



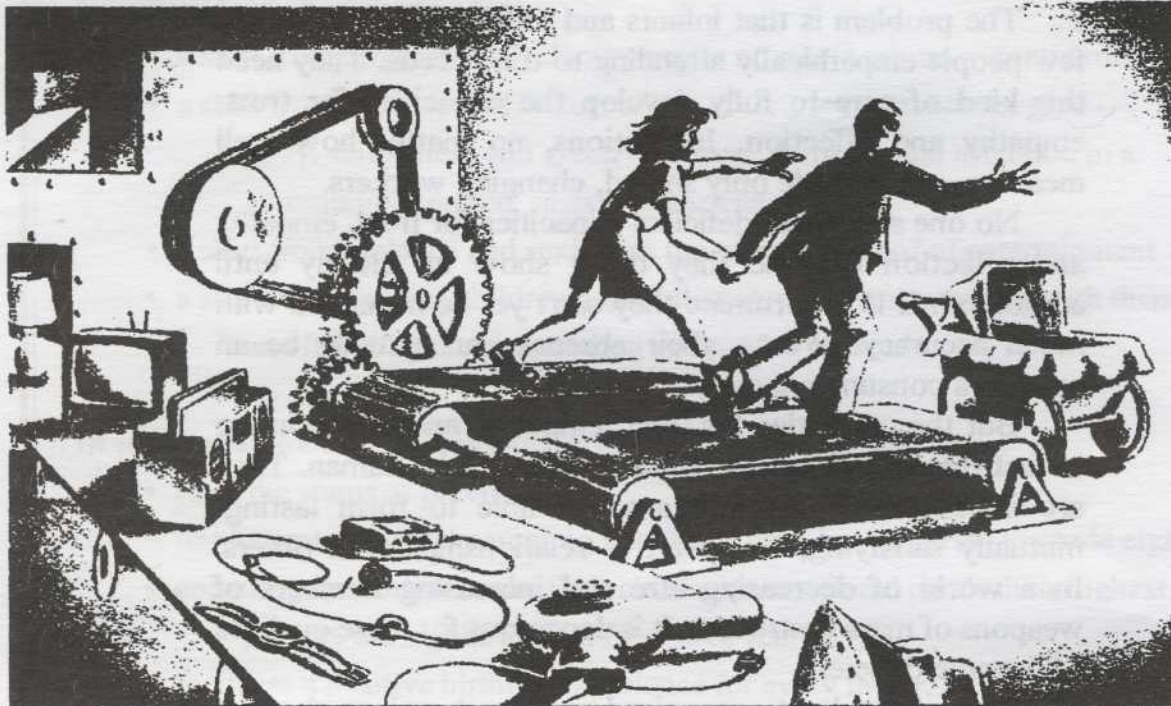
# EMPATHIC PARENTING

Journal of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Volume 23

Issue 2

Spring 2000



*Graham Murphy*

**"It is consumerism that drives the 80-hour work week. When we learn that consumer goods don't make us happy, we can get serious about reconstructing the family. The critical question in America, at the end of the 20th century, is whether consumption or the family will prevail."**

**Christopher Lasch**

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## Consumerism and Childcare

Consumerism cons parents into believing that making money is of greater importance than caring for their infants and toddlers.

The problem is that infants and toddlers need the same few people empathically attending to their needs. They need this kind of care to fully develop the capacities for trust, empathy and affection. Institutions, no matter how well meaning, can provide only shared, changing workers.

No one sees these deficient capacities for trust, empathy and affection because they don't show up clearly until adulthood. It is unfortunate they can't yet be measured with much accuracy. Worse, their absence can actually be an asset in a consumer society.

But the capacities for trust, empathy, and affection are in fact the central core of what it means to be human. They are indispensable for adults to be able to form lasting, mutually satisfying, co-operative relationships with others. In a world of decreasing size and increasing numbers of weapons of mass destruction it is dangerous for these qualities to become deficient.

One of the least recognized and most serious dangers of our consumption addicted society is its effect on the appropriate nurturing of new human beings.

ETB

### WHAT IS EMPATHIC PARENTING?

**Being willing and able to put yourself in your child's shoes in order to correctly identify his/her feelings, and**  
**Being willing and able to behave toward your child in ways which take those feelings into account.**  
**Empathic Parenting takes an enormous amount of time and energy and fully involves both parents in a co-operative, sharing way.**

**EMPATHIC PARENTING**

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Prevention of Cruelty to Children

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**EMPATHIC PARENTING**

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Many articles from past issues of Empathic Parenting are available on the Internet at:

<http://www.empathicparenting.org>

The CSPCC's parent preparation course, which takes about 10 hours to complete and leads to a "A Certificate for Parenting" is now available on the Internet at:

<http://parenting.telecampus.com>



Without making distinctions between those who have money and those who do not, we can say of most Americans at the present time that they suffer from a hunger of the soul, which they try to satisfy by eating too much, smoking and drinking too much, buying too much, looking at too much TV, and rushing around more and faster than necessary. Their unfulfilled hunger drives them to self-destroying life-habits and the growing gap between what they need from life and what they succeed in getting opens them to anguish and despair that they try to suppress by sedatives, stimulants, and mind-changing drugs in enormous amounts, at enormous cost...

Excerpt from "The Poverty of a Rich Society", Proceedings No. 31, by John F. Gardner, © The Myrin Institute Inc., 1978.

## You Can Never Get Enough of What You Didn't Want in The First Place

*Sam Keen*

At present, families are disintegrating at a rapid rate under the impact of economic pressures that force both father and mother into the workforce... The task of caring for and initiating children is increasingly turned over to professionals, as both mother and father choose to centre their identity in the economic rather than the familiar.

More accurately, the crisis in the family goes along with a modern redefinition of economic. The word 'economic' originally meant the art and science of managing a household. Under the impact of the omnivorous market-mentality, it changed its meaning and became "the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities." The subversion and destruction of the family can be measured in the distance between these two definitions — between home economics and corporate economics...

No number of products, money, or abstract goods satisfies us. This is the fundamental mistake we make in substituting the economic for the familiar as the root of identity. Economic man is driven by insatiability because, as my friend Anne Valley Fox says, "You can never get enough of what you didn't want in the first place." Beyond the level of comfortable survival, goods become a substitute for the primal goodness we were denied — familiarity, intimacy, kindness...

