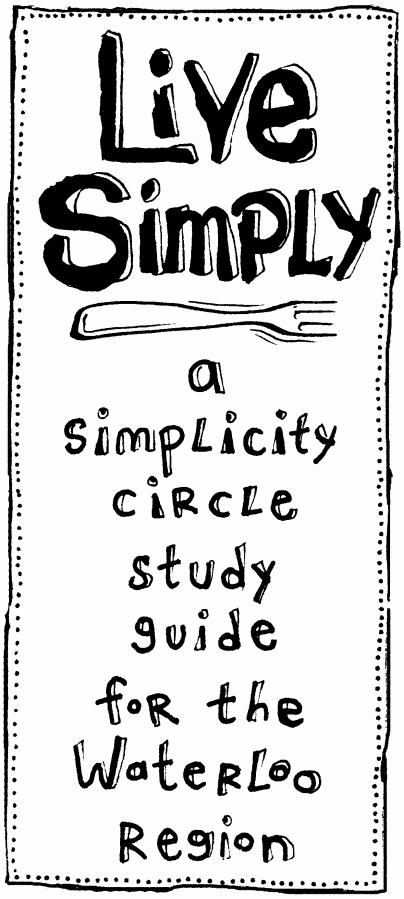

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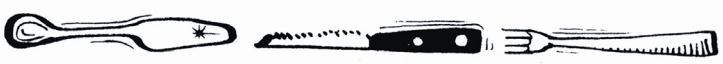

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We thank the Waterloo Region Catholic Community Foundation for their support in producing this study guide.

Working Centre Publications
2000

Welcome to the Simplicity Circle Study Guide for the Waterloo Region! The Working Centre and the Live Simply Project hope that this guide will facilitate the practice of simple, healthful and sustainable living.

This study guide helps a small number of people (6-10) to work and learn together without need of outside resources or leaders. This guide provides all necessary information to start a circle of your own, including practical organizational tips, facilitation skills, and healthy conversation habits.

It is intended to support people interested in learning more about voluntary simplicity and putting it into practice in their own lives. Divided into ten weekly sessions, the guide provides structure and focus for discussion, background information on issues, and offers local resources and examples. The texts, from both international and local authors, illustrate the diverse range of lifestyles and concerns within the simplicity movement.

The Working Centre

> … is excited to sponsor the publication of this simplicity circle study guide. Sustainable living is a way of consciously walking gently on the land around you. It finds its expression in multiple ways. An important part of this is the ability to produce things for yourself with others, to create meaningful community, to make time for reflection, and to consider alternatives to consumerism. This guide has been skillfully designed to help groups and individuals begin or deepen their commitment to this journey. Enjoy!

Table of Contents

Beginnings

Simple living is an idea, a practice, and a growing movement. It is an approach to living that asks each individual to examine their lives and consider the consequences of their choices. Do you feel satisfied with your life? Are you spending your days in activities that you enjoy and have meaning to you? Does your daily activity reflect your goals and values? What impact does your lifestyle have on you, your family, others, the planet?

In order to reflect on what matters most, it helps to step back - even a little - from consumer society. The North American consumer culture tells us that more is better and that bigger is best. There is a great emphasis on spending and material goods as "the answer" (what is the question?). We need to withdraw from the continual pressure to meet external artificial social standards in order to consider our own lives.

Simple living becomes a process of resistance and reflection: resisting the call to consumption so that we may reflect on our own values and purpose.

As an idea, simple living suggests that the good life is not to be found in an endless stream of material possessions, social status, or high incomes; the good life arises out of careful and caring involvement with people, places, and the planet. By taking care of what we have, living within limits, and sharing ourselves and our stuff with others, we can live a life of integrity.

As a practice, to simplify is to reduce to essentials, to streamline, and to clarify. People can reduce expenses, improve their quality of life, and reduce their impact on the earth and other people. Actions that lead to a healthier lifestyle often benefit your community as well - for example, biking to work improves your health while reducing air pollution. Simple living is about finding meaningful work - having joy and meaning in our lives. It means to live more directly, more in connection. Voluntary simplicity is about building relationships, not only with loved ones, but with neighbours and neighbourhoods, and with the processes that sustain us - food, air, shelter, water.

Finally, simple living is also a growing movement. As long as people view simplicity as a purely individual choice, simple living will not flourish. Today, more than ever, we need social and political support to make a successful and lasting transition to a simpler life. We need to redesign our cities, improve our social supports, clean up the environment, and create a sustainable economy. Transforming the way we live to a more healthy, joyful, sustainable path requires the power of a grassroots movement. Networks of simplicity circles can be part of that movement.

The Origins of Simplicity

The call to the simple life has been around throughout most of western history, although the strength of the movement has waxed and waned. Living a direct, meaningful life has been part of most major religions in one way or another. In the Christian tradition, Quakers, Mennonites, and the Amish are the most visible call to living a plain life in order to focus on the greater glory of God. They reject much of modern technology because it interferes with community strength - machines that replace workers also replace working together - intimate relationships are lost.

The great spiritual teachers of Asia - Buddha, Lao-tse, Confucius - all stressed that material self-control was essential to living well. Lao-tse said, "he who knows he has enough is rich".

Pre-colonial Native American societies consciously chose to live within the limits of nature, so that while their daily living may have appeared meagre to colonialists, it was actually based on a deep knowledge of ecological systems. Early Native Americans did not have the same notion of private property, villages might work out agreements over access, but not ownership. One village would have access to a popular fishing spot for a certain period of time, then the next village would use it. Sharing, working together for the common good, was the basis of all social interactions within a community.

In North America, Henry David Thoreau is perhaps the most influential historical figure in the voluntary simplicity movement. Thoreau lived in Concord, Massachusetts in the 1830s. A protégé of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau moved to a small log cabin out of town to "live deliberately", and wrote **Walden** based on his experiences. He was not trying to escape society, indeed he noted that he had more visitors while at the cabin then at any other period in his life. Thoreau wanted to know what he truly needed to live well and to appreciate the beauty of nature. He found he needed very little: "simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail."

Other influential authors have been Richard Gregg, a follower of Ghandi, who coined the term "voluntary simplicity" in 1936. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, wife of Charles Lindbergh, wrote **A Gift From the Sea** in 1955. It was an instant best-seller for women struggling to find meaning in a busy society. Duane Elgin wrote his book **Voluntary Simplicity** - taken from Gregg - in 1981. His work brought the idea of simple living back into the public language. Elgin calls it living a life which is "outwardly simple, inwardly rich".

Interest in simple living developed slowly in the 1980s, but took off in popularity in the nineties. It is strongest in the western United States, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. In Seattle, Janet Luhrs started her newsletter "Simple Living" which led to her book The **Simple Living Guide.** Vicki Robin, author of the best selling **Your Money or Your Life,** lives in the Northwest, running her non-profit New Road Map Foundation. Cecile Andrews, who first developed the idea of simplicity study circles, also lives in Seattle, and writes a column on simple living for the Seattle Times. The Simple Living Network operates out of Washington State as well.

The notion of living simply in order to live well has a long history. Simplicity takes on a new urgency in this new century, as we struggle to understand a radically new world.

Study Circles

Study circles are a form of democratic participatory education. Small groups of people voluntarily gather together to discuss and examine important issues, or learn a new skill, or participate in an activity. Study circles are especially valuable in engaging people in active citizenship, in their community or even at the national level.

Traditional Native American councils are an example of this kind of participatory engagement in governance. Other Canadian roots are found in the civic and labour movements of the early 1900's as well as the Chautauqua movement of the same period. This phenomenon grew out of the Lake Chautauqua Assembly (founded in 1874) and became active in hundreds of communities throughout North America. In Canada, "Chautauquas" went from town to town offering entertainment and education. People could attend lectures and then enroll in home study circles discussing public issues. Today, in Canada, study circles are used by literacy groups to encourage the participation of learners in citizenship activities. The Democracy Education

Network based in Ottawa uses study circles as a way to ensure direct citizen input into policy making at the national level.

The modern study circle is highly developed in Sweden where one in five adults are reported to participate in at least one circle. Sweden calls itself "a study circle democracy" and the government actively supports circles through subsidies to national organizations. Study circle programs are growing rapidly around the world through educational institutions, farm associations, literacy projects, community groups, churches and neighbourhoods.

A study circle progresses from personal experience (how does the issue affect me?) to a broader perspective (what are others saying about the issue?) to action (what can we do?).

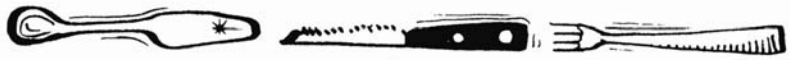
Models of study circles vary. Most study circles depend on trained facilitators to lead the group in discussion. Many circles meet for only a few hours around a very specific issue; others meet over a period of months. Simplicity circles don't use outside facilitators, preferring to rotate co-ordination of discussion among members.

Study materials can consist of a few carefully selected discussion questions, articles, books, videos or in-depth original material. Each study circle is different, depending on the issue and the participants.

Learning comes from the participants' involvement in the discussion and the study materials. Cooperation, participation, and respect are stressed so that the group can capitalize on the experience and wisdom of all its members. All viewpoints are taken seriously and each member has an equal opportunity to participate. The goal is to deepen understanding of an issue and awareness of the values that underlie opinions.

Study circles are a type of popular education. Developed by Paulo Friere in the nineteen sixties in Brazil, popular education recognized that people learn best from their own experiences. Friere argued that in many cases there was no need for "experts of knowledge" as people only needed to be taught the skills to draw out insight from their own experience. Friere believed that people working together were capable of creating new ideas and insights. He viewed education as a collective process: where everyone teaches and everyone learns.

Popular education has several attributes: it begins with the concrete experience of the learners, requires a high level of participation, is an on-going process (doesn't end when the meeting ends), and leads to action for change. It stresses the creation of new knowledge, creates a space for reflection, and strengthens people's ability to work together. Simplicity circles are one form of popular education.



Voluntary Simplicity and Study Circles

Bringing together simple living and study circles is the brainchild of Cecile Andrews. Andrews, who is a newspaper columnist on simple living for the *Seattle Times*, as well as a community educator, realized that study circles were the most appropriate way for people to successfully simplify their lives. People trying to change their lifestyles - even in small ways - need support from like-minded folk. It is very hard to change habits, especially with the pressures of mainstream consumerism. Simplicity circles provide a space to develop our knowledge of the rationale behind simple living, and a community to support our development.

Simplicity circles model the sense of community and the behaviours that best exemplify simple living. Circles begin with people talking from their own experience, telling their own stories, rather than listening to an "expert". In circles, we are the "experts" of our own lives. By allowing time for reflection, encouraging conversation rather than debate, creating space for new ideas, and supporting each other's actions, simplicity

circles can be transformative.

Andrews has found that simplicity circles have been tremendous sources of inspiration for members. Circles meet our need to find our own path, our need to be part of a community, and our need to be connected. As an active and democratic learning process, circles also allow people to learn in a meaningful way. Not only do they develop their own understanding of an issue, but they have the opportunity to take action as well.

Cecile Andrews wrote **The Circle of Simplicity** to encourage people to establish their own study circles. It provides a model for simplicity circles. She recently founded a non-profit organization, *Seeds of Simplicity*, which supports the development of simplicity circles. *Seeds of Simplicity* provides educational materials on simple living and organizes conferences building the voluntary simplicity movement.

The Simplicity Study Guide for Waterloo Region

The Simplicity Circle Study Guide for Waterloo Region is based on Andrew's work but works from a Canadian perspective. Many of the essays are by local authors, reflecting the unique aspects of living sustainably in this particular place. We have attempted to include stories from all sides, from people with secure incomes voluntarily slowing down to people forced through circumstances into low- income lifestyles. All have found meaning in a simpler life.

The people of this region are searching for a better way of living, according to a survey done by The Record in January 2000. In this new century, local citizens hope that our society becomes less success-oriented, less dependent on technology, more compassionate towards those in poverty, and allows us to have more time for one another. Simple living can help people realize this vision of a better life.

This guide attempts to localize voluntary simplicity. It is only when we begin to live "in place" - making connections with neighbours, taking care of our local ecology, supporting small business's - that we can create a thriving community where who you are matters more than what you own. Getting involved with community organizations, participating in municipal decision making, even helping out your neighbour, these are actions that can make a tremendous difference.

A societal shift to simple living will take time. It is a tremendous challenge to learn how to live co-operatively, inter-dependently, with self-restraint, and with the earth. Living simply allows us to take small steps – changing the way we live our daily lives in order to change how we understand the world. It empowers us to take back control over our lives.

Seeking a simple life forces people to ask "what matters?" It brings us back to the knowledge that our daily actions have value; that the ordinary is sacred.

Participating in a Simplicity Circle

All sessions follow the same general format. Each session has a theme, to be explored through reflection, personal stories, articles, and occasionally exercises. This is not a discussion course. The text provides additional points of view and/or new information. Discussion should arise out of personal experience and move into the larger context. Each week ends with an action commitment - each member taking a small step to simplify their life. Each theme is accompanied by information on resources, both national and local.

The questions posed in each session are guidelines only. The group or the facilitator may wish to take the conversation in a different direction.

Organizing a Simplicity Circle

If you are not part of an existing group such as a women's group or church group, it can be a challenge to find interested people. Circles need at least six people for lively discussion. A core group of two or three may find more people through community centres, churches, or neighbourhood advertising. The Working Centre, the Live Simply Project, or Seeds of Simplicity may be able to help you find people.

Meeting Place and Time

The best option may be to meet in member's homes, either by having a regular host, or rotating homes. If members do not know each other well, an outside meeting place may be a better choice.

Set a regular date and time and stick to it. This guide provides ten weekly sessions. After ten weeks, the group can decide on their next step. Many groups continue meeting on a bi-weekly or monthly basis.

Meetings generally run for 2 hours.

Hospitality

Some simplicity circles feel that the hospitality of sharing food and drink is essential. Other groups feel that it is extra work. Have refreshments at the first meeting and then decide whether or not to continue.

The host, who is offering their home and/or food, and the facilitator should be kept as separate roles (otherwise the facilitator is out of the room making tea when they should be paying attention to the discussion!).

Keeping a Journal

It is helpful if each person has a journal or notebook to record their experiences and ideas during the simplicity circle. It can just be a place to jot brief notes and do the exercises, or it can be part of a greater journal of your experiences. Writing or drawing can be very helpful in understanding your movement towards a simpler life.

The Format

Each gathering of the circle follows a general format, with variations depending on the topic and type, if any, exercises being conducted. Keeping to the format helps establish people's comfort with each other and helps maintain focus. Holding the quiet moments of reflection, or breaking into small groups when there are only six people, may feel strange, but will improve the depth of discussion.

As the members of the circle get to know each other and become more comfortable with working within the study circle model, the format is less important. Please modify it to suit the needs of the group.

All times are guidelines only.

Opening.
The facilitator welcomes the group and begins the meeting.

Check-in on Action Commitments.
Quick and informal talking about success of last week's action commitments. 10 minutes.

Week's Theme.
The facilitator introduces the theme, using the guide. Remind people of key questions for this session.

Reflection Time.
A period of silence, while people focus and reflect on the questions of the week. People can use journals to jot down responses or clarify responses had when reading material. This is an important part of the circle, don't skip it. 3-5 minutes.

Go-round.
This first go-round should always start from people's own experience – the connection between the theme and people's circumstances. What resonated? No more than 3 minutes each.

Patterns.
After everyone has spoken, facilitator should pick out key points or areas of common concern. This should be brief and concise - reflecting back the essence of the go-round. 2-3 minutes.

Open Discussion.
The conversation is now open to general discussion. People speak to connections with other people, connections to articles or other ideas. 25 minutes.

Small Group Discussions.
Break into groups of two or three. This brings the conversations back to the concrete. Given all this new information, what changes do people want to make around this issue? What small steps can be taken that simplify life? What new information is needed? 15 minutes.

Whole Group Discussion.
This allows everyone to hear what the small groups talked about. Information and ideas shared should be summarized. Try not to repeat ideas already offered by others. Patterns in ideas and actions should be noted by facilitator. 15 minutes.

Action Commitments.
A final go-round asks people to offer their action commitment for the next week.

Ending.
Decide on facilitator for following week. People offer brief comments on how the session went.

Homework.
Some weeks ask people to do an activity to prepare for the following week. Some groups may prefer to treat any homework as the action commitment for the week, rather than try to do two things.

Notes on Facilitating

The role of the facilitator or co-ordinator is to stimulate and moderate the evening's discussion. The facilitator steps back a little from the topic to:

- help the circle keep focused
- model positive listening and sharing
- encourage everyone to share
- watch for patterns in conversation and reflect them back
- keep the circle on time

In a simplicity circle, the facilitator position is rotated throughout the group. In the model of "everyone teaches, everyone learns", facilitating an evening gives everyone the chance to practice skills in moderating.

It is very important for the facilitator to begin and end the evening on time, respecting everyone's schedule.

During go-rounds, make sure everyone only takes about three minutes to speak. It might help to have an egg timer or sand glass so that facilitator does not have to insist on the time.

During the discussion, the facilitator asks the evening's questions, identifies key points and encourages everyone's voices. Don't let anyone dominate; try to involve everyone. Remember that a study circle is not a debate but a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.

It is helpful for the facilitator to take notes while people are talking – putting down key words or phrases that appear significant or recur frequently.

If the week includes a practical exercise, the facilitator gives the instructions and tracks time.

Shaping the Discussion

Circles work best if everyone respects and adheres to the following ground rules:

- Speak honestly from your own experience.
- Be open to new ideas.
- Respect other people's choices.
- Look for and applaud common ground, rather then pointing out differences.
- Validate and support other people's positions.
- Question, rather than challenge.
- Control yourself, not others.
- Enjoy!

As Cecile Andrews points out, conversation is a barn raising, not a battle ground. Circle members have come together to explore ideas and find positive actions to take. Everyone has had the experience of conversations about critical or sensitive issues quickly degenerating into argument. We have forgotten how to have a reasoned discussion that opens up and expands everyone's understanding and knowledge. Media has taught us that there are two sides to every issue, when in fact every issue has a variety of angles. Conversations should explore ideas, not define a winner. The goal is not persuasion, but understanding. We all see different facets of an issue; together we may see more clearly.

One of the best ways to discourage attack arguments is to use "go-rounds". "Go-rounds" are just that - going around the room asking each person to speak. This way everyone has a chance to offer a response, everyone knows they will get a chance to speak, and the quieter people are ensured an opportunity. It allows people to relax and actually listen, rather than anticipating an opportunity to jump in. People find it easier to speak out once they have already done so, this ensures there is always a time to speak.

It is important for members of a circle to facilitate their own engagement with the group. Don't expect the co-ordinator of the evening to control the situation, each person should watch the time for themselves. We need to pay attention to how much we talk and how we talk. Are we attacking or dismissing someone else's choice? Are we being honest about our own perspective? Are we giving others the space to speak? Are we comfortable with silence?

Simplicity circles are not intended to convert the group to one way of thinking or doing that will simplify people's lives. Judgement of other people's choices is not acceptable. Each individual knows best how to simplify their own life. Consensus is not required. However, it is possible to find areas of common concern, and to focus on supporting each other in their own choices. Simplicity circles are dialogues, not debates.

Week One: Introductions

The first session is intended to introduce the group to the idea of simple living, the practice of study circles, and to each other. The format is slightly different, with less time for discussion, to ensure that all members understand and accept the study circle model.

Each member should have read the **Beginnings** section of the guide as well as this week's session. Someone in the group should have written out the agenda, ground rules and notes for facilitation on flip chart paper prior to meeting.

The facilitator of the first week needs to be especially well prepared to ensure the evening goes well. S/he should be familiar with the information in the **Beginnings** section and prepared to offer a summary on ground rules, facilitating, and format. If you are meeting in someone's house, it is best if the facilitator is not the host.

This evening is busy, so watch the time carefully (you many want to plan for an extra half hour).

Opening.

Once everyone is settled, welcome everyone to the first gathering of the simplicity circle. Have the agenda posted and let everyone know how the session will proceed. Ask everyone to take a minute to answer the following question. Remind people that keeping a written record of their thoughts will be useful both in and out of the circle. We'll return to goals and expectations in the final session.

1) What are your goals or expectations from this circle?

Go-round.

Each person introduces self and answers the question. This go-round should give each person about 2 minutes each.

Patterns.

After everyone has spoken, including the facilitator (who may want to go first in order to act as a model), the facilitator notes common reasons, goals, and expectations. Allow time for responses.

Circle agreement.

Post chart paper notes (ground rules and facilitator's rules) where everyone can see them. Check to see if everyone has read the **Beginnings** section of this guide.

Make sure everyone understands concept of study circles - that everyone teaches, everyone learns, start from personal experience, and so on. Refer to Andrew's article about simplicity circles.

Check for areas of concern - will people feel comfortable facilitating? Talking from own experience? What can we do to help those with concerns?

Go over role of facilitator - needs to be prepared for session.

