

STORIES OF SIMPLICITY

Reimagining the Good Life



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Foreword

'Simple living' is notoriously hard to define. There is an inherent diversity amongst those who pursue simplicity that adds a powerful richness; a tapestry of varied lifestyles, individuals and ambitions, yet all bound together by a common thread. In the stories which follow you'll read of people across the world, urban and rural, young and old, living in tiny houses and on expansive farms, singles and families, those far advanced in their 'simplicity' and those just beginning the journey.

The challenges ahead for all of us are immense. Our nations are structured to depend on high consumption lifestyles and despite feeling the consequences, persist in the belief that economic growth provides the panacea. Whatever our motives for living simply, we all need to see profound shifts in our culture, our politics and our economics, for the sake of our communities, our environment, our health and our sanity.

We hope that in the following stories you will find muse, stimulation, ideas and encouragement to be the change our world needs. May they inspire you as much as they did us.

Samuel Alexander
Simon Ussher

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‘I learned through personal experience how little is really necessary for a good life.’

Mark A. Burch

My interest in simple living arose from a confluence of growing up in the counterculture of the 1960s, many childhood experiences in nature, and my attraction to monastic forms of spiritual practice. I first read Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* when I was in high school. It inspired me to adopt a critical attitude toward the affluence—oriented excesses of my parents’ generation. I also spent most of my youth rambling about in meadows and forests. I had a lively interest in the natural sciences, particularly oceanography. During this formative period, I was reading widely in the spiritual literatures of both East and West, and came to appreciate the value of “positive asceticism”—the choice to forego things that are good in pursuit of things that are better. Fifty years later, my praxis of simple living is still grounded in these key values: a love of Nature, the spiritual journey, a passion I shared with Thoreau to encounter life directly and immediately, and a profound skepticism of “the spirit of commerce.”

In the early 1970s, like many in my generation, I caught the “back to land” bug—the desire to adopt a more rural, simpler and more self—reliant way of life. I purchased a 65—hectare parcel of land in the boreal forest of northern Canada over 50 kilometers away from the nearest settlement of any size. I lived there for five years. The nearest telephone was 12 kilometers away. I heated my cabin with wood, lighted with kerosene, bathed in a lake, grew a substantial fraction of my own food, hunted and gathered to some extent—in short, I aimed to consciously repeat Thoreau’s experiment at Walden Pond, but for a longer time and in far harsher conditions. In the process, I verified by my own experience many of the observations that Thoreau made in his memoir. I learned through personal experience how little is really necessary for a good life.

I left my wilderness homestead from a combination of economic necessity, a desire for more engagement with community, and doubts about the wisdom of trying to raise a family in such isolated surroundings. Over the years, my practice of simple living has been shaped by changes in where I lived and what has been required to raise two children. So my stock of physical possessions has seen moments of expansion and contraction as I voyage through life. Always, however, my manner of living has been informed by my early formative values and the real life experience of having lived very literally a materially simpler life.

Today, I live close to the core of one of Canada’s major cities. My practice of simplicity is very different here than it was in the bush and it contradicts many of the stereotypes of simple living as a rural way of life. Here I live in a small (by North American standards, 75 sq m) house that we have retrofitted in every way we can afford for energy and water conservation. The ecological footprint of our home is only about 30 percent of the Canadian average. Our urban lot (allotment) of 690 sq m is 100 percent under permaculture cultivation on which we continue to grow a substantial fraction of our food and compost organic

materials from our household. Being centrally located in the city means that nearly all of our travel can be by foot, bicycle or urban transit. It also affords access to a rich array of cultural and learning opportunities as well as a chance to collaborate with neighbours on community projects and activities.

For much of the latter half of our careers, both my spouse and I worked half-time. While this has obviously limited our incomes, it has provided instead an abundance of leisure time during which we could pursue activities of greater value to us than making money—the positive asceticism theme again. If security is measured by the quantum of our financial assets, then we are less “secure” than many other Canadians at our stage of life. But the last 20 years has been for us a school of simple living that every day teaches us more about how to make a little do. It has also been a tremendous asset to our essentially contemplative spiritual practice.

I can’t identify any specific difficulties associated with the choice of this way of life unless it might be the uncertainty of whether or not our financial assets will be sufficient to provide for us in our old age. But this is an uncertainty that is shared by many people these days, regardless of how much money they have, and it is being shaped by forces no one, not even sovereign governments, seem able to control.

The gifts of simple living have been countless, among the most precious being the sense of freedom it confers, the wonderful leisure that can be invested in creative and community-oriented activities, the “inner space” and tranquility it offers for spiritual practice, and the sense that we are living more lightly on the Earth than might otherwise be the case had we pursued different values. The challenges we now face as a species as the result of how we abuse the natural world continue to be a powerful motivator for me to practice simple living. Also the contribution simple living can make to support spiritual practice and strengthen the ties of family and community are major values. Living more simply has made it possible for me to teach, facilitate workshops and write extensively on the subject, which I hope has been a gift to others of simplicity itself.

If there is a single experience that I think expresses the spirit of this way of life, it would be the occasion when I was only about 12 years old and was invited to help plant trees on an acreage denuded by two generations of farming. With four of my friends, and under the supervision of my school principal who owned the land, we planted about 150,000 trees over two summers. It inspired me to briefly consider a career in conservation work, a dream I later abandoned for other reasons. But 30 years on, my old school principal invited me to return to this place and see what we had wrought. We walked together through what had become a forest—full of animals, bird song, a small pond, and several small cabins my principal let out to homeless men with nowhere else to live. A naked expanse of sandy land had become something thriving and alive, a place of healing for people and a vibrant community of life for many other species.

In all the years since, this experience has provided an image for me of the potential human beings have as healers and enhancers of life. It hearkens back again to Thoreau who mused that maybe people could do more than just stand by and witness Nature, but that maybe we could have a role too in helping to circulate its vital energies. For me, living simply is the choice to direct a larger portion of my energy and time toward the healing and renewal of both the Earth and of human relationships. This is, in essence, a spiritual undertaking, but it manifests in physical realities. It has been this image of us as symbionts with Nature and Spirit that continually draws me forward and which I have experienced to be full of light and meaning.

‘What makes the shift to small families and modest consumption inevitable is that we really have no other viable choice.’

Jim Merkel

“Granola, coconut milk and raisins” demands Walden, our three—year—old bright—eyed boy. “I want granola, coconut milk and raisins.” I pretend I don’t hear, smile inside and offer him time to remember to “ask nicely.” Soon he begins an improvised chant that fills our yurt. I find it interesting how soon in life our impulses for things begin. We want, and we want it now. Day by day we work with Walden on delayed gratification. To trust that his needs will be met, that he will always be loved, but that sometimes he has to wait, and other times he just won’t get what he wants, even if he asks “nicely” or throws a fit.

I’m sure you can imagine many different ways that delayed gratification can ease our burden on ecosystems. If we catch ourselves getting worked up and wanting something real bad, be it a far—away holiday, electronic device, our impulse food, we could take a few deep breaths and offer the feeling an opportunity to pass. I can be fairly impulsive, but when it came to starting a family— to procreating— I waited it out. Being a first time dad at 51, I can attest that the delay has served Earth, society, my son and myself.



Had I fathered in my teens, with my innocence, it just might have worked out. In my 20s, forget it. Between going through college and then working to build an engineering career in military electronics, I worked long hours and travelled extensively. On weekends, I piled into a van with teammates headed to bike races. Before and after work I trained enough to make it to the nationals twice. My self—absorption led to a divorce. Parenting during this extended adolescence would have been a disaster.

In my 30s it would not have been much better. I had an early mid—life crisis after the EXXON Valdez oil spill and switched from arms dealer to activist. I lived and breathed the causes. In my 40s, I felt clarity to not procreate. While millions of children lived on the streets, and millions died each year of preventable causes, I had no need to make another first—world consumer. Besides, my genes are not

all that great. My research and activism left no illusion that the future would be pretty. As humanity devoured earth, I did not want to contribute to the population bomb, or face the heartbreak of my child witnessing life at the “end of the world as we know it.”

At 54, being a first time dad, all I can say is I’m glad to be a father at this stage of life. I’m a little more mature– I hope. My sweetheart Susan and I decided to stay home for months together before and after the birth. Both of us had careers in the environmental movement, and now were ready to ease—up for a spell to savour this time with “sweet—boy.” We had an amazingly tough but beautiful home birth. Walden was born in a pool of water overlooking Penobscot Bay, Maine. Currently we are starting a new homestead, and Walden is learning to plant and harvest a garden, build a house, and can beans. He pees outside, knows constellations and the names of wild edible plants. In his sandbox he excavates, pours slabs and builds timber frames. For the most part, I can stay balanced when Walden does things that are not so cute.



At a recent family gathering I had a surprise realization when introducing Walden to his cousins all between the ages of 25 and 32. I kept wanting to say, “Walden, say hi to auntie so and so”.

Using a simplified demographic model assuming an average completed family size of two, and an average age of

procreation of 25 years, in 100 years there will be about 9 billion people on Earth, up from the current 7 billion due to a disproportionate number of humans in the procreating years. If, under the same assumptions, one—child families became the norm, world population would reduce to about 1 billion in 100 years. If any of us delay the age of child bearing to 35, 40, or 50, the growth rate slows even more. In my case, a whole generation has been skipped. I’m sure the earth mother breathes a sigh of relief for not having to provide granola, coconut milk and raisins (computers, cars and college) over the last 25 years to another demanding American.

In looking forward to life on a liveable planet, humans will have to consume less in wealthy nations, consume more in poor nations and have fewer children everywhere. In simple terms, human impact on earth can be said to equal total human consumption and wastes multiplied by total human population. Ecological Footprints are arguably the best, easily available measure of our total

consumption and wastes. Footprints have been calculated annually since 1996 for over 150 nations with the results published by WWF in the Living Planet Report available free online from the Global Footprint Network.

These two divinely personal choices, how much I consume, and my family size, taken together, are our most impactful decisions. What I find particularly empowering is that I am in complete control when decision time comes. For example, no one can force me to consume more. The advertisers can flash commercials and billboards at me all day long and I can still say, “no—way Jose,” I’m not buying it. Presidents can sign stimulus packages aimed at getting consumer spending up. I can say, “I’d rather have savings during rough times”. No one can force me to drive a gas—guzzler or to live in a poorly insulated house that is twice as big as I need. You and I are in the drivers seat. And, no one can make you waste. You can decide to bring your own coffee mug and cloth napkin, walk or cycle to work and refuse packaging. I know, I know, some of these decisions require a will at least as strong as is required to raise a child that understands boundaries.

However, if we let go of perfection, I hope you will agree that it isn’t that hard to cut consumerism and wastes dramatically from that of our countrymen and women.

The same is true for procreating. We are all in the drivers seat. I could have 20 women dancing around me, all wanting to procreate. I can just say no. Not that this has ever happened. The point being, I am in full control regarding if and when and if so, how many children I might want to have regardless of how much my mother might want grandchildren.



Can we imagine having only one child of our own, or not becoming a parent at all? Celibacy frees spiritual seekers for a life of service, allowing the thousands of hours consumed by mating rituals and parenting to shift to planet nurturing.

A generation ago, couples tended to marry in their early 20s and start having children within a few years. As more women and men invested in higher education and careers, they both delayed starting families and desired smaller families. In some countries, high costs of living make it less attractive to have large families. Over the last 30 years contraception became more available and the 90’s bumper sticker “copulate not populate” retained the “fun,” without

having to grow up and put the needs of another before your own needs. The “me” generation, although not emotionally intelligent, contributed to smaller families. Around the globe, family size is shrinking, but not fast enough.

August 22, 2012 was world overshoot day. In 8 months, humanity managed to gobble and spew what sweet planet earth requires 12 months to produce and sequester. Put gingerly, our wonderfully artful, creative, compassionate, intelligent and daring species now require one and a half planets. How can we use more than one planet? By degrading the one earth we have. Similarly, your bank account would plummet if you deposited \$1,000 each month, and spent \$1,500. You would quickly draw down your savings or capital. Under plan “status quo” we’d overshoot 225 percent by 2100, requiring an extra two and a quarter planets to supply human demand.

Welcome to the Anthropocene. A scientific movement is afoot to label this new earth epoch— a time when humanity’s presence, machines, live stock and pets, houses full of things, recreation, holidays, disasters, hoarding and fears have triggered the sixth great extinction. Researchers at the Stockholm Resilience Centre report that we are now exceeding safe limits with respect to climate change, nitrogen releases, and biodiversity. Ocean acidification, freshwater use and land use changes are approaching limits. On the ground, billions live in grinding poverty as brutal inequality and super—power wars turn daily life to living hell. Those who happen to live near some resource another more powerful nation wants, will get to experience the ugly side of a human with insatiable demands. Seen in geologic time, since the industrial revolution, our expansion has been akin to a tsunami. You and I are witness to this unique moment in earth history when our ingenuity and adolescent behaviour destroys our life support system.

The Achilles heel of “plan status quo” is that humanity has the capacity to shine and be beautiful and do the right thing for the right reasons. The souls of the world’s powerful and wealthy suffer from too much food, leisure, and stress; call it “Affluenza”. The problem with not learning to delay gratification at a young age is that one might suffer a lifetime of desires. Having two homes and still feeling homeless, living in a sea of abundance and still starving, residing behind gates and still feeling afraid, surrounded by people and still feeling alone. So much taking of what was not yours to take, makes it hard to sleep at night.

Plan “Status Quo” shows few signs of letting up. What makes change difficult is that in a “Me” centred culture, what could be more fun than consuming and making babies? And, what makes it extra difficult is that the industrialists and capitalists of most political persuasions have no other plan but growth— growth of economies, markets, technologies, more, bigger, better. Every new child is a marketing opportunity from pampers to plastic toys to cell phones to fast foods; from college tuition to credit cards to mortgages. Corporations and governments will do everything in their power to stimulate you to make babies and to stimulate you and those babies to consume.

This said, what makes the shift to small families and modest consumption inevitable is that we really have no other viable choice. And, once we wrap our hearts and minds around the futility of “more is better,” we still might kick and scream, rationalize or ignore and hope it goes away– if at some point, we get it, this hasn’t worked and won’t work, we might sink into a deep calm after the storm. Reality check: we can’t have our planet and eat it too. The magnitude of change is huge, but as we start making some of the small changes, often, our life improves.

In the less materialistic cultures we can taste the way forward. There are places where parents still hold their children and extended families provide an unconditional acceptance and love while holding boundaries, all to cultivate a delicious feeling of “I’m OK.” “I am satisfied, here and now.” After having enough experiences with simply being OK and at times feeling a deep inner peace, one develops a memory of the bliss of relaxing with what is.

From this state of OK, many shift focus from “Me” to “We.” Our caring expands to



neighbours and world neighbours and the ecological community. This learned delayed or moderated personal gratification can plant the seeds for a life that heals more than harms. When the more spiritual side of our being remembers how wonderful it feels to be aligned with life on Earth, the tendencies toward self-serving, mean, dishonest, greed, and lust might withdraw back to a

level society can deal with.

My son Walden has shown me how quickly the impulses arise and how much attentive and loving parenting is required to learn limits. He’s also shown me how early in life laughter and wanting to be helpful rise without parental prompting. This spontaneous lightness and heaviness is the human condition– a condition that begins in the first year of life, and will likely stay with us till our grave.

When I look out my window, I see oak forests, a vegetable garden, and a stack of firewood, a well with a hand pump and a set of solar panels atop a composting toilet building. I imagine the consumerism bubble has burst. Like the hi—tech, the “dot—com”, the real estate and the financial bubbles, one by one, these sour displays of our potential imploded. A new bubble is taking form: the sustainability bubble. It is a resilient bubble. It ensures all have enough. You are invited in.

A deeply sustainable future is possible and requires two things, things that you and I can control:

1. Small families: a one—child average through a women's free choice and the eradication of poverty (most of Europe, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, much of Asia including Japan are below 1.6).
2. Small ecological footprints, democratically distributed at the current global average: 6 acres (three times higher than India's 2—acre footprints, one—fourth US's 24 acres.)

In 100 years, the human population would fall from 7 billion to around 1 billion. Under 'Plan Status Quo' with two—child families we'd need two and a quarter planets, with one child families, we'd consume just 20 percent, leaving 80 percent available for the estimated 25 million other species. If done in time, it could avert the sixth great extinction. Two child families— grow to 9 billion. One—child families, grow down to 1 billion. That is one—ninth the impact!

The other day I reflected on something my conservative truck driver dad had once said. "All children are like your own." By the time you read my words, 60 children will have died from preventable causes. That's 10.5 million in a year. One—tenth of US military spending (or corporate bailouts) could have saved these little ones. And by you and I delaying whatever gratification might go along with being a consumer and a procreator, we'll be doing a huge service to the billions living in deep poverty and be giving our dear earth a chance to restore. If we make the leap of my dad, and accept all children as our own, would we rather have one child whose great grandchildren will live in a sustainable world, or two children who will experience a famished world?

‘Without simplicity, I would still be stuck in my cubicle.’

Tammy Strobel

<http://www.RowdyKittens.com>

In 2005, my husband Logan and I lived a normal middle class lifestyle. We were newlyweds with flashy rings, living in a two—bedroom apartment, driving two cars, commuting long distances to work and living well beyond our means. At this time, we were living in Davis, California, which is notorious for expensive real estate and a negative vacancy rating. We were living a life with too much stuff and stress.



Initially, we resisted the idea of moving into a smaller one—bedroom apartment because we were more concerned about appearances and space for guests than for our financial wellbeing. We decided something needed to change once we realized our debt was causing us so much stress. This change began by defining our values and prioritizing our needs versus wants.

After creating many long pro/con lists, the downsizing process began. We sold one car and moved into a one—bedroom apartment near the train station, the local co—op and downtown amenities. Our lives changed for the better! Although we still drove everywhere, with lower rent and only one car we began chipping away at our debt. Around this time, we stumbled across Dee Williams’ tiny house, the Small House Movement and the concept of simple living.

Dee inspired us to go small and start thinking big. So after doing a lot of research and making many to—do lists, we decided to move from Davis to mid—town Sacramento. We scaled down even further, to a 400—square—foot, one—bedroom apartment within walking distance to my work. And now we’re living in a very tiny house.

Thinking big required setting goals and decluttering. Slowly we began focusing on the quantity and quality of our belongings. We donated our TV, most of our

furniture and many of the items filing up our closets to friends, thrift stores and Freecycle.

Downsizing can be stressful, but the benefits are tremendous. Moving to a smaller apartment in the city opened up amazing possibilities. Once we sold our one remaining car, life became even better because we saved money and worked less. It sounds like a cliché, but without the car and the TV we had the time, money and energy to prioritize our health, happiness and life goals. For instance, I quit my day job in early 2010, started my own small business and moved to Portland, Oregon. Without simplicity, I would still be stuck in my cubicle.

I hope our personal story will help you remove clutter from your life, one step at a time.

Good luck in your own simple living quest. Above all, pursue happiness and not more stuff.

'I've slowly refined my life to be more in line with my values. It's a work in progress.'

Merridy Pugh

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!*
– William Wordsworth, 1802

I first came across those lines of poetry as a schoolgirl and they impressed deeply upon my mind. I was acutely aware of beauty, particularly in the natural world, and spent much time contemplating the wonders of astronomy and observing birds. I felt at home in the trees and happiest barefoot. My parents



helped sow the seeds of what grew to be my highest values: friendship, justice, creativity, peace, beauty, love.

Perhaps it was these beginnings that led to my interest in simplicity. In my 20s I began consciously cultivating a simpler lifestyle in the interests of peace of mind and a healthier environment. At that time my chief

motivation came from a strong resistance to materialism and a desire to care for the earth and its creatures.

Over the intervening 20 years I've slowly refined my life to be more in line with my values. It's a work in progress. Living against the tide of consumer culture can be difficult. It's hard not to get caught up in the rush for more.

Fortunately for my state of mind, growing up in South Africa left me with images of destitution that counter the feelings of deprivation that arise when I feel hard done by economically or compare myself to those richer than me. I cannot dismiss the knowledge that the poorest people in my adopted country of Australia are better off materially than billions of others on the planet. That I am fortunate to have the choice to live with less.

When I came to analysing what living simply means to me it came down to these elements:

- simplicity of mind (peace, clarity)
- simplicity in my home (reducing clutter, streamlining for smooth functioning)
- simplicity in my lifestyle (reducing consumption)
- simplicity in my use of time (organisation)
- simplicity in my values (beauty, friendship, creativity, tranquillity)
- simplicity in my consciousness (a perspective encompassing the earth, humanity, and other sentient beings)

These elements move in one of two directions—inwards or outwards—toward the inner spaces of my consciousness or the outside spaces of my environment. These outer and inner aspects of simplicity complement and reinforce one another. Reducing clutter allows for peace of mind and creates a tranquil, beautiful space. Clear thinking helps me make healthier choices in the foods I eat. Being organised gives me more time to nurture my relationships.

Practically speaking, these are some things that have helped me live more simply:

Cultivating quiet. Minimising noise from TV, radio and music systems makes for a peaceful space which induces peace of mind. I set aside part of the day for silent meditation.

Reducing clutter. I love beautiful objects like shells, coloured glass and candles, so minimising such “stuff” I find difficult. But reducing clutter at home gives rise to a feeling of space and streamlines the functioning of living areas. I try to keep things in view that are beautiful, useful or meaningful.

Where I live. I’ve chosen to live in smaller cities because they are less rushed and quieter and cleaner than larger metropolises. Living centrally in Hobart, Tasmania means my daily travel needs are minimal, which eliminates one potential source of stress from my day, and a source of air pollution.

Walking. I live close to shops, beach and city so I can walk most places I need to. It saves petrol but also connects me with my surroundings. Walking means I can appreciate neighbourhood gardens, greet friendly cats, enjoy sunshine on my skin. A trip to buy groceries becomes a pleasure and not just a task to cross off my list.

Cycling. When I lived in the tropical city of Darwin my great love was biking. Extensive bike paths and a warm climate made cycling easy. On days when I had to drive to my yoga class I found the experience frustrating as it took almost as long to travel by car, negotiating traffic and traffic lights. By contrast cycling gave me the joys of air flowing through my hair, the flow of blood to my leg muscles, the pleasure of passing my favourite flowering trees and looking at fish over the side of the nearby bridge. Riding home in the cool dusk I felt at peace.

A simpler wardrobe. I love beautiful, colourful clothing and having a variety to choose from has been one of my daily pleasures. But travelling between cities weekly for a few months recently, I found being confined to one suitcase made dressing each day much simpler. So I've decided on a smaller wardrobe – one which is still composed of items that delight me and are functional (warmth being a priority in Tasmania!), but which allows me less room for deliberation.

Repairing and recreating. I love taking something old and worn and making into something gorgeous and functional. Many of my furnishings, utensils and clothes are secondhand. My favourite chair is an old discarded armchair which I re—covered by hand in white faux—velvet with sparkly silver stars, painting the arms and legs pale blue to match my kitchen. My “fairy chair” cost me \$5 in fabric and nothing in leftover paint, and it's beautiful! Similarly I often repair old clothing or remake it into something quirky and eye—catching.

Simpler food. For many years I've been conscious of buying locally grown fresh and whole foods.

Years ago I banned white flour, sugar and most processed foods from my pantry. I eat a mostly vegetarian diet and buy free—range eggs. I love growing herbs and am working on my vegie—growing skills. I don't use chemicals on the garden. My guinea pigs eat the vegie scraps and turn them into fabulous composting pellets.



A simpler day. I try to keep my daily schedule simple. I write a list to keep me on track. I make a point of not planning too many things in one day. I make time for family and friends.

Garden time. Weather permitting, I spend up to an hour a day in the garden. My flock of guinea pigs need supervising while they exercise outside their hutches, and this gives me the perfect excuse to sit still in the green outdoors. It takes me outside my human preoccupations as I contemplate the behaviours of another species. If I feel the need to be more useful, I tend the garden beds. This simple ritual is one of the most peaceful, nurturing parts of my day.

Simple recreations. Picnics, walks in beautiful places, homemade meals with friends, conversation, painting, sunshine on the beach, floating flowers in a glass bowl– these things nourish my life and make it enjoyable and beautiful.

One experience which encapsulates for me the essence of simple joy was an early morning walk at Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) in Australia's Northern Territory.



My partner and I began at dawn, climbing the rocky path to the top of the gorge. The rising sun lit colours and sparkles in the stone. I wore shorts, singlet and rubber thongs on my feet and felt unencumbered and free. The air was warm on my skin. Birds called. At the top we sat on a flat stone with the immense vista

of river and plain stretching out for miles before us. We peeled fresh mandarins and ate handfuls of dried fruit and nuts, washed down with water. I felt like a queen on a throne of gold, elated and awakened by the beauty around me. This shared contemplation of the landscape in the morning quiet is an experience I will never forget. I am lucky to have had countless such moments in beautiful natural places. They require so little: walking, seeing, hearing– turning on the senses to what is.

‘There is definitely a transition afoot.’

James Magnus—Johnston

Canadian Director, Centre for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy (CASSE) www.steadystate.org

It was an elderly former oil executive who inspired my paradigm shift towards simplicity. That’s the inverse of the cliché where a young student mightily huffs and puffs to protest corporate waste, something I was perhaps more predisposed to do at the time!

Oystein Dahle, the former Vice—President of Exxon Norway and then Board Director of the Worldwatch Institute, spent the last half—century politely persuading his superiors at Exxon that burning oil was bad for the planet. He decided to spend his golden years delivering the same message to young people.

“In order to preserve a reasonable standard of living well into the future,” he stated, “we in the so—called ‘rich—world’ must reduce material consumption to roughly one—tenth of what we consume today— and we must do it within a decade.”

The man was quietly imploring a group of students to change their wasteful ways in a bar at a student conference in Norway. The conference convened diverging opinions on global issues from a cross section of global social contexts. “We are facing a paradigm shift so huge in scale that it can only be compared to the discovery that the Earth is not flat,” he said.

Knowing that we would only have a few years before approaching a climate tipping point, I asked Dahle how we would accomplish a mass paradigm shift in time.

“I’m an old man,” he quipped. “That’s your job.”

After years of thinking about global issues, I took his direct challenge very seriously. Since there have been no technological silver bullets to reduce our level of waste, my generation of “rich—world” inhabitants would have to do something we never seriously considered – start living within our ecological means.

My definition of “the good life” began to shift fundamentally as an outward evangelism of environmental awareness took an inward turn towards mindfulness, sufficiency, and simplicity.

Over the next few years, I would make big changes to move away from consumerism, lower my material footprint, and improve my wellbeing. Things like selling my car, living downtown, giving up TV, and becoming very selective about travelling by air. I became engrossed in the macroeconomic application of these choices and would eventually complete a graduate degree in Ecological Economics.

My personal choices have increased my sense of personal freedom and reduced my stress load, with the exception of communicating these choices to others — that has become a source of ongoing frustration!

Even my wife and I were divided culturally at first, with her branding me an “extreme minimalist,” and with me branding her an “impulse—buying hoarder.” Our perspectives would eventually converge as both of us recognized the need to live simply without abandoning some modern conveniences, but our struggle to explain our choices to our families has persisted. They don’t understand why we would reject material things (“no gifts please”), or why we’d prefer to take the train to local destinations rather than annual air excursions to Cancun. As she and I prepared for our wedding (a tradition we had to renovate significantly to become comfortable with), it has been hard for folks to get their mind around the notion that we don’t want a bridal “shower” or why we would ask attendees to sit on compostable straw bales rather than plastic chairs.

Perhaps most frustratingly for us is our need to justify the choice to rent accommodations with roommates and live (mostly) car—free. We consistently receive questions about when we’ll “finally be able” to buy a car or a house, as if they represent an inevitable progression up the ladder of material accumulation. Indeed, our lifestyle trajectory is aimed in the opposite direction – towards living in a permanent co—housing community where we won’t have to be needlessly mortgaged—for—life, and towards sustainable enterprises such as permaculture and the arts. We are planning to save for early “retirement” and withdraw from the nine—to—five competitive rat race in favour of more time with family and community.

The ongoing tension has made it clear that initiating a full—on cultural transition will be a long—term process – perhaps extending well beyond the course of our lives. Cultural norms and property laws have a long way to go before we can call this movement a renaissance and perhaps it will prove naïve to expect mass enlightenment to take root “in time,” given current research about the limits of the earth’s life—support system.

Nevertheless, there is definitely a transition afoot, and after all, perhaps we can take solace in the fact that our species was eventually able to figure out that the earth is not flat, despite our “common sense” assertions to the contrary.

‘Our current way of living is small and simple, but it has everything we need and want.’

Lorilee Lippincot

<http://www.LovingSimpleLiving.com>

I don't know that our lives were ever all that “un—simple” or “materialist” or whatever one might consider the opposite of simple. We have always been middle class and frugal. I don't think anyone would have considered us “hoarders” and I always considered ourselves organized—as organized as could be expected with two kids.

However things really started to change about three years ago. Through different events and thinking our 2000 square foot house started to seem more than we needed. It wasn't overflowing with stuff, but we started feeling like most of it was taking more time and money than it was worth.

So we started the slow and steady process, that we are still on, that has taken us to being what most would consider minimalist.

Our first change was probably the biggest where we got rid of over half our stuff and moved into a two—bedroom apartment. The process continued as our lives and thinking changed

and we kept getting rid of more and more. About five months ago we moved into a small one—bedroom apartment with the smallest moving truck we could get.



Our current way of living is small and simple, but it has everything we need and want. Our living room turns into a bedroom for our kids at night and all 4 of us share 1 closet. The kitchen is small and has very few cabinets but we still do almost all of our cooking and eating at home. We run three businesses out of our home and I homeschool so we are at home a lot of the time.

I hate clutter and I can't stand feeling like there are piles of things everywhere or we are squished. This set—up only works for us because we have simplified our material belongings as much as we have.

During our learning we have also tried to apply simple principles to other areas of our life including schedules, parenting, and personal growth. Though not as noticeable on the outside, these principles are just as effective in simplifying our life.

I don't want to say that we have figured everything out, that we never have a messy apartment or that I never still loose things. But I can say that we are a whole lot closer than we were three years ago.

What is also cool is what we have been able to do because of our changes. Over the last three years I have been able to work on my writing, learn a lot more about blogging, and publish three books. Over the last three years my husband has become a professional photographer and started a business with it. Over the last three years we have spent over 14 weeks traveling and exploring with our kids in 38 states in the USA and 2 provinces of Canada.

Over the last three years we have grown so much as people and as a family toward understanding simplicity, joy, purpose, and environmental responsibility.

I don't want to tell other people they should do things like we do, because all of us are very different. However, if you are looking at simplifying, and are afraid of the change, I will tell you for us it has been worth it. Our friends still think we are weird (but they still speak to us), our kids are happy and healthy, cleaning the house is a whole lot easier, and money isn't near as stressful as it was before.

‘The simple life is when I cook a meal and most or all of the ingredients come from our land, or have been swapped with friends.’

Liz and Pete Beavis

My husband and I came to live simply in gradual small steps. I think it started from our shared frugality and an understanding that resources are limited. We realised that we didn't want to waste materials and energy and that these things might be limited in future, so we should learn to live as self-sufficiently as possible, and, even better, this also saved us money. We started with eight acres of land and got chickens and a garden, so that we could start to produce our own food. We learnt to hatch the chicks, raise them for eating and how to slaughter them. We had lots of eggs, and used the chicken manure in the garden. Then we got a beef steer,

and another. We had a freezer full of beef and even more manure for the garden. Then we got a dairy cow and learnt how to milk and how to make cheese. We learnt more about fermented foods and everything we could make for ourselves, so now we eat no processed foods.



Then we decided that we needed more land, so we bought 258 acres with all the money we saved being frugal. Now we will always have enough grass and water to feed ourselves, and extra food to sell eventually.

There are many difficulties in living simply. We find that it can be quite lonely, as at first we didn't know many people that wanted to live like we do, people think you are strange to make or grow something that you could just buy. We're not interested in all the latest fashions and cars and spending time shopping or watching sport, so often we don't have much in common with the people that we meet. Fortunately we have found a local permaculture group and other farmers that understand our self-sufficiency dreams. We also find that we are always very busy with different projects, and sometimes we are in danger of wearing ourselves out. We are getting better at recognising this and not taking on too much at once.

The delights of living simply are too numerous to mention! My favourite thing to do is to wander through our vege garden and look at what is growing. Noticing what has sprouted, what is going to seed, what is ready to pick, even the weeds



don't worry me, I just think I'd better get some more mulch and plant some more seeds here and there. We both enjoy sitting on our deck after a hard day of work and looking out at all the chickens and our dairy cow in her

paddock, and eating all the good food that we produce.

One particular experience that best expresses the simple life is when I cook a meal and most or all of the ingredients come from our land, or have been swapped with friends. Cooking on our woodstove (with dead wood from our property) just tops it off! My goal is to stop going to the supermarket completely, then I will know we are truly self-sufficient for food.

‘What could be more creative than fashioning not just a work of art, but a different way to live?’

Greg Foyster

In a previous existence, I had a 9 to 5 job in advertising, adopting some pretty bad habits: staying back late, eating takeaway, drinking every weekend, wasting money because it came so easily. I was staring down the decades at a house in the suburbs, if only I could scrape together the funds for a deposit. But the whole idea of living that way left me feeling trapped and unhappy.

Then I started going out with my partner, Sophie Chishkovsky, in 2008. Some of her friends were artists who lived like modern—day nomads. They made me realise that there were other ways to structure a life.

At around the same time, I began writing a column about environmental issues for a magazine called *Voiceworks*. Up until then I’d considered the work I did in advertising as inconsequential—just a bit of fun. But researching articles about climate change and deforestation made me realise that it was overconsumption, not overpopulation, that was the root of so many ecological problems. And because I worked in advertising, I felt personally responsible for this overconsumption.



In the middle of 2008, my inner conflict boiled over at an industry awards night. I slipped outside the swish function room and started crying. After that I refused to write ads for companies I was ethically opposed to, and towards the end of the year I left my job.

I spent a few years working as a freelance writer and living in a communal share house. We had a vegetable garden, chooks and a bicycle—powered washing machine. I was happy because for the first time my lifestyle matched my values.

Then, in March 2012, Sophie and I set off on our biggest adventure yet: a 4000—kilometre bicycle trip up the east coast of Australia exploring the simple living movement. We ride steel frame bikes weighing about 15 kilograms and loaded with about 25 kilograms of gear packed into four bicycle panniers. Just about everything we need to live fits on our bikes: clothes, sleeping bags, tent, stove, food, water bottles etc. We cook on a methylated spirits stove. We like to travel slowly, averaging between 50 and 80 kilometres a day.

We're only camping about 50 percent of the time, usually between towns. We often meet people who offer us a bed and meal for the night.



I'm interested in living more simply for a number of reasons. Firstly, having seen from the inside how the marketing industry drives up consumption, I'm keen to counteract the effect of all those ads preying on people's insecurities in order to sell more stuff. I also feel a little guilty for the years I spent promoting cars and frozen meals.

Secondly, I'm very much interested in creativity, and what could be more creative than fashioning not just a work of art, but a different way to live?

The difficulties of simple living lie in putting values into practice. For example, it's easy to say we should give up ecologically

wasteful packaged goods, but the alternative – preparing food from scratch – can be hard work. I also find it hard to resist the lure of emissions—intensive entertainment, especially when among friends. If I visit someone's house and the lounge room is orientated towards a massive plasma TV, I find myself wanting to turn it on just because it's there. When you try to live simply you will face these sorts of micro—challenges every day, and sometimes you'll give in. That's okay. You have to learn to accept moments of hypocrisy, and forgive yourself for not being able to live out your values all the time.

Having said that, my own hypocrisy worries me. I have trouble with the practical aspects of simple living. I'm not much of a gardener and I can't sew. It's even

harder to live by my principles on the road. When we're cycling through small country towns we have no choice but to buy food from supermarket chains. There's literally no other store in town.

If I had to choose one thing that sums up the ethos of simple living, it would be a bicycle. A bicycle is a piece of modern equipment, so it shows that voluntary simplicity doesn't have to mean rejecting technology. A bicycle is a 'direct' way of meeting a human need—in this case transportation. A bicycle is environmentally friendly. A bicycle is energy efficient. A bicycle is a pragmatic tool rather than a radical symbol. A bicycle can improve your health and therefore your mood, contributing to overall happiness.

And here's the most important thing. If you travel by bicycle—as my partner and I have done for months on end—then you can't splurge on unnecessary consumer items because you have nowhere to store them. In other words, travelling by bicycle forces you to live simply. It's a great discipline for the rest of your life.

The book of our bicycle journey up Australia, titled *Changing Gears*, will be published by Affirm Press in September 2013. Readers can follow the trip at our blog <http://www.simplelives.com.au>

‘Shaping one's own life away from the norm is a very creative process.’

Sophie Chishkovsky

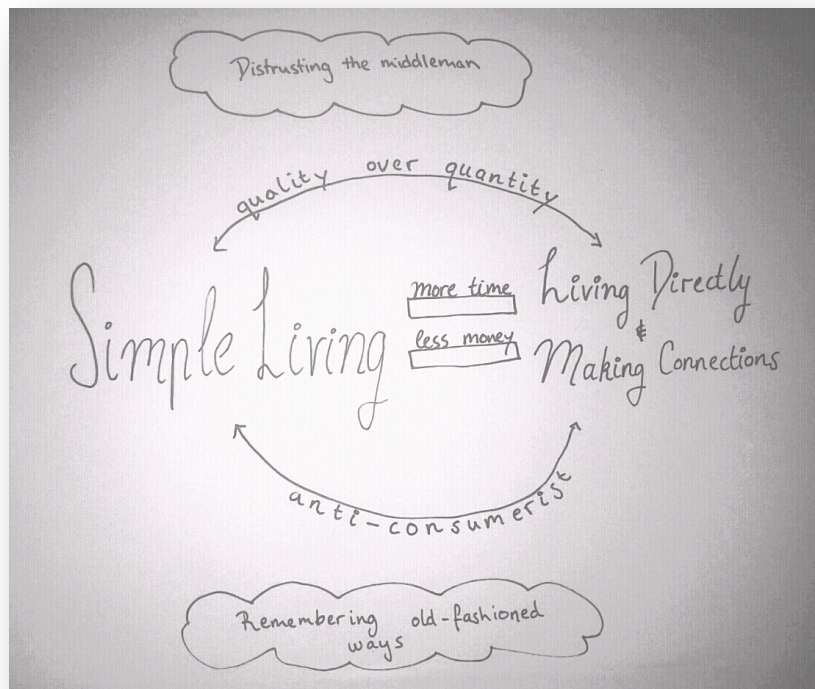
One of the best ways I can describe simple living can be summed up by walking into my local violinery. A little bell tinkers as I walk through the door, and I feel as if I have travelled back in time. The smell of wood and rosin enters my nostrils as I study the room, which displays beautifully crafted stringed instruments on one wall while the other has shelves laden with bows, cases and music stands. I am greeted by my instrumental maker who gets up from his workbench from behind the counter. On this occasion I book in my cello to be fitted with a new bridge. Some people might call this transaction expensive as the cost is equivalent of a month's rent. However, I know that it is not merely a bridge and service I am paying for, but the years of training an instrumental maker undergoes to acquire such intricate knowledge, not unlike seeing a doctor. I am paying the true worth of this specialised craft which I don't often experience in other stores like supermarkets, for instance, where a bottle of soft-drink is cheaper than water.

The attraction to living simply stems from my upbringing. Having a violinist for a mother, I developed a passion for classical music, which then later became my profession. Studying this art form has made me appreciate, and even romanticise, old-fashioned ways of living. I was principally brought up by my father and step-mother, both first generation Australians born to Europeans who struggled during WWII. From them I learnt not to waste things and to always choose quality over quantity. Then in 2004 I went on a yearlong student exchange to France where I learnt sacred rituals connected with eating, drinking and



socialising. This was a slower—paced society that had a greater understanding of moderation.

But it wasn't until I moved out of home that I really began to adopt more direct ways of living simply. After considering animal welfare issues I became vegetarian, which then led me to consider the welfare of the planet. The more I researched, the less faith I had in large and complex industrialised systems that



dominate our food, our products and to some extent our governments. I began to ask questions about what I consumed. If I didn't know the source and manufacture details of a product then I wouldn't consume it. I found it was often the 'middleman' who broke this

connection. Consequently, I bought less, I bought secondhand and I ended up buying raw materials to then make something of them myself. I chose minimal work hours to fit this lifestyle.

For me, one of the hardest inner conflicts I experience with simple living is cognitive dissonance. A touchy example is the usage of toilet paper (and yes, even recycled toilet paper). In his book *No Impact Man*, Colin Beaver discusses this particular issue and states that in many other cultures, it is considered more hygienic to use soap and water than toilet paper. The sceptic in me thinks it says a lot about our Western culture that we can't even empty our bowels without consuming.

On our bicycle tour of simple living, Greg and I met some innovative people. One eureka moment for us was on a visit to a tiny house where we learnt to differentiate between human necessity and the tools commonly used to fulfil that necessity. Greg asked the owner 'How do you shower?' He answered he used hot water and a sponge. He also stated: "You don't need a shower, you need to wash." Greg summed it up nicely in his blog post 'What is necessity?'

So why did I ask him how he could “shower”? A shower, after all, is not a human need. Cleanliness is a human need. A shower is simply the technology we have invented to meet that need.

For me, this realisation opened up a world of possibilities. The journey towards a simpler life has been discovering what I truly need and what I don't. This is incredibly liberating and empowering. Shaping one's own life away from the norm is a very creative process.

One common criticism Greg and I often receive is that simple living glorifies poverty. However, the difference between people being forced to live simply and people who want to live simply is choice. So the choice to live simply and share resources with our neighbours connects us to our communities and our planet.

‘There is a new world coming and those of us practicing simplicity and sustainability will be the leaders.’

Christine Cassella

There comes a time when more loses its appeal. One eventually realizes that the track set up for humans to reach “success” is cyclical; it does not end. We will never be “enough” in this system.

At the same time, when one really chooses to listen, we can clearly hear the Earth creak and groan beneath us—she is running out of resources, her climate is changing, our water and air are polluted. She has had enough of our refusal to recognize limits, and although she will gladly carry on without us, we must really come to terms with that: she will gladly carry on without us.

Somewhere along the line, however, I became attached to my species, hoping that we could live indefinitely into the future.

Reflecting back on human history through centuries of time, I have come to realize that this is indeed possible – it is not necessary for us to have a destructive relationship with the planet. We can, in fact, live within the Earth’s means under the recognition that we are born of her and will return to her in death. We are completely dependent upon the Earth for support every moment of our lives.

Some combination of these realizations led me to recognize at a decently young age that I would no longer like to participate in our current destructive paradigm.



Instead, I became interested in pursuing simplicity and sustainability – two interdependent ways of living that not only contribute to the chances that humans will continue existing on this Earth into the foreseeable future, but also two ways of living that I believe are essential for our own health and well-being.

