

Craig Kurtz

Imagine No Possessions

We all agreed that TV was pernicious capitalist indoctrination so, here we were, strung-out on our own ideology, jonesing for the televised Watergate hearings and completely unaware of John Lennon's announcement on Dick Cavett that he was looking for an American commune in which to 'mellow out' after the Tricky Dick hassle following his flop political album *Sometime in New York City*. Over at Twin Oaks, none of us heard about that—not even the record (which we couldn't afford); we just knew the whole corrupt, war-mongering Presidency was heading for the dustbin of history and, most likely, a lot more intentional Walden Two-type societies would be forming soon. A new America! We would not only 'have a revolution' but also 'give peace a chance'; where the Yippies failed, where the Weathermen went wrong, where the Panthers became a drag was the whole macho ego trip. 'You say you got a real solution, well, we'd all love to see the plan'—and, dig it, Twin Oaks had the plan.

We found out later, Stephen Gaskin's Farm was the first stop by the 'radical' ex-Beatle and his small (for him) entourage of Jon Hendricks, driving a rented Monte Carlo (full of fancy A/V equipment), May Pang and a Siamese cat by the name of Jabberwock. Instead of a (working class) hero's welcome, as he expected (wherever he went), Gaskin personally gave John Lennon a hard time about ciggies and, what was even more unhip, the trunk of booze and beer Jon Hendricks was unloading, as if a bribe for the uncolonized natives. Off they went in a huff. A nearby library search helped get the show back on the road; May Pang read to John a mention of Twin Oaks from a *Time* magazine article, and he decided, since Twin Oaks didn't have a "charismatic asshole," as he put it, going there would be a mellower scene. John had already established his idea of 'Nutopia,' so the utopian socialism of Twin Oaks sounded right on. And, lo and behold, that Monte Carlo pulled up at 138 Twin Oaks Road, across from the organic garden, right at dinnertime. It was June 1st, 1973.

As it so happened, Twin Oaks' sole-remaining founder, Kat, had recently split to scout a possible site for the spin-off community in the Ozarks, East Wind, so the diplomatic duties fell to the senior-most member, Thoreau. He was in the office at the time and saw the humongous gas-guzzler pull up. "Aw, man," he muttered, "more journalists showing up unexpected at dinner time." (Hippie 'vizzies,' as they were pejoratively known, were another hassle, dropping in at all

hours expecting a free meal, and ‘more.’) A mere two and a half years ago, Thoreau was a practicing Mormon, attending Brigham Young University, so he was the least likely among us (the 35 young, idealistic communards comprising Twin Oaks’ membership) to be starstruck and subsequently hustled against his better conscience. However, he visibly flinched when confronted with the first occupant of the vehicle to emerge—an unfathomably foxy Asian chick who introduced herself as “May Pang, John Lennon’s personal secretary.” Wow. At her summons, she and Thoreau went into the office to confer “quietly,” while a gaggle of communards formed around the silent, dark-windowed limo like the cave apes discovering the cosmic monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

“Was that Yoko Ono?” timidly inquired Chamomile, my girlfriend. “Hey, come on out, mystery people,” taunted Tractor, a big bear of a prankster, the most ‘hardass’ member of Twin Oaks. It did send off a weird vibe, that dark, unresponsive limo (like a presidential car) and the secret summit going on in the office. “Hey, Kohlrabi, did I hear right? Is that really John Lennon in there?” Bergamot, one of the more seasoned members, asked me. I shrugged, stunned. When Tractor joked, “Hey, maybe the Beatles are gonna get back together right here,” at least ten people popped out their eyeballs. The hovering tension was about to explode when a funny little man stepped out of the car (Jon Hendricks) along with John Lennon (taller and sexier than all his photographs), while, simultaneously, May Pang and Thoreau appeared from the office. Thoreau loudly announced, “Alright, it’s dinnertime!” And off we all tumbled to Llano kitchen, a few yards away, as if everything was typical and our minds weren’t completely blown.