Go over ground rules. Check for additions or changes. Ask for acceptance of rules by group.

Go briefly over format - check for understanding, ask for acceptance.

Don't rush through this, it is really important that people understand the ground rules and are comfortable with being responsible for their own interactions with the group. 15 minutes.

Week's Theme.

Today we hope to talk about where we are at in terms of voluntary simplicity. We want to explore what we value about living simply, sharing what we appreciate about a "less is more" lifestyle, encouraging each other to

enjoy it's benefits. But we also need to acknowledge some of the struggles we are experiencing. In the weeks that follow, perhaps new perspectives or information will help make these challenges easier to face.

Reflection.

What are you already doing to simplify your life? What is the most important change you have made? What impact has it had on your life? What is the hardest thing (for you) about trying to live more simply?
Take the time to think quietly and make notes. Leave at least three to five minutes - it may be uncomfortable at first but take the time.

Pairs.

In groups of two share stories with one another. This gives people the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the issues they are dealing with. This is the first opportunity for people to really talk - give people 20 minutes.

Go-Round.

Each person briefly shares the most important change they have already made and their biggest challenge in simplifying their life (three minutes each).

Patterns.

Note any patterns in changes and challenges. 2-3 minutes.

Open Discussion.

Does the simple living movement reflect people's activities and concerns? Do the readings match our sense of simple living? Do people feel they are living "ecologically"? Are we living deliberately? 15 minutes.

Action Commitments.

Choose one step you can take in the next week that will simplify your life. You may end up doing something else, but this starts the process. 5 minutes.

Ending.

Any discussion needed for meeting place, meeting time, refreshments. Find facilitator for next week.
5 minutes.

Homework: Complete Ideal Day Exercise (see Week Two for details).

What is Simple Living?

Walden
Henry David Thoreau

I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual. It is surprising how contented one can be with nothing definite - only a sense of existence. My breath is sweet to me. O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment.

If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance, like flowers and sweet-scented herbs - more elastic, starry, and immortal - that is your success.

Living Deliberately
Janet Luhrs

Simple Living is about living deliberately. That's all. You *choose* your existence rather than sailing through life on automatic pilot. Your existence can be in the woods, in the city, as a carpet cleaner, a doctor, an office manage, a retired person, a single person, a parent of six, a person in his 20s, a person in her 80s. You could have any level of income, but you hang onto a good chunk of your income, whatever it is. Simple living is about having money in the bank and a zero balance on your credit card. If you want to travel, you are conscious enough about your choice that you are willing to give up something else. I've chosen to have kid's science projects, newspapers, and my sister's slippers cluttering the living room rather than living an austere existence. Someone else might like austerity because it brings a sense of peace and order. Either way, we've chosen these things *consciously*... they didn't just "happen". Simple living is about making deliberate, thoughtful choices. The difference is that you are fully aware of why you are living your particular life, and that life is one you have chosen thoughtfully.

Ecological ways of living
Duane Elgin

Elgin calls voluntary simplicity a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich.
Those choosing a simpler life:

- tend to invest time and energy freed up by simpler living in activities with partner children, friends, in getting involved in local community.
- tend to work on aspects of self - physical, emotional, mental, & spiritual.
- tend to feel an intimate connection with the earth and a concern for the way we interact with nature.
- tend to feel a compassionate concern for those in poverty.
- tend to lower their overall level of consumption.
- tend to alter patterns of consumption towards less harmful products and services.
- tend to shift their diet away from highly processed foods to simple and unprocessed.
- tend to reduce undue clutter by giving away seldom used possessions.
- tend to use their consumption politically by choosing ethical products and services.
- tend to recycle.
- tend to pursue a livelihood that has meaning for them and is of value to others.
- tend to develop skills of self-reliance.
- tend to prefer small scale living and working environments that foster community.
- tend to egalitarian relationships.
- tend to appreciate non-verbal communication.
- tend towards holistic health care practices.
- tend to involvement in compassionate causes.
- tend to favour greener transportation choices.

Simplicity
Cecile Andrews

As we work to combat consumerism, my vision for the new millennium is one of giving people a tool that helps them meet their real needs instead of the counterfeit needs of the consumer society. People want joy and aliveness instead of numb-ness and weariness, and the emptiness of their lives drives them to the mall. People need something that rekindles their spirit and gives them a life so full of joy that shopping no longer has any appeal.

The method I have found that helps people most is the study circle - an educational approach that comes to us from Sweden and Denmark, countries that have shown remarkable leadership in creating sustainable societies.

As we are increasingly defined as "consumers," our lives are becoming more and more diminished. Study circles are a way to transform ourselves from consumers to whole beings. Study circles rekindle our spirit - the Latin root of the word study is enthusiasm and zest!

As we work to decrease consumerism, it's not enough to just cry foul. We must help people meet their true needs, their real needs of belonging and caring. We must meet their real needs for acceptance and meaning and community and intellectual stimulation and support.

This is what we get in the study circle, where people help each other simplify their lives. A simplicity circle is a transformative experience. When you are face to face, listening to others, each person becomes real. When you come to know people, you recognize them for their true selves. There's no longer the need to consume in order to "be somebody". You are somebody when you are face to face with a small group of other people.

In simplicity circles, we focus on the personal story, discovering our own truths from our own experience. We take action and try out what we have learned. No more second-hand ideas! We know what we know because we have looked deeply into our own lives and acted.

When you discover your own authentic truths, you are no longer easily manipulated. When you know your own values, values that you have tested, you can't be fooled. You can see clearly, think clearly. The consumer society can no longer bamboozle you.

My dream for the new millennium is having millions of people coming together in circles. From a distance, I can see it as sort of a cosmic folk dance of people joining together, laughing and smiling. The image of a circle is a wonderful one. It's about connection, about completion, about continuity. It teaches that we are connected to the universe only if we are connected to ourselves through integrity, connected to each other through compassion, connected to the plants and animals through caring and concern.

In simplicity study circles, we learn that we are all teachers and students - that we learn from life, from ourselves, from each other, and from the natural world (of which we are a part). We discover, in Thoreau's words, "We are all schoolmasters and our schoolhouse is the universe."

Excerpted with permission from Enough!, the newsletter of the Centre for a New American Dream.

For Further Information…

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Simple Living: The Journal of Voluntary Simplicity
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Seattle, Washington
98103 USA
(quarterly newsletter produced by Janet Luhrs)

www.simpleliving.net
The **Simple Living Network** on the web is an excellent starting point, having a wide variety of articles, resources, organizations, discussion boards, and links to explore.

Seeds of Simplicity
P.O. Box 9955
Glendale, California 91226 USA
www.seedsofsimplicity.org
(focus on simplicity circles)

Study Circles Resource Center
P.O. Box 203 Pomfret, Connecticut
06258 USA
www.studycircles.org

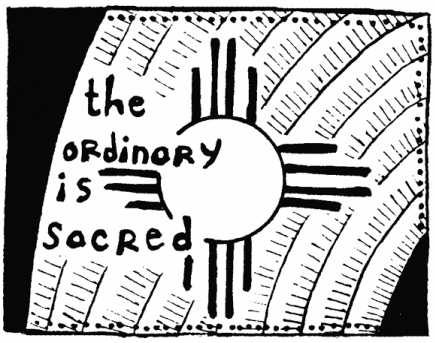
National Adult Literacy Database
Scovil House 703 Brunswick St
Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 1H8
1-800-720-6253
www.nald.ca
Has a package of information on starting and running study circles.

Community Resources

The Live Simply Project
136 Allen St E.
Waterloo Ontario N2J 1J4
(519) 743-2152
Offers talks and workshops on various aspects of simple living, including simplicity circles, parenting and food habits. Produces a newsletter three times a year.

The Working Centre
58 Queen St South
Kitchener Ontario N2G 1V6
(519) 743-1151
Holds an extensive collection of print and video resources on voluntary simplicity, self-employment, and the integration of community and work. Offers a resource centre, a variety of employment services, and community access to tools such as sewing machines and computers. Publishes the *Good Work News* four times a year, offering new perspectives on work and unemployment.

Week Two: The Simple Life



This week we look at our ideal days, the way we would like life to be, in order to discover what we are looking for in simple living. Members should have done the ideal day exercise before the circle and come with notes.

This week asks for two go-rounds, so pay attention to time.

Ideal Day Exercise

This exercise is meant to give you a sense of where you want to be. It will help you understand what you are looking for in simple living.

Close your eyes and take some time to imagine a day in your life that you could live exactly as you like. This is an ordinary every day kind of day, not a vacation or special event, just you living your regular life. Imagine it in as much detail and colour as you can, from the moment you wake up to the time you go to bed. Be as extravagant as you like, throwing in all the luxuries you want.

Write it down, describing the day in as much detail as possible. What did you once you woke up? What did you eat for breakfast? Where are you? Who are you with? What did you do?

Once you have written as much as you can, look it over.

What is the most noticeable aspect of your ideal day? What surprises you?

Once you have considered your ideal day, it is time to pare it down a little. Separate the necessary aspects from the luxuries. What, who, and where is absolutely essential in your day? What would be great, but you could really live without? What does a revised ideal day look like?

Compare to your present daily round. What do you already have in your life? What do you have, perhaps in a different way? What's missing?

(Adapted from Barbara Sher's **Wishcraft**.)

Opening.

Remind people of ground rules. Check to see if everyone was able to do ideal day exercise before meeting.

Check-in on Action Commitments.

Were people able to follow through on an action? (This is not a formal go-round - people can answer or not.) 5 minutes.

Week's Theme.

This week looks more closely at where we are at in living simply. What are our reasons for a simpler life? What do we really want from voluntary simplicity - more time? Less dependence on money? More community? A better world?

Reflection.

Remember a time when you felt you were living simply, as a child or adult. What were you doing? What was the environment like? Who were you with? How did you feel? Was it a brief episode or a particular time in your life? 3 minutes.

Go-round.

Share stories. 10-15 minutes.

Patterns.
Any common elements? Recurring emotions?

Open Discussion.
What makes it hard to live simply in your everyday life? How far removed is your daily life from the time you remembered? Is your memory of a simpler life similar to your ideal day? 20 minutes.

Ideal Day Go-round.
Each person shares their ideal day and reactions to it. This go-round replaces small group discussion, so allow at least five minutes per person. Try to keep general discussion to a minimum until everyone has had a chance to share. 30-40 minutes.

Patterns.
Facilitator notes any common elements -role of work, value of stuff, sense of place.

Open Discussion.
Do ideal days connect to voluntary simplicity? What roles do money, work, time play? What do people already have in their lives? What are people missing? Are members searching for a simpler life, such as Vickery's place in community? Do the ideal days reflect any of the definitions of simple living from Week One? 20 minutes.

Action Commitments.
Commit to a small step that may bring your ideal day closer.

Ending:
Where appropriate, participants should repeat exercise with families. Decide on facilitator for following week. People offer brief comments on how the session went.

> **Homework:** Track your time for the next week. At the end of each day, just before bed, make brief notes about what you spent the day doing. Don't worry about being precise, but give a general figure to each of your activities.

The Search for Simple Living

According to Cecile Andrews, people moving to simplicity are seeking basic human fundamentals that consumer society works against:

- **authenticity** - the ability to actually be ourselves, without worry about image or status or loss of security, be it job or welfare check or whatever.
- **community** - people are social animals, we need each other to survive and be whole.
- **passion** - we need an interest outside of ourselves to feel alive, to focus our attention. It may be something we do to make money or something we do because it makes us feel good.
- **spirituality** - we all need rituals and celebrations that connect to the larger whole.

We can find all these things within a simpler lifestyle.

The following two selections highlight the diversity of people who appreciate living simply. Bender, a well-off artist, lives for a time with the Amish, seeking enlightenment. One man, single and unemployed, is barely surviving. Both find meaning in a simple life, but in different ways. Bender, without romanticizing the Amish, finds inner peace and a way to maintain a balance in an active life. David Vickery finds companionship and service. Both find meaning in living with less. There is no one way to simplify your life, nor is there a single type of person called to it.

Plain and Simple

Sue Bender

The next spring I went back East to the house on Red Dirt Road in Long Island that my husband had designed twenty-five years before. I was coming back in the quiet season, before the onslaught of summer traffic jams, beautiful people, and lines at the supermarket.

The spirit of the Amish was all around.

Unexpectedly, I started cleaning. After twenty-four years and long winters unattended, the house felt neglected. I wrote and cleaned and cleaned and wrote, and somehow the two were connected. I got into corners, emptied cabinets, scrubbed walls, washed windows, polished floors, and loved every minute of it. Far from being a diversion, the housework supported me as I wrote. What do I really need? And out went more and more things. Simpler and simpler.

Stripped down, pared down, the house came alive. Nothing changed and everything changed. Nothing special and everything special.

Taking care of my home was no longer a chore. Like a Zen monk, raking the white pebbles at the temple, I spent seven minutes each morning sweeping the black floor. A meditation.

A friend was horrified. "What are you becoming? An ordinary housewife?"

Could I explain it to her?

I had always devalued Hestia, the peaceful goddess of the hearth. I thought poor, dull Hestia, the ugly duckling goddess, was stuck by the hearth, while my favourites, Athena and Artemis, were out there in the world, slaying dragons.

But when I learned that the Latin word for hearth is focus, something clicked.

Sweeping the floor or doing the dishes is the outer form, the thing to which I attached myself in order to learn. What I had been looking for was the calm and focus I felt when I was with the Amish doing the dishes. It was a state of mind I was after.

No wonder that "way of being" was elusive and fluttery, so hard to grab hold of. My addiction to activity had diverted me from looking inside, fearing the emptiness I would find. Yet, beneath all the frenzy was the very thing, that inner calm I was seeking.

The Amish had found an answer to the question, "How can I live a good life?" They modeled another way to be. Their view of the world is different than mine, so they reached different conclusions about how to live. Their conclusions are not THE WAY, but one way – the way that works for them. Their life is a celebration of the ordinary.

The Amish taught me something about the human costs when old values are cast aside, sacrificed for "success". Now I am ready to ask: "Am I a successful human being, not only a success?"

My task is to simplify and then go deeper, making a commitment to what remains. That's what I've been after. To care and polish what remains till it glows and comes alive from loving care.

Without wanting to admit it to myself, I had hoped that if I could learn the secret of the Amish life of "no frills", it would help me make great art. But their secret is there aren't any secrets. They know there is nothing "out there", just the "timeless present". Through them I am learning not to rush through life in order to get the goodies. Their way of life delivers the goods, and that is quite different.

How they live reflects what they believe. Their life is their art.

But the Amish aren't perfect, though I had seen them for so long with romantic eyes. I couldn't be Amish, and I don't want to be Amish, but I had a chance to observe a way of life that nurtures contentment.

The need to be special and stand out, the need for communality, to be part of the whole, the hunger to belong, to be one among the many – these equally competing, conflicting values are all part of me. All the contradictions are still there. I still feel the pulls. I don't want to go and live on a farm, but I long for a simpler life. To reconcile these seeming opposites, to see them as *both*, not one or the other, is my constant challenge.

The Amish love the Sunshine and Shadow quilt pattern. It shows two sides – the dark and light, spirit and form – and the challenge of bringing the two into a larger unity. It's not a choice between extremes: conformity or freedom, discipline or imagination, acceptance or doubt, humility or a raging ego. It's a balancing act that includes opposites.

It's time to celebrate the life I do have. Piecing together the paradox – making peace with the paradox, to find a balance in some larger sense so

that a life can feel whole – with the pieces I have.

The hardest times have been when it looks as though nothing is happening, or, worse, when it looks as though something is definitely wrong in my life. "It's not working," I say to myself. Then I remember the scrap pile filled with odd pieces of material of those early quilters. Nothing was wasted. Out came those glorious quilts. I have to keep reminding myself that nothing I am doing is wasted time. I may not understand or like what is happening but I can begin to appreciate that the impasse is another marker on the way.

It took me a very long time to discover that I didn't need reasons for doing what I did. I don't have to explain, or convince, or come up with answers for what happened. I went on this journey because I had to. Learning to follow your heart is reason enough.

To follow "a path that has heart", to take it wherever it leads, is not an Amish value, but it is a way I've come to value. I set out on an unfamiliar path toward an unknown conclusion. Although I didn't know it at the time, I was hoping for answers, but I kept finding my way back to the question: **What really matters?**

Excerpted from Plain and Simple.

Meaningful Living

David Vickery

What does living without a conventional job mean to me? In the past four years I've worked about 14 months. I guess I qualify to write something about this.

It certainly isn't an easy life. I've gradually learned that in order to be happy I need to be useful, to occupy my time with activities that help me to grow as a person. I've also discovered that I get my greatest sense of accomplishment from helping others. I'm sure that this is true for most of us, but it's taken me a long time to realize.

When I first came to St. John's Kitchen about four years ago, I was unemployed, in debt, my car was on its last wheels, and I looked and felt burnt out. I was living in a rooming house full of other young men much like myself - disillusioned and frustrated that life could be so empty. When my unemployment cheque ran out, I began living the "welfare" life, waiting for the mailman at the end of each long month. Life is not the word I would use - try "existence".

So what has changed? Today I live in a rooming house next door to the one I started in. I live here by choice - I enjoy living with other people. We've cleaned it up and made it a good place to live. I no longer have (or want) a car. I get around by bicycle when I can, or by foot or by public transport. I live, eat and dress well, by my own standards. Most importantly, I have a sense of direction, a purpose which gives my life meaning and puts a smile on my face.

Very simply, I've learned that the greatest feeling in the world is to be able to share with other people. I have become a part of my community by devoting my time and effort to helping others have a better life. By listening and sharing the joys and sorrows of my neighbours, I have become a part of something much larger than myself. My own problems seem a lot smaller.

What happened? The world didn't change. I did - my attitude adjusted and I became grateful and concerned about something other than myself. I get the feeling that if only we could learn to share, some of the big problems of the world would fade away.

David Vickery is an employment counselor with The Working Centre. Excerpted from Good Work News (October 1995), with permission.

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Sher, Barbara. **Wishcraft**. Random House. New York. 1979.

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Utne Reader
Box 7460
Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0460 USA
www.utne.com
This magazine provides a popular overview of contemporary cultural issues.

Yes! A Journal of Positive Futures
P.O. Box 108180
Bainbridge Island, Washington 98110 USA
www.yesmagazine.org
This magazine offers examples of individuals and groups already living in sustainable ways.

Community Resources

Catholic Family Counselling
70 Weber St West
Kitchener N2H 3Z3
743-6333
Non-denominational counselling for individuals experiencing difficulty with family or social relationships. Offers a stress management program.

Interfaith Pastoral Counselling Centre
Rotary Community Resource Village
151 Frederick Street, 3rd Floor
Kitchener N2H 2M2
743-6781
Offers personal and group counselling services for couples and families on issues such as stress management, divorce, and bereavement.

K-W Counselling Services
Waterloo Town Square
75 King St S 3rd Floor

Waterloo N2J 1P2
884-0000
Offers therapeutic counselling for abuse and dependencies. Also helps adults with developmental challenges and provides family life education.

Lutherwood-CODA Family Life Institute
139 Father David Bauer Drive
Waterloo N2L 6L1
884-1470
Offers workshops on family life, communication, and conflict resolution.

Week Three: You've Got Time

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.
This week we look at the idea of time - is it something we struggle against, always needing more of it, or is it a comfort, offering us a place in the cycle of life?

Reflection.
Describe an experience or period of your life where you didn't worry about time. How do you feel when you have enough time? 3 minutes.

Go-round.
Share stories about positive sense of time. 10-15 minutes.

Patterns.
After everyone has spoken, facilitator should pick out key points or areas of common concern. Are there common attributes to having a sense of enough time?

Open Discussion.
Explore the connections between slowing down and living simply. Looking back on your week of tracking time, where did the time go? Do you feel good about how you use your time? When we have more time, do we live a more conscious life? What are the links between time and relationships? Is Wolfgang Sachs right in arguing that time equals attention? How can we find enough time to do all we want to do? Do we need to do less, make more conscious choices about what we do, as Mostardi did? 20 minutes.

Small Group Discussions.
What can we do to make time intimate again? Are there opportunities to slow down in our daily lives, even for a few minutes? What can we do differently to give more time to the people we love and the activities we enjoy? 30 minutes.

Whole Group Discussion
Share suggestions for changing use of time. What social or cultural forces prevent more people from slowing down? 15 minutes.

Action Commitments.
Focus on finding time for something you don't normally have the time for, or always feel rushed when doing.
Ending. Remind people to bring journals for next week. Choose a facilitator.

Organic Time

Moving towards simple living is often triggered by the dissonance between one's own time and mechanical time. Many people don't feel comfortable in "fast paced" environments (because these situations can be at odds with our internal rhythms) and are made to feel as if they are not high achievers or "winners". Our natural sense of time is connected to organic rhythms that are circadian, lunar, and seasonal.

Time in North American culture is artificially segmented and standardized. The clock divides time into hours, minutes, seconds. With computers, we can even talk about nanoseconds, although

we can never experience them. The use of schedules and agendas define and enclose chunks of future time. Our sense of time has speeded up - we want instantaneous results - even a ten second wait on a computer feels slow. We expect things to happen much more quickly now.

