

Natural Life

Magazine

Going Car-Free

**A Community
Creates
An Earth
Building**



**The Power
Of Fun**



Green, healthy living
from pregnancy
through birth and early
childhood

Natural Child Magazine

From Life Media,
publishers of Natural Life Magazine
since 1976 and Life Learning Magazine since 2002.

- creating a green, healthy home
- non-coercive parenting
- feeding your child organically
- vegetarian babies
- children in Nature
- cosleeping
- blended families and adoption
- healthy pregnancy
- homebirth, water birth
- breastfeeding support
- wellness and natural remedies
- natural family fun and play
- holistic grandparenting
- and much more . . .



***SUBSCRIBE NOW and
join our digital natural
parenting community.
Read online or on your
tablet, save to your
computer, or print it out.
Information and inspiration
whenever you want or need it.***

www.NaturalChildMagazine.com

Inside Natural Life

Inspiring natural family living since 1976

May/June, 2013

4 From the Editor's Desk

Is your lawn contributing to climate change?

6 Eco Nomics

Unjob yourself to freedom.

8 Car-Free

How one family saves money while living green, using cargo and personal bikes for transportation.

12 The Whole Earth Building (WEB)

A child's idea and a community's collaboration create a unique green building from on-site earth.

20 Just Say No!

How to turn compulsory schooling into a more democratic way of educating ourselves.

18 The Power of Fun

Play is important for learning and health, in the workplace, and for motivating and bonding activists.

20 The Feast of Fools

A group of friends revives an ancient feast and shows that world changers need not be joyless and ascetic.

22 Land Trusts

A set of tools for conserving and repurposing land for community control and benefit.

24 A DIY Raised Bed

Make a garden planter using recycled materials.

26 Your Sustainable Home

From Passive House to Active House.

28 The Media Beat

Resources, films, books, and websites for green living.

32 The Back Page

A healthy, family muffin recipe to make your own.

Subscribe.



...and get on the path to saving money while living a greener, simpler lifestyle.

Sign up today for a new, renewal, or gift subscription to **Natural Life Magazine** and create a green, healthy, self-reliant future for yourself, your family, your community, and the Planet.

Natural Life Magazine has been a reader-supported source of information and inspiration about positive solutions for frugal, green family living since 1976.



NaturalLifeMagazine.com



From the Editor's Desk

We're all familiar with the fact that precious food producing land is destroyed when agricultural lands undergo development and urbanization. But there is another important downside to building subdivisions on farm-

land. A recent study published online in the *Soil Science Society of America Journal* shows that more carbon dioxide is released from residential lawns than corn fields. This research shows that such development could impact the carbon cycle and therefore exacerbate climate change.

David Bowne, assistant professor of biology at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, led the study to look at the amount of carbon dioxide being released from residential lawns versus corn fields in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He and his co-author measured carbon dioxide efflux, soil temperature, and soil moisture under the two different land uses. They found that both carbon dioxide release and soil temperature were higher in residential lawns than in corn fields.

Higher temperatures leading to increased carbon dioxide release was not a surprise for the researchers, as this relationship has been documented before. "As you increase temperature," Bowne explains, "you increase biological activity – be it microbial, plant, fungal, or animal." That increased activity, then, leads to more respiration and higher levels of carbon dioxide leaving the soils. What was unexpected, however, was that the higher temperatures found in residential lawns suggested urban heat islands working at small scales. Urban heat islands are dark-colored surfaces such as roofs, buildings, and parking lots. The dark color means more heat is absorbed, leading to an increase in temperature in the neighboring areas, including in lawns.

We've written about two remedies here in *Natural Life Magazine* over the years. You could reduce the heat islands on your property by replacing paved driveways, walkways, and patios with permeable material. And you could tear up your turf and plant organic veggies, perennials, or fruit trees and shrubs, which our latest E-Compendium can help with. We have collected some of the best gardening articles, photos, and charts from our archives in this new *Gardening Inspiration* addition to our popular reprint series. Topics covered include garden planning; Spring garden preparation; companion planting; growing a garden full of pollinator-friendly plants; constructing and planting raised beds; the benefits of mulching; Bokashi composting; attracting beneficial insects; no-dig gardening; and more. You can read it online, save it to your computer, and print out all or part of it. (www.naturallifemagazine.com/compendiums)

Creating a diverse garden landscape rather than a monoculture of pavement and grass on your property will not only help you play a small role in mitigating climate change, it will cushion its effect on your family by adding to your food supply and providing a low-stress leisure space, while providing food for declining populations of bees and butterflies and exercise for the gardener. That's a lot of benefit for a bit of effort!

Read Editor Wendy Priesnitz's blog at WendyPriesnitz.com

Natural Life Magazine

May/June 2013

Editor: Wendy Priesnitz
editor@NaturalLifeMagazine.com

Publisher: Rolf Priesnitz
publisher@NaturalLifeMagazine.com

Contributors:
Megan Gray, Rolf Priesnitz,
Dave Roberts, Gene Sager,
Lori Straus, Jim Strickland

Cover Photo:
© Megan Gray Photography

Copyright © 2013 Life Media.
No part of this publication may be reproduced either in print or electronically without prior permission in writing from Life Media.

ISSN 0701-8002
Established 1976
Published six times per year
in digital format

Subscription Rates:
www.NaturalLifeMagazine.com/subscribe

New Email Address? If you want to change the email address that we use to send your issues, please contact us with both your old and new email addresses as soon as possible so you don't miss an issue.

We Value Your Privacy. Please contact us if you do not wish to receive third-party mailings. Our privacy policy can be read on our website NaturalLifeMagazine.com.

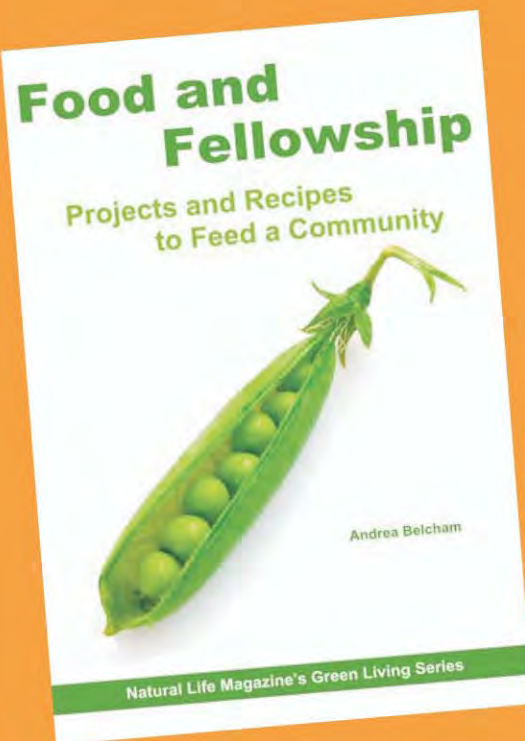
Contribute to Natural Life Magazine. Share your green living expertise with our readers. Contributors' guidelines are at NaturalLifeMagazine.com/writers.

Advertise in Natural Life Magazine. Rates, deadlines and specifications are at NaturalLifeMagazine.com/advertise.

www.NaturalLifeMagazine.com

info@NaturalLifeMagazine.com

Save Money, Eat Well, Have Fun, Build Community



Get together with a few friends and neighbors and share the cost and the work of meal preparation. This book makes it easy to start and manage your food buying club and batch cooking group.

- Be part of the sustainable food solution
- Tips from the author's personal experience
- 100 vegan recipes for your batch cook-ins
- Helpful tips for bulk buying, economizing, storing, and cooking whole foods
- Templates for recruiting, funding, and planning your food buying club and batch cooking group.
- Save the price of the book many times over
- Purchase directly from publisher in print or e-book

www.NaturalLifeBooks.com

Eco Nomics

Nurturing your Life and The Planet While Making a Living

By Wendy Priesnitz, Natural Life Magazine's Editor

Unjob Yourself to Freedom

In the 1970s and '80s, my family helped lead an educational revolution; our children learned at home, instead of at school, and without the trappings, expectations, competition, lack of respect and trust, and coercion that is part of school. I call this "life learning" but some people call it "unschooling." And now, there is a similar term for the way many people are making their living; it's called "unjobbing."

Unjobbing can be thought of either as the process of leaving a job you don't like to work independently, or the actual state of living and working that results from leaving a job. (Or for many people these days, it is the reality they face after their job has disappeared.) It might be the way your family decides to live after starting a family or deciding that your children will learn without school.