Meanwhile, John Lennon’s cat Jabberwock crept out from under the Monte Carlo and, ears flattened, proceeded to chase Burrus, Echinacea’s little tabby, up the steps of Ta Chai, the nearby SLG (single living group, a member dormitory) and combined hammock shop. That didn’t strike me as especially good vibrations, but I kept that thought to myself. The Llano dining room filled up fast, and soon the entire membership of Twin Oaks was sitting around the dude on the cover of *Imagine* with a plate of brown rice, summer squash and black beans lingering in front of him, as he puffed on a foreign cigarette.

“Well,” he said by way of introduction, “I was getting paranoid out in the Village ‘cos I knew I was being followed by government goons, they made it real obvious ya know, and it occurred to me that maybe hangin’ around with a couple of revolutionary madmen like Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman and haulin’ them and that marijuana freak David Peel onto TV, wasn’t the brightest move to be making if I really wanted to get a permanent visa into America, and then Yoko suggested I oughta take my Nutopian idea seriously, make it

performance reality ya dig, and get meself some sanity in an real utopia, ya know.” Most of us were staring at John Lennon like we couldn’t really believe it was him. Yet, that famous thin nose and that Beatley tousled hair and those groovy granny glasses were all we imagined, and there was no doubt that sharp and confiding voice was all *Imagine* magic. Thoreau was the first to speak. “Well, John. . . and May . . . and . . .” “Jon Hendricks” said the chap at the end of the table in a professional voice. Thoreau continued: “As turned on as we all are to have you here with us, Twin Oaks has some . . . *customs* we should let you know about . . .”

“Right right,” John Lennon said charmingly yet impatiently and lit another cigarette. “And one of these,” Thoreau continued, “is we don’t use honorific or last names and, as it turns out, there’s already a John here—” and his and several others’ eyes fell upon a scrawny kid across the table, brown hair parted in the middle, wearing round spectacles and a denim jacket just like John Lennon on the *White Album*, who proceeded to turn red and stammered, “Well, I could always . . . just take another name . . .” John Lennon picked this gambit right up, saying, “No no no. By all means I’ll adopt another fantasy life, ya know; it’s just as well to keep the papers and the autograph hounds out of this little conspiracy anyway—it’s a pleasure to meetcha ‘John’—you can just call me Winston! Dr. Winston O’Boogie! And Jon over there, just call ‘em ‘Hey you’—that’s usually what I do all the time anyway.” May Pang smiled knowingly.

As Thoreau was about to lay down another rap—he always spoke deliberately and slowly—‘Winston’ (as he will now be called) boogied on like he did in all the interviews. “I’ve always thought that a peaceful revolution was the best way ya know, and I can see you got it all figured out—no possessions, no religions, no hangups—and that’s what I imagined, and now I see it’s for real. Fantastic!”

Thoreau looked uptight, I thought. ‘Winston,’ for his part, kept on smoking and kept on narrating while most everybody stared at him and hung on his every word, spellbound. No one dared mention Yoko. Finally, the meal finished, Echinacea inquired, “Who’s scheduled to do dishes tonight?” John (the scrawny kid) raised his fingers shyly. “Well, I’m *sure* our guests will be more than happy to lend you a hand before we show them their accommodations for the night,” Echinacea pronounced. I noticed May Pang at that moment; she looked startled but quickly recovered her mellow equilibrium and stood up, saying, “Yes, certainly, I’d love to help.” By that time, ‘Winston’ was already out the door, followed by a gaggle of communards, saying over his shoulder, “‘Hey you’ (ha ha), how about gettin’ my axe and maybe some beer?”

