “side” you were on, old-timer or new-comer, what were the **kinds of differences** you observed in “the other”?

a. Did you ever feel threatened by these differences? Yes  No

Comments?

b. Do you observe any of these differences today? If so, please list:

27. From whichever “side” you were on in the Seventies, what were some of the **kinds of conflicts** or disagreements you observed, or were part of?
28. Do you feel these conflicts or disagreements persist today?  
No  Yes  it’s about the same  
Yes  but to a lesser degree  
Yes  to a greater degree  
Comments about this?
29. Old-time residents: What were the kinds of major conflict or disagreements *prior to the late 1960s*?
30. In the Seventies, was there conflict about which the community agreed to disagree? Yes  No
- a. If so, what were the topics of these “agreeable” conflicts?
- b. Do you have a story illustrating a Comptche conflict during the Seventies?
31. What are the **kinds of common issues and concerns shared** by residents of Comptche?
32. Around what **kinds of events or concerns** have you observed or experienced the community as a whole coming together? (i.e.: fighting fires...)
33. Who were, or are, some of the **major stand-out figures** in Comptche (these people may be deceased or still living)?
- a. Why do you consider this person, or persons, important?
34. Who were some **other significant characters** in Comptche and why do you find them notable in recent Comptche history?

35. In retrospect, looking back on the recent past in Comptche, do you think community members have resolved the differences and dissolved tensions that were present in the Seventies? Yes  No  Somewhat

Comments?

36. If you answered “Yes” or “Somewhat” to the above question, how did this happen?

a. Can you identify specific events or experiences that helped the people of Comptche to work together, come together?

b. Can you identify specific people who helped bridge the divide? (If they were noted above, it’s okay to list them again.)

37. On a scale of one to ten, and you live there now, how satisfied are you with life in Comptche?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

38. Are there any other observations, thoughts, or reflections you would like to contribute to this study?

The information you provide will remain anonymous. Your signed consent form is not physically attached to this questionnaire, so unless you provide the information below, most likely I will not know your identity. However, I might need or want to contact you to follow up on your responses, or possibly to ask more questions. If this would be agreeable to you, please provide the following:

Name:

E-mail address:

Phone:

I appreciate the time and care you have taken to respond to this questionnaire. I anticipate that in early February 2011, I will post questionnaire findings on the Facebook page:

*Comptche Stories*. You will be able to post your response on the Discussion segment of this Face Book page.

The published thesis will be made available to the community via the Mendocino County Library. Projected thesis publication: December 2012.

Appendix C



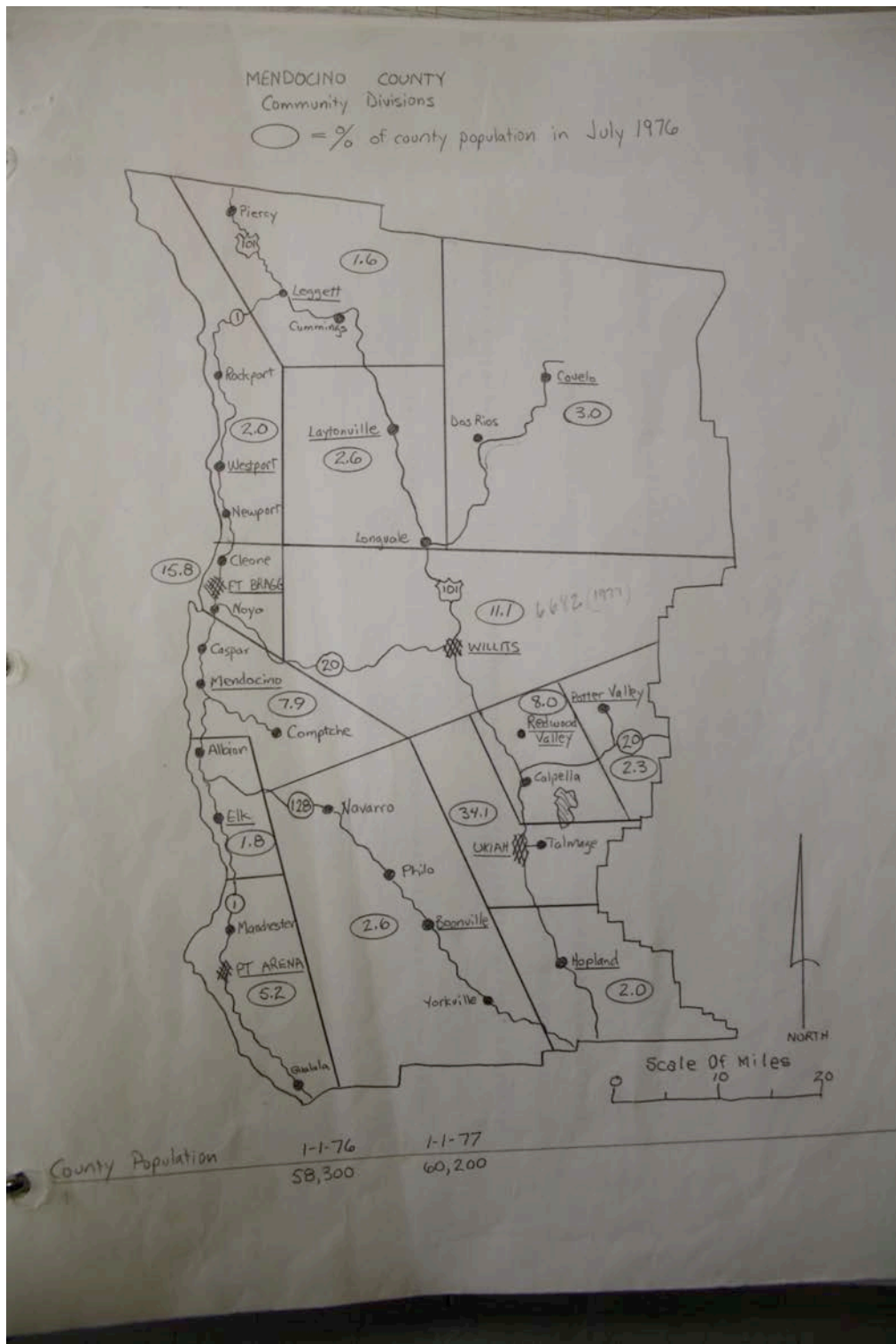
2012 Community Quilt for the Comptche Volunteer Fire Department





Appendix E

Mendocino County Map



## Finding Common Ground: Back-to-the-Land Hippies & Old-timers on the Redwood Coast



A community presentation of Lisa Gruwell Spicer's thesis in anthropology, an ethnography of Comptche in the 1970s:

**Thursday, June 28, 7 - 9 PM**  
**Comptche Community Hall**

Begun as "Comptche Stories" in 2009, community members have participated in this project through stories, memories, and experiences about life in Comptche during a decade of dynamic change. The study includes an historical overview of the Redwood Coast—setting the context for how things unfold in the 70s. The counter-culture movement is explored; discovery includes community conflict resolution and a resilient community.

Come find out how the interplay of free-thinkers and traditionalists developed relationships, found common ground, and built the foundation for Comptche of today. There will be discussion and refreshment after the presentation.

Free to the public. 2012  
[Spicerdent@gmail.com](mailto:Spicerdent@gmail.com)

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