But it is more than that. In the same way that life learning is about more than education, this so-called "unjobbing" is about more than work. It is about aligning all aspects of your life – including work – with your personal values. It means living without the competition, outwardly-imposed structure, lack of respect, expectations, politics, greed, and so on that characterize many conventional workplaces.

In this lifestyle, income might come from self-employment, possi-

bly as a consultant providing services under to other businesses or individuals. Unjobbing might involve freelance or contract work. It might look like a micro-sized business selling a green or healthy product (without greenwashing, of course!) to individuals in your local community or to other businesses. Or maybe you find meaning in public speaking, writing, film-making, teaching yoga, blogging, crafts, art, market gardening, inventing green technologies, or doing odd jobs around the neighborhood. Your unjobbing adventure might involve managing previously acquired assets, or starting a B&B or retreat center.

Most likely, it will involve a variety of activities in a patchwork of income generation. Many unjobbers do work similar to what they were doing when they worked in a paid job; others use the opportunity to follow an entirely different, and more fulfilling, path...one by which they never thought they could make enough money.

Now, this isn't necessarily an easy path to walk. There may be attitudes that you'll have to unlearn. It might mean giving up the need to know what's going to happen next (if you're of that personality type). It will most certainly require flexibility. And perhaps you'll need to accompany unjobbing – at least in the beginning – with a pared-back budget.

Success will be more likely if you're a glass-half-full sort of person who can see opportunities rather than barriers.

For many people, one of the biggest unjobbing transitions involves removing the credentials from behind their names and disentangling their identities from their jobs. After all, this is all about seeing yourself and the world in a holistic way, rather than identifying solely as a teacher, an accountant, or a plumber (although you may use many of the skills from your old job as you find new ways of living). And because it includes the philosophy of living simply and consciously, unjobbing often involves working less than full-time, and devoting the rest of the time to family and home, community service and volunteering, travel, or leisure. (Working less is another challenge for many...you don't need to jump from one treadmill to another!)

If you are making this decision on your own, rather than being forced to leave a job, you'll need to figure out to pay your bills until your new way of life gels, either by new ways of income generation, lowered expenses, or a combination of both. Your personality (tolerance for risk) and family situation (whether or not a partner will remain employed) will be your guide regarding how large a safety net you'll require before unjobbing yourself.

In the same way that my young family began to "unschool" before the term was invented, I stumbled upon the unjobbing lifestyle before it was identified as a trend. Over the years, my work has involved writing books and articles (for newspapers, magazines, and blogs); editing magazines and books; publishing niche magazines, websites, and book; public speaking, coaching, and

consulting. The proportion of my time given to each has shifted many times over the past forty years. I consider what I do to be my life's work rather than a job, and "social entrepreneurship" rather than a conventional business.

I chose this lifestyle for a number of reasons. Originally, it was a way for both my husband and I to work flexibly at home in order to allow our daughters to learn without school – and to provide them with a role model of self-reliance. It allows me to use my talent as a writer and editor and it fits my short attention span. Working for myself means that I don't have to compromise my principles to corporate interests. And it allows me to work for change in the way we educate, work, and live, to move toward a non-hierarchical, egalitarian, cooperative, convivial, peaceful society. I believe that it is almost impossible to change our organizations and institutions from within because those on the inside have vested interests that outsiders – like unjobbers – don't have. So I have chosen to work on the outside.

Some of the societal change that I work for is already happening in the workplace as a result of current world economic circumstances. In fact, some observers believe that unjobbing may become the norm, and that unjobbing is a positive part of a sustainable living solution to what ails the world; I've listed some books at the end of this column that will provide perspective on this.

Of course, as wonderful as it is to follow your passion, enjoy a flexible time schedule, work from home, be your own boss, and try to change the world, unjobbing does require a bit of organization, some planning, and doing some things you might not love to do. (For me, that's bookkeeping.) It is also handy to have a rela-

tively laid back personality. Family agreement is crucial. And you will need to sell – if not a product or a service, then your own talents and abilities. You don't need to be an "entrepreneur" (those are actually quite rare) but you do need to know a few basics about starting and running a business; that knowledge will allow you to concentrate on having fun (and making some money) without having a job.

In short, unjobbing is following your passion and using your talents to make enough money for your and your family's needs without having a conventional job. We can create our own freedom, and, at the same time, improve our lives and life in our communities.

Learn More

Bringing it Home: A Home Business Start-Up Guide for You and Your Family by Wendy Priesnitz (The Alternate Press, 1976, 2012)

Un-Jobbing: The Adult Liberation Handbook by Michael Fogler (Free Choice Press, 1999)

The Renaissance Soul: Life Design for People with Too Many Passions to Pick Just One by Margaret Lobenstine (Harmony, 2006)

Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth by Juliet B Schor (Penguin, 2010)

Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture by Shannon Hayes (Left to Write Press, 2010)

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us by Daniel Pink (Riverhead Books, 2011)

The Art of Non-Conformity: Set Your Own Rules, Live the Life You Want, and Change the World by Chris Guillebeau (Perigee, 2010)

Wendy Priesnitz is, among other things, Natural Life Magazine's editor, a journalist with over thirty-six years of experience, and the author of twelve books.

- NL -

www.NaturalLifeMagazine.com

Life Learning

the unschooling magazine



A unique and trusted source of support, information, and inspiration about personalized, non-coercive, interest-led, learning from life since 2002.

Subscribe today and join our supportive, non-judgmental community of unschoolers!

LifeLearningMagazine.com



Car-Free

How our family saves money while living green

By Megan Gray

This is the question so many family and friends asked us over the past year...honestly, it's something we asked ourselves over and over again too: Could we really do it? Is it really possible? Well, it's been just about two months now that we have lived completely car-free. We mostly use our bikes and walk to get around day to day. Traveling further distances is either done by train, bus, or borrowing a car, but only if that is absolutely necessary.

Our journey to being car-free started when my husband and I saw an ad in a cycling magazine for a cargo

bike. The ad showed a mother riding with her two children happily and comfortably seated behind her as she rode. We had both known about cargo bikes, but thought that they were only in Europe and much too expensive for us to even consider. Well, after seeing the ad we immediately started researching and found so many different options for carrying kids on a bike, and so many different price ranges too. It was actually within our reach to purchase one.

A month later, we had our first cargo bike made by

www.NaturalLifeMagazine.com

Madsen. When we ordered the bike, I was about five months pregnant with our third child, and had not been on a bike for over six years, but I was determined. If I could ride the cargo bike while pregnant, even if just for short rides, I could definitely ride once I had the baby.

Fast forward a few months and now we have three kids, two cargo bikes, bikes for the kids, one regular bike, and no car. There are so many reasons we decided to get rid of our car. The main reasons were money, health, and the environment.

Money was one of the top reasons for us to go car-free. Like many families, we had acquired debt personally, and with starting a business. This debt had been looming over our heads for years. We always made our payments, but it just never went away. It stopped us from truly living and being free. Even though we never were officially keeping up with the Joneses, we were still going in that direction. Our car was paid off, but the cost of upkeep, insurance, and gas were still keeping us in debt. So we made the decision to use part of our tax return to buy our first cargo bike, and then a few months later, after selling some older bikes and lots of other stuff we didn't need anymore, we had enough money to buy another one. All cash and no added debt!

With two cargo bikes – a Madsen and a Bakfiets – we could now easily

Facing page: Megan and her two children riding the family's new Madsen cargo bike while she was pregnant.

Right: The Bakfiets cargo bike (top) with a cover, and (bottom) dad with the new baby's car seat strapped in.





travel without a car with all of the kids, just using bikes. Also, with the addition of the second bike, the Bakfiets, I could easily bike around with all three kids by myself while my husband was at work. This was important because I was the one who used the car the most, so I had to have a bike that could give me the capacity of a car while being easy for me to ride.

Then, we were officially able to sell our car. Most of the items, including the car, were sold by posting them on Facebook and Craigslist. Because of this, our finances are now manageable, and our debt is almost non-existent. We spend less time and money on driving around and going faraway places we don't really need to go, instead spending more of our money at the small businesses located within a mile of where we live. That is helping us to build relationships with local businesses and other people within our community.

Aside from saving money, health was a top priority for us in the decision to embark on a cycling lifestyle. I am a Type 1 Diabetic, and it's important for me to be active, and being able to ride with the kids made that possible. For the first time in years, I finally feel good about being active and I enjoy it. My blood sugars are better, and I don't have to go to the gym, or feel guilty for not going. Not to mention that paying for a gym membership, which I wouldn't use anyway, was not going to help manage our debt. Living without a car also means more exercise for the kids. It teaches them that being active is something that should just be a part of life, not something you schedule time for.