Within minutes, there he was, swaying on a hammock in the

courtyard, slugging a tallboy of Guinness, tuning an acoustic Gibson, surrounded by a throng of hippies at his feet. Someone lit a joint and passed it around. “Ya know,” he said, “this is just like Rishikesh. That was a far-out trip. Hey, gorgeous girl over there—” and he gestured to Chamomile sitting next to me—“how ‘bout sittin’ up here next to me and helpin’ me out with a little tune.” I watched her make her way over to the hammock; she was giggling like a teenybopper. “Ah, here’s one we can’t go wrong with—I, yiy, yiy, dig a pony—” and casually slid his torso into Chamomile’s hips, nudging her to join him as he sang, “Well, you can penetrate anything you want.” I was pretty sure that wasn’t exactly how the song went. And I had to repress my emotions from admitting what I was feeling right then—pure, unadulterated sucker-punch jealousy.

That admission was a real downer for me, not to mention an ego problem to work on, because, at Twin Oaks, the whole uptight possessive trip was bad karma to the max. As Kat phrased it: “The biggest bulwark against jealousy is our heavy communal disapproval of it . . . [T]he stand against personal possessiveness is a moral stand, and most of us here do not approve of our bad feelings when we have them” (Kinkade, *A Walden Two Experiment*, 1973, p. 168). Although Chamomile’s relationship with me was monogamous, it was what she liked to call open monogamy. That meant, she liked me best when I would stop being so straight and could *go with the flow*. Although I was secretly pleased when someone said, “Chamomile is Kohlrabi’s girlfriend,” I knew I couldn’t expect to get away with saying, “Chamomile’s my girlfriend.” Or, in theory, even thinking it. And, damn, here was Mr. No Possessions himself ‘stealing my girlfriend’!

But I didn’t have time to meditate on this because it was my turn to herd the cattle in—and I was scheduled to milk them tomorrow morning, so I split even though ‘Winston’ was performing a song some people would have paid a million bucks to hear live.

Meanwhile, the community Planners were rapping in the living room of Harmony, Twin Oaks’ first self-built SLG. (Planners are a trio of primary decision-makers outside specialized managerial authority, based on the centralized democracy concept from B.F. Skinner’s utopian novel *Walden Two*.) Mainly, the hassle was between Thoreau and Echinacea, with Bergamot looking on.

“Look, Lennon’s secretary girlfriend person wrote us a check for \$10,000,” Thoreau stated smugly, waving the scrap of paper like a banner. “This is enough bread to get us a real dining hall built—plus some common expenses.” Echinacea rested her fists on her hips and shot back, “And making the decision to hustle money from John Lennon wasn’t yours to make, Thoreau. At least not alone! Bergamot and myself are also Planners, and we all agreed that all

decisions would be made by consensus.” Thoreau grimaced. “Look, I had to make a quick move there with that secretary chick, she’s a bit of a hustler herself. How was I supposed to know you would take a completely *irrational position* about accepting \$10,000?”

Echinacea sat down on a tattered sofa arm, petted little Burrus and sighed. While Thoreau still evinced the sort of infallibility syndrome to be expected from a dude who grew up a Mormon, fiercely feminist Echinacea had been a homesteader and she was used to doing her own thing. “I presume the \$10,000 means these showbiz people won’t be expected to follow any of our rules, stupid name change aside. Their whole phony scene is going to discombobulate morale, you know.” “Listen, Echinacea,” Thoreau retorted, “if somebody’s square parents came for a visit, we wouldn’t get hung up on them not baling hay, weaving hammocks or even helping out with dinner, would we? Here’s what’s going down. John Lennon isn’t going to stay with us very long, and I’ll tell you why. He’s going to get bored in a week’s time and go off with his beautiful people friends to London or somewhere. Meanwhile, we’ll have enough money to—”