Separating oneself from the idea that we must consistently achieve more and more titles, awards, and financial gain is extremely liberating psychologically. Riding a bike to the places we need to go, feeling the wind on our faces, and connecting with the seasons strengthens hearts and bodies. Sinking hands into the soil, absorbing beneficial bacteria, and eating home-grown foods reformulate our cellular structure. Practicing simple living supports our minds and bodies, and ensures our ability to thrive in the face of change.

I was not able to achieve these ideals as my body sat wasting away in front of a computer, my self-esteem tied to an elusive piece of paper claiming that I would hold a doctorate. I was misled to believe that I was changing the world when really it was the world that was changing me—taking away my freedom, my health, my resilience, my ability to follow true desires, and simultaneously making me into a consumer always needing more.

My body (and the Earth) was dying in that paradigm.

And in many ways, I have not yet fully escaped and I remain a part of the dying process. I still must breathe this toxic air; I have consumerist addictions I have yet to break; and I am not yet able to supply the majority of my own needs locally. However, I have begun the transition toward simplicity, and in that small step, I have been awakened to the fact that there is a new world coming and that those of us practicing simplicity and sustainability will be the leaders.

Although imperfect, I will be a leader in this movement. I will keep riding my bike, growing and preserving food on a 1/8th acre city lot, practicing herbalism, supporting the local economy, and continuing in other efforts to increase my life's simplicity and sustainability. A large part of this involves detaching from what our dominant culture says I should be doing with my life, and instead developing skills that were somehow left behind when our culture decided technology and constant progress through perpetual growth were the only options. In essence, I am relearning what it is to be enough and have enough. This is what we all must eventually do to create the next phase of our human story on this planet—one that is both simple and sustainable, but is ultimately more fulfilling and conducive to our physical and mental health.

'I vote with my money.'

Sharon Chan

Not entirely sure how it all began but this is what I remembered. Seven years ago I quit my finance job to take a sabbatical. I was living overseas at the time. In order to ship everything back and put it in storage, I had to fill in an insurance form that required you to list all your items and their values. I mean everything from bed sheets to crockery to the number of pair of shoes. I was doing this 6am in the morning just before the movers were arriving. I counted the number of shoes and multiplied by the average price I paid. My heart skipped several beats. How could I have spent this much on shoes, not to mention the clothes in the wardrobe.



Anyway, no time to ponder as the movers were arriving any minute.

Letting go of a well—paid job was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made. In hindsight, it really wasn't about the job or the money, it was about leaving my comfort zone.

Fast—forward two years, I was back in the country, in a new city, getting an education in sustainability management. My simpler life journey has since begun.

Mindfulness and Attitude – I always ponder if everyone can have the right frame of mind to live a simpler life. Not that they do not have a strong will or character but consumerism is so prevalent in the society that you almost think that is the only way of living. I also have this innate capability not to care what other people think about me and my ways. I cannot quite explain how but I am sure spirituality also plays a role here.

Work and Time – Since I left the well—paid industry of finance, I have been working in the non—for—profit sector. Big drop in pay scale but I managed to survive. So I learnt that human can adapt and adjust. With a job that is less pressured, I became time rich. Time to volunteer, time to relax. Time to get organise and time to socialise. Time to exercise and time to live. I even abandoned the car that is the common tool people use to rush around everywhere. No car, no rushing.

Community – Community is now a part of my simpler life. It was not the case in my previous life as I was coping with the high demands of a busying working life. It was a vicious cycle. The more money you earned, the more stress and health concerns there are. Needless to say, community is the driving force of social change and this is a focus of my life now.

Money – I would like to think that I have a healthy attitude towards money. I understand we need it to live but I also understand that it is not everything in the world. I am learning to manage money with slim resources. On the other hand, I vote with my money by supporting business that promotes sustainability, social enterprises and others that deserve support. I now give more generously than ever.

Activism – My friends notice how I live my life. Some think I am crazy for borrowing things when you can buy them cheaply. I am on a mission not to collect stuff and a simpler life does mean less clutter. Ok, this is not necessarily activism but by putting words into action, people can see how simpler life is achievable.



‘I’m just not into stuff or things.’

Grace L. Judson

“You must be getting old,” my mother said to me.

I had just told her that there wasn’t anything I wanted for Christmas—that, in fact, I’m just not into stuff or things.

But it’s not because I’m old. It’s because I’m living so much more simply now that my work—what I do for a living—is aligned with who I really am and what I’m here to do.

For over 25 years, I worked in software development within the financial and technology sectors. My career advanced in all the properly successful ways, ultimately landing me in the ranks of executive leadership with a salary to match. Eight years ago, I left the corporate world to become self-employed.

Looking back at my corporate career, I’m astonished at the things I spent money on. I’ve never pursued shopping as a form of recreation, but what I see now is that I wasn’t happy, and I spent money on things in an effort to soothe that discomfort.

It didn’t work.

The discomfort and unhappiness arose from being out of alignment with what truly brings me joy.

That sounds obvious now, but of course it wasn’t then. And it’s only gradually become evident as I continue developing my awareness of what I’m really here to do, this work that comes through me and makes my life rich and rewarding as I help my clients improve their own businesses, and therefore their own lives.

When I do what is mine to do, when I step into the fullness of that, then simplicity in everything falls easily and naturally into place.

It really is just that ... simple.

‘Not all rich people are unimaginative, but only unimaginative people need to be rich.’

Samuel Alexander

Most people appear never to have considered what a house is, and are actually though needlessly poor all their lives because they think that they must have such a one as their neighbors have. – H.D. Thoreau

‘How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book.’ Over the last two years as I have lain down to sleep in my small, self—constructed, inner—city shed, this passage from Henry Thoreau’s *Walden* was never far from my mind. Whether Thoreau hoped that *Walden* itself would mark a new era in the lives of its readers, no one can be sure. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine Thoreau penning the quoted passage on the shores of Walden Pond, tantalizingly aware that he was in the process of drafting a manifesto that would indeed spark personal revolutions in the lives of generations of readers. My life, for one, has certainly changed drastically since my pre—Walden days, which are seemingly of another lifetime and yet not so long ago, when I would march off to work in my charcoal suit and long black coat to begin my day as a freshly graduated lawyer. The shift in consciousness—an earthquake of the soul—which shook me away from the law firm and into the shed is attributable, almost exclusively, to my engagement with *Walden*. Putting my own story into words has crystallized what I had previously understood only at the level of raw experience. To paraphrase Soren Kierkegaard, life must be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards.

Crisis of Vocation

After completing my Master of Laws at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, I found myself confronted by those great economic questions everyone must face when trying to establish financial independence in a world of scarce resources: How best to earn a living? How much time should I spend at it? How much do I need to live well and to be free? Although I had just graduated from a respectable university, I came to realize that throughout my formal education the deepest questions concerning how to live had been strangely passed over. Furthermore, when I looked at the world around me, I gained little insight into how I should live my life. I saw the potential for freedom, but not freedom itself. And so, unable to ignite my imagination, I spiralled quietly into a deep, vocational crisis. Completely lost and lacking any direction, I anxiously wallowed around what I now suspect were the margins of a depressive episode.

One day, in an act of desperation, I took a train to a small, rural community called Featherston, an hour or so out of Wellington, and with what little money I had I rented an old, rustic cottage, at a very reasonable price. In retrospect, I feel this temporary exit from society is one of the wisest things I have ever done, if only because it gave me the time and solitude needed to search my soul. I lived in the cottage for three months—alone, at peace, tremendously happy, and absolutely

free. Isolated from the worries and expectations of the world, it was a privileged time of uninhibited creativity and committed intellectual inquiry. I would begin each day ritualistically by soaking in a deep, iron—cast tub, while one of Beethoven's symphonies roared in the background, setting the mood for the day. Bathing in this manner was a meditative, even spiritual, exercise for me, similar, perhaps, to Thoreau's daily plunge into the icy waters of Walden Pond, except more pleasurable, I would imagine. Subsisting predominantly on bread and cheap red wine, I spent my days and nights in the cottage before an open fire, composing music, writing abundantly, and reading the great philosophers, especially Rousseau and Nietzsche. I would work creatively till exhaustion then sleep till I was refreshed, wholly unconcerned about the hour of the day.

As the weeks passed, moments began to blur into one, until time itself seemed to stand still. I would often find myself gazing into the fire in a trace—like state, rapt in a timeless reverie, as if lost in the richness of ordinary experience. To borrow the apt words of Thoreau, "I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been." Whenever the inclination took me, whether day or night, I would take long walks in the nearby woods or meadows, often to absorb the pink and purple hues of the sky at sunrise, or to enjoy the silverly blue tints of a moonlit landscape. I even recall going out for walk one evening during a fiercely wet and windy storm, just for the experience. As I marched alone in the dark, confronting the tempestuous elements, Tom Waits' song, "God's Away on Business," boomed through my headphones. All my senses were alight, which was typical of this phase in my life. Be sure, I am not romanticising my experience at the cottage in any way. It was genuinely romantic, for all that word connotes, and I felt intensely alive. I tasted a poeticized existence and its sweetness was intoxicating and unforgettable. For three months I persisted in this state of passionate tranquillity. It was terrifyingly meaningful.

But then the money ran out. My crisis of vocation, which I had successfully repressed for some time, suddenly returned to the surface of my life in an intensified form, shattering my artificial utopia like a stone through glass. During my time in the cottage I had experienced an idealized freedom, but foolishly and regrettably I had taken no steps toward securing it. Now, with a few dollars to my name, I had no option but to return to society to begin my search for a livelihood. The unromantic but important lesson I took away from the cottage was that a poeticized existence depends on money and resources, to some degree, at least. As Marx perceived long ago, life is fundamentally economic.

Fortuitously—if that is the right word—two weeks after leaving the cottage I applied for and was offered an associate position in a small law firm in Christchurch, New Zealand, which I accepted out of financial necessity. Within a few days I had packed my few possessions into a hired van and set out, somewhat despondently, to begin my experiment with reality. It was as if I had been caught in a current and swept out to sea.

I practiced law for about 18 months. Admittedly, this turned out to be quite a stimulating time for me, owing mainly to the brilliance of my employer, and I

proved to be a competent advocate. But my heart was never fully in the game. A career in law promised wealth and status, as well as a form of intellectual engagement, but from the outset I knew it was not my calling. Though I had no idea what my calling was at this time, I knew at least that it did not involve seeking wealth and status. Not all rich people are unimaginative, but only unimaginative people need to be rich; and only timid souls seek status. I was seeking something else.

After a year working in the law firm I managed to exchange a scheduled pay rise for an extra day off work. I now recognize that this negotiation was my first significant act of “downshifting,” which can be crudely defined as the exchange of income/consumption for more freedom, although at the time I was unfamiliar with this concept, as such. My friends accused me of entering semi—retirement, which was not so far from the truth. During my final six months in the law firm I used my three—day weekends to prepare a proposal for a doctoral thesis. Doctoral study, I surmised, would at least allow me to pursue my burning passion for philosophy and politics, as well as give me a few years to think about my place in the world, about which I was still confused. I moved to Melbourne, Australia, to begin my doctoral study in the middle of 2006. I was 26.

The Political becomes Personal

Like most university students, post—graduate or otherwise, I did not have much money, although my scholarship stipend, as well as a short stint lecturing, meant that I always had enough. Not long after arriving in Melbourne I rented the cheapest room I could find, which turned out to be in a five person sharehouse not too far from campus, and there I settled down to begin my post—graduate life. Due to the accidents of my personal history, I enrolled for my PhD in the law school, however my proposed topic was interdisciplinary in nature, more suitable, perhaps, for the departments of politics, philosophy, or economics, than law. The next few years of study were to change my life in ways that I could have never foreseen. For reasons to be explained, I gratefully hold Thoreau responsible.

Without going into unnecessary detail, my doctoral research (which is now complete) involved evaluating the notion of a private property / market system “beyond growth.” Directed toward the highly developed nations, my thesis argues that when an economy grows so large that it reaches or exceeds the threshold point beyond which any further growth is “uneconomic” (i.e. socially or ecologically counter—productive), property rights should no longer be defined and defended in order to grow the economy. Instead, property rights should be constructed or reconstructed to achieve more specific welfare enhancing objectives—such as eliminating poverty or protecting the environment—and the efficient growth of GDP or lack thereof should be treated as a by—product of secondary importance. Put simply, the normative basis of my thesis is the assumption that money and resources are extremely important to human beings up to a point—the threshold point—but beyond that point, which evidence suggests is surprisingly moderate, the pursuit of more wealth insidiously detracts from what makes life meaningful and degrades the health

and integrity of our living planet. This normative position highlights the importance of having a concept of economic sufficiency and of knowing how much is “enough.”

To cut a long story short, when I began constructing the arguments in support of my “post—growth” theory of property, I quickly realized that my position would be rejected by anyone who subscribed to the dominant view that a nation’s progress depends upon ever—increasing growth in GDP per capita. For my thesis to be persuasive, then—or even given a fair hearing—it was absolutely critical that I presented a sound case for why getting richer is not always a trustworthy path to wellbeing, especially in affluent societies. Indeed, I wanted to argue that, in circumstances of affluence, lowering material “standard of living” (measured by income/consumption) could actually increase ‘quality of life’ (measured by subjective wellbeing). This required a fundamental rethinking of orthodox views on money and consumption, including a rejection of the consumerist presumption that “more is always better.” As I began exploring the ethics of consumption and building a normative case for simple living, I found myself naturally drawn to Thoreau’s simple living experiment on the shores of Walden Pond. I studied *Walden* obsessively, almost biblically, and I soon became aware that it was changing my life forever, an impact that I am sure many readers of this journal can empathize with.

Despite my thesis being framed predominantly in terms of political and legal theory, what I was really struggling with was the question of what personal acts could be undertaken to oppose consumer capitalism and whether the cumulative impact of such seemingly insignificant acts could be of any real significance. I did not just want to theorize about alternative political and legal structures, though I felt that was important too; I also wanted to learn how best to live within the existing regime that I was critiquing. Since my thesis was advocating a radically anti—consumerist stance in relation to money and possessions, I felt this aspect of my thesis, especially, had to be lived to be truly sincere. And so, step—by—step, I escalated my personal exploration of the simple life.

Although I had lived like a poor student for most of my adult life—by this stage I was 28—I knew that my material standard of living was much higher than it needed to be. Accordingly, I set myself the task of finding ways to live more with less, which, in a sentence, is what I believe simple living is all about. Prompted by the example of Thoreau, the possibility of squatting in the backyard of the house I was renting entered my imagination as a potential means of reducing my outgoings significantly. With barely a moment’s thought, I approached my house—mates and tentatively tabled the idea of giving up my room and living in the backyard, explaining my reasons for wanting to do so. I told them about Thoreau and of my interest in exploring “the simple life” in an urban context. They considered my proposition to be humorously insane but unproblematic, and so my plans received their consent, even their positive encouragement. In exchange for living in the backyard it was agreed that I would be responsible for purchasing for the house a number of amenities shared by all, such as dishwashing liquid, washing powder, rubbish bags, toilet paper, light—bulbs, mops, etc. This arrangement meant that my “rent” would be extremely low—

approximately AU\$15 per week—but the reasoning given was that my presence would be no inconvenience at all. Since I would have access to the kitchen and bathroom inside, the costs of electricity, gas, water, etc. were to be spilt equally, an arrangement which I happily accepted.

With the essential negotiations complete, it was time to make my madness a reality.

Constructing the Shed

I built the shed over three weekends in the spring of 2008 with my good friend and house—mate, Mathieu. Neither of us had any building experience, and being PhD students in law and meteorology, it would not be unfair to assume that we were among the least practical people on Earth. Perhaps we were lacking in the necessary skills—we didn't really know—however the challenge of building a shelter seemed natural and appealing, so we took to the task with zeal. We had ordered two books online about building basic sheds and cabins, but in our enthusiasm we got to work before they arrived. The books turned up in the letterbox a few days after construction had finished, much to our amusement, and they remain unread. Who knows what wisdom they contain!

We knew, at least, that builders need materials, so that seemed like a good place to start. In the spirit of sustainability and frugality, our goal was to reuse or recycle as much material as possible. We found an old wooden bed frame underneath the stairs, along with a few tarpaulins, two strong hinges, a hammer, and some nails and screws. We also appropriated some wood that was lying forgotten underneath the house, which we felt justified putting to good use. My girlfriend, Helen—who was unconditionally supportive throughout this venture despite having some understandable reservations about it—also informed me that there was a pile of abandoned wood by the railway tracks near her place, which I promptly transported to the construction site. A friend lent us an electric drill (apologies to Thoreau) and a painfully blunt handsaw.

All this provided us with the bulk of our building materials and tools, but it was not quite sufficient for our project. We needed some more wood for the frame and floor of the shed, more tarpaulins for waterproofing, more screws and hinges, as well as some polycarbonate sheeting for the roof. These things we obtained from the hardware store. (When we showed the assistant at the hardware store our building plans, which resembled a two—year—old's drawing of a house, he laughed loudly and firmly recommended that we consider purchasing a ready—made shed or a tent. We thanked him for his sound advice then stubbornly ignored it.) We also picked up some old blankets from a secondhand clothing store to line the inside of the shed. In total, the cost of all these materials was AU\$573.

The building process itself was an absolute delight, not only because the spring days were crisp and clear, but also because I was engaged in meaningful (and often humorous) work with a true friend. The French, gypsy—punk music added another dimension too. In such circumstances, long days of physical work are no

chore at all. We began by constructing the frame of the shed, which was 1.8m wide, 3.6m long, and 2.4m high. The old bed frame was cut up and used to provide extra framing for the base of the shed, upon which we laid the flooring. Tarpaulin was used to waterproof the walls and roof, and the abandoned wood from near the railway tracks was cut up into weatherboards and nailed horizontally into place for the outside walls. With the remaining wood we crafted a simple door and were pleasantly surprised when it swung into place, although the door was not quite square, creating an unfortunate gap which let through a draft. At the front of the shed we also put in place a wooden shutter in the top left corner, which was hinged at the top to swing up and out to create a window space when desired. A piece of thick bamboo was used to hold the wooden shutter up, in the manner of an old beach hut. Finally, three overlapping sheets of polycarbonate sheeting were laid on the roof and nailed into place. Due to a shortage of wood and a complete lack of common sense, we did not create a slope in the roof, hoping that the minor slope of the ground would suffice to induce any rainwater to run off. Our hopes were sadly disappointed. During the first heavy rain, water pooled on the roof and the shed leaked, so later some repairs were needed. The result was a truly bizarre roof design that, although ultimately effective, would have had dear Thoreau turning in his grave. (In our defence, however, one stormy Melbourne evening in March 2010 parts of the Southern Cross railway station collapsed, which was made of steel and concrete, while the shed remained dry and erect. The ultimate vindication!)

As the finishing touch, the shed was given a title. The words, 'Ceci n'est pas une cabane,' were painted above the door, which translate as, 'This is not a shed.'

Practicing Simplicity

Since living in the backyard is a violation of the tenancy agreement, the landlord has not been told of my living experiment. He rarely makes his presence known anyway (especially when he is needed to fix something). When the yearly house inspection is due, I simply pack the shed full of bikes, crates, chairs, blankets, tools, boxes, bags, etc., and hide any evidence that it is inhabited. That is, I disguise it as a shed. When the landlord first saw the shed he understandably looked a bit confused and stated firmly that any further building projects must be run past him first. Much to my relief, however, he was otherwise unbothered by its presence and to this day he seems entirely oblivious to the fact that it is my home. Perhaps I'll send him a copy of this essay one day.

At the time of writing these words, I have lived in the shed for a little under two years. In all honestly I can report that they have been the richest and most fulfilling years of my life. Exactly how much longer I will live in the shed, I cannot say, but since I am squatting illegally on someone else's land, it is hard to conceive of it as a permanent residence. Furthermore, I am in a committed relationship with my girl Helen, who has a magical young child, both of whom I have an increasing desire to live with under the same roof. Due to the insecurity of squatting, however, as well as for reasons of space, I can hardly invite them to live with me in the shed. Accordingly, it would seem that my days in the shed are numbered.

Life in the shed is not just about the shed, however. That is but the most conspicuous (and arguably confused) manifestation of my ongoing struggle with the question of how to live simply in an urban context. The importance of the shed, for me, lies in the fact that housing is typically life's greatest expense, and potentially, therefore, a category where the most savings can be made. Since my rent over the last two years has been approximately AU\$15 per week, significant savings were indeed possible. When the day comes that I must leave the shed, for one reason or another, my aim will be to keep the cost of housing to a minimum by embracing as modest accommodation as possible. For when I remember that the shed took six days to build, and functioned well enough as a shelter, I am deeply bothered by the fact that many people spend 20, 30, even 40 years laboring to pay for their homes. Truthfully, I would sooner live in a tub my whole life, like Diogenes, than exchange forty years of my life for house. Posterity will surely look back on our times and be astounded at how inefficiently we housed ourselves! My time in the shed has taught me the great Thoreauvian lesson that a person can be "richer than the richest are now" while living in very humble circumstances. This has given me "a calm trust in the future", since I now know that a fancy house is not a necessary part of living a happy and meaningful life.

In recent years my outgoings have also been reduced noticeably by growing as much of my own food as possible. On top of the financial savings, the very process of gardening is strangely therapeutic – an ancient truth which escaped me for far too long. The garden space I have available is approximately 1.5 metres wide and 10 metres long, in which I grow organically all manner of fruit, vegetables, and herbs. Since there are water restrictions in Melbourne, a friend and I installed a water tank behind the shed to secure rainwater. I also keep four chickens in the backyard, which provide two or three eggs a day as well as an abundance of fine manure. The chicken coop also functions well as a compost heap. Some of my happiest memories of late are of letting the chickens roam freely in the community park behind the house, while I would drink tea in the shade and enjoy the bemused looks of my neighbors.

The garden does not provide for all my food, however, so I have come to supplement my vegetarian diet with locally and organically grown produce, sourced conveniently and surprisingly cheaply by the Melbourne University Food Co—Op. My reasons for choosing a vegetarian diet, I confess, are rather vague and uncertain. Strange as it may sound, there is something of "the ascetic" in me, and perhaps a large part of my motivation for giving up meat and fish was the rather enjoyable challenge of self—discipline. A moment's research also unveils the troubling environmental impacts of excessive meat and fish consumption, which provided me with additional motivation to rethink my eating practices. At risk of sounding too sentimental, I am also a bit unsure about whether I, personally, could shoot a cow in the head every time I desired a steak, a reality of meat consumption that never used to cross my mind, pushed out of sight by the obscuring distances of a money economy. Since I am undecided about this point, I thought it was easy enough to do without the steak and avoid being implicated in the violence. Whatever the case, I have never felt as healthy as I have since eating a vegetarian diet, which perhaps is justification enough.

Staying on the subject of food for a moment longer, I also do my best to avoid supermarkets, and sometimes find that it can be months between visits. I resent supermarkets for how they use their financial power to promote the toxic practices of agri—business, and thus I do everything I can to avoid giving them any of my money. Their convenience is seductive, however, and avoiding them entirely remains a challenge.

Another feature of my journey toward the simple life in recent years has been my purchase of renewable energy. Since I did not have the lump sum to purchase solar panels or wind turbines, nor the desire to fix such devices to a rental property, I called my electricity provider and inquired about the possibility of purchasing 100 percent renewable energy. A few minutes later I was, as they say, burning green fuel. This came at a price, of course, but the increased rates soon became a part of life and were forgotten. In any case, I effectively offset the costs of the increased rates by taking many small steps to reduce my energy consumption. My greatest energy savings have come through never using a heater, even on those winter nights which sink to zero degrees. It is always the same temperature inside the shed as it is outside, regrettably, making those winter nights rather character—building. But with the right attitude it is really not so bad. I suspect we are all hardier than we think we are. When it gets cold I put on the wool jersey my Grandma knitted me when I was a teenager or wrap myself in an extra blanket. When necessary – and often it has been necessary – I sleep in my ski—jacket, gloves, and a wool hat. The days and nights may be cold, but I never am.

With respect to clothing, I find that purchasing what is necessary at secondhand stores comes at a minimal cost, given some creativity and a little discipline. This does not mean puritanically denying self—expression through what I wear, or giving up “style,” (although others are entitled to disagree about that). But it does involve rejecting high—fashion and all its stands for in favor of some ‘alternative’ aesthetic. According to my calculations, high—fashion clothing is comically expensive, such that I would sooner pay \$200 for an old turnip than I would for a nice shirt. I have higher aspirations in life than to have my place in the world defined by a nice shirt. As for the cheap, mass—produced clothing found in many department stores, a little research reveals that it is almost always the product of wage—slaves in the factories of the Third World. Accordingly, my policy is to do what I can to avoid being implicated in the fashion industry at all.

Perhaps “dressing down,” as it is sometimes called, should even be understood as an outward statement of simplicity, an effort, however small, to express aesthetically one’s opposition to consumer culture. Politics aside, however, I have never had the desire to look brand new. Moreover, I enjoy being able to lie on the grass without giving a moment’s thought to whether my clothes will get dirty. Over the last year I have spent a total of AU\$38 on clothing (which is approximately my average yearly expenditure on clothing over the last four years). I did receive a pair of shoes recently as a birthday gift, however, after my parents saw large holes in the pair I had been wearing. I have also been the grateful recipient of a few castaway items from my brother and from friends,

which I saved from being thrown away. As Thoreau would say, “if my jacket and trousers, my hat and shoes, are fit to worship God in, they will do, will they not?” It is an interesting question to consider, if not in relation to the worship of God, necessarily, then more generally in relation to the living of a passionate life. Old clothes will do will they not? Thoreau proposed that they will do just fine, and I have come to think that he was quite right.

When I speak publicly about simple living at festivals, conferences, meetings, etc., one of the issues I am almost always asked about is the practice of simplicity. Most people seem to accept the dangers of greed and acquisitiveness, as well as the social, ecological, and humanitarian benefits of living simply. But there is much doubt over what simple living actually consists of and whether it is even feasible to live simply in the consumer cultures of advanced capitalist societies. My response to these important, practical questions usually begins by acknowledging that there is not one and only one way to live simply. I ask people not to expect a 12—point plan that can be formulaically applied, for the reality is that there is no Method or Equation of Simplicity into which we can plug the facts of our lives and be told how to live. The simple life, I say, is as much about questions as answers, in the sense that practicing simplicity calls for creative interpretation and personalized application. It is not for “experts”, therefore, or for anyone, to prescribe universal rules on how to live simply. We each live unique lives and we each find ourselves in different situations, with different capabilities, and different responsibilities. Accordingly, I continue, the practice of simplicity by one person, in one situation, may very well involve different things to a different person, in a different situation. Furthermore, simple living is not so much a destination as it is an ongoing, creative process. With this non—universalist disclaimer noted, I then make a few general remarks about what a simple life might look like in practice and how one might begin to live it. I might offer something like the following thumbnail sketch.

Simplicity, as I have come to understand it, is first and foremost a set of attitudes, a recognition that abundance is a state of mind, not a quantity of consumer products or attainable through them. In the words of Richard Gregg:

Voluntary simplicity involves both an inner and an outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure a greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose.

That last sentence gets to the heart of the matter. If we are to know how much material wealth is enough, and thereby avoid laboring without end or purpose, we first need to confront the question, “Enough for what?” Put otherwise, we need to ask ourselves, “What should we want material wealth for?” Anyone who neglects this question is at risk of spending life pursuing material superfluities in a state of “quiet desperation.” There is no single right answer to the question of life’s purpose, of course—we must each find our ‘own way,’ as Thoreau properly

advised—but to live simply means always being awake to the question. ‘To be awake is to be alive.’

Having determined a sense of life’s purpose, the practice of simplicity then involves securing the material conditions of life, starting with food, shelter, and clothing. Eating locally, purchasing “green”, eating out in moderation, eating less meat, eating simply and creatively—I know by experience that this can be done very cheaply. Given some thought and a little discipline, a good diet can be obtained at a surprisingly low cost, especially if you are able to cultivate a vegetable garden. Given that sheltering oneself and one’s family is typically life’s greatest expense, rethinking the meaning and purpose of a house is one of the most important aspects to living simply. This is also likely to be the hardest part of transitioning to a simple life, and may take a lifetime to figure out. Indeed, current political, economic, and social structures can make living in “simple” housing very difficult—perhaps even impossible or illegal – which is one of the main reasons the transition to a sustainable society will depend upon a politics of simplicity (a complex issue which I cannot not explore here, though it is of the utmost importance). In terms of clothing and furniture, buying secondhand is the way to go. Where possible, make your own.

With the necessities of life secured, the practice of simplicity can be explored in an infinite variety of ways. I will not try to list them all. Nevertheless, here are a few representative examples. Simple living might involve riding a bike instead of driving a car; choosing a washing line over a dryer; or even something as simple as choosing a book over television. It might involve avoiding air travel, conserving water by taking a bucket into the shower, or taking energy reduction seriously. Or it might simply involve taking a second look at life, for dissatisfaction with our material situations can often be the result of failing to look properly at our lives rather than the result of any genuine “lack.” Those who live simply generally aim to declutter all aspects of life—personal, work, social, economic – and they will probably value self-sufficiency and be able to entertain themselves for free. Many people living simply also happily subscribe to the frugality maxim of the Depression years: “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.” Many will also avoid unnecessary technology and try to live more slowly and peacefully. Baking bread at home is a symbolic practice. Generally speaking, people living simply never go shopping without a proper purpose and are wary of credit cards. They tend to lend when asked and borrow when necessary.

Rather than stay at luxurious resorts, those exploring simplicity might spend \$12 per night bush camping in the midst of nature. Rather than work long hours to afford a life dedicated to consumption, people might step out of the rush and reduce work hours, freeing up more time to be creative, learn a musical instrument, socialize with friends / family, volunteer or join an organization, meditate, relax, etc. Rather than choose competition, people are likely to choose community. Not money, but meaning. And so and so forth, until the very elements of life have been transformed. Start with a few small steps, enjoy the adventure, and soon enough your life will have changed.

Money

The overarching issue of what place money has in the simple life deserves a little more attention. Although living simply is much more than just being frugal with money and consuming less – as I have said, it is also a state of mind—in a market economy spending wisely plays a central role. In their celebrated text, *Your Money or Your Life*, Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin provide elaborate financial exercises for readers to undertake which seek to provoke reflection on the real value of money and the true cost of commodities. I found their exercises surprisingly enlightening. To over—simplify greatly, one of their core exercises can be paraphrased as follows: Over a one month period, meticulously record every purchase made, and then categorize your expenses (rent / mortgage, bills, food, clothes, coffees, petrol, books, etc.). Multiply each category by twelve to get a rough estimate of the annual cost. Then carefully calculate how much time was spent obtaining the money required to buy everything that was purchased that month (including time travelling to and from work) and multiply by twelve to get yearly working hours (making appropriate adjustments for holiday entitlements). With this information at hand, Dominguez and Robin invite people to critically assess not only the amount of time and money spent on each category, but also the categories themselves. This exercise may sound mundane and a bit pointless – everybody assumes they are careful, rational spenders – but if it is carried out with precision the results may well surprise, and perhaps even shock. One might find that seemingly little purchases add up to an inordinate amount over an entire year, which may raise new and important questions about whether the money might have been better spent elsewhere, not at all, or exchanged for more time by working less. Once you have worked out the figures for one year, consider how much would be spent on each category over 10 years.

The aim of this financial exercise is not to create tightwads, but smart consumers who are conscious of the life/time cost of their purchases. After all, as Thoreau would insist, ‘The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.’ When exploring the simple life with this in mind, I have discovered that some thoughtful reductions and changes to my spending habits, rather than inducing any sense of deprivation, have instead been life affirming. To provide two mundane but personally significant examples, always taking a packed lunch and limiting myself to one take—out coffee per week has resulted in savings of about \$75 per week. That’s almost \$4000 per year or \$40,000 over ten years.

When I realized how easy it was to eliminate many costs that I once considered necessities, things started getting quite interesting. In the interests of experimentation, I decided to dedicate a year to seriously reducing my outgoings. From 4 July 2009 to 3 July 2010, I kept an exact account of every dollar I spent. The total for that year was AU\$6,792, which still included a great many comforts and superfluities. During this period I also spent several hundred dollars printing flyers on simple living, although perhaps this expense was more of a necessity than a superfluity. I can truthfully say that the only time during the year when I felt deprived by my simple living experiment was when my brother had his first child, since I had made a commitment not to travel by plane for a

year and this meant that I could not be with him and his family at that special time. This was by far the most difficult challenge of my living experiment and one that raised the most doubts about its justification.

I was able to live as cheaply as I did partly due to my unusually cheap living arrangements in the shed, which some may regard as a distorted reality. But even so, had I rented a room inside the house (which would have cost AU\$530 per month), my living costs would only have risen to a total of AU\$13,152. When it is remembered that the average full—time wage in Australia today is over AU\$67,000, one begins to get some perspective—so easily lost! —on how affluent Western societies really are. Everyday in the news we read about how growing the economy is still the number one priority. But is getting even richer really the answer to the problems facing Western societies? Or do we labor under a terrible mistake?

When it comes to spending money in accordance with the ethos of simple living, it is also important to bear in mind Vicki Robin's profound democratic insight: That how we spend our money is how we vote on what exists in the world. Purchasing something sends a message, consciously or unconsciously, to the marketplace, affirming the product, its ecological impact, its process of manufacture, etc. Simple living, therefore, involves shopping as conscientiously as possible, directing one's monetary "votes" into socially and ecologically responsible avenues and avoiding irresponsible avenues. A tension can arise here, of course, because shopping conscientiously or ethically tends to be (but is not always) more expensive. If it is true, however, that market expenditure is a vote on what exists in the world, it would seem that the global consumer class has the potential to become a non—violent revolutionary class and change the world, simply by changing its spending habits. Simplicity is the new spectre haunting capitalism. Never before have so many people had the option of casting off the chains of consumer culture, stepping out of the rat race, and living in opposition to the existing order of things. Money is power, and with this power comes responsibility.

Consumers of the world unite!

Deconstructing the Shed

I am under no illusions about what my time in the shed means. I certainly have not provided, nor did I ever aim to provide, a template for simple living. The reality is that I am squatting illegally on land owned by another, and if I am ever caught living in the shed – which is in breach of the tenancy agreement as well as building regulations—it is almost certain that my experiment will be extinguished at once. There could well be consequences, perhaps in the form of a fine. (Given that my doctoral thesis is exploring ways that the laws of property could be restructured to promote simple living, it seems only fitting that the current laws of property have been hanging threateningly over my head throughout my candidature). Furthermore, my living experiment in the shed only ever got off the ground due to the good grace of my dear house—mates, and this fact alone means that my experiment may not be easily repeated by others.

Should the house—mates ever have a change of heart, which they would be quite entitled to do, this would also mark the end of my time in the shed, again exposing the delicate contingency of my way of life.

Such insecurity of accommodation has not bothered me much, I should add, since my unmarried, post—graduate life without dependents has left me unconcerned about the possibility of being summarily evicted at any moment. But I recognize that others, in different circumstances, would understandably find such insecurity a cause of considerable anxiety and worry. Generally speaking, human beings wish to lay down roots—myself included—and this means that squatting is at most a temporary solution to the problem of how to live. Time is nigh, perhaps, to deconstruct the shed.

If Walden has done one thing to me, it has etched into my being the desire to live simply and deliberately. Reading Thoreau's poetic descriptions of nature opened my eyes, like never before, to the miracle of Earth's living processes, and with my eyes now open I crave the nourishment of close contact with nature, even though my urban context cannot provide for the intimacy I truly desire. Having fallen deeply in love with nature, I now see more clearly my duty to protect her from unnecessary violence, and my ongoing journey to live more simply is an attempt to meet that duty as best I can. Thoreau's words also serve as a fiery reminder that we each owe a duty to ourselves as well, a duty to take our own lives, our own dreams, seriously. In Walden Thoreau warned people against wasting their lives in the pursuit of material superfluities, a lesson predicated upon the assumption that every lived moment is of immeasurable importance. When I feel that I am losing sight of this insight, dipping into the pages of Walden usually shakes me awake at once. Any book capable of doing that is worth infinitely more than its own weight in gold.

P.S. A short time after completing this essay the landlord gave notice that he was ending the lease of the rental property where the shed was built (for reasons wholly unrelated to the existence of the shed or my presence, I should add). This meant – by force of property law! – that I was required to deconstruct the shed physically and move out. I have since moved in with Helen, which (as implied in the essay) was already in the cards, and the exploration of the simple life now continues, albeit in different circumstances. I intend to write about this new phase of the journey in the near future, as it raises new and important issues about living simply in an urban context. For now, however, I must tend to the garden.

‘My suburb is already brimming with simple living knowledge.’

Josh Brown

When I first considered the beginning of my simple living story my mind darted to two momentous occasions in my life, separated by just a few days – meeting my partner and leaving the UK. Although these events have been the primary catalysts for change, there have been lessons throughout life that shape how I live now. My Dad had a crafty solution for everything. He taught me to build a solution instead of just paying someone else or buying something. My Mum hammered home the value of money and taught me to be organised and free of debt, wherever possible. That aside, I was still brought up in a fairly typical working middle class household, certainly not alien to TV upgrades and frequent home renovations.

Packed like sardines into halls of residence, university in the UK is surprisingly culturally homogenous. Few students can resist their weekly pilgrimage to the city centre and the guilt—laden gym memberships. It’s hard to pull yourself out of that consumer culture without an inspiration, without a guide or a partner. I certainly didn’t find the right direction then but I was looking. I refused to join the gym; instead choosing lengthy wanders around the city. I voraciously consumed books and records by Fugazi, Kerouac, The Minutemen, craving my own slice of the DIY aesthetic. My friend taught me to make curry pastes which we let combine overnight, revelling in their rich flavours. I still had a lot of maturing to do and was more enticed by the counter culture image than any commitment to social change. However, underneath it all a healthy interest in alternative living was now bubbling away.

Skip forward three years and I now live in Melbourne with my partner Sam. Her and I met in Sweden on an exchange. A combination of romance, new experiences, and a strict budget steered us toward a dramatically different life. Our time in Sweden proved fertile for cultural exchange and it ignited a deep respect for worldly traditions: fermented milk, herbal infusions, vegetarian ideals and a refusal on the part of our hosts, the Swedes, to completely surrender to American conveniences. Cycling was addictive and I vowed then to ride for the rest of my life!

Since living in Melbourne we have been deluged with simple living tips. Food is central to our lives: a source of entertainment, relaxation and fundamental to understanding how to make the most of the resources available to us on this planet. This is the start of a long journey but so far we have focussed on reducing waste, using leftovers such as fruit peel to make stock and vinegar. We have toyed with our back garden but struggled with our patch of ancient soil, limited so far to several patches of compost, a place to store wood and a bumper crop of hardy cucumbers.

Sam's parents are old—school activists, involved in a number of re—wilding and bicycle user groups. A constant source of support and motivation; I have learnt numerous gardening tips from Marsha, and John always encourages me to remain positive when my fragile zeal takes a knock.

My suburb is already brimming with simple living knowledge, cross—cultural and heterogeneous. Old Greek couples don't need a blog to inform you that their broad beans are sprouting, they don't need a certification label on their homemade Avjar and they certainly don't need the latest vegan egg replacement imported from a cave in deepest Peru. For the young folk like myself who sometimes wonder if all this simple living is a little boring, making beer, vinegar and chutneys feels (and is) rebellious and sharing them is conducive to a rich social life.

One of the hardest parts of persevering against the head wind of consumerism is maintaining a decent work life. My moral compass points me away from a number of employers but I still have a deep motivation to be gainfully employed, if only for that sense of participation in society at large. I have settled for a number of casual entry—level roles that, while frustrating and often repetitive, have allowed me to reconsider my aspirations and question what makes a healthy working environment. Understanding that a deflated economy will require less of certain professional skills is a bitter pill for many new graduates. Yet if we rethink manual jobs around more social and safe working environments then I believe many will be surprised at the levels of happiness they can attain in their work lives.

I think everyone on this journey battles with alienation too. Sam and I have tried to favour a middle way, the idea that happiness and simplicity is obtainable in multiple forms. Our flirtations with extremism have always led to unsustainable levels of doubt, negative habits and a feeling of distance from society which I'm personally not happy to maintain. At the opposite end of the spectrum, friends and family can feel threatened by aspects of our simple life that may seem rudimentary to us. For example, I now favour a pragmatic and measured attitude to meat and dairy consumption. Justifying the idea that "I eat meat once in a while, for various reasons, usually a decent cut" can be more difficult than simply declaring yourself a vegetarian (and eating your burger in secret!).

In order to relate to people I think you need to retain a certain level of tact, avoiding the common delusions of the weary activist. Would everyone have as much respect for the lucid writings of Thoreau if they knew he brought his undies home every week for his Mum to wash? Retaining a sense of responsibility and humility seem essential to me.

What I have tried to show through my story is the incredible fortune I have had to reach where I am so far, enjoying my fair share of happiness along the way. I plead for people who are in the privileged position of sharing these experiences to practice tolerance, inclusion and open—mindedness when they consider the reasons why other people live the way they do and the ways, unbeknown to you, that they may practice simplicity in aspects of their life.

I can't wait to live the next chapters in my simple living story and I look forward to hearing the stories of others.

‘The move to minimalism was liberating to say the least and left us wondering why we hadn’t come to the realization much sooner.’

Ang and Sporty Horn

Sporty and I have always enjoyed moving. A year is the longest we’ve ever stayed in one spot and that’s definitely the exception. We usually get itchy feet somewhere around the six—month mark, sometimes even earlier than that.

For years we went through the rigmarole of finding boxes, packing, hiring movers and generally got completely stressed out every time we moved house. Until finally—after God only knows how many moves—it finally dawned on us that life would be a whole lot easier if we just sold our belongings and rented furnished instead.

The move to minimalism was liberating to say the least and left us wondering why we hadn’t come to the realization much sooner.

Our first attempt at downsizing, though impressive, still left us with a fair amount of stuff. So much in fact, that we still needed the help of a mini—mover to relocate to our new digs.



With each move that followed we pared down further, until all we were left with were the bare essentials: clothes, laptops and a few small kitchen appliances that even the fully furnished places never supplied (juicer, blender etc.).

With no possessions to clean, maintain or insure we suddenly had a lot more time on our hands and money in our wallets. Life was good and we were happy.

A subsequent move back to Johannesburg meant having to buy a scooter, as the city’s public transport offerings aren’t all that user—friendly and we worked too far apart to remain a one vehicle family.

We decided to tip the minimalist scales back in our favor by selling our car and renting one instead. This decision came with its own set of pros and cons, but it still beat owing the bank money.

We remained true to our minimalist ways in every other respect however and so life remained pretty much the same, with us having lots of spare time and cash to enjoy at our leisure. Life was still good and we were happier than ever.

After almost two years in the City of Gold we moved back to Cape Town. Our first mistake was to send the scooter down on the train. We'd unwittingly fallen back into the consumerist trap of thinking we needed to keep it and ended up wasting a whole lot of time and money getting it down here only to sell it a month later. I'd love to say we learnt our lesson, but sadly it gets worse before it gets better.

