

**A personal note from Kenwyn to Plaksha readers on March 26, 2022**

The reading for today is the story of another power lab, which is contained in the below book.

Chapter 2, titled *Violence of the Language of the Unheard* is the story that I narrated on day 2 of our course/workshop. Chapter 3 is also about another lab on homelessness. However, it played out in a very different way. I am asking you to read this for several reasons, but especially because introduces the idea that the systemic power lab mirrors the power dynamics that exist in each group and vice versa.

## **YEARNING FOR HOME IN TROUBLED TIMES**

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## Chapter 3

### ENRICHED BY POVERTY

#### Doubting Certainty

In many Power Labs the Elites and Middles have restructured their mini-society in the hope of producing an egalitarian system.<sup>i</sup> These participants are certain that giving everyone the same resources will bring calm. It never works because those in power fail to realize the many ways equality can be understood: Elites think of it in material terms and assume that once food and housing are similar, all will be fine; Middles view it as a feature of governance and want everyone involved in decision making; the Outs, while liking the benefits, see it as a ploy to co-opt them, reduce their rage and undermine their solidarity. When groups try to create an egalitarian system, the Elites focus on redistributing resources, the Middles work to build decision making processes all accept, and the Outs seek reparations for the historical wrongs done to them. If these three orientations were seen as complementary the outcome might be different, but usually they are pitted in opposition to each other and the groups become like ships passing in the night.

A few years after Beacon Hill, I ran another homeless Lab at Fellowship Farm. It produced patterns never previously seen. The structure was similar to Beacon Hill but the processes were very different; what transpired was so transformative and uplifting I was awestruck.

What was the difference that made it unique?

The Farm Elites accepted the Outs were homeless, provided for them, but treated them as a group with interests of its own and got on with the task of running the mini-society as best they could.

The Middles maintained their middle position and did not move into a coalition with the Elites or the Outs. Hence the Farm had a group both buffering and mediating the natural hostilities that emerged from the opposing interests of the Elites and the Outs.

Like the *have-nots* of Beacon Hill, the Farm Outs decided to remain homeless, but they reveled in the riches associated with having nothing, blamed no one for their fate and chose to be fully who they were. Although lacking physical possessions they treated their world as filled with abundance, doubted the veracity of conventional wisdom, and saw their neediness as a treasure and not as a problem to be solved. Instead of demanding that others take care of them, they elected to nourish each other emotionally. In the process these Outs discovered the key to one of the great, ageless mysteries: when we give of ourselves to one another there is more than enough to go around, but when we try to get as much as we can for ourselves there is never enough for anyone.

The Farm participants were students from graduate programs at the University of Pennsylvania and had been together for a semester in a course on group dynamics. There were six Elites, eight Middles and ten Outs, and in most ways things started out in a form similar to Beacon Hill. However this Lab ended in a very different way.

### **Designing an Anti-Revolutionary System**

The primary goal of the Farm Elites was to avoid a revolution. Initially they thought the best way to achieve this end was to make life as equitable as possible. They assumed the Outs would rebel. That led them to reason as follows: *WE must do the right thing or THEY will become criminals; WE must make the system so equitable that THEIR CRIMINALITY and SUBVERSIVE NATURES will not be activated; WE must seize power so it doesn't fall into the HANDS OF THE IRRESPONSIBLE.* The one thing the Farm Elites had in common was their shared angst about what would happen if power was in the wrong hands, and the *wrong hands* were anyone but them. Their fear made it easy to agree about what to avoid, but hard to concur on what to create.

Before the Outs reached the Farm, the Elites were convinced the powerless would hate them because they had power. They argued, *we must protect ourselves from the hostility the Outs will*

*project onto us*, without recognizing the hostile projections of the Elites contained in this view. Having agreed that all problems would be caused by the Outs, the Elites wanted to control **their** behavior and thought democracy was their best defense because any revolt by the masses would be a rebellion against themselves. These Elites concluded, *by placing the power in others' hands, we will not be blamed!* The Elites projected their own fears onto a group that still did not even exist, except in their imagination. They were frightened by the image they had constructed of the Outs.