Edited excerpt from *The Passionate Life: Stages of Loving*, Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1983

## What Is Voluntary Simplicity?

The essence of voluntary simplicity is living in a way that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich. This way of life embraces frugality of consumption, a strong sense of environmental urgency, a desire to return to living and working environments which are of a more human scale, and an intention to realize our higher human potential — both psychological and spiritual — in community with others.

The driving forces behind voluntary simplicity range from acutely personal concerns to critical national problems. The appeal of simple living appears to be extraordinarily widespread, even gathering sympathy from among those who are not presently attempting to simplify their own life patterns. Voluntary simplicity is important because it may foreshadow a major transformation in the goals and values of the United States in the coming decades. Although a social movement still in its early stages, its practical and ethical positions seem well enough developed to permit useful analysis of this way of life.

Voluntary simplicity is not new. Nonetheless, the conditions and trends which appear to be driving its contemporary emergence do seem new in their magnitude and intensity...

*Edited excerpt from an updated rewrite by Duane Elgin and Arnold Mitchell, authors of the Stanford Research Institute's study of "Voluntary Simplicity" which was distributed among major corporations subscribing to the Institute's Business Intelligence Program. Reprinted from the CoEvolution Quarterly, Summer 1977.*



**The Squander Society:** Huge cars race up Big Rock Candy Mountain, symbol of material plenty, carrying people chasing the dreams of the Squander Society. Unfortunately, they can never quite catch their dreams — like driving a bigger, faster car. Their goal in life is to consume and there are always more and more things to want.

# Voluntary Simplicity -- 1936

*Richard Gregg*

**Our present mental climate is not favourable either to a clear understanding of the value of simplicity or to its practice.**

Voluntary simplicity of living has been advocated and practiced by the founders of most of the great religions — Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tse, Moses and Mohammed — also by many saints and wise men such as St. Francis, John Woolman, the Hindu rishis, the Hebrew prophets, the Moslem sufis; by many artists and scientists; and by such great modern leaders as Lenin and Gandhi. It has been followed also by members of military armies and monastic orders — organizations which have had great and prolonged influence on the world.

Clearly, then, there is or has been some vitally important element in this observance. But the vast quantities of things given to us by modern mass production and commerce, the developments of science and the complexities of existence in modern industrialized countries have raised widespread doubts as to the validity of this practice and principle. Our present 'mental climate' is not favourable either to a clear understanding of the value of simplicity or to its practice.

We are not here considering asceticism in the sense of a suppression of instincts. What we mean by voluntary simplicity is not so austere and rigid. Simplicity is a relative matter, depending on climate, customs, culture, the character of the individual. For example, in India, ex-

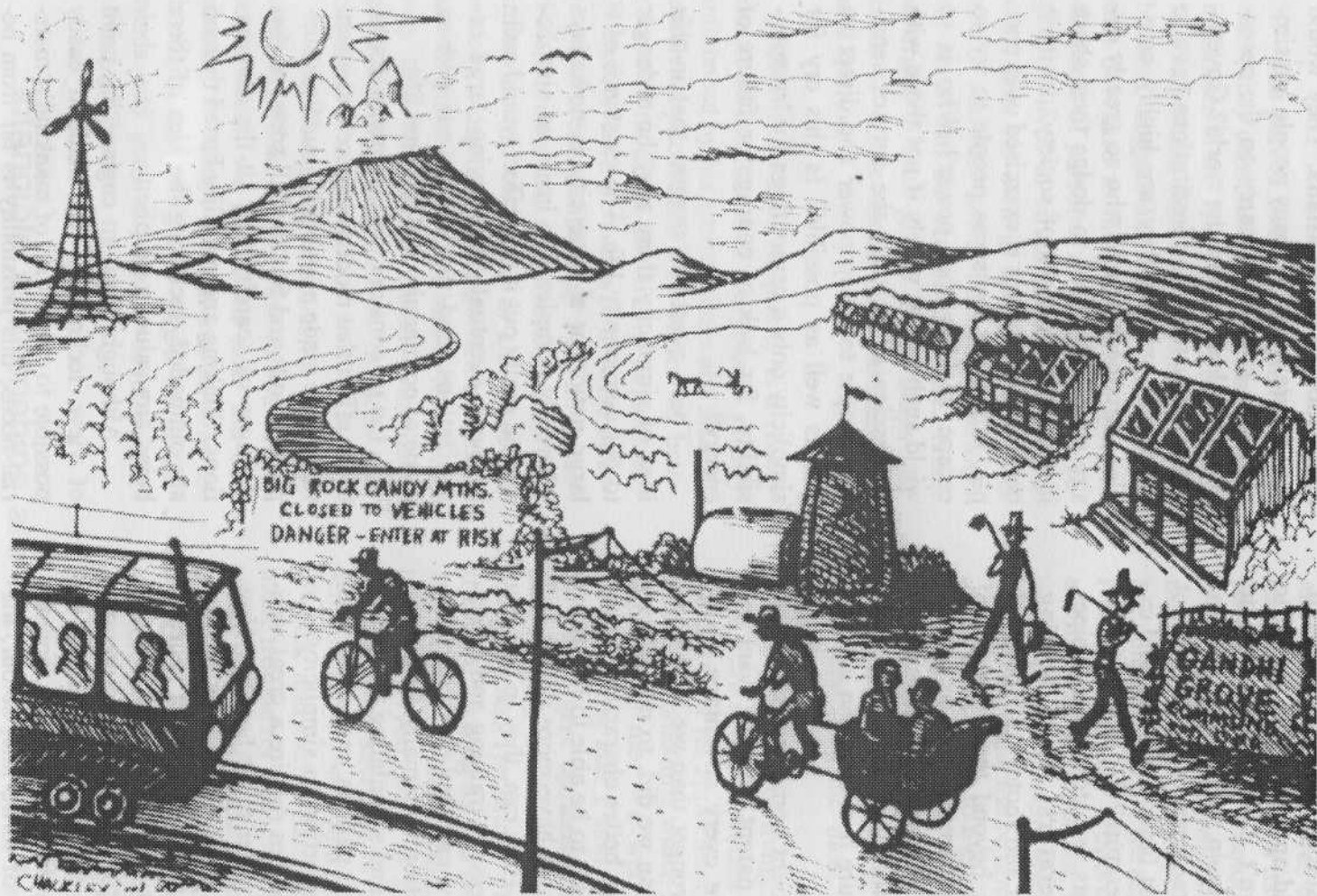
Edited excerpts from the Indian journal *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* for August 1936

cept for those who are trying to imitate Westerners, everyone, wealthy as well as poor, sits on the floor, and there are no chairs. A large number of Americans, poor as well as rich, think they have to own a motor car, and many others consider a telephone exceedingly important. What is simplicity for an American would be far from simple to a Chinese peasant.