We then talked ourselves into renting an unfurnished apartment, which meant buying furniture and everything else we needed to make the place liveable. Looking back, all I can think is that we were so happy to be back in Cape Town that we momentarily lost the plot. It's a lame excuse, but we have no other so

we're sticking with it.



This resulted in us staying in our apartment six months longer than we otherwise would have because we simply couldn't face the thought of moving with all that stuff. We eventually came to our senses in July,

decided enough was enough and made the decision to downsize a second time.

August was spent selling our belongings and looking for a new place to live. Determined to learn from our past mistakes, we made a detailed list of non—negotiables that our new home should have:

- Must be furnished
- Must have a washing machine
- Must have a decent work area
- Can't be near a liquor store, 24—hour convenience store or any other outlet that will attract characters of a dubious nature who wake us up all hours of the night
- Must be close to gym and work

- Must be big enough for two people to live together without wanting to kill each other

We then had a long talk about our finances and decided that if we wanted to healthy up our travel fund we'd need to cap our rent, which meant compromising on the size and location of the apartment.

However after looking at one place in our new price range where the adjacent building was so close the view was quite literally a brick wall, we realized there had to be a limit in terms of the trade—offs we were prepared to make in return for a lower rent.

Fortunately once we'd set our parameters the search was over almost before it had begun. After viewing and the room (the place was too small to call an apartment) with no view and a man cave (don't ask) we discovered a sweet little furnished spot overlooking the harbor, Signal Hill and the city.

The apartment block is on top of a shopping center, so gone are the days of arguing about whose turn it is to pick up groceries. There's also a bus stop right outside in case we're not in the mood for walking and best of all, the rent is within the cap we set. Good times.

And because the Mother City is equipped with relatively decent public transport system we were able to sell our car (yes, we bought a car again too).

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't irked by how easily we fell back into the trap of owning stuff, but I do know that this time we've learnt our lesson for good. Aside from our laptops, clothes and the odd specialist kitchen appliance, we don't ever plan on owning another thing.

We're now working towards earning our income online so that we can be location independent and when that happens we'll be paring down yet again. What that will leave us with I have no idea, but no doubt we'll find more stuff to turf.

People often equate frugal living with a monk—like existence, but for us it just means living smart. By downsizing our belongings we've automatically supersized our lifestyle.

Bio: Ang and partner in crime, Sporty, inspire people to live healthier, happier and simpler lives. If you'd like to find out how to simplify your life you can stalk them on Twitter, find them on Facebook or check them out on Pinterest. Alternatively you could go old school and just shoot them an email.

‘Simplicity has meant I've been able to make more or the most of my one chance to live.’

Bek

In July 2012, the Guardian newspaper ran an online survey called “Breadline Britain”. You inputted your total household annual income, said how many of you, including children there were in the house, and the Guardian gadget placed you accordingly onto a graph. Our little household of three were placed just below the poverty line. Even though it's not to be taken seriously, we were still pretty shocked by this outcome.

Because the way I see it, there are two sides to this: the side that marches for jobs, new housing and progress; we are poor in that our joint annual income is £18,000 and £8,100 of this goes on rent alone, and the side that says all of us in the northern hemisphere could afford to live more modestly—for the benefit of the planet and all life on it, and also because despite our minimum wage earnings we have managed to save in the past six years and life gets better every year.



The latter side most often wins out in my mind as a lifelong simple—liver and respecter—of—elders. (It doesn't get much older and wiser than Mother Earth.)

My own Mum calls herself the black sheep of the family as she struggles, at family gatherings, to make conversation within the family's narrow confines of: work, holidays, and wining and dining out. I could always sympathise as, especially as a child, I found these subjects grotesquely boring anyway. My inspirational Mother always said she would rather work part time and enjoy life day to day, than put all her eggs in the “holiday” basket once a year (flights were rather more expensive when I was a child, and, including my step—siblings, there were five of us) only to come back to soul shattering amounts of laundry and 45 odd weeks of work. Days out would mean taking packed lunches—and

Mum's never been afraid of the sickie. Working in a bank for most of her life made her despair at their unethical practices—including grading her on her sales of loans to people that were most often already in debt. She sucked at it and I felt proud of her. NEVER get a credit card, she warned me many, many times and I've never had one.

Happily, neither of my younger sisters are exactly conventional either—we've all grown up members of food and housing co—ops, veggie or vegan, and non—drivers or graduates (of our own choosing), so “black sheep” no longer exists within our small section of the family. My Mum also left the bank years ago now!

I remember a great childhood: Mum being super cool with my vegetarianism from the age of 10, creating our own libraries and helping my wee sister learn to read, making up shows, songs and dances with my step sister, dog walks for the whole day in the woods, butterfly spotting, my Pop's jungle of a garden and the unforgettable smell of his greenhouse, badminton and camping in Dad's tent on our back lawn, bikes and roller boots. I always loved making things—anything.

As a young teenager I discovered punk, which further appealed to my personality. By the time I left school, I wanted nothing more than to become a new age traveller and eventually have a family of my own. I have to say it was the 90s, however it still appeals to me today, and sometimes my partner Jamie and I talk about passing driving tests and if Jed leaves home, heading off in a van to WWOOF around the UK.

I knew that college and uni would prepare me for having a career, extra wealth, social status, a nice home and the tick—the—box holidays and status symbols that go with having a “good job”. But I saw these things as a distraction from the true and humble joys of living and I've always preferred having as much of my own time as possible to do things the slow way, rather than have money to pay for things instantly. It may sound strange to say, but I am always grateful for that. However not going to uni didn't go down well with my Nan.

Having a bit of a crisis about the future and people's opinions of me as a young, single mother led me to apply to uni later on. I was accepted as a mature student of twenty three (when my son started school). I was studying architecture. However I couldn't afford to continue past the first term as a single parent. My housing benefit had been immediately withdrawn on embarking the course, meaning I would have to work, go to uni and somehow look after my child or pay for childcare. In my view an impossible juggling act, and one I'd have taken no pride in conquering. (I'd had a full time job on an organic farm when Jed was a baby, and sending him to a childminder—and thus also my job—lasted a month, I hated doing it so much.) To be honest though, I was also repulsed by the thought of the schmoozy world of networking which was, to me, what the whole nature of any future success seemed to depend on. It was all “Attend this event in London and make yourself known” (this was pre—Linked In, Facebook and Twitter).

Following my failed uni experience, I chastised myself for not trusting my instinct that formal education is not for me. The two times since that I have forgotten this (with minor courses in Yoga Teaching and Forest School Leadership) I have similarly found formal learning not to my taste. (Though I did finish the Yoga Teaching course; which was a 30th birthday present, and am still on the Forest School one; which my employer has paid for under the condition that I sign a two year contract stating I will not leave my position.)

I love to learn though, and like to think I do still. Reading remains a constant pastime – through wet winter days as well as sunny ones; lounging on a blanket and interrupting my own reading to look up birds (and occasionally butterflies: I memorised most of them as a child—and sadly haven't seen some of them since then) that are enjoying the garden too. Breaking gender stereotypes, I'd say I read mostly non—fiction, and have discovered that I may truly define myself as an anarchist after all – it wasn't just for my teenage years!

Books have also helped me learn practical skills, and, more importantly the successes I have enjoyed in applying them have given me the confidence to have a go at anything. I know how to make rugs, build furniture, carve spoons, knit jumpers, sew clothes, grow and preserve food... Formal education does not seem to do this for you: your confidence lies in becoming an expert and there is no self reliance: you then go to other specialists for the 99 percent of stuff you don't know. I don't understand why “Jack of all Trades” is considered to be a put down—strength in is diversity after all.

The University of YouTube has also been a source of much practical guidance—for example to learn to crochet (and then every time I've come across something unknown when following a pattern!), and play the ukulele. I personally think skill sharing is essential for reasons way beyond the sharing of skills. I'd love to meet and be able to thank all the people who have shared videos for things they could have run expensive workshops on. I wish it happened more offline.

Recently Jamie and I made his parents a unique papercut as a ruby wedding anniversary present. It looked pretty professional, but to have asked an actual professional to do it would have costed over £200. I'm convinced that it's simply not having the time that prevents more people from having a go at things or “realising their full potential”.

I work a minimum wage job in a pre—school and the above phrase, with regards to helping children achieve, is in my job description. A worthy sounding thing. But like many things about my work, I feel that it's a shame (or one of the worst and barefaced lies of the world), that the things we supposedly wish for children have a cut off point—and as adults we're just workers (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs doesn't apply to me when I haven't even got time to eat, drink or have a wee).

As you may have guessed, I do not particularly enjoy my job. There are elements I like, but it's the daily grind and obligation bit that always gets me down and so I have always preferred to work part time. Usually this has been spread over five

days, but in the last couple of years I have condensed the hours I need to do to pay the bills into three days, so this means I have a far healthier ratio of four days out of seven to myself. I can practise yoga more often and the odds of being able to enjoy those rare UK days of summer are higher too! This has been nothing short of a revelation with regards to how much happier I feel. Oddly though, it's hard to describe – much of what Jamie and I fill our days with can come across as boring in these times when many are addicted to always finding something new and exciting (and often expensive) to do.

When I met Jamie, I was sharing my flat with my sister, who had moved in when she left school. Following our first “date”, she immediately teased me about him being “The One” because he had given me a recycled toothbrush. We definitely had a lot in common and similar punk backgrounds / working class families. It sounds so trite, but it's amazing how much more you can do with two like—minds—there is a financial boost and a psychological one. We joined a food co-op, shared an organic veg box, set about creating a veg patch in my garden and began to add more to our savings.

We'd been living together for several years when Jamie was made redundant from Southampton docks – he'd worked there long before we met. He began looking further and further along the west coastline and into Devon for similar work. We had discussed moving to Devon previously as we'd kind of fallen in love with it a bit when we treated ourselves to a caravan holiday there the year before. We'd visited a forest garden, seen the Eden Project and there seemed to be so many more permaculture and similar projects happening further west than in Southampton (we'd also done a permaculture course at Dial House earlier that year). But there's not as many job options that's for sure! Jamie was having no luck with engineering work and so I suggested that he use this as an opportunity to change careers (to make it sound fancy.)

He'd wanted to have a go at organic growing since he began cultivating his own veg and so when he saw an ad for a job on a farm in Devon, he applied. He got an interview, went down on the train for the day and got the job. Suddenly we were moving in six weeks' time! Jed had started a new school and hated it; he had made a bad start, so we figured he wouldn't mind a fresh one. I did the same thing as Jamie and travelled down for an interview with a workers' co—op and got the job as an administrator.

Jed had reached that teenage age where he wanted to ditch most of his toys, so I called my friend who had three under fives and we filled her car. Between the three of us, we ditched two thirds of what we had filled our (too big) house with in order to make it seem “homely”. We hired two small transit vans (one for house stuff and one for the family fleet of bikes, and half of the garden, potted up) and the favours of friends to drive and set off—vans swaying, their bottoms bowed—for the Westcountry.

Jamie had spent a couple of days in Exeter, finding somewhere for us all to live, with Jed and I never seeing it before we moved in (I wasn't allowed time off of work). Our new house is in a uncannily Dursley-esque estate (apologies if you

haven't read or seen any Harry Potter)—all pseudo-posh, similar, and sanitised, and is otherwise surrounded by industrial estate, the airport and the Police HQ, but aside from these wee blemishes is perfect for us and we couldn't have wished for better, especially at such short notice. We'll hopefully stay here until Jed leaves school next year, when who knows what we might do! It's a tiny two bedroom terrace (which rarely needs heating), but still has a garden, as well as a garage for the bikes. (We did downsize on bikes, but each have what we feel is a necessary two—mine are my everyday bike-to-work and an old postal bike which a neighbour of Jamie's parents gave me. It's made by Pashley and is built like the proverbial brick shithouse, complete with a whopping great basket on the front. We've found it indispensable to our car free living and have even done a car boot sale out of it!).

These days, with both of us working three days, and with savings, we feel we've achieved most of our simple short term goals. We enjoy life day to day and the simple pleasures of good food, an ale or cider or two, and the ukulele (oh the entertainment to be had... though I do feel sorry for our neighbours, as neither of us can sing!) We have become masters of prioritising and organisation within our lives, which is not at all uncomfortably restricting, despite sounding that way!

One of the things that we would really love to do in the future is to buy some land with our savings and plant a forest garden purely for ourselves and any wildlife that wants to share it with us. But we remain flexible, as we have learnt that it's the wisest thing to do.

On a low wage, you do not earn enough to live an average lifestyle, and one of the most difficult things with trying to live simply is that the rest of the world does not live like us. When we had invited friends round for dinner in Southampton, we were accused of being middle class—we just thought it'd be a cheaper night than the pub, but maybe we should have just said “food” instead of “dinner”. In these days where people fly to Prague for a weekend because somebody farted, it can be hard to afford to socialise, which is an entirely insane notion, well suited to our topsy—turvey society.

We have met other like—minds down here and celebrations are more likely to be booze round a bonfire, with instruments thrown in (not into the fire, although didgeridoos and bongos should definitely be), or a scything event, or just people coming to our house to collect their food co—op order. It's our joint families back in Southampton whom we have to take care not to offend, and striking a balance can be tricky as although we're very close to them we just cannot jump on an £90 train for every birthday, wedding, housewarming, anniversary, Father's day, Mother's day, barbecue, Christmas... (both families living there mean it could end up being weekly!)

Then there's the female specific and hygiene issues. I am happy to look like a bit of a scruffbag most of the time – and my female friends in Devon are all natural looking, but I admit I do feel self—conscious around people who have a more cultivated look and I always wear makeup and smarter clothes when heading

back to Southampton or when we have visitors. Conveniently I have a lifelong phobia of hairdressers and simple tastes in haircuts so they're easy to do myself, but the not buying deodorant (I never found a non—chemical one that actually worked, so I stopped chucking my money at it) is harder to live with when around people that smell artificially nice. I have grown paranoid of hugging. Recently I read about using lemon juice and this seems to be the best tip I have come by as it works so far (we haven't exactly had the summer to test it out properly though). My most far out move has been to sew my own washable sanitary pads. I don't know anyone else who does this. It really shits me buying disposable ones though. I know you can buy washable ones ready made, but they're so expensive and while they look nice at first, they're only going to get horribly, irretrievably, stained (I also use eco—friendly washing powder), so I made my own – out of old pants. Nicely done eh?

I'm 34 years old and it feels like I've lived this way for a long time. Jed is 16 next week, and while he had his moments when he was younger; sometimes wishing



we had a TV, car, or a house of our own where he'd be allowed to make his bedroom his, he never resents our lifestyle these days, having quickly realised that life is never perfect and is growing up to be independent, resilient and mature – I am

proud. Sadly he has recently discovered Facebook, but this is late compared to his peers, and every evening this week we have enjoyed the rare occurrence of him not only joining us on the sofa, but suggesting we all play Scrabble. He is often with friends or in the garage building bikes these days, so it's nice to know he still enjoys our company and even the simple forms of entertainment he's grown up with.

Our lifestyle has been a slow evolution—exactly as I think things should be. I have a similarly ongoing To Do list, which rather than dictate, contains things I need or want to do, and so when I continually add things I feel no pressure, but mostly welcome anticipation. I select things to suit my mood at the time. Simple living and working less has allowed me to develop ever more interests, which

ensures that there are a wide variety of things that I need or want to do, so I never get bored—unlike a day doing my job.

Many of my days are busier than a working day as I attend to household jobs, create meals from scratch and take care of errands without a car. But the important thing to me is that the things I do are very much my own choice, and even when they're not, I have the freedom to adapt my day around those things in order to get the most out of it, and still find meaning in what I'm doing. (Even if this is simply checking out the charity shops if an errand takes me 40 minutes away into town).

If I want or need a slow paced day I might do something relaxing but useful, like make birthday cards or presents. I cannot imagine requesting this change of pace at work, yet why should this be so? Do we have to push and push and push ourselves every day of our lives in order to be seen as capable—or not lazy? It seems as if that is what makes so many people ill, mentally and physically. Even if I want to do nothing much more than read for a day, I can, and my life to me is a perfect example of a very natural balance being achieved by my own instinctive responses. Jobs have never given me that either—only increasing mind-numbing, resentment and despair—with a bit of pocket money and no real time to enjoy it.

I know I am focusing heavily on paid employment, but that is my experience. I feel I do not have the luxury of being able to extend my voluntary simplicity any further at this stage. I'd love to build my own sustainable home (After jobs, housing seems to be the next part of the puzzle in removing obstacles to living with much less money. And I too would like to be able to make my living space mine), but the planning laws of Britain are not likely to change in my lifetime as I see it. So it feels almost like we have come as far as we can at the moment, but still, on the days that are my own, I am perfectly content.

People say they'd get bored if they didn't work and I am always stunned by this. I feel sad for them as I can only conclude that they've never given themselves the time to live fully and independently enough to develop rich lives for themselves. I recently visited the goose-bump-inducing highlands of Scotland and fear I may come across as all Braveheart with this comment as a result, but to me, personal freedom cannot be overvalued. Yet more and more is denied us with each passing year (and government). Simplicity has meant I've been able to make more or the most of my one chance to live.

'If you reduce your carbon footprint, you end up living more simply.'

Jennifer Self

We didn't come to Voluntary Simplicity 'front on'—that is, we didn't get here by making Voluntary Simplicity our goal. That's just where we ended up. Through a series of small steps and decisions our lives have changed. Our journey so far has followed a meandering path, with false starts, dead ends and u-turns. But it has a kind of logic to it that may be of use to others trying to sort out where they would like the journey to take them. So what follows is as much a description of how we arrived at our conclusions, as it is of what measures we have taken in our lives.

Becoming Informed

For me then, I began by becoming more aware about Anthropogenic Global Warming. I had been aware of it of course for many years but had been dubious. Then a neighbour loaned me her copy of Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth*. I began to wonder if there was more to it than I had appreciated and realised that I really didn't have a clue. So I tried hard to empty my head and to start from scratch; I began to read. Everything. I read all the yay—sayers, nay—sayers, conspiracy theorists; the lot. I evaluated the quality of arguments and went back to any original data referenced to check it for myself. In the end I was persuaded.

I carried on reading, finding new paths of thought to explore and by and by, coming across the work of many fine thinkers and writers. They work in a large number of interconnected fields all of which are important to explore and to understand. After all, you need to prepare for the future that's likely to happen, not the one you would prefer. Areas I have read about include:

- climate change
- peak oil
- water issues
- soil degradation
- population dynamics
- history
- economics and finance

Taking on Board Important Concepts

I came to the realisation that the project of western civilisation over the last 50 years, of using leveraged finance to cover every square inch of good agricultural land in cheap, poor quality, car dependent suburbia, is over; we are approaching a discontinuity. To appreciate what this means and involves, it's really useful to learn as much as possible about societies in the past that have gone through upheavals. The prevailing paradigm of a society reaches a point where it can't go on any longer, so it doesn't. When that happens, one way of life stops, to be

replaced by another, where some of the features of the old life carry on, perhaps in a modified form, but a lot don't. This can be a rapid or a slow process, but there your options stop; it can't be avoided.

Many societies have had to find new ways to supply their needs for food, water, energy and security. Reforms that would have been helpful, needed to be supported by those most benefiting from the status quo, so there was little incentive for them to do so and reforms were resisted. Unfortunately the opportunity to make the compromises that would have saved the system in a more recognisable form were not undertaken.

History has many examples of these discontinuities. Really useful examples that I have studied in detail include: Britain after the evacuation of the Roman Army, medieval Europe after The Black Death in the mid 1300's, the French Revolution, and finally The Great Depression and World War II (which for the purposes of understanding discontinuities are best viewed as a single event).

Developing Broad Aims

My research into Climate Change led me to want to reduce our carbon footprint. Early attempts were useful at least in being able to detect and resolve a grossly overcharged gas bill! Inevitably, if you reduce your carbon footprint, you end up living more simply. One writing team whose work has been particularly influential to me introduced me to a framework for living on which we have built a lot of what we have chosen to do. Step 1 is to get out of debt, so it became important to us to drastically reduce living expenses. Living more cheaply also inevitably involves living more simply.

A key concept covered by a lot of excellent writers is 'Resilience'. So if we are to live through a discontinuity, what can we do to enable us to take care of ourselves and to be in a position to help others. A useful idea I've learned is 'Redundancy'; having at least two ways to fulfill each basic need. It's also important to have them under your own control. Growing your own food and in other ways eliminating dependence on complex external systems is the very essence of Voluntary Simplicity.

If we are going to live with a lower energy footprint, we are going to perform more tasks manually and it's helpful to be fitter. This in turn has health benefits; more on this later. So to summarise, our aims were:

- Reduce carbon footprint
- Live more cheaply
- Live more independently
- Build resilient systems
- Live healthier lives
- Improve quality of life

Abandoning Expectations

It's much easier to provide for your own needs if you greatly reduce them, then work at providing for what's left. It's curious to me that so much of the public discourse when it comes to the problems we face, focuses on supply side considerations and pretty much never considers demand side. But it's only common sense to reduce your demand first *then* look at how you can supply it. This applies in more areas of life than you would initially suspect. Abandoning expectations of levels of comfort and services available is a great step towards reducing what you consider your 'needs'. So what expectations have we abandoned?

The idea that the future will resemble the past. This is the most important adjustment to make, because it's so natural to project what you know about the world into the indefinite future. It is one of the things that people 'know for sure' that just isn't true, because we are approaching a discontinuity.

Once you have semi—accepted that we are approaching a discontinuity, it is tempting to believe that somehow the status quo can be made to continue just long enough for you to have your retirement and pension and then peg out (so you don't need to make any adjustments)—the younger generation can deal with the problems we are bequeathing them, without any help from us. But this is a vain hope—we are all in this together; the older generation needs to support the younger and vice versa.

The idea that what we are now going through is just part of the “cycle”, of good times and not so good. But expansionary phases have always depended on expanding oil supplies, and since world oil production arguably peaked in 2005, there will be no more growth phases – that's over.

The idea that house prices will continue to rise, or that if they have gone down, that they're sure to go back up again if we just wait long enough. For a whole generation we have been confusing 'speculation' (gambling) with 'investment' and assuming that getting something for nothing was an immutable law of nature.

The notion that you will retire (sooner rather than later) on a guaranteed pension that will allow you to carry on in the style you are accustomed to.

The expectation that the younger generation is prepared to buy your house at the price you would like for it and to pay enough taxes to maintain your pension, while at the same time paying off student debt and laying enough away for their own retirement because they've already been told that they can't expect the same pension provisions the older generation they are supporting are enjoying. Oh, and at the same time that they are likely to experience higher levels of unemployment, or jobs with poorer expectations now that so many jobs have been off-shored, and low paid contract work is so much more prevalent.

That the trucks will continue to roll 24/7 to keep the supermarkets topped up with cheap food. Those guys lease their rigs and the financial justification is fragile at the best of times, involving slim margins even when interest rates and fuel prices remain low. Don't assume either of those two things will remain reliably in place.

That there will be any food, cheap or otherwise for the trucks to transport, even if they can continue to roll. Farming has become an increasingly unappealing way of life to the younger generation, who have drifted to the temporarily more profitable lives offered by the city. The average age of farmers everywhere has been increasing and as they have retired, many farms have been carved up for the "middle-aged spread" of cheap suburbia surrounding pretty much every city and town in the western world (on the assumption that values would continue to rise so that owners can sell up and go where they really want to live). This can't (and won't) continue. Add to this more frequent and extreme weather events that reduce or eliminate crop yields and damage (sometimes permanently) the ability of a piece of land to continue to yield, or more importantly the preparedness of a particular farming family to battle on.

The capacity of technology to solve everything. Pretty much everyone 'knows for sure' that life in the 21st century is a relentless, guaranteed march of progress towards ever more sophisticated ways of doing things and that that is a good thing. The problem with that is, it simply isn't true. Moore's Law says something about the capacity of a chip doubling every so often, and this example is often cited as if it's some inviolable law of nature—it's not, it's just an observation based on a limited time period. If you take it through to its logical conclusion, one day we will be able to store all the knowledge that ever existed on earth, on a single atom. Obviously there are limits. To everything. Making things requires materials and energy, and there's plenty of evidence that the future is going to see less and poorer quality sources of both.

The capacity of the earth to continue to absorb our waste products.

The capacity of the economy to continue to provide well paying stable employment of the type we are familiar with.

The ability to import from anywhere any time everything you want to own or enjoy.

The climate staying reliably the same.

The health system sticking around to continue being able to resolve health issues caused by poor lifestyle choices.

The capacity of government to solve all problems all of the time. Even with the best will in the world, if tax receipts decline and need increases, someone or something is going to miss out.

Great, Now What?

So what comes next? I don't think “we” (as in society at large) are going to do anything until circumstances compel us to; inertia is a powerful force and purposeful consensus is difficult to achieve with so many view points to choose from. I'm not comfortable about being involved in projects aimed at convincing large sections of the population to “act now”. Other people are just as smart as I am and have their own perspectives and their own areas of expertise which are not the same as mine. They may have no interest in messages like 'adapt now and beat the rush' (for all that that is a splendid idea). For me then, the answer was to go about adapting me and my life and leaving other people to either work it out for themselves, or not as they see fit. I like to think of myself, my home, my garden, my choices as a “living laboratory” to test out ideas and ways of doing things. The results could then form some sort of resource for those who live near me to draw on when they are ready. The benefit to me then would be to have a community around me that is supportive of broadly the same goals.

Where to Live

For a lot of people, the instinct is to “head for the hills” and we certainly went through our epoch of looking for a piece of land in the boonies to build our homestead. The sorts of issues we gave attention to included:

We wanted to be near a town that is self-contained, self-sufficient, with all the basic services available within it. This is because as oil supplies decline, travel by car may become expensive or unavailable altogether.

We wanted a place that could do well in spite of declining fossil fuels; it seems to me that a useful rule of thumb may be, “if it did well before fossil fuels, it should be well placed to carry on doing well after they are gone”. A town centre designed and built during the Victorian era is likely to be attractive and of sound and sturdy construction as well as being on an appropriate scale.

We wanted a town with a variety of people with the other skills you need in your community—you can't do everything yourself, although being flexible and adaptable is a good thing to aim for.

We were wary of towns that seem to have far more residents than jobs for those residents. That's not so much a town as a dormitory exurb for some other place a compulsory car drive away, meaning that properties there will become not just useless but valueless.

A town needs a variety of sources of income—we were wary of a town whose primary income is say government or mega-corporate patronage of a single entity such as a prison or factory —governments and corporations withdraw their support of these projects fairly readily, leaving communities high and dry.

We wanted a town with a variety of businesses in a quality high street. We are dubious about a town whose shops mostly cater to a through traffic of tourism. Car based tourism is likely to go into decline and you need your basic needs met.

It's preferable if the town has access to a railway line with a station, so that there's some other way of getting around besides the car and so that goods can be moved in both directions and some sort of trade maintained.

The town should have public buildings such as a hospital, library, court, primary and secondary school, Mechanics Institute, council offices and civil services including police, fire ambulance and SES. There's no guarantee of course that these things are going to stick around, but as times get tougher, its going to be a lot harder to build new stuff than to maintain old stuff that's already there.

The town should have facilities for clubs and sports since these are a wonderful way of bringing social cohesion, allowing people to form bonds and ties beyond family and workplace. Also voluntary service organisations, such as Rotary and Apex, since helping out those in difficulty and fundraising for worthwhile local public facilities and services should not be part of a profit generating machine, but simply what decent people do in a civilised, well functioning community, because it is in everyone's best interests.

We went through the process of thinking about all these issues, and had a beautiful country town all picked out—in fact I still feel a very strong desire to move there. The problem in the end was, it wasn't just about the town, it was about the community and most importantly, family support that was the deal breaker for us. I didn't want to go anywhere without my grown up children and they didn't want to come too. Also, we had elderly relatives requiring support near where we already were. In the end, when we made a list of the features and facilities we wanted to be within walking distance of, we already had them right here where we already are. We decided to “adapt in place”. We will expand on this later on.

Solitary or Communally?

We too will get old. It seems to me that if you are going to invest what might turn out to be increasingly scarce resources in a property, then you either want one (now) that won't require a lot of physical labour for the rest of your life (no guarantees there), or it's going to take a multi generational approach. If you have children, they need to form a part of your planning for a solution. This doesn't mean of course that they're on board with any of this right now, but a resilient plan should allow for their presence, because it is quite likely at some point that they will need you and/or you will need them. If you don't have children of your own, then nature has taken care of that, in the sense that you still have an important genetic stake in your blood nieces and nephews, and they in turn, with you.

This is where studying history and biology comes in handy. The best community to co—operate with, is the community that nature provided you—that is, those

people who have just as big a stake in your survival as in their own. Very often this is your own family. For those where this is not an option, society has always provided other avenues to form bonds with other generations, with benefits to both parties. I'll leave it to my readers to work out what those are, since I have no experience to offer. Traditionally, people have lived with three or more generations either under the one roof or very nearby. This will sound unappealing to a lot of modern western readers and since the individual family home was established as the norm (and then got progressively larger) it has come to seem that any other way of doing things is just plain horrible. However for most of human history it has been inevitable, unavoidable and very often of benefit to all involved, that extended family lived and worked together.

Adapting in Place

So we arrived at the point where we had realised that what we wanted most was to adapt in place. Let me recap, in light of the above, why we had arrived at this decision and why this place was the right one for us:

We wanted to be within walking distance of a range of services, including medical, transport, educational, and small business. There is a railway station at the bottom of my street, with a library, small theatre and sporting facilities just beyond (lawn bowls, tennis club and football/cricket oval). We have two bakeries and a small independent grocer in the next street. My dentist and optometrist are there too. My doctor is a short walk away. Another high street with loads more services including my bank are in another high street strip in the next suburb only 15 minutes walk away.

We wanted sufficient land to be able to grow at least a portion of our own food—particularly starch and protein. This will be a useful buffer if those things are ever scarce or expensive. It's still a useful portion of the household budget, to be able to provide for those things even if they don't ever become scarce or expensive. And it's a lot of fun.

We wanted water storage and the means to obtain at least some of our energy needs here on the property. Having been through a decade of drought, with the devastating impacts to our garden and the limitations it placed on our ability to grow any plants of any sort, this was probably number one priority. Problems of supply in energy on the other hand we have less experience of. But once you have taken on board the concept of independence and resilience in one area, it seems natural to extend that into other areas.

We wanted to be walking or bike riding distance to our employment. My husband mostly works from home so is in a good position in lots of ways. I am able to ride my bike the 15 kms to my job, which I do most days, but not every day. I would prefer it to be a lot closer for other reasons, but it suits me in a lot of ways. Not least is the enforced exercise regime—the only way to be fit enough to ride a bike, is to ride a bike.

At the moment we have ageing parents requiring support, and adult children in tertiary education. But these circumstances will change, so we wanted everything from kindergarten access for future grandchildren to services for ailing elderly relatives and everything in between.

Since we already had all of that right here where we are, the next stage, was to consider how to supply as much as possible of our basic needs here on our property. Let's first think about what those are:

- Water
- Energy
- Food
- Shelter
- Clothing
- Health
- Money

Having the essentials of life under our own control

Before we began any measures at all to either reduce usage, or supply need, we needed to know how much we were using. I started to keep weekly readings of our water, gas, and electricity meters. We also added a rain gauge and indoor/outdoor thermometers so that we have been able to collect rainfall and temperature data as well—we now have data covering about three years, pre and post renovations. This data set is probably unique. We also measured the electricity usage of various items around our home to work out which were the biggest users and gave some thought about whether we really needed them.

We engaged a team of architects to look at our data, our aims and priorities and to plan a renovation project. A builder was engaged who is very aware and on—board with the issues that concern us and not only did he do a wonderful job, he has been able to give us guidance and assistance in further projects around the house since the main project was finished. A team of permaculture gardening designers planned our permaculture garden and built the infrastructure. My brother designed and built an excellent sophisticated composting system, which closes the loop of production and consumption of food and recycling the waste into fertile soil.

What follows is further description of these changes. A lot of this may be considered by some to be expensive, so I'm not sure everyone will feel that this qualifies as “simplicity”. However viewed in the sense of a combination of an investment and insurance (as opposed to speculation, a genuine investment involves funding truly productive activity, with dividends paid out over time and insurance involves guarding yourself against calamities that may never occur), these steps will allow our future living to be much cheaper, more independent and resilient than it otherwise would have been.

Water

Before we began our renovation project, we started out by installing 5,000 litres of slim line tanks behind our garage. This was intended to be the beginning and end of our water storage building. Those 5,000 litres were very useful during that first year, to keep our fruit trees and a small vegetable plot alive during drought and water restrictions. We had an old in—ground swimming pool that needed constant topping up to be usable, but this was illegal during the water restrictions associated with the drought. We could use our tanks for this but then we wouldn't have had enough water for the fruit and vegetables which were a higher priority. Once the water level fell below what was necessary for the filter to operate, the water became stagnant; the swimming pool fell into disuse and we considered filling it in.

As part of the renovation project, the architects were able to save its “embodied energy” (the energy expended in its construction and so in a sense stored in its structure) and converted it to an underground water tank—capacity 70,000 litres. Another underground tank composed of a system that looks like a stack of milk crates added another 30,000 litres. We had a look at a grey water treatment system but it seemed expensive, complex, needed frequent inspections and constant maintenance, and there were limitations on the use that the resulting water could be put to. This made it unappealing in the end—we were trying to make our lives simpler! We have the concrete slab in place should we ever change our minds but I think in the future we will go for a simpler solution of running water from the showers onto the fruit trees. With the last two “la nina” years being sufficiently wet, we are yet to implement this, but it's definitely on the 'to-do' list.

I like the idea of modern composting toilets, which are simple and sophisticated in their design, but these are not permitted in our municipality, and there's the “yuck” factor when it comes to the resulting compost, that I'm still sufficiently “suburban” to have trouble dealing with. Our toilets are flushed using water from the old pool and our garden is watered entirely with tank water, so our use of water supplied from off—site has been greatly reduced. I recently bought a hand—operated pump for the old pool, so if there is ever a power failure I will still be able to get water out for watering the garden, or even flushing toilets.

Energy

We used to have two hot water services: one gas that supplied the downstairs part of our house and another off—peak electric one for the rest of the house. Having two qualified under the “resilience” aim, and indeed during the gas outage we had in the 1990's we were very glad to have our electric hot water. However it accounted for a fifth of our electricity usage and both forms of energy were being imported onto our property, so we decided to have the electric system removed. We have since installed a solar hot water system with gas booster and we have found that this has greatly reduced our energy use for hot water.

As part of our analysis of water and energy use, we knew the swimming pool accounted for half our remaining electricity usage. So we switched off the pumps. As mentioned above, we eventually converted the pool to an underground tank. There are still pumps associated with it now that it's a tank, but energy use of these pumps is minimal (since they are only used to move water when it's needed, and not all the time to keep it clean), and our solar panels help cover that. We have an electricity watt meter that you can connect up to each electrical item in the house and track its usage. The results were useful and instructive.

After the electric hot water and the pool, the next biggest user of electricity in our house was by far the dishwasher. The tumble dryer was a close second in the electricity it uses on an hourly basis, but we didn't use it nearly as frequently, so the dishwasher won the crown. It was very old anyway, so we put it out on the nature strip, where some enterprising soul mined it for spare parts. What remained of it ended up in a skip. The space it once occupied now houses a much—appreciated set of shelves for my pots and pans. We wash the dishes in the sink. Most people have been brainwashed into thinking dishwashers are 'green' because they save water (they save a renewable resource by utilising a non—renewable one by the way). Really? How much do you save? It can't be more than what you would need to flush the loo or make a cup of tea. In any case I have 100,000 litres in my garden, so what do I care? Oh, and by the way—I don't find it any more onerous to wash dishes in the sink than to mess about filling and emptying the dishwasher. I'd equally prefer to do neither.

We kept our tumble dryer (well we already owned it) but put it on top of the broom cupboard. This means it can still be used but it is inconvenient, since I need to get a stool to get at it. It's been used only a couple of times since it went up there. I have a hair dryer but now I only use it to dry the dog when she gets a bath. She looks so pitiful when she's wet and miserable (m just as sentimental as the next person) As for me, I'm nearly 50 and I'm pretty sure no one is looking at me. I shove my hair in a couple of rubber bands and that's me done. We once had electric blankets for winter time. Since improving the insulation in our house, we find that we just don't get that cold any more. We got rid of the electric blanket and replaced it with a good quality woollen under blanket. The occasional hot water bottle helps. We didn't find the clock on the microwave or stand—by of our television were large users. The clock on the microwave in fact didn't even register, over a whole 24 hour period.

Another useful item for the bed is a patchwork quilt. I make them and I think they look lovely. In winter we have one as well as the doona, and in summer, instead. They are made of three layers of fabric stitched together. The wadding can be made of a range of different materials: wool, cotton, bamboo fibre, polyester. The wadding has pockets of air that traps your body heat. In winter, having both the quilt and the doona involves not just trapping heat in both the quilt and doona, but between quilt and doona. In the summer, a very hot night can give way to a cool morning. A quilt allows you to feel covered and to slumber on during this transition without being woken by becoming aware of the need to scramble for something warmer.

For cooling, our architects designed a wonderful solution. They removed the old air conditioner and patched up the hole (it let heat in on hot days). Instead they ran a pipe from the pool through a heat exchange unit located under the house and cooled air is blown through the house via one of two fan units on hot days. We know from our indoor thermometers that these are very effective and use little energy. For comparison, formerly on hot days and with the air conditioner running, we managed to keep the room where the air conditioner was running, around three to four degrees celsius cooler than outside (and it was noisy). With the new system, we keep the whole house 10 degrees celsius cooler than outside. We're still warm, because if it's 40 outside it's 30 in here, but it's a huge improvement for very little money and energy expenditure.

For heating, we have radiator panels that have hot water running through them. This hot water is heated with gas and uses much less of it than our old ducted heating system (which was completely removed). Floor areas in front of panels are very convenient places to site clothes airers which are a much more reliable method of getting clothes dry in winter than our outdoor clothes line, (in spite of its being under cover). Our electricity usage now is only about a fifth of what it once was. Our gas usage also is way down.

So having reduced our demand, we looked at generation capacity on site. Solar panels are expensive and I'm not sold on their "green" credentials, but they are a useful way of bringing forward your spending on energy while you still have the means. We had 16 solar panels installed: 10 are in the glass wall over the north side of the house (maximising winter collection because of the angle) and the other six are on the roof in the more traditional angle that is better around the spring and autumn equinoxes. Averaged out over the year this supplies all our electricity needs. We have a grid tied system which has the disadvantage that should the grid go down, our panels have to be switched off. At some point I would like to upgrade them to a battery bank tied system. This means no more earning credit from the electricity we put back into the system, but that was never important to us. It also means having batteries as part of our system, and they have their own associated waste disposal issues which we are having problems working out how to deal with.

Gas is going to be a problem. Obviously we have no way of generating that on site. Where we live relies on Bass Strait gas supplies, which have perhaps 12 to 14 years left (at current rates of consumption). We are hoping to build a system that will last a lot longer than that. Our cooking systems inside the house are all electricity based; it's our home and water heating that rely on gas. Both my husband and I grew up in houses that had no heating at all. My memory of it is not fond, but I didn't die. So setting home heating aside, the missing capacity is in water heating.

A recent addition to our home has been a free standing out—building, that I intend to fit out with alternative means of cooking and heating water. I will be installing a small woodfired stove, and a gas cook top connected to bottled gas. I don't intend to use either frequently—perhaps on hot days when I don't want to heat up the house, or to cook up tomato sauce when I want to work in the garden

but be able to check on what's cooking without clumping dirty boots through the house. This potential to cook using three alternative means adds to our resilience.

Food

Our permaculture team did a superb job designing an integrated system, taking into account the siting and layout of the house, and other factors such as number of people living here, available time to commit and personal preferences. The raised beds they built on the former swimming pool, add to the insulation properties of the cover. Since the water in the pool is used for cooling in the summer, this is an important feature. So we have six raised beds on the pool and one more just off it. This seventh bed is a wicked garden bed—essentially a huge self—watering pot. It is useful for those crops that are more water dependent. It was also important to me to have a variety of features in the garden, to demonstrate to visitors the different options available to them, depending on the size of their properties and their priorities. We have held a couple of open—house events to showcase the various features of house and garden to people who are interested in learning from our experience, but don't necessarily have a large amount of space to work with.

A small terraced garden bed at the front (north) side of the house is useful for growing vegetables in the winter when the angle of the sun is lower and the back (south east side) gets less sunlight. We re—used the old pool fencing at the front so that the fence is high but lets maximum light through. Its construction of vertical wires, is also useful for growing climbing plants such as peas, beans and passionfruit. Our orchard runs along the southern and eastern boundaries of the property, with the chicken run built so that the orchard is fully enclosed. In due course we will use lengths of poly—pipe to form an archway over the run and enclose it with bird proof netting. This will help protect the fruit from lorikeets and other birds, and fruit bats, and the chickens from foxes.

When it comes to harvesting, you tend to get a lot of a handful of things. I've invested in a food dehydrator which works very well for certain foods. It runs on electricity so we are looking at putting food drying racks inside the glass wall on the north side of the house (more on that later) to dry food passively. We also have food bottling kits including a pressure system from the US for bottling low acid fruits and vegetables. I prefer drying food because I feel it's safer. As an added measure, I have a vacuum sealer system that allows for packing food in plastic pockets which exclude air from dried and stored food, and helps it last longer.

Food we grow at home is cheaper than bought food. It is healthier because it is eaten within a short time of harvest. We have added confidence in our food supply because we know its provenance. Certainly preparing food from scratch takes longer than buying prepared foods but it's also a lot of fun and very satisfying psychologically. Given that it's how people have eaten for the vast majority of history it can scarcely be considered a hardship.

Shelter

It was very important to ensure our house was properly insulated. It is a 1950's cream brick veneer and had very old aluminium windows. We began with the ceiling space. Over a number of weeks I worked on replacing and completing the ceiling insulation. Some of the space had been insulated with R1.5 batts. There were large gaps where the batts weren't wide enough to fit between the battens. I doubled up batts, turned them sideways and supplemented where necessary with new batts. The largest part of the ceiling was insulated with fluffy stuff that had been blown in but had compacted and shifted. All this was removed. There were also two rooms that weren't insulated at all. The whole ceiling space is now insulated with R3.5 batts (or equivalent). It was a difficult and dirty job, made especially difficult due to its being a hip roof with irregular outline (10 corners to get into!). As part of the renovations work, the builders took the tiles off all round and pushed insulation down into the wall cavity to insulate that portion of the walls that extended from the soffit up into the roof space and this too made a big difference.