We don't need to learn how to get things done in ever-smaller chunks of time or how to do more things in a day. We need to learn to do less and we need to learn to integrate. An organic sense of time concentrates on the relations between people and the world. Time is connected to intimacy rather than productivity. Intimacy means a sense of knowledge, a connection, a depth of feeling between self and other. By paying attention - giving time - to another person, an activity, a creature, or a place, you are a developing a relationship.

Intimacy can be best developed when your life fits together well. Instead of feeling pulled in thirteen different directions, your life is flowing in one general direction. This requires cutting out things that don't seem to fit, centering your activities in a few places rather than many, having a focus that you are centered on. Rather than doing more, it's about deepening the experiences you are having.

The gift of time creates intimacy. By giving time to yourself, your family, friends, and interests, you are developing knowledge, strengthening bonds, developing yourself. We need time to simply be ourselves in relation to others.

The following articles both describe the value of time. Sachs offers philosophical concerns about time in modern society; Mostardi reflects on how much better she feels when she has more time for herself and her family. Both remind us how little time we have just to relax and "live in the moment."

Rich in Things, Poor in Time

Wolfgang Sachs

A tourist focuses on a most idyllic picture: a man in simple clothes dozing in a fishing boat that has been pulled out of the waves which come rolling up the sandy beach. The camera clicks, the fisherman awakens. The tourist offers him a cigarette and launches into a conversation: "The weather is great, there is plenty of fish, why are you lying around instead of going out and catching more?"

The fisherman replies: "Because I caught enough this morning."

"But just imagine," the tourist says, "you would go out there three or four times a day, bringing home three or four times as much fish! You know what could happen?" The fisherman shakes his head. "After about a year you could buy yourself a motor-boat," says the tourist. "After two years you could buy a second one, and after three years you could have a cutter or two. And just think! One day you might be able to build a freezing plant or a smoke house, you might eventually even get your own helicopter for tracing shoals of fish and guiding your fleet of cutters, or you could acquire your own trucks to ship your fish to the capital, and then . . ."

"And then?" asks the fisherman.

"And then", the tourist continues triumphantly, "you could be calmly sitting at the beachside, dozing in the sun and looking at the beautiful ocean!" The fisherman looks at the tourist: "But that is exactly what I was doing before you came along!"

The story - told by writer Heinrich Ball - plays upon the hopes and fears of the rich. The tourist, upon seeing the lazy fisherman dozing in the sun, remembers his fear of becoming poor, of getting stuck in a situation in which he has no options. At the same time, he instinctively projects the hope of the rich upon the poor. Without thinking twice, he outlines a road map to expand productivity. And at the end holds out a promise that is supposed to give meaning to all these efforts achieving freedom from one's labour and gaining mastery over time.

What makes the anecdote so puzzling is the circular structure of the story; the rich strive to arrive where the poor began. A paradox is offered, which throws up a set of unsettling questions for the affluent. Why all the pains and efforts of development, if the rich attain only what the poor seem to have all along? Or, worse, how come the rich, despite all the hustle and bustle, appear never even to reach the state enjoyed by the poor? For if the tale of development consists in progressively acquiring a wealth of goods to attain a wealth of time, then rich societies today have evidently missed the mark. What went wrong?

In remembrance of time

As is often noted, the economy of time is at the core of any economic action. From Arkwright's Spinning Jenny to Bill Gates' web browser Explorer we know that most of the technology employed for the pursuit of progress is used in the belief that doing more things faster is better than doing few things slower. Indeed, the ability to save time has always been the hallmark of productivity revolutions, which have transformed patterns of production and consumption over the last 200 years.

From the very start, far-sighted men and women saw the reign of freedom rising at the horizon, a realm where toil would finally cease, vastly increasing the ability of people to engage in activities of their own liking. Hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, raising animals in the evening, engaging in literary criticism after dinner. This imaginary day was an ideal not just of the young Karl Marx. But what happened to this utopia? Where has all the time gone?

The use of the automobile can serve as a case in point. From the outset, it was hailed as the ultimate time-saver, dramatically shortening the time it takes to reach a desired destination. But contrary to popular belief, drivers do not spend less time than non-drivers in moving from one place to the other. They travel to more distant destinations. The power of speed is converted to more kilometres on the road. And time saved is reinvested into longer distances. As a consequence, the average German citizen today travels 15,000 km a year as opposed to only 2,000 km in 1900.

Across many sectors - from transport to communications, from production to entertainment - time saved is constantly transformed into greater distances, more appointments, larger outputs and increasing activity. The hours saved are eaten up by

new growth. And, after a while, this expansion generates new pressure for time-saving devices - starting the cycle all over again.

Gigantic gains in productivity have by no means been converted into less work and more time. On the contrary, they have, for the most part, been transformed into new rounds of output and commodities. It is evident that everyone could afford to work just a fraction of today's normal working hours if levels of output had stayed stable over time - just as everyone could afford to spend much less time for all kinds of daily chores if levels of aspiration had not also changed. It is the relentless expansion in output and aspirations that continues to eat up each generation of productivity gains. The utopia of affluence has undercut the utopia of liberation.

Why is there never enough?

The fisherman in our story would be amazed at the never-ending urge for more in already rich societies. After all, he was satisfied with his morning catch and could then afford to rest. The issue is one that has been examined before: John Maynard Keynes, one of the master thinkers of twentieth-century economics, wondered if an exceedingly successful economy would not at some point reach a state of saturation. In his "Essays in Persuasion" he speculated that the imperative of productivity might lose significance under conditions of affluence, as abundance makes it less and less important to allocate means optimally. But rich societies still fail to conform to that expectation. They are hooked upon the principle of non-saturation. Why do they ignore the notion of "enough"?

What matters in such a society is the symbolic power of goods and services; they are less than ever simply vehicles of utility: they serve an expressive function. What counts is what goods say, not what they do. In modern societies goods are means of communication. They constitute a system of "signs" through which a purchaser makes statements about him- or herself. While in the old days goods informed about social status, today they signal allegiance to a particular lifestyle.

Many products have by now been perfected and cannot be developed any further; new buyers can be found only when these goods offer more symbolic capital. Cars that cannot become faster and more comfortable are designed to be technological wonders. Watches that cannot show the time more accurately take on a sportive flair when they become diving watches. Television sets whose images cannot become clearer take on a cinematic effect with wider screens. Designers and advertisers are continually offering consumers new thrills and new identities, while the product's utility is taken for granted.

In such a context, the relationship between consumer and product is shaped mainly by imagination, which is infinitely malleable. Feelings and meanings are anything but stable; their plasticity and ease of obsolescence can be exploited by designers in an unending variety of ways. Imagination, in effect, is an inexhaustible fuel for maintaining a growing supply of goods and services. And for that reason, the expectation that rich societies should one day reach a level of saturation has not come about: when commodities become cultural symbols, there is no end to economic expansion.

Frugality and well-being

Beyond a certain threshold, things can become the thieves of time. Goods have to be chosen, bought, set up, used, experienced, maintained, tidied away, dusted, repaired, stored and disposed of. Likewise, appointments have to be sought, coordinated, agreed upon, put into the diary, maintained, assessed and followed up. Even the most beautiful of objects and the most valuable of interactions gnaw away at our time - the most restricted of all resources. The number of possibilities - goods, services, events - has exploded in affluent societies, but the day in its conservative way continues to be just twenty- four hours long. Scarcity of time is the nemesis of affluence. The rich may have plenty of things, but are poor in time.

In fact, in a multi-option society people do not suffer from a lack but from an excess of opportunities. While well-being is threatened by a shortage of means in the first case, it is threatened by a confusion about goals in the second. The proliferation of options makes it increasingly difficult to know what one wants, to decide what one does not want, and to cherish what one has.

Human well-being has two dimensions: the material and the non-material. Anyone who buys food and prepares dinner has the material satisfaction of filling his or her stomach, and the non-material satisfaction of having enjoyed cooking a particular

cuisine or partaking in good company. This non-material satisfaction requires attention, which means time. The full value of goods and services can only be experienced when they are given attention: they have to be properly used, adequately enjoyed and carefully cultivated. Having too many things makes time for non-material pleasure shrink; an overabundance of options can easily diminish full satisfaction. So poverty of time degrades the richness of goods. In other words, there is a limit to material satisfaction beyond which overall satisfaction is bound to decrease. Frugality, therefore, is a key to well-being.

Indeed, it is often the inability to exercise a certain degree of frugality that is at the core of the problem of time. The art of living requires a sense for the right measure. Less can definitely be more. The modern consumer society continually squanders the wealth of time. In an age of exploding options the ability to focus, which implies the sovereignty of saying no, becomes an important ingredient in creating a richer life. Without that ability, the lament of dramatist Odon von Horvarth may become the universal apology: "I am really an entirely different person; it's just that I never get around to showing it."

It goes without saying that without a wealth of time, there is bound to be less generosity, less compassion, less dedication and less freedom - a sort of modernized poverty which the fisherman innately understood, and the tourist only reluctantly became aware of.

Wolfgang Sachs is with the Wupertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, in Germany. Reprinted from Resurgence magazine.

Reflections on Working Less

Kathy Mostardi

Lacking energy and feeling burnt out in general, I took a leap one year ago and reduced my employment to a four day work week. Now I feel that I have gotten my life back.

Previous to this decision, I had been employed on a full time basis in the social services for ten years. While my work with clients has been fulfilling, the negative economic climate of the past few years has been difficult. Increased demands due to staff cuts, larger caseloads and a multitude of demands have taken a toll. I found myself becoming increasingly drained as each day of the week progressed. It was difficult to find enough time and personal energy for my job much less my personal life: friends, my partner, and personal solitude. I began to feel that I needed to make some permanent changes in my lifestyle - to find a way to "regain" my life and control over it.

Another experience added to my desire for less formal work in my life. Three years ago I took an eight month leave of absence from my job, a kind of sabbatical. My leave of absence gave me a first time experience, since childhood, of having long stretches of unstructured time on my hands. Although difficult at first to adjust to, it was wonderful to find myself with the luxury of living in the moment, rather than always planning, one step ahead of myself. Time seemed to slow down when I didn't plan every moment of it, and even household tasks became pleasurable when not done under pressure. I came to experience myself in a more relaxed, content mode and it was hard to conceive of returning to my former, frequently harried lifestyle.

So for the past several years I have considered making some permanent changes in my employment. My partner and I discussed the feasibility of living with less income and the pros and cons of a reduced work week. We felt that this decision would allow for more relaxed time for ourselves and less pressure around household responsibilities. In addition I hoped to pursue and nurture some long neglected artistic skills. Fortunately my employer was very open to the idea of a reduced work week, and saw my request as benefiting both parties.

I am currently working a four day work week, Tuesday through Friday. I feel as if my life is my own once again. I experience myself differently as I go through each week, having more energy now for myself, and others, and my job. My week is now

divided so that I spend almost as much time at home as I do at my job. The weekend no longer feels like two quick days squeezed in between week after week after week of work, but rather a different place in my life and different way of being, both equally important. Having Mondays off, I began my week giving time to my family and self first. Ironically, I now feel that I have more energy to give to my job when I am there, since I have truly taken time to become rejuvenated.

It is hard to imagine working full time again, though this is clearly the norm in our society. It is even more difficult to imagine how many families manage, with both parents employed full time and children to care for as well. It is my belief, reinforced by personal experience, that the costs of full-time work on the family and personal well-being can be high – and that much is to be gained by working less.

Kathy is a social worker employed in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. Reprinted from the Good Work News (October 1995), with permission.

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Rugak, Lisa Angowski. **Time Off From Work.** John Wiley & Sons. New York. 1994.

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Community Resources

Grand River Conservation Authority
Box 729
Cambridge N1R 5W6
621-2761
Protects and preserves our natural resources. There are 12 conservation areas in the region with a variety of recreational opportunities.

Cambridge Volunteer Bureau
24 Queens Square
Cambridge N1S 1H6
623-0423
Provides information about local volunteer opportunities.

Volunteer Action Centre
68 Queen St N
Kitchener N2H 2H2
742-8610
Provides information on volunteer opportunities. Matches volunteers to charitable agencies needing help.

Week Four: Working for a Living?

Now that you have been meeting for a month, it may be useful to start the session with a reminder of the ground rules. Re-post the rules and gently remind participants that respecting the rules makes for a better conversation. Circles work best when people begin from their own experiences, telling their own stories.

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.
We live at a time when who we are is defined by what we do for a living. Yet so often our work is far removed from the rest of the relationships that form our lives. What does it mean to identify ourselves through our jobs? Do we need to change our understanding of the nature of work? Is our work part of our path of simple living?
Reflection.
Quickly list all the words you associate with work. What emotions do you associate with work? You may define work anyway you choose. Don't think too much - just note the words that come into your head.
Go-round.
Share lists.
Patterns.
Are the words positive or negative? Common feelings?
Open Discussion.
How did people define work? Are we comfortable with thinking about work in a positive light? Do we equate work with drudgery or doing something because we have to? Do people feel trapped the way Correia does - between conscience and reality? Is it possible to re-envision work as Kimbrell's vocation? Is it possible to envision work as something we love to do?

The Perfect Job Exercise
Take 10 minutes to imagine the best possible job for yourself. This is not your ideal day, but something that you do to earn money. What kind of job would you have that you would look forward to everyday? Don't worry about whether this work is useful or meaningful to society. What would you love to do?
What are you doing? What are your major tasks? Where are you? At home or in a high rise office? Travelling? Outdoors? Who would you love to work with? Lots of people? Just a few? Are you part of a team? Do you have a mentor? Are you the boss? Let your imagination soar.
(adapted from Barbara Sher's **I Could Do Anything if I Only Knew What is Was.)**

Go-Round.
People share their ideal jobs.
Discussion.
Why would this work be meaningful to you? Would your life be simpler if you had this work? How does it fit into your ideal day?

Action Commitments.
Choose an action related to work. Do some research on the job you would really love. Spend some reflection time exploring what you really want to do. Do something that would improve your current work situation.
Ending.

> **Homework:** Track your spending for a week. As you go, or at the end of each day, note all your expenses. Where is your money going?

(If you want to continue on with the perfect job exercise at home, spend some time filling in details. Imagine yourself actually doing it or talk to someone else about it. Be more specific about what you actually want to do. Then consider what it is you really like about this job. Is it having control over your time? Is it making something beautiful? Being part of a team? Finding out the essentials can help you view your present job in a new light, or help you evaluate work that might lead to something you love.)

Good Work

Voluntary simplicity assumes that we will find the greatest satisfaction and reward in life when our daily round of activities grows out of the purposes and goals we believe are most important. This includes having work that has some sort of value. Simple living encourages people to re-think their definition of success; perhaps success is not just about job achievement but also about maintaining a balance. Success can mean having time for family as well as work, time to enjoy ourselves and follow our passions.

Canadians are feeling the tension between work and family. In a survey by Chatelaine magazine last year, forty-one percent of respondents felt a lot of stress struggling to balance work and family life. Twenty six percent said family life included care for an aging relative or friend. Most women noted that their education, hobbies, ability to volunteer, and time for themselves were the areas that suffer the most. Many employers are still not supportive of flexible work place practices that give people more options to meet their personal needs. Other research suggests that anyone who works more than forty-one hours a week on a regular basis is more likely to live an unhealthy lifestyle. As a group, they smoke more, drink more, and eat more junk food. Dual-income couples spend twelve minutes a day in conversation.

However, more and more Canadians are less interested in career success at all costs and are searching for a balance. Some are insisting on flexible hours, downshifting, or job-sharing. Others are leaving the corporate world, setting up small businesses or retiring early.

While more and more people are working fifty hour weeks (over twenty-five percent of all workers), more and more people are also struggling to find employment, either unemployed or underemployed. About a quarter of the available work force is searching for jobs, or working part-time but looking for full-time work. This is increasing the gap between rich and poor, creating a culture of inequality and social discontent.

Kimbrell offers us a consideration of the meaning of work in today's culture. Correia describes her struggle to live by her values while working for a large corporation. We need more meaningful work, we need healthier, more balanced workplaces, and we need diverse ways of working.

Breaking the Job Lock

Andrew Kimbrell

The alarm clock explodes with a high-pitched screech. It's 6:30 a.m. – another dreaded Monday. Kids need to be dressed, fed, rushed off to school. Then there's 40 minutes of fighting traffic and the sprint from the parking lot to your workstation. You arrive, breathless, just in the nick of time. Now is the moment to confront the week ahead. As usual you're in overload mode. You seem to be working faster and faster but falling farther behind. What's worse, your unforgiving bosses think everything gets accomplished by magic. But you don't dare do or say anything that might jeopardize your job. (It hurts just to think of those swelling credit card balances.) At the end of the day, when you are drained and dragged out, it's time to endure the long drive home, get dinner ready, and maybe steal a few hours in front of the TV. Then to sleep, and it starts all over again.

Sounds familiar? Despite utopian visions earlier in this century of technology freeing us all from the toil of work, we are now working harder than ever – with little relief in sight. In a recent poll, 88 percent of workers said their jobs require them to work longer (up from 70 percent 20 years ago), and 68 percent complained of having to work at greater speeds (up from 50 percent in 1977). And as if all this were not grim enough, the most discouraging aspect of our jobs is that they seem to accomplish little of lasting value. Studies consistently show that as many as 80 percent of workers in our society feel their jobs, however fast and furious, are "meaningless".

It is a disturbing picture. The "land of opportunity" is fast becoming a nation of stressed-out wage slaves. Yet no one in the American political arena, on the left or on the right, seems to notice what our jobs are doing to us. Everyone from the president on down declares that creating more jobs is our most important goal. Left unspoken are the physical and mental suffering, the powerlessness and meaninglessness, that will be endemic to so many of these "new", often low-paying jobs.

Certainly, a low unemployment rate is not a bad thing, especially for the poor and poorly skilled among us. But more jobs isn't a panacea for our problems. We must pay more attention to the kind and quality of work at which we spend our days, our weeks, our lives. It's not just about jobs, or even well-paying jobs. It's about *meaningful work.* Economists, politicians, union leaders, employers, activists, the media – everyone needs to help create a new vision of how we earn our livelihoods. We need work that is good for body, mind, and spirit; work that sustains family and communities; work that connects us with and helps us protect the natural world.

Re-envisioning Work

An important starting point for any effort to re-envision work is to remember that there is nothing natural or pre-ordained about our modern system of jobs. For most of human history, people worked far differently than we do, usually right at home in the midst of family, community, and nature. Work wasn't separated from the rest of their lives; it wasn't an uninterrupted eight-hour stretch of duty. Many traditional cultures don't even have a word for work, much less wage-based jobs. Indeed, the word *job* in English originally meant a criminal or demeaning action. (We retain this meaning when we call a bank robbery a "bank job".) After the industrial revolution took hold in 18th century England, the first generation of workers felt that wage work was humiliating and undignified. Angry about being driven from their traditional work on the land or in crafts, they applied the word *job* to factory labour as a way of expressing their disgust.

Even today many of us avoid the word *job*, preferring more upscale terms like *occupation* or *career* to describe what we do for 40-plus hours each week. Yet the older meaning of these words also reveals something about the nature of work. *Occupation* originally meant to seize or to capture. (It is still used in this sense when, for instance, we speak of the German occupation of France during World War II.) What an apt description of how jobs take over our lives, subjecting us to the demands of outside rulers. The original meaning of *career* fits well with the role we play in the speeded-up global economic rat race. In the 19th century, *career* meant "racing course" of "rapid and unrestrained" activity.

In searching for ways to put meaning back into our work, we might want to revive the term *vocation* (from Latin for "voice" or "calling"). Today, "having a vocation" or "answering a calling" usually

means embarking upon a religious life - an unfortunate narrowing of the concept. We all deserve to be involved in work to which we have been called by our passions and beliefs. Following a vocation can lead to a *profession* - literally, a "public declaration" of what we believe and who we are. A profession is what our work should be, but so rarely is.

The Cult of Efficiency

Any attempt to transform our work from a mere job into a profession of deeply felt values sets us on an inevitable path of conflict with the values of the industrialised job system. These values - speed, productivity, efficiency - govern the workplace in remarkably similar ways in both capitalist and socialist economies. Even though we are supposed to be living in the post-industrial era - many of our jobs are now dictated by the demands of computers instead of assembly lines - our lives at work are really not much different from those of 19th century factory workers. We are still seen as replaceable spare parts for the great machines of production. From the checkout person at the grocery store to the highly trained engineer, we are all expected to work faster, waste less time, produce more.

We are not machines, of course, and the drive for ever greater efficiency in the competitive global economy is taking its toll. More than 80 percent of Americans say their lives are more stressful now than they were five years ago; pressures at work are cited as the primary reason. More and more of us need to be medicated just to get through the work day. More than 45 million American adults are taking prescription psychotropic medications. The largest increase is not in the use of the much publicized antidepressant Prozac, but rather in a variety of drugs used to treat anxiety and stress disorders.