While democracy promised a way to avoid revolution, it meant they would lose power, there being six Elites and eighteen others. So the Elites chose to form a Community Council with two representatives from each group, with the Elites having veto power on all decisions. They thought of this as power-sharing, but failed to recognize how transparent this was to others.

Within the Elite group decisions were made by consensus. This left no room for dissenting voices. However, one of their group, Blair, always took a different perspective from the other five. He saw his fellow Elites as only wanting to avoid conflict and thought this was not a good basis for decision making; but he could not get them to recognize this. Also, as they built their governance system, the Elites gave no thought to what the Middles might contribute or want, seeing them solely as a group that could be used to dampen the anticipated hostility of the Outs.

As they struggled with creating a democracy, the Elites functioned in highly undemocratic ways, refused to listen to their dissenting voice because he threatened consensus, and treated the Middles purely in utilitarian terms. Without realizing it, the Elites built into the DNA of their mini-society the things they most wanted to avoid: they wanted full participation, but squelched dissent; they wanted liberty for all, but bullied the Middles into a role they opposed. The Elites longed for everyone to be exactly what they were, so long as it was acceptable to the Elites.

Once the Elites learned the Outs were to be homeless, they threw themselves into a crisis

management mode. Finding a solution to the homeless problem became their top priority. They rented from the conference center a *shelter* -- heated space with a carpeted floor, no beds, but enough blankets to keep the ten Outs warm -- and lots of peanut butter, jelly and bread. Providing this level of support for the Outs consumed 75% of the Elites' resources and severely limited their future options. However it solved an immediate problem. The future seemed far off and they believed this gave them a chance of avoiding an uprising on the first day.

### **On Embracing Homelessness**

After the Lab was over an Out gave the following description of their life as a group:

"We were registered the same night as the others, but were kept in a classroom on campus and told to be ready to go at a moment's notice. By 2:00 we figured we would not depart until morning, so we slept on the floor. At 4:30, after a restless night, the registrar told us we were leaving in fifteen minutes. He escorted us to 30th Street Station and after a long wait told us to board the train pulling into platform D, gave us each a ticket plus \$2.70 for a bus fare, instructed us to get off at Norristown, catch the #33 to Crossroads and walk to the point marked X on the map he gave us. Upon boarding the train we quickly galvanized as a group.

"It was a long journey. The last two miles walking in the bitter cold was particularly tough. We arrived at 10 a.m. As we went up the driveway to the Farm, someone quipped, *Never have ten people worked so hard to get to a place they know they do not want to be*, and another said, *We are looking for a place where we can feel at home, but I doubt if we have the capacity to recognize home when we see it*. We had yet to learn that we were to be homeless.

"Upon arrival we were taken to a shelter, two small rooms adjoined by a single bathroom. The floors were carpeted concrete and the ceilings were so low some of us could not stand upright. But things were better than we had expected. As we entered our shelter we ceremoniously took off

our snow-clad shoes so that our beds, the floor, would not get wet. This was the first of many norms we established. The next thing we did was to urinate. It was hours since we'd seen a bathroom and the shelter had only one toilet. The question was asked, *who needs to go first?* This was our second norm: the most needy got priority. Our doors didn't lock but that didn't matter. We had nothing anyone could take. That was liberating. The only thing we could lose was our dignity and that could not be stolen from us. It would vanish only if we gave it away.

“Early on we concluded we wanted adequate food and shelter, would oppose what others valued, and be as unpredictable as possible. We did not want to be institutionalized by others but we were being so reactive we were institutionalizing ourselves. Later we had to free ourselves from this self-created bind.