All our windows were replaced with fibre glass framed double glazed windows. Since aluminium conducts heat we resisted the urge to use them (they are significantly cheaper than fibre glass or wood framed windows). Nearly all the west facing windows and doors were removed and blocked up, since heat from the afternoon sun in summer is particularly ferocious on a hot day. The western walls were externally insulated with a product composed of corrugated steel sheeting lined with 10cm of styrofoam. This has an attractive finish as well as being very effective at blocking out summer heat. The north side of the house has a sloping glass wall built over the old front of the house. Ten of our solar panels form a part of the wall and the rest is ordinary window glass. In the winter this wall helps to passively heat the house, while in summer the house is protected from over heating by air vents that help draw the cool air from the swimming pool cooling system through the house. Insulation over the bricks inside the glass wall further protects that side of the house.

An important aspect of our renovations involved dividing up our large house into separate independent living units under the one roof. My frail elderly mother—in-law was able to come and live with us in her own self contained apartment, without losing her independence, autonomy or dignity. The space she now occupies could just as easily be utilised by a younger family member who wishes to be independent but hasn't yet got sufficient financial means, or we can swap with them if they have children and we can live in the smaller unit, or it can even be rented out to a student or nurse from the nearby university or mega—hospital complex (while those things survive).

Once the main renovations were completed and the associated mortgage paid off, we drew up a list of small projects in priority order, that we have been working through to further improve the system. Early on my husband ordered and installed blinds that fit exactly inside the window reveals, rather than hanging from the architraving. This is important for insulation purposes—I had been considering curtains with pelmets as a means of preventing the flow of air against glass that is a source of cooling in winter, but these blinds obviate that. In

addition the blinds are made as a double-layered 'honey-comb' construction, with extra insulation effects due to the air trapped inside. Of course, there's nothing stopping me getting curtains and pelmets later on, and I may still do that.

There was one window/patio door that wasn't suited to having the blinds installed, so I will at least be making curtains and getting a pelmet installed over that. I learned how to make European—style triple layered interlined curtains from a friend in the UK when we lived there. She is a professional curtain maker who was suffering from ill—health and was having trouble filling her orders. I offered to be her free labour if she would teach me how to make them. She was able to clear her back orders and I learned an important skill. These triple layered curtains are a very effective form of window insulation in cold climates like Britain. I haven't found anyone here who makes them, so I'm very fortunate to have learned this skill from my friend. I paid my brother for the compost bins he built me, by sewing his curtains. He too has renovated his house and garden along the same sort of lines we have, and he needed his curtains as part of his insulation system.

Future small projects on the list include outside blinds. In very hot weather which we experience a varying number of times per year, it's very important to prevent heat entering the house. As part of the garden design, our permaculture team built a pergola over the patio at the south east corner of the house—we've always found this to be the crucial window in hot weather. The idea is to grow deciduous vines up the pergola (either grapes or kiwi—fruit) to provide shade in summer and allow sunlight in, in winter. But the patio is not at ground level—it's on a balcony. So it will be quite a long time before the pergola is sufficiently covered with plant life to make a difference. In the meantime, we plan to install shade—cloth blinds to perform the same job.

Clothing

This is one of the easiest ways to reduce our demand in the modern western world. Women in particular are terrible when it comes to owning large quantities of unnecessary clothing, and disposing of it while it is still quite wearable. One woman's waste is another woman's opportunity; over the last five years, most of my newly acquired clothes have come from secondhand shops. Presumably as life becomes more expensive and constrained, this source will dry up. However clothes can be made to last a long time and can be repaired; a skill set not widely held at the moment, but one I possess and one that can be fairly easily reacquired by people, with only a bit of effort. I am able to sew my own clothes as well as being a proficient knitter. Over the last few years, knitting has become an expensive hobby but it could once again be a useful skill in the armoury of families trying to get by on a lot less, so long as they can source cheaper yarns. I can spin and own two spinning wheels, although I'm not particularly sold on the texture of the yarn that results. Maybe I just need to re—adjust my attitudes...

Health

Our modern health system is extremely complex, relying on very wasteful uses of fossil fuels. It is also very expensive and relies on government funding in an era when governments the world over are withdrawing support due to economic problems. I think it is very unlikely that our health system will survive in its current form for very much longer. This is at the same time that lifestyle related health problems are on the increase and everywhere to be seen. The majority of the population is overweight, sedentary and unfit. Many have harmful addictions and bad habits. So for us, it has been very important to work at being the fittest and healthiest we can be.

As with everything else, it is best to try to reduce your need as much as possible and then to supply what's left. Obviously you can't help being in an accident or maybe getting cancer but you can reduce your risk. For us, riding bicycles as our preferred mode of transport has not only saved us a lot of money but has also helped resolve a number of niggling health issues that you wouldn't necessarily associate with fitness. And we have a hell of a good time. Needless to say we are totally sold on the health benefits of swapping a car for a bike.

Transport

There's no doubt that there's plenty of opportunity to save money, reduce your carbon footprint, improve your health and to build resilience into your system, by making appropriate transport choices. If you buy goods and services locally, then you reduce travel time for those. If you live near where you work and work near where you live, then you reduce need there. If you holiday locally you can save a tremendous amount of money and impact on the planet—and by the way, it's a delicious pleasure. My preference is to spend most of my holidays at home working around the house, or helping my parents with the couple of acres they live on, and to go on long bike rides with my brother who lives near them.

Since I still work full time, being able to spend time at home feels like a wonderful luxury. We do go away weekends and other times and the bicycle is featuring more and more prominently. There is also the train. Where we live, it's very easy to put the bike on the train and travel quite long distances. There are many pleasant bike—touring experiences to be had without once turning the key in an engine. We are very much enjoying being able to explore these opportunities and to better appreciate the land and history of where we live.

My husband and I once had a car each and drove every day to work in the city—it seems totally alien now. On returning from living in the UK, very early on in our simplicity journey, we decided to get by with one car. It mostly sits out on the street—our garage is used to house our fleet of bicycles. I fully expect that one day the most we will be able to do with it is to climb behind the wheel and make 'broom-broom' noises while we reminisce about the old days.

Building Community

People have evolved to work in groups. Research into ideal village sizes has been undertaken, to work out what size ensures that a community can be cohesive as well as to cover all the skills required to have a high quality of life. Something in the region of 150 has been proposed. I'm not convinced that total self sufficiency is an achievable goal, or that I would enjoy the lifestyle that resulted. I'm not some weird sort of survivalist; I want to be a part of a thriving community. I want to have fun and be happy. It seems common sense to try to club together with other people to work on projects and bounce ideas off each other.

For us we have been involved in a few initiatives such as Transition Towns, Permablitz, and I have volunteered at CERES in Brunswick. A year ago I joined the State Emergency Service at my local unit. Voluntary work has given me the opportunity to expand my skill set, which when it comes to making an income has been limited to sitting in front of a computer screen and typing. My voluntary work allows me to learn a wide range of skills, meet a wide variety of people and serve my local community. Given that I believe that Global Warming will lead to more and extreme weather events, it makes sense to be involved with an organisation that works on helping people who, through no fault of their own, have been impacted by flood and storm events.

Money

Here again, it's useful to look at both 'supply' and 'demand' sides of the question; the concept of reducing your need then supplying what's left is a useful one. We are both currently still working full time, but I will be converting to three days a work shortly. Our aim is to have both of us working, so that should one of us lose their job, the other is still bringing in an income. My husband would like to convert to part time too, but its not yet clear how this can come about. Working part time allows for more time to devote to other aspects of your system; in my case more time for working in the garden, for my voluntary work, making curtains and learning new skills. I would like to get my truck driving licence, firstly so that I can drive the rescue vehicles at my SES unit, and secondly as a potential alternative means of earning some income should it ever be necessary.

No plan for more resilience, simpler living, or a better quality of life, would be complete without getting out of debt. Having no debt means that much less of our income is required to service debt and to keep a roof over our head. Owning the roof over your head gives you a measure of security over the circumstances of your existence. Reducing living expenses allows an increase in paying down debt, and once debt is paid off, living expenses are further reduced allowing for further paying off debt, in a circular sort of way. We have now paid off all our debts and I no longer have a credit card.

Strangely, I find that this last is the one aspect of my chosen way of life that horrifies the most people. Almost everyone I know couldn't imagine living without utilising credit and the convenience of having that card. In fact I still have a means of say, shopping on line, because I have a debit card. However the

necessity of planning spending, going to the bank and putting what I need on the card first, is a form of enforced discipline. Any purchases I make that way have to be planned in advance and considered carefully. My home is a living diary of impulse purchases made when I had a credit card; I don't need most of it and I don't miss not being able to add to it.

Amongst other things, my savings capacity is going towards paying my son's university fees so that he too can graduate without a debt just as my husband and I did, and my parents before us. This will give my son the opportunity to change his mind about his path in life without feeling locked in to a decision that was made while he was still basically a child and inexperienced. Should he choose to continue on his current path however, since his chosen field of study is medicine, for all that I don't think his career is likely to be quite as he currently imagines, his skills will be a useful contribution to our community and our overall resilience plan. Other savings are going towards other projects around the house that contribute to our plan for independence and redundancy as mentioned earlier.

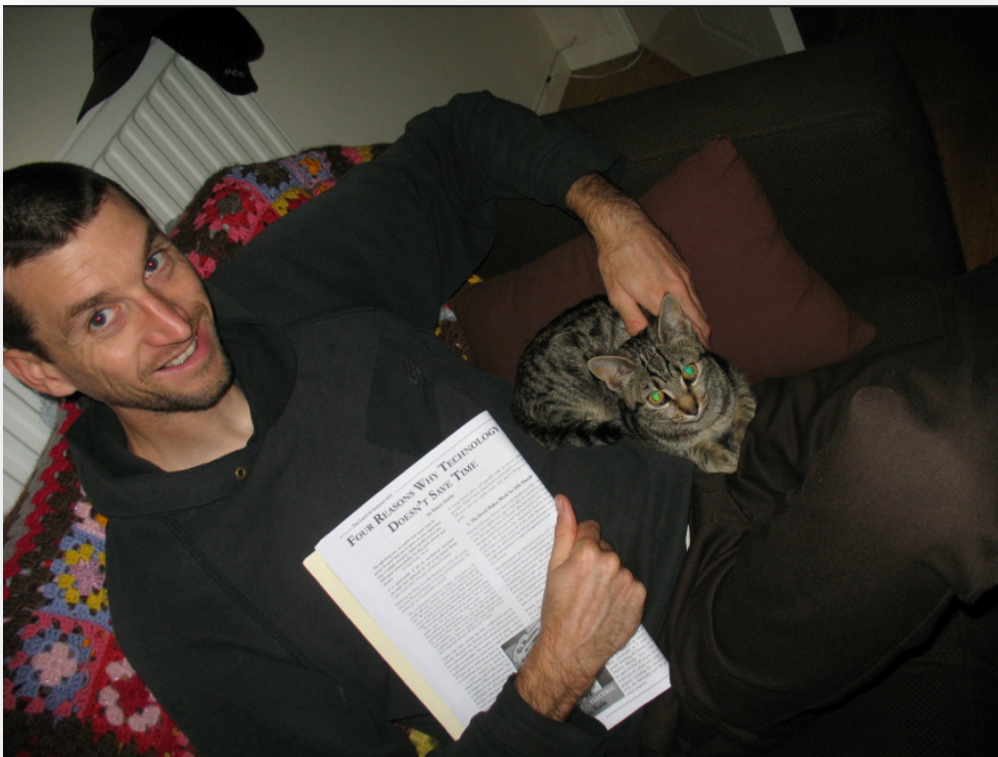
Conclusion

To many people there will be aspects of my life as described that may seem alien, or unappealing. I hope though, that there are many more people who feel inspired to have a go at making a few changes and seeing where it leads them. I can honestly say that how I live now has the highest quality of life that I have ever enjoyed, with a future that I feel optimistic and cheerful about. I'm able to feel valued and fulfilled in both my professional and volunteer life. I'm surrounded by those I care about and I am able to contribute to the necessities of life of my wider family circle. I'm doing things that I enjoy doing, learning new skills all the time and having a hell of a good time. I'm independent of a lot of things other people depend on and this gives me a sense of extra security. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who has a sense of living through epochal change. I think the most important message for me is that I feel 'rich'. That is I have everything I need to be perfectly happy, and I don't think its possible to be richer than that. This article describes just my view of things which of course may be wrong in lots of ways. I hope though, that I have encouraged people to look around them, have a think and maybe make some changes in their lives so that they too can feel more resilient and more fulfilled. I wish them well.

‘Cutting that credit card up and pledging to never get another and live debt free was a liberating experience.’

Jamie Festo

My name is Jamie, I'm 35 years old and live in Devon, England. We have lived in Devon for just over three years now having moved here from Southampton. I live in a rented house with my partner (Bek), our teenage son (Jed) and our two cats (Biffy and Harry). I work three days a week on a local organic farm, mainly in the role of salad grower and picker. Bek also works three a week, which gives us a



combined annual income of just over £15000. We currently pay just over £8000 a year in rent so the government deems that we need financial support to the tune of about £3000 a year in benefits. We have not asked for these benefits and in honesty, receiving them has meant that we have been able to save money.

As a vegan family, all of our vegetable needs are covered between a weekly vegetable box, the farm vegetable seconds (i.e. produce deemed unsuitable for sale due to damage or unsold produce), gardens in our work places and our garden at home. We seldom eat processed foods such as expensive soya and tofu substitutes and cook meals from scratch 99 percent of time. Having been part of a large vegan food co-op in Southampton, one of the first things we did after moving down here was to set up a non profit, Organic food buying co-op. We bulk buy with 10 to 15 other members from our nearest whole food distributor

every six weeks. Luckily for us they happen to be a really great workers Co—op. By buying in this way we meet the minimum price order requirement and pay trade price for the produce, making organic food a very affordable option.

I think the seeds of my wanting to live simply were sown early on. I was brought up in a modest working class family, where both my parents worked full time and we kids were expected to help out with cooking, cleaning and shopping. I enjoyed being able to contribute the household. I have great memories of going to car boot sales on Sunday mornings, building dens in the woods with my mates, repairing and riding old bicycles with my dad, going for long dog walks and of being completely obsessed with skateboarding. Skateboarding for all it's commercial crassness is still at its core, an amazingly simple and beautiful thing to do.

I read an interview recently where the interviewee said that punk rock music was his education. That is very true of me. As a an angry 17 year old I cannot down play the influential role of punk band lyrics and of the people that I met in the Anarchist music scene had on me. Being part of that scene was an incredibly empowering experience, it helped to shape a lot of my political views and outlook on the world in general.

But as much as punk helped me to live by my ethics at weekends and occasional evenings, my day to day life at that time was still very different. I was still trapped in a full time job as marine fitter that was taking anywhere between 60 and 90 hours a week from me. Having completed a five year apprenticeship and two further years as a journeyman almost straight from leaving school, I was at the point of nervous break down. This was my first experience of the destructive power that a job can have on the mind.

Rather than have a complete melt down at 22 I decided to quit my job and go backpacking. While hardly the most original, authentic or sustainable idea it gave me a couple of years of thinking / reflecting time. I really enjoyed working part time between the trips, living relatively simply and cheaply.

At around the age of 25 I began to take veganism more seriously and began looking into food nutrition. This opened the door for the world of food ethics to enter my life. I had been vegetarian and vegan for about seven years on animal rights grounds but had not considered the wider impact of what I was eating, where it had come from and what its environmental costs were. I read about Organic food and quickly decided to ask a friend if I could try to grow some organic vegetables in his disused back garden.

Armed with nothing but a couple of old, outdated and confusing gardening books I had found in a charity shop, a friend and I proceeded to double dig the small plot and planted potato tubers and onion sets. We alternated which way up we planted the onion sets as we didn't know which end was which and figured it increased our chances of success!. I had never grown nor wanted to grow anything in my life. This was purely a political decision. I figured that in a crazy world in which I felt very helpless, then trying to grow veggies was at least

something I could do. What I hadn't bargained for was, that growing that first crop would be one of the most life changing experiences of my life.

The next year I grew a lot wider range of crops with varying successes and the bug had bitten. I was extremely fortunate that at this point I met my partner Bek. I had already started to begin feeling slightly ostracised amongst my friends because of my changing life style choices. There didn't seem to be to many of my other friends that were worrying about where their T—shirt was made, GM food or why carrots never seem to grow! My friends were worried I was becoming a hippy and not a punk rocker anymore, Ha Ha.

Meeting Bek was like a meeting of minds and aspirations. It was life affirming to have someone else to talk frankly and openly about the ideas I was having without feeling like I was attacking some else's choices, or that I was a total weirdo. Bek brought a much needed down to earth, practical, everyday life approach to the whole equation. Simple living being the main one. We discovered a lot of new books and ideas together quite quickly. Self-sufficiency, small scale organic farming, permaculture, forest gardening and many more.

For all these amazing ideas my life was again being dominated by the tiredness and dissatisfaction of full time work though.

Our entire Western way of life is based upon debt. Debt, which in reality is totally mythical, but which still keeps most of us miserable and shackled down. My nice friendly bank sent me a credit card on my 17th birthday. My parents warned me about getting into debt which to be honest did mean I was a lot more sensible than most of my friends. That said, I still racked up a debt which I just couldn't ever quite seem to pay off fully, meaning that I was paying interest every month.

Bek offered to pay the remaining couple of hundred pounds of my debt if I cut up my credit card. If I am honest, the thought of not having the “Security” of a credit card unnerved me, what if we needed it someday! Bek continued to offer over the space of six months and eventually I agreed. Cutting that card up and pledging to never get another and live debt free was a liberating experience.

We began ordering a local organic vegetable box which forced us the become more inventive and simplify our cooking. This is a criminally understated thing to do. To be able to prepare simple, tasty and nutritious food with what you have is a must. This is a very on going process. Every year the weather conditions change, crops fail, crops glut and we try new vegetables.

We joined a local vegan food buying co-operative which reduced our financial out goings further. We finally began to save money and to enjoy the benefits of buying in bulk. Doing a food order every six weeks forced us to really think about what food we needed, what were only luxuries and how we could consume less in terms of imported foods and packaging. We both regularly volunteered to help with the co-op. As well as great conversation and humour with good friends I think it was a good example of what meaningful work can be and what we can achieve by pooling our resources and and working together.

Working conditions in my job were getting worse all the time so I tried to start getting even by organizing in my work place through a trade union. After a two frustrating years of organising I began to make head way when a “Recession” hit. I quickly found myself being made redundant on the grounds of cut backs. After some angry theatrics from me, Beks helped me to see this as an opportunity. We had discussed moving away from Southampton before but had decided to shelve it till Jed left school because in reality, we couldn't afford to move. Redundancy and the pitiful pay off that goes with it presented us with an opportunity.

Six weeks later, we were living in Devon and I began working on an organic farm. It quickly became apparent however that organic farming is a very physically hard way to earn a living. It requires an unrealistic amount of overtime and combined with an 16 mile bicycle round trip everyday I was suffering. I dropped a day in my second year there and that winter the boss further reduced my working week by another day leaving me at three days a weeks. Yet another piece of the puzzle had fell into place, permanent part time working. Our small outgoings (not including our extortionate rent) allow us both to only work three days a week. Life is good my friends.

In a recent article in the *Guardian* newspaper there was an online survey that you could fill in and it would calculate your financial situation. We filled in it and much to our amazement we were living below the poverty line for this country. Now I don't wish to seem funny, naive, insensitive or judgemental of anyone else's situation but I would definitely not say that we are living in any sort of poverty. We may not do, or have a lot of things that other people enjoy but we are happy and live dam well.

While living in Southampton we had began to look at buying some land but couldn't afford it. Land ownership is still a strange concept really, the earth doesn't belong to any of us, we are just part of it. But as things stand in this crazy capitalist / greedy society, land can be viewed the only true wealth, you can, in theory live on it, eat from it and be buried on it. In the last six years the price of land has tripled and looks set to increase further. This has meant that we have never been able to quite stump up enough money, when it was £4000 per acre we had £2000, when we had £4000, land was £6000 per acre.

Having already shed most of the stuff we owned to move down here we decided to sell one of our last and probably loved possessions which was our record collection. Now getting rid of the CD's, DVD's, magazines, fanzines, old tools, millions of black punk T—shirts and even most of the books was easy compared with the record collection. We are both crazy about music and both began collecting records when we were teenagers. We probably had a combined collection of about 4000 records. I definitely identified with being a record collector. I loved hanging out with other record nerds, and most of all, loved coming home from work on a Friday, having a few ales and listening to the Discharge—Fight back 7” or The Zounds—Can't cheat Karma / War Subvert 7”.

Now we are a couple of months down the line and have started to seriously look at land (still not sure we have enough) I am glad we got rid of them. I couldn't see it at the time but I think that the collection was a burden on me. It is a crazy concept to credit a large part of who you are with the stuff that you own. I still listen to a lot of music on the computer but get easily as much joy out of playing punk songs on the ukulele. There is that old saying, "you don't own stuff, it owns you", I know this to be true.

I am fairly sure that my friends think that I am an aspiring Luddite when it comes to a lot of technology. This is not entirely true. It's more a matter of asking whether we really need things or if they break do we need to replace them. We both had mobile phones and realised that we could easily make do with one. So when the contract came up for renewal we just cancelled one and both share the other, it works fine and saves us money. When the toaster broke we stopped eating as much toast and just use the grill in the oven when we really fancy toast. When the bread maker broke I began making bread by hand and discovered that I love making bread.

The hardest thing about trying to live a simple life is that it feels like the rest of western society is going against you. This a lot of the time includes our families, children and friends. Birthdays, Christmas or come to think of it, any special occasion becomes a guilt ridden minefield. We try to make cards, buy only thoughtful / useful / secondhand gifts. We travel back home for only certain occasions where the television will not be the main event. We have even made a present or two recently. I think that our parents / friends are starting to get it, it is just hard sometimes when our siblings with good jobs are throwing loads of money at things and making lots of grand gestures.

All social life in this country revolves around going to the pub, which if you have children, or are not on a good wage pretty much excludes you a lot of the time. We enjoy going to pub, but again, not all the time. It feels like a treat when we do go and not just a habitual weekly mash up to help forget the woes of the working week.

I very much doubt that I have to say anything about car free living in this car centric society. We live on the outskirts of one of the biggest cities in this county and still find it incredibly hard and expensive to get around practically. A lot of things that most people take for granted as a short car journey can take us half a day because we walk, cycle or try to piece together buses or trains. In order to attend land based courses or open days we have found that the idea of using public transport is not even considered, and that car use is an absolute given. While I concede that this is not always the fault of the organizer and we can and do sometimes car share, I do find it personally frustrating and saddening that these events are only accessible by the privileged car owner. The permaculture movement teaches us that the solutions are in problem. If you can't get there by human power or public transport then maybe you are just are not meant to go! I keep trying to tell myself this, Ha Ha!

Trying to live simply, consume less, co-operate with each other and share more feels like the right thing to do. I believe they are the natural order of things, they are the things that make me happy. And if that isn't a good gauge that I am doing the right thing then I don't know what is. I look forward to reading your stories.

‘Our simple life is eminently satisfying, giving us freedom to participate in community activities and local democracy.’

Michael A. Lewis

Simplicity has crept up on me over the past 63 years.

I grew up in a standard American household. My father was a doctor and career Air Force officer. We moved every year, living in base housing and suburban homes.

Though we lived in housing developments wherever we moved, I always found wild places and open space to play in. I spent a good chunk of my time outdoors, exploring forests, beaches and pastures, making friends with horses and wild animals, building forts, hiking trails and paddling about on makeshift boats and rafts. When the weather was uncomfortable outside, I was always curled up with a book, reading about mountain men, animals and Indians. When we moved from place to place, my parents dropped me off for the summer with relatives who ran a large cattle ranch in the sand Hills of Central Nebraska. I worked horses, drove farm machinery, explored the alkali lakes and discovered old homesteads buried in the sand dunes.



When I was 14, my parents divorced and I moved with my mother and brother and sisters to Nebraska full time, where I went to high school and worked during the summers on my uncle's cattle ranch. I learned to diagnose and fix machinery, manufacture parts from available material, weld, train horses, drive grain trucks, and doctor cattle till the veterinary arrived. Living thirty—five miles out, we couldn't drive to town for parts and supplies, so I learned self—sufficiency, repair skills and making do with what was at hand.

Over the ensuing years, I pursued several “careers,” from cartographer to photographer/video producer to archaeologist and museum curator. There were several times when I lived close to the bone, in tents on archaeology sites, in a teepee on the Gros Ventre River, on horseback in the Absoraka Wilderness, in a cabin in Central Alaska, on a 38 foot cabin cruiser in Southeast Alaska and in a 1964 VW bus.

I finally settled with my wife in a 1964, 900 square foot mobile home on the Central Coast of California. We've brought all our learned skills for simple living

to our life here. My wife has a similar background and a similar love for a simple life. I've learned volumes of unwritten wisdom from her example.

We grow much of our food on our small mobile home lot, in containers and planters in auspicious places around our home. What we can't grow we buy from farmer's markets or family owned markets that sell real food (not food products) produced locally. We heat our home in the rainy winter with careful window management and a small wood stove that we stoke with wood gathered from local wood lots on our daily walks to and from work. We chose part—time jobs within walking distance of home, and we walk or bicycle everywhere, driving our well—maintained 1972 VW bug to the grocery store on weekends for staple supplies. We don't have cell phones, iPods, iPads, TV cable, Androids, Blackberry (except those growing over the back years fence) or other electronic distractions. We use our computer for communications and word processing.

More importantly, we don't shop. We acquire very few things, and those that we do (other than toothpaste and underwear), we find on our mobile home park Free Table, at our local recycling center or charity thrift shops. Consequently, though we have very low income, below poverty level, we put the majority of our income in savings in a locally owned bank.

We've learned, over the years, that things possess us. The drive to buy things creates a demand for larger and larger incomes to pay off larger and larger houses, demanding more and more working hours, to pay off more and more bills. We decided to live small, with less, to be satisfied with sufficiency. Left to us, the "Global Economy" would collapse overnight. Our own personal tax cut program consists of keeping our income so low that our small tax withholding is returned each year, sometimes with interest!

Our simple life is eminently satisfying, giving us freedom to participate in community activities and local democracy. We are adamant defenders of natural habitat, limits to economic growth and development. Since we work part—time at most, we attend community and government meetings and take an active part in the decision—making process in our community.

When one lives a simple life, it's quickly apparent that the "typical" life of corporate consumerism is an aberration, a disease, a mental illness. Not only is it bad for the environment and all living things, it's unhealthy for humans as well.

We love our simple life!

‘When I was a boy scout (way back when) we learned our motto "be prepared," which is still very sound advice today.’

Mike Yates

As a young man I lived a mostly rural life, which gave me some of the skills that are still useful and even necessary for a simple life today. That was how most of the people lived back in those times, so it was not thought of as unusual by any means. I later worked, and sometimes lived, in various towns and cities and so became part of the "modern world" of the 60s and 70s. Married and raising a family (girl and a boy) kept me on the move following various job opportunities in British Columbia, Canada where I was born and lived most of my life. Throughout those years I longed for the simpler life that I had during my youth.

In 1966 I read Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* and was made aware of the increasing pollution problem, and how we were destroying our ecosystems with the indiscriminate use of chemicals. I also happened upon the *Limits to Growth* report (1972) by Donella



Meadows et al., which confirmed my own ideas that had been developing over the years. It didn't take much thought to realize that the so called "good life", that nearly everybody in the western world had come to accept post WWII as normal, was a system on borrowed time.

I decided to return to a simpler lifestyle, even if it meant accepting a much lower "standard of living."

After my children graduated from high school my wife decided to return to the city and I headed west in to a sparsely settled area to search for a simpler life. I found what I was looking for in an area called the Chilcotin. It is a sparsely settled area with little development other than a few remote fly in fishing lodges and a scattering of ranches, with a growing forest industry. This area is still mainly ranching country but the population is now about triple what it was in

the 70s although it's still sparsely settled and is still classed as wilderness. There is also a large native population which, at that time, made up the majority of the people in the area. Although these Chilcotin native bands were mostly settled on the Indian Reserves that the Canadian government set aside for them not so long ago, there were (and still are) some old timers living a mostly hunter gatherer life which includes following the seasonal harvests of fish, berries, deer and moose and other wild foods.

I worked here and there around the area for a few years, relying on the skills that I had learned as a young man, as well as learning a few new ones. Out here there is still need for those simple skills and a man is still respected who can use a double bitted axe to fall trees, build a log cabin, or a fence. Of course, it has become relatively easier to live out here with modern technology such as satellite internet and power lines along the main road and running down in to one or two valleys where most people have taken up land.

The first 10 years were spent working in the area doing any kind of work that was needed. I have worked as a cowboy, building log cabins, as a wilderness guide, horse packer and survival instructor. In 1988 I chanced on a large chunk of land that is nestled on the eastern side of the Coast mountains, adjacent to a wide plateau with plenty of game, wood and water and with a natural meadow that produces hay for my horses and other farm stock.

Over the years I have built a comfortable log cabin, greenhouse, corrals, fences and a large garden that provides me with vegetables which I store in a root cellar located only a few feet from the back door of the cabin. There is still plenty of fish and game in the area to supplement my food requirements. Considering that It is a 370 mile round trip to the nearest small city, I don't make many trips to the supermarket, however I am quite comfortable here with few expenses. As the price of fuel becomes less affordable, I only drive my small pickup when absolutely necessary, such as to the nearest post office in the next valley 30 miles away, or to the little village, population 20, located 40 miles away on the main road where I can get some general store supplies, a lot of gossip, and even a meal at the local Inn if they happen to be open that day. I call this "going to town". I could ride horseback to the little village, pick up any necessities available there, and bring the supplies back using pack horses if necessary. This trip would not take more than a few days, including a visit or two with friends along the way. It could be done at any time of the year but the Fall is always preferable for several reasons including cooler weather. The scenery is also best at that time of year with the poplar trees in full colour, perhaps a little early snow on the mountains, and the ponds and lakes fringed with colorful reeds and often with waterfowl resting there on their southern migration. The country hereabouts is quite spectacular.

There are also difficulties that can be expected at times.

This is true wilderness, which has it's own challenges. The difference out here is that a person still may have to deal with any problems themselves. This lifestyle requires that you understand and accept reality, which in turn requires you to be

realistic and practical. From my own observations, folks that have only known a modern lifestyle have become dependant on the "system" to solve all their problems. They seem to have lost the sense of challenge and the deep satisfaction gained by real independence. These old skills can be learned of course, but they have come to be seen as unnecessary, redundant, or backward in the modern world. Perhaps more important is the fact that there is always the possibility that these old skills could be useful again one day if things go haywire, as they well could.

There is a deep personal pride that comes with knowing that you are master of your own fate, and the satisfaction and self-confidence that is it's own reward for an independent, self sustained life. When a person has to use their own judgement, skills and resources to manage their everyday life out here, there can be deep satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. One must also be constantly aware of their own personal safety. This develops a keen sense of awareness and a cautious attitude. It takes many years to learn and refine these skills, but it is possible. We are after all only recently removed from our past when a keen eye, practical hands and common sense were necessary for our own survival. And we are each ultimately responsible for our own actions.

Now that I am well established here on this land there is time to reflect on life and the state of the world today. After many years here with limited communication, in 2005 I installed a satellite internet system and also solar panels and a wind generator to provide electric power. As well as electric lighting and access to electrical power, this technology gives me access to the internet. Now I can keep in contact with the rest of the planet. Actually, in spite of my relative isolation, I feel more in touch with the world than I was many years ago. More important perhaps, I am able to do this while at the same time living up close and personal with the natural world.

Although this simple lifestyle might appear difficult to many people today, there are basic values that go with it which, in my opinion, make all the difference. For instance, if a person has become accustomed to "instant gratification", such as all the things money can buy in the city, the "value" of that item or service is diminished simply due to the fact that it is easy and (for now at least) cheap to acquire, was produced by someone else and, most likely there will have been no personal involvement by either the purchaser or the seller/manufacturer, only an impersonal monetary transaction.

I do occasionally have to buy an item that is either a practical tool that can't be made out here or a replacement for a completely worn out piece of equipment. However, it would surprise many people just how few items you really need to have a reasonably "good life"! I suspect that if we removed all the advertising pressure that people are exposed to today through TV, radio, etc., there would be much less interest in the kind of mindless shopping that we see in modern western society. Although I do use some money to pay my internet bill and my land taxes, it is still common here to barter and/or trade for labour or other needs. Most repairs are done myself or by someone in the local community if possible. Sometimes this can still be done by bartering or trading labor, etc.

For instance, if I needed a new axe handle I would make it myself. I would first find a tree with the best straight grain possible. After falling the tree it would be necessary to remove the section that would become the new axe handle(s) which could be done with a cross cut saw. If the tree had good straight grain but a large diameter, I could use the old axe head as a splitting wedge to remove the section I had chosen for the new handle. I could then roughly shape the new handle with a draw knife eliminating most of the excess material in order to make it lighter to transport back home where I could take my time to complete it.. So now I have a new axe handle, probably much superior to anything I could find in town, which, of course, is 200 miles from here. I have just such a handle that I made several years ago. It is a good serviceable handle of which I am very proud, and I also



have a strong personal attachment to it. I think it would be difficult for me to have the same pride in a store bought axe handle and I wouldn't have the personal memories of having crafted it myself.

I am attached to this land and can honestly say I feel I am a part of it. The "improvements" I have made over the years now fit in to the natural environment and so have become a part of the surrounding wilderness. I have accepted the local animal residents and I try to respect their claims to the land as, after all, they have been here much longer than I have. In return, I seem to be, for the most part, accepted here by them. There are many wild animals including grizzly and black bears that pass through on their travels, some spending a few days hanging out around the big meadow. These animals seldom come around

the cabin area which I have claimed for myself. In return, they know that they are safe as long as they respect my personal area. Wild animals understand these things instinctively as that is their nature. All it takes is a little respectful consideration to establish mutual trust and territorial priority. However, it is always necessary to trust with caution. Any situation could be dangerous under the right conditions. All animals can be aggressive if they feel threatened, including man!

There is also a large wolf population hereabouts and I sometimes see them running on the frozen lakes in wintertime when I am snowshoeing my winter trails. Occasionally I will hear them howling up on the side of the hills to the west and sometimes they pass through the meadow, leaving only their tracks. Quite often they will follow my well packed snowshoe trails as they pass thru the area. Winter always reveals the tracks and signs of all movement in the snow and is a very interesting season to travel in the bush. Even the birds leave tracks and other signs of their passing. An example of that might be where a great horned owl swooped down on a snowshoe hare, broke the animals back and rose up with his prey securely in his talons. This leaves a clear story in the snow for anyone to see.

The country here now has a large population of foxes. Foxes can become habituated quite easily to people and are much more trusting than most other wild animals. There is a little red fox that I have named "Freddie the Freeloader" who has made himself quite at home here, often trying to play with my old dog (who will have nothing to do with him). Once, when I had a couple of friends come by and we were enjoying a meal, Freddie came right in the cabin door, cautiously checked out the people and the piece of meat on the table in front of me. He then jumped right up on the table, ate the meat and jumped back down. The people were surprised to say the least! Freddie sleeps in a big flower pot in front of the cabin and follows me around the place while I am doing outside chores. He's great company and provides some entertainment with his antics as well as keeping the rodent population under control. He is not a pet but a wild animal that has learned to trust me. This trust is conditional and is renewed every day. If either the fox or I screwed up this trust it would never be the same again. Life is conditional and we earn trust—it's not something we find very much of today.

This time of year, late summer, is the time of harvest. There are berries to pick and other foods such as wild mountain potatoes, mushrooms and other natural gifts that are still a part of the annual food gathering cycles. This bounty goes to supplement the winter food supply along with the garden harvests. Later in the month there will be wild salmon coming up the river from the ocean to spawn in the cold clear waters of our rivers. The local native peoples have maintained their tradition of catching and smoking their winters supply of these fish. High protein salmon has traditionally been the main winters food resource for these people for centuries. There are deer, moose and other animals here that have traditionally provided sustenance for people, supplying meat, skins, furs, as well as a host of other "renewables".

The opportunity is not here today to allow everyone to live this lifestyle. If people today that live in the cities (large and small) were to flood out on to the land, there would be little space and resources available to them to support even a "simple life". Also, most would not have the skills or knowledge to succeed. We have everywhere fewer resources and many more people in the world today. It would be chaos. Those of us who have reduced our ecological footprint already, have established our place through voluntary simplicity are ahead of the game for now. However, there is safety in numbers and it may be necessary even for rural folks to "circle the wagons" for their own safety and even their survival. When I was a boy scout (way back when) we learned our motto "be prepared", which is still very sound advice today.

Meanwhile, life goes on out here and it's business as usual everywhere as far as I can see. With rare exceptions, there are very few people prepared, or even aware of the fragility of the "system". This includes most of the folks out here in the country. They may all soon have to drop the pretences and face reality, which will be well nigh impossible for many, or most. Hard to fathom how people can live in total denial when it's right there in your face for all to see. It's the human condition I guess.

'I use self—talk to undermine the influence of advertisements or social norms.'

Lee M. Dufrene

Hello, my name is Lee Dufrene. I live a life of reduced consumption in Austin, Texas. The main areas that I have reduced my consumption are in housing and clothing. I live in a 14' x 14' home. It's basically a one-room house with a kitchenette on one wall, and a bathroom along the back wall. The interior square footage is about 184 square feet. As for clothing, I've been buying 90 percent of my clothing from thrift stores, and I focused on buying only what I needed. So, my wardrobe is definitely on the small side.

Another area that I've reduced my consumption is in my diet. For me, this has meant eating meat less often, and when I do so, I eat smaller portions. Further, I now eat less beef than I used to. In place of the meat that I used to eat I eat more eggs and also more

legumes. Last, I frequently cook at home and eat out less often than I used to a few years earlier.



I have ridden a bicycle for transportation several times since mid 2009. Then finally, last fall I used the local bus system for the first time. Since then, I've used the bus system about 10 times, but I'd like to use mass transit more and use a bike as my main form of transportation. I'm actually interested in living car free, but I'll have to change my career in order to do so. That, I feel, is the main thing holding me back from living an even simpler life. I need to have a truck for my job. I do landscape maintenance and habitat restoration for a local company. I lead a small crew and use my truck to haul tools and debris. Though my job is good in many ways, I'm constantly thinking about ways that I could work from home. Besides, I've always planned on being self—employed.

As for difficulties in following a life of voluntary simplicity while living in mainstream western culture, I struggle with choosing to own a horse or not (and

I do), with deciding whether or not to travel and compete with the horse, with eating out for dates more than cooking at home, and with travelling by plane for an annual vacation. At the moment I'm leaning towards keeping my horse and competing in no more than 15 local to regional events per year. I feel like that is a compromise compared to my previous ambitions while I was a rodeo cowboy, and wished that I could attend 30+ rodeos. Then, as for dinning out, I'm planning to cook at home more after I build my next small home. I'll set up an outdoor stove. I did cook more often during the cooler months last year, and I plan to return to that. It's just been much easier to eat out at a restaurant and use the excuse that I don't want to heat up my tiny one room house by cooking in it. In fact, it is already hot when I get home from work because I only run the air



conditioning from about 9pm till midnight. As for travelling by plane, I didn't do that until I was 30 years old. I'm planning to cut that out. It shouldn't be too hard, but I've been offered to go on affordable group trips each time.

99 percent of the time I don't feel as though I need to have clothes that is in style, or anything that is in style or luxurious for that matter. I have associated new products with environmental degradation, even if they are supposedly "green". So, that completely undermines the social norms that I witness of having shiny new things, or the advertisements that I see each day. Oh, and about advertisements, I don't own a television, and I rarely listen to broadcast radio. So, I don't hear or see as many advertisements as the average 1st world individual. I did just start listening to podcasts about horses though, and they do

advertise products. I doubt that I will be affected though. I use self—talk to undermine the influence of advertisements or social norms.

I mentioned building a tiny home. The one that I'm living in now is one that I'm renting. This spring I purchased a small lot in a blue—collar neighborhood for only \$13,000. That is super cheap for Austin. I'm planning to build a 220 sq. ft one room home on it this fall and paying cash for the materials and labor (95 percent of which will be me laboring). I'm on a mission to build a home for very little money and show others that it can be done even within the city limits.

Until the age of 23 I hoped to become a wealthy real estate investor in order to pay for a for a big house, and to pay for travelling around the US and competing in rodeos. Things changed once I was rodeoing in college and having to make decisions about continuing as a finance major or not. I chose to change my major to agriculture since I had worked several 'ag' related jobs between going to school, and I was good at those

jobs. Then, the next year while working an outdoor job for the government, I discovered that some people were able to afford to begin farming on their own, and the way that they were able to do it was to settle for having a small or tiny farm with much less



overhead and start up cost. At the same time, I learned about organic farming and became much more concerned about various environmental issues. I continued to read more and more about small farming. One magazine showed how farming with draft horses was feasible, and could even be more profitable for small farms. I then subscribed to magazines about farming with draft animals. Then, in those magazines I saw mention of the simple life, especially when speaking of the Amish. Soon after that though, I saw the book *The One Straw Revolution* mentioned in an issue of *Acres USA* magazine. It was there that I learned about choosing to go back to nature, and about choosing to live a much simpler life while departing from mainstream culture a bit. I also discovered the term permaculture in that book, and soon after discovered writings about voluntary simplicity online after searching about info on simple

living, or living the simple life. I was thrilled to see that there was a subculture that followed these principles, and that there was much writing about it available.

At the age of 27 I was able to work as a welder's helper on the construction of a natural gas powerplant. That allowed me to finish paying off my debts, which were once about \$10,000, and begin to save 75 percent of my income. 11 months later I had 52k saved. From there on I have lived a debt free life. I still have access to those higher paying jobs, but I don't want to work in those industrial environments, or in the towns which the work is available. Instead, I choose to work at a job where in I do habitat restoration and maintain landscapes of native plants. Also, I have a flexible schedule, and the company is owned by people that are also concerned about environmental issues and social justice. While I make only about 33 percent as much money as I could on industrial jobs, I feel that choosing to work my lower paying job has been worth it to me. It is one way that I live a life that is voluntarily simpler than what I actually have access to.

Now, I'm a single (dating) 32 year old male that owns a horse, pays board and rent fees, and plans to build a tiny house on his own lot. I'm happy about all of those things. Nevertheless, I struggle with spending money and other resources on horses. I try and justify this by pointing out to myself that horses no longer have free land to roam and graze on, and that humans must feed them and give them a home. So, I can be one of those humans. Also, I realize that I'm a skilled horseman, and that I get some healthy fulfilment from riding horses. This isn't always effective though, because I know that my ego is possibly behind some of my motivations for riding horse. Oh, it isn't easy to choose.

‘Simply living for me is living local.’

Paula Ajuria

Stage one: I was not happy

My journey towards a simpler life began one day as I sat tired after work on a comfortable sofa in the furniture department of a David Jones Store. I wondered if working as a journalist for SBS radio would really make me happy being such a public job. The assumption was I should be happy. I sat on the beige leather sofa looking at the furniture around me and thinking that living in Sydney, the dominating belief that drove people was simply consumerism. The illusion of an easier lifestyle is powerful when one is working long hours; comfort and space have become very valued. And these values were being reflected in the homes of people in the world everywhere: a spacious lounge room dominated by a big TV, uniform surfaces made of composites in bathrooms and kitchens, heating and cooling at the touch of a button and things like a garage with a gate that opens with a remote control, and an easy to maintain garden being very valued, or a view. I questioned whether these houses could ever really feel like a home, I felt they were sterile, a lot of materials were imitations, synthetics, fireplaces with no real fire, and a general feeling of being on an aeroplane. The character of the inhabitants not being reflected at all in the home.