And here Echinacea raised her hand. “You don’t know people very well, Thoreau—especially women,” she said. “All it’s going to take is a couple of days before the damage is done.” “Damage?” interjected Bergamot. “Sure,” Echinacea continued. “It only took, what, twenty minutes before ‘Winston’ put the moves on Chamomile. I’m guessing right about now he’s got Coneflower on his lap, and pretty soon it’ll be some other ‘dolly’ having a turn. By tomorrow night, every young woman here will be at war with each other and all the boyfriends will be freaking out. We’ll probably lose half our membership after the weekend.” Bergamot wrinkled his forehead thoughtfully, then volunteered, “But we all agreed we don’t have jealousy here.” Echinacea smiled indulgently and said, “We don’t have competitiveness either, but what do you call it when someone’s supposed to, uh, ‘get it on’ right after one of the Beatles?” Thoreau answered sourly, “Even if half of these kids bag out, we’ll have their spots all filled by next month anyway.” And off he walked, check in hand.

Echinacea had made her point however. A few hours into it, even the sober-minded, cool-headed Planners, all pillars of the community, were at loggerheads, if not outright war, over the supposed outtasight grooviness of having Dr. Winston O’Boogie crash with us at Twin Oaks.

Meanwhile, after herding in the cows, I found the courtyard still. The festivities moved down the hill to the bonfire area where a huge blaze illuminated ‘Winston,’ still strumming and singing, surrounded by twenty enraptured Twin Oakers. I heard snatches of a

song that went, “We don’t care what flag you’re waving, we don’t even wanna know your name.” I hadn’t heard that one before and, frankly tired and sweaty, didn’t care to hear more. I saw Chamomile blissfully installed next to ‘Winston,’ as well as Coneflower and Beehive—the foxier community women squeezing in, nodding their heads, shaking their long hair and beaming beatifically while the dudes kept a respectful fan distance as if a Beatle charisma forcefield pushed them out to the cheaper seats. Since I had to be up in five hours and didn’t want to lay a possessiveness trip on Chamomile, I kept on truckin’. I mean, who wants to be a downer in front of ‘his girlfriend’—or John Lennon?

I heard . . . something . . . coming from the bonfire area when I got up to milk the cows at dawn. A sort of burbling, sunrise, getting high swirl of murmurings and laughs. Beer tops opening. A reefer cloud billowing above. I dared not peek. I just kept on truckin’. And I milked the cows while trying not to cry.

It was quiet in the courtyard when I got up that early afternoon. Only the straight communards were about—Echinacea mowing the grass; Tractor baling hay across the garden; Toadstool weaving a hammock in Ta Chai; and Pinecone hanging laundry on the lines outside Harmony. They were the Pete Seeger people. It was a clear summer day, something that should have been serendipitous—although I heard a cat yowling in the distance. Inside Llano, I saw May Pang fumbling with a skillet of fried eggs. She wheeled around and zapped me with a platinum smile. “Can you help me find some Earl Grey tea and maybe a few slices of bacon? Where’s the bread? Is there a toaster around here? And, another thing, where would someone go to get a carton of Gauloises?” I truly never saw a more ungodly chick in person before and took a second to get it together. “Uh,” I mumbled, “there probably won’t be any bread until dinner . . . unless Frisco gets to it earlier, but he’s got an outside job so that probably won’t happen . . . unless Moonchild wants to do it . . . and we don’t have any bacon or gray tea; we just got herbal tea, it’s over there. And, sorry, what are galoshes?” “Gauloises. Cigarettes. Or how about Gitanes? Is there a store around here that might have them?” she sharply inquired. “There’s a gas station down Yanceyville, but I don’t think they’d have that kind of cigarette. You’d have to go to Richmond for far-out ciggies.” She looked through me at that point, and I felt extremely uncool.

Suddenly, I heard ‘Winston’ yelling across the courtyard. He was stationed in Oneida’s biggest room, and I saw his finger angrily waving through an open window. “Hey, Jabberwock’s up a tree! See ‘er over there? Right there! That tree! See it? Somebody *do something!* Get your shit together! And where’s May? Where’s me bloody

Kestrel

breakfast?” The cat was yowling, high up the branches of the twinned oak outside Llano. I noticed a panicky silence following ‘Winston’s’ outburst. It’s a real bummer to hear a Beatle cussing you out like your angry dad.