Our car-free life is also helping the kids to see that you don't need to have a car to navi-



This page: The versatile Madsen cargo bike holds a week's worth of groceries, a pregnant Megan and two kids, or a combination of those.

Next Page: The biking family uses, at different times, two cargo bikes, two kids' bikes, and one regular adult bike.



gate your day-to-day life. My husband goes grocery shopping by himself with one of the cargo bikes every week, and there is always plenty of room to fit everything in the bike once he's done shopping. When he has a day off, we all take the bikes out and do something fun, or get on the train and go on an adventure to New York City.

With becoming a biking family we finally feel we are being the change we wish to see in the world. We are taking control of our transportation instead of waiting for the government, or a company, to give us an alternative to a car. Plus, we are physically doing something to help lessen our burden on the environment, and the kids will, we hope, take this with them into the future. It's a big change for us, although small as a whole, but we know any little bit helps. We have become even closer to each other, our community, and the environment. All are worth a lot more than owning a car. It has been an amazing, and at times challenging, way of family transport. However, I wouldn't change it for the world.

I know it's not possible for everyone to go car-free, but it is possible to walk and ride your bike more. It is possible to rethink how you get places. You will be amazed

how much you can really do and get to, within your neighborhood, even if it's just a nearby park or store. It helps you physically and emotionally all while helping our environment. Start small and before you know it you will be walking further, riding longer, and feeling better.

As an aside, we are also part of a cargo biking group that's making a crowd-sourced documentary. They have been so awesome in helping us become car-free. You can check out the progress of the documentary on this website: www.lizcanning.com/Liz_Canning_Creative/Cargo_Bike_Documentary.html.

Learn More

How to Live Well Without Owning a Car: Save Money, Breathe Easier, and Get More Mileage Out of Life by Chris Balish (Ten Speed Press, 2006)

<http://carbusters.org>

Megan Gray is a car-free mother of three living on the New Jersey Coast. Follow her family's car-free adventure at <http://www.dayswiththegrays.com>.

- NL -

The Whole Earth Building

By Nancy Mintie

A child's idea and a community's collaboration create a unique green building made from on-site earth.

“Green building stories are boring!” the seasoned Los Angeles Times environmental reporter informed me. “Not this one,” I thought to myself. “We have kids, Iranians, artists, Chevron, mad genius teenagers, and a Native American tribe. In fact, it’s been a little *too* interesting around here for some time.”

It all started seven thousand years ago. That’s when the first human beings stepped foot onto this patch of California land that is the subject of our tale. Things went very well for the first 6.75 thousand years or so. People took what they needed from the land, leaving enough behind for the wildlife and successive generations. For instance, they observed that during the late summer, the mesquite plant made up three quarters of the coyote’s diet. So even though they used the plant for many of their own needs, these thoughtful folks made sure to leave enough untouched to ensure Brother Coyote’s survival.

After thousands of years of peaceful living, everyone knows what happened next. Culture clash. Genocide. The San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians, or “Tongva” in their own language, nearly died out, with the few remaining survivors being driven underground to escape discrimination and persecution.

Fast forward to the twenty-first century. The surviving Tongva are emerging from obscurity and promoting a revival of their culture, language, and traditional knowledge. We can learn from them. Nearby, our nonprofit organization, Uncommon Good, is attempting to create sustainable communities where everyone’s basic needs

can be met in a healthy environment. And we are working on these big “save the world” projects on a shoestring budget, as these things generally are done, out of donated space in a hundred-year-old convent. We are educating the children of the poor, supporting young doctors working in the slums, and starting urban farm projects, all with an environmental focus. For we had noticed during Hurricane Katrina, that there was a conspicuous absence of bodies of the rich floating down the streets of New Orleans. It had become gruesomely obvious that in a deteriorating environment, the poor would be hurt first and worst. And it had become equally obvious that we wouldn’t be able to have a pristine environment if we had starving poor who would do anything necessary to feed their children, even if it meant cutting down the last tree on the planet. So we knew that eliminating poverty and saving the earth had become inextricably intertwined activities.

But on our way to saving the world, we hit a bump in the road. The old convent was declared unsafe. We were losing our workplace. As we were bemoaning the fact that we’d now have to come up with rent money for a depressing storefront somewhere (the convent, old as it was, had had a certain retro flair), a student in our youth environmental program piped up. She’d learned about an Iranian architect in one of her classes at school who was promoting the building of radically sustainable hand-made buildings using little more than on-site earth. “Could we build one?” she asked.



The front patio of the unique, green earth building that is the new headquarters for the California nonprofit Uncommon Good.

Photo © Carlos Camillo

Immediately, ecstatically, we grasped what this could mean. If we could create a building that did not harm the earth in any way, out of the simplest of materials, we could model how, in the words of Gandhi, “to live simply so that others may simply live.” We could walk the walk, not just talk the talk. And if we could do this here in Los Angeles County, California, which has the strictest building codes in the world, we could show that it could be done anywhere by anyone on the planet wanting to build a home for his or her family or enterprise.

Okay. Great idea. But no land. And no money. Uncommon Good didn’t have the funds to buy property in Southern California, home of sky high land prices. So the idea nearly died in its infancy until a local congregation, the Claremont United Methodist Church, stepped up and offered to share a piece of its campus for the building. Later, the church was joined by the neighboring Claremont School of Theology, which also allowed part of its land to be used for the project.

Okay. Great idea. Got land. But still no money. We went to every known foundation that funded capital campaigns and were hurriedly shown the door at each one, even those with an environmental focus. Building a

dirt building was either too radical, or too humble, or too untried, or too visionary, or too *something* for them all.

Then Chevron got sued and we got lucky. Chevron decided to settle the litigation in part by creating a pot of money that could be used for clean air projects in California. Most of the applicants for the money were in the field of transportation. But we argued that buildings use forty percent of the energy in this country and seventy-percent of the electricity, and creating all of that power caused air pollution. So if we could demonstrate a way to create and operate a building that used nothing but human power and solar energy, and that, in addition, actually functioned as a carbon sink, absorbing more carbon emissions than it created, we could make a great contribution to air quality and climate change mitigation.

It worked. We got the money. (And as I am legally obligated to insert in any discussion of the building’s funding: This project was funded by a grant from the Reformulated Gasoline Settlement Fund.) But there was one thing more to be done. It turns out that the land offered to us by the church and the school of theology was precisely where those first humans that we mentioned in the first paragraph of this story had settled eons ago. For



Photo © Arccon Alger



Photo © Carlos Carrillo

thousands of years, the ancestors of the Tongva people had lived, played, worked, and prayed on this site. So it only seemed right to ask the permission of the Tongva to build there. We sought out a tribal elder who consulted with the Tongva leadership. The tribal members not only gave us their blessing, but partnered with us to help the project promote a return to their traditional value of

This page above: Volunteers of all ages helped construct the Whole Earth Building.

This page left: The WEB's arched Great Gathering Room.

Next page top: Children from Uncommon Good's educational program on the front patio of the Whole Earth Building.

Next page bottom: The inner arches of the WEB follow the curved pattern of the building and are decorated by local artists to reflect local indigenous culture.

living in harmony with Nature, or in other words, sanity.

The result is the world's first Whole Earth Building or WEB, as in "web of life," because we took the entire ecosystem into account in its construction and operation, including the soil, water, air, energy, plants, wildlife, people, and community. We combined the best of ancient earth building techniques with the best of modern green technology. This beautiful, sophisticated building was built entirely by hand, using only on-site earth for eighty-five percent of its building materials, and is expected to stand for five hundred years.

Hundreds of community volunteers participated in the WEB's creation, including Tongva tribal members, children, seniors, scientists, artists, and low-income families. Young golden-brained geniuses from the renowned engineering school, Harvey Mudd College, created a unique earth air tunnel system that provides additional cooling to the building on those few days when the thick walls alone do not provide sufficient insulation. Tongva ethnobotanists helped us select native plants for the landscape and for the first-of-its-kind green roof that are of most importance to the tribe's culture. Internationally renowned artist Sheila Pinkel made photo tiles of Tongva artifacts, plants, and animals to adorn the building, as well as a magnificent photo mural illustrating Tongva symbols and cosmology. Another artist copied prehistoric pictographs from the region's caves onto some of the walls. Solstice and equinox markers were created to help the staff track when to extend or retract the windows' light shelves to take advantage of the changing angles of the sun as the year progresses. A seasonal stream bed returns storm water runoff to the ground water.