And yet the lifestyle was not easy even if it appeared to be. Vast amounts of energy are invested into the building, purchasing and maintenance of these dwellings and the life they entail. Knowing about climate change and peak oil I realised how dependent and fragile we are living in a consumerist society. I thought of our country as a nation of spoon fed babies unwilling to grow up and learn to feed ourselves. And I did not feel in control, I did not feel free.

Going to work made me feel enslaved. I needed to have a direct involvement or role in procuring the basic necessities of life such as obtaining food and the type of home I would live in. And having lived in many places here and overseas I knew by then I needed to feel that I belonged to the place and people where I lived. It was about being more in control of my life and future. A lot of these conclusions had derived from my own experience and knowledge about the state of the world and just human health. But then I was driven by an urge to feel free, but this was a feeling, and I of course I had moments of self doubt, as I felt alone.

It was early in my 20s I knew I did not want to doubt myself any more. Questioning assumptions and acknowledging discontent have been fundamental for me. It was simple: I wasn't living according to my values, being out of my home working all day to earn money to pay for it all made no sense to me. I had experienced living local growing up in a remote area in Europe, and I believe this is what shaped my understanding of sustainability. I missed having a vegetable garden, just life in a more natural setting in a place where I could belong.

Stage Two: I find out there are others like me

Then I learned about permaculture, other movements, ideas, groups and practices from which I learned ways that would enable me to live a better life. I had found what I was missing. I read most of David Holmgren's books, attended meetings and conferences, practised as much as I could in my small land at the time in my terrace in inner city in Sydney.

One day I realised that a lot of time was going into networking, meetings and discussions. And meeting other like minded people and group forming, in other words: going out, reaching out to form connections. And you have to travel to do that. But I had understood localisation as one of the most important principles behind the sustainability movement and perhaps because I have lived and practised localisation overseas. I was enthusiastic about living local again. With the collaboration of the friendly neighbours in my street I managed to get our lane at the back of my terrace turned into a fairly productive garden, and it was a very rewarding initiative. It was during that time that I became aware of one of our biggest shortfalls: our inability to reach out not to the like minded but to the unlike minded living right next to us: our neighbours.

Then I moved out of Sydney to the Blue Mountains. Here I was able to put into practice my readings and work experience on a larger block, and get to know my new neighbours. After a about a year of good work, working on the fertility of the soil, clearing and planting, life took me to a permaculture farm. I was to explore another expression of sustainable living away from a suburban setting. Having a past of farm life I loved the idea that one can create self—sufficiency in a system that does not rely on resources brought from elsewhere. And I believed that living on a permaculture farm would be perhaps the best way to practice a low impact lifestyle. However, the experience strengthened my motivation to work towards localization, retrofitting, and thinking small instead of big.

When I moved to the permaculture farm it was a very exciting time of my life. The place was inspiring: self sufficient in terms of energy, water and food. And beautiful, an oasis in the middle of barren, Australian sheep land. The farm was, for Australian standards small, and a very good example of how we can free ourselves from dependency on exterior inputs of such resources and others like fertilizer when we practice nutrient cycling. I was very pleased to see how here in Australia, even in the colder areas we can live exclusively off our own home—grown food. I felt privileged to be there learning next to the permaculture teacher. The team work with WWOOFers, and going to bed feeling physically exhausted was very refreshing and healthy.

But once I understood how the place worked, I wasn't learning much moving mulch, picking fruit and making jam for days, as I have lived on a farm in the past. And again I had began questioning assumptions. The assumptions in my mind were that the farm would exemplify living local; that living with like minded people I would not feel alone: and that it just had to be a model for living simply.

But was this farm really practicing local living? I soon learned that the WWOOFers were saving the farm residents from the drudgery of dealing with a surplus of fruit that was way beyond the household needs. It was hard work. In this case the locals were not interested in the organic produce due to its non competitive price and I saw during that year stay that not even the large market held monthly, and only walking distance from the farm, would absorb the produce. The fruit was being driven away long distances to places where it could be grown anyway. This made me think a lot about the importance of giving good consideration to the people to land size ratio. I thought: we need to grow food where we are going to eat it.

My understanding of living local has to do with less driving and more neighbour engagement. Seeing the amount of child chauffeuring that was taking place was disappointing. And all though close, the residents of this farm had little to do with their neighbours.

I had previously believed that if I was surrounded by people with the same ideas as myself I would never feel alone. But I could see that if people were to move there and it was to become an intentional community, a creation of one person, to be followed by a small group of like—minded people I would definitely feel alone. I knew it was not for me to be living in a homogenous and small group isolated from neighbours.

Finally I thought a lot about where we are at. I could see that one day, there would be a demand locally for the farm's produce and that people would live there. But as for now the farm was a permaculture destination for tours and teachings and to me another example of how permaculture practice becomes business. But it was not an example of how to live simply.

I could have followed the trend and created a facebook style blog of the good life on the farm as the budding tour cook I had become: upbeat text, permaculture teaching, lots of happy faces, farm life, and food. But I was still searching and becoming more honest with myself at acknowledging what did and didn't make me happy.

I wanted to live local. Facing up to my realizations once again I felt alone. It was about people, but where did I belong? I had struggled with the idea of living in a suburban setting but I could see then it was the best option for me. And I soon began to see opportunities there to make it what I wanted. A farm needs people, and a household that practices self—reliance is more energy efficient and productive with more people in it, and so for a small community, if it is to strive for self—reliance, people are its main asset. Suburban settings are ideal and ready for reinventing life there. Australia is blessed with good climate and space. And now is the time. Small areas in the suburbs can be cultivated intensively by smaller groups such as families and can be very productive. We know this works as there are examples of successful small intensive cultivation everywhere around the world.

I found myself excited at the thought that we need to change ourselves to retrofit what we have rather than change the world by rebuilding it. But in a society where we move out of the home early in life and work hard for our own space: — forever bigger and more private, how can we learn to live closer?

I wanted to work with the people around me instead of looking for and working with people like me, but that meant my neighbours, friends and family. That also meant a huge challenge.

Stage Three: Time to be free

I had a lot to do to live the way I wanted staying in my place in the Blue Mountains, growing my own food, making the house sustainable, and the hardest thing: establishing significant and collaborative relationships in my new neighbourhood. I wanted to grow food but I also wanted them to grow food. I had enough knowledge and confidence to redesign the place but how to get others living next to you to grow their own food too?

Not sure, not sure if it will ever happen, but to start with I just wanted to be a real neighbour, with everyone close in my street. And I wanted to work with everybody including the ones I couldn't possibly imagine willing to interact much. I decided that I did not want to drive my car much at all either. I really wanted to stay local.

Permaculture has helped me free myself. Working at home and in my garden my efforts were being directed to cover my immediate needs and this is liberating. But we find it hard to establish collaborative relationships with our neighbours because it is easier to not get involved, as there can be friction when there is difference. People fear conflict, and so it is easier to keep private. But facing a future of energy descent and climate change we are in need of collaborative relationships. Yet we live in a world where people are isolating themselves into unhealthy states of loneliness and insulation, and people need to have a sense of belonging. So how can we establish working relationships with our neighbours?

To say that it is easier for me to establish connections by social interaction rather than pro—active informing and meeting organizing is not to say that it is an easy endeavour. I celebrated the council permission given to cut down 10 big gum trees on my property to make space for my orchard; but when I did I thought I'd lost all my friends around here, as nativism is strong. Some friendly neighbours didn't like it when I cut the trees, there I was mulching in my garden one morning, meditating on the need to have a sense of belonging in one's community, and I shrank as I saw them driving out in their car, looking the other way as they saw me wave enthusiastically.

There is plenty of information on permaculture practice, and plenty of literature on the importance of localisation and retrofitting the suburbs but I can't find anything specifically on gearing human relationships with your immediate neighbours towards self—reliance and preparedness for an uncertain future of energy descent. There are of course guidelines such as in the Transition

Handbook for example where there is a program of raising awareness of peak oil and climate change through organised meetings in your area. But I did not want to try get people to grow their own food in my neighbourhood by talking to them about peak oil and climate change.

Small steps can be a big start and this is how it happened for me:

Neighbour's food garden

I had recently moved into the area and one day I looked at my “doing nothing” nature strip in a different light and imagined it alive with children stopping by to pick fruit from the trees and neighbours picking veggies at sunset for their dinner, and that was it: it had to happen. But I was new in the neighbourhood and didn't have enough compost, manure, and mulch for the garden I had in mind. And I didn't know if the neighbourhood I had just moved into would approve. I spoke to one neighbour who had shown to be supportive right from the start and she encouraged me to get it going, let everyone know and begin.

So I spoke to a few neighbours and let them know what I was doing and that I wanted it to be for everyone. One Wednesday I door—knocked neighbours and asked everyone I knew around here to call in on Sunday morning to get together and talk about it.

I expected little interest, but I was wrong. Before that Sunday meeting there was a trailer load of manure brought by one neighbour who has horses. Then there were different neighbours calling in with hay, wheelbarrows full of grass clippings, compost, and cardboard. Surprisingly about 20 people, all from within walking distance homes, came on that Sunday. And now we have a food garden at the front. The garden absorbs neighbours' grass clippings as mulch, we have a constant supply of resources and, it is thriving with relatively small effort.

Most surprisingly some neighbours are as enthusiastic about this as I am. With my immediate neighbour we are working together at deciding what trees to plant on our properties so that we can exchange fruit in the future. I acknowledge that in the process I have had adversity as people have different ideas, yet with an open approach and gentle dealings, relationships are hard to break.

I have applied this knowledge share with my friends and family and gradually they are all getting their gardens overhauled into food gardens, it is a joy to watch how they progress and how rewarding it is to them as families. Of course it is much easier to share what you know with those who come to you interested, but personally I find it immensely more gratifying to see how the initially uninterested people are motivated into growing their own. I can see that anything is possible once you start being interested in those around you. No matter who they are. Working quietly, dealing with people in my little community here I am learning that it's not just the plants that grow, I have found myself wobbling at times, but I don't question if it's worth the effort. I can see the results everyday.

I no longer feel restricted because I am living according to my values. I don't know if I am free, that would be a philosophical question, but I can certainly say that working in this way I feel free. These are joys of simple living: seeing my neighbours come with seedlings to put in the garden, eating my own home grown food and exchanging stories and food over the fence. It intrigues me when I see those who I thought would never get their hands dirty: on their knees, mulching and weeding the garden we share. I don't know how it happened, but I find it promising that it happened naturally.

‘This is a story about baking bread, yet it is also much more than that.’

Carol Altman

One of the simplest, most sustaining elements of life is bread, yet until recently, I relied upon the supermarket to provide it for our table.

My partner and I live in the country, miles from any artisan bakery, so the choice of bread is either white or wholemeal from the family run bakery, or white, wholemeal and the occasional ciabatta stocked by the supermarket.

In an effort to make our own bread, we tried a breadmaker and pre-packaged bread mixes which produced mostly doughy and lop-sided results until the breadmaker finally blew up and, like all mass produced kitchen appliances, was cheaper to replace than to repair.

We took the breadmaker to the tip and reluctantly returned to buying supermarket bread, until two things happened which proved to be a turning point in the quest for a lovely loaf.



First, I cut into a ‘fresh’ ciabatta from our shopping trip to find it frozen in the middle. Drops of water beaded on its crust as it defrosted in front of me and I felt despair at having to eat bread which was probably several days, if not weeks, old and which had been held in cold storage until it was trucked hundreds of kilometres to the supermarket shelves.

Second, we had two visitors from Germany who one morning picked up the limp plastic bag which held our lump of defrosted ciabatta and asked, in the most polite way, whether we might have any sourdough.

Sourdough?

I had heard our friend, Sam, talk about making sourdough using starters and bread leavening baskets called bannetons, but I had never tried it – and I wasn't about to, because I am not a baker. I loved the thought of making and baking things, but every attempt to present my friends and family with homemade biscuits or cakes for Christmas had resulted in burnt, inedible offerings, albeit nicely wrapped.

My partner Louise, however, was open to exploring the idea of learning how to make sourdough bread, so in line with our pledge to buy each other experiences for our birthdays, rather than things, I organised for Louise to take a sourdough baking lesson with Sam as part of her next birthday gift.

Louise thought she was going to learn how to make bread and so did I. What we didn't expect was that making sourdough would encapsulate the essence of what it takes to live more simply: it demands patience; it demands you slow down and spend time on just one task; it is hard, physical work; things can go wrong; and, on occasion, you wonder why you don't just take the easy route like everybody else.

But sourdough also encapsulates the beautiful rewards of a simpler life: the unadorned, human connection that comes from making and sharing food, the wonder of working with a living thing that, if cared for, will create sustenance, and the sheer pleasure of eating a warm, crusty loaf made by hand rather than a machine.

The bread—making lesson lasted for several hours spread across two days, which is how long it takes to make a sourdough loaf from scratch. Louise spent the weekend driving back and forth to Sam's house as the various stages of the kneading, leavening and baking process unfolded.

At the end, Louise arrived home with an oval—shaped sourdough loaf wrapped in a tea—towel and a dollop of cream—coloured starter to call her own. The starter, the living yeasty blob which is at the heart of making sourdough, was 10 years old.

In that time, it had replicated itself many times over and been shared among countless people who had torn a piece from their starter to share with another novice sourdough maker, who in turn had torn off a piece to share with someone else.

How I would love to be able to trace the start of Louise's starter and map the kitchens and fridges it has passed through in those 10 years as it continues its cycle of renewal on a journey that is still unfolding.

Louise's starter reminds me of a soft, steamed Chinese bun as it sits in an old sugo jar in our fridge waiting to be 'fed'—like a goldfish, or our two Cocker Spaniels— with tepid rain (not tap!) water and flour. If it is not fed, it will turn black and die, so Louise and her sourdough friends (she now has three, all of whom use offshoots from the same 10—year—old starter) take turns to babysit

each other's starters when they go on holiday. When we return, it is always the starter and our five chooks which Louise is most pleased to see alive and well.

While I remain an onlooker to the beauty of breadmaking, I can see the place where Louise is transported when she decides to 'make a loaf' at the weekends.

The demands and disappointments of her working life—the non-simple life—fall away from her shoulders as she kneads the dough on our kitchen bench, which is cluttered with bowls and knives and plastic scrapers all bearing the sticky remnants of earlier steps in the preparation.

The dough is then covered and left to rise in front of our wood heater in a ritual which replicates that of centuries past. In these moments, time collapses and we are momentarily linked to the generations who came before us.



In this precious space, there is no Internet, or ABNs, or ATMs, or KPIs or super funds, or shopper loyalty cards, or a 24—hour news cycle: there is just wood, fire, and a living thing rising to become bread.

The final act of the sourdough story is fast and focused. Louise opens the roaring oven and throws a handful of icecubes into a skillet at the bottom and while they sizzle and melt almost instantly, she thrusts the dough inside and wipes her brow. Done.

The loaves that emerge less than 45 minutes later are always delicious. Some have seeds, some are wholemeal, some are white and some are Silesian rye. Most are flat and round, others are rectangular high tops.

This is a story about baking bread, yet it is also much more than that.

It is about the act of making and sharing something timeless in a world that has no time.

It is about creating a quiet space where nothing else matters but the rhythm of the wrists as they knead the dough.

And it is about sitting by a warm fire, talking about living a simpler life, and waiting for the bread to rise: slowly, slowly, slowly.

‘What I traded off in basic services, I gained in the forms of freedom and the satisfaction of self—reliance.’

Estar Holmes

Radical simplicity is the brass ring I have cashed in to achieve many objectives on the ride of life. I want what everybody else does: security, significance, and well-being—but I go outside the status quo circle of accumulation to get them.

By the age of 19, I'd left the bustle of New York City and was living in a tent in my sister's back yard in San Diego, CA. I had originally aspired to a successful career in the fashion industry, but within a year of downsizing to a cloth house, I'd also gotten rid of my clothes. Not all of them, just the normal ones. I only had a few left by then anyway, and traded those in for a simple outfit of drawstring pants and a tunic made from undyed muslin.

Attire is a powerful symbol of cultural values. The simple outfit I chose was my announcement to the world that I rejected society's materialism and its superficial clothing fixation. It worked out because I didn't have a regular job. In fact, while still wearing mainstream clothes, I had been fired from my job at a picture framing studio for failing to wear a skirt. That, and a subsequent incident of being chastised for wearing inappropriate shoes to a spiritual gathering, led to my unconventional fashion statement that declared: this is all I ever wear—deal with it.

Wearing the simple white outfit only lasted six months, but it foreshadowed the intentional simplicity mindset that would characterize the means I would use to follow my dreams. I was at the age when young adults are figuring out how to get what they want out of life. Freedom and creative expression were high on my list. I saw two potential routes for achieving them. One was to work hard and make a lot of money so I could eventually buy the life I wanted. The other, which seemed immediately attainable, was to find ways to be happy with as little as possible. I chose the latter route, which also entailed a lot of hard work, mainly in the form of physical labor. Forty years later, I can tell you that radical simplicity works quite well for meeting personal needs, both spiritual and temporal. On the other hand, pursuing the simple life in our hyper—consumerist paradigm can sometimes feel like walking up a mountain with a refrigerator strapped to your back.

Speaking of refrigerators, I thrived without one for seven years. It happened after I'd moved to the rural Pacific Northwest to pursue my dream of country living. (This is where I adopted the Northwest grunge look, comprised of functional items that could be purchased inexpensively secondhand). My mother, a practical cosmopolitan woman, had warned me that I would starve in the country. I went anyway and discovered different tactics of living that had never occurred to me as a city girl. One revelation was that it is possible to eat a nourishing diet without the benefit of refrigeration. During my unrefrigerated

years, my staples were grains, beans, nuts, and fruits that can all be stored dry. I picked wild edibles, grew gardens, gleaned, and preserved food by dehydration and canning. I made sprouts from various seeds and beans and occasionally feasted on fish. During the northern winters, the cold air became my refrigerator and I stored luxury goods like cheese and meat in an "ice box" on the porch.

Refrigerators, it turns out, are not necessary. The same goes for most electrical household implements the modern masses are addicted to. Well, as evidenced by the shake—up that occurs during power outages, the modern masses do need electricity to maintain safety and comfort, but only because the system is designed in a way that makes people dependent on it. Given the spectres of climate change, resource shortages, and looming economic collapse, I think the best solution is to revert to simple basics. We are at a juncture where people need to remember how to get along happily with just the essentials, then apply only appropriate technologies to raise the standard of living. Expecting to satisfy society's current rate of consumption with sustainable power won't work. It's like trying to cram 10 pounds of lard into a 5-pound can impossible.

I also made the strategic decision to live in a dwelling without running water. Therefore, I learned how to get by on a tenth of the water the average American consumes. The people in my households were not stinky and dirty. We found alternative ways of staying clean and maintaining a sanitary environment. Water will soon become the new oil, scarce and worth waging wars over. Therefore, it behooves us all to advance the art of living well on a fraction of modern water usage.

What I traded off in basic services, I gained in the forms of freedom and the satisfaction of self—reliance. For example, building an adequate shelter for a few thousand dollars met my needs perfectly without going into debt. My heart goes out to people losing their homes because they can't pay their mortgages when simple living would have kept them out of that situation in the first place.

I never attained true self—reliant off grid living because I always relied on some essentials provided by the prevailing system. Fuel for the car, propane for the stove, kerosene for the lights. But I got a realistic glimpse of how good things could be if the culture supported what I call simple unhooked living. The amount of investment needed to set up networks of simple autonomous households and communities represents a miniscule portion of the national debt. The problem is, it would change the position of the current power structure to the status of a disappearing task force. Many of its services, hence justifications for existence, would be minimized, and the oligarchy will always fight for total control and maximum profit.

Most modern folks cringe at the prospect of simple living without power and water. It's a situation they strive to avoid at all costs. They don't realize there are tricks of the trade, and they don't care because of an overblown sense of entitlement that results in unwavering allegiance to shaky systems beyond their control. They see images of people in the poor and dry countries living with scarcity, and it frightens them. It doesn't occur to them that voluntarily

eschewing current levels of usage and waste will help their progeny to avoid that road. They don't realize there are ways to live simply with dignity.

Our culture's abhorrence of simple unhooked living is what makes practicing it akin to walking up a mountain with a heavy weight. Just when you've worked hard to get set up to live well without many trappings of modern society, somebody makes a law that complicates your efforts. We now have a litany of anti—simplicity rules and regulations across the US, though that's not what they're called. These rules run the gamut from bans on clotheslines to the opacity of wood from your fire, to how many people you can work out your simple living aspirations with on a piece of land. Most people don't even know such regulations exist because they never aspire to the simple unhooked life. Folks who do practice radical intentional simplicity are often blindsided by such rules. That is unfortunate. Those who are willing to live the solution should be empowered by society in every possible way.

I have not always lived in radical simplicity, but have dipped in and out of it as life's twists and turns dictate. Currently, I spend six months of the year in a simple off—grid camp. I still aspire to grasp that brass ring of full time simple sustainable living because I know it is worth many times its weight in gold.

Estar Holmes is the author of *The Truth About Simple Unhooked Living*, an eBook that details methods of living simply without corporate power and water, and the legal hurdles that get in the way.

'I began to question how could one person need so much stuff?'

Robyn Green

After years of living in the clutter and confusion of two teenage children, I was finally an empty nester looking to downsize from the family home. The family home sold and I decided to temporarily store my worldly possessions while I looked for a suitable one person size dwelling. I hired a storage unit six metres by three metres (a single car garage size). What a shock when even after a major



garage sale and culling of my possessions, this was quickly filled and I had to find more storage space for my “stuff.”

I began to question how could one person need so much stuff? Obviously I didn't. And so began the transition to a simpler lifestyle. As I unpacked my boxes into my new home much too big for one person – I began to see that these possessions represented a different person. All the crafts and hobbies started and abandoned. All the clothing purchased to impress other people and rarely worn.

The move to simplicity was also a wonderful journey of discovery towards who I really was and how I wanted to live my life. Simple fresh food cooked not bought

at the takeaway shops, meant kitchen items were retained although all duplicates, broken and chipped crockery, presents from other people that sat at the back of the cupboard were donated or thrown out.

All the clothes that were never worn, shoes that pinched, or the too small clothes that would fit when I just lost that weight – all disappeared.

My wardrobe shrunk dramatically but how liberating to go to the cupboard and see only clothes I enjoyed wearing and which fit me. Shoes were limited to running, hiking, work and casual and in one multipurpose shade only! Handbags were two—day and evening only!

My new home was uncluttered, it had empty cupboards even in the kitchen, but I could find anything I wanted at any time and my home felt serene and peaceful.

The transformation soon began financially also. I was suddenly only responsible for myself. I chose to try and significantly reduce my debts. I had never been a big shopper so it was easy to avoid the shopping centres. I had money to pay my bills as they became due and I was targeting my mortgage with any extra funds. My goal was to pay off my city mortgage so I could move to a smaller regional centre, work casual hours in a job that nourished my soul and spend more time in the vegetable garden producing food and be debt free.

With little money now being wasted on consumer debt, I have recently purchased my country allotment. I am drafting up plans for a home that better suits my needs and I am scouring seed catalogues.

Small incremental steps are leading me to a more fulfilling simpler path, all you need to kick start your journey is to try and fit all your possessions into a storage unit!

‘I gleefully dumpster dive under cover of darkness once a week.’

Katherine Copsey

I came to the realisation that I wanted to live simply over time, largely because of the creative and fun—filled antics of my sharehouse compatriots during my uni days. In one particularly pugnacious simple—living sharehousehold, I was daily surrounded by artwork created on a shoestring budget and devices, bikes, repairs and furniture built from scrap and salvaged materials. Suggestions flowed fast and then turned into realities as we installed a vegie garden and



chicken coop in the garden, and built alternative housing for an additional (secret) tenant who volunteered to live in the backyard! It was a wonderful period of time in which fast friendships were formed and my eyes were opened to the limitless productivity of human creativity, resourcefulness and invention.

These can't be all salad days, though—alas! Living simply in an urban environment then and now has presented special challenges and opportunities. The most difficult one I've encountered since leaving sharehousing behind is how to obtain a secure, adequate home without buying into an enormous mortgage and consequential wage slavery. I was born and raised in metropolitan Melbourne, growing up in a large detached house with a big backyard, then moving into a series of sharehouses (usually Victorian terraces) with largely paved yards, and in the last couple of years have lived with my partner in an

apartment. These moves have been dictated by my financial circumstances and having tried all these modes of living out, I've come to the conclusion that I could live comfortably and happily with my (future) family in a large apartment or small unit, but that to be truly happy I'd need to have access to a productive green space as well. What can I say, I miss the chooks.

Detached housing in inner Melbourne on a reasonably sized block (read: one large enough to contain a productive garden) is prohibitively expensive for young people. To purchase something like this I would need to relocate to an outer suburb or rural area. Neither of these options are workable. Urban sprawl caused by Melbourne's expanding suburban belt is like a virus, making our city sick and bloated, and I don't wish to contribute to or support it by buying in an outer suburban development. Whilst I love the idea of living in a rural community and contributing to its regional culture and economy, that notion unfortunately doesn't marry with my current occupation—working at a large law firm with offices located exclusively in capital cities.



Based on my current occupation, I've established that I have to live in the city or inner suburbs—but can't afford to buy a desirable property in those locations. Renting a desirable property is one solution, and I do it now, but I would hope that one day I can own a home, mainly for the freedom to make changes to the property (like retro-fitting and installation of water tanks and solar panels) that would afford, and also for security of tenure. I'm therefore investigating the possibility of purchasing a smaller unit or apartment with access to good

community gardens or a commons, building my own alternative housing (though this presents challenges in terms of planning approvals) or co—operative purchasing between friends.

Gosh though—I hope that one of our achievements as a simple living movement will be securing access to affordable and appropriate housing for all! My vision for that is attractive housing subsidised for our most vulnerable citizens, and an end to speculative investment in housing that drives the cost beyond the capacity of the average single wage earner.

Anyway—that is the central challenge I'm grappling with in translating my vision



of a simple urban life into reality at the moment, and I welcome suggestions and debate as to how it can be overcome! But there are also the delights of simple living, many and varied, and these I already incorporate into my urban existence with ease and subversive joy.

In my current rental property I'm lucky to have a small amount (1.5x2 metres) of soil in the front yard. It was previously lawn and I've ripped it up to put down delicious vegies from asparagus to zucchinis... or they would be delicious if I was a more diligent waterer! We have a compost bin that deals amply with our vegie scraps and weeding, as well as giving back to the garden. I just wish I had enough space for chooks as we had some at an old sharehouse and I developed as close a relationship with the little egg—machines as I have with many a cat and dog

over the years. Chooks have really underappreciated qualities when it comes to being the family pet, and great big personalities!

My local supermarket is not one of the Big Two and therefore doesn't seem have a budget for a security guard to watch its bins, so I gleefully dumpster dive under cover of darkness once a week. Sometimes this means bringing home a garbage bag full of unloved vegies that just need some judicious sorting and trimming to come back to their full potential in the kitchen. When I can't eat for free out of the bin, I support my local organic store or get an organic vegie box from my local food commons. I also try and buy locally, organically and cruelty-free where possible, and am vegetarian for environmental and ethical reasons.

When it comes to clothes and cosmetics shopping, I opt for second-hand clothing from Melbourne's wealth of amazing opp—shops and cruelty free, locally made make-up. It's easy to achieve a classic look with beautiful pieces from eras past, and I love the fossicking and finding element of vintage rummaging.

I have never owned a car and choose my tenancies based on good access to public transport. I also ride my bike when I'm travelling locally and to work, and get so much joy and exercise from getting out and about amongst our city and its



people—if you haven't got into cycling yet, you should! You don't need lycra to find your place on a bike.

Also one of the greatest pleasures of living simply in a city (especially Melbourne—though I admit to bias on this topic) is the wealth of free entertainment and cultural events available. Even entertainment can be divorced from over-consumption with the amazing array of free and low-cost theatre and film events, poetry nights and story slams, galleries, public talks and lectures, dance classes, music and festivals on offer. Melbourne's vibrant cultural scene is so healthy, and opportunities abound not just to absorb it but to participate in it. Check listings for free events and sign-up to cultural bulletins to make sure you hear about events in advance and get into it! For example, I've been involved in singing groups for the last five years, from gospel choirs to my current Spector era girl-group band that plays regular gigs in local pubs. It's so much fun to sing

with others and I get the satisfaction of giving back to the community that give me so much pleasure as an audience member.

The same goes for activist and political activities. There are always so many satisfying ways to contribute to forming and participating in the type of society you want to live in. Whether it's a community organisation like the Simplicity Collective, a formal institution like a political party or your local council or a movement for change like your local Transition Town effort, there are myriad ways to get involved and have a real and lasting impact.

In short, in every aspect of this city life, I love the challenge and the satisfaction that comes from finding a way to critically consume. With some deliberation, creativity and effort, you can consume only in accordance with your own principles and those of the Simplicity movement. I find that in doing so I wind up having great fun creating a self and a life that is proudly intentional, conscious and ethical. I hope you find the experience just as rewarding!

‘Voluntary simplicity is not “living cheap” but is “living fully according to one’s own priorities.”’

Dominique Boisvert

I started living simply much before I ever heard about voluntary simplicity (VS from now on). I grew up in a family where learning was considered better than material objects, where growing up as a good human being had more value than financial wealth. Even though I must admit that I am the only one of six living children to have really chosen VS as an adult: the family upbringing is no guarantee of later individual choices.

The major reason why I decided to live simply, with my wife and later with our two boys, is Africa. I worked for two years as a volunteer high school teacher in Ivory Coast, when I was 21. My wife also volunteered for three years as a teacher in Madagascar. And when we decided to marry upon her return to Quebec (Canada), in 1972, we realized that we had been happy in Africa with very little money and material possessions: so why start running after wealth, big jobs and lot of stuff because we are back in our western society?



I must add that we also add another incentive to live simply back in those years: the Gospel teaching about poverty and the experience of the first Christian communities. We lived in community setups for the first 25 years of our family life: “communal life” (a few families together), co-ownership of housing, sharing of cars, etc. Pooling some of our resources of course made it easier and cheaper to live for everybody.

Ironically, it is when we bought our first “individual house”, around 1999, that I first heard about VS and started reading and writing about it. A 60 year old well known Quebec activist and writer re-published an earlier book, titled “Voluntary Simplicity... More Than Ever” (the earlier book, published in 1985, had been totally ignored) and it quickly became a (modest) best-seller. The timing was right and he started giving speeches and interviews across the Quebec province.

That is when we founded the Quebec Network for Voluntary Simplicity (RQSV for its French acronym, at www.simplicitevolontaire.org) in April 2000. The story of RQSV would need a full separate text, in order to share adequately our expectations, successes and failures since then. But the Quebec Network clearly played a major role in spreading the word about VS, not only in Quebec but also in many other French speaking countries (through our website and internet presence: for example, French speaking Belgium has now a well alive and growing network of VS local teams, which they acknowledge being directly inspired by RQSV). Just so that those of you who could be interested be able to know, we published lot of material in French, both on the Web and in paper newsletters and books and we also have a blog (www.carnet.simplicitevolontaire.org) since early 2010.

Going back to my personal VS experience, I must confess that I practiced it for a variety of (mostly) good reasons and bad ones. For instance, I tend to look for “the less expensive”, which is very good in terms of needing less money, but which is NOT a correct way of understanding VS. VS is not “living cheap” but is



“living fully according to one’s own priorities”.

Nonetheless, spending much less money than most of my friends and colleagues for almost everything, through all sorts of means (sharing, owning in common, not owning a car, buying cheap, etc.), had some very practical consequences: I

have more savings in the Bank than most of them, despite the fact that I chose to work part—time, and in community groups rather than big market jobs, for most of my life; and despite the fact that I “retired” (meaning that I stopped looking for earnings, even though I am almost busier now than before!) much earlier than them.

That is certainly one of the most important results of VS, at least for me: providing a financial freedom that very few other people can enjoy. Because not only you can choose to do mostly what you really want to do, but you are also “free” (or certainly much more free) from financial worries, struggles or even expectations. I have never bought anything other than “cash” in my life (even our house or share of a house; and we chose not to buy a car, but could have bought one cash also). That is a liberty that not all people who live VS can enjoy, of course. But VS can contribute to free all of us from lots of financial concerns.

VS is also a matter of “time”. The less you have to “work to earn a living”, the more time you spare to use according to your own desires and priorities. Most people do not like their job enough to go on working when they are not obliged for money reasons. That is why “needing less” to be happy or satisfied automatically free you from all the needed “working time” if you need a bigger revenue in order to be happy.

And finally, VS also allows one to be much more generous with both his/her money and time, because s/he has more of both. All my life, I had money to share, lend or give to social groups, political parties or even individuals (most of the lending without interest). In that area too, VS provided me with lots of freedom and flexibility.

In fact, even though living against our consumer society trends needs autonomy of thinking and a certain dose of courage, it is also a matter of perspective (it plays as much “between the two ears”, as we say in French, as it depends on material facts. For instance, eating filet mignon is more tender (and more expensive) than other beef parts. But you can easily get used to eating minced beef and get pleasure out of it. You can go to opera in the upper balcony as well as in the stage box or parterre: the opera (and often acoustics) is the same, but the price is not. Briefly stated, VS is often easier than most people would think.

Going back to the origin of the expression “voluntary simplicity”, it was coined by American Philosopher Richard B. Gregg, while he was in India in 1936 to study Gandhi’s teachings and practice. And for Gregg, the most important word of the two was not “simplicity” but “voluntary”! Not as the contrary of involuntary but rather as “intentional”: to live consciously, fully aware of one’s own priorities. And then, the simplicity part is only meant to make sure that one will not get distracted from his/her priorities. VS is not really to live with “little” (money, objects, possessions, etc.) but rather to live “fully” (full of happiness, intentions, one’s basic needs being fully satisfied, etc.). And that is why “living with less” (than our society wants us to long for) may well be “living happier”.

'It seems to be about finding delight and beauty in the ordinary and everyday.'

Mari Shackell

I think of myself as a very ordinary person. I live in Whitstable, a seaside town in East Kent, England. I've lived here with my husband in the same house in an ordinary street for nearly half my life. We worked locally and raised two children together, both now adult and independent, and have one grandchild. Now retired, I would not call ours the Simple Life, although our lifestyle might be considered as downshifted. To me simplicity is both an ideal and also rather an enigma. I do wonder, what does it really mean?

I grew up in Middlesex, now a suburb of south west London, in the 1950s and 60s. My parents and grandparents had lived there through the Second World War and often talked of the austerity measures – rationing, make—do—and—mend, waste—not—want—not. Their frugality lasted all their lives and was an important factor in my early upbringing. I also spent several years on a modest student grant, living simply to spin out the money until the end of each term and keep out of debt. So these might be examples of personal economic simplicity.

Before settling in Kent I lived in several other places as an undergraduate, a VSO volunteer, a trainee teacher and a qualified teacher abroad. My professional life has been in languages and teaching. I retired from Special Education in July 2008. There's not much that's especially simple in any of these things.

In 1972 I went to Nepal with VSO to teach English. At that time Nepal was the fourth poorest country in the world. The village where I was posted had standpipes which only supplied water from about 5am to 6am and again for about an hour in the early evening. We filled large earthenware water jars each day for our own use. All the water had to be boiled for 10 minutes before you could drink it.

The electricity supply was batteries. Most local people were involved in various small—scale agricultural activities. People got exercise through this and by walking – mainly up and down mountainsides since we were in the foothills of the Himalayas, the nearest road a day's walk away. Entertainment was mostly talk, handicrafts, letter writing, reading or music on cassettes. I also took a lot of photos. This was a profoundly formative experience in sustainable living. It has influenced my way of life ever since and I am very fortunate to have had this opportunity.

Superficially, this lifestyle might seem desirably simple. However, for most Nepalis it was far from idyllic: illiteracy levels were high, sanitation was primitive, the diet at times very monotonous and health care sporadic. Preventable diseases were endemic. There was a TB clinic in the village, run by the British Medical Trust and people walked for days to get to it. There was a longing in this country for western standards of living.

In the 1990s I got interested in Permaculture, mainly through reading. I then realised that the ideas I had been chewing over for so long actually had a name. I went on a course, attended some permaculture events, visited some sites, talked to lots of people and started to consciously apply the principles in my own life.

In September 2007 I came into contact with several other people in Whitstable interested in the burgeoning Transition Movement, which was raising awareness of the combined time—bombs of Peak Oil, climate change and potential economic collapse and recommending a return to sustainability. In December 2007, Whitstable became the first Transition Town in Kent (27th in UK). For a year I served on the steering group and we put on films, talks, open space meetings and other public events. We also formed links in Canterbury and Faversham who set up their own Transition groups. Since then, many other initiatives have sprung up in Kent and elsewhere.

I have a garden of average size for my provincial town. As a wildlife garden it has won awards but it is also a forest garden with fruit trees and bushes, herbs and many flowering plants, mostly wild or naturalised perennials. It is easy to manage, relaxing to be in and is full of wildlife all year round.

I also have 10 rods of allotment which I cultivate according to Permaculture principles as I understand them, although to my fellow gardeners my plots probably seem like slightly organised chaos. But they yield well all year round. I am especially interested in companion planting, polycultures, seed—saving and allowing edible species to self—propagate: spinach, orache, brassica, winter salads, jerusalem artichokes, strawberries, currants, raspberries, gooseberries and many beneficial herbs and flowers all do this.

Near Whitstable we have beautiful ancient woodlands and coastal conservation areas which anyone can visit for free. I enjoy nature study, especially botany. I'm a keen phenologist, recording over 100 seasonal events a year for Nature's Calendar. This organisation collates data from thousands of people like me to log the effects of climate change.

At home I try to be energy efficient and resource—saving. We're quite obsessed with not wasting drinking water on jobs where grey water will do. We have water butts and a stock of buckets for toilet flushing and other cleaning tasks. We also recycle, re—use or repair everything we can, compost any suitable organic waste and support the local charity shops.

We've insulated our house as much as is reasonable and economical and have an eco—friendly boiler and white goods. I cook veggie lunches most days, using my own fresh produce as much as possible. We also eat a lot of salads and fresh fruit, but even so I'm still trying to lose weight.

Many of my leisure activities come from my interest in a simple lifestyle – making clothes or customising from second—hand, playing acoustic musical instruments, leading and teaching a folk music group and learning different

styles of dancing, of which the next, I hope, will be Appalachian clogging. I also have an on—going fascination with Chinese characters: I've been known to spend several days at a stretch poring over pages of them, dictionary in hand. On a more practical note, I also enjoy making my own Christmas and birthday cards, gifts and numerous other small homely things.

My holidays are mainly short breaks with my husband. As we're both in our 60s and have a small, somewhat elderly car we appreciate short journeys. We enjoy camping and recently went to northern France, which is very easy for us to reach. If we need to go further, for example to visit family, we typically go by train.

We've both travelled widely, together or individually, and are fortunate to have seen many different parts of the world. But now I'm usually content to be at or near home because that's where most of my interests and activities are centred.

Spiritually I'd now describe myself as holistic or integral. A long and tortuous faith journey of over 40 years via contemplative western traditions, meditation and eastern religions, notably Buddhism, has eventually led me to a simple, practical and open—ended view of spirituality. Most recently I have found the timeless ideas of Tao especially inspiring and relevant to my life.

But I also wrestle with demons: as I get older it's harder to find the physical energy for things I want to do. The long, dark months of winter are especially hard to cope with. Weeks of dull, damp weather depress me and strings of winter evenings indoors with nothing much new can leave me extremely bored. Most of what's on TV or available as “retail therapy”, too much casual conversation and many leisure pursuits don't interest me. But then, wouldn't most people say just the same?

I constantly fight clutter, paperwork and overload which at times seem to engulf me, despite my best efforts. Sometimes the kindred spirits I know to exist seem very far away and the internet or printed word seems no real substitute for their company. But again, all these feelings are doubtless very common.

I'm not really very proud of my little economies and steps towards the simple life, because I feel they are all on such a small, personal scale that none of them add up to any significant contribution towards sustainability, none of them address the bigger global context. Although I actively campaign for those wider issues via the internet and elsewhere, I still feel this is only at the level of ideas, which don't always lead to the desired practical outcomes. I feel that I am still only scratching the surface of simplicity, not genuinely grasping or implementing it.

Over time, man—made systems and natural organisms do not tend to simplify themselves, they gain in complexity. Our global civilisation, so highly complex and sophisticated, is constantly changing and evolving. It's difficult to comprehend the vastness of the infrastructures that govern and support our lives: laws, medicine, communications, science, technology, commerce and so on. Progress, however we view this, won't stop; complexities increase exponentially.

As well as all these examples of human endeavour there are all the diverse natural resources and myriad life—forms on our planet. Simplicity has to embrace all of these.

One idea which is important to me is interbeing: we are all interdependent, our lives and options only possible because of the work, knowledge and help of countless other beings. Everything I do affects others and vice—versa.

I know I've been very lucky: I've led a fulfilling life and now have the time, health, faculties and resources to write this story. I have not found it easy to write, but it has made me wonder about what simplicity really is and why I should aspire to it.

Like most other people, it makes no sense for me to break away from society or become a hermit, simplicity must be about growing where I'm planted, here and now. It's also becoming clear to me that I won't find it in my own personal achievements so much as in cultivating the right values, attitudes and understanding, keeping the big picture in focus.

I'm still feeling my way slowly towards understanding simplicity, but already some tentative conclusions are emerging:

To me, it seems to be about feeling genuine appreciation and humility, recognising how little I can do or become on my own.

It seems to be about finding delight and beauty in the ordinary and everyday.

It seems to be about joy in small things and awe in the magnitude and complexity of our universe, of which I am a tiny but infinitely connected part.

It seems to involve really caring deeply about fair shares and striving to bring about a good quality of life for all.

I need to keep reminding myself that enough is sufficient.

When I've done the best I can, I need to be able to accept that and be contented.

So ends, but also begins, my story of simplicity.

‘The “simple” approach to life is a wonderful arena for creativity and inspiration.’

John Olle

One of my mates at work recently said to me, after he’d heard about me being made redundant, “You’ll be all right, you’re always bubbling and fermenting” (with ideas I think he meant). “Does that mean I’m going rotten?” I asked. “No”, he answered, “it’s good”. “Ah, you mean transforming”, “Yes, that’s it”. But transmutation is a better word because it doesn’t just mean a change in form but also encompasses a “change in nature, substance, form or condition”. For me the search for the simple life is like being an alchemist in the Middle Ages trying to turn or transmute lead into gold. The way it’s pictured in history books, there was always a lot of bubbling and fermenting going on back then.