## *Widespread Doubts*

First of all, modern machine production seems to have solved the age-old condition of scarcity of the material things needed for life. Science and invention, industrialism, commerce and transportation have made it possible to produce and distribute more and better food, clothing, housing materials, tools and equipment, comforts, and luxuries than mankind has ever had hitherto. For an American, a stroll through a ten-cent store, a chain-grocery store and a department store, followed by a perusal of a catalogue of some of the large mail-order stores, is convincing on that score, to say nothing of what meets our eye on every street. Henry Ford's idea that civilization progresses by the increase in the number of people's desires and their satisfaction, looks sensible. The vast quantities of paper and ink devoted to advertisements add emphasis to that belief. The





**Conservor Society Three:** Subscribes to values very different from those prevalent in North America today. People in this Conservor Society believe that happiness and satisfaction can't be bought with material things, so they "do less with less and do something else." They have actually given up many goods — and strive for harmony and unity with nature.

financial and social stability of every industrialized country seems to be founded on the expectation of an over-expanding market for mass production. Russia, as well as capitalistic nations, has this aim. The whole world appears to be geared to this concept. Isn't it an anachronism to talk of simplicity in such an age? Complex as our paraphernalia is, does it not protect us against famine, disease, and extremes of temperature? Do not our tractors, electric lights, gas stoves, water pipes, electric refrigerators, house heating, airplanes, steam and motor transport, telephones, lift us beyond the threshold of animal existence, remove from us oppressive fears, give us a sense of security and at least the possibility of leisure? We must surely have leisure if civilization is to advance.

Another doubt comes readily to the mind of every parent. We all want our children to have every advantage, to be healthier and stronger than we have been, to learn more than we did, to make fewer mistakes, to have better characters, to see more of the world, to be able to live fuller and richer lives, to have more power and beauty and joy. How can, they in this day acquire the necessary training and education for this, how can they come into contact and association with many people and many beautiful and stimulating things and scenes if we, their parents, cramp our lives and theirs by resorting to simplicity? Do not even their bodies require a great variety of foods in order to be healthy? How is the mind to grow unless it is fed unceasingly from a wide variety of sources? Surely beauty is a most important element in the life of both individuals and communities, and how can we have beauty if we are limited by a drab, severe and monotonous simplicity of form, line, colour, material, texture and tone?

Again, many people who doubt the validity of simplicity would say that if it were put into effect it would extend itself beyond the lives of individuals and claim application to group affairs. They would then naturally say, if many people 'go simple', who is going to carry on the necessary complex work of the world? Governments, industries, and institutions have to be carried on and they are highly complex. Are these people who so greatly desire simplicity going to dodge their share in the complex tasks of society? In most organizations power is exercised over people. Is it right for some people to try to escape wielding that power? Who is to wield such power wisely if not those with a conscience? Is it not the duty of sensitive people to grasp power and direct its use as well as possible? Is this cry for simplicity only a camouflage for irresponsibility, for lack of courage or failure of energy?

These questions suggest that in this idea of simplicity there may be a danger to our community life. The existence of a large nation or a large city is nowadays inherently complex. To insist on simplicity and really put it into effect would seem to mean eventually destroying large organizations, and that means our present mode of community and national life.

Let us consider the first major doubt, to the effect that modern science and inventions have made possible a boundless supply of goods and foods of all sorts, so that the ages of scarcity and all the assumptions, thinking and morality based thereon are outmoded, including the idea of there being any value in simplicity.

Although, from an engineering point of view, technology has made it easily possible to supply all of mankind's material needs, this possibility is far from being an actuality. There is a very big "if"



**Conservator Society One:** A society that believes in growth with conservation, and follows the credo, “do more with less.” As in North American society today, people would still want to try to climb the Big Rock Candy Mountain, (symbol of material plenty), but they would do it with as little waste as possible — in small cars or by public transportation, at a well considered pace, with great care for the view along the way.

attached. Despite the wondrous mechanical, chemical and electrical inventions, scarcity of necessities still exists to a painful degree in every country. There are large portions of the population of the United States who do not have such comforts as water piped into the house or apartment, and furnaces to provide house warmth in winter. Yet this country is one of the wealthiest and most widely mechanized. Another failure in application of technology is shown by the vast numbers of unemployed in almost all countries — probably more than ever before in the history of the world.

Our financial price system and debt structure controls production, distribution and the wherewithal to pay for consumption. That system operates to cause wheat to be burned in the United States while millions are starving in China; tons of oranges to be left to rot in California while children in our city slums are subject to rickets, bad teeth and other forms of ill health for the lack of vitamins in those oranges; and so on for a long chapter.