Then, Thoreau strode into Llano, saying, “Hey, someone help me with a ladder.” Obviously that meant me. We hauled a ladder from the barn and propped it up the tree where the cat was urgently mewling. May Pang raced out to us and nervously implored, “Please hurry; Jabberwock’s an inside cat, and John will be *very upset* if we don’t get her back safely.” Tractor appeared and laughed, “Not much of a man if he can’t corral his own pussycat.” Any further attempts of humor were quelled by a glance from Thoreau. I went up the ladder, then back down. “Hang on,” I said. “I’m gonna need bait, right?” I ran into Llano, foraged in the back of the communal refrigerator, then ran back out, a slimy bit of liver in my hand. “This’ll do it,” and, minutes later, I had the cat purring in my arms. She was warm and soft. May Pang snatched her and ran back to Oneida. “What a pain,” Thoreau muttered. “What a pansy you mean,” added Tractor.

We didn’t see ‘Winston’ until late afternoon, sternly grabbing a carton of ciggies and some other (bagged) stuff from ‘Hey you’ out in the parking lot. Then he dashed back into Oneida, slamming the door behind him. May Pang asked everybody to “please not bug” ‘Winston’ that evening. I hadn’t seen Coneflower all day, as I usually did, I darkly noticed.

Meanwhile, ‘Hey you’ was doing a little partying out in the Monte Carlo. Moonchild was there as well as her boyfriend Thistle, who looked a little weirded out. They were drinking beer and watching TV inside the limo. Afro was there and so was Scallion. Plus, hovering around, Beehive and her dude Borealis, along with Maple and Birch. They reminded me of the small-town teenagers I left behind in St. Louis county, hanging out in parking lots, swilling brews and going nowhere. It didn’t seem to me that Dr. Winston O’Boogie was bringing much enlightenment to Twin Oaks. I was mainly concerned about Chamomile, who told me to ‘Go away’ when I knocked on her door at Harmony.

Sometime in the very early morning, right before I headed out to milk the cows, I tried again, very lightly. She opened her door and let me in. Like most rooms at Twin Oaks, it contained a broken-down bed with a second-hand mattress, a rickety old desk, two ancient office chairs and a milk crate bookcase filled with candles and natural objects from outside. She was sitting on her bed, braiding her hair, looking serious. “I suppose you want to know how it was? Getting it on with an ex-Beatle?” she said in a hurt, challenging tone. I looked away from her and replied, “I already know how it was. What I’m here for is to

see how you are afterwards.” She got up and hugged me tightly. She felt warm and soft. We must have held each other for twenty minutes, silently. Then she looked at me with a tear running down her face and chuckled nervously. “Hey, it helps me appreciate you better.” I kissed her forehead and informed her I had to go to the dairy barn. Would she come along? “No,” Chamomile replied, “but come back over when you’re done. Wake me up, it’s okay.” And so we ‘made up’ I suppose.

I felt pretty weird about the idea that the guy I sang along with all through my college years was the jerk who recently screwed my girlfriend. Well, not ‘my girlfriend’; the grown-up girl I loved.

A few days passed and there wasn’t much sign of ‘Winston.’ May Pang buzzed around making a lot of long-distance phone calls in the office, conferring with ‘Hey you’ in the parking lot and fretting about the shortage of munchies in Llano kitchen. Apparently the famous macrobiotic diet was off now that Yoko wasn’t supervising her husband’s meals. Supposedly ‘Hey you’ seduced several chicks with the promise of ‘ludes and televised Watergate hearings (it was a big comfy car). Meanwhile, Jabberwock was scratching at my door, frequently visiting; that scoop of liver really made an impression. Mainly, though, Twin Oaks fell into two distinct ideological factions—those who thought ‘Winston’ was a cosmic dude who was turning on the human race and those who claimed he was a counterrevolutionary dildo who exploited the masses. I noticed most of the former were the chicks who hadn’t yet been invited to into ‘Winston’s’ room and the latter were those who had, then were asked to split. An increasing number of the boyfriends were falling into the latter camp, dejectedly. And what was said about ‘Hey you’ was not at all civic-minded, for sure. Concurrently, some joker blasted the new Alice Cooper album from the Hammock Shop.