“We Outs were a wild mixture: a fiery, Irish Catholic, who had been a truck driver, a union organizer and a card-carrying member of the teamsters; two Jewish women from the upper class; an Indian male, a Brahman awakening to the effects of class and caste upon his identity and that of his people; two WASPs; a Catholic woman who was an avowed feminist; a man all feminists want to change; an Asian American woman whose Taiwanese family immigrated to the U.S. when she was in high school; an Argentinean Jew who'd been trying to make a home for himself in Paris; a gay man, painfully open about his sexual orientation; and a man whose refugee family had come to the U.S. from Russia during his teens as they fled the horrors experienced by Soviet Jews.

“Many of us had strained relationships before the Lab and it was hard to imagine this bunch of headstrong individuals could become a cohesive group. Also men and women were living in close quarters, so bodily functions like urination and menstruation ceased to be private events.

“We chose to make decisions using what we called a *round robin*. When we had to decide something, one person would define the issue, and then each spoke in turn briefly about what he or

she thought or felt. No one would repeat what another had said but each was free to affirm or disagree with a previous statement. When all had spoken, the round robin cycled through a second or third time and each would express unspoken thoughts or feelings provoked by what others had said. During the recycling we often took different positions from our initial ones. Those with nothing to add said 'pass.' When everything had been stated, the group voted. A 70% majority constituted a decision. Once we made a decision we never went back on it. If a vote failed to get 70% the group reverted to the prevailing status quo.

“It took a while to become proficient at this process but we eventually became masters at it. When something minor required attention we worked fast and came to a speedy conclusion. If we had a critical issue we took the time needed to consider everything fully. During our round robin we were not just making decisions, but were creating our group's character. We believed our shared integrity was our greatest asset. We had to nourish it. We treated each individual's view as important and changed our minds based on what others said. For us *mind changing* was a strength and not a weakness. This helped us voice what we honestly thought and felt.

“Something else happened to us Outs. There was a quality to the conversations we were having that was unusual. As we spoke our minds we recognized there were many things we rarely gave voice to, and that life might pass us by without our ever discovering what these unexpressed thoughts and feelings meant to us. So with everything that happened we told one another not only how it made us feel, but what aspect of life it helped shed light on. By the second day we were speaking with each other at a level of intimacy few had ever experienced.

“We saw the Elites as driven by the need to get rid of their guilt, and, thinking we could use this, adopted a stance of *give us what we want and we won't make trouble for you*. That gave us some power, but also created an unexpected consequence. We tried to improve our position by



not improving our position, to undermine others by not undermining them. However we soon found that we actually felt more fulfilled by not improving anything and not undermining anyone. So we chose to accept our Out status, forget about trying to be anything else, and agreed to openly accept all gifts offered to us. This was a new experience for this bunch of individuals who believed that all progress depended on how well we fend for ourselves. We had never learned how to receive gifts others were willing to give us. We knew what money and ambition brought, but had no clue about the treasures tucked inside impoverishment and surrender.

“After a few hours a subtle movement occurred in the Outs way of being. We stopped basing our life on anyone else's terms, craving wealth and material possessions, or being envious of those with resources. Instead we became grateful for all we had been given. This represented a sea change in our thinking. From then on, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a bedless shelter stopped being a sign of our homelessness and became a symbol of all the ways we were blessed.

“By the end of the first day at the Farm the Outs no longer cared about what the other groups did. We were existing fine and chose to spend our time examining what being homeless meant to us as human beings living in our particular world. For all of us, given what we expected out of life, the thing we feared most was having nothing and being nothing. Yet having nothing at the Farm left us no longer afraid of this possibility. We all craved to belong to a community, to have roots, yet we were all on journeys destined to create rootless lives. At the Farm we were learning what a remarkable community could be created by those who feel rootless.

“Our group was also falling in love, not romantic love, not Eros, but the form the Greeks called Agape, compassion for one another as valued members of the community. We became awash in Agape as we told one another what was in our hearts -- the good, the bad and the ugly.”