The building's groundbreaking made press on every continent except Antarctica. Al Gore's Climate Reality Project (then Alliance for Climate Protection) endorsed

Photo © Carlos Carrillo



Photo © Ardoin Alger



the project. The building was visited by recently retired Dr. James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the world's foremost climatologist.

As of this writing, Uncommon Good is finishing up the details for its occupancy permit. A joyful Grand Opening then will ensue with the hundreds of community people who contributed their labor and talents to the project. Then Uncommon Good will move into its beloved Whole Earth Building, to humbly resume its mission of serving the poor and saving the planet, joyfully and against all the odds.

Nancy Mintie is Executive Director of Uncommon Good in Claremont, California. The organization's website is at www.uncommongood.org.

- NL -

Just Say No!

How to Turn Schooling into an Education

By Jim Strickland

What if our kids simply said, “No thanks. I think I’ll let you keep those grades and that diploma. And in the meantime, I’ll take the classes that I am really interested in and get the education I really want.”

Since the dawn of parenthood, the struggle to get kids to eat well-balanced, nutritious meals has been an ongoing battle between parents who want kids to eat all their vegetables and kids who simply aren’t interested. And over the years, when the use of reason, cajoling, and downright get-down-on-your-knees begging have failed, parents have learned to pull out that age-old secret weapon that goes something like this: “Okay, big guy, you eat your vegetables or you won’t get any dessert.” Ouch! Talk about playing hardball...

As a former child, I can personally vouch that this strategy works pretty well, at least in the short run. As long as I had my eye on that delicious bowl of ice cream, that rich, chocolate brownie, or that homemade pecan pie, I could somehow manage to choke down even the most obscene “vegetables” my mother could throw at me. I mean Brussels sprouts? Spinach? Beets? Rutabagas? To a six-year-old, this is truly the stuff of *Fear Factor*!

The revolution happened when I was about twelve. One evening when my mother began her nightly barrage of threats, I found myself responding with a calm, self-assured, “No thanks. I think I’ll skip dessert tonight.” What? Skip dessert? With that simple declaration, I had effectively removed my mother’s power to control my eating. I was finally free! I continued to voluntarily eat vegetables of my own choosing, but I haven’t touched a Brussels sprout or a rutabaga since. And good riddance!

Well, we do the same thing when it comes to schooling. When kids resist schoolwork because it is boring or ir-

relevant, we pull out the big guns with statements like, “Do this or you won’t get a good grade,” or “Do this or you won’t get your diploma.” And these threats tend to hold sufficient weight for most students to buckle down and comply. But at what expense? Like I said before, I haven’t touched a Brussels sprout or a rutabaga since I was twelve. Is this artificial manipulation producing the creative thinking and lifelong love of learning we say we really want?

This is one thing that worries me about moves towards the implementation of national standards, such as the U.S.’s Common Core State Standards. It’s not that there is anything wrong with the standards themselves. For example, here’s a high school literacy standard randomly selected from the CCSS website:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

That’s a little cumbersome to muddle through, but it’s basically a call for improving one’s vocabulary. No problem there. The real danger, however, is the same as that which accompanies any attempt to impose large-scale conformity on real individuals and human systems. In

In the same way that manipulating kids to eat their vegetables can backfire, the artificial manipulation involved with compulsory schooling, pre-packaged curriculum, and standardized testing does not produce the creative thinking and lifelong love of learning we say we really want.

designating rewards only to those willing to eat the Brussels sprouts and rutabagas, we impose standards that are “common” in the sense of “mediocre” instead of creating opportunities for real excellence.

This is why our most selective colleges and universities insist that they are not looking so much for students who are well-rounded individuals, but for students with specific passions, interests, and life experiences who, together, make up a well-rounded student body.

This strength inherently found in diverse systems is what makes democracy so powerful. When we encourage maximum individuality along with a strong commitment to the common good, then together we make up a vibrant, inclusive, life-giving society where there is truly a place for everyone.

As an adult, I love broccoli and carrots and all kinds of vegetables, but I am quite healthy and happy without the Brussels sprouts and rutabagas of my childhood nightmares. Might it not be the same with learning? Do we have enough faith in human curiosity and capacity for self-directed learning that we can let go of the obsessive need to control our youth, especially as they move through their high school years?

So... What if our kids simply said, “No thanks. I think I’ll let you keep those grades and that diploma. And in the meantime, I’ll take the classes that I am really interested in and get the education I really want.” Would that be such a disaster?

And is a high school diploma really as critical to success as we like to tell our kids? My son skipped high school altogether and is finishing up his second year in community college with a 4.0 GPA and plans to transfer



Photo © Carlos Horta / Shutterstock

to a four-year university next fall. Yes, it’s true — you don’t have to have a high school diploma to attend community college. And I suspect that most employers are more concerned with who you are as a person, how you have acted on your passions and interests, and the unique talents you bring to the workplace than with your ability to jump through the standard hoops required for high school graduation.

Life is too short for sacrificing creativity and passion for compliance and conformity. Our kids need education, not schooling. And the simplest way to make this happen is to just say NO!

Jim Strickland is a veteran public educator and long-time advocate for democratic and noncoercive approaches to learning. He lives with his wife and three children in Marysville, WA. You can contact Jim at livedemocracy@hotmail.com.

- LL -

The Power of Fun



By Wendy Priesnitz

Play helps us learn, keeps us stress-free and healthy, helps create sound relationships, encourages workplace productivity...and is just plain fun.

Photo © Aletta/Shutterstock

I enjoy – truly love, most days – my work. In fact, you might say my work is my fun. At least that’s how I excuse working all the time and avoiding play.

I realized in midlife that I didn’t really know much about playing and being silly. As the only child of serious parents who were middle aged with health issues when I was born, I grew up with few role models for having fun. We hardly ever laughed out loud in my house, and I was encouraged to be quiet and unobtrusive. Maybe choosing the work of a writer, researcher, and editor was my unconscious way of ensuring I’d have an enjoyable life, even without play (which I ended up with lots of once I had my own children). And maybe because I had so little of it as a child, I’ve always been interested in observing and researching fun and play – as they relate to all ages.

Does play always have to be fun? No. It can be spontaneous and silly, but it can also be focused and goal-oriented. However, play is usually associated with pleasure and enjoyment, and should be voluntary.

Play and Learning

As the parent of young children, and later in my work advocating for independent, informal education, I discovered the importance of play to learning. Everything children do teaches them about the world, their place in

it, and how to relate to it. Psychology professor Alison Gopnik calls children “scientists in the crib” because of their natural instinct to educate themselves. In their case, there is no difference between play and work, between learning and life. Psychologist and author Penelope Leach puts it this way: “For a small child there is no division between playing and learning, between the things he or she does ‘just for fun’ and things that are ‘educational.’ The child learns while living and any part of living that is enjoyable is also play.”

And, if children are allowed the freedom to continue to explore and experiment – to play in an unstructured manner – they will also learn the things we consider to be “academic” in nature through play. Homeschooling parents are familiar with this way of informal learning. In his wonderful new book *Free to Learn*, Dr. Peter Gray presents research about how and why this works...and why the decline of play in our schools is harming children’s education. The same could be said for adult education, which is a high-stakes, expensive industry.

Play and Health

Play is also healthy. It offers a natural and satisfying sense of joy and calm, and re-learning to play can help motivate adults to adopt a lifestyle of health and well-

"Fun is easy...It's not something to strive for. But melt into, to sink into, to open up to. Listen. You can almost hear the laughter. Breathe. You can almost taste the joy. Listen a little more closely. Breathe a little more deeply. And there it is again. Fun. Real fun. Deep, forever fun." ~ Bernie DeKoven

being. Stress is one of the most prevalent health complaints of our time, and it can be managed and alleviated through appropriate play.

Stuart Brown, a physician, psychiatrist, founder of the National Institute for Play, and author of *Play: How it Shapes the Brain*, has made a career of studying the effects of play on people and animals. His conclusion is that play is no less important than oxygen. His study of thousands of people's play histories, from murderers to Nobel Prize winners, has also convinced him that play is how humans learn empathy and to socialize – from the very first play interactions between mother and child to adult relationships between couples and co-workers.

Play and Work

Brown also believes that work and play are mutually supportive. Just as laughter is necessary for a healthy lifestyle, it is also necessary for a healthy workplace. People who enjoy their work and are able to play (appropriately) at work are more effective, efficient and productive, according to Canadian author and therapist (and cancer survivor) Catherine Fenwick. When we are feeling relaxed and positive, we get along better with others and do better work. She notes that a healthy sense of humor at work helps to keep things in perspective, facilitate change, build confidence, and boost morale.