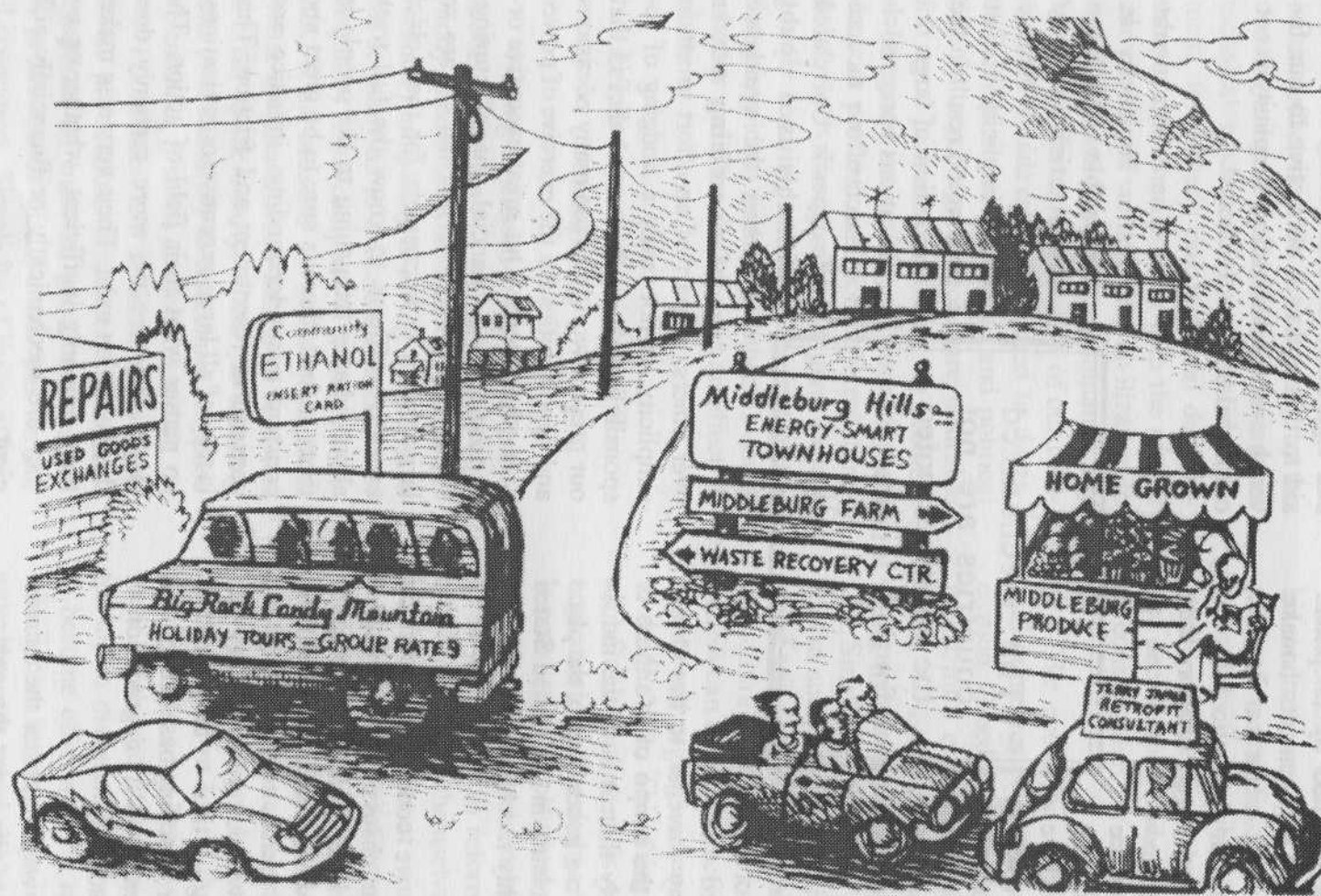
The great advances in science and technology have not solved the moral problems of civilization. Those advances have altered the form of some of those problems, greatly increased others, dramatized some and made others much more difficult of solution. The just distribution of material things is not merely a problem of technique or of organization. It is primarily a moral problem.

In volume III of Arnold J. Toynbee's *Study of History* he discusses the growth of civilizations. For some sixty pages he considers what constitutes the growth of civilization, including in that term growth in wisdom as well as in stature. With immense learning he traces the developments of many civilizations, — Egyptian, Sumeric, Minoan, Hellenic, Syriac, Indic,

Iranian, Chinese, Babylonic, Mayan, Japanese etc. After spreading out the evidence, he comes to the conclusion that real growth of a civilization does not consist of increasing command over the physical environment, nor of increasing command over the human environment (i.e., over the nations or civilizations), but that it lies in what he calls "etherialization"; a development of intangible relationships. He points out that this process involves both a simplification of the apparatus of life and also a transfer of interest and energy from material things to a higher sphere. He follows Bergson in equating complexity with Matter and simplicity with Life.

To those who say that machinery and the apparatus of living are merely instruments and devices which are without moral nature in themselves, but which can be used for either good or evil, I would point out that we are all influenced by the tools and means which we use. Again and again in the lives of individuals and of nations we see that when certain means are used vigorously, thoroughly and for a long time those means assume the character and influence of an end in themselves. We become obsessed by our tools. The strong quantitative elements in science, machinery and money, and in their products, tend to make the thinking and life of those who use them mechanistic and divided. The relationships which science, machinery and money create give us more energy outwardly but they live upon and take away from us our inner energy.

We think that our machinery and technology will save us time and give us more leisure, but really they make life more crowded and hurried. When I install in my house a telephone, I think it will save me all the time and energy of going to market every day, and much going about for making petty inquiries and minor er-



**Conservor Society Two:** The Affluent Stable State. Having reached a plateau of material comfort on the Big Rock Candy Mountain, people in this society have decided enough is enough. Content with life on their plateau, they “strive to do the same with less.” More material goods will not improve their lives — and may in fact have a negative impact, undermining environmental quality for example.

rands to those with whom I have dealings. True, I do use it for those purposes but I also immediately expand the circle of my frequent contacts, and that anticipated leisure time rapidly is filled by telephone calls to me or with engagements I make by the use of it. The motor car has the same effect upon our domestic life. We are all covering much bigger territory than formerly, but the expected excess of leisure is conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, where the motor cars are very numerous, you can now, at many times during the day, walk faster than you can go in a taxi or bus.

The mechanized countries are not the countries noted for their leisure. Any traveller to the Orient can testify that the tempo of life there is far more leisurely than it is in the industrialized West. To a lesser degree, the place to find relative leisure in the United States is not in the highly mechanized cities, but in the country.

Moreover, we continually overlook the fact that our obsession with machinery spoils our inner poise and sense of values, without which the time spared from necessitous toil ceases to be leisure and becomes time without meaning, or with sinister meaning — time to be 'killed' by movies, radio or watching baseball games, or unemployment with its degradation of morale and personality.

No — the way to master the increasing complexity of life is not through more complexity. The way is to turn inward to

that which unifies all — not the intellect but the spirit, and then to devise and put into operation new forms and modes of economic and social life that will truly and vigorously express that spirit. As an aid to that and as a corrective to our feverish over-mechanization, simplicity is not outmoded but greatly needed.

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There is a doubt whether simplicity is compatible with large organizations of any kind, so that insistence upon simplicity in that field would result in the destruction of large organizations upon which so much of our modern life depends. Correlated with this is a doubt whether the avoidance of exercising power

over others, as part of an effort to attain simplicity, is not really a dodging of responsibility. As to these my belief is that our present world has too many occasions and opportunities for the exercise of power over other people. Our great executive organizations — financial, manufacturing, commercial, and governmental — are so large that it is impossible for their chief executive officers to know the full truth about what is happening to the people in them, indeed, there is sure to be great and constant misunderstanding, injustice and consequent resentment and friction. That is true of all large executive organizations, no matter what their field of action. The larger they are the more certainly does this condition exist. Their very size makes them humanly inefficient, whether or not they are mechanically or financially efficient.

