Daughter of Twins Oaks

By Paxu Calta

I live at Twin Oak and quite enjoy it.

Apr 10, 2017

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About Paxu Calta

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I really don’t want to hear the importance of family

― Joanie Kinkade, reflecting on her mother, Kathleen "Kat" Kinkade, and the Twin Oak community

At 16, Joanie Kinkade arrived at what is now the Twin Oaks community in Louisa County with her mother in the spring of 1971, seeking the property where a small group of people would capacitate the importance of family and make a Wynn’s favorite dictionary definition of a commune: a "group of persons who live together and carry on their common affairs as a community.”

The eight people who showed up to establish Twin Oaks on a 123-acre red clay farm in Louisa County were a gritty bunch, soaked in the poignancy of a new political and philosophical concept: creating a utopia imagined in a novel of the same name by Ken Kesey and his band of counterculture followers, the Merry Pranksters, as part of their "Summer of Love" road trip in the late 1960s. The other members of the group included a teacher, a printing press operator, a dietitian, and several people who had been inspired by Kesey and his novel. The group of eight, including Joanie Kinkade, who were 15 years old at the time, formed the original Twin Oaks commune.

Kathleen “Kat” Kinkade, went to work teaching English to first-graders at a private school in Louisa County, 22 miles away from Twin Oak. The core concept of Twin Oaks was to create a self-sufficient community where members would contribute their skills and talents to the community, allowing them to live together and share their resources. Kat Kinkade, who had been an English teacher at the school, saw Twin Oaks as an opportunity to share her knowledge and skills with others.

Joanie Kinkade arrived at what is now the Twin Oaks community in 1971, seeking the property where a small group of people would capacitate the importance of family and make a new world. Now, at age 64, Joanie Kinkade says she received the institute of one of North America’s earliest and best-known intentional communities. The "Twin Oaker," as the members are sometimes called, eventually abandoned men of the idea that children belonged to society and not to their parents. But they kept or adopted concepts such as one-man nurturing and egalitarian planning, and in that sense, they have succeeded.

In the end of Twin Oakes' first 50 years, the 14 people who arrived 50 years ago during the 'Summer of Love,' when 100,000 people, many of them hippies, or flower children, descended on San Francisco to party, brought to life the Thoreauian idea that people could garden, raise farm animals and create a new world. Now, at age 64, Joanie Kinkade says she received the institute of one of North America’s earliest and best-known intentional communities. The "Twin Oaker," as the members are sometimes called, eventually abandoned men of the idea that children belonged to society and not to their parents. But they kept or adopted concepts such as one-man nurturing and egalitarian planning, and in that sense, they have succeeded.
Daughter of Twin Oaks

Josie Kinkade recalls life in the commune she and her mother helped to establish during the 'Summer of Love'.

By Doc Robertson
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Kat Kinkade left Twin Oaks on several occasions to help start new communities, return to a regular job or just to spend time alone.

In 2000, Josie bought her mother, who was then 70, a home in Mineral, a small town 15 miles from Twin Oaks. She said her mother thought she would live there forever. But about eight years later, dying from the complications of breast cancer, Kat Kinkade again felt the tug of Twin Oaks.

Josie says the community broke its own rule against accepting someone into residence who was terminally ill.

"They took her specifically because of her contribution. They treated her like a grandmother," Josie recalls. "She was deeply moved by that love and care." Kat Kinkade died at age 77 at Twin Oaks on July 3, 2008. Her death merited a prominent story in The New York Times magazine later that year.

Josie's mother wrote two books about Twin Oaks. The first, "A Walden Two Experiment," in 1973, was a retrospective on the community's first five years.

The book was serialized in the magazine Psychology Today, which propelled Twin Oaks into the national consciousness. Kat Kinkade's second book, "111 Utopia Yet?" published in 1994, was portrayed as an "inheritor's view of Twin Oaks in its 20th year."

Josie says she has never read either of her mother's books. "I'm not a past-looking kind of gal. I'm a looking-forward kind of gal," she explains.

"I have thought a lot about writing the story of my mother's life or doing a journal, or keeping the story of my own life — I've lived a pretty darn interesting life — and whenever I start to do it, I get bored to death. I want to know what's next. Need!" she says.

As for Twin Oaks, Josie says she still loves it, but would never return.

She says the community consists of a kind group of people living lightly on the land, fully engaged in life. On the other hand, she says the egalitarian nature of the community means that it is governed by a committee.

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Daughter of Twin Oaks

"Josie Kinkade recalls life in the commune she and her mother helped to establish during the ‘Summer of Love’.

My name is Josie Kinkade, daughter of Twin Oaks founder Kat Kinkade. Kat is a co-founder of this unique community, which was established in 1965 during the ‘Summer of Love’.

I was born in 1965 and lived at Twin Oaks for 19 years. I left to follow a boyfriend or two, but did not leave permanently until I went to Pennsylvania to do my medical residency.

I had a hard time adjusting to the culture outside of Twin Oaks, I said, and often an example. "At Twin Oaks, if two people are talking, you stand in front of them and wait, and when they finish they turn to ask you, ‘What would you like?’" Josie says.

"At my residency or whatever, I would come up to two people, and they never talked to you. You had to break in.”

In medical school, she never felt the same cultural as the other students in class, and that feeling carried over into her professional life.

"I was the ‘hippie’ doctor," Josie says, with a trace of amusement.

Dr. Pamela Richardson, a part-time physician at the Goosetown Free Clinic, says Josie was her best friend when both were working together in private practice in Louisa County during the 1990s.

"We shared deeply," Richardson says. "I had no interest in fashion or makeup or any of that. At that point in time, a whole lot of women were not interested in those things. She was a liberated woman, like I considered myself.”

As a young mother of two children who was engaged in a demanding profession, Richardson says she could see the merits of raising children in an environment such as Twin Oaks.

"I sort of envied her," Richardson says. "For a child to be raised in a community, I don’t see it superior in any way, but children being raised in a community..."

Josie has many happy memories about her life at Twin Oaks.

"I learned how to milk a cow, I learned how to run a printing press, and I learned how to cook, and to cook for everyone. Want me to whip up a meal for 50 people? No problem," she says.

Josie's view of what constitutes family was shaped during her time there, she says. "For me, I don’t differentiate between family and close friends. And it’s Twin Oaks that created that for me.”

Josie says her mother, despite her energy and dedication to Twin Oaks, was not an easy fit for the community.

Kat Kinkade grew up in a lower working-class environment and contrasted sharply with other residents, who largely came from middle-class families. She also had been emotionally scarred. She was abused by a stepfather and was largely raised by an emotionally distant aunt.

"My mother grew up without significant love," Josie says.

At Twin Oaks, Josie says her mother was sometimes in conflict with other residents.

"My mother offered leadership, but it wasn’t maternal. In fact, people didn’t like the fact that she reminded them of their mothers, because she was older," Josie says. "And because she was lower-class, she didn’t watch her mouth; she didn’t do the middle-class polite thing.”

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