As a society we continue to honour the virtues of caring and empathy in our personal lives, and these must become the cornerstones of a new kind of work ethic. Empathy for the physical and mental needs of workers must replace efficiency as the paramount value of the workplace. After all, no one in their right mind evaluates the importance of their family, friends, or even pets on a strict efficiency basis.

The Dictatorship of the Workplace

Good work involves not only the character and values of work, but also the power relationships in the workplace. Economists and politicians never mention it, but under the job system, virtually every workplace is a dictatorship. Let's face it: Most of us spend the majority of our lives as passive subjects in managerial tyrannies. Workers - whatever the colour of their collars - have little say in forming workplace policies or conditions.

Even many of the advances for workers, hard-won through decades of labour-movement struggles; have been rolled back in recent years. While this is largely the result of corporate pressure, unions bear some responsibility for their own decline by choosing to focus almost exclusively on wage issues, they seldom explore other ways to improve worker's lives. Pay is important to anyone with a job, but a sense of purpose and accomplishment, an outlet for creativity, an opportunity for flexibility, and co-worker relationships matter, too. As the American labour movement pushes to revitalize itself by reaching out to women, youth, minorities, and the public at large, there's hope that helping workers achieve other elements of good work will find a more prominent place on union agendas.

Over the past 20 years, a variety of employee ownership strategies and more ambitious efforts toward workplace democracy have brought greater equity to many thousands of workers. A new generation of socially responsible businesses have broadened employees' role in decision making - a trend that is now spreading to some mainstream firms. Many people have found that leaving the dictatorship of the workplace and pursuing partnership or self-employment options, while fraught with risks, can be a way to more fulfilling work and lives. For some it simply means repackaging current job skills as a consulting business in order to spend more time with family or favourite pursuits; others, inspired by writers like Wendell Berry and Paul Hawken, have created independent livelihoods that make a contribution to society and the planet. Each of these efforts is a potentially important step in the re-creation of work.

A Nation of Strangers

For years we have heard urgent pleas to "preserve family values" and to "restore a sense of community" in our lives. Yet we rarely hear the advocates of these causes mention that our current job system is one of the chief culprits in destroying traditional bonds of family and community life. For generations workers have been forced to move to wherever jobs could be found, uprooting their spouses

and children from family, friends, and community connections. Downsizing, corporate restructuring, shifting production to low-wage areas, and other favourite tools of the globalized economy keep almost all of us anxious and scouting for the next job. Always anticipating the next move to Seattle, Sarasota, or Singapore, we invest little energy in maintaining strong bonds to our extended family, our community, or any particular place. We have become, in investigative journalist Vance Packard's memorable phrase, "a nation of strangers." Witness the throngs at airports each Thanksgiving as millions return "home" to find a 48-hour semblance of family and community.

A new vision of good work involves pressuring corporations to make a firm commitment to the places where they do business, and working to end the game of global economic pinball, where jobs are endlessly bumped from location to location. It also requires that we begin to value family concerns, community connections, and ties to the places we live, above the financial gains of job mobility. This is not an easy commitment to make since it may mean missing out on more money or a job advancement. Yet if we continue to prize career success above all other aspects of our lives, we run the risk of becoming little more than global nomads seeking a buyer for our labour and ourselves.

Get Working

For the vast majority of us, even contemplating liberation from our current job seems hopelessly utopian. We'd love to tell our boss to "take this job and shove it," but mortgage and rent notices, insurance premiums, and credit card bills remind us every day why we can't. We're victims of a kind of wage blackmail. For many Americans, this situation is compounded by the fact that buying things we don't really need or even particularly want has become a comfort and compensatory compulsion that helps us cope with jobs offering little meaning.

We can no longer let wage blackmail run our lives. We must seek a vocation that truly expresses our values and fits our needs. Thinking about our true calling, perhaps for the first time, may take considerable time and patience. We've worked for so long at jobs we "have" to do that we often haven't considered the work we want and need to do.

Even when the path becomes clear, embarking on your profession may not be easy. You may have to steal hours from jobs that financial need requires you to keep. You may have to slash your monthly budget to have the time you want. You must also be prepared to face criticism as people scold you for abandoning your responsibilities and sacrificing the well-being of others to "do your own thing."

On the political front, we must push for measures that give workers more paid vacation, greater flexibility in choosing part-time work, a higher minimum wage, and paid leave to care for family. National health insurance is an important step that could free the entrepreneurial energies of workers who stay in their jobs just for the medical benefits.

The calling of good work also involves mentoring young people to seek vocations rather than settling for jobs. Raising children, nurturing families, and volunteering in your community are wonderful vocations in their own right, deserving at least as much respect and support as wage employment. We must also urge teachers, counsellors, and clergy to redefine work for future generations, and to understand the vital role good work must play in true education, and in spiritual and mental growth. Ultimately, of course, the most important way we can teach the next generation about good work is by example.

For many, the necessities of life, and even following a calling, may still mean working within the corporate job system. Good work in these circumstances requires us to do all we can to revive unions as active forces for workplace democracy. Unions, for their part, should become key players in establishing patterns of worker participation and job flexibility. At the same time, we need to promote socially responsible business behaviour as the standard, rather than the exception.

We must be patient with ourselves and others as we begin the difficult personal and collective search for good work. Yet we must remain firmly dedicated to the principle, expressed well by economist E.F. Schumacher, that our "real task is to adapt the work to the needs of the worker rather than demand that the worker adapt himself to the needs of the work".

Andrew Kimbrell is president of the International Centre for Technology Assessment in Washington, D.C. Reprinted from Utne Reader.

The Price of Conscience and Spirit in Work

Liliete Correia

"Life and livelihood ought not be separated but to flow from the same source, which is Spirit, for both life and livelihood are about Spirit." (Thomas Aquinas).

So you've been asked to make a commitment to the "corporation". That's easy enough if you believe in the corporation's mission. You're a good person and you can be a team player working and contributing as best you can. And once you believe in something, it is incredibly easy to become immersed in activities and tasks which support this belief. You give of yourself entirely and benefit from the rewards of personal satisfaction and high self-esteem which then continue to sustain your drive. You put in extra hours, take on extra tasks and even put your personal life temporarily on hold for that professional reward.

But one day you have an awakening: in light of economic re-structuring, the corporation puts its mission on the back-burner and reminds you that it owes you nothing. It owes you no support, no understanding and certainly no thanks. You also realize that putting your personal life on hold is not temporary but has lasted years. The more you do, the more you are requested to do and there just aren't enough hours in the day. And in the words of the thirteenth century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, you realize that you are "worked" instead of working. Eventually, you may start to forget the mission, who you are, what you are doing and the why of your motivation. The reward ceases to exist. The spirit and soul are no longer there. The empty body becomes a soulless "employee" and your "raison d'etre" within the corporation is elusive. The disillusionment of having contributed to an empty cause or entity is heavy and de-motivating and commitment and morale are at their lowest.

So why not do something? Why not rally for the cause, the belief and principles governing our spirits? Why not fight to regain the values in the face of hard times? Why not fight the injustices and take back our conscience?

Well, the fact remains that, unfortunately, only the privileged can afford a conscience. Those with the reality of bill payments and children to raise unselfishly forfeit their conscience, spirit and self for the much needed paycheque. They continue to work diligently and selflessly for fear of being perceived as not having given enough of themselves to the corporation. The system wields fear of job loss in an uncertain economy as a tool of restraint and coercion. This, in fact, is an oppressive tactic not new to our society. It has existed throughout the history of humanity and will probably continue to exist as long as we give in to it. The sad thing is that this is happening everywhere. It is happening to real people all around us, people whom we love and care for. It can be compared to the battered wife who continues to stay in the oppressive/depressive situation because she has nowhere else to go. This continues to feed into the systemic degradation of self (esteem) which in turn feeds the oppressor's power. The result is a society and workforce which have lost their spirit, values and of course, conscience. It's really that simple.

The solution, however, is never simple and in fact is only carried out by the most heroic and visionary among us and those able to afford a conscience. You can leave the situation, regain your self-esteem and drive, take back your spirit and reinvest it in something rewarding and valuable. Or, you can stay and do the same by challenging the status quo. However, this one is really up to the corporation as you may not be permitted to stay. I suppose that in a sense the easiest thing to do would be to stay, not question, be "worked" and forget personal motivation fed by spirit and values. You'd always have the paycheque.

Frankly, no matter how terrifying the road to "who-knows-where" is and no matter how terrifying joblessness is, I think I'd rather look back on my life and see many causes fought for and lost, than to see no causes or values at all. The reclamation of work which feeds the spirit is the crux. All I have to do is decide whether or not I can actually afford a conscience and a spirit.

Liliete Correia is a pseudonym. Reprinted from Good Work News (March 1996).

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Community Resources

The Alternative Work Catalogue
1-877-252-2072
(519) 743-3840
Put out by The Working Centre, this catalogue offers over 300 books that focus on work related issues, including simple living and choosing a career path.

Career Transition Services
Human Resources Canada
409 Weber St West
Kitchener
571-5500

Cambridge Place 73 Water St N
Cambridge N1R 7L6

Offers job search assistance and career planning. Variety of information and services available for people exploring career options.

Explore Work/Life Possibilities
105 Lexington Road, Unit 17
Waterloo N2J 4R7
725-3676
This local small business helps people plan for both career and life opportunities.

Lutherwood-Coda Self-Employment Assistance

305 King St W 10th Floor	35 Dickson St
Kitchener N2G 1B9	Cambridge N1R 7A6
742-1782	623-9380

Offers support and information to people starting up their own business.

The Working Centre
58 Queen St S
Kitchener N2G 1V8
743-1511
Community based drop-in centre with job support services including counsellors, computers, phone message service, newspapers, typewriters, and internet access. The new resource centre, at 43 Queen St South, offers supports for home-businesses, computer training, links to BarterWorks, and a multitude of resources and workshops that support initiative, work alternatives, and integrating working and living.

Week Five: Money isn't Everything

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.
This week we look at the role money plays in our lives. Today, everything we do seems to be based on an economic transaction. We pay for food, transportation, child care, entertainment, even therapy. What can we do to reduce our reliance on money? What other kinds of transactions can replace it?

Reflection Time.
Describe an experience in which you solved a problem without throwing a lot of money at it. What did you do instead? How did it make you feel?

Go-round.
Patterns.
Name or group the choices people made when solving problems without money.

Open Discussion.
How do we view money? Is it a necessity? An opportunity? A burden? Does the need to have money affect our sense of satisfaction with our lives? If participants tracked their spending, were they surprised at where their money went? Did all your costs seem reasonable?
Consumer culture insists that money improves our lives, but Myers points out that our level of happiness has very little to do with our financial status. Is Myers right? How much money is enough?

Favourite Things Exercise.
Take 5 minutes and list 20 things you enjoy doing. Try not to think too hard, write things down as they come. They can be anything from playing with the cat to world travel.

Small Group Discussions.
Break into groups of two. Discuss favourite things - relationship to work, to time, to money. How many favourite things require continual inputs of money? How many need a minimum of money or things? How many need people? If you tracked your spending, did you spend money on your favourite things?

Whole Group Discussion.
Comments arising from favourite things exercise. How often do we engage in our favourite activities? Does money (or the act of earning money) help us or prevent us from enjoying the things we love to do? Would changing our spending habits free up more time for ourselves? Are we spending money mostly on necessities or luxuries? Could we live like the youth in Simone's article?

Action Commitments.
Choose an action that will impact on your relationship with money. Write down everything you spend for the week. Or reflect on how you view money and where that may have come from.

Ending.

Money, Money, Money

We are embedded in an economic web of relations in North America. Most of our connections to other people are mediated through economic transactions - we pay a babysitter rather than have a family member look after our children, we have nursing homes rather than social support networks. We rely on money to smooth our way in the world, we need it for our basic necessities of life as we can no longer rely on our physical labour or community. This not only impacts on our self-reliance, but on our relationships. How much money is enough? What can we do to reduce our reliance on money? The articles this week look at the big picture of finances. David Myers considers our cultural assumption that money does buy happiness. Rose Simone talks to local youth who are choosing a different way of life.

There are many ways we can reduce our spending, but the first step is tracking our money. Where do we spend it? What do we spend it on? If you can track your spending for a month it can help you understand your financial needs. Just sit down at the end of every day and note all your expenses. As you continue you will be able to lump costs into categories (food, dining out, health, etc.). Little items often add up. Hobbies and entertainment can be more costly then we suspect. Our priorities may change and we may not want to spend so much money on clothes or dining out. We may find that we need to find cheaper housing or don't really need a car. Then we can create a realistic budget that accounts for our personal wants but puts limits on them, letting us put our money, energy and time towards the things that matter most to us. Reducing our monthly costs by twenty percent can make a huge difference to our savings account.

Does Economic Growth Improve Human Morale?

David G. Myers

During the mid-1980s my family and I spent a sabbatical year in the historic town of St. Andrews, Scotland. Comparing life there with life in America, we were impressed by a seeming disconnection between national wealth and well-being. To most Americans, Scottish life would have seemed Spartan. Incomes were about half that in the U.S. Among families in the Kingdom of Fife surrounding St. Andrews, 44 percent did not own a car, and we never met a family that owned two. Central heating in this place not far south of Iceland was, at that time, still a luxury.

In the hundreds of conversations during our year there and during three half-summer stays since, we repeatedly noticed that, despite their simpler living, the Scots appeared no less joyful than Americans. We heard complaints about Margaret Thatcher, but never about being underpaid or unable to afford wants. With less money there was no less satisfaction with living, no less warmth of spirit, no less pleasure in one another's company.

Are rich Americans happier?

Within any country, such as our own, are rich people happier? In poor countries, such as Bangladesh and India, being relatively well off does make for somewhat greater well-being. Psychologically as well as materially, it is much better to be high caste. We humans need food, rest, warmth, and social contact.

But in affluent countries, where nearly everyone can afford life's necessities, increasing affluence matters surprisingly little. In the USA, Canada, and Europe, the correlation between income and happiness is, as University of Michigan researcher Ronald Inglehart noted in the 1980s 16-nation study, "surprisingly weak (indeed virtually negligible)". Happiness is lower among the very poor. But once comfortable, more money provides diminishing returns. The second piece of pie, or the second $50,000, never tastes as good as the first. So far as happiness is concerned, it hardly matters whether one drives a BMW or, like so many of the Scots, walks or rides a bus.

Even very rich people - the Forbes' 100 wealthiest Americans surveyed by University of Illinois psychologist Ed Diener - are only slightly happier than average. With net worths all exceeding $100 million, providing ample money to buy things they don't need and hardly care about, 4 in 5 of the 49 people responding to the survey agreed that "Money can increase OR decrease happiness, depending on how it is used." And some were indeed unhappy. One fabulously wealthy man said he could never remember being happy. One woman reported that money could not undo misery caused by her children's problems. Examples of the wretched wealthy are not hard to come by: Howard Hughes, Christina Onassis, J. Paul Getty.

Adapting to fame, fortune, and affliction

At the other end of life's circumstances are most victims of disabling tragedies. With exceptions - vicious child abuse or rape, for example – most people who suffer negative life events do not exhibit long-term emotional devastation. People who become blind or paralyzed, perhaps after a car accident, thereafter suffer the frustrations imposed by their limitations. Daily, they must cope with the challenges imposed by their disabilities. Yet, remarkably, most eventually recover a near-normal level of day-to-day happiness. Thus, university students who must cope with disabilities are as likely as able-bodied students to report themselves happy, and their friends agree with their self-perceptions. "Weeping may linger for the night" observed the Psalmist, "but joy comes with the morning."

These findings underlie an astonishing conclusion from the new scientific pursuit of happiness. As the late New Zealand researcher Richard Kammann put it, "objective life circumstances have a negligible role to play in the theory of happiness." In a society where everyone lived in 4,000 square foot houses, people would likely be no happier than in a society in which everyone lived in 2,000 square foot houses. Good events - a pay hike, winning a big game, an A on an important exam - make us happy, until we adapt. And bad events - an argument with one's mate, a work failure, a social rejection - deject us, but seldom for more than a few days.

Feeling the short-run influence of events, people use such events to explain their happiness, all the while missing subtler but bigger influences on

their long-run well-being. Noticing that an influx of cash feels good, they may accept the Hollywood, Robin Leach image of who is happy - the rich and famous. In reality, we humans have an enormous capacity to adapt to fame, fortune, and affliction.

We adapt by recalibrating our "adaptation levels" - the neutral points at which sounds seem neither loud nor soft, lights neither bright nor dim, experiences neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Here in Michigan on a winter's day, 60 degrees would feel warm, but not when we are adapted to summer's heat. So it is with things. Our first desktop computer, with information loaded from a cassette tape, seemed remarkable, until we got that speedier hard-drive machine, which itself became pokey once we got a faster, more powerful machine. So it happens that yesterday's luxuries become today's necessities and tomorrow's relics.

Does economic growth improve human morale?

We have scrutinized the American dream of achieved wealth and well-being by comparing rich and unrich countries, and rich and unrich people. That leaves the final question: Over time does happiness rise with affluence?

Typically not. Lottery winners appear to gain but a temporary jolt of joy from their winnings. Looking back, they feel delighted to have won. Yet the euphoria doesn't last. In fact, previously enjoyed activities such as reading may become less pleasurable. Compared to the high of winning a million dollars, ordinary pleasures pale.
On a smaller scare, a jump in our income can boost our morale, for a while. "But in the long run," notes Inglehart, "neither an ice cream cone nor a new car nor becoming rich and famous produces the same feelings of delight that it initially did... Happiness is not the result of being rich, but a temporary consequence of having recently become richer." Ed Diener's research confirms that those whose incomes have increased over a 10-year period are not happier than those whose income has not increased. Wealth, it therefore seems, is like health: Although its utter absence can breed misery, having it does not guarantee happiness. Happiness is less a matter of getting what we want than of wanting what we have.

The short-lived pain of simplification

For that matter, the pain of simplification may also be short-lived. Cornell University economist Robert Frank experienced this when: *As a young man fresh out of college, I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural Nepal. My one-room house had no electricity, no heat, no indoor toilet, no running water. The local diet offered little variety and virtually no meat. Yet, although my living conditions in Nepal were a bit startling at first, the most salient feature of my experience was how quickly they came to seem normal. Within a matter of weeks, I lost all sense of impoverishment. Indeed, my $40 monthly stipend was more than most others had in my village, and with it I experienced a feeling of prosperity that I have recaptured only in recent years.*

Our human capacity for adaptation helps explain why, despite the elation of triumph and the anguish of tragedy, lottery winners and paraplegics usually return to their pre-existing happiness. And it explains why material wants can prove insatiable - why Imelda Marcos, living in splendor amid privation in the Philippines, could buy more shoes than she could conceivably wear. When the possessor becomes possessed by accumulating ever-more possessions, the adaptation-level phenomenon has run wild.

Are we happier today?

We can also ask whether, over time, our collective happiness has flouted upward with the rising economic tide. Are we happier today than in 1940, when two out of five homes lacked a shower or bathtub, heat often meant feeding a furnace wood or coal, and 35 percent of homes had no toilet? Or consider 1957, when economist John Galbraith was about to describe the United States as the Affluent Society. Americans' per person income, expressed in today's dollars, was less than $8000. Today it is more than $16,000, thanks to increased real wages into the 1970s, increased nonwage income, and the doubling of married woman's employment. Compared to 1957, we are therefore, "the doubly affluent society" - with double what money buys including twice as many cars per person, not to mention microwave ovens, big screen TVs, home computers, and $200 billion a year spent in restaurants and bars - two and a half times our 1960 inflation-adjusted restaurant spending per person. From 1960 to 1990, the percentage of us with: dishwashers zoomed from 7 to 45 percent, clothes dryers rose from 20 to 69 percent, and air conditioners soared from 15 to 70 percent.

Looking through unsolicited mail order catalogs recently, my wife, Carol, remarked, "You

know what's becoming big business? It's stuff to put your stuff in." Such storage systems sell well in our neighbourhood of century old homes, built presuming less need for closets and shelving to store our accumulated possessions. And to store that shelving we're building bigger houses. In 1966, 22 percent of new homes had more than 2,000 square feet; in 1994, 47 percent did.

Not the best of times for the human spirit

So, believing that a little money would make us a little happier, and having seen our affluence ratchet upward little by little over nearly four decades, are we now happier?

We are not. Since 1957, the number telling the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center that they are "very happy" has declined from 35 to 30 percent. Twice as rich, and a little less happy. In fact, between 1956 and 1988, the percentage of Americans saying they were "pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation" dropped from 42 to 30 percent.