Hence we are unable to wield vast

powers without probably doing more harm than good. There is too much concentration of power in the hands of too few people. I agree with Mr. Justice Brandeis that our organizations are too large for human efficiency. To say that only by the concentration of wealth can we attain great technical advances is not a valid argument, for already our technical development is out of proportion with the rest of our growth. If we want our civilization to last we must prevent megalomania and keep the different departments of our common life in harmony. We need to decentralize our economic, social and political life. If larger aggregations are desirable for some purposes, it should be possible to integrate the small units more loosely than at present, and for different functions. Such changes would give society greater security, not less. In view of the foregoing ideas and some others I doubt whether complete socialism is an effective answer.

*Let us turn to the reasons for  
simplicity*

Having discussed some of the major doubts, let us turn to the reasons for simplicity. There are a number of reasons for voluntary simplicity of living, but perhaps not so many as to make the discussion of simplicity itself complex. If it seems complex, it is because so much intellectual clutter and underbrush has to be removed in order to see clearly. Since our thinking runs predominantly to economics, suppose we consider first the economic aspects.

Economics has at least three divisions: production, distribution and consumption. Of material goods we are not all producers or distributors, but we are all consumers. Simplicity of living affects primarily consumption. It sets a standard

of consumption. Consumption is the area within which each individual can affect the economic life of the community. Small as his own share may be, that is the area within which every person can exercise his control over the forces of economic production and distribution. If he regards himself as responsible for our joint economic welfare he has a duty to think out and decide upon and adhere to a standard of consumption for himself and his family.

The economic system in which we find ourselves is gravely defective in operation. Greed and competition are two of its harmful elements. Competitive ostentation — ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ — is a prominent feature of modern social life. Simplicity of living acts as a deterrent to such ostentation and hence to both greed and competition. Therefore, all those who desire to reform the existing economic system can take an effective part by living simply and urging and encouraging others to do likewise. This thing comes close to all of us. Capitalism is no mere exterior organization of bankers and industrialists. It consists of a spirit and attitude and habitual actions in and among all of us. Even those who desire to reform or end it usually have within themselves certain of its attitudes and habits of mind and desire. If capitalism is to be reformed or ended, that change will alter the lives and thoughts and feelings of every one of us. Conversely, if I wish actively to participate in this transformation, I myself must begin to alter my own life in the desired direction. If I share too heavily in the regime I want to change, it becomes too difficult for me to disentangle myself and I cease to become effective as a reformer. Those who live on income from investments will not dare to advocate deep economic changes, unless they live simply enough

to permit a lowering of their income without too great an upset in their mode of life. My changes must be both inner and outer and must, I believe, be in the direction of more simplicity.

Exploitation of human beings is an ancient evil, older than capitalism. It existed under European feudalism, and probably in most of the other forms of economic and social organization in every continent. It goes on today all around us, and practically everyone of us shares in it at least indirectly. The first step I can take to cut down my share in exploitation is to live simply. All luxuries require unnecessary labour, as John Woolman so clearly showed. The production and consumption of

luxuries divert labour and capital from tasks which are socially more productive and beneficial; they often take land away from wise use; and they waste raw materials which might be used to better advantage. This tends to increase the prices of necessities and thereby lowers real wages and makes the struggle of the poor harder.

Since poor people imitate the rich, we see girls on small wages buying furs, expensive shoes and cosmetics, and depriving themselves of proper food and warm clothing in order to do so. In such a case the ostentatious luxury of the rich

clearly is a factor in causing hardships and sickness, and resulting in unnecessary labour on the part of the poor, to repair those losses. The fashions in luxuries often change arbitrarily and suddenly, and such changes create unemployment. Those who work at luxury trades are, in time of economic depression, in the most insecure position of all, because then the spending

for luxuries is the first thing to stop. Therefore the fewer people there are engaged in luxury trades, the more secure the population will be.

Simplicities must not infringe upon the minimal needs of individuals, or upon even the wise surplus margins above those minima. But inasmuch as the desires of mankind are boundless, and we all tend to rationalize our desires, there is endless dispute as to how wide the surplus margin should be in order to be wise.

of mankind are boundless, and we all tend to rationalize our desires, there is endless dispute as to how wide the surplus margin should be in order to be wise.

In view of all this, it is clear that in our expenditures of money, while elemental necessities must be met, nevertheless there is above that line a wide realm for the application of the principle of simplicity.

A guiding principle for the limitation of property was suggested by Ruskin: "Possession is in use only, which for each

Simplicities must not infringe upon the minimal needs of individuals, or upon even the wise surplus margins above those minima. But inasmuch as the desires of mankind are boundless, and we all tend to rationalize our desires, there is endless dispute as to how wide the surplus margin should be in order to be wise.



man is sternly limited; so that such things and so much of them as he can use, are indeed, well for him, or Wealth; and more of them, or any other things, are ill for him, or Illth."

Lack of unity between men is now widely prevalent. To give a concrete instance of what I mean by unity and disunity, it would be consistent with a real awareness of human unity if I should invite into my house for a meal and a night's lodging a starving man who has knocked at my door. But if my rugs are so fine that I am afraid his dirty shoes may ruin them, I hesitate. If I have many valuable objects of art or much fine silverware, I also hesitate for fear he may

pocket some of them or tell men who may later steal them from the house. If my furniture and hangings bespeak great wealth I mistrust him lest he hold me up; or perhaps if I am less suspicious and more courageous and more sensitively imaginative, I fear lest the contrast between his poverty and my abundance will make him secretly envious, or resentful, or bitter, or make him feel ill at ease. Or perhaps he is so very dirty that I fear he has vermin and I am revolted by that thought and am so far from him humanly that I do not know how to deal with him humanely. In this case it is clear that my lack of simplicity acts as a barrier between him and me. The prolonged lack of simplicity

of our whole society has increased the distance between his thoughts, feelings and ways, and mine, and so adds to the social barrier.

Or again, if I have much real and personal property and am interested in it, my time is very largely occupied in looking after it. I will not have much time for simple neighbourliness. A selfish and aggressive neighbour may infringe on my

boundaries so as to use some of my land next to his own. He would not have been so likely to do that if I had previously been truly friendly with him, had shared some of my garden produce with him and his family and had been kind to his children. So my failure to do the things which would have created good feeling and a sense

of human unity in him has resulted in trouble between us. The lack of simplicity in my own life has engrossed too much of my time and energy and has been an effective cause in creating disunity.