The Macquarie dictionary has two definitions for the word ‘alchemy’: the medieval chemical science which sought in particular to transmute baser metals into gold, and to find a universal solvent and an elixir of life; and any magical power or process of transmuting. The analogy is exact because I find gold and magic in op shops and on nature strips and in interactions with other people. I find new purposes for old objects and in doing so transform myself by tasting the elixir of life every day. The “simple” approach to life is a wonderful arena for creativity and inspiration. Maybe ‘fermentation’ is the best way to describe it all after all.



An Alchemist's Journey

So how did this process of 'fermentation' begin for me? When I was about 12 or 13, I came across a popular anthropology magazine entitled *The Family of Man* in the local shop at the end of my street. It was a collectable encyclopedia of all the different peoples in the world starting at A and ending at Z. Every week I bought the next issue. For many people this may have seemed like a curiosity, it may have given rise to comments along the lines of "Oh dear look how primitive/ignorant/underdeveloped they all are" but for me the effect was quite different. Even at that age I already had doubts about the 9 to 5 lifestyle of the 'modern western world' and reading these magazines made me aware that this was not the only way to live. Different cultures meant something more than just surface differences in customs, music and art but meant there were different ways a person could live his/her life. And some of these ways made a lot more sense to me than the lifestyle I was facing.

My parents' left-wing political activism also influenced me. The lesson I got from them was that if you didn't like something, get out there and change it. As Karl Marx once said, our role is not just to interpret the world but to change it.

So when I left school I set out on a life of political activism mainly within the growing environmental movement at the time. For money, I worked in a waffle factory at first then took up taxi-driving. NGO's at that time didn't pay wages, it was all voluntary. This was the early 70's and issues of environmental degradation and fossil fuel depletion were appearing. I went to university to study environmental science and sociology but dropped out fairly quickly because it struck me as being very dry and boring.

It struck me at the time that just talking about what needed to be done wasn't enough, to have any impact on ourselves or others we needed to live out our beliefs rather than just talk about them. So I built a tipi with pine poles I cut in the Creswick State Forest and sewed the canvas cover by hand then I went bush. (I think I must have been reading Thoreau at the time). I lived in a communal experiment on a 2000 acre property on the Monaro plateau in southern NSW. The tipi worked fantastically and I lived happily in it beside a creek for two or three years.

Then in the early 80s, together with some other people, we bought a 150 acre property in the middle of the East Gippsland forest. However, I left fairly shortly after and went to Sydney to become a director of Greenpeace for three years. I met someone, started a family and moved back to East Gippsland to build a house and develop a permaculture system. Our water came from the rain and the river (from a floating water wheel I built), the electricity from the sun via PV panels that powered the house and furniture—making workshop using "waste" wood from logging coupes which became one of our sources of income. The hot water came from the woodstove and solar hot water panels. The only fossil fuel we used was LPG for a small fridge (one large 45kg gas bottle lasted about six months) and petrol for the car which we used for a fortnightly trip to the local

town for shopping. The house itself was built from local timber and insulated with fiberglass and natural wool. We did all of the building, wiring and plumbing ourselves. I don't remember exactly how much it cost but it wasn't more than a few thousand dollars. The PV system was the largest cost at about \$7000. The rest in total was less than that amount. (I am not as good an accountant as Thoreau was!). We spent our time looking after the trees, vegetables, chooks, ducks, geese and goats, cutting firewood, doing woodwork, making wine and beer, preserving food and many other interesting things whilst at the same time trying to preserve the National Estate forests from clear—felling.

These were my first attempts to live simply. In the end after about 10 years I left East Gippsland and here lies one of the difficulties of living simply in the bush. As a furniture designer and wood artist I often used to feel that the wood “spoke” to me. This wasn't enough. I missed people and I felt at the time that the number of people living in the valley was not enough to create that critical mass required for an interesting life. In short, I missed “civilization”. This was before the time of the internet but even now with all kinds of digital technology we still need the face—to—face interactions of everyday living. I also felt that even though I was all right, I could have been contributing more to the development of alternative ways of thinking, feeling and being.

Because I was always interested in other cultures and languages, I started studying Indonesian and Asian Studies by distance education, went to Indonesia several times during my study and ended up spending close to 12 years studying, researching and working in the country and in other countries in relation to it. During that time, I broke up with my partner because it was clear that our lives were going in different directions. I now have five degrees, a very long CV and can speak two languages fluently besides English but I was no longer ‘living simply’ or living very happily. I moved around a lot, always facing deadlines, often stressed out due to the workload and while the work I did was valuable and received positive feedback, I felt that I had lost my “centre” and was no longer ‘grounded’. I realized that even though I was quite good at doing this work, the focus was too much on the work and not enough with real people and the natural world.

It is only fairly recently that I underwent another transmutation and realized that the meaning of life is not so much about what we do in the world but the attitude we have towards whatever it is we do and challenging the ingrained habits of mind that go along with that. So I started on a true journey of self—discovery. The conclusion I've come to so far is that the essence of the simple life resides in our hearts and spirit not the external world but the challenge is to be able to manifest it in our lives in doing whatever we do.

The Alchemists at Work

In 2006, my current partner Ayu and I moved back to Australia. We had little money, no jobs and stayed for a time in a family holiday house too far from any potential work. With no jobs we had trouble finding anywhere to rent in Melbourne. Finally we found a flat in Sandringham available only for a few

months. At the time there was a property boom and one of the possibly unintended results of that is that renters have to constantly move as houses/flats are sold out from under them or redeveloped (e.g. knock down one house to build two narrower ones or a block of units). When we both finally got jobs, (me in TAFE and my partner in secondary school) even though at the time they were not permanent or ongoing positions, we decided that the solution was to buy our own house.

My parents brought me up with a very simple idea that you don't spend money until you've got it. My partner, being Indonesian, also feels this way. Economic cycles are too short term to rely on long term. We lived through the 1998 economic collapse in Indonesia when cigarettes became cardboard and body lotion burned your skin. Nevertheless, we had to get a loan to buy a house. In the end we went with a credit union, not a bank and were determined to pay it off as soon as possible. We bought a very cheap house in a non—salubrious suburb which happens to be only 1.8km from the beach. It took us three years and nine months of putting about 60 percent of our joint income into the mortgage to pay it off, but we did it! (Just as a note, 10 months later due to the Bailleau government's cuts to TAFE, I've just been made redundant).

Since moving here in 2008, we have been rapidly turning our 110 sq. m. house and 585 sq. m. block into an urban permaculture. We have a large vegetable garden with no—dig garden beds and an elaborate system of containers scattered around the block to take advantage of different microclimates, we keep chooks for eggs, manure, insect control and enjoyment, we have planted fruit and forage trees in the front, back and side yards. We grow tree lucerne and bamboo to provide material for trellises, tipis for growing beans, wood for the bbq, mulch and compost. I grow carrots in old bathtubs collected from the hard waste collection, beans in secondhand 200 litre plastic drums cut in half. Trellises made from old bed frames and waste wood are alive with peas and passionfruit, Chokoes climb over the nectarine tree and give us fruit in winter long after the nectarines are finished. The possibilities feel endless as does the opportunity for experimentation.

We live by the three 'R's'—reduce, re-use, recycle. I am writing this story at a very nice old wooden desk and sitting on a very simple swivel chair that feels 'just right'. The desk cost \$25 and the swivel chair cost \$5 at a local Rotary sale. Most of the furniture in the house and structures and objects used in the garden was bought at the opportunity shop, at local secondhand sales or collected from the annual or semi-annual hard waste collections. Most of our clothes come from the op shop as do some of the kitchen appliances. Our consumption of packaging has reduced so much that we only put the rubbish bin out every three weeks rather than weekly. This is because we produce a lot of our own food from the garden and we make a constant effort to reduce our intake of processed food. We have three large water tanks (14,500 litres) which seem to stay full from only using half the roof which we use to water the garden. Since a lot of energy is used in the mass production and transportation of food, we feel that a home garden is one of the best ways of saving energy. We also have a roadside foraging route where we travel every autumn into the country to collect apples, plums, quinces

and hawthorn berries (good for high blood pressure). Locally, we forage for mulberries and feijoas when the time is right. We have not yet installed solar panels due to the capital cost (every spare cent went into paying off the house loan).

That brings up another issue though, and that is that in the first two years or so of the mortgage, we let it oppress us and life felt complicated and stressful. I have also let myself be oppressed by the garden – it often felt like there was too much to do. I used to oppress myself about getting this or that done or sometimes even panic because the list of things to do was so long. Then we began to explore matters of the spirit and underwent journeys of self-discovery, our internal habits and attitudes have undergone changes and these oppressions have lifted. Nowadays, I still occasionally make a long list but never look at it again for months and then when I do look at it, I find that I've done most of the things on it without following it, just by 'being in the present moment' in the garden. If there are things that are left undone they are usually not very important things or if they are, I don't mind—nothing is ever 'perfect' so I don't expect to get everything done. Living and doing is always a work in progress.

We spend a lot of time out in the garden. This doesn't always mean doing something but just being. It can include observing the interactions of the animals and plants, making notes, doing research and productive planning (both spatial and temporal), feeling the energy of the plants and animals and taking pleasure in the present moment, whatever it brings.

The Alchemy of Delight

For us, that focus on the present moment is the key to a change in attitude that allows space and time for the discovery of the spirit and its capabilities for development. The idea of simplicity can help us to slow down, stop, take a breath and then the next one, notice the present moment then revel in it. We see our attempts at the simple life as being an integrative ongoing process that combines the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual into a cohesive whole, part of the process of the transmutation of life.

What are the delights of living simply? —the opportunities for learning, experimenting, transforming and transmuting not just our external environment but also ourselves. Re-using objects is a wonderful opportunity for creativity and lateral thinking. Thinking and planning in terms of energy cycles is another. We feel that we have become transformers, alchemists of the spirit as well as alchemists for the transition to sustainable living. I really like the idea that I transmuted a bathtub from a place to wash the body into a place to grow carrots. I moved it along into a different part of the natural cycle of life.

We get up with the light and go to sleep with the dark. We observe and interact with the animals, plants and ourselves, and our habits, attitudes, feelings and thoughts. We live within an ecology of life which includes our own internal ecology—mental emotional, physical and energetic. To be aware in each moment

of how all these interactions flow and change is an amazing and magical experience.

Tasting the Elixir of Life Every Day

There is increasing interest these days in alternative health, meditation, yoga and other modalities. These practices are popular because they involve work on both inner and outer aspects of our human being. But many people I've talked with feel that they don't have enough time to do it. They are far too busy.

I used to feel this way until I just decided to make time because I slowly realised some kind of daily practice combining both inner and outer aspects of being was important in my transmutation. After trying many practices I settled on tai chi because I had slowly become aware of its benefits in the rest of my daily life. My daily practice at the moment is the Silk-Reeling *qigong* movements which are the core of Chen-style Tai Chi. This daily practice didn't come suddenly. It takes determination and discipline and some days I still have to force myself to do it but most of the time now I just do it without thinking or struggling against it.



Focusing on the details of the movements keeps my "monkey mind" (the one that is usually full of internal chatter) productively busy while my basic vehicle, my body, meditates and establishes new habits of trained unconscious operation, what the Japanese call 'mushin.' This unconscious operation is both mental and physical. My body can clear itself of negative feelings and other toxins that otherwise would accumulate in it and the movements encourage the circulation of qi (bio-electric energy) that supports my body, mind and spirit. The mind is trained to concentrate and return to the present moment through this process. This practice, whilst done as slowly as possible, is aimed at increasing the power and speed of the movements. I visualise the process of qi circulation as being like increasing the voltage and amperage of my own human electric circuit.

The practice seems to make me calmer, happier, more tolerant of and patient with other people and more skillful in dealing with what I may have previously felt as stressful or difficult situations. The interesting thing about it is that I don't have to try to be calm or happy or patient, it just happens as a natural result of

the practice. Whilst visibly physical it is really about the inner alchemy of spiritual transmutation. I don't mind using the word 'magical' because it feels pretty magical to me! As for the future, I think I'll be increasing the voltage so I can keep on bubbling and fermenting!

‘The theory and practice of living simply are gradually coming together for me.’

Anonymous

For 25 years I worked professionally on public policy affecting energy, transport, climate change and sustainability. Furthermore a background in planning and psychology has provided me with insights into my own behaviour and that of society. Also, inevitably, my direct personal experiences have shaped my perceptions.

I conclude that people—myself included—accumulate physical and virtual assets (such as money, status, consumer goods, enhanced beauty, education, social networks and even children) to exert control over their own future and to progress their priorities. In practice this often means generating and using assets to calm fears created by our genes and culture, as well as to manage/hedge future risks and uncertainties.

Accumulation of assets appears part-and-parcel of the evolutionary drive to improve reproductive success. As such a deep and widespread voluntary simplicity is very difficult to achieve as it requires foresight, commitment and bravery to intellectually lead society by the head—rather than succumbing to survivalist hoarding instincts.

My understanding of and commitment to the philosophy of voluntary simplicity is founded on an array of interrelated beliefs and understandings, including:

Societal fixation on competitively accumulating excessive personal physical assets is fundamentally damaging to the planet and the psyche of individuals. Furthermore from a societal perspective such fixations are unsustainable and fundamentally stupid as they do not contribute to building a better world. In contrast, the pursuit of deep-seated voluntary simplicity provides an intellectually robust and practical solution to many of society’s problems.

Various types of assets are substitutable. Increasing the quality of assets can substitute for their quantity. Living simply is co—related to increasing awareness, education, creativity and good design. Unfortunately these positive traits in people can also be easily subverted. For example a fixation on transient fashions, new technologies and manipulation of social media can (and often is) used to stimulate people’s latent wants and to sell products which address newly created fears.

Assets provide comfort and peace of mind. They provide both practical and emotional support while physical assets can also be liquidated to provide money—a perceived universal answer to many of life’s challenges. Voluntarily living with a smaller buffer of physical and social assets requires considerable bravery as it flies in the face of social convention and requires greater reliance on one’s own inner strengths when things get tough.

Voluntarily moving away from a state of having a gross excess of physical stuff is relatively easy and directly rewarding. However, moving further down the track towards simplicity is exponentially more practically and emotionally difficult as well as intellectually demanding to justify (e.g. it takes people like Mahatma Ghandi to piece together the theory and practical structure of voluntary simplicity) In addition, the practice of voluntary simplicity (i.e. living with a low base of physical assets) is particularly difficult if you have direct responsibility for the long term welfare of dependents.

Assets are often accumulated out of fear. The fear of becoming socially isolated, of boredom, lack of status, being unattractive, etc. Fear is closely related to insecurity, both of which breed a mentality of increased greed and hoarding to reinforce one's competitive position – traits which are antithetical to the philosophy of voluntary simplicity.

Living simply is inherently risky. Voluntarily operating without a large buffer of personal assets puts a greater burden on the state, family, friends and partners to pick up the pieces if things go seriously wrong. However it makes sense (from environmental and resource efficiency perspectives) for the state and society to provide the buffer rather than demanding that each individual madly fortifies themselves with assets to survive in an increasingly competitive and fearful society.

I think that society and the individuals in it need to focus more on what really makes them happy and to tackle these issues directly. Otherwise it is all too easy to revert to the conventional shotgun tactic of working and accumulating stuff to meet every eventuality and to use assets to activate every potential happiness button as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately the accumulation of assets is correlated to a society-wide fixation on 'action' (rather than being) to the extent that almost any action is seen as a positive and a virtually perfect metaphor for progress. In contrast simplification and desire to just 'let things be' are derided by our go-getter culture which endorses action—any action— above all else to provide the illusion of progress.

It still amazes me that overwhelmingly people's first reaction to solve a problem or improve almost any situation is to add stuff and complexity to the mix—rather than to remove something or to simplify the situation.

The evolution of simple living in me

Voluntary simplicity is a philosophy which complements my personal traits – of being analytical and practically and independently minded, as well as not being strongly connected to the dominant social conventions (e.g. marriage, children, group sports, career path, etc). Consumerism is tightly bundled with society's dominant economic systems and patterns of behaviour. Obviously perhaps, but the less you 'buy into' or have a vested interest in the dominant consumerist

social ethos, the more likely it is that you will be sympathetic to anti-consumerist philosophies like voluntary simplicity.

I was brought up in a large family with relatively little money, DIY parents and was a poor student during my early years. This left me with a bias towards being efficient, self-sufficient, practical and frugal. Over time the personal and societal implications of my own behaviours become apparent as I became more deeply involved professionally in sustainable resource policy development. Ironically this happened while I continued to earn more money in my chosen profession and was sucked in by the appeal of both more and better “stuff”.

However, it wasn't long before I started taking the first steps towards voluntary simplicity. I began raising the bar for consumer items brought into the house. My desire for items that are of high quality, functional, good value for money, fundamentally beautiful, environmentally sustainable, long—lasting and repairable makes them more difficult to find, let alone buy. Buying used products has allowed me to get better quality and design at a lower cost. Interestingly when/if it is necessary to let go of the item it owes me little and I can easily afford to pass it on to the next user at little cost – ironically while this fosters more sustainable use of resources it also feeds consumerism by reducing the effective costs of consumer items.

Unfortunately, raising a similar social bar to people with empathy for the ideals of more simple lifestyle also means that it can be difficult to find likeminded people with whom I can share such ideas and experiences.

Over the years the transient nature of physical stuff and the importance of making better decisions for me, as an individual, and the planet, have all been reinforced by the effects of temporary financial hardships, interpersonal relationship issues and the wisdom of age. Unfortunately there are relatively few people who have a deep understanding of the beauty and elegance of living simply – hence the importance of groups like the Simplicity Institute.

I still have a long, long way to go but the strands of theory and practice of living simply are gradually coming together for me. The more I understand about the total concept of sustainable simple living the clearer, more elegantly cohesive and attractive it appears.

‘I am probably earning less now than I would if I had decided to keep on my previous career path—but I have more time to myself and some life quality back.’

Sabine Perrone

I am originally a molecular plant pathologist. I did my PhD at Melbourne University in the early 90s and several post docs around the world. I also worked for private companies around Europe but always loved the Australian ecosystem, the sun, the space and lifestyle. I decided to come back to settle here even though getting back home to France was very tempting at the time. After a brief employment period at Melbourne University, I worked for a state department: I ended up managing several research portfolios, their budgets and the stress levels that usually go with them. I couldn't cope with the travelling back and forth especially when the head office was just a few tram stops away from home, the illogical restructures and erratic research directions reflecting even less logical political incentives.

After five years, I decided to resign and start my own little Pty Ltd focussing on Biosecurity issues. Working for myself meant I could finally do whatever I wanted and that I wouldn't have to answer to any boss or obscure hierarchical system. I wanted to have the choice of the projects I would take on and didn't want to have to report to anybody about it. I had enough of endless administrative tasks, of providing reports that nobody took the time to read, enough of seeking approval for the most insignificant decision.

Starting one's own little company can be overwhelming and very challenging though—after all, there are already a lot of consultants around with a very good reputation and expertise, but I managed to keep on going and still am. I left behind a secure and potentially high profile future for the pleasure of taking the time to look at my garden in the mornings and listen to the birds with a cup of tea in one hand and my cat on my lap, rather than being stuck in the traffic to go to a depressing workplace.

There are a few things in life that make it worth living and are worth fighting for—one just has to make it happen.

I can finally catch up every other Friday first thing in the morning for a chocolate and coffee degustation with a good friend of mine before going to my ritual Queen Victoria market trip, go to my movie club on Tuesday evenings, my French dinners on Thursday evenings, garden and grow food, cook it and share it with my friends. I can exchange fresh produce with my neighbours, swap cuttings and recipes. I feel whole again. I can also travel whenever I want (and can afford to, of course!) and for as long as I decide to. Something I never thought I could ever manage.

Working for myself freed some time to take care of my health, go back to the gym and yoga classes, and walk to my office when the sun is shining. I don't have to

count my hours, I don't have to worry about office politics; I just have to honour my contracts—I can breathe again.

Most importantly, I now have time to work with my bees. I have also decided that my Pty Ltd should concentrate on honeybee research and bee biosecurity projects. I recently completed a community engagement project (BeeForce), which gave me a lot of satisfaction and allowed me to meet a group of very passionate hobbyists and semi-professionals who have decided to keep honeybees in urban areas. They all wanted to produce their own honey and take time to get closer to nature and live to the rhythm of the bees. I felt honoured to share their experience and run a project with them.

I am probably earning less now than I would if I had decided to keep on my previous career path—but I have more time to myself and some life quality back—this is invaluable.

Of course the down side is the self—funding aspect and its consequences: issues with applying for loans and mortgages, taxes, not knowing what my income will be from one year to the next, but who has financial security these days anyway?

‘My simple life is a work in progress...’

Ellen Regos

For me voluntary simplicity has been a journey, never a destination. At 18 years of age I was given the best advice a mother could give a daughter when embarking upon a career. “Follow your passion” she advised me. And so that is what I did. My passion led me from art, to teaching, to ecology, to inner development, to writing, to gardening, to poetry, to “sucking the marrow out of life” as Thoreau so aptly put it. Woven with the threads of pleasure sown on the fertile ground of my passions, my life has been lived moment to moment, the term “work” recontextualised so that how I exchanged my time for my livelihood became the fulcrum by which decisions were made.

My conscious evolution towards simplicity dates back to childhood. I have fond memories watching my grandfather in his garden tending his food plants. I learnt the joy of climbing a hot tin roof in summer to harvest warm figs. And I watched him reuse and recycle everything (and I mean everything) as nothing was ever thrown out. By osmosis I was shown a different way of living to the way I was brought up. This picture permeated my being. However it wasn’t until I read Thoreau that I started to see the bigger picture.

I still remember the exhilarating feeling as a 22-year—old being handed *Walden* to read for the first time. When I read passages like ‘I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived’ it stirred my soul deeply, very, very, deeply. That part of me that knew exactly why Thoreau went to the woods, that part of me that wanted nothing else than to follow him there and the naked realisation that I was woman living in a very different time and place.

I started to connect my behavior to greater issues such as habitat destruction, species extinction, pollution, climate change and animal suffering just to name a few. I became active in non-violent activism, became vegan and started protesting. Until something very significant happened that changed my life forever.

I became a mother.

Becoming a mother was by far the greatest and most significant role I have ever undertaken. At the age of 25, barely an adult myself, I was pregnant and contemplating motherhood. Birth, babies and breasts, was where my life was headed and as my body started to grow, things changed. In fact everything changed. From the first moment I held my daughter in my arms nothing was ever the same again.

An abundance of joy, love and time swallowed me whole. I found staying at home was as challenging as it was transformative. I chose the simple path: no cots,

change tables, gismos or gadgets. My time was spent making bread, growing food and washing nappies. No task was ever complete as each day brought about the same “chores” again and again and again. And in that sameness, my sense of self collapsed. Three magic moments of mothering...

Surrendering to Breastfeeding

I always thought breast-feeding to be an instinctual part of mothering. Sitting up in agony for many nights after my daughter was born cooking cabbage leaves to put on my breasts taught me otherwise. Through the trials and tribulations I managed to breastfeed like an Amazonian, with just one breast. Second time around a lactation consultant assisted so that I was able to really enjoy the process. Watching the rhythmic motion of my daughter suckling my breast while at the same time feeling the milk leave my breast is a sensation that I believe can only be experienced to be fully understood. My body provided the nourishment my daughter needed to survive and thrive.

There Were Three in the Bed

Co-sleeping seemed like a logical bridge to build after birth and having a newborn in the bed made everything easy, from breastfeeding to changing nappies. I could lie for hours watching our daughter sleep; there was such beauty in the silence and stillness of each breath. It also allowed me to practice resting: I learn how to “just be”.

Hanging Nappies on the Line

A daily ritual enacted over five years, I became very skilled at hanging cotton nappies on the Hills Hoist so as to minimize peg use and maximize sun exposure. One morning while hanging out the nappies on the line I experienced a moment of “blissful being” when the sun reflected off the white cloth and I embodied the warmth, contentment and inner peace of domestic life. And what joy to watch those juvenile magpies bungee jump from my maternity bras in the morning...

Feeding, sleeping and changing nappies are three rites of early motherhood that 15 years later I can now reflect upon.

Motherhood required me to work towards a relationship of being to myself and to others that was simply lived moment to moment, in an authentic and honest way. A reintegration of self: so that I was no longer trying to balance the roles of partner, mother, career woman or daughter as separate and distinct parts. This process required me to practice small steps of “letting go”. I learnt to create and honour the empty spaces in my life, those small crevices of silence and pockets of stillness that I experienced daily.

Motherhood shifted my understanding of voluntary simplicity from the outside to the inside of myself.

‘When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be’. Lao Tzu

'It is the bigger vision that inspires me in living simply.'

Karen Hickman

I remember as a child being enticed by a local trash and treasure market. The idea of reuse, recycle and reinvent spoke to me at a very young age. I would spend my pocket money buying books to display from local opportunity shops.

Like Henry Thoreau I had a cabin in the backyard. It was down the back corner of the quarter acre block. Originally it was made by my father to house the briquettes. It ended up being my simple and humble cubby house.

I live simply because it is within my DNA. Not because it is the 'in thing' or admirable. I like simple living because it requires creativity, a different type of creativity and I quote:

"Thrift is the really romantic thing; economy is more romantic than extravagance...thrift is poetic because it is creative; waste is unpoetic because it is waste...if a man could undertake to make use of all the things in his dustbin, he would be a broader genius than Shakespeare." G. K. Chesterton

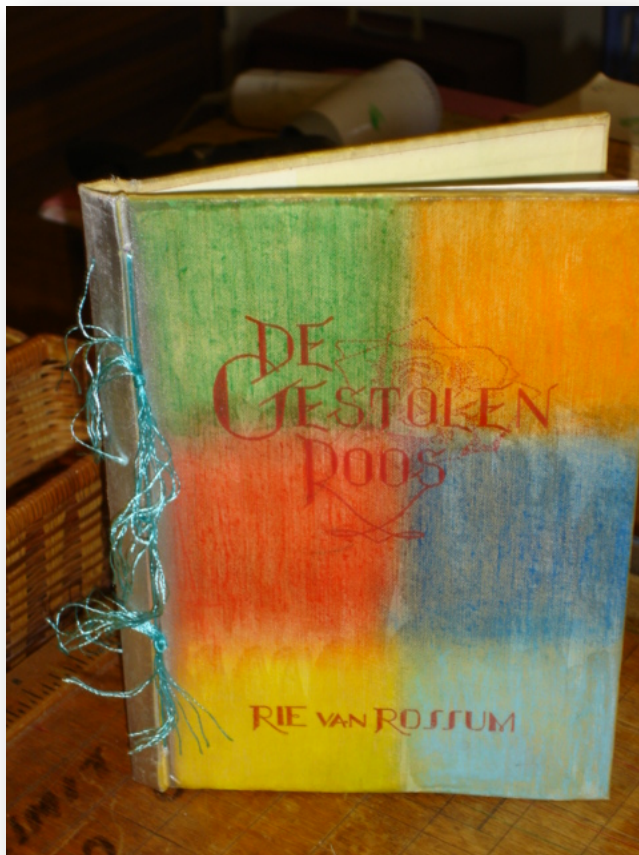


I live simply by very practical means. I live in a small three-bedroom and one bathroom home in the outer western suburbs of Melbourne. My husband and I buy secondhand everything, well nearly everything and make do and mend. We do not eat out and cook from scratch. All leftovers are reused. I try and grow some produce and hope to grow more in the future. We do not do air travel and have one old car. My husband is a fix-it man and fixes most of our appliances and broken things. He services and repairs our car and keeps it on the road. I make all my own gifts and do not enjoy going to the mall to buy presents for people. Simple living for me is not to be found anywhere near the mall or travelling for a couple

of weeks to other countries. We prefer to save for anything we may want or need. We refuse to take out loans and pay interest.

I share my interest in simple living on my Facebook Group titled Melton Bowerbirds. I read extensively on simple living. And I am currently being inspired by a beautiful book which I first learnt about in Radical Homemaker titled *Lark Rise to Candleford*.

The difficulties of simple living are minimal for me, if they exist at all. We can be seen, we think to be a bit too frugal. I think my husband's family find it eccentric that I make my own gifts. I think we are judged by them for not doing what it is



they would like us to do which is buying them new gifts from the mall. I do not worry too much about what they think in this respect because I believe so strongly that this is the way of the future if we are to survive. It is the bigger vision that inspires me in living simply. And I like the fact that making gifts takes a lot more creative thought and effort than going to the mall.

The delights of simple living for me revolve around being resourceful in a creative way. Also, living with less is less stressful and it is a relief not to have to keep up with others on the consumer treadmill. We love to think we are playing The Man at his

own game and winning. Another big delight is that I do not have to work and my husband is semi retired in our 50s.

Simplicity is living on a considerably reduced income but still living well with all that you need.

‘Our biggest success is reaching financial independence while raising two sons with special needs.’

Diane Williams

After reading *Your Money Or Your Life* in 1992 and following the program, we reached financial independence at 50. We’re middle class folks: Chuck worked as a construction tradesman and Diane worked (mostly) in government finance. We never made over \$100,000 per year and didn’t inherit any money from our families. Chuck travelled frequently for work and was home only on weekends most of the time.

We did set family goals and saved towards them. Our priority was freedom from paid employment in our 50s and it helped us focus on jobs that paid well and provided benefits. We learned to invest in the stock market for the long term. Our discussions about money became productive.

Our biggest success is reaching financial independence while raising two sons with special needs. Our son Mark was diagnosed with bi—polar disorder at age 9 and gastroparesis at 22. He’s fed by a tube into his jejunum and requires daily care. Chuck E was born with Down syndrome and gastrointestinal abnormalities requiring surgical intervention. Providing health insurance for them was vital and both sons may live with us for the rest of our lives.

The best part of being financially independent is the freedom to spend our time as we wish. Diane has started her own business to help others with money. Chuck has re—connected with his passion for woodworking and studying about bridges. We love doing what we want to do when we want!!! Life is good!!!

‘Hands in the soil, making and eating your own food—it’s so rewarding, both mentally and physically.’

Zaia Kendall

My husband Tom and I live with my 11—year—old son in a small Queenslander on Australia's Sunshine Coast. Our property is 34 acres, which we have converted to a Permaculture Demonstration site. We now run Permaculture and Self Reliance courses on the property.



Geese and chickens in resource paddock

Tom comes from a farming background. When he grew up there was no money or time (or a phone) to call someone when something broke down. So he learned from a very early age to fix things himself with whatever was available. He also learned that everything can become a resource, and knows

what to look out for. A lot of people we know call us and ask us whether we would like something they are about to throw away. We hardly ever say no. Everything may have a use sometime.

I have a passion for cooking and food processing. I love living simply because it makes my life simple. This lifestyle wasn't

something I consciously set out to live, but it has become very satisfying.



Homemade beef and pumpkin curry with mildly spiced taro and chokochilli sauce



Marimba playing, one of our favourite pastimes

The first thing was not having a television. Television, the drug of a nation, is breeding ignorance and feeding radiation (to quote some wise words from a song from the 80s...) We watch a movie on occasion, but we do not watch commercial television at all. This frees up all this time to follow your passions, read, spend time together or learn something.

We hardly buy any food. I may buy some organic tomato sauce if we do not have enough tomatoes and some coconut cream, but our meat, most of our fruit and vegetables are all home grown.

At the moment we cook on natural gas, but there are plans to make a biodigester for the manure created on the property, so that we can cook with methane gas in the future. In winter we mainly cook on the wood stove, which heats the house as well.

Our water is heated by a solar hot water service which we were able to buy cheap secondhand because it had a crack in it. Tom fixed the crack and it works beautifully. If we do not have any sun for a few days, we light the booster, which is a wood fired system made up by Tom.



Our wood fired water heater booster

We live a fair way out of town, so unfortunately still need the car to get us places. We try and only use the car when we have a number of things we need to do, lists are made over time and taken when we need to go into town.

We try and re-use / recycle everything on the property. We make our own compost, fertiliser and mulch and try to have as minimal outside input as possible at this stage. We are aiming for less all the time, it is a process that may take a little time though. We catch most of our own waste and compost it or keep it for later use.

We have found that life becomes simple when you live simply. There is so much joy to be found in life, and that only becomes evident when all the other outside stuff is not there. Hands in the soil, making and eating your own food – it's so rewarding, both mentally and physically.

We cannot be self sufficient without a community, so we would never claim to be self sufficient. Fossil fuels are still used, so we are a fair way off yet. But we try to be as self reliant as possible. Tom services the cars himself, and if anything breaks he fixes it. We grow our own food and deal with most of our own waste. We are responsible for our own water (water tanks), including drainage and retaining of water. If money runs out tomorrow we will still be able to feed ourselves. That is a comforting thought.

We are so passionate about our lifestyle and how it empowers us, we now run courses on the property, including a Permaculture Design Certificate, Self Reliance Skills, Earthworks and Sustainable Building. We also run a 10 week Permaculture Lifeskills Internship for people who are keen to live it. We aim to provide education for truly sustainable living to affect world change. It is wonderful to see people empowered after doing a course with us, realising that they can do things themselves.



One of our water tanks, doubling as a vine grower



Tom teaching a group of PDC students

I am a firm believer in being the change I want to see in the world. Life needs to become simpler if we want to be able to live on this planet for a few more generations. We can only start with ourselves.

Tom and Zaia Kendall head the Permaculture Research Institute Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia and run regular permaculture and self—reliance courses and internships. Visit their website to find out more about them, what they do and the courses they run at permaculturesunshinecoast.org.

‘We wanted to see how much food we could realistically produce on our own in a suburban backyard.’

Zainil and Michael

My husband and I, we live in one of the northern suburbs in Melbourne. We moved out of a two—bedroom apartment in St Kilda in July 2011 to a freestanding three—bedroom house. We did it for the food, at least for the concept of growing our own food. We wanted to see how much food we could realistically produce on our own in a suburban backyard.

The backyard is developed based on permaculture principles and we keep it as organic as possible. We have also installed two rainwater tanks for the 17 raised vegetables beds, and a chicken run for four ISA browns.

Thirteen months into the move, 772 eggs and over 172 kilos of produce later, we are convinced that ample food can be produced from the average suburban block. As part of my research project, I have been keeping a log of my harvest from the very beginning of the garden.

Previously, like most city dwellers, we would do our green grocery shopping once a week. Since growing our own vegetables we now do our grocery shopping (from a local independent organic shop) once a month and mainly for things we don’t grow enough like seasonal fruits, onion, garlic and ginger and dry goods like beans, pasta, grains, cereals and cooking oil. Our fruit trees are still too young to be producing any fruits.

The four ‘girls’ provide us on average 12 eggs in wintertime and about 21 in warmer weather. Being vegetarians, eggs are our main source of protein. We haven’t bought eggs in over a year. We swap our surplus for jams, honey, figs, persimmons, limes, lemons and seeds.

No, we haven’t achieved self—sufficiency in our food production but by growing our own food we have become more confident in our food growing skills and ability. We produce more than we could possibly consume. I had to learn food storing and preservation methods, which means there is always food in the house in some shape or form.

It has allowed us to be involved in food swapping and in the process we got to know some of our neighbours well. We bartered our produce for some much needed furniture. And in the summer time, we even sold some of the excess produce to other people.

Growing our own food means we have a choice, which gives us some control over our food. We planted mainly heritage and/or organic variety of vegetables. The main reason is to encourage the continual survival of the variety.

But the greatest benefit of growing our own food is the connection with our neighbours and the sense of community it gives us as a new comer to the area. From these interactions, we got seeds, gardening tips, preservation tips, cooking tips and friendship. Our next project is bee keeping. We plan to install a top—bar beehive this spring.

'You start to reduce your need for money, and therefore work, which frees up time to pursue other creative and enjoyable pursuits.'

Jonathon Rutherford

I joined the simplicity movement after a long intellectual process of thinking through global issues – so to tell my story requires explaining something of my political evolution.

My political interest was sparked – like many, I imagine, in their 20s – by the horrifying events of September 11. At Uni I found myself agreeing with the Marxist's on campus that market capitalism was at the heart of our problems, but also felt uninspired by their vision of alternatives and particularly their belief – shared with almost everyone else – that material abundance was the key to a good society. In my early twenties I read Clive Hamilton's *Growth Fetish* and agreed with his critique of endless economic growth and the sheer futility of consumerism in terms of making us happy.

For a long time, however, most of this had only a marginal impact on my behaviour. I had few other people around me who (appeared) to question the consumer way and this prevented me from acting confidently on my beliefs. While in my mind I had doubts about the fundamental direction of society, on the outside I was just a typical young male enjoying sport, girls, work and –above all – obsessed with 'fitting in' and being liked. Slowly I began to accommodate myself to consumer society.

The real turning point came in my mid twenties when I discovered Ted Trainer's work on 'the Simpler Way.' Ted's writing connected with me like nobody else ever had. It was like reading my own thoughts...only expressed far more articulately and with greater conviction, depth and insight than I could ever manage. I found his critique of our 'greed and growth' society and his vision of 'a Simpler Way', totally compelling. It stirred me up and forced me to rethink my life and aspirations.

Today I live far more simply than I used to. Whenever I go to buy something I try to consider first whether I really need it. If I do, I try to obtain it secondhand or via the LETS scheme I belong to. I still have a car, but I feel guilty whenever I drive it! I am slowly learning to grow vegies and I got my mum to teach me how to make bread—first steps, I hope, to a more self—sufficient lifestyle. I have been lucky enough to go part—time at work, which at the moment I am spending writing a joint book with my dad (about God – long story!), and starting a blog on the 'politics of simplicity'. One of the great things about 'downshifting' is you start to reduce your need for money, and therefore work, which frees up time to pursue other creative and enjoyable pursuits.

Despite the importance of intellectual argument in my own journey, it was also massively important for me to connect with others who shared similar views.

This is vital for morale, enthusiasm and just meeting great new friends! I have joined a range of local groups in Canberra such as LETS trading and SEE—Change, through which I have met inspiring people doing wonderful things to reduce their ecological footprints. These people encourage me with their dedication, wisdom and enthusiasm. In the future, I really hope to be able to get some local economic activities going – such as a community veggie garden – in my suburb, Campbell.

I have a strong view that the simplicity movement (and Transition Towns, perma culture etc) must be bold in their political outlook and critique. Eventually we need to go beyond mere lifestyle change – as important as that is – and start thinking how we can build a political movement that aims at the eventual replacement of capitalist/consumer society. The really inconvenient truth is that generalised simplicity is not possible without huge change to the organisation, institutions and values of our ‘greed and growth’ society. In our own small humble ways, in the towns and suburbs where we live, we have to start building and inspiring others with an attractive vision of a ‘Simpler (but richer) Way’. Despite the enormity of the task, I believe the revolution is possible. After all, as Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly remind us: ‘from little things, big things grow.’

‘Living in this intentional community of people with varied abilities was the first step away from a gainful career and towards voluntary poverty.’

Othmar F. Arnold

My journey started more than fifty years ago in Switzerland. I was born the second child of four to parents who grew up still deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of a conservative Catholic society. The first fourteen years of my life I grew up comfortably and quite sheltered in a small town. My family was the perfect family: dad was working as an engineer (he was the first in his family to benefit from higher education, thus escaping the rural poverty of the peasant life or the hardship of the working class experienced by his forefathers). Mom stayed home after marriage, but before has mastered a professional qualification and has earned a living on her own (this was also a first in her family that had also very recent rural roots – her father was born into a migrant farm worker family with no possessions and very limited rights). They were very proud of their achievements and upward mobility in social class. They also had grand expectations for her children who were to be given all opportunities to make it to the top of modern society.

At age fourteen, I woke up from the dream. The construct of the perfect family vanished, and I started to question the personal and social realities around me. In high school, I was involved in discussion circles and activist groups that explored all major alternatives to the church mandated world order that still dominated our upbringing and education. Liberation theology was one of the movements I explored. We saw the historical Jesus as the proto socialist.

When I was eighteen, after finishing high school, I left the Roman Catholic church. The same year, I became a conscientious objector. After watching part of the TV mini series of “Holocaust” with Meryl Streep, I was no longer able to participate in the preparatory training to become a fighter pilot. I was also no longer able to enjoy the sportsmanship and laurels of a marksman. I wrote a lengthy defense ahead of my conscription into mandatory military service, pointing out the irreconcilable discrepancies between my personal beliefs and my civil duties.

My existential search also led me to abandon my childhood dream of becoming an archeologist. Instead, a calling to live “a different, greener life” became audible. But I had no idea and no support on how to go about this faint calling. I became convinced that I needed to care for the planet at the same time as I produced my own food. I opted for a plain life, became an organic farmer and helped establish a small farm coop, but never completely gave up the academic and professional interest in archeology. I was able to complement the livelihood from the mixed farm with cash income from contract work as a research assistant.

The dream of finding a stable land base for farming, and a place to raise a family away from the ongoing harassment and persecution by the Swiss authorities

(linked to their claims related to my repudiation of military service) led me to immigrate to Canada in 1993.

We settled in the Yukon, but the farming dream was soon replaced by reality. I eventually found work as a wilderness guide, which was a blessing. I was able to work close with the manifestation of my spiritual centre that is also the place where I find the easiest connection to God – the glory of creation. Eventually, we established our family home near a small, predominantly First Nations community. I became involved as a volunteer in emergency services and community development initiatives. This involvement led me to return to university and pursue a nursing education. Now I shifted my direct focus of care from the land to the people.

Within nursing, my area of interest was never in the medical system. The influences of the social determinants of health, the inequalities and injustices, the degradation of our natural environment spoke much stronger to my heart and eventually formed the foundation for my research interest. I pursued graduate studies in conflict analysis and peace building as well as nursing.

But all these academic credentials and professional qualifications led me deeper into a postmodern world, away from the plain life, the simplicity, and the compassionate service that was the utopian vision I started my path on. After my separation, I also realized how much I missed the communal life that was part of the utopia. I was seeking a place where I would be able to integrate all these ideas and engaged in a L'Arche community.

Living in this intentional community of people with varied abilities was the first step away from a gainful career and towards voluntary poverty. Along that way, I also volunteered with Doctors without Borders/MSF to fulfill a promise for action made as a boy in response to the horrific pictures of starving children from the conflict in Biafra. After I got confirmation from MSF, I began to work on my logistics. I have decided not to maintain a physical residence. A mailing address should be sufficient to satisfy the needs of governments, banks, etc. Of course, that left me becoming dependent on friends and acquaintances for many practical things after I got back from the field. I believed it would be helpful to experience that relative insecurity and lack of control. It might be an essential part of the larger package of experiences that became inspired by Quakerism.

Living on less than \$15,000 per year, the unofficial poverty line in Canada, has been quite liberating. One of the intended effects of a simpler life is that I am no longer liable to pay income tax, and thus have to financially support a country at war (not only through its involvement in military action in foreign countries, but conceptually at war with everything that resists the consumerist—capitalist agenda of the current government).