We are also more often downright miserable. Among Americans born since World War II, depression has increased dramatically - tenfold, reports University of Pennsylvania clinical researcher Martin Seligman. Today's twenty-five year olds are much more likely to recall a time in their life when they were despondent and despairing than are their 75-year old grandparents, despite the grandparents having had many more years to suffer all kinds of disorder, from broken legs to the anguish of depression. Researchers debate the actual extent of rising depression... but no matter how we define depression, the findings persist: Today's youth and young adults have grown up with much more affluence, slightly less overall happiness, and much greater risk of depression, not to mention tripled teen suicide and all the other social pathologies we have considered. Never has a culture experienced such physical comfort combined with such psychological misery. Never have we felt so free, or had our prisons so overstuffed. Never have we been so sophisticated about pleasure, or so likely to suffer broken relationships.

These are the best of times materially, "a time of elephantine vanity and greed" observes Garrison Keillor, but they are not the best of times for the human spirit. William Bennett, no critic of free market economies, is among those who recognize the futility of economics without ethics and money without a mission: "If we have full employment and greater economic growth - if we have cities of gold and alabaster - but our children have not learned how to walk in goodness, justice, and mercy, then the American experiment, no matter how gilded, will have failed."

The conclusion is provocative

How then, can we avoid a startling conclusion: our becoming much better off over the last four decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased psychological well-being. The same is true of European countries and Japan, reports economist Richard Easterlin. In Britain, for example, sharp increases in the percent of households with cars, central heating, and telephones have not been accompanied by increased happiness. The conclusion is provocative, because it explodes a bombshell underneath our society's materialism: economic growth in affluent countries provides no apparent boost to human morale.

David Myers is Professor of Psychology at Hope College, Holland, Michigan. Reprinted with permission from The Consuming Passion.

Putting Values ahead of Wages: young people question today's economic priorities.

Rose Simone

As Nansi Harris of Waterloo looks toward the next millennium, she sees an economy that appears to be on an unsafe roller coaster ride.

"The path we are on is neither economically nor environmentally sustainable," the 26-year old says.

Harris has a job she loves - she's an instructional assistant for a Halton Board of

Education environmental leadership program - but like many young people, continuing to do what she loves may mean a future of working from contract to contract.

It's quite possible she will never have the economic security that generations before her have sought and attained. But she's happy with her low-cost lifestyle, which includes sharing a house with a group of people.

Harris, who participated in a recent Economics for the People seminar presented by the Global Community Centre, said generalizing about her generation's prospects as a group isn't possible.

"There is a lot of polarization in my generation," she said in an interview. "There are people with technical degrees, such as computer programmers, who are making more money than my mother, who has worked as a public health care nurse for 30 years."

But for many other people, those more interested in social, cultural and artistic endeavors, "it's an unstable and quite stressful world," she said.

In her own case, Harris said, teaching children about the importance of safe-guarding the environment is work she sees as enormously important. But in an economy that stresses privatization and profit over public service, she observed, it is also regarded as a "fringe program".

The 16-hour Global seminar, held over a weekend at no cost to participants, attempted to demystify the economy and show it for what it is - a system set up to put monetary value on what people do. It put a spotlight, said Harris, on things she has already discovered in her own life, that some of the most valuable things - an unspoiled environment, raising children, a healthy and egalitarian society - have little or no value in this economy.

"I feel that everything I value as a Canadian - be it accessible health care or meaningful work - those programs or opportunities are being eroded, are being decreased," she said. "The priorities have shifted."

Another seminar participant, Stephen McDonald, 26, of Kitchener, said he remains positive about the future, despite the uncertainties of the global economy.

"I believe in hard work and that a lot can come through if you dedicate yourself to a project," McDonald said. "I don't think the economy is going to change drastically. I'm hoping that it will be instead tweaked and transformed... because if there is an economic crash, a lot of people will go through a lot of hardship."

McDonald left university to take a job in his father's small family business, which services water heaters. He said he sees small business and small community-based institutions as a key to providing fulfilling work for people.

Still, in an economy dominated by large, mostly foreign-based corporations, he would like to see those same corporations made more accountable to average people, and he thinks the best way of doing that is through education of individual shareholders.

"People as individuals need to learn more about the market and where their money goes and make corporations and banks more accountable," McDonald said.

McDonald said people who come to be excluded from the new economy will need more assistance, but those who have work will probably get by.

"I do think you have to be knowledgeable, watch spending, not buy a house you can't afford, and live within your means," he added.

Meanwhile, there are many young people such as Darren Pusca, 28, of Waterloo, another participant in the Global seminar, who are marching to the beat of a different drummer.

They are deliberately choosing to pursue goals they feel are important to themselves and society, even if it means less income and a simpler lifestyle.

Pusca has university degrees in business and politics, and came to Waterloo from Saskatchewan to take a six-month contract job with Project Ploughshares, an organization dedicated to peace and nuclear disarmament. Although his long-term job prospects are uncertain, "I've made a decision to do the things that I believe in, and I am willing to give up other things to do that," he said.

As the stock markets fall and rise, and cutbacks continue in the midst of a so-called economic boom, Pusca said he is banking on change toward a more sustainable economy.

"There are even now financial leaders out there who are now saying there are major flaws in this system. It's not sustainable in any kind of

environmental way, and it's certainly not sustainable for labour. We are just now starting to feel the effects of that."

Pusca said many of his friends have unfortunately come to believe they have no power to change anything. And that sense of hopelessness and despair among young people "is the most frightening thing."

He said he retains his belief that he can make a difference in the world and believes the choices around what is to be valued in the future can be different.

"And hopefully that change won't have to come as a result of a major crash," he said.

Showing people possibilities of structuring the economy in an alternative way was one of the major reasons the Global Community Centre decided to run the economic seminars.

"We want people to be able to challenge what is going on," said Sarah Marsh, one of the organizers. "The economy is structured along certain lines, but the truth is that there are other choices, other alternatives," she said.

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New Road Map Foundation
P.O. Box 15981
Seattle, Washington 98115 USA
www.newroadmap.org
Established by Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez, authors of Your Money or Your Life, this foundation supports people and organizations in their efforts to live a more sustainable life through reducing spending.

Community Resources

BarterWorks
43 Queen St S
Kitchener, On N2G 1V6
749-1911
A local economic trading system that allows people to trade with local individuals and businesses.

Credit Counselling Services, Catholic Family Counselling Services
70 Weber St W
Kitchener, N2H 3Z3
743-6333
Provides money management services. Helps with creditors and debt consolidation.

Global Community Centre
Lower Level, Market Square
25 Frederick St
Kitchener, N2H 6H8
570-0955
Offers economic literacy workshops that explore the influence of the global economic system on our lives.

Week Six: Living in a Consumer Society

Opening.

Check in on Action Commitments.

Were people able to take action on their relationship to money?

Week's Theme.

This week we look at our consumption levels and habits in the context of the consumer society. Why do we consume so much? Why is our society oriented towards consumption, rather than conservation? What impact does it have on the planet, others, and on ourselves? Within a consumer society, how can we consume less?

Reflection Time.

Describe a purchase you made that wasn't really necessary. Why did you buy it? How did you feel? What did you think? You can also use this quiet time to note any responses or connections to reading.

Go-round.

Patterns.

Are there common threads in the stories? Any emotions or thoughts that kept recurring?

Open Discussion.

Responses to go-round. Why do we consume? What are the pleasures and benefits? How much do we identify ourselves as consumers? Where are we at in terms of personal consumption (retirees may be wanting to get rid of things, new parents may find themselves accumulating)? Do we consume more when we have more money?

Small Group Discussions.

Break into groups of three. Was Durning's article useful? Is a culture of sufficiency possible? Can we resurrect the art of 'creative inventiveness', as Mains suggests we need? What are the possibilities for trading, small-scale production, scavenging, and other activities? Are there examples of these happening at a personal or community level? What are the pleasures and benefits of these models? What are the challenges?

Whole Group Discussion.

Living in a highly consumptive society can be overwhelming. What are some small steps we can take to control our consumption? Brainstorm a list of practical questions to ask before making a purchase.

Action Commitments.

Focus on one change to consumer habits.

Ending.

Decide on facilitator for following week. As next week is about food, you may want to plan a potluck.

Consumer Society

The term "consumption" dates to the early fourteenth century. Its' original form meant to destroy, pillage, subdue, and exhaust, not very positive images. Today we accept the label consumer without a second thought for its meaning. We are described as consumers by corporations, the media, and even the government. But for most of human history, we identified ourselves in very different ways: as members of tribes, as residents of a place, as citizens. We need to move our core identity from consumer of things to citizens of a community.

Durning's article offers us facts and insights into just how much North Americans consume, not just consciously, but as members of wasteful societies. The Global Living Project, which does research into the "ecological footprints" we leave on the earth, says that that each Canadian requires 19 acres of land to live (Americans use 25 acres). There is only 5.5 acres of land available for each of the six billion people in the world - only 1 acre each if we leave room for all the other species. The GLP has, through evaluating energy efficiency, intensive agriculture techniques, and other current innovations, demonstrated that Canadians could maintain our present lifestyles on 3.2 acres. The possibilities for a sustainable society already exist.

Jennifer Mains records her impressions of seeing people work with what they have to meet their needs. Alternatives to spending money, such as re-using possessions, scavenging trash, and bartering, provide opportunities for creativity and exploration. Contemporary society no longer values such ingenuity.

How Much is "Enough?"

Alan Durning

Early in the post-World War II age of affluence, a U.S. retailing analyst named Victor Lebow proclaimed, "Our enormously productive economy... demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in consumption... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate." Americans have risen to Mr. Lebow's call, and much of the world has followed.

Since 1950, American consumption has soared. Per capita, energy use climbed 60 percent, car travel more than doubled, plastics use multiplied 20-fold, and air travel jumped 25 fold.

We are wealthy beyond the wildest dreams of our ancestors; the average human being living today is four and a half times richer than his or her great-grandparents, and the factor is larger still among the world's consuming class. American children under the age of 13 have more spending money - $230 a year - than the 300 million poorest people in the world.

The richest billion people in the world have created a form of civilization so acquisitive and profligate that the planet is in danger. The lifestyle of this top echelon - the car drivers, beef eaters, soda drinkers, and throwaway consumers - constitutes an ecological threat unmatched in severity by anything but perhaps population growth. The wealthiest fifth of humankind pumps out more than half of the greenhouse gases that threaten the earth's climate and almost 90 percent of the chlorofluorocarbons that are destroying the earth's protective ozone layer.

Ironically, the abundance has not even made people terribly happy. In the United States, repeated opinion polls of people's sense of well-being show that no more Americans are satisfied with their lot than they were in 1957. Despite phenomenal growth in consumption, the list of wants has grown faster still.

Of course, the other extreme from over-consumption - poverty - is no solution to environmental or human problems. It is infinitely worse for people and equally bad for the environment. Dispossessed peasants slash-and-burn their way into the rainforests of Latin America, and hungry nomads turn their herds out onto fragile African rangeland, reducing it to desert. Of environmental decline results when people have too little or too much, we must ask ourselves: how much is enough? What level of consumption can the earth support? When does consumption cease to add appreciably to human satisfaction?

Answering these questions definitively is impossible, but for each of us in the world's consuming class, seeking answers may be a prerequisite to transforming our civilization into one the biosphere can sustain.

The Compulsion to Consume

"The avarice of mankind is insatiable" declared Aristotle 23 centuries ago, setting off a debate that has raged ever since among philosophers over how much greed lurks in human hearts. But whatever share of our acquisitiveness is part of our nature, the compulsion to have more has never been so actively promoted, nor so easily acted upon, as it is today.

We are encouraged to consume at every turn by the advertising industry, which annually spends nearly $500 per U.S. citizen, by the commercialization of everything from sporting events to public spaces, and, insidiously, by the spread of the mass market into realms once dominated by family members and local enterprises. Cooking from scratch is replaced by heating prepared foods in the microwave; the neighbourhood baker and greengrocer are driven out by the 24 hour supermarket at the mall. As our day-to-day interactions with the economy lost the face-to-face character that prevails in surviving communities, buying things becomes a substitute of self-worth.

Traditional measures of success, such as integrity, honesty, skill, and hard work, are gradually supplanted by a simple, universally recognizable indicator of achievement - money. One Wall Street banker put it bluntly to the New York Times: "net worth equals self-worth." Under this definition, there is no such thing as enough. Consumption becomes a treadmill with everyone judging their status by who's ahead of them and who's behind.

Technologies of Consumption

In simplified terms, an economy's total burden on the ecological systems that undergird it is a function of three factors: the size of the human population, people's average consumption level, and the broad set of technologies - everything from mundane clotheslines to the most sophisticated satellite communications systems - the economy employs to provide for those consumption levels.

Transformation of agricultural patterns, transportation systems, urban design, energy use, and the like could radically reduce the total environmental damage caused by the consuming societies, while allowing those at the bottom of the economic ladder to rise without producing such egregious effects.

Japan, for example, uses one-third as much energy as the Soviet Union to produce a dollar's worth of goods and services, and Norwegians use half as much paper and cardboard apiece as their neighbours in Sweden, though they are equals in literacy and richer in dollar terms.

Eventually, though, technological change will need to be complimented by curbing our material wants. Robert Williams of Princeton University and a worldwide team of researchers conducted a careful study of the potential to reduce fossil fuel consumption through greater efficiency and use of renewable energy.

The entire world population, Williams concluded, could live with the quality of energy services enjoyed by West Europeans - things like modest but comfortable homes, refrigeration for food, and ready access to public transit, augmented by limited auto use.

The study had an implicit conclusion, however: The entire world population decidedly could not live in the style of Americans, with their larger homes, more numerous electrical gadgets, and auto-centred transportation systems.

The details of such studies will stir debate among specialists for years to come. What matters for the rest of us is the lesson to hope and work for much from technological and political change, while looking to ourselves for the values changes that will also be needed.

Consuming Drives

The realities of current consumption patterns around the world point toward quantitative answers to the question of how much is enough?

For three of the most ecologically important types of consumption - transportation, diet, and use of raw materials - the world's 5.3 billion people are distributed unevenly over a vast range. Those at the bottom clearly fall beneath the "too little" line, and those at the top, the cars-meat-and-disposables class, clearly consumer too much. But where in the larger middle class does "enough" lie?

About one billion people do most of their travelling - aside from the occasional donkey or bus ride - on foot. Many in the walking class never go more than 100 miles from their birthplaces. Unable to get to work easily, attend school, or bring their complaints before government offices, they are severely hindered by their lack of transportation options.

The massive middle class of the world, numbering some three billion people, travels by bus and bicycle. Mile for mile, bikes are cheaper than any other vehicles, costing under $100 in most of the Third World and requiring no fuel. They are also the most efficient form of transportation ever invented and where not endangered by polluted air and traffic, provide their riders with healthy exercise.

The world's automobile class is relatively small: only 8 percent of humans, about 400 million, own cars. The auto class's fleet of four-wheelers is directly responsible for an estimated 13 percent of carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels worldwide, along with air pollution and acid rain, traffic fatalities numbering a quarter million annually, and the sprawl of urban areas into endless tract developments lacking community cohesion.

The auto class bears indirect responsibility for the far-reaching impacts of their chosen vehicle. The automobile makes itself indispensable: cities sprawl, pubic transit atrophies, shopping centres multiply, employers scatter. Today, working Americans spend nine hours a week behind the wheel. To make those homes-away from home more comfortable, 90 percent of new American cars are air-conditioned, which adds emissions of gases that aggravate the greenhouse effect and deplete the ozone layer.

Around the world, the great marketing achievement of automobile vendors has been to turn the machine into a cultural icon. As French

philosopher Roland Barthes writes, "cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals.. the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as purely magical objects."

Ironies abound: more "Eagles" drive America's expanding road network, for instance, than fly in the nation's polluted skies, and more "cougars" pass the night in its proliferating garages than in its shrinking forests.

Some in the auto class are also members of a more select group: the global jet set. The four million Americans who account for 41 percent of domestic trips, for examples, cover five times as many miles a year as average Americans. Furthermore, because each mile traveled by air uses more energy than a mile traveled by car, jet setters consume six-and-a-half times as much energy for transportation as ordinary car-class members.

Eat, Drink, and Be Sustainable

On the food consumption ladder, people of the world fall into three rungs reflecting calories eaten and the richness of diet. The world's 630 million poorest people lack the resources necessary to provide themselves with sufficient calories for a healthy diet, according to the latest World Bank estimates.

The 3.4 billion grain eaters of the world's middle class get enough calories and plenty of plant-based protein, giving them the healthiest basic diet of the world's people. They typically receive no more than 20 percent of their calories from fat, a level low enough to protect them from the consequences of excessive dietary fat.

The top of the ladder is populated by the meat eaters, those who obtain about 40 percent of their calories from fat. These 1.25 billion people eat three times as much fat per person as the remaining 4 billion, mostly because they eat so much red meat. The meat class pays the price of their diet in high death rates from the so-called disease of affluence - heart disease, stroke, and certain types of cancer.

In fact, the U.S. government, long beholden to livestock and dairy interests, now recommends a diet in which no more than 30 percent of calories come from fat. California heart specialist Dr. Dean Ornish, credited with creating the first non-drug therapy proven to reverse clogging of the arteries, prescribes a semi-vegetarian diet virtually indistinguishable from that eaten daily by peasants in China, Brazil, or Egypt.

Indirectly, the meat-eating quarter of humanity consumes almost half of the world's grain - grain that fattens the livestock they eat. They are also responsible for many of the environmental strains induced by the present global agricultural system, from soil erosion to over-pumping of underground water.

In the extreme case of American beef, producing a pound of steak requires five pounds of grain and the energy equivalent of a gallon of gasoline, not to mention the associated soil erosion, water consumption, pesticide and fertilizer runoff, groundwater depletion, and emissions of the greenhouse gas methane.

Beyond the effects of livestock production, the affluent diet rings up an ecological bill through its heavy dependence on shipping goods great distances. One-fourth of grapes eaten in the United States are grown 7,000 miles away in Chile, and the typical mouthful of food travels 1,300 miles from farm field to dinner plate. America's far-flung agri-business food system is only partly a product of agronomic forces. It is also a result of farm policies and health standards that favour large producers, massive government subsidies for Western irrigation water, and a national highway system that makes trucking economical by transferring the tax burden from truckers onto car drivers.

The thousands of small farms, bakeries and dairies that once encircled and fed the nation's cities cannot supply chain supermarkets with sufficient quantities of perfectly uniform products to compete with the food industry conglomerates. Their lot is to slide ever closer to foreclosure while hauling their produce to struggling weekend "farmers' markets".

Processing and packaging add further resource costs to the affluent diet, though those costs remain largely hidden. Even relatively familiar prepared foods are surprisingly energy consumptive. Ounce for ounce, getting frozen orange juice to the consumer takes four times the energy (and several times the packaging) of providing fresh oranges. Likewise, potato chip production has four times the energy budget of potatoes.

The resource requirements of making the

new generation of microwave-ready instant meals, loaded as they are with disposable pans and multi-layer packaging, are about ten times larger than preparing the same dishes at home from scratch.

Mirroring food consumption, overall beverage intake rises little between poor and rich. What changes is what people drink. The 1.75 billion people at the bottom of the beverage ladder have no option but to drink water that is often contaminated with human, animal, and chemical wastes.

Those in the next group up, in this case nearly two billion people, take more than 80 percent of their liquid refreshment in the form of clean drinking water. The remainder of this class's liquid come from commercial beverages such as tea, coffee, and, for children, milk. At the quantities consumed, these beverages pose few environmental problems. They are packaged minimally, and transport energy needs are low because they are moved only short distances or in a dry form.

In the top class are the billion people in industrial countries. At a growing rate, they drink soft drinks, bottled water, and other prepared commercial beverages that are packaged in single-use containers and transported over great distances - sometimes across oceans.

Ironically, where tap water is purest and most accessible, its use as beverage is declining. It now typically accounts for only a quarter of the drinks in developed countries. In the extreme case of the United States, per-capita consumption of soft drinks rose to 47 gallons in 1989 (nearly seven times the global mean), according to the trade magazine Beverage Industry. Americans now drink more soda pop than water from the kitchen sink.

The Stuff of Life

In consumption of raw materials, about one billion rural people subsist on local biomass collected from the immediate environment. Most of what they consume each day - about a pound of grain, two pounds of fuelwood, and fodder for their animals - could be self-replenishing renewable resources. Unfortunately, because they are often pushed by landlessness and population growth into fragile, unproductive ecosystems, their minimal needs are not always met.

If these billion are materially destitute, they are part of a larger group that lacks many of the benefits provided by modest use of nonrenewable resources - particularly durable things like radios, refrigerators, water pipes, high-quality tools, and carts with lightweight wheels and ball bearings. More than two billion people live in countries where per-capita consumption of steel, the most basic modern material, falls below 100 pounds a year.

Though similar international data are not available for most other raw materials, energy consumption can serve as a substitute indicator since most processes that use lots of raw materials also use lots of energy. In those same countries, per-capita consumption of all types of energy (except subsistence fuelwood) is lower than 20 gigajoules per year.

Roughly one-and-a-half billion live in the middle class of materials users. Providing them with durable goods each year uses between 100 and 350 pounds of steel per capita and between 20 and 50 gigajoules per capita. At the top of the heap is the throw-away class, which uses raw materials like they're going out of style. A typical resident of the industrialized world uses 15 times as much paper, 10 times as much steel, and 12 times as much fuel as a resident of the developing world. The extreme case is again the United States, where the average person consumes most of his or her own weight in basic materials each day.