### **Pushed into a Buffer Role**

This was how a Middle woman described their shared life at the Farm:

“We had so much diversity in our group it was hard to find common ground. The Middles had three women: two African Americans -- one from the Deep South and one from the northeast-- and one Jewish woman. We had five men: an Afrikaner from Johannesburg, a Mormon from Middle America, a Jew from the Bronx, a Chinese American, and a black American born in Ethiopia and raised by a white family. However, upon meeting the Elites, we had a common experience of shock. They told us they would not ask the Outs to work because they did not want to alienate them, and proceeded to tell us Middles that we had to do the menial tasks at the Farm to create resources to help feed the Outs. They did not seem to care how we felt.

“By the time we went to bed on the first night, the Middle men, outraged by the idea of working to get money to feed the Outs, wanted to revolt and unseat the Elites. But we Middle women were distressed by our men and their rebellious impulses, so we squelched them.

“The next morning the tension between the men and women in our group grew fierce. We women refused to do our assigned work, but demanded the men do it so our group privileges would be preserved. We schemed among ourselves and were self-congratulatory when we conned the men into doing our bidding. The joint feelings we had about the men helped us three females to bond with one another. Meanwhile, our positions of *we won't work but the men should* and *we're against rebellion because we don't want to lose our privileges* led the men to believe that life would only improve for them if there was a full-blown social revolution.

“The Elites hoped we Middles would supervise the Outs, and defined the Farm's goal as *overcoming the debilitating effects of homelessness*. They wanted a program of *cultural enrichment* so the Outs could be liberated from their emotional and intellectual impoverishment and be able to take their place as equals in the society. They asked that the society be governed by a Community

Council with two representatives from each group.

“While we were not opposed to these ideas, we asked what would happen if we refused to do as the Elites decreed? The answer was the Middles could lose our meals and our beds. We proposed that the system be run on the *one person, one vote* principle. Their response was we could propose what we liked but we must use the Community Council as the vehicle for reform. However, capitulating to this demand would validate the very thing we wanted changed, but rebelling might make us Outs, so we went along with their scheme. That's how the Elites sucked us into the middle role.

“The Outs were pleased and surprised by how well they were cared for, but saw the Elites as easy to manipulate. They knew that the more pathetic they became, the more handouts they'd get, acquired of course by our Middle men who were doing the menial jobs so we Middle women would not lose our privileges. To be a mediating force we needed good relations with Elites and Outs; but we were shunned by the Outs and felt zero connection to the Elites or their goals.

“The most difficult thing for us, however, was that the men and women in our group could not agree on anything. The men wanted to displace the Elites and control the Farm, but we women blocked them. We were angry that our men made statements on behalf of all Middles without checking with us women to see what we thought. We were also convinced they would botch a coup attempt, resulting in all Middles losing our beds and meals. We also thought that being ruled by the Middle men would be worse than the current Elites.

“For a while, the Outs sent representatives to the Community Council and were part of the Farm's governance and we believed we were making progress. But the Council reinforced the differences among the groups: the Elites felt manipulated by the guilt-induction routines of the Outs, yet never acknowledged that they were trying to steer the other groups to do as they wished, namely

not to rebel; the Outs concluded that they were given things only because others were afraid they might disrupt Farm life and that they were being bought off as a way to preserve the status quo; the Middles wanted to democratize the system built on the *one person, one vote* principle, but our group remained patriarchal with the Middle men making all decisions with no female input, while we women did endless covert things to undermine our men.

“During the Community Council meetings it was obvious how divided the Elites were. When one made a statement another would contradict it. Their attempts to clarify made the waters muddier. It was obvious the Elites were not up to the task of running this society. The problem was, who could do it? The Middles were the only serious alternative, but the Outs thought life would be no better under us. For them swapping rulers would advance nothing.

“On one occasion, all representatives at a Community Council meeting were women. This was not planned. It just happened. As we began I noted the irony of having only women in this role at this time: the Farm society was bankrupt; when there were no resources left women were asked to sort out the mess. For a while the six female Council representatives debated what to do. But as we tried to deal with our bankrupt system, the Middle men interrupted repeatedly. We were furious that they would not be quiet. The meeting achieved nothing, in large part because the *haves* would not take responsibility for running the society. The Outs argued that the successes and the failures belonged to the *haves*. Their position was, *we supported you as the rulers during the best of times, and now that it's the worst of times, you are still responsible. You can't pass your problems onto us. We are the Outs! That gives us the liberty of not having to worry about fixing a system we think is broken beyond repair.* In an instant our beliefs about what drove the Outs were shattered.