As a result, I am now living a more contemplative life, studying the meaning of oneness with God. The challenging part of this pilgrimage is to find appropriate ways to engage with the realities of the world, how to translate calling into

action, how to live mysticism and resistance, and how to inspire others to find their own way to live a simpler life.

'It was difficult initially as what I did was against what the 'normal' people around me were doing.'

Melissa Pirie

My 'story of simplicity' began 24 years ago when I was looking at buying my first car. A friend of mine questioned whether I really needed a car and it gave me enough pause for thought to wonder just why it was that I felt I had to get a car. I guess just because everyone else was and that's just what you do.

Around that time I also read an article in the paper by Keith Dunstan on why it wasn't necessary to own a car, and how it was perfectly feasible to get around Melbourne by bike and public transport. So I bought myself a bike, and have never looked back. I have never bought a car and have loved the alternatives I've found, riding a bike, getting outside, getting exercise, using public transport and getting to interact with people, and car sharing with friends. It's been a far more social and satisfying way to get around and has turned what for most people is a drag—getting from one place to the other, into a fun and enjoyable part of my day.



I think a lot of my simple living now has flowed on from that. Not having a car means I am more planned and deliberate about going out shopping for instance. I can't just jump in a car and drive to the nearest furniture store on a whim. When I do shop I only buy what I really need, as whatever I buy I have to carry on my bike. If I want to make a big purchase I have to think about it and organise it, giving me time

to reflect and ask "do I really need that?". And I think that's my favourite piece of advice I can give to people "do you really need it?".

I now live in Central Ballarat with my partner. Living in town is a deliberate decision on our part as it enables us to get most places by bicycle. We can live a lot more cheaply. Never having a car must have saved me tens of thousands of dollars over the years. Looking at the RACV's car owning and operating costs guide, depending on your income and the car you drive you can be working one or two days a week just to keep your car.

I left my job as an analyst programmer for a large organisation 5 years ago. I live simply and have few costs. I shop very little for clothes, furniture, household goods etc and when I do I tend to buy secondhand and from op shops. I ride a bike everywhere. I have a veggie patch where I grow a good portion of our



veggies and some fruit. I shop at the local Farmer's Market each weekend. I buy dry goods such as flour, oats, beans etc from small local businesses. We have few electronic and white goods so our power use is relatively low. Living simply to me is a satisfying and congruent way to live. I wasn't happy working in an environment where I had to compromise my values to get by. And to support that work I had to compromise my values also in that I didn't have time to spend in the garden or visiting local shops for instance.

It was difficult initially as what I did was against what the 'normal' people around me were doing. The experience of riding a bike for years I think made it easier, as I was used to being seen to be 'a bit different'. My advice to anyone trapped in a job they hate and a life they find demoralising is to find other people who feel the same about the state of our world. For me it was with my local

environment group, and also in Permaculture. There are many great community groups in Ballarat—BREAZE, Ballarat Permaculture Guild, BalBUG, Ballarat Community Garden. Even groups that don't have a specific focus on simple living or the environment. For instance The Ballarat Observatory has a great small community of volunteers and members. Just get involved in your community in some way. Switch off the TV, ditch the shopping trip and go spend some time with real people in your community. It may seem less exciting at first as you wean yourself off the addictions of that lifestyle, but as you get more involved with the community around you you'll find it's a far more satisfying way to live.

‘I have found the "delights" to far outweigh any difficulties.’

Rosemary Spiota

My name is Rosemary Spiota, and after a life of teaching science in Australia, I am now living in the southwest of France with my French husband. I have always enjoyed a simple lifestyle and tried to avoid waste, and the study of ecology was introduced into school courses when I was in my last years of high school. Helping to preserve and enjoy nature appealed to me from early days, and when



I studied agricultural science and taught in high schools, I was able to learn and expand my understanding of land use and human behaviour. It was really just a matter of thinking out ways of doing things in the most efficient way and finding how to achieve this with pleasure. Sharing vehicles, cycling, walking, re—using, avoiding throwaway items, trying simple cures for simple problems give a sense of control and usefulness. I have found the "delights" to far outweigh any difficulties.

Cycling ten km each way to work in Canberra was a pleasure, right up to retirement, but of course I took my car on days of heavy rain or when I had lots of shopping to be done. Some people find it weird when they prefer high powered cars for every trip (students once called out "speed kills!" when they

saw me cycling!), but it is hardly a danger or offence. I found that teaching agriculture gave an amazingly different picture of teenagers, as they toiled in the garden and proudly took home their cauliflowers, ate radishes and chomped on carrots. All organically grown, of course, so no health worries (though we had to ensure everyone had tetanus injections, in case of a fork landing on a foot).

Now in southwest France, we have a little over a hectare of land 500m from a village, a big vegetable garden, lots of fruit trees, a big garage. We have planted lots of shrubs, mostly local but several Australian natives to remind us of our gardens in Australia. We have three donkeys (photo) and use the oldest one to pull a modern "animal traction" machine to cultivate the vegetable garden. We produce a large part of our needs but also support local markets. There is a lot of emphasis here in France on local produce for ecological reasons. I walk with a



group of mostly retirees every Thursday (10—12 km) and we share vehicles and choose varied spots within a half hour drive; there is a tremendous variety here in this part of the Lot. Villages, forests, farms, old churches and barns, prehistoric ruins, drystone walls, caves, cliffs. The word "convivial" really does suit the life we have here.

Our car is a Renault Twingo from 1995, we make hay with the mown grass around our house and shrubs, we use all the donkey manure mixed with straw from the stable for our compost heap in winter, we have no TV, no mobile phone, eat meat moderately, have reasonable health and try to help others by sharing and ensuring we do as little damage to the environment as possible. Voluntary simplicity is much easier than the enforced poverty so many have to endure, so we work also for change to the ways resources are used in society.

'If artists in our community could live off about \$10K per year, it seemed that I should be able to manage on this income too.'

Ewan Ogilvy

For me, there wasn't just one dramatic realisation that a lifestyle of reduced consumption was desirable; it has been a gradual process. From several perspectives, it just makes no sense acquiring more and more "stuff":

- there are only so many items [devices, clothes, services etc] that can be consumed/used at any one time; so, why have more than you "need"
- the acquisition of duplicate, triplicate items ... only presents additional challenges ... maintenance issues, storage challenges, disposal difficulties ... the list goes on
- when we leave this planet, we can't take our earthly possessions with us ... why create unnecessary challenges for our relatives and friends who are left to pick up the pieces
- there is the ethical dimension ... how can I possibly justify consuming more and more stuff when there are so many people in this world without the basics of life ... like clean water and a roof over their heads
- and again, from a very different perspective, I acknowledge the tyranny of rising expectations. Although a slow adopter of the latest technology, when it comes to computing power, I'd love to acquire a faster machine. But, the realisation that computers almost become superseded the day after they have been acquired, suggests that any upgrade is only likely to deliver a nanosecond of extra satisfaction ... not a smart move!



So, how am I going? When I look around my current abode, I still see far too many items that do the same job. Sure, many are not in current use ... but, rationalisation is required. The best [or worst] example of excessive consumption I can give concerns "time keeping devices". On last count, I possess twelve devices that, among other things, all tell the time. In no particular order,

these devices include: 2 computers [laptop and netbook], microwave, 3 alarm clocks [quite ridiculous], VCR, answering machine, watch, mobile phone, fax machine ... and, lastly, a mini weather station.

On other fronts, I've been a little more successful. I do not own a car. On the housing front I continue to downsize. In 1977 I acquired a small three roomed row house [total house and land area .. about 100sqm]. Since 2001, I've been living in two roomed units [total area about 60sqm]. This year, I'm planning to move to a one roomed studio [total area of about 40sqm]. With these moves, I do not perceive any decline in the quality of life. Indeed, consuming less space has many advantages ... there is less to worry about, care for, heat [or cool] etc etc. All good!

On the employment front, dramatic changes have taken place. In 1990 I moved from full to half time employment ... and in 1997, I left the formal workforce altogether [well before the official retirement age!]. Around 1997, my housing outlays were very low, and my income from savings amounted to about \$10K per year. If artists in our community could live off about \$10K per year, it seemed that I should be able to manage on this income too. So, the experiment began ... I have been engaged in voluntary work ever since. While there have been a few challenges since 1997, for the most part, these have not been financial. And, most importantly, I perceive no decline in the quality of my life.

While I'd be the first to admit that I'm a beginner in exploring/leading a lifestyle of reduced consumption, I've had no regrets in embarking on this journey. Indeed, I'd conclude that my quality of life has improved over time; a wonderful outcome!

‘The best things in life are truly “free.”’

Patrice Shannon

I was raised in a frugal household; (the oldest of nine children with a stay at home mother). I have always been sensible and don't spend money wastefully. Although my husband made good money I carefully budgeted and shopped for the best price and quality I could afford. I sewed most of my clothing as well as my husband's shirts and my daughter's school clothes. I canned and stocked a freezer, and made meals from scratch rather than using box items.

When my husband and I divorced, I was 57 years old and starting over. Assets had to be split, and many items replaced. I also had to re—enter the work force and I learned to be more frugal than ever before.

I began shopping the thrift stores to supplement my household items. I purchased appliances secondhand, and started wearing clothes from the Goodwill. It became a game to me to see what wonderful bargains I could find. Now I am so spoiled I could never bring myself to spend the extra money it requires to purchase new. I only purchase underwear new.

Medical issues forced me to retire at 62. This is when I really started learning how to live a more simple life. I relocated to the Pacific Northwest where I have family. I found an inexpensive one bedroom apartment in a senior property where I do not have to pay water, sewer or garbage as it is included in my rent. My apartment is one of the nicest, most inexpensive places to be had in my city. It is in a safe area, on a bus line, and grocery shopping is close enough to walk to. It is peaceful and quiet. I no longer have my own washer and dryer, and often do laundry at my daughter's house to save money. I quit putting clothing in the laundry hamper after one wearing, and I use my towels for a week at a time. This also enabled me to eliminate a lot of linens, and free up more space in the closet.

This is the smallest apartment I have ever lived in and it forced me to evaluate each item I own and determine which are the most important. The apartment has central heat, and I have learned to lower the thermostat to 64, and after a major adjustment I became accustomed to dressing warmer and have developed a greater tolerance for cooler temperatures. In the summer I keep the drapes closed and open all the windows at night to capture the cool breezes. If it is unbearably hot I have a fan which I use, but rarely.

I do not collect anything such as milk glass or stuffed animals or antiques; I consider it a total waste of money. I have observed my neighbors as they pass on or have health issues which require them to move to assisted living. It is very sad to watch the family come in and disposes of their belongings, much of which ends up in the dumpster. Everything they considered so important to their happiness is now determined to be unimportant or unwanted by the children.

I cancelled my home phone. I am on my daughter's cell phone plan so it is very inexpensive. I also quit bundling my internet and cable and I downgraded my internet service to 7 mgs from 12, and can barely tell the difference. Internet is very important to me and I spend a great deal of time on the computer. I also tried using an indoor antenna for television but could not get reception in my area.

Consequently I downgraded to a basic plan and have managed to cut my expenses over half of what I originally paid. I have found that it is not necessary to subscribe to a plan which features 100 channels, or HBO, etc. I do not watch sitcoms or reality shows, but do want to keep up with world events and I watch some worthwhile programs. Most of the shows featured on television is not worth watching anyway. I don't watch television every night, and it is never on during the day. I find myself listening to music more often.

I am an avid reader and used to spend a lot of money on magazines and books. I visit the local library which is only a couple of miles from my home and I read magazines there and check out large volumes of books and other periodicals for free.

I assessed items in my kitchen and eliminated my crock pot, my food processor, and many other unnecessary items which I seldom needed. I no longer bake so I disposed of my cake and pie pans, etc. I realize my days of hosting large family gatherings are over. I now go to the children's houses for the holidays. I do not miss these things at all.

I also purchased a small apartment sized freezer and I shop the sales and keep it stocked. I eat small portions of meat, mostly chicken, and make a lot of stir fry's, or burritos. I received a keurig coffee maker for Christmas as a present and I now make my coffee by the cup and a 5 lb can of coffee lasts me a very long time.

I plan my grocery shopping and stock up on basics the first of each month, and then supplement with fresh items about once a week. I do not eat sweets, but I do enjoy fresh fruit. I budget carefully and do not purchase expensive foods. I purchase many items in bulk from bins at Winco, and store them in air tight containers. I eat oatmeal most mornings with raisins and soy milk. Occasionally I make an omelet with bell pepper and onion and fresh mushrooms. Meat is not a major part of the meal, but used mostly as a flavoring. In the winter I make a lot of dishes like chili, spaghetti, homemade soup, etc, which lasts me for days, and if I am tired of it before I finish it I freeze the remainder for eating later.

I sorted my wardrobe and donated my career apparel and most of my dressy clothing, I find I need very little in the way of clothing, I live daily in jeans and tees, and only kept a couple of dress up outfits for weddings, etc. I eliminated a lot of shoes also. I was looking at my closet just yesterday and realized I could downgrade a lot more and it is now on my "to do" list. I find I wear the same outfits over and over again anyway. And I no longer worry about whether or not I am dressing in style. I dress in what I like and what I find comfortable. I

purchase items that can be mixed and matched and stick to about 3 basic colors and two accent colors. I do not have tons of shoes or purses either.

I have stopped coloring my hair. I went to the beauty shop and had it cut really short and just kept trimming it every month until the color was all gone, it took about four months. Since I no longer work it was not important that others could see my roots. If I was concerned about it I would have used a semi permanent color to blend the two colors for a while. I no longer need to spend money on expensive trips to the beauty shop, or hair care products. And I stopped wearing my hair so short so I do not have to get haircuts every month. I no longer wear makeup every day either, it took some getting used to, but since I am not trying to date, it is not a priority to me any longer. Of course when I go somewhere I still do wear makeup and try to look my best.

I have discovered if I spend a little more money on quality bar soaps they last much longer than the popular bars available at the grocery stores. I purchase shampoo and many cleaning products at the dollar store. I get all my birthday cards there as well. I have quit buying birthday and Christmas presents for the grandkids, I have a cutoff date of 18 years old. And I no longer send out Christmas cards.

I am far from perfect. My weakness is decorating my home. I love the French country rustic vintage look. I am working on not changing the décor as often as I used to. And now my décor items come from the thrift stores. I have pretty much settled on this look and only occasionally tweak it.

I have found that eliminating excess items is extremely freeing. It is like there are strings from them to me and each one I eliminate lighten my burden. And when I purge even more, it makes the vibration in the home feel more peaceful. I am the happiest I have been in years, and I am discovering what is really important in life. I plan to make more changes as time passes by, and I am continually evaluating my situation to see what else I can do. My life is peaceful and satisfying, much more so than ever before. I have even considered downsizing to a studio apartment, but so far I have not found anything which is as inexpensive as what I presently have when all things are considered. I am 68 years old but I still dream of getting rid of everything and traveling the country, or living in an RV, and being even freer.

So many of the things I do are such second nature to me now, that it takes some thinking to detail them in this email. It is a way of life. It is not about depriving yourself of the good things in life, it is about the discovery of what is really satisfying and important and realizing we have been brainwashed by the media and others to think we are not successful if we do not have lots of “things”. The opposite is actually the truth, the less we focus on material possessions, the happier we will be. The best things in life are truly “free.” Stop worrying about keeping up with the Joneses, and start discovering what really makes you happy. Your worth does not depend on what others think of you, but what you think of yourself.

'I don't feel like an ascetic, though many people would see me that way.'

Dan Sponseller

Hello, my name is Dan Sponseller, a 45 year old librarian in Ohio. I grew up on the family farm, the fourth generation (bought 1899) with a father who lived through the Great Depression. His experiences affected his psychology, which affected the family. We also did not have much money, but never felt poor. We actually moved there when I was nine in 1975 and we became very self-sufficient. We had no plumbing for the first few months and used an outhouse and heated water from a hand pump on an electric stove. My father bought a wood-burning stove and we started cutting dead wood from the woods. He still heats that way today.

We had a milk cow, which provided milk, and from which our mother made cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt. We had steers which provided meat (much to our horror—all three of us kids are now vegetarian). We had a garden and orchard which provided most of our fresh food and we canned and froze the rest. Our mother made bread and all the meals, clipped coupons, and we lived for several years quite comfortably, despite my father not having a job for a time. He also knew about saving money, so that helped get us through.

We ate out once a year, had ice cream and soda pop once a year, went to a movie every couple years, but we didn't feel we were missing out on anything. We got our clothes from garage sales and thrift stores and never thought twice about it. Living the free life on the farm was the best place to grow up. Good honest work and frequent play gave us all a sense of living.

In my adult life after college I settled in Columbus, OH, falling into a library job that I still have after 22 years. It has allowed me to travel quite a bit. I walk to work every day and drive rarely. Even in the winter when it's 20 degrees Fahrenheit, I get warm after the half hour walk and it helps with the cabin fever. In the morning I wake up slowly and wind down after the day on the way home. I live next to a park where I spend a lot of time reading. My heat is included in my rent, but I keep it at the low end of comfortable to save energy. I take showers once a week (I apparently don't get as stinky as the average person, according to my girlfriend). I only have one light bulb on at a time, I have an old mechanical mantel clock, I do watch TV, have a stereo and a computer, but I use them all sparingly. Everything I use I try to find a re-use for. Almost everything I dispose of gets recycled because we have a good program here. I carry cloth bags everywhere for groceries. My girlfriend and I carry reusable containers when we eat out so we don't have to use new take-home containers. Everything I do, I think about the environmental consequences first. It doesn't mean I am an ascetic. I don't feel like one, though many people would see me that way. I got a recycling program started at the library 22 years ago, which is still in place, earning me the nickname Eco—Dan.

When I first learned in 8th grade about the environment, pollution, and plastics not degrading, I couldn't believe such things were allowed to be. The farm was such a clean, pure place. Or so I thought until I learned about organic farming. My father's father used to say in the 30s "We have to conserve our resources or some day they'll all be gone". We recycled growing up long before it became the thing to do. I hope and expect to take over the farm some day, and when that time comes, I will use the land responsibly and do whatever I can to make it a benefit to the Earth, instead of a burden.

Making one's life simple isn't always in accord with one's other principles, but most of the time it is. Whatever benefits the Earth is also often what is the simplest way. I am proud to be a part of that movement.

Thanks for listening!

‘Lots of small little things add up over time.’

Tina

I retired a little over 4 years ago and have been attempting to simplify my life a little longer than that. My reasons for doing so are mainly to decrease stress levels in my life as I feel that is what I most need to do. I find it is an ongoing process and it gives me pleasure to do so. I have been trying to consume less as well as to decrease clutter in my life. It also gives me peace to know that doing so also helps the environment. I love to read about other people and their experiences in doing the same as this motivates me and I learn from others. I have made some changes such as line drying my clothes, using no paper towels and cloths instead and hand washing dishes a permanent part of my life. Lots of small little things like these add up over time and can be done slowly. I try to consume and own less stuff overall and this really feels like a load is lifted once you do so.

‘I vowed to bring nothing into our apartment or lives that was not beneficial.’

Fawn Hoener

When I was 40 years old, I left my husband and his family farm. I moved my four children, ages 16, 5, 4 and 1 years into a two—bedroom apartment. The 16 year old had his own room and the three younger children and I shared a futon mattress on the floor. We each had a week's worth of clothing and a few dishes and a couch. Despite the fact that I had a job in management, a 50 minute commute each way and three children in day care requiring 40 percent of my salary, I felt incredibly free. I wanted to do the best job parenting my children



that I could, and I vowed to bring nothing into our apartment or lives that was not beneficial.

I reduced my commute to 20 minutes and later to 7 minutes when I bought a home near work. I bought a TV (to attract babysitters) and gave it away six months later as I did not like the way we interacted with it in the house. I kept my own wardrobe to a week's worth at a time, and the children's as well until they stopped growing, then their wardrobes grew to about two weeks worth. They learned to do their own laundry. I cook most of our meals from scratch. The eldest graduated college and married a delightful young woman. I currently have three teenagers at home.



I went back to hourly work as I enjoyed it more and eventually part—time. To facilitate the reduced income of my part—time work, I decided to stop spending money on my hair, which had been almost waist length and blond for a decade. I cut all the blond off and am letting it grow out naturally.

I have a blog at singlemomenough.wordpress.com where I document the delights of simple living with children.

'Life away from all that idiocy is wonderful. I love the black night with scattered stars. I love the hushed tones and crickets chirping.'

Andre Heiser

I'm not sure when our journey began but somewhere along the line my wife and I decided to be nice to the Earth. It had, after all, always been nice to us. It was never too hot like Mercury (except in Australia), too cold like Pluto or too humid like Venus. I had seldom fallen through the Earth's surface as I would on Jupiter. Nor had it ever repealed the laws of physics (unless you are a creationist). Of all the things the Earth could have done to me, I was grateful it had done so little. Unlike most scientists, I don't want to leave a mark on this world when I died. It's simple gratitude.

Angel's family live on the Sunshine Coast and both of us loved Maleny so it was the obvious choice. By then we had our environmentalism well—established so our dreams of avoiding CO2 emissions and not buying toxic fish (an industrial chemist friend recently told me that tuna has enough mercury to make it economically—extractable) sounded ideal. Secretly I was worrying about Peak Oil (I didn't tell my wife my fears in case I was: a) wrong or b) right) and decided I would start learning how to cope. Alongside independence from an oil—based society was avoiding other adverse effects of that society such as fishing out the food chain or deforestation. Our independence would reduce our role in such activities.

My biggest fear is for the oceans. The ocean wasn't always a desert with its life underground and a perfect disguise up above.

We have managed to destroy it so thoroughly that it seems normal to look over a clear blue expanse devoid of life. The old reports of cod and whales are there for people to read should they want to see what it was like long ago. Even more amazing are the new reports. New Scientist et al will occasionally bemoan the damage done to fisheries (50 – 90 percent depletion in most of them) and I get shivers when I think of a world that was once so rich in life. Newfoundland is merely one among many examples of this trend.

I was determined to succeed as an example that a "normal" person could do it. The greenie movement has been co—opted by its most...visible members and I



Before they were hunted to near extinction, tuna were more like sharks than fish

feel that the mainstream members of society who take real steps (rather than the usual lip-service paid by the hoi polloi) to help ought to be seen too. Society views us with suspicion or contempt and I was hoping to join the ranks of “acceptable” people who care. There is a collective, unspoken belief in mainstream society that we are hippies in rainbow beanies demanding that Australia Zoo help the environment by feeding its crocodiles economists wrapped in tofu.

Our most visible members of the environmental movement are not the majority, they are simply the ones brave enough to risk jail to fight their cause so they grab the attention of us all and give a skewed perspective to the others. I like what the militant environmentalists do (most of the time) so rather than silence them, I act as one of the many alternative archetypes for others that may want to help but are allergic to handcuffs, bullets or pepper spray.

Angel and I decided to step away from a society that was worrying us. Back then my wife and I didn’t often communicate as such we just went in the same direction independently and we ended up in Maleny (actually Witta but people ask fewer questions if I say Maleny). We searched high and low for houses (not sure why as houses are easy to see) and finally settled on a nice one in the middle of nowhere.

It had a small dam (which I have yet to fill with mussels and fish), a large garage (which was promptly filled by relatives who needed a place to store things), three bedrooms (one of which was devoted entirely to our pet rats) and a huge living room. There are several established mandarin trees (I am now heartily sick of mandarins) and a fireplace (which is not as good as it sounds when you need to cut down a tree yourself).



Nourishing on the underneath. Peaches on top.

We like animals so of course we have chickens. We built a dome just like Linda Woodrow described...assuming she described a crooked cone with wobbly sides and a tarp that flies away in high winds. The chooks are odd creatures making “weh-werk!” noises when we approach in hopes we’ll let them out. To the novice, these noises sound angry and initially made Angelina cry because she thought they hated her.

The first time we let them out, they had a merry time chasing imaginary bugs and would fall off things in a single-minded pursuit of flies. The first time it rained they just sat there until I put them in the chook dome. The light dawned as they realized that rain need not be tolerated. They are fun creatures and give delicious eggs. When they are hungry they hunt down Angelina and peck her

ankles. When they see her come into the garden, they run with that straight—legged style that makes them rock side to side. They are pampered creatures and demand to be let out each morning with the first rays of light.



Of course the reason we did all this was to grow food and get away from it all. We start each garden with the chooks' help (wonderful way to do things so thanks to Linda Woodrow). Our first garden was in the front yard where we built the chook dome. The dome is about 3 – 4 metres in diameter and the path to the back garden was about 1.5 metres wide. This caused a problem and our solution may be the reason our dome has never since been dome—shaped.

Nevertheless we use it to clear the way for each new garden bed. I first add compost (letting things rot is the one gardening skill I have mastered) then I throw on lots of mulch (which the chickens kick aside) and I then plant seeds for the chooks to eat. To keep the

chickens fit, I put up a five—foot high fence for them to jump.

A surprising amount survives so my next task is to learn how to cook fresh veggies instead of buying KFC. After that I need to learn how to eat them. I am not sure how much of my enjoyment is due to eating genuinely fresh food and how much is just due to my gratitude of getting something to eat after all that effort. Luckily I am married to a chef who makes wonderful broccoli and potato soup and can appreciate my efforts at cooking her a nice dish of steamed bok choy with a side of boiled corn.

I am not that good with veggies but I persist. I planted potatoes once. I did all the right things and a plant grew out of the spot. I was very happy with myself until a friend told me they weren't potatoes. I persevered because they had to be potatoes! After all that's where I had planted potatoes! It transpired that they were sweet potatoes not regular potatoes. How this happened is beyond me because Angel has never bought sweet potatoes so I couldn't have planted them even by mistake. I think veggies just hate me. This is most unfair because I am making an effort not to hate them. The least they could do is reciprocate. Well, they were huge (one was the size and shape of a rugby ball) so it wasn't all bad. I put them in my omelette but the thing about sweet potatoes is that they are sweet so my omelette was not a success—but at least the bacon tasted sugary.

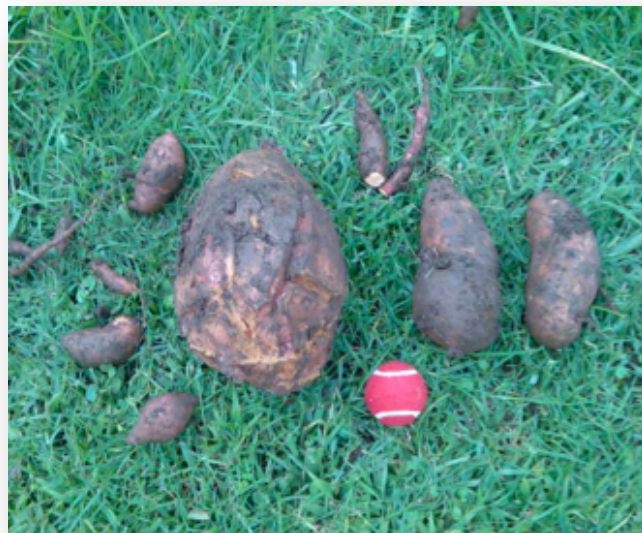
Fruit trees are better. They require less worry and unlike the vegetable seedlings, I have yet to see a chicken uproot a tree. There are plenty of trees on our place already but they are in the way of my future orchard. Ecologists and economists are usually at loggerheads with each other but both would be appalled at the idea of me cutting down trees and replacing them with trees. I hold onto a bright

future where the student in me can eat for free and the chef in me can create a meal by picking fruit off a tree.

I am not at all good with food—in fact I can cook five things. Rice, omelettes, damper, cheese sticks and bagna cauda. This is the other reason I like fruit trees. Dicing human skin for eight years has given me one culinary skill so I can choose some fruit, cut it up, make a platter and claim to have cooked dinner. My wife is ultra—healthy and considers such things to be legitimate meals. It is a perfect fusion of my skills and my wife's tastes. Our fruit trees aren't quite there yet (most are two feet tall) so the best I could do right now is a mandarin, orange and lemon fruit salad sprinkled with parsley, rosemary and thyme.

But to do that I need to make room for my trees. My ideal is to have an orchard so I need to remove the other trees one by one. This gives me firewood and an excuse to use my chainsaw. The offending tree is sliced into logs and then the real fun starts with the axe. I have no upper—body strength (nor do I have lower—body strength) so my axe—work is necessarily precise.

The chainsaw worries me—not for the safety reasons but the fact that it uses petrol. I've looked at the issue of peak—oil and I have adopted a middle ground. We won't run out of oil but it will get rarer. Somewhere along the line, falls in productivity (especially the rate of extraction) will meet the increase in demand and all hell will break loose. After that, who knows?



I was astonished these weren't regular potatoes

Rising costs will reduce demand and buy us time to figure out something else but it will be painful. Economists are probably correct in thinking the market forces will do the adjusting for us but they don't consider what happens at the end of that process. It is like an engineer who doesn't care about a building's structural integrity because gravity will pull the building down and the result will be a more stable structure. Technically correct but largely unhelpful.

The other thing economists don't consider is energy. Think of all those apocalyptic movies where people drive around in armoured cars. In this case, the energy comes from petrol so the question is where does the petrol come from? A more generalised (and correct) question is where does the energy come from? Societies that adopt a more medieval stance still need to burn trees to create iron. Simply stopping metal object from rusting requires energy

somewhere. Pressurised cylinders will leak over time, fuel stales (if that is a verb), buildings need maintenance, bottles break, leather rots, plastics degrade and all of these things (and countless others) require some input of energy. This is a mere generalisation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (which deals with heat not disorder as the pseudo—educated will claim). I can't take those movies seriously because without a decent input of energy, things fail quickly. Without that input, quality of living declines rapidly and so the hordes of savages running around the city chasing the hero would not last. They would quickly run out of food and equipment and lack the ability to create more. It is an extreme case but a small—scale example is seen in the fossil fuels used to create fertilisers. We need that energy for damned near everything. On a side note, Mad Max II had the right idea—the crude—oil refinery was coveted by everyone—a fine example of market forces coping with the supply and demand of fossil fuels.



I spend most of my time cutting up human skin for cancer, but occasionally I'll make dinner for my wife (but not with the same knife).

"Market forces" is correct as far as it goes but a better phrase would be "natural selection". The economists never seem to have considered what happens after the market hits a new equilibrium (or they think that reality is subject the economic theory and can therefore be ignored). We will have a new stability based on getting by with far less fossil fuel but it won't be much fun. I feel we need to prepare for and delay peak oil so

my use of the chainsaw is a little concerning. I don't want to become even more reliant on dead bacteria than I already am.

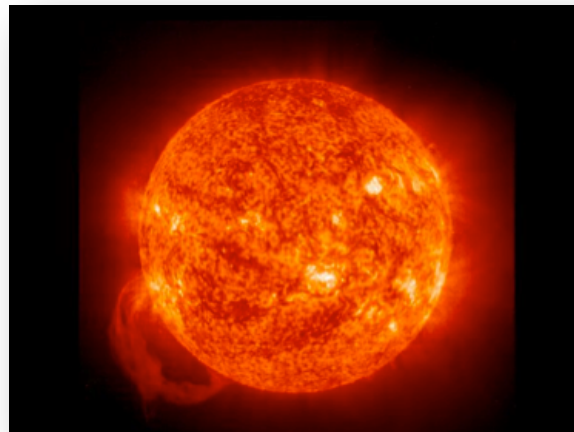
A brief word on nuclear power; I'm undecided. We need the energy and the "nice" sources such as solar can't provide enough even at best efficiencies. Fusion reactors (not counting the one fusion reactor we already use) are just a concept and fission is a dangerous reality. Right now I say no but I say so only out of the obvious safety concerns. I may change position on nuclear power according to new evidence.

You may not like that stance but, as a scientist, it is the only one I can adopt with intellectual honesty. Fission is still too dangerous for what it gives but desperation or technological improvements may change my attitude. I cannot, for instance, justify denying a hospital electricity merely because a fission reactor is ideologically offensive to me. If the crunch comes, I will need a better reason than politics to continue my hatred of splitting the atom.

Back to dead bacteria. We live in a society powered by them and when I look around I am often appalled by how we use this power. People around me are so concerned about what clothes they wear and what celebrities are doing. They want a new mobile phone because it will be a new mobile phone. Some drive in impressively powerful cars at unimpressive speeds in the city or install stereo so powerful it cannot be used at full volume because it would contravene strategic arms limitation treaties.

Why do people bother on such idiocies? There is a whole world out there. They could travel, study, listen to (good) music or visit art galleries. Learn programming. Climb a mountain. Talk to their spouse. Teach their child how to build a tree house. They could do volunteer work or simply build a patio for themselves. Instead most people seem to sit and watch and eat. Even if the naysayers are right and there is no point to curbing greenhouse gas emissions or protecting animals this is still a pointless waste of every resource imaginable including people.

Even if people got involved in politics for selfish ends or became accordion players they would still be doing something more worthy than watching a dazzling exposé about Jennifer Aniston or tuning in to Australian Idol just to disapprove of Kyle Sandilands. With work and the garden, I have little time for TV. I'm not upset, as you may have guessed.



**I'm a big fan of at least one nuclear fusion reactor.
Others too perhaps. We'll see how it goes.**

Life away from all that idiocy is wonderful. I love the black night with scattered stars. I love the hushed tones and crickets chirping. Having come from a fractured family with lots of angry shouting, I truly love the quiet times.

Mostly I like the quiet however so I love sitting in the hammock looking at the birds in the trees as I decide which to cut down next. I sit and plan the next phase of becoming independent. Ideas of beehives under the (remaining) trees, sleepy cod in the dam and adding another veggie garden float through my mind. One day I will have solar panels or a wind turbine.

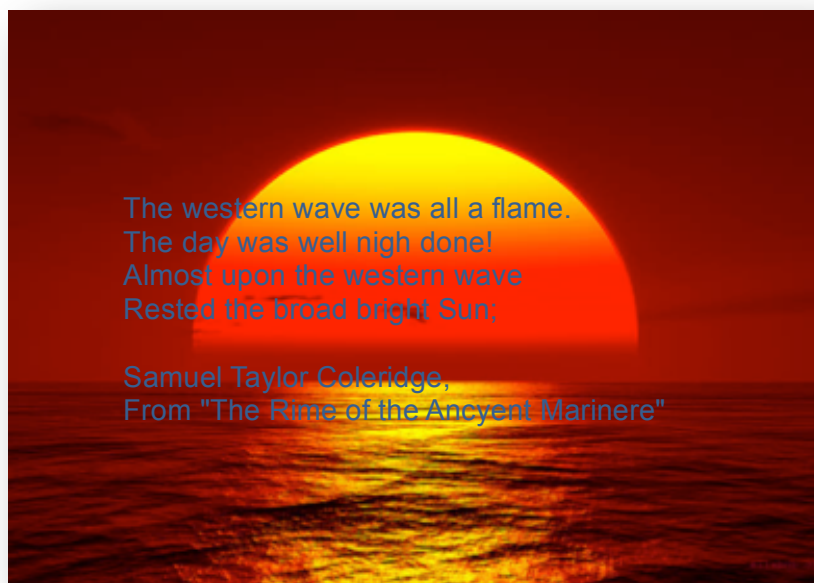
My current idea for the dam is simple enough. It needs filtration so I can put in either a solar—powered filter or add some mussels. Mussels are my favourite as they can filter the water more or less continuously forever. I don't know if they can cope so the sheer brute force of technology is my other option. Possibly both. The other reason for mussels is that they filter out some of the nasties in the water. Bioaccumulation can work in our favour if done correctly. Although if there is something undesirable, the mussels won't be fit to eat.

The whole idea is to keep the water clear enough for fish. I'm not sure how much silt fish can handle but I figure I'll give them the best chance I can. I'm thinking of sleepy cod as they seem to be easy to catch and are nice to eat. Eel or catfish also sound good but they are harder to catch. Ideally I would have a fish that looks after itself and will breed happily even after the rains bring the silt.

A beehive is the big one. I have never looked after bees but that is half the fun. They will be fascinating to watch and I like the idea of having my own honey. I am going to visit a friend's hives and I look forward to learning. Bees can do the tedious business of nectar collection and I'll just skim some off the top like the best of corrupt cops. I once tried to make honey myself but all I did vomit nectar onto the kitchen bench.

I also want to build a hand pump from the dam to the garden. There's no reason for this, it just sounds like a fun project (I do a lot of things because I can or to see if I can—it drives my wife nuts sometimes).

Smaller projects include rebuilding the chook dome. It is hard to move the current one so my new design will disassemble and be moved in pieces. I like this idea because I can put star pickets into the corners of the garden and slot the



dome straight onto them. When the dome is not in use, pre-built fencing with PVC pipes on the ends will slide onto the star—pickets to enclose the garden.

The orchard, as mentioned grows slowly as do the trees. I would like a

variety of apples, some limes and more mulberries and lychees. Others will be added as they come to mind. They take years to become ready so I had better get started on them right away. We are also planting vines along the fence to add some privacy (and fruit) and the garden beds will increase in number (if nothing else, to reduce the amount of grass to mow).

I think solar panels will be next combined with knowledge of how to (safely) cut the link to the main grid if I no longer want to share. Batteries and an electric stove will be added if I feel peak oil is near.

I have lots of plans for our home. I hope they are not dreams. Clearly our journey hasn't ended. I hope it will never end. There's always another project to plan, something new to learn. I care for the planet because it is beautiful. I love beauty because it is true. Science gives me truth so, by inference, planning the next phase of our journey means learning how to do it and that makes the world a prettier place.

There is truth all around us and as I build, grow or generally tinker with the world to make it a slightly better place, I learn a little bit more about the world and take another step on that journey to make it prettier. I love discovering new things...hell, one day I may even discover something no one else knows.

I look forward to a day when I can pick apples from the trees or relive my childhood by eating mulberries until my lips turn purple. Quiet, away from it all, it is enough. I do worry about where the rest of the world is going. I may be wrong, I may be pessimistic but as I watch the clumsy landing of a pheasant coucal or a red—belly basking in the sun, I can't help but think that even if my fears for society are wrong, I still made the right choice.

‘In the end, we all have a clock counting down and you can’t buy more time.’

Ryan Mitchell TheTinyLife.com

My name is Ryan Mitchell, I am 28 and run TheTinyLife.com. It has been an interesting journey to where we are today.

It all started by getting fired, yup, that’s right, fired. Back then I found myself facing layoffs at my job; I was a recruiter. That is when the economy took a turn for the worst. I found myself with no job, no car, had to move home, newly single, was uninsured and didn’t qualify for unemployment. It happened so fast that I could barley believe it; that is when I found Tiny Houses.

Luckily for me I was able to get a position very quickly, but during my short time unemployed the reality and gravity of how we approach things from a housing perspective is precarious at best when considering the volatility of the job market.

During those two months of being unemployed I did a lot of introspection and re-evaluating of my life and where I wanted it to go. It was this thinking that primed me for living simply. After spending a few hours looking for jobs that day, I was surfing around the web and came upon a photo of a Tiny House. I thought they were kind of neat, I had always had this affinity for alternative housing, but there was something different about Tiny Houses. To be honest I didn’t think too much of it until later I found myself on a Tiny House website. That’s when I had my a—ha! moment.

Here I was realizing that the system I was taught to go by, had essentially failed me. I had done everything “right.” I went to High School, was awarded Boy Scout’s highest rank of Eagle, I had an impressive list of extracurricular activities, which got me into college. Four years later, I graduated with my bachelors and was awarded the Research Scholar’s award. I was quickly accepted into a Masters program, which I did well in. I landed contract after contract, making way more than I should have right out the gate. But what did it really amount to? Was I happy? Did I find value in it? Was it something I wanted to do for the rest of my life?

I was looking at Tiny Houses not just as a downsized living space, but as a lifestyle which circumvented the pitfalls of the typical framework. I began to realize that it was not about material things. It was what mattered: Relationships, Time, Freedom, & Self Sufficiency. You must love the life you live. You must love those you live it with. You must have time to be in the moment. In the end, we all have a clock counting down and you can’t buy more time. I realized my initial approach was flawed, it did not support what truly mattered.

So that’s how it started.

‘Each individual has a vital leadership role to play.’

Chris Harries

As a young man I read *The Limits to Growth* in 1972 when it was hot off the press and was convinced by its clear logic. Ever since then I’ve been puzzled as to why it is so darned difficult for millions of people—even many who are educated to high levels in science and economics—to understand the most basic of arithmetic concepts: you can’t keep drawing on a finite system without eventually exhausting it.

To this day I remain puzzled by that social conundrum, especially since failure to grasp that bald fact of life has brought our society—with its fixation on growth—to a crisis point. It seems that denial and rationalisation are intrinsic to human psychology and conclude that it is those deep—seated human foibles that have to be challenged head on if we are to draw back from the brink.

Anyway, it seemed that being moral about what politicians and business leaders ought to do is naively hypocritical if we are not also prepared to address our personal imprint on this finite planet. Put simply, if environmental destruction is caused by the millions of decisions that we Earth citizens make each day, then a bleedingly obvious moral thing to do is to moderate our own daily lifestyle decisions. (This does not mean we ignore society’s power structures, but it does mean that we recognise that each individual has a vital leadership role to play.)

In earnest pursuit of that belief axiom, I’ve always tried to mix political activism (what “they” ought to do) with living sustainably (what “I” ought to do) in the four decades since that time. What “I” ought to do is not as easy as it seems, as anybody who tries soon finds out, because we are confronted by a huge array of physical and psychological barriers that get in the way... not enough time... not enough know—how... disapproval from friends and family. A multitude of such external barriers get in the way, then there are our own demons... our consumer desires... procrastination... even understandable desires like wanting to go and explore the world via jet aircraft.

Home truth: nobody can afford to be smug.

Year by year I’ve tried to explore those multitudinous barriers and find ways to confront them and in that endeavour recently managed to win for my community a government grant – so that we could workshop with our peers what stops the average well meaning citizen from living more sustainably. Illuminating stuff!

Switch back to the 1980s when my daily routine meant going home late evenings to the leafy green Hobart suburb of Fern Tree. An evening bus plied the route hourly back then but I was invariably the only passenger. Just me and my 10

tonne bus! I enjoyed the peaceful chauffer—driven ride but with a nagging concern that those evening services could not be very environmentally sustainable, nor financially sensible for Metro. Sure enough they were later discontinued. The stark irony is that Fern Tree, in the foothills of Mount Wellington, is no average suburb. As a middle class, well educated demographic Fern Tree is as deep green as you can get, boasting the greenest polling booth in Australia. Cars are us.

Well, that early experience introduced me to the fact that the relationship between good environmental behaviour and good intent is heavily distorted by relative wealth. Later on I was to find that disposable income is arguably the most powerful barrier for my own educated, middle class demographic set – i.e. that class of people who are most convinced that we are in deep trouble.

Now let's step forward a few years to 2012. Behaviour change has by now become widely commented on even in media. Power utilities, NGOs and government service providers almost fall over each other to give liberal advice on how we can live more sustainably... how to improve your home... how to drive economically... what products can save you energy and money and so forth. I've partaken in many of those educational programs and wouldn't decry them, but generally they skim the surface. After a while I found them too prone to fostering shallow behaviour changes – changing light bulbs without fundamentally changing society. We live in a crazy, half way era when people, with the very best of intentions, do totally contradictory things. Put in a little vegetable garden then jet off on a whimsical holiday half way across the world. Install an efficient shower head one day then the next day make a decision to enlarge an already enormous home.