An increasing number of companies are getting that message. In its July 2012 trend report *Play As a Competitive Advantage*, the marketing communications firm JWT highlighted how companies are injecting the idea of play into their business models and how marketers are promoting adult play in their messaging. High tech companies are at the forefront of that trend, and most of have read about how Google and its ilk have incorporated play into their facilities, with pool tables, lounges, cafés, patios, and even bowling alleys for employee's use.

Unfortunately, many of us adults either don't take the time to play or, like me, worry about looking silly while we're having fun. That is the topic of the next article, about how one group of friends has created the opportunity to be silly and foolish. And I think that's something we could all do with more of.



Major Fun

Any description of fun and play wouldn't be complete without Bernie DeKoven, who excels at circumventing seriousness. He is an American game designer, author, lecturer, and fun theo-

rist. He is most notable for his book *The Well Played Game: A Playful Path to Wholeness* (iUniverse, 2002), for his contributions to the New Games Foundation, his pioneering work in computer game design, and the websites www.deepFUN.com and www.MajorFun.com. Among the resources on the deepFun site are a treasure trove of games to be played just for the fun of it, a wonderful publications list, quotes about fun, and an insightful and lively blog. The MajorFun site is all about the Major Fun Award, which goes to games and people that bring people fun, and to organizations managing to make the world more fun.

Learn More

Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life by Peter Gray (Basic Books, 2013)

Reaching Their Potential Through Mud by Ann Schuster in *Natural Child Magazine*, September/October 2011
www.naturalchildmagazine.com/1110/power_of_free_play.htm

The Curriculum of Play by John Taylor Gatto in *Life Learning Magazine*, May/June 2010
www.lifelearningmagazine.com/1006/curriculum_of_play_by_John_Taylor_Gatto.htm

Junkyard Sports by Bernie DeKoven in *Natural Life Magazine*, May/June 2005

Fun Theory by Laura Grace Weldon
www.educationrevolution.org/blog/fun-theory

Where Does Spontaneity Go? by Wendy Priesnitz
www.childsplaymagazine.com/articles/where_does_spontaneity_go.htm

Fooling Around by Bernie DeKoven
www.deepfun.com/fun/2013/04/fooling-around

Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul by Stuart Brown (Avery, 2009)

The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally by David Elkind (Da Capo Press, 2007)

The New Game Plan for Recovery: Rediscovering the Positive Power of Play, by Tobin Quereau (Ballantine Books, 1992)

The Art of Play: Helping Adults Reclaim Imagination and Spontaneity by Dr. Adam Blatner and Allee Blatner (Brunner/Mazel, 1997)

Fun Works: Creating Places Where People Love to Work by Leslie Yerkes (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001) - NL -

The Feast of Fools

By Gene Sager



A group of philosophers and activists, friends and neighbors has revived an ancient feast dedicated to having fun. And they're demonstrating the wisdom of balancing world-changing with pure play. Here is inspiration for your Feast.

The original Feast of Fools was celebrated in Medieval Europe as comic relief from the restrictions and gravity of contemporary society. The merriment included outrageous games, parades, silly dances and songs, and the lampooning of political and religious officials. The mirthful event was observed around January first and was celebrated annually until the Council of Basil condemned and banned it in 1431.

My family and friends, eight of us, have revived the feast; we have retained the basics of the celebration, but we have dispensed with the lampooning. Lampooning can carry value messages and, for some participants, appear to promote or demote a political or religious cause. Such a message runs counter to the crucial, central theme of the Feast of Fools, which is pure play. Pure play, unlike work and activism, is an end in itself; it is non-

instrumental. It enjoys the here and now, neither trying to push nor pull the world this way or that.

We have found that the more foolish the game or activity, the more playful the play. Last year's feast included balancing a stack of toilet tissue rolls while walking a simple obstacle course (right). By contrast, a well-known game or an activity associated with common social holidays can be humdrum or may even be loaded with distracting memories. Activities like the fool's parade (previous page) is just foolish enough to help us unload our memories and let go of our inhibitions.

The fools come to our home at about two o'clock in the afternoon, wearing bizarre, creative outfits and, if this year is wacky hat year, a crazy hat. My personal favorite was a homemade hat piled very high with artificial fruit. Somehow, it stayed together and crowned the fool throughout the games. The house is decorated tastefully with socks and shoe strings hanging from streamers. We begin with a champagne (or alternative) toast and "horse divers" – organic vegan finger food. The fool's parade proceeds slowly around our long loop driveway. It features different drums and instruments every year. I keep time with a saucepan and wooden spoon. Outdoor games follow the parade.

One of the indoor games is the distance candle blow. The fools see how much wind they have. The "easy blow" is ten inches away. Then we try the sixteen inch challenge, and so on. We see how far our "blow out" ability extends. A very different wind activity is each fool's story of the most foolish thing he or she has ever done. These are humorous, true stories of weakness of mind or weakness of will. After all the outdoor and indoor activities, it is time for an organic vegan feast served on metal pie plates. It can be a potluck, but we have found that it is easy enough if we (the hosts) make a big veggie stew or stir-fry and serve oranges from our trees.

We have hosted the Feast for five years in April; the weather and our fruit and garden veggies are perfect at this time in southern California. The designated wacky apparel and the activities are different every year. All phones and electronic devices are turned off. Since not everyone can be a fool, we invite only those who can. Of course, children are welcome. Most children naturally enjoy pure play. As we say, "Except as ye become like a little child, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Fools."

A word about the competitive spirit. Since the games are quite silly, most people don't feel competitive. Some years we have awarded points for games and crowned the overall winner as the Monarch of Misrule. But, depending on the personalities, you might want to mitigate



the competitive aspect by making wacky changes in the game as it goes along. By the end, no one really knows who is the "victor." Finally, don't let the Feast of Fools become a complicated event. The costumes, the decorations, the food, the games...keep them simple and easy.

The original Feast of Fools was banned by Medieval church officials because it was sometimes distorted into drunken revelry and mean-spirited lampooning. We are engaged in undrunken pure play, so we do not expect to be banned by the city or church officials! In fact, our neighbors look forward to the Feast of Fools, and we recommend it to all who dare to be foolish.

We dare to claim we have learned a bit about *homo festivus*. What is the point of balancing rolls of toilet paper? There is no point. Such activities are "meaningless" in a good sense of the term. For philosophers, we hasten to add that our philosophy is not nihilistic. We do not believe, as the nihilists do, that life has no value or meaning. Many of the fools in our group are committed activists who strive for social justice and a healthy environment. But, as Harvey Cox says in *Feast of Fools*, "World changers need not be joyless and ascetic." Neither is their festivity escapist or obsessive. To balance our world-changing work, we need to enjoy pure fun. If the Feast of Fools has a point or meaning, it is just that: to let go and have fun.

Gene Sager is Professor of Environmental Ethics at Palomar College in San Marcos, California. - NL -

Land Trusts

Conservation and Stewardship for the Benefit of People and the Earth

By Wendy Priesnitz

"Land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living,
and countless members are still unborn" ~ A Nigerian tribal saying

Land trusts are important tools for those who wish to establish and participate in decentralized, ecologically-sound, self-governed, and humane communities.

Although the land trust model can also be used to avoid taxes and preserve personal or corporate wealth, in this context, it is a nonprofit, charitable organization that, as all or part of its mission, actively works with landowners and the community to conserve land and control its use. By accepting donations of land, purchasing land, negotiating private conservation agreements, and stewarding the conserved land, the trust removes it from the speculative market and manages it for the common good. In this way, the land trust addresses the connections between ecology, economy, and community.

Conservation Land Trusts

The goal of a conservation land trust – also called a land conservancy – is to preserve sensitive natural areas, ecologically sensitive land, farmland, ranchland, water sources, cultural resources, or notable landmarks forever.

Land conservancies have been in existence since the late 1800s but have become popular in the past twenty-five or so years. According to the Land Trust Alliance, there are 1,700 land trusts in the U.S. that have collectively conserved thirty-seven million acres of land, an area roughly the size of all the New England states combined. Land trusts are also particularly active in Canada, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Australia.

Land conservancies can be local, regional, nationwide, or international. They vary in size from small trusts operated by volunteers to large organizations like The Nature Conservancy that employ professional staff to manage their acquisitions and land. They accept donations and bequests of land and/or conservation agreements and, in some cases, may purchase them. They are

also supported by memberships and donations from generous residents in the communities they serve.