In the throw-away economy, packaging is the essence of the product. It is at once billboard, shipping container, and preservative. Seven percent of consumer spending in the United States goes for packaging. Yet, it all ends up in the dump. Disposable goods proliferate in America and other industrial countries. Each year, Japan uses 30 million "disposable" single-roll cameras, and Americans toss away 18 billion diapers and enough aluminum cans to make about 6,000 DC-10 jet airplanes.

In throw-away economies, even "durable" goods are not particularly durable, nor are they easy to repair. Technological improvement would be expected to steadily raise the average working life of goods. Yet, over time, new items have fallen dramatically in price relative to repair cost, according to data compiled by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The average life span of most household appliances has stayed level. The reason is that manufacturers have put their research dollars into lowering production costs, even if makes repair more difficult.

Tinkerer-filmmaker Tim Hunkin spent two years poking around waste sites in England studying discarded household appliances. His findings, reported in the British magazine New Scientist, reveal the prevailing trend toward planned obsolescence and disposability.

"The machines that date back to the 1950s are very solid, made mostly of metal with everything bolted or welded together," observes Hunkin. "As the years passed, machines have become more flimsy. More parts are now made of plastic, and they are glued together rather than welded or bolted...Many parts are now impossible to repair...New machines are so cheap that it frequently does not pay to have a faulty appliance repaired professionally."

Where disposability and planned obsolescence fail to accelerate the trip from purchase to junk heap, fashion sometimes succeeds. Most clothing goes out of style before it is worn out, but lately, the realm of fashion has colonized sports footwear, too. Kevin Ventrudo, chief financial officer of California-based L.A. Gear, which saw sales multiply fifty times in four years, told the Washington Post, "If you talk about shoe performance, you only need one or two pairs. If you're talking fashion, you're talking endless pairs of shoes." In transportation, diet, and use of raw materials, as consumption rises on the economic scale so does waste - both of resources and of health. Bicycles and public transit are cheaper, more efficient, and healthier transport options than cars. A diet founded on the basics of grains and water is gentle to the earth and the body. And a lifestyle that makes full use of raw materials for durable goods without succumbing to the throwaway mentality is ecologically sound while still affording many of the comforts of modernity.

Ethics for Sustainability

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he could count the rules of ethical behaviour on his fingers. In the complex global economy of the late 20th century, in which the simple act of turning on the air conditioner affects planetary systems, the list of rules for ecologically sustainable living could run into the hundreds.

The basic value of a sustainable society, the ecological equivalent of the Golden Rule, is simple: Each generation should meet its needs without jeopardizing the prospects of future generations. What is lacking is the practical knowledge - at each level of society - of what living by that principle means.

In a fragile biosphere, the ultimate fate of humanity may depend on whether we can cultivate a deeper sense of self-restraint, founded on a widespread ethic of limiting consumption and finding non-material enrichment.

Those who seek to rise to this environmental challenge may find encouragement in the body of human wisdom passed down from antiquity. To seek out sufficiency is to follow the path of voluntary simplicity preached by all the sages from Buddha to Mohammed. Typical of these pronouncements is this passage from the Bible: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Living by this credo is not easy. As historian David Shi of Davidson College in North Carolina chronicles, the call for a simpler life is perennial through the history of the North American continent: the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, the Quakers of Philadelphia, the Amish, the Shakers, the experimental utopian communities of the 1830s, the hippies of the 1960s, and the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s.

None of these movements ever gained more than a slim minority of adherents. Elsewhere in the world, entire nations have dedicated themselves to rebuilding human character - sometimes through brutal techniques - in a less self-centred mould, and nowhere have they succeeded with more than a token few of their citizens.

It would be hopelessly naive to believe that entire populations will suddenly experience a moral awakening, renouncing greed, envy, and avarice. The best that can be hoped for is a gradual widening of the circle of those practising voluntary simplicity. The goal of creating a sustainable culture, that is, a culture of permanence, is best thought of as a challenge that will last several generations.

Voluntary simplicity, or personal restraint, will do little good, however, if it is not wedded to bold political steps that confront the forces advocating consumption. Beyond the oft-repeated agenda of environmental and social reforms necessary to achieve sustainability, such as overhauling energy systems, stabilizing population, and ending poverty, action is needed to restrain the excesses of

advertising, to curb the shopping culture, and to revitalize household and community economies as human-scale alternatives to the high-consumption lifestyle.

For example, if fairly distributed between the sexes, cooking from scratch can be dignified and use fewer resources than the frozen instant meal. Just so, communities that turn main streets into walking zones where local artisans and farmers display their products while artists, musicians, and theatre troupes perform can provide a richness of human interaction that shopping malls will never match.

There could be many more people ready to begin saying "enough" than prevailing opinion suggests. After all, much of what we consume is wasted or unwanted in the first place. How much of the packaging that wraps products we consume each year - 462 pounds per capita in the United States - would we rather never see? How many of the distant farms turned to suburban housing developments could have been left in crops if we insisted on well-planned land use inside city limits?

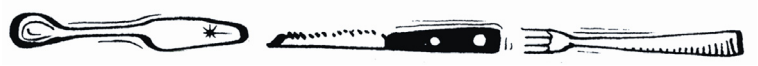
How many of the unsolicited sales pitches each American receives each day in the mail - 37 percent of all mail - are nothing but bothersome junk? How much of the advertising in our morning newspaper - covering 65 percent of the newsprint in American papers - would we not gladly see left out?

How many of the miles we drive - almost 6,000 a year a piece in the United States - would we not happily give up if livable neighbourhoods were closer to work, a variety of local merchants closer to home, streets safe to walk and bicycle, and public transit easier and faster? How much of the fossil energy we use is wasted because utility companies fail to put money into efficient renewable energy systems before building new coal plants?

In the final analysis, accepting and living by sufficiency rather than excess offers a return to what is, culturally speaking, the human home: the ancient order of family, community, good work and good life; to a reverence for excellence of craftsmanship; to a true materialism that does not just care about things but cares for them; to communities worth spending a lifetime in.

Maybe Henry David Thoreau had it right when he scribbled in his notebook beside Walden Pond, "A man is rich in proportion to the things he can afford to let alone."

Alan Durning works with the Northwest Environment Watch in Seattle, Washington. Reprinted with permission from Worldwatch Magazine.



Creative Inventiveness

Jennifer Mains

When I first read [the essay] 'Conserving Communities' by Wendell Berry, I was provoked by the statement that promoters of a global economy believe "the industrial standards of production, efficiency, and profitability are the only standards that are necessary." I agree with Berry that these standards are destructive and unsustainable and that they are not the 'only' standards. I would like to expand upon Berry's arguments to include the alternate standard of creative inventiveness, an old art and I believe an instinctive one which many of us are fast losing.

There have been three occasions in my life where I have been struck by the instinctive ability of human beings to creatively invent the necessary tools from the world around them. Having been very thoroughly indoctrinated with the post-war standards of "newer, bigger, and purchased", exposure to the value of "reused, small, and found" was rather revolutionary and inspiring!

My first encounter as an adult with this creative inventiveness was in a small, rural schoolyard. The playground was a scraped-out driveway, the only level part of the schoolyard, which was surrounded by the rocky outcrops and patches of grass. Young children are renowned for discarding brightly coloured, carefully designed toys for a simple cardboard box or a wooden spoon, so this story is not new. The children had taken small rocks, sticks and stones and mapped out the floor plan of an intricate

castle. Rains washed away their designs, cars drove over them, but every recess and lunch hour they would rush out to reconstruct their castle. Over the weeks, as I watched them play out various plots of murder, intrigue and conquest, I, too, saw the tall castle walls, the turrets flying their flags and, when invited into its walls, carefully walked over the bridge, wary of the dangerous moat below. There was no destructive competitiveness in their game. Improvements, additions and renovations were joyfully included and celebrated by the children. This is a nostalgic story but also an example of what we might be praising and encouraging in our children – their instinctive ability to take found objects and create and to celebrate these inventions.

The second occasion where I have been instructed in the art of creative inventiveness was when I lived in outport Newfoundland during the 1970s. We drove up a winding road in the woods to a small logger's mill. There, parked tightly beside the mill's walls was a rusting old car. With my bedroom community, Ontario sensibilities this rusting car was litter, destroying the beauty of this wilderness setting. I later learned that the car was an inexpensive source of power for the mill, the belts of the saw ran off the rear end of the car. Someone had the insight to see beyond its rusting carcass. During the years I lived there, I was continually encountering examples of creative inventiveness - the axle and gear box of an old car erupting through the deck of a fishing boat where it was used to haul up fishing nets, the nets winding past the tire still on the rim; a stable torn down when the horse was sold would resurrect, in part, as a neighbour's wood shed; or the chain, gear and wheel of a discarded bicycle transformed into the steering mechanism of a single engine fishing boat (tire still on the wheel). What was most astounding to me, beside these often startling resurrections of found materials was the way people would quietly acknowledge and praise the others' inventiveness, their "good eye" and that this praise was not tinged with competitive jealousy.

The final story of creative inventiveness I would like to share is about a close friend who works as a milliner with various theatre groups. Theatre companies with larger budgets have given her costly fabrics imported from Europe, and antique ribbons and lace to create period hats. But the hats that have given her the most joy and caused me the most wonder are those that she has created from the bits and pieces of scraps. I have often wandered into her workplace and seen her surrounded by scraps of materials, ribbons and laces hauled out from storage in her basement. They are often not the exact color or texture, but with a practised eye she combines ordinary, often dowdy and unrelated fabrics into hats that evoke the grandeur of the original drawing. The industrial standards of productivity, efficiency and profitability have no influence in the creation of this work or in the amazement of the onlooker when they realize that the rich, textured band around the hat is a humble scrap of beige eyelet.

In this present culture of "post-everything" standards we do not recognize the creative inventiveness that surrounds us. My stories are only a few examples. Who is celebrating the creative inventiveness of surviving without a job, creating a home for children on subsistence wages or pedaling around town on a bike, without ten gears and gel seat? My fear is, that with the disappearance of rural societies (as we have known them) which have always been rich in the tradition of creative inventiveness, we will further lose the ability to celebrate this inventiveness—and what will sustain us?

Jennifer Mains works with St John's Community Kitchen. Excerpted with permission from the Good Work News.

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Adbusters
The Media Foundation
1243 West 7th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V6H 1B7
www.adbusters.org
This magazine provides a hip consideration of ways to subvert contemporary society through "culture-jamming". Also supports actions such as "buy nothing day" and "turn off your tv week".

Alternatives Journal
Faculty of Environmental Studies
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1
www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/alternatives/
Offers an in-depth analysis, from a Canadian perspective, on environmental thought, policy, and action.

Centre for a New American Dream
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 900
Takoma Park, Maryland
20912 U.S.A.
www.newdream.org
This organization is dedicated to helping Americans consume responsibly to improve their quality of life and protect the environment. Membership includes a Yearning for Balance action kit, a quarterly entitled *Enough!*, and a monthly action e-mail.

Council of Canadians
502-151 Slater St
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3
(613) 233-2773
www.canadians.org
This national activist groups takes on the big issues such as biotechnology or the privitazation of water. Led by Maude Barlow, the council has chapters in most cities that use council materials and techniques to educate citizens and encourage our participation in the political decision making process. Contact the Ottawa office to find the contact for Waterloo Region.

Community Resources

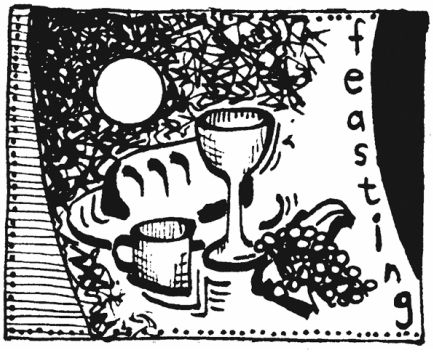
Residential Energy Efficiency Project (R.E.E.P.)
Environmental Studies 1
University of Waterloo
Waterloo N2L 3G1
888-4567 ext. 6661
This project offers a home energy evaluation by nationally certified experts. Homeowners are provided with 2detailed information about their home's energy loss and what can be done about it. Recommendations help homeowners save money while saving energy.

Recycle Cycles
43 Queen St S
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1V8
749-9177
Recycle Cycles refurbishes used bicycles and helps people repair their own.

Waterloo Region Public Interest Group (WPIRG)
Student Life Centre Room 2139
University of Waterloo
Waterloo N2L 3G1
888-4882
WPIRG investigates current social and environmental problems and works towards their resolution. Makes links between university and community. Has a resource centre and speakers available on a variety of issues.

WholeLife Magazine
87-C Benton St
Kitchener N2G 3H3
579-1892
WholeLife magazine is a community based bi-monthly that can be picked up free of charge at libraries, health food stores, and alternative health care providers. It explores local initiatives around healthy, holistic living.

Week Seven: Eating Well



If you began with a potluck, start the discussion over dessert.

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.

One of the quickest ways to start moving towards simple living is changing food habits. Whether you love cooking and don't have the time for it, or hate to cook, it is important to understand the impact our food habits have on our health, our community, and the planet. Eating in a sustainable fashion can make a difference.

Reflection.

Describe a meaningful food experience. What made it special?

Go-round.

Share stories.

Patterns.

Common elements to meaningfulness?

Open Discussion.

Why aren't meals more important? How can we value food and hospitality more? How can we eat in a more sustainable fashion? Were people aware of the impact of their diet on others and the earth, as described in the first article? Can we eat using local sources for our food? How do the seasons affect our eating patterns? How does eating well relate to our sense of time? Generate a list of alternative ways to access food.

Action Commitments.

Commit to one change in food habits.

Ending.

Eating Well

Using the framework of living more simply, we can consider food in two ways. We need to look at what we eat - how is it grown? Where is it grown? What does it take to bring this food to us? Does our diet contribute to our health and well-being? We also need to look at how we eat - do we pay attention to the act of preparing a meal? Do we pay attention to the act of eating? Do we pay attention to the people we eat with?

Since food is such a necessary part of our existence, even small changes in diet can make a big difference to our own health and the health of the planet. By reducing meat and dairy consumption, we improve our health (lower cholesterol, reduced risk of heart disease) and put less pressure on the land. Much arable land in developing countries is used for export animal feed rather than to feed their own people. Choosing organic foods means we are choosing to support sustainable farming practices that don't pollute the environment. We can eat a healthy, tasty and varied diet simply by relying on fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes.

Choosing food from local growers, or turning your backyard into a garden can also make a

difference. Community gardens and community supported agriculture are ways to support a healthier food system.

What we eat is important, but so is how we eat. Do we eat on the run? Do we sit down with our families and eat together? Must we always eat prepared foods or do we have the time to create a meal? For some people, taking time to eat home made meals is not important. Food is not a priority on their path of simplicity. They may simplify their lives by simplifying their menus. They develop a weekly menu with easily prepared foods and follow it until they are bored. This frees them up from worrying about food so they can spend time on other things.

For other people, the act of eating is much more important. They want meals that are social occasions. They prefer to spend more time cooking, having friends and family over, and turning meals into community events that last all evening. Often the cooking becomes as important as the eating, with everyone working together in the kitchen. Others prefer to eat out more often, supporting local restaurants and connecting to the community Some people make one or two nights a week a family meal where everyone is committed to showing up. They take the time to set a beautiful table, make a special meal, or even eat by candlelight. They use dinner as a way for the family to reconnect.

We need to slow down and appreciate our meals, remembering the people who grew the food, the people who prepared it, and the people we share it with. The first article, by The Moment, a now defunct social justice non-profit in Toronto, helps us understand the impacts of the global food system. Stephanie Mancini's piece reminds us of the simple pleasures of creating a meal.

Food Today

The Moment

Food Troubles

Many of us still remember when relatives were farming. Less than a century ago, Canadians, as a whole, were much more connected to the land. Most people were only a step or two away from the food they ate. If they didn't produce it themselves, then they purchased it from a neighbour who did. Generally speaking, that proximity has gone.

Today, an enormous food system stands between producer and consumer. It is controlled by a handful of giant multi-national corporations for whom food is a commodity and the bottom line is profit. The food system consists of an inter-locking web of food producers, processors, distributors and retail stores. A profuse number of interventions are made between the growing of food and its consumption. Food analyst and author, Brewster Kneen refers to this process as distancing. Every act of distancing adds to the cost of the food while actually diminishing its nutritional value.

According to the rules of the multi-national food system or agri-industry, food is not about the joys of breaking bread together, it is not about supporting our local communities, economies and environments, and ensuring that we all have access to nourishing, affordable food. For them, food is about control, about centralized production, processing and distribution, and about uniformity - the ability to mass produce similar products and distribute them over vast distances. This system favours large scale operations, as they contribute the most to profits. There is a high price for this system and the corporate profits it generates.

Who Pays the Price?

Farmers are under great pressure to produce food in ways that are not good for the environment, and therefore the resources we need to grow food are being lost or degraded. Much of our best farmland is no longer available to grow food. Soil continues to be washed or blown off our croplands. Waterways are still being polluted by chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The uniformity required by the food system means that farmers must go against nature. Nature loves diversity, but crops and farm animals must display uniform characteristics to make harvesting and processing easier on a large scale.

The food system favours high capital investment and large-scale operations, making it difficult for small-scale farmers to survive. Local economies suffer as competition forces small operations out of business, and strips people of a livelihood. Multi-nationals move their capital and business to wherever land, labour and resources can be had most cheaply and without regulations. The food we eat is often grown on the other side of the world. In the wake of such movements we see a trail of increasing polarization of income and wealth, ruined local economies, disintegrating communities, unemployment, poverty, a shrinking social safety net and social upheaval.

Hunger in a world of plenty

As poverty climbs, more people cannot afford the food they need to be healthy and hunger grows. Hunger in Canada is increasing at an alarming rate. Food banks and emergency food centres are mushrooming nearly everywhere in Canada.

In 1993, B.C. food activist and community organizer Laura Kalina noted that "... the first official Canadian food bank opened in Edmonton, Alberta in 1982 as a temporary stop-gap. Ten years later, 372 food banks distribute 13 million kilograms of food per year to approximately 1,300 outlets in more than 300 communities in Canada, including Montreal's traditionally prosperous West End and Toronto's Richmond Hill. There are also food banks on college and university campuses. An informal check by the Canadian Federation of Students revealed that food banks had opened on 13 campuses across the country in 1993."

Poor nutrition is a major factor in poor health, which perpetuates cycles of dependence, unemployment and poverty. We know that unhealthy eating habits play a role in the majority of diseases. Foods that are high in fat and artificial chemicals but low in fibre and nutrients, contribute to heart disease, cancer and obesity. Middle and upper income people can afford a nourishing diet, but for a multitude of reasons, often don't make healthy choices.

Over two million Canadians use food banks every month because they can not afford what the food system offers. And usually what's available at the food bank is not very nourishing and people get

whatever they're given. The lower people's incomes are the less healthy they are likely to be. Lack of proper food is a critical factor in their poor health.

In a world where there is enough food for all, emergency food outlets are not an appropriate solution to ensuring that all have food. Direct food aid relieves hunger in an immediate way, but it humiliates those who depend on it and it does not build lasting solutions that ensure food security.

What is food security?

Food security is the assurance that all people, at all times, have access to enough food for an active and healthy life. The key elements of food security are access (everyone getting enough to eat) and availability (is there, and will there continue to be, enough food to go round). Food security is best assured when food is locally produced, processed, stored and distributed.

Together, we can find the answers

Innovative government policies, advocacy and community development are the answer to food security and creating alternatives to the food system as we now know it. We need action at the international level, to counter the tide of economic globalization that is causing poverty and hunger to balloon.

And we need to take action close to home, right in our own communities, to improve access to good quality food for everybody. As Debbie Field, a food action organizer and analyst in Toronto, points out, when we experience the power of working collectively to bring about changes that improve our lives directly, it becomes possible for us to see ourselves as activists for social change, working to create a just society in which hunger no longer exist.

We need to reclaim the local food system, to oppose distancing by encouraging proximity. We need to narrow the gap between producer and consumer. And we need to foster diversity, by keeping as many types of plants and animals alive as we can, to ensure the health of the earth and all the life forms, including our own, that depend on each for survival. In the words of Brewster Kneen, "proximity and diversity are the proper keys to a socially just and ecologically sound food system, a system devoted to feeding all people well."

Reprinted from Food for Thought and Action, 1995.

Feasting

Stephanie Mancini

The sunlight sparkles through the tree behind the house, birds flitter about and fill the air with their song. The sky is clear as far as you can see.

I like to think of the sun as nourishing, warming and ripening the fruits and vegetables. This is quite contrary to the current mode of ozone depletion and of arming ourselves against the harmful rays of the sun. How easy it is to demonize the very sun that keeps us alive rather then to change our driving/air conditioning/excess manufacturing which destroy the ozone - nature's way of looking after our very thin skin.