Professionals label these contradictory behaviours as 'cognitive dissonance', a term that describes our brain's remarkable ability to do things that flout our sense of ethics whilst allowing us to feel okay about it.

Well that's an area for deep psychologists. But I try to look at this phenomenon at a practical level. By observing my own life and that of colleagues I came to an early conclusion that we have an undisclosed and disquieting problem. In a nutshell: Once a person earns a higher disposable income than what is required to provide for his / her basic needs it is well nigh impossible to live within nature's means. A bit like the camel passing through the eye of a needle, you could say.

To challenge that notion we introduced discussions on money into our local community workshops. We asked the question: "To what extent is money a barrier to living more sustainably?" The most common responses affirmed that yes, it's an issue. But the devil is in the detail. Most people believe that they need more money to live more sustainably. More money to invest in solar panels, or a Prius car or double glazing and such. People on lower incomes often reported that lack of money put them at a distinct environmental disadvantageous to those who are wealthier than themselves. Almost nobody reports the reverse, that having money is a major barrier.

It's a sobering thought to put this money thing into a real context:

- 1) Per capita, Australian society is amongst wealthiest in the world.
- 2) Per capita, our environmental footprint also tops the world.
- 3) In the light of these two facts, how ironical that we hold on to a deep seated cultural belief that we need to be even more wealthy in order to be more environmental!

Delving deeper we find that disposable income as a barrier is a somewhat embarrassing, taboo subject. After all, who wants to talk about their money in the bank or the personal debts that they've racked up? Or how having money tempts us into those snap decisions that undermine all our very best efforts at trying to do the right thing.

On exploring this issue further, we find a typical behavioural pattern emerges. The same experience is played out again and again. Disposable income – i.e. the background knowledge that we can afford something – eats away at our resolve and in time we relent and spend it on a not so environmental behaviour.

To repeat: Once a person earns a higher disposable income than what is required to provide for his / her basic needs it is well nigh impossible to live within nature's means.

Once the money subject is broached it's not too hard to have a fruitful discussion about this and compare experiences. An interesting side argument that often comes up is: How then can I dispose of wealth environmentally? Even that's not a black and white issue. There's a stark difference between spending, say, \$1,000 on a piece of artwork or buying a plane ticket, but even when money is expended on lower impact items it then feeds into the money economy and from there its circulation is beyond our control. All the same, there's probably good scope for a productive conversation on environmentally wiser ways to expend money.

Perhaps a more fruitful discussion is to look at the inverse relationship between the two most significant barriers that middle class Australia faces:

- 1) 'not—enough—time' and
- 2) 'excess—disposable—income'.

Nearly every householder reports that we are trapped in a speeded up society and as a result there's not enough time in their day to do all the things that they would really like to do. Like walking their kids to school or growing their own veggies, or managing a compost heap, or getting down to insulating their windows. For many citizens there's not even enough time to bend down and turn off that vital power point. Perceived lack of time is reported as the biggest daddy of them all. Excess wealth probably ranks second (albeit this barrier is often not recognised or admitted). For most people, these two barriers are joined at the hip, so to speak, and it is best to treat them in tandem: One balances the other. If

we choose to earn a bit less we normally have more time at our disposal to do the things we would really like to do.

When that symbiotic relationship is brought into discussions many people find that a re—assessment of their life's priorities can deliver

- 1) a lower environmental footprint in tandem plus
- 2) a less stressful, more fulfilling lifestyle.

As an addendum to this story my family was confronted by the money dilemma when Mr Rudds \$1,000 stimulus paycheque arrived in the mail a couple of years ago. The rationale behind those paycheques was that we good citizens should all go out and spend up on goodies and thus give the Australian economy a boost. Moral dilemma: what to do?

In the end we made a decision to expend the free money by paying for the mass—production of a bumper sticker that read, “Live Simply so that others may simply live.”

The printing man got some money and yes, it still helped to stimulate the Australian economy, but we hope the salient message helps to compensate a little. The sticker is very popular down here.

[The slogan originated from Gandhi, but the message seems to particularly fit these uncertain times as thinking people try to come to terms with consumerism and the fate of our world.]

‘I belong here, I’m built into this place and its part of me.’

Ted Trainer (Part 1)

Many now recognise that the alarming global problems confronting us cannot be solved unless we move from a society committed to affluent “living standards” and economic growth to one based on very frugal, self—sufficient and non—affluent ways. Unfortunately at present most people would see this as involving accepting great deprivation and hardship in order to save the planet. This is totally mistaken: The Simpler Way would not just be a liberation from the stress, insecurity, over—work and other problems inflicted on us by consumer society, it would make possible a far higher quality of life for all.

Following is an indication of how enjoyable things could be. Mostly I describe the way I spend my day as a homesteader—peasant on my isolated bush block. But my quality of life could be much higher if I lived on the edge of the localised, highly self—sufficient and self—governing community The Simpler Way envisages, and these benefits are noted later in Part 2.

It is important to stress that it is not being argued that all should live as I do, or that this is necessary to solve global problems. My preferred lifestyle would not suit most people as it is rather isolated, and involves coping with a somewhat difficult site. At present our access problem with the local council obliges me to be the only family member on the property most of the time. Above all my lifestyle is more frugal than most people would want, but it will not be necessary for people in general to live on my low levels of non—renewable resource consumption when we transition from consumer—capitalist society. Nevertheless I hope the account indicates the kinds of benefits that all could derive from living in simpler ways.



Wake up early, but not very early. Listen to the birds. Look through the big windows to the light in the trees. I could lie there all day if I chose to, but so many interesting things to get at. Chat to the dawg and give him his breakfast. Put the porridge on to simmer. Get changed into scruffy old clothes; in winter just crawl into heavy stuff and change at morning tea time. Almost never buy new clothes; repairing and patching the many old ones on the shelf in the shed is a much—valued hobby, especially for winter nights by the fire.

Porridge ready; take pot, spoon and dawg for a walk. Where to today? Let’s have a yarn with the chickens. Happy friendly lot, eager for their breakfast. We discuss various issues. Notice that their gate needs tightening; must come back with a spanner. The local fox is a wizard at finding the weak spots. You fix promptly or he’s in and got the lot in one go. Homesteaders fix as soon as they see a problem, or it will be a bigger problem when you get around to it. You give thanks to yourself when that pipe fitting you put in decades ago unscrews

because you had the sense to grease it well back then. Things that are not in good shape are an aesthetic affront; they are ugly, not ship—shape. You wouldn't want anyone to see that you have a crumby fence or a leaking tap. You want to fix them up. That's how we should look at our social machinery, as mechanisms that we feel an urge to fix if they're not working well. But in consumer society you don't have to fix anything; at best you phone the council or the expert. Our new local communities will have to be run by us, by responsible citizens who want to make our systems run well for the good of all.

You never get everything fixed properly, but it is good to walk away from something you have got going again. I find that homesteading is very much about watching for things that need repairing, or improving, or totally remaking. It's about design and rethinking and revising, getting your devices and gadgets and systems into good shape. It took me four years to get the open fire to work well; now it's a dream. But after several decades I still don't have a satisfactory water supply system for our difficult site – and nothing is more important than water. My home—made washing machine (70 watt car fan motor, 5 metre long chassis, 2 metre diameter rickety flywheel) is now marvellous (and connects to two water pumps, and will soon cut firewood.) Doing the washing is a cheer up. Dump a few things in, flick the switch, slosh slosh, and go off to some nearby job for five minutes.

Meander back towards the kitchen, detour to carry some empty pots to the nursery, enjoy the garden, the sunrise through the big gums on the river flat, see two more jobs to put on the list (is there room?), move the PV panels to face the sun, pick up some fallen sticks to take to the kindling pile, stop to kick a ball for dawg, turn on a drip irrigation tap, enjoy looking at the garden. There, several little jobs done while having breakfast; it all adds up. Use up all the scraps, including left over bits of time, and do two things at once if you can. Notice a little fog, so it will soon be a sunny day. When you have lived in one place since you were three you get to know its habits and moods. There are many ways you become connected to your patch. See those big fellows there, 20 metre spotted gums. I planted them decades ago.

That's earth bonding. I belong here, I'm built into this place and its part of me. After decades here I know its soils, animals, moods, problems, delights. I know the kinds of fires and floods and autumn sun sets it brings. I look forward to the coming season, open fires in the winter, the variety of colours in the Autumn skies, the calm cool relief of Autumn after getting through the hot summer with its water shortages, that brilliant yellow sunlight on the glistening gum trunks that exists for only half an hour a year if you are lucky, when the low sun drops below the cloud to the west after a late afternoon shower. I could write a long list: the first crackling of the Sea Eagles or the Plovers on the river mud flats, evening call of the black swans, the yip yip of the unseen sugar gliders after dark, the first black snake sighting in the Spring, the smell of the rain, the rich soil it has taken me thirty years to build up in the southern paddock. A peasant lives pretty close to Nature. Bonds to place and community can take a long time to develop, they require patience and long distant future thinking. In our poor soils those minute spotted gum seedlings just up in the greenhouse will take thirty

years to become self—respecting trees. We had to drop a big old ribbon gum across the chicken pens; he'll rot away in a decade or so, enriching the soil and producing worms and slaters for the poultry.

My house is the best in the world. It was built from scrap army materials in 1946, the floors creak, there's no new paint anywhere to be seen, and it's typically judged to be spooky, because of the vines all over it, and drab. But it is sufficient. I don't need anything more expensive or elaborate or new or stylish – and I would not want to live in a house that was. The local real estate agent and the council would see my house as way beyond due for KDR (“knock down and rebuild”). They don't understand that my house is superior to theirs, mainly because it is resource and dollar cheap, recycled, humble, full of history and meaning, much loved and appreciated. In fact I feel guilty having such a good one when several million people don't have a house of any kind.

My mulch barrow is another good example of this principle. It is dilapidated, rusty, weather—ruttled handles, holes in the bottom, wonky, scruffy. And it's drab too – but it is perfectly sufficient. It is a great mulch barrow. Why would I want a more expensive or stylish or painted one? And I'm saving resources keeping this one going.

My clothes are the same, all tattered, darned, odd socks, lace—less shoes (or laced with wire), winter warm gloves and beanies sewn from socks and old jumpers – and not just sufficient but custom—made comfy and durable and repairable. I kept one jumper going for 35 years, until a bushfire got it hanging on the line. I think I have not worn a suit or a tie more than once in 20 years. It would be hard to find any unchipped crockery in the cupboard. I trim my own scruffy hair via the mirror. I have only one pair of going—out shoes. This is of great revolutionary significance; growth and greed society cannot be transcended until the mainstream comes to opt for what is good enough, not for what is the best, most stylish, swish, new and expensive. They see luxury as attractive. They admire and envy Bill Gates house, built for \$100 million I believe. It's not a matter of accepting deprivation and second class things in order to save the planet; it's about coming to see things that are old, unpainted, repaired, home made and rough—and—ready as nicer, admirable, and superior. In general I see new things as morally disturbing and indeed unattractive, repulsive. Give me a well—worn old jumper or chisel or garden fork any day.

This is the problem of “standards”. People in consumer society think they have good standards. But what they mean by a “nice” house is just an expensive house, and it's one that is resource and ecologically appalling; it's far too big, not built to last and badly designed. Their standards lead them to purchase clothes, cars, entertainment, holidays etc. that are far too dollar and environmentally costly.

My hands are another good example. They are gnarled, puffy, scabs and split skin, jagged nails, and ingrained with irremovable dirt, rust and windmill grease. I like the way shop assistants recoil with horror when I reach for my change; I say to myself, “Let's see your hands – hmm, not very self—sufficient are you?”

My hands are the best part of me. They can clean out a bucket, hold a pen, swing an axe, pat dawg. But, another design fault here. I only have two and when you're up a windmill at night in a gale clinging on with one hand and holding a bolt through a loose blade with the other you really need a third to operate the spanner. Lots of jobs are three—hand jobs unfortunately.

Just walking around is one of the homesteader's delights...looking at and enjoying your patch. I walk all day, back and forward across the maybe 3 ha that keeps me busy. But often at lunchtime I'll take a sandwich and go for a stroll, around where I've been several times already that day, but this time slowly and just to look and enjoy. This has the added benefit of coming across a plant just starting to flower, or things that will need fixing soon, or seedlings to transplant or places that could be tidied up, or landscaping ideas. The homesteader's most valuable tools are his boots.

So you can understand why I never go on holidays. I "work" here every day of the year, except when I go to the city (once a week by train to the part—time job). But of course it isn't work. In fact the work—leisure distinction has no meaning here. Just about everything I do is productive but it's only done because I enjoy it and would chose to do it even if I won the lottery. Winning the lottery would be such a distracting bother. I don't need any more money. I'd have to find some subversive cause to give it to.

I listen to the pocket radio most of the day. That keeps me in touch just about enough with the world out there. Never buy a newspaper, but I do read a lot of books, and current affairs and back grounders via the net and subscriptions to periodicals. I use the laptop about two to three hours a day, mostly to type and edit. I've never played a game on a computer, or used a credit card, or bought a new car, or sought promotion. I have bought one suit and gone on two holidays and had two paid jobs and lived in one house since I was five years old and would never travel overseas...that is seriously morally problematic. I fret about driving as far as the shops.

Now where is that job list jotted down last night? To me life is about jobs, making things, growing things, fixing things, looking after the animals, planning, designing, revising gadgets and systems. Others might have a different view of the good life but to me it has to be very active and productive. I realise this is challengeable and actually links to one of my faults, which is not being good enough at appreciating things, taking the time to smell the roses, being content with what I've done or with my good fortune. I do a bit too much doing and not enough being. But that's another job I'm working on.

I often start the day with some fire break clearing, to the west where the danger side is. Gets me some exercise and warmed up, and a barrow load of mulch to trundle over to the vegetable patch. I compost the juicy weeds and make another stack with the woody stuff out on the sandy paddock I'm gradually enriching. It rots down slowly there, making homes for bugs and worms and retaining moisture. In a year or two I'll plant more grass on the far side of the heap and pile the new loads on the near side, gradually moving this soil—enriching

machine to the East. Long ago almost nothing grew out there in the sand but now we're on the way to more nice pasture for Billy the goat and Smokey the Shetland. They are our chief fire officers. Billy eats the tough weedy things, and Smokey deals with the grass, and between them they keep the vegetation in that fire—danger area low. That's a permaculture principle; get the job done by something that also does many other things. Smokey is an interesting person to have around, he can carry things, he increases the leisure resources of the place – and he produces highly treasured manure for the garden. One of our most prized leisure activities is taking a couple of buckets to collect it.

Onto the main event; working on the new pump, again a small car fan motor geared down by bicycle chains to low revs driving a water wheel to lift grey water to garden level. I use four or five types of water, and they all involve pumps and taps and fixing. And remaking and improving from time to time. The reticulation is via polypipe and T's and elbows I braze from 12 mm copper tube. So, carpentry and metal work, and a little 12 volt wiring, for an hour or so, using mostly hand tools, listening to the radio. My best tools are 70 years old, saws, chisels and planes with good steel in their blades, unlike the one's they sell today. Wish I knew a bit more about blacksmithing, especially how to harden and temper. For years I've been trying to get around to making a good set of wood turning chisels, from the old car springs stored in one of the sheds. There are five shed roofs out the back, covering all sorts of recycled treasure, and connected up with gutters and pipes to add to the rainwater collection area. Mostly I can make something new without buying materials; just scrounge through the old bits and pieces, much of it collected from rubbish tips and roadsides. Then there are the resources the bush provides, wattle saplings and bark for binding, plenty of earth and clay for pottery and building, wood for bush carpentry, vines for basket weaving, red ochre pebbles from the ridge top for mosaic work, reeds, and further up the hill the toffee coated laterite stones for paving and other stone work. I'm bringing up bracken from the swamp to make cushions for the tea house sofa.

Oops, done it again. Race over to turn off that drip tap I forgot. Major design flaw here; brain was fitted with a sub—prime memory. I keep a piece of light chain in my left pocket and hang it around my neck when I need to remember something like a tap turned on. Trouble is I usually forget to put it on, or forget what it's on to remind me about.

Jess drops in to borrow a drill and to chat. We set up a time for her friends to muck around in the pottery tomorrow. We prepared some clay a week ago, dug up from our favourite pit about a kilometre away in the bush. Almost purple red, so it will be interesting to see what colour comes out in the firing. The pottery was built from that clay. I must remember to check the forge and the furnace out there too they might like to get them going. We sometimes do candle making, aluminium casting and paper making on the benches under the Scribbly gum.

I do many jobs at once. Usually you can only take any one some distance before you find something you need to rethink at the next morning tea, or you have to wait until the cement sets enough, or you realise you need to buy bolts you don't

have in the shed. This means there's a lot of variety in a day. Fancy having to do one thing all day, five days a week. So while doing the pump I'm happy to side track into little tasks here and there as they catch my eye, putting the high tank pump on, tidying up the pipe rack, pulling out some weeds, dismantling something. If you are walking from A to B you look for anything that needs to be taken towards B from around A.

Nearly morning teatime. Check the new honey cabinet; for solar melting the honey out of the frames taken from the bee hive. It's working pretty well, but still gets too hot in full sun and melts the wax. Must remember to re—think at morning tea. Move the solar panels on the way to the kitchen, and switch on the inverter at the battery bank to charge a few devices. The sun's now out fully so I should try to get some of that drilling and sawing done later, via the 12 volt electric motors. In my life after next I'll do an electronics course and finally make an automatic sun—tracker for those panels.

Morning tea; nice to sit on the veranda, dawg on knee, book, manuscript and scrap paper pile handy so new jobs, repairs to do, and brilliant ideas can be jotted down. Feet are already keen for a rest. Gaze out at the forest, the Forest Red gum that's as old as I am, the new pencil pines and the pansies recently put inside the stone path border. Simple stone work is another of my highly prized activities. Over many years I have collected several tonnes of broken up council concrete pavements in the old trailer and these are now footpaths, walls, bridges and shed foundations. When we dig up most of the suburban streets for gardens we'll have so much fabulous building material.

Daydreaming rudely interrupted by the arrival of Chook, the Currawong. Have to get up and go into the kitchen for sultanas to throw to him one by one, from half a metre now. I'm creeping up on him, with the goal of getting him to take them from my hand. I marvel again at how he can pick them out of the air. He inspects, decides and delicately catches each one, all within a split second. If I try to dud him with a bit of flatbread he'll check it out but let it go through.

I find homesteading very intellectually stimulating. There are always things to think about, problems to nut out, designs to improve, especially to do with gadgets and garden, and observations to reflect on and think on from. I try to remember to look up the books in our library at lunch time or at night, to find out a bit more about something that caught my interest during the day. Listening to ABC radio prods a lot of thinking too. I cannot understand why anyone would watch TV, or listen to music all day, let alone play IT games; a criminal waste of the gift of life, and a refusal to think about things that matter. I detest the massive preoccupation with trivia, celebrities, sport, pop idols, fashion, spectacles etc. etc. which is at the core of the pathology bringing down consumer society. Why don't they get a garden?

It would be misleading to say that I live in my house. I live in my patch, in and out of the house, the shed, the gardens. I walk all day, zig—zagging across the gardened area and paddocks we occupy most of the time (within 100 ha of wilderness, containing a Heritage Listed 10 ha open wetland.)

Home—made honey in the tea. Should check the beehive soon. Time to work on that manuscript revision, but it's hard to get to it with all the autumn sunshine on the bush and the gum tree trunks down the slope to the wetland to gaze at, and the chatter of the parrots in the eucalypt tops. My feet up on a stack of nice dry firewood. Now firewood is real economics. It's "oikos", to do with running a household well. Plenty of firewood in is wealth and security, and a sense of self—sufficiency, competence, indeed power. I did that, I can provide, I have the fire wood stacks well organised for winter – and it didn't have any cost in dollars or non—renewable resources. Will I read a bit more of that new book, or edit another page, or do a bit more sewing, patching up that beanie...or just sit?

Apologise to dawg and finally persuade him to get down off knee. Rinse out a few things in hot water from the solar panel. It should be moved a bit higher because it's now partly in the shade in winter. That Grey gum shades the house and is getting bigger, but we'd never cut him down; he's part of the family now. One of my best paintings is of his trunk.

After morning tea is always for religious ritual, that is, vegie gardening. Does wonders for the spirit. Check the greenhouse first; not much more than watering to do really, but it's a favourite place so it's not difficult to find an excuse to dither around in there. Lots of re—potting overdue in the water trays outside. I like water plants and I'll be making more concrete tubs before long. I make them, from tray size up to 6,000 litre tanks, by plastering cement over chicken wire and 6 mm rods around a tin form. Slow process, sometimes add a bit each day for months, but the tanks are very strong and will last forever.

Rake a bed level for the cabbage and lettuce seedlings that can go out soon. Smell that rich soil. A compost heap was broken down and spread here the other day ... fabulous wealth. Accidentally dig up a fat worm, so relocate him. He's got as much right to enjoy life as I have. Is he conscious? Of course he is. How does he think? He does make decisions. What the hell is consciousness anyway? I'm made up of material created in supernovae, so how does that stuff generate consciousness? The peasant life is full of challenges. Water a few things. Pick some odds and ends for lunch – parsley, garlic and mint, plus a couple of chokoes and some of the last outside beans. We will soon have more in the greenhouse.

Look at that tidy row of spuds. I like tidiness – a bit. I like mess too – a lot. Most of the garden, and almost the entire workshop, looks like a mess, but never confuse order and tidiness. My workshop works well, it produces a lot, and I know where to find things. A highly productive forest garden won't look neat and tidy. Tidying up takes time, and that's scarce stuff.

Nice to go back to the house carrying some produce. Put the chokoes up on the pantry shelf beside the pumpkins, which are such works of art we hate to cut them up. We still don't have a very well stocked pantry and that's a major goal. It testifies to a well run household economy, and to many enjoyable hours that went into the bottling, checking the solar fruit dryer, threading the onions on strings, writing the labels and it says, look at all the skills and knowledge we

have accumulated, now being able to do all this. Remaking the solar dryer is moving up the short list of possibles to go on the priority—five list of jobs waiting to go on the current list – which is under the urgent list which is under the must—do—today list.

I should point out that the main reasons why there's so much to do here are because it's a difficult site, with poor soil and scarce water, a lot of time and energy is going into developing Pigface Point as an educational site, and because we have to provide all the electricity, fire wood, house water, garden water, and waste recycling for the main house and the caretaker's cottage, as well as care for the animals, maintain entry tracks, deal with bushfires and floods, etc.

Gardening is very much about organisation and responsibility, making sure you have things done in time, a steady stream of seedlings coming on, the beds ready, things watered well enough. It's difficult to avoid the gaps. This year I left it a bit too long between carrot plantings so there won't be many for a month or so. I like the paper work, at cuppa time, listing new seeds to buy, when to plant what, looking through records for clues about how to organise better, putting notes in the big file.

Back to the shed but this time to do that drilling that's been sitting there waiting for a sunny day. The other night before tea I marked and centre punched all the parts for the pump brackets that will bolt on half way up the windmill tower (it's 17 metres high and home—made.) I did all the 12—volt electric wiring for the house, shed, pumps and the caretaker's cottage (which I build with hand tools in 6 months spare time, for about \$16,000 in today's dollars.) I must also run the electric pumps while the sun is high, to top up the tanks. I do all the plumbing. I can cut glass, solder, braze, weld, paint, sculpt, draw, spin, sew, blacksmith, build a house, swing an axe, make ship models...well enough but not with great expertise. I am a Jack of All Trades and that's what we'll want around the new communities, people who can make many things, grow many things, make do and improvise, trouble shoot, get it going, patch it up. There's a place for experts and professionals of course, but most of the things we'll need done to live well despite the intense scarcity of post—consumer society will be done by ordinary people with a wide range of practical skills.

Food is the best illustration. In consumer society it's produced mostly by people in suits with tertiary qualifications sitting at screens, managing gigantic warehouses, ships, insurance companies, trucking networks, packaging corporations...while depleting energy, resources, soils and ecosystems. Ridiculous! We can produce far better food than they can, just by home gardening, community edible landscapes and local mini—farms which won't use a computer or any diesel or packaging or advertising.

Lunch starts with a big bits—falling—out—everywhere sandwich mostly made up of home made goodies, including too much copped up society garlick and parsley and lettuce and cucs. Gingerly set it on a plate, call for dawg, and set out to ramble. Where to this time? Maybe down to the swamp, detouring to the new

Blue Gum forest on the way back to see how they're going. They haven't changed much since the last visit, two days ago, but they appreciate being admired again. We have lots of arts and crafts to potter at, although I do far less than I should. In addition to the main events, painting, drawing and model making, there's sculpture or modelling in plaster or wax, lead light window making, basket making, candles, mosaics, concrete garden pots, blacksmithing, paper making, wood turning, and casting of lead and aluminium using our mini—furnace. We've also made our wood and fibreglass canoes.

Another major interest is landscaping, continually adding to the garden and the bush paths, ornamental pots, ponds, statues, water tubs and trays, castles caves and pagodas. One of our pagodas is about five metres long and we have double storey one some seven metres tall. There's a flying fox and a seven metre (cement) crocodile. There is no limit to the things we want to put into the main Peter Pan area, including a big cave with elves at work, a pirate ship made from the old launch we have, tree houses and Tarzan ropes. A sign near the statue of Peter Pan says he's laughing at us for working so hard when we could spend most of our time playing as he does.

After another go at the pump I get onto the new wringer at the washing machine. It's been quite a puzzle, getting the top roller to turn and not slip while under a lot of weight. I got the knock—out solution at about 3 am one night, and jotted it down on the pile of scrap paper beside the bed for such purposes. Use a bike chain around sprockets on top and bottom rollers and down to a pulley with two house bricks hanging from it. Lots of old bike wheels and chain in the top shed.

No wind for the mills today, so a trip to switch on the house high water pump. Climb up and check the level in the big tank. Must fit a float indicator on it someday. I realise that the cottage roof is getting nearer to needing a repaint. Clean out some leaves from the gutters. Coming back through the vegie garden I stop off to hoe the spuds and weed a bit more of the carrot patch. They are slow to get going so it's always a time consuming business getting them up to mulching height.

Now, let's braze those copper fittings for drip irrigating the new Kiwi Fruit in the greenhouse ready to be planted out.

Sometimes I focus on a few main premeditated jobs through the day, or between lunch and afternoon tea, and sometimes I just potter with no particular job in mind, just going from one to another as I come across something else. I rarely work at one thing for more than half a day. About a quarter to a third of a home day is spent reading or typing or editing, and I go to my city desk for a whole day once a week. Travel there is by bike, train and bus, meaning more reading time. So I get plenty of variety and apply a wide range of skills every day.

Although I'm not good at remembering or appreciating what's been done, a major source of satisfaction is the sense of "progress", of slowly getting the place into better shape. I'm usually too preoccupied with the present, especially with the snags, breakdowns, slowness, but from time to time I look up and recognise

that I have got things done. Economists talk about “discounting the future”; unfortunately I have a strong tendency to discount the past, to not think much about or give myself credit for what’s been achieved. We keep a diary of photos and notes on Pigface Point, beginning in 1942 when we bought the block, and it sobers me up when I occasionally glance through it.

Progress is a strand in my unrepentant Enlightenment mentality. It is very important to see things improving, developing, moving “forward”, systems working better now, bare patches greening up at last, trees thriving, a gate that now works properly. When a problem occurs you ask yourself how can I fix that so that it won’t break down again. Again this is how I think about social systems; if they aren’t working well then that is, among other things, an aesthetic problem—its ugly, so let’s fix them right now.

Trouble is, to fix the gate properly takes more time, and you have to compromise a lot. In fact I think never do anything properly, really satisfactorily...because the only thing that goes smoothly around my patch is time.

Afternoon tea is another sacred ritual, in a seat on the veranda with a different view, but with the same kit of books and papers, and dawg on knee as usual. Feet usually more than ready for a sit down. Thinking about how the jobs are going and revisions that might make sense, what to do before teatime.

I usually try to “knock off” and do some luxury landscape gardening before dark. Often this just means going around with no plan and doing whatever interesting thing I come across. While I’m walking to find the mattock I’ll see something to re-pot, or a spot that could be weeded or a stone I’ve have been meaning to move. By the way there’s a sharp distinction between job categories. Gardening is not classified as a job; it’s a luxurious indulgence you should stop soon and get back to the bench. I never do any art or craft during the day; that’s for after tea, if I’m not typing or reading. I never read just for enjoyment. I read a lot, but I do it in order to find out more about things that I regard as important, sometimes about science or history but mostly to do with the state of the planet. I never read novels – and I don’t approve of people who write them; there are more important things to do. There are a lot of people I can’t approve of. Let’s get back to self-indulgence when that one billion people are not hungry any more.

Sometimes, too rarely though, late in the afternoon I’ll take the kayak 150 metres down to the river and go for a slow paddle into the sunset – dawg between my knees. Fishing is another thing we could do here. But it takes time. Lugging the trolley back up the hill makes me puff a bit. I value huff and puff exercise as I don’t get much during the day. I am conscious of the exercise my day provides and I never regret having to bash away with the axe or dig a hole or lug stones or push the too—full mulch barrow; all that keeps me in better shape. I get a lot of exercise just by plodding through the day, but it’s a bit uneven with too much feet and arms, so I go for a run before tea. Well, maybe it’s a slow jog; well, actually more of a pathetic shuffle. There I am wheezing and spluttering and I look down and there’s dawg walking with a bored look on his face.

What's for dinner. Tucker in all its forms is a big part of the good life. I eat better than a king, but all of my favourite dinners are very simple. Top of my list are a plate of boiled vegies, fried egg with native spinach from the river flat, and oat porridge for breakfast. And I'm a bread addict; nothing beats fresh crusty bread, just out of the oven. I almost never go to a restaurant, or movies. Can't recall when I last went to a party.

Best thing about winter is the open fire. It's taken me years to get a good design and next year I'll work (again) on the 12—volt fan and the ducts to take the warm air from it to the colder parts of the house. These will connect with the hot air solar panel on the roof so that heat can be drawn in on sunny winter mornings. In front of the fire there is a thoroughly evil chair. It destroys my will every time. I'm rather slowed down after tea and I sit on the edge to light the fire then lean back and I'm gone. Can't get up again.

I don't light the fire until I'm a rather cold. On a winter evening I try to do heavier outside jobs before coming in for tea. That keeps me a bit tougher and more robust than I would be if I lived in an air—conditioned house. I think it would be a mistake to be comfortable all the time. It's important to experience (mild) adversity now and then, difficulties, discomfort and inconvenience, because it makes you more appreciative when you get through. When I sink back into that evil chair I think how nice it is and how extremely lucky I am. I get this feeling most strongly when I have a shower; it makes me think about the billion or more people who do not have that luxury. What gets me out of the chair eventually is the water boiling in the big pot I sit on a rack just over the coals, for the daily washing up. In winter that pot also heats up water for the hot water bottles, although sometimes I just leave a house brick on the top of the fireplace to get warm.

After tea I might read or type, listening to the radio. I often do some sewing, usually repairing or making up new bed socks or winter jackets for dawg. Then there is the ship yard, a door opening to a two square metre room where the ship models are made. We are way behind intended production schedule unfortunately, with a tug, three mast barque, trawler, Xebec, schooner and sloop crammed on the bench all suffering from serious and inexcusable neglect.

Last time I estimated my personal expenditure was way below the poverty line. One day working for money each week would be quite enough for me. (I realise most people locked into mortgages etc. couldn't do this now, but after the revolution they will be able to.) I don't have much need to spend money, partly because I wish to live frugally and partly because my patch gives me most of what I want, most obviously things to do all day. I don't use up many of the planet's non—renewable resources. My per capita electricity use is about 8 Watts, probably under 3 percent of the national average. I estimate that the Australian "Footprint" of productive land used, around 8 ha per capita could be cut by 90 percent without people having to be anywhere near as frugal as I choose to be. (See <http://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/tsw/HOWCHEAPLY.htm>)

My days are very long and intense. Too much to do. Always too much to do. How lucky I am to have too much to do. My old friend Sartre got it wrong – it isn't other people that's hell; hell is not having far too much to do. Purpose is everything. Nothing is worse for a human than lacking purpose, being without things one is eager to get at, and consumer society condemns large numbers of people to that fate.

It is good to be tired, sleepy tired. In winter I go to bed like an arctic explorer, with layers of home—sewn beanies, jackets and bed socks. Dawg gets tucked into his basket, then probably the best moment of the day is flopping back on that pillow and relaxing every muscle. Only two more things to do; think back over what we got done in the day, and think about the things I'm eager to get at tomorrow.

Then, drat! Left that last tap on. Grump out into the cold to turn it off.

‘I live on a very low monetary expenditure, but I’m very “rich.”’

Ted Trainer (Part 2)

Now add community

Although I live less than one kilometre through the bush to McMansions suburbia I have no connection with my locality. Thus I have no access to what I believe are the most powerful and abundant sources of a high quality of life, which are to do with living in a self—governing community.

The most obvious benefits of community include access to conversation, advice, help, emotional support, friendship, care, security, skills, interesting people, activities and events. According to The Simpler Way perspective on our global situation a sustainable and just society must be built around highly localised and self—sufficient, cooperative, participatory and self—governing communities, and it must be based on values to do with frugality, friendliness, the public good, giving, and helping others to thrive. (The vision is detailed in my book, *The Transition to a Sustainable and Just Society*, Envirobook, 2010.) These are not options we can take or leave. Unless we organise around these ways and values we will not cope with the coming crisis of scarcity and breakdown. But they also enable liberation and fulfilment. Following are some of the aspects of this vision that would greatly add to the life satisfactions I would get in addition to those my homestead provides.

Contributing to working bees

This most powerful institution can build and run most of the basic things our town or suburb needs, the premises for the bee keeper, the orchards and forests, the ponds and theatres and workshops, and the great cathedral that will be our community centre/workshop/ museum/art gallery/gift and recycling centre/ town hall/parliament house. We will pay most of our local tax in contributions to working bees, by maintaining the parks, windmills, water recycling systems, community forest gardens and edible landscapes, and helping a few professionals to look after old people and teach.

In important ways working bees contradict the economics and culture of consumer—capitalist society. They are cooperative and collectivist. They are about giving. Things are not done for money or profit. The concern is the public good, not individual gain. They build solidarity: a sense of comrades working together for mutual benefit. They reinforce our power, our knowledge that we have the skills, ideas, systems – the capacity and determination to run our town well.

Contributing to the working bees would be a major source of life satisfaction.

Serving on committees

These would monitor and research and organise many aspects of the town's economy and culture, such as energy supply, food supply, water systems, care of old people, the "welfare" of young people, education, leisure, concerts, celebrations and rituals.

Contributing to working bees and committees would build strong cohesion, responsibility, public spirit, concern with the welfare of the town, and thus good citizenship. It would create a sense of mutual interdependence, and the knowledge that we can depend on each other. Community cannot be artificially or quickly created; it can only emerge from working together on mutually important goals that people give to selflessly. I would find it most gratifying to gradually establish a reputation as a good contributor to working bees and other community activities, a reliable, conscientious, helpful and caring, public spirited contributor, a good citizen.

Having access to public wealth

My life would be far richer if I had access to a thriving locality, to a landscape crammed with little firms and farms, drama clubs, co—ops, workshops, ponds, fish farms, mini dairies, quaint architecture, ornamental structures, meditation retreats, skilled crafts people, lakes and forests...that I could use, or just visit and look at. The working bees would stack our habitats with many such things, making it leisure—rich. Then my garden would then be a kilometre across, with an inexhaustible number of things to look at, all fussed over by a thousand manic gardeners.

Enjoying a rich cultural life

My ideal town would have lots of artists, craftspeople, authors, comedians, musicians, magicians, jugglers, dancers, and acrobats – all eager to do their stuff at the free concerts. There would be plenty of painters, potters, blacksmiths, gardeners, poets, astronomers, historians etc. eager to teach me their crafts.

The committees would organise festivals, rituals, celebrations, and adventure and mystery tours, visiting lectures, discussion groups, dances, picnics, etc.

Where would people get the time for all this? They would have about five days a week to devote to their obsessions because on average they'd probably have to work for money about two days a week.

Attending town meetings

In the coming era of intense resource and energy scarcity central governments will be greatly reduced and will not be capable of governing every small town and suburb. We will, at last, (have to) take on the responsibility of governing ourselves. This will be one of the greatest advances in the history of human kind, moving from thousands of years of being governed to the maturity and sense to

govern ourselves. Again this is not optional; unless we master this transition our localised settlements will not work satisfactorily. Our fate will depend heavily on our capacity to manage our own ecosystems, local soils and forests and social systems well.

As the Ancient Greeks understood, having to be involved in self—government brings out the best in us. It makes us think about the public good, take responsibility, realise we must think and plan carefully, because if we don't we will make bad decisions we will be sorry about. Self—government is immensely empowering. We will take pride in knowing that we can run our town well. It would be very satisfying to me to think I was a member of a town that did run well and that I contributed to this.

Above all I would get satisfaction from helping to run my town in ways that provided for all and enabled all to thrive. To begin with we would make sure there was no poverty or unemployment or loneliness or depression, and that everyone had a livelihood, the capacity to make a valued and respected contribution through a job or small business. We would be constantly concerned about what problems people were experiencing and if and when we found a problem we would deal with it. We would make sure no one was struggling. We would not leave everyone's fate to be determined by whether they could beat others in competition for scarce jobs and business opportunities.

Of course nothing like this would be possible unless we scrapped the present economy and replaced it with one in which we deliberately and rationally organised to apply our existing productive capacity to the meeting of needs, in a cooperative and planned way. (In my view it would be possible and desirable to retain much scope for private small firms; the community—controlled economy need not try to run everything. It needs only to be concerned with making sure everyone is provided for and has access to the minimally necessary basics.)

To live in a community that had the sense and the resolve to do these things, to take the control of our own fate out of the hands of distant politicians, corporations and bankers, and to prevent it being determined by "market forces", would be a source of immense satisfaction to me. Again it would be difficult to exaggerate the historical significance of such an achievement, of ordinary people finally refusing to be governed.

Living in the kind of community I have indicated would enable a far greater degree of peace of mind than I have now, knowing that I was living in ways that do not generate global problems.

As I see it, it's an open and shut case. The Simpler Way would not only enable us to live on a minute footprint, and thus to defuse global problems, it would give us a vastly higher quality of life than consumer—capitalist society provides. In the terms of the present economy we would be very "poor", but that would not matter in the least. I live on a very low monetary expenditure, but I'm very "rich", even without the great benefits that community would add to my peasant—homestead experience. We would have security, support, perfect food, equity,

beautiful landscapes, comrades, a society we could be proud of, time to devote to art, gardening, learning, or just sitting in the sun...and freedom from over—work, and fear of unemployment, poverty, loneliness, stress and depression. The paradox of course is that these riches cannot be gained unless the quest for endlessly increasing material wealth is abandoned. Our main task is to get people to see how delightful their days could so easily be.

Homemaking, the radical choice

Rhonda Hetzel

<http://down---to---earth.blogspot.com.au>

There is something quite magnificent about taking on the role of homemaker. Whether you're older or younger, male or female, there because you choose it or just filling in time until an outside job comes along, homemaking has the potential to change you in profound ways. When I first came back to my home, I hadn't thought much about housekeeping. I guess I looked on it in the same way our society views it - mundane, monotonous and menial. I eventually dived into my housework with open arms and since that day I've felt honoured and fortunate to be able to call myself a homemaker.



So what is it that deeply divides opinion? How can one group see it as a beautiful and significant way to live and others view it with absolute dread. Why do some see it as a great help to the family finances and others as not contributing to the family at all?

When I first started housekeeping here in my own home, I realised that I'd never really understood the role of the homemaker. I'd seen my mother working in our family home, stretching every dollar to make ends meet. She cooked and did the housework, my father went to work at two jobs and eventually mum got an outside job as well. A lot of people my age saw their mothers go off to work for the first time and I suppose it devalued the work the mothers did at home. Instead of seeing my own mother's move into the paid workforce for what it was - a financial move towards a better life, as a teenager, I thought she wanted to work outside the home because it was more exciting.

No one ever told me about the feeling of control you get when you work in your home as if it's your own small business. We're told that housekeepers don't do much, that they have no power, but in my opinion, the opposite is true. Working full time at home I have the time to make the most of what we have. I can shop for grocery bargains and stockpile them, I can grow food in the backyard, make my own cleaners, sew, mend and recycle. I know that I have to balance my budget, keep the utilities connected, the fridge full and the vegetable garden productive. Homemakers have to be multi-skilled. Healthy food, clean clothes and a comfortable home enable those living there to make the most of the time they are away from home, working or studying. A good home sets workers and students up for success, and that is good for the nation. There is no doubt about it, choosing homemaking as a career is a radical choice.



When I rise early in the morning I feel that I have the freedom to do a wide variety of things. I'm often invited to take part in various things around the place but I feel at my best if I stay and work here on this land. I write my blog, let the chickens out, feed the cat, look at the sky to check the weather, have breakfast, make bread or bake cakes, organise our main meal which we eat at midday, clean up, wash up and make the bed. I do those things almost every day. Sometimes, I make cleaning products, knit, sew, mend, garden, work in the community, preserve food in jars or freeze it for later. And although it might look as though my days just repeat what happened the day before, it feels fresh every day. I get to decide when I sit down and rest. I decide if I want to sit in the garden or work in it. I will work all day or takes frequent breaks, it all depends on how I feel and how much work I will do on that particular day. And all these decisions are mine. I'm not told by a boss when to have morning tea or lunch. I can wear whatever I like, and that pleases me no end because most days I'm here at home I look like a moving scarecrow. Home is the best place to wear out those old clothes.



Homemaking seems to fit simple life like a glove. It doesn't matter if you're a full time homemaker like me or if you do it in tandem with a paid job. Homemaking supports the role of the breadwinner because it allows them to come home to

good food, a clean home and happy children. Sometimes the breadwinner is the homemaker and in that case the skills of homemaking come into their own. Following routines, meal planning, stockpiling, freezing food for later and budgeting help the part-time homemaker like nothing else can. And when it all comes together, when I hear someone say they enjoyed the meal I cooked, or the cake was delicious, or "grandma, biscuit peas", well then I know I'm where I should be. When I go outside and sit watching the garden, seeing what birds are flying in to visit, or watch the antics of the chooks, I don't want to be anywhere else.

Ours is simple work but that doesn't mean it's less important than paid work. It all has its place and it's all important in its own way. Recently, I've heard a couple of women say that they want my life but the truth is it's all here for the taking, my life is in every home. Everyone can do what I'm doing, all it takes is the will to do it, the mindset to stick to it and the skills to make it happen. And remember, it's all small steps - the will, the mindset and the skills. This is here to fill a lifetime, it's not the 100 metre sprint.