“We were upset that the Outs accepted their homeless state; we hoped they'd fight the Elites. What would we do with our rebellious energy when the Outs were unavailable to express it on our

behalf? Would we battle with the Elites ourselves and risk losing all? Since the Elites and Middles had only one common purpose, keeping the Outs contained, we were confused about what to do. We had projected our hostility onto the Outs and were not happy with their cooperative spirit, because it meant we had to deal with our own hostility ourselves. We imploded and had a terrible fight. We women attacked the men for everything they had done and accused them of not being committed to the democracy they espoused; but we women had been silently undermining the men. Privately the men congratulated themselves on being liberated; but they saw us women as unwilling to do anything for anyone, which was true; but they never said a word of this to us women!”

### **Being a Recipient of Grace**

The Elites' also imploded. This was how one of the Elites explained what transpired.

“When the Outs accepted their fate we should have celebrated; our goal of avoiding a revolution had been achieved, but our group was paralyzed by conflicts of our own and we were unhappy. The Elite group had a lot of diversity: two African Americans -- a male and a female -- two white men -- a Jew and a Mormon -- a blue-eyed blond woman and a Japanese American woman. Initially our differences seemed irrelevant, but once we ceased to see the Outs as a threat we fell apart. First we attacked Blair, our dissident. He had asked us to look at how fear was driving our actions, but we were too scared of our privileges, too scared of failing, and too scared of being dethroned to embrace our fears. Blair made no suggestions about what to do, but he objected to every initiative we proposed. He stymied our group and we tried to make him conform. But he refused to fit in. Actually he was only opposed to our unwillingness to examine why we chose the actions we did, but we never understood, even though he said it repeatedly.

“As Blair got increasingly out of synch with the rest of us, we worried about what he would do if he was in a position of power and there weren't people like us to keep him in check. We assumed

he would become a mini-Hitler and unleash on others the negative energy we saw him expressing in our group. We thought this negativity was an attribute of his character, something he was born with, or acquired during a bad childhood. We could not see that he was holding up a mirror to us, showing us something about our collective negativity. We saw him as a closet tyrant who would destroy the other groups just as he was ravaging ours. It never sunk in that his goal was to get us to examine our motives and to look at the inhumanity contained in what we were doing.

“At one point I'd had enough and turned on him: *Blair, you often refer to yourself as our devil's advocate. Well, to hell with you! You ARE the devil in this group. Whenever we're close to doing something constructive you block us.* Yet the others and I had blocked as much as Blair. For all that frustrated us, we blamed Blair. But he refused to be silenced, and this infuriated us.

“We never noticed how our insistence on having consensus was impeding us, that our decision making process gave each individual the ability to hold the group hostage. By refusing to agree, any of us could block action. We wanted to veto decisions other groups made that we didn't like. They rejected that. Yet each of us could veto an emerging decision in our group. Actually we all did this to ourselves often, but we only got upset when Blair tried to block us. Instead of altering how we made decisions, we rejected the one we saw as threatening our consensus.

“Blair knew we wanted him to be silent but he refused. His position was *you can kick me out, but until I'm gone I will speak my mind!* This idea of throwing him out of the group planted a seed that germinated and grew. However, in the early days we needed Blair. He served as a kind of emotional garbage dump into which we could deposit our shared frustrations.

“There came a point when Blair privately decided to withdraw and became passive. During this time we made Blake, the other white male in our group, the focus of our anger. We accused him of being a wimp and not standing up to the other groups when they made demands on us, the very

issue that had troubled Blair about all our behavior. For a while we Elite women blamed Blake for every thing that had gone wrong, acting as if he had unilaterally made all our decisions. We flung expletive after expletive at Blake.