But this is meant to be a celebration - a celebration of food, of abundance, of the gifts of the garden. It's mid-July, and our breakfast was brimming full of raspberries and red currants picked fresh from the garden, cherries picked from Margaret's tree behind us, and blueberries from an Italian man at the market. So far I have three big bags of raspberries frozen and ready to make into ice cream all winter long. My fingernails were stained for a week after pitting and chopping cherries now also in the freezer. There is a delightful aroma to the basil and cilantro picked fresh from the garden, whirred in the food processor and frozen for winter pestos and for fresh herb sauces.

Joe's delightful culinary abilities turn all this freshness into a feast at each meal. Last night's supper started with tiny garlic chives we uprooted from a pathway in the garden, joined by one of our new onions that was popping out of the soil where it grew, and big leafy greens (swiss chard, dandelion) were chopped and added in. Snap peas, mushrooms, and squash from Charlie (he is a local grower, has a stall at the Kitchener market, and is a member of BarterWorks) were stir-fried quickly in the wok while the pasta cooked. Steaming pasta was poured into

the dish, over some fresh sheep's feta (bought from the Greek couple who have a store on Ontario Street downtown). The vegetables were gently stirred in along with some freshly chopped basil, cilantro, parsley and chives.

Eating such a dish is a celebration, made even more special by the act of preparing the meal. Our conversation touches on where the food came from - "Are these Charlie's onions?" "Who did you get the peas from?" "Where does the Italian market vendor grow his food?" or on how to prepare the food - "How finely should these be chopped?" "Can you run outside and pick 5 or 6 leaves of basil?" We pass an evening preparing and enjoying such a meal, topped off with a dish of home-made ice cream (last night's treat was espresso-chocolate chip - mm!)

Now, making a meal in our household is not a simple task. Supper takes at least an hour to prepare and many hands are needed to pick, wash, fetch and clean up. Meals are a family pastime. Our teenage daughters apprentice under their father's watchful eye. Our five year old son regularly makes chocolate-chocolate chip biscotti and scones, and has now become the official "shaper" of the cookies as they go on the cookie sheet.

These habits and patterns have been built over years of learning. For example, this year we met Charlie the organic gardener. He visited our garden and we shared some herbs and produce from our garden which he in turn sold at the market and he has shared some of his produce with us. Last year we canned organic plum tomatoes which were grown specifically for us by a woman in Wellesley who makes an income from her farm land while she home schools her children. Finding local sources, learning to use food in season, preserving food for winter is part of the cycle of the seasons. Every year we learn something new. To some this way seems complicated or difficult. As someone who despises shopping I would gladly labour in my garden or wander the market than stand in line in a grocery store.

What can be more complicated then buying blueberries in July from a large store, that were picked in B.C., loaded into plastic trays, and shipped across Canada to be sold "fresh" in Ontario stores while local growers search for ways to sell their blueberries? What of the fumes created by the trucks that carried the berries, and the plastic that lies intact in area landfills? As a society we have lost the ability to et without using over-packaged, highly processed foods, we've turned good growing land into suburbs which are regularly treated with pesticides, and we've institutionalized hunger where it is seen as charitable to share the excesses of our food system with the poor. Understanding the immensity of these problems is far more complicated for me.

Perhaps the greater price we pay is losing the symphony of tastes, smells and textures as we harvest, clean, and prepare our food. In this context, using the backyard to grow food, participating in a community garden, eating well, buying locally, and sharing with others become acts of resistance.

Stephanie Mancini is a co-ordinator at The Working Centre.

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Canadian Organic Growers
(613) 231-9047
P.O. Box 6408, Station J
Ottawa, Ontario K2A 3Y6
Network of organic growers with chapters across the country. Contact to get name of local chapter contact. Organizes an organic growers conference every winter in Guelph. Membership includes subscription to Eco Farm and Garden.

FoodShare Toronto
238 Queen St W.
Toronto On M5V 2Z7
(416) 392-6653
www.foodshare.net
Supports a variety of innovative grassroots projects designed to improve access to affordable, nutritious food. Also offers public education on food security issues.

Toronto Vegetarian Society
2300 Yonge St Ste 1101
PO Box 2307
Toronto On M4P !E4
(416) 544-9094
www.veg.on.ca
Promotes vegetarianism. Sponsors a festival every September that provides information and resources for a healthy lifestyle. Contact to get name of local chapter contact.

Community Resources

Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank
56 Dickson St
Cambridge N1R 1T8
622-6550

Members receive food while participating in maintaining the organization. Offers supportive workshops and programs. Runs the Good Food Box program.

Community Garden Network
883-2000 ext. 5801
The Region of Waterloo has community gardens all around town. Members get a small plot of land to grow vegetables through organic gardening methods.

Ebytown Food Co-operative
280 Phillip St,
Waterloo N2L 3X8
886-8806
Ebytown is a small community based co-operative that emphasizes organic and bulk foods. Run by members, you must call ahead for the store hours.

Ontario Natural Food Co-operative Buying Clubs
1-800-387-0354
Buying clubs allow people to get together and buy natural foods at a good discount. Orders are made every few months for non-perishable items. Call for information about local clubs.

St John's Community Kitchen
97 Victoria Street North
Downtown Kitchener
745-8928
Free nutritious lunch time meal.

Week Eight: Going Local

This week includes a group brainstorming exercise. It may be helpful to have some flipchart paper for the facilitator to record the activity.

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.

People belong to many different communities: through neighbourhoods, churches, families, ethnic groups, or cultural interests. Despite this, our sense of community today does not appear to be very strong. More and more people feel isolated, more and more people depend on money for the things they want, rather than their relationships with others.

This week we're discussing practical ways of building community through our daily round of activities. Why not view shopping as a chance to visit with friends rather than a chore? Shopping in locally owned small businesses can help us build a sense of community, as store owners learn our needs and interests, and we learn about them. Can we re-invent our habits so that they bring us together rather than keep us isolated?

Reflection Time.

Describe an experience when you felt like part of a community.

Go-round.

Share stories.

Patterns.
Open Discussion.

What are the key elements of community? Which elements do we already possess in our lives? What can we do to increase our sense of community? What blocks our ability to develop a stronger sense of belonging? Are the blocks internal or external?

Healthy Communities Exercise

Scott Russell Saunders calls for a Bill of Responsibilities that each person would honour in the place where they live. Perhaps we can imagine a community that nurtures and supports people living more simply. Brainstorm a list of attributes of a healthy, supportive community. What kinds of things could we do to create such a community?

Action Commitments.

Make one small connecting step to your community. Spend some time reflecting on what kinds of communities you belong to - is there one you can direct more attention to?

Ending.

Going Local

This week's reading looks at the small actions and attitudes that build up into the larger whole of community. Saunders recognizes that North Americans are trained to individuality and anonymity, which makes settling in one place very difficult for us. We may not want to make long

lasting relationships with the people around us, looking towards someone or someplace new. He points out how much we take for granted locally based institutions, forgetting that only local people can bring them to life.

We can also consider ways we can begin to live in place, making connections with neighbours and friends, building skill sets that sustain us, and using time instead of money to meet our needs. If living simply is to contribute to our sense of community, we need to spend our time in the place where we live. Joe Mancini of The Working Centre provides a framework of a "producer economy" that will shape our lives in much healthier ways than a consumer economy.

Web of Life

Scott Russell Saunders

A woman who recently moved from Los Angeles to Bloomington, Indiana, told me that she would not be able to stay here long, because she was already beginning to recognize people in the grocery stores, on the sidewalks, in the library. Being surrounded by familiar faces made her nervous, after years in a city where she could range about anonymously. Every traveler knows the sense of liberation that comes from journeying to a place where nobody expects anything of you. Everyone who has gone to college knows the exhilaration of slipping away from the watchful eyes of Mom and Dad. We all need seasons of withdrawal from responsibility. But if we make a career of being unaccountable, we have lost something essential to our humanity, and we may well become a burden or a threat to those around us.

Ever since the eclipse of our native cultures, the dominant American view has been that we should cultivate the self rather than the community; that we should look to the individual as the source of hope and the center of value, while expecting hindrance and harm from society. We have understood freedom for the most part negatively rather than positively, as release from constraints rather than as a condition for making a decent life in common. Hands off, we say; give me elbow room; good fences make good neighbours; my home is my castle; don't tread on me. I'm looking out for number one, we say; I'm doing my own thing. We have a Bill of Rights, which protects each of us from a bullying society, but no Bill of Responsibilities, which would oblige us to answer the needs of others.

What other view could have emerged from our history? The first Europeans to reach America were daredevils and treasure seekers, as were most of those who mapped the interior. Many colonists were renegades of one stripe or another, some of them religious nonconformists, some political rebels, more than a few of them fugitives from the law. The trappers, hunters, traders, and freebooters who pushed the frontier westward seldom recognized any authority beyond the reach of their own hands. Coast to coast, our land has been settled and our cities have been filled by generations of immigrants more intent on leaving behind old tyrannies than on seeking new social bonds.

The cult of the individual shows up everywhere in American lore, which celebrates drifters, rebels, and loners while pitying or reviling the pillars of the community. The backwoods explorer like Daniel Boone, the river- boat rowdy like Mike Fink, the lumberjack, the prospector, the rambler and gambler, the daring crook like Jesse James or the resourceful killer like Billy the Kid, along with countless lonesome cowboys, all wander, unattached, through the great spaces of our imagination.

Fortunately, while our tradition is heavily tilted in favor of private life, we also inherit a tradition of caring for the community. Writing about what he had seen in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville judged Americans to be avaricious, self-serving, and aggressive; but he was also amazed by our eagerness to form clubs, to raise barns or town halls, to join together in one cause or another: "In no country in the world," he wrote, "do the citizens make such exertions for the common weal. I know of no people who have established schools so numerous and efficacious, places of public worship better suited to the wants of the inhabitants, or roads kept in better repair."

Today we might revise Tocqueville's estimate of our schools or roads, but we can still see all around us the fruits of that concern for the common weal - the libraries, museums, courthouses, hospitals, orphanages, universities, parks, on and on. No matter where we live, our home places have also benefited from the Granges and unions, the volunteer fire brigades, the art guilds and garden clubs, the charities, food kitchens, homeless shelters, soccer and baseball teams, the Scouts and 4-H, the Girls and Boys Clubs, the Lions and Elks and Rotarians, the countless gatherings of people who saw a need and responded to it.

This history of local care hardly ever makes it into our literature, for it is less glamorous than rebellion, yet it is a crucial part of our heritage. Any of us could cite examples of people who dug in and joined with others to make our home places better places. Women and men who invest themselves in their communities, fighting for good schools or green spaces, paying attention to where they are, seem to me as worthy of celebration as those adventurous loners who keep drifting on, prospecting for pleasure.

The words community, communion, and communicate all derive from common, and the two syllables of common grow from separate roots, the first meaning "together" or "next to," the second having to do with barter or exchange. Embodied in that word is a sense of our shared life as one of giving and receiving - music, touch, ideas, recipes, stories, medicine, tools, the whole range of artifacts and talents. After 25 years with my wife, Ruth, that is how I have come to understand marriage, as a constant exchange of labor and love. We do not calculate who gives how much; if we had to, the marriage would be in trouble. Looking outward from this community of two, I see my life embedded in ever larger exchanges - those of family and friendship, neighbourhood and city, countryside and country - and on every scale there is giving and receiving, calling and answering. Many people shy away from community out of a fear that it may become suffocating, confining, even vicious; and of course it may, if it grows rigid or exclusive. A healthy community is dynamic, stirred up by the energies of those who already belong, open to new members and fresh influences, kept in motion by the constant bartering of gifts. It is fashionable just now to speak of this open quality as "tolerance," but that word sounds too grudging to me - as though, to avoid strife, we must grit our teeth and ignore whatever is strange to us. The community I desire is not grudging; it is exuberant, joyful, grounded in affection, pleasure, and mutual aid. Such a community arises not from duty or money but from the free interchange of people who share a place, share work and food, sorrows and hope. Taking part in the common life means dwelling in a web of relationships, the many threads tugging at you while also holding you upright.

I have told elsewhere the story of a man who lived in the Ohio township where I grew up, a builder who refused to join the volunteer fire department. Why should he join, when his house was brick, properly wired, fitted out with new appliances? Well, one day that house caught fire. His wife dialed the emergency number, the siren wailed, and pretty soon the volunteer firemen, my father among them, showed up with the pumper truck. But they held back on the hoses, asking the builder if he still saw no reason to join, and the builder said he could see a pretty good reason to join right there and then, and the volunteers let the water loose.

I have also told before the story of a family from that township whose house burned down. The local people sheltered the family, then built them a new house. This was a poor township. But nobody thought to call in the government or apply to a foundation. These were neighbors in a fix, and so you helped them, just as you would harvest corn for an ailing farmer or pull a flailing child from the creek or put your arm around a weeping friend.

My daughter Eva and I recently went to a concert in Bloomington's newly opened arts centre. The old limestone building had once been the town hall, then a fire station and jail, then for several years an abandoned shell. Volunteers bought the building from the city for a dollar and renovated it with materials, labor, and money donated by local people. Now we have a handsome facility that is in constant use for pottery classes, theater productions, puppet shows, art exhibits, poetry readings, and every manner of musical event.

The music Eva and I heard was Hymnody of Earth, for hammer dulcimer, percussion, and children's choir. Composed by our next-door neighbor Malcolm Dalglish and featuring lyrics by our Ohio Valley neighbor Wendell Berry, it was performed, that night by Malcolm, percussionist Glen Velez, and the Bloomington Youth Chorus. As I sat there with Eva in a sellout crowd - about a third of whom I knew by name, another third by face - I listened to music that had been elaborated within earshot of my house, and I heard my friend play his instrument, and I watched those children's faces shining with the colours of the human spectrum, and I felt the restored building clasping us like the cupped hands of our community. I knew once more that I was in the right place, a place created and filled and inspired by our lives together.

I am not harking back to some idyllic past, like the one embalmed in the Saturday Evening Post covers by Norman Rockwell or the prints of Currier and Ives. The past was never golden. As a people, we still need to unlearn some of the bad habits we formed during the long period of settlement. One good habit we might reclaim, however, is looking after those who live nearby. For much of our history, neighbours have kept one another going, kept one another sane. Still today, in town and country, in apartment buildings and barrios, even in suburban estates, you are certain to lead a narrower life without the steady presence of neighbours. It is neither quaint nor sentimental to advocate neighbourliness;

it is far more sentimental to suggest that we can do without such mutual aid.
Even Emerson, preaching self-reliance, knew the necessity of neighbours. He lived in a village, gave and received help, and delivered his essays as lectures for fellow citizens whom he hoped to sway. He could have left his ideas in his journals, where they first took shape, but he knew those ideas would only have effect when they were shared. I like to think he would have agreed with the Lakota shaman Black Elk, who said. "A man who has a vision is not able to use the power of it until after he has performed the vision on earth for people to see." If you visit Emerson's house in Concord, you will find the leather bucket hanging near the door, for he belonged to the village fire brigade, and even in the seclusion of his study, in the depths of thought, he kept his ears open for the alarm bell.

We should not have to wait until our houses are burning before we see the wisdom of facing our local needs by joining in common work. We should not have to wait until gunfire breaks out in our schools, rashes break out on our skin, dead fish float in our streams, or beggars sleep on our streets before we act on behalf of the community. On a crowded planet, we had better learn how to live well together, or we will live miserably apart.

Scott Russell Saunders lives in Bloomington Indiana. Reprinted from Utne reader.

Building Relationships: Community Tools and Producing at Home

Joe Mancini

For over 18 years, The Working Centre has attempted to contrast large-scale bureaucratized work with what we call small, local, personal work. The former is a seductive drain on communities with its philosophy of short-term thinking, de-skilling and Dilbert-like motivational techniques. Local economies are left with a legacy of environmental destruction, waste and top heavy thinking. The more we are dependent as wage earners on large corporations the more our households are dependent on the mass produced commodities they produce. In contrast, daily work that seeks to limit the reach of the "globalized market" in our everyday lives, that fosters creative and useful unemployment while pursuing productive activities, is a recipe for creating communities and neighbourhoods that matter.

In our work we have sought to provide ideas that support small production and help these projects develop stability. We call the first of these projects Community Tools - community-inspired projects and undertakings that assist people to live full and productive lives with less income. The second of these projects is complimentary in that it identifies and supports individuals relearning the skills of local production.

Community Tools

Community Tools are projects designed to put productive tools into the hands of people. They have the added benefit of a co-operative and neighbourhood structure so that individuals do not have to work in isolation. An economy that is gentle on the environment needs ways for people to produce things for themselves. Communities can benefit from developing facilities where individuals have access to tools in order to support local producing and trading. It is possible to build decentralized and diversified structures that trust in the ability of individuals to freely produce for themselves and others when they have access to tools.

Community Tools seek to make daily living more affordable and cooperative. Workers and volunteers who are involved in the organization's everyday activity usually control the service, product or project. The essential ingredient is that the services are provided cheaply and in an accessible way. The projects often have access to tools as their main goal. Organizations are able to solicit money for purchasing tools for pottery, carpentry, cooking, leatherwork, sewing, gardening, computers, etc.

The skill is to devise ways to ensure the tools are freely available to a wide range of people. Four local examples are the computers and phones available at The Working Centre, the bicycle tools at Recycle Cycles, the pottery equipment at Cambridge Active Self-Help (CASH) and the bartering infrastructure for green dollars developed by BarterWorks.

Finding a location for the tools is not as difficult as it sounds. Creative ways of finding space include cooperative arrangements with organizations that have extra space. Such organizations do not have to charge a market rate for rent, because the resulting use and exposure of their own organization will more than justify the use of the space.

Cities that spend $65 million to build city halls can find some cash to purchase downtown buildings and lease them out in a way that covers their maintenance expenses. Service clubs can do the same, such as the project of the Kitchener Conestoga Rotary Club to purchase a building to be used by non-profit organizations.

Habitat for Humanity has a community tools approach. The organization receives donations for land and materials and uses volunteers to build houses for people. The families add sweat labour and are able to move in with an affordable low mortgage payment.

The same strategy applies to land for community gardens. It is not hard to conceive of projects where the land is purchased by a community land trust and developed for community gardens. Municipalities can play a supporting role by encouraging such developments and sponsoring model gardens within the city limits at various sites within neighbourhoods. Potential members of the community gardens could do the initial preparation work.

The production of food is an example of a lost skill where most people have little knowledge of how food is grown or how it arrives on the grocery store shelf. Small and diversified projects like community shared agriculture, organic growers associations, ecological farmers associations, community gardens, people who produce food in their backyards and front yards are changing this reality. The production of fresh and vital food is the work of many people including those who search out large and small plots, those who grow food in containers and those who convert rooftops into gardens and greenhouses. The production of food should not be left to the dwindling numbers of farmers who find themselves marginalized by low prices and high debt and addicted to pesticide sprays.

The growing of food in and around urban areas is the stuff that binds neighbourhoods and people together. The projects in all their diversity that grow the food are the community tools. And they need to be supported, encouraged, and developed.

Access to Tools

Over the last ten years, a great deal of Working Centre energy has been directed towards building Community Tools projects. We have defined our work as putting productive tools into projects which continually change and evolve. The projects have grown to include self-directed computer training, public access computers, community voice mail, the food and facilities made available at St. John's Kitchen, the St. John's Kitchen Garden community, the Queens Greens Garden and 30 Kitchen gardens, sewing machines, bolts of fabric and craft workshop space, the nurturing of BarterWorks, the re-shaping of Recycle Cycles with a new home and long-term stability, a library that focuses on the skills of local production, and expanded community meeting space.

These projects are designed to help groups and individuals work together to provide concrete things that people can use. Volunteers contribute in substantial ways to each project. Co-operation grows along with mutual aid and trust, when people work together to make their community a more friendly and helpful place.

Home Producing

The experience of long-term unemployment, the inability to work full-time or the search for meaningful work can mean that consumerist spending is either unattainable or irrelevant. The Working Centre has attempted to help people uncover the productive capacities that are part of the household economy. That simply means recovering the ability to produce what we have become used to paying for.

Like all binges, the consumer economy binge reminds us of the pleasure of doing without. It only takes imagination to learn how to enjoy living away from the store. Fewer jobs, more time at home means more time to learn the skills of producing for yourself.

Instead of chauffeuring yourself to work in your car in order to produce something, you can stay home and do the same. The Canadian Automobile Association estimates that the average annual cost of owning and operating an automobile is $7,000. It starts by questioning how many hours of work it takes just to pay to operate one or two cars.

Packaging represents more than a pretty box. It usually signifies a value-added manufacturing process that has merely converted some raw materials into a more expensive item. The home producer can easily get access to either the raw material or an appropriate substitute and craft the item whether it is from food, wood, clay, glass, paper, steel, etc. It is at this point that the importance of community tools takes shape. When the proper tools are available and others are willing to teach their use, then amazing new possibilities start to emerge.