Moreover, if, as some people believe, we are at the beginning of a period of economic decline, it may well be that great simplicity of living is the main condition upon which the learned professions which require leisure will be permitted to exist. If so, the previous voluntary adoption of greater simplicity by the learned professions would count for their security and make the transition easier for them. Something of that is recognized in the age-old Hindu society in which the Brahmans —

It is clear that in our expenditures of money, while elemental necessities must be met, nevertheless there is above that line a wide realm for the application of the principle of simplicity.

## Friendship and love do not require ownership of property for either their ordinary or their finest expression.

the teachers, physicians, priests and other learned professions — are morally bound to and predominantly actually do maintain lives of extreme simplicity as an essential element in their professional code, to which great respect is accorded.

The greatest gulf in society is between the rich and the poor. The practice of simplicity by the well-to-do helps to bridge this gulf and may be therefore an expression of love. The rich young man was advised by Jesus to sell all his goods and give to the poor, and thus simplify his life, in order to perfect his religious life. No doubt such an act would have resulted in more than simplification of the young man's life, but that would have been one of the results.

Hinduism and Buddhism have also emphasized the value of simplicity. The anonymous author of *The Practice of Christianity* believes that tender-heartedness — gentle kindness — is the supreme virtue and the essence of Jesus' teachings. Tender-heartedness, together with great intelligence and strength of character, has in the cases of such leaders as Buddha, Jesus, St. Francis, George Fox, John Woolman and Gandhi, resulted in simplicity. Tender-heartedness seems to have been one of the elements which compelled those men to recognize human unity and to live in accordance with it and to share their property and lives with those who had need. Thus simplicity is, perhaps, a part of utter gentleness, and may be essential to those who would really practice religion.

It is often said that possessions are important because they enable the posses-

sors thereby to enrich and enhance their personalities and characters. The claim is that by means of ownership the powers of self-direction and self-control inherent in personality become real. Property, they say, gives stability, security, independence, a real place in the larger life of the community, a feeling of responsibility, all of which are elements of vigorous personality.

Nevertheless, the greatest characters, those who have influenced the largest numbers of people for the longest time have been people with extremely few possessions. The reason for this is something that we usually fail to realize, namely that the essence of personality does not lie in its isolated individuality, its separateness from other people, its uniqueness, but in its basis of relationships with other personalities. It is a capacity for friendship, for fellowship, for intercourse, for entering imaginatively into the lives of others. At its height it is a capacity for and exercise of love. Friendship and love do not require ownership of property for either their ordinary or their finest expression. Creativeness does not depend on possession. Intangible relationships are more important to the individual and to society than property is. It is true that a certain kind of pleasure and satisfaction come from acquiring mastery over material things, but that sort of power and that sort of satisfaction are not so secure, so permanent, so deep, so characteristic of mental and moral maturity as are some others. The most permanent, most secure and most satisfying sort of possession of things other than the materials needed for bodily life, lies not in physical control and

power of exclusion but in intellectual, emotional and spiritual understanding and appreciation. This is especially clear in regard to beauty.

If a person lives among great possessions, they constitute an environment which influences him. His sensitiveness to certain important human relations is apt to become clogged and dulled, his imagination in regard to the subtle but important elements of personal relationship or in regard to lives in circumstances less fortunate than his own is apt to become less active and less keen. This is not always the result but the exception is rare. When enlarged to inter-group relationships this tends to create social misunderstandings and friction.

Observance of simplicity is a recognition of the fact that everyone is greatly influenced by his surroundings and all their subtle implications. The power of environment modifies all living organisms. Therefore each person will be wise to select and create deliberately such an immediate environment of home things as will influence his character in the direction which he deems most important and such as will make it easier for him to live in the way that he believes wisest. Simplicity gives him a certain kind of freedom and clearness of vision.

The foregoing discussion has answered, I think, much of the second strong doubt which we mentioned near the beginning, the doubt that parents have as to the harm that simplicity might do to the minds and general cultural development of their children.

In regard to aesthetics, simplicity should not connote ugliness. The most beautiful and restful room I ever entered was in a Japanese country inn, without any furniture or pictures or applied ornaments. Its beauty lay in its wonderful proportions and the soft colours of unpainted wood beams, paper walls and straw matting. There can be beauty in complexity but complexity is not the essence of beauty. Harmony of line, proportion and colour are much more important. In a sense, simplicity is an important element in all great art, for it means the removal of all details that are irrelevant to a given purpose. It is one of the arts within the great art of life. And perhaps the mind can be guided best if its activities are always kept organically related to the most important purposes in life.

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

**Intangible relationships are more important to the individual and to society than property is.**

advice agrees with modern Western psychology of wishes and suppressed desires. This also substantiates what we said near the beginning of our discussion, that the

application of the principle of simplicity is for each person or each family to work out sincerely for themselves. ☺



"We must be willing to face the hard reality that preventing child abuse and neglect is possible only when we are ready to attack its sources in the fabric of our society and culture, rather than merely provide social and medical services to its victims."

David G. Gil

Consumption · Quality of Life · Environment · Values  
*Center for a New American Dream*

**Are there signs that the late 20th century materialism is abating? Might the 21st century become the “postmaterialist” age? Or will free market competition, combined with our human tendencies to adapt to new pleasures and to compare with others, fuel a continually spiralling materialism and consumerism?**

**Mark**

I see no evidence that consumer culture is abating. In fact, it is expanding explosively over the whole planet. North American consumer spending was higher in 1999 than any year on record. I think these developments are deplorable and frightening, but they are factual.

The 21st Century will certainly become the “post-materialist” age but probably not by choice. The interaction of population growth, poverty, political corruption, climate change, habitat and species destruction, the accumulated legacy of pollution, erosion, deforestation, desertification, salinization, over-fishing, and a disastrous narrowing of the gene pool providing our principal sources of food virtually assures some sort of “coming to terms” within one human generation. Consumer culture is doomed. We need to be busy creating alternatives.

**Dave**

Can educating people about the modest connections between wealth and well-being -- and about the greater important of positive traits, close relationships, and faith communities -- contribute to a more humane and environmentally healthy world? Or is mere knowledge unlikely to be persuasive, much as knowing the perils of smoking fails to liberate a nicotine addict?

**Mark**

If “education” is merely the transmission of information from one person to another, then I don’t think it will help much, just like the smoking example. If education can be conceived as a far deeper process of self- and social transformation, then it has immense value. BUT, education takes time and time is short...

This article consists of edited excerpts from the April 2000 CNAD listserv conversation – an Internet exchange of emails. These conversations are distributed courtesy the Center for a New American Dream's bi-monthly Syndicated Column Service which explores the connections between consumption, quality of life, environment, and values.