A conservation agreement – also known as a conservation easement or covenant – takes the form of a legal contract between a conservation-minded landowner and a land trust that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its natural, historical, or agricultural values. Each agreement can be crafted to meet the needs of the landowner and the conservation aims for the property.

Sometimes, the land will remain in private hands, but the trust will purchase a conservation agreement on the property to prevent development, or purchase any mining, logging, drilling, or development rights on the land. If the land remains under private ownership, public access can be limited. However, in many cases, land trusts work to eventually open up the land in a limited way to the public for recreation in the form of hunting, hiking, camping, wildlife observation, water sports, or other responsible outdoor activities. In other situations, the trust will protect habitat, preserve agricultural property, and keep small-scale, organic farming viable.

In addition to the satisfaction landowners get from knowing their land is protected forever, there are also potential tax advantages to granting a conservation easement, depending upon the jurisdiction. These could include an income tax deduction, an estate tax benefit, or a property tax reduction.

Community Land Trusts

The land conservancy movement has a less well known little sister called the community land trust, which involves community ownership, development, and stewardship of affordable residential property, community gardens, civic buildings, commercial spaces, and other community assets on behalf of a community.

The central principle motivating the work of the community land trust is that homes, commercial buildings and businesses, barns, fences, gardens, and all things done with or on the land should be owned by individuals, but the land itself is a limited community resource that should be owned by the community as a whole. So a residential community land trust acquires a piece of land, builds or renovates housing units, and then leases it (often on a recurring ninety-nine year basis) to people who own the buildings on it. As the home is truly their own, it provides a homeowner with the same permanence and security as a conventional buyer, and they can use the land in the same way as any other homeowner. The trusts usually retain rights to buy buildings from residents or business owners who move out of the community. Charters based on the principles of sustainable and ecologically-sound stewardship and use are common.

The benefits are many, both to those who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford housing and to the community. Trusts reduce the accumulation of land by wealthy families and corporations, and limit absentee ownership, putting land back into the hands of people who want to work and care for it. A study conducted by the Community Land Trust Network, The Housing Fund, and Vanderbilt University of almost one hundred housing land trusts across the U.S. found that conventional homeowners were ten times more likely to be in foreclosure proceedings than community land trust homeowners at the end of 2010. Foreclosure has been destabilizing many American neighborhoods as vacancy and abandonment rise and absentee landlords replace homeowners.

Community land trusts are at work in many major urban areas, spurring the revitalization of declining neighborhoods while ensuring that the local community benefits and that long-time residents and businesses can afford to stay after redevelopment.

The modern model appeared in the U.S. in the late 1960s to address the need for affordable housing in the impoverished rural south and is credited to Robert Swann, a community activist. Swann and others founded the first such project of its type in rural Georgia, calling it New Communities; they later created the E.F. Schumacher Society (now the New Economics Institute), which is a strong champion of the model. Their work built on a number of projects around the world, including indigenous land tenure systems, the Garden Cities in England, a long tradition of common ownership of land in Scotland, the Gramdan villages established in India following Gandhi's death, and the Hoshav communities in Israel.



Photo © iSnapshotPhotos/Shutterstock

Non-profit community land trusts can revitalize declining neighborhoods and provide affordable housing.

There are currently over two hundred and fifty community land trusts in the U.S., with growing movements underway in England, Canada, Australia, Kenya, and New Zealand. Europe's first community land trust project recently launched in Brussels, Belgium. And, in the UK, the East London Community Land Trust is hoping to integrate a land trust into future plans for the Olympic Park.

In his 1949 classic book *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold wrote, "We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." And that, I believe, describes the essence of the land trust movement.

Learn More

Conservancy: The Land Trust Movement in America by Richard Brewer (Dartmouth, 2004)

Investing in Nature: Case Studies of Land Conservation in Collaboration with Business by William Ginn (Island Press, 2005)

Nature's Keepers: The Remarkable Story of How the Nature Conservancy Became the Largest Environmental Group in the World by Bill Birchard (Jossey-Bass, 2005)

The Community Land Trust: A Guide to a New Model of Land Tenure in America by Robert Swann (Center for Community Economic Development, 1972)

Community Land Trusts: Affordable Access to Land and Housing by UN Habitat (UN Human Settlements Programme, 2012)

Community Land Trust Handbook by the Institute for Community Economics (Rodale Press, 1982)

www.cltnetwork.org

www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk

www.landtrustalliance.org

www.clta.ca

www.cltnetwork.org

www.schoolofliving.org

www.trustfornature.org.au

- NL -

A DIY Raised Garden Bed

By Dave Roberts

This simple raised bed utilizes scrap floor tiles and short lengths of copper electrical wire. They will last forever and the copper should help to repel slugs.

My inspiration was a visit to Dublin Rooftop Urban Farm and the beds they are making from scrap containers. I happened to have some leftover tiles in my shed and knocked this one up in my garden one afternoon. The top edge could be finished off with a piece of split plastic pipe or U-channeled timber trim to give a broader lip and could be varnished or painted.

If you had a good tile cutter and a smoothing stone and trimmed a slight angle off the vertical edges of each tile you could even make bowl shapes.



Step 1: Take a pile of 12-inch or larger scrap tiles.



Step 2: Gather pliers and some scrap electrical wire.



Step 3: Using 2 lengths of wire, twist at tile edge.



Step 4: Wrap the wire around tiles and twist at other edge.



Step 5: Make a stack of tiles wrapped in wire.



Step 6: Join by twisting wire ends, edge to edge.



Step 7: Join as many as you like for your raised bed size.



Step 8: Line with weed fabric or polyethylene with holes.



Step 9: Fill with dirt and plant your flowers or veggies.

Dave Roberts was born in London, England. His father was a tropical agriculturalist working in Malaysia, and he and his brothers grew up on plantations in the Far East and in west Africa. He graduated from Dublin's National College for Art and Design as an Industrial Designer and currently works as a Product Design Lecturer at the Institute of Higher Education in Sligo, on the west coast of Ireland. He has three children and two grandchildren and enjoys tinkering with ideas, in particular prototyping low tech solutions for home cropping and conserving water.

- NL -

Your Sustainable Home

By Rolf Priesnitz

Active Houses

I've often written in this column about the Passive House – or Passivhaus as it is known outside of North America – green residential building standard. And now there is the Active House. Whereas Passive Houses are situated, designed, and insulated so they don't use or produce much energy, Active Houses are designed to capture and generate more energy than they use, and make major use of windows and skylights. There is a great deal of overlap between the two models.

The Active House model addresses three components: energy-efficiency and renewal sources; an indoor climate that is healthy and comfortable, with a generous supply of daylight and fresh air, and uses healthy materials; and positive interaction with its environment, including the local context, focused use of resources, and overall environmental impact throughout its life cycle.

The world's first Active House, built in Lystrup, Denmark in 2009, includes fifty square meters of solar cells and solar panels, which are said to produce more energy than the house needs. It is controlled by a computer that monitors the temperature and opens, closes, and adjusts windows. Active Houses have also been built in Portugal, Austria, Norway, UK, Italy, Netherlands, and Russia. Canadian builder Great Gulf is working on a development of twenty Active House townhouses in Toronto, to be ready for occupancy in late 2014.

North America's first Active House opened in March, 2013 in the St. Louis, Missouri suburb of Webster Groves. Custom built by Hibbs Homes and Verditek Solutions, both well-known green building specialists, this prototype home was built as an infill project in an historic neighborhood. The original house on the lot was in poor condition and deemed not to be a good candidate for renovation. It was carefully deconstructed and much of the material – such as interior framing – was recycled. The concrete foundation of the original home was even ground into gravel for fill in the new construction. The rest of the salvageable material will be repurposed by Habitat for Humanity.

Among the house's components are extensive use of skylights and sun tunnels for natural light and passive ventilation, partnered with a system of remote control blinds. Structural Insulated Panels (SIP) result in a good, if not spectacular, energy rating of R25 for walls and R45 for roof panels. The windows are all high-performance, wood frame, low-e glass with argon between the two panes. Non-toxic sealants around windows and doors on the interior, durable caulk around the exterior, and foam insulation in door jams tighten the envelope to prevent air leaks and reduce heat transfer. The roofing is fitted with solar-reflective tiles, which are coated with reflective granules to reflect most of the sunlight and heat

www.NaturalLifeMagazine.com

and prevent the penetration of UV rays, protecting the roof and keeping it cooler. There are also a roof-mounted solar thermal system for hot water and a photovoltaic system for power.