The home or community gardener can devise multiple ways of producing food, compost and seeds. The starting point is finding plots of land that can be converted to productive use. The combination of raised beds with the continuous addition of compost creates a soil bursting with nutrition and potential. The techniques of permaculture, organic gardening and extending the seasons can be learned through study and practical trial and error. This learning grows over a five to ten year period as knowledge of how things grow takes root and appropriate structures and tools are designed and adapted. Raised beds, compost areas, seedling starters, cold frames and moveable small hoop greenhouses are meshed with self-seeding and perennial greens, vegetables and fruits that establish themselves.

Savings come from wise use of resources. Every bike trip saves wear and tear on the car. Living without a car saves tens of thousands of dollars over the years. Gardening produces food and the waste can be converted to compost that saves on fertilizers. Preserving food means that you are paying yourself for your labour rather than giving it away. Learning to eat fresh grown or stored vegetables is healthy and avoids food manufacturing and preservatives. Finding a piece of junk and reconditioning it often results in major savings plus the satisfaction of a job well done. Turning a room of a house into an office or workshop doubles the productive capacity of your living space and means you can save on rent or commuting.

The excesses of our overdeveloped society cannot continue ecologically or financially. When people have less work and more time, it only makes sense to remember and apply the thrift skills. It is surely not advisable to continue patterns that will result in personal debts when income no longer exceeds expenses.

Community tools and home producing are two ways to ensure full and cooperative living within the changing rules of work. The old economy is obviously changing. In its place people can create an economy of sufficiency. Wolfgang Sachs calls this "the connection between the elegance of simplicity and elegance of living". When people have time to think, create, and give of themselves, then the potential for building sufficiency through community tools and living simply grows exponentially. This is a good time to take the time and explore the opportunities that exist.

Joe Mancini is the director of the Working Centre.

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Natural Life Media
RR1, St George,
Ontario N0E 1N0
(519) 448-4001
www.life.com
Natural Life is a magazine about sustainable healthy living in Canada. It is available by subscription or on the internet. Natural Life also offers a variety of books and products that promote healthy living. The Natural Life Festival occurs every August long weekend in St. George, an hour south of Kitchener, highlighting innovative products and technologies.

Community Resources

Cambridge Active Self-Help
14 Water St S
Cambridge N1R 3C5
623-6024
Provides support to people who have experienced mental health problems. Runs a pottery co-operative.

Rotary Community Resource Village
1100-153 Frederick St
Kitchener N2H 2M2
576-8856
This building – sponsored by the Rotary Club of Kitchener-Conestoga - houses local non-profits in a co-operative manner.

Habitat for Humanity
120 Northfield Drive East
Waterloo N2J 4G8
747-0664
Builds homes for low-income families using donated materials and labour.

Kor Gallery & Studio
79 Joseph St
Kitchener N2G 1J2
742-0154
Provides studio space for musicians and workshops and gallery space for artists.

Neigbourhood Associations and Community Centres
Contact your City Hall to find out about neighbourhood associations and community centres in your area. Associations provide a forum for residents to address common concerns and build friendships. Community centres provide a place for recreation and other activities.

Waterloo Community Arts Centre
25 Regina St S
Waterloo N2J 1R8
886-4577
Provides a variety of arts based programming, including courses, workshops, kids' summer programs, and concerts.

Week Nine: Celebration

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.
Holidays are often the most difficult time for people trying to reduce their habits of consumption. You want to celebrate and enjoy the special occasions, but how to do it simply? Family and cultural pressures can make it very hard to celebrate in a simple fashion. Christmas, birthdays, weddings, all seem to now carry the expectation of extravagant gifts and expensive entertainment. Is it possible to be extravagant in joy and sharing without the expense?
Reflection.
Remember a holiday or special occasion that was especially meaningful to you. What were the elements that were important to you?
Go-round.
Share stories.
Patterns.
Open Discussion.
What are some of the current challenges around celebrating in your own life? How can we, as individuals, and as a society as a whole, move towards a way of celebrating that maintains meaning and ritual? How do we find the balance, as in Spirit of the Season, between our own needs and those of family and community? Are Longacre's elements helpful in understanding the role special events play in our lives?
Small Group Discussion.
Break into pairs to consider why you celebrate special occasions. What are the connections between celebration and spirituality? Celebration and community? Is a sense of ritual important to you? Is a sense of tradition important? What matters most to you when it comes to celebrations?
Whole Group Discussion.
Share insights from pairs.
Action Commitments.
Ending.
Remind people that next week is the final week. What can we do to make our last evening memorable? Even if refreshments have not been a regular part of the circle, it is a good idea to make sure the last meeting includes a meal or snacks. Members of the circle may want to spend some time considering if they want to continue meeting, and in what way.

Special Occasions

In this time of excess and indulgence, when grocery shelves are filled with food, and stores filled with toys, it can be hard to appreciate special occasions. More chocolate, more candy, more alcohol, more food, more stuff. In times of hardship, extravagant festivals bring cheer and delight. In times of abundance, festive occasions can also be overwhelming and exhausting. In a commercial culture, we need to remake our common celebrations, creating festivals that meet our needs of tradition while not denying the changing circumstances we are facing.

Some people want to simplify their holidays, putting the emphasis on relationships and renewal of their spirit. Other people, who have simplified their lives, want to keep the indulgent joys

of celebrations, appreciating them all the more in contrast to their more simple daily lives. Each of us has to explore the role of special events in our lives and our families' lives.

As our public celebrations have become increasingly commercialized, many of us have also lost the significance of ritual in our private lives as well. If we can find ways to re-connect to our spirit and meaning on a regular basis, it may help to take some pressure off our more public holidays. Meditation, yoga, tai chi, journaling, prayer, walking, and altars, are all activities people use to rejuvenate themselves.

Longacre provides some insights into the nature of celebration that may help you in planning a special event. Heath reminds us that we can meet our own needs for ritual and celebration within our common culture.

Celebrations

Doris Janzen Longacre

Writers' conferences tell you there is no subject on which you cannot write something significant. I disagree.

When products or services having to do with weddings, Christmas, or Easter must be advertised, people do find themselves writing on subjects about which there is absolutely nothing sensible to say. And write they must, or lose their jobs! This dynamic process produces literature that makes you laugh or cry.

Take the "Spring Bridal Supplement," which yearly comes stuffed into our small town newspaper. It's a collection of ads mixed with banalities in news article style and is all abut how to get married and dazzle your friends at the same time. The day it comes no one needs the funnies.

First a photographer promotes "new posing and lighting techniques" and says, "We do more double and triple exposures then ever." Next is a wedding cake with linking electric lights and a real water fountain which, miraculously, will not squirt onto either the icing or the bridal gown. A fashion column, wary of being caught a few days behind the trends, plays it safe with "couples this spring will middle-aisle it in traditional updated styling."

Some years the whole business fills me with pity for brides. Ads cajole them to buy everything from Super Shooter Food Guns for cake decorating to special alarm clocks for the wedding morning. Brides have it hard. But this year I wept for the grooms.

Kindergarten boys would fold under the put-downs. "Brides, please don't trust anyone else with your groom!" says a men's store. An ad for tuxedo rental begins smoothly, "He's in the wedding, too, looking handsome," and ends, "in finely tailored formal-wear you think was cut just for him." A list of "The Bride's Obligations," given similar importance to the Ten Commandments, ends with "get wedding present for the groom." And the groom thought that ballpoint pen she gave him was her own idea, born of true love!

These creative writers carefully handle the subject of the groom's feet. Perhaps this is a reaction against a few overly casual pasture weddings of recent years in which he went barefoot. And that was in reaction to the stiff shiny shoes which pinched his toes. Last-minute tips for the groom remind him to "line up clean underwear and appropriate socks beforehand, check to see all zippers are performing as they should, and, if using rented shoes, make sure one is for the left foot and the other for the right." Like an airplane pilot poised for flight, he checks all systems: up-down on the zipper, left-right on the shoes...

Since life is short, we may as well laugh. And then determine that our celebrations will indeed center on praising God, not mammon. By God's grace we can make both holy and merry the unique events that mark our years.

1. **Celebrate the meaning of life** at births, birthdays, marriages, deaths, various anniversaries, and special times. Living more with less does not mean abolishing commemorations and festivals.
2. **Celebrations are more than entertainment**. They should nurture people and strengthen faith. Activities which joyfully accomplish that are appropriate.
3. As much as possible, **separate celebrations from commercial interests.** Sometimes paid services are useful, but their availability must not dictate how we celebrate.
4. **Money may be well spent on celebrating.** But in our day overspending is the greatest temptation. Look for moderation and simplicity.
5. **Even at celebrative times, cherish nature by saving energy and by avoiding products that litter and pollute.**
6. **Gifts given during celebrations serve the receiver's genuine needs or reflect the giver's desire to show love, or both.** In the case of simply wanting to show love, a gift of time, personal expression, or other innovation may accomplish the purpose best.
7. Weddings do not belong only to the bride (it's your day!) or birthdays to the child (you can have anything you want at your party) or funerals to the one who died (but that's what father would have wanted). Celebrations belong also to

families and churches and communities. **Considering the feelings and involvement of many is important.**

8. **Celebrations are not only for today.** They become our history. For once-in-a-lifetime events, like weddings and funerals, handle tradition sensitively. Make room for new ideas, but carefully weed out what is cheap and frivolous. Rented shoes or bare feet may embarrass you when you look back in twenty years.

Excerpted from Living More with Less.

Spirit of the Season
fiona heath

There is much to love about the Christmas season - the colours, the smells and the food combine to make it all seem so exciting. Every year I look forward to mince pies, mandarin oranges, gingerbread, mulled cider, and all the rest. Candles fill the house with a warm glow and the scents of cinnamon, bayberry, and pine.

But the pleasure is mitigated by the sense of discomfort I feel about the false cheer of shopping malls and the pressure to spend money. The unrelenting advertising turns the giving of gifts into a stressful chore. The winter holiday is the hardest time of year to live simply without cutting oneself off from family and friends.

Since Christmas has little religious significance for us, we celebrate the winter solstice on December 22nd, the longest night of the year. Right now, it's a quiet family time - lighting candles, drinking apple cider, and sharing small gifts. As our child grows older, our rituals for the day will continue to evolve. It's important to me that our celebrations remember and respect our connection to the earth and the seasons. Winter solstice is a time of reflection and transformation, marking the darkness but looking towards the return of the light. The last of the long nights creates a sense of new possibilities. It redirects the excitement and anticipation I once felt about receiving presents towards the process of developing myself - what I will focus on in the new year.

Celebrating winter solstice allows us to express our values without offending or interfering with more traditional extended family celebrations. As well, in a society that is no longer just christian, but jewish, hindu, muslim, sikh, buddhist, winter solstice is an event that crosses religious boundaries by marking our connection to the place we all share.

We share Christmas with our families. I continue to struggle with the tension of living out my values while still belonging to family. I love giving and receiving gifts, but it can be hard to appreciate gifts that refute my chosen lifestyle. We don't want our child growing up believing that Christmas is about receiving lots of stuff. I am very fortunate to be surrounded by generous and loving people, but it can be hard for them to respect our choices. By reminding family of our pleasure in hand made, second hand, small gifts, we are asking them to change not just their shopping habits, but their belief that more money and more stuff better demonstrates their love. Everyone knows it's a false equation, but they don't have the time to be more creative in gift giving. As well, it somehow feels wrong to give something that costs little or nothing. We have to learn to separate the value of gifts from their price.

The giving of gifts is an essential part of creating community. People give gifts to demonstrate love or friendship, to make a connection. It feels good to give gifts. It is so sad that big business has turned Christmas from a religious holiday into an excess of overspending and materialism. I continue to struggle to find the balance between joyfully accepting tokens of affection and refusing to overindulge in stuff.

I try to buy or create gifts that are experiences rather than possessions. Food and candles are always good gifts since they get used up. Tickets to an event lets people experience something new. When I do buy items, I try to purchase them from fair trade, social justice organizations or local craftspeople. That

way my money helps small business, here or abroad, and I'm not supporting corporations more interested in profit than people. I spend within my means, and try not to care that my gifts might not cost as much as someone else's.

Our society has so few festival days left and even fewer rituals to mark them. I want to reclaim the winter holiday back from excessive consumerism and make it a meaningful time again. When I look back on the Christmas celebrations of my childhood, what I enjoyed most was that it was a day out of the ordinary. The anticipation of opening presents, the opportunity to dress up a little, eat mince pies and chocolate for breakfast, the big feast, and sitting by a warm fire all day long, made Christmas special. It is the sense of the extraordinary that I want to pass on to my child. Gifts are only a small part of a beautiful day.

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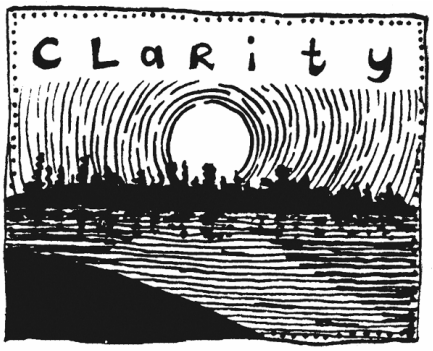
Alternatives for Simple Living
5312 Morningside Avenue P.O. Box 2787
Sioux City, Iowa 51106 U.S.A.
www.simpleliving.org
This organization provides resources on simple living from a Christian perspective. They focus on encouraging celebrations that reflect a non-consumer lifestyle.

Week Ten: Reflection



It may be helpful for members to also read Continuing on the Path for this session.

Opening.
Check-in on Action Commitments.
Week's Theme.
This is the last week of the simplicity circle. It's a time for reflection, celebration, and looking forward. Did this circle help you towards simplifying your life? Where do you want to go from here?
Reflection Time.
Check your notes from the first session. What did you want to get out of this circle? Did you receive it? How do you feel about the last ten weeks? Sit quietly and take the time to reflect on the impact of this simplicity circle on your life.
Go-round.
Patterns.
Open Discussion.
Has the simplicity circle made a difference in your life? What helped, what didn't? How did the process work? Were people able to hold to the ground rules? Were people comfortable in the role of facilitator?
What Next?
Where do we go from here? Many groups find themselves at a crossroads at the end of the sessions. Some circles begin to meet bi-weekly or monthly. They may follow another simple living study guide or book, or have members organize a session on a particular topic. It is a good idea to have readings to start from. What topics would you like to explore that haven't been covered in this guide?

Some members will have found a growing interest in spirituality or the inner life. Others will be energized into community action. Both are valuable orientations, however a circle that wants to continue may not be able to encompass it all. Since circles are intended primarily as a learning group rather than an action group, it may be best to organize a separate group that wants to get involved in a particular project, activity, or community action. Circles work best as a forum for discussion and reflection – giving people the opportunity to explore ideas through their own experiences.

Some groups may want to become a kind of simplicity book club - instead of each person reading the same book (and buying all those copies), one person can read a book and present a detailed summary of the ideas. Certain groups may become theme groups – moving from simplicity to spirituality or parenting or ecological issues. Some may want to meet more casually.

Some circles may not meet again, but individual members may choose to start another simplicity circle through another venue – their church or parent's group. If your group cannot decide, but would like to keep meeting in some way, plan to meet again in two weeks or a month. Set a date now. Members can explore different options and report back to the circle.
Go-round
Each person takes a few minutes for final thoughts and comments about this process. Mention at least one idea, insight, or action you will be holding onto. Don't forget to thank one another!

Continuing on the Path

Voluntary Simplicity is a process, not a destination. It is a way to frame your life in order to ensure that you are living your life according to your values, goals, and sense of purpose. When you live simply, in peace with yourself and your place, you can extend that healthy behaviour into the world.

Simple living is intended as a way for you to make connections, to see the connections between your own well being and that of your community, and the earth. It is about making choices that choose a better life for everyone, choices that support sustainable living, both here and around the world. These choices require working together to create social systems that support meaningful and joyful ways of living for all.

If your simplicity circle is now over, continue to explore simplicity through the many books, magazines, websites, and organizations listed in the Resource section. There are so many more aspects to voluntary simplicity than these ten sessions were able to cover. Consider working with the Live Simply Project to organize more circles in this area. Start another circle, join a book club, follow your passion. Keep up the sense of connection with friends and the community that you may have developed over the past ten weeks.

If you have read through this booklet as an individual, we hope you are inspired to start a simplicity circle of your own. Drop by The Working Centre to find more resources and people interested in simple living. Or call the Live Simply Project for upcoming workshops or talks.

The Working Centre and the Live Simply Project invite people to share their experiences in voluntary simplicity. Let us know how you felt about your simplicity circle and how your journey in simple living is going. We'd love to hear how to improve the study guide, suggestions for possible follow-up sessions, and ways we can better support people in Waterloo Region moving towards a sustainable lifestyle.

The Working Centre is building a body of resources on simple living at 43 Queen St South, and would like your input on good resources. What books or articles have you found useful? Consider volunteering to help others in their search for a simpler life.

Most of all, we'd like to hear your stories. Consider writing down your thoughts or ideas as a letter, essay or article. Both the *Good Work News* and the Project's newsletter would like to give more people a voice on choosing voluntary simplicity.

May these final thoughts inspire you to live simply and to live well!

How Simple?

Richard Gregg

If simplicity of living is a valid principle, there is one important precaution and condition of its application. I can explain it best by something which Mahatma Gandhi said to me. We were talking about simple living and I said that it was easy for me to give up most things but that I had a greedy mind and wanted to keep my many books. He said, "Then don't give them up. As long as you derive inner help and comfort from anything, you should keep it. If you were to give it up in a mood of self sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is greatly desired."

This Loom Called Time

Vicki Robin

It's a miracle when people can actually step outside and say, "I have the power to create my life. I have the power to take this loom I've been offered

called time and weave on it something new, something that comes from within me. Something that comes from within me in relation to what I observe in the world might be needed.

That's how I've lived my life since I was 26 years old. I feel so lucky to be able to live that way. I would live to have all people live this way, because my sense is that we're a hairbreadth away from a world that could work. And that hairbreadth away is people having access to that freedom and being able to place themselves in jobs, in relationships or in parts of the world where their skills and capacities will be the best used and where they will be most fulfilled in being able to give themselves.

A Gift from the Sea
Anne Morrow Lindbergh

But I want first of all – in fact, as an end to these other desires – to be at peace with myself. I want a singleness of eye, a purity of intention, a central core to my life that will enable me to carry out these obligations and activities as well as I can. I want, in fact – to borrow from the language of the saints – to live "in grace" as much of the time as possible. I am not using this term in the strictly theological sense. By grace I mean an inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony. I am seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from the *Phaedrus* when he said, "May the outward and inward man be at one." I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to in the eye of God.

Resources

Books

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Keyes, Ralph. **Timelock.** HarperCollins. New York. 1991.

Kingwell, Mark. **Better Living: In Pursuit of Happiness from Plato to Prozac.** Penguin Books, Toronto. 1998.

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Zelinski, Ernie J. **The Joy of Not Working**. 10 Speed Press. Berkeley, California. 1997.

Magazines

Adbusters
The Media Foundation
1243 West 7th Ave
Vancouver, BC V6H 1B7
www.adbusters.org

Alternatives Journal
Faculty of Environmental Studies
University of Waterloo
Waterloo Ontario N2L 3G1
(519) 888-4567 ext 6783
www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/alternatives/

Natural Life
RR1, St George,
Ontario N0E 1N0
(519) 448-4001
www.life.com

Resurgence
PO Box 404
Freeland, Washington 98249 USA
www.resurgence.org

Utne Reader
Box 7460
Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0460 USA
www.utne.com

WholeLife Magazine
87-C Benton St
Kitchener N2G 3H3
(519) 579-1892

Yes! A Journal of Positive Futures
P.O. Box 108180
Bainbridge Island, Washington 98110 USA
www.yesmagazine.org

Organizations

Alternatives for Simple Living
5312 Morningside Avenue P.O. Box 2787
Sioux City, Iowa 51106 U.S.A.
www.simpleliving.org

Centre for a New American Dream
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 900
Takoma Park, Maryland
20912 U.S.A.
www.newdream.org

Council of Canadians
502-151 Slater St
Ottawa, On K1P 5H3
(613) 233-2773
www.canadians.org

New Road Map Foundation
P.O. Box 15981
Seattle, Washington 98115 USA
www.roadmap.org

Seeds of Simplicity
P.O. Box 9955
Glendale, California 91226 USA
www.seedsofsimplicity.org

The Simple Living Network
www.simpleliving.net

The Live Simply Project

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The aim of the Live Simply Project is to support and encourage people's explorations in sustainable living through bringing people together, sharing information, and offering new perspectives on how to live well. Workshops and talks on various aspects of simple living are available and a newsletter is produced three times a year.
Fiona Heath writes the column "Voluntary Simplicity" for WholeLife Magazine. With her partner and son, she lives in Waterloo, Ontario.

Andy Macpherson

Andy Macpherson does his art with the support of his partner Susie Fowler and their sons Jacob and Devlin. They live in downtown Kitchener and can be contacted at (519) 576-4375 or fowlermac@golden.net.