

Social ecology pioneers



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARA AND ROBB

The Love Bus

Inside the Love Bus just a month after the project was started to create a new home.

Marc Tonglen
Nederland

The Nederland area has always given the impression of being environmentally progressive with conservationist values. Recently, a family has moved back to town that is ready to push the edge of our comfort zone with regard to how we may best live in connection to ourselves, the earth, each other and the natural environment. Cara Judea Alhadeff, PhD and Rob Menagerie are a climate action duo, and along with their young son Zazu. They are focusing on living a life of social permaculture, focusing on the inherent connection that exists between people, economies and governing structures – and creating the conditions for humans to flourish on a societal level and to develop beneficial relationships with the ecosystems which sustain us. They have returned to the Nederland area so as to engage the community in how we can do the same.

Cara and Rob traveled back to the region on the home they built on wheels while living out in Appalachia. The Love Bus is a masterful piece of art thanks

to Rob's fine woodworking skills. As Cara explains, "How we build our home using only repurposed materials parallels how we build our sense of belonging. Our home demonstrates our deepest sense of self and our deepest sense of community." She continues, "This includes how we educate and raise Zazu through creative-waste living – everyday choices that echo our deepest ecological and social justice values. Our social permaculture-based homeschool program weaves together human rights and ecological resilience within a cross-cultural framework. Our home reflects all of this as a shared artistic practice."

The family trio is also focused on raising awareness around Petroleum Parenting. As Cara tells it, "We're always using our children as a rationale or excuse: 'The children are our future!' Yet we're not educating them in a way that reflects a deep change and a deep respect for the planet and one another, and that's heartbreaking to me. We have this infrastructure (Wild Bear for example) but where are all the families? Kids are

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Social ecology pioneers return to Nederland



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Creating the home of their dreams

Above, left; Couple collaborators, Dr. Cara Judea Alhadeff, artist and author, and Rob Menagerie, biodiversity scientist, built and live in the LoveBus, their school bus-converted tiny home constructed using only repurposed materials. Above, right; Rob's hand-crafted furniture is made from sustainably-harvested local hardwoods and reclaimed resources.

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being forced online because of Covid and the school system is now feeding into our technological addictions. We are digging ourselves deeper and deeper into a world of disconnect from each other and our natural ecology. We must educate the kids so that they understand what this is all about. How do we bring all of this to the surface in a way that isn't threatening and doesn't create more anxiety? This is about our interconnectedness and how we raise our kids.

"We have all these ingrained habits in this culture that we take for granted that compound the system of convenience culture. How do we actively not do that on an individual and collective level? The answer is really tangible, yet it's also a lot of work if we're doing it on our own. That's why community involvement and changes to public infrastructure is critical.

"If there are parents who don't want to participate in screen culture, big pharma, car culture, then it's time we come together to have the hard conversations.

It's time that we take risks and step out of the familiar, in terms of the creative, cultural and spiritual aspects of our community and society.

"It's time that we really check in with ourselves about our habituated obedience; obedience to a norm that is obviously killing us. How are people actually doing right now in their daily lives with their children, work choices, education choices, transportation choices, entertainment choices, food choices, etc? These are the conversations that must be had. It means not just being green washed or using the green economy as an excuse. It's time to move beyond saying we're progressive liberals and into a time where we are actually making different choices. Choices that are always in the right relation to industry and infrastructure so that self and corporate accountability always go hand in hand."

As Menagerie chimes in, "Nederland is a small enough community, so how do we take actions collectively? How do we transform the individual into the collective? How do we create a



movement? It includes our children, our homes, our lifestyle. How many of us are actually in it from the moment we wake up in the morning to the time we go to sleep? The relationships we have with our body and the earth body is the most integral aspect in our daily lives." He continues on to speak about greenwashing. "The more stuff you have, the more you have to take care of. The more you have to work to maintain it and replace it. That plays into the greenwashing that's going on in our society. For instance, replacing petroleum energy consumption with wind farms – these turbines cost one million dollars each and utilize a lot of resources spawned from petroleum energy. If we consume the same amount, that's not going to buy us any time. There has to be a reduction in our consumption and a shift in the way we look at our resources and even ourselves."

With all of this in mind, Alhadeff and Menagerie are looking forward to sharing more on their life of social permaculture with the local community. In 2019, Cara published a book entitled *Zazu Dreams* – A story about racial equity and ecological consciousness in relation to human rights. As world renowned author Dr. Henry Giroux explains, "*Zazu Dreams* reclaims the power of language

as both a poetic intervention into politics and storytelling and as a powerful force for reclaiming the radical imagination. *Zazu Dreams* moves across disciplinary borders, collapses genres, unsettles how we think about the planet and the need to keep it going, and inspires and energizes a sense of individual and social agency and collective hope as it unfolds. This is a brilliant book whose relevance cuts across generations, merges the space between adult and child, and gives the poetic, as a force for struggle and hope, a new and urgent political register."

Cara and Rob are now planning to hold social justice reading and action groups around the material presented in *Zazu Dreams* and its interdisciplinary approach to social permaculture and climate action, combining academics, intergenerational education and activism to solve some of the most pressing issues that face us today. For more information, logon to www.zazudreams.com and carajudea.com. For direct contact and to set up a reading and action group of your own, please email Cara Alhadeff, PhD, at Cara@Carajudea.com and Rob Menagerie at Menageriewoodworking@gmail.com.

Is the Nederland community ready to heed the call?