In addition to function, appearance was an important factor in the design of the home. The owners, David and Thuy Smith, made it clear that they didn't want a "funky" home in the modern style of some European Active Houses – just a "nice, Midwestern house" that didn't "stick out" in the nearly-century old neighborhood.



Active House is a set of guidelines, rather than a certification program, and the Missouri house is, in fact, being certified under four U.S. programs, including ANSI-700 National Green Building Standard, EPA Indoor Air Quality, Energy STAR, and Builder's Challenge Home. The homeowners have agreed to allow the University of Missouri's Midwest Energy Efficiency Research Consortium to monitor the home for the first year.

Learn More

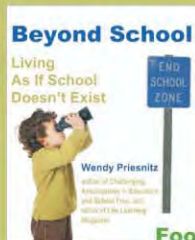
www.activehouse.info

www.activehouseusa.com

Rolf Priesnitz is the founder and Publisher of Natural Life Magazine. He has over forty-five years of experience in the construction industry. **-NL-**

Books to change your world

from the publishers of Natural Life Magazine



Beyond School: Living As If School Doesn't Exist

by Wendy Priesnitz

How families and individuals can live and learn without coercion or struggle, and with trust, respect, and dignity. An impassioned but well reasoned case for a different way of helping children learn about today's world while becoming equipped to live in tomorrows. PDF digital format only.



Food and Fellowship: Projects and Recipes to Feed a Community

by Andrea Belcham

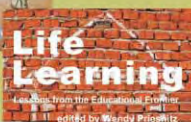
Save money, eat well, have fun, build community. Save the cost of the book many times over by starting a food buying club and a batch cooking group. Includes detailed instructions and tips; 100 vegan recipes for your batch cook-ins; helpful tips for bulk buying, recruiting, and more.



Natural Life Magazine's Green and Healthy Homes

by Wendy Priesnitz

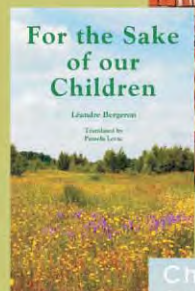
Make your home greener and healthier, and save money too. Includes avoiding dangerous household chemicals; making your own cleaning supplies; green renos and energy retrofits; water conservation; avoiding mold, radon, and plastic; eco gardening; organic textiles; and more.



Life Learning - Lessons from The Educational Frontier

Edited by Wendy Priesnitz

Thirty essays about life without school, by academics, parents, and young people. How and why people learn without being taught, and the transformative intellectual and social benefits of a self-directed education. A great introduction to unschooling and a reassuring resource.



For the Sake of Our Children

by Léandre Bergeron Translated by Pamela Levac, Foreword by John Taylor Gatto

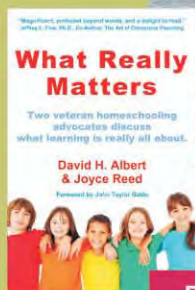
Trusting children to grow and learn with respect and without coercion. Home birth, natural parenting, and unschooling woven through a series of journal entries describing a year in the life of a family living and learning on a small farm. "The best of its breed," says John Taylor Gatto.



Challenging Assumptions in Education

by Wendy Priesnitz

A passionate challenge to the most common assumptions about conventional schooling. Why and how we need to stop warehousing children and free them to learn, unschooled, in their families and communities. John Taylor Gatto says, "I heartily recommend this book!"



What Really Matters

by David H. Albert & Joyce Reed Foreword by John Taylor Gatto

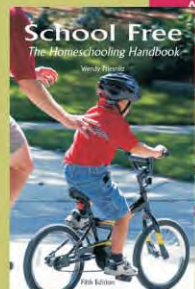
In a conversational style, two veteran homeschool advocates play off each other's experiences with and ruminations about society, schools, children, and learning to provide an engaging, enlightening, and thought-provoking look at homeschooling and parenting.



Bringing it Home: A Home Business Start-Up Guide for You & Your Family

by Wendy Priesnitz

How to make money at home. Hundreds of tips on how to research, start and run a family-friendly home business, including integrating family and working lives. By Natural Life Magazine's editor, co-founder, and owner. New revised e-book version now available.



School Free - The Home Schooling Handbook

by Wendy Priesnitz

Answering all your questions about home-based education: socialization, how to avoid using curriculum, adjusting to school after learning at home, dealing with relatives, assessment (or not), and much more. Priesnitz is a pioneering advocate for independent learning, with over forty years of experience advising life learning families. New revised e-book version now available.

www.NaturalLifeBooks.com

The Media Beat

Editor Wendy Priesnitz shares sources of green information and inspiration

Healthy Eating for Life

The new documentary film *Hungry for Change*, by the makers of the 2008 *Food Matters* doc, takes on the billion dollar dieting and weight loss industry.

Dispelling the myths around dieting, weight loss, and processed so-called health food, the film deliv-



ers the expertise of top medical doctors and nutritionists to prevent and reverse disease through healthy food. It demonstrates how transforming our eating habits results in our bodies regulating themselves and attaining their natural weight.

Featured are Britain's famous healthy food crusader, Jamie Oliver, as well interviews with bestselling health authors and medical experts including Dr. Alejandro Junger, Dr. Christiane Northrup, Dr. Joseph Mercola, Daniel Vitalis, and Mike Adams. The film also tracks real life stories of people who have struggled

for years with their weight and managed to turn their lives around.

There are practical and realistic solutions about foods to buy and those to avoid, how to read labels and identify harmful food additives, the most effective detox and cleansing strategies, the facts behind the damaging effects of sugar, and more. You can view the trailer, learn more, and purchase the film on DVD at www.hungryforchange.tv.

The same experts bring their experience, patient success stories, and more than one hundred recipes to the page in a companion book *Hungry for Change: Ditch the Diets, Conquer the Cravings, and Eat Your Way to Lifelong Health* (HarperOne, 2012).

Saving Pacific Salmon

I first became aware of Canadian biologist Alexandra Morton's work on behalf of Pacific wild salmon in 1997 when she submitted an article to *Natural Life Magazine* entitled "Whales Don't Eat Farmed Salmon; Why Should We?" She has now released *Salmon Confidential*, an eloquent seventy-minute film on the government cover-up of what is killing British Columbia's wild salmon.

When Morton discovers BC's wild salmon are testing positive for dangerous European salmon viruses associated with salmon farming worldwide, a chain of events is set off by government to suppress the findings. Tracking viruses, Morton moves from courtrooms, into British

Columbia's most remote rivers, grocery stores, and sushi restaurants. The film documents Morton's journey as she attempts to overcome government and industry roadblocks thrown in her path and works to bring critical information to the public in time to save BC's wild salmon.



David Suzuki has endorsed the film, saying, "For years, Alexandra Morton has soldiered on providing evidence of and calling for action on the catastrophic state of wild salmon. Government and industries have thwarted her over and over again. This film clearly documents that governments do not put protection of wild salmon at the top of their priorities and [people] should be outraged. I am."

Salmon Confidential is a film for anyone who cares about wild fish and all that depends on them, or the safety of our food supply. Community groups across BC are hosting screenings. Or you can watch it online at www.salmonconfidential.ca.

Slow Fish

The Slow Food movement has created an international Slow Fish campaign. The premise of Slow Food is that the road to making responsible food choices is via a return to the local origins of food and

through concentrating on curiosity and pleasure.

Slow Fish seeks to recover the traditional wisdom of fishing communities, which often have not moved far from ancient fishing practices, the diets of past generations, and the known and unknown resources guarded by rivers, lakes, and seas. It's doing that in two ways: the Slow Fish event, held every two years in Genoa, Italy, and a multilingual website at www.slowfood.com.

The sixth edition of Slow Fish, organized by the Liguria Regional Au-

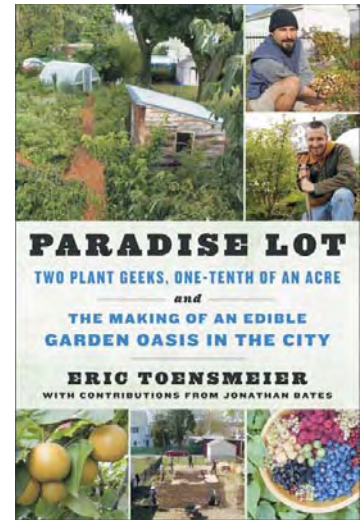
The website is a treasure trove of information for consumers, chefs, and retailers. The "Which Fish?" section gathers together the contributions from the Slow Fish Challenge, a scheme launched throughout the Slow Food and Terra Madre network of a hundred thousand Slow Food members plus thousands of food producers, farmers, fisherfolk, cooks, and academics. Everyone in the network is asked to participate by sending in local recipes for sustainable seafood and information about the types of fish used.

