

# Dirty Yeti

Spokane's DIY House

Taylor Weech

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Neither the fire marshal nor the police have ever paid a visit to the Dirty Yeti. It's a small house in Spokane, Wash. which has hosted shows for local bands and a variety of musicians and artists on tour, travelers from around the world, has been a kitchen and pantry for the local Food Not Bombs, and a zine publishing and workshop space alongside its rotating cast of permanent residents.

Located in Spokane's Peaceful Valley neighborhood, it is part of a small and constantly shifting network of community houses where DIY culture thrives outside the funded art and nonprofit worlds. It's tucked almost directly beneath a looming concrete bridge—its traffic hushed to an ocean-like white noise 150 feet below the road—and a

three-minute walk to the banks of the Spokane River below its falls. No one remembers exactly where the name came from.

When my sister Ryan and I moved in, we weren't looking to create a communal space. As it evolved, we learned the do's and don'ts of inviting strangers and friends to share their time and talents with us and about the balance necessary to live together in a functional and meaningful way.

THE FUSION OF ART, COMMUNITY BUILDING, AND EDUCATION at the house was an inadvertent case study that I used as a lens to develop my political and social ideas, learning that cooperation without coercion is possible and that it takes hard work. As the economic and social structures that hold together the individualistic culture of the U.S. begin to show their weaknesses more dramatically, the young people involved in some of these scenes gives a lot of hope for a different type of culture and future.

Ryan Weech, a Spokane artist and writer, says, "The whole spirit of DIY or collectivism is being autonomous and self-sufficient. It's knowing how to create things, provide, skill share, teach. All those things will be necessary when the systems that are in place inevitably collapse."

Sharing space, food, and belongings with strangers outside of a natural disaster or emergency situation is uncommon for the relatively insulated communities in the U.S. culture.

FORMER DIRTY YETI HOUSEMATE, Alyx Franz, a Spokane poet and arts organizer, says, "Family and others sometimes just don't get it, don't see the meaning in it, don't understand why you are sacrificing your own space and sharing personal items and food with a bunch of people. Opening up, being honest with yourself and those around you and really admitting to your own vulnerability so you can grow with those around you and help them grow seem daunting to someone who has never thought any of that could be beneficial to them."

Trust in strangers and sharing are two of the central ideas of creating safe, community space. The artistic exchange taking place in the house was amplified when we extended an open invitation—crash for free on our couch or floor through Couchsurfers, the on-line service connecting global travelers.

Ryan describes it as "a symbiotic relationship between people who were hanging around and new blood that would come with great ideas at a time our own community was constantly feeding its own fire with ideas." Touring musicians represent a large proportion of guests in the house. Bands and travelers from different parts of the U.S. and Canada, France, England, Japan mixed with our next door neighbors and shared breakfasts that the housemates mention as favorite events where ideas were hatched and discussed.

In any family, nuclear or not, the consistent domestic problem is dishes. It's a problem that can be solved in a variety of ways, some (rotation by meal or day of week) more egalitarian than others (mom does the dishes, because she's mom). When a house is shared by a rotating cast of people with varied opinions on how a house ought to be run and with no societal enforced hierarchy in place for creating rules, the process of deciding how to live together gains layers and nuance. Former Dirty Yeti housemates mention the same basic concepts about the potential pitfalls of living among other humans: boundaries and communication.

Jason Wolpert, from the band Bad Hex, says, "It's important to meet consistently and express frustrations, and be open to listen to others. I've lived in community spaces where that happens, and where it doesn't. The former usually ends in friendships and lasting relationships, while the latter makes a very unhealthy living situation."

Alyx says, "You set and keep boundaries through communication. Period. If you don't communicate directly to those living with you about concerns or conflicts, things are not going to change and you won't feel comfortable."

Opinion varies widely regarding what types of rules, agreements, and processes should be used by individuals living together through the anarchist, punk, DIY, and hippie subcultures where communal living is popular. Respect for one another and our surroundings is crucial to any successful collective and necessary for individual development as well.

This message was consistently reinforced not only by the full time tenants at the house, but by the community that gathered around it and many of the artists who performed there.

Sixty people crammed into a house together, hot, loud, and possibly inebriated, were being greeted with messages of the importance of diversity, resistance, and mutuality that are suppressed in the dominant culture. Touring bands would bring political and personal zines to distribute alongside their t-shirts and albums.

Radical poets and announcements from the community shared the mic with bands and solo artists. Writers and artists who met at and lived in the house spread the word about the thriving and growing scene in Spokane houses in the now-defunct, “Get the Fuck Up Off that Couch” zine.

Without shouting, “Anarchy!” from the rooftop, we still planted important seeds in the minds of the young people who gathered there. A new wave of young people and houses are cropping up and expanding the energy of DIY in Spokane and in communities all around the country. Very few of them explicitly state a group ideology, but aspects of the lifestyle promoted and enabled by their existence are inherently anarchistic.

According to Ryan, “There weren’t a lot of armchair philosopher types waxing poetic about anarchist theory and that kind of thing, but the crux of the DIY scene in general, to a large extent, anarchism plays a role in the foundation and process.”

“The term DIY, do it yourself;” he says, “there’s so much implied in that. Do it your own way, think for yourself. Those are pretty anarchistic ideas.”

Taylor Weech is an independent journalist and activist living in Spokane, Wash., who hosts a weekly radio program, Praxis, heard on KYRS-FM ([kyrs.org](http://kyrs.org)) and podcast at [praxisradio509.podomatic.com](http://praxisradio509.podomatic.com). She can be contacted through her blog of travels and commentary at [truthscout.net](http://truthscout.net).

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