“Blair was relieved not to be the target of our anger for once. Had he tried to interrupt he'd have taken the brunt of it again. At the peak of the rage one of us argued *the only solution is to expel Blake from the Elites*. For a while it looked like this might happen. Then the one black man in our group moved to defend Blake. His move had a chilling effect on us and showed us women that we were the ones who were furious and were dumping our anger on the white men. Once it looked like we could have a male-female fight in our group I backed off. That was the last thing I wanted. However the emotion in our group was like a hurricane whose fury was yet to be released.

“During the second day someone mentioned the names of the Middle men and we Elite women exploded. We began by assassinating the characters of these men. Some of our attributions were extreme, such as *those guys and Hitler were cut from the same cloth* and *I never realized that Elites had to protect society from little dictators who want to take control*. We had harbored similar thoughts of Blair. Could it be that we were seeing in the Middles things we felt about ourselves?

“When this emotional outburst ended we realized that our group was about to change in an unexpected way. Blair suddenly got up and left our group. We felt great relief.

“We eventually came to understand what happened to Blair. Shaken and disillusioned, he was sure the Middles would never accept him but he also did not want to be with them. He wanted to escape the struggles of the Farm and longed for a new resting place. The homeless shelter was his best option, so he went to ask the Outs if he could join them. He expected to be rejected. He did not see that having nothing and being eminently rejectable made him an Out by definition. He had no home, and hence no one could label him as *not homeless*. The Outs' only choice was whether to

welcome him into the shelter. Such irony: as an Elite, Blair owned the shelter; now he doubted if he'd be allowed to lay his head in it.

“With obvious pain, he told the Outs *I've left the Elites and want to ask if you'd let me be a part of your group.* The Outs were shocked but did not show it. Quickly one of them said, *Before you enter please take your shoes off. To belong to us you must first humble yourself, and how we do this is to treat this grungy old floor as sacred ground.* Without a word Blair took off his shoes and sat on the floor. He had been in this shelter many times but had never removed his shoes. He had never considered that his snow-clad boots might make their bed, the worn-out carpet, so wet it would be impossible to sleep on. Nor had he ever sat on this floor, felt the cold of the concrete slab on his buttocks, or looked to human interaction to warm himself. One of the Outs told Blair that he had to understand that the physical conditions in the shelter were harsh and they had strict rules to help them cope. If he joined them he had to respect and abide by the Outs' rules.

“Blair was comforted to know there were rules to live by and clear consequences for his actions. It had frustrated him that the Elites acted as if they could do as they chose and experience no repercussions. It had felt tyrannical to have no rules, and was liberating to be forced to respect some standards. Right away he recognized the Outs knew how to regulate their own behavior, something the Elites had yet to learn. The constraints and consequences had a calming effect on him. Blair told the group he had locked his possessions in an Elite car because he did not want to be different from the Outs. One of them gave him a little sermon: *Blair, you'll always be different because you were an Elite and did not walk the same path as us to reach Outness. But you don't have to be the same as us to be an Out. We are all different! All Outs had a similar fate but our pain is not the same. There is no rule saying our suffering must be identical. If you are in pain and have no place to stay, then you are homeless! Outs don't determine who is out. Others define that.*



“The Outs asked Blair to leave their shelter for a few minutes so that they could make their decision. They then proceeded with their round robin decision-making process. Several issues were raised. While it seemed dangerous to let Blair join them, they decided they were strong enough to deal with any risk his presence posed. The main issue was that they had no right to turn anyone away from the shelter. It was public space provided for all who needed it. They were its current occupants, but that gave them no right to stop Blair from seeking refuge there.