Creating An Urban Homestead

When Eric Toensmeier and Jonathan Bates moved into a duplex in a run-down part of Holyoke, Massachusetts, the tenth-of-an-acre lot was barren ground and bad soil, peppered with broken pieces of concrete, asphalt, and brick. They got to work designing what would become not just another urban farm, but a "permaculture paradise" replete with perennial broccoli, paw paws, bananas, and more than two hundred low-maintenance edible plants in an innovative food forest on a small city lot. The garden – intended to function like a natural ecosystem with the plants themselves providing



thority and Slow Food, is being held in early May in the Historical Port of Genoa, Italy. Slow Fish is a fair dedicated to the world of fish and marine ecosystems, consisting of an open-air market; Taste Workshops; events and meetings with fishers, chefs, and experts; and even awareness-raising for children.



most of the garden's needs for fertility, pest control, and weed suppression – also features a water garden, a year-round unheated greenhouse, urban poultry, and even silkworms.

In telling the story in the new book *Paradise Lot* (Chelsea Green, 2013) Toensmeier explains the principles and practices of permaculture, the choice of exotic and unusual food plants, the techniques of design and cultivation and, of course, the adventures, mistakes, and do-overs in the process. Packed full of detailed, useful information about designing a highly productive permaculture garden,

Paradise Lot is also a funny and charming story of two single guys, both plant nerds, with a wild plan: to realize the garden of their dreams and meet women to share it with. Amazingly, they have succeeded on both counts.

Toxic Chemicals

Most of us assume that the chemicals in our lives have been tested for safety – but they often are not. In the U.S., most of them were grandfathered without testing when the *Toxic Substances Control Act* (TSCA) was passed in 1976. With each new scientific report linking toxic chemical exposure to a serious

MEGAN GRAY
PHOTOGRAPHY
www.MeganGrayPhotography.com

health problem, it becomes more obvious that the law is not working.

Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families (www.saferchemicals.org) is an effort to get the U.S. government to update the TSCA. Representing over eleven million people, it includes more than four hundred and fifty groups, including parent organizations, health professionals, public health organizations, advocates for people with learning and developmental disabilities, reproductive health advocates, environmental organizations, labor groups, and small businesses.



They are demanding that the government:

- Take immediate action on the most dangerous chemicals,
- Hold industry responsible for the safety of their chemicals and products,
- Use the best science to protect all people and vulnerable groups.

There is a great deal of information on the coalition's website www.saferchemicals.org about the threats from these chemicals, the case for further regulating them, and what individual citizens can do to help.

A bill that would put common sense limits on toxic chemicals, called the *Safe Chemicals Act*, has been introduced and the coalition expects that there will soon be a vote on the bill in the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee and hopes to see it move to the Senate floor. - NL -

Contribute to Natural Life Magazine

We welcome your article ideas and submissions, as well as books and websites for review.



Send an email to editor@NaturalLifeMagazine.com



LEGGE Fitness STORES

Over 12,000 Sq. Ft. of quality health and fitness products on display!
Best Selection in Southern Ontario

- Cardio Products
- Hot Tubs
- Saunas
- Strength Machines
- Inversion Tables
- Vibration Platforms

1-800-695-7338 www.leggefitness.com Listowel & Fergus, Ontario, Canada



An inspiring memoir about trusting children to grow and learn, using respect and without coercion.

Home birth, natural parenting, and unschooling are woven through a series of journal entries describing a year in the life of a family living and learning on a small farm.

"The best of its breed." ~ John Taylor Gatto

For the Sake of our Children

By Léandre Bergeron

Translated from the French by Pamela Levac

Foreword by John Taylor Gatto

www.NaturalLifeBooks.com



Sue's Tomato Muffins

A healthy, yummy family recipe that you can make your own.

By Lori Straus

Sue was my favorite childhood cousin, but my sister and I called her Susie. She was about ten years older and the best babysitter around. Unfortunately, we lived in different cities, so our families rarely saw each other. Susie gave the original recipe for these muffins to my mom, and my mom changed it and made it hers. This version is a result of my son and I adding our own touches to it.

This tomato spice muffin is super healthy and lets me hide extra vitamins, protein, and vegetables in my sons' food as I slowly navigate the murky waters of gently broadening their palettes. I'll even serve these vegetable-packed muffins occasionally at mealtime if the evening's supper experiment is going to be a bit of a stretch for my kids. Kids don't taste the vegetables (and neither do adults, for that matter), and the muffins are not very sweet. In fact, omitting the raisins makes them taste bland.

The recipe is incredibly flexible: my mom changed the original tomato muffin recipe to a whole foods recipe; I experimented with the applesauce/squash component and put the eggs back in; my son suggested adding the carrot. Here are some other options you can try:

- Make the muffins vegan by substituting the eggs with egg replacer and the honey with agave syrup.
- Prepare the first three wet ingredients during harvest time, freeze them in freezer bags or containers and then thaw the mixture before baking the rest during the winter.
- Replace the raisins with chopped figs or dates and throw in some orange zest for Christmas muffins.
- If you only have whole spelt flour, just substitute it for the chickpea and amaranth flours. It does taste better, though, with all three.

Susie made our time together a wonderful treat in my life that I could never get enough of. These muffins are the same. See what your kids come up with and make this your own family recipe.

5 whole roma tomatoes
1 cup honey
½ cup unsweetened applesauce or cooked squash
2 eggs
2½ cups whole spelt flour
¼ cup chickpea flour
¼ cup amaranth flour
2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
¼ tsp sea salt
1½ tsp ground cinnamon
¾ tsp ground cloves
1 tsp ground nutmeg
1 large grated carrot
1 cup raisins

Preheat your oven to 350°F. Line two muffin tins with muffin cups, preferably unbleached ones. This recipe will make two dozen medium-sized muffins.

Pureé the tomatoes (skin, seeds, everything), honey and applesauce/squash in a food processor. Add in the eggs and process until fully mixed.

In a large bowl combine the flours, baking powder, baking soda, sea salt, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg.

Add the wet ingredients to the dry, mixing until all flour lumps are gone. Add the raisins and carrot.

Divide over your two muffin tins and bake for about 12 to 15 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. (If your oven is wide enough, you can put both muffin tins on the same rack. You may need to switch sides about half way through or so to help them bake evenly.)

Let them cool a little in the muffin tins, and then remove them to cooling racks. They will keep for a few days out of the fridge, but ideal is to freeze the ones you won't eat that day and then thaw as needed. Just be sure they're completely cooled first. They are wonderful warmed up in a toaster oven or after being simply thawed at room temperature.

Lori Straus is a mom of two and wife to one who loves getting creative in the kitchen and prides herself on being able to cook and bake for the full gamut of diets out there today.

- NL -

Natural Life Magazine's Green and Healthy Homes

by Natural Life's Editor Wendy Priesnitz

Make your home greener and healthier, and save money too. Includes tips on making your own cleaning supplies, advice about green renovations and energy retrofits, how to avoid and clean up mold and radon, water conservation tips, sorting out the plastic controversy, avoiding dangerous household chemicals, using organic cotton and hemp textiles to decorate your home, eco gardening, and much more.



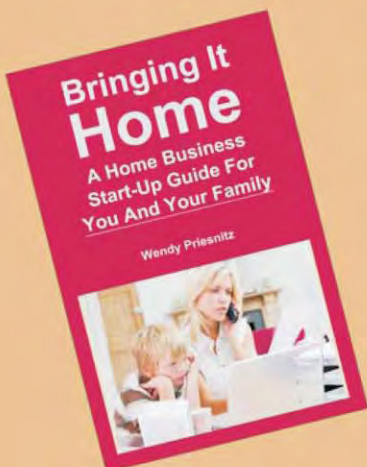
www.NaturalLifeBooks.com



Business at Home?

Natural Life's editor Wendy Priesnitz has been working at home for 37 years, and coached other home business owners for 25 years. In this newly updated e-book edition of her popular guide for home business families, she helps you to make money at home while parenting.

Choose the right business for you, research your market, set your prices, find suppliers, balance family and work time, deal with legalities, keep good records, find customers, set up an efficient and child-friendly home office, create a professional image, and much more.



Get more information and purchase this book at

www.NaturalLifeBooks.com