Elsewhere, Echinacea was pressuring Bergamot to help her overthrow Thoreau’s unilateral maneuver which she considered a fascist deal. “The drugs and TV in the parking lot are a bad trip and you know it,” she stated with finality. “The telephone calls day and night are also a rip-off. Nobody’s working. Dishes are piling up. Hammocks aren’t getting made. Half the women are ‘calling in sick’. Their dudes are freaking out. The vibes are terrible. It’s not worth the bread.” “Well, that’s kinda true—except the moola. I’m sorry but I’m with Thoreau; having the dough’s good for the community.” And he left, singing “Power to the Planners, power to the Planners, right on!” Echinacea smacked the wall when he was out of sight. “Chauvinist pigs,” she growled under her breath. If she could ever get that ‘secretary’ slut off the office phone, she’d find a way to contact Kat. Kat wouldn’t put up with this Beatle bullshit. She only listened to ‘long hair music’ like Bach.

As it turned out, ‘Winston’ bummed out on Twin Oaks by the fourth day. No Gauloises or Gitanes. No bacon, no sausage, no English biscuits, no Earl Grey tea. No ‘telly’ in ‘his’ room. No air-conditioning. All the dollies wanting him to play “Imagine” on some piece of shit piano with middle C missing. And all the Beatle freaks showing up with their guitars in tow wanting ‘to jam, man’ like the Manson Family or something. “Christ, it’s not easy bein’ a bloody ex-Beatle!” he cursed behind the bathroom door which (according to Twin Oaks’ norms) ‘shouldn’t be closed’ because the bathrooms are all communal. “God knows, they probably want me toilet paper for a keepsake!” So he waved Thoreau down and said he was on his way, thank you very much. May Pang was more solicitous but, all around, the whole trip bummed everybody out.

While May Pang was packing up for ‘Winston’ like some dutiful housewife (such as Edith Bunker), Chamomile and I were having a heavy rap about our thing. “Look, Kohlrabi, don’t pretend not to be jealous; I know you are because I know you. You’re not that liberated. What I need to know, is can you forgive me? I mean, how many women who aren’t dykes turn down sleeping with John Lennon?” I stopped to consider that. Would my mother have balled John Lennon during Beatlemania? “I’m not so sure how liberated you are, either,” I petulantly replied—then hastened to add, “I can totally forgive it, though. After all, he’s Sgt. Pepper the working class hero. Give peace a chance.” And we kissed. Chamomile then showed a serious expression. “I’m happy you said that. I’m not going to love any man who doesn’t have forgiveness in his heart. Now I can let myself love you.”

There was a crowd in the parking lot soon after, and I walked over to scope out the scene. Chamomile stayed back. ‘Winston’ was yelling, “Where’s me bloody cat Jabberwock?” Had anyone seen her that day? Actually I had because she started showing up at my door early in the morning, then after sunset to sleep with me. This went on the last few days; that scoop of liver really made an impression. But I kept that to myself. Instead I walked up to ‘Winston’—heavy in his expensive ensemble of hip black threads and boots—and nervously said, “Imagine no possessions, ‘Winston’.” Frowning, he grumbled, “Sod off ya stupid git,” and got in the rented Monte Carlo with his entourage and took off from 138 Twin Oaks Road, heading wherever it was they went.

“Well, it coulda been worse,” Tractor smiled. “You mean, Yoko could have been with him?” asked (our) John. “No. It coulda been the *other* three jackoffs.”