“These ten Outs had traveled a long way from the Elite world they had left behind and to which they would return after the Lab. In the future many of them in regular life would make a mark on the world. However at the Farm they embraced the view that *we are all but temporary occupants of this earth and during the time we are here our task is to be faithful stewards of all we have been given. To fight over who actually owns this land would be as silly as two fleas on the back of an elephant arguing over who owns the elephant.*<sup>ii</sup>

“The Outs saw themselves as living in an abundant world that had apportioned a little of its wealth to them which they should share with all in need. They unanimously welcomed Blair as a full member of their shelter group. But they cautioned him: *You have a lot of information that would be useful if we got in a fight with the Elites. However we don't want you to say anything about what the Elites are planning. If you betray them that would compromise your integrity. If we asked you to compromise your integrity, we'd be inviting you to do something we would not do to ourselves. Please just share whatever you choose about your experience to date. That way the integrity of every one will be maintained.*

“This was hard for Blair to hear. They had welcomed him and said, *it is important to US that YOU preserve your integrity.* Blair, a despised Elite, was being offered a warm embrace. That took his breath away. He had never known what it felt like to be unconditionally accepted. He thanked

them, but Blair's pent up emotion overwhelmed him. The Outs were understanding and patient. When he regained his composure he asked, *What is your strategy? I want to join in.* They roared with laughter: *Our strategy is to never have a strategy. Right now we are going to play soccer. Please join us. Being Out is tough work and we must play to preserve our sanity.*

### **Reinventing Society, Soviet Style**

While the Elites and Middles lost focus the Outs were feeling increasingly potent. The fact that Blair, an Elite, had joined them fuelled a playful fantasy. *Since we are the haven for all the discontents that don't fit in any more, in time we'll rule the world because they'll all be part of us.* This statement started as a court-jester type joke. However the whole of the Farm society had grown so weak, the homeless group was its strongest component.

The final afternoon, the Outs allowed themselves to be pulled into a power game that they regretted. It started with a serious suggestion in response to an authentic question. The Elites wanted to know how the Outs had built such a sense of solidarity. They responded, "the best way to learn that is to walk a mile in our shoes." The Elites asked, "How could we do that?" The Outs glibly replied, "Come and eat sandwiches with us and sleep in our shelter." This was not meant to be taken seriously. No Out wanted the *haves* sleeping on the floor with them. But the Elites said "OK, we will join you in the shelter for the night!" Before the Outs could stop it, a new movement had begun, one the Outs found to be sickening: *let's empathize with the down-trodden!* In a flash they had the Elites' syrupy empathy, and felt sickened by it. The Outs just wanted to be left alone. Soon all remaining Elite and Middle meals that had already been paid for were canceled and in their place extra peanut butter and jelly sandwiches were ordered for all. And twenty-four people prepared to cram themselves for a night into a shelter that could accommodate no more than twelve.

The Outs won a moral victory, but the *haves* were treating it like a *one-night stand*, an evening

field trip, an opportunity to camp out with the homeless. For the Outs, having the Elites and Middles walking into, around and through their inner sanctum felt debasing.

## Chapter 4

### DANCING WITH SHADOWS

#### On Reflection

Upon the conclusion of the Lab at Fellowship Farm the participants and staff spent two days reviewing what had transpired over the previous 60 hours. We explored what had happened in relationships among the three groups, what had gone on within each group, and ultimately what had been activated inside each person. We soon realized there had been *Power Labs* occurring at three different levels. First, there was the system-as-a-whole Lab, defined by the tussles **among the Elites, the Middles and the Outs**. However, within the ranks of these three groups there had also been a constant struggle between people who occupied positions of *power, powerlessness* or *caught in the middle*. So, a second set of Labs were those that had taken place **inside each group**. Then there were the *Power Labs* raging **within each participant**, as each tried to manage the part of the self that felt powerful, the part that felt powerless, and the part that was trapped in the psychological void between these internal polarities.

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<sup>i</sup> For a full description of another retreat similar to Beacon Hill, see the Montville section of Smith, Kenwyn K. (1982) *Groups in Conflict: Prisons in Disguise*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

<sup>ii</sup> From the movie "Crocodile Dundee" when Mick Dundee explains how the Australian indigenous First Peoples view themselves as just temporary stewards of the land they occupy.