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There is also another layer of issues that hasn't been mentioned. It's simplistic to think that the engine of consumer culture is just a misplaced notion of how to attain happiness or well-being. Some of us participate in consumer culture some of the time in a search for greater happiness. But I see in consumer culture a complex web of motivations, potential rewards, anxiety reducers, aversion avoiders, and addictive co-dependencies. We pursue money for the happiness we mistakenly believe it can bring into our lives, but we also pursue money because we think it can protect us from pain, discomfort, illness and death; because we believe it confers power over others; because we think that possessing it can enable us to escape the negative judgments of others; because we mistakenly think that it is pre-requisite to doing other good works; because the technology of planned obsolescence forces us to consume; because debt service forces us to earn and consume; and often because we see no viable alternative ways of life such that pursuing consumerism appears to be the only "realistic" way to live.

It will take more than simply informing people about the weak correlation between income and happiness in life to untangle the mass of delusions that makes

up the guiding mythology of consumer culture, and undo the mass of co-dependencies, coercive manipulations and deliberately designed strategies of misinformation that sustain consumer economies.

### **Molly**

If we can't even get people to recycle (our town's rates have changed very little in 10 years), which takes NO extra time,

money, or effort, how can we effect big changes that really require sacrifice? Recycling requires NO sacrifice, would SAVE our town money, and has NO down side and people have been educated for more than a decade about its benefits (including to future generations) -- yet people will not do it voluntarily. How can we expect them to use electric cars (cost too much, inconvenient, not enough selection),

carpool (very inconvenient, have to rearrange schedule, have to get up early, have to do what others want, have to reach consensus on daily basis, etc.), get off the grid (cost, need to study and learn technical skills, potential inconvenience, potential ostracism), live in intentional communities (sacrifice of privacy, personal space, and one's own total control; cost; have to get along with diverse people; might get stuck babysitting someone else's kids!), vegetarianism (give up meat? are you crazy?) etc. Yes, there are BENEFITS to

I see no evidence that consumer culture is abating. In fact, it is expanding explosively over the whole planet. North American consumer spending was higher in 1999 than any year on record. I think these developments are deplorable and frightening, but they are factual.

all of these things, but there are benefits to recycling and composting, too, including immediate benefits, but they're not still catching on with the mass of people.

What does it take?

**Richard**

The big problem is that its harder to send a message by NOT consuming something! People can SEE what you ARE wearing or driving, but they can't see what you have chosen not to wear or drive or eat. If I had the bad taste to wear a Nike T-shirt they would know it instantly. So to my mind, one of the key things we need to think about to make non-consumption an attractive social option, is how to make not-consuming more visible. Any ideas?

**Mark**

People notice quite a lot about what we refrain from doing. I've found it surprising how many people notice that I am vegetarian, that I walk rather than drive a car, that my wardrobe is simple and unpretentious, and that come the weekend I'm not on the golf course or the downhill ski runs, but instead busy myself in my garden, in my church or in various community activities in which I take part. If they ask me about these choices, I explain them. But even people who don't ask often still notice, and walking the talk broadcasts more clearly than any amount of talking alone.

**Diane**

How does one keep from despair in light of the environmental onslaught we are currently experiencing?

**Sara**

I find it is very easy to lose hope because people who believe as we do about living simple lives find it hard to locate others who feel the same way, so we are surrounded by those who don't understand.

**Bruce**

Hello to all, and thanks for the stimulating exchanges.

There's a lot of concern and fear of "losing hope" as this advocacy for the Earth is tough stuff with lots of setbacks. I maintain hope by focusing on one area of stewardship or care locally and one internationally. Then I can focus my energies and defend these two areas like a Grizzly defends her cubs.

It's easy to look at all of the problems and feel on overwhelm---or to dilute your energies or even to burn out. Maintaining a narrower focus while being aware of the scope of the problems can be a real life saver. Thus, a majority of areas will be defended and nurtured by those who know them the best and love them the most. Those areas that are without advocates may unfortunately be lost.

I believe that the above holds true for social issues: find an area of advocacy that means the most to you or the place where you can be the most influential and give it all ya got! And pray that other areas that are of lesser value to you find an advocate or help encourage others in these areas.

There's my 2 cents worth.....Towards quality of life for all,

**Dave**

Malcolm Gladwell, in his controversial new book, \*The Tipping Point,\* offers examples of how new behavior patterns or infectious ideas can, like viruses,

spread rapidly from a few individuals through a population. In the past, books have helped do this, as when Rachel Carson's *\*Silent Spring\** helped awaken the environmental movement and Betty Friedan's *\*The Feminine Mystique\** helped ignite the feminist movement. Aided by the Internet ideas can spread faster than ever.

#### **Tom**

Check out the writing of Jeremy Rifkin. A proactive, grassroots approach would be to become a model/leader in your community for implementing low-tech (preferably) sustainable methods, particularly food production. Low cost greenhouses along with fish trenches, gardens, and many clever techniques that make growing vegetables easy and cheap regardless of whether you have a yard or not can be learned.

I have started a non-commercial website ([www.bagelhole.org](http://www.bagelhole.org)) to help people do just these things and to foment a global movement in that direction.

High tech is amazing but so is low-tech and we need both. I would love to hear what others think and if any would like to participate and help make this movement real and effective.

#### **Mark**

In the current reality, sustaining hope may be the most important thing we need to sustain.

My heart goes out to Diane, as well as my admiration for her honesty and courage. It takes courage to admit that we feel despair. I share this feeling as a daily reality. I also want to share some things that help me. Maybe they'll help you too.

First, I agree completely with Bruce's suggestion that it helps to focus on some small part of what we think will make things better.

Second, I would strongly recommend that you read Joanna Macy, either *\_Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age\_* or *\_Coming Back To Life\_*. Joanna is a Buddhist and brings the wonderful open hearted perspective of Buddhism to the current world situation. Her books help me see despair as a dynamic feeling capable of transformation, like other feelings, as well as showing me a way through despair, in solidarity with other beings.

Third, it helps me to remember how small I am and how limited. This can be a disempowering feeling, but I prefer to think of it in terms of humility and in that I find hope. There are over six billion people in the world, most of them smarter than me. They want a future for themselves and their families just as much as I do. Things are happening everywhere that I'm not aware of and many of them are probably hopeful developments. It would be a cause of regret if I popped my cork thinking that saving the world was all up to me only to find out the next day that someone in Madagascar or Trinidad just discovered a sure-fire cure for greed or fear.

Fourth, as arcane as it may be, I've found hope in chaos theory. I recommend *\_Chaos\_* by James Gleick. It's rather bizarre stuff, but I take heart in a mathematics that finds fundamental principles in the universe that are spontaneous and unpredictable as well as examples of very small "causes" working in non-linear ways to produce very large effects. To me it means that corporations and governments



focused totally on prediction and control will ultimately always be defeated.

Fifth, Abraham Maslow, the great psychologist of the human potential movement, once wrote that the mature self-actualizing person is always somewhat prone to feel sadness and a measure of despair because he or she perceives life more truly as it is and less through wishes, denial and distortion. He maintained that joy in life is not simply the absence of pain, but suffering pain in the service of things that really matter. Occasional feelings of despair are therefore evidence that we are awake, not evidence of a personal failing. Sadness is what a healthy human soul understandably feels in the present situation.

It's denial, apathy, and hostility that represent pathology.

Finally, and most important to me--respecting that many people may not share my belief--I pray every morning for divine grace, for supernatural help to sustain my work if that work is a holy one, and to sustain my hope as long as it please Divine Being to sustain it, and to provide for me as long it please Divine Being to do so, and to bless this work as its own being in the world as long as my faltering efforts are aligned with the divine will. And every day, from a source far more mysterious than I can ever hope to understand, there pours in the energy and the hope for another day. This, more than

anything, enables each new step.

I don't want to make this message too long, but I think it's futile to try to petition governments to act effectively on our behalf since they have mostly become mechanisms for protecting corporations from the democratic control of citizens. Moreover, it is futile to expect corporations,

as private sector interests, to meet people's basic needs apart from their prime directive to maximize profit. Until we reform corporate charters to make them socially responsible and not just fiscally responsible, I think the most promising pathway to self-help is to form our own corporations focused on "manufacturing" human well-being, i.e., co-operatives providing for basic needs

without making a profit, or which return their profits to their members. These sorts of entities can be created under existing laws and have much more clout than individuals acting alone, or trying to subsist alone, no matter how much we prize voluntary simplicity.

I think if the idea got around that people could work together instead of compete, and could redesign communities based on a different understanding of what they need and want, then block by block, we could probably re-build and re-occupy our communities and fashion a liveable existence out of it as well. ☉

It is futile to expect corporations, as private sector interests, to meet people's basic needs apart from their prime directive to maximize profit.

The **Center for a New American Dream** is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping individuals and institutions reduce and shift consumption to enhance quality of life and protect the environment.

### **Why A New American Dream?**

The traditional American Dream once focused on greater security, opportunity, and happiness. Increasingly, that dream has been supplanted by an extraordinary emphasis on acquisition. The recent commercial definition of the American Dream has hidden costs for the environment and our quality of life.

### **Small Planet, Big Appetites**

Our throw-away culture is taking a heavy toll on the environment. A few startling facts offer some perspective:

- Americans consume 40% of the world's gasoline and more paper, steel, aluminum, energy, water, and meat per capita than any other society on the planet.
- The average American produces twice as much garbage as the average European.
- Recent scientific estimates indicate that at least four additional planets would be needed if each of the planet's 6 billion inhabitants consumed at the level of the average American.

### **The Earth's Not in Balance and Neither are We!**

Our hectic work-and-spend way of life also takes its toll on our financial well-being, psychological health, and personal happiness. The commercial culture leads many to accumulate debt and live beyond their financial limits. In 1998, over 1.4 million families declared personal bankruptcy, credit card debt reached new heights, and the personal savings rate fell to the lowest level since the Great Depression. The average employed American now works more than 47 hours a week in the struggle to keep up with mounting bills, causing tremendous stress. Millions of Americans report feeling exhausted, pressured, and hungry for more balanced lives. We seek greater purpose and more free time to spend with family and friends.

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## **The Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children**

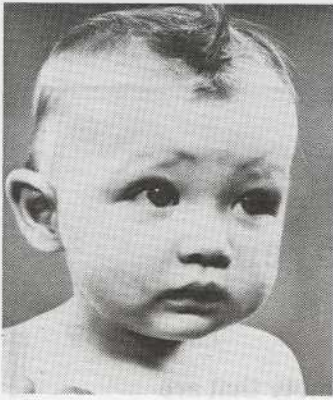
The CSPCC is working to change those things in Canadian society that are making it difficult for parents to give their children the care they need to grow into healthy, confident, non-violent, loving adults.

### **In general we are working for:**

- ◆ a shift from arbitrary male dominance to no-one's arbitrary dominance
- ◆ a shift from the essential beliefs of our society's consumer religion -- envy, selfishness and greed -- to trust, empathy and affection in a community-centred, sustainable society
- ◆ a shift from violence and sexism as the warp and woof of entertainment
- ◆ a shift from treating children as sinful or stupid to empathizing with them and fulfilling their expanding and particular needs

### **In particular we are working to:**

- ◆ raise the status of parenting
- ◆ implement universal parenting education from kindergarten to grade eight
- ◆ encourage parents to make their children's emotional needs their highest priority during the critical first three years
- ◆ facilitate a positive birthing experience for every father, mother and baby
- ◆ promote extended breastfeeding with child-led weaning
- ◆ make it easier for parents to meet the emotional needs of each child by encouraging a minimum three year spacing between siblings
- ◆ increase awareness of the potential long term hazards of separations between children under three and their mothers.



Recognizing that the capacity to give and receive trust, affection and empathy is fundamental to being human.

Knowing that all of us suffer the consequences when children are raised in a way that makes them affectionless and violent, and;

Realizing that for the first time in History we have definite knowledge that these qualities are determined by the way a child is cared for in the very early years.

# CREDO



## WE BELIEVE THAT:

- The necessity that every new human being develop the capacity for trust, affection and empathy dictates that potential parents re-order their priorities with this in mind.
- Most parents are willing and able to provide their children with the necessary loving empathic care, given support from others, appropriate understanding of the task and the conviction of its absolute importance.
- It is unutterably cruel to permanently maim a human being by failing to provide this quality of care during the first three years of life.

## THERE IS AN URGENCY THEREFORE TO:

- Re-evaluate all our institutions, traditions and beliefs from this perspective.
- Oppose and weaken all forces which undermine the desire or ability of parents to successfully carry out a task which ultimately affects us all.
- Support and strengthen all aspects of family and community life which assist parents to meet their obligation to each new member of the human race.